Cultural Competence: A Form of Stereotype Rationality

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As societies become more diverse, interactions among people from varied backgrounds will likely benefit from increased cultural competence so that individuals can more readily understand, empathize, and communicate with one another. Although there are many definitions of cultural competence (e.g., Campinha-Becote, 2002; Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell, & Greene, 2000), most emphasize the need to understand one's own culture, an awareness of cultural differences, and an understanding that there is also likely a wide variation among individuals within a given culture. Although research on cultural competence initially emerged from concerns over the inadequacy of healthcare and education services available for ethnic minority groups (Cross et al., 1989; Delpit, 2006; Schim & Miller, 1999; Sue, 1998), as globalization progresses and as any population becomes more racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse, skill at understanding and navigating such differences becomes increasingly more important.

Terms like "skill" or "competence" are synonymous with being good or successful at something. Thus, cultural competence involves some sorts of skill(s). In this chapter, we argue that one central component of such competence is accuracy. Understanding diverse cultures implies *accurately* understanding those cultures. Cultural competence, in this view, requires that anyone whose work puts them into sustained contact with individuals who are different from themselves, hold beliefs about people from different racial, ethnic, and/or cultural groups that are generally true. Furthermore, *deploying* those understandings in a competent manner also requires another set of understandings: that cultural generalizations do not uniformly apply to all members of any ethnic or cultural group, that individual differences are usually vast, and that, therefore, one cannot mindlessly assume all individuals perfectly fit even an accurate understanding of their cultural background.

Cultural competence, therefore, requires *accuracy* in perceiving cultural groups and their individual members. To us, this is tantamount to a call to increase (1) stereotype accuracy and (2) sensitivity to individual differences.

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These two issues have a long history of scientific research behind them in social psychology. Quite a lot is now known about the (in)accuracy of stereotypes and also about the interplay of stereotypes and sensitivity to individual differences. This chapter takes the perspective that a high level of cultural competence implicitly includes stereotype rationality. That is, cultural competence requires reasonable and rational use of stereotypes when individuating information is absent, scarce, or irrelevant (see, e.g., Fox, 1992) *and* the use of and reliance on relevant individuating information when it is available.

However, it is also clear that the very idea that stereotypes may be accurate and function approximately rationally is anathema to many social scientists (for reviews, see Jussim, 2012; Jussim, Crawford, & Rubinstein, 2015a). Therefore, before connecting stereotype rationality to cultural competence, this chapter first briefly reviews some of the moral and scholarly obstacles that have led social and applied psychologists to resist accepting their own data on stereotype accuracy.

Stereotype (In?)Accuracy

Everyone "knows" that stereotypes are inaccurate, so aren't we barking up the wrong tree by even attempting to link stereotype accuracy to cultural competence? If stereotype accuracy is an oxymoron, an empty set because stereotypes are "inaccurate," won't any attempt to link stereotype accuracy to cultural competence be doomed to failure from the start? To address these questions, we first briefly review some of the reasons stereotypes have such bad reputations. Before proceeding, however, we clarify what we mean by stereotype accuracy and how we define stereotypes.

We contend that only descriptive or predictive beliefs about a group can be assessed for their accuracy. The accuracy of a belief such as "rich people vote for Republicans" can be evaluated; the accuracy of "I don't like people who vote for Republicans" however cannot be evaluated in the same way, even if it is psychologically important. Additionally, one cannot evaluate the accuracy of a stereotype when it resembles a prescriptive belief such as "men should not wear dresses." This is because prescriptive beliefs represent notions or opinions about how things should be and thus cannot be evaluated for their accuracy.

Thus, we define stereotypes as *beliefs about the attributes of social groups*. This definition identifies stereotypes as one kind of generalization, that is, subject to exceptions as no generalization will ever be 100% accurate. Jussim (2012) previously suggested that accuracy can be assessed in two different ways – discrepancies from perfection and correspondence with reality. Accurate discrepancies from perfection can be either bull's eyes, or judgments within 10% of perfection, and near misses, judgments between 10% and 20% of perfection. A high degree of accurate correspondence of a stereotype with reality is indicated by a correlation of 0.40 or higher, a value double the typical effect size obtained in most social psychological studies (see Richard, Bond, & Stokes-Zoota, 2003) and one that corresponds to being right about 70% of the time (see Rosenthal, 1991). A moderate degree of correspondence is indicated by a correlation between 0.30 and 0.40, meaning the judgment is accurate about two-thirds of the time (Rosenthal, 1991).

