



# Discriminatory Types and Homogenising Relevance: A Schutzian Perspective on Oppression

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## Abstract

In this paper, we draw on Alfred Schutz's theoretical framework to better understand how oppression is enacted through discriminatory acts. By closely examining the role of typifications and relevances in our experience of others, and by supplementing this analysis with contemporary social scientific resources, we argue that a Schutzian perspective on oppression yields important phenomenological insights. We do this in three key steps. Firstly, we contextualise *Equality and the Meaning Structure of the Social World* within Schutz's broader body of work, elucidating his central conditions of discrimination. Secondly, we highlight the limitations of Schutz's account, in how it fails to capture more peripheral, subtle, and implicit oppressive practices. Finally, we introduce two underexplored insights derived from Schutz's framework: the role of relevances in understanding the motivational underpinnings of implicit biases, and the connection between self-typification and stereotype threat. With this multidimensional approach, we hope to enhance our understanding of oppression whilst bridging gaps in Schutz's original conceptualization.

**Keyword** Alfred Schutz · Oppression · Relevances · Types · Implicit bias · Stereotype · Discrimination

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## Introduction

Alfred Schutz is perhaps best known for his 1932 seminal work *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, in which he compellingly demonstrates how our experience of the world, and our social reality, is structured from the outset according to types. What has been left relatively unexamined from Schutz's *oeuvre* are the ways Schutz, in his later life, concerned himself with investigating the problems of racism, stereotypes, and minority rights which troubled him in the 1950s USA.<sup>1</sup> Schutz writes:

We are worried citizens of the United States of 1955, deeply troubled by the many manifestations of discrimination, prejudices, and other social evils prevailing in our particular social environments and we are looking for appropriate remedies. (Schutz, 1996: 148)

This letter, as has been noted by Schutzian scholar Helmut R. Wagner, quite explicitly presents Schutz abandoning “his stance of aloofness from partisanship in practical social issues” (Schutz, 1996: 147). The letter was addressed to the speakers of a conference in 1955 in which Schutz presented *Equality and the Meaning Structure of the Social World* (hereon, “*Equality*”). The core aim of *Equality*, according to Schutz, was to distinguish between various forms of typifications, describe intergroup relations, and ultimately, apply this conceptual framework to the concrete problems of discrimination and equality of opportunity (Schutz, 1996: 150). Such a politically motivated application of phenomenology is beginning to characterise a large portion of contemporary phenomenological scholarship and has been—albeit contentiously—termed the ‘turn’ to a *critical* phenomenology (Ferrari et al., 2018; see also Weiss et al., 2020). In this paper, we provide a Schutzian contribution to this recent trend by not only bringing phenomenology into dialogue with social scientific disciplines but doing so for the sake of critical purposes. We go about this by demonstrating the central role of typifications and relevances in oppressive acts of discrimination.

Importantly, this paper aligns with Schutz's own (unfulfilled) philosophical aims. In the same letter as mentioned above, Schutz also expresses a demand for a cross-fertilisation of his phenomenological insights from the empirical social sciences:

< I submit > that philosophical analysis of the underlying principles [of *Equality*] requires supplementation by findings of the theoretical and empirical social sciences in order to find the epistemological middle ground for further research. (Schutz, 1996: 150)

Since the publication of *Equality*, a great deal of both empirical and theoretical research on oppression has been carried out, in particular with how it manifests in observable patterns of discriminatory behaviour. Today, our understanding of how oppression informs discriminatory behaviour has been increasingly nuanced by our empirically grounded understanding of implicit and cognitive biases, stereotyping, and the conceptualising of more undetectable forms of prejudicial injustices. Despite

<sup>1</sup> Some exceptions include: Gordon (1995b, 1997); Barber (2001); Yancy (2017); Gyollai (2022).

Schutz's account predating their empirical thematising in the 1980s onwards, we take the phenomenological tools developed by Schutz to be sensitive to these more pernicious discriminatory practices. By bringing these findings into relief with Schutz's phenomenological descriptions and emphasis on typifications, we hope to carve open (anew) a novel and illuminating approach to understanding oppression and how it manifests.

To achieve these aims, we begin this paper (**Schutz's Theoretical Framework: Types and Relevances**) by contextualising *Equality* within Schutz's wider corpus with the aim of also providing a clear understanding of what is meant by 'typifications,' 'relevances,' and the significance Schutz attributes them. We then (**Schutz on the Problem of Discrimination**) outline the two central characteristics of oppressive discrimination according to Schutz, namely, the *effective* and *affective* imposition of *typifying* social categories by an outsider. In (**A Limitation of Schutz's Account**) we argue that Schutz's account of discrimination, as it is, is inadequate in that it is unable to capture many more peripheral, subtle, and implicit oppressive practices. This leads us in (**A Revised Perspective on Oppression**) to develop two key insights that can be derived from Schutz's account. These are: (**Uncovering Implicit Biases and their Motivational Underpinnings**) the role of relevances in understanding the motivational underpinnings behind implicit biases, and (**Stereotypes, Stereotype Threat, and Self-typification**) how self-typification leads to stereotype threat. By taking these two insights in turn, we integrate into Schutz's theoretical framework the hermeneutical resources and social scientific evidence that was left wanting in his original attempt at theorising oppressive modes of discrimination.

## Schutz's Theoretical Framework: Types and Relevances

Before delving into Schutz's critical analysis of discrimination, we must first get a firm understanding of two central concepts running throughout his philosophical corpus: "type" and "relevance." For Schutz, the intertwining structures of typifications and relevances form the background knowledge that allows us to make sense of a given situation. Most importantly, they represent the schemes that guide our understanding and interactions with our fellow others and for this reason are crucial for Schutz's account of discrimination.

