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EXPLORING STEREOTYPES: ANALYZING THE EFFECTS OF STEREOTYPING ON ROLE PERFORMANCE AND IDENTITY

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................................... 1

2. IDENTITY .......................................................................................................................................................... 3
   2.1 MULTIPLE IDENTITIES .............................................................................................................................. 4
   2.2 COMPLEMENTARY AND CONFLICTING ROLES ..................................................................................... 5

3. CASE STUDIES ............................................................................................................................................... 7
   Case 1: Dissimilarities in how women and men experience parent versus professional roles........ 7
   Case 2: “Still looking for my Jonathan” ........................................................................................................... 8
   Case 3: “I am not a depressed person” ........................................................................................................... 9
   Case 4: Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans............... 9

4. COPING STRATEGIES .................................................................................................................................... 11
   4.1 REJECTION OF A ROLE ............................................................................................................................ 12
   4.2 COMPARTMENTALIZATION ......................................................................................................................... 13
   4.3 INTEGRATION ............................................................................................................................................ 15
   4.4 LIVING WITH THE CONFLICT .................................................................................................................. 16

5. INTERSECTIONALITY ..................................................................................................................................... 18

6. DISCUSSION .................................................................................................................................................... 20
   6.1 COPING STRATEGIES ............................................................................................................................... 20
   6.2 VALIDITY ................................................................................................................................................... 23
   6.3. CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................................ 23

7. SOURCES ....................................................................................................................................................... 25
1. INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will look into role stereotypes through four case studies. By looking at the theory behind the studies themselves and other theories related to the topic, I will discuss how much, and in what different ways stereotypes attached to roles create confusion, conflict, or behavioural change. Through examining how the subjects in the studies dealt with various conflicts, I will look at possibilities and ways to cope with stereotype-related role conflict.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1993), stereotypes are “A preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc; an attitude based on such preconception.”. Stereotypes can be seen as negative or positive ones, but regardless of that, they define how each one of us sees the world, and the people around us. Every single person has stereotypes about other people, as that is how human beings rationalize the world.

The interesting thing about stereotypes is that they are often viewed from the viewer’s perspective – how do I see the world, due to my stereotypes? In this thesis, however, that ideology will be flipped around to show how commonly held stereotypes affect the identity of the people they are directed towards. Steele and Aronson (1995) only speak of negative stereotypes, and how those affect a person’s performance and actions, whether they know it or not. I wanted to include some downsides to stereotypes, and stereotyped roles, that may not be perceived as negative in themselves, but may become that in certain contexts. I will be doing this by introducing 4 different studies, where individuals and their identities are affected by stereotypes. The first two studies discuss the topic from an either-or point of view, where the individual has two roles that due to the stereotypes attached to them, are conflicting. The third one is one where individuals are not able to recognize a role they possess as part of their identity, due to the way said role has been stereotyped by society. The fourth, and last case shows how stereotypes can directly affect an individual’s academic and social performance.

The reason I am looking into the field of stereotypes and how they affect us is partly personal, and partly professional: being a future educator, and having been told mul-
tiple times that I have to be able to acknowledge my own stereotypes, and how they influence my actions towards other people, I was interested in seeing how it works the other way around. From a personal point of view, it has to do with a person I knew a few years back in Mexico. It was a friend, who I was talking to about stealing – he was asking me why I trusted Mexicans not to steal my things, and left my backpack carelessly around (although I felt I was being very careful when I told my friends to watch it for me). After me telling him that I like to trust people, he says he doesn’t – not anymore. According to him, after he realized people are going to think he is going to steal their bags or wallets just for being Mexican, he thought he might as well do so. Recently I have thought a lot about this friend – he clearly knew what he was doing, and he knew stereotypes affected him. But does everyone?
2. IDENTITY

Schwartz, Luyckx and Vignoles (2011) and Sollberger (2013) state that the definition(s) of and the theories behind identity are highly scattered, and depend greatly on how the researcher, theorist or interpreter views the topic. In addition, the area is so vast that even people who study identity are often only familiar with a minor portion of all the literature that exists (Schwartz, Luyckx, Vignoles 2011). Many times identity is viewed as a label for characteristics that an individual has – but is it really that simple? Having a Finnish passport makes me a citizen of Finland, but does it necessarily make me identify with other Finns? If someone is intelligent, do they necessarily identify as an intellectual? Or do all people of particular skin colour automatically identify with a certain ethnic group? These characteristics only count when a person considers them to answer the question: “Who are you?” (Schwartz, Luyckx, Vignoles 2011).

