

# Stereotypes essay

Experience, Belief



## **Stuck in Stereotypes**

It is difficult to go for a day without hearing a stereotype which may be negative or positive. According to McLeod (1), a stereotype can be defined as a fixed and over generalized belief concerning a particular class or group of people. Research indicates that stereotypes exist of different cultures, races, ethnic groups, nations and even individual behaviors. People often get stuck in stereotypes because their use simplifies the social world in a major way. McLeod (1) observes that they reduce the amount of thinking or processing that one has to do when he or she meets a new person. For example, in his reality home-made views, Kassem G meets a group of Asian young men at a recreation park and the first thing he asks them is “ are you a dance crew?” this is stereotypical in the sense that there are many dance crews that have dancers of Asian origin, especially in the dance reality show America’s Best Dance Crew (ABDC).

But why do people get stuck in stereotypes? According to psychologists, people stereotype by race, gender, ethnicity, age, nationality and behavior since their brains are wired to automatically do so (Stossel & Kendall 1). It is some sort of categorization which people use to understand members of their pack and those of a different pack. It is for this reason that even people who believe that they don’t stereotype others actually do. According to Stossel & Kendall (1), people will immediately, automatically and unconsciously categorize others based on their race, sex or other differences. As such, through stereotyping, people infer that an individual has a whole range of abilities and characteristics that are then generalized to all members of that group which the individual belongs to. They lead to

social categorization which often leads to prejudice attitudes leading to in-groups and out-groups (McLeod 1).

Stereotyping starts at childhood. In their article on the Psychology of Stereotypes, Stossel & Kendall (1) conducted a simple study of children. They showed three groups of kids of two men, one Asian and another Arab. When asked the man they liked it better, more kids preferred the Chinese guy saying he had a smile on and looked better. When shown pictures of a black man and a white man, the children commented that the black man looked mean and he was probably a basketball player while the white man looked nice. However, in real sense, the black man was a Harvard University professor. This means that the children categorized the men based on their physical looks.

Therefore, according to Paul (1), people use stereotypes without knowing it all the time. For example, there is a sex stereotype concerning white and black women. According to this stereotype, white women are perceived to be weak, passive, fragile and powerless. However, with many white women taking top management positions in government and corporations, this stereotype becomes ironic. On the other hand, African American women are perceived as being assertive, aggressive and independent. Therefore, stereotypes serve as social shorthand and this explains why people are stuck to stereotypes. Positively, they facilitate connection by allowing people to feel that they know something about other people without having to actually know them. Negatively, they make people feel justified in looking at others differently and can lead to people not making connections. Usually, beliefs informed by stereotypes can become too strong that people tend to accept

them and act as if they are true. This explains why girls may have the perception that they cannot be good at math or women may feel that they cannot hold management positions.

Behavioral theories can be used to explain why people form and continue to use stereotypes. According to the social learning theory, people learn stereotypes from their parents, peers, the society and the media. According to cognitive psychology, stereotypes result from the process of categorization. People categorize the physical and social world into little groups for three reasons. One, it is cognitive efficient. This means that once an individual is categorized, then we do not need to know about every member of the group to which that individual belongs. As such, the behavior, traits or culture of that individual can be generalized to all the members of the group. This saves processing or thinking time. Two, categorization satisfies the need to predict and understand the social world. This means that one need not wonder what each person is like or what he or she might do. Through a stereotype, one is able to understand and predict the behavior of a person at first sight. Three, categorization makes people feel better about themselves by thinking that their groups are better than those of others. These are what are referred to as in-groups and out-groups.

According to Khan et al (3), from the cognitive perspective, stereotypes are a kind of mental shortcut which people rely on so as to obtain information quickly and effortlessly. Studies on judgmental heuristics show that there are many stimuli that compete for a person's attention at any one time. Due to cognitive limitations in processing all the information, people deploy mental strategies in order to make decisions quickly and effortlessly so that their

attention can be allocated to critical information that is considered important decisions. From the definition of stereotypes, it can be deduced that they are traits associated with a particular group. It is these traits that contribute to the overall attitudes of a group, attitudes which can be conscious or unconscious. There are a number of theoretical perspectives that describe why people get stuck to stereotypes. The gestalt theory shows that people are judgmental. Absolutism shows that the belief in absolute truths make people think they are right and thus others must be wrong. Relativism shows that different cultures create different views of reality and morality. The same views can be reflected in the social, political and economic perspective. Social identity theory groups people into them and us which create the need to belong. Other factors include scapegoating, sexism, racism, ethnicity, homophobia, marginalization, propaganda, war and advertising.

Therefore, stereotypes become difficult to change due to a number of reasons. First, when people come across situations that disprove their stereotypes of a certain group, they tend to make the assumption that those situations are atypical subtypes of the group. Second, the perceptions of people are often influenced by their expectations and three, people tend to recall selective instances that confirm their stereotypes but ignore the disconfirming instances. Stereotypes have a number of dangers since they can cause distortions of reality by causing people to exaggerate differences in various groups, discriminating against certain groups and even causing tragedies such as The Holocaust and the Rwandan Genocide. However,

despite these negatives, people continue being stuck to stereotypes mainly due to categorization.

## **Works Cited**

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