

"Othering" : the psychological role of the stranger and the mechanisms used to cope with the anxiety evoked in the face of otherness.

By Shelley Ostroff

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The German Final Solution was an aesthetic solution; it was a job of editing, it was the artist's finger removing a smudge, it simply annihilated what was considered not harmonious

Cynthia Ozick¹

The meeting with people who are seen as different in significant ways is often a trigger on the one hand for feelings of curiosity and enthusiasm and on the other hand for feelings of distrust, disdain, aggression and hatred. In this article I explore some of the psychological mechanisms that determine the way in which human beings relate as individuals and as groups to people who are different from them. The tendency towards prejudice, disdain, fear, envy, anger, hatred and hostility towards an-other, generally stems from a sense of anxiety and a perception of the other as in some way threatening. To overcome this anxiety a variety of psychological mechanisms are mobilized. These mechanisms are evident in much of everyday human behavior but in extreme forms are the psychological roots of racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of severe social discrimination, structural inequality and socio-political conflict. Awareness of psychological roots of the anxiety and coping mechanisms related to the encounter with "otherness" in its different forms provides practical tools for those working towards reducing inter-group conflict and creating environments and processes which reduce anxiety and diminish prejudice, stereotypes and hostility. In this paper I will explore the role of the stranger in society and the way in which the attitude towards the "other" or "stranger" becomes embedded in structural inequality. The first section of this paper looks at the role of the "stranger" in society and the anxiety and ambivalence which the stranger evokes, the second part presents some of the psychological mechanisms used to cope with anxiety aroused in the face of strangers and the third section discusses the mechanisms typical of groups and the way in which these may be mobilized to deal with stranger anxiety.

The stranger

Simone De Beauvoir is often quoted as saying "Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought". It is not so much the otherness itself that is at issue in this paper - but rather the form that that process of

¹ Quoted in Bauman, pg. 66

“othering” takes and the way that the process of “othering” becomes institutionalized in societal forms of structural inequality. “Othering” is an essential part of self-development. By noting differences between oneself and others, by identifying more with some characteristics and behaviors and less with others, by modeling oneself on some and rejecting others as role models, one is able to build a richer and clearer sense of one's own identity. It is when these identifications are tinged with judgement and distortions of oneself or others that the process of “othering” becomes dangerous. The judgement based quality of “othering” through which “in groups” and “out groups” are created is ubiquitous. It can be found for instance in the “popular kids group” in kindergarten, the adolescent cliques and gangs, the inter-departmental and inter-disciplinary stereotypes and prejudices in organizations, in the phenomena of ethnic prejudice, racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of social prejudice, discrimination and ideologically based conflict.

When prejudice, stereotypes and fear of the other coincide with unequal power relations, the power is often used in conscious and unconscious ways to reinforce existing oppression and maintain, if not promote the inequality in formal and informal ways. Formal, manifest structural inequality can take the form of discriminatory laws and regulations in the areas of politics, education, economics and social rights and privileges. It is the “informal structural inequality” which is more elusive to the naked eye. It is implicit for instance in the way society organizes itself so that it perpetuates socio-economic inequality and inequality of opportunities in areas such as literacy, education, professional roles, salaries, popular cultural figures and public decision making roles.

Different theories address the issue of structural inequality through different prisms. Neo-Marxist and Race, Class and Gender Studies focus on the way in which unequal power relations are consciously used for purposes of domination and exploitation. Social psychology looks at the way in which inequality is internalized and perpetuated in daily social interactions, for instance by teachers who tend to reinforce boys more than girls for certain types of academic achievement or by employers who entrust whites over blacks with roles of greater responsibility. Feminist theory that focuses on the social construction of reality highlights the way in which gender inequality is embedded in and perpetuated in discourse. The “authoritative” writing of those in power about those with less power is seen as a form of colonialism. (Kitzinger and Wilkinson, 1996)

In the different forms of structural inequality, people are differentiated along lines of belonging to a certain group according to parameters such as race, colour, age, disability, gender, religion, nationality or sexual orientation. In each case there is the group who enjoys certain rights or privileges and the other,

who is to some extent excluded from these rights or privileges. To the privileged group, the excluded or oppressed group is marked out by some form of “otherness” or as “strangers” to the “in-group”.

