Negative stereotyping in business ethics vignettes

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Abstract

In 2014, Birtch *et al.* published an article that, in our view, contained unnecessary negative cultural/racial stereotyping in a vignette presented in their introduction. Given the potentially harmful consequences of negative stereotyping, and the relatively frequent use of vignettes in the business ethics literature, this prompted us to wonder whether this was an isolated instance or a more widespread occurrence. To investigate this question, we conducted a search of the scholarly literature for articles containing the string 'vignette' or 'scenario', and 'business ethics' using the EBSCOhost databases to which our institution subscribes. This search yielded a collection of 154 articles where vignettes were presented. Of these, approximately 18% contained negative cultural or racial stereotyping while 38% contained some form of negative gender stereotyping. In our view, these are uncomfortably high frequencies, so uncomfortably high, in fact, that they prompt us to conclude with a plea to authors, editors and reviewers within the business ethics academic literature to be on guard against this practice.

1. Introduction

Consider the following scenario: *A politically connected White Western European businessman offers to smooth the way for your company to sell in his country … for a fee.*

If this leaves you feeling a little uncomfortable, it should. Were it not for our aim to draw attention to the issue of stereotyping with a little piece of academic drama, this would be a fine example of blatant and completely unnecessary negative stereotyping. The inevitable question that one ought to ask is

this: Under normal circumstances, what on earth would necessitate or justify anyone making use of such negative stereotyping?

We were prompted to move beyond just thinking this question to ourselves, to formally asking it in public, by a 2014 article published in the *Journal of Business Ethics* by Birch *et al.* titled 'The influence of business school's ethical climate on students' unethical behaviour'. The article presented an empirical study of the influence of students' perceptions of the impact of the "ethical climate" (to use the authors' nomenclature) of their business school on their behaviour. In so doing the authors aimed to make a contribution to the discourse on teaching business ethics. However, what was most striking for us was not the empirical contribution of the article. It was the completely unnecessary negative cultural/racial stereotyping insinuated in the vignette[1] presented in the article's introduction. The context of the vignette was "A business school in Asia" (p. 283) and specifically, a new executive leadership programme being offered by this school. The "ethical climate" in the school in general, and in the programme specifically, was painted as poor. The name of the person overseeing the programme and the main moral 'baddy' in the vignette was given as "Lai Ming". It seems reasonable to assume that this is the name of an Asian person. Lai Ming was described as being solely interested in maintaining student numbers, and as a result, was completely indifferent to repeated ethical transgressions of students. Lai Ming was contrasted with the exacerbated 'goody' in the scenario who was given the name "Ted" which, with a little poetic licence, is a bit like Donald Trump (i.e. somewhat Western). In short, the corrupt 'baddy' and the corrupt 'bad institution' in this scenario were apparently Asian, while the 'goody' was perhaps (probably?) not.

This scenario brought back some unwelcome memories for one of the authors of this article of having undergone corporate ethics training at a large, multinational consulting firm in the mad rush to do such training following the collapse of Enron. The training was computer based with enacted vignettes. Typically, these vignettes had two parties. The first party was a person confronted with deciding between a morally good option and a morally bad option. The second was the ultimate 'baddy' or corruptor who was presenting the first party with the immoral opportunity. By way of assessment, the person undergoing the training was expected to decide what the first party ought to do. Choosing the morally right, good or virtuous option would allow the person being assessed to pass and vice versa. What was striking at the time was that, in spite of different actors playing the role of the corruptor in the different scenarios, without exception these different actors were all Hispanic men.

The use of vignettes is fairly common in the scholarly business ethics literature. In some instances, such as Birch *et al.*'s vignette, these are simply used to illustrate some sort of moral problem or dilemma. In most cases, though, they make an appearance in experimental protocols used to assess the ethical judgement or moral reasoning of subjects (Mudrack *et al.*, 2013). The commonplace character of vignettes in the business ethics literature, combined with the concerning negative stereotyping that we witnessed in Birch *et al.*'s vignette (and the reminiscences that this evoked) prompted us to wonder

just how frequent negative stereotyping might be in vignettes used in this literature. It was our curiosity about this that we set out to satisfy in this short article.