The central thesis of Schutz's analysis of typification is that the world, the physical as well as the sociocultural one, is experienced from the outset in terms of types (Schutz, 1962: 306; 1976a: 233; 1996: 142; 2011: 125).<sup>2</sup> Importantly, our constant

<sup>2</sup> Schutz is undeniably indebted to Husserl's understanding of types as a wellspring of familiarity and that through which we experience our lifeworld. As Husserl writes in the *Crisis*, "the world of life[...] holds us to its essentially lawful sets of types, to which all life, and thus all science, of which it is the 'ground', remain bound" (Husserl, 1970: 173). Or, in Husserl's posthumously published *Experience and Judgment*, where he argues that "the factual world of experience is experienced as a typified world" (Husserl, 1973: 331). An interesting point of difference between Schutz and Husserl is in Husserl's seemingly interchangeable use of 'type' and 'style' in *Ideas II* (1989). Whereas for Schutz, typifying necessitates the glossing over of what makes an individual unique and irreplaceable (1976a: 234), for Husserl, we have personal styles akin to 'personal types' which express a character that is *typical* of that unique individual (1989: 284-290).

typifying often remains at the passive level of prepredicative thinking. I am not making active decisions and deliberations on which type is most suitable, rather, I pre-reflectively typify on the basis of a long history of previous experiences. Following Husserl, Schutz shows how types mediate and structure our experience of the life-world, providing a sense of typical familiarity in everyday life (Schutz, 1962: 59).<sup>3</sup> As Schutz writes, “*familiarity thus indicates the likelihood of referring new experiences, in respect of their types, to the habitual stock of already acquired knowledge*” (Schutz, 2011: 126; original emphasis). In other words, our incessant reliance on a typology to structure our experience of the world is the basis for achieving a feeling of familiarity. Types inform our expectations, and familiarity is achieved when our experience coheres with our expectations. It should be noted that types are grounded in intersubjective processes of meaning-constitution and, as such, they are liable to changes over time. In other words, while typicalities represent enduring frameworks for organising our surrounding world, which can become recalcitrant, they are not static and ahistorical. This inherent plasticity of types allows for social change to occur. As Schutz claims “the self-interpretation of the group, its central myth, as well as the forms of its rationalization and institutionalization, is subject to changes in the course of history” (Schutz, 1976a: 245).

Thus defined, typification plays a crucial role in our interactions with persons. Indeed, we grasp and understand our fellow others based on pre-constituted *personal ideal types* (hereon, types).<sup>4</sup> Such types allow us to subsume others under general and homogenous social categories, leaving out all the nuances and peculiarities that distinguish them as individuals (Schutz, 1972: 184). To illustrate what he exactly means by types and how they work in structuring our social world, Schutz often uses the example of the postal worker (e.g., Schutz, 1972: 184f., 197). When I send a letter, I trust that dedicated professionals, whom I refer to as postal employees, will efficiently handle it, ensuring its timely delivery to the indicated address. In other words, I interact with these others not as individuals as such, but in accordance with their social roles and the responsibilities they encompass. In the same fashion, I may typify someone as a cis woman, a police officer, as a parent or a romantic couple, and in each instance, I presuppose and expect certain habits and behaviours, and I myself act accordingly.<sup>5</sup>

In this sense, types emerge as interpretative frameworks that offer solutions to situational challenges, and their formation heavily relies on the observer’s interests

<sup>3</sup> “The world, as has been shown by Husserl, is from the outset experienced in the pre-scientific thinking of everyday life in the mode of typicality. The unique objects and events given to us in a unique aspect are unique within a horizon of typical familiarity and pre-acquaintanceship” (Schutz, 1962: 59).

<sup>4</sup> As Embree (2012) shows, throughout his oeuvre, Schutz uses two different concepts of types. On the one hand, he adopts Max Weber’s formulation of “ideal types” to indicate the set of social constructs formed in common-sense thinking or social and philosophical research. This understanding of typification is comprehensively displayed in *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (1972). On the other hand, Schutz embraces Husserl’s theorisation of “empirical types” (Husserl, 1973) to indicate universal essences (or *eide*) constituted in passivity. For the purposes of our current discussion, we will exclusively focus on the first meaning of “type”. Consequently, we use “personal ideal type” and “type” interchangeably.

<sup>5</sup> Schutz makes a further distinction here between “characterological” and “habitual” types: the former being less anonymous as it pertains to direct experiences of the typified subject whereas the latter is more anonymous as it refers to them solely in terms of their function (Schutz, 1972: 196f.).

and motivations (Schutz, 1976c: 124). Schutz explains this phenomenon through his theory of relevance systems. As he claims, “[w]hat Husserl has not explained in his published writings, [...], is that this typification takes place according to particular structures of relevancy” (Schutz, 1970: 125). So, the central thesis is that typifying processes do not occur independently of any regulatory principle. Rather, they are guided by interdependent webs of topical, interpretative, and motivational relevance (see Gyollai, 2022: 619–621). In other words, the formation and attribution of types, as well as the meaning they hold within specific contexts, are conditioned by a system of relevances.

Schutz provides his most comprehensive analysis of relevances in “*Reflections on the Problem of Relevances*” (1947–51), wherein he distinguishes among three primary types of relevances: topical, interpretative, and motivational. Topical relevance is responsible for determining the focus of our attention and interest as observers. Something or someone becomes topically relevant when they present unfamiliar features that cannot automatically be traced back to our set of taken-for-granted, typical knowledge (Schutz, 2011: 107). According to Schutz, the selective activity of our attention is guided by interest — “[i]t is our interest at hand that motivates all our thinking, projecting, acting, and therewith establishes the problems to be solved by our thought and the goals to be attained by our actions” (Schutz, 1976c: 124). In other words, “interest” refers to the set of motivational relevances that lead us to (a) thematise something as the focus of our attention (because-of motives), and (b) decide how to act based on the meaning we attribute to the latter (in-order-to motives) (Schutz, 2011: 119; Schutz & Luckmann, 1974: 222). Indeed, once the unfamiliar object (or subject) captures our attention, we immediately perceive it as offering itself for interpretation. The interpretative process is carried out through interpretative relevances, which allow us to make sense of the unfamiliar set of perceptions by comparing it to relevant, coherent types from our previous experiences (Schutz, 2011: 113). As Schutz clarifies, different types of relevances are interdependent and are experienced as an undivided unity in concrete situations (Schutz, 2011: 132f.). Therefore, they intertwine in forming tripartite systems of relevance that we use to make sense of our everyday situations.

While *Reflections on the Problems of Relevances* mainly focuses on explaining how relevances work in the case of objects, the intertwining structures of typifications and relevances also play a fundamental role in grasping persons. An illuminating instance of this are the reactions to the 2017 viral BBC interview with political scientist Prof. Robert Kelly (see, e.g., Davies, 2017). During the interview, two young children unexpectedly enter Prof. Kelly’s home office and are promptly dragged out of the room by an Asian woman. The ensuing viral comments on Facebook and Twitter immediately assumed that Prof. Kelly’s Asian wife was the children’s nanny—a common misunderstanding among parents of mixed-race children (see Martell, 2016). In terms of relevance, when a parent displays a racial identity that differs from that of their children, this set of perceptions is considered unusual such that the observer’s attention is pulled, and the object of attention poses an interpretative puzzle. To make sense of this unfamiliar situation, the observer draws upon preexisting (stereo)types sedimented in their stock of knowledge from past experiences and socio-historical norms, and formulates interpretative possibilities—e.g., the accompanying adult is

a nanny or the child has been adopted.<sup>6</sup> The because-motive of such interpretations involves numerous pre-reflective assumptions, such as the tendency for individuals to select partners from their own ethnic groups or the stereotype of non-white women being hired as caregivers or household aides by white individuals.

