A Positive Theory of Stereotyping and Stereotypes: Is Stereotyping Useful?

Donovan A. McFarlane

Adjunct Professor of Marketing & Faculty Blog Manager, H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business and Entrepreneurship, Nova Southeastern University, 3301 College Avenue, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314, United States

Abstract. This paper represents a "developing" perspective on stereotyping and stereotypes. The paper briefly introduces a less popular and potentially new theory or perspective on stereotyping, a process or social phenomenon often seen as a highly undesirable and negative in modern society. The author cites cultural dimension theory, socialization, social learning, cultural syncretism, and other sociological and behavioral processes and theories as having both elements and bases for stereotyping and stereotypes. The author agues that these processes by their very nature make stereotyping natural, if not a legitimate rationale approach to human relationships, interaction, and communication in the process of knowing each other as well as self more fully. This perspective does not underscore the negative aspects and consequences of stereotyping and stereotypes as we have come to know them in our modern society and everyday living. The author also proposes a Social Competitive Theory of Stereotypes to further explain the "usefulness" from a Darwinian and materially oriented Malthusian perspective - resources competition makes stereotyping a necessity. The author recommends further consideration on the views presented in this paper, and if possible, further research into the positive perspective or view of stereotyping and stereotypes as serving an important social function.

Keywords: Collectivism, Cultural syncretism, Discrimination, Individualism, Knowledge insufficiency, Prejudice, Social Competitive Theory, Socialization, Social learning, Stereotypes.

Introduction

The range and variety of social and cultural interactions that define modern society have created numerous opportunities for learning and understanding the value and consequences of differences. At the same time, the opportunities for social discrimination and misunderstanding have increased where ineffective communication, ethnocentrism, hostility and lack of inclination and motivation to learn about others prevail. One of the most interesting and fascinating aspect of our increasingly globalized society is the impact on human social interaction and communication in terms of barriers and factors tending toward and away from cultural syncretism. Prominent among these factors is stereotyping as a social acclimatization or reactionary process – we engage in stereotyping as a way of resisting new norms, cultures, behaviors, and realities; and also as a process or method of becoming more familiar with these and eventually adopting and adapting them. Stereotyping without negative intent tests the limits and fit of new cultural, social, and religious values, as well as acceptability of difference bound in both physical and non-physical characteristics.

Stereotypes are static and oversimplified ideas about a group or social category that strongly influence our expectations and behaviors (Thompson & Hickey, 1999). Stereotyping does not represent an abnormality in human social behaviors and values because we seem genetically predisposed to recognize social and physical differences in others, and we naturally use them in our social assessments and evaluations whether we are in a search for a friend or significant other. It is simply the nature of people to develop ideas about other people and their behaviors based on our understanding and expectations of self. Sometimes people's behaviors and values exemplify our mirror selves, and other times they are completely opposite to ours. When the latter is the case, we will more likely engage in stereotyping because our looking-glass self (Cooley, 1902) cannot be used as a basis for social comparison or social understanding. Therefore, we must speculate and make assumptions from general patterns of behaviors or appearance, and we invariably extend these to others from the same clique, society, or culture until we

realize otherwise. This may stem from our social evolutionary development from simple isolated social groups of races, cultures, ethnicities, communities, and regions to now highly integrated global societies in which we must still assert our own individual and group identity while struggling to appreciate and accept others' especially when they are outside of our norms and values.

Evolution of Stereotypes and Stereotyping

Stereotyping and stereotypes have always been a part of human society and may have originated from our attempts to describe and understand the behaviors, values, languages, appearances, cultural practices and ideals of others different from us. It should be imagined that the social learning processes of observation and imitation were essential in the communication and interaction of preliterate-primitive societies and communities for both in-group and out-group contacts and encounters. We can imagine when two primitive tribes in the Amazon Jungle or the Congo met for the first time. First, there is fear because of concern over aggression and the existence of differences as imposed by being part of a particular clique or clan. The attempt to communicate must have involved gestural exchanges unique to each tribe, and these became the first basis for social interaction and prevailed as experiences to be talked about, demonstrated, imitated, and eventually used as a basis for speculation, assumptions, and generalizations regarding the tribe or strangers encountered.

Stereotypes emerge out of our cultural and socialization patterns and our interactions with family, friends, peers, and they exist within the social institutions where we live, work, and play (Thompson & Hickey, 1999). Our ability to recognize and build our social institutions and values upon differences creates a social fabric in which stereotyping and stereotypes were bound to exist and are perpetuated not only as a means of maintaining status quo, but as a means of preserving those values, ideals, norms, and human behavioral and other identities that we see as unique to us and superior to others. However, stereotyping and stereotypes serve more than an identity and preservation or reactionary purpose – it serves to cover

our inability and limitations when it comes to our understanding of the others, and consequently, performing a progressive function by arming us with presumptions upon which we can strive to ascertain truth or factual knowledge of the others (other people and cultures) to eliminate these stereotypes or at least reduce them until self-knowledge becomes more possible or is accomplished.