The article proceeds as follows. Our first port of call is to briefly summarise relevant literature on stereotyping. Besides providing a basic overview of what stereotyping is, our primary objectives here are to emphasise some reported consequences and mechanisms of transmission of stereotypes. Ultimately, this brief review of stereotyping provides the rationale for us bothering to worry about stereotyping in the business ethics literature in the first place. Having established this rationale, we then formally explore the extent of negative stereotyping in vignettes used in the business ethics literature. And finally, we conclude with a simple appeal to authors, editors and reviewers to be vigilant against stereotyping.

2.   Stereotyping

To say that the literature on stereotyping is vast would be a gross understatement. As Fiske (2000:300) described it, "Academic bookshelves overflow". It is, therefore, neither possible nor our intent to review this literature comprehensively here.[2] Instead, we zoom in on three aspects that are particularly germane to our argument: (a) developing a very basic understanding of what stereotypes are; (b) a reflection on some of the negative consequences of stereotyping; and (c) a discussion of the transmission of stereotypes with a particular emphasis on the role of stereotypes themselves, and of the authority of those advancing them.

Turning then to the basic understanding of stereotyping, the term 'stereotype' in its contemporary form is generally attributed to Walter Lippman in his 1922 book titled, *Public Opinion* (Bernstein, 2013). It was derived from printing and typography circles where templates were used to duplicate original pictures. Following this metaphor, Lippman described stereotypes as "the projection upon the world of our own sense of our own value, our own position and our own rights", (Lippman, 1922:96). Critically, Lippman noted the role that stereotypes play in the maintenance of power relations amongst people and that people's feelings are entrenched in their stereotypical ideals (Lippman, 1922). Although several authors subsequently used the term (e.g. Gilbert, 1951; Katz *et al.*, 1933), it was Allport's 1954 book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, that seems to have really cemented it with his specific focus on stereotyping as a cognitive underpinning of prejudice. In this way, stereotyping as a cognitive domain came to occupy its place in the broader field of bias, together with prejudice as the affective domain and discrimination as the behavioural domain (Fiske, 1993a; Fiske, 2000; Hewstone *et al.*, 2002).

One of the more important contributions of Allport was the recognition that stereotyping is a normal and arguably essential element of human cognition needed to "tame the wild profusion of existing things" (Foucault, 2002:xvi). This assertion was subsequently reinforced, particularly through the works of Tajfel early on (e.g. Tajfel, 1969) and somewhat more recently in Devine (1989) and Macrae *et al.* (2000). In short, stereotypes develop from people's innate tendency to categorise objects in order to make sense

of them, and to avoid an overload on their cognitive abilities (Macrae *et al.*, 2000). Stereotypes help people to make decisions regarding other people about whom they have limited or no knowledge, using heuristics or mental shortcuts developed from their own past encounters or from their communication with others (Quadflieg *et al.*, 2011).

This brings us to the second of our aims in this section: the consideration of the consequences of stereotyping. And in this regard, in spite of stereotyping being a normal and arguably necessary aspect of human cognition, its negative consequences cannot be overstated. Fiske (1993b:621) captured this as follows: "Without stereotypes, there would be less need to hate, exclude, exterminate … People do not want to be stereotyped because it limits their freedom and constrains their outcomes, even their lives. In short, stereotypes exert control." In fact, in the most abstract sense, a reasonable argument using very good authority can be advanced that concludes that the existence of stereotypes is antithetical to the achievement of justice itself. The first premise in such an argument would be the recognition that stereotyping is the cognitive anchor of bias (Devine, 1989; Fiske, 2000). The second would be the recognition that, central to the achievement of fairness is the "demand to avoid bias" (Sen, 2010:54). The final premise would be Rawls' thesis of "justice as fairness" (Rawls, 1971:3). Thus, the argument would proceed as follows: stereotypes lead to bias; bias leads to an absence of fairness; and an absence of fairness equates to an absence of justice; therefore, stereotypes are likely to lead to injustice.

