**Negative Bias: Regarding Group Membership**

Before turning from gender bias to group bias, I think it wise to interject a brief discussion about semantics. In this book, readers will probably notice that I deliberately avoid several popular terms (like “the white race” and “the black race”) and choose instead other ways to identify certain ethnic groups. There are certain terms I myself try to avoid: *minority, under-represented minority, people of color, Hispanic, Latino/a, Black, White*. And wherever possible, I avoid using the word “race” because it is, as most of us agree by now, not a real biological category. But of course it remains a very powerful social construction. One has only to look at the U.S. Census’s use of the word to see how pervasive it is. (As one expert has mused, if we agree that “race” was socially and politically constructed, then why can’t we undo that construction, piece by piece? This is beyond my power but not beyond my wishing.)

In this book, I will eschew “race” and instead employ the following words and hyphenated descriptors: *non-immigrants (NI); majority group* which signifies the *European-American group*; *under-represented women (URW); colonized groups* which to me means the same as non-immigrant groups; *hyphenated ethnicities such as European-American, Mexican-American, Chinese-American, Cuban-American individuals and groups* and so on; and finally *communities of descent* which will mean ethnic lineage traced to specific places such as India, Korea, China, Haiti, Ireland, and so on (this is historian David Hollinger’s term, 2005, 2011).
As a further clarification, when I use the interchangeable terms non-immigrant groups or colonized groups in this country, I am intending to include only these five: **African Americans, Mexican Americans, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Puerto-Rican Americans.** Chapter 3, I trust, will make very clear why only these five should be described as non-immigrant, colonized groups and why and how these groups came to be associated with a negative bias regarding their intellectual capabilities and promise. In fact, these groups were forcibly and unfairly assigned an extraordinary negative bias called a “stigma.” This is the term used by sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) to denote the assignment of a “spoiled identity” that disqualifies members of a particular group from full societal acceptance and respect. Obviously dealing with and pushing back on a negative bias—let alone a more intense stigma—turns into an unenviable and “tiresome” task, as Professor Nell Painter has phrased it.

Earlier in this chapter, I described how under-represented women in predominantly male settings and departments have to spend extra time and energy in order to push back and cope with their under-valuation and short-changing. And I listed some strategies (such as blind peer review and heightened self-correction by evaluators) that are bringing about greater equity and recognition for women.

In this section, I will do the same as I spotlight the colonized, non-immigrant (NI) groups listed above. Let us begin. One stunning example of negative group bias has been sketched out by MIT Emeritus Management Professor Thomas Allen, himself European-American. As both a faculty member and administrator, he observed that “racism is so ingrained in this society that people don’t see it in themselves.” Repeatedly he saw the following scenario play out: “Without even thinking, two people will walk in—one’s white, one’s black—and they [his colleagues] assume the black isn’t capable. Yet they don’t know a thing about either one of them, nothing.” As a dean, he was repeatedly frustrated and angered by his majority-group colleagues. When he
would bring in an African-American job candidate, Allen’s colleagues in subtle but unmistakable ways “would discount that person right away.” They would assume that this candidate was “not as capable” as the majority candidate.

While Allen didn’t see this behavior in everyone, he saw it “in so many people who you wouldn’t expect it from, people who espouse liberal values.” He strenuously and wittily underscores: “These aren’t rednecks I’m talking about.” Rather, these are educated colleagues who “make wonderful talk” about equal opportunity and democratic values but unconsciously make “simplistic and damaging assumptions” about who can be competent and who cannot (quoted in C. Williams, 2001, pp. 314-19).

As several cognitive scientists have pointed out, for those surrounded by a negative stereotype “far more evidence is required for a judge to be certain that an individual possesses an unexpected attribute.” The unexpected attribute is competence while the expected attribute is incompetence, according to University of Kansas Psychology Professor Monica Biernat (2003, p. 1020) whose lab does meticulous tracking of shifting standards (see also Sagaria, 2002, on filters applied differently to different groups of job candidates). If a member of a search committee assumes a job applicant from an under-represented group is possibly substandard, then that committee member will predictably “raise the bar” and insist on far more evidence than required before he/she can accept the applicant as worthy of consideration. It is a common practice for faculty search committees to seek from under-represented candidates (but not others) extra assurances that they are qualified, such as additional writing samples, letters of recommendation, and so on (Reyes and Halcon, 1988). This sort of “raising the bar” is one of the cognitive errors discussed in Chapter 1.

Negative group bias regarding competency can also lead search committees to insist that non-immigrant, under-represented candidates must have earned doctorates and must have
performed their residencies or post-doc training at the most prestigious places—a requirement that is not usually essential for other applicants. Majority candidates will probably enjoy the assumption of being competent and well-qualified and will have extra points added to their evaluations, albeit unwittingly. On the other hand, those with negative bias will have points subtracted by evaluators, albeit unwittingly.