In much of the literature, there seems to be little differentiation between the terms "strangers" and "enemies". The term enemy generally refers to a conscious and defined other with whom there are reciprocal relations of opposition, struggle and hostility. The relationship with strangers is often accompanied by feelings of hostility and struggle, however the term "stranger" does not in itself have clear emotional or judgemental connotations. The Oxford Pocket Dictionary definition of the stranger is a "person in a place or company that he does not belong to, person strange to or to one, person strange to something".

On the feeling and image level, the processes of differentiation are generally multi-faceted and ambiguous. Concepts such as friend and enemy are terms that nudge the unarticulated feelings into boxes in order to create order. They can be seen as articulated formulations of ongoing internal processes whereby humans differentiate themselves from others. These processes involve evaluations of similarities and differences, likes and dislikes, attractions and fears and are a core part of establishing one's identity and place in society. Their use provides a certain clarity and can be seen as mechanisms to cope with the discomfort arising from the ambiguity and ambivalence inherent in internal images and feelings which accompany inter-personal relations.

While friends and enemies are clearly situated in relation to oneself the place of the stranger is enigmatic. Simmel and Bauman focus on the anxiety and hostility that the stranger arouses because he embodies uncertainty and poses a threat to the clear order of binary opposition.

The unity of nearness and remoteness involved in every human relation is organized, in the phenomenon of the stranger, in a way which may be most briefly formulated by saying that in the relationship to him, distance means that he, who is close by, is far, and strangeness means that he, who also is far, is actually near. (Simmel, 1903, pg 402)

They (strangers) are the premonition of that third element which should not be. These are the true hybrids, the monsters- not just unclassified, but unclassifiable. They question oppositions as such - the plausibility of dichotomy it suggests and the feasibility of separation it demands. They "infringe onto the division of things.(Bauman, 1991, pg. 54)

Following Simmel, Bauman describes friendship and enmity as the archetypal forms of sociation and as constituting a two-pronged matrix. According to Bauman, friendship is determined by a sense of responsibility while enmity is based on the pragmatics of struggle and a renunciation of responsibility and moral duty.

Against this cosy antagonism, this conflict torn collusion of friends and enemies, the stranger rebels. The threat he carries is more horrifying than that which one can fear from the enemy. The stranger threatens the sociation itself - the very possibility of sociation.And all this because the stranger is neither friend nor enemy; and because he may be both. And because we do not know and have no way of knowing which is the case. (Ibid pg. 55)

(The stranger) disturbs the fought after co-ordination between moral and topographical closeness - the staying together of friends and the remoteness of enemies: The stranger disturbs the resonance between physical and psychical distance; he is physically close while remaining spiritually remote. He brings into the inner circle of proximity the kind of difference and otherness that are anticipated and tolerated only at a distance -where they can be either dismissed as irrelevant or repelled as hostile. The stranger represents an incongruous and hence resented synthesis of nearness and remoteness. (ibid, pg. 60)

Both Simmel and Bauman focus on the strangers who come into ones life world at some point in time - they are not there from the start and constantly hold the possibility of leaving. In society, these are for instance foreign workers and immigrants who by their entering into ones life world uninvited, 'put one on the receiving side of their initiative' and bring into it qualities which do not emerge from the group itself.

Bauman suggests that the structural inequality evident in Nationalist states is designed primarily to deal with the problem of strangers rather than the problem of enemies. The nationalist ideology attempts to eliminate strangers, to reduce all divisions that threaten national unity, and to promote or even enforce ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural homogeneity. If these cannot be enforced then a 'cultural fence' is created and the stranger is made 'untouchable'.

