

Exploring the Racial Stereotyping in the Movie “Crash” (2004) Directed by Paul Haggis

¹Omar Nyang*, ¹Afina Murtiningrum, ¹Diyah Fitri Wulandari, ¹Idha Nurhamidah

¹English Literature, Faculty of Language, Literature, and Culture, Universitas Islam Sultan Agung, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author

Email: omarnyang02@gmail.com

Abstract

This study analyzes racial stereotyping depicted in the movie “Crash” experienced by the Fahmad, Dorri and Lara Ruiz. Data of this study is obtained through dialogues from the movie script. This study is descriptive qualitative research through the process of collecting data qualitatively and reporting it descriptively. This study shows how racial stereotype issue related to color and discrimination is reflected in “Crash” movie. The study explores the complex and interconnected lives of Los Angeles residents, addressing themes of racial stereotyping. Through a series of intersecting story lines, the movie delves into the biases and assumptions individuals hold about race, ethnicity, and social class. Key moments highlight the implicit and explicit ways racial stereotyping manifests in everyday interactions. The characters’ experiences reveal the multifaceted nature of discrimination, fostering a critical discussion on societal divisions and the human capacity for empathy.

Keywords: *bias; discrimination; racial stereotyping; social class*

INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes, as they apply to social psychology, are mass generalizations, either inaccurate or coincidental. However, for an effective definition, they will be considered to be social tools that induce or excuse behavior. These excuses may come in the form of assertions that others are typified. Simply, it occurs as humans like to know what to expect in others. This is such an important thing that society greatly rewards behavior that can be given assurance through knowing (Beeghly, 2021, pp. 115- 180).

According to Sherman, the concept related to stereotyped perceptions is automatic or implicit perception: unintentional perception, memory, and judgment (evaluation). It is suggested that very simple stereotypes can be processed automatically. In summary, stereotypes are simply categorizations that allow for expectations and inferences about others based on cognitive representations or mental schemas. Stereotyped beliefs, group expectations, perceptions, memory, judgment, and behavior are intertwined; suggesting that stereotyped cognition may occur through many social processes and operate at many different levels. When these tendencies are investigated within the moral domain, moral issues such as group differences in education level, occupation prestige, and other causal factors are brought to the fore. Moreover, Person stated that the following sections define the key concepts, delineate the different levels of stereotyping in terms of attribution theory, and discuss the general consequences of holding and using stereotypes. Stereotyped beliefs also often yield group-based expectations, which then affect perception and memory, often leading to self-fulfilling prophecies (Sherman, 2023, pp. 1418-1431).

In terms of the racial stereotype, it is a deep-seated belief about a particular group of individuals. Often, racial stereotype forms the basis for the dislike and prejudice against another race. Thus, racial stereotypes form the basis for the beliefs and attitudes of many individuals. Stereotyping,

in the case of race, are the beliefs of superiority and negative behaviors towards another race. Racial stereotype can also be seen as a product of the deep-seated beliefs and feelings of the collective cultural unconscious. According to the race social construction theory, one's position in society is based on one's social, economic, political, and environmental resources. There are many general and not so general stereotypes that are found in almost, if not all, groups. Men are expected to be strong and untouchable, but should also not show any weakness and should be tough, and so those that do get out-grouped. In a society dominated by the "have a go" ideology (you are a man so go on, do it), which is supported by comments such as "take it like a man", male in-groups are supposed to take risks and to distance themselves from cooperative, nurturing, and constructive motivation behavior because such groups are associated with women. Abuse and ridicule of any male that does show these characteristics can be seen countrywide, and bullying especially among secondary school children is often based on such lines. Reasoning suggests that it is not simple gender stereotyping that causes these reactions, but reasoning issues are no replacement for the conclusion that the in-groups/inspirational groups (men that display these characteristics) think and act in these ways, and the out-groups (women and men that display none or few of these norms) act in a contrasting way, making the in-group feel comfortable (Lingras, 2021, pp. 301-330)

