Covert Racism and the Subtlety of Modern Resistance

I took my 18-month-old son to a daycare center near my house last month to check out the environment. I put him down on the floor, and he saw another 18-month-old boy a few feet away. He toddled over to him to give him a hug and a kiss. Well, you know how unsteady 18-month-olds are. When he tried to hug the other boy, they both kind of tumbled onto the floor and they started to cry. Immediately, the boy’s mother and a daycare worker rushed over to the boys to separate them. Excitedly, the daycare worker turned to me and asked, “Does he bite?” A few minutes later, two White girls were interlocked in combat, with each pulling the other’s hair. These two girls were screaming bloody murder, but the same daycare worker was gently saying things like, “It’s all right.” “She didn’t mean to hurt you.” “Please let go.” “It’ll be okay,” and so forth. I thought, “Well, if they are going to treat Black kids and White kids so differently, I’m not going to let my son be exposed to such an environment. I made a decision right then and there to find a different daycare center for my son.”

Shelly Harrell (personal communication, August 1997)

Most of us are familiar with images of racism. Such images include American Indians being nearly wiped out by the genocide of last century, Ku Klux Klansmen posing for pictures after a lynching, Japanese Americans having nearly all of their worldly possessions confiscated and being imprisoned during World War II just because of their generic Japanese heritage, Bull Connor and his police dogs and billy clubs suppressing African Americans who were nonviolently asking
for their rights, fire hoses blasting away at African American protesters, George Wallace standing in the doorway of a school to prevent African American elementary school children from registering for school, Mexican Americans being rounded up by Immigration and Naturalization Service agents just because of the color of their skin. These images are seared in our minds as icons of American racism. More modern images of racism include that of Rodney King being beaten with nightsticks by five Los Angeles policemen, David Duke—a former Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan—being nominated for governor by a major United States political party, Yusef Hawkins being shot to death in New York City because he was walking in a White neighborhood and someone thought he was the African American man dater a woman from that neighborhood, Patrick J. Buchanan, a major candidate for the Republican Party’s presidential nomination in 1992 and 1996, suggesting that we place racially charged and life-threatening symbols on the border between the United States and Mexico saying things like, “This is a warning to you, Jose, to stay out of our country,” the horrific murder of James Byrd, Jr., in Jasper, Texas, by three White supremacists who dragged Mr. Byrd for miles behind their pickup truck . . . these are reminders to us that racism still exists. However, because we do not engage in such activities—and we might even condemn them—we are able to live with safety in knowledge that we ourselves are not racists.

Crispin Sartwell (1998), in writing about the murdering of Byrd by dragging him behind the pickup truck, stated that White America needs such incidents of bigotry so that it can go along deploiting such incidents in order to feel nonracist. He writes:

Average white people don’t think that they are racists. Because they would never utter the “n-word” or eat in segregated restaurants or teach their children explicitly that black people are inferior, they believe that they cannot be prejudiced. When public opinion surveys are taken, almost no one responds with what are considered to be racist views, which has led some “experts” to conclude that Americans have overcome their legacy of racial injustice. . . . [However] (1) the basic racism of American culture has not even been addressed, much less solved. Everyone should deplore Byrd’s lynching. But it is easy to deplore lynching. It is much harder to do anything about the central, subtle racism that surrounds us. (p. M-5)

☐ Ridley's Conceptualization of Racism

Imagine yourself watching television when two consecutive commercials depict an African American as the central character. If these were not sports commercials, would your immediate thought be, “Gosh, they are sure promoting a lot of Blacks on TV”? However, when two or three (or ten) consecutive commercials depict White individuals as the central characters, do you ever wonder, “Why is it that they have so many Whites on TV”? This thought about African Americans (or other identifiable ethnic minorities) indicates what might be considered to be covert, unintentional racism.

Charles Ridley (1989, 1995) presented a conceptualization of racism that can be applied to individuals or to institutions. This conceptualization identifies three forms of racism that can occur at the individual or institutional level: (1) overt, intentional racism; (2) covert, intentional racism; and (3) covert, unintentional racism.

Overt, intentional racism is the form of racism that is of the Ku Klux Klan variety, where it is clearly racist and recognizable by all. The protagonist is aware of his or her behavior and is intending the behavior to hurt a person or group of people. This form of racism does not need to be further delineated. We all know what it is.

Covert, intentional racism is hidden racism. It is expressed when an individual (or institution) wants to act in a racist manner but tries to disguise it so that it can operate undetected. I lived in Chicago during the days after the infamous Mayor Richard Daley ruled the city. It was discovered that the Chicago public school system was woefully in debt because it had 25% too many schools, given the student population. Many said that the reason there were so many schools, was that Mayor Daley had become concerned whenever African American areas began to intrude upon White areas. In order to keep the resultant integration from taking place, he built another school in the African American area under the guise of doing them a favor by giving them new facilities. I cannot confirm the veracity of this explanation of why there were so many public schools in Chicago. I can only say that there were, in fact, 25% more schools than were needed, and that these extra schools were in predominantly African American areas. But if racism was the real reason, this would be a clear example of covert, intentional racism.

Covert, unintentional racism is a form of racism that comes about because of laws or traditions that are racist in nature, but the protagonist is unaware of the racist roots of these laws or traditions. An excellent example of this situation is the famous incident in which the Los Angeles Dodgers’ General Manager, Al Campanis, said on national television that Blacks did not have the “necessities” to become baseball managers or general managers. He was given the opportunity to retract or amend his statement, but because he was unaware of the racist nature of his words, he only made the situation worse. Mr. Campanis was immediately fired from the Dodgers for making such
inflammatory statements. Dr. Harry Edwards, a famous University of California, Berkeley, sociologist, whose life work is in the area of eliminating racial barriers, especially in college and professional athletics, worked with Mr. Campanis as a result of the above incident. Dr. Edwards said that after working on a variety of issues to improve race relations, he was convinced that Mr. Campanis was not a racist, he was simply naive in his understanding of racial issues. Mr. Campanis naively repeated and perpetuated racist stereotypes that were widespread in the world of baseball.

At the risk of exposing myself as an unintentional racist (at least in my younger days), I recall a conversation I had with a high school friend. We were wondering who would be quarterback for the high school the following year, after Vince Ferragamo graduated. (I was in Ferragamo’s graduating class, but I was worried for my friend’s class the next year.) He suggested the name of an African American at the school, and I asked, “How could he be quarterback?” My friend said that this guy had a great arm, was fast, and could make quick decisions, but I still wondered how he could be quarterback. I had heard that Blacks could not be quarterbacks, and I blindly accepted this view, not knowing why people were saying such things. I played high school basketball, and I knew the athleticism and quick decision-making of my Black teammates, but no one had ever told me that Blacks could not play basketball. In fact, I knew that Blacks could play basketball, for Elgin Baylor was one of my favorite basketball players back then, and he was widely regarded as one of the best basketball players of all time. However, I did not know that Blacks could become quarterbacks, as there were no professional Black quarterbacks at that time and very few on major college football teams. Boy, was I naive! Ridley (1995) wrote about people like Al Campanis and me:

Unintentional behavior is perhaps the most insidious form of racism. Unintentional racists are unaware of the harmful consequences of their behavior. They may be well-intentioned, and on the surface, their behavior may appear to be responsible. Because individuals, groups, or institutions that engage in unintentional racism do not wish to do harm, it is difficult to get them to see themselves as racist. They are more likely to deny their racism. (p. 38)

My self-perception is that I am more aware than most people about issues of race, and that if something that I think or do is pointed out as unintentionally racist, I will immediately attempt to eliminate it from my repertoire of responses. However, I am self-aware enough to know that I have to be continually vigilant, or my covert, unintentional racism will, as Ridley suggests, become insidiously ingrained in me.

Given my state of awareness about such issues, I have enough insight to know that it must be very difficult for those with less awareness to be convinced of the underlying racism in their thoughts or actions. Shelly Harrel’s potential daycare worker would probably deny that she had a racist bone in her body and would insist that her question about the “eating habits” of Shelly’s son was simply a point of information. However, had Dr. Harrel’s son been exposed to a daily environment of such subtle racism, he may very well have internalized the oppression (Tatum, 1997) and as an adult he would accept and operate by the absorbed rules and stereotypical categories that he had learned to use as definitions of what it means to be an African American male.

Covert, Intentional Racism in the Broader Social Context

Cultural racism—the cultural images and messages that affirm the assumed superiority of Whites and the assumed inferiority of people of color—is like smog in the air. Sometimes it is so thick it is visible, other times it is less apparent, but always, day in and day out, we are breathing it. None of us would introduce ourselves as “smog-breathers” (and most of us don’t want to be described as prejudiced), but if we live in a smoggy place, how can we avoid breathing the air? (p. 6)

Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997)

Because covert, unintentional racism is so insidious, it is important to be able to recognize it, expose it, and work on ourselves and others to eliminate it. For the rest of this chapter, I discuss such racism as I have encountered it. In so doing, I hope to sensitize readers so they can detect this form of racism in their own lives.