Our personal prejudices and intolerance are also strong sources leading to the creation of stereotypes and the stereotyping process that prevents us from taking time to understand and truly know others without resorting to the easier way out – making assumptions based on undeveloped knowledge and generalizing these across entire groups and populations. The many interpersonal and extensive conflicts across human variety of cultures, races, and societies have ensured that our minds predispose us to stereotyping as the most convenient and safest resort in resisting the impositions and values and cultures of others where negative experiences from our primitive ancestors precondition us by virtue of social genetics to resist differences and guard against cultural syncretism and assimilation where such would endanger our own survival and existence from a social competitive theoretical perspective.

Variables and Social Stereotyping Processes

Cultural dimension theory, socialization, social learning, cultural syncretism, and other sociological and behavioral processes and theories have both elements and bases for stereotyping and stereotypes because they inherently depend on past and current understanding, knowledge, and experiences about social phenomena that change with time, places, and individuals. Hence, they are social theories and processes built on past, existing, and pre-existing knowledge and ideas about social phenomena upon which change is always operating. This makes our very facts, ideas, knowledge and understanding susceptible to the lure of stereotypes and stereotyping where we must otherwise use generalizations, assumptions, hypothetical constructs, speculation, and informal guessing processes to stitch together the little or insufficient we know to understand the whole or fuller reality.

Thus, knowledge insufficiency is one of the most fundamental variables leading to the stereotyping process being not only natural, but automatic. Many of our theories and ideas about people, individual, personality and behavior provide the bases for formulating stereotypes, thus making stereotyping natural, if not a legitimate rationale approach or process in understanding and building interests in human relationships, interaction, and communication in the process of knowing each other more fully, as well as in knowing ourselves. We learn stereotypes and foster stereotyping through several components of social experiences or social processes: knowledge insufficiency, socialization, social learning: modeling or imitation, drama and role playing, ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, and diversity. All of these lead to the formulation of stereotypes and facilitate the stereotyping process because they endeavor to expose us to new social realities in an increasingly integrated global society.

Knowledge Insufficiency

As human beings we depend tremendously on our ability to speculate and make assumptions, to generalize and guess at things which are currently not within our body of knowledge, learning, and experience. This invariably leads to stereotyping as we seek to fill the gaps in our understanding of people and things. Thus, knowledge being insufficient, we must seek as best as possible to make sense of the world and people around us. When human cultures and behaviors are outside of our schema, we attach more importance to one particularly notable act, trait, or characteristic when we encounter someone from a new or unfamiliar culture. Thus, we believe that all others are as the one or behave like the one because this becomes our only frame of understanding to view others from that culture or social group until we develop further knowledge or acquire further facts, or have encounters with other individuals from the group, race, gender, nationality, community or organization we are stereotyping. Given that our knowledge about people is insufficient, stereotypes serve as fillers, but must be corrected or erased once we learn real facts.

Socialization

Socialization as a human process of social interaction and communication is common to all of us. We are socialized into cultures, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and our many and varied patterns of behaviors. In fact, socialization is the most important process on the path to becoming fully human. Those from whom we learn about ourselves, others, society, and cultures are themselves flawed, given not only insufficiency of human knowledge, but by virtue of the fact that they also have prejudices, biases, and their particular ideologies and modes of thinking. We sometimes learn these fully from them and are influenced in our reaction and behaviors toward others from this learning process. The experience, education, and particular worldviews and knowledge of parents and others at the helm of socialization create more than sufficient opportunities for stereotyping to become an ongoing and important process shaping how we approach human interaction and communication. For example, a child who is raised by White Supremacists such as the Klu Klux Klan, or a child raised by Black Supremacists such as the Black Panthers will invariably have extensive racial stereotypes regarding other racial and ethnic groups. Thus, while socialization represents a nurturing process in human society, it can foster indoctrination and acquire cultic significance where it imbues individuals' minds and hearts with negative stereotypes of others. According to Thompson and Hickey (1999) many stereotypes have been taught and learned through the process of socialization by its major agents: peers, family, schools, church, and even the mass media. This means that it is virtually impossible to get rid of stereotypes and stereotyping because they are ingrained in minds and cultures over long periods of time.