Strict prohibitions of cunnubium, commercium and commensality are the most common methods of cultural isolation and limitation of contact. Applied singly or in combination, they set the stranger as the Other and protect the ambiguity of his status from polluting the clarity of native identity." (ibid pg. 66)

"They (Nationalist States) are engaged in incessant propaganda of shared attitudes. They construct long historical memories and do their best to discredit or suppress such stubborn memories as cannot be squeezed into shared tradition - now redefined, in the state appropriate quasi-legal terms, as 'our common heritage'. They preach the sense of common mission, common fate, common destiny. They breed, or at least legitimize and give tacit support to, animosity towards everyone standing outside the holy union. In other words, national states promote uniformity. Nationalism is a religion of friendship; the national state is the church that forces the prospective flock to practice the cult. The state enforced homogeneity is the practice of nationalist ideology." (ibid pg. 66)

Bauman adds that the social institution of stigma serves as a 'weapon against ambiguity'. Modern societies rebel against fate and ascription and advocate self-actualization and self-determination. Stigma however which marks others by outward signs creates a limit to the extent which an individual or group can transform themselves and mask their differences. 'Stigma ... restores dignity to the fate and casts a shadow on the promise of limitless perfectibility.' (Ibid pg. 68)

The psychoanalytic approach looks to the origins of stranger anxiety. At the age of seven or eight months, babies begin to react with anxiety in response to strangers. They may 'freeze' at the sight of anyone new and then begin to cry. In the second year this reaction may intensify, and thereafter the intensity begins to wane. Erlich (1990) notes that "stranger anxiety" sets in at the moment when the fusion with the mother becomes an almost conscious source of pleasure and security, and the stranger threatens to undercut and interrupt that merger. He suggests that the extent to which the stranger evokes either curiosity and exploration or anxiety and projection may be related to the "goodness" and security sensed in the mother child relatedness and in their affective attunement.

Erlich links these early experiences with later feelings towards strangers who can be seen as the 'prototype of the internal, psychic enemy that becomes a "social reality" - the enemy who threatens "to destroy our peace, to snatch us out of the calmness that comes through Being - the merger with another in the experience of simply being alive. Historically and currently, there is always great readiness to project onto the stranger this role of the enemy, 'the destroyer of the peace'." (Erlich, 1990)

Many authors have written about the psychological need for enemies and the function enemies fulfill. In these cases there is often an interchangeability of the use of the terms stranger and enemies. Robins and Post suggests for instance that enemies are needed in order to facilitate self-definition. However, they say, "A mature, integrated person learns that "enemy" objects are at most adversaries or distasteful beings, not

objects to be hated or destroyed. For some people, and for many when under stress, however, the bad objects become true enemies.” (Robins and Post , 1997, pg. 92) These statements indicate the problematic of the term “enemy”. In the ubiquitous process of evaluating ones position in relation to others, different degrees of closeness and animosity are experienced towards "others". The problem of definition lies in the question as to when is the mixture of attraction and animosity, compassion and hostility felt in relation to others, such that the other can be clearly defined as an enemy?

In situations of stress and threat, it becomes more difficult to contain ambivalence and the tendency is to revert to the early coping mechanism of splitting the world into good or bad - in this case - friends and enemies. In these situations the “enemy” becomes all bad and as such must be controlled or eliminated. A group is more likely to be able to cope with the ambivalence that strangers arouse when they feel secure that the stranger does not hold any threat to their basic needs. This will depend on the maturity and sense of security of the group as well as on the nature of the particular stranger and what the stranger represent s for that group. To the extent that the person or group feels threatened on the level of their basic needs, the greater the likelihood that the stranger will be perceived as the enemy.

It is questionable however if humans have an innate need for enemies or whether the creation of enemies is a secondary function that serves to fulfil other more basic needs. If there is a basic need for enemies, this does not explain the peaceful periods of history nor the many communities which function without any clearly defined enemies or acts of hostility. The theories about the need for enemies nevertheless draw attention to some of the functions that the creation of enemies serves. Some suggest these functions relate to the psychological need for identity and superiority; sociological functions of fostering cohesiveness and solidarity; political functions of gaining and holding control; and economic functions of profit, and trade. (Middents, 1990) Others argue that enemies facilitate the maintenance of a favorable self-image and harmony in the group and that the externalization of aggression allows for group solidarity and continuity (Bryce, 1986). According to Zweig and Abrams (1991) enemies serve the vital function of being the objects onto whom we can attribute those qualities that we cannot tolerate in ourselves. Schneider (1998) suggests that the enemy allows us an opportunity to rid ourselves not only of the qualities that we despise, but also to rid ourselves of the inner conflicts and difficulties. The conflict is no longer within ourselves, but rather with a concrete external object.

