

**The exploration of stereotypes among non-academic staff  
within a South African higher education institution**

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## COMMENTS

The reader is reminded of the following:

- The editorial style as well as the references referred to in this mini-dissertation follow the format prescribed by the Publication Manual (6<sup>th</sup> edition) of the American Psychological Association (APA). This practice is in line with the policy of the Programme in Industrial Psychology of the North-West University (Potchefstroom) to use APA style in all scientific documents as from January 1999.
- The mini-dissertation is submitted in the form of a research article. The editorial style specified by the South African Journal of Industrial Psychology (which agrees largely with the APA style) is used, but the APA guidelines were followed in referencing and constructing tables.

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## ABSTRACT

**Title:** The exploration of stereotypes among non-academic staff within a South African higher education institution

**Keywords:** Stereotypes, age stereotypes, gender stereotypes, racial stereotypes, occupational stereotypes, non-academic staff, and higher education institutions

After the first democratic elections in 1994 in South Africa, various changes took place in terms of socio-economic, educational, and urbanisation status. South African organisation's had to replace discriminatory policies with new policies to integrate all people and to embrace diversity. These posed more challenges for organisations. Higher education institutions are an example of such a diverse working environment which is changing rapidly. These changes resulted in more diverse management teams and a more culturally diverse workforce who posed various dangers, such as an increasing lack of tolerance, misunderstandings, frustrations and reinforcing stereotypes. There have been many researchers that have focused on stereotypes; however, studies on stereotypes within South Africa are limited more especially within higher education institutions.

The purpose of this research project was, therefore, to explore what individuals within a South African higher education institution understand regarding stereotyping, the types of stereotypes that exist amongst them and their experience of these stereotypes. The general objective of this study is to explore the experience of stereotypes among the non-academic staff within a higher education institution.

Qualitative research from a phenomenological approach was used. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. A total of 30 support staff members were interviewed. A combination of both quota and convenience sampling was used. Interviews were tape recorded. Content analysis was used to analyse and interpret data. The results indicated that all participants understood the concept 'stereotype.' The main existing stereotypes include age, culture, gender, occupational, qualification and racial stereotypes. These are the stereotypes that they have of others and those that they experience themselves. There is also an indication that stereotypes have different effects on the stereotyped which are cognitive,



emotional and behavioural effects. Many of the participants have an opinion that stereotypes originate from one's past experiences, primary and secondary exposure and one's subjective perceptions.

Recommendations for future research and practice were made.

## OPSOMMING

**Titel:** Die verkenning van stereotipes onder nie-akademiese personeel in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse hoër onderwys instansie

**Sleutel terme:** Stereotipes, ouderdomstereotipes, geslagstereotipes, rasse stereotipes, beroepstereotipes, nie-akademiese personeel. en instansie vir hoër onderwys

Sedert die eerste Suid-Afrikaanse demokratiese verkiesing in 1994, het verskeie veranderinge plaasgevind in terme van sosio-ekonomiese, opvoedkundige, en verstedeliking status. Suid-Afrikaanse organisasies het hulle diskriminerende beleide vervang met nuwe beleide van integrasie en omhelsing van diversiteit wat meer uitdagings vir organisasies daarstel. Hoër onderwys instansies is 'n voorbeeld van so 'n diverse werksomgewing wat vinnig verander. Hierdie veranderinge het tot gevolg gehad dat meer diverse bestuurspanne en 'n meer kultureel diverse werksmag tot stand gekom het, wat verskeie gevare inhou, soos die toenemende gebrek aan verdraagsaamheid, misverstande, frustrasies en versterking van stereotipes. Daar is talle navorsers wat fokus op die bestudering van stereotipes, maar studies oor stereotipes binne Suid-Afrikaanse hoër onderwys instansies is beperk.

Die doel van hierdie navorsingsprojek was dus om ondersoek in te stel na wat stereotipering vir individue beteken binne 'n Suid-Afrikaanse hoër onderwys instansie, die tipes stereotipes wat bestaan en die individu se ervaring van hierdie stereotipes. Die algemene doelstelling van hierdie studie is om die ervaring van stereotipes onder die nie-akademiese personeel binne 'n hoër onderwys instansie te ondersoek.

Kwalitatiewe navorsing vanuit 'n fenomenologiese benadering is gebruik. Semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude is gebruik om data in te samel deur 'n totaal van 30 ondersteuningspersoneel te ondervra. 'n Kombinasie van beide kwota-en gerieflikheidsteekproefneming is gebruik. Onderhoude is op oudioband opgeneem. Inhoud-analise is gebruik om data te analiseer en te interpreteer. Vanuit die resultate was dit duidelik, dat alle deelnemers die konsep, 'stereotipe', verstaan. Die belangrikste bestaande stereotipes sluit in ouderdom-, kultuur-, geslag-, beroeps-, kwalifikasie- en rassestereotipes.

Hierdie stereotipes is ervaar deur ander sowel as hulself. Daar is ook aangedui dat stereotipes verskillende uitwerkings het op deelnemers, en wel op kognitiewe, emosionele en gedragsgebiede. Vir baie van die deelnemers was dit eenders. dat stereotipes ontstaan as gevolg van ervarings in die verlede, primêre en sekondêre blootstelling en subjektiewe persepsies.

Aanbevelings vir toekomstige navorsing en praktyk is gemaak.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

South Africa has been referred to as the 'rainbow nation', a title which epitomises the country's diversity. According to Claassen (1997) South Africa is one of the most diversified countries in the world consisting of different ethnic and cultural groups and has eleven official languages. Apart from these differences, South Africans vary in terms of socio-economic status, educational status, and urbanisation status. These dissimilarities became more palpable after the democratic election in 1994 when most South African organisation's had done away with discriminatory policies which were replaced by policies of inclusion and integration of all people and collaboration of diversity (see Employment Equity Act). This, more diversified workforce created more challenges for organisations to create a corporate climate which is recognised by all employees (Claassen, 1997).

Grobler Warnich, Carrell, Elbert and Hatfield (2002) stated that the change in the demographic structure of the South African workforce mirrors the diversity of the South African population as a whole. Therefore, the challenge of recruiting, selecting and managing a diverse workforce is necessary for organisational survival. Devoe (1999) stated that managing diversity is more than simply acknowledging differences in people. It involves recognising the value of differences, combating discrimination, and promoting inclusiveness. He further mentioned that managers may also be challenged with losses in personnel, absenteeism and lower work productivity due to prejudice, discrimination, complaints and legal actions against the organisation. Maicibi (2007) further mentioned the following as the challenges that organisations have to cope with in managing diversity; resistance to change, interpersonal conflicts, segmented communication networks and competition for opportunities. Ongori and Agolla (2007) stated that many people feel threatened by working with people of a different age, sex, or culture. They further mentioned that conflicts arise when two or more individuals or

groups do not see eye to eye on a particular situation: “This can produce negative dynamics such as ethnocentrism, stereotyping and culture clashes” (White, 1999, p.478).

Higher education institutions are an example of such a diverse working environment, which is changing rapidly worldwide. Redressing historical imbalances relating to both staff appointments and student access is, therefore, an imperative for South African higher education institutions (Norris, 2000). The education system in South Africa is now rapidly changing towards a complex mix of races, cultures, languages and sexual orientations. These changes have resulted in more diverse management teams and a more culturally diverse workforce (Niemann, 2006). According to Williams and Green (1994), the workforce today in South African educational institutions is much less traditional and hence results in a tendency to ignore differences, but this also poses various dangers, such as increasing lack of tolerance within the group, misunderstandings, frustrations, defensiveness, criticism and aggressive behaviour, and reinforcing stereotypes. Diversity tension is often created because people feel that they are being marginalised or treated unfairly, and this signals that these problems have to be addressed (Niemann, 1994).

### Stereotypes

According to Oakes, Haslam and Turner (1994), stereotyping is defined as a process of ascribing characteristics to people on the basis of their group memberships. They further stated those stereotypes are the collection of attributes believed to define or characterise the members of a social group. Oakes et al. (1994) also stated that the way that people behave towards other people and their feelings about them; very much depends upon the social groups to which they belong. Whether it is desirable or not, people hold beliefs about social groups and these beliefs influence their interaction with people identified as members. Oakes et al. (1994) argued that this process of stereotyping can lead to the misrepresentation of one’s true characteristics.

Schneider (2004) stated that stereotypes often seem to be integrally related to the group memberships and with conflict between groups. He further stated that people seem to have stronger and more negative stereotypes about groups to which they do not belong (i.e. out-

group) than to those to which they do (in-group). In-group has been defined as a group of people sharing similar interests and attitudes, producing feelings of solidarity, community, and exclusivity (www.dictionary.com). Out-group is defined as people outside one's own group, especially as considered to be inferior or alien; a group perceived as other than one's own (www.dictionary.com). People see the group to which they belong (the in-group) as being different from the others (the out-group), and members of the same group as being more similar than they are (McLeod, 2008).

According to McLeod (2008), social identity theory states that the in-group will discriminate against the out-group to enhance their self-image. Group members of an in-group will seek to find negative aspects of an out-group, thus enhancing their self-image by discriminating and being prejudice against the out-group (the group they don't belong to). Conflict with other groups not only naturally heightened negative feelings toward the out-group, but strengthened in-group loyalties and feelings as well (Schneider, 2004). Examples of in-group and out-group in terms of gender are men and women.

According to Du Plessis (2001), stereotypes are *inter alia* derived from ethnocentrism, which is the use of one's own culture as a yardstick to measure, assess or judge others. He further stated that the dangerous part of this is that people tend to do it subconsciously. People, quite naturally, have a preference for their own language, for the customs and traditions they inherit from their ancestors and or their religion. Stereotypes are nothing but prejudices that are based on perceptions created by factors such as own experiences, hearsay and the mass media. In many instances, the main culprits in peddling stereotypes are parents who transmit their experiences and perceptions and stereotypes to their children. The children, without having tested the prejudice, will carry these as baggage for the rest of their lives until they challenge the stereotypes themselves through personal exposure (Du Plessis, 2001).

### **Nature of stereotypes**

Swain (2011) stated that all stereotypes are subjective on some level. He further mentioned that depending on the environment in which they are discussed and the company present during the

time uttered, the stereotypes could be positive and negative on several levels. The stereotype becomes negative when they become barriers and are used as a means to classify people without getting to know them. Stereotypes become negative when used as a tool of oppression. Stereotypes also become unbearable when a person is unable to fulfil their purpose in life for fear of venturing outside of the norm. Stereotypes can be oppressive, positive and negative at the same time. It is the individual that gives it meaning and power (Musings, 2011).

Burgess (2003) argued that although stereotypes generally have negative implications, they aren't always negative. The author further stated that stereotypes are basically generalisations that are made about groups. Such generalisations are necessary in order to be able to interact effectively. People must have some idea of what people are likely to be like, which behaviour will be considered acceptable and which not. Burgess (2003) also stated that stereotypes are only a problem when they are inaccurate, especially when those inaccuracies are negative and hostile. Nittle (2011) concurs with other researchers that both negative and positive stereotypes exist; however, stereotypes are limiting and leave little or no room for individuality. The victims of stereotypes are invariably embarrassed. Even though an individual may be smart, highly intelligent and of good standing, he or she may still be tarnished with the brush of a particular stereotype (Du Plessis, 2001).

Furthermore, appearance creates stereotypes in society that exist outside of gender, race or traditional standing. These stereotypes are designed to help society place an individual within a group of people in the society for identification purposes. A person who has a large amount of visible tattoos may be stereotyped as a threatening or a bad person by a segment of society while someone in a business suit may be stereotyped as trustworthy (Swain, 2011).

### **Types of stereotypes**

#### ***Age stereotype***

Hedge, Borman and Lammlein (2006) defined age stereotypes as widely shared judgements of the standard or typical ages at which individuals hold a particular role or status. Such age

stereotypes and age norms can have a significant influence on expectations of performance; the performance itself and how that performance is evaluated (Hedge et al., 2006). Older people tend to be rated relatively lower than younger ones on physical but not on cognitive and personality attributes (Slotterback & Saarnio, 1996). Elderly individuals are seen as less potent, active, decisive, instrumental and autonomous. However, they are seen to be more positive on social warmth traits such as nurturance and are seen to have wisdom. Examples of stereotypes about young people include 'young people are irresponsible, lazy, rude and inarticulate.' On a positive note, young people are stereotyped to be more productive, flexible, loyal to organisations, are independent and self-sufficient (Hart, 2006) and are extremely technology-literate (Lowe, Levitt & Wilson, 2008).

### *Gender stereotypes*

Onwunta and August (2007) mentioned that gender stereotypes stem from the classification of women and men into social roles. Gender stereotypes like other social stereotypes, reflect perceivers' observations of what people do in daily life. Kwatsha (2009) defined gender stereotypes as sets of beliefs about what it means to be female or male and includes information about physical appearance, attitude and interest, psychological traits, social relations and occupation. He further mentioned that these various dimensions are interrelated in that by simply knowing that an individual is female implies that this person will have certain physical characteristics (for example soft voice, dainty, graceful actions and certain psychological traits like nurturing, dependent, weak, emotional) and will engage in particular kinds of activities (child care, cooking, gardening). Basow (1992) mentioned that masculinity is associated with competency, instrumentality and activity; men are often stereotyped to be aggressive, independent, not emotional, competitive, skilled in business, excellent in mathematics and science and very adventurous (Basow, 1992).

### *Racial stereotypes*

Swain (2011) stated that race has been the source of long-standing detrimental stereotypes. These stereotypes can divide society into racial groups. These racial groups are identified by the



person or group applying the stereotype based on the appearance of the individual applied by the appearance or lack of certain facial, colouring and body type features applied to a given racial group. A stereotype of this nature can be applied by anyone or may not be correctly based on the applier's actual knowledge of the racial group as it relates to the person's stereotyped beliefs (Swain, 2011). Black women are often stereotyped as aggressive, loud and materialistic. Black men are often stereotyped as aggressive, lazy, and athletic. Indians are stereotyped to be brilliant in mathematics and science and Italians are often stereotyped to be romantic (Swain, 2011).

