BARRIERS TO ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR AND STABILITY: STEREOTYPING AND SCAPEGOATING AS PRETEXTS FOR AVOIDING RESPONSIBILITY

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Abstract: The paper considers the relationship between stereotyping, scapegoating, unethical behaviour and instability and shows how stereotyping and scapegoating can contribute to national and international instability. It presents a revised version of a three-part model of conflict previously developed by the author, with the components of an issue of dispute, a context which favours violence over peaceful resolution, and a trigger event, and shows how some of the theories of scapegoating and the resulting violence fit into this model.

The paper also discusses potential solutions to current vicious cycles in which unethical behaviour, stereotyping and scapegoating promote or lead to instability. The role of multi-loop action learning and organizations such as SWIS are highlighted in providing support for whistleblowing, responsibility and accountability at both the collective and individual levels, a strengthening of both individual and group identities and increasing respect for currently stereotyped and discriminated against outgroups, which will reduce their vulnerability to scapegoating. The role of systems approaches to the study of conflict situations is also briefly discussed.

Keywords: Ethics, stereotyping, scapegoating, models, conflict, multi-loop action learning.

1. INTRODUCTION

National, regional and international instability, leading to armed conflict are still very real issues, with 36 armed conflicts in 28 countries in 2004. However, this is a decrease from the peak of 44 armed conflicts in 1995 (Ploughshares Project, 2004). These conflicts have had very serious consequences, including an estimated 50-51 million deaths, including those of non-combat civilians in the period 1945-2000 and 130-142 million deaths for the whole of the twentieth century (including deaths in German concentration camps (Leitenberg 2001). Mortality due to national political decision making (Hobsbawn 1996), including genocide, starvation, deaths in prison camps and conflict has been estimated at 214-226 million deaths for the twentieth century (Leitenberg 2001). While there is no one sufficient condition for international (regional or national) stability, ethical behaviour is clearly a necessary condition. A commitment to ethical behaviour would lead to the development of mechanisms for resolving conflict peacefully, reducing tension and removing the types of social, economic, political and other contexts which encourage violent conflict. This includes external conflict to divert attention from internal problems.

The factors that lead to unethical behaviour include the scapegoating, stereotyping and marginalisation of particular social groups. This acts as a barrier to more powerful individuals and social groups examining their own behaviour and taking responsibility for its consequences, including on national and international stability. The focusing of attention on the alleged iniquities and negative differences of a particular group can be used to divert attention from government policies or other activities which have a detrimental impact on human rights and/or could lead to violent conflict. It may also lead to attacks on members of the group which is being scapegoated or violent conflict between different communities. A particular group may be built up as a threat to peace, civilisation and democracy and used to manufacture a situation which leads to armed conflict, which is desired for other reasons. Alternatively, an external enemy is created or an existing dispute magnified to divert attention from internal problems and allow (political) leaders to be re-elected and/or otherwise maintain their power base.

This paper will consider the role of stereotyping and scapegoating in leading to conflict and (ethical) approaches to conflict avoidance and/or resolution. The term ethics will be used here, as it is generally used in a professional context, and it will not be attempted to distinguish it from morality (Hersh, 2000). The paper is laid out as follows. Section 2 presents a three part model of the causes of conflict, which is an updated version of a model previously developed by the author (Hersh, 1997). Section 3 discusses scapegoating and stereotyping and relates a particular model of scapegoating or the onset of violence to this three-part model. Section 4 considers the relationships between stereotyping, scapegoating and instability and the impact of scapegoating on ethical behaviour and Section 5 presents conclusions.
2. A THREE PART MODEL OF THE CAUSES OF CONFLICT

In order to discuss the role of ethical behaviour and the avoidance of stereotyping and scapegoating in conflict prevention or resolution, it is useful to have a model of its causes. The three-component model presented here and illustrated in Figure 1 is an updated version of the model previously developed by the author (Hersh, 1997). It involves dynamic and interacting processes rather than purely static causes and has the following three components, which will be discussed further in Section 2.1:

1. **Issue:** One or more issues of dispute.
2. **Context:** A context which favours instability, discourages dialogue and the peaceful settlement of issues of concern and encourages moves towards violent ‘solutions’.
3. **Trigger:** A trigger event or circumstance, such as the approach of a significant anniversary or the assassination of an important personage, which results in the actual declaration of war.

However, the three components are not totally independent of each other. For instance, trigger events are more likely to occur when there are many issues of dispute and a climate or context which does not encourage peaceful settlement. The tensions associated with a social, economic and political climate in which there are no real mechanisms for discussing and resolving problems are also likely to be a source of potential issues of dispute. The focus has frequently been on the trigger event, as the ‘cause’ of the armed conflict. However, the trigger is frequently only the event which determines when an armed conflict, for which all the conditions are in place and which has developed over a possibly extended period, actually starts. In some cases the issue of dispute and/or the trigger event may act as a pretext for an armed conflict which is desired for other reasons.