University of Pittsburgh Emeritus Law Professor Richard Delgado has observed similar standard-shifting in law schools’ academic searches and decision-making. He points out that when the archetypal academic search committee is seeking a new colleague and after several months of work has not located the “superhuman, mythic figure who is Black or Hispanic,” then the committee turns to a non-mythic, average candidate who is almost always “white, male, and straight.” The committee has confidence that the choice they are reaching is a sound one: this is because the lower standard of evidence—applied to a positively stereotyped person—is being unwittingly used (Delgado, 1998, “Storytelling,” p. 265).

Another manifestation of negative bias was uncovered by Robert Haro, an educational researcher in the Southwest. He interviewed “Latino/a leaders in higher education” as well as a number of European-American trustees and members of hiring committees at twenty-five colleges and universities. (I myself will use the word “Latino/a” here because Professor Haro does so.) On the basis of 120 personal interviews, Haro found that Latinos/as are often stereotypically and negatively treated: their academic credentials and experience are viewed as suspect and their styles of personal interaction discounted as inappropriate. For instance, European-American job candidates for a college presidency were not required to have had previous experience as an academic dean or provost but Latino/a candidates were. European-American candidates might squeeze by with a doctorate from less than a top research university but not a Latino/a. Latina candidates were sometimes pronounced to be inappropriately dressed.
and wearing “cheap and distracting” jewelry, in the words of a trustee and a member of a search committee (Haro, 2001, p. 32).

What is the negative stereotype being spotlighted in these studies and anecdotes? It is, of course, the presumption of inferiority and incompetence—and this presumption about under-represented women (URW) and non-immigrant groups (NIs) endures and endures even in the face of abundant evidence of their accomplishments and leadership. Internal surveys of University of Michigan faculty repeatedly reveal that professors in these categories at the Big Ten University frequently feel they are discriminated against, scrutinized far more than majority male professors, and undervalued as intellectuals. A number of European-American male faculty members at Michigan agree that they too had seen such undervaluing and intense scrutiny of their colleagues. Other campuses’ annual and biennial climate surveys reveal very similar patterns.

Can it be any wonder that colonized, non-immigrant groups in the faculty ranks often lament that they are never given the benefit of the doubt, that they are always “on stage,” and that they feel they are always being sternly judged? Sociologist Lois Benjamin found that almost all of the one hundred of African-American professionals she interviewed for her book The Black Elite felt they were indeed on “perennial probation” and had to prove themselves twice as accomplished as majority colleagues in academe, law, and medicine (Benjamin, 1998, p. 28; Cooper and Stevens, 2002; Hollinger, 2011).

In his decades of faculty-development work on campuses throughout the country, Robert Boice has found that under-represented faculty from colonized groups have to deal constantly with insinuations that they are unworthy. They must brace themselves for almost daily snubs and putdowns, both large and small. Boice’s finding is compellingly reinforced by two nationally-distributed films that feature more than twenty minority professors in various academic
disciplines: “Through My Lens” (produced and distributed by the University of Michigan) and “Shattering the Silences” (produced by the Public Broadcasting Company and now distributed by several outlets). These two eye-opening films make painfully clear the costs exacted from under-represented male and female faculty as they undertake their daily struggles for professional recognition and dignity and for fair evaluations of their teaching and scholarship.

Both male and female members of colonized, non-immigrant groups in this country often have to deal with “stereotype fatigue.” In a study of African-American physicians and professors in academic medicine, the professionals could not recall a single positive “race-related experience” within any of the medical institutions where they had worked, but they easily recalled an abundance of negative ones.

Apparently, medical workplaces and their administrators diligently ignore the negative stereotype (the proverbial elephant in the room). Every under-represented doctor in the above study reported that the relevance of race is never acknowledged and that no informal or formal discussions are ever held about the elephant and how to shrink its size or even remove it from the room. A family medicine physician observed: “We have, as a society, figured out ways to systematically deny that racism exists. And so have the medical institutions that train us. There is no way to have a discussion about it because it has been decided that it doesn’t exist.” Stereotype fatigue results from having to accept this heavy silence and avoidance while simultaneously having to “deal with the pressure of whatever stereotypes people may have about race…and it is a daily stress at work. It’s exhausting for me” (both quotes included in Nunez-Smith, p. 49). This is surely a classic crazy-making situation: silence on the one hand and omnipresent stereotyping on the other.