In a more concrete sense, the bias that emerges out of stereotyping leads to general distortions in reasoning and inevitably to fallacies (Correia, 2011). A wonderful example of such a fallacy, in this case, associated with the negative stereotyping of developing countries and the corollary, positive stereotyping of developed countries, was identified by the authors of the call for papers for the 2018 European Business Ethics Network Research Conference. In reflecting on the conference's theme of 'Beyond Corruption – Fraudulent Behavior in and of Corporations' the conference organisers stated:

> Also the common explanation that corruption and other forms of fraudulent behavior are caused by the existence of corrupt environments especially in less-developed or developing countries, due to low salaries, weak infrastructure, disorganised administration and unstable political conditions in such countries, proves not to be valid. From this perspective, corporate malpractice of western companies has been downplayed as a kind of 'some-bad-apples-theory' where a few ill-motivated actors jeopardise the honesty of the whole system. This, however, cannot explain why it was namely Western multinational corporations that have been involved in contemporary corruption scandals in recent years. Even though most of these companies ostensibly had anti-corruption programmes and monitoring systems in place, such measures obviously did not prevent management from engaging in fraudulent activities. It seems therefore that corporate malpractice is a widespread and common phenomenon in the business world.[3]

At a much more detailed level, the stereotyping literature has considered the consequences of stereotyping from at least two perspectives: (a) from the perspective

of the responses (affective and behavioural) from within in-groups (the stereotyping groups); and (b) from the perspective of responses from out-groups (the stereotyped groups). In terms of the former, Fiske and co-workers proposed a simple analysis of the types of responses likely to emerge within in-groups grounded on the stereotype content model that they proposed (Fiske *et al.*, 2002; Fiske *et al.*, 2007). This model was based on the thesis that stereotype content can be universally specified along two dimensions of social cognition: warmth and competence. They explained the warmth dimension as encapsulating the perception of the out-group as having either good or bad intentions towards the in-group and the competence dimension as perceptions about the capacity of the out-group to achieve these intentions (Fiske *et al.*, 2007). They then proposed the affective responses to low warmth and low competence to be contempt with the tendency for behavioural responses to be towards both active and passive harm. They proposed the affective or emotional response to low warmth and high competence to be envy with a behavioural tendency towards active harm and perhaps passive facilitation. They proposed the affective response to high warmth and low competence to be pity with a behavioural tendency towards paternalistic active facilitation and passive harm. Finally, they proposed the affective response to high warmth and high competence to be admiration and the behavioural tendency to be towards both active and passive facilitation. If this model is indeed valid, negative evaluations of an out-group in either of their two 'universal' stereotype content dimensions would likely lead to some form of emotional antipathy, which may in turn lead to the legitimisation of harmful behavioural responses by in-groups towards out-groups.

The consideration of the responses of out-groups to stereotypes imposed on them has primarily been consolidated under the rubric of stereotype threat in the literature (Croizet *et al.*, 2001; Spencer *et al.*, 2016). This concept was originally coined by Steele *et al.* in 1995 as being a focus on the "social-psychological predicament that can arise out of widely-known negative stereotypes" (Steele *et al.*, 1995:797). This body of literature documents compelling evidence that, when engaged in tasks where stereotypes are known to apply, individuals who are 'burdened' with these stereotypes will tend to underperform. Although the research has typically focused on negative stereotypes, Cheryan *et al.* (2000) have reported evidence that even positive stereotypes might cause underperformance in specific tasks at hand. Beyond these immediate performance effects, substantial evidence also suggests a more long-term dis-identification (decreased desire to participate in and ultimately withdrawal) from the tasks and even negative physical health consequences (Maass *et al.*, 2003; Spencer *et al.*, 2016). Such effects have been observed in many stereotyped groups[4] and in relation to both intellectual and physical tasks. A variety of mechanisms ranging from working memory depletion through to over-thinking automated processes have been proposed (Maass *et al.*, 2003; Schmader *et al.*, 2008; Spencer *et al.*, 2016). The frightening implication of stereotype threat is that, even if the stereotypes held by an in-group are suppressed to the extent that they do not find expression in affective or behavioural responses, they can still have negative consequences that can be self-fulfilling within the out-group.