Current approaches usually focus on three levels of identity: individual, relational and collective. Individual identity refers to the self-definition of an individual, including goals, values, physical characteristics, self-esteem, and one’s overall life story. The aspects of this level are not influenced by the individual’s membership of a group, and are often things that the individual cannot control (skin color, place of birth). However, the aspects of individual identity that can be changed are often the ones that change the most over that person’s lifetime (for example, political involvement, religion, values). Relational identity is one’s roles with other people – parent, spouse, child – and how these roles are defined and interpreted by the assumer. At this level the individual defines themselves through interactions with other people, as opposed to personal experience. Many theorists claim that relational identity cannot be formed by an individual on their own, but these roles need to be authenticated by the society around said individual for them to be secure. (Schwartz, Luyckx & Vignoles, 2011; Sueda, 2014)

The third level, collective identity, refers to an individual’s identification with social groups – what meanings the individual gives to said groups, and what beliefs and attitudes sprout from them. This level is not fixed, nor is anyone born with it, but rather collective identity is created through developing oneself to become a part of the group. Sometimes this means drastically changing one’s behaviour or ways of life to conform to the group’s norms. (Schwartz, Luyckx & Vignoles, 2011)
2.1 Multiple identities

Erikson (et al. 1959) state that the multiplicity of identity is something, that a person should get over in time, to form a single and completely integrated identity. However, many scholars would disagree, at least to a certain extent. With multiple aspects of identity, one can simultaneously identify with multiple roles: being smart, musical, a mother, a daughter, a teacher, and many other things, all at the same time. Of course the main role played depends on where they are, and at what point in time. What needs to be noted, though, is that none of these aspects function properly without the other, and none of them are mutually exclusive (Sueda, 2014) – a mother cannot simply stop being a mother when at work, and someone who is musical cannot simply stop being it when jogging, although having perfect pitch has nothing to do with running. (Schwartz, Luyckx, Vignoles 2011, Berman et al. 2014)

Where lines of research differ in opinion is whether people have one single identity, multiple ones that they switch between, or just multiple different aspects of one identity. Schwartz, Luyckx and Vignoles agree that all three are viable options, and it only depends on how the concept of identity is being looked at. (Schwartz, Luyckx, Vignoles 2011) The terms role, self-aspect and (aspect of an) identity are often used as completely synonymous, depending on the study. In this thesis what is sometimes also described as aspects of the identity, or different identities, will be called roles. I will be using the term identity to describe the entity of how the different roles a person has come together to form who they are.

According to Sueda, (2014) all of our roles have a certain hierarchy in our minds – the ones that are more highly ranked are more likely to be “used” or stimulated in a given situation, versus roles that are not as highly ranked. The ranking depends greatly on one’s level of commitment, and of their positive evaluation of a role – the higher the two, the more likely an individual is to use a specific role over another. What also makes one role be chosen over the other is its relevance to any given situation. The boundaries set on a role can be redefined and broadened, if the society around the individual is flexible enough:

“... if a famous tennis player behaves as a tennis player always, and is treated by people as such in any social context, he/she strongly identifies with a category of famous tennis player.”
In other words, if the individual feels like they can use one role in multiple situations, it is very likely that they will lean towards doing just that. (Sueda, 2014)

2.2 Complementary and conflicting roles

The perception we have of our roles is greatly dependent on how the society around us has taught us to view them (Sueda, 2014). In other words, whether we view any given role as a negative or positive one, depends on the stereotypes that we have been taught since childhood. While stereotypes can be both positive or negative, what is clear is that the stereotypes associated with the roles we possess affect the way we act and think of ourselves. Every single person has stereotypes about not only other people, but they have assumed stereotypes of themselves as well. (Steele & Aronson, 1995)

As Bowker and Star (1999) explain, classifying things and people through simplification, and thus stereotyping, is inevitable. In its simplest and most natural form, not only is stereotyping not a negative thing, but it is necessary for our everyday survival. Our brain is hard-wired to make collective groups of everyday things to make sense of the world. However, when we forget that not everything always works exactly as we are used to imagining it, and do not give people room to prove that they may not be what we have stereotyped them to be, is when classification and stereotypes become negative, or even dangerous. (Bowker & Star, 1999) When an individual internalizes the stereotypes set on their roles by society is when they run into trouble – either by creating internal conflict, or making the individual change the way they act, often unconsciously.

To begin with, it has to be noted that having multiple roles to rely on is not always seen as a negative thing: some see it as having a sort of insurance in case one of the roles is perceived as negative in any given situation, or in case the individual fails, in their own opinion, to conform to the stereotype of that said role. Multiple roles could be compared to dividing yourself into parts - if one part gets hurt, the other parts remain intact and can be used to hold on to if necessary. The individual can still identify with the other roles, instead of feeling like their entire identity has been diminished to nothing. (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015; Hodges & Park, 2013)

These multiple roles only work together in a positive way when they are perceived as complimentary, or non-conflicting. This happens when the values and expectations, set on one role are not significantly different from the ones set on another. (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014) For example, being a child and a pupil at the same time would not be thought of
as conflicting, as the requirements and expectations are very similar for both. In contrast, being homosexual and religious at the same time can be seen as conflicting, as conservative religious values often diminish or even condemn homosexual relationships. Multiple scholars state that in dealing with a conflict, individuals, who are either self-affirmed, or have strong, positive self-views are less influenced by the stereotypes and expectations of the society, and therefore will not be as perceptible to becoming distressed over minor conflicts. (Cooper & Carlsmith, 2015; Karelaia & Guillén, 2014)

The main goal of human beings is to create and maintain a healthy identity. They do this by holding up a positive and coherent self-image to perceive themselves as competent, capable, good and moral individuals (Hodges & Park, 2013; Sueda, 2014). Therefore, when faced with two or more conflicting roles, the individual will result to different ways of dealing with these conflicts. Failing to do so can have serious negative consequences, some of which are diminished well-being, stress, low levels of life satisfaction, depression, suicidal thoughts, and in extreme cases, suicide. (Karelaia & Guillén, 2014; Hodges & Park 2013)