### ***Occupational stereotypes***

Lipton, O'Connor, Terry and Bellamy (1991, p.129) define occupational stereotyping as "A preconceived attitude about a particular occupation, about people who are employed in that occupation, and about one's own suitability for that occupation." People do see some jobs as masculine (for example, construction industry) and others as feminine (for example, nursing). Males and females also differ in the kinds of jobs they like with males having a relative preference for jobs involving things and females for those dealing more with people (Lippa, 1998; Lupaschuk & Yewchuk, 1998). Other examples of occupational stereotypes include 'lawyers are liars', 'theologians are righteous' and 'car salesmen are dishonest'.

### **Outcomes of stereotypes**

According to Singletary, Ruggs, Hebl and Davies (2009), stereotypes about an individual's group, which can be shaped as either positive or negative, elicit a variety of emotions. Negative stereotypes often cause negative responses which can manifest themselves in the stereotyped individual's reactions, performance on a task, motivation, and self-esteem (Singletary et al., 2009). Research has shown that the threat of being evaluated, judged by, or treated in terms of a negative stereotype can cause individuals to perform worse in a domain in which negative stereotypes exist about a group of which they are a member. Spencer, Steele and Quinn (1999) and Steele and Aronson (1995) termed this phenomenon as stereotype threat.

The consequences of stereotype threat have been noted. Aronson (2002) mentioned that perceptions of negative stereotypes lead many individuals to engage in activities such as self-handicapping (Smith, 2004), challenge avoidance (Good, Aronson & Inzlicht, 2003), self-suppression (Steele, 1997; Pronin, Steele & Ross, 2004), and disengagement with the task or the context in which the task is to be performed (Aronson, 2002; Steele, 1997; Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolf & Croker; 1998). Research suggests that the negative effects of stereotype threat on performance are mediated by psychological and physiological mechanisms such as anxiety, arousal (i.e., readiness to respond to specified stimuli), and working memory (Schmader & Johns, 2003; Spencer et al., 1999; Steele, 1997). Stereotype threat not only creates performance decrements but ultimately may also impact on major life decisions and prevent individuals from reaching their full potential within a threatened domain (Gupta & Bhawe, 2007). Another study found that when stereotype threat was induced, there was an increase in blood pressure in African American participants taking an academic test (Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn & Steele, 2001). These results offer insight into the role of arousal on performance under conditions of stereotype threat.

Zhang (2010) stated that stereotypes could have psychological, emotional, and social costs. Psychologically, the stereotyped people can suffer from low self-esteem, extreme depression, distress and might produce other/self-directed violence and punishment (Zhang, 2010). Emotionally, frequently rejected people often suffer from anxiety, excruciating pain and often feel crushed (Zhang, 2010). Stereotypes can also affect the stereotyped socially in terms of foregoing social life, enduring loneliness and alienation. According to Zhang (2010), peer exclusion often happens to those who are perceived as outsiders or nerds with inadequate language, communication, and social skills. People are more likely to initiate friendship with those who are perceived as similar, good at self-disclosure, and having good social and communication skills.

The effects of stereotyping increases concomitantly with prejudice, so prejudiced perceivers are much more likely to discriminate against negatively stereotyped groups (Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson & Gaertner, 1996). Mor Barak (2005) stated that discrimination occurs in the workplace where people are treated differently due to personal characteristics such as race,

ethnicity or gender by individuals, institutions or governments, and when these actions impede access to jobs, promotions or compensation. Stereotypical thinking can lead to false impressions, poor judgements and inappropriate actions (Hedge et al., 2006). Burgess and Borgida (1999), for example, stated that descriptive stereotypes have a disparate impact on women's career advancement, limiting them by depicting them as unsuitable for certain jobs that require stereotypically masculine traits and attributes. Gender stereotypes also prevent those with true leadership and management capabilities from getting ahead (Martins, 2012).

In addition, Hedge et al. (2006) stated that myths of aging are also found in a work organisation's culture and are often reinforced by its policies and procedures. They further stated that these myths influence the attitudes of others toward 'older people'. Rosen and Jerdee (1985) in Hedge et al. (2006) stated that in a business context, decisions based on race, sex or age stereotypes run the risk of ignoring or misjudging individual differences in skills, abilities and motivations. Such stereotyping may thus result in an underuse of human resources (Hedge et al., 2006).

Martin (2012) mentioned that stereotyping creates barriers in communications at the workplace and discourages creative thinking and teamwork among employees. Stereotypes at work cause employees to place assumptions on others based on the stereotypical role that they play, therefore, employees can lose out on valuable opportunities. Stereotypes based on race and ethnicity can, therefore, alienate employees. If employees are not communicating based on their preconceived notions, they are not engaged in the same goal for the organisation and this will ultimately reflect in the organisation's failures (Martin, 2012).

Based on the above, it can clearly be seen that stereotypes have an impact on the individual and the organisation and, therefore, highlights the importance of studying this phenomenon. Also, there have been many researchers who have focused on stereotypes; however, studies on stereotypes within South Africa are limited more especially the study of stereotypes within higher education institutions, and hence the importance of this study. The purpose of this research project is, therefore, to explore what individuals within a South African higher

education institution understand regarding stereotyping, the types of stereotypes that exist amongst them and their experience of these stereotypes.

Based on the above-mentioned problem statement the following research questions can be formulated:

- How are stereotypes conceptualised according to literature?
- How are stereotypes understood by non-academic staff within a higher education institution?
- What are the most prominent stereotypes that were mentioned by non-academic staff within a higher education institution?
- What stereotypes do non-academic staff within a higher education institution hold about other people working with them?
- What stereotypes do non-academic staff within a higher education institution experience about themselves in the workplace?
- What is the origin of the stereotypes?
- What recommendations can be made for future research and practice?

## **1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The research objectives are divided into a general objective and specific objectives.

### **1.2.1 General objective**

The general objective of this research is to explore the experience of stereotypes among the non-academic staff within a higher education institution.

### **1.2.2 Specific objectives**

The specific objectives of this research are:

- To conceptualise stereotypes according to literature.
- To determine the understanding of stereotypes by non-academic staff within an academic environment.
- To determine the most prominent stereotypes mentioned by individuals working within an academic environment.
- To determine the stereotypes that the non-academic staff within a higher education institution hold about other people working with them.
- To determine the stereotypes that non-academic staff within a higher education institution experience about themselves in the workplace.
- To determine the origins of stereotypes.
- To make recommendation for future research and practise.

## **1.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **1.3.1 Research approach**

The research approach that is followed in the study is qualitative research from a phenomenological approach. The main goal of the phenomenological approach is to discover universal themes to explain the series of meanings of a phenomenon (Lester, 1999). Salkind (2009) defined qualitative research as a behavioural or social science technique that investigates human behaviour by making use of exploratory techniques, namely; interviews, observations and focus groups. This approach seeks to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspective of the local population it involves. Qualitative research is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, behaviours and social context of a particular population. The strength of this approach is its ability to provide complex textual

descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It provides information about the “human” side of an issue.

### **1.3.2 Research strategy**

The case study is used as a design. In case study research, the researcher intensively examines many features of a very few cases in-depth over a duration of time (Neumann, 1997). Case studies help researchers to connect the micro level, or the actions of individual people, to macro level, or large-scale social structures and processes (Vaughan, 1992). According to Walton (1992), the logic of the case study is to demonstrate a causal argument about how general social forces shape and produces results in particular settings.

### **1.3.3 Research method**

The research method for the purpose of this mini-dissertation consists of a literature review and an empirical study.

### **1.3.4 Literature review**

In phase 1 a complete review regarding stereotyping is done. The sources that are consulted include:

- Article databases, which include EBSCOHOST, ScienceDirect, Emerald, Sabinet Online and SA ePublications.
- Relevant textbooks.
- Internet-based search engines such as Google Scholar.
- Journal articles from various publications.

### **1.3.5 Research setting**

The research takes place at the higher education institution. The participants are interviewed at their offices for the sake of convenience so that they can feel comfortable and to ensure privacy. A 'do not disturb' sign is put outside their doors to avoid disruptions. The researcher introduces herself in a welcoming and friendly manner to ensure that the participants are at ease. The researcher then clearly explains the context of the interview, and with the permission of the participant, the interview is tape-recorded. The interview starts with an introduction and an explanation of the purpose of the research.

### **1.3.6 Entrée and establishing researcher roles**

Permission is requested from the university authorities to conduct the research and to have an interview with the participants in the institution. The participants are contacted, and dates and times that best suits them are scheduled. The researcher presents herself in a professional manner and introduces herself in a welcoming manner. The researcher explains the purpose of the study and the context of the interview. The researcher explains to the participants what is expected of them, the amount of time likely to be required for participation, the fact that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions and how confidentiality is ensured. All this information is provided in a language that the participant can understand. Permission is requested from the participants to tape record the interview sessions. The participants are requested to sign a consent form after being provided with the above-mentioned information. The participants are competent to make a decision about participating in the research. Criteria for inclusion in this research are individuals who: 1) are non-academic staff working in the academic environment; 2) who are able to speak English; 3) differ according to age, gender and race; and 4) are willing to participate in the research and prepared to have a tape-recorded interview with the researcher.

### 1.3.7 Sampling

For this study, a combination of both quota and convenience sampling is used. In quota sampling, a population is first segmented into mutually exclusive sub-groups, just as in stratified sampling. Then judgment is used to select the subjects or units from each segment based on a specified proportion. Quota sampling is useful when time is limited, a sampling frame is not available, the research budget is very tight or when detailed accuracy is not important. Subsets are chosen and then either convenience or judgment sampling is used to choose people from each subset. The researcher decides how many of each category is selected (Dodge, 2003). Convenience sampling (sometimes known as grab or opportunity sampling) is a type of non-probability sampling which involves the sample being drawn from that part of the population which is close to hand. That is, a sample population is selected because it is readily available and convenient. The sample consists of support and administration staff working at a higher education institution ( $n = 30$ ). Participants differ in terms of age, race and gender. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with participants and data is gathered until data saturation is attained.

### 1.3.8 Data collection methods

Semi-structured interviews are used to collect data. An interview schedule is developed before conducting the interviews. The interview starts with an introduction and an explanation of the purpose of the research. All participants are asked the following seven standard questions:

1. *"In your own words, please explain what you understand about the word 'stereotype'"*  
(*"What does the word stereotype mean to you?"*)
2. *"What stereotypes do you think exist in your workplace?"*
3. *"Do you associate yourself with any stereotypes within your workplace?"*  
(*"Do you think there are any stereotypes about yourself within your workplace?"*)
4. *"Do you experience any stereotypes about the specific occupation you are in?"*
5. *"How do you experience these stereotypes?"*
6. *"What stereotypes do you hold of other people in your workplace?"*



### 7. *“What are the origins of these stereotypes?”*

A pilot study will be conducted with three participants from the support and administration staff of the higher education institution in order to ensure that questions are understood correctly by participants. A pilot study allows for the successful execution and completion of a research project. A pilot study allows the researcher to obtain comprehensive background knowledge about a particular phenomenon. The main function of the pilot study is to ensure that the investigation which is done by the researcher is successful and effective (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, Poggenpoel & Schurink, 1998). A pilot study will aid the researcher in making required alterations of the data-gathering instrument.

Each of the participants is requested to complete a short biographical questionnaire (age, gender, race, etc) at the end of each interview.

#### **1.3.9 Recording of data**

During the interview, the conversation is recorded with a tape recorder then transcribed at a later stage. Participants give consent in order to have tape recorded interviews. Information is well stored and kept safe. Identity of participants remains anonymous.

#### **1.3.10 Data analyses**

According to Neumann (1997), qualitative researchers analyse data by organising it into categories on the basis of themes, concepts, and similar features. The researcher develops new concepts, formulates conceptual definitions and examines the relationships among concepts. Data will be coded thereafter and analysed by the use of content analysis. Struwig and Stead (2001) defined content analysis as the systematic analysis of text in order to determine patterns in the text. According to Kerlinger (1986), content analysis consists of the following steps:

- Content analysis is applied to get a collective understanding of the context that must be analysed. All the answers of the participants are defined and categorised.

- Sub-units of the analysis is determined i.e. words and themes. The researcher examines all the responded notes to attain a clear understanding. Subsequently, the researcher examines the notes for the purpose of establishing themes. A continued analysis of the information is carried out until repeated themes are identified. The strong themes that are identified are further explored.
- Data is freed from redundant information in order to establish the meaning of sub-units by linking it to the whole picture.

### 1.3.11 Strategies employed to ensure quality data

In order to ensure the integrity of the research data and for promoting the quality of the study, the researcher takes into account the way the participants subjectively interpret their experiences within their social context. Quality data include the participants' subjective responses and their authentic experiences (Neumann, 1997). The researcher takes into account the subjectivity and the context to evaluate credibility. Guba's model for qualitative research (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999) is used with the aim of ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings. These include credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

According to Streubert and Carpenter (1999), credibility can be established when participants distinguish the reported research findings as their own experiences. There are certain activities that will enhance the likelihood of credibility:

- *Prolonged engagement*: It can be defined as the investment of sufficient time to learn about the culture being studied, and to build trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
- *Referential adequacy*: The interviews are tape-recorded and field notes are used in order to ensure referential adequacy.
- *Member checking*: A literature review is conducted with the aim of linking the research findings to previous studies. The researcher also ensures that all recordings are done correctly.

Transferability guarantees the appropriateness of the results, by means of the comparison of sufficient descriptive data, as well as dense description of the data. Dependability entails that the research shows the same findings when repeating it with the same or similar participants in the same context. Dependability is reached through an audit, keeping any raw material, providing a clear explanation of the research method, using the same procedure throughout the study, triangulation, peer examination and the code-recode procedure. Conformability is reached by applying the criterion of neutrality or freedom from bias, by keeping a suitable distance not to manipulate the research, as well as triangulation and the code-recode procedure.

### **1.3.12 Reporting**

Themes and subthemes are extracted from the interviews and direct quotations are used to confirm results.

### **1.3.13 Ethical considerations**

The participants are provided with the consent form that explains the background and the purpose of the study. They are informed about the purpose of the study before they sign the form. The researcher is honest, fair and respects the participants and does not try to misinform or deceive the research participants. Confidentiality of the participants is ensured. No identifying information is made available to anyone. The participants remain anonymous throughout the study. People are not coerced to partake in the study. Participation is voluntary and they can withdraw from the study at any time with no negative repercussions. All participants are treated with respect. The researcher avoids and minimises any harm towards participants during any interaction.