Furthermore, we contend that stereotypes may or may not:

1. Be accurate and rational
2. Be widely shared
3. Be consciously applied
4. Be rigid and resistant to change
5. Exaggerate real group differences
6. Lead people to assume group differences are essential or biological
7. Cause or reflect prejudice and discrimination
8. Cause biases in person perception and result in self-fulfilling prophecies
9. Play a major role in some social problems

This definition allows for a stereotype to be accurate or inaccurate and thus turns the issue of accuracy into an empirical question.

Are Stereotypes Inherently Bad?

In contrast to the definition offered above (for similar definitions, see Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981; Judd & Park, 1993; Ryan, 2002), much of the research on stereotypes has approached them like a social disease. Chen and Bargh (1997) concluded that "research has shown many ways in which stereotypes, *like a dangerous virus*, can survive and perpetuate themselves despite attempts to eradicate them" (p. 557, emphasis added). Stereotypes are routinely defined or characterized as inaccurate or as exaggerations with only a tiny "kernel of truth" (Allport, 1954/1979; see recent reviews by Jussim, 2015a; Jussim et al., 2016). Stereotypes are often associated with prejudice and discrimination, and considered either sources of social inequality and oppression, or tools to justify and rationalize such social ills (e.g., Fiske, 1998; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Plous, 2003; Stangor, 1995). Consequently, many articles contend that stereotypes must be overcome, prevented, or stopped (e.g., Devine, 1989; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Worse still, both high- and low-prejudice individuals are equally knowledgeable of cultural stereotypes, which are often activated automatically, in ways that are outside of awareness (Devine, 1989). In other words, if allowed free reign, stereotypes cause a wide range of evils, distortions, and social problems.

For all these reasons, social psychologists have understandably approached stereotypes as a kind of social toxin. Perhaps equally understandable, but scientifically untenable, is the corresponding belief that because stereotypes contribute to these many malignant outcomes, they must also be – in the main – inaccurate. The tacit equation is, if stereotypes are associated with social wrongs, they must be factually wrong. However, the accuracy of stereotypes is an empirical question, not an ideological one. And for those of us who care deeply about stereotypes, prejudice, and social harmony, getting to the truth of these collective cognitions should guide inquiry about them.

The Black Hole at the Bottom of Most Declarations that Stereotypes Are Inaccurate

The claim that stereotypes are inaccurate has become so widely accepted within the social sciences that it is often made without reference or citation to any relevant empirical findings. Even when citations are provided, they usually refer to a paper that declares stereotypes inaccurate itself without providing any empirical evidence supporting the claim. This has occurred even though, in science, the convention is to support empirical claims with evidence.

For example:

> Journalist and political commentator Walter Lippmann, who coined the term (of stereotypes), made a distinction between the world "out there" and the stereotype – the little pictures in our heads that help us interpret the world we see. To stereotype is to allow those pictures to dominate our thinking, leading us to assign identical characteristics to any person in a group, regardless of the actual variation among members of that group. (Aronson, 2008, p. 309)

This implies that people assign *identical* characteristics to *any* person who is a member of a group and that any individual perceiver may assign such characteristics to an individual. This is an extreme claim, and Aronson (2008) does not provide any citations to support such a claim. Simply put, in almost 100 years of empirical research on stereotypes and person perception, there is not a single study or shred of evidence that there is even one person who believes all members of a group have identical characteristics:

> The term stereotype refers to those interpersonal beliefs and expectancies that are both widely shared and generally invalid. (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981) (Miller & Turnbull, 1986, p. 233)

Miller and Turnbull (1986) provide a citation, to Ashmore and Del Boca (1981). However, Ashmore and Del Boca (1981) did not review previous definitions of stereotypes, nor did they provide empirical evidence about stereotype accuracy. Ashmore and Del Boca's (1981) conclusion was concerned

with the idea that stereotypes were best characterized as "beliefs about the personal attributes of a social group (p. 21)."