In other words, when it comes to maintaining a coherent picture of the self, the important part is how these different roles are perceived not only on their own, but in relation to one another: are the roles compatible or conflicting? As a Russian-American, can you be both in all situations, or is one more convenient at times? What about gay priests? (Pollock, Van Reken 1999, Berman et al. 2014). The perception of being successful, or fulfilling the expectations set on these roles by the society, and comparing well with the stereotypically ideal role model, is crucial for an individual to be able to maintain a positive self-image. (Hodges & Park, 2013)

If, however, there is only one stereotyped role that is valid to the situation (as portrayed in case 4 below), and there is no internal conflict, the individual can still be affected by one or several stereotypes, and unknowingly change the way they act. There are changes to how a person acts when their stereotyped role is activated, regardless of whether the stereotypes are positive or negative. (Steele & Aronson, 1995) For example, according to extremely outdated stereotypes, African Americans have lower mental capabilities than Caucasians. As case 4 shows us, just activating this stereotype makes the individual perform according to that stereotype - in this case, it shows up as lower test scores. (Steele & Aronson, 1995) This effect can be positive as well, though - if an individual thinks they are expected to perform well according to a stereotype, they are likely to do so.
3. CASE STUDIES

To begin with, I will introduce a few studies as case examples on the topic of role conflicts. This is to open up the spectrum of causes for these issues – to show that they stem from both, micro and macro scale situations, personal conflicts, and conflicts that affect large groups of people at the same time.

The case examples on internal conflict study a relationship between two roles, where it is an either-or decision – mother or professional, homosexuality or religiousness, and so on. What I would like to point out, however, is that role conflict is not as simple as that, as identity is something made up of the mix and match of dozens of roles, which we all perceive slightly differently. For example, the multiplicity of identity has been studied through intersectionality. It is a line of study that concentrates on not only showing one role, but multiple ones, and how they intertwine with each other. In short, intersectionality (Beyer & Woehrle, 2014) focuses on the discrimination someone experiences, not only from one point of view (e.g. race), but by taking all other aspects into account at the same time (social and socioeconomic status, sex, etc.), to create a more personalized view of what that one person experiences. Intersectionality understands that the identity is a complex system, formed of multiple roles that work together to form who we are. (Beyer & Woehrle 2014) These studies, unfortunately, do not take that into account. However, I will be discussing intersectionality in more detail in chapter 5 of this thesis.

Case 1: Dissimilarities in how women and men experience parent versus professional roles

Hodges and Park (2013) conducted a study in the USA to find out more about an everyday example of role conflict: mother vs. professional woman. According to them, an ideal professional is, among other things, competitive, independent and ambitious, while an ideal mother is affectionate, considerate and giving. Not only are some of the characteristics complete opposites, but for example a competitive mother was not generally seen as a positive thing.

Hodges and Park (2013) indicate that this conflict causes women find it difficult to feel good about fitting into one role, while fulfilling the other. This makes them constantly switch between their two roles. For professional women who are also mothers, living up to the expectations set by society for one role means falling short on the other. According to this article, the most important thing for women to be able to juggle both roles at the same time is to have role models that are, according to society, fulfilling both role descriptions.
It is not, however, the sole job of the woman to make these changes, but as Hodges and Park suggest, the prototypes of motherhood and professionalism themselves must be changed to befit today’s society. As Hodges and Park (2013) put it, having to leave work early to go pick up a sick child should not be the end of the world, but, for example, something that is seen as ability to manage multiple important issues at the same time. (Hodges & Park, 2013)

Case 2: “Still looking for my Jonathan”

“Still looking for my Jonathan”, a study conducted by Pitt (2010) in the USA. The study followed religious black men, who also identified themselves as “out as same-sex loving individuals”. The subjects of this study were not only religious while being gay, but most of them were viewed as leaders of their church communities. According to Pitt (2010), levels of religiosity, church attendance and the degree of internalization of religious beliefs are all seen as factors that increase negativity towards homosexuals. All of the men in the study stated that their gay identity is meaningful to them, and they spoke of it positively.

Even though most of the men were very open about their homosexuality, they were only able to be comfortable with it in certain groups – close friends and family. Within their church community, they were often still secretive about their sexual orientation. According to Pitt, this suggests that while being comfortable about their homosexual role, these men recognized the stereotypes and stigma related to their homosexual role within their church community. This lead them to a conflict of roles, which causes them to take some sort of action to harmonize their life: Some of these men decided to reject one of their roles, for example, the homosexual one by hiding it, or more drastic measures, such as going to conversion therapy, an extreme form of forcefully converting people from homosexuality to heterosexuality.

The other coping method used was compartmentalizing the two, almost living a double life where the men are gay in one situation (with family), but not in the other (at church). These two ways of coping are tough and stressful, and therefore some men had resulted to “integrating” the two identities and live with both identities in harmony. (Pitt, 2010)

The previous two cases are examples where the person with a role conflict is clearly aware
of their different roles, and thus also the conflict between them, but what if that someone has no idea a certain attribute is a role they possess?