Covert, Unintentional Racism at the Departmental Level

My first awareness of covert, unintentional racism occurred when I was in my very first academic position in the Department of Counseling at California State University, Fullerton. I hesitate to mention this, because the unintended consequences turned out to be quite positive for me. However, at the time of its occurrence, it placed me under a great deal of stress.

I was a junior faculty member in a department whose responsibility was to train master’s level mental health workers. The State of
California had recently required that such students take a course in multicultural issues. Our newly hired faculty member was to teach this course but, unfortunately, this individual decided at the last minute not to join our department. His dissertation was taking him much longer to complete than he had anticipated, and he reasoned that if he decided to teach in our department, with its requirement of teaching four courses each semester, he would not finish his dissertation for quite some time. The Thursday before classes were to begin on the following Monday, my department chair asked—no, assigned—me to teach the cross-cultural issues course that the new hire was supposed to have taught. Dutifully, I agreed to do so, and I added this new preparation to that for the other three courses I was to teach. Needless to say, it was not a fun semester for me.

As I had mentioned, the long-term consequences turned out to be positive for me, as my work in the multicultural area has been my most rewarding academic endeavor. However, there was no reason in the world for me to teach this course other than covert, unintentional racism. Even though I received my Ph.D. in an era when I was supposed to have had training in multicultural issues, in fact, I had never taken such a course, as my department did not even offer such a course (see my discussion in Chapter 1 on this, based upon the Bernal and Padilla, 1982, article). I had not read extensively in the area, as my dissertation had concerned an application of cognitive psychology theories to detecting thought disorder on Rorschach protocols. It was only the second year of my first academic position, and with four courses to teach each semester, I had little time to read in areas outside of my teaching preparation. Apparently, the only “qualification” I had to teach this course was that I was a faculty member who was also a member of an ethnic minority. I will come back to this point after I discuss the next incident of covert, unintentional racism. I want to underscore how covert and unintentional this racist incident was. I was on very friendly terms with the department chair, and she even apologized for having to make this assignment. However, she did not dare to assign it to any of the White faculty members in the department, and she was not on friendly grounds with another ethnic minority faculty member, who would have resisted this assignment.

My next position was in the Department of Psychology at Washington State University. As most academics know, one of the requirements involved in earning a doctoral degree is to successfully complete a preliminary examination. During my first year in the department, those who were involved with students’ prelim exams gathered together for a meeting to discuss the students’ performance and to decide whether or not to pass each student. One very senior professor criticized the

performance of an ethnic minority student. He said that although her overall performance was acceptable, he was quite disappointed in a section in which he had asked her to discuss how the literature on cross-cultural issues might address the topic (I believe it was psychopathology). Despite the fact that such articles did not exist on her approved prelim list and that she was primarily responsible for the raising of her five children in her very traditional marriage, this professor seemed to think that just because of her ethnic minority status, she should have been aware of the literature pertaining to ethnic minorities. Again, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, a course on this topic did not exist in the department until I developed it (and its first offering was two years after this student’s prelim). Therefore, one wonders how in the world this student would have been able to prepare for such a question. I am certain that this professor thought he was doing her a favor by asking about cross-cultural issues, demonstrating to her how sensitive he was in recognizing the importance of the area. The fact remains that his behavior was covertly and unintentionally racist. Both this student and I were somehow supposed to know about the literature simply because of our status as members of ethnic minority groups.

Covert, Unintentional Racism in the Profession

In many respects, this entire book is an attempt to address covert, unintentional racism in the profession of psychology and the larger system of academia. Certainly, the seven deadly resistances identified in the Sue et al. (1998) book and discussed in Chapter 1 are often uttered by well-intentioned but unintentionally racist individuals. As these seven resistances were addressed before, I will not address them here. However, this chapter would be incomplete if I do not address at least a couple of instances that demonstrate that the profession of psychology still has a long way to go to eliminate covert, unintentional racism.

Korchin (1980) related a story that demonstrated the profession’s insensitivity to ethnic minority issues. He and a colleague were attempting to publish a study comparing successful and unsuccessful African American college students. This study found some important differences, but one of the reviewers rejected the study. “In the opinion of one consulting editor, the study was ‘grievously flawed’—there was no white control group” (Korchin, 1980, p. 263). Given that this was a study that examined subgroups of African American college students, it is curious that the reviewer would have made such a comment: he or she must have been blindly following a covert, unintentionally racist
dictum that states that no study is important unless it contains White participants. As Korchin put it, “What would happen, might we suppose, if someone submitted a study identical in all respects except that all subjects were white? Would it be criticized because it lacked a black control group?” (p. 263).

Sue (1998, 1999) discussed the Korchin experience within the broader framework of the tension between internal and external validity. As most psychologists know, in research, the tighter the controls one employs to address internal validity, the less externally valid the results. On the other hand, the more one attempts to address concerns about the external validity and generalizability, the more threats to internal validity one encounters because of uncontrolled variables. As Campbell and Stanley (1963) put it in their classic book on research design, “Both types of criteria are obviously important, even though they are frequently at odds in that features increasing one may jeopardize the other” (p. 5). Thus, researchers must find a balance between these two pressures. However, Sue (1998, 1999) argued that the overwhelming majority of those who review manuscripts and conduct studies forget the demands of external validity in favor of tight internal controls. Therefore, the reviewer of Korchin’s manuscript rejected it because of a blind adherence to internal validity. As most studies dealing with ethnic minority populations are attempts to reflect the realities of the external worlds, such studies are naturally concerned with the pressures of external validity and so are disadvantaged in the eyes of reviewers not accustomed to taking such variables into account.

Another evidence of covert, unintentional racism is revealed by a situation I witnessed. I feel this situation epitomizes the type of insensitivity that is prevalent among well-meaning individuals who may act in such unintentionally racist ways.

As most who are reading this book know, the president of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1998 was Martin Seligman. Dr. Seligman is legendary for his past work on learned helplessness (e.g., Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978; Seligman, 1968, 1975; Seligman, Rossellini, & Kozak, 1975) and his newest work on learned optimism (e.g., Seligman, 1991, 1998). Clearly, he is one of the giants in the field of psychology. His new initiative may be most influential and have a strong impact not only on the field of psychology but also on the world stage: ethnopolitical warfare.

I had been elected a member of one of the APA’s governance groups, the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA) for the years 1998 to 2000. This committee meets twice a year along with all of the other governing committees of APA. My first meeting was in the spring of 1998. Dr. Seligman came to visit our meeting to show his support for the committee and also to discuss his new initiative on ethnopolitical warfare. Events such as the Holocaust during World War II and more recent events such as the holocaust in Rwanda and the ethnoreligious fighting in the Balkans convinced Dr. Seligman that something was needed to address such issues and avoid bloodshed in generations to come. He said that throughout his career, he had had to beg for money by fighting with his dean or university for departmental support, by applying for private and government grants, and so forth. However, when he began to inform foundations and other agencies about his plans to start a branch of psychology (or even a brand new discipline) concerned with ethnopolitical warfare, “this was the first time in my life that such agencies asked me how much they can contribute to such an enterprise.” Money was flowing into his cause. As a first step toward this new discipline, he had organized the first-ever ethnopolitical warfare conference in Derry, Northern Ireland, both as a symbol of ethnopolitical healing and as an encouragement of rapprochement between the Protestants and Catholics in the region. He proudly talked about how many world experts he had invited to the conference and the abundant funds that had been contributed.

Clearly, as an afterthought, and realizing the makeup of the audience to which he was speaking, Dr. Seligman quickly added that anyone on the committee was welcome to attend the conference, “but you had better hurry up and register because there is limited space in Derry.” One of the committee members, Sandra K. Choney, asked where she could apply for funds to attend the conference. Dr. Seligman said, “You will have to get there on your own funds. The money is spent.” Dr. Choney, a woman who gave up an academic position at a major university to live on an American Indian reservation and work with her tribe, tried to explain that some committee members were earning limited funds and could not afford to fly to Ireland and pay for a week’s worth of hotel expenses, so they needed help if they were to attend the conference. Another committee member, Roberto Velasquez, tried to get Dr. Seligman to understand how ethnopolitical warfare has happened right here in the United States, as the American Indian population was nearly wiped out by Whites who wanted to expand westward and settle in land occupied by the indigenous people. It was important for a conference of this type to hear from those whose history has been directly relevant to the very topic of discussion. Again, Dr. Seligman said, “The money is spent.” I said, “But I thought you said that this was the first time in your lifetime that funding agencies were asking you how much they could contribute to this worthy cause, so surely there must be some money available for
overcome the years of resistance and counterarguments to which we are exposed. Resistance is in the air that we breathe. As I stated above, even though I am more aware of these issues than most people, I still lapse into moments when I am unaware of the smog.