In the following paragraph Post describes some of the functions of enemies and the paradox of being bound to our enemies. Because they are necessary for our process of self-definition, it is necessary to have them in our midst.

The more “different” the stranger in our midst, the more readily available he is as a target for externalization. An important aspect of the development of group identity is symbols of difference shared by the other - symbols on which to project hatred. But because they are representations of the self that are being projected, there must be a kinship recognized at an unconscious level. We are bound to those we hate. Nevertheless, there must be a recognizable difference, a distinct gap to facilitate the distinction between “us” and “them” - A “good enough enemy” is an object that is available to serve as a reservoir for all the negated aspects of the self. In this way, the enemy provides the valuable function of stabilizing the internal group by storing group projection. Just as the paranoid delusional system makes sense and provides cohesion for the individual ego under threat of fragmentation, so too does the enemy provide cohesion for the social group, especially the social group under stress. Ironically those groups from which we most passionately distinguish ourselves are those to which we are most closely bound. (Robins and Post, 1997, pg. 92)

Marshall Rosenberg suggests that the making of enemies is neither an innate inevitable phenomena nor a need. Like any forms of daily occurrences of judgement, criticism and discriminatory or violent behavior he postulates that enemy making is "the tragic expression of other unmet needs".² What are the basic needs that may be threatened by the encounter with people who are different? What are these basic needs which when unmet will increase the likelihood that strangers or those who are "other" in significant ways will be transformed into enemies or into others who must be excluded, controlled, oppressed or dominated?

Our primary needs are for survival and for physical security. We also have basic needs for a positive self image, a sense of self worth and dignity, a sense of physical and emotional integrity, a certain level of freedom, a sense of fundamental mastery in order to be able to maneuver in the world, a coherent identity, a sense of belonging and kinship, and ultimately a sense of self actualization. These needs can be directly threatened in situations of war where there is a threat to ones life, territory and resources for survival.

In the case of war, the enemy is clearly defined, the cause of war most often being conflict over territory, human rights, identity or ideology. When basic human rights are jeopardized, many of the needs stated above cannot be satisfied. When another group upholds an ideology different to ones own, ones sense of coherent identity, sense of mastery, self worth and belonging may also be threatened. Religious conflict

² Notes from a seminar by Marshall Rosenberg on “Non-Violent Communication” , Switzerland 1994

for instance is based on two mutually exclusive worldviews and perceptions of truth. Confronting the other's perspective can put into question the very foundations of one's own existence, the cultural beliefs one has always assumed to be "the only acceptable way" or the "right way". Thus exposure to different attractive cultures and belief systems may threaten one's identification with one's own group. Structurally embedded socio-economic and socio-political inequality also frustrates many of the above-mentioned needs.

A strong link between stress and enemy making is evident in much of the literature. Robins and Post state that the "innate tendency to idealize the in-group and demonize the outgroup can never be eradicated. The germs of that more primitive psychology remain within the personality, ready to be activated at times of stress. Thus otherwise psychologically healthy individuals can be infected by paranoid thinking when the group with which they identify is attacked, when economic reversals occur, or even when epidemics of disease or forces of nature, such as earthquakes, afflict the group." (Robins and Post pg. 98)

The link between certain types of stresses such as war, socio-economic inequality, oppressive governmental policies and religious coercion are likely to increase prejudice and hostility and push towards structural inequality which controls the strangers who are perceived as a threat. But what of prejudice and the resulting structural inequality which do not seem to result directly from situations of societal stress - prejudices such as sexism, anti-semitism, racism and homophobia.