2.1 The Three Components of the Model

There are a number of different types of issues of dispute which can lead to conflict, including the following (Chestnut, 1985; Deutsch, 1973; Hersh, 2006a; Renner 1993; Renner 2002; Richardson 1993):

- **Resources:** illegal resource exploitation which has become lucrative, concerns about access to and decreasing natural resources, often in conjunction with population growth, and concerns about decreasing food security.
- **Environmental issues,** including overexploitation of water resources, soil erosion, desertification and deforestation.
- **Economic issues,** such as economic instability, recession, goods dumping and trade embargoes.
- **Power differences and interventions by more powerful nations,** which believe they are entitled to interfere in the affairs of other nations, as well as grievances resulting from the fact that the existing written and unwritten rules of international behaviour favour the more powerful nations and discriminate against the weaker ones.
- **Boundary and land issues.**
- **Human rights issues,** including the treatment of minorities and the dictatorial stances of some governments.
- **Clashes of ideologies and/or cultures.**
- **Actual and/or unresolved historical grievances.**
- **Ethnic tensions,** particularly when the minority group is between 10 and 40% of the population (Burton, 1990) and political boundaries which split cultural, linguistic and ethnic groups have been artificially imposed.

![Figure 1](image-url)
There may be a main issue of dispute, several major issues or a number of minor issues which are significant enough in combination to create a substantive issue of dispute. Current national and international contexts tend to favour the escalation of disputes rather than their peaceful resolution. The main features of these contexts include militarisation, cultural misunderstandings, resource scarcity, the lack of peace building, the lack of mechanisms for settling disputes, globalisation, historical factors and the domestic context. Although there is some commonality, different combinations of contextual factors will be important in different conflicts.

Militarisation includes the very high levels of military expenditure in many countries worldwide. Military expenditure globally remains very high, despite a drop in real terms between 1987 and 1997 from the 1987 peak due to the cold war build-up (SIPRI, 2001). It is now rising again (in real terms), with, for instance, increases of 7%, 6.5% and 11% respectively between 1998 and 2001, in 2001-2 and 2002-3 (SIPRI 2001; SIPRI 2004). European historical and recent data shows a relationship between occurrences of war and the strength of armed forces and between the total number of military personnel and the number of casualties (Brusaco-Mackenzie, 2002). A related factor is the formation of military alliances. The start of war is now generally either preceded by or marked by the formation of alliances (Hersh 1997). A notable example is the context leading up to the start of the first world war. Although arms races have reduced in importance, spending on peace research and social programmes remains very small compared with military expenditure (Hersh, 2006). Despite the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, there are still stockpiles of nuclear weapons, only limited progress has been made towards disarmament and the nuclear weapons countries are not acting on their obligations for total nuclear disarmament in the short term.

The international context lacks mechanisms for arbitrating and settling disputes peacefully and allowing leaders to back down without losing face. Existing written and unwritten rules about international behaviour tend to favour the most powerful nations (Mitchell, 1995). The closest approximation to a world government is the United Nations, which lacks any real power and the infrastructure and enforcement mechanisms (Mitchell, 1995) to affect the more powerful nations or mediate lasting and socially just settlements.

The literature on reasoning and judgement (de Greene, 1989; Mandel, 1986) indicates that many people are poor at assessing uncertainty, often misinterpret cause-effect links and make spurious correlations. This can lead to underestimation of the scale, commitment of resources and the human and financial costs of war, overconfidence of ‘winning’ and misjudgements of the likelihood of a conflict escalating to war and the opponents’ willingness and capability of fighting (Deutsch, 1973). Hostile parties in a conflict generally assume that their opponents have more information and a better understanding of the situation than they do. Both sides may also manipulate information and propaganda to mobilise and maintain support for the use of force. This has included promising a better life, highlighting opponents’ past crimes, deploring the oppression of or threat from particular minority or majority groups and trying to dehumanise opponents (Renfrew, 1983).

The continuing prevalence of armed conflicts and the fact that ‘resolution’ has rarely involved a truth and reconciliation process, for instance on the South African model, has further contributed to a context which favours violence over peaceful resolution. The lack of a reconciliation process generally leaves the ‘losers’ and sometimes also the ‘winners’ with unresolved grievances which could lead to subsequent armed conflicts. Cultural differences and a lack of full understanding of other cultures can lead to misunderstandings and misperceptions. These misunderstandings and misperceptions, together with ideological differences and/or a history of unresolved hostilities and grievances impede peaceful conflict resolution and are frequently an important component of the process leading to war (Mitchell 1995; Hersh, 1997). Although hostile attitudes may disappear with time, they are frequently revived when tension escalates. Victors may try to repeat past successes and the defeated try to obtain revenge or reverse their losses. Changes in the political climate, particularly the collapse of important ideological or political systems, such as the disintegration of the Soviet Union, can also increase the probability of violent conflict.

