Stereotypes: A unique love triangle between race, culture, and work identity.

Positive and negative stereotypes restrict, reinforce, and perpetuate prejudices and biases one may hold about another group's race, culture, or work identity. *These generalizations are equally present and powerful forces within and between minority groups*. Stereotypes can also regulate professional aspirations or choices for people who identify with these populations. The interplay between race, culture, and work identity is complicated, nuanced, multifaceted, and personal. According to the cultural theorist Stuart Hall one's cultural identity is not fixed; it is always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. Race, culture, and work identity, subsequently, influences the other in unprecedented and dynamic ways precisely because they are always influx.

The stereotypes and values associated with certain opportunities and professions vary with each racial minority group. For example, first-generation immigrants to the U.S. may have a favorable view of law, engineering, or medicine – roles that have historically been for white, wealthy males. To pursue a certain career is one approach to adhering, assimilating, and living out the "American" dream. In comparison, minority groups that have a longer history with this country *and* who acquire the same kind of roles may consequently be viewed as a sell-out from their own in-group (family members and peers).

The following items are worth considering while you navigate this process.

♦ What is the added value *and* cost of aligning with societal expectations?

♦ How do you define success? Is it based on income, title(s), or something else? The value placed on titles, for example, has evolved with the younger generation.

♦ How will your decision to fulfill (or not) certain stereotypes associated with jobs influence the dynamic of your respective in-group?

Pressure from your in-group to fulfill racial norms and expectations around jobs and industries is understandably, psychologically and emotionally exhausting. What exacerbates things is having to unpack and balance this, alongside subscribing to or reinforcing professionalism defined by white counterparts. Below is just one model for how one's professional identity can develop. How things unfold is an individual and fluid process; *focus on what you can control*!

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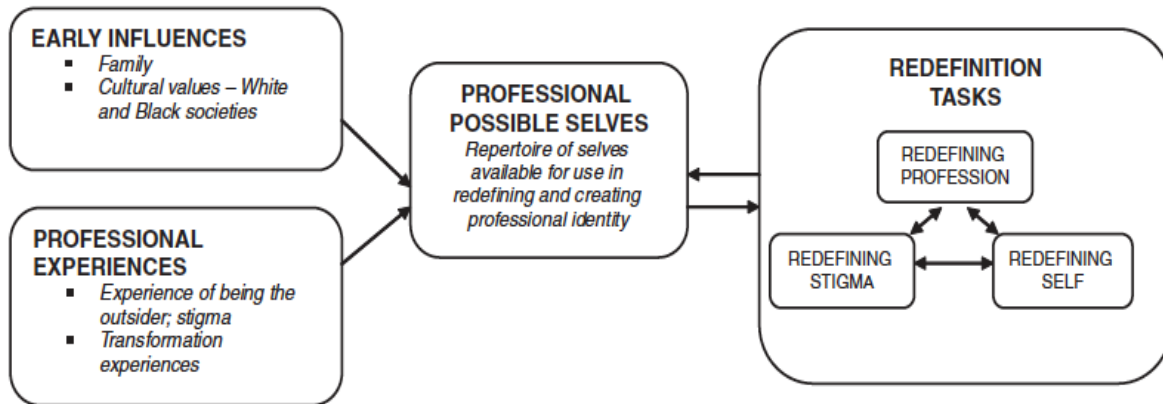
Slay, H., Smith, D. 2011. Professional Identity Construction: Using narrative to understand the negotiation of professional and stigmatized cultural identities. *Human Relations*, 64(1), p. 99.

To further discuss this topic, please schedule an appointment with the Internship Coordinator, Ned Khatrichettri.