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# Social and Ethnic Stereotypes: Classifications, Functions, and Cultural Interpretations

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**Abstract:** The study of stereotypes has attracted scholarly attention since Walter Lippmann first introduced the concept in the 1920s. Initially linked to ethnic and ethnocultural perceptions, stereotypes have gradually expanded to encompass broader social categories such as age, gender, and profession. This article examines the theoretical approaches to understanding stereotypes, their classifications, and the mechanisms of stereotyping. By analyzing the works of researchers such as N.A. Rozhdestvenskaya, P.N. Donets, L.I. Grishaeva, V.S. Ageyev, and V.V. Krasnykh, the paper highlights the variety of perspectives on stereotypes, including personal, material, pragmatic, cognitive, hetero- and auto-stereotypes, as well as superficial versus deep-rooted stereotypes. The role of culture in shaping ethnic consciousness and national stereotypes is emphasized, illustrating how stereotypes are embedded within cultural practices and transmitted through socialization. Special attention is given to the role of mass media in reinforcing and simplifying stereotypes, often shaping public opinion and cross-cultural perceptions.

**Keys words:** Stereotype, social stereotype, ethnic stereotype, cultural perception, classification of stereotypes, stereotyping, media influence.

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**Introduction.** The concept of stereotypes has occupied a central place in social sciences since Walter Lippmann's seminal work *Public Opinion* (1922), in which he first introduced the term to describe the "pictures in our heads" that shape perceptions of the social world. Initially, scholarly attention focused on ethnic and ethnocultural stereotypes, which were understood as stable and generalized representations of the psychological and behavioral traits attributed to specific national or cultural groups. Over time, however, the scope of the term expanded to include broader categories, encompassing not only ethnicity but also age, gender, social class, and professional identity. Today, stereotypes are regarded as standardized and emotionally charged images that influence not only interpersonal relations but also intergroup dynamics on local, national, and global levels.

Stereotypes are complex phenomena that combine cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions. On one hand, they function as psychological mechanisms of simplification, allowing individuals to process large amounts of information by categorizing people and events into familiar patterns. On the other hand, they are deeply rooted in cultural traditions, historical contexts, and social structures, shaping collective identities and influencing behavior. Scholars such as N.A. Rozhdestvenskaya, P.N. Donets, L.I. Grishaeva, V.S. Ageyev, and V.V. Krasnykh have attempted to classify stereotypes according to their origins, functions, and levels of stability, ranging from superficial and temporary stereotypes formed under the influence of political and historical events, to deep-rooted cultural stereotypes that persist across generations.

The persistence of stereotypes makes them a crucial object of interdisciplinary study. In sociology and social psychology, they are examined as mechanisms of social perception and intergroup bias. In linguistics and cultural studies, they are analyzed as symbolic constructs embedded in discourse and communication. The influence of mass media has become particularly significant, as it not only reflects existing stereotypes but also actively constructs and disseminates new ones, often reinforcing simplified or distorted images of social groups.

In the context of globalization and multicultural interaction, the study of stereotypes is of growing importance. They can foster prejudice, discrimination, and intergroup conflicts, but at the same time they serve as markers of identity and cultural continuity. Understanding the classifications, functions, and transformations of stereotypes is therefore essential for promoting intercultural dialogue, reducing bias, and creating more tolerant and inclusive societies. This article seeks to examine the theoretical foundations of stereotypes, their typology, and the cultural factors that shape their persistence, while also highlighting the role of media in their transmission and transformation.

**Literature Review.** In recent decades, the role of media in the dissemination of stereotypes has been a major focus of scholarship. Mass media do not merely reflect existing stereotypes but actively shape and perpetuate them by transmitting simplified, ready-made images of social groups. The rise of global communication technologies has further intensified this process, often leading to the internationalization of certain stereotypes (e.g., Western views of Eastern societies, or vice versa). Scholars note that media-driven stereotypes can both reinforce prejudices and provide opportunities for their deconstruction, depending on how cultural groups are represented.