Finally, even the American Psychological Association (APA, 1991) has been pulled into this black hole. They declare that:

> Stereotypes 'are not necessarily any more or less inaccurate, biased, or logically faulty than are any other kinds of generalizations, Taylor, *supra* note 11, at 84, and they need not inevitably lead to discriminatory conduct. (p. 1064)

They then declare the following:

> The problem is that stereotypes about groups of people are often *overgeneralizations and are either inaccurate or do not apply to the individual group member in question*. (Sex Bias in Work Settings, *supra* note 11, at 271 (emphasis in original) (p. 1064)

When a person, persons, or an organization evaluates the rationale for first declaring stereotypes to be not necessarily inaccurate and then immediately follows that declaration with a claim that stereotypes are either inaccurate or inapplicable is beyond the scope of this chapter. The APA, however, does include a reference to an article by Heilman (1983), which does declare stereotypes to be inaccurate, and also reviews evidence of bias and discrimination. But, it neither provides nor reviews empirical evidence of stereotype accuracy (for more examples see Jussim, 2012).

Thus, like most other declarations of stereotype inaccuracy, these examples end in a black hole (for numerous examples of this point, see Jussim, 2012; Jussim, Crawford, Stevens, & Anglin, 2015b; Jussim et al., 2016). This state of affairs runs counter to one of the most widely accepted conventions in science – that one's claims about the state of the world should be driven by data and supported by empirical evidence. More important than "convention violation," however, is that this state of affairs means that the abundant *declarations* that stereotypes are inaccurate are itself based, not on flawed science but on *no science at all*. Before showing that such evidence does not exist, however, we first address logical problems inherent to defining stereotypes as inaccurate.

The Illogic of Defining Stereotypes as Inaccurate Given the frequency with which stereotypes are assumed to be bad and inaccurate, both in the popular culture and the social scientific literature, the first order of business is to define "stereotype." What do researchers mean when they define stereotypes as inaccurate or declare them to be inaccurate? The accuracy issue becomes "settled" if stereotypes are defined as inaccurate. In this section, we explain why a more agnostic approach is needed.

First, let's take definitions. Researchers have a great deal of leeway with respect to how they define their constructs. However, once they do so, they are then required to accept the implications of their own definitions.

As noted above, only descriptive statements can be accurate or inaccurate. "Rich people vote for Republicans" can be evaluated for accuracy; the accuracy of liking or disliking Republicans cannot (just as the accuracy of liking/disliking bananas cannot). Stereotypes as prescriptive beliefs, too, cannot be evaluated for their accuracy. Accuracy is irrelevant to notions such as "men should not wear dresses." Therefore, if one defines stereotypes as "inaccurate," one cannot logically include anything *other* than descriptive or predictive statements (and beliefs about such statements) as "stereotypes."

Any labeling of stereotypes as inaccurate (which is included in definitions of stereotypes) must therefore refer to descriptive or predictive beliefs. What, then, are the implications of labeling such stereotypes as inaccurate? That depends on exactly what this definition means. It might be that "all beliefs about all groups are stereotypes, and all are inaccurate." This definition requires concluding that it is inaccurate to believe two groups differ and inaccurate to believe they do not differ. This is logically impossible, so this meaning of "stereotypes are inaccurate" can be dismissed out of hand. All beliefs about all groups cannot possibly be inaccurate.

Alternatively, it might mean, "Not all beliefs about groups are inaccurate, but stereotypes are the subset of beliefs about groups that are inaccurate." According to this variation, beliefs that

are accurate are *not* stereotypes; only inaccurate beliefs about groups are stereotypes. This, however, also needs to be dismissed, unless one is willing instead to dismiss the vast body of research on stereotypes. That is because we are aware of no research – not a single study – that has been framed as follows:

> *Is THIS SPECIFIC belief about THIS SPECIFIC group a stereotype? We are going to figure out whether THIS SPECIFIC belief about THIS SPECIFIC group is a stereotype by assessing whether that belief is inaccurate. If THIS SPECIFIC belief is inaccurate, we will conclude that it is a stereotype. If THIS SPECIFIC belief accurately described THIS SPECIFIC group, we will conclude that it is not a stereotype.*

Absent an a priori demonstration that a belief about a group is inaccurate, the researcher cannot know that a stereotype is under study. No research framed as studying inaccurate stereotypes includes such an a priori demonstration. If one does not know that one is even examining a stereotype, the results, no matter what they are, cannot be known to reveal anything about a stereotype. Thus, anyone subscribing to such a definition cannot also review any empirical studies that constitute research on "stereotypes" because no such research can be known to exist, if one accepts this definition.