Elizabeth Breuhl-Young examines some of the theory from the fields of psychology and social psychology on prejudice. The Neo Marxist theory indicates that these phenomena are related to issues of power and exploitation, the conscious use of prejudice being used to maintain a hierarchical oppressive class structure. Realistic group conflict theory argues that groups which are "positively interdependent" and equal in status do not hate and stigmatize each other, while groups that are competing and vying for dominance develop derogatory attitudes to justify and explain their hostility and the unequal power relations. The Frustration aggression scapegoat theory - suggests that prejudice operates by displacement. In this view, prejudice operates as a steam escape valve. By venting frustration and aggression through prejudice on a scapegoat, a greater explosion is prevented. The frustration and aggression arises for instance when impersonal forces like a set of rules or an economic crisis prevents people from getting what they want. The aggression is then expressed towards a third party - a scapegoat. The intensity of the aggression is related to the intensity of the frustration so that in situations of economic hardship anti-semitism may be greater. After the first world wars theorists began to examine the phenomenon of

'ethnocentrism' arising in countries where there were strong waves of immigration and attributed prejudice to the needs of all groups to mark themselves as distinct and protect their territories and identity. Studies also found a correlation between people who grew up with frustrating authoritarian parents and prejudice.

Allport defines prejudice as: “An aversive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to a group.” (Allport, 1954, pg 7) He specifies ethnic prejudice as “an antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization. It may be felt or expressed. It may be directed toward a group as a whole, or toward an individual because he is a member of that group.” (Ibid. pg 9)

Elizabeth Breuhl-Young rejects the reduction of prejudices to a singular phenomenon with the same cause and manifestations. In her psychoanalytic study she examines the different roots of different types of prejudices. She suggests that there are unique forms of prejudice and distinguishes these from ethnocentrism which she considers a universal prejudice, the function of which is to protect group identity in economic, social and political terms. Prejudices on the other hand such as racism, sexism (homophobia is also in this category) and anti-Semitism focus on marks of difference between people, they are supremacist and make evolutionary claims. She terms these prejudices “ideologies of desire” and refers to them as products of modern society that become institutionalized in structural inequality.

Ideologies of desire are, generally, backlashes against movements of equality; they are regressive prejudices that reinstate inequalities and distinctions when the force of movements for equality has been registered and (often unconsciously) rejected. As the psychoanalyst Ernst Kris remarked: “Everywhere in Western civilization there exists some sort of link between equalitarian beliefs and the growth of prejudicial attitudes. Prejudice replaces social barriers of another kind.” Prejudices institutionalize at a deeper and more inchoate individual and social or political levels the differences between “us” and “them” that movements for equality address. In other words, ideologies of desire become entangled with governments, with states proclaiming equality before the law, either as they are used (like anti-Semitism) to destroy such states and establish suprastate entities, or as they are institutionalized (like racism) by such states, or as they extend (like sexism) state political reach into nonpolitical arenas.” (Young- Breuhl, 1996, pg. 30)

She argues that anti-Semitism, racism and sexism represent three different types of this kind of historically specific modern prejudice. Like ethnocentrism they all involve distorted generalizations, projection and stereotyping. They are however quite distinct because they derive from three distinct types of psychic configurations or characters. She recognizes that the typology she presents of the three

prejudices is a theoretical typology and in reality no ideal types exist. She offers the typology as an opportunity to raise questions and draw attention to certain phenomena and tendencies.

While the prejudices overlap and people can be both anti-semitic and sexist, she believes that most people who are prejudiced usually have a fundamental prejudice. The three broad character types she describes are the obsessional, hysterical and narcissistic and she relates these to anti-Semitism, racism and sexism respectively. She suggests, "There are social and political conditions in which the various character types and their characteristic prejudices flourish, in which they have political and social power and also ideological power to influence peoples ideas."(Ibid. pg. 37)

According to Young-Breuhl, the obsessional prejudice such as anti-Semitism is typical of people with rigid, superego-dominated characters - and societies which are organized and function obsessively. This prejudice is linked most clearly with issues related to the anal stage of development when the child is struggling with issues of toilet training, control and autonomy.