Social Learning: Observation, Modeling and Imitation

Social learning theory emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others in our acquisition of knowledge, learning experiences, and social interactions. According to Bandura

(1977), behaviors are learned from the environments in which we live through the process of observational learning, as we observe other individuals in our daily lives and those we encounter or otherwise have opportunities to observe. As McLeod (2011) notes, individuals that are observed are called models. In society we are surrounded by many influential models, such as parents, other family members, characters on television, friends and peer groups, among others, and theses models provide examples of behaviors we observe and imitate, even if we are selective in the process of observation and imitation. We observe the behaviors of others and draw assumptions about them and those similar to them, and we also use these observed and imitated or learned behaviors to evaluate others and place them into contexts and categories that are significant to us on our social pathways. The behaviors, attitudes, or other dispositions we acquire through social learning that allow us to stereotype others can remain with us or we can discard them as we learn the facts or truth. Unfortunately, it is easier to hold on to old beliefs and values than to learn new ones as these require new social and cognitive orientations, new ways of viewing the world, and much effort as old habits are hard to die. Thus, stereotypes and stereotyping prevail in some cases, even after we have learned and observed otherwise.

Drama and Role Playing

Drama and role playing represent processes of communication and social interaction and thoughts and ideas as the oversimplified static assumptions we have about others are often depicted and reenacted by us in drama or role plays. This reinforces these stereotypes and shares them with a wider audience who comes to believe them without personal experience or testing them for accuracy. Through the mass media – television and radio, as well as the Internet via modern broadcasting channels and social media, drama and role playing become more widely dispersed depicting stereotypes by models (actors and presenters) we observe and imitate, even when it is simply "acting" for these celebrity endorsers of

stereotyping and stereotypes, and does not reflect their true values or nature. Whatever the case, the inclusion of stereotypes in the media via plays, movies, dramatization and role playing of various sorts helps to foster and perpetuate stereotyping. Acting itself is very stereotypical because it is the imitation of characters real or imaginary, and these characters are human characters representing the different races, ethnicities, cultures, nationalities, genders and the variety of behaviors, values and attitudes associated with each. Stereotyping and stereotypes are perpetuated in drama and role playing and we must be mindful of this as simply actors or social actors playing multiple roles, and stereotypes unfortunately might be the only or most viable way of playing roles we never before experienced.

Ethnocentrism

There are many individuals and groups with self-perpetuating and self-adulating beliefs and attitudes that their race, culture, and values are the best and hence should be the rule for everyone else. This is part of the ethnocentric philosophy that has created and perpetuated some of humankind's greatest oppressions including the African Slave Trade and the Holocaust. According to Wolman (1973), ethnocentrism refers to "the tendency to consider one's group, usually national or ethnic, superior to other groups using one's own group or groups as the frame of reference against which other groups are judged" (p. 129). Ethnocentrism causes individuals to develop attitude or a personality syndrome where there is a perception of social reality as composed of in-groups with which individuals identify and out-groups toward which they are hostile (Wolman, 1973). Thus, stereotyping people positively or negatively depends on their in-group or out-group membership and degree of authoritarian and power-oriented social relations (Wolman, 1973). Those falling outside our in-groups will more likely be negatively stereotyped in an attempt to undermine their value and importance.

Cultural Relativism

Our global society has come to appreciate the fact that racial, ethnic, political, economic, religious and cultural and social integration are the realities of the 21st century and humankind's future. We are becoming increasingly homogenous and the need to be tolerant of others regardless of prevailing differences has been emphasized as a desirable social trait and practice. Thus, we are encouraged to look at differences within the contexts of their own cultures and within the parameters of individuals' behaviors and experiences. Cultural relativism essentially dictates that patterns of behaviors must be viewed with their contexts of origin, and bearing this in mind will foster acceptance of others and tolerance and help reduce stereotyping as we come to understand that what is strange to us in others might be what is normal in their culture, society, group,, nation or organization. Cultural relativism advocates consideration of cultural setting as the most important factor in evaluating differences or patterns of social responses that differ from ours (Wolman, 1973). Cultural relativism reinforces the idea that each culture, individual, race, nationality, and difference has their particular merits. Thus, it is assumed that those who embrace cultural and moral relativism will be less stereotypical in views and perspectives regarding other cultures and peoples.

Diversity

As the civilization of 21st century society we are the most diverse group of people who have ever lived on the earth, and diversity has thus become one of the major worldviews fueling progress and action. We have come to understand that cultural competence is valued and understanding and accepting diversity is the key to effective and successful communication and social interaction. Diversity has allowed us to be mindful of others regardless of the many differences that create opportunities for stereotyping and stereotypes. We are becoming more cognizant of the need to reserve our ideas and assumptions about others until we fully learn the facts through exploration of individuals' social environments, personal character, and culture. Without the level of diversity and its place in our society today we

would have far more conflicts and misunderstandings than we do today. Through diversity training and inclusion processes and programs we are educated on being sensible and responsible citizens and members of social organizations where we respect others regardless of differences, and even by legal consequences and laws, are forced to decrease our tendency to oversimplify and judge each others at face-appearance. Diversity has no doubt decreased incidents of stereotyping and stereotypes through education and tolerance.

