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Classic Argument: Stereotyping Men Is Harmful for Relationships

“Gender Stereotyping” is defined by a *Frontiers Psychology* article as, “The practice of ascribing to an individual woman or man specific attributes, characteristics, or roles by reason only of her or his membership in the social group of women or men. Gender stereotyping is wrongful when it results in a violation or violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms” (Hentschel, Heilman, and Peus). Stereotyping in general is in a complicated topic. It is something that all individuals do subconsciously, regardless of their opinion on the matter. However, I believe stereotyping should be something everyone works to moderate. Although certain stereotypes can be valid, with some basis in truth, no stereotype is completely accurate when representing a given social demographic. For example, I think the majority of stereotypes concerning men are unjust. It is impossible to make a generalization about men as a whole, and it be completely accurate. As a result, stereotypes concerning men can actually be very harmful for all parties. This is why I think stereotyping people based on their gender is ignorant and detrimental to one’s ability to develop meaningful relationships.

When people stereotype men and women, they often make hasty generalizations that are based on their own personal prejudice and experience. They then apply these generalizations to the entire social demographic they are stereotyping. The problem with this approach is that one woman’s experience with one man, or even a dozen men, does not represent the entire male population. Also, gender roles are not static from generation to generation either. That means,

gender roles often can change over time, in contrast to rigid stereotypes. For instance, the stereotypes of men and woman have been described as this: “Accordingly, men are characterized as more agentic [that is, loner-types] than women, taking charge and being in control, and women are characterized as more communal than men, being attuned to others and building relationships” (“Gender Stereotyping”). Even though this could accurately describe some men and women, it doesn’t accurately describe them all. This can be a harmful stereotype because if women expect this stereotype to hold true everywhere, then this will most likely create conflict in social interactions and personal relationships. For example, if women expect all men to be masculine and in charge, then they are likely to be condescending or judgmental to men they meet that don’t fit this description. This is problematic because all men don’t fit this description, and they shouldn’t have to possess a stock set of stereotypical characteristics to be considered “a man” to women. Also, women can have the belief that all men fit this description, regardless of what she desires, and this can lead to discouragement when dating. While invoking stereotypes is often an involuntary subconscious thought, doing so can be very harmful to people and make developing healthy relationships that last much more difficult.

For example, I have seen the harm caused from stereotyping men first hand. I think it is just as harmful for the woman invoking the stereotype as it is for the man being stereotyped. This is because a woman’s stereotype of a man prevents relationships from developing. The woman’s preconceived idea of how men are often inaccurate compared to the particular man’s personality. So, women can go into something with a harmful conception of how a man is going to be. This prevents her from being able to connect with the man and actually learn how he is. Also, an even more frustrating aspect of this from my perspective is men have to deal with being misjudged because of how other men have influenced women’s perception of men. I have dealt and

continue to deal with being stereotyped as a man, and I have struggled to build relationships with some girls because of their belief of how men are and should be. To reference the definition of gender stereotyping I included at the start of this essay, I think being able to start a relationship with a clean, non-prejudiced slate is a fundamental social freedom. This would make this form of gender stereotyping wrong.

Of course, some stereotypes based on gender have validity. This is an undeniable fact. After all, this is why stereotypes exist in the first place. Stereotypes are mental shortcuts that every human being uses. While these shortcuts can help the human brain process information quickly, however, they are highly prone to providing a person with false information when they are relied on exclusively. Thus, while it is easier to believe all men possess the same characteristics than to acknowledge that all men are different, no overbroad generalization is truly accurate. This was shown in an experiment conducted by Northeastern University's College of Science. The researchers asked a series of questions guided to reveal people's stereotypes of different social demographics. They also had participants of different ages and backgrounds. After running the first part of their experiments, they tried something else:

“Then, just as with the earlier studies on children, they asked the participants how the individual would behave in a particular situation or what kinds of physical attributes the person would have as an adult. But unlike the earlier studies, Eidson and Coley split their participants into two groups with two different directives. Half of them had to wait 10 seconds before making their decision about the character while the other half had to make a snap judgment, answering the question in less than two seconds. The constraint made a significant difference. Those who had to reply quickly tended to respond with more stereotypical answers, just as a pre-elementary-school child might do. The participants

who had more time to consider their replies tended to respond with more socially-acceptable answers” (Herring).

This shows first hand that using stereotypes allows people to make a snap judgment of someone much more easily.

Thus, overbroad stereotyping people based on their gender is counterproductive to building good relationships and is harmful for everyone. When women stereotype men based on their past experiences, no one benefits. That is especially because the majority of the time the stereotype is mostly negative. It is hard to develop relationships with members of the opposite sex when you have already at least subconsciously made up your mind about who someone is and how they will act. This is not a smart or mature way to think about people. In the end, this type of prejudice is not only unfair to men but harmful to women, by prematurely preventing possible relationships that could be good for both individuals.

Works Cited

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