Obsessionals purge themselves of polluting thoughts and desires by displacing them onto others who then are experienced as dirtying and assertively polluting. Their ideal is a self filtered of all impurities, all temptation - an imperturbable, perhaps even saintly self that cannot be attacked. (Ibid. pg. 214)

The aggressor is perceived as a penetrator (especially from behind) who is intrusive both physically and mentally like a parasite and towards whom compassion must be suppressed, and for whom a solution must be found. They must be marked off so that they cannot infiltrate and spread their pollution unknowingly. The coping mechanism is one of "undoing". They must be eliminated, expelled, destroyed - so that no trace is left and they no longer intrude into the mental and physical space of the prejudiced. In the same way, any trace of their history must be eliminated - hence the movements which deny the holocaust.

Obsessional prejudices are the prejudices toward which people who are given to fixed ideas and ritualistic acts gravitate and through which they can behave sadistically without being conscious of their victims. The obsessional prejudices feature conspiracies of demonic enemies everywhere, omnipresent pollutants, filthy people, which the obsessionally prejudiced feel compelled to eliminate - wash away, flush away, fumigate, demolish. The obsessionally prejudiced attribute to their victims a special capacity for commercial or economic conspiracy and diabolical behind-the-scenes cleverness, and they both envy this capacity and, acting imitatively turn the fruits of this cleverness (particularly in the domain of technology) on their

victims. They imagine the conspirators as having the capacity to penetrate them, get into their bowels and their privacies. (Ibid. pg. 34)

The hysterical prejudice of which racism is typical is related to issues around the Oedipal developmental stage when the child is struggling with its sexual identity and forbidden wishes toward the parent of the opposite sex. In racism, a group is appointed which is seen as acting out forbidden, sexual and sexually aggressive desires that the person has repressed.

Racism, by contrast, exemplifies hysterical prejudice - that a person uses unconsciously to appoint a group to act out in the world forbidden sexual and sexually aggressive desires that the person has repressed. Racism is a prejudice that represents or symbolizes genital power or prowess and sexual desires by bodily features like skin color, thick hair, muscularity, or big breasts; it equates strength, size, and darkness with primitivity, archaic and unrestrained sexual activity forbidden in "civilization." The victims are, like victims of the most common forms of classism, another hysterical prejudice, "lower". Racism is a prejudice of desire for regression expressed as a charge that people who are "other" and sexually powerful - as parents or siblings are in the eyes of children - have never progressed, are intellectually inferior, are uncivilized. The "lower" men are imagined as brutal, the "lower" women as either (and sometimes both) sexually lascivious or maternally bountiful, milk giving and care giving.

Racists are people who, in the manner of hysterics, prevent themselves from regressing into infantile helplessness and incestuous love of their own family members by cordoning off their desires and by loving or forming partial, unconscious identifications with the victims of their prejudices. The "others", either as domestic servants or slaves or as a fantasized part of the prejudiced person's household, are love and hate objects in the loving and hating of whom no bans on incest or on rivalry are violated; they are the safe - for the prejudiced person - objects of childhood passions. Ideally the victims do not get destroyed completely or flushed away as the obsessional's victims do; they are needed alive so that they can be loved like mummies, prostituted or raped like whores, sexually mutilated, beaten, deprived of their power, crippled, emasculated - and in all instances, kept in their places. (Young Breuhl pg. 34)

A splitting off process occurs within the hierarchical worldview of the racist where on the one hand he views himself as more refined and less sexual than those toward whom he directs his reproach and prejudice. Often this is accompanied by sexual fantasies or actual sexual acts with those he is prejudiced against. These acts are denied and the conscious self-image remains unsullied. Sometimes these acts take the form of "gang bang"s upon women of the "lower class" or gang bashes" - lynching and torturing of the men to render them impotent. In the case of racism, acts are often of humiliation rather than elimination. Racism is driven by rivalry and early feelings towards the powerful parents of the opposite

sex who one envies and for whom one must compete. Racism can also be seen as sibling rivalry for the favors of the parents.