I might add that Dr. Seligman may need to be more sensitive to gender issues as well as to multiculturalism in order to receive the broad band of support he desires for his new initiative on ethnopolitical warfare. In the opening chapter of his book *Learned Optimism* (Seligman, 1991), Dr. Seligman wrote in a footnote:

> Throughout this book, when the pronoun “he” is used, as it is in this sentence, simply to mean a human being, the reader is asked to read it as “he or she.” To use “he or she” in every instance would be awkward and distracting, and at the moment there seems to be no workable alternative, although in due time the ever-vigorous English language will doubtless evolve one. (p. 6)

This footnote accompanied an 11-sentence paragraph in which he used the words “he” and “his” nine times within a space of four consecutive sentences. The surprising thing about this is that APA had adopted a position over a decade earlier to replace the sexist language to which Dr. Seligman’s footnote refers, and it has published guidelines for alternative language at least since 1978 (American Psychological Association, 1978). Interestingly, by the time of the reprinting of *Learned Optimism* (Seligman, 1998), Dr. Seligman—who was then president of the APA—was still holding onto his original sexist language despite the fact that he had rewritten the forward and two decades had passed since the APA had first published its guidelines.

### Covert, Unintentional Racism in Society

Now it is time to examine the air we breathe. In many respects, this might be the most difficult section to write because there is so much I could discuss, I cannot cover it all. In my discussion of a few incidents I have noticed, I will point out the subtle examples of covert, unintentional racism in society that I discuss with my students. These examples are not dramatic but insidious, and they are primarily media-driven.

Let me turn from ethnopolitical warfare to a related topic: political violence within countries. In my observations of news stories, I notice that White reporters are continually referring to political violence between factions of Blacks as “Black-on-Black violence.” When supporters of ousted President Jean Bertrand Aristide of Haiti suspected
people within their neighborhoods of being informants to the military junta that forced President Aristide out of the country, they engaged in “necklacing,” a horrible practice of placing a tire soaked in gasoline around the neck of the informant and setting the tire on fire. The press showed these rituals on worldwide television, calling it Black-on-Black violence. When Nelson Mandela was released from prison, and it looked like a Black leader might be the next president of South Africa, there were many clashes between Mandela’s African National Congress Party and Zulu Chief Buthelezi’s Inkatha Freedom Party. At times, these clashes turned into violent ones, and again, the international press referred to it as Black-on-Black violence. However, whenever there was a clash between supporters of the Irish Republican Army and the Ulster Unionists in Northern Ireland, I did not hear one international correspondent refer to it as White-on-White violence. The entire war in Bosnia-Herzegovina was between White ethnic Europeans, yet again, no reference to it as White-on-White violence could be heard in the international press. Were these reporters blatantly racist? I would suspect not. However, their reporting certainly reflected covert, unintentional racism.

In the United States, the drug problem is often depicted as a Black (or minority) problem. Certainly, whenever news stories want to illustrate the drug problem, they show “shooting galleries” in inner cities where collections of individuals are injecting heroin into their veins, or they show the sale of drugs on inner-city street corners or inmates imprisoned for drug abuse. Nearly every one of the offenders has black or brown skin. Words are not needed; the pictures tell the story. Or do they? One reason images of inner-city shooting galleries are shown is because it is easy to do so. These individuals typically do not have the ability to refuse such stories, or they can be bought off very easily because of their financial circumstances. On the other hand, if such news stories attempted to show drug use in White suburban settings, threats of lawsuits and court injunctions would surely follow. Pictures of drug sales on inner-city street corners are easily obtained through telephoto lenses, whereas such scenes are not typically available in White suburbs because of the increased police protection enjoyed by suburban communities. It is easy to show Black and brown faces in prison drug programs because for ethnic minority communities, the drug problem is considered a law enforcement problem, but for White communities, the drug problem is considered a mental health problem, and mental health settings enjoy much more confidentiality than do prison settings. Ethnic minorities who abuse drugs are sent to prison, whereas their White counterparts are sent to drug rehabilitation programs. Despite this disparity in the way in which ethnic minorities and their White counterparts are treated at the last stage of the criminal justice system, Whites still constitute the great majority of arrests for drugs in this country—67% (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1997).

William Bennett, the “Drug Czar” under the Bush Administration, underscored the above points when he was in office. On a number of occasions during interviews on television, he cited statistics provided by his office that indicated that the White majority in this country was being given the false idea that the drug problem was mainly an inner-city, ethnic minority problem. He stated that 95% of all African Americans living in the inner city do not abuse drugs and that 75% to 85% of all abusers of drugs (whether they are arrested or not) are White. In thinking that drug use occurs primarily in the inner city among ethnic minorities, Whites have failed to understand how their indifference to the problem has led to policies that are ineffective in dealing with drug abuse in the United States.

Another aspect of covert, unintentional racism involves acts of omission as opposed to acts of commission. People experience crime as an ethnic minority issue because the media reports things like “Black gang violence,” “Latino gang violence,” and “Asian gang violence.” Such reports do not protect the larger African American, Latino, and Asian communities from suspicion. Whenever Whites are involved in gang activities, they are characterized as “The Mafia” or “White supremacists,” thus allowing the average White citizen to be protected from incrimination, safe in the knowledge that he or she is not in the Mafia or involved with the White supremacist movement. I have heard countless African American males relate stories of how they are offended when they pass a White woman who not-so-subtly clutches her purse more tightly or even avoids close contact by crossing the street instead of walking by the “threatening” figure. However, a little-known statistic reveals that the overwhelming majority of child molesters are White. West and Templer (1994) reported that more than 91% (83 of 91) of the incarcerations in the state of Nevada for child molestation were of White perpetrators. I had heard this 90% to 95% statistic many times, yet in my search for hard evidence of it, the West and Templer study was the only one I could find. This article was published in Psychological Reports, a journal that is not typically cited. However, because West and Templer reported statistics concerning the entire population of inmates convicted of child molestation in the state prison they examined, I felt that no one could argue the with the accuracy of the figure. I searched perhaps 200 national crime statistics charts, journal articles, and books to confirm this statistic, so its absence is further evidence to me of the covert nature of racism.
Incidentally, I have yet to hear any of my White friends, colleagues, or acquaintances say how offended they were when they passed a woman with a child who shielded her child from them.

**Conclusions**

Although most of us would like to believe that we have put racism behind us, the modern forms of racism are subtle and insidious. It is in the air that we breathe. It does not matter if one is a brilliant psychologist, a hard-working news correspondent, or an average citizen who is being bombarded by these covert messages. It takes vigilance to detect these forms of racism and expose them for what they are—unfortunate and secretive ways of perpetuating racial stereotypes, biased attitudes, and discrimination. It is my firm belief that most people are of good will and that once they understand their own contribution to this perpetuation, they will work to purge it from their repertoire. However, this work is difficult, and we all need to help one another to identify and expose these subtle forms of racism.

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Disguised Racism in the Broader Society

How do people get wrongfully convicted? Racial discrimination—among cops, prosecutors and jurors—can certainly be a factor. Clarence Brandley, an African-American janitor, was accused of killing a white girl in Texas in 1980. A police officer allegedly told Brandley and a white janitor that one of them would hang for the crime, then turned to Brandley and added, “Since you’re the nigger, you’re elected.” It was later shown that prosecutors suppressed evidence; Brandley was freed after 10 years in prison.

John McCormick (November 9, 1998, p. 64, Newsweek)

Certainly, blatant racism, as depicted in the above story on the inequities of the criminal justice system, still exists. But as indicated in the previous chapter, such overt forms of racism are not the principal problem in modern society. Old, blatant forms of racism are readily rejected by most people, today; covert, subtle forms of racism are difficult to detect and are therefore given the weight of “logical” argument. Well-meaning, principled people can be taken in by logical-sounding positions, unaware of the racist roots underlying those positions. This chapter presents some observations by multicultural theorists of how subtle forms of racism are made palatable by intellectual-sounding arguments, some of which are even based on a sprinkling of scientific research.
Modern Forms of Racism

Consider the following two possibilities: (1) Factors such as race, ethnicity, and gender should be taken into account when determining the most qualified person for a particular job; (2) The most qualified person for a particular job should be hired regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. Which of these two alternatives do you support? If you are like most Americans, you favor no. 2. There seems to be a perception that people hired on the basis of affirmative action are less well qualified than their White male counterparts. However, this assumes that aspects of race, ethnicity, and gender fall outside of one’s definition of “qualification” for positions. Those who have been engaging in modern or symbolic forms of racism have convinced most Americans that race, ethnicity, and gender should have nothing to do with job qualifications.