Racial stereotype is an issue that is engulfed in controversy and analyzed in many literary works, one of them is in a movie entitled 'Crash'. 'Crash' is a 2004 movie that takes place in Los Angeles during a two-day period and portrays multiple characters dealing with and experiencing race-related issues. The movie features multiple subplots involving racial and social issues prevalent in the city and was the recipient of three Academy Awards, including Best Picture. Critics have noted that the movie embodies a significant approach towards the current racial tensions plaguing America, wherein "all of the characters, who are affected in some way by each other, all have inherent dispositions, which feed their racism" (Goldberg, p. 378). Consequently, author Arthur wants the audience to draw their own conclusions and reflect on the situations and circumstances in which the movie's characters find them. With these discussions, the movie can be defined as having fourteen characters who are involved with each other and their communities. The first layer of the story follows a Persian man, Farhad, buying a gun from a white store owner, Chubb, and their mutual hate for each other.

Further than that, 'Crash' movie is written to explain what happens with the society at that time, especially dealing with stereotyping. Bettina Fabos, author of 'Wrong Turn! Ooh, we're just the same! Explains that "Crash is a WHY-dunit movie rather than a WHO-dunit movie, in that it reveals the process of stereotyping. Not who is a criminal or a saint, but how some of us come to confront or realize the choices we make in response to our own pre-judgments" (p. 214). The movie takes racial stereotype, about people and breaks them down, revealing that the stereotypes are not as true as they are portrayed or perceived by society. At the same time, Lawrence Perry believed that 'Crash' took major risks with stereotypes that "could backfire," but with most producing effective storytelling. The movie brings the audience and the characters together in an almost adrenaline rush to the end of the movie. With the carrot, the creators brought anticipation, shock, and unease to the audience with major race relations. Some types of stereotyping are portrayed and serve as examples of real-life situations that have become stereotypes. This paper highlights some of the important contributions that the sociological imagination, as a whole when we all become more aware of and understand rather than stereotype. These are significant contributions, in a world that continues to become more diverse. All those reasons become the major concern of this paper in analysing the movie by exploring the issue of racial stereotyping.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping is a common behavior among human beings that involves ascribing particular characteristics to individuals or groups of people without factual evidence or knowledge. The problem with stereotyping is that it is a form of prejudice that leads to unfair treatment of certain

people, often based on their race, gender, ethnicity, or other personal attributes. Unfortunately, stereotyping has been around for centuries and continues to affect people's lives in various ways. This essay explores the concept of stereotyping, its effects, and how individuals can overcome this behavior. To understand the concept of stereotyping, it is essential to first define the term itself. According to Collins English Dictionary, stereotyping is "a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing." In other words, stereotypes refer to the categorization of people based on their perceived attributes or traits. Stereotyping is a fundamental human bias that enables individuals to make sense of complex information and situations quickly. However, it often leads to oversimplification, biases, and generalizations of the group being stereotyped (Collins English Dictionary, 2020, pp. 90-99).

The effects of stereotyping on individuals and society as a whole are extensive. According to a study by Greenwald and Nosek, stereotyping can lead to negative attitudes, biases, and discriminatory behaviors toward the group being stereotyped. For instance, racial stereotyping has been associated with police brutality and racial profiling. Gender stereotyping has also led to limited opportunities for women in leadership roles in various fields, such as politics and business. Stereotyping has also been linked to poorer mental health outcomes, especially for those who experience stereotype threat, which occurs when a person is aware of a negative stereotype about their group and worry about confirming that stereotype. In short, stereotyping has far-reaching effects on both individuals and society as a whole. Overcoming stereotyping requires a deliberate effort from individuals and society. One effective way to overcome stereotyping is through education and awareness campaigns. For instance, national campaigns such as the 'Black Lives Matter' movement in the United States have raised awareness about the negative effects of racial stereotyping and oppression. Similarly, efforts to promote gender equality through various platforms have led to increased opportunities for women in various fields, including politics, science, and technology. The media also has a significant role to play in combating stereotyping. The portrayal of individuals and groups in movies, TV shows, magazines, and social media influences how people perceive others. Therefore, media platforms should strive to be inclusive and portray individuals and groups based on factual evidence rather than stereotypes. Stereotyping is a common behavior among humans, but it has negative effects on individuals and society as a whole. Stereotyping leads to unfair treatment of certain people, often based on their race, gender, or ethnicity, among other personal attributes. Overcoming stereotyping requires a deliberate effort from individuals and society at large, including education, awareness campaigns, and media inclusion. Eliminating stereotyping should be a priority for all societies to promote equity and fairness for everyone (Greenwald & Nosek, pp. 85–93).