This possibility of the self-fulfilling character of stereotypes leads us to our third focus in this section: a discussion of the transmission of stereotypes. Much of the discussion on the formation and transmission of stereotypes refers to their self-reinforcing character. Hilton *et al.* (1996) comprehensively summarised the mechanisms of formation and maintenance of stereotypes and it is striking how frequently the notion of the self-reinforcing character of stereotypes arises either implicitly or explicitly in the mechanisms that they describe. In the case of the formation mechanisms that they described, the mere occurrence of stereotypes within an in-group is likely to reinforce statistical aberrations. These aberrations lead to spurious detection of co-variation and correlation as well as fallacious perceptions of out-group (and indeed in-group) homogeneity within individual members of the in-group. In terms of maintenance, the "assimilation effects" (Hilton *et al.*, 1996:250) they described are in essence self-reinforcement. Where transmission is concerned, stereotypes are communicated through continual exposure to conversations grounded in stereotypes and depictions of stereotypes (Muñiz *et al.*, 2013; Tan *et al.*, 1996). And, very critically, the degree to which stereotypes are transferred to others appears to be strongly influenced by appraisals of the source of the stereotype.

When stereotypes are repeatedly advanced by sources that people consider reliable, especially authority figures such as members of the clergy, politicians and educators, they are frequently taken as truth and adopted (Black *et al.*, 2013; Moskowitz *et al.*, 2012; Peterson *et al.*, 1990; Punt, 2009; Tan *et al.*,1996). It seems quite reasonable to us that one might include scholars and academics in this list of trusted people. Finally, once established, a stereotype becomes an instinctive position, with the consequence that its suppression requires significant cognitive work (Hilton *et al.*, 1996).

In summary then, while stereotyping is deemed to be a normal and indeed necessary part of human cognition, its consequences are more often than not socially undesirable. Furthermore, stereotyping begets stereotypes. Once established, stereotypes are self-reinforcing and contagious in social settings through positive feedback loops. And, of course, their suppression requires cognitive work.

3.   Methodology

At the outset, we decided to limit our attention specifically to negative stereotyping such as that insinuated in Birch *et al.* (2014). While positive stereotyping is just as important in the constitution of fallacies (as illustrated above in the European Business Ethics Network call for papers, quoted at length above), and while it always implies the corollary, negative stereotype, on some very emotional level it is overt negative stereotyping that simply offends more directly. And our article represents a response to such offence. It is also typically negative moral evaluations that manifest in vignettes illustrating ethical problems.

We began assembling our collection of literature containing business ethics vignettes with a literature search using the EBSCOhost databases to which our institution subscribes.

In total, there were 179 of these, including the following prominent databases: Academic Search Premier, Business Source Complete, EconLit, Education Source, ERIC, MasterFile Premier and SocINDEX. We used the following search terms: 'vignette' or 'scenario', and 'business ethics'. We filtered our search to return scholarly articles only, and those where we had access to the full articles.

Once we had assembled an initial collection, we then screened this for articles that actually contained vignettes, excluding those that simply used the terms 'vignette' or 'scenario' in passing, or that made reference to using vignettes but which did not actually present the vignettes.[5] To this collection we added a small number of articles from our own private collections that had not been found. In total, this yielded a collection of 154 articles published between 1975 and 2017.

We then scrutinised the vignettes in this collection for any traces of negative stereotyping. A judgement that negative stereotyping was present required *both* the attribution of some specific identity to a subject (an individual or entity) in the vignette as well as some negative moral evaluation of that subject. In terms of the attribution of specific identities, we only recognised completely unambiguous attributions. Names, in particular, which might have been suggestive of identities, were not considered because of the inevitable possibility of ambiguity in these. The Birtch *et al.* (2014) article, which initially provoked our investigation, illustrates the application of this 'rule'. As we noted in the Introduction, the names of the 'baddy' ("Lai Ming") and the 'goody' ("Ted") in the vignette were suggestive of identity. The key word here, however, is 'suggestive'. It is possible that "Lai Ming" is not the name of a person from an Asian country or that "Ted" is not akin to Donald Trump. And so, were it only for these traces of identity we would, somewhat grudgingly, have given the authors the benefit of the doubt. However, in describing the context as "A business school in Asia" (p. 283), Birtch *et al.* were unambiguous in their attribution of an identity.

