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Research Statement

Research Overview

Organizational contexts are replete with consequential decisions. We decide whom to hire, how much to pay our employees, who becomes a leader, and the like. To make decisions like these, we often have to size others up: to appraise other people in light of what we know about them. For example, are others lazy or are they hardworking? Are others charismatic or are they dull? Although we like to believe that we make appraisals such as these in an unbiased way—that we pay attention to others' track records and nothing more—decades of research have made it clear that this is often not the case. Instead, factors that are irrelevant to a coworker's credentials, like their national origin, their gender identity, or even their political affiliation, can influence whether we hire them, how much we pay them, and whether see them as leaders.

As a social psychologist who studies stereotyping, my work informs the interdisciplinary conversation on person perception across social psychology and management. I study how stereotypes—or the beliefs we harbor about members of different social groups—influence the way that we perceive other people. To date, I have published 11 peer-reviewed journal articles, of which 8 are first-authored. This research is published in top scientific outlets that span the fields of social psychology, organizational behavior, and political science. My primary line of research is on the topic of intersectional stereotyping; my secondary line of research is on the topic of political stereotyping. Much of this research focuses on basic scientific questions. Nevertheless, this research has direct application to the field of organizational behavior. Understanding the ways by which stereotypes shape person perception enhances the precision with which organizational scientists can predict (and in the best cases, prevent) biased behaviors at work.

The following sections of this statement summarize: (1) my primary line of research on intersectional stereotyping; (2) my secondary line of research on political stereotyping; and (3) my ongoing research, which examines the applications of my work to the field of organizational behavior more broadly.

Intersectional Stereotyping

My primary line of research is on the topic of intersectional stereotyping, or how it is that we stereotype other people in light of the multiple, intersecting identity groups to which others belong. This line of research has made a variety of scientific contributions, the most notable of which has been the development of a new theory that I call the lens model of intersectional stereotyping. The lens model recently made its debut in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Petsko, Rosette, & Bodenhausen, 2022). Since its publication, this model has gained traction in both psychological science and organizational behavior. Indeed, my writing on the lens model has already been cited 97 times—a rate of citation that is five times greater than what one would expect based on journal impact factor alone. Below, I describe the development of the lens model, as well as what this model proposes.

A great number of research findings, especially findings from organizational science, have documented that our perceptions of other people tend to be contingent on the intersecting identity groups to which others belong. For example, it is well-established that people tend to exhibit backlash against women (vs. men) who exhibit dominance in the workplace. Yet this research reveals that when the women in question are Black rather than White, backlash effects become attenuated. As another example, gay men tend to be stereotyped as less effective leaders than straight men. But curiously enough, this finding only holds when the leaders in question are White. When the leaders in question are Black, there is instead a reversal of this bias—for example, gay Black men are stereotyped as more effective leaders than straight Black men.

Although the research literature on intersectional stereotyping has been generative, it has a problem, which is that many of its findings appear to contradict each other without satisfying explanations as to why. For example, on the one hand, this literature reveals that people's stereotypes toward others can depend on the intersecting identities to which others belong. Yet on the other hand, this same literature reveals that sometimes, people's stereotypes toward others do *not* depend on the intersecting identities to which others

belong. An example of the former phenomenon can be found in a series of experiments I published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (Petsko & Bodenhasuen, 2019). These experiments revealed that the racial stereotypes we apply to a person can depend on whether they are gay vs. straight. For example, people in the U.S. stereotype gay Black men as seeming "less Black" than their heterosexual counterparts. An example of the latter phenomenon can be found in a follow-up paper I published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2019b; Exp. 1). In this latter paper, I examined whether participants would, as a logical extension of the prior paper, exhibit lower levels of racial discrimination toward gay (relative to straight) Black defendants in the criminal justice system. To my surprise, the data in this latter paper did not support this possibility. Instead, the data revealed that although participants did exhibit a racial bias—a bias against Black relative to White defendants—this bias was *entirely unmoderated* by defendants' sexual orientation. In other words, it was as if participants had sharpened their focus on defendants' racial groups so strongly that they had barely even noticed—at least in the context of this experiment—whether defendants were gay vs. straight.

