



Individual differences in the acceptance of stereotyping [☆]

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Available online 17 February 2006

Abstract

Previous research has documented individual differences in a range of constructs relating to social stereotyping, prejudice, and intergroup attitudes. However, research has not sought specifically to measure a general acceptance of social stereotyping. In the present research, we explored attitudinal, cognitive, emotional, and personality correlates of a person's self-reported willingness to rely on stereotypical information when interacting with people of different social and cultural groups. In six studies ($N = 1080$) we found that more acceptance of stereotyping was associated with more explicit and implicit stereotyping of particular groups, less liberal gender-role values, more authoritarian attitudes, preference for hierarchies, higher social dominance orientation, less universal outlook, less complexity in describing others' emotions, less utilization of emotional information, and more utilization of social categories (gender and race) when rating the similarity of faces, less agreeable and more agentic personality, and more rigid and simplistic cognitive style (all independent of one's gender). Female and African-American participants were less accepting of stereotyping than male and

[☆] This research was funded with grants from the National Science Foundation to the second author. We thank Donna Ambra, Bhushan Babajiyavar, Jennifer Cardoos, Grant Edmonds, Alexia Mantzaris, Michael Peabody, Alycia Piccone, Alexes Reardon, Lavonia Smith LeBeau, and Mahima Subramanian for their assistance in conducting this research, and Marianne Schmid Mast for her very helpful comments on the manuscript.

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Caucasian participants. The general tendency to accept stereotyping in daily life is a measurable individual difference that may prove useful in social-personality research.

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Keywords: Acceptance of stereotyping; Individual differences in stereotyping; Attitudes; Emotions; Personality; Intergroup perception

1. Introduction

Many people would agree that because stereotypes about social groups may be inaccurate and negative, relying on them in daily life may be inappropriate. However, even the most liberal-minded people engage in stereotypical thinking, probably far more often than they would like to admit. In daily life, we often feel that knowing something about another person's social and cultural group memberships helps us to interact with that person, and the lack of such knowledge can produce uncertainty about how to behave and may undermine our feeling that we know the other person. Furthermore, uncertainty about others' group memberships (whether these refer to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, social class, religion, political party, social clique, etc.) can make a person anxious about making social gaffes.

Stereotype application may also seem to have a certain functionality to it, insofar as a simplifying assumption is at least a starting point from which to plan behavior toward another person. From the perspective of the person who has to make behavioral choices, using stereotypes—that is, making assumptions about members of social and cultural groups—may seem like a useful, sensible, and adaptive thing to do, and such a person might, as a consequence, feel a strong need to know about others' social and cultural memberships as a guide for his or her own behavior. On the other hand, another person may be highly doubtful of the utility or validity of stereotypes and be more willing to build knowledge of others from the ground up. Thus, any attempt to assess the extent to which stereotyping occurs must consider the issue of individual differences in stereotyping.

In the present research, we were interested in individual variation in the tendency to accept stereotyping in daily life. Acceptance of stereotyping as a general tendency not aimed at any particular group is an individual difference that could have considerable relevance for research on personality and social behavior. Acceptance of stereotyping as a general trait has been central to much theorizing (e.g., Allport, 1954), and there are numerous measures of stereotype application and prejudice (e.g., Brigham, 1993; Glick & Fiske, 1996) or willingness to show prejudices toward specific groups (Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Plant & Devine, 1998). Research also exists on personality types (e.g., Altemeyer, 1981) and other individual difference variables associated with stereotyping (e.g., Moskowitz, 1993). However, no research that we have found has examined the extent to which individuals explicitly report their general willingness to use stereotypical information in the course of daily life. Evidence does exist, however, to suggest that this might be a general trait among adults, as indicated by positive correlations among prejudices towards several different social groups (Bierly, 1985).

Stereotyping has been defined in numerous ways throughout the history of research conducted on the topic (Lee, Jussim, & McCauley, 1995). Thus, it is important to be clear that in the current investigation we define acceptance of stereotyping as the belief that

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