Well-known cognitive scientist Steven Pinker will be given the last word about negative stereotyping. He warns: “If subjective decisions about people, such as [college] admissions,
hiring, credit, and salaries, are based in part on group-wide averages, they will conspire to make the rich richer and the poor poorer” (2002, p. 206).

**Positive Stereotype/Bias: Regarding Gender and Group Membership**

Now let’s turn to positive stereotypes and to the experiences of those who enjoy such a positive assumption by others about their capabilities. As you would guess, those with what might called a “positive halo” are *presumed to be competent and bona fide*. They will not bump up against implicit quotas limiting their representation to no more than three or so, in a department or on a campus. They will collect more positive points for their achievements, relative to those coping with a negative stereotype. Their extra points will mount up and result in cumulative advantages and advancement, relative to those viewed negatively.

Those with the positive bias are anointed, in a way, with the presumption of competence and deserved authority. The phrase “well-qualified white man” is simply *not* in the lexicon (conversation with Professor Nell Painter). Due to this presumption of worthiness, it can be easy for those with the positive bias to slip into a state of feeling entitled to success and deference. This entitlement can be understandably viewed as arrogance by those lacking the positive halo (Thompson and Louque, 2005; Boice, “Lessons,” 1992; Smith, 1996, 2000, 2009). By contrast, those with a negative bias are often doubted by others and sometimes by themselves (“maybe I’m an imposter?”). While in graduate school, James Bonilla felt he did not belong; in fact, he felt at times like he was play-acting. He repeatedly mulled over: “What is a working-class, New York Puerto Rican trying to do entering the ivory tower?” Only with the bolstering and encouragement of the other two members of his writing support group was he able to overcome
his “internalized fear and racial vulnerability” (Bonilla, quoted in Moody, 1996, p. 8). Bonilla now works as an associate professor at Hamline University.

A European-American professor, Frederick Frank, discloses that “while I worked like a Trojan to earn my way in this life, I nevertheless assert that a good measure of my success” results from societal perception. This professor is surrounded by the favorable stereotype of being competent. In such an advantageous position, he is sure he has gotten “breaks” and at times received “more positive evaluations” of his job performance, more positive “than I expected or deserved.” He concludes: “I try to be grateful” (Frank, 1999, p. 148).

Expressing similar gratitude, Management Professor Peter Couch admits that his being a white male has brought him “extra” points and extra opportunities at every stage of his academic career. “I have always found myself in a world of opportunities—opportunities that I [naively] thought were available to anyone energetic and capable” (Couch, quoted in Gallos and Ramsey, 1997, p. 21).

The fundamental privilege of being in the European-American majority group, according to Wellesley College researcher Peggy McIntosh, is that you “take for granted” the legitimacy and power that such social status automatically bestows on you. In fact, those with such status are taught to be oblivious to their social privilege and unearned advantages (McIntosh, 1989, p. 3). “To be white in America is not to have to think about it” (quoted in Doane, 1999, p. 75). Being oblivious means you believe you are the norm. You don’t think of yourself as having race, privilege, and perhaps even ethnicity—you’re an American.

Numerous reports have shown that there are glass borders, glass ceilings, “Keep Out” signs, and jealously guarded stations of inside information at every turn, for women seeking to enter male occupations and for under-represented groups seeking high-paying and prestigious occupations and professions (Massey, 2011). In seeking desirable jobs, majority males will be
aided by the phenomenon that like people hire like people. Employers tend to hire those who look, think, and speak like themselves, unless they become conscious of this evaluative bias and concentrate to overcome it. Without a doubt, majority employers faced with equally qualified applicants “prefer white to black or Latino job applicants three to one” (Fischer et al., 1996, p. 182). A wry story captures the reproduction principle of hiring: An elderly, European-American manager is preparing to meet job candidates. Leaning into the intercom on his desk, he instructs his secretary to “Send in someone who reminds me of myself as a young buck.” In other words, this employer is putting up a “Welcome” sign for those who are clones of himself.

In his national research studies, Sociology Professor Ronald Breiger at the University of Arizona has found that professional, managerial, and even technical workers are almost three times as likely to have secured their jobs through personal contacts as through direct application or responding to newspaper advertisements. The jobs with “the highest pay and prestige and affording the greatest satisfaction to their incumbents, were most likely” to be filled through personal contacts (Breiger, 1988, p. 78). Because URW and NI faculty usually are outsiders with fewer personal contacts, they have to work extremely hard to secure academic posts and promotions. In recognition of this, I make it a point in my consulting to help them build very wide professional networks to compensate for being outside the usual circles of academic tradition and influence.

Many European Americans realize on a “gut” level that they are indeed fortunate to belong to the majority group imprinted with the positive bias.