I engaged in a class discussion with a White woman in my undergraduate cross-cultural course on the topic of affirmative action. She said that her boyfriend had always wanted to become a police officer. She went along with him to take a qualification test. Although her boyfriend scored slightly higher on the test than she did, she was invited to train at the police academy and her boyfriend was not. She felt this was entirely unfair because she did not feel herself to be as qualified as he was. She said it was only the police academy’s affirmative action policy of increasing the number of its Latino and female members that garnered her the invitation, so she refused it. The next time her boyfriend applied for a position and took the entrance examination, he passed and was invited to attend the academy.

I pointed out to her that there are many fewer women in the police force, and that in situations such as domestic violence and responding to rape victims, women officers are often needed. Thus, the very fact that women are women should play a role in determining whether applicants are qualified for particular positions. Certainly, had she scored below a certain grade, she would not be considered qualified to become an officer, but if she had scored above a particular level, her gender should be a consideration. The reason the police force wanted to increase the number of Latino officers was that Los Angeles County is so heavily populated by Latinos that it only made sense to seek Latino officers so that members of the community would feel comfortable with the members of their police force. Moreover, such officers would be much more likely to speak Spanish, which was a very important qualification. However, those engaging in symbolic racism have convinced most of America that “qualification” is measured only by test scores.

Jones (1997) identified three forms of modern racism that are based on negative attitudes that persist in those who otherwise believe themselves to be unprejudiced in racial matters. These forms of racism are symbolic racism, modern racism, and aversive racism.

Symbolic Racism

Symbolic racism is based upon Sears’ (1988) notion that hostility toward Blacks (and, presumably, all people of color) still exists among many Whites, and that this hostility can be expressed in terms of adherence to the “traditional values” of individualism and the Protestant work ethic. According to Jones (1997) and Sears (1988), symbolic racism can be measured by the degree to which individuals support three basic notions: (1) antagonism toward Black demands, (2) resentment of gains made by Blacks through “special favors,” and (3) denial of the continued existence of discrimination.

Sears and his colleagues (e.g., Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears, 1988) were able to demonstrate that people’s adherence to the above three basic notions of symbolic racism had predictive value in determining attitudes toward and voting behavior on racially charged issues, such as affirmative action, bilingual education, and voting for Black candidates. Moreover, symbolic racism has the advantage of protecting individuals from seeing themselves as being racist according to traditional definitions of racism. Instead seeing themselves as holding traditional values. Jones (1997) wrote:

Sears argues that symbolic racism has a far greater effect on white attitudes and behavior than does the old-fashioned, hostility—antagonism racial hatred. Symbolic racism is highly correlated with traditional racism in that both have a strong antiblack component. However, it is different in that it incorporates a focus on traditional values, whereas traditional racism does not. (p. 123)

Modern Racism

Jones (1997) identified McGonagay (1986) as defining the term “modern racism.” This form of racism holds that racism is a past problem, not a contemporary one, that those who are working toward the end of racism are pushing their agenda too hard, that the tactics of those working against racism are unfair, and that any gains achieved through these “unfair” tactics are fundamentally undeserved. This form of racism is related to symbolic racism, although people who can be
characterized as modern racists consciously feel that racism is bad. These individuals, instead, see their own (prejudiced) views as being based on facts and believe that they do not hold what are traditionally thought to be racist views.

Jones (1997, pp. 126–127) reported that over the years, McCouhahay's (1986) Modern Racism Scale (MRS) has been distilled down to six items:

1. Over the past few years, the government and news media have shown more respect to Blacks than they deserve to be shown. (Strongly agree = 5)
2. It is easy to understand the anger of Black people in the United States. (Strongly disagree = 5)
3. Discrimination against Blacks is no longer a problem in the United States. (Strongly agree = 5)
4. Over the past few years, Blacks have received more economically than they deserve. (Strongly agree = 5)
5. Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights. (Strongly agree = 5)
6. Blacks should not push themselves where they are not wanted. (Strongly agree = 5)

The MRS has, according to Jones (1997), demonstrated its usefulness in measuring racial prejudice and has become an important tool in the racism literature.

Aversive Racism

Jones (1997) identified Gaertner and Dovidio (1986) as the proponents of aversive racism. This form of racism is not hostile or aggressive toward Blacks (and, presumably, other people of color) but is more avoidant. The avoidance is based on the idea that these individuals have been raised in a culture that promotes racism while also promoting egalitarian views. Thus, a conflict results. Because conflict is aversive, one can avoid the conflict by avoiding contact with Blacks (ethnic minorities).

Gaertner and Dovidio (1986) posited that whenever egalitarian norms are unequivocal, aversive racists avoid contact with Blacks or do not assist Blacks as readily as they do when egalitarian norms are clear. Moreover, if there are possible nonracial factors that could allow the rationalization of unfavorable behaviors toward Blacks, aversive racists would seize upon these factors even under conditions of clear egalitarian norms. Their research supported these claims (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Frey & Gaertner, 1986).

Overall, Jones (1997, p. 150) concludes that three factors underlie symbolic, modern, and aversive forms of racism:

1. Negative affect associations to Black people;
2. Ambivalence between feelings of nonprejudice or egalitarianism and those negative feelings;
3. A tendency for people who aspire to a positive, egalitarian self-image to nevertheless show racial biases when they are unaware of how to appear nonbiased.

As discussed in the last chapter, modern forms of racism are covert in nature and, as such, are insidious. They have measurable effects upon the conduct of individuals, yet racism can be denied because only the old-fashioned, traditional forms of racism are considered to be truly racist.

At my own university, we have an ethnic minority president whose two major goals are to promote diversity in the campus community and to modernize our technology base. In his 7 years as president, he has made large gains in both of these areas. For example, the university is located in a predominantly Hispanic/Latino and Asian area, but when he took over as president, the student population was predominantly White. Now the population is predominantly Hispanic/Latino and Asian. However, a substantial number of faculty members have opposed this president from the very beginning. Under general claims of wanting things to be “like they used to be,” they have attempted to undermine his authority, taking actions that culminated in a call for a vote of no confidence to be sent to the chancellor of the university system. (Incidentally, none of them have claimed that they do not want their new computer systems, so one has to wonder what is meant by wanting things to be “like they used to be.”)

Interestingly, this call for a vote of no confidence came a year after a previous attempt to do the same thing. Leaders of the Academic Senate attempted to get the entire senate to endorse this plan, and it was voted down by a substantial margin. A positive result of this confrontation was an agreement between the president and leaders of the senate to meet on a regular basis. Although there were still some disagreements, it seemed that the entire atmosphere had changed. However, near the end of academic year 1997-1998, when the president was out of town representing the university in Washington, DC, the leaders of the senate voted in executive session to go forward with this vote of no confidence. They sent out the ballots and an accompanying 14-page list of
grievances against the president. Some of these grievances were legitimate, some were legitimate but had been resolved years before, and some were completely illegitimate. This 18-page list of grievances was so detailed, and its reproduction and the ballot preparation appeared so soon after the president’s last meeting with the senate leadership and his subsequent departure for Washington, that one can only conclude that the leadership had been planning this vote regardless of how the meetings with the president were proceeding. Incidentally, although the Academic Senate represents the entire campus, the ballots were mailed only to professors on the campus, and only professors were allowed to vote on this issue.

Most of the ethnic minority faculty and other fair-minded individuals were appalled by this maneuver, and there was a concerted effort to let cooler heads prevail at least to delay the vote until more information could be gathered. However, the leaders of the senate had called for the votes to be returned only 1 week after the ballots had been received and did not budge from this date. When one of the ethnic minority faculty members wondered out loud if there were some sort of underlying racial resistance that might be examined, she was immediately shouted down by numerous voices. This occurred despite the fact that (1) all of the ethnic minority organizations on campus were in strong support of the president, and (2) one of the president’s main initiatives was to work for the diversification of the campus. There were other issues in the set of grievances, principally concerning the allocation of merit pay, and these issues allowed otherwise fair-minded individuals to cast their ballots in favor of the no-confidence resolution. The resolution passed by a margin roughly equivalent to the percentage by which white faculty outnumbered ethnic minority faculty on this campus. Modern forms of racism are insidious.

Modern Forms of Racism in the Broader Society

The State of California

The state of California is often considered to be the bellwether of the nation. Its 1978 revolt against taxes set the stage for Ronald Reagan’s election based on tax cuts in 1980; its years of electing conservative governors preceded the years of conservatism in the country. Although California is now swinging toward more liberal policies, its stance on race relations seems to portend continued resistance toward multiculturalism, as indicated by the passage of Propositions 187, 209, and 227.

