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Ethnocentrism in the workplace

Though we may choose to vehemently deny it, all of us are ethnocentric in some way or the other, with the marked exception of a few people. In case you're wondering what the concept of ethnocentrism exactly is, this OpinionFront article gives you an explanation as well as some examples to help you understand it better. Did You Know? William G. Sumner, who coined the term ethnocentrism, is famously known as America's first sociology professor. He taught social sciences at the Yale University. It is wondrous, really, how this world is made up of so many different people belonging to different races or ethnicities. Color, language, culture, appearance, values—all these factors come together to group people based upon the aforementioned. There's nothing wrong with ethnicity, to be honest. It just means a group of people practicing or following the same culture. However, what happens when ethnocentrism takes over? What is Ethnocentrism? Ethnocentrism is judging another culture based upon the values and standards set in one's own culture. It is a form of bias, where we tend to immediately judge another culture as 'bad' or 'wrong' based upon their actions, if their values are not aligned with our own beliefs. Does this concept seem familiar to you? We all do it, some time or the other, mostly not even realizing that we're being ethnocentric at that moment. Though not always so, the concept of ethnocentrism has gained more of a negative tone owing to discrimination on ethnic grounds. Psychology tells us about the concept of in-groups and out-groups, where one tends to agree with the beliefs and actions of one's in-group (such as race, religion, or ethnicity, for example) and judge or have biased opinions about the out-groups (such as other religions or ethnicities). The term ethnocentrism was coined by William G. Sumner, after having observed people distinguish or discriminate between their in-groups, and other groups. Ethnocentrism is thus the tendency to consider one's own culture or race to be superior over all others. Though it is present in little forms in every culture, history has shown us how it can have tragic consequences if not controlled. Ethnocentrism might seem similar to ethnic pride, which is having pride for your culture and values, but there is a very fine line separating the two. Given below are a few examples of ethnocentrism— both historical and modern-day examples that will definitely help you understand the concept better. Example 1— Nazi Germany ♦ This is one of the worst, most extreme, and most tragic examples of ethnocentrism. Hitler believed that Jews, as well as people belonging to some other communities were all inferior to his ethnicity, and did not deserve to live. He had thousands and thousands of innocent people slaughtered in concentration camps, all because they weren't of his 'pure' race, which was, according to him, superior among all. Though ethnocentrism is not always this extreme, history does tell us stories about how the concept and prejudice that rose from it, took such a turn for the worse, and had horrible consequences. Example 2— Imperialism ♦ Imperialism is defined as a policy or practice by which a country increases its power by gaining control over other areas of the world (Merriam-Webster). The most famous example of it would be European imperialism, where European countries believed that the other areas of the world, such as Africa, America, India, etc. needed to be controlled by them owing to their supposed underdeveloped natures. European countries establishing their colonies in other parts of the world is an example of ethnocentrism: they believed that they were superior, civilized, and developed than other countries, which is why they 'needed' to establish control in order to help these countries come up to their standards, too. Example 3— Terrorism and Hate Crimes ♦ This is again a negative example of ethnocentrism. Terrorism and hate crimes take place when one religion or community believes that it is superior, and better than any other religion or community. Ethnocentrism tends to blind people from seeing things from another perspective— just because another community does something that yours doesn't— like a particular style of worship, for instance, doesn't make it inferior to yours, and nor does it make the other community's style of worshiping incorrect. However, ethnocentrism can make individuals feel as if the other community is bad, or wrong, and can make them take action in the form of terrorist attacks or hate crimes. Example 4— In Movies ♦ In movies and other sources of entertainment, ethnocentrism is often, but not always, portrayed in a humorous, light-hearted manner. One example of ethnocentrism portrayed in a light manner would be the movie, 'The Big Fat Greek Wedding', where a Greek family believes that being Greek is the one and only acceptable way of living. However, the makers of the movie took great care to make sure that the Greek culture was never shown in a negative or pushy manner, and that the audiences took it in the way it was supposed to be taken. Another example of ethnocentrism in movies is the legendary movie, The Godfather. Racial slurs, discriminatory opinions about African-Americans, and the male domination depicted in the Italian community are all examples of ethnocentrism, as befitted the time the story was set in. Example 5— In Business ♦ Though it is easy to assume that ethnocentrism affects only the lesser-educated, less aware people in the world, it is not