* I grew up in an affluent Connecticut suburb in the 1960s. Secure behind old stone walls and trimmed hedges, safeguarded by burglar alarms, this was a world far removed from any discussion of race. It was a world of good schools, safe streets and perfect teeth. . . . In this world, people of color were the ones who came to your house to
work, and they worked hard . . . [but] the better jobs went to the plumbers, the electricians, the painters: people from the ethnic white working class of the town, most of them Italian. . . . There were also a few Black kids at the school, but almost no one knew them. . . . Everyone liked them, wondered how they did it, but most thanked God every day that they had been born white (Correspondents of The New York Times, 2001, pp. 335-6).

These illustrations point out the clear and daily benefits of belonging to a group viewed as competent and sound. Members of such a positively regarded group, according to a number of experts, are likely to:

- receive the benefit of the doubt if there is ambiguous evidence about how well they performed or behaved
- receive more “points” for their achievements
- find that their “points” accumulate faster and produce a sturdy base of successes
- are assured that their successes are unlikely to be questioned or suspected
- find they do not face a quota system that restricts them to only token representation (meaning one of a few) and restricts them to marginal power in an organization
- find they do not have to worry about their race and in fact can be oblivious to it
- and, finally, enjoy greater deference inside and outside their traditional venues, whether that is the college classroom, the laboratory, the boardroom, the courtroom, the operating room, or the legislature.

Reflecting on this state of affairs, a European-American professor confesses that “for all of us white guys who are honest enough to admit it, we know in our heart that we have been blessed by birth to have had options not available to those who are not white and not male”
(Frank, 1999, p. 75). In a similar vein, President John F. Kennedy once archly observed that majorities who touted the astounding progress being made by non-majorities in this society, nevertheless, would not for a moment consider exchanging places with them. Being a majority insider has its incontestable privileges and hidden profits.

But what about a male with a positive bias who chooses to work in a female-dominated profession such as nursing, social work, or librarianship? Certainly he would be a “token” (meaning he is the only one or one of a few “others” who are different from the rest). A solo or one of a few, according to organizational experts, usually occupies a stressful and awkward position because those in the majority give skewed attention to the solo and often misinterpret his/her real motives and performance. Yet this man, albeit unusual in nursing or library work, nevertheless brings his higher status and positive stereotype of competence with him. Instead of being devalued and hitting a glass ceiling (as a woman, for instance, in science and engineering would almost certainly experience), the male solo will typically find himself on a “glass escalator” that somehow brings quick recognition, promotion, and a corner office as a dean or director (C.L. Williams, 1992; Yoder, 1994; Kanter, 1977, 1997).

In short, those assigned a positive stereotype will receive substantial hidden profits that advance them on a cumulative basis in both traditional and non-traditional settings. Those assigned a negative stereotype will be dealt extra penalties, taxes, and glass ceilings that will hamper their advancement on a cumulative basis (see C.L. Williams, C.G. Williams, Steele and Aronson, McIntosh, Valian, Rosser, MIT Report).

European-American males’ privileges and positive-bias “halo” are givens. Yet increasingly, certain Asian-American and Central and South American subgroups have privileges and positive bias that they too can take for granted. These groups, beneficiaries of
exceptional conditions, have recently sought and been granted the high status of “honorary whites” (Lopez, 2006, pp. B8). In Chapter 3, I will return to this development.

How do negative and positive stereotypes about groups arise and then endure? The stereotypes are the outcomes of political power exercised at various times by the dominant European-American group in this country. In Chapter Three, I will make this clear through synthesizing the work of dozens of anthropologists, political scientists, economists, historians, novelists, and sociologists. These experts have found that those American citizens whose ancestors started out in this country as the conquered, dispossessed, and enslaved (that is, incorporated by *force, not choice*) are usually branded with a long-lasting negative stereotype. This stereotype continues, generation after generation. The groups treated with overwhelming force by the dominant majority group include: American Indians, African Americans, Puerto Rican Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Hawaiians.

By contrast, voluntary immigrants who exercised choice in settling here usually enjoy a positive stereotype, much higher status than colonized and conquered groups, and societal expectations that they are likely to succeed in attaining the American dream. Immigrants benefit because they and their ancestors exercised varying degrees of choice as they entered the country. These groups include members of the very powerful and dominant European-American group as well as some Asian-American groups and many recent immigrants from Central and South American who have come to be regarded as “honorary whites” in this country (see Takaki, Lopez, Wu, Hollinger, Tapia; also see Chapter 3 of this book).

What about European-American women’s status and treatment? These will vary, largely depending on whether the women are trying to enter and succeed in fields and in institutions traditionally closed to them. Some of the situations in which negative bias and glass ceilings severely restrict majority women were discussed earlier in this chapter.