In the autumn of 1994, Proposition 187, which cut social benefits to all illegal aliens, including children, was passed. It passed despite the fact that an unusual coalition of compassionate liberals and law-and-order policemen was formed to prevent its passage. The compassionate-liberal argument was that one should not deny social benefits such as health care to children who had no choice in their parents’ decision to move to the United States. From a practical standpoint, poor health care would also lead to the spreading of disease to citizens and legal aliens. The law-and-order argument was that if illegal alien children were not allowed to attend school, they would be out of the streets and potentially become involved with the legal system. However, these arguments failed, and Proposition 187 passed by a wide margin.

Proposition 209, passed in 1996, eliminated affirmative action programs sponsored by the state, including college admission standards and state contracts to businesses. Despite the fact that the debate was framed to pit Asians and Whites against other ethnic minority groups, statistics indicate that Asians, along with other ethnic minority groups, voted against Proposition 209 (Duster, 1998). Arguments in favor of the passage of the proposition fell along the lines of the modern forms of racism: Blacks (and other ethnic minorities) are undeserving, affirmative action is unfair, and people should be admitted into higher education and get state contracts on their own merits. Interestingly, Proposition 209 specifically denied women and ethnic minorities any competitive advantage, but it allowed advantage based upon legacy (children of alumni receive special admissions consideration in higher education) and geographic area (individuals who are “less qualified” by objective measures but are from rural areas are given special consideration for both college admission and state contracting). Thus, the arguments calling for pure merit-based awards were disingenuous, as only gender and ethnic minority status were specifically denied special consideration.

Proposition 227 was passed in 1998. This proposition eliminated eligibility for bilingual education after 1 year, unless some overwhelming need was demonstrated by a school system. It was characterized as being supported by the Hispanic/Latino population—the population that would seem to benefit from the continuation of bilingual education—but exit polls taken on Election Day indicated that a majority of Hispanic/Latino voters actually opposed the measure.

A White majority bloc voted overwhelmingly for the passage of all three of the propositions. Even though ethnic minorities are now at or near majority status in California, well over 80% of the voters are White (Duster, 1998). Because the debates are framed along the lines of modern forms of racism, the racism remains undetected by most voters.
Because these forms of racism do not resemble old-fashioned forms of racism, direct reference to the racist nature of the propositions can lead to a backlash and an even greater adherence to the position of being against people of color. However, in all three of these cases, the trend of the public was toward voting these measures down (Duster, 1998). As people became more informed about the meaning of the issues they became more inclined to recognize the subtle racism behind them.

The Rest of the Nation

The issue of affirmative action is likely to be a major political debate for years to come. Conservative voices, couched in the language of modern forms of racism, have been opposing affirmative action for years (e.g., Beitz, 1991; D’Souza, 1991; Nielsen, 1991). Nielsen (1991) has even warned that affirmative action will ultimately lead to civil war initiated by those who feel disadvantaged by affirmative action policies—that is, White males.

As evidenced by the passage of Proposition 209 and other national antiaffirmative action decisions, conservative voices are winning the battle at this time. White (1998) indicated that the disarray of the NAACP has allowed opponents of civil rights and affirmative action to take the initiative:

Almost all efforts to increase minority participation in the workplace and on campus have been undermined by opponents as quotas and racial preferences. Lurid stories about white male job seekers or college applicants being passed over for less qualified blacks or women have been accepted as the norm, even though many of the tales turned out to be bogus. (p. 27)

However, White (1998) indicated that under the leadership of Julian Bond and Kwesi Mfume, the NAACP has restored its focus and is ready to engage in the battle.

Still, conservative voices have proliferated in the past decade or two. Among the most vocal critics of affirmative action policies has been Dinesh D’Souza, who traveled the circuit of campuses and talk shows to promote his book attacking affirmative action policies (D’Souza, 1991). (Interestingly, Michael Kinsley, then cohost of the CNN show “Crossfire,” wryly pointed out the irony of D’Souza’s making a very good living by being paid to speak on college campuses where he rants about how voices like his are not being allowed to speak on college campuses.) According to D’Souza (1991), “Although university leaders speak of the self-evident virtues of diversity, it is not at all obvious why it is necessary to a first-rate education” (p. 230). He went on to write:

The problem begins with a deep sense of embarrassment over the small number of minorities—blacks in particular—on campuses. University officials speak of themselves as more enlightened and progressive than the general population, so they feel guilty if the proportion of minorities at their institutions is smaller than in surrounding society. (p. 231)

D’Souza also attacked women and homosexuals as exploiting the race issue for their own “extremist” agenda.

Chang-Lin Tien, Chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley, and the first Asian Pacific American to be appointed to lead a major university in the United States, resigned over the 1996 University of California Regents’ decision to eliminate affirmative action policies in the state’s higher education system (he “officially” retired, although it was clearly in protest over the new policy). This occurred even before the passage of Proposition 209. Most of us in education noted that every single regent who was an educator voted to continue the state’s affirmative action policy, but because the majority of the regents were noneducation appointees by Governor Pete Wilson, the policy was passed along strict ideological lines.

Tien (1995) indicated that diversifying a college campus—especially a public institution such as Berkeley—to the point where it at least somewhat reflects the diversity in the surrounding community is a basic charge, and to do anything less is to shun the citizens of the state. Moreover, he pointed out that the campus became more diverse under his leadership, graduation rates increased concomitantly. Berkeley students have a 76% rate of graduation within 5 years, as compared to 48% in 5 years in the mid-1950s. Finally, in the freshman class admitted just before he wrote his article (autumn 1994), standards had been subjected to higher standards than the freshman class had been a decade earlier. The mean high school GPA for that class was 3.84, and the mean SAT score was 1225. “The numbers dispel the notion that diversity has somehow sacrificed the quality of our institution. In fact, the diversity has been coupled with rising standards” (Tien, 1995, p. 20).

As Tien (1995) implied, perhaps those who feel wronged by admission denial are misplacing their hostility. He stated that Berkeley received 22,700 applications for the autumn of 1995. Of these applications, 9,500 had a high school GPA of 4.0. Because of space limitations, only 3,470 students were to be admitted that fall, so even if one were to select students strictly on the basis of GPA, many students with perfect high school records would have to be denied admission. Quite clearly,
nothing beyond numerical criteria had to be used to make final actions decisions. Yet some of the students who were denied admittance pointed to ethnic minority students with slightly lower GPAs blame them (and affirmative action policies) for their rejection. Incidentally, I have been having affirmative action debates in my graduate courses in recent years. These debates are to culminate term papers based on library research and each student's personal experience through the debate about affirmative action. The quarter typically has equal numbers of students for and against affirmative action, but those against affirmative action quickly discover that there is little evidence in favor of the non-affirmative action side of the action, only opinions. They quickly discover that the overwhelming number of cases in this area are documented cases of discrimination against ethnic minorities and women: very few cases concern reverse discrimination. However, the reverse discrimination cases get most of the headlines and most of the attention in debates. Students typically find these affirmative action debates and their own processes discovery to be valuable experiences. For example, one student initially was firmly against affirmative action wrote in his term paper:

consider this debate an extremely valuable experience. This debate and personal research has given me the chance to undo all my earlier misunderstandings regarding affirmative action. Before I participated in this project, my personal belief was always against affirmative action. It is partially due to the many common myths and misleading arguments that I often hear from the media. Because of the complexity of this issue, I never had the time nor the chance to verify these misleading pieces of information. (Asian/Pacific male no. 1)

hock" Humor

Another way in which racist material is disseminated is through the use of humor or intentionally provocative commentary. Protected by the right of free speech, some individuals gain notoriety by using the bile airwaves to make subtly or not-so-subtly racist remarks. Many of these individuals have found "legitimate" outlets for espousing their treasonous ideology, from Rush Limbaugh and G. Gordon Liddy to Pat Buchanan and Robert Novak on television. However, although I disagree with their positions, I can see that there is reason behind their words and we can, at least potentially, engage a thoughtful dialogue about the issue. What I feel is more damaging is the medium that allows so-called shock jocks to advocate racist positions under the guise of "entertainment" or shock value. One such shock jock is Doug Tracht.

Doug Tracht was a disc jockey for WARW, a rock station in the Washington, D.C. area. He played a selection from African American hip-hop singer Lauryn Hill, who won a record-breaking five Grammy Awards one year. After playing the selection, he commented, "No wonder people drag them behind trucks" (D.C. "Shock Jock," 1999). This was in reference to the terrible dragging death of James Byrd Jr., in Jasper, Texas. Just prior to the time Tracht had made his remarks, the horrific details of the dragging death were being made public. These details included the length of time medical examiners estimated Byrd remained conscious, trying to keep his head off the pavement, the limbs strewn along the side of the road, and that ultimately, his head had been ripped off his torso. The timing of this comment was such that these sickening images were still in listeners' minds.