Results like those described in the preceding paragraph raise an obvious question. Why would perceivers exhibit clear evidence of intersectional stereotyping in certain contexts, yet an ostensible indifference to intersecting identities in other contexts? In a review paper I published in *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* (Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2020), I argued for the possibility that perceivers' minds operate in a compartmentalized way. This is to say that perceivers may attend to targets' identities, or even to intersections of targets' identities, in a "one-at-a-time" fashion. The idea, for example, is that if perceivers sharpen their focus on race, they may exhibit a racial bias, but not—in these moments—any bias on the basis of targets' sexual orientation (Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2019b). In contrast, if perceivers sharpen their focus on targets' intersectional identities, they may exhibit stereotypes that are specific to an intersection (e.g., specific to gay Black men), but not so much stereotypes that relate to the concept of race more broadly (Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2019a). This line of thinking provided an explanation for contradictory research findings like those noted above, and it became the foundation for the lens model.

So what, exactly, does the lens model of intersectional stereotyping propose? According to the lens model, perceivers have a repertoire of different *lenses* in their minds that they can use as templates for perceiving others, and perceivers use just one lens at a time in a given social environment. This model construes lenses as identity-specific schemas that influence patterns of social categorization. The idea, for example, is that perceivers have a lens for the concept of race, a lens for the concept of gender, a lens for the concept of sexual orientation, and even lenses for intersectional identities (e.g., race-by-gender lenses, or race-by-sexual orientation lenses). When one lens comes into focus, perceivers are expected to use that lens as a basis for stereotyping the targets of their perceptions, but to stop using alternative lenses.

Putting this all together, the lens model suggests that how Black women are stereotyped, for example, depends on which lens is made situationally salient to perceivers. If the lens of race is made salient to perceivers, perceivers are expected to exhibit racial stereotyping against Black women, but not gender stereotyping. In contrast, if the lens of gender is made salient, perceivers are expected to exhibit gender stereotyping against Black women, but not racial stereotyping. Finally, if an intersectional lens is made salient to perceivers, perceivers are expected to stereotype Black women not as *women* more generally or as *Black people* more generally, but as *Black women* in particular. In these moments, perceivers are expected to deploy specifically intersectional patterns of stereotyping.

Does the lens model hold up to scrutiny in controlled experiments? Generally, it does. The first tests of the lens model—those that appeared in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Petsko et al., 2022)—were designed to focus on perceptions of individuals at a variety of intersecting identity groups: race-by-gender groups (e.g., Black women), age-by-gender groups (e.g., older men), and age-by-race groups (e.g., Black children). These experiments repeatedly demonstrated that when participations were situationally incentivized to use one lens (e.g., the lens of gender), they tended to focus so strongly on the identities implied by that lens (e.g., who is a man vs. a woman) that they neglected to attend to identities implied by

other lenses (e.g., who is White vs. Black). Moreover, these experiments revealed that while people do sometimes use singular lenses—lenses that sharpen their attention on a single demographic category—so too do people sometimes use specifically intersectional lenses.

Although lens model is still in its infancy, it represents the heart of my research program. This framework is gaining traction in social psychology and in organizational behavior. Moreover, the lens model provides order to the contradictory research literature on intersectional stereotyping, and it can be used to generate previously untested predictions. For example, one prediction made by the lens model is that people will cease to exhibit prejudice at work when they view others through professional lenses. This prediction has so far held up to scrutiny, and it will be described in greater detail in the final segment of this statement.

Political Stereotyping

My secondary line of research is on the topic of political stereotyping—broadly, how it is that our stereotypic views toward others are inflected through the lens of our own political leanings. This line of research emerged out of interdisciplinary collaborations with colleagues in organizational behavior, political science, and psychology. Overwhelmingly, this line of research suggests that our political identities indeed color our perceptions of others: from our perceptions of ethnic minorities (Petsko, Lei, Bruneau, & Kteily, 2021), to our perceptions of political outgroup members (Petsko & Kteily, in press). This line of research, as well as its implications for grappling with political polarization, is summarized below.

Most of my research on political stereotyping has involved measuring what is in the minds of liberals vs. conservatives by using a technique known as reverse-correlation image classification. Reverse-correlation image classification is a cognitive psychological instrument that enables researchers to estimate how it is that groups of people mentally represent the facial features of one another. My early research on political stereotyping used reverse-correlation image classification to examine how a person's political leanings influence how it is that they mentally represent the facial features of ethnic minorities (in this context, Arabs). This research, published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* (Petsko, et al., 2021), revealed that although liberals often espouse egalitarian views toward ethnic minorities at the explicit level, they nevertheless harbor mental representations of ethnic minorities at the implicit level (i.e., in their mental representations) that appear unmistakably dehumanizing. Thus, this research revealed that societal dehumanization ethnic minorities in the United States—as stark as it appears to be—is perhaps more widespread than would be assumed on the basis of self-report data alone.