As the example already suggests, the sedimented structures of typification and relevance, albeit structurally necessary, can constitute the foundational basis to initiate and perpetuate discrimination and oppression when filled with prejudicial content. To make this clearer let us make three crucial observations.

First, as Schutz already problematizes in *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, when we rely on ideal types as interpretive schemes of our social world, we often apprehend others as homogeneous and anonymous types (Schutz, 1972: 185). Typifications offer a rapid, standard solution to an unfamiliar set of perceptions. In this sense, the ideal type “is itself always determined by the interpreter’s point of view. It is a function of the very question it seeks to answer” (Schutz, 1972:190). When we rely on a typification as our interpretive scheme, we take the perceived object (or subject) to exhibit a property which corresponds to numerous others of the same type. To typify a subject, interpret their behaviour *as typical*, and act toward them according to their type is to stand in what Schutz calls a “They-relationship” to them (Schutz, 1972: 202). Unlike Thou-orientations and “We-relationships” wherein you are orientated toward the other as an individual ‘You,’ in a They-relationship you adopt a They-orientation toward the other and constitute them *qua* typical or group-level features. When the typified person reacts in an expected way to a given event, we understand this as the “typical conscious experiences of ‘someone’ and, as such, as basically homogenous and repeatable” (Schutz, 1972: 184). This ranges from the typical reaction that we expect of a waiter when we ask for the bill, to the more problematic ways in which we deem certain responses typical according to one’s gender, race, nationality, etc.

Such a homogenising approach to others is strictly related to anonymisation. Schutz writes that an ideal type is merely an anonymous individual, exhaustively defined by their typical functions and associations (Schutz, 1972: 185f.; see Natanson, 1978: 1979). This is not to say that something has gone wrong in the interaction, but for Schutz, this is simply a description of social existence (Natanson, 1979: 539). Prior to any assessment of value, anonymity stands as an invariant feature of our everyday experience of others in the world, and typification is a tool to navigate it (Natanson, 1986: 24). Unlike a ‘real person,’ who is attributed real conscious processes which are unknown, unpredictable, and cannot be inferred from the outside without direct engagement, the ideal type “is only a shadow person” (Schutz, 1972: 190). They are determined and defined by the limits of the observer’s own expectational horizon.

Second, as hinted above, types do not function in isolation; they are jointly sedimented with relevances. In *The Structures of the Life-World* (1974: 243), Schutz explains that the subjective relevance structures that underlie our use of types are from the very beginning developed within socially determined meaning-contexts. This implies that homogenising and anonymising typifications always take on spe-

<sup>6</sup> See Daniel Gyollai’s (2022) discussion of the interpretative possibilities of “individuals crossing borders” (622f.).

cific contextual meanings. The types sedimented in our knowledge are a function of the relevance systems at play in the specific social context wherein the types are used. Thus, the same type can acquire different meanings based on the relevances along which it is sedimented. The way a misogynist develops the type “woman” is influenced by the specific relevance structures attached to the latter, such as “weak” or “dangerous”. It is these very relevances that, in turn, determine how misogynists frame, interpret, and subsequently act in their interactions with “women.”

Third, systems of relevance are not always a matter of choice; they can also be enforced. Indeed, as Schutz argues, relevance systems come in two different forms: intrinsic or imposed. Intrinsic relevance systems derive from a subjectively chosen interest, which entitles us to, at any time, shift the focus of our attention and redefine our relevance structures accordingly. Imposed relevances, on the contrary, are rooted in interests which come from the outside and cannot be actively controlled or modified. Such imposed relevances may arise from various factors, including unfamiliarity or anonymity (Cox, 1978: 86). As Schutz explains, the more the other becomes anonymous, the more we are potentially subject to their control (Schutz, 1976c: 129). In particular, relevance structures are intimately tied to dynamics of in-group and out-group interactions, with each group imposing distinct sets of relevance structures and typifications both onto in-group fellows and onto out-group members (Schutz, 1976a: 236f.; 1976c: 129). In this sense, relevances can be socially enforced.<sup>7</sup> That is, socio-cultural relevance structures can be institutionalised and subsequently internalised such that they influence the ways in which we understand ourselves and others (see Gordon, 1995b: 58ff.).<sup>8</sup> Misogynistic and racist relevances, for instance, may be consciously adopted or, more insidiously, enforced by broader societal knowledge structures (see Gordon, 1995a, b; Alcoff, 2006). Even Schutz himself has been challenged for his discussion of housework as involving “only very superficial levels of our personality” (Schutz, 2011: 98f.); a position that reveals his own patriarchal understanding of the social world (Smith, 1987: 83, as cited in Jacobs, 2024).

## Schutz on the Problem of Discrimination

Although it may already be apparent just how central the notions of types and relevances are for a phenomenological account of discrimination, Schutz himself rarely thematised their more socio-political implications. It is only in his later writings in the 1950s – in particular in *Equality* – that we see Schutz discuss the ways in which an ideal type can be imposed discriminatorily. Importantly, the kind of discrimination Schutz was concerned with, and which we hereon focus on, is *oppressive* discrimination. We take our understanding of oppression from Young (2011) who conceptual-

<sup>7</sup> Henceforth in this text, we will consistently employ either “imposed” or “enforced” to indicate relevance structures that arise in the context of cross-temporal in-group/out-group relations characterised by increasing unfamiliarity and anonymity. In this use, Schutz’s technical concept of *imposition* converges with a common-sense understanding of (institutionalised) impositions onto others by individuals or groups.

<sup>8</sup> We discuss this in Sect. “Uncovering implicit biases and their motivational underpinnings” and “Stereotypes, stereotype threat, and self-typification” respectively.

ises oppression as a structural arrangement that leads to at least one of the following group-based harms: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Discrimination can then be understood as oppressive when it results from and further reinforces these structural constraints in relation to subjects *qua* their group membership. Albeit a cursory account, with this formulation in mind we suggest that the oppressive character of discrimination can be most easily identified when the act bolsters, reinforces, or motivates structural group-based harms such as racism, (hetero)sexism, ageism, ableism, xenophobia, classism, and so on (see Young, 2011: 39–65).