Thus, given our definition of stereotypes (see above), we therefore conclude that: (1) Defining stereotypes as inaccurate is logically incoherent because such a definition implies that all beliefs about groups are inaccurate. Thus, believing that two groups differ is inaccurate, while believing that two groups do not differ is also inaccurate. (2) If we accept that stereotypes are not simply beliefs about groups, and instead are the subset of beliefs about groups that are inaccurate, then one is required to demonstrate that a specific belief about a group is inaccurate before it can be declared a stereotype. Thus, declaring stereotypes to be empirically inaccurate is unjustified whenever scholars do so without reference to actual empirical studies demonstrating inaccuracy (which is almost all of the time, see above). These problems are readily solved by *not* defining stereotypes as inaccurate, and our preferred definition (see above), first proposed by Ashmore and Del Boca (1981), neither presumes nor precludes (in)accuracy.

Obstacles to Acknowledging That Stereotypes Are Not Inherently Inaccurate There may be many reasons for the persistence of stereotype inaccuracy claims (see Jussim, 2012). One strong contender is the motivation to combat social problems such as prejudice and inequality. Pervasive claims of pervasive stereotype inaccuracy appear to primarily stem from concerns about rationalizing prejudice and inequality (e.g., Fiske, 1998; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Stangor, 1995). Emphasizing the inaccuracy of stereotypes removes any "blame" from the target group and instead identifies the perceiver who employs stereotypes in social perception as an intentional or unintentional villain. Acknowledging the potential for stereotype accuracy risks being seen as "blaming the victim" – which is a bad thing to do because it means we have callously joined the oppressors and perpetrators of injustice.

Of Mice and Stereotypes When mice are used as research subjects, a set of rules and regulations requires scientists to treat them as morally and humanely as possible. For instance, mice need to be kept in clean cages and fed on a regular schedule, unless of course one is studying the effects of hunger. Although, with good reason, mice can be sacrificed for scientific purposes, they cannot be sacrificed gratuitously. Yet, under different circumstances, the same rights would not be granted to the same mouse (Herzog, 1988). If a researcher employs snakes as a research subject, rules and regulations would require they be treated as morally and humanely as possible. They would require clean cages and feeding schedules. Snakes prey on and eat mice. Thus, in this scenario the mouse is food and has no rights as a research subject. What does this tangent have to do with stereotypes and cultural competence? In both cases when one changes the context, the moral interpretation changes.

Taking group differences seriously is often viewed as morally offensive, if we are discussing stereotypes. But taking those same group differences may be viewed as justified and even beneficial in other contexts. For example, cultural psychology contains a plethora of findings documenting differences between groups and culture. East Asians are more "collectivist" than "individualistic" Western Europeans and Americans (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and also think in fundamentally different ways than Westerners (Norenzayan & Nisbett, 2000). Sociologists discuss differences between cultures of honor, dignity, and victimhood (Campbell & Manning, 2014). Demographic statistics such as life expectancy, birth rates, and fertility rates are often cited in discussions of health policy (Murray & Lopez, 2006), and there is widespread support for promoting knowledge about groups across many professional settings (Cross et al., 1989; Delpit, 2006; Schim & Miller, 1999; Sue, 1998).

In a similar vein, social and personality psychologists rely on "known-groups" validity (Cook & Campbell, 1979) when validating a new questionnaire. For instance, religious leaders (e.g., priests, rabbis, imams) should score higher on measures of religiosity than atheists or agnostics; and Whites should show more prejudice toward Blacks on all sorts of measures than African-Americans. Validity – one of the core, essential ingredients of psychological research – takes for granted that groups differ in many ways and uses that knowledge in the service of advancing science.

