

F. E. W. HARPER: UPLIFTED FROM THE SHADOWS

TEACHER TOOL 2

Use this Teacher Tool as a guide when leading a discussion about how students can intervene and challenge a person who is using a stereotype.

What is a stereotype?

Define the term “stereotype” as “a generalization made about groups of people on the basis of partial and inaccurate information.” Explain that we learn to generalize or put things into categories from a very early age. It is helpful to categorize things and ideas because it makes our lives more organized. However, it is not good to put people into categories. When we generalize or assume that all people of the same race, gender, age, occupation, or religion have the same characteristics, we are stereotyping individuals within these groups.

How do stereotypes form?

Stereotypes are often presented on television and in movies, books, and music. People also often learn to stereotype others from their friends and families. Stereotyping is part of human culture and human societies. Negative stereotypes are created by persons in one group for the purpose of making them feel superior to the group they negatively stereotype. For example, when people in one group call all people in another group lazy and unreliable, they do this not because it is true but as a form of aggression. By stereotyping members of another group negatively, people can have a sense of dominance over those in that group.

In many societies, women are stereotyped as inferior to men both physically and intellectually. This stereotype serves to reinforce male domination over women. White slave owners stereotyped black people during slavery as lazy, unable to care for themselves, and happy in their enslavement. These stereotypes enabled whites to justify white supremacy as well as a race-based system of bondage. When women, African Americans, or any member of a stereotyped group defy the stereotype created about them, they are often viewed as dangerous, “uppity,” or threatening the status quo.

Unfortunately, sometimes individuals believe the stereotypes about themselves and behave in a manner that conforms to the stereotypes others have of them. When this occurs it is called “internalized oppression” because the negatively stereotyped individual allows him or herself to be defined by someone else’s label thus limiting his or her self-expectations. It is an indication that racial and gender stereotypes are deeply entrenched in society when even those who are negatively pigeon-holed define themselves according to the stereotypes of those seeking to oppress them.

What are some of the harmful effects of stereotyping?

Stereotyping denies human individuality and potential. We underestimate human individuality when assuming that all members of any group have certain characteristics and behave in a particular way. We must remember that each human being is unique and cannot be easily or fairly categorized or labeled.

How can someone intervene when they encounter a person using a stereotype?

- Provide facts and statistics to prove that the stereotype is inaccurate.
- Provide examples of how stereotypes hurt members of the stereotyped group.
- Simply say: " Hey, that's a stereotype—labeling a person that way denies their uniqueness—it says you're just a label, not an individual."

How might a person stop his or herself when they are process of using a stereotype?

- Think of individuals you know in that group who do not fit the stereotype.
 - o If you tend to think of others in the group as meeting the stereotype, think deeper and farther about the members of the group.
- Go out of your way to get to know people in different racial, gender, ethnic, and religious groups. When you establish deep relationships with people who are different from you, you will discover that they are distinct individuals who cannot be adequately described by a stereotype.

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