Although Tracht was fired from the radio station for this remark, many felt his firing came several years too late. A few years earlier, during the celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Tracht had made a comment to the effect of, "If they kill four more of them, we can have a week off." Amazingly, WARW did not fire him at the time for making that insensitive remark, and he had a few more years to implant racist feelings in his listeners.

Matsuda (1993) addressed the question of why there tends not to be an outcry from those in non-targeted groups (typically the White majority) whenever individuals like Tracht make such bluntly racist remarks:

The typical reaction of non-members is not to consider the incidents isolated pranks, the product of sick but harmless minds. This is in part a defensive reaction: a refusal to believe that real people, people just like us, are racists. This disassociation leads logically to the claim that there is no institutional or state responsibility to respond to the incident. It is not that kind of real and pervasive threat that requires the state's power to quell. (p. 29)

The Bell Curve

The concept of intelligence—particularly genetically endowed intelligence—has been controversial for many years. Jensen (1969) took a firm position that intelligence is almost entirely inheritable, and that measured differences among the races reflect fundamental genetic differences. Jensen took this stand despite the clear evidence that environmental factors greatly influenced measured intelligence. For
example, Gottesman (1968) pointed out that identical twins raised apart show differences in measured intelligence that are greater than the differences between Whites and African Americans. Kagan (1969) concluded that environmental differences offer a much better explanation of variations in measured intelligence than does genetic makeup. In a related area—academic achievement—Sue and Okazaki (1990) stated that differences within racially identified groups far exceed differences among racially identified groups, so environmental factors must contribute much more to differences in academic achievement than do genetic factors.

The genetic argument resurfaces at the time of the publication of Herrnstein and Murray's (1994) *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life*. Although Herrnstein had passed away by the time the book was published, Charles Murray participated in numerous interviews to promote his work. The book's conclusion—and Murray's pronouncements while on his book tour—was that there are genuine genetic differences in intelligence, and that society should be set up such that those with lower intelligence are at the service of those with higher intelligence. Sue and Sue (1999) concluded, "What is problematic about *The Bell Curve* is that it presents a good deal of genuine science sprinkled with science fiction and a political ideology aimed at creating an elite class in America" (p. 20).

Herrnstein and Murray defend themselves by stating that their book is not really about race but about social class. Moreover, even if one were to make assumptions about intelligence based upon racial group membership, this need not interfere with daily interactions among the races. However, they do not waver from their essential conclusions that true differences in measured intelligence exist. Jones (1997) critiqued Herrnstein and Murray's position:

Gould (1994) notes *The Bell Curve*’s claim that cognitive ability “... almost always explains less than 20 percent of the variance ... usually less than 10 percent and often less than 5 percent. What this means in English is that you cannot predict what a given person will do from his IQ score.” Gould (1994) suggests that if you take the Herrnstein and Murray (1994) claim that about 60 percent of IQ differences can be explained by genetics, and given that these differences only explain about 5 to 20 percent of individual variation, then only 3 to 12 percent of variations among individuals can be accounted for by heritability. (This is based on 50% heritability × 5 to 20 percent of the variance explained.) What explains the other 88 to 97 percent? (p. 560)

Quite clearly, *The Bell Curve* opened up old wounds in the debate about the heritability of intelligence. However, what struck me about this entire debate was the readiness with which the public was willing to accept this book when Murray was on his book tour. It is indicative to me that such impulses are just barely under the surface in the general public and, to borrow from Sue and Sue (1999), how just a little science can make science fiction so palatable.

## Conclusions

Modern forms of racism are subtle and disguised. They are more often than not couched in terms that seem palatable to most well-intentioned individuals and have the effect of persuading such individuals of positions to which they might not normally give credence if they knew the root or intention of these arguments. Alternatively, they can be thought of as intentionally provocative and thus be discounted. Topics such as services to illegal aliens, affirmative action, bilingual education, and the subjugation of one class of individuals to another are couched in terms of economics, reverse discrimination, ineffective teaching and learning, and the heritability of intelligence, which gives these arguments an air of justice or science to back up their positions. However, when one examines these issues carefully, one sees the motivation behind them and the implications of such policies. More often than not, one rejects these positions upon closer inspection.

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The Construction and Maintenance of Stereotypes

My math professor told me I was lazy and did not try very hard in his class. I told him I was trying as hard as I could, but he didn’t believe me. I came from a small village in rural Vietnam, and I did not have very much schooling before I came to America. But my professor said that all Asians were smart in math, so that must mean that I wasn’t trying very hard in his class.

Vietnamese student (personal communication, April 1986)

As the above story indicates, even what many consider to be positive stereotypes can be turned into straitjackets. Are all stereotypes bad, or can some be good? Are stereotypes inevitable by-products of human cognition, or can they be avoided? Although stereotypes were discussed briefly in Chapter 1, this chapter addresses the concept that stereotypes are constructions of mental processes.

Definition of Stereotypes

Kenrick, Neuberg, and Cialdini (1999) defines “stereotyping” as “(t)he process of categorizing an individual as a member of a particular group and then inferring that he or she possesses the characteristics generally held by members of that group” (p. 414). Jones (1997) identified the literal root of the word “stereotype” and noted when this literal root was first applied to people:
Literally, a stereotype is a mental plate that is used to make duplicate pages of the same type. Social commentator Walter Lippman borrowed this term back in 1922 to describe what he considered to be a biased perception. The bias was evidenced by comparing those "pictures" we had in our heads of someone and the reality the person presented to us. The bias resulted from preconceptions that were the result of the stereotyping process, whereby we "stamped" every member of the group as a duplicate of every other member—in other words, we created a stereotype. When we encountered a member of the group, we did not see him or her realistically. Instead, we saw the image of him or her filtered through this mental picture of the group we had stereotyped. (p. 167)

As most in this area would agree, stereotypes are a cognitive component of human interactions; prejudice is the evaluative component, discrimination is the behavioral component, and racism is the institutionalized component. Some (e.g., Jones, 1997; Justim, McCauley, & Lee, 1995) use the words "stereotype" and "prejudice" essentially interchangeably. Most of this book is focused upon eliminating or at least addressing discrimination and racism. An assumption upon which I am working is that most people are motivated to be less prejudiced than they are, but they need the awareness and the tools presented in this book to help themselves overcome these prejudices. Consequently, I am focusing upon stereotypes in this chapter because some literature suggests that stereotypes are natural products of cognitive processes.

The Cognitive Miser Approach

Versus the Social Reality Approach to Stereotypes

Ever since the so-called cognitive revolution influenced social psychology in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the focus of research on stereotypes has been on how stereotypes are an inevitable by-product of normal cognitive processes (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 1984, 1993; Hamilton, 1981; Markus & Zajonc, 1985; Taylor, 1981; Wyer & Gordon, 1984). Essentially, this cognitive approach suggests that social information is quite complex, and in order to attend to as much information as possible, large pieces of information are collapsed into small, easily usable pieces of information. In collapsing large pieces of information into small, simplified pieces, we can free up other attentional resources to concentrate upon other important information. Cognitive psychologists call this "chunking." This approach has become known as the cognitive economy or cognitive miser approach to stereotypes.

According to the cognitive miser approach, when I enter a racially mixed room, if I can lump all racial and ethnic groups into separate categories, it would occupy only a few "bits" of my attentional resources. As Miller (1956) stated long ago, we can hold only seven or so bits of information in our minds at any one time, so a few bits of attentional resources can be used to attend to other information in the room. According to Miller, a bit can be as small as a single item or as large as an entire collection of items that can be represented in a single form. If all of our attentional resources were dedicated to finding out the complexity of even one person—much less a collection of outwardly appearing similar people—there would be no resources left to attend to anything else in the room. Thus, there is a cost/benefit exchange in which the cost of the perhaps slightly inaccurate information transmitted by the stereotype is offset by the range of information to which we can attend. This cognitive miser stance dominated research in stereotypes for nearly two decades.

