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Final Synthesis Paper

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FINAL SYNTHESIS PAPER

Abstract

Current world events have influenced the way we perceive individuals of different cultures. This perception has made visual stereotyping second nature. Whether these stereotypes are accurate or not, they influence the way we interact with certain individuals based solely on their visual appearance. This paper brings together how my work throughout the semester which includes an academic analysis of two conflicting articles, my personal cultural autobiography and data from my community partnership field work assignment influences my personal positioning on visual stereotyping. I will take a closer look at my personal perception of human diversity and how this course has influenced my position throughout the semester.

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Prior to taking this course on Human Diversity, my thoughts on visual stereotyping were greatly influenced by continual terrorist attacks around the world, the latest presidential immigration stance and racial stereotypes. It seems that every time there was a terrorist attack, there would be a very negative impact on how individuals that were perceived as Middle Eastern were treated. As time passed, there has been an increase in visual stereotyping and how individuals are being treated depending on what race or culture the media is portraying as the bad guy. I have always been taught to be respectful and treat others how I would like to be treated. I could not grasp how someone could be so mean to someone based on what they looked like. I did not understand what went into creating these stereotypes. I simply thought that they were not taught to respect other human beings. The assignments throughout this course have helped me learn more about myself and how I think. It also showed me how easy it is to get caught up in stereotyping.

The academic analysis was very eye opening, I was able to find studies that supported the ideas of stereotypical behaviors. The first article that I found was "*Anxiety and Terrorism: Automatic Stereotypes Affect Visual Attention and Recognition Memory for White and Middle Eastern Faces*" (Horry and Wright, 2009). This article outlined a study that was conducted to prove that there was a correlation between anxiety and the stereotyping of Middle Eastern faces. It also proved that White faces were more accurately identified with results showing an own-race bias. The authors used scientific experiments to prove their hypothesis. They primed half of the participants with terrorism related words before showing them faces of both White and Middle Eastern faces and tabulated the reaction time for both groups for the first experiment. I feel like

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this article supports the argument that as humans, our brains are easily influenced by what is in the media and causes us to subconsciously stereotype faces of certain races that fit a “bad guy” profile. At the same time, no one experiment can prove that all individuals subconsciously visually stereotype all Middle Eastern faces because of media coverage.

The second article was, “*The Attractiveness Halo Effect and The Babyface Stereotype in Older and Younger Adults: Similarities, Own-Age Accentuation, and Older Adult Positivity Effects*” (Zebrowitz and Franklin, 2014). This article sought to prove that the attractiveness halo effect and babyface stereotype are common among older adults just as in younger adults. Dr. Zebrowitz and Dr. Franklin use scientific experiments to gather their data. They had participants rate faces for competence, health, untrustworthiness and hostility (Zebrowitz and Franklin, 2014). This article supports the fact that not all stereotypes can be negative and that more attractive and babyfaced people are positively impacted by this stereotype while others that do not fit in the category of attractive are negatively impacted. It also proves that all ages subconsciously stereotype in some form.

The cultural autobiography really made me take a closer look at myself and how my mother raised me. I feel like she did an awesome job instilling compassion and empathy into who I am today. I feel like being a younger generation Mexican-American has really opened my eyes to the issue of visual stereotyping and how it has a very negative impact on certain groups of people. With the last presidential election, there was a lot of visual stereotyping and many people had a negative perception of individuals who looked Middle Eastern. Living in Europe, I found that this was especially true. My husband has experienced visual stereotyping because he

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has a beard and is constantly perceived as being Middle Eastern. Once they hear him speak English they will ask him where he from and what he is. Once they find out that he is Mexican-American, they change their attitude towards him and many actually make a comment on how they thought he was Middle Eastern. After that they are extremely nice to him and immediately start to talk about American politics and want to know what he thinks about “the wall”. I find this to be very rude and cannot see how individuals can treat someone so different based on their race and culture.

When I set out to do my community partnership, I wanted to observe somewhere that I would encounter many interactions between different people. I live in a small town in Germany that has a huge American population due to the military presence. I chose a gym that is American friendly and is frequented by many English speaking individuals because I am not fluent in German and did not want to miss any pertinent information when observing the encounter. I observed a Turkish male being treated differently because he did not speak very good German or English. In Germany many people are stereotyped as Syrian refugees and will be treated very different based on visual stereotypes. I also observed encounters at the clinic on the military base and found that visual stereotyping was geared more towards rank than race and culture. I found that most of the encounters were very respectful and most people were addressing each other by either Sir or Ma’am. There was one instance when a lower ranking Airman made a comment that a Sergeant was rude to him and his group of patients because they were White. I feel like that group was treated differently because the group was so low ranking instead of what race they were. After my observations, I realized that

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After learning more about human diversity and seeing how natural stereotyping can be, I hope to take this new information and apply it to my daily interactions. I feel like I am already paying attention to how I interact with others and question myself when stereotypical thoughts cross my mind. I am also putting myself in others shoes to see their perspective and see how I would feel if someone else made those assumptions about me. Another thing that I feel I have taken away from this class is the fact that human diversity goes beyond racial and cultural differences, each and every person has been through different things that shape who they become. You truly cannot judge a person by their appearance, you would have to dig deeper to get to know the person before you pass judgement on them.

References

- Horry, R., & Wright, D. B. (2009). Anxiety and Terrorism: Automatic Stereotypes Affect Visual Attention and Recognition Memory for White and Middle Eastern Faces. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 23*(3), 345-357.
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