

Stereotypes are a common idea in literature. Our first impressions of people are often heavily based on assumptions that are already made by others. This is shown through *Crash* directed by Paul Haggis, *Day Trip* directed by Zoe McIntosh, *Coffee and Allah* by Sima Urale, and the oral text *I am Maori* by Sheldon Rua.

In the film 'Crash,' the audience immediately associates Daniel as a gang member due to his rough, physical appearance of having a shaved head, imprinted tattoos and loose, baggy pants. Through this we see that society still has the prejudiced view of people with tattoos being very aggressive and judge them as people that experience hardship in finding employment. Daniel's character is greatly misunderstood in this film. He is simply a hardworking locksmith who wants the best for his family. His friendly and composed personality is overlooked because people are more concerned that he is Hispanic and further associates him as a dangerous gangster. It is inevitable that the first thing we look at in people is their physical appearance, particularly when someone is of a different ethnicity. We use stereotypes to identify people, to give ourselves an idea of a person. But very often, this leads to making assumptions that paint a false image of others as we do not get to see the true picture of them. Despite facing such issues, Daniel challenges stereotype through presenting the audience with a strong moral ethic. He proves to Jean that he is indeed not a gang member by returning the keys before he left the Cabot's house. Even though Daniel is treated disrespectfully, he still dealt politely with others. He does not comply to the stereotype placed on him by leaving the keys behind and still helps Jean and Farhad who are of different ethnicity despite being accused as a "gang-banger" and a "cheater". This attitude Daniel portrays is similar to the protagonist of *Day Trip*. When Willy arrives in the small port town of Picton, he was indirectly attacked by the rude act of a mechanic who stuck his tongue out. However, Willy chose to trivialize the action of the mechanic because it will not benefit him in any way. Both the characters are challenging stereotypes by turning away from it without causing harm towards others.

This form of stereotyping - judging others based on physical appearances is similar to the stereotype established in the film 'Day Trip'. The director introduces Willy with a full, intricate facial tattoo that represents his Maori culture. Again, in this film, the viewer sees Willy as another gang member. However, the presence of a tattoo does not mean that they are bad or are affiliated with crime. Neither Willy nor Daniel from *Crash* exhibit actions of violence. Initially, Willy is denied drinks by the bartender at the pub in Picton due to the gang patches seen on his clothing. The people at the pub automatically assume Willy is a gang member without knowing his real intentions of coming to the pub. However, when Willy removes the gang patches and reveals his true identity, he is eventually accepted. Willy simply wanted to spend some time away from the isolation he has placed himself in. By removing his barriers, this gave him the opportunity to be able to participate and share part of his day with the people at the pub. This film further emphasizes how society is quick to place others in a category, which eliminates the opportunity for us to discover them for who they are. But if we do the opposite and make an effort to learn about others by looking past their appearance, our ideas can change about the individual. In addition to portraying a strong moral ethic, the viewer sees Willy challenging stereotypes by taking a day off which allows him to leave the house and get a better perspective of the outside world. Willy's experience at the pub has given him another image of the world, that there are so many positive things to explore and focus on rather than letting stereotypes define him because of his background at home. I think the way Willy challenges stereotypes is similar to the poem by Sheldon Rua, as he highlighted how we could continue to allow society to define us and carry this stigma of "a home thing" or let go of it.