Case 3: “I am not a depressed person”

A study conducted by Farmer, Farrand and O’Mahen (2012) looks for reasons for people suffering from depression not to seek help immediately after symptoms occur and are recognized. While this may not be an obvious role conflict, in a few extreme cases portrayed in the study, it took some participants up to decades to seek medical attention because most of them did not see “depressed” as something they could be, so they avoided the topic in order to keep their identity intact. Some of them blamed the symptoms on outside forces, such as the people they spent time with, a course they were taking or something else that was just momentarily putting them down. After accepting that depression was, indeed, a part of who they were at that moment, all but two participants eventually decided to get help. The two (out of a total of 20 participants) who did not end up seeking any assistance assimilated depression into their identity so deeply, that they had accepted that the symptoms would go on forever, and therefore decided that they did not needed or would not benefit from external help. (Farmer, Farrand & O’Mahen, 2012)

The previous studies are from the point of view of stereotypes creating an inner conflict between how the individual is performing, and how that makes them see themselves in relation to others, therefore working at the first two levels of identity. This fourth one is slightly different, as it shows how seeing yourself in relation to others may make you change the way you behave – or in other words, how conforming to the stereotypes set on a role may affect an individual’s performance and behaviour, even when done unconsciously:

Case 4: Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans

Steele and Aronson (1995) conducted a set of four studies in the USA to see whether, and how much, stereotypes affect the academic performance of African American students in comparison to their Caucasian peers. Two of the initial 23 African American participants were not permitted to take part in the tests at all, because as soon as they came to the venue they suspected the test had something to do with race.
First, Steele and Aronson tested whether there was a difference in results in the same test, depending on what the participants were told it measured: if they were told it measures intellectual ability or competence, the African American students were prone to underperforming in comparison to the control group, and their Caucasian peers. Steele and Aronson stated that this happened because the African American subjects conformed to the negative stereotype of having lower intellectual ability than, for instance, Caucasians. The control group, however, was told that the test is simply one that tests problem-solving skills. The African Americans in this group performed just as well as anyone else. In another study, where they used the same test, but the only variable was that one group had to state their race, and the other didn’t. Steele and Aronson found that just the act of having to cross a box to state their race significantly lowered the African American participants’ results, in comparison to those who were either Caucasian, or did not have to state their race at all.

After being asked about it, the participants themselves did not feel that stating their race affected their performance, as in the United States stating it is a common practice in everyday life. They did not feel that it was anything different from the usual, or even pay attention to it. What Steele and Aronson (1995) deducted from the whole series of studies was, that simply the existence of a stimulant that activates a certain stereotype can make an individual conform to it, without thinking about it twice.

One of the major collective theories still contributing to the idea that intelligence is inherited from one’s parents, and adding to the idea that African Americans cannot be as intelligent as Caucasians, is the “Bell Curve” published by Herrnstein and Murray in 1994 (as cited by Goldberger & Manski, 1995). According to the Bell Curve theory, in addition to intelligence being highly hereditary, it is becoming more unevenly distributed between white and black individuals. Supposedly, the research for the Bell Curve theory proves that funding the education of black children is almost like throwing money to waste, as intelligence is hereditary, and thus something that cannot be improved. According to Hall (2002), however, research such as the Bell Curve increase and ratify racial stereotyping, and therefore further affect how individuals, such as the African Americans in the study by Steele and Aronson (1995) perform. The Bell Curve, along with other similar theories have been debunked by several scholars (for example: Goldberger & Manski, 1995; Hall, 2002). However, it is clear that the ideologies in them still prevail.
4. COPING STRATEGIES

A threat to one’s identity, or just a single role, causes symptoms that are very similar to any other type of stress. It can reduce one’s cognitive resources greatly. (Hodges & Park, 2013) Therefore, the individual, just as when coping with any other stress, will try their best to cope with any conflicts, to retain or rebuild their positive self-image. They will, in one way or another find a way to either get around the stereotype, fight against it, or just simply let it be.

Sueda (2014) suggests that in juggling conflicting roles, the most important thing is whether or not the individual can keep up a positive image of a major role. If that is not possible, the individual will try to shift to another one, or redefine the existing one in order to maintain a positive view of themselves. Ishikawa (1992, as cited by Sueda, 2014) has found four ways to sustain or redefine an existing identity: Hiding the role that is negatively viewed, drastically changing and redefining it, try to enter and start identifying with a more valued group, or last, by discriminating others to improve the relative social status of the role. Another factor in juggling roles is whether the individual feels that a particular role is under threat: A study conducted by Rosenberg and Gara (1985, as cited by Sueda, 2014) found that when under threat, the participants tended to shift from one major identity to another. If the participant did not have multiple major roles, they tended to shift towards identifying with something contrasting. (Sueda 2014)

When trying to find a more permanent solution to dealing with the stress caused by their conflicting roles, individuals tend to go through one or more ways of trying to take power away from whichever role they feel is causing the conflict. In a study conducted by Levy and Reeves (2011) in the USA, several individuals were followed to see how they coped with the contradiction of being a lesbian, gay or queer individual, while having strong religious beliefs. Levy and Reeves found that most of the participants tended to do one of the following when struggling with the conflicts of their identities: Reject one of the identities, integrate the two, compartmentalize them, or live with the conflict. Other studies (for example: Pitt, 2010) and theories support this division, although some of them may have used different terms, but descriptions closely correlated with or matched the ones used by Levy and Reeves (2011).
4.1 Rejection of a role

