

## INTERSECTIONAL AND DYNAMIC SOCIAL CATEGORIES IN SOCIAL COGNITION

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People belong to multiple social groups, and the meaning of these groups to others shifts as nonverbal, emotional, and other contextual cues in the environment also change. As such, social categories are both *intersectional*—in that the overlapping nature of categories affects how a person is perceived—and *dynamic*—in that perceivers continuously monitor and update their category-based perceptions in light of new information. Yet, social-cognitive research has often treated social categories as independent and fixed. In contrast, the studies in this special issue acknowledge the intersectional and dynamic nature of social categories. Seven articles examine how perceivers categorize targets according to their multiple social identities and, subsequently, how stereotypes are shaped by overlapping and shifting social categories. As such, the articles in this issue reveal social processes that may be otherwise obscured when identities are treated in research as independent and fixed rather than as intersectional and dynamic.

*Keywords:* intersectional, dynamic, categorization, stereotyping

Decades of social-cognitive research has examined the psychological processes underlying how we think about and come to understand other people. This work has highlighted the critical role of *categorical thinking* in person perception and construal, emphasizing that we sort others into social categories and then use our broad knowledge of those categories to interpret, explain, and even create narratives about others' behaviors (Allport & Postman, 1947; Bodenhausen & Macrae, 1998; Devine, 1989; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Categorical thinking occurs quickly and automatically (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999), and is robust even when person

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perception occurs under degraded conditions (Cloutier, Mason, & Macrae, 2005). Person perception is also made more efficient by categorical thinking, freeing up limited cognitive resources that can be used for other tasks (Bargh, 1999; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Macrae, Milne, & Bodenhausen, 1994).

The efficiency of social categorization is particularly remarkable given that people are multifaceted, cuing a number of social identities, emotions, and behaviors at any given time (Kang & Bodenhausen, 2014). Indeed, social categories are both intersectional and dynamic. *Intersectionality* addresses the overlapping and intertwining nature of social identities as they shape the way that a person is perceived (Warner, 2008; Warner & Shields, 2013). *Dynamic categorization* addresses the continuously shifting, versus perpetually fixed, nature of categorical social perception (Freeman & Ambady, 2011). The concept of intersectionality was initially described by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in an analysis of case judgments in anti-discrimination law. Crenshaw detected a pattern in race and sex discrimination cases in which courts often rendered judgments arguing that Black women are not entitled to “extra” legal protections not afforded to Black men and White women. That is, the law did not acknowledge that Black women may be treated differently than Black men and White women because of the combination of their stigmatized identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Similarly, psychology has historically treated social identities as separate and discrete entities, one reason being that this way of conceptualizing identities easily lends itself to quantitative measurement (Cole, 2009; Remedios & Snyder, 2015a, 2015b; Warner, 2008). However, intersectionality theory questions the very meaning of a particular identity considered outside the context of other identities (Warner, 2008). Thus, the articles in this issue move social cognition research forward by heeding the call to recognize the intersectional and dynamic nature of social categories. In addition to capturing some of the ways in which the interdependence of identities affects social-cognitive processes, the paradigms implemented in the present studies provide examples of how intersectional research questions can, indeed, be tested in quantitative ways (see also Warner, 2008).

The goal of this special issue is to present new and innovative research examining how the intersectional and dynamic nature of social categories shape person perception. This issue is divided into two sections representing emerging research on intersectionality in two primary domains of social cognition: social categorization and stereotyping. Across these sections, the authors forward innovative research that recognizes categories as intersectional and dynamic to reveal social-cognitive processes that may be obscured when social categories are treated in research as fixed and stable.

## INTERSECTIONAL AND DYNAMIC SOCIAL CATEGORIZATION

Well-established models of person perception suggest that perceivers spontaneously categorize individuals according to visible categories, like race, sex, and age (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). This automatic process requires few cognitive resources,

unlike the alternative process of understanding and integrating each individual attribute about a person (Pendry & Macrae, 1994). For example, participants who were given a category label to describe a target, along with a list of traits consistent with their expectations of that category, were better able than those not given a label to concurrently memorize information for a general knowledge test (Macrae et al., 1994). It is therefore clear from these models why perceivers rely on categories to understand others; however, what is less clear is how perceivers respond to the *multiple* categories to which people belong. To address this question, Bodenhausen and Macrae (1998) advanced a framework in which focal categories are activated during person construal and non-focal categories are inhibited. A category may be considered focal when the target's behavior highlights the category (e.g., sex is the focal category for an Asian woman applying lipstick; Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1995), the perceiver has a categorization goal (e.g., to sort targets by sex; Quinn & Macrae, 2005), the perceiver is motivated to see the target according to a positive or negative category (Sinclair & Kunda, 1999), and the perceiver is dispositionally predisposed to focus on a particular category (Fazio & Dunton, 1997). Non-focal categories were thought to be inhibited such that they did not factor into person construal.

