Defining Stereotypes

What defines you? As people, we often consider ourselves to be multifaceted, complex beings. Yet in every culture people stereotype others, and oversimplified beliefs about people and cultures have a negative impact every day. Even though America’s society is exceptional in positive ways, it is also exceptional in its use of stereotypes, which can be seen through the racism that still pervades the U.S. Stereotyping is a form of racism that creates a single depiction of a group of people based on one aspect of their identity.

Most cultures intentionally or unintentionally manipulate the images of a certain group or person, and as a result, stereotypical depictions are a widespread form of racism. For example, the Ferris State University’s Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia can give a dark glimpse into racist depictions of Latinos: “The stereotypical depictions of Mexicans, especially those thought to be in the United States illegally, are harsh and demeaning. The men are portrayed as illiterate criminals. The women are depicted as hypersexual. Both men and women are portrayed as lazy, dirty, physically unattractive menaces” (Ferris State). In extreme cases, racial profiling can be considered a form of
stereotyping. Racial profiling is “the use of race or ethnicity as grounds for suspecting someone of having committed an offense.” One example of racial profiling took place on February 23, 2020, when two white men took the life of a young 26-year-old African American man named Ahmad Marquez Arbery while he was jogging around his neighborhood: “Gregory McMichael told the police that he thought Mr. Arbery looked like a man suspected in several break-ins in the area,” demonstrating the most abhorrent outcome of racist stereotypes (New York Times).

Some may argue that there is such a thing as a good stereotype, but all stereotypes are inherently racist. Yes, many cultures have stereotypes that are positive, but are they truly beneficial? Sam Killermann states in “3 Reasons Positive Stereotypes Aren't That Positive,” “Positive stereotypes exist for just about every identity and have the capacity to be just as damaging as the negative ones.” Take the stereotype that people of Asian descent are good at math. Positive stereotypes not only set standards high but also discourage individuals from performing; good stereotypes can also alienate individuals and make them depressed because they don’t have the characteristics everybody believes they have. There are many forms of stereotypes, but one thing is for sure: there is never such a thing as a good stereotype.
Works Cited


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