Caribbean Cultures and Stereotyping

While the cultures of the Caribbean are a unique mixture of heritage from Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas, and some nations have very noticeable practices emerging dominantly from certain regions and nations (Hall, 1993; Hall, 1994), Caribbean cultures have many variables and practices in common, and this might stem from their similar colonial history, as well as experience with slavery and forced African Diaspora resulting from an extensive global slave trade, existence of a historical plantocracy and oppressed classes, and invariably, widespread cultural and social exchanges in the region. Also emerging out of Caribbean cultures are many differences that lead to labels, name-calling, indirect references and informally ascribed and assigned idioms and expressions that are reflective of the various races and people that have in the past occupied the region and continue to exist there today in a highly intermixed social environment where an almost homogenous cultural tendency toward social familiarization prevails. Thus, in Caribbean cultures stereotypes are easily understood and taken far less seriously than in American and European cultures, as such is seen as a *lingua franca*.

The richness and multiple divisions in Caribbean cultures stemming from distinct social strata throughout their histories and development made stereotyping prevalent, and in many cases, a mainstay of culture as vestiges from a past intermingled with various social classes and class struggles that have come to be less meaningful in terms of impact and effect today, but nevertheless, remain an

entrenched part of language and expression that can neither be easily substituted or eliminated. Therefore, stereotypes and stereotyping act as more than social contextual cues of references; they serve as tools and instruments that define the history, class struggles, relationships among different people, tolerance, humor, traditional and even outdated frames of references, and have also emerged as an instrument in socialization and entertainment. Thus, Caribbean people become less worked up about stereotypes and stereotyping because the abrasive negativity is in many cases is devoid from the intent behind frames of references that in American and other societies and cultures are taken as offense, mockery, ridiculing and demeaning of persons, or as represented hostility or intent to be hostile or insensitive.

The "Nicknaming" Process

In Caribbean cultures, especially in island nations such as Jamaica, it is quite common for individuals to have what is called a "nickname." A nickname refers to a usually familiar or humorous, or sometimes pointed or cruel name given to a person or place, as a supposedly appropriate replacement for or addition to the proper name (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2013). The presence of nicknames within human society and cultures reflect a tolerance for stereotyping and stereotypes. In Caribbean cultures it is regular and considered non-offensive to many individuals, especially in rural cultures or communities. For example, it is quite common for obese or morbidly overweight individuals, especially females in the island country of Jamaica to be called "fatty" by their peers and others alike. Experience growing up in the rural Caribbean presented a case of a shopkeeper and his wife who was a morbidly overweight woman. Many children grew up to hear adults address her as "fatty" and they did the same in greeting her or referring to her and she took no offense to it as it was not done in a negative or derogatory, but in a friendly manner. While some nicknames are cruel and perpetuate stereotypes in many cases, others reflect what is observed and represent social gestures of reference without negative intent. In fact, the nicknaming process represents social

familiarity and joviality in some cultures, especially collectivist cultures, while in individualist cultures like the United States, it is seen as discrimination, intolerance, prejudice, or as a sign of bias or disrespect.

Collectivist Cultural versus Individualist Cultural Tolerance in Stereotyping

The literature identifying and explaining the differences on cultural types is well developed and formulated, especially our understanding of cultural dimensions used to characterize individuals on national and regional levels. For example, we characterize cultures by virtue of their tendencies away or toward certain social extremes – on a social continuum of masculinity, femininity, collectivism, individualism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1982). These cultural dimensions are defined below:

Power Distance (PDI):

> This dimension expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. The fundamental issue here is how a society handles inequalities among people. People in societies exhibiting a large degree of power distance accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. In societies with low power distance, people strive to equalise the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power.

Individualism versus Collectivism (IDV):

> The high side of this dimension, called Individualism, can be defined as a preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families only. Its opposite, Collectivism, represents a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. A society's position on this dimension is reflected in whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we."

Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS):

The masculinity side of this dimension represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material reward for success. Society at large is more competitive. Its opposite, femininity, stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Society at large is more consensus-oriented.

Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI):

The uncertainty avoidance dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. The fundamental issue here is how a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? Countries exhibiting strong UAI maintain rigid codes of belief and behaviour and are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas. Weak UAI societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles.

Long-term versus Short-term Orientation (LTO):

The long-term orientation dimension can be interpreted as dealing with society's search for virtue. Societies with a short-term orientation generally have a strong concern with establishing the absolute Truth. They are normative in their thinking. They exhibit great respect for traditions, a relatively small propensity to save for the future, and a focus on achieving quick results. In societies with a long-term orientation, people believe that truth depends very much on situation, context and time. They show an ability to adapt traditions to changed conditions, a strong propensity to save and invest, thriftiness, and perseverance in achieving results.

(The Hofstede Centre, 2013, p. 1).