## **1.4 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS**

In Chapter 2, the findings of this research study are discussed in the form of a research article. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of this research study.

## **1.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the problem statement and the research objectives are discussed. Furthermore, the research method is explained, followed by a brief overview of the chapters that follow.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**The exploration of stereotypes among non-academic staff within a  
South African higher education institution**

**ABSTRACT**

The objective of this study was to explore the experience of stereotypes among the non-academic staff within a higher education institution. The research approach was qualitative and the case study design was employed. A combination of both quota and convenience sampling was used. The sample consisted of ( $n = 30$ ) administrative staff within a higher education institution in South Africa. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The results indicated that the participants do experience stereotypes within their workplace. The participants experienced age, gender, racial, and occupational stereotypes. Different occupational groups have different negative opinions and perceptions about other occupational groups within their work environment. The results also indicated that stereotypes have different negative effects on people, thus emotional, cognitive and behavioural effects. The participants do also hold negative stereotypes of other people within their workplace. The origins of stereotypes were also determined namely, apartheid, primary and secondary exposure and subjective perceptions.

## OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie was om die ervaring van stereotipes deur die nie-akademiese personeel binne 'n hoër onderwys instansie te ondersoek. Die navorsingsbenadering was kwalitatief, en die gevallestudie ontwerp is aangewend. 'n Kombinasie van beide kwota-en gerieflikheidsteekproefneming is gebruik. Die steekproef het bestaan uit administratiewe personeel binne 'n Suid-Afrikaanse hoër onderwys instansie ( $n = 30$ ), waar semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude gebruik is om data in te samel. Die resultate toon dat die deelnemers stereotipes binne hul werkplek ervaar. Die deelnemers het ouderdom, geslags-, rasse-, en beroepstereotipes ervaar. Verskillende beroepsgroepe het verskeie negatiewe menings en persepsies oor ander beroepsgroepe binne hul werksomgewing. Die resultate het ook aangedui dat stereotipes verskillende negatiewe uitwerkings inhou vir deelnemers, naamlik emosionele-, kognitiewe- en gedragseffekte. Die deelnemers ervaar ook negatiewe stereotipes van ander mense binne die werkplek. Die oorsprong van stereotipes is ook bepaal, te wete, apartheid, primêre en sekondêre blootstelling, en subjektiewe persepsies.

## INTRODUCTION

According to Mayekiso and Snodgrass (2008), the political, economic, social and technological landscape in post-apartheid South Africa is demanding and challenging because South Africa is undergoing a process of transformation since of the first democratic elections in 1994. Institutions and organisations are fundamentally changed as individuals come into contact with people who think, look and live differently. In addition to the many and varied structural changes occurring in South African institutions of higher education, academic leaders face increasing diversity issues relating to that of race, age, gender, marital status, sexual orientation and so forth because of a changing and diverse workforce (Mayekiso & Snodgrass, 2008). De Klerk and Radloff (2010) mentioned that the challenge facing universities has been to respond quickly to the national imperative to facilitate transformation, both in terms of day-to-day institutional practices as well as perceptions, attitudes and mindsets, which, while very elusive and invisible, are the most powerful determinants of the prospects for success in any efforts to achieve real change.

According to Bowen, Kurzweil and Tobin (2005), higher education institutions have become the gatekeepers to full social, economic, and political citizenship. Yet, they remain a long way from reaching the goal of becoming genuinely inclusive, diverse, and democratic. Norris (1996) stated that although most higher education institutions have changed their admission and recruitment policies, they still do not reflect the demographics of South African society. Niemann (2006) stated that the education sector in South Africa has to be prepared to facilitate diversity to ensure the effective functioning of its institutions. The problem is that managers have to know how to plan for and handle such issues.

According to Gordon (2001), a diverse workforce also includes people with varying attitudes. People have an array of beliefs, formed in large part from their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and other experiences and these varying beliefs likely result in different attitudes. Niemann (2006) mentioned that management teams and employees have to change their attitudes regarding a range of issues, from racial and gender attitudes to attitudes about the disabled, in order to comply with South African legislation, and to adjust and effectively

manage the different contexts in which institutions/organisations are presently operating. One of the biggest obstacles in dealing with such a diverse workforce is breaking through people's conceived attitudes about those who are different from themselves (McKinney, 1996). All of these differences can lead to stereotyping which may result in workplace tension (Solovic, 2012).

### **Stereotypes**

Kassin, Fein and Markus (2011) defined stereotype as a belief or association that links a whole group of people with certain traits or characteristics. Stereotyping refers to a set of assumptions held about an individual or situation based on previous experience or societal norms (Sargeant, 2011). According to Rake and Lewis (2009), once a stereotype is applied to an individual, it is assumed that they will behave in a certain way, in line with a fixed general idea or set of associated images. Hinton (2007) stated that people use stereotypes, often unconsciously in an unfamiliar situation, in the first meeting, and this could be compared to the different reasons why people categorise. Kreitner and Kinicki (2004) and Kassin et al. (2011) stated that stereotypes are not always negative and inaccurate; some are more accurate than others. Although many stereotypes are based on completely illusory information or perception, some do stem from a kernel of truth, and still others may be fairly accurate (Kassin et al., 2011).

Sanderson (2010) stated that although stereotypes may sometimes be relatively harmless, they can lead to prejudice which means hostile or negative feelings about people based on their membership in a certain group and discrimination, meaning behaviour directed against persons solely because of their membership in a group. According to Brotherton (2007), stereotypes can be both causes and consequences of prejudice. Stereotypes underlie all prejudice, and pervade acts of violence, segregation and discrimination against minority groups (Moore 2006). Dovidio, Glick and Rudman (2005) pointed out that the stereotype acts as both a justificatory device for categorical acceptance or rejection of a group, and as a screening or selective device to maintain simplicity in perception in thinking. According to Johnson, Hewstone, Pendry and Frankish (1994) and Kunda, Sinclair and Griffin (1997) stereotypes are hard to change. People seem to cling steadfastly to their social preconceptions because stereotypes serve a number of

important functions for social perceivers (Moreno & Bodenhausen, 1999). Stereotypes can be used to justify the status quo, to establish a superior social identity and to confer a sense of orderliness and predictability on the social environment (Jost & Bajani, 1994; Sidanius, 1993).

### **Origins of stereotypes**

Fiske, Lin and Neuberg (1999) stated that stereotyping begins by categorising people into groups according to various criteria such as age, gender, race and occupation. According to Kassin et al. (2011) this process is called social categorisation. Fiske et al. (1999) mentioned that first people infer that all people within a particular category possess the same traits or characteristics, then, people form expectations of others and interpret their behaviour according to the stereotype. Finally, people maintain the stereotypes (Fiske et al., 1999).

When people group other people the way they group foods, animals and other objects, people can form impressions quickly and use past experiences to guide new interactions (Kassin et al., 2011). Bodenhausen and Hugenberg (2009) stated that with so many things happening around in the social world, people can save time and effort by using people's group membership to make inferences about them. The use of stereotypes is influenced by the amount and type of information available to an individual and his or her motivation to accurately process information (Bodenhausen, Macrae & Sherman, 1999).

Categorising people leads to an overestimation of the differences between groups and to underestimate the differences within groups (Ford & Tonander, 1998; Spears, 2002; Stangor & Lange, 1994; Wyer, Sadler & Judd, 2002). Since perceived similarities are minimised and perceived differences are maximised, stereotypes are formed and reinforced (Kassin et al., 2011). One way that stereotypes persist is through the illusory correlation which is defined as a tendency for people to overestimate the link between variables that are only slightly or not at all correlated (Meiser & Hewstone, 2006; Risen, Gilovich & Dunning, 2007; Sherman, Kruschke, Sherman, Percy, Petrocelli & Conrey, 2005). Kassin et al. (2011) stated that when two relatively unusual events happen together, that combination may stick in people's minds and this can lead people to overestimate an association between the two events.

People also maintain the stereotypes through how they explain the behaviours of others (Kassin et al., 2011). Perceivers make attributions or explanations about the causes of other people's behaviours and these attributions can sometimes be flawed. These flaws can help perpetuate stereotypes (Kassin et al., 2011). When people see others acting in a way that seems to contradict a stereotype, they may be more likely to think about situational factors in order to explain the surprising behaviour (Kassin et al., 2011). Rather than to accept a stereotype-disconfirming behaviour at face value, perceivers imagine the situational factors that might explain away this apparent exception to the rule. In that way, perceivers can more easily still maintain their stereotypes of these groups (Karpinski & Von Hippel, 1996; Philippot, 2005; Sekaquaptewa, Espinoza, Thompson, Vargas & Von Hippel, 2003; Seta, Seta & McElroy, 2003; Sherman et al., 2005).

### **Types of stereotypes**

There are different types of stereotypes found in literature. This study focused mainly on the four common types of stereotypes, namely; age, gender, racial and occupational stereotypes. These types of stereotypes appear to exist in many working environments.

#### ***Age stereotypes***

Sargeant (2011) stated that age stereotyping is concerned with associating certain characteristics, or lack of them, with certain ages. Robinson, Gustafson and Popovich (2008) mentioned that age stereotypes homogenise the particular age group as being all the same rather than recognising any diversity within that age group. Age stereotypes reinforce age discrimination because of their negative orientation (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). This type of stereotype is not restricted to older people, it can apply to all ages and age groups (Sargeant, 2011). Long standing age stereotypes depict older workers as less satisfied, not as involved with their work, less motivated, less productive than the young workers (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). Younger workers are perceived to be more IT friendly, more dynamic and enthusiastic (Sargeant, 2011). According to Kreiter and Kinicki (2004), these stereotypes are based more on fiction than fact. Gordon (2001) argued that the myths about older workers' inability to learn,



slow speed of response, and inflexibility are not true because older workers can demonstrate the same creativity, adaptability and manageability as younger workers.

### *Gender stereotypes*

Kreitner and Kinicki (2004) defined gender stereotypes as beliefs that differing traits and abilities make men and women well suited to different roles. Gender stereotypes tend to be prescriptive as well as descriptive (Fiske & Stevens, 1993). Madden (2011) stated that gender stereotypes are pervasive and have an impact on all aspects of women's and men's behaviour. Prime, Jonsen, Carter and Maznevski (2008) suggest that men's stereotypes have the potential to undermine women, even when stereotypes may be seen as positive. Research by Eagly and Karau (2002) found that women were perceived as modestly more effective in education, government, and social services as in other kinds of organisations. Women are perceived to be more submissive, emotional, affectionate, talkative, patient and creative than men. Men, on the other hand, were perceived to be more assertive, aggressive, courageous, competitive and ambitious than women (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004).

### *Racial stereotypes*

Racial stereotypes are automatic and exaggerated mental pictures that one holds about all members of a particular racial group (Notre Dame University, 2012). Racial stereotypes are harmful because they ignore the full humanity and uniqueness of all people. When our perceptions of different races are distorted and stereotypical, it's demeaning, devaluing, limiting, and hurtful to others. According to research done at Notre Dame University (2012), racial stereotypes can also foster feelings of hate and aggression that might lead to a false sense of entitlement and superiority. For those individuals who have power, this can lead to their engaging in discriminatory and racist practices (Notre Dame University, 2012). Examples of racial stereotypes are 'Blacks are lazy and stupid', 'Whites are intelligent and industrious' (Oakes, Haslam & Turner, 1994), 'Blacks are good athletes', 'White men can't jump' (Kassin et al., 2011).

### *Occupational stereotypes*

Occupational stereotyping has been defined as a preconceived attitude about a particular occupation, about people who are employed in that occupation, and about one's own suitability for that occupation (Lipton, O'Connor, Terry & Bellamy; 1991). Several studies demonstrated that stereotypes of people in different jobs exist (McLean & Kalin, 1994) and that particular constellations of traits are deemed more suitable for some jobs than for others (Arkkelin & O'Connor, 1992). According to Larkin (2008), many jobs are still perceived as better suited to women (e.g. nurse, preschool teacher) or men (e.g. construction worker, truck driver). Oswald (2003) stated that occupational titles associated with men were perceived to be more prestigious than those associated primarily with women. Examples of occupational stereotypes include 'lawyers are liars' and 'car salesmen are dishonest' (Basow, 1992).

### **Consequences of stereotypes**

According to Kray and Shirako (2009), many organisations are particularly focused on evaluating employee performance in regard to productivity, profit and potential and these evaluations occur throughout an individual's career. These regular evaluations can have various effects on individuals in relation to stereotype threat. Stereotype threat can steer individuals away from seeking particular jobs and can reduce career and leadership aspirations (Kray & Shirako, 2009). Kreitner and Kinicki, (2004) mentioned that stereotypes can lead to poor decisions; can create barriers for women, older individuals, people of colour and people with disabilities, and can undermine loyalty and job satisfaction.

According to Roberson and Kulik (2007), repeated exposure to stereotype threat may have serious and primarily negative, side effects. Researchers have further suggested that repeated, regular exposure to stereotype threat may lead a person to disengage (or 'disidentify') with the performance domain (Steele, 1997). Roberson and Kulik (2007) stated that when stereotype threat occurs, performance is disrupted, however, the effects of stereotype threat go beyond short-term performance decrements. Long-term exposure to stereotype threat could be one

cause of turnover for women and racial/ethnic minorities in professional and managerial jobs (Roberson & Kulik, 2007).

Furthermore, Gill (2012) mentioned that in the corporate world, there is a high price to be paid for stereotyping and that includes litigation, lost employees, poor employee morale, lost sales and customers, difficulty hiring top-level employees, difficulty retraining employees and diminished productivity/profits. Gill (2012) further mentioned that people also suffer personal consequences when people judge other people based on biases, labels, and stereotypes. People miss out on valuable experiences, connecting with others on a genuine level, insights, and sincere relationships.

Stereotype threat exerts its effects through multiple processes (Schmader, Johns & Forbes, 2008). One of these is by triggering physiological arousal, which may interfere with people's ability to perform well on the task at hand (Ben-Zeev, Fein & Inzlicht, 2005; Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn & Steele, 2001; O'Brien & Crandall, 2003). Other negative physical health effects associated with constant exposure to stereotypes are coronary heart disease and hypertension (Clark, Anderson, Clark & Williams, 1999; Mendes, Major, McCoy & Blaschovich, 2008). Thomas, Bardwell, Ancoli-Israel and Dimsdale (2006) also reported other negative physiological effects are difficulty sleeping and constant fatigue.

