

Stereotypes, social psychology of

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1. Origin and History

Introduced to the social sciences by Walter Lippmann in his book *Public Opinion* (1922), the concept of stereotype refers to beliefs, knowledge, and expectations of social groups. To capture the idea of a stereotype, Lippmann made famous the phrase "pictures in our heads" to refer to an internal, mental representation of social groups in contrast to their external reality. At a time when mental constructs of any type were undeveloped and soon to be frowned upon in American psychological discourse, it is especially remarkable that Lippmann and other early theorists detected and described the psychological importance of stereotypes. Not only was such a possibility theorized, the results of empirical tests of stereotypes were made available as early as 1933 by Katz and Braly. Their checklist method of asking respondents to assign trait adjectives (e.g., intelligent, dishonest) to ethnic and national groups (e.g., Jews, Germans) dominated the field, and in modified form, remains in use even today. With the exception of a hiatus in research on stereotypes at mid-century, the concept of stereotype has occupied a dominant position in psychology throughout the past 80 years. Reviews of historical and contemporary research on stereotypes are liberally available (see Fiske, 1998).

The concept of stereotype, in many ways, remains largely in keeping with its original formulation, although some shifts in definition and emphasis are worth noting. In the earliest proposals, stereotypes were regarded to be inaccurate assessments of groups; in fact, according to Lippmann, a stereotype was a "pseudoenvironment" or "fiction" and according to Katz and Braly (1933) it was an unjustified and contradictory reaction to an outgroup. In contemporary psychology, the accuracy with

which a stereotype captures the essence of a social group is not of central theoretical interest. The belief that **A**Many X-s are Y**@** may well be accurate (e.g., Many neurosurgeons are men) but if such a belief is applied in judging an individual member of a group (e.g., Female X is not, or cannot be, a neurosurgeon), a stereotype is seen to be in play. This process, by which an individual is given or denied an attribute because of membership in a group, is regarded to be of psychological and social interest. Such a shift is the result of a change in emphasis from examining beliefs about social groups per se (stereotype content), to an interest in the mental mechanics by which they influence interpersonal and intergroup perception and interaction (stereotype process). It is obvious that both aspects of stereotypes, their content and process, are critical to an understanding of their nature and function in social interaction. In fact, attention to implicit or automatic stereotypes in recent years has rekindled an interest in stereotype content and strength and in their relationship to related constructs such as explicit stereotypes, implicit and explicit prejudice, and group identity.

From the earliest use of the term in psychology, stereotypes have been regarded as the cognitive (thought) as opposed to the affective (feeling) component of mental representations of social groups. As such, the construct is tied to but differentiated from the concept of attitude, preference, or liking as well as the concept of discrimination. **AI** do not like group X**@** is a verbal statement of an attitude or prejudice, while an act denying friendship or intimacy with a member of group X may be regarded as a behavioral indicator of prejudice. To say **AI** believe group X to be incompetent**@** is to express a stereotype, while an act of denying employment to a member of group X based on such a belief is seen as the behavioral indicator of that stereotype. Of course, such arbitrary distinctions between mental and behavioral measures disappear when measures of brain activation are introduced. Verbal self-reports,

bodily gestures, decisions about hiring are all viewed as behavioral, as opposed to brain indicators of stereotypes and prejudice. It is likely that just as measures of activation in particular sub-cortical structures like the amygdala have been shown to be associated with behavioral measures of prejudice (Phelps, et al. 2000), the future will yield similar studies of stereotypes and their neural correlates. Such research has the potential to unify social, cognitive and neural levels of analysis by demonstrating that the learning of stereotypes that culture and social environments make possible can be synchronously detected in observable behavior as well as in brain activation.

The lure of a cognitive analysis in psychology led to a preponderance of attention to stereotypes, to the exclusion of its sister concept, prejudice. Fiske notes a 5:1 ratio in published work on the two concepts between 1974 and 1995. That trend appears to be shifting with attention to both stereotype and prejudice in recent years and especially to their relationships as observed at both conscious and unconscious levels. In addition, research has focused on the role of mood states in dictating stereotype expression with the counterintuitive proposal that positive mood increases rather than decreases reliance on stereotypes (Bodenhausen, Kramer, & Susser, 1994). The relationship between stereotype (cognition) and prejudice (attitude) has been a complex one with early work linking the two concepts closely enough so as to regard them as synonymous. Today, the relationship between the two is an uneasy one, without a clear sense of the exact nature of the relationship between stereotypic thoughts and prejudicial feelings. It is assumed that stereotypes and prejudice need not be evaluatively compatible. Attitude (liking) can be dissociated from stereotypes (competence, respect, etc.).