Our account of oppression is largely similar to what we find in Schutz's *Equality*, albeit without his use of the term 'oppression'. Schutz's analysis, as we will clarify, specifically points to institutional discrimination based on an objective interpretation of group membership (Schutz, 1976a: 265; see Barber, 2001: 117). This form of discrimination is grounded in the prejudicial rationalisation and institutionalisation of the underlying self-interpretation of an in-group, its "central myth." In this sense, Schutz contends, institutional discrimination, or oppression as we term it, fundamentally entails an unequal treatment based on attributes that should not be imputable to the individual, such as race, sex, or ethnicity, or on social generic categories such as language, ideology, national or social origin, etc. (see Schutz, 1976a: 263).<sup>9</sup>

To begin with, a central feature of Schutz's account is the problems which arise when subjective (insider) and objective (outsider) meanings come apart.<sup>10</sup> Ideal-typical schemes make possible an outsider's interpretation of the meaning of another's acts and behaviours. Regardless of whether the interpretation is based on logical predicates and research, or on pre-predicative experience, there is always a subsuming of subjective meaning into an objective meaning-context. Two people may consider one another as heterogeneous, but once placed under the same social category by the outsider's typification, the two individuals are treated as if they constitute a homogenous unit (Schutz, 1976a: 255). There is a discrepancy between the insider's subjective interpretation and the outsider's objective interpretation.

<sup>9</sup> It will become evident in our argumentation that Schutz also insists on the crucial role played by the subjective affection of the discriminatee. The reason for this possibly comes from his interest in discussing equality of opportunity (Schutz, 1976a: 269ff). As Michael Barber discusses, Schutz is not concerned with what he calls mere "objective equality" (Barber, 2001: 202) but how any account of equality of opportunity must "ensure that the viewpoint of the racially oppressed is taken into account" (Barber, 2001: 252). Schutz is undoubtedly justified in emphasising the importance of taking into account the standpoint of the oppressed. But as we demonstrate in the section **A Limitation of Schutz's Account**, the viewpoint of the oppressed is not constitutive of oppression, but rather an important standpoint that any analysis must take into account. On how Schutz's phenomenological sociology has influenced standpoint theory, see Jacobs (2024).

<sup>10</sup> The terms 'subjective' and 'objective' are misleading. Schutz takes them from Max Weber, for whom *subjective meaning* refers to the meaning attributed by the subject to their own acts, whereas *objective meaning* is simply the interpretation of the same situation or action but by anybody else (Schutz, 1976a: 227). As Schutz himself notes, 'objective' and 'subjective' are an "unfortunate" choice of terms (Schutz, 1976a: 227). They are in effect misnomers as what is really at stake is a distinction between *inside* (in-group) and *outside* (out-group) positions of the interpreter (Schutz, 1976b: 275). For this reason, when Schutz refers to the Weberian distinction between *subjective* or *objective* meanings, we hereon use the terms *insider/subjective* and *outsider/objective* interchangeably. This takes the lead from Lester Embree's discussion of Schutz in: (Embree, 2015: 137).



These considerations directly point to the concept of *domain of relevance*. Schutz defines domains of relevances as the comprehensive set of types which enable a subject to regain a sense of familiarity when encountering something (or someone) unexpected (Schutz, 1976a: 235). We constitute domains of relevance by gathering all the types that we, as insiders, deem relevant to make sense of an outsider who perhaps behaves, looks, or sounds in a way which is initially unfamiliar. These domains of relevances can then be collectively constructed such that “the subjective meaning the group has for its members consists in their knowledge of a common situation, and with it of a common system of typifications and relevances” (Schutz, 1976a: 251). This common system is what enables a feeling of belonging, of a shared ‘normality,’ and is approved as being constitutive of the way of life of an in-group (Schutz, 1976a: 236). As well as isolated types which correspond to harmful stereotypes and tropes, domains of relevance are also an integral part of discriminatory practices. This happens when elements owing to different domains of relevance (i.e., *heterogeneous* elements) are lumped together to create falsely *homogeneous* domains (Schutz, 1976a: 239, 259). To explain this, let us take the example of a classroom within which the teacher states that they expect the boys in the class to perform better in maths than the girls. In this case, the teacher is linking mathematical ability to the students’ gender, thereby constructing a false homogeneous domain of relevance that carries oppressive consequences.

With this in mind, we can now examine when, in Schutz’s account, the often unproblematic, let alone discriminatory, practice of typifying outsiders turns into an instance of institutional discrimination or oppression. On our account— and this seems to also be aligned with Schutz— we are interested in discriminatory practices which further sediment oppressive paradigms by perpetuating prejudicial types and installing homogenising domains of relevances for entire social groups. In *Equality*, we read Schutz as outlining two necessary conditions which, when taken together, are *sufficient* for identifying (oppressive) discrimination.<sup>11</sup> These criteria entail that a discriminatory experience, as a mechanism of oppression, must encompass both *effective* and *affective* components.

The first condition is that the typification is performed not only by an outsider but by an outsider in a dominant position of power. As Schutz writes:

The resultant discrepancy between the subjective and the objective interpretation of the group remains relatively harmless, so long as the individuals thus typified are not subject to the outsider’s control [...]. If, however, the outsider has the power to impose his system of relevances upon the individuals typified by him, and especially to enforce its institutionalization, then this fact will create various repercussions on the situation of the individuals typified against their will. (Schutz, 1976a: 255)

<sup>11</sup> Non-oppressive forms of discrimination could be, for example, the way fairground rides discriminate against people according to height, how people discriminate against potential romantic partners on the basis of their gender identity, or cases of discriminatory hiring practices which favour candidates from underrepresented backgrounds.

To support his claim, Schutz discusses how the American way of life is left undisturbed by the fact that foreigners identify it with the ideal-typical schemes that are presented in Hollywood films (Schutz, 1976a: 255; see also Barber, 2001: 113f.). Although there is a typification from the outside, this typification fails to be enforced and inflict repercussions and thus US Americans are not, on Schutz's account, oppressively discriminated against. This condition of power is important as it introduces a clause of *efficacy* which carries a dual meaning. The typification must not only be imposed from the outside, but to some extent be *effectively imposed*, or *institutionalised*, such that the victim is "disturbed" by the "repercussions" (Schutz, 1976a: 255) of being typified by an outsider in a position of power.