The combination of population growth, resource depletion, environmental degradation and global inequalities have led to a context of uncertainty, insecurity and unequal access to resources, with much of the world’s population lacking sufficient resources, while a small percentage overconsumes (Hersh, 2006a). This has led to an increase in resource based conflicts with, for instance, resource exploitation contributing to a quarter of the armed conflicts in 2000 (Renner, 2000). The globalisation of trade has made it both lucrative and easy for warring groups to access key markets, thereby facilitating trade in illegal resources. Major international companies help to perpetuate resource based conflicts by purchasing commodities, such as conflict diamonds, that provide revenues to governments at war and by operating in countries with repressive or illegitimate regimes (Renner, 2002). Leaders facing internal social and economic problems may use aggressive foreign policies, including war, to divert attention from problems at home to consolidate their domestic political situation and increase their chances of re-election (Downs and Rocke 1994; Tarar 2006; Gent 2009). However, diversionary tactics can be important even when there are no formal reselection mechanisms, as all leaders can be removed from power and replaced by others. Conflicts where diversion has been an important contributory factor include the 1982 Malvinas/Falklands war (James, 1988); the Napoleonic Wars, the Crimean War and World War I (Gent 2009). In this case the context is the most significant factor and the issue of dispute is largely a pretext.

This ‘diversionary’ theory of war illustrates how the context effects the way issues of dispute are treated. The theoretical basis of diversionary theory is the sociological literature on...
in- and out-groups, with in-group cohesion increased through conflict with an external group (Simmel 1995). For instance, the popularity of US presidents generally increases during international crises (Gent 2009), though this ‘rally round the flag’ phenomenon rarely lasts long (Mueller 1973). However, foreign conflict is likely to intensify internal conflict which is already at a very high level (Coser, 1966). In addition, not unsurprisingly, diplomatic defeat is likely to intensify internal political division (Simmel 1995). There is some evidence for the diversionary hypothesis (Gent 2009), but the three-part model of conflict indicates that it is one component, rather than the whole story.

3. SCAPEGOATING AND STEREOTYPING

3.1 Scapegoating

The term ‘scapegoat’ is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as someone who is blamed or punished for the wrongdoing, mistakes or sins of others. Medical definitions add the projection of angry feelings or feelings of hostility through inappropriate accusation of others. Self-deception and lack of full consciousness of the projection and offloading of blame are frequent features (Anon, undated a). Scapegoating is a process by which a group transfers the blame for a perceived evil onto one of its members (Ellenberg and Wyman 1998). This can preserve existing relationships and promote group cohesion at the expense of this member (Ellenberg and Wyman 1998; Gemmill 1989). It can also act as a defensive mechanism to contain unwanted feelings and shared unacceptable ideas and impulses by projecting them onto the scapegoat (Schiedlinger 1982). Scapegoating has happened throughout history (Wright 1987).

Scapegoats may be individuals or groups and include both the ‘approved’ enemies of large groups of people and individuals scapegoated by other individuals. They are generally chosen (Allport 1966; Girard, 1986, 2005; Toker 1972) because they have an obvious difference which stands out, for instance a confused sexual identity or obvious unorthodoxy, are available and are unlikely to be able to defend themselves due to the greater numbers and prestige of the scapegoaters. Previous attacks and undermining may act as a preparation for scapegoating. While the scapegoat is generally an individual or social group, this is not always the case. For instance, observed global climate change has been blamed on natural cycles of cooling and warming rather than emissions of ‘greenhouse’ gases resulting from human activities. This ‘scapegoating’ is then used as a pretext not to take action to prevent or mitigate global warming.

It has been suggested (Allport 1966) that scapegoating results from frustration due to needs and wants not being met, guilt evasion, feelings of inferiority and fear and anxiety. Aggression resulting from this frustration and guilt are projected onto a scapegoat rather than the real cause. Negative images of the scapegoat allow the scapegoaters to improve their self image and perceptions of their own value. Other important contributory factors include oversimplification and generalisation rather than looking for the complex underlying causes of problems and conformity with the behaviour of a group whose approval and acceptance are desired.

A controversial, but frequently cited theory of scapegoating is based on mimetic (imitative) desire (Girard, 1978, 1986, 2005); much of human behaviour is motivated by a form of imitation leading to desire for the same object(s) by individuals, societies, groups and/or nations. Clashes resulting from attempts to obtain these object(s) then lead to violence. The conflict is inevitable since many people want the same object and need to overcome the barrier of the other people who also desire it (Esmail 2007). Violence within societies can then be defused by arbitrarily scapegoating an individual or group, which is different in some way, vulnerable and on the edge of the society. Responsibility for the problems of the community which have led to the cycle of violence is offloaded onto the scapegoat, who is then killed or expelled from the society. The combination of the associated catharsis and the unity brought about by working together against the scapegoat ends the cycle of violence, confirming to the scapegoaters that the scapegoat was indeed to blame. A new social order may then result, as well as a myth in which the scapegoat is both considered guilty and (deified as) a founder of this new order. A crucial part of the theory is the lack of awareness of the scapegoaters of what they are doing and a belief in the guilt of the scapegoat.