The third character type that she outlines is the narcissistic type, exemplified by the sexism as a prejudice. The developmental issue here relates to issues of the child discovering that the love object is not identical to oneself.

The sexist prejudice has a narcissistic foundation. Sexists cannot tolerate the idea that there exist people not like them, specifically - anatomically not like them although this is displaced and disguised and can appear for instance in intellectual separatism. Unlike the other prejudices, Young-Breuhl claims that the deepest motivational layer of sexism is one of denial of difference that is hidden beneath upper layers where sexual difference is emphasized and even exaggerated. "Sexism keeps the denial in place, it keeps the hope of sameness alive. In its most elementary forms sexism keeps alive the male child's belief that this mother is like him, even to the point that she has a phallus like his " (Young-Breuhl, pg.234) This is often achieved by keeping the other (in this case the woman) out of sight so as not to be confronted with differences. Men's only clubs, women being kept out of sight in public and out of the places of power, and in certain cases even covering themselves for modesty can be seen as examples of denial operating. The purpose of sexism is to preserve " a narcissistic sense of intactness rather than purification or elimination". (Ibid pg.236)

"The narcissistic prejudices are prejudices of boundary establishment of genital intactness asserted and mental integrity insisted upon. On the other side of the narcissist's boundaries there is not a "them", a "not us", but blank, a lack - or at the most, a profound mystery. Women challenge male gender identity and represent the possibility of castration. Control over women, and especially over women's sexuality and reproductive capacities, equals control over the marks of difference between males and females; it is the deepest counter to anxiety over gender identity and over castration. Sexism is expressed in many ways but its essential meaning is control over female sexuality and reproduction, and its essential purpose is to keep men from recognizing women in their difference or from succumbing to their fear of becoming women. The most sexist societies are those in which narcissism is encouraged and vice versa. (ibid pg.35)

Sexism as active devaluation is, of course, also common, and within the Melanie Klein object relations tradition, it is charged primarily to envy. Klein who defined envy generally as the angry feeling one person experiences when another person possesses and enjoys something desirable, which produces an impulse to steal or spoil that something, believed that the infant's first and paradigmatic envious feelings are directed at the mother's breast. Children want to incorporate the breast, to gain for themselves its milk, its awesome

power. She felt that a girl's penis envy rests, ultimately, on this breast envy - that the penis is experienced as a source of power on the model of the breast. And analysts noted that the strongest defense men (and women) summon against envy is devaluation. Sexism in this sense, is a defense against the desire to have the maternal breast, to be maternal or to regain the merger or symbiosis with the mother that is given up with growing up. (ibid pg. 128)

By devaluation one implicitly deals with the unbearable difference by saying that the other is so different, - so much lower than myself that any comparison is unworthy and irrelevant and thus there is no threat to my own intactness.

Young Breuhl notes that feminist analyses of sexism often reveal a kind of countersexism. They also mobilize denial in creating images of "Before Difference" female superiority. There is a female narcissistic idealizing of the mother infant daughter bond or matriarchal period that reveals a longing to return to unchallenged narcissism where there are no differences.

Young Breuhl sees homophobia as linked to sexism

Many of the psychological and social elements that combine in sexism similarly merge in homophobia. But homosexuals are distinctive as a victim group by virtue of their abilities (as assigned to them by homophobes, of course) to fulfill the needs of all of the types of ideologies of desire. Homosexuals (particularly males) can be filthy lucre for the obsessively prejudiced, who maintain for example that the Jews and the gays control Hollywood, or that all the Jews who control Hollywood are gay. The obsessively prejudiced may insist that there are no gays in the American military - mendacious newspaper stories to the contrary notwithstanding - because gays are much too interested in making money to bother with the military. And so forth. Homosexuals can also be "Negroes" (especially the ones who are Negroes) for the hysterically prejudiced: they are imagined as hypersexual or sexually monomaniac, they have huge phalluses or abnormal genitalia, they engage in all manner of exciting and forbidden perversities; they are "black" pornography, they are always ready for rape. (Ibid. pg. 36)

Young-Breuhl links the feelings, fantasies and behavioral manifestations of these prejudices to early experiences and in doing so differentiates clearly between the three types of prejudice. However it seems that a serious limitation of her theory lies in the reification and crystallization of certain character types and qualities, such as racism and racists, or sexists and people who are homophobic. This pathologizing of certain sets of people creates a different set of "others". This type of categorization in effect creates a different set of societal splits - between the "good" and the "bad" people - those who are racists or sexists. She thus does not give adequate recognition to the existence of these phenomena to a greater or

lesser extent in the majority of the population. As long as we can point to others as racists and sexists as the 'others' we can feel pure of those qualities within ourselves.