Rejection of an identity was mostly described in studies on religious-homosexual conflicts. It happens when an individual deems one of their roles unacceptable, for one reason or another. In the study conducted by Pitt (2010), the ways in which this is done were described as varying from less drastic ones, like praying to no longer to be gay, or more extreme ones, such as trying out reparative therapy (Pitt, 2010). Major and O’Brien (2005) take the description to a more fundamental level by saying that when facing a role conflict, the individual will minimize the meaning they themselves give to the role they want to reject, and thus make sure that this role is no longer important to their self-worth. As Major and O’Brien (2005) found, most of their subjects would relate extremely closely with the role the society around them deems more acceptable. This way they feel like they have more support for who they are, and therefore gain a stronger sense of belonging. Which role the individual decides to give up on, or distance themselves from, depends greatly on which one is higher in their hierarchy. (Major & O’Brien, 2005)

Homosexuality was often the first role the men tried to reject, as it was generally the one condemned by all the people around them. When that failed, they started blaming the church for making them feel bad, and therefore started distancing themselves from church instead. Sometimes, this happened through simply becoming atheists, but most times it meant finding a new religion or church that does not stigmatize homosexuality, either as strongly as the previous one, or at all. However, most men (7 out of 9) were not happy with the experience of a new church, due to the lack of cultural and social experience they were used to at their previous one. They were used to the ways of the old church, and the new one did not give them the comfort and familiarity the old one did, regardless of what they had experienced in terms of being stereotyped.

Pitt does not talk about successful rejection of the homosexual role. He does recognize, however, that there is a lack of representation of such individuals, and therefore it is not a factor to be counted out. Although he does not believe in reparative therapy himself, he feels that it should be studied in more depth to successfully analyse whether rejection of a role is a viable option. (Pitt, 2010). However, according to Haldeman (1991), even though a 58% success rate is claimed for conversion therapy, he is apprehensive of this, as the main goal of the therapy is not to cure, but to “suppress homosexual behavior”. Therefore, it would seem that even those who do claim conversion therapy worked, have not actually been ridded of their homosexuality, but they have simply suppressed it.
The idea of rejecting a major role does not necessarily rely on having only two major roles to go to, but none of the studies take into account situations where multiple roles are simultaneously conflicting. If it were possible that only one role at a time was conflicting, switching between two whenever it is convenient could be possible. However, as Couture (2016) states, this is not usually the case, as people always have multiple roles, and especially individuals who are part of multiple minorities, and thus have multiple minority roles, are in danger of multiple stereotypes affecting them simultaneously. In addition, giving up an identity is not always a real option – unless a professional woman is ready to completely give up their career (seeing as they cannot truly stop being a mother at any time), there is no way for them to simply reject a part of themselves (Hodges & Park, 2013). Also, as both, Pitt (2010) as Major and O’brien (2005) found: neither giving up the religious, nor homosexual identity worked in the long run, and neither did rejecting depression in case 3. Taking all this into account, rejection of a role is not a very viable permanent option.

4.2 Compartmentalization

Pitt (2010) describes compartmentalization as “leading double lives”. When compartmentalizing two conflicting roles, the individual splits them apart. For the gay men in his study this meant letting everyone believe they are straight when attending church, but letting their closest relatives and friends outside the church community know the truth. Sometimes this included being in a homosexual relationship, but hiding it when at church. Pitt (2010) felt that this is possible due to the “don’t ask, don’t tell” approach to the Black Church members – as they were assumed to be straight, and sexuality was never a topic of open discussion, it was easier for the men in the study to act the way they were. One of the subjects said that he doesn’t “mix sexuality with religion”, that he simply does not think about it when at church, as he is there to praise God. However, in the same study, Pitt (2010) stated that this was not always as easy, depending on one’s role at church: if they were in a position of an instructor, it was harder for them to simply avoid the topic of homosexuality, as it does come up in the Bible and other texts, and they found it to be a topic that was almost impossible to get around. In addition, as many of the social events circulate around the heterosexual norm, some of the men found it difficult to be, what they considered, a real part of the church community.
In the professional woman setting, compartmentalization was seen to be somewhat possible (Hodges and Park, 2013), however, it is not as easy for a mother to just not “think about it” at work. There is still a constant need to be vigilant of the phone in case teachers or nannies call, and if it comes to it, a mother will have to leave work early to pick up a sick child. Therefore, in this case, compartmentalization cannot be as clearly done, when compared to Case 2, as described by Pitt (2010). Similarly, compartmentalization cannot truly be used in Cases 3 or 4, as someone cannot simply stop being depressed when they need it, nor can an African American simply stop being one, when taking a test.

Hodges and Park (2013) state that switching between roles is mentally exhausting. First of all, it is not always easy to draw a line between when an individual is supposed to choose one role over the other. What is even more difficult, is choosing which role to conform to, if multiple ones are available: Cotoure (2016) states that the stigma that comes from being part of a negatively stereotyped minority or a discriminated group can affect academic performance, and hinder mental and academic capabilities. Having only one role looked down upon lets the individual rely on the others to somehow boost their self-image, therefore using one of the three first coping mechanisms. Being a part of multiple minorities, however, means that there is potential that more places, groups and situations seem threatening, therefore making the individual (consciously or unconsciously) feel as more than one stereotype is affecting their decisions and actions at any given time.