Despite his focus on violence resulting from mimetic desire, Girard considered it to be good in itself as the basis of love seen as the imitation of a positive model. He also suggested that mimetic desire was the basis for increased openness, which could lead to a range of positive actions, including devotion to others and heroism (Adams and Girard 1993). Mimesis has also been proposed as one of the driving forces leading to social identification and consequently to human sociability and intersubjectivity (Galilee 2009). The differences between the positive and negative outcomes of mimetic desire relate to individual and collective ethical responsibility, the interaction between the individual and the collective, and the differences between a mob and a community and will be discussed in more detail in Section 4.2. There is considerable evidence for both the existence of mimetic desire and its impact on behaviour. This includes purchasing behaviour motivated by television advertising or copying of friends and neighbours; the following of fashions in clothes and, more dangerously, ideas and ideologies; the importance of peer group pressure and the difficulties experienced by individuals who stand against the majority; the emulation of cult figures, such as singers, actors, members of bands and football players; and Milgram’s (1974) not particularly ethical psychological experiments. However, the theory that all conflict arises from mimetic desire leading to a cathartic scapegoating or even that all scapegoating is a result of mimetic desire is an oversimplification.

Scapegoating normally ends with expulsion or other harm to the scapegoat. However, the process can be reversed and the...
scapegoating ended before damage occurs. Malekoff (1994) presented a case study of such a reversal in a group of young people through the scapegoaters’ recognition of the scapegoat’s full humanity and shared experiences with the scapegoat (Malekoff 1994). The Scapegoating Website (Anon, 2003) discusses the process of reversal and suggests that this is more likely to be successful if the bystanders who did not oppose the scapegoating are involved in the undoing, even if only by being identified as taking a stand against it. Undoing requires truth telling to enable the facts to be established and the scapegoater(s) to take responsibility for their actions and to stop blaming the scapegoat. In addition, the scapegoaters should not restart the scapegoating process later or claim the undoing was invalid and that they were forced into it. This website also considers the barriers to undoing scapegoating and suggests that they include the scapegoaters’ vested opposition, pride and egoism, the passage of time, which makes subsequent claims less believable, and the differences in power and influence which allowed the scapegoating to take place.

The diversionary theory of conflict (Gent 2009) is an example of scapegoating. An external ‘enemy’ is targeted and the responsibility for social and economic problems, dissatisfaction and frustration projected onto this enemy, who becomes the scapegoat. However, unlike other forms of scapegoating, there is potential for two-sided (or even multi-sided) scapegoating to occur when two states with issues or a pretext for dispute arising from some degree of common history which furnishes issues or pretexts for dispute both have social and economic problems which could threaten their leaders’ maintenance of power. The Malvinas/Falklands conflict is an example of this. However, as this conflict illustrates, the success of the scapegoating mechanism in diverting attention and maintaining the leader(s) in power may depend on their actual (or perceived) success in the conflict. In most scapegoating situations, there is a significant power difference which makes scapegoating feasible in only one direction. The use of diversionary scapegoating implies that the power difference between them is not very great, so both sides have a possibility of winning the resulting conflict. It is this more near equality of power that makes two- (or multi-sided) scapegoating possible in the case of this type of diversionary scapegoating.

3.2 Stereotyping

The term ‘stereotype’ is defined by the Oxford English dictionary as a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the typical characteristics of a person, thing or situation. It was first used in its modern psychological sense by Lippmann (1922), who defined it as an oversimplified view of the world that satisfies a need to make it more understandable and manageable. He considered stereotypes to involve frequently pernicious and unfair generalisations about categories of people. Stereotyping has been considered responsible for social injustices, such as racism and sexism (McCueley et al, 1980). Studies have shown that stereotypes about individuals can lead to them behaving in accordance with the stereotype (McCueley et al, 1980) and that individuals find it easier to remember behaviours that are consistent with their stereotypes (Hamilton and Rose, 1977). This selective memory probably acts as a confirmation of the stereotype. The associated term prejudice is defined by the Oxford English dictionary as an opinion about a person or object that is not based on reason or experience or a dislike or unfair behaviour based on such opinions. An associated concept is that of in- and outgroups. The ingroup is the putatively normative and superior group to which an individual belongs or aspires to belong. Outgroups are therefore automatically considered inferior. In-groups result from interdependence in which members need each other for important outcomes. Shared beliefs are considered a key component of group membership. This frequently leads to compliance with group norms about expressing or not expressing stereotypes. Therefore, the core social motivation to belong affects stereotyping and discrimination through echoing, compliance and mimicry. There is a tendency to consider outgroups as more homogeneous than ingroups. Shared socially constructed understandings, including perceived outgroup homogeneity and stereotypic attribution, both reinforce stereotypes and facilitate ingroup functioning through a shared understanding (Fiske 2000).

Social identity and self-categorisation theory both consider that the salient level of self-categorisation which determines membership of in- and out-groups is an important factor in determining prejudice, discrimination and intergroup conflict (Kessler and Mummendey 2001). Therefore, intergroup conflict could be reduced by reducing the salience of this categorisation by personalised interaction (Brewer and Miller 1984) or recategorisation of subgroups into one common ingroup (Gaertner et al. 1993). This could reduce conflict between the pre-existing groups, but lead to conflict between this new common in-group and a new common out-group by increasing the salience of conflict at this level (Kessler and Mummendey 2001).

