

Book Review: *I Never Wanted to Be a Stereotype: A Sociologist's Narrative of Healing*

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Publication Type: Book Review

Preferred Citation: Cuddy, Leslie. 2023. Review of *I Never Wanted to Be a Stereotype: A Sociologist's Narrative of Healing*. *Sociation*, 22(2): 3-5.



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Dollar, Cindy Brooks. *I Never Wanted to Be a Stereotype: A Sociologist's Narrative of Healing*. Peter Lang, New York. 2021. Pp. 210. \$92.00 (paper); \$101.00 (ebook).

I Never Wanted to Be a Stereotype is an inspiring narrative of a sociologist's experiences with sexual objectification and the prolonged journey it takes to heal from trauma. It provides insight into how cultural conditioning can lead us down a path of isolation, regardless of having insight into the patriarchal society we are products of.

This book is divided into ten chapters, each detailing a specific idea. Sociological concepts and ideology are interwoven throughout the narrative in each chapter. The academic literature included throughout the book provides an understanding of the place in which the narrative is situated in the world and helps the author understand their healing process.

Dr. Cindy Brooks Dollar begins *I Never Wanted to Be a Stereotype* by describing an incident that is likely not foreign to many young girls. The sexual objectification that starts at an early age and continues throughout the life course can result in many unwarranted feelings of shame, confusion, blameworthiness, and humiliation. It becomes clear that the chapters to follow will unravel the experiences of sexual objectification and trauma at different milestones in Dr. Brooks Dollar's life through different mediums of poetry, art, and dream recollection. There is an importance to the inclusion of these "raw" memories. They provide a limitless account of different life stages and the ability to hear directly from the person experiencing the events when they were written rather than the potential of inciting current situations and versions of oneself. This is why Dr. Brooks Dollar mentions there will be a lack of extensive interpretation or specific context on the imaginative writing and art included in the book.

An overarching theme throughout the book is stigma and stigmatization management. Dr. Dollar discusses how research theorized by Bruce Link and his colleagues led her to reevaluate specific coping mechanisms she was employing, such as secrecy. This reevaluation stresses how our work can impact us directly. The labeling of others as "victims" is internalized through social processes of gendered identity formulation and living within patriarchal rules that continuously objectify women and girls. In our dominant society, girls and women are expected to be passive and internalize any frustrations they may have. Dr. Dollar gives a powerful example in *I Never Wanted to Be a Stereotype*, when Dr. Dollar's yoga teacher suggested she "show up, be seen, and smile." Her response was to discuss the different lived experiences of men and women, to which she responded by telling him,

"When women are told to smile, an underlying message is "You need to look pleasing. You exist as decoration. You exist to make me comfortable." The fear of being stigmatized as "damaged" can be

understood through the expectations of women and girls coupled with the dominant patriarchal views creating a “rape culture.”

Rape culture is an aspect of patriarchal dominance that normalizes sexual assault. Most of us have heard questions like “What was she wearing?” “Why was she out at night by herself?” “How much did she have to drink?” These are only a few of the questions that often attempt to normalize sexual assault and victim blame. Even if we are unaware of existing in a culture of rape does not discount our socialization to that culture. This internalization has a powerful hold on how we cope with trauma and thus can lead to attempts to reject a master status of being “damaged.” This is passionately expressed in chapter eight by Dr. Dollar:

If I say that I’m hurt, people will see me as hurt. From there, I will always be broken to them. I wanted the chance to move through the hurt. What if I want to move out of the hurt, but people treat me like I’m stuck in the hurt. Then, am I stuck? What if people won’t talk to me the same way anymore? What if people are afraid to look at me or touch me? What if they take everything I do and say as part of my injury? I DON’T WANT TO BE A STEREOTYPE!

As social beings, we tend to view ourselves not as who we are but as others view us; or as we perceive others to view us. Thus, a master status can be imposed on us. The importance of peacemaking criminology can help reject this master status by separating the person from their traumatic experience(s). Somewhere along the way, Dr. Dollar realized the strength in verbalizing her feelings of victimization. This can be credited to the sociological inquiries and yoga practice that overwhelmingly became part of Dr. Cindy Brooks Dollar’s everyday life.

Discussions of yoga and sociological research are interwoven throughout the book to highlight how both played crucial roles in Dr. Dollar’s healing journey. Yoga was always interesting but not in the same respect it became once Dr. Dollar began studying with a mentor. Within a year, yoga became more of an intentional practice. Her intentional engagement with yoga was an act of self-love and self-awareness. The autonomy and sense of oneself can help make sense of the body in relation to trauma. Sociological research, in addition to practicing yoga, created a deeper understanding of not only the world but herself and her trauma.

One of the book’s greatest strengths is the inclusion of “raw” writings in the form of poems and dreams. Through these writings, the reader gets an insight into the transition from feelings of hurt, anger, and confusion to an understanding through a peacemaking approach. This transition can be seen through both the writings and the narrative. For example, when recalling an event towards the end of the book in which a young person from her family was kidnapped by an older man, Dr. Dollar turned to a peacemaking approach. She recounts how she discussed accountability rather than punishment with her family, she validated any feelings the family members had, and she turned to meditation and ceremony to understand her own feelings. The revisiting of this event, coupled with the symbols of transformation within the writings, show the work being put in towards this growth and development. There are earlier signs of this transition as well, such as when discussing trajectories and transitions in the life course dynamic. One example Dr. Dollar provides is Kevin’s impact on her returning and investing in her education. She also attests to her relationship with Kevin as something that impacted her ability to truly feel loved and to love others in a manner she was not familiar with. From start to finish, we can see the journey of healing and insight into the trauma-related processes Dr. Dollar concludes with.

There are three phases Dr. Dollar discusses as being part of the trauma-related process. These include trauma of self-identity, the trauma of social identity, and communal trauma. In trauma of self-identity, one might reject most others regardless of their apparent or actual similarities. In the trauma of social identity, one rejects anyone who does not have shared identities, and in communal trauma, there is no distinction between oneself and others. The reader can point to each of these phases throughout the book and dissect which phase the author resides in at different milestones in her life. The trauma-related process can be beneficial to understanding one’s place in society and one’s lived experiences as they impact one’s healing process.

This book can open many discussions on trauma, healing, and the role society plays in both the fear of accepting a label of being “damaged” and the healing process. Dr. Cindy Brooks Dollar pours her heart out in this

narrative in which she is finally able to describe not only her traumatic childhood and lifelong objectification but more importantly, her healing journey.