



## BEYOND A STEREOTYPE IS AN INDIVIDUAL WITH A UNIQUE MIND

By Rachida A.Boukaila



A couple of years ago, while a friend of mine was on her way to the airport, the UBER driver started talking about how IMMIGRANTS were POLLUTING the country. He went on talking about BLACK communities being a threat to the country and how MUSLIMS should never be allowed to enter the country because they were all religious FANATICS and TERRORISTS. “What a bunch of idiots” he said, “and what’s the story with their women wearing those ridiculous VEILS? They truly look like clowns!”

**Spell:** POLLUTING - FANATICS- TERRORISTS

**The Uber driver started talking about how were polluting the country?**  
IMMIGRANTS

**According to the Uber driver, which communities represent a threat to his country?** BLACK

**Name one terms that the Uber driver used to describe Muslims?** FANATICS-  
TERRORISTS- IDIOTS

**Define immigrant?** A PERSON WHO LIVES IN A COUNTRY OTHER THAN THEIR  
BIRTH-PLACE

That is one bold STATEMENT to say out loud to a stranger you barely met! But my friend sat quietly and listened attentively. The Uber driver was

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about to discover that my friend was a Muslim, not a terrorist nor a religious fanatic and that she had never worn the veil. The reason the driver felt comfortable sharing his point of view was probably due to the fact that my friend didn't appear to him as being part of any of those groups he mentioned. In other words, she didn't fit any of those STEREOTYPES. A stereotype is a "STANDARDIZED mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represent an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment."\* Many people have a mental representation of Muslims as having brown skin, dark hair with a MIDDLE EASTERN accent and possibly wearing religious clothing such as a veil for women. However, my friend is blond, has fair skin and speaks ENGLISH without an accent. People never really know where she comes from and that gave her an OPPORTUNITY to teach this man a lesson. Although the Uber driver acknowledged his wrong after hearing my friend's respectful and informative reply, it would be unrealistic to think that people can change based on a single experience. It is a process which involves a long battle with our societies deeply INGRAINED beliefs.

Spell: STATEMENT- STEREOTYPES- OPPORTUNITY

My friend sat quietly and listened? ATTENTIVELY

What was the driver about to discover about my friend? Name one? SHE IS A MUSLIM- NOT A TERRORIST- NOT A RELIGIOUS FANATIC-SHE NEVER WORE A VEIL

A stereotype is what type of mental picture? STANDARDIZED

A stereotype is a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents what? Name one? AN OVERSIMPLIFIED OPINION- PREJUDICE ATTITUDE- UNCRITICAL JUDGEMENT.

What is the average mental representation that people have if they were to describe a Muslim? Name two? BROWN SKIN- DARK HAIR- MIDDLE EASTERN ACCENT- WEARING RELIGIOUS CLOTHING SUCH AS A VEIL FOR WOMEN

It would be unrealistic to think that people can change based on a single experience due to our societies deeply beliefs? INGRAINED

How do you think my friend felt after hearing the Uber driver's bold statement?

No one enjoys being described based on a stereotype so why do we use them? Our minds are always trying to ORGANIZE information for optimal PROBLEM-SOLVING. We are constantly exposed to tremendous amounts of information and in order to cope and PROCESS that information to make quick decisions, the brain



uses mental strategies to simplify that information by CLUSTERING and grouping. Our brain uses SCHEMAS, a concept introduced in 1923 by developmental psychologist JEAN PIAGET, which are mental REPRESENTATIONS that help us organize our knowledge into categories. For example, we have different schemas for different animals. The schema of a cat and that of a tiger may be similar in that both animals are four legged, hairy and have a tail, but specific details enable us to DIFFERENTIATE them, such as their size or the sound they make.