The conditions for being scapegoated of having an obvious difference and vulnerability indicate that it is frequently the members of outgroups who are both stereotyped and made scapegoats. The relationship between stereotyping and scapegoating is illustrated by Allport’s (1966) four stage model of the development of scapegoating: (i) a preference for certain traits and characteristics; (ii) rigid preferences leading to stereotyped judgments or prejudices; (iii) discrimination in the form of exclusion based on prejudice and the labelling as a member of a discredited group; (iv) verbal or physical aggression. The process of stereotyping may be automatic and subconscious or explicit and conscious. However, frequent use of unconscious stereotypes will generally lead to the development of explicit stereotypes (Anon, undated b). Both stereotypes and competition between groups exaggerate differences (Brewer, 1979) and a lack of familiarity with other groups encourages stereotyping (Hurst, 2007).

Functional explanations of stereotyping, based on the need to categorise and organise complex information and save
cognitive resources, have become more important, for instance (Fiske 1993), as category based knowledge, including stereotypes, is very easy to use. Stereotypes facilitate the processing of information and efficient, though not well-reasoned judgments. Unfortunately, this may then lead to prejudice, discrimination and other forms of disadvantage for the stereotyped group. Other theories of stereotyping include enhancing self-esteem by stereotypically favourable comparisons of one’s own and other groups; learning, particularly in early childhood, from parents, teachers, the peer group and the media (Anon, undated b); and a lack of knowledge of other groups. It seems probable that all these factors contribute to stereotyping, but that different factors may be more salient for different individuals or in particular circumstances. Studies of stereotyping and the resulting judgments, for instance (Blair, 2002; Ellenbeg and Wyman, 1998; Fein and Spencer 1997) have shown that threats to self-esteem, such as negative feedback, can lead to negative evaluations of a stereotyped target, which may therefore result from an effort to improve a threatened self-image. On the other hand, less stereotyping occurs when self-esteem is boosted by an affirmation procedure (Fein and Spencer 1997).

Theories of the functional role of stereotyping in reducing cognitive demands imply that active inhibition of stereotypes is probably required and that stereotype activation is selective and stronger for people with higher degrees of prejudice. This seems to be borne out by studies, which show that people with high and low degrees of prejudice differ in their responses to the presentation of an outgroup category. In particular, highly prejudiced people tend to endorse the negative stereotypes associated with an outgroup category label, whereas those with little prejudice endorse the positive ones and also activate stereotypes less frequently in response to an out-group (Lepore and Brown 1997). The use of prejudice and stereotypes may also be automatic, with users unaware of their cognitive processes (Blair 2002; Bargh 1999). Even subliminally presented cues can activate stereotypes and these stereotypes can affect judgements (Devine 1989). It is often assumed that the automicity of these biases makes them inflexible and impossible to change, despite the perceiver’s intentions and goals (Bargh 1999; Devine 1989). However, studies show that automatic stereotypes and prejudices can be strengthened or weakened by a number of different factors, including motivation to maintain a positive self-image or have positive relationships, attempts to reduce stereotypes and/or promote counter-stereotypes, and contextual factors and cues. The characteristics of individual group members also affect the extent to which they automatically activate global stereotypes and prejudices. In particular, a negative self-image can lead to negative stereotypes as an attempt to improve self-image by contrast, whereas positive feedback can reduce negative stereotype responses (Blair 2002).

Theories of stereotyping based on lack of knowledge lead to the conclusion that increasing knowledge, for instance by contact with members of other groups, will reduce stereotyping. There has been considerable discussion of the conditions required for optimal intergroup contact. Suggested conditions (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998) include equal group status in the situation, common goals, intergroup cooperation, the support of authorities, law and custom and the development of friendships. Optimal intergroup contact leads to learning about the outgroup and changes in behaviour which may lead to changes in attitudes, positive emotional ties and reappraisal of the ingroup, which can lead to more positive attitudes to outgroups in general. This then gives rise to the question of whether the increase in positive attitudes to the specific outgroup member, contact situation and outgroup can be generalised more widely. Generalisation to other situations has been found to require contact in several optimal situations and generalisation from a particular individual to the outgroup as a whole to work best when the individual is typical of the outgroup. However, optimal intergroup contact is most likely with output group members with atypical interests, as they are more likely to have common interests with members of the ingroup. However, generalisation from both atypical outgroup members to the outgroup as a whole and from a particular outgroup to other outgroups can occur (Pettigrew 1998). For instance, surveys have shown that outgroup friendship increases acceptance of minorities of all types (Pettigrew 1997ab).

Early theories of prejudice, which have fortunately long since been discredited, were based on a ‘well-earned’ reputation according to which negative attitudes to a group were based on reliable knowledge of the group. The scapegoat theory of prejudice, developed about 60 years ago as a replacement, considered that hostility towards minority groups tended to be out of proportion to any undesirable characteristics the group might possess (Zawadzki, 1948) and that majority groups generally did not elicit the same type of hostility on the basis of their characteristics. Any minority group negative characteristics were considered to be the result of social conditions and oppression and to be likely to change when these conditions changed. The associated discrimination could result in economic and social status gains to even the poorest members of the majority group. While some politicians took advantage of and manipulated the prejudice, this was unlikely to be of benefit to the majority group (Zawadzki, 1948).