Unfortunately, all of the case studies were portrayed as either-or options, where the subject was in an either-or position, and other roles were not taken into account. In addition, just perceiving the situation as one where roles may be conflicting, may cause it to become a self-fulfilling prophecy where the individual not only starts to act in a way they think they are expected to according to stereotypes, but they also start (again, often unknowingly) seeking for the slightest indication of any action towards them that may suggest stereotypes being directed at them. Couture (2016) also argues that individuals with less visible roles would be able to separate the stereotyped role from their identity slightly easier, due to the fact that others cannot immediately see “what they are”. This way they can choose who they want to be allowed to know about their hidden role, which may relieve stress and the feeling of constant stereotyping in some situations. On the other hand, Couture (2016) also notes that they spend lots of energy in either trying to figure out whether the group they are in should know about their hidden roles, or being frightened about someone possibly finding out.
4.3 Integration

Levy and Reeves (2011), as well as Pitt (2010) state that integration of identities is a long process, where social encounters with people with a positive and accepting view on homosexuality and religiousness together is one of the key points. In Pitt’s (2010) study, some of the men said that when they started seeing being gay as something God made them, they became more comfortable with rejecting the stigma and stereotypes that come with it. As a result, many of them reported to be able to follow what they were taught at church, and to apply that to their romantic relationships: they found who they, as gay religious men, are. Previously they had thought that having multiple sexual partners, for example, came with being gay, and felt like they should regret it every time at church. After accepting that they were who they were, and creating, in their minds, a new role that could be called “gay religious”, they found a desire to look for more meaningful romantic relationships, and therefore could apply most of what the church said about relationships into their personal lives.

Similarly, in Case 1 and 2, becoming aware first, of who you are as an individual, and second, how unrealistic the stereotypes set on your role(s) are, or how ill-fitting they are to your particular way of life, both mother-professionals and the depressed subjects were able to create a completely new role (professional mother, or depressed me). Hodges and Park (2013) stated that when mother-professionals found role models who were conforming to both stereotyped roles in a way that was deemed as a functional way by society, they found more self-confidence to be both at the same time, therefore creating a new role, professional mother. Through the motivating example of others, and come to an understanding of what the roles mean to them personally, the subjects realized how their roles come together to form who they are.

Hodges and Park (2013) further argue that while the ideas an individual has of the roles they possess have a major role to play in whether the individual is able to work with both simultaneously, it is their perception of how the society views them that matters the most. In addition to this, they also stated that it is not the women in their study who seek to be professionals as well as mothers who need to change, but it is up to society to change the stereotypical prototype of “professional” and “mother” to better befit today’s society for this problem to go away.

In Case 4, on the other hand, integration of the stereotype into a role was the problem itself. However, Sueda (2014) argues that people do not only conform to roles, but cre-
ate and modify them. What the subjects in Case 4 were doing, was essentially unknowingly fortifying the stereotype of African Americans without meaning to do so at all. In this case, as well as in the others, the important thing would be for the individual to understand and know of the stereotypes that are directed towards the roles they possess, and rationalize to themselves how those stereotypes are not a part of who they are, thus creating a new stereotype for that role. (Steele & Aronson 1995)

4.4 Living with the conflict

When a situation arises where people cannot give up the role they are in, hide one role, nor live a double life due to only one role being activated in a situation, (as is the case in Case 4) they will simply have to live with the conflict. (Levy & Reeves, 2011) Unlike the other categories, living with the conflict often happens unconsciously. For example, in case 4 (Steele & Aronson, 1995), the subjects were not doing anything that was different from everyday life. While they were aware of the stereotypes in general, they did not realize that they are underachieving, due to stereotypes that they, unknowingly, have conformed to.

The effects of what happens when an individual knowingly or unknowingly ends up conforming to a stereotype is explained by the theory of self-fulfilling prophecy. This means that when a person thinks they are expected to perform in a certain way due to a personal characteristic or role, they end up doing so (Major & O’brien 2005). In Case 4, the result ended up being negative, and lowering the subjects’ achievement. But as I stated before, stereotypes can be both positive and negative, and therefore can also affect how we act in either positive or negative ways: A study conducted by Weaver, Moses and Snyder (2015), shows that if a basketball coach is told that their students are exceptionally good, they will treat the students as exceptionally good, and therefore gaining exceptionally good results. According to Major and O’brien (2005), to get rid of the negative effects of stereotype-induced behaviour, the individual needs to be aware of the stereotypes that they are conforming to, in order to break the cycle.

For example, as Case 4 shows, the mere act of having to write down their race lowered test results for African-American students, due to their assumed stereotypes. What would have been interesting to know is how the two African American participants, who were left out due to having assumptions that the test had to do with race, would have compared. Since they were clearly aware of what the situation was about, would they still have
unknowingly conformed to the stereotype? Or was being aware of the fact that the situation was racialized in any way enough to break the cycle?