Spell: SCHEMAS- REPRESENTATIONS- DIFFERENTIATE Our minds are always trying to organize information for optimal

solving? PROBLEM

We are constantly exposed to tremendous amounts of? INFORMATION

The brain uses mental strategies to simplify information by? CLUSTERING AND GROUPING

What year did Jean Piaget introduce the concept of schemas? 1923

How long ago was this?  $2020 - 1923 = 97$  YEARS AGO

Who was Jean Piaget? A DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGIST

What is a schema? A MENTAL REPRESENTATION THAT HELPS US ORGANIZE OUR KNOWLEDGE INTO CATEGORIES

Name another example of schema?

Why do you think people don't enjoy being described based on a stereotype?

We also use HEURISTICS which are mental SHORTCUTS for quick and EFFICIENT problem-solving. For example, if a person of authority makes a statement, we are more likely to ASSUME that what they say is true rather than questioning it. Our brains are like computers, but they can only process a certain amount of information. If one had to analyze in detail every situation, we would never get anything done! We make hundreds of quick decisions every day: "Should I have toast or cereal for breakfast?",

"What should I wear today?" and so on... These mental shortcuts allow us to save time and OPTIMIZE mental effort so we can use that mental energy for situations that require more in-depth critical thinking like writing this lesson for example.

(Watch video below)

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## Schemas and Heuristics explained



VAKT <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsgNubqLyMo>

**Spell:** HEURISTICS- SHORTCUTS- OPTIMIZE

Heuristics are mental shortcuts that we use for quick and problem-solving? EFFICIENT

if a person of authority makes a statement, we are more likely to that what they say is true rather than questioning it? ASSUME

Why don't we analyze every situation in detail? WE WOULD NEVER GET ANYTHING DONE- OUR BRAINS CAN ONLY PROCESS A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF INFORMATION

What do these mental shortcuts allow us to do? THEY ALLOW US TO SAVE TIME AND OPTIMIZE MENTAL EFFORT THAT CAN BE USED FOR MORE IN-DEPTH CRITICAL THINKING

Name another quick decision that you make every day?

Why do you think people are more likely to assume that what a person of authority says is true?

Although these STRATEGIES can save us time and are PRACTICAL for our everyday life decision-making, we also tend to apply these strategies with people by OVERSIMPLIFYING images and ideas of a particular type of person that can lead to stereotypes. Let's take for example a picture of after-shave lotion and a picture of lipstick. Many people would associate the image of a man with the shaving lotion and a woman with the lipstick. Although these examples can seem harmless for some, they can lead us to make ASSUMPTIONS that can be DAMAGING to the

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TRANSGENDER community whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. However, these assumptions are often INVOLUNTARY and occur at the SUBCONSCIOUS level because we are constantly exposed to ideas as well as images in our everyday life that influence and shape our perceptions.

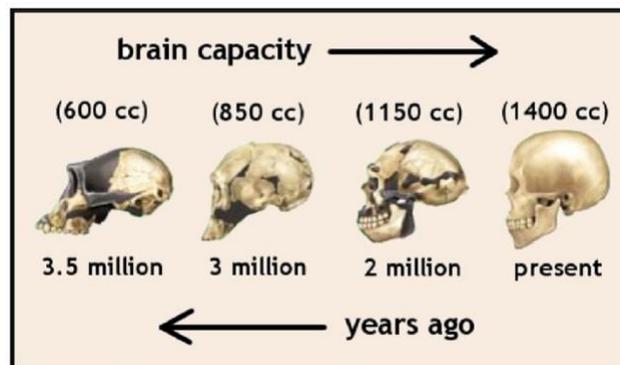
Spell: OVERSIMPLIFYING- ASSUMPTIONS- SUBCONSCIOUS These strategies can save us time and are \_\_\_\_\_ for our everyday life decision-making? PRACTICAL How can these strategies lead to stereotypes? WHEN WE APPLY THEM WITH PEOPLE BY OVERSIMPLIFYING IMAGES AND IDEAS OF A PARTICULAR TYPE PERSON

An individual whose gender identity is different from the sex he/she was assigned at birth is known as a? TRANSGENDER