The two main current approaches to the study of prejudice are ethnocentrism and intergroup hostility, based on intergroup dynamics and processes, and individual differences respectively. It has been suggested that individuals with negative feelings about one outgroup tend to have negative feelings about all outgroups, including fictitious ones. Other theories include the effect of personality and world view on ideological and intergroup attitudes, with both right wing authoritarian and social dominance orientation scales predicting the extent of ethnocentrism and generalised prejudice. Factors such as social conformity and belief in a competitive jungle world contribute to these scales (Duckitt et al. 2002).
4. STEREOTYPING, SCAPEGOATING & INSTABILITY

4.1 The impact of scapegoating on ethical behaviour

Scapegoating by both individuals and organisations takes place. Organisations often blame human operators or other (low level) members of the organisation for systemic failures which have led to serious accidents or other problems, rather than investigating the operation of the organisation, searching out systemic failures and correcting them. For instance, Union Carbide is blaming sabotage for the major accident in 1984 at its Bhopal plant in India (Union Carbide, 2009). However, the situation could have been characterised as ‘an accident waiting to happen’ with totally inadequate safety procedures, inadequate training, safety notices and manuals in English which many of the workers do not read and a total lack of response to the warnings of the US engineers who investigated the site two years before the accident (Hersh 2006a). Blaming ‘saboteurs’ or other scapegoats avoids having to take responsibility and make possibly expensive systemic changes to avoid future problems. While the Bhopal plant has long since been closed, it should be noted that the significant factors included the lack of a safety culture and due attention to human factors, including mechanisms for reducing both the likelihood of mistakes or sabotage occurring and the consequences if they did occur.

Most organisations have a considerable degree of inertia or resistance to change and their members may also fear change. However, appropriate and appropriately managed change can often lead to improvements which benefit almost everyone. An organisational or national climate which condones or even encourages scapegoating will discourage ethical behaviour. This generally involves both discouraging the acceptance of responsibility and the lack of ethicalness of scapegoating, which is likely to lead to cover-ups and further unethical behaviour to hide the initial problems as well as the fact that scapegoating has occurred. Scapegoating can be used to avoid or delay investigation of systemic and other factors operating in the organisation and the need to make changes. In addition, many organisations have a culture of blame which encourages cover-ups and attempts to avoid acknowledging responsibility due to well founded fears of excessive punishment if mistakes are acknowledged or detected. Since organisations and nations characterised by a culture of blame and scapegoating lack mechanisms to identify the real systemic causes of problem(s), they are unable to learn from their mistakes and problems are likely to be perpetuated.

In addition, scapegoating both allows political and other leaders to deflect attention and disavow responsibility for their inappropriate or even disastrous decisions and acts and members of the group, organisation or nation to shift blame rather than put pressure on these leaders. When scapegoating is prevalent, organisation members and concerned citizens may consider that putting pressure on national or organisational leaders and decision makers to resolve systemic and other problems is likely to have little effect. They may also fear being themselves scapegoated if they draw attention to contentious issues. The result may then be a conspiracy of silence in which serious problems continue, but everyone appears to be pretending that they do not exist. This will frequently become part of a context which favours instability and violence over the peaceful resolution of problems.

Stereotyping provides potential targets for scapegoating by distancing and differentiating members of particular social groups. However, the list of potential scapegoats is fairly wide-ranging and further research would be required to determine the relationship between scapegoat characteristics and the particular situation. Figure 2 illustrates some of the causes of stereotyping, the links to scapegoating and the feedback loops which perpetuate particular ways of thinking and perpetuate existing social systems and unethical behaviour.

Propaganda and mythmaking may be used to present scapegoats as simultaneously both the dreaded enemy against which society needs to protect itself and the scapegoat responsible for all its ills. This is part of the process of labelling and construction of the other. The distancing and differentiation of scapegoats, who become ‘other’ and may also be dehumanised, make possible the inhuman behaviour likely to meted out to them, particularly if they become the ‘enemy’ in armed conflict. This has been particularly notable in the case of terrorism and terrorists (Hersh 2006b), where terrorists and their victims are generally constructed as ‘other’. This enables terrorism both to be considered as an all-pervasive threat against which any measures are justified and as something out there which has not been engendered by the society ‘we are part of’ (Dutta, 2004). ‘We’ are neither perpetrators nor victims. In both foreign and internal policy
‘a notion of what “we” are … intrinsic to an understanding of what “we” fear’ (Campbell, 1998). This polarisation into ‘us’ and ‘them’ avoids the need to examine the real underlying issues and make changes which challenge the status quo, thereby leading to stagnation and complacency. Since stereotyping and scapegoating are used as pretexts to avoid taking serious measures to resolve the underlying real problems, they contribute to the development of a context which favours violence and instability rather than the peaceful resolution of problems.

