Discuss how self-fulfilling prophecies operate, how they are related to stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination and how their most invidious consequences can be prevented.

Name: Don Pugh

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# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .............................................. 1  
2. Definition of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies ................. 2  
3. Operation of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies ................. 3  
4. Relation of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies to Stereotypes .. 9  
5. Prejudice .................................................. 12  
6. Discrimination ............................................. 13  
7. Prevention of Stereotypes, Prejudice and Discrimination 14  
8. Conclusion .................................................. 17  
9. Bibliography ................................................ 20
1. Introduction

Self-fulfilling prophecies and their associated phenomena of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination are of major interest to social psychologists. Issues such as minority rights and equal opportunity relate directly to self-fulfilling prophecies and occupy the interests of the Australian legislator today.

This essay explains the meaning of the term self-fulfilling prophecy and examines the social psychological mechanisms by which the process works. These mechanisms will be described by use of a six stage model which includes these elements: the social setting, individual background and beliefs, development of expectations, interaction and communication with other people, their internalisation of expectations as self-identity, their subsequent behaviours and the interpretation of these behaviours by the first party. Outcomes include confirmation of the original expectations and subsequent labelling and discrimination.

Self-fulfilling prophecies are related specifically to the phenomena of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination.

Stereotypes as generalizations are demonstrated to be generated as part of social identity and to be perpetuated and confirmed as a result of self-fulfilling prophecy.

Prejudice, or intolerant attitudes towards others, will also be shown to be a product of social identity. The process is an ethnocentric one whereby people value their own groups more than others. Self-fulfilling prophecy is shown to be a means which
is used to justify the apparent validity of prejudiced views.

Discrimination, or unfair behaviour towards other people, is also shown to be explained by social identity theory and is justified by the self-fulfilling prophecy process.

Lastly, specific strategies for reversing the harmful effects of self-fulfilling prophecies are suggested such as education, cooperation, and enhancement and equality of distinctive groups.

2. Definitions of Self-fulfilling Prophecies

The term 'self-fulfilling prophecy' was initially suggested by Merton (1948). He defined it as "a false definition ... evoking a new behaviour which makes the originally false conception come true" (p. 195). In essence, Merton (1948) believed that false expectations by people could come true or create their own reality by causing other people to change their behaviours to match and fulfil the initial expectations.

A well publicised example to illustrate the process is the panic which resulted in well established banks becoming insolvent in 1929. A run on savings withdrawals followed a false rumour that the banks were bankrupt. Expectations became reality as investors withdrew all their savings.

Equally well known to psychologists as a threat to internal validity of experiments is the Rosenthal (1966) effect or experimental bias. Here, the researcher's expectations are communicated to the subject either verbally or by body language. The subject, anxious to please the experimenter, behaves in the required way so that the experimenter's theory is pleasantly
confirmed.

The expectations concept gained popularity and stimulated massive research as a result of a book by Rosenthal and Jacobsen (1968) on "how one person's expectations for another person's behaviour can quite unwittingly become a more adequate prediction simply for its having been made"(p.123).

Initial teacher expectations were found by these authors to be matched by the subsequent behaviour and performance of their students. Teachers who possessed high expectations for certain students found that the performance of the students improved to match these expectations. Conversely, students who were labelled as slower or as behaviour problems performed less well and altered their behaviour to become behaviour problems. In essence, students "...will become the people they are thought to be, and their behaviour will reflect the cross-situational consistency and temporal stability that are the defining features of personality traits..."(Snyder & Swann, 1982, p. 257).

Subsequent research has verified the self-fulfilling prophecy effect. A meta-analysis by Rosenthal and Rubin (1978, in Miller & Turnbull, 1986) has found that two thirds of three hundred and forty five educational studies demonstrated some teacher expectancy effect. Crano and Mellon (1978) in a four year longitudinal study of 5,200 children have confirmed the "causal primacy" of expectations in influencing achievement in school children.
3. Operation of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

An overview of the operation of self-fulfilling prophecy is demonstrated in the diagram below. The model is based on ideas from Snyder & Swann (1984) combined with Brophy (1982).

