**THE FACTORS INFLUENCING STEREOTYPES IN SOCIETY**

The factors influencing stereotypes in the society include;

Socialization and upbringing is one of the most common factors which influence stereotypes in the society. It is important to note that childhood beliefs, lessons and experiences have a great influence in one’s adulthood and future. Our early experiences, beliefs and what we see shapes our future hence children tend to copy and hand over the norms, practices they saw and learnt while growing up to their successive generations. For instance in the society we have some stereotypic social roles, beliefs, traditions and norms which are passed down from one generation to another. For example the society has accorded men and women specific roles i.e. fathers are viewed as sole providers for their families while mothers are housewives and their role is to cook and take care of the kids, in addition boys and girls were viewed in different perspectives like for instance while growing up some individuals perceived that girls are fragile and boys don’t cry, girls are good at Languages, Art and Music while boys are good in Math and Physics, Girls are perfectionists, very neat, tidy organized while boys are very disorganized, untidy, dirty, that boys are sporty and athletic. However, such stereotypes are not true since there are men who take care of the kids and cook while some women are the sole providers of their families, while there are girls who are very good in Math, Physics and boys who are very good in Languages, Art and Music, and are very tidy and organized.

Conflicts influences stereotypes since various groups view each other in terms of who they are and who they are not. For instance people living in countries in constant armed conflicts and war often view themselves negatively as “opponents, enemies etc” and that nothing good can come from the rival country. Whenever there is a problem the opponent is always blamed in many cases while the main cause of the problem is ignored. Children born in Israel when they come of age they are told or learn naturally that Palestinians are their enemies and vice versa however, we have heard several cases of Israelis and Palestinians intermarrying. In addition armed conflicts tend affect gender inequality and roles for instance in the recent unrest in the Ukraine, Somalia, Syria, Palestine, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) etc women owing to their perceived roles and place in the society will be required to leave their country in times of war in order to take care and ensure the safety of the children, while men remain behind to fight. The same is necessitated by the fact that traditionally men are strong and they fight for women and children who are weak. Also during negotiations for truce as a result of conflicts women are not placed on the negotiation table because it’s perceived that their input is minimal since they are too emotional and indecisive.

Inequalities in the society are another factor which influences stereotypes. For instance individuals who are rich family members are perceived to be very competent, proactive, hardworking, and industrious and posses the entire positive attributes while the poor are perceived to be incompetent, lazy and possesses all the negative attributes. Also in other scenarios the poor people are perceived to be caring, warmer, and humble compared to the rich who are portrayed as arrogant, proud, bullies etc. A study recently conducted in Norway came to a conclusion that individuals with power and wealth tend to exhibit negative attitudes towards the poor and the less fortunate in the society whereas the rich show more positive attitudes towards the wealthy as compared to the poor. In addition inequalities in the levels of education has also significantly influenced stereotyping since people who are educated are believed to be very successful while those who are less educated are less successful. Also those who stay in posh apartments in the cities are perceived to be very happy and comfortable as compared to those who stay in rural areas. This means that in the upshot the continuous existence of classes and inequalities in the society will significantly increase the stereotypes in the society.

Religious indoctrination and radicalization also influences stereotypes in the society. Virtues, beliefs and behavior of certain groups in the society can be assumed to have resulted from someone’s subscribed religion. In certain religions, women for instance are required to behave in a particular manner. In the Muslim religion, women are required to wear hijabs but it would be unusual to find a Muslim woman who is outspoken and doesn’t wear her hijab. In addition there are other perceptions for example that those who are very religious are very good people while those who aren’t religious are very bad people, some religions e.g Islam are viewed as terrorists and/or support terrorist related activities, others view Christians are homophobic i.e. when you go close to them they will recruit you, atheists are considered to be very immoral, insensitive, perverts etc. As a result various individuals or groups are view negatively or positively due to their religious beliefs, doctrines, ways of worship and practices.

Illusory correlations also influence stereotypes in the society. Illusory correlations are when we see an association of two actions, ideas, events which aren’t actually associated. For instance it could sound weird in some community setting to find a woman in the middle of several men, a child in a group of adults, a Muslim Imam in a theological college etc. It also involves the perception of associating people of a certain color with good things and not bad things in comparison with people of a different color. The idea of viewing people in a particular manner gets more exaggerated in our minds hence we see it more common than what it actually is. For example there is a belief that people who live in urban areas are rude, thus when we meet a rude person we tend to belief that he or she comes from urban areas, also that people from certain regions are prone to violence, that when we eat certain foods and live particular lifestyles it will end up causing harm to our bodies or diseases, also driving black cars at night is perceived to very dangerous even though there is no proof or evidence that there is a connection between the color of the car and road safety.

Not being open to different ideas and way of life also influences stereotypes since some individuals who tend to be rigid and stick to their own culture perceive other peoples ways of life differently. Failure to appreciate divergent ideas, opinions, views, situations, ways of life by believing that whatever one believes in, perceive how things are done, ought to be according to his or her school of thought can really be a factor which influences stereotype. For instance in an organization where we have several people from diverse backgrounds e.g. race, nationality, tribe, religion, levels of education there is a possibility that an idea proposed by a minority may be view negatively by the majority or vice versa. This is occasioned by the fact that inferior feel that whatever comes from the majority is always discriminatory and unjust. This is why individual or groups who refuse to be appreciate other people’s diverse backgrounds and divergent ideas, views and ways of life are more often than not influencing stereotypes.