4.2 Stereotyping, Scapegoating and Conflict: The Individual, the Community and the Mob

This discussion draws largely on the work of Girard (1978, 1986, 2005) on mimetic desire and the resulting violence and scapegoating, commentaries, such as those by Esmail (2007) and Fleming (2004) on Girard’s work and Kakar’s (1996) work on crowd formation. Whilst a useful and important contribution to the subject, Girard’s work involves considerable oversimplification in ascribing the cause of all violence to mimetic desire. However, mimetic desire fits into the three-part model of the causes of conflict presented in Section 2. The issue of dispute is the object of mimetic desire and the context favouring violence is one in which it is taken for granted that the object of mimetic desire needs to be owned uniquely, whether by an individual, group or nation, and cannot be shared, jointly owned, borrowed or duplicated to avoid the conflict. Many of the causes of conflict discussed in Section 2 could be represented as objects of mimetic desire. However, while the desire for certain types of resources is purely mimetic, the desire for others, such as sufficient food and clean water, is very real and not based purely on mimesis. However, there is not a clearly defined trigger point. Instead violent conflict occurs when tension has built to such a point that it can only be released through the projection of the responsibility for the growing cycle of dissatisfaction and violence onto a scapegoat. Thus, as illustrated in Figure 3, at the third stage the issue is no longer whether a trigger event will lead to violent conflict, but whether a suitable scapegoat can be found to prevent it. This is clearly highly unethical and disastrous for the scapegoat. It allows a temporary resolution of the problem, but locks the scapegoaters into a repeating cycle of violence and scapegoating and what could be called ‘lose-lose learning, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 3, Representation of Girard’s theory of mimetic desire and violence in terms of the three-part model of conflict

Figure 4, Cycle of ‘lose-lose learning’ resulting from stereotyping and scapegoating
The rigidity of this cycle and the fact that scapegoating generally requires both stereotyping and the scapegoaters wilfully or unconsciously ignoring what they are really doing locks them into repeating patterns of behaviour which are likely to lead to violence and which may reduce or stifle creativity and development at the material and spiritual levels. Ending this cycle requires understanding of the context in which mimetic desire leads to violence rather than increased community cohesion. As discussed by several of the commentators on Girard, the context in which mimetic desire results in violence is one in which individual judgement is submerged in that of the collective and the collective becomes a mob rather than a community. It will now be suggested that this renunciation of individual judgment or submerging it in that of the collective is an essential factor for the deformation of a community into a mob, which is a prerequisite for both violence in pursuit of an object of mimetic desire and scapegoating. This relates to Kakar’s (1996) theories of crowd formation in Hindu-Muslim riots in India in which periods of social tension and precipitating event(s) led to group ‘fusion’ based on stereotypical images of the self and the ‘other’. This resulted in the individual submerging their identity in that of the group, acting stereotypically and in accordance with the behaviour expected of a mob acting against a particular stereotyped scapegoat, in Kakar’s discussion, Muslims or Hindus.

The solution involves transforming the individual-group dynamic to eliminate (or at least reduce) the various pressures on individuals to submerge their identities in the group to avoid becoming stereotyped, excluded and/or scapegoated. This transformation will require a strengthening of both the individual and collective sense of responsibility for ethical behaviour, the maintenance of individual identity within the collective and tolerance and respect for diversity. This will then give rise to a community of distinct and diverse individuals based on mutual respect. A prerequisite will be strengthening the sense of both individual and collective identity. It will also require a transformation of the definitions of communities of different types based on inclusion rather than exclusion. The concept of the ‘other’ will also need to be challenged as part of the move towards groups based on inclusion rather than exclusion.

In this way the ‘other’ becomes someone to be learned from and a source of cultural richness, creativity and growth rather than an outsider and potential scapegoat. This will also require a recognition by the dominant social group(s) who comprise the potential scapegoaters that they have a distinct culture and identity rather than their way of life being an acultural default. This will further require the dominant groups to learn to value their own culture and traditions, as a prerequisite for valuing those of others, while at the same time being able to critically evaluate them, giving rise to possibilities of positive and sustainable development and change. This recognition by the dominant social group(s) of their own culture will lead to a strengthening of feelings of identity and pride which makes it easier to respect the cultures of other groups rather than stereotyping them as potential scapegoats. This strengthening of identity then makes it easier for individuals to maintain their values within the group rather than becoming totally submerged in it.

Another important factor is the development of support mechanisms at the collective level for individuals and organisations participating in the transformation process discussed above. This will help individuals resist pressures towards conformity with unethical group norms and behaviour and temptations to stereotyping and scapegoating as a means of avoidance of responsibility. SWIIS and similar types of organisation have an important role here in the following ways:

- Highlighting issues and encouraging debate in the IFAC, engineering and related communities. This will generally take place through the formal mechanisms of the IFAC SWIIS (Supplementary Ways of Improving International Stability) Technical Committee conferences and workshops and the presentation of papers and organisation of sessions at IFAC world congresses and other IFAC events.
- Providing support for individuals, sharing stories and ending isolation. While there is some scope for doing this through the formal mechanisms indicated above, the most appropriate mechanism is probably informal networking involving the members of the SWIIS Technical Committee and their colleagues.
- Encouraging engineers and related professionals to consider the ethical implications of their work and, in particular, to avoid work with military applications.
- Supporting discussion of how best engineers and related professionals can apply their skills and creativity in ways that promote national and international stability and contribute to sustainable development.
- Circulating information about ethical career opportunities.