Sanderson, (2010) mentioned that constant exposure to stereotypes is also associated with negative psychological effects. People who perceive discrimination due to racial stereotypes are more likely to report depression, sadness, helplessness, anxiety and substance abuse, (Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999; Gibbons, Gerrard, Cleveland, Wills & Brody, 2004; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). Stereotype threat can also cause negative thoughts, worry and feelings of dejection, and they can cause individuals to focus more on trying to avoid failure than to achieve success (Sanderson, 2010). Schmader and Johns (2003) also stated that stereotype threat impairs the threatened individual's working memory, which, of course, impairs task performance.

From the literature, it is quite clear that stereotypes do have a definite impact on individuals and organisations. This study aimed at exploring what individuals within a South African higher education institution understand regarding stereotyping, the types of stereotypes that exist within their working environment and the impact that these stereotypes have on them.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **Research approach**

This research was qualitative by employing the case study design and following the phenomenological approach. Qualitative research has been defined as a behavioural or social science technique that investigates human behaviour by making use of exploratory techniques, namely; interviews, observations and focus groups (Salkind, 2009). The main goal of the phenomenological approach is to discover universal themes to explain the series of meanings of a phenomenon (Lester, 1999). Case studies enable researchers to connect the micro level, or the actions of individual people, to the macro level, or large-scale social structures and processes (Vaughan, 1992).

### **Research setting**

This research took place at a higher education institution within South Africa. The participants were interviewed at their offices for the sake of convenience so that they could feel comfortable and to ensure privacy. A 'do not disturb' sign was put outside their doors to avoid disruptions. The researcher introduced herself in a welcoming and friendly manner to ensure that the participants were at ease. The researcher then clearly explained the context of the interview, and with the permission of the participant, the interview was tape-recorded.

### **Entrée and establishing researcher roles**

Permission was requested from the authorities of the higher education institution to conduct the research and to have an interview with the participants working at the institution. The

participants were contacted, and dates and times that best suited them were scheduled. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and the context of the interview. The researcher explained to the participants what was expected of them, the amount of time likely to be required for participation, the fact that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions and how confidentiality would be ensured. All this information was provided in a language that the participant could understand. Permission was requested from the participants to tape record the interview sessions. The participants were requested to sign a consent form after being provided with the above-mentioned information.

### **Sampling**

For this study, a combination of both quota and convenience sampling was used. In quota sampling, the purpose is to draw a sample that has the same proportions of characteristics as the population (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006). Quota sampling is often more convenient and economical and data can be collected at an arbitrary location (Bless et al., 2006). MacNealy, (1999) stated that convenience sampling includes participants who are readily available and agree to participate in a study. Convenience sampling is often called accidental (MacNealy, 1999), while Frey, Carl and Gary (2000) agree with the alternate title of accidental but also include haphazard as an alternate title. A convenience sample can provide useful insights (Babbie, 2001).

The criteria for inclusion in this research was individuals who: 1) were non-academic staff working in the academic environment; 2) who were able to speak English; 3) differed according to age, gender and race; and 4) were willing to participate in the research and prepared to have a tape-recorded interview with the researcher. The sample consisted of administrative staff ( $n = 30$ ) within a higher education institution in South Africa.

Table 1

*Characteristics of participants (n = 30)*

Item	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Race	Blacks	16	53
	Coloureds	6	20
	Indians	2	7
	Whites	6	20
Gender	Females	16	53
	Males	14	47
Language	Afrikaans	8	27
	English	6	20
	IsiZulu	4	13
	Southern Sotho	2	7
	Setswana	6	20
	Northern Sotho	1	3
	Shona	1	3
	TshiVenda	2	7
Qualification	Higher education and training	28	93
	Further education and training	2	7
Economic activity	Employed	30	100

The sample consisted of 30 administrative staff within a higher education institution in South Africa. From Table 1 it is evident that 53% of the sample were females, while 53% were Africans, and 27% Afrikaans-speakers. The majority of the sample group (93%) had a postgraduate degree qualification.

**Data collection methods**

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. An interview schedule was developed before conducting the interviews. The interview started with an introduction and an explanation of the purpose of the research. All participants were asked the following seven standard questions:

1. *"In your own words, please explain what you understand about the word 'stereotype'"*  
(*"What does the word stereotype mean to you?"*)
2. *"What stereotypes do you think exist in your workplace?"*

3. "Do you associate yourself with any stereotypes within your workplace?"  
(Do you think there are any stereotypes about yourself within your workplace?)
4. "Do you experience any stereotypes about the specific occupation you are in?"
5. "How do you experience these stereotypes?"
6. "What stereotypes do you hold of other people in your workplace?"
7. "What are the origins of these stereotypes?"

A pilot study was conducted with three participants from the support and administration staff of the higher education institution in order to ensure that these questions were understood correctly by the participants. Each of the participants was requested to complete a short biographical questionnaire (age, gender, race etc) at the end of each interview.

### **Strategies employed to ensure quality data**

Guba's model for qualitative research (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Terre Blanche, & Durrheim, 1999) was used with the aim of ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings. These included credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. According to Streubert and Carpenter (1999), credibility can be established when participants distinguish the reported research findings as their own experiences. There are certain activities that would enhance the likelihood of credibility:

- *Prolonged engagement*: This can be defined as the investment of sufficient time to learn about the culture being studied, and to build trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
- *Referential adequacy*: Specifically the interviews were tape-recorded and field notes were used in order to ensure referential adequacy.
- *Member checking*: Where a literature review was conducted with the aim of linking the research findings to previous studies. The researcher also ensured that all recordings were done correctly.

Transferability guarantees the appropriateness of the results, by means of the comparison of sufficient descriptive data, as well as dense description of the data. Dependability entails that the

research should show the same findings when repeating it with the same or similar participants in the same context. Dependability can be reached through an audit, keeping any raw material, providing a clear explanation of the research method, using the same procedure throughout the study, triangulation, peer examination and the code-recode procedure. Regarding conformability, the researcher remained neutral throughout the study, and did not manipulate the research, as well as triangulation and the code-recode procedure.

### **Recording of data**

During the interview, the conversation was recorded with a tape recorder then transcribed at a later stage. Participants gave consent to have tape-recorded interviews. Identity of participants remained anonymous.

### **Data analyses**

Data was coded and, thereafter, analysed by the use of content analysis. According to Kerlinger (2000) content analysis consists of the following steps:

- Step 1: Content analysis is applied to get a collective understanding of the context that must be analysed. All the answers of the participants were defined and categorised.
- Step 2: Sub-units of the analysis were determined i.e. words and themes. The researcher examined all the respondents' notes to attain a clear understanding. Subsequently, the researcher examined the notes for the purpose of establishing themes. A continued analysis of the information was carried out until repeated themes were identified. The strong themes that were identified were explored further.
- Step 3: Data was freed from redundant information in order to establish the meaning of sub-units by linking it to the whole picture.



## **Reporting**

Themes and subthemes were extracted from the interviews and direct quotations were used to confirm results.

## **Ethical considerations**

The participants were provided with the consent form that explained the background and the purpose of the study. They were informed about the purpose of the study before they signed the form. The researcher was honest, fair and respected the participants and did not try to misinform or deceive the research participants. Confidentiality of the participants was ensured. No identifying information was made available to anyone. The participants remained anonymous throughout the study. People were not coerced to partake in the study. Participation was voluntary and they could have withdrawn from the study at any time with no negative repercussions. All participants were treated with respect. The researcher strived to avoid and minimised any harm towards participants during any interaction.

# **RESULTS**

The findings of this study were organised into seven major categories and various themes and sub-themes. Below, categories and relevant themes and sub-themes will be discussed. The respective Tables show the themes and sub-themes. Direct quotations were also included to support the findings.

## **Meaning of stereotypes (Category 1)**

On this category, the participants were asked to give their own understanding of the concept stereotype. It was evident that all the participants knew and understood the meaning of stereotypes.

Table 2

*Meaning of Stereotypes*

Theme	Sub-theme	Response
Association	About people	"... an impression that is created when a person is associated to something."
	Positive/negative	"When you associate a person with something good or bad."
Assumption	About groups	"If an individual is having a perception about something, and automatically assuming that because of such an experience that you've had with an incident, you perceive that because of that, everything that happens is because of that."
	Accurate/inaccurate	"... assumptions made of other people or groups, and in most cases they are wrong assumptions about their characteristics."
	Based on race	"Normally it is assumptions made based on the colour-racial stereotypes."
	Past experiences	"If an individual is having a perception about something, and automatically assuming that because of such an experience that you've had with an incident, you perceive that because of that, everything that happens is because of that."
Categorisation	About groups	"I think it's when we look at the person's behaviour or group of people's behaviour and we categorise them according to the way in which they behave or talk."
	About people	"When you put people into specific categories."
	Accurate/inaccurate	"Basically people or individuals get thrown into groups or pigeon holes, even though they don't fit that exactly."
	Based on behaviour	"Stereotyping is thinking that people are the same, based on their behaviour or their group dynamics ...".
Classification	Based on race	"... For instance you will regard a particular group of people because of the colour of their skin and categorise them as lazy, unqualified, less educated, and not eager to work hard".
	About groups	"Stereotyping would be classifying people in a certain group, putting them in a certain group depending on what you are looking at."
	About people	"From what I understand it is basically classifying people according to colour; stereotype you according to other colours and all those stuff."
Discrimination	About people	"Stereotype is not treating people equally. You treat one group better than the other group or one person better than the other person."
	Based on gender	"Stereotyping is more of a prejudice when you look at people in terms of their colour, gender or anything of that sort."
	Based on race	"Discrimination in terms of race. Someone from a particular race group will undermine another person from another race group ...".
Generalisation	About people	"... is a generalisation of a specific person based on a preconceived notion of a group of people."
	Accurate/inaccurate	"What you see you cannot generalise in terms of a person. Because everybody is an individual, everybody thinks and operates in a different way."
	Based on behaviour	"If you see one or two people behaving this way you generalise that males are like that, and to me that is the stereotype."
Judgement	About people	"Stereotype is how people judge each other based on how they see and perceive the other people."
	Based on own beliefs	"You judge people and their behaviour based on your own beliefs and expectations."

Perception	Past experiences	"They judge you based on their previous experience with the person who had the same position before you came."
	About people	"Stereotyping is the perception that you have about certain people based on race, gender and so forth ...".
	Accurate/inaccurate	"Stereotypes mean some preconceived conclusions or perceptions about things or people in whatever form, but are not necessarily confirmed to be reality."
	Based on gender	"I think stereotyping is the perception that you have about certain people based on race, gender and so forth ...".
	Based on own belief	"Having a perceived pre-empted perception of an object, person or anything else, based on your own values, personalities and belief."
	Based on race	"Various race groups, who have various perceptions about one another."
	Negative	"... it's basically a shortcut of trying to understand other people. Usually it has negative connotation attached to people. So the perception is usually negative, basically because we often, as human beings, don't make an effort to understand other people and show interest."
	Past experiences	"I think the perception is based on some of my experiences as well ...".

Table 2 consists of the broad themes of the meaning of stereotypes, the sub-themes of the data accumulated as well as the examples of original responses that were analysed. When participants were asked to give a description of the concept stereotypes many different definitions for the concept emerged. The themes and their definitions are provided below:

*Association:* Stereotypes is when you associate people with something positive or negative.

*Assumption:* A stereotype is an assumption that you create about a group of people based on their race or your past experiences. These assumptions might not always be accurate.

*Categorisation:* A stereotype is when you categorise a group of people based on their race or similar behaviour. These stereotypes are sometimes accurate and sometimes inaccurate.

*Classification:* A stereotype is when you classify people into certain groups.

*Discrimination:* A stereotype is when you discriminate against people based on their race and gender.

*Generalisation:* A stereotype is a generalisation of people based on certain behaviour and these generalisations might not always be a true reflection.

*Judgement:* Stereotyping is a judgement that you make about people based on your own beliefs and past experiences.

*Perception:* Stereotyping is a perception that you create about people based on their race or gender. These perceptions may also be based on your own beliefs and past experiences. Perceptions are usually negative and might not always be accurate.

When reviewing the Table, the themes that include the most sub-themes are *perception*, *assumption*, and *categorisation*. The themes with the least sub-themes include *association* and *classification*. With the different definitions provided by the participants, more negative meaning is attached to the stereotypes. Examples of the negative meaning attached to the stereotypes are as follows:

**Sub-theme: accurate/inaccurate:** *"To me stereotypes mean assumptions made of other people /groups and in most cases they are wrong assumptions about their characteristics."*

**Sub-theme: categorisation: accurate/inaccurate:** *"... So it's a biased perception that leads to generalisation basically people or individuals get thrown into groups or pigeon holes even though they don't fit that exactly."*

**Subtheme: discrimination: about people:** *"... Usually these stereotypes tend to be unfair. People rarely ever make positive stereotypes. Usually they tend to make prejudicial stereotypes."*

### **Existing stereotypes within the workplace (Category 2)**

On the second category, the participants were requested to give examples of stereotypes that exist within their workplace and they were aware of. It is important to note that these stereotypes mentioned by the participants were not necessarily their own stereotypes (i.e. stereotypes they

themselves have about others) it may also be stereotypes that they experience themselves or stereotypes they are aware of that others may have about people beside themselves.