In terms of the attribution of gender identities, we decided not to code articles as engaging in negative gender stereotyping if there were subjects identified as both men and women that were attributed negative moral evaluations. In total, 12 articles out of our collection did this. In some instances, this decision was not necessarily comfortable. For instance, it was somewhat challenging to exclude articles where there were five vignettes and four of them had negative moral evaluations of one gender and only one of the other. However, introducing exceptions would have opened a methodological can of worms in terms of specifying these exceptions and so we elected to remain categorical in the application of this rule.

Finally, when it came to the attribution of some negative moral evaluation to a subject, it was important to distinguish between the attribution of some actual negative moral behaviour to a vignette subject and the attribution of temptation to a vignette subject. The contemplation of an unethical action by a vignette subject does not constitute a negative moral evaluation. It simply recognises the inherent human capacity to be tempted.

4.   Findings and discussion

In presenting our findings, we elected to separate out the negative stereotyping associated with cultural groupings or race from gender stereotyping. This was simply because the cultural or racial stereotyping and gender stereotyping tended to co-occur in vignettes. For example, negative moral evaluations might be attributed to "an Asian businessman". Such co-occurrences of negative stereotypes complicated our presentation of the counts of these occurrences and their percentages a little. Looking then at cultural or racial stereotyping, out of the 154 articles in the collection, we found negative cultural or racial stereotyping in a total of 28 articles. This represented just over 18% of the collection, which is alarmingly high in our view. By far the most commonly stereotyped group were Asian people. Stereotyping of this group accounted for 15 articles where they were exclusively the target of negative stereotyping and a further two where people from a variety of Asian countries were targeted along with other groups (Table 1). The USA appeared in vignettes in a total of six articles, although they were the sole target in only two. Canada also featured as the sole target in two articles. Other than this, Argentinean, Australian, Black, British, Greek, Italian, Latin American, Nigerian, Norwegian and "the third world" people were all the subject of a single instance of negative stereotyping in a vignette.

Table 1: Frequencies of stereotypes in business ethics vignettes

Stereotyped group	Frequency
Asians generally	14
Canadians	2
Argentineans, British, Japanese, Koreans, Norwegians, Singaporeans and people from the USA	2
People from the USA	2
Australians	1
Black people generally	1
People from Hong Kong	1
Italians	1
Latin Americans generally	1
People from the third world generally	1
People from the USA and Greeks	1
People from the USA and Nigerians	1
Total	28

The overwhelming prevalence of this negative stereotyping of Asian people (both generally and from specific Asian regions) initially struck us as somewhat surprising. This was particularly so given that we are Africans. And as Africans, we are all too aware of the persistent negative stereotypes in popular discourses about the people of our continent. For example, most of these vignettes illustrated instances of corruption, and countries on our continent consistently find themselves ranked near the bottom

of corruption perception indices such as Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index.[6] Much the same can no doubt be said of Latin America. Common sense (in the Gramscian formulation) dictates that we ought perhaps to simply be grateful as Africans for the small mercy of being spared further negative stereotyping in this particular literature. However, good sense, emergent out of a rather unpleasant history characterised by the exploitation of African people legitimised on the basis of salvation (Allsobrook *et al.*, 2017), dictates that we ought to interrogate this much more carefully. And in doing this, two particular questions present themselves: (a) Why were there so few instances of negative stereotyping of groups other than Asian people who are otherwise so commonly negatively stereotyped in popular discourse?, and (b) Why were Asian people so frequently negatively stereotyped?

In terms of the first of these, an appropriately cynical interpretation might easily be that this result is the manifestation of another stereotype altogether, the stereotype that people from Africa and Latin America are simply perceived not to have a place in business. People from Africa and Latin America become, to quote Ellison (2014:3), "an invisible man". A similar, but somewhat more mechanistic interpretation might emerge from a consideration of Fiske *et al.*'s (2007) stereotype content model. This would involve speculation that in a world dominated so strongly by the developed world, these developing regions, as the out-group, might traditionally find themselves placed in low-competence categories in Fiske *et al.*'s (2007) model. As such they might have attracted passive harm (or harm by ignore-ance) as a behavioural response.