The efficacy of the typifying process, however, is insufficient in itself to account for an *oppressive* practice of discrimination. As Schutz notes, rent laws, tax laws, and various administrative measures are institutionalised and effective impositions of typifications, yet are rarely discriminatory (Schutz, 1976a: 255f.). Moreover, Schutz argues these bureaucratic typifications are *of minor importance*, as only a small, superficial, part of the insider's personality is impinged upon (Schutz, 1976a: 256). We ought to then disambiguate 'institutionalisation' from formalised institutional frameworks. In many cases (as with the various administrative and financial laws and measures Schutz discusses) schemes of typifications are imposed through formal institutions. However, we can also think of institution in more phenomenological terms; i.e., as the institution of sense within a particular lifeworld which leads to styles of habits, expectational horizons, and presuppositions (see Schutz, 1976a: 251). In this latter sense, schemes of typifications and domains of relevance can be historically instituted, albeit informally.

This leads to the second necessary condition of discrimination, namely that the imposed typification must *affect* the discriminatee. This condition is itself twofold. On the one hand, discrimination implies that its target feels degraded or alienated as a result of having a significant part of their self-concept identified with a single and homogeneously typical trait (Schutz, 1976a: 256f.). On the other hand, this affliction needs to be acknowledged by the discriminatee. This means the victim must also be reflectively aware of the outsider's imposed typification. To be discriminated against thus entails a subjective feeling of being "alienated from themselves" (Schutz, 1976a: 261) because you feel you no longer have the right or freedom to decide what is relevant to the interpretation of yourself from the outside. Schutz uses the examples of how Germans who had severed all allegiance to Judaism found themselves declared as Jews by Hitler's Nuremberg laws, or how refugees from Europe were often considered enemy aliens by virtue of the very nationality they wanted to abandon (Schutz, 1976a: 257). We can understand this as akin to what Frantz Fanon originally termed the experience of being "overdetermined from the outside" by anti-black racism (Fanon, 1952/2008), that is, being determined by characteristics irrelevant to your own characterisation (see Gordon, 1995a: 179 ff.; 1995b: 58 ff.). This means an oppressive practice thus "presupposes both *imposition* of a typification from the objective point of view and an *appropriate evaluation* of this imposition from the subjective viewpoint of the *afflicted* individual" (Schutz, 1976a: 261; our emphasis). The alienation of the discriminated and oppressed is a result of the inner conflict of having their self-understanding come up against a hegemonic system of relevances.

One is made palpably aware of the typifications employed by others to interpret one's own actions and behaviour.

## A Limitation of Schutz's Account

In this section, we briefly outline a crucial limitation in the Schutzian account sketched out above. As we demonstrate in Sect. "[A revised perspective on oppression](#)", this limitation does not pertain to the wider theoretical framework that Schutz provides but rather his conceptualisation of what constitutes discrimination. We must be forgiving, to some extent, of the limited hermeneutical resources that Schutz had at his disposal in the 1950s. Our conceptual understanding of oppression has developed a great deal and now encompasses far more implicit and pernicious forms of discrimination than those described by Schutz. That being said, we now argue one of Schutz's central conditions is not a constitutive component of (oppressive or non-oppressive) discrimination, namely, that the subject is *affected* by an objective typification.

Schutz argues that discrimination emerges out of an outsider's typification which afflicts the insider's subjective experience, thus causing them to feel alienated from themselves, degraded, and treated as a mere unit in a wider homogenous whole (Schutz, 1976a: 261; see Bernasconi, 2000: 181). There is not only the imposition of a typification but "by the very imposition of the typification they become alienated from themselves" as there is "an appropriate evaluation of this imposition from the subjective viewpoint of the afflicted individual" (Schutz, 1976a: 261). The presence of discrimination, on Schutz's account, requires that the discriminated subject is negatively *affected*.

Although the strong affective force of discrimination which Schutz demands is not uncommon, it seems tendentious to include this in an understanding of what *constitutes* discrimination. Subjects can surely be oppressed and discriminated against without the objective typification leading to the subjective experience of alienation which is required in Schutz's account.<sup>12</sup> To illustrate this, we can imagine a company that does not consider a suitable candidate's job application by virtue of their name sounding foreign and unfamiliar. More than this, the motivation to reject the application was not simply due to unfamiliarity, but because the hiring manager was ideologically committed to supporting what they considered to be 'ethnically British' people with traditional English names. In such an example, and innumerable others like it, it would be strange to say that this hiring practice is neither oppressive nor discriminatory by virtue of the applicant remaining unaware of the unjust grounds for their rejection. Contra Schutz, the applicant is surely discriminated against irrespective of whether they have the *afflicted* experience of being typified, let alone the accompanying feeling of *alienation*.

This illuminates a limitation of Schutz's account of discrimination. Beneath the explicit and institutionalised forms of discriminatory violence and oppression lies a huge underbelly of implicit forms of discrimination which occur unbeknownst to

<sup>12</sup> Discrimination is also often acted out unbeknownst to the discriminator in the form of implicit biases, but we take these instances to be clearly compatible with Schutz's account.

the typified ‘outsider.’ Schutz formulates discrimination in a way which presupposes both *effective* and *affective* components. Granted, the job application example is effective on various levels: the typification derives from culturally instituted racist, xenophobic, and nationalistic stereotypes and prejudices, is imposed by an agent in a position of authority and could be institutionalised to such an extent that the hiring manager is not even aware of their prejudicial attitude toward unfamiliar names. Yet, what makes the above a discriminatory manifestation of structural oppression is precisely the treatment rather than its “appropriate evaluation.” As in many other cases, if the victim of a racist, sexist, or classist typification remains unaware of the discriminatory motivations behind their treatment, it would be presumptuous to attribute a feeling or experience of alienation, of being subject to the outsider’s control, or of being homogenised by the imposed typification. Nonetheless, such discriminatory practices as exemplified above, by virtue of their treatment itself, irrespective of how it is subjectively felt by the victim, seem to be an obvious instantiation of oppression. This leads to the question: what is lacking in Schutz’s account such that he cannot accommodate these more insidious and implicit forms of discrimination?

Having shown why Schutz’s account of oppressive discrimination— as something objectively imposed *and subjectively experienced*— is an inadequate description, we now motivate a rearticulation which hinges on the treatment of the subject themselves rather than how they are affected by the treatment. Returning to the example of the discriminatory hiring practice— even if we imagine the applicant is not materially disadvantaged or harmed by their rejection— what makes their rejection a discriminatory expression of oppression is that they were subsumed under a homogenous category which treats all people with ‘foreign sounding names’ worse than ‘British sounding’ applicants. Discriminatory practices require that you are disadvantageously discriminated against *differentially* to others, *qua*, your types (see Lippert-Rasmussen, 2014; Eidelson, 2015; Thomson, 2018; Altman, 2020). Drawing on an example provided by Schutz, if you, like Marian Anderson was, are barred from performing in a certain space because you are Black, you are subsumed under a falsely homogenous domain which treats everyone who is Black as equally barrable (Schutz, 1976a: 259; see also Barber, 2001: 113). Even if you have no desire to enter the Constitution Hall in Washington D.C., the possibility of you being unaffected by this does not preclude your being discriminated against according to type, and thus your being oppressed. By broadening our conception of discrimination to allow space for *inaffective* discriminatory practices we can better appreciate the merits of Schutz’s wider theoretical framework for describing the experiential structures and motivational relevances for more implicit, non-deliberate, and imperceptible modes of discrimination.

