When Stereotypes Flourish: A Research on the Multifaceted Impact of Stereotypes on Adolescents' Daily Behaviors

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Abstract:

With modern society progressing in all areas, human beings care more about equity and objectivity. The stereotype is a hot concept that triggers a lot of attention. Though typical discrimination based on race and gender is gradually turning out well, teen stereotypes are often unconsciously displayed by adults. Biases and stereotypes are unavoidable nowadays since people tend to form unconscious ones. This paper provides basic concepts of stereotypes, common types of stereotypes about teenagers, and causes of stereotypes such as education. By reviewing relevant studies and explaining specific psychological theories, including illusory correlation and self-fulfilling prophecy, the causes and effects of stereotypes are discussed. This research aims to analyze the potential risks and interventions of stereotypes targeting teenagers since it is a serious problem that can be extremely detrimental on adolescents' development. Parents, educators, social media platforms, and communities should all work together to provide a comfortable environment for teenagers to counteract the negative effects brought by stereotypes such as mental illness and poor friend relationships.

Keywords: Stereotypes; illusory correlation; behaviors; adolescents; health.

1. Introduction

Psychology is gradually turning into a research hotspot with the rapid development of modern society. Though it is relatively new compared to other subjects in the field of science, many psychologists have conducted meaningful and valuable experiments to demonstrate crucial topics and concepts such as stereotyping. The term, which refers to a fixed and oversimplified belief targeting a group of individuals [1], is different from bias since bias does not always necessarily develop into a stereotype. As people become increasingly conscious of impartiality and fairness, the harmfulness of prejudice is unmasking, which in turn necessitates and compels the world to eliminate it. Researchers once believed that stereotypes were exclusively used by bigots; however, facts show that stereotypes are something everyone

uses on a regular basis without even realizing it. Thoughts in minds can seriously affect people's behaviors and attitudes toward others, including facial expressions and eye contact, which accordingly impact others' behaviors. The effect of stereotypes is far more influential than people's imaginations. In social psychology, in-group and out-group are two important terms that reflect people's gregariousness to a large extent; in psychology, self-efficacy and self-esteem further explain the biased behaviors one may have. Adolescents, as a traditional group, are participants who deserve to be studied, especially since they are currently staying at a transition stage where their brains are matured but not experienced yet. Though stereotypes can be reliable sometimes, according to some scientists, stereotype threat is common [2]. It is a psychological term that refers to people behaving differently due to the existence of potential negative stereotypes. In this case, the research focuses on investigating the relationship between stereotypes and their multifaceted impacts on students' daily behaviors. Literacy and experiment reviews are being used to conduct the research by analyzing the potential negative effects of stereotyping on youths. The first section of this article focuses on introducing the concepts of stereotypes, biases, and prejudices. The second section discusses the causes of stereotypes, both explicit and implicit, in detail. The following section explains several stereotypes-related studies and the theories behind them. The final section provides information on the effects of stereotypes in general and possible solutions to rectify the situations. The main purpose of the article is to raise people's awareness of the harmfulness of stereotypes and encourage people to avoid such an indifferent notion. By showing trustworthy evidence and deep analysis, the article can be especially meaningful to enhance people's overall understanding of stereotypes and determinations of stopping discrimination against other groups of individuals.

2. Basic Concepts of Stereotypes, Biases, and Prejudices

2.1 Concepts and Definitions

Society today is becoming more liberal and prosperous, in which human beings are enabled to focus more on the spiritual world, especially since technology and the new media industry have been developing fast. Teenagers, with data that 35 percent of them use popular social media platforms more than several times per day [3], are likely to be influenced by others' comments. Movies and shows "Mean Girls" and "Sleepover" hugely form the image

of typical teenagers. Stereotypes, therefore, are shaped. According to Griffin, 84 percent of students feel adults always assume their feelings [4]. Despite what is going on deeper inside, teenagers are always being stereotyped by using words like 'risky' 'immature', and 'irresponsible'. It is undeniable that stereotypes help people to simplify complicated situations, which saves a lot of energy. However, it is also obvious that stereotypes make people over-generalize groups and ignore differences between individuals. Racial and gender are the two most common types of stereotypes that exist. The difference between the terms 'stereotypes' 'biases', and 'prejudice' is that stereotype is a belief, biases is a pre-judgment, and prejudice is an attitude. Cambridge defined prejudice as an internal opinion that is unreasonable or unfair towards a group [5]. To further clarify their relationship with teenagers, concepts in cultural psychology and social psychology will be discussed.

