Social Psychology of Prejudice:

Historical and Contemporary Issues

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My Start on Stereotyping and Prejudice

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I suppose I've always been interested in prejudice, perhaps because I grew up in a White Polish-Catholic neighborhood in Detroit, Michigan. I am too young to remember the race riots that rocked the city in the late 60s, but I did grow up with the odd sense that my hometown was extremely prejudiced toward its Black citizens at the same time that it supported and celebrated them (Motown stars, Joe Louis, Rosa Parks, and Mayor Coleman Young are some examples). And though I grew up in this city with one of the largest Black populations in the country, my world of friends and neighbors was homogeneous with respect to race and religion; it wasn't until I began my undergraduate work at the University of Michigan that I had anything more than superficial contact with non-Whites and non-Catholics.

In graduate school at Michigan, my interest in conducting research on stereotyping and prejudice was piqued in a seminar taught by Mel Manis. We read a lot about the contact hypothesis that semester, and this led me to do some correlational research on the topic. I was interested in how stereotypes about campus groups might develop and change over time, with exposure to members of those groups. Some of the findings from that work were consistent with a social reality or "kernel of truth" view of stereotypes, in that stereotypes became stronger–and campus groups were perceived as more distinct from each other–with increasing knowledge of them. At the same time, liking of a group—an affective measure—predicted reduced stereotyping or differentiation. This suggested two routes to stereotype learning and change–one knowledge based and one emotion-based. This work got me interested in how to best measure stereotypes, and later in how to best measure prejudice, especially prejudice toward Black Americans.

At the same time that I was doing research on stereotypes about and prejudice toward groups as a whole, I also became involved in work Mel Manis was doing on social judgment—how we form impressions and make evaluations of individuals who are members of stereotyped groups. With Mel and fellow graduate student Tom Nelson, I studied how an accurate stereotype–the belief that men are taller than women–guides judgments of the heights of individual men and women. We found that this stereotype was "potent and resilient" (as the title of one of our articles suggests); it guided judgment even when perceivers were offered money for accuracy and explicitly told that the stereotype didn't apply to a particular set of individuals. This research on height later led to an interesting observation—judges who were asked to evaluate how "short" or "tall" male and female targets were seemed to adjust the meaning of

those rating points in a within-category fashion—a woman might be subjectively judged "tall" even when she was objectively (in feet and inches) perceived to be shorter than a man judged subjectively less tall. This finding and others like it led us to develop the "shifting standards model," which suggests that stereotypes operate as standards against which individual group members are compared. In this way, judgments of individuals may sometimes be contrasted from stereotypes, as when a behavioral act by a woman—interrupting someone who is speaking—leads to a stronger inference that she is aggressive than the same act committed by a man. Over the past dozen years or so, the bulk of my work on stereotypes has been focused on this model, examining how gender and racial stereotypes lead to contradictory patterns of judgment: Subjective judgments seem to mask or reverse stereotyping effects, but evaluations made in more objective units reveal them. For example, women and Black men may subjectively be perceived as better applicants for a job than a White man (presumably because they are evaluated with respect to lower standards) at the same time they are objectively perceived less well and are less likely to be hired.

Whereas I view my work on shifting standards as largely cognitive in its emphasis–judgments of individuals are based on group-level mental representations–the research on values and prejudice discussed in my chapter in this book takes a hotter or more motivated perspective of social judgment. Values are charged in a way stereotypes need not be. But my perspective on values is still closely linked to the stereotype concept– values have their impact when groups are stereotyped in ways relevant to those values. In this way, this line of work nicely reflects my interests in both the affective and cognitive underpinnings of prejudice. It also reflects my concern with understanding both how groups as a whole and individual members of those groups are evaluated.