Ideas learnt about other people/groups from friends and media. This can influence stereotype since whatever idea you hear, learn about a particular group in the media can easily be trusted. For instance media may portray or associate people and groups with specific issues negatively for example the profiling of intersex people and other key population i.e. those affected and infected with HIV/AIDS, T.B and prostitutes, portraying women as less beings and exploiting them as sex objects, perceptions that other continents are less developed because of their retrogressive cultures, poverty and politics, misconceptions that all Muslims are religious extremists just because of the few terrorists who stage terrorist attacks on specific places i.e. schools, churches, government installations and other public and private place. In addition men who post a lot of contents, videos, pictures on social media accounts like istagram and facebook are viewed as feminists since its perceived that some social media applications are more feminine than masculine. Also there are some perceived negative practices which people see or learn from social media which completely negates their perception on that particular subject matter.

Inadequate mental and emotional development can also influence stereotypes. For instance lack of adequate mental and emotional development can lead to one’s low self-esteem. Low self esteem can lower the quality of someone’s life in many ways including negative feelings towards him or herself. Frequent and constant self-criticism can lead to persistent feelings of anger, sadness, shame and guilt. As a result an individual can form a negative perception against anyone whom he or she feels superior due to inferiority complex. In addition those who are full of themselves may tend to judge others and/or believe that it’s only themselves who can perform certain tasks as compared to others whom they belief are very lazy, ineffective and inefficient. Also autistic people are viewed as incapacitated however; there are those who have made significant strides in the society. For instance Michelangello who was an Italian sculptor, architect artist and had high-functioning autism. But in spite of his condition he made very beautiful sculptures of David and painted the Sistine Chapel ceiling in the Vatican City among other renowned drawings and paintings.

Difficulty of the task is a major factor which influences stereotype in the society since people tend to belief that tasks measure abilities. For instance it is perceived that specific tasks are performed by men while others are done by women. For example it would be very difficult to find a woman mechanic, a woman track driver, a female senior politician in Saudi Arabia and a male house help etc. since there is a perception that women tasks are to do household chores e.g laundry, cooking, taking care of kids. While men do all the difficult tasks and provide for the family. Such perceptions in respect to tasks performed by respective genders are one of the most significant factors which influence stereotypes. Women are also viewed as caregivers and nurses owing to the fact they are weak, too emotional and passiveness while men are viewed as leaders since they are aggressive to solve problems, courageous etc. Such assumptions that men and women would have different personalities, perform certain roles in the family, certain jobs can best be done by either women or men and that women and men should dresses in a particular way significantly influences stereotypes in the society.

Poor parenting is another factor which influences stereotypes. Parenting plays an important role in molding one’s future. For instance if one is brought up in a good and decent way he or she will end up living positively and co-existing with everyone however, in the contrary if one is poorly brought up by his or her parents for example if one is exposed to physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse while growing up this will eventually affect how he or she will relate with either men or women in the future. For instance a girl who was subjected to physical and sexual abuse by a man at a tender age may develop a very negative attitude, hate or detest for men in the future. The girl may never get married and/or refuse to get a baby of her own because she believes all men are evil. In some cases children who were neglected, abandoned and were not given due attention by their parents tend to develop very bad perceptions about parenthood.

Repeated exposure also influences stereotypes since in most cases we tend to adopt ideas and norms that are repeatedly exposed to us. People tend to believe repeated information than what we read. For distance we are more likely to follow what is being spread in the social and mainstream media and believe it. However, the same could not be the case. The amounts of exposure various groups receive influence their perception in the society. For example a situation where a lot of emphasis is laid on a particular course i.e. there is a lot of discourse and debate surrounding LGBTQ+ in the African continent and the whole world. The continuous and un-ending discussions about this group of persons can lead to stereotype since whoever supports it are themselves in that particular group or are evil. In addition if a certain area is always prone to attacks, insecurities, theft and lawlessness there is a tendency to believe that particular area is as a high risk area.

Not spending a lot of time with people who are different from you in some way can lead to stereotyping since you may not know more about them and/or have full information about how they conduct their things, businesses, norms and practices. Hence one may end up developing a negative perception or belief that other behaves in a different way. For instance when an African goes to China for example and finds out that snake and dogs’ meat is a wonderful delicacy there. As a result he or she may end-up forming a negative opinion against Chinese yet research has it that snakes are very rich in nutrients, have a lot of fat and protein. In addition in some tribes young girls live with boys in one room while in other tribes the same is a taboo, in some communities particular food are a reserve for men and women. For example in the Luhya community of Kenya only men are allowed to eat gizzards and if a woman attempts it is believed that it is a bad omen. Hence there is need to appreciate various cultural diversities in respect to how various people live. Lack of exposure to various people’s values, practices, norms can greatly influence stereotype.

Cultural differences can also influence stereotype since there are divergent cultural differences in the society. In some African countries Female Genital Mutilation is acceptable however, the fact that the old practice is practiced by some ethnic tribes in Africa doesn’t mean that all Africans are primitive and practice such retrogressive practices. In addition the West look more liberalized, modernized in their culture compared to Africans and Arabs who appear conservative and reserved e.g in the West for example there is no issue with a male wearing, earrings, necklaces, make-ups, eye laces, wigs but in some African countries if they dress that way they will be considered outcasts, even referred to us ‘mad people’. In Saudi Arabia for example when women attempt to wear reviling clothes they are classified as evil and can even be given a very punitive punished.

In conclusion it is important to note that a stereotype occurs naturally. However, some stereotypes possess positive attributes and other negative attributes. In order to avoid stereotypes there is need to seek to expose misconceptions in norms, assumption, beliefs and ideas, also find out the actual background, class, and region of a person or group. Do not make an assumption.