

# Stereotypes – What are they?

Whenever we meet a stranger, we are not able to form a complete picture of that person. Instead, our brain employs mechanisms that make information processing manageable by filtering, simplifying and categorizing.

What comes to your mind, if you look at the following pictures?



Frequently, specific familiar aspects of a person grab our attention, which we assess very rapidly. This allows us to judge a person more quickly.

These mechanisms that are used by our brain are useful and necessary for us to find our way. Nevertheless, it is important for us to be aware and critical of these processes of the brain.

In our daily lives it is common that people are categorized into groups which are connected to certain traits. These traits are then attributed to all members of that group and thus a **stereotype** is formed.

Examples for such stereotypical groups include: “foreigners”, “people with dark skin”, “women”, “retirees” or “academics.”

## Stereotype, Prejudice, Discrimination – What is the Difference?

### Stereotype

The conviction that certain traits are characteristic of a group of people. These can be both positive or negative, true or false and justified or unjustified. They relate a person to a group and neglect individual differences. Stereotypes are rooted in culture and do not inevitably lead to certain behaviour.

#### Examples

Women are not interested in technology.

Men are not concerned for other people's lives.

### Prejudice

Negative opinion towards members of a specific social group due to previous condemnation of the group. Prejudice does not necessarily lead to certain behaviour towards others.

#### Examples

Women are not suited for technical jobs since they are not interested in this subject and will thus deliver worse results than men.

Since men are not concerned for the lives of others, they are less suited for social jobs.

### Discrimination

Negative or harmful behaviour towards people on the grounds of membership in a certain social group.

#### Examples

A listed position in a technical field will more likely be filled by a man rather than a woman, because they are perceived as incapable.

A listed position in a social field will more likely be filled by a woman, as men are seen as socially less adept.

**Generally:** stereotype, prejudice and discrimination **can** appear together, but not necessarily so.

Gilovich, T., Keltner, D. & Nisbett, R.E. (2006). Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination. In T. Gilovich, D. Keltner & R.E. Nisbett (Hrsg.), *Social Psychology*. New York: Norton.



# Causes for Success and Failure – A Matter of Perception?

Description of causes for success and failure in the context of performance.<sup>1,2</sup>

Cause \ Performance	Self-dependent	Dependent on external circumstances
Constant Causes	Ability	Simplicity / Difficulty
Temporary Causes	Effort	Luck / Bad Luck

1 Weiner, B. [1986]. An attributional theory of motivation and emotion. New York: Springer-Verlag.

2 Weiner, B. [1985]. An attributional theory of achievement motivation and emotion. *Psychological Review*, 92(4), 548-573.

# Success – Do Men and Women Assess Causes Differently?

	Success	Failure
Men 	Ability	Lack of Interest or Effort / Bad Luck
Women 	Effort / Luck / Simplicity	Lack of Ability

Men tend to see their own performance (self-serving) as cause for their success, while women attribute their success more often to luck or simplicity (self-devaluation) of the task.<sup>1,2</sup>

These assessments often not only apply to one-self, but are also applied to others.<sup>3</sup>

1 Heller, K.A. & Ziegler, A. [1996]. Gender differences in mathematics and sciences: Can attributional retraining improve the performance of gifted females? *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 40, 200-210

2 Rosenthal, P., Guest, D. & Peccei, R. [1996]. Gender differences in managers' causal explanations for their work performance: A study in two organizations. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 69, 145-151.

3 Beyer, S. [1999]. Gender differences in causal attributions by college students of performance on course examinations. *Current Psychology: Developmental Learning Personality Social*, 17(4), 346-358.

# Stereotype Threat – What Does that Mean?

## Stereotype Threat

The fear to comply with a known stereotype that is part of one's own social group. This fear can lead to decreased performance.<sup>1</sup>

### Examples

A woman, who is employed in a technical field, is afraid of fulfilling the stereotype that women are not suited for technical jobs. This fear can act as a blockade which reduces the actual performance of the woman and thus confirm the stereotype.

Men are not expected to be able to tend to children. This creates a pressure on men which can cause them to feel less self-confident when taking care of children.



<sup>1</sup> Steele, C.M. & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of african americans. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69(5), 797-811.