A second research project in the vein of political stereotyping, which was recently published in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (Petsko & Kteily, in press), was concerned not so much with how liberals vs. conservatives mentally represent ethnic minorities, but instead with how liberals vs. conservatives mentally represent each other. This project revealed that although liberals and conservatives represent one another in dehumanizing ways, they cognitively emphasize different sets of attributes when doing so. Whereas liberals' dehumanization of conservatives tends to emphasize attributes related to savagery (e.g., barbarism), conservatives' dehumanization of liberals tends to emphasize attributes related to immaturity (e.g., naivete). This distinction between savagery- and immaturity-based dehumanization had been previously unexamined in the literature on partisan animosity. Yet my research suggests that this distinction may be central to understanding what it is that animates political polarization in the U.S.

A third research project in the vein of political stereotyping, which was published in *Perspectives on Politics* (Nelson & Petsko, 2021), was concerned with examining whether rural consciousness—a political view that is characterized by pride in one's rural identity and a resentment toward urban Americans—might be motivated, at least in part, by racial prejudice. My colleague and I took an interest in this idea because many political scientists had been discussing rural Americans' resentment of those living in urban spaces as though living in urban spaces were unrelated to one's racial characteristics. Data from this project, which included reverse-correlation data as well as nationally representative ANES polling data, revealed that

although rural consciousness does indeed predict support for important policy preferences (e.g., policies that reduce economic inequality between the rich and the poor), it does so to a significantly weaker degree once racial prejudice is partialed out of the equation. In other words, there are instances in which the variance explained by one's political stance can, at least for some people, be reducible to racial prejudice.

Each of these projects on political stereotyping underscores the idea that political identities color our perceptions of the world: our perceptions of ethnic minorities (Petsko et al., 2021), of political outgroup members (Petsko & Kteily, in press), and our perceptions of public policy (Nelson & Petsko, 2021). What motivates this research is a belief that political polarization can only be remediated, in organizational contexts or in society writ large, to the extent that its contours are understood—understood by policy makers, to be sure, but also by social scientists.

Ongoing Research and Organizational Applications

Much of my ongoing research examines questions related to organizational behavior. The throughline of this research is that the psychological processes I study—the mechanisms by which stereotypes influence social perception—help us to understand consequential organizational phenomena: from what explains racial bias in leader selection (Petsko & Rosette, 2022), to how we might "switch off" prejudice at work (Petsko & Rosette, in progress). A sampling of these projects is described below.

One of the first organizational extensions of my research involved examining stereotypes that give rise to racial bias in leader selection. When I started investigating this topic, several groups of researchers had been arguing that racial disparities in leadership attainment were not being driven by stereotyping processes. In a series of experiments published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* (Petsko & Rosette, 2023), I argued that this narrative was not quite accurate. While it is true that people in the U.S. are unwilling to self-report that they stereotypically associate the concept of leadership with White individuals (more than with non-White individuals), implicit measures of stereotyping reveal clear-cut evidence that this bias is pervasive—so much so that it can be observed even among Black American samples of respondents. This finding is consequential because, as decades of research on leadership categorization theory have illustrated, people's prototypes of leaders often guide whom it is that they select to occupy positions of social influence.

A second organizational extension of my research, which is ongoing, has been to examine whether using professional lenses, like using demographic lenses, can be powerful enough to "switch off" perceivers' likelihood of exhibiting prejudice at work. Initial tests of this idea have been promising, with large-scale, pre-registered experiments demonstrating that when people view others through the lens of profession, they completely cease to exhibit racism and ageism, respectively (Petsko & Rosette, in progress). In addition to conducting experiments like these, a related aim has been to re-cast the lens model as being not in competition with organizational models of stereotyping, but as being complementary to these models. A paper of mine that is currently under invited revision at *Personality and Social Psychology Review* (Freiburger, Hall, & Petsko, invited revision), for example, argues that whereas the lens model can be used to predict *when* intersectional stereotyping occurs, a popular organizational model of intersectional stereotyping—Hall et al.'s (2019) MOSAIC framework in *AMR*—can be used to predict *how* intersectional stereotyping occurs (specifically, how strongly particular stereotypes are applied to intersectional targets).

In summary, much of my research revolves around basic scientific questions, like whether and to what extent stereotypes influence low-level perceptual processes. But in recent years, my focus has turned to understanding how these insights extend to issues facing present-day organizations. In a way, this growing component of my research program represents my identity as a researcher: as a social scientist who seeks to integrate social psychological theorizing with organizational behavior. The projects I have conducted to date already speak to intractable problems that organizations face, from what precedes racial disparities in leadership attainment, to how we might "switch off" prejudice at work. In the coming years, I will continue to identify the relevance of social stereotyping to organizational contexts, processes, and outcomes.