

# Media Impact on Stereotypes: How the Media Feeds the Bias Beast

Emma Campbell



# Stereotyping in News Media

- The news media industry is expected to be as unbiased as possible because of its role in society as a source of valuable and trustworthy information for the public.
  - Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics: “seek truth and report it,” “minimize harm”
- Yet, stereotyping is still pervasive in the news industry
  - Ramasubramanian et al. 2023—stereotyping of racial/ethnic groups is still pervasive, though it has changed
  - Wood & Hendricks 2009 study—“poverty culture” of Appalachia in news stories
  - Diane Sawyer *20/20* documentary—portrayal of incest
  - Wang 2020 study—stigma of mental illness through exemplars



# Negative Effects of Stereotyping

- News organizations that habitually and carelessly stereotype people and/or groups when reporting damage their credibility
- People and/or groups that are stereotyped by news media are likely to experience negative consequences on both internal and external levels.
  - External: negative outsider perception, governmental policy ramifications (Ramasubramanian, 2011), difficulties in the public sphere (Kroon et al., 2019), etc.
  - Internal: distorted view of self and/or group identity (Foster et al., 2021), conflict between perceived identity and felt identity, self-stereotypization (Crapolicchio et al., 2022)



# Psychological Methods of Diminishing Stereotyping

- Stereotype negation training
  - This tactic aims to prevent the automatic activation of stereotypes in the brain by training the mind to negate associations between categories and their stereotypes.
  - Studies (such as Kawakami, 2000) show that training oneself to negate stereotypes can minimize the automatic activation of those stereotypes.
- Comparative thinking
  - Corcoran et al., 2009 suggested a correlation between comparative thinking and the behavioral and judgmental effects of stereotyping.
  - Suggested that focusing on differences can help minimize stereotyping



# Media Industry Adaptation: Begin with the Journalist

- Journalists must first be aware of the stereotypes they hold.
  - Taking stock of cultural perceptions, personal beliefs, and blind spots
- Once stereotypes have been acknowledged, they must be confronted.
  - After identifying areas of bias or stereotyping, can assess and address those beliefs—either seeking to change them or planning to keep them in check when reporting the news.
  - Stereotype negation training could help individual reporters address their biases at a personal level.



# Media Industry Adaptation: Take Care with the Audience

- Journalists affect the ways people view and interpret the news based on how they present it, whether they realize it or not.
  - Therefore, journalists should take responsibility for portraying the news in a way that gives the audience as full a picture as possible.
  - Comparative thinking with a focus on differences—presenting people and/or groups that are often stereotyped in a way that highlights the differences between reality and stereotype could be an effective strategy in minimizing stereotypes in news media.



# Ethical Considerations and Suggestions

- When does attempting to minimize stereotypes cross the line into shaping the news beyond what is ethical or fair?
- As gatekeepers of information, news media does not advocate for any one person or group, nor should it. Thus, in seeking to provide fair and accurate news coverage, journalists and reporters need to consider the balance between fairness and advocacy.
- When making such judgement calls, there are several guidelines which could be helpful for a journalist facing an ethically confusing situation



# Ethical Considerations and Suggestions

## 1. The dignity of the person/s in the story

- *Does an attempt to minimize stereotypes of one person skew the tone of the story in favor of one person/group over another?*
- *Are stereotypes being minimized to protect somebody in the story from the possibility of an unpopular public opinion? How does that affect the other people involved in the story?*

## 2. The integrity of the facts of the story, removed from those involved

- *Does an attempt to minimize stereotypes gloss over any of the objective truths in a story, such as physical harm done to others or damage to property?*
- *Does an attempt to minimize stereotypes leave out any of the pertinent facts that affect the story?*





# Ethical Considerations and Suggestions

## 3. The context of the story

- *Does minimizing stereotypes remove or change the context of the story and unfairly change the meaning or audience's understanding of what happened?*
- *Does the objective context of the story naturally suggest certain stereotypes?*

## 4. Thorough research

- *None of the other markers can be accurately assessed if the reporter has not done thorough research into the events surrounding a story.*
- *If a reporter is unable to answer any of the questions, that probably means they need to do more information gathering.*

## 5. Remember the role of news media—not to advocate, but to seek the truth and report it.



# References

- Corcoran, K., Hundhammer, T., & Mussweiler, T. (2009). A tool for thought! When comparative thinking reduces stereotyping effects. *Journal of Experimental Psychology, 45*, 1008-1011.
- Crapolicchio, E., Sarrica, M., Rega, I., Soledad Norton, L., & Vezzali, L. (2022). Social representations and images of slum tourism: Effects on stereotyping. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 90*, 97-107.
- Cross, A. (2009). Learning to keep the stereotypes at bay. *The Quill, 97*(3), 31.
- Foster, K.N., Tanny, O., Freeland, C., & Metcalf, H. (2021). Attachment, pride, and respect: Exploration of a multidimensional tool to measure Appalachian identity. *Journal of Appalachian Studies, 27*(2), 220-232.
- Kawakami, K., Dovidio, J. F., Moll, J., Hermsen, S., & Russin, A. (2000). Just say no (to stereotyping): Effects of training in the negation of stereotypic associations on stereotype activation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78*(5), 871-888.
- Kroon, A.C., Trilling, D., Van Selm, M., & Vliegenthart, R. (2019). Biased media? How news content influences age discrimination claims. *European Journal of Ageing, 16*(1), 109-119.
- Ramasubramanian, S. (2011). The impact of stereotypical versus counterstereotypical media exemplars on racial attitudes, causal attributions, and support for affirmative action. *Communication Research, 38*(4), 497-516. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00936502103854>
- Ramasubramanian, S., Riewestahl, E., & Ramirez, A. (2023). Race and ethnic stereotypes in the media. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.1262>
- Society of Professional Journalists. (2014, September 6). *SPJ code of ethics*. <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>
- Wang, W. (2020). Exemplification and stigmatization of the depressed: Depression as the main topic versus an incidental topic in national US news coverage. *Health Communication, 35*(8), 1033-1041. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2019.1606874>
- Wood, L. & Hendricks, M. (2009). *Media representations of Appalachian poverty: Culture or capital; corruption or coal?* [Address]. Conference Papers—International Communication Association, Annual Meeting.