Further addition to cultural dimensions includes Indulgence versus Restraint (IND), where "Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun" (The

Hofstede Centre, 2013, p. 1), and where "Restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms" (The Hofstede Centre, 2013, p. 1). These various cultural dimensions will have differing degrees of impact on stereotypes and stereotyping in societies according to their placement of cultures on the continuum of long-term versus short-term orientation for example. In a society with high power distance, individuals will tend to have stereotypes reflected in the separation of power between social groups based on socioeconomic and political power perceptions. For example, it would be natural for those with high ranks in a society to hold demeaning stereotypes of those outside of or "below" their social, economic, or political class, while those who find themselves on the lower levels of the social ladder or social strata where power matters, would find those with power as being snobbish, unethical, greedy, and the like. In a society with high masculinity inclination stereotypes of people will include viewing them as overly assertive, selfish, materialistic, and competitive, whereas in a society highly inclined towards femininity, stereotypes will prevail of that society and its people as weak, inferior, less competitive, and even less capable and less intelligent. Societies and people with short-term orientation may be stereotyped as typically masculine, individualist, and even narrow-minded because of the tendency towards normative thinking, while societies and people with high long-term orientation may be stereotyped as dominantly relativistic in moral and ethics, ethically and morally compromising, and even socially unstable. Societies and people with strong uncertainty avoidance may be stereotyped as conservative, narrow-minded, inflexible, old-fashioned, and socially and morally non-progressive, while societies and people with weak uncertainty avoidance may be stereotyped as lacking sound principles and guides for behavior, inexperienced and unstable, as well as placing low importance on planning and posterity.

In collectivist cultures stereotyping and stereotypes seem to be more tolerable, and in fact accepted and part of the informal familiarization and social interaction process, especially in large extended families and close-knit communities where

individuals often have a "nickname" or "pet name" or are called by some stereotypical names or referred to in such terms. In individualist cultures stereotyping and stereotypes seem to be less tolerable, and this might stem from the high focus on individual self-esteem, self-concept, and preoccupation with individual interests and ideals where collectivist constructs are less tangible and more socially diffused and diminished. Furthermore, the extraordinary focus on individual rights and need for assertion in individualist cultures or societies create more tensions and disagreements stemming from a kind of entitlement perception held by individuals, so much that offense is more easily taken even when not intended. For example, in collectivist cultures, especially from Caribbean experiences, it is typical for people engaging friendly interaction and conversation to address an individual according to face-value or appearance, or notable and distinct physical characteristics until familiarization is established. Thus, an individual in the street addressing an elderly person for the first time might refer to him or her as "granny" or "grandpa" when in fact and in reality, this person might not have any grandchildren, and also has a name. This is also typical in collectivist Asian societies. After familiarity or reprimand arises a familiarity is established as a basis where proper address may be indicated or communicated as preference – for example, a name or preferred title. In an individualist society such occurrence is more likely to be taken as an offense. However, in collectivist societies and cultures referring to an elderly person in such a way is seen as a sign of respect even though he or she might in reality not be a grandmother or grandfather to any children or anyone. Thus, cultural and societal tendencies toward individualism and collectivism not only affect the types of stereotypes we foster and embrace, but how these stereotypes are perceived and their real and actual intention. Whatever the case, the social cohesion and maternal care factors in collectivist societies and cultures seem to foster greater acceptance of stereotypes as non-offensive in most cases where they are not intended to create offenses, and as part of the social interaction and familiarization process.

Can Stereotyping Be Helpful?*

Never before has human society exhibited so much diversity as in the 21ˢᵗ century where we encounter people of different cultures, race and ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, and origins in our everyday tasks, ranging from social interaction and communication to work and play. This opportunity has afforded us a richness that has yielded both positive and negative experiences. Indubitably, it is out of this profusion of diversity or differences that both our conflicts and misunderstandings emerge, and as social beings, in our quest to more fully appreciate and make sense of this, we imitate others, make assumptions, and draw conclusions even from brief and immature encounters thereby giving birth to stereotypes to fill the gaps in our knowledge of each other or each new situation.

Our society is preoccupied with stereotypes and stereotyping when it comes to social interaction and the way we perceive others. This should lead us to some important considerations: *In what ways can stereotyping be a helpful process? Can a stereotype be useful, even if it is not entirely accurate? Are we better off by getting rid of our stereotypes or by making them more accurate?*

Stereotypes are universal; meaning, they exist in every community, society, and culture. This means that they are socially significant and reflect something about human traits and character. According to Ivancevich, Konopaske, and Matteson (2011), stereotyping refers to a translation step in the perceptual process that people use to classify or categorize people, events, and situations.

Stereotypes are often seen as negative in today's world. However, they are helpful in guiding us and shaping our attitudes and behaviors toward other peoples, races, and cultures. They provide us with conscious awareness of differences and the need to understand that different norms and values exist regardless of our assumption of the common. In this way, we eventually learn to be anticipative in social interaction and communication and consciously seek to verify our beliefs regarding others.

