Stereotypes

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What is it?

Stereotypes associate members of a group with one or more characteristics attributed to that group. Stereotypes are rigid representations in cognitive processes that are functional for those who use them. Stereotypes are used as a shortcut to depict groups in one-dimensional simplistic ways in both conversation and media. Although research has not found stereotypes to be accurate, people use them as a basis for decision making resulting in prejudice and discrimination. As people get to know each better, stereotypes become less relevant.

Who uses the concept?

In the early 19th century, Morier coined the term stereotype in his *Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan*. Nearly 100 years later Walter Lippmann popularized its modern usage as "pictures in our heads." Historically, psychologists have been most prolific in studying stereotypes, focusing on why people stereotype. Communication scholars, along with some in psychology and sociology, focus on how stereotypes are constructed, maintained, and shared through both interaction and media.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

From a cognitive perspective, stereotypes influence decision-making and behavior since stereotypes are schemas that guide how information is interpreted. From a constitutive perspective, communicated stereotypes help to construct cultural identity. From both perspectives, stereotypes can integrally and unknowingly affect our intercultural dialogue in innumerable ways, including preventing participants from engaging in intercultural dialogue at all.

What work remains?

Through communicated stereotypes, knowledge is passed on from generation to generation and thereby reproduced within a culture. Political correctness has attempted to thwart stereotype reproduction; yet, stereotypes persist in society. Further research is needed to explore how communication facilitates stereotype maintenance within a cultural knowledge base and the ways in which people can move beyond stereotypes.

Resources

Hamilton, D. L., Sherman, S. J. & Ruvolo, C. M. (1990). Stereotype-based expectancies: Effects on information processing and social behavior. *Journal of Social Issues, 46*, 35-60.

Hinton, P. R. (2000). *Stereotypes, culture, and cognition: Psychology focus*. Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.

Kurylo, A. (2013). *The communicated stereotype: From celebrity vilification to everyday talk*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.