Subsequent research, however, challenged the idea that non-focal categories are completely inhibited during person construal; indeed, non-focal categories have been shown, in some cases, to interfere with, or cause deviations from, categorization according to the focal identity (Freeman, Nakayama, & Ambady, 2013; Quinn & Macrae, 2005). For example, participants asked to select the sex of a White woman by tracing a line from her photo to the word "woman," deviated slightly in the paths they traced when the word "White" was also presented on the same screen (Freeman et al., 2013). In other cases, non-focal categories facilitate categorization because of shared characteristics between the non-focal and focal identities. For example, masculine phenotypes and stereotypically masculine traits expected of Black targets facilitate "male" categorizations of Black men; similarly, feminine phenotypes and stereotypically feminine traits expected of Asian targets facilitate "female" categorizations of Asian women (Johnson, Freeman, & Pauker, 2012). Cues like emotional expressions and targets' actions may also "tune" or shift social categorization. Indeed, studies show that, not only do perceivers expect Black targets to be angry (Devine, 1989), they also are more likely to categorize racially ambiguous angry faces as Black (Hugenberg & Bodenhausen, 2004). Similarly, participants rated a biracial target who spoke out (versus stayed silent) about racial prejudice as more "Black" (i.e., as being more Black-identified and having more stereotypically Black preferences). Multiple social categories are, moreover, spontaneously discerned from exposure to faces (Martin, Swainson, Slessor, Hutchison, Marosi, & Cunningham, 2015). Such findings further complicate conceptualizations of categories as discrete or fixed entities and offer evidence, instead, that categorization is dynamic and susceptible to reinterpretation based on constant monitoring of top-down and bottom-up influences (Freeman & Ambady, 2011).

The first set of articles in this issue advance our understanding of social categorization as intersectional and as dynamic, and also offer insight into the processes

underlying categorization as they are shaped by the multifaceted nature of person construal. An important question raised by dynamic models of person perception is to what extent categorization is context-dependent in that it is driven by top-down influences. In this vein, Pauker, Carpinella, Lick, Sanchez, and Johnson (this issue) examine whether the likelihood that perceivers categorize biracial (Black/White, Asian/White, and Asian/Black) targets as biracial, versus as monoracial (i.e., Black or Asian) depends on perceivers' geographical location. The authors show that biracial categorizations are more frequent in Hawaii than in California, and that this effect may be due to varying amounts of racial integration in those states. Thus, geographical location may represent a top-down influence that affects the conceptualization of race (Pauker, Carpinella, Meyers, Young, & Sanchez, 2017) and racial categorization (Pauker et al., this issue). Brooks, Stolier, and Freeman (this issue) add to this literature by using a reverse-correlation technique to disentangle the extent to which emotions influence sex categorizations via top-down and bottom-up processing routes. In this work the authors show that sex categorizations are not only biased by the expectation that women and men express different emotions, but also by the association between certain emotions (e.g., anger) and target sex (e.g., male). Further examining the intersectional nature of sex categorizations, Lick and Johnson (this issue) explore how a targets' combination of sex and race identities cues particular age identities. The researchers frame their hypotheses using gendered race theory (Johnson et al., 2012) and predict that Asian women are perceived as feminine and, thus, as young, whereas Black men are perceived as masculine and, thus, as older. Lastly, Remedios and Snyder (this issue) establish that, although perceivers recognize the intersectionality of social categories, there are cognitive costs to perceiving categories as intersectional units. Indeed, perceivers showed a perceptual advantage when sorting targets into single versus intersectional categories. In sum, the articles in this section transform our understanding of how social perceivers categorize targets by considering the dynamic processes that shape everyday person perception.