Thus, context influences whether it is socially acceptable to take group differences seriously. When one is discussing stereotypes, prejudice, and oppression, it is often unacceptable to discuss the accurate perception of group differences, particularly demographic group differences. Examples of this include Google engineer James Damore, who was fired for a memo he wrote and shared internally that discussed the possibility of biological influences on gender differences in preferences and abilities, and Larry Summers who resigned as the President of Harvard after controversy erupted because he suggested the greater male variability hypothesis (see Halpern et al., 2007; Hyde & Mertz, 2009) may explain the lower percentage of women (compared to men) in STEM fields (for a more in-depth discussion of Damore's memo and the greater male variability hypothesis, see Stevens & Haidt, 2017a, 2017b). Yet, in other contexts, e.g., when one is validating a measure using known-groups validity or when one is trying to advance cultural understandings, taking group differences seriously is not merely acceptable, it is encouraged.

Conceptual Overlap Between Cultural Competence and Stereotype Accuracy

Cultural Competence

Cultural Competence can be viewed as an ability to understand cultural diversity and to demonstrate an awareness and sensitivity to difference (Schim & Miller, 1999). In other words, *culturally competent* individuals possess an accurate awareness of their own culture and accurate knowledge about the different cultural groups with whom they work. This allows them to productively apply specific techniques and strategies when interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds (Sue, 1998).

Research on cultural competence stemmed, in part, from concerns within the healthcare industry about cultural and linguistic mismatches between practitioners and patients (e.g., Comas-Diaz & Griffith, 1988; Jenkins, 1985; LeVine & Padilla, 1980; Trimble & LaFromboise, 1985). Some scholars suggest that these mismatches can negatively impact the validity of assessment and impede the development of a rapport between the practitioner and patient (Sue, 1998). Ethnic matching between practitioner and patient/clients has often led to better treatment and outcomes for a wide variety of groups in a wide variety of contexts (Sue, Fujino, Hu, Takeuchi, & Zane, 1991; Takeuchi, Sue, & Yeh, 1995; Yeh, Takeuchi, & Sue, 1994). Similar concerns about cultural mismatching are also prevalent in teacher-student interactions in education (Delpit, 2006; Erickson, 1975; Sue et al., 1991; Takeuchi et al., 1995; Yeh et al., 1994).

Stereotype Accuracy

Accuracy is quantitative and probabilistic, not absolute. It refers to correspondence between belief and criteria (Funder, 1987, 1995; Jussim, 1991, 2005, 2012). As such, accuracy questions are fundamentally about how close the content of people's beliefs are to a criterion or set of criteria, *not* the processes of social perception. Thus, declaring a stereotype to be moderately, or even highly, accurate does not preclude the possibility that it also contains errors and biases that distort the process of person perception.

A culturally competent individual is an accurate social perceiver. This individual possesses knowledge about *other* cultures and how these *different* cultural backgrounds can produce *differences* in behavior. Thus, calls for increased cultural competence represent calls for more *accuracy* in the perception of *real group differences*. Therefore, a culturally competent individual is one who possesses valid knowledge about cultural group differences, but who also makes use individuating information (relevant information unique to each individual) when it is available.

A review of the empirical evidence suggests that considerable cultural knowledge is relatively common. Many studies have assessed the accuracy of the racial and ethnic stereotypes held by student and nonstudent samples (see Jussim, et al., 2015a, for a review). Although none have found people are perfectly accurate, most find moderate-to-high levels of accuracy (Ashton & Esses, 1999; Kaplowitz, Fisher, & Broman, 2003; McCauley & Stitt, 1978; Ryan, 1996). When inaccurate, research often finds that people underestimate (Kaplowitz et al., 2003; McCauley & Stitt, 1978; Wolsko, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2000) rather than exaggerate real differences. Similar patterns have been found for many other stereotypes, such as gender stereotypes (Briton & Hall, 1995; Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Diekman, Eagly, & Kulesa, 2002; McCauley & Thangavelu, 1991; McCauley, Thangavelu, & Rozin, 1988; Swim, 1994), and stereotypes of college majors, occupations, sororities, and jazz vs. modern dancers (Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Clabaugh & Morling, 2004; Judd, Ryan, & Park, 1991).

