

Breaking-down Generalisations and Stereotypes about the "Group" your
Perpetrator/s belong to
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"A stereotype is a mental image, or an exaggerated belief, which assumes that whatever is believed about a group is typical for the entire group. Stereotypical thinking is unavoidable in social life and it is not automatically bad. The essence of prejudicial thinking, however, is that the stereotype is not checked against reality. It is not modified by experiences that counter the rigid image (Farley, 2000)."

It is very easy to understand why a traumatic event such as rape and sexual assault may sometimes trigger a self-protective instinct to avoid people of a certain gender, social group, race, sexuality, profession, etc who the survivor may connect to their experience. This avoidance may lead the survivor to develop over-arching generalisations and stereotypes about the perceived group to which their perpetrator/s belonged. While this may feel safer for the survivor, and even justified given their experiences, it can also have a lot of repercussions. Survivors report feeling guilty for thinking this way, ashamed, embarrassed, afraid of being seen as a bigot, racist, sexist, etc, and may also find their negative beliefs cut them off from certain sources of support, education, health-care, and so on. For example, think of a survivor abused by a teacher who decides not to continue with tertiary education because in their mind all teachers are dangerous, or a survivor who was not offered the validation and support of their doctor after the assault, and now won't go to the doctor when they are ill because they believe doctors don't care about their clients and can't be bothered to help.

There are times when holding onto these generalisations of groups and stereotypes can be to the detriment of the survivor, rather than a way to protect themselves. An important part of overcoming trauma is recognising that it was an individual, or perhaps even individuals, of a group who hurt you, not the entire group.

Healing negative beliefs about the group which reminds you of your perpetrator/s is something that takes work. There are many ways survivors have found that have helped to break down their generalisations and enabled them to place the blame onto the person/s

who hurt them, rather than on the "group" they belonged to. Some suggestions that other survivors have offered:

- Talking in therapy about the feelings you hold towards the "group" which reminds you of your abuse
- Getting to know members of this group on a personal level, getting to know them as people rather than judging them as a whole
- Working on integration and healing, learning to trust your judgement and building trust in your ability to take care of yourself regardless of who you are around
- Actively challenging your thinking and logic when you find yourself falling into these generalisations
- Reminding yourself of people in your life who you love and respect, who are also members of the group that you fear
- If you don't have any examples of the above, try reminding yourself of people who fall into the group you fear who your loved ones respect and care for
- Developing your strategies and tactics to [cope with triggers](#)

Carrying generalisations, stereotypes, or prejudice against certain groups may make you feel safer, but for many survivors it can leave them feeling that in some ways their abuser/s still have control over them, or that their interactions with others is still being defined by their rape and being a survivor. Healing the fear you hold towards those who remind you of your abuse can be a way of taking back your power and your control of your own thoughts and actions/reactions.

Further reading:

Farley, E. (2000). *Majority-Minority Relations*. Prentice-Hall: New York.

Grober, M. (1990). [Stereotypes and Prejudices](#).