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The role of social identities and individual differences in predicting prejudice: a plea for tolerance

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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN
PREDICTING PREJUDICE: A PLEA FOR TOLERANCE

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

PETER RICHARD CHRISTOPHER LEESON, B.Sc. (Hons.) Psych

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

2006

Certification

I, Peter Leeson, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Department of Psychology, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualification at any other academic institution.

Signed: Peter Leeson

Date: 18/04/06

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Abstract

This thesis explored the need for greater integration between individual difference and group-based explanations of prejudice. It began by addressing the claim of many self-categorisation theorists that any attempt at integration is doomed, because individual differences play little role in predicting intergroup behaviour when a person's social identity is salient (Turner, 1982). Contrary to this prediction, both Study One and Two showed that even when participant's social identities were salient, individual difference variables correlated with prejudice. Study Two went on to illustrate the dynamic nature of individual differences. It demonstrated that the relationship between ingroup belonging, intergroup prejudice, and the sub-scales of the Personal Need for Structure measure differed depending on the situational context. Finally, contrary to self-categorisation theory, it was found that Australian identity was unrelated to prejudice.

This led to the second question at the heart of the thesis, do all individuals identify with their group in the same way; are the images, stereotypes, and norms of a national group held universally, or even widely? In Study Three, participants generated attributes they believed typical of the average Australian. These responses were content analysed by independent raters, producing a final list of 27 attributes. An examination of this list revealed a broad range of, often, contradictory auto-stereotypes. These attributes were then presented to a separate sample of participants in Study Four. A factor analysis produced three distinct, if inter-related, stereotype components: 'positive ingroup regard', 'traditional Australian', and open-minded/independent. These auto-stereotype components were, in turn, differentially related to participants' value orientation, as measured by Braithwaite and Law's (1985) social values inventory. Thus, compared to moral relativists, dualists were significantly more likely to depict Australians using attributes from each of the stereotype

components, with the security orientated scoring significantly higher than moral relativists on both the 'positive ingroup regard' and 'traditional Australian' components. Study Five examined the relationship between Social Comparison Orientation (SCO) and perception of group belonging. Reflecting a pattern similar to that of Study Two, the correlation between SCO and perceptions of both the ingroup and outgroup differed depending on situational context. The combined results of these studies point to the need to re-examine the importance of individual differences when considering the relationship between social identity and prejudice.

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