These studies typically employ a methodological approach where subjects are asked to assess a group or a variety of groups on some criterion or criteria. These assessments are then compared against data on the group or groups measured (for a review of this methodology, see Jussim, 2012). For instance, Ashton and Esses (1999) assessed the accuracy of beliefs about differences in academic achievement in Canada among nine different ethnic groups in Toronto. Subjects were asked to estimate high school grades for members of each group, using the grading scale used throughout Canadian high schools. Judgments were compared against the average grades published by the Toronto Board of Education. Subjects indicated near bull's eye level accuracy for almost all of the nine ethnic groups.

Political stereotypes, however, appear to represent an exception to this pattern of underestimating real differences between groups. Such stereotypes tend to accurately identify differences between rival political groups on policy positions (Chambers, Baron, & Inman, 2006; Chambers & Melnyk, 2006) and moral values (Graham, Nosek, & Haidt, 2012). However, political stereotypes often *exaggerated* these group differences (Chambers et al., 2006; Chambers & Melnyk, 2006; Graham et al., 2012; see also Crawford, Modri, & Motyl, 2013; Dawes, Singer, & Lemons, 1972; Judd & Park, 1993; Keltner & Robinson, 1996; Robinson, Keltner, Ward, & Ross, 1995). The exaggeration of political group differences appears to be particularly pronounced among activists who strongly identify with their political groups and those whose own views are more extreme (e.g., Chambers et al., 2006; Chambers & Melnyk, 2006; Westfall, Van Boven, Chambers, & Judd 2015). For instance, Chambers and Melnyk (2006) reported that pro-choice activists, who identified women's reproductive rights as a core value issue, exaggerated the difference between their positions on women's reproductive rights and those of pro-life activists. Likewise, pro-life activists, who identified the value of human life as a core value issue, exaggerated the difference between their positions and the positions of pro-choice activists. The extent of exaggeration was

strongest among those individuals who most strongly identified with a political group (see also Chambers et al., 2006).

These political findings could be relevant to cultural competence. When individuals believe that their groups are in political conflict with another ethnic, cultural, or national group, their stereotypes may tend to exaggerate real differences. Although such a pattern is plausible, no empirical research has directly tested this question. However, we speculate that political conflict may undermine the accuracy of stereotypes held by individuals whose cultural groups are in conflict and hinder the development of cultural competencies.

Cultural Competence as Stereotype Rationality

Cultural competence quickly becomes important when interacting with individuals from different backgrounds, as do doctors with patients, employers with employees, and teachers with students. In professional fields where calls for increases in cultural competence have occurred, such as education and healthcare, the rejection of a one-size-fits-all approach in favor of individualized approaches that account for *real differences* between groups and individuals results in greater success on a variety of outcomes (Ammar & Spada, 2006; Bruce, Sims, Miller, Elliott, & Ladipo, 2007; Rogers & Soyka, 2004; Todtling & Trippl, 2005). Teachers may leverage their knowledge of students' zones of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) to deliver more nuanced specific instruction based on their understanding of the learners' needs. Likewise, healthcare research has encouraged the investigation of group-specific processes related to different demographic categories such as race and gender to understand the etiology of illness and to make better treatment recommendations (Bruce et al., 2007).

In this section, therefore, we consider the evidence that bears on how and when people apply their knowledge about groups to their judgments of individuals. Do people judge others primarily on the basis of stereotypes or are they sensitive to individual differences?

The Rational Application of Stereotypes

The rational application of stereotypes involves using them cautiously in most cases and jettisoning one's reliance on them when relevant individuating information becomes available (see Jussim, 2012). That stereotypes associated with race/ethnicity and gender often correctly approximate group differences *and* underestimate them suggests that even when employing stereotypes, people often do so cautiously. They do not typically leap to extreme judgments about groups. The cautious and judicious application of cultural stereotypes sounds a lot like cultural competence. It combines the *accurate* recognition of group differences with a sensitivity to the high degree of variability in individuals' abilities, characteristics, and personalities. These points raise an empirical question: How well do people correspond to this ideal?