Stereotyping can be helpful to individuals approaching new cultures because it provides them with a refrained and restrained state of mind that potentially cautions and saves them from making social and cultural blunders. Moreover,

stereotypes help us as individuals to organize our social experiences as it helps us to more meaningfully categorize and classify people, events, and situations in ways in which we can best remember them, identify with them and relate to them (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2011). Thus, while stereotypes are not entirely accurate, they are useful in guiding our social experiences as we enter complex and diverse environments of languages, places, races, and people. While not entirely accurate, stereotypes are not entirely inaccurate either, and even the slight accuracy in some of the stereotypes we hold cautions us in how we regard others and relate to them.

Stereotypes are stereotypes and if they were to become accurate, or more accurate, then they are no longer stereotypes as we use the term negatively. In fact, what many people hold as stereotypes sometimes prove to be social experiences despite them being generalized across entire groups or populations. Stereotypes in many cases are insufficient ideas and beliefs about people and events. However, we would not be better off by getting rid of our stereotypes or by making them more accurate because they are stereotypes by virtue of the fact that they represent something credible and real about us as human beings – we have incomplete knowledge and understanding of people, events, and situations, and must depend on generalizations and assumptions to fill the gap while we seek learning experiences and opportunities to further our knowledge and understanding of things, people, situations and events.

The major negative aspect of stereotypes is when they are persistent despite newly discovered facts, truth, information and knowledge. When stereotypes persist even after learning has taken place then we enter the territory of prejudice, bias, and discrimination. What do you think? Is it wrong or unethical to view stereotypes and stereotyping in a positive way?

The Positive-Negative Model of Stereotypes

Social Competitive Theory of Stereotypes

Stereotyping as we have seen can be done with positive or negative intent, and the impact and consequences can be categorized as the same. With positive

stereotyping the individual really has no intent to inflict harm. Social Competitive Theory can be used to explain negative approaches to the development and perpetuation of stereotypes. Stereotyping and stereotypes that damage the credibility and reputation of others whom we must compete against serves a positive purpose from a Darwinian perspective because it allows us to declare ourselves fit and others unfit through the building of stereotypes that ascribe to others, demeaning, undesirable, or weak traits and characteristics that are shunned or abhorred by the majority and our social institutions. We are constantly competing in a society where our needs and wants outpace our resources and stereotyping and stereotypes have become useful as competitive tools for many. In fact, stereotyping can be used effectively as a propaganda strategy against our counterparts, or against those for whom we hold personal grudges or biases.

We live in a society of unlimited wants and limited means; a society where the problem at the heart of economics represents a pendulum of sustained struggle and conflicts for us. That is, we must compete for scarce resources which Thomas Malthus predicts will become the doom of an increasingly populous society where scarcity and exhaustion of resources will drive us into dark alleys of starvation and extinction. We are self-preserving in our values and attitudes and want to ensure survival even at the cost of others. This means that stereotypes and stereotyping emerge as anvil and axe in the war for survival and material well-being or resources. Where stereotyping our fellowmen of different races, cliques, and cultures can benefit us in the way of providing an extra advantage for more resources such serve a functional rather than a dysfunctional purpose for the *stereotyper* (the one doing the stereotyping), while it creates obstacles for the *stereotypee* (the one being stereotyped) in securing said resources. It is the kind of stereotyping designed to inflict harm on another that becomes the dangerous and negative type of stereotyping that we fear as individuals and as a democratic and open society because such is contrary to our ideals of equality and freedom. Regardless of the positive purpose that stereotyping serves for us, it serves a negative purpose for those being stereotyped, and we must therefore consider both limitations and consequences.