Name a stereotype that seems harmless but can be damaging to others? These assumptions are often? INVOLUNTARY- SUBCONSCIOUS

Why are these assumptions often involuntary? WE ARE CONSTANTLY EXPOSED TO IDEAS AS WELL AS IMAGES IN OUR EVERYDAY LIFE THAT INFLUENCE AND SHAPE OUR PERCEPTIONS

Humans are a product of nature and NURTURE both affecting how we make sense and organize the world around us. Our brains have evolved to optimize SURVIVAL in any given ENVIRONMENT and to do so we have



developed what we call survival intelligence which is our ability to CONTROL our environment by limiting direct THREATS and ADAPTING to new threats. A lot of strategies have been used by humans that have become deeply ingrained in our



brain to the extent of becoming hard wired and at times beyond our conscious control. Moreover, our brains have also evolved to become BIASED by attending to certain types of information while ignoring others. We prefer rewarding stimuli over AVERSIVE situations so, we use mental short-cuts to make quick decisions.

**Spell:** ENVIRONMENT- THREATS- BIASED

Humans are a product of nature and? NURTURE

Our brains have evolved to \_\_\_\_ survival in any given environment? OPTIMIZE

What does survival intelligence mean? IT IS OUR ABILITY TO CONTROL OUR ENVIRONMENT BY LIMITING DIRECT THREATS AND ADAPTING TO NEW THREATS.

Why did our brain evolve to be biased? WE PREFER REWARDING STIMULI OVER AVERSIVE SITUATIONS

Name an aversive situation?

What does “humans are a product of nature and nurture” mean?

These biases can be very useful because they save us time but when we OVERGENERALIZE them by only using evidence that fits with our set beliefs, we risk ignoring important information such as overgeneralizing CHARACTERISTICS of a group which can lead to stereotypes and PREJUDICE. When our TENDENCIES lean toward being suspicious of people who do not belong to our group, we perceive them as STRANGERS. These biases evolved for survival reasons when small groups of humans fought against each other for resources such as water and food.

**Spell:** OVERGENERALIZE- CHARACTERISTICS- PREJUDICE

Biases can be very useful because they save us? TIME

What does overgeneralize mean in this context? USING ONLY EVIDENCE

THAT FITS WITH OUR BELIEFS- IGNORING IMPORTANT INFORMATION

What happens when we overgeneralize characteristics of a group? STEREOTYPES- PREJUDICE

For what reasons did these biases evolve? SURVIVAL

Give me a synonym of prejudice? DISCRIMINATION- ANIMOSITY





**DEFINITIONS:**

**An outgroup** is any group that you don't belong to, while **an ingroup** is a group that you associate yourself with. One basis for stereotypes is the tendency to see members of an outgroup as similar (called outgroup homogeneity) and members of your ingroup as different from each other (called ingroup heterogeneity).\*\*

If we look at RELIGIOUS or RACIAL stereotyping for example, heuristics can lead us to make assumptions that can be damaging by believing that MEMBERSHIP to a certain racial group defines the INNATE qualities of an individual such as their personality and behavior. This idea is known as ESSENTIALISM. When these assumptions are negative for any OUTGROUP, it results in SEGREGATION which is the act isolating an individual or a group of people from a larger group.

**Spell:** MEMBERSHIP- ESSENTIALISM- SEGREGATION

Heuristics can lead us to make assumptions that can be? DAMAGING Give me one term that refers to the innate qualities of an individual? PERSONALITY- BEHAVIOR What idea describes our assumptions that membership to a certain racial group defines the INNATE qualities of an individual? ESSENTIALISM What happens when these assumptions are negative for any outgroup? SEGREGATION

What does segregation mean? THE ACT OF ISOLATING AN INDIVIDUAL OR A GROUP OF PEOPLE FROM A LARGER GROUP.