Table 1: A Model For the Operation of Self-Filling Prophecy

| Stage 1.1: The model operates within a social context which may define the attitudes, and beliefs of its members through the application of social norms and social identity as well as common practices. Norms are pressures upon group members to conform with the expectations of the group. Within this situation social norms such as stereotypes, discrimination, racism and prejudice may be relevant.

Stage 1.2: During this stage the individual or actor interacts with other individuals (targets) who present highly visible and distinctive characteristics. Such characteristics may include gender, social class, disability, occupation or race. Grady (1977, in Deaux and Wrightsman, 1988) has found that sex and race is always immediately noted and remembered. The actor may also be influenced by heresay or gossip, past interactions or culturally induced stereotypical predispositions. |
Stage 2: First impressions or expectations aroused by these highly apparent characteristics are based on assumptions about these characteristics dictated by the individual's previous experience or by conformity to group norms and stereotypes. Cognitive psychologists term these preconceptions as schema. These are presented as a means for simplifying decision making by distorting perception and memory to confirm the model (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). Everyone carries these implicit personality theories, which dominate judgments about other people (Schneider, 1973, in Deaux & Wrightsman, 1988).

The individual may recall or imagine scenarios based on his impressions and imagine future interactions. Abelson (1981), for instance, has described the use of imaginary scripts in planning future actions. These beliefs represent expectations about the type of reaction and behaviour which will be displayed by the other person. They will "...likely...guide subsequent thought and interaction involving the targets of beliefs..." (Snyder & Swann, 1982, p. 293). Social beliefs are, in effect, scenarios anticipated for the target person.

Even when beliefs are posed as hypotheses, Snyder and Swann (1978) have found that questions chosen to elicit further information about the hypotheses were biased to confirm the hypotheses. In an experiment involving introverted versus extraverted interviewees, the self-presentation conscious interviewees presented themselves in ways that confirmed the interviewers hypotheses concerning introverted or extraverted characteristics. Psychologists (Snyder & Swann, 1984) have found a link between beliefs and the subsequent behaviours associated with those
beliefs.

**Stage 3:** Behaviours are initiated based on a strategy to test out the validity of the beliefs or expectations. The actors behave towards their targets in a manner consistent with their beliefs, perhaps in a rigid and stereotyped manner.

Many factors influence the degree of impact of expectations on the target (Blease, 1983). Some factors include the consistency of behaviours based on expectations, their strength, the length of time they are held, the degree of clear communication of expectations and the number of people holding and communicating the expectations.

Gothman (1959, in Corder, 1987) has emphasised the importance of nonverbal as well as verbal clues for communicating expectations. For instance, smiles, nods, increased eye control, forward body lean, pats, hugs and approving vocal clues may act as positive reinforcements. Frowns, threatening looks and gestures, neutral facial expressions and reduced eye contact, hostile vocal clues and silence may act as punishments.

Brophy (1982) has described a behaviourist mechanism termed the interactionist theory. This theory argues that actors' behaviours have been altered in such a way that differential instruction occurs for different targets. Consequently, expectations will be fulfilled.

For teachers interacting with students believed to have low academic performance, for instance, the following teacher behaviours have been observed to occur. The teacher pays less atten-
tion to "lows," ignores their comments, asks fewer questions, provides less wait time for answers, spends more time on discipline, paces the students more slowly and accepts poorer performance. Feedback would include more criticism, less praise and less feedback. Personal communications were affected by placing "lows" at the back, and by negative body language such as fewer smiles, eye contact or warmth. Students categorised as "highs" receive the reverse treatment.

Stage 4: Behaviours of the actor do communicate to the target impressions about how the target is expected to behave or perform. The process is analogous to priming, a process in which the actor accesses the relevant self-schema to the forefront of the target's thinking (Higgins & King, 1981 in Deaux & Wrightsman, 1988).

