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Short Assignment 3

Stereotypes in Society

A “Stereotype” is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* to be “a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc.; an attitude based on such a preconception…” Usage of the word is commonly used in society to describe the phenomena of generalizing attributes to different groups of people, which this definition notes. *To Stereotype or Not to Stereotype* by Fein, Hippel, and Spencer provides an interesting insight into the nature of the stereotype. Using Kunda and Sinclair’s article to ground their analysis of stereotype, Fein et al. point out that stereotypes are a result of motivation (52). The researchers concluded that this motivation was likely to support the self-esteem of the subject. If the subject had low self-esteem, they would utilize negative stereotypes to boost their own feelings. If the subject received a compliment, they would utilize positive stereotypes in order to maximize the validity in which they perceived this compliment (50).

Similarly to one of my own questions about stereotypes, Fein et al. considers that stereotypes may be “activated automatically on exposure to stereotyped groups, group labels, or similar cues” (50). Are stereotypes synthesized as part of human nature or are they imposed through interactions with others? Fein et al. goes on by analyzing the motivation behind stereotypes, citing their use to attack character by applying generalizations to an individual (50). Inversely, stereotypes can be positive and thus increase the trust or credibility of a group. “…participants who received praise from a Black doctor were quicker to activate the positive stereotype for doctor. Presumably, these participants were motivated to see the target person positively so that they could feel better about the praise he offered them” (50). Thus, stereotypes can be used as a means to dehumanize and isolate a group or to boost the perception of an individual (based on the stereotype used). Stereotypes are generalizations that are applied to an individual in order to provide the illusion that they are part of a larger group. Qualities that may be observed in several members of the group will immediately be attributed to others, ignoring the possibility for variance in an individual group.

The original definition for stereotype also hints at its current definition: “The method or process of printing in which a solid plate of type-metal, cast from a papier-mâché or plaster mould taken from the surface of a forme of type, is used for printing from instead of the form itself” (“Stereotype.”). Similarly to a printing press, stereotyping a human imprints ideals onto every individual in a group. Although it may be useful to print masses of newspapers, stereotypes limit the possibility of unique human beings by mixing the group into one. Stereotypes result in a group full of variety being constrained to an image put forth by society. These stereotypes exist for any group: race, gender, sexuality, occupation, or age all have different groups with stereotypes for each. This is very interesting, though I wonder if it might be better situated further up in your paper?

As Fein and his colleagues conclude in some cases of their research (51), I believe that stereotypes are heavily influenced through interactions with others, including the media and popular culture. Stereotypes tend to ignore the nuances of an individual and instead qualify them as part of a group. Could popular culture portray characters under specific stereotypes and thus reinforce these stereotypes to the public? How are stereotypes supported, modified, or altogether disproven through pop culture? The media provides an interesting outlet to the public that has the capability to change stereotypes, but does it actually attempt to change these views?

Works Cited

Fein, Steven, William Von Hippel, and Steven J. Spencer. "To Stereotype or Not to Stereotype: Motivation and Stereotype Activation, Application, and Inhibition." *Psychological Inquiry* 10.1 (1999): 49-54. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Feb. 2014.

“Stereotype.” *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 3rd ed. 2010. Web. 15 Feb 2014.

Writer’s Memo

When choosing my keyword, I was extremely lost as to what to choose. I was at a loss for interesting words like “agonism” and couldn’t find much that got me excited about writing. In the end, I chose “stereotype” because I thought I might want to observe how pop culture alters our perception of others, particularly through the usage of stereotypes. I read a few articles on JSTOR involving stereotypes and Fein et al. seemed to be the most interesting. I wasn’t able to find much that established a *definition* for stereotypes, so articles that detailed it in action allowed me to discover the context of the word. Of course, the *OED* gave me the basic definition for the word. I’m not largely satisfied with the paper as I am still not too clear with the exact process of writing the keyword paper is. I thought I understood the process after reading your message on Canvas as well as the rubric, but seeing the extremely detailed example on Canvas made me freak out a little bit. I was overwhelmed with the quality research that was present in the example and I knew that my word was not nearly as cool or important as “negrophobia.” I’m certain that writing this paper and delving into JSTOR will help guide my major paper. I see this as the goal of this paper, so in that respect I’ve done well. I know that my weakness in this paper, however, is that I didn’t know much of where I was going and my thoughts aren’t very organized very well. I think that one problem with my keyword is that it may be a bit broad: I may have to focus my study of stereotypes in pop culture when I end up writing my major paper. Simply analyzing every stereotype present in a text will not produce a good paper. When you ask in the rubric if genre influenced my choice, I will assume you meant the genre being “pop culture.” In that case, pop culture played a huge role in choosing my keyword. Pop culture is full of stereotypes, especially race and gender. Although I’m disappointed in my lack of clarity in this paper, hopefully my next one will be a bit better.

Jack,

You’re a bit too hard on yourself here. You have some legitimate concerns about the scope and clarity of your paper, but your work, read by another peer, would likely be just as intimidating as you found “negrophobia” to be. You’ve done precisely what that student did in his or her own paper: you positioned yourself as an expert, as an authority, which is exactly what a keyword should do. I’ve commented on a number of the most significant revision issues in margins, but the main thing to keep in mind scope. You’re right that talking about all stereotypes is a bit excessive, but here I think you can narrow to pop culture more quickly to give your readers a solid grasp on your argument and the specifics of the dynamic with which you are engaging. I think the biggest step will be deciding what you actually find most interesting in the subject and narrowing your keyword essay from there. I look forward to seeing where you end up taking this project!