One example is how the 9/11 terrorist ATTACKS affected how we PERCEIVE the entire Muslim communities. If one hears the word 'terrorist', the first image that comes to mind is a Muslim religious fanatic from the Middle East, with brown skin and dark hair but, rarely would anyone picture a "white person" with different religious beliefs as a terrorist. The fact is, some Muslims are terrorists but not all Muslims are terrorists. Similarly, if one black person shot a cop, it does not imply



that all black people are dangerous cop killers. These racial or religious biases are ever so common. When people who have these types of biases are confronted with evidence that CONTRADICTS their beliefs, they tend to ignore it and only look for information that fits with their EXISTING beliefs. This concept is known as the CONFIRMATION bias. As humans, we all have these confirmation biases in different contexts. Another example would be someone who only seeks out news sources that align with their beliefs while ignoring sources that may contradict them. These biases limit our access to all the facts, and they can become very HARMFUL, especially when judging others. (Watch video below)

### Confirmation Bias Explained



VAKT: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xKklLpIng>

Spell: ATTACKS- PERCEIVE- CONFIRMATION

Which terrorist attack affected how Muslim communities are perceived?

9/11

What do the numbers 9/11 refer to? THE ATTACKS OCCURRED ON SEPTEMBRE 11 (2001)

The concept of overgeneralizing and ignoring evidence that contradicts our beliefs is known as the bias? CONFIRMATION

What happens when someone chooses only to turn to news sources that align with their beliefs while ignoring others? IT LIMITS THEIR ACCESS TO ALL THE FACTS

Give me an example of another confirmation bias?

So how can we avoid stereotyping? Earlier, we talked about how making sense and categorizing information often occurs at the subconscious level. Once we

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ACKNOWLEDGE this phenomenon, we have to identify and evaluate situations that require more cognitive effort- especially when our decisions can impact the WELLBEING of others- by taking into account all the information that is ACCESSIBLE to us and when in doubt just ask the person, someone who may know or even better, research the missing information by reading reliable sources. So, we need to be more mindful, careful and try to understand others' beliefs, the environment they grew up in as well as their UNIQUE experiences. We also need to consider people as individuals first before jumping to categorizations. Each individual has different experiences which makes their personality and behavior unique. We should embrace differences and celebrate them because it allows us to expand our views and knowledge about HUMANITY and most of all, DIVERSITY allows individuals from different backgrounds, cultures and faiths to exchange and share their experiences while fostering creativity and INNOVATION.

Spell: ACCESSIBLE- DIVERSITY- INNOVATION

Making sense and categorizing information often occurs at the

\_\_\_\_\_level? SUBCONSCIOUS

How can we avoid decisions that can impact the wellbeing of others? BY TAKING INTO ACCOUNT ALL THE INFORMATION THAT IS ACCESSIBLE TO US

And when in doubt, what else can you do? ASK THE PERSON-SOMEONE WHO MAY KNOW- RESEARCH BY READING RELIABLE SOURCES.

Each individual has different experiences which makes their personality and behavior? UNIQUE

What concept allows individuals from different backgrounds, cultures and faiths to exchange and share their experiences? DIVERSITY

What does diversity foster? CREATIVITY- INNOVATION



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Another way to avoid stereotyping is INCLUSION and COLLABORATION. We live in a digital world where TECHNOLOGY allows the entire world to be connected all the time while giving us access to the same information. Teenagers, all over the world are enjoying similar music and fashion trends that are promoted by INTERNATIONAL celebrity icons. Cable Television, movie streaming services such as NETFLIX and PRIME VIDEO, online shopping and virtual events are available all over the world and people are social medias friends without having ever met in person.

Spell: INCLUSION- TECHNOLOGY-INTERNATIONAL

Another way to avoid stereotyping is inclusion and? COLLABORATION What allows the whole world to be connected nowadays? TECHNOLOGY What do teenagers all over the world enjoy? SIMILAR MUSIC AND FASHION TRENDS

Name a celebrity icon?

