

Let's Fight Racism!

Challenging Racial Stereotypes



Equity Committee

Thank you for taking the time to speak to us about challenging racial stereotypes today – the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination! This takeaway provides information about racial stereotypes, answers some frequently asked questions about the topic, and connects you to campus and community organizations who promote equitable treatment of visible minorities/racialized communities.

What are racial stereotypes?¹

A stereotype is a widely held set of beliefs about a specific group or type of person that is intended to represent that entire group of people and give you an expectation of that group's behaviour. A racial stereotype then, is a widely held set of beliefs about a race or ethnic group that informs your thinking about who a racialized person is and what you should expect from their behaviour as a member of that racial group.

Where do racial stereotypes come from?

Racial stereotypes in many ways act as mental shorthand for our brains, allowing us to quickly and easily identify racialized people and set our expectations for who they are, what we should expect from them, and all sorts of other social expectations. It's a lot of mental work to assess each other person individually and make judgements about who that person is and what to expect from them, so most people tend to take the experiences and expectations they have with an individual racialized person and generalize that set of beliefs up to apply to that racialized person's entire ethnic group. People sharing their generalized beliefs about other racial communities in turn influences other people's thinking and further spreads a racial stereotype. This effect is magnified by the television, movies, music, internet memes, literature, and other media that people consume.

Why are racial stereotypes harmful?

These stereotypes promote ignorance and hatred of racial groups and limit racialized peoples' opportunities. If your stereotyped view of a racial group is that they're lazy, dangerous, thuggish, barbaric, savage, subhuman, criminals, stupid, etc. then that promotes hatred towards everyone from that group, encourages you to isolate yourself from that group, and prevents members of that group from positively engaging with you in the community, at work, and in social settings. Job opportunities are lost, friendships are prevented, and trust is impossible to form when racial groups are stigmatized by racial stereotypes. Individuals are prevented from being judged on the content of their character and their behaviour. Instead, they're labelled and weighed down under the weight of this unfair generalization from the get go.

How can we prevent racial stereotypes from forming?²

Spend time with people from outside your own racial background

Being in equal status relationships with people from different racial backgrounds enables us to see them as complete human beings – unique in their particular set of personal experiences and

characteristics. A little experience with cross-racial interactions reduces anxiety among both majority and minority group members and encourages us to move beyond tolerating different communities, and celebrating and including them instead.

Approaching other communities with cultural humility

It's important to approach people from different racial backgrounds with the same kind of respect and consideration you want to receive from them, including:

- Being self-aware. Understanding our own racial perspectives and how those perspectives have been shaped and informed.
- Reducing any power imbalances between us and the other person. Especially important when meeting someone from a different racial background in a place where our own racial community is dominant.
- Entering into reciprocal relationships where both people open themselves up to the other. Don't expect the other person to share everything about themselves and their community without equally revealing things about ourselves and our community.
- Advocate for fair treatment for all racial backgrounds in the organizations we are part of. Ensure that other racial communities have the same opportunities as our own racial community by working for equitable policies and processes in the institutions we are a part of - our workplaces, our schools, our governments, our religious institutions, our businesses, our community organizations.

Don't buy into or perpetuate racial stereotypes

Make an effort not to spread the racial stereotypes you encounter. Don't share that racist meme on Facebook, don't like that racist comment on a news story, don't make that racist joke, don't buy that racist video game, etc. The easiest rule of thumb to follow is: if it makes you feel an uncomfortable twinge or is something that you'd feel uncomfortable sharing with a person from that particular racial community - then don't spread it around.

About the Equity Committee

The TRUSU Equity Committee is a group of eight elected and appointed students who work to raise awareness about the systemic oppression of marginalized communities in society, and to challenge that oppression on campus.

Endnotes

1. McGarty, Craig; Yzerbyt, Vincent Y.; Spears, Russel (2002). "Social, cultural and cognitive factors in stereotype formation". *Stereotypes as explanations: The formation of meaningful beliefs about social groups*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1–15.
2. Getting Race Right. "How Do We Rid Ourselves Of Stereotypes?." March 13, 2018. Hope College.

How can I get more involved in racialized equity on campus or in the community?

Participate in an ethnicity based TRUSU Club activity

One of the best ways to break down racial stereotypes is to actually meet and spend time with folks from those communities. Ethnicity based TRUSU clubs offer a fun and casual way to engage with folks from different racial backgrounds on campus.

Visit the Clubs Directory on trusu.ca to get in contact with an ethnicity based TRUSU club and see their upcoming activities.

Access the Thompson Okanagan Respect Network's resources

If you're looking for information about anti-racism and anti-hate resources in the region and additional opportunities to get involved, then the Respect Network is a great resource to check out. They bring together the work of many community organizations doing anti-racism/anti-hate work through awareness raising, community outreach, and events and activities to advance racialized equity. Visit respectnetwork.ca to see their work and opportunities to get involved.

Show your support through the UN's Let's Fight Racism campaign

If you want to show your support for fighting against racism but you don't have a lot of time to devote right now, that's ok! The UN's Let's Fight Racism campaign has plenty of quick online and other activities that you can take part in to help raise awareness and take some small actions.

Visit un.org/en/letsfightracism to see their list of quick online things you can do to show your support and spread the word about fighting racism.

Find out more

Follow the Equity Committee's work by visiting trusu.ca/news/equity or liking the TRUSU Facebook page!



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