2.2 Common Stereotypes among Teenagers

Whether children or adults, social categories, such as stages of development, divide people into various groups and attribute distinct characteristics to them. Teenagers, as one of the most representative groups, are a typical example of social classification. Both peers and adults create specific stereotypes toward adolescents based on how they identify with the group they belong to. Exaggerated media and attention-grabbing extremes often reinforce and lead to the formation of stereotypes. In Western cultures, teenagers are always associated with troublemaking, laziness, and stress [6]. The public's negative perceptions of neurocognitive development during adolescence, in most cases, far outweigh the positive attributes [7]. On the other hand, adolescence is often seen as a period of sensitivity and hard work in Eastern culture. For example, one of the best parenting books in Korea is called Smart Guide, Parenting Made Easy. The cultural difference makes it impossible to generalize all the stereotypes targeting adolescents in a specific and comprehensive way. However, there are three globally common stereotypes:

-Teenagers are often considered disobedient because they are always arguing with their parents, which is the result of them wanting to fully exercise their right to decide and express themselves

-Teenagers are often considered as unstable trouble-makers because their brains are not yet developed

-Teenagers are often considered easily influenced by others because they have tons of creative and unrestrained ideas.

3. Causes of Stereotypes

3.1 Categorization Creates Stereotypes: In-Group Versus Out-Group (Ingroup Favoritism)

Human beings are socialized and gregarious. Modern society has classified people into different groups based on different standards. Social identity theory, a theory of intergroup conflict proposed by Henry Tajfei and John Turner, suggests that part of an individual's self-concept comes from their membership in a social group [8]. In 1971, Tajfei et al. conducted two experiments to investigate social categorization and intergroup behavior. In the first experiment, the researchers found that in a situation where there were only fairly unrelated categorical variables to distinguish between in-group and out-group, subjects favored their own group when assigning real rewards and punishments. In the second set of experiments, researchers found that subjects were willing to sacrifice group and personal gain to achieve favorable intergroup differences to satisfy their self-esteem [9]. In this case, the cognitive process of categorizing people clarifies the world for people but also oversimplifies it. When the natural oversimplifications cross the line, they become stereotypes. People tend to perform in-group favoritism, behavior that is biased towards the benefits of the in-group, and out-of-group favoritism, behavior that creates disadvantages for the out-group [10], since self-esteem is an important factor that drives and motivates people. It is hard for people to see individual differences between members of other social groups. When people lack knowledge about a particular social group, they are more likely to form stereotypes since people often assume that there must be something causing other people's common classification and making them essentially similar.

3.2 Education Creates Stereotypes: Media and Textbook

Personal experiences shape people's mindsets, which promotes the formation of stereotypes. If some notions are being repeatedly heard and seen, which can be identified as rehearsal, the idea is then more likely to be memorized and stayed. Information and data that seem to be credible are possibly of being biased. Selection bias, measurement bias, and reporting bias are all types of information bias that occur frequently in the modern scientific research area. Unconscious stereotypes can be spread through two common media. To start with, textbooks, which people use from a young age, often appear from the perspective of the corresponding country, which causes teenagers to form stereotypes toward certain groups in a relatively early period. Secondly, social media, which is becoming increasingly vital in adolescents' lives, offers countless misleading concepts. Online platforms do not set up high requirements for bloggers, which makes many people interested in becoming influencers. In addition, the algorithms encourage many influencers to send unaudited and eye-catching information while at the same time sending all the users content they are interested in. This process, in turn, affects and limits people's perception of the world in constant practice, especially teenagers. The unauthorized information may mislead people to form false beliefs about other people and thus form stereotypes. For example, Grunwald, Nyarko, and Rappaport studied 14,000 Facebook posts from U.S. law enforcement agencies. The results showed that black suspects were, on average, 25 % more likely to be arrested on Facebook compared to the actual arrest rate [11].