A common claim is that stereotypes lead people to "ignore individual differences" (see Jussim et al., 2015a, b for a review). If this were true, it would certainly constitute evidence of unjustified stereotyping. Does the evidence indicate people ignore individual differences?

Some evidence has often been misinterpreted as indicating that it does. Across a wide range of stereotypes, in the absence of individuating information, or in the presence of ambiguous individuating information, stereotypes do influence people's judgments of individuals. Such effects are indeed evidence of bias. Under conditions without individuating information or with ambiguous individuating information, people judge individual men to be more assertive than individual women, students from lower social class backgrounds to have lower academic achievement than those from more privileged backgrounds, and Democratic politicians to be more liberal than Republican politicians

(e.g., Crawford, Jussim, Madon, Cain, & Stevens, 2011; Darley & Gross, 1983; Locksley, Borgida, Brekke, & Hepburn, 1980).

Such findings, though revealing bias in person perception, are not evidence of people "ignoring individual differences." If studies present no individual differences, then there are no individual differences to be ignored. Even if studies hold individual differences constant in order to experimentally examine effects of stereotypes, they cannot assess whether people ignore or rely on those differences. Experiments cannot test the effects of factors that are held constant; they can only test the effects of manipulated variables (i.e., variables that actually vary).

Overall, therefore, research that examines the role of stereotypes in person perception without individuating information or with ambiguous individuating information held constant often finds evidence of bias in person perception. Nonetheless, this is reasonably rational and constitutes people doing as well as they can under uncertainty. Stereotypes, like other categories, are often relied upon when there is little or no other useful information. Just as it is reasonable to predict that any particular daily high temperature is lower in Anchorage than in Akron if one has no direct daily temperature information, it is similarly reasonable to predict that a person from Mississippi is more religious than one from Massachusetts if one has no direct information about either's religiosity.

To test whether people ignore individual differences, experimental research must actually manipulate those differences. Nonexperimental research, too, can examine this question by, e.g., assessing the relationship of individual differences in the real world (which almost always are highly variable) to person-perception judgments. What, then, has been found by research that has actually been capable of testing whether stereotypes lead people to ignore individual differences? It has found they do not ignore individual differences. When individuating information is available, people rely on it so heavily that it is one of the largest effects in all of social psychology (Jussim et al., 2015b; Kunda & Thagard, 1996). People perceive assertive targets as more assertive than passive targets, regardless of whether those targets are male or female, and they perceive students with histories of high grades and standardized test scores as performing at higher levels and having higher ability than those with histories of low grades and standardized test scores, regardless of those students' race/ethnicity, gender, or social class (see Jussim, 2012, for a review). Furthermore, when individuating information is clear, relevant, and available, most studies find that people's reliance on stereotypes is small to nonexistent both in the laboratory and real world contexts such as classrooms (Jussim, 2012; Jussim et al., 2009; Kunda & Thagard, 1996).

So, rather than stereotypes leading people to ignore individual differences, the empirical pattern is almost completely opposite. *Clear, relevant individual differences lead people to (mostly) ignore their stereotypes.* The evidence from the stereotype and person-perception literature strongly suggests that people often function in a manner that is approximately rational and which approaches recommendations for cultural competence (understanding differences between groups, while being sensitive to individual differences). They generally use whatever information is most available and useful to them when making a prediction or judgment about another person's behavior. If a stereotype is available and useful, they will usually use it; if individuating information is available and useful, they will use it.

It is reasonable and rational to use stereotypes under many circumstances. In the absence of individuating information, when such individuating information is perceived as irrelevant, and when it is scarce (see Fox, 1992), people have little else to go on besides the stereotype. The rationale for believing doing so is unjustified derives primarily from the false presumption that stereotypes are inaccurate. But once one accepts that many stereotypes are reasonably accurate, relying on them in the absence of useful individuating information is manifestly rational.

