

Stereotype

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A stereotype is a popular belief about specific social groups or types of individuals. The concepts of "stereotype" and "prejudice" are often confused with many other different meanings. Stereotypes are standardized and simplified conceptions of groups based on some prior assumptions.

Etymology

The term stereotype derives from the Greek words στερεός (stereos), "firm, solid" and τύπος (typos), "impression," hence "solid impression".

It was invented by Firmin Didot in the world of printing; it was originally a duplicate impression of an original typographical element, used for printing instead of the original. American journalist Walter Lippmann coined the metaphor, calling a stereotype a "picture in our heads" saying, Whether right or wrong (...) imagination is shaped by the pictures seen (...) originally printers' words, and in their literal printers' meanings were synonymous. Specifically, cliché was a French word for the printing surface for a stereotype. The first reference to "stereotype," in its modern, English use was in 1850, in the noun, meaning "image perpetuated without change."

The term, in its modern psychology sense, was first used by Walter Lippmann in his 1922 work Public Opinion although in the printing sense it was first coined in 1798.

Dynamics

In one perspective of the stereotyping process, there are the concepts of ingroups and outgroups. Ingroups are viewed as normal and superior, and are generally the group that one associates with or aspires to join. An outgroup is simply all the other groups. They are seen as lesser than or inferior to the in-groups. An example of this would be: Asians are smarter than American. In this example Asians are looked at as being smarter because of their education systems are more strict than that of the Americans.

A second perspective is that of automatic and explicit or subconscious and conscious. Automatic or subconscious stereotyping is that which everyone does without noticing. Automatic stereotyping is quickly preceded by an explicit or conscious check which permits time for any needed corrections. Automatic stereotyping is affected by explicit stereotyping because frequent conscious thoughts will quickly develop into subconscious stereotypes.

A third method to categorizing stereotypes is general types and sub-types. Stereotypes consist of hierarchical systems consisting of broad and specific groups being the general types and sub-types respectively. A general type could be defined as a broad stereotype typically known among many people and usually widely accepted, whereas the sub-group would be one of the several groups making up the general group. These would be more specific, and opinions of these groups

would vary according to differing perspectives.

Certain circumstances can affect the way an individual stereotypes. Some theorists argue in favor of the conceptual connection and that one's own subjective thought about someone is sufficient information to make assumptions about that individual. Other theorists argue that at minimum there must be a casual connection between mental states and behavior to make assumptions or stereotypes. Thus results and opinions may vary according to circumstance and theory. An example of a common, incorrect assumption is that of assuming certain internal characteristics based on external appearance. The explanation for one's actions is his or her internal state (goals, feeling, personality, traits, motives, values, and impulses), not his or her appearance.

Sociologist Charles E. Hurst, "One reason for stereotypes is the lack of personal, concrete familiarity that individuals have with persons in other racial or ethnic groups. Lack of familiarity encourages the lumping together of unknown individuals."

Stereotypes focus upon and thereby exaggerate differences between groups. Competition between groups minimizes similarities and magnifies differences. This makes it seem as if groups are very different when in fact they may be more alike than different. For example, among African Americans, identity as an American citizen is more salient than racial background; that is, African Americans are more American than African.

Theories on stereotypes

Different disciplines give different accounts of how stereotypes develop: Psychologists may focus on an individual's experience with groups, patterns of communication about those groups, and intergroup conflict. Pioneering psychologist William James cautioned psychologists themselves to be wary of their own stereotyping, in what he called the psychologist's fallacy. Sociologists focus on the relations among different groups in a social structure. Psychoanalytically-oriented humanists (e.g., Sander Gilman) have argued that stereotypes, by definition, are representations that are not accurate, but a projection of one to another.

A number of theories have been derived from sociological studies of stereotyping and prejudicial thinking. In early studies it was believed that stereotypes were only used by rigid, repressed, and authoritarian people. Sociologists concluded that this was a result of conflict, poor parenting, and inadequate mental and emotional development. This idea has been overturned; more recent studies have concluded that stereotypes are commonplace.

One theory as to why people stereotype is that it is too difficult to take in all of the complexities of other people as individuals. Even though stereotyping is inexact, it is an efficient way to mentally organize large blocks of information. Categorization is an essential human capability because it enables us to simplify, predict, and organize our world. Once one has sorted and organized

everyone into tidy categories, there is a human tendency to avoid processing new or unexpected information about each individual. Assigning general group characteristics to members of that group saves time and satisfies the need to predict the social world in a general sense.