## A Revised Perspective on Oppression

We have argued that Schutz’s account of what constitutes oppressive discrimination is too narrow in scope. Yet, we want to defend the persisting relevance of his theoretical framework. In emphasising the constitutional significance of types for our experience of the world, Schutz casts a light on some of the fundamental intentional structures at play in oppressive instances of discrimination. Schutz did not

use the prefix ‘oppressive,’ but he was almost exclusively concerned with how racist, xenophobic, and fascist discrimination is enacted. Additionally, although the examples Schutz employed were all explicit and observable acts of discrimination, his theorising also illuminates more nuanced facets of oppression that phenomenologists increasingly attempt to investigate.<sup>13</sup> For example, Schutz’s theoretical framework helps us indicate the motivational relevances behind certain implicit biases and the grounds upon which stereotype threat emerges. In this section, we take these two Schutzian insights in turn.

### Uncovering Implicit Biases and their Motivational Underpinnings

Research in social psychology focusing on the phenomenon of implicit bias has proved conducive to Schutz’s theoretical analysis. Implicit biases are considered to be automatic patterns of thought or feeling, often not transparent to us, and thus difficult to detect and control (Holroyd, 2018: 385). Although there is no common agreement on the nature of implicit biases (see Brownstein, Madva, & Gawronski, 2019), many sources from empirical psychological literature convene in identifying them as mental constructs involving the habitual, automatic utilisation of “associations stored in memory” (Amodio & Mendoza, 2010: 364, as cited in Holroyd & Sweetman, 2016: 85).<sup>14</sup> In the context of our social relationships, such silent associations link social categories to certain traits and characteristics reproducing and fostering our stereotypes. For example, the most well-known implicit bias measure, the IAT (Implicit Association Test), shows how white study participants are quicker and more accurate in associating negative concepts or evaluations, such as “murder” or “abuse,” with Black individuals as compared to white individuals. Thus, implicit biases can lead to discriminatory and oppressive behaviours by affecting the ways we perceive, judge, and interact with people belonging to certain social categories. Importantly, such stereotypical associations have their roots in socio-cultural paradigms, which are intersubjectively shared (see Gendler, 2011: 43ff.; Gyollai, 2022). This makes clear why implicit biases are detected among those who do not reflectively endorse them, or even in members of the groups negatively targeted by these biases (see Correl et al., 2002; Saul, 2013: 40; Valla et al., 2018).

Building on Schutz’s theoretical framework, implicit biases might be defined as typifications which have been sedimented along with relevances that are negative and harmful for the typified subjects. In the example above, the type “Black” is associated and sedimented with negative relevances such as “dangerous.” Understanding implicit biases in terms of typification and relevances is useful for disclosing the socially sedimented, shared, and automatic nature of these phenomena as well as for unveiling their internal structures. In other words, Schutz’s analyses of typification and relevance can help us make sense of how certain stereotypes are implicitly shared among the members of a community. Moreover, they can illuminate the

<sup>13</sup> See, for example: (Al-Saji, 2014; Ngo, 2016; Yancy, 2017; Hedges, 2024; Magri, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> While these cognitive associations can also be neutral, in the context of this paper we will focus on implicit associations that yield negative and harmful consequences.

motivational and interpretative structures behind implicit biases. Let us address these aspects separately.

As explained in Sect. “[Schutz’s theoretical framework: Types and relevances](#)”, the subjective stock of knowledge containing our typification and relevances is socially conditioned. As Schutz and Luckmann put it “certain elements of the worldstructure are irrevocably imposed on the individual. [...] Mediate and immediate social relations are in part unambiguously institutionalized and in part molded by meaning contexts, which are for their part socially objectivated in speech and institutions” (Schutz & Luckmann, 1974: 244). In this sense, certain negative relevance structures that we habitually sediment along with specific typical categories do not derive from subjective processes of explication. In recent years, it has been extensively shown how, as Devine and Sharpe write, “during socialization, a culture’s beliefs about various social groups are frequently activated and become well-learned. As a result, these deep-rooted stereotypes and evaluative biases are automatically activated, without conscious awareness or intention” (Devine & Sharp, 2009: 62). The relevance structures and their accompanying catalogues of types are socially imposed, learned, and become normalised (and normalising) knowledge that we pre-reflectively take for granted to make sense of our social encounters.

Starting from these considerations, Schutz’s theory allows us to illuminate the implicit motives underlying biases. Schutz elaborates on how our interest in that which is typical leads us to selectively take the familiar for granted. When we encounter objects, animals, or people, we are pre-predicatively interested in the properties which cohere (or clash) with our past experiences which felt similar. This notion of interest, for Schutz “is the set of motivational relevances which guide the selective activity of the mind” (Schutz, 2011: 129; see 1976c: 126). In this context, as we initially encounter a situation and select our interests, already-instituted relevance structures encoded with specific stereotypes influence us, determining what we perceive as unfamiliar and requiring interpretation (i.e., the focus of our attention). An illuminating example of this phenomenon is given by Sara Ahmed in retelling an encounter with her new neighbour:

A neighbor calls out to me. I look up somewhat nervously because I have yet to establish ‘good relations’ with the neighbors. I haven’t lived in this place very long and the semipublic of the street does not yet feel easy. The neighbor mumbles some words, which I cannot hear, and then asks: “Is that your sister, or your husband?” I rush into the house without offering a response. The neighbor’s utterance is quite extraordinary. There are two women, living together, a couple of people alone in a house. So what do you see? (Ahmed, 2006: 95)

In this bizarre yet illuminating example, we immediately see how the neighbour’s interest is piqued by the unconventional nature of the relationship between Ahmed and her wife, which stands in contrast to the heteronormative relevances imposed and normalised by our society. The typification is also institutionalised at multiple layers: on the one hand, it has been habitually instituted by the neighbour such that their horizon of expectation is bound to the parameters of heterosexuality, on the other, their typification implicitly appeals to the literal institution of marriage as something

reserved (at the time) for heterosexual couples. This institutionalised and oppressive typification, regardless of how it might make Ahmed and her wife feel, is discriminatory since it treats its targets disadvantageously by virtue of their lesbian identity.

