

GIVE STEREOTYPES **THE BOOT**



THE EQUALITY AUTHORITY
AN tÚDARÁS COMHIONANNAIS

The Equality Authority, as part of its remit to promote equality, together with community and voluntary organisations is implementing a strategy to combat stereotyping.

Equality legislation (Employment Equality Acts 1998 to 2007 and Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2008) prohibit discrimination in employment, vocational training, goods and services, accommodation and education on the nine grounds of gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion and membership of the Traveller community.

Aims

The aims of the *'Give Stereotypes the Boot'* Action Strategy are:

1. To raise awareness and create understanding of stereotyping and of the negative impact of stereotyping on people across the nine equality grounds;
2. To promote critical thinking about the way groups, covered by the nine equality grounds, are represented across multiple environments including education, employment, public services, the advertising industry and the media.
3. To identify and support appropriate ways in which stereotyping can be challenged and addressed by employers, educators, public sector service providers and those involved in advertising and in the media.

Actions

A. The *'Breaking Stereotypes'* exhibition will be displayed in various locations around Ireland, including libraries and art centres. The exhibition was developed by the European Commission as part of the *'For Diversity, Against Discrimination'* information campaign. The exhibition will act as a focal point to stimulate a response to the issue of stereotyping.

STEREOTYPING: A fixed and inflexible view about someone or a group of people.



B. Regional action strategies will be developed to raise awareness of stereotyping and to address stereotyping. Regional action strategies will involve employers, public sector service providers and educational institutions. Initiatives specifically targeted at media and advertisers will be developed to raise their awareness of stereotyping and the damaging impact of stereotypical portrayals of groups under the nine grounds.

C. Guidance publications will be developed highlighting ways in which stereotyping can be addressed in the workplace, in the provision of public services and in educational contexts.

What is a Stereotype?

‘Stereotyping’ literally means ‘rigid impression’ or ‘solid image’. It first came into use over 200 years ago in Greek and Latin. At this time it was used to describe how a stereotype, or a mould, was used to print identical copies of documents.

Today, the word ‘stereotype’ is defined in the dictionary as a ‘standardised idea of a type of person or thing’. However, when people are stereotyped it usually means that they are reduced to one positive or negative characteristic in a way that suggests that this characteristic is inherent or ‘naturally’ built in to them. In other words we label people. This label is often based on misinformation or incorrect attitudes or opinions. It is also based on an oversimplified generalisation of a social group and ignores the personal identity of individuals – that is, the features that makes them different from all other people.

Stereotypes can be both positive and negative and more than one stereotype can exist about individuals and groups at the same time. Negative stereotypes diminish people. However, even positive stereotypes can have a negative effect as they can end up patronising or disempowering the individual.



STEREOTYPING: A standardised idea of a type of person or thing.

Stereotypes influence the attitudes of people towards groups or individuals outside of their own group. Stereotypes also influence the attitudes of people towards their own group and themselves. In other words people can internalise stereotypes.

Where does Stereotyping Happen?

Stereotyping happens at all levels of society including:

- At a social level - within individuals; within families; within groups; between groups; in public places; in social language and discourse;
- At a cultural level – in arts and literature; in the media; in advertising; in cultural language and discourse;
- At a political level – in government policies and administration; in political language and discourse; and
- At an institutional level – in the culture, policies and administration of organisations.

Key arenas within which stereotypes are generated and have influence:

- The workplace;
- Educational establishments;
- The media;
- Public sector service provision; and
- The advertising industry.

STEREOTYPING: Incorrect or fixed expectations about people and their capabilities, based on inadequate information.



The Impact of Stereotyping – An Equality Perspective

There is a link between stereotyping and inequalities experienced by groups and individuals. This link is evident in how those who are stereotyped are treated by society and in the status they are accorded by society.

In stereotyping images are portrayed, assumptions are made and perspectives are communicated which serve to perpetuate unfounded myths about the group and its individual members, to limit the choices open to individuals from the group and to shape expectations of the group and its individual members.

Stereotypes do not just reflect a way of thinking but are also manifested in organisational practices, policies and procedures which may lead to situations where discrimination can happen. Practices within institutions are shaped by ideas, images and language which may be based on stereotypes about particular individuals or groups.

Challenging Stereotypes

Stereotyping can be challenged by:

- Raising awareness of stereotyping, how stereotyping happens and its negative impact;
- Promoting communication and debate about stereotyping with a view to creating images and language that more accurately reflects the variety in the experiences and situations of groups and individuals;
- Identifying and implementing good practice such that stereotyping plays no role in decision making, policies, procedures and practices within organisations.

STEREOTYPING: Socially constructed ideas about a group of people, which have negative consequences.



Inequality and the Stereotyping of Young People

by Maurice Devlin, published by the Equality Authority and the National Youth Council of Ireland

Key findings from focus groups of young people:

- In general, young people believe themselves to be the subject of stereotypical ideas and images, and of prejudicial and discriminatory treatment based on such ideas and images.
- In general, young people see their institutional relationships with adults for the most part as unequal, troubled and rooted in stereotypical ideas about their attributes and abilities.
- Young people highlighted particular issues of stereotyping by the media, their local communities, the Gardai, shopping centre security staff and teachers.
- The media were regarded as particularly prone to stereotyping young people in very negative ways by constantly associating 'youth' with crime, deviance, delinquency, drug and alcohol problems, sexual promiscuity and general disorderliness.

STEREOTYPING: Forming an idea about a group of people, based on superficial knowledge.



An Introduction to Gender Equality Issues in the Marketing and Design of Goods for Children

by Maryann Valiulis, Aoife O’Driscoll and Jennifer Redmond,
published by the Equality Authority

Key findings in this background paper are:

- Gender stereotypes are communicated to children in the marketing and design of goods through the language used in advertisements, the production techniques for advertisements, the symbols and imagery used, and the portrayal and use of space in advertisements.
- These gender stereotypes are based on girls being portrayed as dependent, nurturing and passive and on boys being portrayed as independent, aggressive and active.
- Marketing strategies diminished and limited the range of possibilities available to children on the basis of their gender, presenting children with a very narrow set of possibilities.

STEREOTYPING: Seeing everyone
in a group as the same.



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