The theory of self-fulfilling prophecy also supports Sueda’s (2014) comment on individuals creating and reinforcing role stereotypes, in addition to conforming to them: by conforming to stereotypes (either knowingly or unknowingly), they strengthen the former role description, and the idea of the ideal prototype for that role, and therefore leave even less room for different behaviour. Of course the blame cannot be put on the negatively stereotyped role, but on society itself - the individuals have been hard-wired to comply to whatever they are believed to be.
5. INTERSECTIONALITY

As briefly mentioned before, intersectionality is a line of study that views the identity as a multiplicity of social factors, or roles, that come together to form who an individual is. Intersectionality started with Black Feminism (Carbado, et al., 2013), but has further developed to fit a broader spectrum of contexts. Originally Crenshaw (1991, as cited by Carbado et al., 2013) used intersectionality to show how black women are subject to discrimination not only due to their skin colour, but also, for example, their sex, thus making them susceptible to multiple ways of discrimination in any given situation. However, as Malcolm and Mendoza state (2014), intersectionality is not only about “piling up” different oppressed roles to show in how many possible ways a person can be discriminated against, but the idea is to look at how the different roles mould each other, and how they together form each individual’s identity.

Malcolm and Mendoza (2014) also add that it is not only about the different roles, but the different levels of identity (individual, relational and collective, as described in chapter 2, “Identity”), thus making identity not only a sum of multiple roles, but something that works at many different levels. They also state that people who understand the intersectionality of their own roles, come to give less meaning to external influence. These individuals are more aware of the stereotypes set on each role, and understand that they are who they are, and can act in a way that they see the best, regardless of what society dictates.

Pesonen (2015) describes intersectionality as something that reinforces the idea that identity is diverse and situational, and it changes through time and context. Intersectionality is used to emphasise how a single role cannot be defined in the same way separated from context – roles, and how they are experienced are not static, nor are they experienced in the same way between different individuals. By studying a certain group of people, with a certain set of roles, and assuming all the roles are perceived in the same way in relation to each other, the norms of society may end up being further confirmed, instead of challenging them. (Pesonen, 2015)

As Pesonen (2015) states, however, intersectionality does not ensure that all possible scenarios are taken into account. What it does do, however, is make the notion of identity more humane, and realistic.

The reason I wanted to bring forth the concept of intersectionality is because none of the studies portrayed in this thesis take this multiplicity into account. They unfortunately
assume that, for example, each woman experiences motherhood in the same way. This, however, is not the case in “the real world”. I do see that intersectionality is the way identity and roles should be studied in the future. It brings forth a more humane viewpoint that helps not only stereotyped individuals, but the society that has cast those stereotypes on them, break free from old ideologies. In the long run, it could ensure that everyone is allowed to be who they wish to be, without a fear of judgement from those around them.
6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Coping strategies

Of course, the four models of coping described are in themselves quite compartmentalized, and create an extremely artificial division between different ways of coping with stereotype-related conflict. As with any other theoretical division or categorization of the way people act, this one should not be seen as the absolute truth.

For example, compartmentalization and rejecting the identity as terms were used almost interchangeably at times, or different studies would describe them slightly differently. In addition, in “Still looking for my Jonathan” (Pitt, 2013), as well as in the study conducted by Levy and Reeves (2011), rejecting one of the identities was seen as the first step, followed by compartmentalization, and the end goal being integration of the roles. In the other Cases they were portrayed as completely separate coping methods that do not necessarily need to form a pattern or a timeline for when a person is over their inner conflict. Not only that, but as could be seen from my review of the models, not all of them can be directly applied to all (or any) of the case examples. I felt, however, that this division was the clearest one. The parts of this division were also, in one form or the other, mentioned in most studies, even though not all of them mentioned the parts by name, nor did all studies mention every one of all four.

Regardless of the exact use of terminology, and the inconsistencies between the exact definitions, what could be taken from all of the case studies was that no matter which one was being viewed, there are two things that directly affect how a person perceives themselves, and how they deal with the conflicts that arise from being stereotyped: First, understanding and acknowledging the stereotypes that are causing the issues. If, and as soon as the subjects were able to identify the source, they were able to either create a completely new role which they could define completely on their own, thus gaining the freedom to act in a way that they deemed fit their individual situation the best. In some cases, they simply start re-defining their old role and acting according to it, which in the end meant the same freedom as with creating a completely new role.
Second, external sources were almost always the key to understanding oneself, and reaching some kind of equilibrium. In Cases 1 and 2 finding role models who had successfully found a way around society’s stereotypes was the key to finding a way to, in the individual’s own mind, create a new role that joined the two – therefore creating a completely new role, as Sueda (2014) suggested. This kind of true integration was seen as the least stressful, and the only valid long-term option (Pitt, 2013; Levy & Reeves, 2011).

I must point out, however that if an individual truly believes they have successfully rejected a stereotyped role, it could be said that they, as well as anyone using any other method, have achieved a positive self-image, and no longer have the issue. They have, therefore, reached their personal goal of getting rid of the conflict by getting rid of a negatively stereotyped role. When they have reached that point in the separation from the unwanted role, they no longer give that role any meaning, and consequently no longer see themselves as someone who behaves according to the stereotypical standards. In my mind, this shows that integration may not be the only way to successfully find a balance of roles, and create a wholesome identity with no conflicts. Successful rejection of a role, just as integration, required outside help and support, either from the church community, or through reparative therapy.