Another theory is that people stereotype because of the need to feel good about oneself. Stereotypes protect one from anxiety and enhance self-esteem. By designating one's own group as the standard or normal group and assigning others to groups considered inferior or abnormal, it provides one with a sense of worth.

Some psychologists believe that childhood influences are some of the most complex and influential factors in developing stereotypes. Though they can be absorbed at any age, stereotypes are usually acquired in early childhood under the influence of parents, teachers, peers, and the media. Once a stereotype is learned, it often becomes self-perpetuating.

Other theories propose that the praising of intelligence and ability rather than effort and hard work inevitably changes the perspective from a malleable sense of self-worth to a definite concept of self-worth as seen from the individual and others around them.

Effects, accuracy, terminology

Stereotypes can have a negative and positive impact on individuals. Joshua Aronson and Claude M. Steele have done research on the psychological effects of stereotyping, particularly its effect on African Americans and women. They argue that psychological research has shown that competence is highly responsive to situation and interactions with others. They cite, for example, a study which found that bogus feedback to college students dramatically affected their IQ test performance, and another in which students were either praised as very smart, congratulated on their hard work, or told that they scored high. The group praised as smart performed significantly worse than the others. They believe that there is an 'innate ability bias'. These effects are not just limited to minority groups. Mathematically competent white males, mostly math and engineering students, were asked to take a difficult math test. One group was told that this was being done to determine why Asians were scoring better. This group performed significantly worse than the control group.:443

Possible prejudicial effects of stereotypes are:

Justification of ill-founded prejudices or ignorance

Unwillingness to rethink one's attitudes and behavior towards stereotyped group

Preventing some people of stereotyped groups from entering or succeeding in activities or fields

Stereotypes allow individuals to make better informed evaluations of individuals about whom they possess little or no individuating information, and in many, but not all circumstances stereotyping

helps individuals arrive at more accurate conclusions. Over time, some victims of negative stereotypes display self-fulfilling prophecy behavior, in which they assume that the stereotype represents norms to emulate. Negative effects may include forming inaccurate opinions of people, scapegoating, erroneously judgmentalism, preventing emotional identification, distress, and impaired performance.

Yet, the stereotype that stereotypes are inaccurate, resistant to change, overgeneralized, exaggerated, and destructive is not founded on empirical social science research, which instead shows that stereotypes are often accurate and that people do not rely on stereotypes when relevant personal information is available. Indeed, Jussim et al. comment that ethnic and gender stereotypes are surprisingly accurate, while stereotypes concerning political affiliation and nationality are much less accurate; the stereotypes assessed for accuracy concerned intelligence, behavior, personality, and economic status. Stereotype accuracy is a growing area of study and for Yueh-Ting Lee and his colleagues they have created an EPA Model (Evaluation, Potency, Accuracy) to describe the continuously changing variables of stereotypes.

Role in art and culture

Stereotypes are common in various cultural media, where they take the form of dramatic stock characters. These characters are found in the works of playwright Bertolt Brecht, Dario Fo, and Jacques Lecoq, who characterize their actors as stereotypes for theatrical effect. In commedia dell'arte this is similarly common. The instantly recognizable nature of stereotypes mean that they are effective in advertising and situation comedy. These stereotypes change, and in modern times only a few of the stereotyped characters shown in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* would be recognizable.

In literature and art, stereotypes are clichéd or predictable characters or situations. Throughout history, storytellers have drawn from stereotypical characters and situations, in order to connect the audience with new tales immediately. Sometimes such stereotypes can be sophisticated, such as Shakespeare's Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. Arguably a stereotype that becomes complex and sophisticated ceases to be a stereotype per se by its unique characterization. Thus while Shylock remains politically unstable in being a stereotypical Jew, the subject of prejudicial derision in Shakespeare's era, his many other detailed features raise him above a simple stereotype and into a unique character, worthy of modern performance. Simply because one feature of a character can be categorized as being typical does not make the entire character a stereotype.

Despite their proximity in etymological roots, cliché and stereotype are not used synonymously in cultural spheres. For example a cliché is a high criticism in narratology where genre and categorization automatically associates a story within its recognizable group. Labeling a situation

or character in a story as typical suggests it is fitting for its genre or category. Whereas declaring that a storyteller has relied on cliché is to pejoratively observe a simplicity and lack of originality in the tale. To criticize Ian Fleming for a stereotypically unlikely escape for James Bond would be understood by the reader or listener, but it would be more appropriately criticized as a cliché in that it is overused and reproduced. Narrative genre relies heavily on typical features to remain recognizable and generate meaning in the reader/viewer.

In movies and TV the halo effect is often used. This is when, for example, attractive men and women are assumed to be happier, stronger, nicer people.

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