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

Peter R. Leeson

University of Wollongong, pleeson@uow.edu.au

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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

Acknowledgements

As I come to the end of what, at times, appeared to be an endless journey, it is appropriate to briefly acknowledge those individuals who have had an impact on this thesis. The various post graduates with whom I have shared the post graduate room over the years. It is questionable whether they facilitated or impeded my progress with their conversational skills.

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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.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Tables.....	x
List of Figures.....	xi
1 Chapter One: An Overview of the Thesis.....	1
1.1 Preamble.....	1
1.1.1 The History of the Study of Prejudice.....	1
1.2 Issues Addressed in this Thesis.....	2
1.2.1 Identities and Individual Differences.....	2
1.2.2 Identities: Not the Same Thing to All People.....	4
1.3 Outline of Chapters.....	7
2 Chapter Two: Prejudice: from Individual Differences to Social Identity.....	10
2.1 Overview.....	10
2.2 The Nature of Prejudice.....	10
2.2.1 Definition.....	11
2.3 Prejudice: New for Old.....	12
2.4 History of the Study of Prejudice in Psychology.....	12
2.4.1 The Individual Difference Approach.....	13
2.5 The Group-based Approach.....	14
2.5.1 The Role of the Group	14
2.5.2 Prejudice and the Group.....	16
2.6 Social Identity Theory.....	17
2.6.1 Categories, Groups, and Beliefs.....	17
2.6.2 Personal and Social Identity	18
2.6.3 The Self Esteem Hypotheses.....	19
2.6.4 Minimal Groups Paradigm.....	20
2.7 Self Categorization Theory.....	22
2.7.1 Personal and Social as a Continuum	22
2.7.2 Salience of Identities.....	24
2.7.3 Depersonalisation.....	24
2.7.4 Stereotyping and its Role in Group Membership.....	26
2.7.5 Insufficiency of Individual Differences.....	27
2.7.6 Conclusion.....	28
3 Chapter Three: The Rise and Fall and Rise of Authoritarianism	29
3.1 Overview.....	29
3.2 The Authoritarian Personality.....	29

3.3 Development of the Authoritarian Personality.....	30
3.3.1 Sources of Authoritarianism.....	31
3.3.2 Research Techniques.....	32
3.4 Criticisms of the F scale.....	33
3.4.1 Methodological Problems.....	33
3.4.2 Validity of the Scale.....	33
3.5 Authoritarian Personality Revisited	34
3.5.1 RWA Defined	36
3.5.2 The Three Subcomponents of RWA	37
3.6 Authoritarianism and Prejudice.....	38
3.6.1 Posse Mentality.....	39
3.7 Source of Authoritarianism: from Freud to Bandura.....	40
3.7.1 Life Experience and the Fear of Strangers.....	41
3.8 The Compartmentalised Mind.....	42
3.8.1 Authoritarianism: Not What but How.....	42
3.9 RWA: Just Another F Scale?.....	45
3.9.1 The RWA Scale and Personality.....	46
3.9.2 The use of RWA in the Present Study.....	48
3.9.3 Conclusion	48
4 Chapter Four: Social Values: from Freedom and Equality to Security and Harmony.....	50
4.1 Overview.....	50
4.2 Rokeach and Values.....	50
4.2.1 Values as Abstractions.....	51
4.2.2 Values as Standards.....	52
4.2.3 Instrumental and Terminal Values.....	52
4.2.4 Two-Value Model	53
4.2.5 Criticisms of the Two-value Model.....	54
4.3 A New Model of Social Values.....	58
4.3.1 Construction of the Social Values Inventory	59
4.3.2 Validation of the Measure.....	60
4.3.3 The Social Value Inventory and Political Ideology	62
4.3.4 The desirability of both Harmony and Security Values	64
4.3.5 Value Balance Model.....	65
4.3.6 Conclusion	65
5 Chapter Five: Situationally Dynamic Individual Difference Variables	67
5.1 Overview	67
5.2 PNS.....	68
5.2.1 PNS, Authoritarianism, and Intolerance of Ambiguity.....	70
5.2.2 PNS and Occupational Strain	72
5.3 Stereotypes.....	74
5.3.1 Erroneous Stereotypes.....	74
5.3.2 Illusory Correlations.....	75
5.4 PNS, Identity and Prejudice.....	76
5.5 Social Comparison: Iowa Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure.....	79
5.6 Conclusion.....	81