If the actor's behaviour is consistent, intermediate outcomes include the development of self-images, self-expectations, motivation, aspirations, attitudes, conduct and performance of the target, who is also formulating strategies to cope with the interaction. Darley and Fazio (1980) note that the targets will come to expect stereotyped behaviour consistent with expectations as the norm.

Targets do differ in their degree of susceptibility. Research into locus of control theory (Johnson, 1970 in Brophy, 1982) has indicated that people who have an external locus, showing dependence and looking to other people for guidance, are more likely to be influenced by the process of self-fulfilling prophecy. Other factors include the salience of the expectations for the target.
Stage 5: Festinger (1954) has explained that people seek to balance their behaviours with their beliefs to avoid the discomfort of cognitive dissonance. In order to reduce anxiety it may be expected that behaviour and performance will be brought into line to match with the self-concept created by the actor's entrenched expectations. The target's beliefs are translated into congruent and reciprocal behaviours.

Goffman (1963) has demonstrated how stigmatised groups such as the handicap are forced to play stereotyped roles. Bem (1972) has confirmed in self-perception theory how people define their self-concept. They observe their own actions believing that 'I am what I do' or 'because I act that way, I must be that sort of person.' By such a process internalisation of behaviour and the development of a self-identity occurs. Behaviours are designed to confirm the expectations of the actors and consequently to confirm the self-image of the target.

Stage 6: The behaviour of the target is observed by the actor in the light of his or her expectancies. Attribution theorists using social cognition processing models have verified the perceptual distortions or attribution biases which occur when encoding and processing these observations.

Jones (1986, in Corder, 1986), for instance, has shown correspondence bias to be "a tendency to assume that a given action can be explained by reference to a correspondent disposition when actually people with a variety of dispositions would have behaved in a similar way.... We fail to take fully into account the controlling roles that situations play" (p.3).
When expectancies are fulfilled in a desirable way the actor attributes confirmation to the disposition or personality of the target. If expectations are not fulfilled, the actor may attribute disconfirmation to the situation.

In contrast, if undesirable expectations are confirmed by an out-group, these are attributed to the disposition of the group. If undesirable expectations are not confirmed, attribution is to transitory factors in the situation (Pettigrew, 1979).

As Miller and Turnbull (1988) conclude, behaviours are interpreted consistently with expectancies and the actor may believe that his or her expectancies have been confirmed even if they were disconfirmed.

Snyder & Swann (1982) have shown that memory of events relevant to beliefs will be biased to recall those events that confirm the beliefs.

As an outcome the reality which was believed to exist has become real by effects of the actor's beliefs on the target. A belief has created its own reality. The initial error will be unrecognised as the target changes his or her behaviour to validate the apparent accuracy of the original view. As Merton (1948) notes, "the specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. Outcomes are cited as proof of being right from the beginning" (p.195). Consequently, as Blease (1983) shrewdly observes, a self-fulfilling prophecy is not easy to recognise because of the subjective nature of reality and the conviction by the holder that his or her version of reality is the correct one.
Snyder et al. (1982) resolve that "...beliefs about people ... are actively involved in initiating and guiding the course and outcome of social interaction and the remembering and interpretation of events relevant to these beliefs..."(p.292).

4. Relation of Self-Fulfilling Prophecies to Stereotypes

Stereotypes are defined by Hogg and Abrams (1988) as "generalizations about people based on category membership"(p.65). Lippmann (1922, in Hogg & Abrams, 1988) has seen them as simplified views of the social world which are false, rigid, and difficult to change.

There are different mechanisms for the development of stereotypes. The social cognitive view of stereotypes as role-schemata which contain specific social roles has been criticised(Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Such social cognition is seen as asocial, reducing groups to "isolated information-processing modules" which overlook group processes(p.89).

Hogg and Abrams (1988), in contrast, explain the stereotyping process as one of social identity. They explain that society consists of many social functional categories which differ in power and status and which tend to conflict. In order to enhance self-esteem, being composed of personal and social identity, people immediately identify with the group or 'in-group' to which they belong. The self-identity is modified by symbolic interactionism. This is a process whereby the self-identity of the person is affected by his or her perception of how other members in the relevant reference group perceive him or her. Self-
identity is influenced by the social category to which a person belongs. The group perception provides self-definition and a means to simplify, order and understand society.