Typifications and relevances do not merely disadvantage certain others in a discriminatory way, they also consolidate stereotypical categorisations as epistemically grounded and can thus become recalcitrant to reflective revisions (Barber, 2001: 15). We consider ourselves as assured in having knowledge of the typical until counter-proof emerges or circumstances motivate reconsideration (Schutz, 2011: 128). Such consolidation of (stereo)types further instantiates oppressive hegemonic orders. In the case above, a hegemonic order of heterosexism. But as Schutz is well-aware, experiences which defy expectations and frustrate our typifications are precisely moments that bring to bear the historical contingency and fallibility of our schemes of typifications. While types are certainly recalcitrant, moments of crises, hesitation, upheaval, or simply surprise, all present opportunities for critical reflection and revisions (see Al-Saji, 2014; Magri, 2022; Wehrle, 2023; Hedges, 2024). The conditions required for such critical re-institution of our typical categories and interests of relevance is are beyond the scope of this paper, but it is important to avoid the temptation to ossify our tendency to discriminatorily typify and homogenise others.

Our reliance on imposed relevances becomes even clearer when we engage in the process of interpreting unfamiliar situations. Indeed, Schutz shows how we are motivated to take those properties which confirm our prejudices as relevant at the expense of atypicalities and the unfamiliar. To put it differently, we interpret unfamiliar sets of perceptions by giving preference to stereotype-consistent options deriving from our past experiences. In her paper “On the epistemic costs of implicit bias,” Gendler (2011) shows how we search for information that confirms our hypothesis in a way that properties which we deem “stereotype-congruent” are attended to, whereas “type-incongruent” properties are often ignored and assimilated (Banaji, 2002: 151f., as cited in: Gendler, 2011). In Ahmed’s example, we see how the neighbour’s system of relevances provides them with apparently only two possibilities: either Ahmed’s partner is deceptively a man, or the two are sisters (despite being two women of different ethnicities). The neighbour is attempting to transfigure Ahmed’s living situation into a typical explanation of how these two people could have ended up living together. We see here how standardised schemes of oppressively heterosexist typifications motivate the ways we experience one another (Schutz, 1976a: 238). Moreover, the typification employed discloses the interests of the person who constructs it (Schutz, 1972: 205). In the case of Ahmed’s neighbour, they clearly have an interest in maintaining a heteronormative patrilineal status quo. Even if Ahmed’s example is a snippet of how heterosexism structures our social world, it is nonetheless an illuminating instance of how individuals who are incongruous to the prevailing systems of relevances are discriminated against in the most banal of interactions.

### **Stereotypes, Stereotype Threat, and Self-Typification**

Within social psychological literature, stereotypes are often explained in terms of their functioning as an epistemic shortcut (Beeghly, 2021: 5). Stereotypes ease the epistemic labour of having to make sense of the unfamiliar; functioning as a medium

through which one can interpret the world according to taken-for-granted patterns and “because motives” (Schutz, 1972). This social scientific understanding of stereotypes resonates with Schutz’s discussion of types as we consistently rely on stereotypes in order to gain a sense of familiarity and epistemic efficiency.

The problem in the case of oppressive typifications and discriminatory typifying, however, is that the type disadvantages the typified subject by virtue of some perceived property that is used as an index for comparison. This is what is at stake in stereotyping. For example, I perceive somebody to have a name which I associate with coming from a foreign country, I then typify this person as a foreigner (or more specifically as a certain nationality) and treat them disadvantageously compared to someone I consider a compatriot. This alludes to the relationality of typifications. As Lewis R. Gordon writes, “the inferior Other becomes a fundamental project for the establishment of the Superior Self, whose superiority is a function of what it *is*” (Gordon, 1997: 70). This claim that stereotypes which grant preferential treatment necessitate the inferiorisation of others is further supported in the social scientific literature on stereotypes.<sup>15</sup> Stereotyping is relational insofar as stereotypes which are supposedly positive simultaneously sustain unjust and oppressive social relationships (Beeghly, 2021: 10). This means we can identify instances of discrimination that do not derive directly from the imposition of an alienating typification on an outgroup, but indirectly from a positive yet exclusionary typification on, or interpretation of, a fellow ingroup.

Such a phenomenon of ingroup favouritism is a crucial mechanism by which oppression is perpetuated through group-based processes of exclusion and marginalisation (Holroyd, 2018: 383-385). For example, white study participants are much more likely to take situational factors to be most relevant when interpreting violent behaviour enacted by another white person, but when the perpetrator is Black, they instead take personal factors like their ‘violent disposition’ to be motivationally relevant (Duncan, 1976, as cited in Holroyd, 2018: 383). In-group favouritism refers to the bias of imposing the most favourable relevances onto ingroup members so as to maintain the positive status of one’s own ‘type.’ Beyond social psychological studies, we also daily witness this in how mainstream media differentially reports on white and non-white people suspected of crimes. This ranges from reporting more white defendants by name, alongside personally descriptive words, using photos of them in suits or with family and friends, compared to reporting on more Black defendants anonymously, using crime-related language, and using mugshots as part of the media coverage (Colburn & Melander, 2018; Urell, 2021). Such skewed representation pertains to an implicit motivation to perpetuate the typification and ‘overdetermination’ (Fanon, 1953/2008) of Black men as criminal and dangerous in order to preserve the taken-for-granted interpretation of white people as *typically* innocent.

A perhaps even more insidious way in which oppression manifests at the primordial level of embodied experience is through stereotype threat. Schutz’s framework sheds light on the problematic ways group members are motivated to self-typify as

<sup>15</sup> For example, see the recent development of the implicit relational assessment procedure (IRAP) for analysing how implicit biases and stereotypes operate not only associatively, but also relationally (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2010).



part of their sense of belonging (Schutz, 1976a: 251f.), and how these acts of self-typification can entail the internalisation and self-perpetuation of oppressive stereotypes. Stereotype threat involves performing in a way which confirms a perceived yet negative stereotype regarding yourself such that your capacity to perform certain tasks is diminished. In Schutzian terms, stereotype threat involves the pre-reflective self-typification according to an outsider's interpretation which brings you under the heading of a negatively valenced 'They.' For example, studies show how when stereotypes regarding ability are made salient (such as males being better at STEM subjects rather than females, or Asian people having superior quantitative skills) this impacts the performance of those to whom the stereotype pertains (Shih et al., 1999; Sobieraj & Krämer, 2019). These social psychological findings seem to point to mechanisms of overdetermination and self-typification whereby positive and negative characteristics of a personally relevant typification are internalised to such an extent that one acts in accordance with them. Asian-American women, for example, have been found to perform better or worse on a maths test depending on whether their ethnic or gender identity is made salient (Shih et al., 1999). Even if the participants reflectively reject these systems of relevance which inappropriately homogenise domains of mathematic ability with ethnicity, this reflective disavowal is not forceful enough to mitigate the pre-reflective self-typification (Sobieraj & Krämer, 2019; see also Steele & Aronson, 1995; Holroyd, 2018). These studies on stereotype threat support the claim that relevance and typifications have been effectively imposed without being affectively salient for the subjects implicated.