really true. Ethnocentrism can be seen on a large scale in business, and at the workplace. For instance, an employee may refer to his client as a 'moron' if the client needed some time to understand whatever the employee was trying to tell him. A business owner might yell at his foreign employees and call them stupid because of their different races, cultures, or values that are different from the boss'. Another business owner based in a developed country may refuse to merge with a company that is originally based in a developing country because he believes that the developing country is very inferior to his own. Ethnocentrism thus is a part of business and is experienced at the workplace, but if it is not controlled, it has the capability to even destroy a company. Example 6— In Schools ♦ Ethnocentrism can be witnessed in schools across the world. Many experts agree that focusing a curriculum, say a world history curriculum, only on the history of the major developed countries and ignoring the developing and underdeveloped countries altogether, is an example of ethnocentrism in schools. Children are taught only the greatness of one country, which might lead them to develop prejudices against other countries. Sometimes, teachers and teaching patterns can also be slightly discriminatory, which leads to ethnocentrism. The students belonging to minority communities can feel sidelined, targeted, or ignored. Example 7— Consumer Ethnocentrism ♦ Consumer ethnocentrism is observed in those consumers who judge others buying imported goods instead of nationally or locally— produced goods. Choosing to buy a good is actually an individual choice, and judging someone on the basis of their taste or preference is not a good idea. Consumer ethnocentrism has become much more obvious since globalization, and consumers affected by ethnocentrism believe that purchasing foreign goods is unpatriotic, as it does not support the domestic economy but helps foreign economies instead. Example 8— In American Society ♦ The popular belief among American ethnocentric people is that their country, culture, values, development, and everything else is superior to every other nation in the world, and that every other nation is inferior to the United States. This belief has led to political meddling among the matters of other countries, leading to misunderstandings and miscommunication between different countries in the world. The present-day politics are a good example of the same. Here, the country as a whole can be considered as one group, or the in-group. Example 9— Ethnocentrism and Culture ♦ Every culture on earth tends to impart ethnocentrism, albeit unintentionally. Various aspects of culture such as mythological tales, folktales, legends, religion, songs, proverbs, language, rituals, etc. promote the superiority of that one culture over others. Though this is an unintentional kind of promotion of ethnocentrism, it instills the belief that 'my race/my culture' is really better than the rest, in so many ways in most of us, especially during childhood or teenage. ♦ Like I said earlier, most of us tend to vehemently deny this. However, it is true that we're all ethnocentric sometime or the other in our lives, without even realizing it. For instance, if we see someone dressed according to a style we don't follow, we immediately develop a biased judgment against them. "God, what is he/she wearing? It's clear he/she has no sense of fashion." In an instance as small as this, we tend to immediately conclude that the person we're judging has a bad fashion taste, and we're much better than him/her. ♦ Another example of ethnocentric behavior would be if a tourist on a holiday judges the destination based upon his comparison with his native place. "Look how dirty this country is! They should just see MY country. No wonder this place is so underdeveloped and backward!" In this instance, the tourist developed a biased judgment of the destination based upon his opinion of his own country. Maybe if he had stopped to think of the poverty rates of his tourist spot, or the dwindling economy, or even the history of that place which was different from his own culture, he wouldn't have immediately deemed it to be inferior. ♦ Food, or rather, cuisines, can also become a source of ethnocentrism. Very often, people tend to praise the type of food that they eat, and put down the cuisines that do not seem very appealing to them, deeming the other cuisines to be very inferior to their own. Ethnocentrism does not necessarily have to be negative; in fact, it does have its share of advantages, such as— Generating pride and self-confidence among the people of a group, about the group, themselves, and each other Defining social standards and the behavior that a group is expected to follow, thus maintaining uniformity among the people There's not much chance of causing internal conflicts. Immunity to external control and influence Ethnocentrism, if kept in check, cannot harm the society. Only when it goes out of hand does it pose any risk to other members of society, especially those belonging to the out-groups. Can you think of any other examples of ethnocentrism? If you can, feel free to let us know in the comments section below! Disclaimer: The examples provided in this article are for educative purposes only, and are not meant to offend or hurt anyone's sentiments. ethnocentrism in the workplace examples. how to overcome ethnocentrism in the workplace. promote ethnocentrism in the workplace. ethnocentrism and prejudice in the workplace

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