Table 3  
*Existing Stereotype*

Theme	Sub-theme	Characteristic	Response
Age	Young	Inefficient	"Older have the opinion that the youngsters cannot do the work; too young to do the job."
		Inexperienced	"The younger ones I would say they still have a lot to learn."
		Invaluable	"Older have the opinion that the youngsters ....cannot give meaningful inputs."
		Unreliable	"People from the old generation have this perception that you cannot trust people from the new generation to do the job efficiently, and most of the time they are not reliable."
	Old	Matured	"Older people are more matured; maybe it's because of their life experiences."
		Old-fashioned; slow; cannot learn new things	"Today's youth have the perception that older people are old-fashioned, slow and cannot grab new information."
Culture	Zulu people	Violent	"We still have tribalism stereotypes: things like Zulus are violent."
Gender	Males	Better leaders	"People think that men are better leaders than females and that is not entirely accurate."
		Efficient in certain tasks	"In terms of gender: people still think that there are tasks that can only be performed better by men than women."
		Hardworking	"... people might think that white women cannot do the same work or work the same amount or work as hard as white men can work."
	Females	More experienced	"People think white males are more experienced."
		Incompetent	"I am a female in the sports sector, I am not competent and I have a limited understanding and knowledge of sports in general."
		Less efficient in certain tasks	"Females are less capable of managing different sporting codes."
		Not hardworking	"... people might think that white women cannot do the same work or work the same amount or work as hard as white men can work."
		Not knowledgeable	"... the same goes for women, the men still perceive us as still lacking skills and knowledge in comparison to them."
		Physically weak	"Older black males do resist the females in certain areas because they feel they are not strong enough."
		Poor leaders	"... they still think being a manager should be a men's job."
Occupational	Human Resources	Noisy; unprofessional	"Examples are HR Generalists here are noisy and not

	Generalists		<i>professional and the HR Specialists are more professional."</i>
	Academics	Conceited	<i>"The academics look down on people with less or low qualifications."</i>
		Undermining	<i>"... professors will question as to who you are, what are you doing/your qualification. Even though they don't put it directly you could tell that this person is undermining my integrity."</i>
		Work half day	<i>"Here there is a perception that academics only work half day. There is no way you will get hold of them after lunch."</i>
	Support staff	Conceited; undermining	<i>"One of the stereotypes that I see is that of the academics and admin staff where the one look down on the other or undermining one another."</i>
		Poor leaders	<i>"... you as a low level employee, you are not regarded as a leader, and you are not regarded as manager material. They just regard you as an administrative officer and that's it."</i>
	Managers	Undermining	<i>"Managers are always trying to put down their subordinates."</i>
Qualifications	Low level of qualification	Lazy; incompetent; not knowledgeable	<i>"There are stereotypes within HR that people who are not busy with their postgraduate studies; their colleagues see them as being lazy and less informed because they are not upgrading and developing themselves."</i>
Racial	Black people	Have limitations	<i>"Black people have got limitations."</i>
		Incompetent	<i>"Black people are usually seen as less informed and lazy to study therefore, they are seen to be incompetent in the workplace."</i>
		Noisy	<i>"Older group seems to think younger groups, but specifically blacks are very loud. When they are speaking on the phone or when they are talking to one another there is always noise."</i>
		Not committed	<i>"... if you give a white person a task it will be done better than when given to an African. Africans don't take their work seriously."</i>
		Not hardworking	<i>"There is a general perception amongst especially white colleagues of mine that the black colleagues are either lazy or that they don't have commitment and ... that they sometimes need to be double-checked..."</i>
		Not intelligent	<i>"People tend to think black people are stupid and not educated."</i>
		Not knowledgeable	<i>"People who are black are considered as "not knowing" that is the stereotype that is prevalent in our environment."</i>
		Unreliable	<i>"Africans are not reliable and dependable."</i>
	Previously	Not hardworking; not	<i>"You will regard a particular group of people because of</i>

disadvantaged groups	knowledgeable; not ambitious	<i>the colour of their skin and categorise them as lazy, unqualified, less educated, and not eager to work hard. This is how people from previously disadvantaged groups are perceived."</i>
Coloured people	Not hardworking; violent and unreliable	<i>"Coloureds only relate well with other Coloureds, they are lazy, violent, absent from work all the time."</i>
Indian people	Enterprising Good at maths	<i>"People believe that Indians are good businessmen." "They are also good in maths so me being in the finance department is not a surprise to other people."</i>
White people	Conceited  More efficient  More hardworking; dedicated Not interactive with other races Occupy more powerful positions Valuable	<i>"... White people have more of an opinion about themselves than the rest of the racial groups that is around." "If you give a white person a task it will be done better than when given to an African. Africans don't take their work seriously." "Whites are more hardworking and dedicated." "In terms of colour, too many whites not interacting with other race groups." "I think our environment here is still predominantly white people in powerful positions or higher positions." "A recommendation coming from a white man is easily accepted rather than if it is coming from a black female, coloured or black man."</i>

Table 3 consists of the broad themes of the existing stereotypes, the sub-themes of the data accumulated, the characteristics as well as the examples of original responses that were analysed. The main existing stereotypes that were mentioned by the participants include *age, culture, gender, occupational, qualification and racial stereotypes*. When participants reported on their experience of existing stereotypes it became clear that the participants assigned characteristics to the different types of stereotypes. The examples and explanations of the existing stereotypes that were mentioned by participants were as follows:

*Age:* Young employees are seen to be inefficient, inexperienced, invaluable and unreliable. Older employees are perceived to be more matured but slow, old-fashioned and unable to learn new things.

*Culture:* Zulu people are perceived to be violent.

*Gender:* Men are stereotyped to be better leaders, hardworking, efficient in certain tasks and more experienced whereas women are stereotyped to be poor leaders, not hardworking, physically weak, less efficient in certain tasks, incompetent and not knowledgeable.

*Occupational:* Human Resources Generalists are perceived by Human Resources Specialists to be noisy and unprofessional. Academics are perceived by the support staff to be conceited, undermining and to work only half day. The support staffs are seen to be conceited; undermining and poor leaders.

*Qualification:* Employees with a low level of qualification are perceived to be lazy, incompetent and not knowledgeable.

*Racial:* Black people are seen to have limitations, are incompetent, not knowledgeable, not intelligent, unreliable, noisy, not hardworking and not committed. People from previously disadvantaged groups are perceived to be not hardworking, not knowledgeable and not ambitious. Coloured people are stereotyped to be not hardworking, violent and unreliable. Indian people are perceived to be enterprising and good at maths. White people are seen to occupy more powerful positions, conceited, more hardworking, dedicated, more efficient and valuable.

The most prominent stereotype is the *racial* stereotype. The least reported stereotype is *qualification*. Most of the examples of the existing stereotypes provided by the participants were negative except for the stereotypes associated with white people that had more positive characteristics. The examples of the responses provided by the participants are as follows:

**Sub-theme: academics and support staff: conceited, undermining:** *“Looking at this institution we still have a few stereotypes. One of the stereotypes that I see is that of the academics and admin staff where the other can look down on the other or undermining one another.”*



**Sub-theme: black people: incompetent; lazy; less informed:** "... black people are usually seen as less informed and lazy to study therefore they are seen to be incompetent in the workplace."

**Sub-theme: white people: more efficient** ".....If you give a white person a task it will be done better than when given to an African. Africans don't take their work seriously."

**Perceived stereotypes about oneself (Category 3)**

On this category, the participants were requested to give examples of stereotypes that they associate themselves with within their workplace. It was clear that the participants do identify themselves with the stereotypes that are in existence within their workplace. However, a third of the participants indicated that they did not associate themselves with any stereotypes within their workplace.

Table 4

*Perceived Stereotypes about oneself*

Theme	Sub-theme	Characteristic	Response
Age	Young	Incompetent	"Older people think because we are young we are not competent in our work. They will always want to spell it out to you what to do and what not to do."
	Old	Inefficient	"People think if you are old you cannot perform and that is not true."
		Matured; professional	"Older people are expected to behave more matured, professional and be role models to the younger ones."
Gender	Males	Valuable	"You always get a sense that when for an example you are in a meeting and you raise points, you have to repeatedly put forward those points, but when a male person puts those point forward its easily accepted."
		Disregarded as leaders	"There was a time when women were not taken seriously in managerial positions. Yes, as a woman in a managerial position you are never taken seriously."
	Females	Inefficient	"People have the perception that being a female I will not be able to run the sports office effectively and efficiently."
		Overcompensate to prove self; more assertive to pull rank	"I think being a black African female you always have to work twice as hard than any other people to prove your worth. As a female manager it is like I always have to pull rank on other people to get what I need."

Occupational	Human Resources	Undermined	<i>"When you work in HR, you are not taken as a serious member of the organisation especially the academics."</i>
	Human Resources Specialists	Conceited; knowledgeable	<i>"I am an HR Specialist and I am busy with my PhD. I know the generalists call us academics and they say we look down on them as we think they are not learned like us. That is not true. We respect them and their work. They say we are arrogant and we don't talk to them because we think they are not our peers or they are not like us."</i>
	Negotiators	Unreliable	<i>"Stereotypes also do occur between interest groups where labour would say something like you cannot be trusted if you are at the bargaining forum because you represent management and management can't be trusted ..."</i>
	Support staff	Not intelligent	<i>"I think academics could stereotype me as a professional support staff person, as a person not with the intellectual capacity that they have."</i>
	Managers	Disregard subordinates	<i>"Management positions and senior management definitely stereotypes people underneath them with less importance, less access to resource and less decision making"</i>
Racial	Black people	Disrespectful; unreliable	<i>"People give us names. If you are an African female you have to jump when somebody says jump. You cannot say no even though the policy does not allow you to say yes to what somebody is asking. ... Males would tell you, you do not have respect because I do not give in to their demands. If the academics apply for training funds, if you do not approve their application and advance them with reasons why, they will call you names like you are stupid, useless and lacking information regarding the core business of the institution."</i>
		Incompetent	<i>"... Black people have got limitations. They are only there because of employment equity and sometimes they doubt your abilities and competency."</i>
		Not hardworking; not knowledgeable; criminals	<i>"People from other races tend to think of blacks as being lazy, criminals, less educated and stupid. When you are educated then your peers might see you as being arrogant and they say you think you know it all."</i>
	Coloured people	Not intelligent	<i>".... You find this in the manner that people interact with you where they try to explain things and certain concepts as if you are too dumb to understand."</i>
		Drink a lot	<i>"I mean we have stereotypes of all coloured people drink ..."</i>
		Gangsters	<i>"Yes because some people do think that coloured people are all gangsters and drinking a lot."</i>
	Incompetent	<i>"People would generalise and say bad things about you because they did not get the response that they expected from you. If you point someone to the right person they will say things like "I am not surprised that you cannot</i>	

		<i>help me. You coloured people are so incompetent". That hurts."</i>
Indian people	Wild	<i>"... all coloured girls are wild."</i>
	Crooks; materialistic	<i>"I know that people have this idea that Indians are crooks and they like money so they can sell you anything."</i>
White people	Conceited; self-centred	<i>"I think other people usually see, and I mean other races, they think that white people think more of themselves, think they are a step above the others."</i>
	Knowledgeable; racist	<i>"People have these opinions that we think we are better than other races because we are white and we think we are more educated and we look down on other races. People still think we are still racists."</i>
Foreigner	Limited employment opportunities	<i>"I am a foreigner, so at times when it comes to employment it is also considered that you are a foreigner, so they take that into consideration."</i>
	Do not experience stereotypes	<i>"I don't associate myself with the stereotypes."</i>

<sup>1</sup>Qualification as a theme was mentioned only once, therefore not explained.

Table 4 indicates the broad themes on the perceived stereotypes about oneself, the sub-themes, characteristics as well as the examples of original responses that were analysed. The main perceived stereotypes about oneself included *age*, *gender*, *occupational*, *qualifications* and *racial*. Examples of the stereotypes that the participants associate themselves with are as follows:

*Age*: Young employees believe that they are perceived to be incompetent by older employees. Older employees associate themselves with the stereotype that they were seen to be more matured and professional but on the other hand were seen to be inefficient by younger employees.

*Gender*: Males perceive themselves to be valuable. Females see themselves as having to overcompensate to prove themselves, be more assertive to pull rank and they feel they are disregarded as leaders.

*Occupational*: Human Resources personnel perceive themselves to be undermined by other employees. Human Resources Specialists associate themselves with the stereotype that they are

conceited and knowledgeable. Negotiators are perceived to be unreliable. Support staff have a perception that they are seen to be not intelligent. Subordinates perceive themselves to be disregarded by managers.

*Racial:* Black people perceive themselves to be stereotyped as being disrespectful, unreliable, not intelligent, not hardworking, not knowledgeable, incompetent and are involved in criminal activities. Coloured people associate themselves with the stereotypes that they are gangsters, drink a lot, and are wild and incompetent. Indian people are of the opinion that they are viewed as being crooks and materialistic. White people believe that they are stereotyped to be conceited, self-centred, knowledgeable and racist. The foreigners identify themselves with the stereotype that there are limited employment opportunities for them.

The most reported perceived stereotype about oneself is the racial stereotype while stereotypes about foreigners are the least reported. Most of the participants seemed to have negative perceptions about themselves across the different groupings within their workplace. The only group that seemed to have a positive perception about themselves were male participants. Some of the responses included:

**Sub-theme: old: inefficient:** *“People think if you are old you cannot perform and that is not true. I am a bit older than my colleagues and they treat me as if I cannot perform my duties properly. My line manager always double-checks my work”*

**Sub-theme: female: disregarded as leaders:** *“... As a female, you have to repeat yourself to be heard. Certainly, people do not listen to you. They just brush you off just like that.”*

**Sub-theme: support staff: not intelligent:** *“It could be I think academics could stereotype me as a professional support staff person, as a person not with the intellectual capacity that they have, management positions and senior management definitely stereotypes people underneath them with less importance, less access to resource and less decision making.”*

**Sub-theme: coloured people: drink a lot; wild:** *“We have stereotypes of all coloured people drink; all coloured girls are wild...”*.

#### **Occupational stereotypes (Category 4)**

On the fourth category, the participants were requested to give a description of the stereotypes that they experience in the specific occupations that they were in. The data accumulated indicated that some of the participants reported that they do not experience any occupational stereotypes within their workplace but the majority of the participants gave detailed descriptions of the occupational stereotypes that they were confronted with.