When searching for large-scale theories of stereotypes or theories in which the role of

stereotypes is central, one comes up relatively empty-handed. The focus of research appears not to have been on the development of broad theories, although two exceptions must be noted, in each of which stereotypes play a role in the larger framework: a psychodynamic, individual difference approach advancing the notion of an authoritarian personality to understand ethnocentrism (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), and a social-cognitive approach based on social identity and self-categorization (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to understand individual-group relationships and their psychological and social consequences. The paucity of large-scale theories of stereotyping and prejudice is compensated by creative experiments that form the groundwork of what may in the future yield unified theories of stereotypes and related constructs of prejudice and discrimination. The last three decades are likely to be remembered for noteworthy experimental discoveries and diversity in the manner in which stereotypes have been measured, with special emphasis on the role of consciousness in thought and feeling about social groups.

2. Categorization and Beyond

To perceive is to differentiate, and social perception inherently involves the ability to see differentiation among groups, e.g., to see women as differentiated from men, elderly as differentiated from young, European as differentiated from Asian. Individual humans each belong to multiple social groups, with gender, age, race/ethnicity, class, religion and nationality being the most obvious such categories and numerous other differentiations also easily perceived along dimensions such as political orientation, physical attractiveness, etc. A fundamental feature of social perception is the classification of individuals into groups, and the process by which such classification is achieved is assumed to be automatic (Fiske, 1998). Once categorized, attributes believed to be associated with the group are

generalized to individuals who qualify for group membership. Thus, for example, women may come to be seen as nurturant and nice, men as strong and competent whether they as individuals, deserve those ascriptions or not.

Stereotypes are fundamental to the ability to perceive, remember, plan and act. Functionally, they may be regarded as mental helpers that operate in the form of heuristics or short-cuts. Historically, this view of stereotypes as devices that allow a sensible reading of a complex world, marked a breakthrough in research on stereotypes. Advanced by Allport (1954) and Tajfel (1969), the idea that stereotypes were inherent to the act of social categorization now forms the basis of the modern view. As such, stereotypes are regarded to be ordinary in nature, in the sense that they are the byproducts of basic processes of perception and categorization, learning and memory. This cognitive view of stereotypes has dominated the field since the early 1980's, and from this standpoint several noteworthy discoveries about the nature of stereotypes have emerged.

3. Discoveries

Early research in this cognitive tradition showed that within-group differences are minimized and between-group differences are exaggerated, with greater confusion, for example, in memory for within-race and within-gender comparisons than between group comparisons. Stereotypes can be generated through a misperception about the frequency with which an attribute is associated with a group. For example, perceivers may come to see an illusory correlation based on the shared distinctiveness of particular attributes. Specifically, when a doubly distinctive event occurs (e.g., when a statistical minority performs a low frequency behavior) such an event is overemphasized in memory and produces a bias in perception such that their occurrence is overestimated. Hamilton and Gifford (1976) have

shown how such a process can lead to the assessment that members of minority groups perform more evaluatively negative behaviors than is actually the case. Research in this tradition has also provided a good understanding of how stereotypes, in the form of expectancies of what social groups are capable of, can lead to a bias to confirm rather than disconfirm expectancies. Moreover, the targets who are stereotyped may themselves fulfill the expectancies the perceiver holds about them to complete the biased cycle of intergroup interaction. Stereotypes are the vehicles of essentialist thinking about social groups. Dispositional group attributions, or the belief that groups are inherently the way they are, can lead to the assessment that attributes associated with groups are stable and unchanging.

Stereotypes play their role from the earliest moments in the information processing sequence, giving preference to stereotype-consistent options. To date the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that stereotypes influence the manner in which information is sought, perceived, remembered, and judged. Stereotypes limit the amount of information that is required to make a judgment by giving meaning to partial and even degraded information, and they allow decisions to be reached even when time is short. Stereotypes facilitate initial identification of congruent information and disallow attention to incongruent information. Although research has focused on the role of stereotypes in thinking, they are viewed as serving a socially pragmatic function **B** as helping social interaction proceed smoothly and with ease (Fiske, 1998).

From such research it may appear that the only judgments of individuals that ensue are those that rely entirely on knowledge of and beliefs about social groups. Yet, that is not the case. Depending on the context and the motivation of the perceiver, category-based stereotypic judgments may well yield to more individualized, person-based judgments (Brewer, 1988; Fiske & Nuberg, 1990). Indeed,

experiments on the mechanisms of stereotype expression have regularly shown that stereotypes may or may not play a role depending on the extent to which such knowledge is seen as meaningful or justified (Banaji, Hardin, & Rothman, 1993).

The routine simplification function of stereotypes can have far-reaching effects. In the work of Tajfel and his colleagues, categorization of individuals into social groups was shown to produce a heightening of perceived differences, and these differences (even when the distinction between groups was arbitrary and minimal) created intergroup discrimination in the form of greater resource allocation to members of one's own than another group. Thus, emanating from ordinary categorization, stereotypes can play a crucial role in interpersonal and intergroup relations. Besides routine simplification, stereotypes are also regarded as serving the function of protecting a stable and psychologically justified view of the world and the place of humans, as members of social groups, in it. Jost and Banaji (1994) argued that holding negative stereotypes of another's group may serve not only an ego-protective function (I am better than you) and a group-protective function (My group is better than yours) but a system justifying function as well. The counterintuitive hypothesis from such a perspective is that when status hierarchies relegate groups to relative positions of inferiority and superiority, members of disadvantaged groups may themselves come to hold negative beliefs about their groups in the service of a larger system in which social groups are arranged.