In Case 3, getting help and support from friends, and finding professional help was the key to understanding that depression is not always what it is put out to be, and that while not fulfilling every single stereotypical characteristic of a depressed person, they may still need professional help. Case 4, however, shows that just finding a new role, or accepting the one you have is not enough - it is necessary to actively fight against stereotypes. It is not, however, the sole job of the stereotyped individual to do that, but by recognizing how stereotypes affect their own actions and beliefs, stereotyped individuals can work towards breaking those stereotypical roles.

None of these coping mechanisms remove the actual issue at hand, though: stereotyping. Especially in the first three cases, where the issues were portrayed as mostly internal, the three first coping mechanisms were seen as a solution to the problem, when that, in my mind, should not be it. Although Hodges and Park (2013) did portray stereotyping as an issue created by society, instead of finding a solution the studies have created an issue of victimization, where the innocent party is blamed for something they have no power over. Stereotyped individuals should not be victimized into being the only ones to rid their roles of old-fashioned, or simply outdated stereotypes. Although individuals can do their
share, these problems have more to do with the society and how it dictates the roles, than the individual themselves.

Hodges and Park (2013) further enlighten us on the issue of stereotypes. They simultaneously name the rapidness and the slowness of social change as the main cause for stereotype-related issues: While, for example, women are faced with the freedom to choose between many new roles that did not exist for them at all only a couple of decades ago, they are still held back by the old, but yet still societally valued and upheld, roles they are used to be seen in. (Hodges & Park, 2013) This idea is applicable to the other cases as well – when it comes to homosexuality and religion, religious values are often seen as very outdated, and views on homosexuality are such as well. Even the homosexual men in the studies often had an idea that they were supposed to have multiple sexual partners, and act in a “typical way for homosexuals to act”. (Pitt, 2010) Pitt (2010) states that when compartmentalizing their roles, some of the men in his study were only doing so due to an impression that who they were as gay men would never suit their roles as religious men. Similarly, while the idea of African Americans having lower mental capabilities than Caucasians has been discarded decades ago, the stereotypes still stay afloat and affect people’s lives (Steele & Aronson, 1995). No matter how much has changed, and what ideologies have been deemed unrealistic or simply untrue by science, or any other evidence, the old ideologies still persist. Meanwhile the world moves on, and the stereotypes of the roles of yesterday no longer apply today.

As Hodges and Park (2013) put it, “whether two identities are in conflict with one another depends on cultural expectations for what successful performance is in each”. According to them, the conflict does not initially arise from within the individual, but from “social comparison to the ideal prototype of these roles”. From there it then develops, and when the stereotypical prototype is internalized, it causes personal issues. The models and ideas of what is wrong, and what is expected of each role is cultural and something we learn, not something we are born with. (Hodges & Park, 2013) In simple words, the problems are initially caused by society, but they turn into an internal conflict and a personal issue, and are often then treated as such. While the case examples used in this thesis are more or less global, the severity, effects, and social pressure caused by each may differ greatly, even within a country.
6.2 Validity

It must also be stated that while in the study conducted by Steele and Aronson (1995) what was tested was simply how the activation of a stereotype affects an individual’s performance, stereotypes are not the only reason for the generally poorer performance of African Americans. The other reasons for this are, just like in the case of stereotyping, caused by society. Unfortunately, the society is often constructed in a way that prevents, or at least makes it very difficult for African Americans to achieve a similar education to those of Caucasian heritage (Bottiani, Bradshaw & Mendelson, 2016). Therefore, while I believe Steele and Aronson bring an important aspect to the discussion, it is also important to note that their study does not take into account the general unfairness of society.

As mentioned at the end of the Intersectionality chapter above, none of the studies take the multiplicity of identity into account. While they serve, in my opinion, to give us a general idea of how stereotyping may affect individuals in certain ways, they do not give a very diverse or widely applicable explanation to, or description of how, for example, individuals who are homosexual and religious at the same time may feel.

Additionally, all four case examples were from the USA. Unfortunately, this means that a lot of what was said in the case examples may differ greatly if compared with similar cases from any other country. For example, Case 1, the professional woman vs. mother study (Hodges & Park 2013), is very tied to a certain culture. I do feel that in cultures where women’s roles are more equal to men’s in general, and where more household chores are shared, the conflict women experience between the two roles may not be as great. This being said, I would still like to state that it is not only the USA that suffers from stereotyping, so although the cases should not be compared directly, the underlying issue of stereotyping, still stays the same.

6.3. Conclusion

Coming back to the Mexican friend I mentioned in the beginning, and the way he saw stealing as something he might as well do because “they” will think he’s going to do it anyway. In most of the cases I portray, people aren’t conforming to behaviour seen as negative on purpose, but either do it unknowingly, or try to hide it. My friend, however, felt that he had been blamed long enough for something he had never done, to have the right to
go ahead and do it. It would be truly interesting to find out how much people reinforce existing stereotypes on purpose, for the sole reason of not caring anymore, due to being constantly openly stereotyped. It would also interest me to know how much the difference between being told to your face what you are like, and stereotypes that people keep up but do not say to your face affect how much an individual conforms to said stereotypes. In addition – are people aware that they tend to conform to stereotypes?
7. SOURCES