3.3 Illusory Correlation Creates Stereotypes: False Connection

LibreTexts defines illusory correlation as people perceiving and believing a connection between two variables when no such relationship exists in reality [12]. Illusory correlation is a cognitive bias when two infrequent events co-occur, which contributes to both the formation and reinforcement of stereotypes. A famous study conducted by Hamilton and Gifford in 1976 needs to be explained. The researchers recruited 104 undergraduates and invited them to read some texts describing the positive behaviors and negative behavior of two groups: one majority and one minority. The groups were abstract enough to prevent prior biases. After reading, the participants were asked to estimate the frequency of members in each group performing desirable and undesirable behaviors. The results indicate that the subjects overestimated the number of members presenting negative behaviors in the minority group. In conclusion, there was a perceived false relationship between undesirable behaviors and group characteristics [13].

It is very easy to understand if you think about this example: What comes to your mind first if a question asks you to think about Chinese people? Diligent, quiet, or good at mathematics and Kungfu? Once a stereotype is formed, individuals are more likely to pay attention and remember instances that fit with it, which in psychology is called confirmation bias. You are less likely to focus on Chinese people who contradict the above adjectives and ignore personal factors that may affect some of the Chinese people to be diligent, quiet, or good at mathematics and Kungfu. Without even realizing it, individuals reinforce stereotypes through illusory correlation and covert rehearsal.

4. Potential Impacts Brought by Stereotypes and Possible Solutions to Counteract Stereotypes

4.1 Potential Effects of Stereotypes on Adolescents' Daily Behaviors

Stereotypes, as preconceived notions about a group of people, can be detrimental to the development and growth of adolescents since adolescence is a remarkable period marked by exploration and vulnerability [14]. Though it is acknowledged that stereotypes sometimes work as a useful and helpful schema that sorts out the world, it is also undeniable that stereotypes can be negative and have permanent, profound effects on teenagers. Culture-shaped adolescent stereotypes, when continuously rehearsal by the youth themselves, may present a self-fulfilling prophecy and guide them to behave based on shaped expectations and standards. In a three-year longitudinal study, Qu and her colleagues found that stereotypes targeting adolescents can predict their future behavior and influence brain structure [15]. During the first year, the researchers surveyed 22 seventh graders about their perceptions of adolescent behavior and controlled for variables. In the second and third years, the participants again underwent brain scans and cognitive tests. Researchers have found that teens who hold negative stereotypes about adolescence engage in more risky behavior during the transition from middle school to high school [16]. The result supports the theory of self-fulfilling prophecy, which refers to a change in a person's behavior due to others' expectations of the person [16], and demonstrates the visibility of stereotypes in adolescence.

4.1.1 Academic Performance

Negative stereotypes about intelligence and academic ability have a significant impact on teenagers' motivation. For example, a gender stereotype may suggest a particular gender is less skilled in math, which in turn causes a student from that gender to feel anxious and perform worse on the subject. The self-fulfilling prophecy is a guide that somehow forces teenagers who are aware of stereotypes to act and internalize that their efforts will not lead to success. Once the motivation to learn and work is reduced, adolescents are less likely to present in a high-quality manner and stop reflecting on their real abilities and skills. As many people in their adolescence are unsure of their new roles and actively seek out new information about teenagers, stereotypes tend to have a more profound impact on their academic behaviors. Stereotype threat, a term proposed by Steele and Aronson, refers to the anticipation of a situation that can potentially confirm

a negative stereotype about an individual or their group [17]. The researchers conducted an experiment in 1995 and recruited 114 black and white undergraduates. The participants were given a 30-minute test that was difficult. The condition participants were informed that the test was examining their intellectual ability, while the other participants were told nothing. In the result section, white participants performed equally, and black participants performed improved in the control condition where they were told nothing. In this case, it is supported that stereotypes are capable of adversely impacting adolescents' self-perception and academic performance. Teenagers' lower level of school engagement can be partially explained by the stereotypes they are imposed on.

4.1.2 Social Interaction and Relationship

When socializing, teenagers' interactions and communication with their peers can be significantly affected by stereotypes targeting them. Peer relationship is an important topic that a lot of teenagers care about. Stereotypes such as students from Asia are usually rigid, which can decline others' willingness to form friendships with members of the group. In addition, stereotypes can lead to bullying and exclusion [18]. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, almost one out of every four students (22%) report being bullied during the school year [19]. Categorizations separate people from each other and lead to the occurrence of out-group discrimination. When there are differences between groups, adolescents may exhibit behaviors that help maintain self-esteem, i.e., elevate the status of the group they belong to by putting down others through stereotypes. On the other hand, teenagers who are being stereotyped may conform to stereotypical behaviors when they want to avoid judgments and bullying from others. Moreover, adolescents may also actively challenge all the suggestions and views offered by their parents and peers to defy societal stereotypes. By displaying risky and abnormal behaviors that seem to be crazy, teenagers wish to show their uniqueness and escape from typical stereotypes.

