

Skewed stereotypes

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Stereotypes are an essential part of human reasoning. The semantics of a wide range of words and constructions rests on stereotypes and knowledge about stereotypical situations. Stereotypes are usually acquired by generalizing over personal experience: We plan and reason about S based on earlier experiences with instances of S – or so it should be.

Our input of information about the world, however, is frequently filtered by media both traditional and digital. Journalists as well as algorithms select instances of S that are worth being reported. In making such choices, they can influence our personal statistics and thus shape our expectations as to what is “frequent” and “typical”. In this way pieces of news that may be correct information about the world can still lead to skewed stereotypes.

The talk reviews generic sentences, progressives and evidential markers. All arguably have a meaning that refers to beliefs about stereotypes. By way of case studies, I trace how skewed stereotypes, created by biased media input, lead to false beliefs about the world.