In terms of the second of our two questions, the question as to why Asian people were so frequently negatively stereotyped, one might then be tempted to continue down the speculative opportunity presented by Fiske *et al.*'s (2007) stereotype content model. This might involve speculating that people from Asia might not be located within the same stereotype content quadrants as people from other developing contexts and might thus be the subject of different affective and behavioural responses. One might, in particular, speculate that Asian people might find themselves being located in Fiske *et al.*'s (2007) low warmth, high competence quadrant where they would likely be the victims of much more active harm as a behavioural response. This might quite conceivably include being branded as unethical.

While this speculative interpretation does hold much intuitive appeal, it does not, on its own, capture what emerged from the scrutiny of our collection of articles. What emerged empirically were the very powerful roles played by particularly prolific authors and the transmission of vignettes as standard methods through the literature. In terms of prominent authors, of the 28 articles that contained negative cultural or racial stereotyping, David Fritzsche was an author or co-author on no less than six (21%) (Fritzsche, 1988; Fritzsche, 1995; Fritzsche 2000; Fritzsche *et al.*, 1983; Fritzsche *et al.*, 1984; Wolfe *et al.*, 1998). Negative stereotyping of Asian people was a feature of all of these except for his collaboration with Wolfe where Latin American people were the target group. Furthermore, Fritzsche's contribution to stereotyping in vignettes in the business ethics literature was not limited to his own authored and co-authored works. In 1983,

in collaboration with Becker, he first presented a series of ten vignettes, which were to become one of only a handful of standard sets of vignettes used repeatedly in the literature for evaluating ethical behaviour or thinking in the business ethics context.[7] One of these vignettes was the Rollfast Bicycle Company vignette used to consider bribery specifically. This was a two-party vignette where the second party was characterised as a "businessman" from an "Asian country" (Fritzsche *et al.*, 1983:293) seeking a bribe. Clearly, this person was attributed a specific identity and loaded with a negative moral evaluation, making this obviously negative stereotyping. Besides his own contributions that used this Rollfast vignette (Fritzsche *et al.*, 1983; Fritzsche *et al.*, 1984; Fritzsche, 1988; Fritzsche, 1995), it appeared in no less than four other articles (Barnett *et al.*, 1998; Kennedy *et al.*, 1996; Kennedy *et al.*, 1998; Lund, 2000; Premeaux *et al.*, 1993). In short, the influence of Fritzsche can be seen in 10 out of the 28 articles (36%) in which we detected negative stereotyping, and in nine out of the 14 articles (71%) that negatively stereotyped Asian people specifically.

In some ways this observation might, at first glance, appear to be somewhat comforting. Indeed, one might be led to feel that because much of the cultural or racial stereotyping found in our collection could be attributed to a single author, a single vignette, and a single target group, this has been a relatively 'localised' phenomenon. We believe that such a sense of comfort would be misplaced. In the first place, none of the cultural or racial stereotyping that we picked up served any purpose whatsoever. This was perhaps most remarkably illustrated in Fritzsche's publications. In his 2007 collaboration with Oz, the Rollfast vignette was apparently quite comfortably sanitised of negative stereotyping of Asian people. This was presumably necessitated because the study was conducted in "an Eastern graduate school" (Fritzsche *et al.*, 2007:338) and the stereotyping in the original vignette would no doubt have been a source of offence to participants. Similarly, in the articles by Barnett *et al.* (1994) and Whitcomb *et al.* (1998), "Asian country" was quite comfortably replaced with "foreign country" in the Rollfast vignette specifically. While it is unclear why Barnett *et al.* (1994) saw fit to alter the vignette in this way, the same cannot be said for Whitcomb *et al.* (1998). As was the case with Fritzsche *et al.* (2007), part of their study was conducted in the Far East and again there seems little doubt that the stereotyping would have been offensive to participants. Interestingly, this dimension of vignette variance was not mentioned by Mudrack *et al.* (2013) in their fairly detailed evaluation of the Rollfast vignette.

Beyond this, we would argue that this sense of comfort would be misplaced because the fact remains that, in a collection of articles containing vignettes in the business *ethics* literature, nearly 20% were allowed through the peer review process containing this unnecessary negative cultural or racial stereotyping. To further emphasise this point, it ought to be noted that these articles were not published in fly-by-night journals. On the contrary, the majority came from top business ethics journals including *Business Ethics Quarterly* and *Journal of Business Ethics*. This finding takes on particular significance when one recalls the importance of the perceived authority of the source of stereotypes in their transmission as noted earlier.