4.1.3 Mental Well-Being

Based on all the effects of stereotypes mentioned above, the pressure to conform or disprove stereotypes can lead to significant stress and anxiety for adolescents. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, an estimated 5 million teenagers in the U.S. had at least one major depressive episode [20]. In this case, stereotypes can lead to disorders like sleeping disorders, eating disorders, and mood disorders. When teenagers are being stereotyped and excluded, they are more likely to present demotivated behaviors, which cru-

cially affect their mental health and thus reinforce negative behaviors.

4.2 Possible Solutions to Rectify the Situation

Given the detrimental effects of stereotypes, it is vital to challenge teen stereotypes and enhance their healthy development through open communication, promoting diversity and individuality, and building resilience. To start with, open and non-judgmental communication is the key to dealing with the stereotype 'crisis'. Parents, teachers, and adolescents can interact with each other in a polite manner and break free from stereotypes. Listening and respecting are important. Teenagers' thoughts, feelings, and ideas should be shared candidly without giving 'tips' and 'theories' that the adults believe to be correct. Once all the notions are authentically shared, teenagers can avoid being significantly influenced by negative stereotypes. Secondly, celebrating and nurturing adolescents' uniqueness and positive images are important to ratify the situation in which teenagers are forced to conform to prior beliefs about them. People are diversified, people have different interests, and people are good at different things. Once adolescents are supported and included in the surrounding communities, they can rise above the limitations of stereotypes and embrace whoever they are. Teenagers, in this case, are more likely to follow their own passions and show their real selves. In addition, social media is an important platform that should play a role in preventing stereotypes. Since information online can be spread and shared quickly, teenagers, as those who often use mobiles, can be seriously affected. Both algorithms and policies working behind all the social media platforms should protect teenagers and encourage them to be empathetic and inclusive instead of pushing attractive fake news that arouses contradictions. Last but not least, resilience is crucial for teenagers to withstand outside expectations and pressures. Resilience can be built through solving problems, overcoming obstacles, and even developing confidence. Teenagers are smart and skillful enough to address stereotypes once they are trained. Teens can thrive in adolescence by seeing themselves as someone who is strong and competent.

5. Conclusion

Negative stereotypes targeting adolescents are a salient issue that needs to be solved. Psychological research that integrates developmental psychology and cognitive approach demonstrates the role of stereotypes in shaping and affecting teenagers' daily lives and development. This research investigates the multifaceted and common effects of adolescent stereotypes. In society today, there are more categories of groups for people, which makes the emergence of stereotypes more prominent. First of all, this research briefly introduces the basic concepts of teen stereotypes. Negative adjectives such as rebellious and immature are commonly used to describe teenagers in different cultures. Secondly, the paper explains the causes of stereotypes, including categorization, education, and illusory correlation. By reviewing three studies related to stereotypes, it is found that negative stereotypes can be detrimental to teenagers by affecting their academic performance, relationships, and mental well-being. The problem is severe and needs to be considered. Three easy interventions are building resilience, communicating openly and inclusively, and working together with social media platforms. Resilience is an important characteristic that helps teenagers improve their mental well-being, usually caused by categorization; an open and inclusive environment is the key to dealing with any problem related to social interaction; algorithms and policies behind social media platforms are the ways to combat the dissemination of biased information that can affect teenagers' beliefs. Although society today is promoting fairness and equity, awareness of the seriousness of adolescent stereotypes is still limited. Therefore, future research should figure out more social contexts related to teen stereotypes and their evolution to be holistic and dynamic. In addition, more effective measures should be researched to intervene in negative stereotypes of teenagers. In conclusion, this paper examines the effects of stereotypes on adolescents and allows readers to be more conscious of the modern situation. The negative effects are clearly mentioned and were expected to enable readers to stop stereotyping and reflect on their own behaviors.

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