Stereotype is a common simplifying device in perception (Schermerhorn, Osborn, Uhl-Bien & Hunt, 2012). We can aptly view stereotyping as enveloping certain positive and negative social processes that we use to understand others whom we are interested in getting to know, but necessarily lack knowledge and opportunity or sufficient facts to do so, or as a means to undermine others with whom we must compete for life's bounties. The model in **Figure 1** below shows some of these social processes or social ideas and ideals.
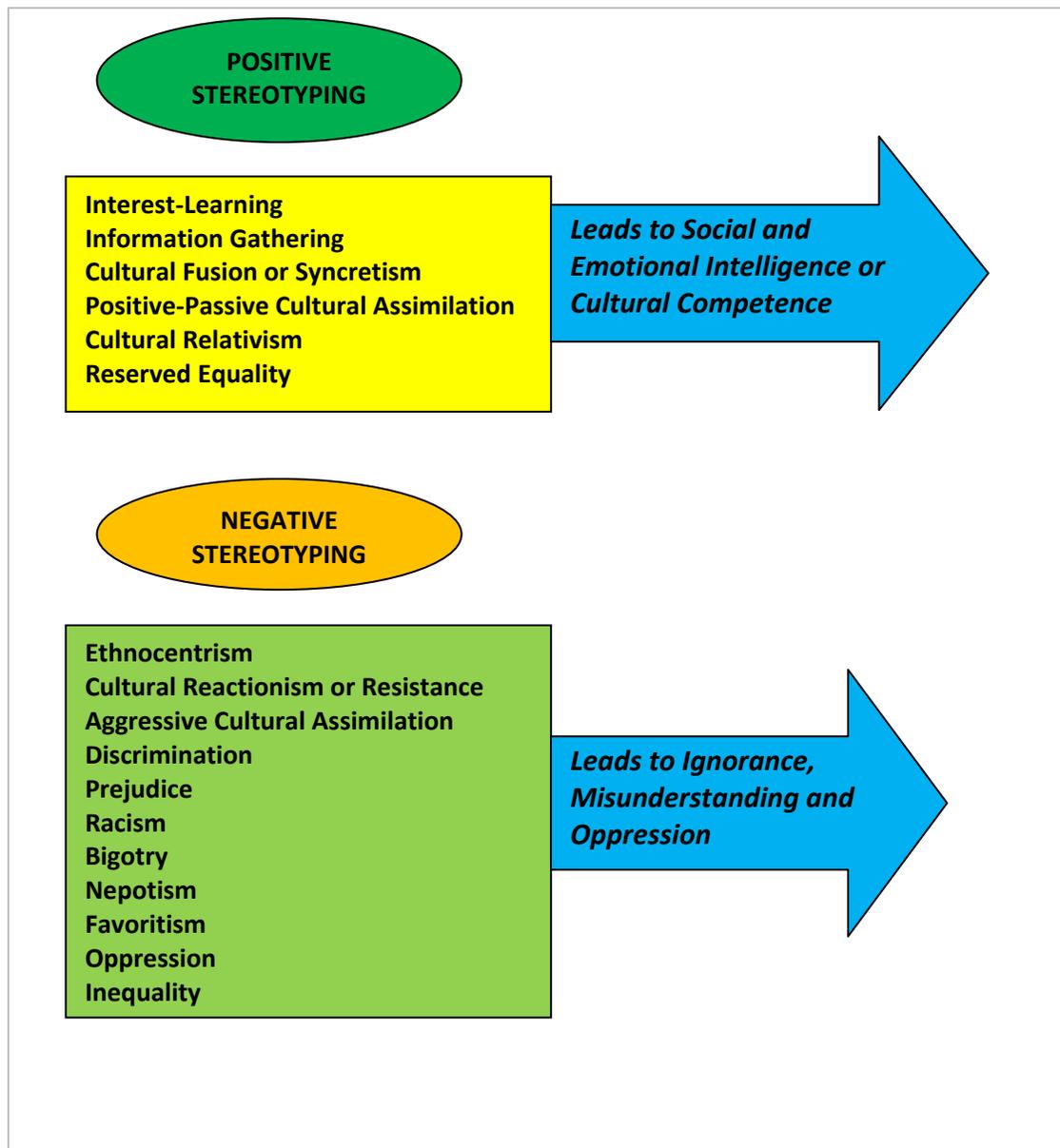
POSITIVE STEREOTYPING

Interest-Learning
Information Gathering
Cultural Fusion or Syncretism
Positive-Passive Cultural Assimilation
Cultural Relativism
Reserved Equality

Leads to Social and Emotional Intelligence or Cultural Competence

NEGATIVE STEREOTYPING

Ethnocentrism
Cultural Reactionism or Resistance
Aggressive Cultural Assimilation
Discrimination
Prejudice
Racism
Bigotry
Nepotism
Favoritism
Oppression
Inequality

Leads to Ignorance, Misunderstanding and Oppression

Figure 1: The Positive-Negative Model of Stereotypes

Darwinian and Malthusian Perspectives on Stereotypes

Stereotypes are seen by many as decisively negative, intentionally negative, socially demeaning, and oppressive. From such perspectives stereotyping and stereotypes cannot be seen as "positive" or having anything other than bad intention. This is an appreciable view of stereotyping and stereotypes since when we consider the problem of scarcity and the fact that human societies have traditionally competed for limited resources, the fight for survival or fight to emerge as and become the fittest requires undermining those with the potential to acquire the resources and things we seek – a Darwinian understanding of stereotypes which dictates we must necessarily through stereotypes undermine the character, worth, value and capabilities of those whom we must compete against to survive. This is why in ancient times and dynasties soldiers and warriors could be executed by their kings or generals for praising the enemies' prowess or strategies as it undermines self-interest and self-goals. Thus, some of us use stereotypes to undermine those whom we must compete with for positions in organizations, for rewards, and other social benefits. For example, a male desiring a particular female as his partner will necessarily deride and discredit a competing male in character, personality, value, worth and credibility to increase his chances and opportunities with the targeted female. This is not unique to human beings, but is readily observable in the interactions of animals. Thus, stereotypes serve a Darwinian purpose, especially where one culture or nation collectively embraces stereotypes about another to undermine its strengths and virtues.

