

Weekly Reflection, Module #3

COMM1030, Sec. 005

Jonathan Riezman

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Dr. Suahn Cho

Chapter 4, Application Question 2: Why is the idea of stereotyping so distasteful to many people?

Stereotyping is classified by communications scholars as one of six fundamental forces of interpersonal perception. (Floyd, 2021, p. 117) In general, we have an idea of what a stereotype but in an academic discussion it is important to have specific definitions for the terms used so that all those involved in the discussion can communicate effectively. In this case they are defined as “generalizations about a group or people that can have powerful influences on the way we perceive those people.” (Floyd, 2021, p. 117) While this definition leaves room for stereotypes to be positive or negative, they are often considered negative and individuals are often hurt emotionally or even physically because of stereotypes. In the past many minority and immigrant groups in the US were treated horribly due to stereotypes about their intelligence and supposed cultural advancement.

It may be that stereotypes are a natural outgrowth of in-group and out-group dynamics that have been documented in human society. They may also reinforce the separation of groups as they are forming. When groups are stereotyped in a certain way they may take control of that as a way to assert their group identity such as a teenage punk rock fan spiking their hair and dyeing pink to conform to stereotypes of that group. The association of stereotypes with group identity may be why it can be so unpleasant for people to be the target of stereotyping. “For some people, being perceived as different can be an exciting or intriguing experience. For others, however, that experience can be stress inducing. For example, research shows that immigrants often experience abnormally high stress during their first year in their new homeland. We often refer to that stress as *culture shock*, or the jarring reaction we have when we find ourselves in highly unfamiliar situations. That’s a common experience for students who come to the United States from other countries to attend college, for instance, as they often struggle to adapt to an entirely new cultural environment. Research shows that the stress of culture shock can contribute to illnesses such as high blood pressure, depression, and heart disease.” (Floyd, 2021 p. 36) This surprising result could easily explain one aspect of people’s reluctance to be stereotyped. Because stereotypes are generalizations they are not accurate for every member of the group and so members of that group who do not conform to this generalization may feel pressure to do so which as we see can cause actual disease.

I have even experienced some degree of this in my own life. My parents were of different religious backgrounds: Jewish and Lutheran. Neither was very devout so my brother and I were raised in a secular home. Despite not being Jewish according to that religions own traditions and being raised with no religion at all I am often judged to be simply a Jewish person. I obviously have no issues with being considered to belong that tradition, but it is certainly not an accurate description of my life. I can only imagine what others might have to deal with considering some of the awful racial stereotypes that have been and unfortunately still are being propagated by less tolerant individuals.

Word Count: 534

Works Cited:

Floyd, K. (2021). *Interpersonal communication* (4th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.