

"The Danger of a Single Story" Video Response

Tiana Juarez

E101: English Grammar

Jewel Randolph

December 9, 2017

“The Danger of a Single Story” Video Response

Introduction

The video “The Danger of a Single Story” is a TED Talk presented by Novelist Chimamanda Adichie. In her presentation, Adichie narrates her story and connects it to how stereotypes develop all around the world. In so doing, she warns that the moment we forget that the lives and identities of people are made up of many overlapping stories, we risk developing and showing a critical and cultural misunderstanding of them. She makes it clear that stereotypes typically develop from single perspectives covered as a single story, which makes them incomplete, and, for the most part, untrue.

Part A

- *What is Adichie's thesis statement?*

Adichie’s thesis statement is “what this demonstrates, I think, is how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story, particularly as children” (Adiche, 2009).

- *What key points does she raise in this video presentation?*

Adichie raises several points in her video presentation that support her thesis throughout the story. One, she raises the fact people know about others, but it is dangerous if they see them and know them as only one thing because they do not know more about their real identity. She says that the single story is created when people are constantly shown one thing, which is what they eventually become (Adiche, 2009). Secondly, Adichie reminds the audience that they must seek diverse perspectives of people in order to know them fully and it is also in their best interests to tell their personal stories so that they contribute to the changing of stereotypes developed by initial perspectives. In addition, she says that although stories have been used to dispossess and defame people, they can also act as tools that can empower and humanize (Adiche, 2009). Explaining this point, she says that stories have the ability to break a people’s dignity and at the same time the ability to restore the lost dignity.

Lastly, she says that the result of the single story is that it robs people of dignity, makes it difficult for us to recognize our equality as humans and emphasizes the differences rather than the similarities (Adiche, 2009).

- *How does she support her arguments? Give specific examples.*

To support the arguments she makes in her presentation, Adichie uses anecdotes and personal experiences. For instance, in the beginning, to reinforce how as children we are vulnerable and easily influenced, she tells of her own story as a kid where she wrote stories and did crayon illustrations and had white, blue-eyed characters who played in the snow, were passionate about the weather and ate apples. She explains how, as a child, she was influenced to believe that since all the books she read had foreign characters, all books had to have foreign characters by design (Adiche, 2009). Secondly, to explain the concept of the single story and how single stories of others influence the thinking of the observer, she gives the account of their houseboy, Fide, whom she knew her family was poor only to discover later that they were also hardworking (Adiche, 2009). To reinforce his point, she tells of her personal experience in the United States as a student, where her roommate was shocked to see that she spoke English very well and also had a tape of Mariah Carey. This was because her roommate felt sorry for her for the perception with which she had grown up that Africans were backward and primitive. On the same point, she tells of how she was also guilty of knowing the single story of Mexicans as immigrants as inspired by the Political climate in America (Adiche, 2009).

Part B

- *Describe a stereotype that you had about a group of people that you believe was harmful and a stereotype that someone else had of you? (Please note, this section should not be more than one page long).*

One stereotype that I had about a group of people that could have been harmful is that of Mexicans being gang members and drug dealers. This stereotype was inspired by Hollywood movies, which often have the roles of drug dealers and gang members as Mexicans. I believe this stereotype was harmful and highly insulting since the portrayal is damaging to Mexicans as a whole while in reality, the depiction is mere propaganda. The stereotype is insulting especially since most Mexicans have seen and experienced how the drug war has destroyed their home country and inspired a corrupt government, both local and national.

I have also been subjected to a stereotype. Once, I visited a friend in Florida and had to tell my friend’s friends that I am from Oklahoma. One of them, although jokingly, asked me where I had left my Cowboy Hat and if I had left my pickup truck in the driveway since there is the perception that everyone in Oklahoma wears a Cowboy Hat and drives a pickup truck. This was not true since, although pickup trucks and cowboy hats are popular in my home area, Oklahoma has a variety of culture, fashions, and choice of transport vessels.

- *Discuss the process that you went through to come to a more enlightened view of this group of people.*

To get a more enlightened view of Mexicans as a group to which I attached the ‘drug dealer’ and ‘gang member’ stereotype, I engaged in several practices that helped me gain a better perspective of them. First, I sought to learn more about the problem I had. I tried to increase my awareness of racism and how I could address it on a personal level (Schroder, 1991). To do so, I attended training at work on prejudice and conflict. I also tried to celebrate diversity by myself by having Latino friends, an aspect that helped me get a different view of Mexicans from the one I had before as was inspired by Hollywood movies. Additionally, with Latino friends, I was able to learn about their cultures and try their foods. My experience with my Latino friends put me in the middle of cross-racial and cross-cultural interactions. In

addition, I went out of my way to research movies that portray Mexicans as drug dealers and gang members to understand what motivated the directors of the movies to paint the picture they did and if indeed they viewed Mexicans in that manner. I was surprised to discover that most directors of the movies used the image of Mexicans as drug dealers and gang members to depict multicultural interactions and paint the picture that gangs and drug dealers are present in the society and they only used Mexicans specifically to spice up the movie and give it a touch of reality, although misplaced. Lastly, looking for facts, I compared the presence of drugs in the United States and Mexico. In so doing, I discovered that both had drugs and drug dealing as a major issue, although the effect was much felt in across homes in Mexico than in the U.S.

- *In what ways can you challenge the stereotypes that those around you might have, e.g. in your church, family, school, workplace etc.*

I can challenge the stereotypes that those around me might have in my workplace from both a personal and organizational perspective. To start with, I would strive to be as authentic as I can be (Barry, 2015). Knowing what I want from my job, I would not change how I dress, shorten my name or fear to speak about my traditions and culture openly. Secondly, I would give value to truth since I believe it is the best way to develop a relationship of trust with colleagues and supervisors, advance my career and create a lasting positive image (Schneider, 2005). From a broader perspective, I would work to influence the top leadership of the company to come up with and implement policies that discourage stereotyping and discrimination among employees at the workplace. I would also provide suggestions to supervisors on the necessity of diversity training in the workplace to train managers, supervisors, and employees. These training activities would increase awareness among employees regarding diverse populations and even help the organization view diversity beyond the typical topics of diversity such as sex, nation of origin, religion and race.

In summary, stereotypes in most cases go beyond sex, race, color, religion, and nation of origin as the basis of unfair and harmful generalizations. Stereotypes are experienced on most platforms including schools, workplaces, churches, and public places like hotels. Most people have been in situations where they were viewed from stereotypical perspectives, some of which leave the individuals hurting, albeit unnecessarily. To avoid making stereotypical utterances, one can learn more about the specific aspect they are referring to and even reach out to the subjects of the stereotypes to learn more about them.

References

Adiche, C. (October, 2009). The Danger of a Single Story [Video file]. Retrieved from

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg>

Barry, S. (2015). Challenging stereotypes at work. Retrieved from

<https://www.cnbc.com/2015/08/05/challenging-gender-race-stereotypes-at-work-commentary.html>

Schneider, D. J. (2005). *The psychology of stereotyping*. Guilford Press.

Schroder, H. (1991). How To Avoid Ethnocentricity and Stereotypes in Analysing Another Culture.