While her descriptions of societal processes are recognizable and provide insight into possible important links between different phenomena, the use of a typology creates an artificial simplification of complex process and an artificial boundary between those who fall into her categories and those who do not. Perhaps it is worthwhile to consider the phenomena she describes as dynamic processes which occur to a greater or lesser extent in all human beings, and which change with changing circumstances.

While she distinguishes these categories from ethnocentrism, it seems that the dynamics she describes can also shed light on processes evident in different forms of ethnocentrism that exist today. In highly complex societies which are often split along multiple lines including ideological, political, socio-economic, sexual orientation, religious, ethnic and cultural, (beyond issues of sexism, racism and anti-semitism), many of the "obsessive", "narcissistic" and "hysterical" phenomena she describes can be seen to exist in the inter-group dynamics. It is important however to see these phenomena as dynamic qualities and processes which are not exclusive to any individuals or groups. Otherwise we are in danger of defensively projecting our own "obsessive", "narcissistic", and "hysterical" qualities (to the extent that these can be defined) onto others and it is likely to be displaced rather than worked through in a process of integration and maturation.

The exploration by authors such as Baumann And Simmel, Robins and Post and Young-Breuhl draw attention to the highly loaded psychological aspects of "otherness" especially evident in today's highly competitive and individualistic cultures.

A psychodynamic systemic perspective argues that while human beings have certain innate proclivities, they also have within them all qualities to a greater or lesser extent. During socializations certain elements are highlighted and others repressed. There is a tendency to deny in oneself and project onto others the qualities that individuals consider unacceptable or undesirable. The maturation process involves to a large extent befriending the "imperfections", the qualities which have been rejected, denied, repressed and often projected and reintegrating them into the personality. Similarly with a healthy maturation process the individual is able to develop a tolerance of ambiguity, ambivalence and complexity.

With maturity, people develop increasingly sophisticated ego defense mechanisms and more realistically appraise their environment and distinguish the internal from the external world, and thus progress beyond the world of polarized idealized love and hateful persecutory evil, where the good object and the internal persecutory object are widely separated. Their own self-concept comes to contain all aspects, neither disowning uncomfortable feelings nor idealizing. In the felicitous phrase of Donald Winnicott, they integrate the disparate aspects into a “good enough mother.” As this is accomplished, they develop an integrated holistic sense of objects, for the most part no longer idealizing and demonizing.” (Robins and Post, pg 79)

There is a danger that in an individual's discomfort with his or her own prejudice - they displace the prejudice onto “prejudiced” people and develop theories about them in a parallel process of “othering”. Young-Breuhl, like other theorists who write about prejudice of different sorts may unconsciously be trapped in the same systemic process of projection, displacement, stereotype and devaluation of the “other” who is seen as the oppressive enemy.

Summary

In this section I have explored the psychological role of the stranger in society, and a psychological approach to understanding the origins of the threat that the stranger may be perceived as posing and the mechanisms employed to deal with this anxiety. The challenge for social scientists and those involved in social change is to explore the way in which through education and social structures these maturing processes can be facilitated. When repressed and denied, the powerful emotions stirred in the encounter with otherness are likely to erupt in violence and oppression and the use of power to maintain structural inequality that impinges on human rights. Often this oppression, rooted in anxiety, is cloaked in paternalistic, economic or ideologically self-righteous justifications. In order to find ways to promote tolerance and pluralism in society it seems essential that the unconscious mechanisms at work in the encounter with otherness must be explored, understood and brought to consciousness.