Racial stereotyping

Racial stereotyping refers to the beliefs and expectations that people have about certain racial groups. These stereotypes are often based on physical characteristics such as skin color, facial features, and hair texture. Some common racial stereotypes include the assumption that Black people are athletic and good dancers, that Asian people are good at math and science, and that Hispanic people are passionate and emotional (Fiske, 1998, pp. 48-811).

Racial stereotypes can be harmful because they can lead to discrimination and prejudice against certain racial groups. For example, studies have shown that Black people are more likely to be subjected to police brutality and violence compared to other racial groups due to racial stereotypes that associate Black people with criminality and aggression. These stereotypes can also affect the educational and career opportunities of individuals from certain racial groups, leading to significant social and economic consequences (Goff et al., 2008, pp. 4-18).

According to Kovel, racial stereotypes may be defined as oversimplified, exaggerated, or distorted generalizations about a particular racial group (Kovel, 1984, p. 5). The American Psychological Association defines stereotypes as characterizing a group of people based on their

physical, cultural, or other differences from the majority or dominant groups. They can be overt or subtle, verifiable or non-verifiable, and may be based on race, ethnicity, language, accents, religion, gender, social class, age, disability, sexual orientation, or national origin. These ideas typically stem from prejudgments made by people regarding others based upon their appearance or cultural differences (Snyder & Tanke, 1985, p.4).

Racial stereotypes have been perpetuated by several institutions, including the media, education, and legal systems. The media, particularly movies, music, and television programs, have played a prominent role in creating and reinforcing racial stereotypes. According to a study by Noble and Drury, movies depict characters of color as being less intelligent and more violent. Moreover, such movies primarily portray them in degrading roles, which further reinforces the racist stereotypes that they have created over time. Support for media-backed stereotypes can be seen even in the way we create news stories. For instance, when reporting on crime, the media tends to spend more time and space to report negative stories about people of color, surmising that that kind of crime is more prevalent in their communities than in others. This kind of reinforcement of racist stereotypes by the media leads to people forming prejudices and adverse opinions about certain races and ethnicities. (Noble & Drury, 1999, pp. 89-107).

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research methodology, which is appropriate for understanding complex social phenomena such as perceptions, behaviors, and interactions. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of how individuals and groups navigate social realities, making it suitable for examining the ways racial stereotyping is represented in media. The research focused on the movie *Crash* (Haggis, 2004) as the primary source of data. The methodological process involved several sequential steps: watching the movie, reading the script, identifying relevant data, classifying the data, and reducing the data for analysis.

The first step was watching *Crash* to gain a comprehensive understanding of the plot, characters, and interpersonal conflicts. This step was crucial to contextualize instances of racial stereotyping and to identify key moments where such themes were most evident. The second step involved reading the movie script. This allowed for a closer examination of dialogue, character interactions, and narrative descriptions, which were then used to extract quotations and specific examples of stereotyping that, could serve as data. The third step, data identification, involved marking and noting all instances from the movie and script that reflected racial stereotyping. These instances included both overt and subtle forms of bias, prejudice, and social assumptions linked to race. The fourth step was data classification. The identified data were organized according to categories related to the research objectives, such as negative stereotypes, power dynamics, and social consequences of racial prejudice. This classification helped in structuring the analysis and linking observed behaviors to broader societal patterns. The final step was data reduction. At this stage, the collected data were carefully reviewed, and only the most relevant and illustrative examples of racial stereotyping were selected for inclusion in the findings. This ensured that the discussion remained focused, evidence-based, and analytically rigorous. By following this methodological framework, the study was able to explore how *Crash* portrays racial stereotyping and how these portrayals reflect, reinforce, or challenge societal attitudes toward race.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Racial stereotyping is a central theme in *Crash* (Haggis, 2004), with several characters experiencing prejudice that reflects broader societal biases. This section explores how Farhad, Lara Ruiz, and Dorri navigate racialized assumptions and how these stereotypes shape their interactions and reactions. The analysis draws on key dialogues from the film to demonstrate direct and indirect forms of

stereotyping and their social implications.