Table 5

#### *Occupational Stereotypes*

Theme	Sub-theme	Characteristic	Response
Occupational	Human Resources Specialists	High earners	<i>“Well from what I have experienced from people like as an HRD Practitioner; that is a very high position; they think that we are earning more than them. They think we are earning a lot, more than what they are earning.”</i>
		Isolated from reality	<i>“The academics think we are isolated from reality of what is important for the institutions, and the academics see us as the obstacles in their achievements.”</i>
		Perceived as academics	<i>“HR Generalists label us HR Specialists as “academics”. They label us because most of the specialists are busy with their postgraduate studies and most of the generalist have either certificates or diplomas in HR.”</i>
	Finance staff	Hardworking; being overestimated	<i>“... Since I am in payroll you might experience this issues that people in the institution think our work entails just to press a button and things will happen automatically. People expect us to work wonders at times.”</i>
		Knowledgeable about finance	<i>“People think since I work in finance I must have this long chain of qualifications or financial degrees to back it up. There is that perceptions that if you work in finance you have to be finance-oriented and have that financial background, and of course you are working in finance so you are supposed to know everything about finance be it student accounts, creditors etc. People expect you to know everything as long as it has to do with finance.”</i>
	Support staff	Incompetent	<i>“If you want to further your career you have to apply for the lecturer’s post. The perception is that you are not capable of doing anything besides the PA’s job. You are</i>

			<i>limited. They limit your ability."</i>
		Not intelligent; invaluable	<i>"Academics think if you are working in the support department you are kind of dumb, they are superior and management feeds this stereotypes by tending to value academics higher than people in the support environment ... You are treated as less important than other people, you are less capable than your academics, you are less valuable."</i>
		Not knowledgeable	<i>"The stereotyping that is prevailing in terms of my specific job is that I can only be an admin officer even when you apply for a job in another department. I don't think they are actually looking at your current studies but they are looking at what you are doing. From their side they cannot even shortlist you even when with your studies you qualify for the position but because you are not doing that work now you don't get anywhere."</i>
	Human Resources	Administrators; not self-sufficient	<i>"HR or people working in HR are always regarded as administrative; just dealing with paperwork; just follow processes and procedures. They can't think for themselves, they just take instructions from the seniors and implement decisions. In other words they are just implementers."</i>
		Undermined	<i>"Academics do not see us as their equal partners. Unfortunately we are ... they see us as below them you know."</i>
	Subordinates	Unreliable; need to be supervised	<i>"Management think we are irresponsible; always want to check your every move as if you are still a school child. If you are an employee, you need to be controlled. They think we cannot work by ourselves. We constantly need somebody to control us."</i>
	Do not experience occupational stereotypes		<i>"My work is highly technical and professional I don't experience the stereotypes. You work with the exact sort of problems."</i>

<sup>2</sup>The themes at Dispatch and Library were mentioned only once.

Table 5 consists of the broad themes on the existing occupational stereotypes, the sub-themes, the characteristics as well as the examples of original responses that were analysed. When the participants were requested to give description of the occupational stereotypes that they experience within their workplace, the following themes emerged:

*Human Resources Specialists* reported that they were perceived to be academics, high-earners and isolated from reality.

*Human Resources* employees were seen to be undermined, not self-sufficient and perceived to be just administrators.

*Finance staff* was stereotyped to be hardworking and underestimated.

*Support staff* were perceived to be incompetent, not intelligent, invaluable and not knowledgeable.

*Subordinates* were stereotyped to be unreliable and need to be supervised regularly.

The most reported occupational stereotypes were that of support staff and the least reported theme was that of subordinates. Most of the characteristics associated with the different occupational groups were negative except for the finance occupational group, which was associated more with positive characteristics. The examples of the responses are:

**Sub-theme: Human Resources Specialists: academics:** *“HR Generalists label us HR Specialists as “academics” They label us because most of the specialists are busy with their postgraduate studies and most of the generalists have either certificate or diplomas in HR.”*

**Sub-theme: support staff: not intelligent; invaluable:** *“Academics think if you are working in the support department you are kind of dumb, they are superior and management feeds these stereotypes by tending to value academics higher than people in the support environment.”*

## The experience of stereotypes (Category 5)

The participants were requested to give an account of the stereotypes they were confronted with and how they experience them. While many participants gave account of their experiences, a number of participants reported that they were not bothered by the stereotypes and that the stereotypes had no effect on them.

Table 6  
*Experience of Stereotypes*

Theme	Sub-theme	Response
Behavioural Effect	Avoiding	"... I think because I have dealt with so many people one learned how to deal with people in general. If somebody is saying something bad it doesn't help to confront the person, you just avoid that person."
	Defensive	"You are always on guard. You are just waiting for somebody to say something. You are always on guard. Every time they want to talk to you about something you are always on a defensive mode already trying to think ahead ..."
	Prove yourself	"Irritates you that people can still think like this after so many years of transformation. You actually are forced to work twice as hard to prove to them that you are competent and capable of doing the job."
	Suspicious	"You experience them when you try to break the sense of working in silos trying to draw from each other's expertise and knowledge, HR-related matters. You sort of sense it then to say "why does she want to work with us", "why is she interested", so there is some level of suspiciousness, people are sort of guarded of their territories, they don't want people to come into their space ..."
Cognitive Effect	Challenging	"It can be very frustrating because from a career perspective where you think "I am capable of doing this and I can do it very well" and if a lot of obstacles and hurdles are placed before you it means there are a lot of barriers to access, limiting access to those opportunities and it can be frustrating".
	Cynicism	"They impact a lot because eventually you feel tied in the corner, you give information and they go back to verify with somebody superior to you. It impacts negatively on one's career because you feel that you are not treated fairly, you are not respected and then why should you still be in this environment".
	Discriminating; Derogatory	"Discriminatory sometimes derogatory. It's like you forever have to prove yourself that you are indeed capable of doing a job. So it's like you are constantly trying to prove a point and it shouldn't be like that I think."
	Doubting	"... But sometimes if you doubt yourself your self-esteem might actually be affected and you might end up having an inferiority complex."
	Excluded	".... You feel like an outcast. This makes you feel like you are not part of the group. You feel isolated, lonely and excluded."
	Limiting	"Frustration and you feel limited. It affects your enthusiasm, your energy, your sense of innovation and working together and learning from each other, so it's quite limiting."



	Negative	"... We experience them in a negative way because people would generalise and say bad things about you because they did not get the response that they expected from you."
	Embarrassing	"They come out very strong, trying to make a point but when other managers listen to them and realise this is not what they want, that becomes like a work conflict. You feel so embarrassed and you also feel stupid as if you studied for nothing".
Emotional Effect	Frustrating; agitating	"... It impairs on the effectiveness of team work and team cohesiveness within the HR environment. You feel more frustrated and agitated."
	Irritated	"It irritates you that people can still think like this after so many years of transformation."
	Sad	"One of the stereotypes that we experience from HR side ... is that when you work in HR, you are not taken as a serious member of the organisation especially the academics ... It irritates me. I feel so sad that they are so narrow-minded."
No effect	Not bothered	"...I think if people still have an opinion of what people say I think they need to wake up. I just laugh it off because it's not true...".

Table 6 indicates the broad themes on the experience of stereotypes, the sub-themes and the examples of original responses that were analysed. Stereotypes can have different effects on different people. Kreitner and Kinicki (2004) provided an explanation of different effects as follows: Emotional effect includes the feelings or emotions one has about an object or situation. Cognitive effect is the belief or ideas one has about an object or situation. Behavioural effect is how one intends to act or behave towards someone or something. The broad themes that were identified include:

*Behavioural effect:* The participants reported that when they were confronted with stereotypes they respond by either avoiding the stereotype, becoming defensive, having to prove themselves and they become suspicious.

*Cognitive effect:* Many participants reported that they experienced stereotypes to be challenging, discriminating, derogatory, limiting, negative, cynicism, doubting and excluding.

*Emotional effect:* The participants reported that they felt frustrated, agitated, irritated, sad and embarrassed when confronted with stereotypes.

The theme that included the most sub-themes was cognitive effect with 8 sub-themes identified as: *challenging, discriminating, derogatory, limiting, negative, cynicism, doubting and excluded.*

The theme with the least number of sub-themes was behavioural effect. Most of the different effects mentioned by the participants were negative. Examples of these negative effects include:

**Sub-theme: behavioural effect: suspicious:** *“You experience them when you try to break the sense of working in silos trying to draw from each other’s expertise and knowledge, HR-related matters. You sort of sense it then to say “why does she want to work with us”, “why is she interested”, so there is some level of suspiciousness, people are sort of guarded of their territories, they don’t want people to come into their space in the spirit of working together.”*

**Sub-theme: cognitive effect: challenging:** *“It can be very frustrating because from a career perspective where you think I am capable of doing this and I can do it very well and if a lot of obstacles, hurdles are placed before you it means there are a lot of barriers to access, limiting access to those opportunities and it can be frustrating”.*

**Sub-theme: emotional effect: irritated:** *“It irritates you that people can still think like this after so many years of transformation”.*

#### **Perceived stereotypes about others (Category 6)**

On this category, the participants were requested to give an account of stereotypes that they held of other people. While it was evident that some participants did hold stereotypes of other people, a number of participants reported that they did not stereotype as they believed that they were open-minded, exposed to diverse groups and that they could form their own impressions.

Table 7

*Perceived Stereotypes about others*

Theme	Sub-theme	Characteristic	Response
Age	Young	Conceited	<i>"Younger employees think they are wiser than older employees and they think they can be more productive than the older employees."</i>
		Technologically advanced	<i>"Youngsters are so advanced technologically. They have all this gadgets and everything is so easy for them."</i>
Culture	Old	All knowing; begrudging	<i>"... The rest of my colleagues are young, few are older and they think they know it all. Because they have been here for longer, they think they know it all they don't give the younger ones chance to grow."</i>
		Technologically challenged	<i>"I have an idea that older people cannot handle computers. You cannot send them electronic stuff."</i>
	Sotho men	Assertive	<i>"Gender stereotypes like in our South Sotho culture men are esteemed highly. A man is considered to have a final word. You don't challenge men because that is being disrespectful towards them even when you know they are wrong."</i>
		Zulu men	Polygamous
Gender	Black men	Patronising; ambitious; resistant to change	<i>"Black men are very patronising, power-hungry and are resistant to change. Times have changed. They need to start embracing us women as human beings with our very own capabilities."</i>
	Females	Not intelligent; incompetent	<i>"... you know there are other departments that can take advantage of you because you are a female, they take advantage of the female's ability to do the job. It doesn't work like that because at the end of the day you studied, you educated yourself to be in that position, in order to advise this people but because they think you are female they take you as stupid or you are just incompetent."</i>
		Poor leaders	<i>"I used to think a white female in HR information systems will not be a good leader. I used to think that a male manager would do a better job than her, but she proved me wrong. She is brilliant."</i>
Occupational	Human Resources	Conceited	<i>"I still have this thing of in-group and out-group where I see my department or directorate as better than other departments within HR, perhaps the department HR is better than other department within the university."</i>
		Academics	<i>"... The academics think that they know better than you because you are a support staff. Although you are in HR, your HR background you have more experience in terms of what's wrong and what's right. So I think that stereotyping of people is not right because people are not like that. The academics do not treat us as experts on our field of work. They think they know everything. They will always criticise or question HR processes. It is so irritating. It's like we always have to defend our work."</i>
		Rude; mean	<i>"Older academics are rude and mean to the support staff"</i>

	Negotiators	Rude	<i>members."</i> <i>"... there are times where in the heat of a moment when you are sitting at the bargaining forum you tend to think union representatives are rude. You end up categorising them in the same manner. You tend to generalise that all union reps are rude."</i>
	Managers	Controlling Incompetent	<i>"All managers are control freaks."</i> <i>"Supervisors don't really know anything. People in the ground are the ones who know everything."</i>
		Narrow-minded; intimidating	<i>"... Well, maybe one stereotype that I have is that you don't challenge managers. I think our managers are not open as much as they claim, superficially they are open to new ideas and all that, in reality actually that is not the case. You tend to get a different reaction when you do that."</i>
Racial	White people	Conceited	<i>"Now some of the stereotypes that we hold as Africans are that whites always think they are better than us in whatever they do, and that is just an illusion and not the truth."</i>
		Not knowledgeable about other races	<i>"White people lack knowledge of black people, that's a racial stereotype also."</i>
		Racists	<i>"I sometimes just think that these whites are racist whereas they are not."</i>
Do not stereotype		Exposed to diverse groups	<i>"Previously I used to hold stereotypes but before moving to Gauteng province because I was confined, I was teaching at a predominantly coloured school. I was not exposed to other races necessarily, but since moving to Gauteng province that definitely changed all the perceptions and stereotype thoughts that I had because then for the first time I got to interact with other races as well, so many of those stereotypes for me completely disappeared and you actually learned that it's just people like you are."</i>
		Forms own impression	<i>"I don't believe in stereotypes. I don't put people into those boxes. I allow myself to form my own impressions."</i>
		Open-minded	<i>"I don't hold any stereotypes. I'm open-minded."</i>

Table 7 consists of the broad themes on the perceived stereotypes about others, the sub-themes, the characteristics as well as the examples of original responses that were analysed. The main perceived stereotypes about others included:

*Age:* Older employees perceived young employees to be conceited and technologically advanced. On the other hand, the young employees perceived the old employees to be all-knowing, begrudging and technologically challenged.

*Culture:* Zulu men were perceived to be polygamous whereas Sotho men were seen to be more assertive.

*Gender:* Black men were stereotyped to be patronising, ambitious and resistant to change. Females were seen to be not intelligent, incompetent and poor leaders.

*Occupational:* Human Resources employees were perceived to be conceited. Academics were also stereotyped to be conceited, troublesome, undermining, critical, rude and mean. Negotiators were seen to be rude. Managers were stereotyped to be narrow-minded, intimidating, incompetent and controlling.

*Racial:* White people were seen to be conceited, not knowledgeable about other races and racists. The theme that had the most number of sub-themes was occupational stereotypes whereas culture theme had the least number of sub-themes. Most participants held negative stereotypes about different groupings within their workplace. The examples of these negative stereotypes are:

**Sub-theme: young: conceited:** *“Younger employees think they are wiser than older employees and they think they can be more productive than the older employees.”*

**Sub-theme: black men: patronising, ambitious, resistant to change:** *“Black men are very patronising, power-hungry and are resistant to change.”*

**Sub-theme: academics: conceited:** *“... The academics think that they know better than you because you are a support staff. Although you are in HR, your HR background you have more experience in terms of what’s wrong and what’s right.....”.*

## Origin of stereotypes (Category 7)

On the last category, the participants were requested to give a brief explanation on how stereotypes originate. The responses that were accumulated give an indication that the participants had their own opinion of where stereotypes originate from. It is interesting to note that many of the participants had similar views.