In addition, SWIIS and other IFAC members have a further role in using systems approaches to study conflict situations and to investigate both the factors that encourage and those that prevent instability and conflict, both in general and in specific situations.

The involvement of SWIIS and similar organisations can be used to support multi-loop ‘win-win’ learning, as illustrated in Figure 5. This is an extension developed by the author (Hersh 2006a) of triple loop action learning. As shown the extension to the fourth level involves the wider society. However, further levels could be added to, for instance, consider the national, regional and international contexts. Multi-loop action learning will lead to respect for difference and openness to learning at the individual level and social inclusion and holistic approaches at the organisational or group level. This will result in a decline in stereotyping and scapegoating and communities based on inclusion (rather than exclusion) and enrichment of society at the national and international levels.
SWIIS (and analogous organisations) also have a role in providing support to individuals and groups who challenge scapegoating, which occurs and ‘succeeds’ in a particular context largely because it is not challenged. Research shows the risks inherent in whistleblowing, which can have very serious consequences for the whistleblower, their friends and families (Hersh, 2002). This can be countered by a combination of external support and extending whistleblowing, which is often seen as the concern of a lone individual, to the group or society as a whole (Stapleton and Hersh, 2004).

5. Conclusions

The paper has discussed the relationship between stereotyping, scapegoating, unethical behaviour and instability. It has been shown that there are currently are a number of vicious cycles in operation in which unethical behaviour promotes or leads to instability. In particular, the existence of scapegoating acts a barrier to ethical behaviour, because it allows national and organisational leaders and decisions makers to shift responsibility (and blame) for their decisions to another individual or group. It also makes it easy for individuals at all levels of society to abrogate responsibility for their actions. Theories of both scapegoating and stereotyping have been discussed. The types of individuals and social groups likely to be made scapegoats have been considered, as well as the role of stereotyping in devaluing the members of social outgroups, positioning them as potential scapegoats and possibly also dehumanising them, thereby making it easier to exclude them and make them the targets of violent attacks.

Theories of stereotyping include boosting self-esteem, (early) influences and the use of categorisation to facilitate mental organisation. However, this categorisation is based on exclusion and devaluation rather than inclusion. Theories of scapegoating include Girard’s theory of mimetic desire leading to cycles of growing violence which can only be broken by catharsis through projection of responsibility onto a scapegoat, who is then killed or expelled, thereby ending the cycle of violence and confirming the scapegoat’s guilt to the scapegoaters. Their lack of recognition of what they are doing is a crucial part of the theory. It was noted, that, while a useful approach, Girard’s theory involves a degree of oversimplification.

This discussion was preceded by the presentation of an updated version of a model of the causes of conflict developed by the author (Hersh, 1997). This model has the following three components: an issue of dispute, a context which favours violence over peaceful resolution, and a trigger event. It was then shown that other theories, such as the diversionary theory of conflict (which is a form of scapegoating) and Girard’s theory of mimetic desire leading to conflict or scapegoating can be described by this model.

There is therefore a need both to promote ethical behaviour and to break down the prejudice, discrimination and social exclusion which set the conditions in which scapegoating can occur. This will contribute to transforming the context (of the three-part model) to one that favours peaceful resolution over violent conflict, thereby increasing stability at all levels – local, national, regional and international. The approaches to achieving this involve transforming the individual-group dynamic to eliminate (or at least reduce) the various pressures on individuals to submerge their identities in the group to avoid becoming stereotyped, excluded and/or scapegoated.

This transformation will require a strengthening of both the individual and collective sense of responsibility for ethical behaviour, the maintenance of individual identity within the collective, valuing by majority groups of their own cultures and tolerance and respect for diversity. This will then give rise to a community of distinct and diverse individuals based on mutual respect. It will have the further advantage of transforming the ‘other’ into a source of learning, cultural richness, creativity and growth rather than a an outsider and potential scapegoat.

Figure 5, Multi-loop ‘win-win’ action learning to challenge stereotyping, scapegoating and unethical behaviour
Another important factor is the development of support mechanisms at the collective level for individuals and organisations participating in the transformation process discussed above. This will help individuals resist pressures towards conformity with unethical group norms and behaviour and temptations to stereotyping and scapegoating as a means of avoidance of responsibility or being themselves blamed, scapegoated and excluded. SWIIS and (similar organisations) have the important role of highlighting issues and encouraging debate at SWIIS and other IFAC events and more generally in the IFAC, engineering and related communities, as well as providing informal support through networking. They can both provide support for whistleblowing and encourage multi-loop ‘win-win’ learning as a means of learning at the individual, organisational and wider societal levels. They can also encourage engineers and related professionals to consider the ethical implications of their work and support discussion of how best engineers and related professionals can apply their skills and creativity in ways that promote national and international stability and contribute to sustainable development, as well as circulate information about ethical career opportunities. There is also a role for the application of systems approaches to the study of conflict situations and the investigation of both the factors that encourage and those that prevent instability and conflict, both in general and in specific situations.

Further work will investigate the application of other techniques and, in particular coloured Petri nets, to modelling the causes of conflict.

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