Members of in-groups are regarded and see themselves as homogeneous in attitudes and behaviours. In-groups are generally perceived as cohesive and different from other 'out-groups.' People categorise others as members or non-members of the same group. They accentuate or stereotype differences between in and out groups through social comparison in order to stereotype or define the positive aspects of their own group. In-groups are preferred and seen to occupy an ideal position.

Out-groups are stereotyped in a disparaging way by in-group members. Such views are learned by "referent informational influence" and are shared by all in-group members (Hogg & Abrams, 1988, p. 172). The stereotypes are shared, and become the basis for group uniformity and norms. These exert conformity and are a basis for prejudice, scapegoating and discrimination.

The experimental proof has been provided by Tajfel (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). Subjects exaggerated the difference in line length between categories. Exaggeration did not occur when lines were unlabelled. Such an experiment suggested that people exaggerated similarities within categories and differences outside of categories.

Stereotypical behaviour at an inter-personal or group level involves treating other people with behaviours that reflect the views of the stereotype. This, in turn, elicits behaviours from the target which confirm the belief and support the stereotype in
accordance with the theory of self-fulfilling prophecy.

Gender stereotypes are particularly apparent with expectations that men are dominant, independent, competitive, ambitious and aggressive. Women are usually perceived as submissive, dependent, conforming, affectionate and sympathetic.

Skrypnek and Snyder (1982) have illustrated how such stereotyped beliefs about the nature of the sexes caused behaviour which confirmed these beliefs. People are frequently manoeuvred to elicit behaviours which conform with the expected role. An experiment involved pairs of unacquainted students who interacted in a situation which permitted control of knowledge of the opposite sex (Skrypnek et al., 1982). One member was given an expectation of the sex of the partner. This belief influenced the outcome of the division of labour on tasks regardless of the real sex. Women, believing they were working with men, chose stereotypical female tasks. The partner regardless of sex demonstrated behaviours associated with the male gender.

Nevertheless, stereotypes, generally, remain a false reflection of reality because they generally apply in interpersonal relations. There are usually enough people interacting with the target who do not hold stereotypical views to permit a range of behaviours based on the situation. Consequently, behaviours do not always reflect immediate stereotypes.

5. Prejudice

Prejudice refers to intolerant attitudes to other groups of people. Prejudice may operate at the inter-personal or cultural levels. Initially, psychologists explained prejudice at the
personal level by using such Freudian theories as repressed aggression and projection onto out-groups (Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

Other explanations included frustration in achieving goals with subsequent aggression via displacement on convenient out-groups or scapegoats. Out-groups are presumed to be power-seeking and are sought to be eliminated.

At the group level stereotypical beliefs about the characteristics of another group are usually learned by operant conditioning or modelling from other members of the group through their conformance to norms. These beliefs are transformed into inappropriate behaviours which lead to confirmation of the prejudice. In addition, attention, diverted from the dominant group, unites the in-group (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). A common form of prejudice is racism, or the belief of cultural superiority, a process which allows the in-group to maintain its dominant status.

6. Discrimination

Discrimination is defined as demonstrating an unfair behaviour towards a person or group on the basis of a major defining characteristic such as race or sex. Discriminatory decisions are based on stereotyped beliefs about the object and on prejudice.

Rokeach (1968) suggests that discrimination is a result of perceived dissimilarity in values between groups. One person or group is presumed to reject another because there is the belief that the other group possesses different values. Other research-
ers (McKirnan, Smith & Hamayan, 1983, in Deaux & Wrightsman, 1988) have found that similarities in beliefs reduce prejudice and discrimination.

Both views fit the social identity model which suggests that groups accentuate differences between in and out groups but would include people who were similar to the in-group. Because of scarce resources and the need to maintain the cohesive boundaries of the in-group, prejudice and discrimination are displayed towards outsiders. Expectations of bizarre behaviours by members of out-groups tend to lead to these prejudiced behaviours by in-group members and to the subsequent maintenance of discriminatory policies by the in-groups.