Name one movie streaming service? NETFLIX-PRIME VIDEO

Give me the name of a social media platform? FACEBOOK- INSTAGRAM- TWITTER

Individuals share SIMILARITIES beyond their differences, regardless of their race, gender, ETHNICITY, religious affiliation, socio-economic background, political beliefs and the list goes on ... and those perceived differences should be INTEGRATED. When we accept, tolerate, communicate and collaborate, we allow inclusion to become a natural process, not a PRIVILEGE that one needs to fight for. Of course, we don't have to get along with everyone we meet, but RESPECTING others is our responsibility. Treating others with EQUALITY reduces negative thoughts, conflicts and promotes communication while inclusion develops confidence and positive feelings of BELONGINGNESS.

Spell: ETHNICITY- PRIVILEGE- BELONGINGNESS

What do individuals share beyond their differences? SIMILARITIES Name a difference amongst individuals? RACE- GENDER- ETHNICITY- RELIOUS AFFILIATION- SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND- POLITICAL BELIEFS

When we accept, tolerate, communicate and collaborate, we allow inclusion to become a natural? PROCESS

What is our responsibility? RESPECTING OTHERS

When we treat others with equality, what does it reduce? NEGATIVE THOUGHTS-

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## CONFLICTS

And equality promotes? COMMUNICATION

What does inclusion develop? CONFIDENCE- POSITIVE FEELINGS OF BELONGINGNESS.

Last but not least, the NEWS media has one of the most powerful INFLUENCE on how we view different groups and they need to be more careful. Most news content focuses on negative events, but they should be equally PROMOTING positive contributions and ACCOMPLISHMENTS of different groups to avoid feeding these stereotypes. Of course, it is the news media's RESPONSIBILITY to inform the public on the FACTS, however, it is also their responsibility to report only the facts at the pace at which they occur.

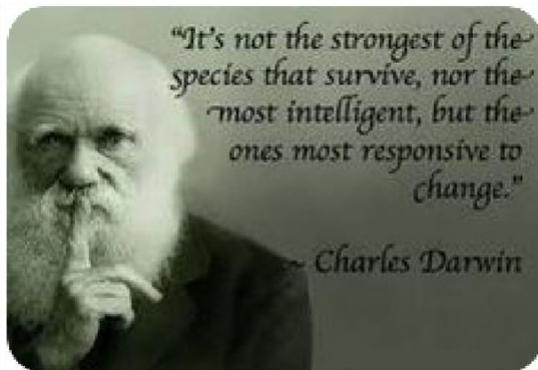
Spell: INFLUENCE- ACCOMPLISHMENTS- RESPONSIBILITY

What type of media has one of the most powerful influence on how we view different groups? NEWS

How can the news media avoid feeding stereotypes? BY PROMOTING POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF DIFFERENT GROUPS

Name another type of media that has a strong influence on shaping our perceptions?

What should be the main responsibility of the news media? THEIR MAIN RESPONSIBILITY SHOULD BE TO REPORT ONLY FACTS



Charles Robert Darwin 1809 –1882

Unfortunately, IGNORANCE and fear of the unknown create CONFLICTS and segregation. We need to educate ourselves and value the UNIQUENESS of each individual instead of the category we believe they fit in. Pertaining to a group is

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purely a human construct which evolved for survival purposes, but we should learn to EXPAND the boundaries to allow for humanity's PROGRESS. Of course, many people have already changed, and social activists are effectively spreading awareness but there is still a lot that we have to learn and integrate. The world is continuously changing and as CHARLES DARWIN once said: "It is not the strongest of the species that survive nor the most intelligent but the ones most RESPONSIVE to change."

