Stereotyping **Class set – Please don't mark on this sheet**

Some sociologists study the effects of the idea of "race" on human behavior. They also explore the impact of ethnicity. An ethnic group is a distinctive group of people within a country. Members share a cultural heritage. Ethnicity can be the basis for feelings of pride and solidarity. But, like race, it can also be the basis for prejudice and discrimination.

The word prejudice comes from the word pre-judge. We pre-judge when we have an opinion about a person because of a group to which that individual belongs. A prejudice has the following characteristics.

1. It is based on real or imagined differences between groups.
2. It attaches values to those differences in ways that benefit the dominant group at the expense of minorities.
3. It is generalized to all members of a target group.

Discrimination occurs when prejudices are translated into action. For example, a person who says that all Mexicans are lazy is guilty of prejudice, but one who refuses to hire a Mexican is guilty of discrimination. Not all prejudices result in discrimination. Some are positive. But, whether positive or negative, prejudices have a similar effect - they reduce individuals to categories or stereotypes. A stereotype is a judgment about an individual based on the real or imagined characteristics of a group. Joseph H. Suina, a professor of education and a member of the Cochiti Pueblo, recalls the effects stereotyping had on his behavior in the Marines.

From the moment my comrades in the military discovered I was an Indian, I was treated differently. My name disappeared. I was no longer Suina, Joseph, or Joe. Suddenly, I was Chief, Indian, or Tonto. Occasionally, I was referred to as Geronimo, Crazy Horse or some other well-known warrior from the past. It was almost always with an affection that develops in a family, but clearly, I was seen in the light of stereotypes that my fellow Marines from around the country had about Native Americans.

Natives were few in the Marine Corps. Occasionally, I'd run across one from another battalion. Sure enough, just like me, each of them was "Chief" or "Indian." Machismo is very important in the Corps and names such as Chief and Crazy Horse were affirmations of very desirable qualities for those entering combat situations. Good warriors, good fighting men, we were to be skilled in reading the land, notable for our physical prowess, renowned for our bravery. In addition, we were to drink to the point of total inebriation or to be in the midst of a barroom brawl before the night was over. Never permitted to assume leadership, but always in the role of supportive and faithful companion, just like the Lone Ranger's Tonto.

Personally, I was anything but combatant, and my experiences with alcohol had been limited to two or three beers prior to my enlistment. Never in my wildest dreams had I imagined that I would be accorded the characteristics of a noble and reckless warrior. Since these traits were held in such high esteem, I enjoyed the status and acceptance they afforded me among the men. My own platoon commander singled me out to compete in a rope-climbing event at a regimental field meet. After I easily won that contest (my Pueblo life had included a great deal of wood chopping), my stature as chief increased.

I actually began to believe that I had those qualities and started behaving in accord with the stereotypes. Later during my two tours of duty in Vietnam, I played out my expected role quite well. I went on twice as many search and destroy missions as others; I took "the point" more often than anyone else. After all, couldn't I hear, see, smell, and react to signs of the enemy better than any of my comrades? On shore leave, I learned to drink with the best of them and always managed to find trouble.

Almost a full year beyond my four years of enlistment, I was recovered from my second set of wounds and finally discharged. I had earned two purple hearts, a bronze star, the Gallantry Cross (Vietnam's highest military award at the time), and numerous other combat expedition medals. I also had, on my record, time in jails in Japan, the Philippines, and Mexico.

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Over twenty years later, Jeanne Park, a student at Stuyvesant High School in New York City, had a similar experience with stereotypes.

Who am I?

For Asian-American students, the answer is a diligent, hardworking and intelligent young person. But living up to this reputation has secretly haunted me.

The labeling starts in elementary school. It's not uncommon for a teacher to remark, "You're Asian, you're supposed to do well in math." The underlying message is, "You're Asian and you're supposed to be smarter."

Not to say being labeled intelligent isn't flattering, because it is, or not to deny that basking in the limelight of being top of my class isn't ego-boosting, because frankly it is. But at a certain point, the pressure became crushing. I felt as if doing poorly on my next spelling quiz would stain the exalted reputation of all Asian students forever.

So I continued to be an academic overachiever, as were my friends. By junior high school I started to believe I was indeed smarter. I became condescending toward non-Asians. I was a bigot; all my friends were Asians. The thought of intermingling occurred rarely if ever.

My elitist opinion of Asian students changed, however, in high school. As a student at what is considered one of the nation's most competitive science and math schools, I found that being on top is no longer an easy feat.

I quickly learned that Asian students were not smarter. How could I ever have believed such a thing? All around me are intelligent, ambitious people who are not only Asian but white, black and Hispanic.
Superiority complexes aside, the problem of social segregation still exists in the schools. With few exceptions, each race socializes only with its "own kind."

Students see one another in the classroom, but outside the classroom there remains distinct segregation.
Racist lingo abounds. An Asian student who socializes only with other Asians is believed to be an Asian Supremacist or, at the very least, arrogant and closed off. Yet an Asian student who socializes only with whites is called a "twinkie," one who is yellow on the outside but white on the inside.

A white teenager who socializes only with whites is thought of as prejudiced, yet one who socializes with Asians is considered an "egg," white on the outside and yellow on the inside.

These culinary classifications go on endlessly, needless to say, leaving many confused, and leaving many more fearful than ever of social experimentation. Because the stereotypes are accepted almost unanimously, they are rarely challenged. Many develop harmful stereotypes of entire races. We label people before we even know them.

Labels learned at a young age later metamorphose into more visible acts of racism. For example, my parents once accused and ultimately fired a Puerto Rican cashier, believing she had stolen $200 from the register at their grocery store. They later learned it was a mistake. An Asian shopkeeper nearby once beat a young Hispanic youth who worked there with a baseball bat because he believed the boy to be lazy and dishonest.

We all hold misleading stereotypes of people that limit us as individuals in that we cheat ourselves out of the benefits different cultures can contribute. We can grow and learn from each culture whether it be Chinese, Korean or African-American.

Just recently some Asian boys in my neighborhood were attacked by a group of young white boys who have christened themselves the Master Race. Rather than being angered by this act, I feel pity for this generation that lives in a state of bigotry.

It may be too late for our parents' generation to accept that each person can only be judged for the characteristics that set him or her apart as an individual. We, however, can do better.