3.1 Implicit Stereotypes

With its roots in the ideas of G. Allport and Tajfel, the notion that stereotypes may operate without conscious awareness, conscious intention, and conscious control is hardly surprising. In fact, throughout the 20th century, experiments have showed that in one form or another stereotypes emerge

spontaneously from initial categorization and continue to have a life of their own independent of conscious will. Yet, it would be fair to say that a direct interest in implicit or unconscious social cognition is relatively recent, with theoretical input from theories of unconscious mental life and methodological input from the development of new measurement tools and techniques.

Contrast the following two measures of stereotypes. A respondent is asked to indicate, using a traditional verbal self-report scale, the extent to which African Americans are scholarly and athletic. Or, a respondent is asked to rapidly pair words like >scholar= and >athlete= with faces of African Americans, and the time to do so is measured. The first measure assumes the ability to respond without self-presentational concerns, and more importantly, it assumes the ability to be able to adequately reflect on the content of one's thoughts and provide an accurate indication of the complex association between race and psychological attributes. The second measure, although not within the traditional view of stereotype assessment, provides a measure of the strength of association between the group and the attributes. Such a measure has been taken to be an indicator of the stereotype and its strength. To investigate the implicit or automatic manner in which stereotypes of social groups may express themselves, investigators have used a variety of techniques from measuring response latencies (i.e., the time to make a response), to examining errors in memory and biases in linguistic reports. The largest single body of work has used response latencies as indicators of automatic stereotypes and prejudice and the data from such measures have yielded several new results and debates about them (see Banaji, 2001).

Stereotypes can be activated by the mere presentation of symbols of social group or group-related attributes. It appears that although conscious prejudice and stereotypes have changed, their less

conscious, automatic expressions are strikingly strong. As measured by the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) automatic stereotypes appear to exist in robust form; large effect sizes are the hallmark of automatic stereotypes (see Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2001). A priming measure has also been widely utilized in which prime-target pairs are presented in close succession and response latency to the target serving as the measure of automatic stereotypes. For example, responses are reliably faster to female first names (>Jane=>) when the immediately preceding word is stereotypically consistent (>nurse=>) than inconsistent (>doctor=>). Such effects are obtained with words and pictures and they generalize to a variety of social groups.

Given the socially significant consequences of stereotype use, investigations of the variability and malleability of automatic stereotypes have been examined. Research has focused on the relationship between conscious and unconscious expressions of stereotypes and prejudice. As Devine (1989) showed, evidence of automatic race stereotypes is present irrespective of the degree of conscious prejudice toward Black Americans. Additionally, Banaji & Hardin (1996) showed that automatic gender stereotypes were manifested irrespective of endorsement of conscious attitudes and beliefs about gender egalitarianism. Such results point to the dissociation between conscious and unconscious social stereotypes, but it is clear that a simple dissociation may not adequately or accurately capture this relationship. Rather, results are now available that indicate that those with higher levels of conscious prejudice may also show higher levels of automatic or implicit prejudice. It appears that studies using multiple measures of each stereotype and statistical tools to uncover latent factors will yield evidence in favor of a relationship between conscious and unconscious stereotypes, while also revealing their unique and non-overlapping nature.

Questions concerning the controllability of automatic stereotypes are hotly debated (Fiske, 1998). It appears that a desire to believe that stereotypes can be controlled, perhaps because of their pernicious social consequences, can result in the wishful assessment that they are indeed controllable. Automatic stereotypes do not appear to be controllable by ordinary acts of conscious will. However, habitual patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior toward social groups that cohere with broader value systems and ideology appear to predict automatic responses. In addition, Greenwald et al. (in press) have shown that automatic identity with one's group can predict stereotypes held about the group and attitudes toward it and have put forth a unified theory of self, group stereotypes and attitudes. In support, they have found that attitudes toward mathematics and science can be predicted by the strength of the automatic stereotype that math is male or masculine. Women who hold a stronger math = male stereotype also show more negative attitudes toward mathematics.

The effects of minor interventions to activate stereotype-incongruent associations (e.g., female-strong) can be detected in weaker automatic stereotypes (Blair & Ma, 2001). Such findings point to the flexibility of the representations of social stereotypes. Although the category **Astrong women@** may be counter-stereotypic, interventions that highlight this association can produce a lowering of the default stereotype of female = weak. The possibility of such strategies for inducing a shift in automatic stereotypes and the potential to track stereotypes through both behavioral and brain activation measures has the potential, in the future, to inform about stereotype representation, process, content, and mechanisms for social change.

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