Thomas Malthus proposed a theory on population growth and its economic consequences in which our competition for scarce resources on both individual and collective levels will increase as population increase to a level causing famine and starvation, and this theory implies an increase in competition for scarce resources as the problem of scarcity becomes even more pronounced in the future. It also relates to the Darwinian natural selection and survival construct, and Darwin afforded Malthus great significance in formulating his theory of Natural Selection as evident in his 1876 autobiography. Given the Malthusian Fear, our

consciousness – both individual and collective consciousness implore us to compete for resources, especially as our struggles become more pronounced in a culturally and globally integrating society where we encounter people from different walks of life, social institutions, and culture with unique and sometimes better skills and abilities than ours, and against whom we must compete for society's limited resources. In such a case, stereotyping and stereotypes can become a weapon in the competitive war for declining and scarce resources and opportunities, and are thus used to increase our opportunities while undermining opportunities available for others by viewing them as weak, untrustworthy, incompetent, and using other stereotypes to make them less favorable to those who control resources or rewards. Darwinian and Malthusian perspectives of stereotyping and stereotypes are decisively negative and present us with new lens from which to view the evolution and emergence of stereotypes.

Stereotyping: Cost-Benefit Considerations

As one commenter, Debrah Silveira, wrote in response to the original blog entry from which this paper has been developed, "The issue is whether the benefits outweigh the harm or vice versa" (cited in McFarlane, 2013, p. 1). This is an important consideration and a difficult one to provide a definitive answer to. However, our understanding and knowledge of others often begin as stereotypes or social stereotypes which change overtime and are relevant to our ability to adapt to new facts, ideas, information and situations, cultures or people. Thus, stereotyping acts as a social mechanism to understanding, appreciating, and learning differences. It validates the basis of diversity and uniqueness as having value. In a society where individual rights are upheld in almost every institution and places we venture, we are able to witness the negative reaction to the consequences of stereotyping and stereotypes that damage individuals' self-esteem, self-concept, opportunities, and worth or value, and we enact laws, policies, and establish social norms and standards which forbid stereotypes and stereotyping.

One who stereotypes does not necessarily have bad or negative intent as stereotyping is sometimes an innocent process of breaking the ice, hiding one's own deficient knowledge of other cultures, people, things, or situations, and even a way to avoid social isolation, fit in with peers, and sometimes individuals will facilitate and embrace stereotypes for in-group processes and simply to appear cool or acceptable to significant others engaged in the same process. However, when there is an intent to demean, disrespect, devalue or harm through espousing and purposefully projecting and announcing some stereotypical ideas one holds, then this is not only insensitive, but reflects cultural and social intolerance, and a lack of regard for others' well-being and feelings.

Implications and Need for Research

The idea of stereotyping and stereotypes as having positive aspects or usefulness in human social interaction, relationships, and communication might not be well-received by some because we have decisively attached a negative perspective to the word "stereotype" and many might argue that such a view will provide rationale for perpetuating or encouraging others to use stereotypes in dealing with others. This is far from the intent in this paper as the author clearly pointed out the differences between stereotyping as emerging within the natural context of human limitations and stereotyping that is deliberate with intent to harm or demean others. Those whom would declare that they have never used stereotyping and stereotypes when evaluating or attempting to understand others would not be completely honest since our processes of socialization and learning involve stereotypes. Furthermore, our knowledge is insufficient and we must often place things that are unfamiliar into meaningful chunks or bits, and human nature for generalizations makes us vulnerable to using stereotypes. What should matter most is one's recognition of the need for tolerance and education; becoming more culturally competent and appreciative of human diversity and similarities so that he or she can discard unqualified beliefs or assumptions about individual races, genders, classes, nationalities, religions, and people.

Stereotyping and stereotypes may represent vestiges of primitive and preliterate approaches to dealing with differences and new cultural and social values, and must in our 21st century, become relegated to things rather than people. We are a highly integrated and interdependent society where we are now exposed to the variety of individual behaviors and cultures, to the entirety of human racial and ethnic groups to fully understand that what should really matter is our common interests and common destiny – a destiny one would hope to fight against those forces, both natural and manmade that threaten to eradicate us, rather than fighting against physical differences that have been used to separate us into clans, villages, nations, religions, and regions. It is recommended that further research and considerations be carried out in understanding the perspectives herein communicated by the author.

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This portion of the paper includes a blog excerpt from the "Huizenga School Means Business Success!" Management, HSBE Faculty Perspective On Business as posted by author.