Turning then to the negative gender stereotyping, in spite of our conservative decision to categorically exclude those articles where there were negative moral evaluations of both women and men in the same article, we detected negative gender stereotyping in no less than 38% (59 articles out of 154) of our sample. These negative gender stereotypes were a feature in vignettes in all three of the standard methods that we found replicated extensively in the literature (Fritzshe *et al.*, 1983; Brenner *et al.*, 1977; Reidenbach *et al.*, 1990). As was the case in cultural or racial stereotyping, by and large, these instances of negative stereotyping were not found in obscure journals. In fact, the vast majority were once again found in top business ethics journals. Prominent titles included *Business Ethics: A European Review*, *Business Ethics Quarterly* and *Journal of Business Ethics*. On a slightly more positive note, there was some evidence that the prevalence of this has waned over the years (Figure 1).
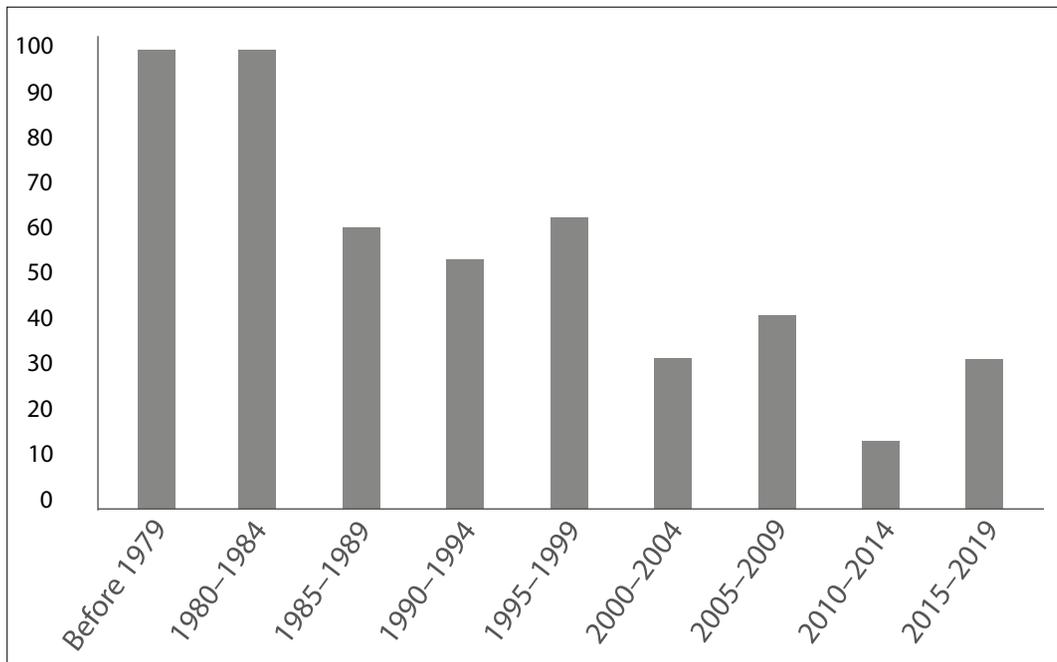

Figure 1: Percentage of articles in the collection where some negative gender stereotyping was detected over time

In terms of who was negatively stereotyped, all but one article in our collection attributed negative moral evaluations to men rather than women. The question then is, how does one interpret this? Does this simply imply that there is a stereotype out there that men are morally inferior to women in the business context? The construction and transmission of such a stereotype would certainly be supported by empirical evidence if our population of articles is anything to go by. Out of the total of 154 articles in our collection, ten explicitly considered the effects of gender on ethical reasoning. Of these ten, six concluded that women generally exhibited stronger moral reasoning than men (Cohen *et al.*, 1998; Eweje *et al.*, 2010; Nguyen *et al.*, 2008; Petersen *et al.*, 2010; Smith *et al.*, 1997; Wang, 2008), while

the remaining four concluded that the results were ambiguous or that there were no differences (Radtke, 2000; Roxas *et al.*, 2004; Schmink, 1997; Weeks *et al.*, 1999). None of the articles concluded emphatically that men exhibited stronger moral reasoning than women.