**Analysis.** W. Lippmann's ideas had a great influence on all subsequent studies on stereotypes, and since then many definitions of the term "stereotype" have been put forward. However, initially this concept was mainly associated with ethnic and ethnocultural stereotypes. Ethnic stereotypes are understood as stable, generalized ideas about the psychological characteristics of people belonging to certain ethnic, national or cultural groups. In broader interpretations of the concept of "social stereotype", a certain group (category) of people is also mentioned as the object of a stereotype. Such groups can be formed not only on the basis of ethnicity or nationality, but also on other social criteria, namely age, gender, profession, etc. Most definitions of social stereotypes also include other social objects (events, events, etc.). In general, a social stereotype is interpreted as "a standardized, stable, emotionally charged, value-determined image, image of a social object."<sup>1</sup>

According to N.A. Rozhdestvenskaya, stereotypes are divided into two categories according to their content: the first are stereotypes that characterize people as representatives of a certain national, social or political group; the second are stereotypes that characterize a person's personal characteristics - behavior, physical features, appearance, etc.<sup>2</sup>

P.N. Donets divided stereotypes into several asymmetrical oppositions:<sup>3</sup>

Personal stereotypes - these represent people as members of a certain social community;

Material, event stereotypes include objects - things, events, states, etc.;

Pragmatic stereotypes - are associated with emotions, assessments, etc., while cognitive stereotypes represent only objective, rational information;

Heterostereotypes - perceptions of "others", that is, "strangers"; autostereotypes - self-awareness, that is, as a representative of one's own ethnos or culture, an image of "oneself";

Intentional (goal-oriented) and spontaneous (self-generated);

<sup>1</sup>Shikhirev P.N. Sotsialnye stereotypy // Ros. sociologist. encyclical / pod ed. G. V. Osipova. - M.: Norma-Infra-M, 1998. - S. 538.

<sup>2</sup>Rozhdestvenskaya N.A. Role stereotyping v poznanii cheloveka chelovekom // Vopr. psychology. - 1986. - No. 4. - S. 69-76.

<sup>3</sup>Donets P. N. K tipologii stereotypev // Sotsialnaya vlast yazyka. Voronezh: Izd-vo VGU, 2001. - S. 183-188.

Positive and negative;

Intensive (strongly charged) and moderate stereotypes.

L.I. Grishaeva and L.V. According to Tsurikova, stereotypes can be not only positive or negative, but also neutral.<sup>4</sup>

According to V. S. Ageyev, “the failure to distinguish between social and psychological functions, that is, the confusion of levels of scientific analysis, leads to a one-sided negative assessment of social stereotypes not only as a social, but also as a psychological phenomenon.” The author proposes to distinguish between the concepts of social stereotype and stereotyping. Stereotyping as a psychological process serves as a mechanism for the formation of stereotypes, but does not determine the content of the stereotype. The content is formed on the basis of social factors and can be assessed in the categories of “good” or “bad”.<sup>5</sup>

According to V.V. Krasnykh's classification, stereotypes can be of two types: image-stereotypes and situation-stereotypes. .<sup>6</sup>

- image-stereotypes: bee – hardworking, sheep – stubborn;
- Situation-stereotypes: ticket – composter, stork – cabbage.

Stereotypes can also be divided into superficial and deep stereotypes.

A distinctive feature of superficial stereotypes is that opinions and judgments about other peoples are based on historical facts, domestic political and international situations, as well as some other temporary factors. Such stereotypes are not stable and change depending on external and internal political changes in the world and society. Superficial stereotypes can be called “image-images”, since they are based on specific historical facts.

Deeply meaningful stereotypes, on the other hand, are the complete opposite of superficial stereotypes and have the property of permanence, that is, they do not change over time. Such stereotypes are widely used in research devoted to the study of various national character traits. Stereotypes themselves serve as material for studying the nation that has become the object of stereotyping. And the assessment of stereotypes makes it possible to give a characteristic description of the group in which these stereotypes are widespread.

When talking about deep-rooted stereotypes, one can also distinguish a group called external stereotypes. Such stereotypes are associated with the identity and lifestyle of the people. They are not dependent on changes in the life of the people and change very slowly. For example, matryoshka and samovar have become an integral part of Russian life. Despite the fact that these attributes are practically not used today, they are still in demand among foreigners or are used in various ceremonies.<sup>7</sup>

**Discussion.** A stereotype is considered a national concept, but if similar situations occur in other cultures, this phenomenon is called a quasi-stereotype. Although such stereotypes are similar in external signs, they differ in small differences and details. For example, let's take the following situation. A representative of Russian and Uzbek culture asks “Who is the last?” or simply stands in line, while in European countries it is customary to take a ticket indicating the queue number and wait for the number to appear on the screen.

Ethnic consciousness and culture, which can influence human behavior, are formed on the basis of innate factors and factors acquired in the process of socialization. The second group of factors are cultural stereotypes, which a person acquires only when he considers himself to belong to a certain

<sup>4</sup>Grishaeva L. I., Tsurikova L. V. Introduction and theory of intercultural communication. - M.: Academy, 2007.

<sup>5</sup>Ageev V.S. Mejgruppovoe vzaimodeystvie: social-psychological problems. - M., 1990. - C.96 .