'I am Maori' contrasts with the first two texts I have chosen. This is a different approach as stereotype is not established in this text but the poet depicts his personal views as a Maori. The poet himself is the persona who is trying to express his perspective about stereotypes towards his culture such as the struggles they face as a member of the society. They are often disadvantaged and often, the society stereotypes them to be unemployed and unprivileged. Sheldon himself is saying that stereotypes exist in the society but we don't need to conform to it. We have the power to not let it affect us. The poet points out "But regardless of your reality, people will still throw you in the same box as the Māori next door". This reflects the society we live in today as stereotypes continues to exist. This is similar to the

protagonist Daniel in *Crash* as we presume that he is a gang member because of his physical appearance. In addition, the poet highlights the various stereotypes that exist in society which are often drawn towards Maori such as coming from an abusive family. Rua asserts, "But a house is not a home, And unfortunately I occupy a house" suggesting the stereotype that their home is not a safe place for them. "But dad's there..drunk, And Mum's stoned", alluding to Maori parents being associated with alcohol and drugs and also commonly stereotyped as uneducated. Very often, this attitude gets passed onto younger generations which then affects their education and therefore chances of getting a job in the future. The poet challenges the viewers as he mentions "these stains may remain but they never, ever, have to" and that "I've noticed that stereotypes, they don't change but people do." He challenges the audience by standing up for himself and his culture. Therefore, we shouldn't feel disadvantaged because of our ethnicity. We need to remind ourselves that we do not have to stick to social norms and let society define us. In my opinion, the way the poet challenges stereotype is similar to the character Abeba from *Coffee and Allah*. She also makes no effort to conform to stereotypes with her strong faith in Allah and is reluctant to give up her traditional way of brewing coffee. She is standing up for herself and her culture. In addition, Rua includes some Maori language to show that he has not forgotten about his own culture and his own language. Similarly, Abeba attempts to use her own language in order to communicate with the Samoan barista at the coffee shop. I believe that the difference in culture and therefore appearance makes the characters Daniel, Willy and Abeba feel unwelcome in society. Although Willy and the persona (Rua) are native individuals in New Zealand in contrast to Abeba who is a refugee here, the three of them still struggle to fit in due to being stereotyped.

Stereotype is also established in the film, *Coffee and Allah* which features an Ethiopian refugee who struggles to 'fit in' with the people in New Zealand. Her struggles are similar to the characters Daniel and Willy as she is introduced to the audience with the blue burqa. The blue burqa made her stand out and look different thus isolating her from the locals. The audience sees that her blue burqa carries a stigma that is generalized as terrorism and violence causing her to struggle to form connections with other people. This film further reinforces that society is often quick to judge people based on their physical appearance especially by the way they dress and their ethnicity. In addition, Abeba refuses to accept a cup of coffee from the Samoan barista at the coffee shop but she accepts the container of food from her sister who appeared similar in terms of their clothing. I believe stereotypes are established here as this further implies that people often gravitate to people who appear similar to them than those who are of different ethnicities and look different. Abeba challenges stereotype by continuing to dress the same way which shows that she is proud of her culture and would not change the way she dress just because she is in a foreign country. In the coffee house, Abeba positions herself behind the magazine to avoid any form of eye contact with other people. This is also similar to the scene in the tunnel in *Daytrip*. As people passed by Willy, there was no eye contact exchanged, let alone initiation of any conversations. This reflects the reality of society; those who appear different, especially with appearance, are often neglected as society tends to gravitate towards people they identify with. Despite coming from a background of different ethnicity, Abeba goes out in search of coffee beans and this eventually allows her to create a link with New Zealand where she is later made to feel accepted in society and accepts the cup of coffee from the Samoan barista as he makes an effort to interpret her message and respects Abeba's decision of not accepting the coffee initially. Thus, this eventually forms a connection between them which is similar to how Willy ends up being accepted as they offer him the beer.

In conclusion, *Crash*, *Day Trip*, *Coffee and Allah*, and *I am Maori* present us with powerful messages about stereotypes. The four texts have reminded us that stereotypes exist everywhere, regardless of who you are and where you are. By learning to accept others for who they are, focusing less on people's physical appearance and getting to know a person before categorising them, our perspective of them changes. There are various ways of overcoming stereotypes such as respecting others and having a strong moral ethic. They have raised awareness of the stereotypical actions of society towards people of different cultures and physical appearances. They are successful in showing how stereotypes exist in our society and how the characters challenge these stereotypes.