6 Chapter Six: Prejudice towards Aboriginals and Homosexuals: The Impact of Individual Differences and Social Identities.....	83
6.1 Overview.....	83
6.2 Early Research into Aboriginal Prejudice.....	83
6.3 Aboriginal Prejudice: New for Old.....	85
6.4 Correlates of Prejudice towards Aborigines	87
6.4.1 Authoritarianism and Prejudice towards Aborigines.....	87
6.4.2 Aboriginal Prejudice and Social identity.....	88
6.5 Homosexual Prejudice.....	90
6.5.1 Authoritarianism and Prejudice towards Homosexual	90
6.5.2 Co-correlates of RWA and Homosexual prejudice	91
6.6 Prejudice towards Homosexual and Values.....	93
6.7 Aims and Hypotheses.....	93
6.8 Method.....	95
6.8.1 Participants.....	95
6.8.2 Materials.....	96
6.8.3 Procedure.....	99
6.9 Results.....	99
6.9.1 Overview.....	99
6.9.2 Analysis of Differences between Men and Women	100
6.9.3 Correlations	101
6.9.4 Regression Analyses.....	104
6.10 Discussion.....	106
7 Chapter Seven: PNS and Social Identities: Placing the Role of Individual Differences in Context	111
7.1 Overview.....	111
7.2 Attitudes towards Asians	111
7.3 Stereotypes of Asians.....	112
7.4 Prejudice toward Asians.....	113
7.5 Correlates of Asian Prejudice.....	114
7.5.1 Authoritarianism.....	114
7.5.2 The Role of Social identity.....	114
7.5.3 PNS and Prejudice.....	120
7.5.4 Subjective Uncertainty and PNS.....	121
7.6 Aims and Hypotheses.....	123
7.7 Method.....	125
7.7.1 Participants.....	125
7.7.2 Material.....	126
7.7.3 Procedure.....	129
7.8 Results.....	130
7.8.1 Overview.....	130
7.8.2 Manipulation Check	130
7.8.3 Analysis of Differences between Men and Women, and Identity Conditions ...	131
7.8.4 Correlations.....	132
7.8.5 General Linear Model.....	134
7.9 Discussion.....	136

8 Chapter Eight: A Contemporary Measure of Australian Auto-stereotypes.....	140
8.1 Overview.....	140
8.2 History of the Study of Stereotypes	141
8.2.1 Two Approaches to Stereotypes.....	141
8.3 Auto-stereotypes	143
8.3.1 Australian Auto-stereotypes.....	143
8.3.2 Australian Auto-stereotypes and Self Categorisation Theory.....	144
8.3.3 Identity the Same Thing for All People?.....	147
8.4 Aims.....	148
8.5 Method	149
8.5.1 Participants	149
8.5.2 Materials.....	150
8.5.3 Procedure.....	151
8.6 Results.....	151
8.7 Discussion	154
9 Chapter Nine: Australian Auto-stereotypes and their Relationship to Value Orientations	156
9.1 Overview.....	156
9.2 Values and Social Attitudes.....	158
9.3 Value Balance Model and Social Attitudes.....	159
9.3.1 Moral Relativists and Dualists.....	160
9.4 Values and Identification.....	162
9.5 Aims and Hypotheses	164
9.6 Method.....	165
9.6.1 Participants.....	165
9.6.2 Materials	166
9.7 Results.....	167
9.7.1 Overview.....	167
9.7.2 Structure of Australian Attributes.....	168
9.7.3 Partial Correlations.....	170
9.7.4 Value Balance Model.....	173
9.8 Discussion	174
10 Chapter Ten: SCO and Perceptions of Group Belonging: the Impact of	
Situational Context.....	180
10.1 Overview.....	180
10.2 The Importance of Social Comparison in Social Identity Theory.....	181
10.3 Meta-contrast and Social Comparison.....	182
10.4 SCO.....	183
10.5 Australian Auto-stereotypes.....	184
10.6 Aims and Hypotheses.....	186
10.7 Method.....	188
10.7.1 Participants.....	188
10.7.2 Materials.....	189
10.7.3 Procedure.....	191
10.8 Results.....	191
10.8.1 Overview.....	191