More recently, many social psychologists have turned their attention to a social reality approach to stereotyping. This approach suggests that stereotypes reflect the social reality of various groups, conveying an essential truth about the groups (see Spears & Haslam, 1997, and Zayas, Rocher, & Schadron, 1997, for reviews of this view). Spears and Haslam (1997) suggest that this approach has its roots in some of the seminal writings of the literature of stereotyping (e.g., Brunner, 1990; Lippman, 1922; Tajfel, 1969). Zayas et al. (1997) discussed their position:

In our view, stereotypes work as enlightening Gestalts: they supply perceivers with extra information by capturing upon a rich set of interconnected pieces of data. Moreover, stereotypes comprise more than the list of attributes that describe a particular social category. They also, and perhaps most importantly, include the underlying explanation that links these attributes together. (p. 21)

They based their view on the cognitive tradition of concept formation. Writers such as Rosch (1978) and Rosch and Mervis, (1975), who borrowed their ideas from the philosopher Wittgenstein (1953), discussed how we form concepts based upon exemplars that represent different categories. Over time, we begin to abstract a prototype of the categories. This prototype becomes the basis upon which we make categorical judgments about new objects. This approach has been applied to successful investigations into person perception (e.g., Anderson & Krantz, 1987; Brewer, 1985; Cantor & Mischel, 1977, 1979). If it can be applied successfully to individuals, why not to groups? Thus, if one were to encounter a number of individuals from various ethnic minority groups, one could abstract what one perceives to be the essence of each group, based upon exemplars of the groups.
From this concept formation/social reality perspective, Sperber and Haslam (1997) empirically investigated the cognitive miser versus the social reality approaches. They found evidence in support of the social reality approach and concluded:

For us the functionality of stereotyping lies in detecting [psychologically meaningful] social reality, not in saving cognitive energy. Following this view, we would thus argue that it is not the case, as is commonly supposed . . . that in a "perfect" world or given a longer life free from cognitive demands, people would always treat and perceive everyone else as individuals. For to do so would involve missing out on reality and effectively preclude social activities which necessarily rely upon group-based social categorical perception. . . .” (p. 266)

**Consensual Stereotypes**

One aspect of the social reality approach to stereotypes is what Gardner (1994) calls the consensual stereotype view, also known as the sociocultural approach (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). This view suggests that not only are stereotypes accurate and informative but they emerge from the group itself. This type of stereotype helps us to determine our own group norms. Moreover, Oakes, Haslam, and Turner (1994) suggested that such stereotypes are important in psychologically binding like-minded individuals together. This is the basis of social identity theory [e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1975]. According to Oakes et al. (1994), “People seek a positive social identity. Since the value of any group membership depends upon comparison with other relevant groups, positive social identity is achieved through the establishment of positive distinctiveness of the in-group from relevant out-groups” (p. 82). One of the negative results of this positive social identity is that it formed the basis for discrimination against out-group members.

For example, I may self-identify as a Democrat because my belief is that Democrats balance justice with freedom. This is a self-identification, and other like-minded individuals may identify themselves as Democrats for the same reasons I do. We all share this same view, and we also share the view that Republicans do not seek a balance between justice and freedom. Instead, Republicans place much more emphasis on issues of freedom, rather than justice. Because we both value freedom, the major difference between my conceptualizations of the two groups is that Democrats value justice more than Republicans do. Therefore, I emphasize this difference more when trying to convince others of the “correctness” of my political affiliation. I may also denigrate Republicans for not valuing justice, thus beginning my discrimination against Republicans.

**Negative Effects of Stereotyping**

Regardless of whether stereotypes are unfortunate summaries of more complex constellations of behavior or accurate reflections of the essence of a group of individuals, the fact remains that stereotypes can be misused and can result in negative effects. The social reality perspective depends on a dispassionate, logically constructed development of one’s conception of the target object. This is fine when attempting to categorize inanimate objects such as furniture or animals such as birds or mammals (see Rosch & Mervis, 1975), but as we know, the categorization of people is not a dispassionate exercise.

**Motivation and Stereotypes**

Hilton and von Hippel (1996) suggested that motivational factors play an important role in why, when, and how stereotypes occur. If a person is disliked, much more evidence is needed to convince the perceiver of the existence of a positive characteristic (intelligence) than a negative characteristic (lack of intelligence; see Ditto & Lopez, 1993). Similarly, if a person is liked, relatively little information is needed to reduce a negative stereotype (see Klein & Kunda, 1992, and Pedry & Macrae, 1994). Quite clearly, in a dispassionate, unmotivated state, all information should be weighed equally. Valence for or against the target object should not have any effect upon our categorization decisions.

**Ascription of Stereotypes**

To the extent that the dominant society gets to decide which characteristics or abilities are valued, the dominant group can also ascribe negative values to the characteristics shared by those in the nondominant position. Although not related to racial/ethnic stereotypes, a story I like to tell my students is one involving the value of different gender characteristics. I was on the Women’s Studies Advisory Committee at Washington State University. One of the women reported that a male mathematics professor had said something like, “The reason women do not do well in mathematics is that mathematics is
very precise language, and women do not have the ability to think precisely." Around this time, our campus was being visited by the resident of Vladivostock University in Russia, a university that had a sterilization agreement with Washington State University. The president of that university said to our president something like, "I don't know what is wrong with women. They can only be mathematicians, doctors, and scientists. They do not seem to have the ability to write novels or poems." Clearly, those in power get to value their own characteristics and denigrate the characteristics of out-group members. Moreover, they seem to attribute this to some sort of essence of the out-group members as opposed to some sort of societal circumstance (see Pettigrew, 1979, on the "ultimate attribution error," also to be discussed later in this chapter).

**Stereotypes as Filters**

As discussed by Jones (1997), African Americans and other ethnic minorities commonly receive negative stereotype labels from the broader society. Often, it is these stereotypes that are relied upon rather than useful observation. Part of the problem with such imposition is that it allows the filtering in of only those pieces of evidence that confirm the stereotype, and it screens out those pieces of evidence that disconfirm the stereotype. Jones (1997) concluded that "stereotypic structures affect what we expect to happen in our social world when we fit our stereotype appear. These expectations affect how we process social information, and what we remember about people" (p. 91).

**Stereotypes Guiding Construal of Information**

According to Jones (1997), stereotypes can also influence how information is construed or interpreted. As a demonstration of this, Darley and Gross (1983) led research participants to believe that a female child was from either a high or a low socioeconomic class. When the participants saw the child taking an examination and getting answers right and wrong, those who were led to think that she was from a high socioeconomic class believed that she got more answers correct than she actually did and believed the test to be harder than it actually was. The participants who were led to think that the child was from a lower socioeconomic class believed she got more answers incorrect and believed the test to be easier.

**Stereotypes as Self-fulfilling Prophecies**

Finally, Jones (1997) discussed how stereotypes can affect the actual behavior of the target of the stereotype. This is known as the self-fulfilling prophecy (e.g., Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). In an interesting demonstration of this phenomenon, Snyder, Tanke, and Berscheid (1977) led research participants to believe that they were interacting over the telephone with either an attractive or an unattractive partner. The participant did not know that the other participant had any knowledge about his or her attractiveness. The unsuspecting partners were videotaped and evaluated only visually (the sound was turned off). Judges rated the partners' thoughts by the research participants to be attractive as being, in fact, more attractive; the partners thought to be unattractive were rated as being more unattractive. Again, these partners did not know that they were being labeled as attractive or unattractive, and the judges did not know anything about what was being said, what the partners or research participants knew or did not know, and so forth. However, the research partners elicited attractive or unattractive judgments in accordance with their preconceptions. In racial and ethnic stereotypes, if one held a stereotype that a certain ethnic minority had a tendency to be hostile, one might act defensive around a member of that ethnic minority group. This behavior might have a negative effect upon the stereotyped target (not quite explicitly but barely perceptibly), and his or her behavior might be more forceful in response to the defensiveness. This, in turn, causes more defensiveness, which then causes a more forceful response, in a very short time, both will be consciously aware of the forceful ("hostile") behavior of the target, thus confirming the initial stereotype.

**Stereotype Threat**

As noted in Chapter 1, Steele (1997) discussed the negative effects of what he termed "stereotype threat." Briefly, he found evidence that when African Americans were led to believe that their performance on a very difficult test would have some sort of diagnostic implications about the fundamental differences between Blacks and Whites in intelligence, their performance dropped. When there was no threat of confirming a negative stereotype, African American performance was equal to that of Whites. This was replicated in women who feared confirming the stereotype of the male/female differences in mathematical abilities in America. Again, when measured by performance under conditions in which the negative stereotype was not being confirmed, there were
no differences between the two groups under investigation. However, differences became apparent when performance was linked to the negative stereotypes. This occurred even when this connection was very subtly implied.

One of the main problems with negative stereotypes (or with stereotypes in general) is that they are quite difficult to eliminate. As was discovered in the old series of studies investigating the autokinetic phenomenon (e.g., Jacobs & Campbell, 1961; Sheriff, 1957), several generations of research participants had to pass through before the influence of one confederate was washed away. If it took several generations of participants to overcome something as dispassionate as a judgment involving the distance a pinpoint of light in a dark room has moved, imagine how many generations it will take to counteract years and years of emotionally charged opinions about different races! After an exhaustive examination of stereotypes, Hilton and von Hippel's (1996) first major conclusion was that we know more about how stereotypes are formed than we know about how to eliminate them.