Farhad

Farhad, an Iranian immigrant, experiences racial stereotyping that highlights both external prejudice and internalized fears. In one interaction, he confronts Daniel, the locksmith:

Farhad: "You think I'm an Arab?"

Daniel: "I don't give a flying fuck what you are. I'm here to fix a lock." (p. 42)

This dialogue takes place during his confrontation with **Daniel**, the locksmith. This line is part of a heated exchange after Daniel advises Farhad to replace his broken door rather than just fixing the lock. Farhad misinterprets Daniel's intentions and accuses him of being prejudiced, revealing Farhad's own insecurities about racial stereotyping and misunderstanding. Based on the quote, Farhad fights for collapsing the Middle Eastern identity because most people treat anyone from the Middle East as Arabs regardless of their culture. It is conversational evidence of the absence of critically engaged thought regarding Middle Eastern communities—how ignorance breeds racial stereotyping. Farhad's frustration marks his action against the racial stereotyping.

Another significant moment occurs when Farhad speaks to his daughter, Dorri:

Farhad: "They cheated me because I'm not white!"

Dorri: "They didn't cheat you, Papa. You didn't do what they told you to do." (p. 45)

This dialogue occurs after Farhad's frustration with the insurance company refusing to cover the damages to his shop following a break-in. Farhad expresses his belief that the system is biased against him because of his ethnicity, highlighting his feelings of victimization and alienation in a society he perceives as unjust. Farhad's words, "They cheated me because I'm not white!" emphasize the issues concerning systematic distrust and immigrant tendentiousness. Farhad has an issue with a service provider; the latter Farhad considers concealing facts in an ethnic manner. Essentializing this dialogue therefore enhances the stereotype of immigrant victimization minorities feel they are perished and distrust majority groups. It raises awareness of a presumed Caucasian disadvantage connected with race.

Finally, the scene in the gun store emphasizes Farhad's vulnerability to stereotyping:

Farhad: "I need a gun to protect my store."

Gun store owner: "Yo, Osama! Plan a jihad on your own time." (p. 48)

This exchange occurs when Farhad attempts to purchase a firearm for self-defense after feeling increasingly vulnerable due to the vandalism and break-in at his shop. The gun store owner reacts with hostility and prejudice, stereotyping Farhad as a potential terrorist, which escalates the tension in the scene. This interaction highlights the pervasive racial profiling Farhad experiences and his growing frustration with being misunderstood and mistreated based on his ethnicity. A quote by Farhad is, "I need a gun to protect my store," which means more than just a literal need for protection; also represents the stereotype of paranoia and violence associated with immigrants.

Lara Ruiz

Lara Ruiz, as a young Latina, encounters stereotyping that shapes her perception of public spaces and personal safety. When warning her father, Daniel Ruiz:

Lara: "You have to be careful out there!"

Daniel: "I'll be fine, mija. Don't worry about me." (p. 20)

The dialogue reflects Lara's concern for her father's safety as a hardworking locksmith who often works in unsafe neighborhoods. A quote by Lara "You have to be careful out there!" describes how they are seen by others and how they perceive themselves to be treated based on their ethnicity as a family. The dialogue shows that Latinos are expected to be criminals: It depicts the major discrimination minority groups' experience, such that, based on appearance, they are presumed to have a certain attitude. It is a coding method that looks at which idea, emotion, or stereotype is articulated and how it is amplified throughout a text, suggesting fear of racialized urban violence.

Lara: "They're looking at us like criminals."

Daniel: "No one's going to hurt us, mija. I promise." (p. 25)

This dialogue occurs during a moment when Lara becomes aware of the prejudice and discrimination directed toward them, likely due to their ethnicity and working-class background. Lara Ruiz quotes "They're looking at us like criminals." Lara warns her family members to be careful because there is likely to be trouble outside their home. This is in keeping with a larger prevailing culture of fear of racialized violence. They recommend that the members of marginalized groups consider themselves vulnerable in public arenas based on prejudices or oppression. The analysis of the structure and politics of particular ways of using language within society at large. It elucidates how play shapes power relations, discursive discourses, and then stereotyping. "They're looking at us like criminals." focuses on the aspect of Latino people in society as the other, the criminal, and the threat. This method analyzes how the characters' decisions on what to say and what not to say, or their linguistic behaviors, accord with or challenge dominant power relations, discursive racism, or ethnocentrism in today's American society. Holds impact of stereotype where Latino people are seen as dangerous.

