Stigma

Consensual beliefs about undesirable attributes or characteristics

Stigma Classifications (Goffman, 1963)

Tribal identities:
Social groups into which individuals are born
- religious groups
- ethnic groups
- racial groups
- national groups

Abominations of the body:
Physical ailments:
- deformities
- illnesses
- paralysis

Blemishes of individual character:

- drug addiction
- prostitution
- homosexuality
- mental illnesses
According to Goffman (1963): Stigmatized groups regarded by many as flawed.

Stigma Characteristics
- Concealability: Extent to which a stigma can be hidden from others.
- Stability: Extent to which a stigma can change over time.
- Extent of which a stigma can be experienced.

Stigma

Homophobic Study
Adams, Wright & Lohr (1996)

Homophobic Men
Non-Homophobic Men

Heterosexuals
Lesbians
Gay men

Which group was aroused?

Both

People report that they do not emulate, or try to be like, the stigmatized groups.

Individuals with stigmas are victims of prejudice, discrimination, hate crimes.

Stereotypes about stigmatized groups are negative.
Disruptiveness
Extent to which a stigma disrupts social interactions

Danger (Peril)
Extent to which a stigmatized person is seen as dangerous

Aesthetic Qualities
Extent to which a stigma is physically unappealing to others

What we do know...
Stigma characteristics are not all-or-none

Responsibility
Extent to which a stigmatized person is seen as personally responsible for their stigma

What we do know...
Stigma characteristics are not mutually exclusive
What we do know...

People can hold different beliefs about a stigma’s characteristics

Functions of Stigmas

Self-enhancement function
Social identity function
System justification function
Terror management function

Self-Enhancement Function

Stigmatizing out-groups make people feel better about themselves

Based on Downward Comparison Theory

Social Identity Theory

Assumptions:

- People categorize others into in/out groups
- Categorization creates a social identity
- People want to be in groups held in high esteem
- People sustain positive identity by derogating out-groups

Self-Enhancement vs. Social Identity Theory

Self-Enhancement:

- Derogate the stigmatized
- Feel good about oneself

Social Identity Theory:

- Derogate the stigmatized
- Feel good about one’s group
- Feel good about oneself

Self-Enhancement & Social Identity Functions

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Self-Devaluation Study
Clark & Clark (1939)

253 African American children
Presented with 4 dolls
➢ 2 brown with black hair
➢ 2 white with yellow hair
Children asked questions

Identify actual color of doll
Example questions:
"Give me the brown doll"
"Give me the white doll"

Results:
Children able to identify the doll's racial identity
➢ 93% gave the brown doll when asked for the one that looked like an African American child
➢ 93% gave white doll when asked for the one that looked like a White child

Identify racial identity of doll
Example questions:
"Give me the doll that looks like an African American child"
"Give me the doll that looks like a White child"

Result:
Children correctly identified the doll's color
➢ 93% gave the brown doll when asked
➢ 94% gave the white doll when asked

Identify child’s racial identity
Example questions:
"Give me the doll that looks like you"
**Self-Devaluation Study**
Clark & Clark (1939)

**Results:**
Children not as good at identifying their own racial identity

- 66% gave the brown doll when asked which looked like them
- 33% gave the white doll when asked which looked like them

**System Justification Theory**

**Assumptions:**
- Group inequalities in every society
- Advantaged groups stigmatize those who belong to disadvantaged groups in order to justify why they have more
- Justifications show how the system is fair

**Identify racial preference**

**Example questions:**
- “Give me the doll you like best”
- “Give me the doll that looks bad”
- “Give me the doll that is a nicer color”

**System Justification Theory**

Through system justification people:
1. Come to believe that they deserve their privilege
2. The system under which their culture operates is fair
3. Perception of fairness reduces intergroup conflict

**Results:**
Children devalued own racial identity:

- 66% liked the white doll best
- 59% said the brown doll looked bad
- only 38% said the brown doll was a nice color

**Limitations:**
Cannot explain social revolutions that initially heighten intergroup conflict
Terror Management Function

Assumptions:

People are aware of their own mortality
This awareness creates anxiety
People protect self from this anxiety by subscribing to a cultural view that provides order & meaning to an otherwise random world

Terror Management

Stigmatization serves to reject those who are different and who violate and challenge cultural views