<sup>6</sup>Krasnykh V. V. Ethno-psycho-linguistics and linguo-cultural studies: Course lecture. - M.: ITDGK "Gnozis", 2002. - 117 p.

<sup>7</sup>Brodetskaya M.V. Classification of stereotypes and background knowledge of stereotypes. – Science Time, no. 2 (38), 2017. - C. 72-76.

nation and culture and realizes that he is an integral part of this culture. Thus, a person lives in a world of stereotypes instilled in him by culture. For example, stereotypes can be identified by comparing people belonging to rural and urban cultures or people of certain professions. The first person says under the moonlight, "The light is so strong that you can sew clothes," while the second in this situation says, "It is so bright that you can read."

The perception of a foreign culture can have different levels of complexity. From professional ethnographic, country studies and sociological studies of other cultures to simplified images that are a product of mass culture, often ideologically negative. The media often repeat existing stereotypes, transmit ready-made and simplified schemes and patterns. This leads to an exaggeration of the similarities of representatives of other cultures and a denial of their differences.

In ordinary consciousness, words such as "stereotype", "stereotypical" usually have a negative connotation and are associated with a uniform and unusual phenomenon. However, from the point of view of intercultural communication, the attitude towards stereotypes is not so one-sided, since stereotypical ideas about national characters exist to a certain extent in the consciousness of any person.

When a person encounters representatives of other cultures, he naturally evaluates their behavior based on his own cultural position. No one can have a completely objective idea of a particular group or constantly perceive the complex reality around them in all its aspects. In this sense, the tendency to generalize unknown and complex phenomena on the basis of previously existing categories is considered a natural feature of human nature. Stereotypes have existed in all historical periods. Their content has changed depending on economic, political and socio-cultural conditions. As A.P. Sadokhin noted, in the process of interpreting the behavior of representatives of other cultures, "the content of causal attributes depends mainly on the stereotypical ideas of both parties about each other. This means ideas about the lifestyle, customs, morals, habits and ethnocultural characteristics of a people in general. The basis of such ideas are simplified mental representations of a certain category of people, which exaggerate common features and deny differences".<sup>8</sup>

The study of stereotypes of masculinity and femininity is of great importance from the point of view of language and culture, since through them it becomes possible to understand the cultural potential of the nation, to come closer to understanding the mechanisms of interaction between men and women, as well as to reconsider views on their roles in society and their place in the social hierarchy. Since gender stereotypes reflect the relationship between two opposing groups, such as men and women, the content of these stereotypes is formed by dividing them into categories consisting of pairs of gender-defined qualities. Such a categorization method serves to more clearly show the differences that are considered characteristic of men and women in the minds of society. These categories include: characteristics related to activity and activity, qualities related to power and management, interpersonal processes, qualities related to the emotional and cognitive spheres, and a set of stereotyped social roles.<sup>9</sup>

When analyzing the emotional and cognitive spheres, first of all, psychological characteristics are put forward. In cognitive activity, men often use logic, resort to thinking, and tend to perceive information objectively and critically. Women, on the contrary, rely more on intuition, irrationality, and illogicality, and are far from critical in receiving and evaluating information, which in some cases is perceived by others as stupidity.

**Conclusion.** Stereotypes remain one of the most persistent and influential phenomena in both social and cultural life. Their historical development, beginning with Walter Lippmann's foundational concept, has shown that stereotypes extend far beyond ethnic associations, covering multiple social categories. Scholars have proposed various classifications that help to differentiate between stereotypes based on their content, depth, and function. While superficial stereotypes often change in response to historical

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<sup>8</sup>Sadokhin A. P. Theory and practice of intercultural communication. - M.: YUNITI-DANA, 2004. - S. 203.

<sup>9</sup>Ryabova, T. B. Stereotype and stereotyping kak problema tendernyx issledovaniy / T. B. Ryabova // Lichnost. Culture . Obshchestvo . - 2003. - T. V. Vyp . 1-2 (15-16). - S. 120-139.

and political contexts, deep-rooted stereotypes persist as part of cultural consciousness, reflecting stable values and symbols.

The distinction between stereotyping as a psychological mechanism and the social content of stereotypes is crucial, as it helps to understand the dual role of stereotypes: as both a cognitive simplification and a cultural marker. Furthermore, the influence of media in reproducing and transmitting stereotypes demonstrates the significant role of communication technologies in shaping social consciousness. Ultimately, stereotypes, whether positive, negative, or neutral, form an inseparable part of social identity and intergroup relations, making their study vital for intercultural understanding and the promotion of tolerance.

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