Table 8

### *Origin of stereotypes*

Theme	Sub-theme	Response
Apartheid	Culture	<i>"I think its culture and apartheid. Local people are still bitter about apartheid. They think it is their time now; they should have most of the advantages. It's their time to enjoy now so I think it's where it really stems from."</i>
	Past experiences	<i>"I think they originate from the past experience of both races, black and white. The past experience that we had in this country, the apartheid."</i>
	Race	<i>"It's the division that we experienced. We were separated in terms of races ..."</i>
Primary exposure	Lack of exposure	<i>"I think its lack of knowledge more than anything, lack of exposure as well ..."</i>
	Past experiences	<i>"I think it must be from past behaviour. If people experienced something bad or good in the past I think it comes from there. Past experiences whereby you start stereotyping and putting people in categories."</i>
	Social interaction	<i>"I think it has to do with your upbringing, your culture, and the society that you live in, the friends that you associate with. All these people they influence you and your thinking in one way or the other."</i>
Secondary exposure	Social interaction	<i>"I think they originate from our upbringing, because they are not necessarily realistic, from our engagement with other people who share the same sentiments ... but basically from our social interactions with other individuals that where all these stereotypes emanates from."</i>
	Upbringing	<i>"I think it's from personal upbringing, I think the way we are raised and how we interact with other people from the early ages make us form this opinion about other people based on our experiences."</i>
Subjective perceptions	About people	<i>"... Our upbringing plays a big role and the way we see and perceive people. or even our inability to change, to be confronted with new information and realise that I was thinking this and this of somebody or certain race or even gender ..."</i>
	Human nature; Religious influences	<i>"... it's part of human nature. From the religious perspective. I am a Christian and its part of a sin, sinful nature of a human being to hate one another instead of loving one another that is the reason for stereotypes."</i>
	Ignorance	<i>"I really think it is really just ignorance. People should form their own opinions. Information that you hear as people talk we tend to base our opinions on that information"</i>

Table 8 consists of the broad themes on the origins of stereotypes, the sub-themes of the data and the examples of original responses that were analysed. The following broad themes were identified:

*Apartheid:* Some participants reported that stereotypes originated from our past experiences where people were segregated by the apartheid system according to their race and culture.

*Primary exposure:* refers to exposure that occurred through primary agents such as family. The participants indicated that stereotypes originated from the experiences that they gained during their social interactions with the society or lack of exposure thereof.

*Secondary exposure:* referring to exposure that occurs through secondary agents such as religion and the workplace. Other participants mentioned that stereotypes emanated from ones social interactions with other individuals and ones upbringing.

*Subjective perceptions:* this refers to people's subjective view of the world that is not the reality and shapes their behaviour (Corey, 2012). Some of the participants reported that stereotypes originated because of religious influences. Stereotypes were also viewed as being part of human nature.

All the themes have three sub-themes except for the secondary exposure theme that has the least number of sub themes (2).

## DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of stereotyping on individuals working within a higher education institution. The first objective was to determine the understanding of stereotypes by non-academic staff within an academic environment. According to literature review, different authors gave various definitions of the concept stereotype. Sargeant (2011) defined stereotypes as a set of assumptions held about an individual or situation based on previous experience or societal norms. Greenwald and Banaji (1995) referred to stereotyping as a

psychological categorisation of specific social groups held by general public, which influenced decision making and information processing tasks. Pantea and Pantea (2007) defined stereotype as a generalisation about a person or a group of persons based on certain characteristics or traits. Stereotypes may be based on the hearsay, preconceived ideas, or unfounded assumptions and incorrectly infer that all members of that group are the same (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Stereotypes contain a judgment and are fairly inflexible (Aguilar, 2006). Biernat and Manis (1994), Kobrynowicz and Biernat (1997) and Biernat and Fuegen (2001) stated that while stereotypes are potentially helpful for understanding unknown situations, things and other people, the stereotypes we develop may not reflect reality or facts correctly. Sanderson (2010) also stated that stereotyping can lead to prejudice and discrimination.

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of the literature. The results confirm that all the participants knew and understood the meaning of stereotypes as conceptualised in the literature. The participants indicated that stereotyping is associated with the following concepts, namely; *association, assumption, categorisation, classification, discrimination, generalisation, judgement, and perception*. These are the themes that are reflected in the above-mentioned definitions of stereotypes. The participants also indicated in their definitions of the concept that stereotypes may not always be a true reflection.

The second objective was to determine the stereotypes that exist in participants' workplace. The results indicated that while some participants mentioned that there were no stereotypes, other participants did experience stereotypes within their workplace. The main existing stereotypes that were mentioned by the participants included age, culture, gender, occupational, qualification and racial stereotypes which are the main types of stereotypes that are also found in literature (Onwunta & August, 2007).

With regard to the age stereotypes, the findings of this study indicate that young employees are perceived to be inefficient, inexperienced, invaluable and unreliable. This is in line with literature findings where Sargeant (2011) mentioned that older workers are more reliable, more loyal, more committed and less likely to leave than younger workers. However, Arnett (2004) argued that there is such a negative view in our society of the age group (late teens through the



twenties) that they are lazy or not hardworking. Older employees are perceived to be more matured but slow, old-fashioned and cannot learn new things. This is also confirmed in literature that there is a stereotype that older workers are harder to train, less adaptable, less flexible, and more resistant to change (Weiss & Maurer, 2004). As a result, older workers will provide a lower return on investments such as training (Posthuma & Campion, 2009) and have less potential for development (Duncan, 2001). Older workers have less mastery of training materials and complete the training more slowly (Kubeck, Delp, Haslet & McDaniel, 1996). According to Posthuma and Campion (2008), the older workers could be frustrated by their employer's perception that they cannot learn new skills. Brooke and Taylor (2005) further alluded that the perception that older people cannot learn leads to their exclusion from re-training, the obsolescence of their skills, plateaux in their careers, and early exits. Desmette and Gaillard (2008) stated that employees who see themselves as 'older' exhibit a stronger desire to retire early and are more prone to cross-generational competition.

This study indicated that regarding the existing gender stereotype: Men are stereotyped to be better leaders, hardworking, efficient in certain tasks and more experienced whereas women are stereotyped to be poor leaders, not hardworking, physically weak, less efficient in certain tasks, incompetent and not knowledgeable. Wentling (2003) and, Bible and Hill (2007) stated that there are significantly more men than women in management positions. According to Besen and Kimmel (2006), the disproportional representation of women in managerial positions is due to the glass ceiling: blocked opportunities for women, while some argue it is due to the sticky floor: keeping women in lower paying jobs. Men felt that they were superior to women in problem solving, inspiring, delegating, and influencing superiors (Hymowitz, 2005) and women are not seen as good at problem solving as their male counterparts (Bible & Hill, 2007). This also confirms the findings of this study.

The results of the study also indicate that the participants experienced racial stereotypes. Based on the findings, black people are seen to have limitations, are incompetent, not knowledgeable, not intelligent, unreliable, noisy, not hardworking and not committed. This is also consistent with literature on how black people are perceived. Sigelman and Tuch (1997) provided data from a large study in the United States about perceptions among blacks and whites. Over 60% of the

black sample agreed that whites thought that blacks are more likely to commit crimes, are less intelligent, have low morale standards, are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, are always whining about racism, are lazy and have no self-discipline (Seligman & Tuch, 1997). Furthermore, pertaining to this study, white people are seen to occupy more powerful positions, are conceited, more hardworking, dedicated, more efficient and valuable. Bayton and Byoune (1947) in Schneider (2004) stated that white people are seen to be industrious, progressive, sophisticated and conceited.

The findings of this research also indicated that coloured people are stereotyped to be not hardworking, violent and unreliable. The study findings are in line with literature (February, 1981) where coloured people are perceived to be lazy, love to drink, swear and fight at the slightest provocation. The study also indicated that Indian people are perceived to be enterprising and good at maths. Yee (1992) confirmed the study findings and characterised Indians to be intelligent, industrious, quiet, family-oriented, and being good in maths and science.

The third research objective was to determine the stereotypes that the participants associate themselves with in their workplace. The research findings gave an indication that the participants associate themselves with the following stereotypes: age, gender, occupational and racial stereotypes. The results of the study indicated that males perceive themselves to be valuable, knowledgeable, intelligent and hardworking. Females see themselves as having to overcompensate to prove themselves, be more assertive to pull rank and they feel they are disregarded as leaders. Literature supports this finding as males are perceived to be better managers than females (Deal & Stevenson, 1998; Dodge, Gilroy & Fenzel, 1995). Coward (2010) stated that people are conditioned to expect women to be less competent, therefore, women have to prove overly competent to be taken seriously. Amble (2005) mentioned that women leaders will always be undermined and misjudged, regardless of their talents or aptitudes. The results of this study indicate that the respondents hold more positive stereotypes about themselves. Schneider (2004) confirms this by stating that people seem to have stronger and more negative stereotypes about groups to which we do not belong than to those to which we do.

With regard to the age stereotype, the research findings gave an indication that young people associate themselves with the perception that they are incompetent. Older people associate themselves with the stereotype that they are matured and professional but on the other hand, inefficient. Rupp, Vodanovich and Crede (2006) stated that managers with significant age-based biases cited older employees for poor performance more often and more severely than they cited younger employees. Prenda and Stahl (2001) mentioned that even though younger employees may be faster than older employees at certain computer-related tasks, they are not more accurate.

The results of this study indicated that, in terms of the occupational stereotypes, Human Resources perceive themselves to be undermined. Human Resources Specialists see themselves to be conceited and knowledgeable. Support staff is believed to be not intelligent and managers are perceived to disregard subordinates.

In terms of the racial stereotypes, black people perceive themselves to be disrespectful, unreliable, not intelligent, not hardworking, not knowledgeable, criminals and incompetent. Coloureds see themselves to be gangsters, drink a lot, and are wild and incompetent. These findings have been confirmed by literature (Sigelman & Tuch, 1997; February, 1981). Indians associate themselves with the perception that they are crooks and materialistic. According to Blaine (2007), Indians are associated with stereotypes that they are timid, sly, conforming and untrustworthy. White people perceive themselves to be conceited, knowledgeable, racist and self-centred. According to Schneider (2004), white people described themselves as competitive, lazy, intelligent, independent and arrogant which confirms the study findings.

The fourth objective was to determine the occupational stereotypes that the participants are confronted with within their workplace. Looking at this study's results, it is clear that the participants do experience occupational stereotypes within their workplace. The occupational stereotypes that were mentioned included: support staff are seen to be incompetent, not intelligent' invaluable and not knowledgeable. Human Resources Specialists are perceived to be academics, high-earners and isolated from reality. Finance staff is stereotyped to be knowledgeable about finance and hardworking. Subordinates are believed to be unreliable and

constantly need to be supervised. Several studies indicated that stereotypes of people in different jobs exist (McLean & Kalin, 1994).

The results of the study also indicated that different occupational groups seem to have different negative opinions and perceptions about other occupational groups within their work environment. These appear to be the case in a sense that other occupational groups might be lacking insight into other occupational group hence they form these stereotypes. Another reason might be that different occupational groups form stereotypes about other occupational groups because they feel inferior to them. So the stereotypes that they form make them feel superior. Fein and Spencer (1997) stated that threats to one's self-esteem can lead individuals to use available negative stereotypes to derogate members of stereotyped groups, and that by derogating others people can feel better about themselves.

The fifth research objective aimed at determining how the participants experience stereotypes that they are confronted with. Literature indicates that when confronted with stereotypes, people react differently. Stereotypes have different effects on different people. It has been shown that stereotyping with negative images often leads to negative outcomes like performance decrement (Bargh, Chen & Burrows 1996; Steele 1997; Shih, Pittinsky & Ambady 1999). The results of the study also indicated that the experience of stereotypes were mostly negative. Stereotypes can have cognitive, emotional and behavioural effects on the stereotyped group (Gordon, 2001). These effects were also found in this study. Behavioural effect is a behaviour that occurs as a result of a person's feeling about a focal person, object or situation (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). The results of this study indicated that most of the participants responded by either avoiding the stereotype, becoming defensive, having to prove themselves and they become suspicious when confronted with stereotypes. Cognitive effect occurs when individuals have beliefs about a certain person, object, or situation that they accept as true based on their values and experiences (Gordon, 2001). Many participants reported that they experienced stereotypes to be challenging, discriminating, derogatory, limiting, negative, cynicism, doubting and excluding. Emotional effect refers to the feelings that people have that result from their beliefs about a person, object, or situation (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). The participants reported that they feel frustrated, agitated, irritated, sad and embarrassed when confronted with stereotypes.

The sixth research objective aimed at determining stereotypes that the participants hold of other people within their workplace. It is clearly indicated by the data collected that the participants do hold negative stereotypes of other people within their workplace. According to Onwunta and August (2007), most of the stereotypes that one can think of are predominantly negative. The authors further mentioned that it was true that some stereotyping may be positive, but most of the popular stereotypes are negative and one hardly hears any positive stereotyping especially about women. However, according to Carpenter and Hewstone (1996), contact between members of different groups enables discovery of mutual similarities and thereby positively changes stereotypical attitudes towards each other. The common stereotypes that these participants held were stereotypes in terms of age, culture, gender, occupation, qualifications and race. Schneider (2004) stated that black people described whites to be prejudiced, corrupt, mean and selfish which is somehow in agreement with the results of the study where white people are seen to be conceited, not knowledgeable about other races and racists.

Regarding the age stereotype, older workers view older people more favourably than they do younger people (Celejewski & Dion, 1998; Spears, Doosje & Ellemers, 1997). The results of the study indicated that older people perceive the younger people to be conceited and technologically advanced, and young people perceive the older to be all-knowing, begrudging and technologically challenged. With regards to gender, men are more rational, obnoxious, opinionated, and ambitious (Schneider, 2004). Men are perceived as better, more competent and more valuable people than women (Blaine, 2007). In the study, black men are perceived to be patronising, ambitious and resistant to change and females are seen to be not intelligent, incompetent and poor leaders. In terms of the occupational stereotype, Mandy, Milton and Mandy (2004) stated that stereotypical perceptions exist within certain professional groups. Each professional group viewed itself more positively than it viewed the other professions (Streed & Stoecker, 1991). Occupational stereotypes might emerge due to the increased lack of understanding of each other's professional role (Mandy et al, 2004). In this study, Human Resources were seen to be conceited. Academics were perceived to be conceited, troublesome, undermining, critical, rude and mean. Managers were seen to be narrow-minded, intimidating, incompetent and controlling. People with low qualifications were seen to be inexperienced and incompetent.