Through Schutz, we can thus understand stereotype threat to be a direct product of the oppressive circulation, imposition, and sedimentation of harmful and unjust typifications and relevance structures. When discriminatory types and systems of relevance become institutionalised, systemic, and normalised, members of marginalised and minoritised groups can be led to assimilate the domains of relevance and typifications of (dominant) outsiders (Schutz, 1976a: 252; see Latrofa et al., 2012). This process of internalising a typification can be understood along the same lines as what is called processes of 'depersonalisation' in social identity and self-categorisation theory (Turner, 1981; Turner et al., 1987; Hogg, 2004; Latrofa et al., 2012). Depersonalisation is characterised as "a shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person defined by individual differences from others" (Turner et al., 1987: 50f.). Understood as a core mechanism in the process of experiencing oneself qua group membership, depersonalisation is often discussed as a gain rather than a loss of identity. Depersonalisation enables a gain in identity as you shift from experiencing yourself in the first-person *singular* to the first-person *plural*. In shifting to a we-perspective, differences between the singular 'I' and other typical members of the 'We' are downplayed, and similarities are accentuated. Through self-typification, we perceive ourselves as 'someone like us' and this can lead to a subsequent increase in conformity with salient stereotypes.

The worry is, that when the social category through which your self-perception is now mediated is a category imbued with prejudicial typifications and relevance, the depersonalisation is undoubtedly harmful (see Hedges, 2023). It is this harmful form of depersonalisation which we find in instances of stereotype threat. In such cases, we

are no longer dealing with an other-directed implicit bias but a self-directed implicit bias, and a bias which does considerable *epistemic*, *doxastic*, and *affective* damage (see Gendler, 2011; Bailey, 2018). I come to see myself as an iteration of a wider social category, but the outsider interpretation of that social category is obscured by sexist, racist, ableist, or heteronormative meanings, and these meanings have *effects* on my very cognitive capacities and beliefs, and self-conception thereof. Such processes of self-typification according to the dominant group's system of typifications can of course be reflectively resisted in an attempt to alter the content of how they are typically constituted by the out-group (see Schutz, 1976a: 147f.). However, stereotype threat operates at the level of pre-reflective self-typification, such that even if you reflectively disavow and deny the legitimacy of a culturally salient type, this does not preclude the possibility of it negatively impacting your feelings, beliefs, and cognitive ability.

Interestingly, stereotype threat also impacts members of dominant groups. Albeit less frequently (Latrofa et al., 2012), sometimes the institutionalised typifications and systems of relevances attribute typical positive features to otherwise 'low-status' groups. For example, the stereotype of Asian men being better at maths and that Black people possess superior natural athletic ability have both led white study participants to self-typify themselves negatively such that they suffer from stereotype threat (Aronson et al., 1999; Stone et al., 1999; Stone, 2002, as cited in Gendler, 2011). Such findings further support the theoretical purchase of Schutz's framework. Stereotype threat results from the internalisation of an effectively instituted typification and domain of relevance. The harm inflicted stems from the interplay between prejudicial typifications and their activation when deemed relevant to the situation at hand. The oppressive character of stereotype threat lies in its function of being a means to diminishing the capacities of subjects *qua* type.

## The Normalising Perpetuation of Oppressive Types and Relevances

Understanding oppression through a Schutzian lens enables us to describe how our pre-reflective and habituated typifications and domains of relevances are saturated with historical relations of power and domination. Members of many social groups, *qua* their membership, are inscribed with discriminatory typifications which serve to mark them as 'other' than, deviant to, or diminished instantiations of the prevailing norm(s) of their social world. Our systems of typifications and relevances— contra how they are often spoken of within phenomenological literature— are not organically constructed over the course of our experiential lives such that they adequately map onto our social reality. What you take to be typical is not merely an expression of your personal experiences over time. Rather it is the outcome of what you have inherited from past generations, been provided by your present milieu, and what serves to further reproduce the current "sociocultural situation" with its accompanying inter-related systems of typifications and relevances (Schutz, 1976a: 226).

The socio-historical sedimentation of typifications and relevance structures means that we find ourselves and our surroundings already "mapped out" in everyday life (Schutz, 1962: 347f.). It is in this sense that we can speak of the recalcitrance of

our taken-for-granted typifications (Schutz, 1972: 132ff). The merit of a Schutzian account of oppression is that we can relate our very basic way of experiencing the world to the cultural and historical sedimentation of homogenising and prejudicial systems of typifications and relevances. These generative nexuses within which we navigate our social worlds are relied upon to establish and perpetuate a sense of normality which further reproduces discriminatory differences through implicit biases and stereotyping (Hedges, 2024). When we take-for-granted our schemes of typification without critically reflecting on their origins, the typical can quickly become the normal, and the normal potentially even the ‘natural.’ Stereotypes such as boys being better than girls at maths, or Black men being more athletic or prone to criminality, have become so deeply sedimented into our stock of knowledge that such sexist and racist constructions have been normalised and sometimes even asserted as ‘natural’ differences. Yet, oppression is not a ‘natural’ consequence of our fundamental tendency to experience the world in terms of types, but rather, discriminatory acts of biases and stereotypes are morally problematic manifestations of when these schemes of typification are informed by unjust, oppressive, and alienating presuppositions.

In conclusion, by focusing on two key features of Schutz’s theoretical framework, namely discriminatory typifications and homogenising relevances, we have demonstrated how Schutz offers an illuminating perspective on oppression. Types and relevances are constitutively significant in the ways in which even the most subtle forms of oppressive discrimination manifest: from implicit biases to ingroup favouritism and stereotype threat, to the more explicit and violent practices of race and gender-based violence, exclusion, and stigmatisation. Lastly, we wanted to fulfil (to some extent) Schutz’s own demand to supplement his phenomenological reflections with empirical and social scientific findings. This is an endeavour which justifies a still greater depth and scope of research, but one which we hope to have partially answered to.

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