However, as was the case in cultural or racial stereotyping, in the presence of any negative stereotyping, even the absence of negative stereotypes becomes a cause for concern and speculation. Given the prevalence of patriarchy in our society, we would again be tempted to speculate that our "invisible man" (Ellison, 2014:3) explanation for the relative absence of negative cultural or racial stereotyping of people from Africa or Latin America holds much explanatory power. In essence, we would be tempted to venture the possibility that women are seldom negatively stereotyped simply because they are not seen as having any place in serious business. Certainly, the 'invisiblising' of women in business that has been documented elsewhere (e.g. Baker *et al.*, 1997; Miller *et al.*, 1995) lends weight to this speculation. Alternatively, Fiske *et al.*'s (2007) stereotype content model might again be invoked as an explanation. This would involve speculation that, in a male-dominated world, women as the out-group might traditionally have been placed in the low-competence quadrants of Fiske *et al.*'s (2007) model. As such, they might have attracted passive harm (or harm by ignore-ance) as a behavioural response. The apparent waning of the prevalence of gender stereotypes generally over time, as patriarchy has been confronted with increasing vigour (although by no means overthrown), might perhaps support these latter more cynical interpretations of the almost complete absence of negative stereotyping of women.

5.   Conclusion

In many ways, this article is not really an article at all. It is more of an open letter to the academic authors, editors and reviewers. It presents an appeal as the conclusion of an argument that goes something like this:

Premise 1: Stereotyping is undesirable. To requote Fiske (1993b:621): "Without stereotypes, there would be less need to hate, exclude, exterminate …", i.e. the practice of stereotyping is often bad, frequently leading to fallacies and injustice.

Premise 2: The degree to which stereotypes are transferred is influenced by appraisals of the source of the stereotypes.

Premise 3: The academic literature in general claims great authority as a source of the best current approximations of truth and is therefore likely to be a very compelling propagator of stereotypes if they are allowed in.

Conclusion: Academic authors, journal editors and peer reviewers have a particular responsibility to exercise the necessary cognitive effort to prevent stereotyping finding its way into the academic literature.

This is our appeal.

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Endnotes

1   The terms 'vignettes', 'scenarios' and 'cases' are all commonly used terms to describe what we refer to as 'vignettes' in this article.

2   Indeed, a large number of reviews covering various aspects of stereotyping already exist. The edited volume by Dovidio *et al.* (2010) provides a comprehensive overview. Fiske (2000) presented a turn of the century review of the stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination literature. Hilton *et al.* (1996) reviewed the "How" and the "When" of stereotyping. Several reviews, including Schmader *et al.* (2008) and Spencer *et al.* (2016) have dealt with stereotype threat specifically. Closely related to this was the work on social stigma reviewed by Major *et al.* (2005). Fiske's (1993a) and Macrae *et al.*'s (2000) reviews of the social cognition literature drew attention to the cognitive categorisation that underlies stereotyping. Furthermore, reviews dealing with intergroup social psychology and intergroup relations (Brewer *et al.*, 1985; Tajfel, 1982), attitudes (Oslon *et al.*, 1993) and gender (Martin *et al.*, 2009) have all touched on stereotyping.

3   Source: http://www.eben-net.org/?q=content/call-papers-eben-research-conference-2018 [Accessed 24 April 2018].

4   For example, African Americans (Steele *et al.*, 1995), Asian American women (Cheryan *et al.*, 2000) and women in general (Cadinu *et al.*, 2005).

5   We found 18 articles where the use of vignettes was described, but the actual vignettes used were not presented. This was a surprisingly high number given the obvious salience of the actual vignette in interpreting any emergent results as argued by Mudrack *et al.*, (2013).

6   In many ways, these are themselves profoundly grounded in bias. They are by nature constructed on the basis of perceptions. And besides this, how else might one explain the persistent high ranking of European countries such as Switzerland or Luxembourg in spite of the not-so-secret role of their vast financial services industries in facilitating global corruption? (See, for example, Van Vuuren, 2017).

7   Other sets of commonly used standard vignettes would include those suggested by Brenner *et al.* (1977) and Reidenbach *et al.* (1990).