10.8.2 Manipulation Check.....	192
10.8.3 Analysis of Differences between both Men and Women, and between Identity Conditions.....	192
10.8.4 Pearson Correlations.....	193
10.8.5 Differences in Strength of Correlations between Conditions.....	195
10.8.6 Structural Equation Modelling.....	195
10.8.7 Measures of Fit	196
10.8.8 Testing theoretical Model One	197
10.8.9 Testing theoretical Model Two	198
10.8.10 The final versions of Model One and Two.....	198
10.9 Discussion	201
11 Chapter 11: Summary of Findings and their Theoretical Implications.....	205
11.1 Overview.....	205
11.2 Summary of Findings.....	205
11.2.1 Study One.....	205
11.2.2 Study Two.....	206
11.2.3 Study Three	207
11.2.4 Study Four.....	207
11.2.5 Study Five.....	208
11.3 Implication of Findings.....	210
11.4 Limitations.....	212
11.5 Future directions.....	213
11.6 A Final Word.....	214
References.....	215
Appendix A: Questionnaire for Study One Reported in Chapter Six.....	229
Appendix B: Questionnaire for Study Two Reported in Chapter Seven.....	239
Appendix C: Questionnaire for Study Three Reported in Chapter Eight.....	248
Appendix D: Questionnaire for Study Four Reported in Chapter Nine.....	252
Appendix E: Questionnaire for Study Five Reported in Chapter Ten.....	260

List Of Tables

Table 6. 1 Demographic breakdown of the sample.....	95
Table 6. 2 Mean scores and standard deviations for male and females	100
Table 6. 3 Partial correlations, controlling for gender, between each variable and prejudice towards Aboriginals	101
Table 6. 4 Partial correlations, controlling for gender, between each variable and prejudice towards Homosexuals.....	102
Table 6. 5 Partial correlations, controlling for gender and identities, between individual difference variables and Aboriginal and homosexual prejudice.....	103
Table 6. 6 Significant predictors of prejudice towards Aboriginals and Homosexuals	105
Table 7. 1 Demographic breakdown of the sample.....	125
Table 7. 2 Mean scores and standard deviations for national and personal identity conditions.....	131
Table 7. 3 Mean scores and standard deviations for male and females.....	132
Table 7. 4 Correlations between each of the variables in the personal identity condition....	132
Table 7. 5 Correlations between each of the variables in the national identity condition....	133
Table 7. 6 Results for General Linear Model examining the predictors of prejudice and ingroup homogeneity in the personal and national identity conditions	135
Table 8. 1 Demographic breakdown of the sample.....	149
Table 8. 2 Final list of attributes selected, their frequency (<i>N</i>), and the percentage of participants who nominated each attribute.....	153
Table 9. 1 Demographic breakdown of the sample.....	165
Table 9. 2 Factor loadings of Australian stereotypes after oblimin rotation	169
Table 9. 3 Partial correlations between values and Australian stereotypes, consecutively controlling for both 'National strength and order' and 'International harmony and equality'.	171
Table 9. 4 Correlations between ingroup stereotypes and Hinkle et al.'s (1989) measure of social identification.....	172
Table 9. 5 Means and standard deviations on Australian stereotypes for each value orientation.....	173
Table 10. 1 Demographic breakdown of the sample.....	188
Table 10. 2 Mean scores and standard deviations for national and personal identity conditions.....	192
Table 10. 3 Mean scores and standard deviations for males and females.....	193
Table 10. 4 Correlations between each of the variables in the personal identity condition..	193
Table 10. 5 Correlations between each of the variables in the national identity condition...	194

List Of Figures

Figure 10.1	Structural equation model testing the final version of model One	199
Figure 10.2	Structural equation model testing the final version of model Two	200