Limitations

Of course, there are also many limitations to the perspective presented here. We have focused quite narrowly on striking similarities between cultural competence and stereotype accuracy. However, there are also striking differences too. Cultural competence can be viewed as a subset of stereotype accuracy because stereotypes can be about any type of group. With respect to the range of skills included, however, stereotype accuracy is also a subset of cultural competence, because competence includes a wide variety of interpersonal skills, not just accuracy.

Furthermore, our perspective has not addressed prejudice or discrimination. One can perceive a group accurately and still despise them and discriminate against them. The extensive evidence we have reviewed on stereotype accuracy and rationality does not preclude the possibility of prejudicial attitudes or and discriminative actions. It would be a major mistake to interpret this chapter as arguing that discrimination is a thing of the past and that oppression and inequality do not exist or are trivial. This chapter has not addressed those issues. To the extent that encouraging cultural competence has the goal of reducing prejudice in applied psychologists, this chapter has been largely irrelevant. Given that people generally are more attracted to those who are similar to them (Byrne, 1961), it is even possible that high stereotype accuracy in perceptions of group differences would increase prejudice. Overall, however, the evidence is that stereotypes and prejudice are only weakly related (Park & Judd, 2005).

In addition, this chapter has reviewed the evidence that, for most of the stereotypes examined, the people studied have generally been fairly accurate. However, disproportionately, those people have been college students (although a substantial minority of studies have also examined nonstudent samples) in North America. It is possible that relatively educated samples are disproportionately likely to be informed about group differences. Given a wide range of differences between Western samples and other people (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010), perhaps less educated and less western samples hold less accurate stereotypes.

Last, although accuracy has been assessed among a wide variety of stereotypes, there are many that have not been studied. It is possible that many unstudied stereotypes are far less accurate than the ones reviewed here. If so, people's overall levels of cultural competence may not be quite as strong as our review of stereotype accuracy seems to suggest. However, at least when conflict and prejudice do not interfere, the evidence reviewed here strongly suggests that, even when initially ignorant about a specific group, overcoming that ignorance may not be particularly difficult. People seem to be fairly well-attuned to learning about group differences.

Implications for Applications

Our perspective suggests that cultural competence interventions are likely to be effective if several conditions are met. First, prejudice and conflict levels between those undergoing training and those they are being trained about should be low. Second, the training should not unintentionally increase prejudice or conflict – which it can easily do if it frames the need for such training in an accusatory manner, implying that those being trained suffer some sort of deficiency and/or are somehow responsible for others' disadvantages (e.g., Moss-Racusin et al., 2014). Third, such training should emphasize that it is reasonable for thoughtful people to be informed about real group differences. At the same time, however, such programs should also emphasize the importance of *not* assuming all or most members of some group share any particular cultural attribute, and encourage a sensitivity to individual differences, not just group differences.

Conclusions

Social and applied psychologists cannot continue to have it both ways. They cannot deny group differences exist when studying stereotypes in order to maintain that stereotypes are inaccurate, but

then embrace the existence of group differences when discussing the need to promote cultural competence or related goals, such as multiculturalism or diversity. It seems odd to, on one hand, encourage people to develop cultural competencies and then, on the other, condemn them for holding supposedly inaccurate stereotypes. This sort of mixed message risks discouraging people from actually developing cultural competencies, if they fear accusations of racism or bigotry because they believe groups may differ. The "stereotypes are inaccurate" message also risks erroneously communicating to earnest people that "differences should not be taken seriously, we are really all the same" (see also, Pinker, 2002). It risks blinding people to real and important differences between groups that might sometimes be very important to understand (e.g., when they are a doctor or teacher).

Group differences are real, many, and varied (Henrich et al., 2010; Jussim, 2012; Stevens & Haidt, 2017a, 2017b). Culturally competent people strive to recognize them and apply their knowledge of them rationally, gently, and flexibly in interpersonal interactions. The accurate identification and documentation of group differences could improve cross-cultural interactions in healthcare, education, and business. Whether we refer to this process as the application of accurate stereotypes or cultural competence, we are encouraging the same end result. People are better at social perception than the social sciences have often suggested. People are, of course, not perfect. However, research to date shows that they often make good use of the typically limited information available to them. Programs to enhance cultural competence could harness this skill by providing people with more substantive information about particular groups while emphasizing the value of sensitivity to individual differences.

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