The last objective of the study was to determine the origin of the stereotypes. The participants were requested to give a brief explanation on how the stereotypes originated. Schneider (2004) stated that stereotypes are direct reflections of our experience. He further mentioned that many of the important stereotypes are based on at least some contact, sometimes indirect, with relevant groups. Some participants indicated that some stereotypes originated from one's past experiences where people were segregated by the apartheid system according to their race and culture. This is also in support of what was mentioned in the literature. Schneider (2004) mentioned that our cultures provide us with different expectancies, labels and explanations for behaviour and no one has ever had a naked experience unclothed by culture. Other participants gave an indication that stereotypes originated from the experiences that we gain during our social interactions with the society or lack of exposure thereof. Schneider (2004) supports the findings as he stated that stereotypes are also based on mixtures of what we have been taught and seen.

Other participants mentioned that stereotypes emanate from primary and secondary exposure. Primary exposure refers to exposure that occurs through primary agents such as family and secondary exposure refers to exposure that occurs through secondary agents such as religion and the workplace. Schneider (1996) supported the participants' view when he stated that socialisation can occur through direct and indirect influences, and can affect the content of stereotypes as well as ways of thinking about people in general or specific groups. Social agents sometimes tell us what to believe and how to think about certain issues (Schneider, 2004). Blaine (2007) stated that much of our behaviour is learned by watching other people, a mode of learning which is especially important for children.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study indicated that the participants do understand the concept stereotypes. There is evidence that there are existing stereotypes that the participants identify with within their work environment. The types of stereotypes that are more prevalent are age, gender, occupational and racial stereotypes. There is evidence that the participants also identify with occupational stereotypes within the occupations that they are currently occupying. It is also clear that stereotypes do have different effects (behavioural, cognitive and emotional) on the persons

being stereotyped. This study also provided evidence that other participants do hold stereotypes of other people. The main perceived stereotypes about others included age, gender, occupational and racial stereotypes. Different themes on the origins of stereotypes emerged and the participants indicated that stereotypes originated from apartheid, primary exposure, secondary exposure and our subjective perceptions.

## LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations to this study. Firstly, the qualitative method used might make it difficult to replicate the study in future. Secondly, the method used in the study, i.e. the case study design is not generalisable because it focuses on only a few individuals. The sample size was small and consisted of 30 support staff members only. This could have been extended to the academic staff as well. Therefore, the results cannot be generalised for the whole institution. Thirdly, data was collected within only one higher education institution in the Gauteng province and may, therefore not be representative of all support staff within all higher education institutions in South Africa.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Collins, Walker and Hamda (2011) stated that organisations can do the following to become more aware of stereotypes that exist within the workplace: challenge stereotypic comments and assumptions when they hear them; suggest changes in systems and processes to make them more equitable and accessible; spend time (e.g., meals, breaks) with people who are different from them in a variety of ways; let people know that ethnic, gender, racial, religious, etc., jokes are off limits; suggest methods to hold all staff accountable for fair treatment and respectful behaviour; speak up and educate when you hear a derogatory comment, slur, or joke; suggest resolution strategies when staff has diversity related conflicts; challenge your own assumptions and stereotypic thoughts; give suggestions about ways to make the department more inclusive and check out the facts before you pass on information.

For future research it is recommended that additional research designs such as multiple case studies, grounded theory or triangulation be considered to explore stereotypes. A bigger sample should also be used which include support staff members from academic institutions from other provinces. It is also recommended that future research focus on including other occupational groups and not only focuses on support staff as they do not perform similar jobs.



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## CHAPTER 3

### CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter comprises conclusions regarding the literature study review and the results of the empirical study. Furthermore, it outlines the limitations of this project, followed by recommendations for future research.

#### 3.1 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions are set under the specific objectives of this study.

##### **The first objective was to conceptualise stereotypes according to literature**

Kassin, Fein and Markus (2011) defined a stereotype as a belief or association that links a whole group of people with certain traits or characteristics. Rake and Lewis (2009) mentioned that once a stereotype is applied to an individual, it is assumed that he/she will behave in a certain way, in line with a fixed general idea or set of associated images. Although many stereotypes are based on completely illusory information or perception, some do stem from a kernel of truth, and still others may be fairly accurate (Kassin et al., 2011). Although stereotypes may sometimes be relatively harmless, they can lead to prejudice and discrimination (Sanderson, 2010).

The results of the study indicated that the participants knew and understood the meaning of stereotypes as conceptualised in the literature. The participants indicated that stereotyping is associated with the following themes: association, assumption, categorisation, classification, discrimination, generalisation, judgement and perception. The participants also alluded to the fact that stereotypes may not always be accurate and true.

**The second objective was to determine the stereotypes that exist within the participants' work environment**

The results obtained in this study show that the participants did experience stereotypes within their workplace which were mostly negative. The main existing stereotypes that were prevalent include age, culture, gender, occupational, qualifications and racial stereotypes. With regard to the age stereotypes, older workers are seen to be more reliable, more loyal, more committed and less likely to leave than younger workers (Chiu, Chan, Snape & Redman , 2001). McGregor (2002) stated that young workers also face prejudice based upon stereotypes. The author indicated that the young workers' strengths lie in computer experience and enthusiasm, but are unlikely to have leadership qualities or a strong work ethic. This confirms what was also mentioned in this study. Young people were perceived to be inefficient, inexperienced, invaluable and unreliable and older people were perceived to be matured, old-fashioned, slow and cannot learn new things.

Regarding the gender stereotypes, Blaine (2007) mentioned that stereotypes held about women, especially among men, have the potential to be more discriminatory than women's beliefs about men. The author further mentioned that men's qualities are more positively valued than women's qualities and men are perceived as better, more competent and more valuable people than women. The results of this study concur with the literature. Men are seen to be better leaders, more hardworking, more efficient in certain tasks and more experienced. Females, on the other hand, are seen to be poor leaders, not hardworking, physically weak, less efficient in certain tasks, incompetent and not knowledgeable.

In terms of the racial stereotypes, Blaine (2007) stated that stereotypes of many social groups are predominantly composed of negatively valued qualities. A great quantity of research (Plous & William, 1995) shows that white individuals negatively stereotype blacks. Two traits in particular, laziness and low intelligence are constants in whites' stereotypes of blacks (Blaine, 2007). Yee (1992) characterised Indians to be intelligent, industrious, quiet, family-oriented, and being good in maths and science and similar stereotypes were also mentioned by participants in

the study. Black people are stereotyped to have limitations, are incompetent, not knowledgeable, not intelligent, unreliable, noisy, not hardworking and not committed.

**The third research objective was to determine the types of stereotypes that the participants associate themselves with within their workplace**

The results of this research indicated that the participants do experience stereotypes themselves, and age, gender, occupational, qualifications and racial stereotypes were mentioned by participants. Most of the participants seemed to believe that other people within their workplace have negative perceptions about them except for male participants who believed that people had positive perceptions about them. With regards to the racial stereotypes, all racial groups seem to have negative perceived stereotypes about themselves. Blacks are seen as having low levels of competence and warmth (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002) and are seen to be dangerous and aggressive (Correll, Park, Judd & Wittenbrink, 2002). These confirm what was indicated in this study. Black people are seen to be disrespectful, unreliable, not intelligent, not hardworking, not knowledgeable, are criminals and incompetent. Coloured people are perceived to be gangsters, drink a lot, are wild and incompetent. Indian people are characterised to be crooks and materialistic. White people are stereotyped to be conceited, self-centred and racist.

**The fourth objective was to determine the occupational stereotypes that the participants are confronted with within their workplace**

Based on the results of the study, some of the participants reported that they do not experience any occupational stereotypes within their workplace but the majority of the participants do experience them. Most of the characteristics associated with the different occupational group's stereotypes were negative except for stereotypes about individuals working in finance which is associated with positive characteristics where they are stereotyped to be hardworking and underestimated.

The occupational stereotypes that were mentioned are: Human Resources Specialists are perceived to be academics, high-earners and isolated from reality; Human Resources employees

are seen to be undermined, not self-sufficient and perceived to be just administrators; support staff are perceived to be incompetent, not intelligent, invaluable and not knowledgeable and subordinates are stereotyped to be unreliable and need to be supervised regularly. No literature could be found to support the findings of the study regarding the occupational stereotypes that exist within the participants' work environment.

**The fifth research objective aimed at determining how the participants experience stereotypes when they are confronted with it**

The study's findings indicated that while a number of participants reported that stereotypes have no effect on them; the majority of the participants indicated that stereotypes do have some negative impact on them. The results of the study indicated that when confronted with stereotypes, the participants could react in three different ways; stereotypes can have a behavioural (how one intends to act or behave towards someone or something), cognitive (belief or ideas one has about an object or situation) and emotional (feelings or emotions one has about an object or situation) effect on the stereotyped (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004). Behaviourally, the participants reported that they responded to stereotypes by either avoiding the stereotype, becoming defensive, having to prove themselves and they become suspicious. Cognitively, the respondents reported that they experienced stereotypes to be challenging, discriminating, derogatory, limiting, negative, cynicism, doubting and excluding. Emotionally, the participants reported that they felt frustrated, agitated, irritated, sad and embarrassed when confronted with stereotypes. These findings are in line with the literature.

**The sixth research objective aimed at determining stereotypes that the participants hold of other people within their workplace**

While it is evident from the study's results that some participants do hold stereotypes of other people, a number of participants reported that they do not stereotype. The participants reported that they do hold age, racial, gender and occupational stereotypes about other people. The results indicated that most participants hold negative stereotypes about different groupings within their workplace.

In terms of the age stereotype, most stereotypes ascribe negative characteristics to older workers (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Older workers are more likely to resist change and have problems with technology, may also be less flexible, less willing to train and be less creative than younger colleagues (McGregor, 2002). Men and women are presumed to be different in terms of intellectual abilities and competence (Blaine, 2007). Males are perceived to be better managers than females (Deal & Stevenson, 1998). Black people described whites to be prejudiced, corrupt, mean and selfish (Schneider, 2004). In the study, young people are seen to be conceited and technologically advanced, older people are perceived to be all knowing, begrudging and technologically challenged. Females are characterised to be not intelligent, incompetent and poor leaders. White people are stereotyped to be conceited, not knowledgeable about other races and racists.

#### **The last objective of the study was to determine the origin of the stereotypes**

The results obtained in this study indicated that many of the participants had similar views on the origins of stereotypes. Some participants indicated that some stereotypes originated from past experiences where people were segregated by the apartheid system according to their race and culture. Other participants gave an indication that stereotypes originate from the experiences that one gains through primary and secondary exposures. Primary exposure refers to exposure that occurs through primary agents such as family. Secondary exposure refers to exposure that occurs through secondary agents such as religion and the workplace. Other participants mentioned that stereotypes originate from our own subjective perceptions which refer to people's subjective view of the world that is not the true reality and shapes their behaviour (Corey, 2012). The stereotypes were reported to originate because of religious influences. Stereotypes were also viewed as being part of human nature.

### **3.2 LIMITATIONS**

The first limitation of this study is with regards to the qualitative method used, which might make it difficult to replicate the study in future. Myers (2000) stated that qualitative methodology is

rebuked because studies are often difficult to replicate because future researchers may not have access to the same subjects, and if other subjects are used, results may differ.

The second limitation of this study is on the use of the case study design. De Vaus (2001) stated that case studies have the drawback that they focus on a few individuals, and may, therefore, be difficult to generalise. Hamel (1993) agreed that the case study has basically been faulted for its lack of representativeness and its lack of rigor in the collection, construction and analysis of the empirical materials that give rise to the study. He further mentioned that this lack of rigour is linked to the problem of bias introduced by the subjectivity of the researcher and others involved in the case. Flyberg (2006) also concurred with other authors and stated the following limitations of the case study design: one can't generalise from a single case so a single case doesn't add to scientific development; the case study confirms the researcher's preconceived notions and it is difficult to summarise case studies into general propositions and theories.

The third limitation is on the sample size. With qualitative studies, data saturation determines the sample size, which was the case in this study. The sample size was quite small. The sample size consisted of 30 support staff members only within an institution where there is approximately 3500 support staff. Therefore, the results cannot be generalised for the whole institution. The study focused only on the support staff; it could have been extended to the academic staff as well. The results of the study cannot be generalised for the entire population within the institution. Lastly, the study took place in one higher education institution in one province, namely Gauteng. The results may not be generalised for support staff within all higher education institutions in South Africa.

### **3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations can be made with regard to future research and for the organisation

### **3.3.1 Recommendations for the organisation**

Ekandjo (2012) stated that it is possible to do away with stereotyping at the workplace; companies should just embrace diversity and leverage on diversity to attain core objectives to deal with stereotypes. According to Chitumba (2012), managers must create platforms for employees to respect each other's differences and do away with stereotyping others at the workplace. Ekandjo (2012) further stated that doing away with stereotypes starts at a personal level by learning about yourself, understanding your own attitude, behaviour and assumptions and beliefs, then move to the interpersonal level where you build diverse and inclusive relationships, seeking to listen and building inclusive and productive teams and lastly moving to the organisational level where there is development of a diversity plan, building processes, systems, goals, measures, accountability and implementation.

Organisations need to encourage team work which builds relationships among employees, makes employees feel comfortable about sharing and also helps employees to be more open to learning about different cultures (Solovic, 2012). According to Roberson and Kulik (2007), organisations can also decrease stereotyping by expanding employees' knowledge about diversity by teaching employees about cultural difference to reduce negative attitudes, stereotypes and prejudice against members of different groups. Kray, Thompson and Galinsky (2001) also mentioned that managers should talk explicitly about stereotypes with their potentially threatened employees as explicit discussion about stereotypes can be useful in reducing their impact. Honest engagement of the problem and an exploration of action strategies to counteract perceptions can increase trust, reduce stereotype threat and improve performance (Roberson & Kulik, 2007).

### **3.3.2 Recommendations for future research**

It is recommended that the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods be used in a similar study. Additional research designs like multiple case studies, grounded theory or focus groups should be considered to explore stereotypes further. A similar study should be done with a bigger sample, which will allow generalisability of the research results. Future research should focus on including other occupational groups so that a comparison could be made of how people



from different occupations experience stereotypes. It is recommended that a similar study should be conducted within other higher education institutions in other provinces to also enable generalisation of the findings.

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