Many studies have investigated the effects of sex discrimination in business (Brown, 1986). With resumés of equal quality, varying only in sex of the candidate, discriminatory bias towards one sex indicates clear beliefs about the difference between men and women. Lower expertise is assigned to women. The self-fulfilling prophecy process suggests that these beliefs, when conveyed to women employees, will result in a lower standard of work and the perpetuation of the inferiority myth.

7. Prevention of Stereotypes, Prejudice and Discrimination

It may appear that stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination are an inevitable part of social categorisation. In such a way a dominant position by one group is maintained over another and the process of interpreting the world is simplified. However, stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination may be modified in ways
which reduce their harmful effects.

At an interpersonal level, interpersonal interaction has been a way to develop friendships and disprove stereotypical beliefs. Allport (1954, in Brown, 1986) wrote that "prejudice may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports..." (p.613).

It is presumed that the provision of more accurate information through regular and close contact alters expectations and the invidious effects of self-fulfilling prophecies. People may discover that their beliefs may have been wrong. Equal power and status among those who interact have been found to be essential (Deaux & Wrightsman, 1988).

Common goals foster cooperation and a desire to work together to achieve these goals as was demonstrated by the young campers in the robbers cave experiment by Sherif et al. (1966, in Deaux & Wrightsman, 1988).

Stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination may also be reduced by reducing competition and establishing cooperative situations. Here, success by individuals enhance the status of the group. Equal status cooperation fosters an in-group identification which promotes cohesion and friendships. One example is Aronson's (1978) jig saw classroom, in which students work in groups and are forced to share resources and information cooperatively in order to succeed.
Education may provide a means to provide processes to avoid techniques leading to self-fulfilling prophecies. Snyder et al. (1982) recommend teaching people to disprove their hypotheses rather than seeking evidence to confirm them. He also suggests that people may be sensitivised to impression management so that they will work to be broad minded. Other writers emphasise the need to use unbiased textbooks which present high expectations for other cultures and minorities (Parsons, 1982). Writers seeking gender equality urge non-discriminatory language, use of women as well as men examples and positive discrimination for women in search of careers (Oregon, 1987).

Hutslar (1977) has suggested that people be trained to employ a single subject evaluative model, whereby an area of interest is chosen, baseline data on interactions is collected, expectations altered, and baseline data recollected to measure changes in the target behaviour. Such an approach may not be practical outside of an experimental situation.

Alloy (1985) in explaining how labelling's influence may be reduced in therapy, suggests that efforts be made consciously to reduce the effects of expectations and to increase a search for valid situational information through research.

Brown (1986) suggests that stereotypes, being natural category formations, are inevitable. However, stereotypes should not be exaggerated in a negative way by the media. Actions such as job employment should not be based on stereotypes or prejudice when specific diagnostic information is available.

Locksley (1980, in Brown, 1986) has found that discriminatory
practices in job hiring decrease with the provision of useful individual information about the candidates (p.602). Brown (1986) concludes that "when information is available ... that is highly relevant or diagnostic, it can overcome the effects of group prejudice ... and become the exception that breaks the rule" (p.608).

Hogg and Abrams (1988) say that a productive approach must focus at the group level. Firstly, intergroup status and power structures must be equalised in a way which undermine stereotypical differences. In this process, education must be accompanied by objective measures to equalise educational and economic outcomes between groups. Harvey (1988), for instance, in an examination of Australian Aborigines asserts the need for further interventions to equalise differences between groups including changes to the law, land rights and public polity.

Many groups assert and take pride in their distinctive differences. By being culturally assertive, these groups raise the value of their self and social identities through 'voice' or social action, competition, propaganda and by creating 'cognitive alternates' or examples of success. This process increases a sense of social injustice among group members. By their resistance to prejudice and discrimination out-groups provide directions and incentives for remediation. Positive social identities which may result from this process may enhance the self-identity of these group members.