## INTERSECTIONAL AND DYNAMIC STEREOTYPING

The second set of articles in this issue focuses on how stereotyping proceeds in a dynamic and intersectional person construal system. Stereotype activation occurs spontaneously, as a consequence of categorization (Devine, 1989). Stereotype activation describes the hyper-accessibility of trait knowledge (e.g., aggressive) associated with a social category (e.g., Black), the onset of which takes place following a very brief exposure to a target (Kunda, Davies, Adams, & Spencer, 2002). Stereotype activation may lead to stereotype application, or the explicit and conscious use of stereotypes in judgments of targets, particularly when perceivers are high in prejudice (Devine, 1989) or have little time or motivation to individuate a target (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). However, even automatic stereotype activation has been shown to affect a variety of cognitive functions that shape how perceivers form impressions. For example, stereotypes bias memories of Black targets as

aggressive (Allport & Postman, 1947), emotion detection of Black targets as angry (Hugenberg & Bodenhausen, 2003), and threat assessments used in decisions to shoot or not shoot Black targets who may be armed (Correll et al., 2007).

Researchers have also posited, however, that stereotype activation tracks the intersectional and dynamic nature of social categories. Initial research suggested that perceivers activate stereotypes associated with dominant or salient categories and inhibit stereotypes associated with non-focal categories. For example, participants who watched a video of a Chinese woman eating with chopsticks activated Chinese stereotypes and inhibited female stereotypes; those who watched the same woman applying lipstick activated female stereotypes and inhibited Chinese stereotypes (Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, 1995). Similar stereotyping patterns were observed among motivated perceivers: participants motivated to like a Black doctor from whom they received positive feedback activated positive doctor stereotypes and inhibited negative Black stereotypes, whereas those motivated to dislike a Black doctor from whom they received negative feedback activated negative Black stereotypes and inhibited positive doctor stereotypes (Sinclair & Kunda, 1999). The dynamic nature of stereotyping is further underscored by the time course of stereotype activation and dissipation, which is sensitive to whether perceivers develop motivations to individuate targets (Kunda, Davies, Adams, & Spencer, 2002).

Beyond scenarios in which target behavior or perceiver motivations make a social category salient, research has revealed the joint contributions of intersectional categories to stereotyping. Kang and Chasteen (2009) examined how perceivers detect emotions on the faces of White, Black, young, and old targets. Rather than main effects of race or age of target, the authors observed an interaction effect in which participants detected hostility sooner on young Black versus White faces, but later on older Black versus White faces. Additionally, Remedios, Chasteen, Rule, and Plaks (2011) showed that stereotypes about perceptually ambiguous categories—in this case, about sexual orientation—interact with stereotypes about perceptually obvious categories during impression formation. Black men were perceived as less likeable than White men, but only among targets who self-identified as straight; self-identified gay targets were perceived as more likeable if they were Black versus White.

Broadly, this work contributes to a growing literature emphasizing the intersectional and dynamic nature of stereotyping processes (Freeman & Ambady, 2011). Building on past research, the second set of articles in this issue focuses on the intersectional and dynamic nature of stereotyping. Steele, George, Cease, Fabri, and Schlosser (this issue) examine automatic stereotype activation, focusing on the implicit attitudes of Black and White targets differing in emotional expressions. They provide evidence that implicit racial biases are malleable, and may be weakened when perceivers focus on targets' dynamic emotions rather than their race. The remaining two articles address questions pertaining to explicit stereotype application. Craig and Bodenhausen (this issue) present a model of *extrapolative stereotyping* in which perceivers draw on stereotypes about a target's multiple social identities to infer information about the target's unknown characteristics. Lastly,

Babbitt, Gaither, Toosi, and Sommers (this issue) show that racial meta-stereotypes vary by gender; specifically, both White and Black participants perceive White men as more racially prejudiced than White women.

## CONCLUSION

The goal of this special issue is to bring together research in an emerging field investigating how intersectional and dynamic social categories shape social cognition. Social categorization affects such disparate social-cognitive processes as self-perception, the self-concept, person perception, person-memory integration, and stereotyping and prejudice. Yet, much of what we have learned about social categories to date rests on the assumption that the groups to which people belong are independent and fixed (Cole, 2009; Remedios & Snyder, 2015a; Warner, 2008). In reality, determining how to categorize the self and how to partition our social environments is rarely straightforward. All individuals belong to multiple social groups and can be perceived according to more than one category at any given time (Bodenhausen & Peery, 2009; Macrae et al., 1995). Further, our understanding of social categories is dynamic and fluid, rather than fixed (Freeman & Ambady, 2011). In line with this goal, each contribution to this issue grapples with the effects of intersectionality and dynamism on the social-cognitive processes of social categorization and stereotyping. In doing so, the research offers a much-needed viewpoint to the field that increases the relevance of the social psychological perspective to complex, real-world social perception.

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