### Attributions and Attributional Errors

As every social psychologist knows, the simplest form of attribution theory is a two-by-two matrix, with one of the dimensions being internal versus external attributions and the other dimension being stable versus unstable attributions. Thus, the attribution of a behavior could be the result of an internal and stable reason, an internal and unstable reason, an external and stable reason, or an external and unstable reason (e.g., Heider, 1958; Jones, Kanouse, Kelley, Nisbett, Valins, & Weir, 1972; Kelley, 1967; Weir, 1974, 1986). As Jones and Davis (1965) have pointed out, actors have a tendency to attribute their behaviors to external or unstable factors, whereas observers tend to attribute actors' behaviors to internal and stable factors. Thus, if I were to trip, I might attribute my stumble to the crack in the sidewalk, whereas you might attribute my stumble to my clumsiness.

Many social psychologists think the tendency to attribute the behaviors of someone else to internal or dispositional traits derives from the fact that many people are naive personality psychologists. If someone has behaved in a particular manner, it must be due to some deep-seated personality characteristic in the person. Ross (1977) has labeled this tendency to act like a personality psychologist the "fundamental attribution error." Aronson, Wilson, and Akert (1997) define the fundamental attribution error as "the tendency to overestimate the extent to which people's behavior is due to internal, dispositional factors and to underestimate the role of situational factors" (p. 126). Social psychologists would much more readily try to find the social or contextual factors that led to the particular behavior.

What if a person seeing me trip on a crack in the sidewalk were not only to attribute it to an internal, stable characteristic (my being clumsy) but also to generalize this trait to all Asians? The attribution would then be, "Gosh, I guess all Asians are clumsy! That's why Jeff tripped." If the person were to make this attribution, Pettigrew (1979) would call it the "ultimate attribution error." Aronson et al. (1997) defined the ultimate attribution error as "our tendency to make dispositional attributions about an entire group of people" (p. 498). They discussed how this process of making an ultimate attribution error was applied to the stereotype of Jews' being interested only in money:

When the Jews were first forced to flee their homeland during the third Diaspora, some 2,500 years ago, they were not allowed to own land or become artisans in the new regions in which they settled. Needing a livelihood, some took to lending money—a profession they were not allowed to have. Although this choice of occupation was an accidental byproduct of restrictive laws, it led to a dispositional attribution about Jews: that they were interested only in dealing with money and not in honest work, like farming. As this attribution became an ultimate error, Jews were labeled <= corrupting, vicious parasites. This dispositional stereotype contributed greatly to the barbarous consequences of anti-Semitism in Europe during the 1930s and 1940s and has persisted even in the face of clear, disconfirming evidence—such as that produced by the birth of the State of Israel, where Jews tilled the soil and made the desert bloom. (p. 498)

Deaux and her colleagues (e.g., Deaux, 1976, 1984; Deaux & Emmswiler, 1974; Deaux & Farris, 1977; Deaux & Lewis, 1984, Deaux & Major, 1987; Deaux, Winston, Crowley, & Lewis, 1983) have proposed a gender expectancy model to explain the differences in attributions seen between men and women for successful and unsuccessful performance of various tasks. This model was developed to address the gender differences often observed, in which males tend to attribute successes to internal, stable factors and failures to external or unstable factors, whereas females tend to attribute successes to external or unstable factors and failures to internal, stable factors. Interestingly, this pattern of attribution has been found in those who have above-average self-esteem and in those who have below-average self-esteem, with the male pattern of attribution being similar to those with high self-esteem and the female pattern of attribution being similar to those with low self-esteem (Deaux, 1984).

Do men generally have high self-esteem and women generally have
low self-esteem? Deaux says no. Rather, the differences are related to the fact that researchers often use tasks stereotypically associated with males (e.g., mathematics exercises). According to Deaux’s gender expectancy model, because the task is consistent with the stereotype for males (males are supposed to do well in mathematics tasks), men would attribute their successes to high ability and their failures to bad luck, poor effort, or the difficulty of the task. On the other hand, because the task is inconsistent with the stereotype for females (females are supposed to do poorly in mathematics tasks), women would attribute their successes to luck, good effort, or the ease of the task and their failures to poor ability. However, if the task were a stereotypically female task such as supportive verbalizations, exactly the opposite attributional pattern would be the result. Thus, the attributional pattern found in past studies was a function more of an artifact of measurement than of true gender differences. I recall an anecdote told by Shelley Taylor (either in print or at an APA convention) about a student who looked at her vita and commented, “Wow, you must work very hard!” To offer the student an alternative explanation, Taylor said, “No, not especially. I’m just smart.”

In a similar vein, if a negative stereotype is ascribed to an ethnic minority group and a member of that group were to behave in a manner consistent with the stereotype, the stereotype would be reinforced. However, if a member were to behave in a manner inconsistent with the stereotype, the behavior could be attributed to some sort of situational factor. I recall that when the riots in Los Angeles occurred after the first Rodney King trial decision was announced, people tended to feel that the riots simply reinforced people’s notion that African Americans were violent. This was brought into sharp focus when videotapes of the Reginald Denny beating were replayed over and over. However, people tended not to attribute care to the African Americans who pulled Reginald Denny to safety.

The Media and the Maintenance of Stereotypes

As implied in the last paragraph, the media can have a major effect upon the formation and maintenance of stereotypes. Many would contend that the contributions of the media are crucial in this matter (e.g., Feng, 1995; Jones, 1997; Mok, 1998; Falk, 1971; Pomernto & Pedersen, 1993; Williams, LaRose, & Frost, 1981). Perhaps the stereotype of African Americans’ being violent was maintained after the Rodney King riots because the Reginald Denny beating was replayed much more often than was his rescue.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, when we discuss the media and stereotype maintenance in my multicultural courses, I point out to students how the media refer to inner-city violence as Black-on-Black violence. However, when the media refer to violence in the suburbs or other forms of violence involving White communities, they never call them White-on-White violence.

This last point was sadly and poignanty brought home by an editorial by Courtland Milloy (1999). He was writing about the horrible tragedy at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, where two White males who were members of a group of students known as the Trench Coat Mafia killed and wounded dozens of their classmates in a planned assault on the school. Bombs and booby traps were also set all over the school. Milloy discussed how there exists a “parallel universe” for Blacks and Whites in this country. In this parallel universe, perspectives of the same events were quite different. He said:

In my parallel world, you hear comments like, “I’m so glad those killers weren’t Black. You know we’d all be in trouble if they were.” . . . In the parallel universe, there is acute awareness that White America responds differently when killers are Black and that its police apparatus can easily become a Gestapo-like operation. . . . In Columbine, the parents of the killers were not questioned by police for several hours after the crimes, even though police knew that bombs had been made in their homes. Had the killers been Black, the parents would no doubt have been hauled off in handcuffs in front of television cameras, and everybody who knew them would be under suspicion. . . . In Columbine, a TV reporter actually referred to one of the killers as “a gentleman who drove a BMW.” The shooters also were referred to as members of a “clique,” not a gang, and they were—we were reminded again and again—so full of academic promise. This obvious identification with the killers, and the reluctance to demonize them as Blacks would have been, did not go over well in the parallel universe.

Milloy went on to discuss the differential treatment by politicians and the media of violence in the inner city and in the suburbs. When violence occurs in the inner city, discussions of crackdowns on hoodlums arise. When violence occurs in the suburbs, discussions arise about how society is to blame because of the culture of violence portrayed in the media and the availability of guns.

Conclusions

Many believe that stereotypes are natural results of our desire to categorize large pieces of information. This categorization helps us to save attentional resources for other forms of information that require
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r attention. However, social stereotypes are not necessarily benignly structured. Portrayals in the media can profoundly alter our formulatons of opinions of groups other than our own. Is there any solution to this problem of media portrayal? I do not know. However, I believe that we all must be aware of these discrepancies and make our students aware of them. At some point, public action must take place, if those who control the media are made aware of their bias by people, change can occur.

References


The Construction and Maintenance of Stereotypes


Allies: How Are They Created and What Are Their Experiences?

In addressing resistance to important social issues, such as the acceptance of multiculturalism, feminism, lesbians and gay men, various religions, and so forth, we have found that such work is difficult to accomplish without the help of individuals who leave their own demographic group to help those being oppressed. These individuals are known as allies. In this chapter, we focus on an examination of the motivations of these allies and on experiences as allies. In so doing, we hope to reach a better understanding of allies and thus make a step toward setting up an environment conducive to the creation of more allies.

There have been allies throughout history—people who work on behalf of others and who take up unpopular causes, people who work on behalf of groups other than their own. There were Whites in the abolition movement who opposed U.S. slavery and worked toward its demise. Christians hid Jews in Europe during World War II, often risking their own lives in the process. Men have marched on behalf of equal rights for women, and heterosexuals continue to support the rights of lesbians and gay men not to be discriminated against in public or private life.

It is expected, and perhaps assumed, that members of minority or oppressed groups are interested in issues and causes related to their own experiences. For example, one would not be surprised to find gay