Lara: "We're not safe here!" (p. 27)

Daniel Ruiz responds by saying: "Yes, we are. I'll keep you safe, mija."

This dialogue emphasizes Lara's role as a child who, despite her innocence, is deeply impacted by the societal challenges her family encounters. It also underscores the protective dynamic between Lara and her father. Lara's words, "We're not safe here!" Lara also fears that they would not be safe in a white neighborhood. This dialogue represents prejudice and discrimination better than anything I have come across. It sentimentalizes the feeling that the minority families are uncomfortable and even feel like they are intruders where they are; hence, they are always feeling out of place.

Dorri

Dorri, Farhad's daughter, also experiences racial stereotyping but negotiates it with agency and calmness, illustrating a nuanced response to prejudice. During the gun store scene:

Dorri: "Give me the gun I asked for."

Gun store owner: "Fine, whatever. Which box do you want?" (p. 50)

This line occurs during the tense scene where Dorri accompanies her father, Farhad, to purchase a firearm. Dorri quotes "Give me the gun I asked for." As for the gun that Dorri insists is a must-have for her family's protection, she insists on it. This conversation embodies that of the immigrant experience, especially where immigrant populations believe they need protection to survive where they are living, hence the guns. How impressions, feelings, or stereotype statements manifest or circulate within a text.

Dorri: "He doesn't understand. I'll handle it."

Gun store owner: "Yeah, whatever. Just hurry up and pick one." (p. 53)

Based on the quote, Dorri assumes power by interpreting communication of her father during squabbles. This goes by the stereotype that immigrant families rely on the children to conduct their business through translation. It depicts the problems of living in a new society that drastically changes the language that causes prejudice and a discriminatory society. The role of language together with its arrangements in relation to the social and political environment. They always reveal how powerful relations and discursive framing of people and socio-cultural reality are produced and reproduced. understand. I'll handle it." This method assesses how different characters' use of language represents the relations of power in society and racism in words given.

Finally, her calm negotiation while completing the gun purchase reinforces her agency:

Dorri: " calm negotiation while buying the gun"

Gun store owner: "You want the gun or not? Make up your mind." (p. 58)

Dorri is calmly negotiating while buying the gun, she is speaking to the **gun store owner**. During this scene, Farhad (her father) is initially trying to buy the gun, but he struggles with English and is visibly agitated. Dorri steps in to handle the situation with poise and efficiency, asking the gun store owner for the weapon on behalf of her father. The interaction highlights the racial stereotyping Dorri and her father encounter, as the gun store owner makes assumptions about Farhad based on his ethnicity, but Dorri handles the exchange smoothly despite these tensions.

The experiences of Farhad, Lara, and Dorri collectively illustrate the pervasive impact of racial stereotyping in *Crash*. Farhad's encounters highlight how stereotyping can manifest as direct prejudice, while Lara's experiences reflect internalized fear and vigilance stemming from societal assumptions. Dorri's interactions demonstrate both the persistence of stereotypes and the potential for individuals to navigate and counteract bias. Together, these narratives emphasize that racial stereotypes are not only social constructs but also lived realities that shape behavior, perception, and power dynamics within society.

CONCLUSION

The movie 'Crash' has helped me obtain a deeper insight into the relations that exist between judges and parties of different races and the impacts they produce in society. It demonstrates how racial stereotyping has become wired in the society. The main characters of the movie are ethnic representatives with different biases and phobias in their hearts. Non-hypocrites, including police officers and shop owners, too, possess prejudice towards other races and ethnic groups. This goes further to put it beyond doubt that stereotyping and racial profiling are not a preserve of any certain people but are part and parcel of many societies.

The movie 'Crash' is quite a good portrayal of how current society is full of racial stereotypes. It enlightens the root causes of racial stereotyping on individuals, groups, and society. Going from the movie, it calls to society's conscience and asks us whether or not it was right to discriminate against people from different races or different ethnic groups, and if we were all equal, the world would be a better place to live in for everyone.

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