Spell: IGNORANCE- PROGRESS- RESPONSIVE

Ignorance and of the unknown create? FEAR- CONFLICTS

What do we need to value in each individual instead of the category we believe they fit in? Their? UNIQUENESS

What should we do to allow humanity's progress? EXPAND THE BOUNDARIES

Who is effectively spreading awareness? Social? ACTIVISTS

According to Charles Darwin, what species is most likely to survive? THE ONES MOST RESPONSIVE TO CHANGE

What theory is Charles Darwin most known for? THE THEORY OF EVOLUTION

Creative writing:

1-What are your thoughts on stereotypes?

2- What does the concept of equality mean to you?

3- TED Talk is asking you to present and defend a social cause. Write a

presentation that highlights the reasons of your choice and how you

believe the issue can be addressed.

4-Write a poem or a song to advocate for any social cause of your choice. 5- You are asked to welcome members of a different group that you have never met before to your home for a given period of time. Describe how you could apply inclusion and collaboration.

VAKT Activities:

1- Listen to a song about social injustice: Black Eyed Peas: *Where Is The Love*

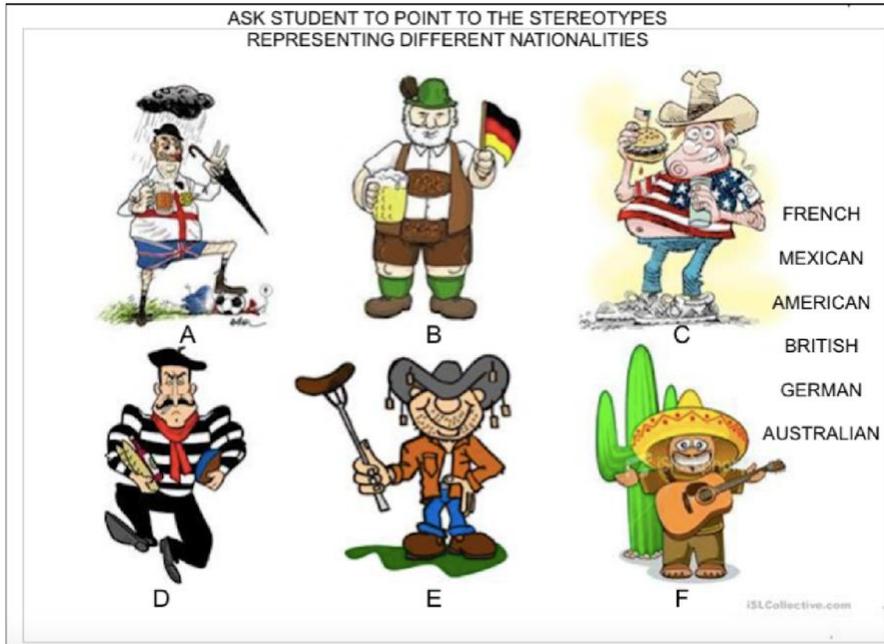
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpYeekQkAdc>

2- Stereotypes: Identify and point to the stereotypes representing different nationalities



3- Dance protest: follow the dance moves for social justice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnnDztTckII>



Rachida A. Boukaila is a S2C practitioner in training who lives in Toronto, Canada. She is currently facilitating an online creative writing workshop for an amazing group of spellers who go by the name of The Master Musketeers. She is also working on setting up a not-for-profit organization for the spelling community of Ontario that will open its doors by December of 2021. When Rachida is not working, she enjoys spending time with her friends and family, reading, traveling, hiking as well as Netflix binge-watching after a long day!

The mission of [I-ASC](#) is to advance communication access for nonspeaking individuals globally through [training](#), [education](#), [advocacy](#) and [research](#). I-ASC supports all forms of augmentative

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and alternative communication (AAC) with a focus on methods of spelling and typing. I-ASC currently offers [Practitioner training in Spelling to Communicate \(S2C\)](#) with the hope that other methods of AAC using spelling or typing will join our association.

\* <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stereotype>

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-a-heuristic-2795235>

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\*\* <https://study.com/academy/lesson/ingroup-vs-outgroup-definition-andexplanation.html>

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/segregation>