As Moscovici (1980) asserts, minorities may then influence the actions of majorities by changing private opinions of majority members with a consistent, forceful and confident stand. Conse-
quently, the majority opinion may change to favour minority groups. Expectations for these groups change to become positive. The self-fulfilling prophecy process operates positively to enhance the achievement of these groups. The existence of and loyalty to distinct groups may help to prevent discrimination (Brown, 1986).

This process is apparent, for instance, in the promoting of the French language in Quebec, Canada from its former status as a minority language. Now it is the sole language of Quebec and a requirement for political success and advancement in the Canadian civil service (Brown, 1986). Expectations for French speakers have changed from a view that the language represented a "ethnic trap" to the view that the bilingual skill was an essential attribute for advancement.

8. Conclusion

Self-fulfilling prophecies have been shown to be a process whereby beliefs held by one person about another often appear to come true. The process by which these beliefs come true has been demonstrated and explained by the construction of a six stage model.

Stage 1 provides the context which is responsible for the origin of beliefs for the actor. Stereotypes and prejudiced beliefs have been shown to emerge from a theory of social identity whereby actors enhance the advantages of their group and disparage other groups.

In stage 2, first impressions from obvious characteristics pro-
vide a basis for beliefs and subsequent behaviours. These beliefs take the form of schema or scripts which distort reality.

Stage 3 involves acting on the basis of beliefs in a way that communicates directly or indirectly through body language the beliefs of the actor.

In stage 4 the target develops his self-identity as a result of the consistent impact of stereotyped behaviour. This self-identity determines his or her motivation and actions.

In stage 5, the target matches his actions with his or her beliefs and behaves in a way which confirms the original beliefs.

Lastly, in stage 6 the actor interprets the behaviours of the target as fulfilling his or her original beliefs. Distortion or attribution bias may occur to allow data to be fitted to pre-existing conceptions. The outcome is a reality which has been constructed by the actor to fit his or her expectations.

This process of forming beliefs is often determined by social identity. The beliefs formed are learned from other group members and are designed to enhance the status of the group and to lower the status of other groups. Stereotypes, being generalisations about other groups are often false. However, because they are believed the process of self-fulfilling prophecy can make them come true. Consequently, beliefs are confirmed and pernicious stereotypes may be perpetuated.

Prejudice or intolerant attitudes are also a product of social identity in many cases. They are learned by conformity to group norms. Because prejudice conveys clear dislike to recipients,
targets may react in a reciprocal and hostile way. Such reactions confirm the belief of the actor in the justice of showing prejudiced behaviour. The vicious cycle is continued.

Discrimination or unfair behaviour towards others, like stereotyping and prejudice may result from accentuating the positive qualities of an in-group and acting negatively towards any competing groups. Discrimination may result in hostile and retaliatory behaviour by the recipients, justifying in the eyes of the actor the need for discriminatory behaviour. Because of the process of self-fulfilling prophecy, a furious cycle may occur.

Prevention of the effects of self-fulfilling prophecy includes action at both an inter-personal and group level. At an inter-personal level, people's cognitive processes may be altered through education to reduce the effects of biases which lead to stereotypes. People may learn to disregard the effects of stereotypes and prejudice in preference for obtaining unbiased situational information.

Introduction of cooperating groups who interact closely with each other on an equal basis to achieve superordinate goals has been shown as another constructive way to reduce the effects of self-fulfilling prophecies.

On a group level, intergroup status and power needs to be equalised so that all groups may share distinctive but favourable self-images. In this way derogatory beliefs about other groups and the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination may be reduced.

Outcomes may be positive beliefs whose self-fulfilling prophecies
enhance the individual, the group and the humaneness of mankind.
9. Bibliography


Fig. 1: Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Model

1.1 Social Context
1.2 Interaction

2. Expectations

3. Behaviours Tested

4. Interaction: Behaviours Communicate Expectations
   Target Develops Self-expectations

5. Target displays behaviours.

6. Behaviours interpreted as confirming beliefs