

Research Statement

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How do factors in our environment, especially those we are unaware of, affect our attitudes, decisions, and interactions? And, how do these factors influence interpersonal and organizational relations in terms of diversity and equality? These questions are the driving force behind my research that investigates how different factors --social tuning, perspective taking, culture, stigmas-- affect attitudes, decisions, perceptions, and self-views. Overall, my research aims to understand the influence these different factors have in order to promote and enhance equality, diversity, and cultural understanding.

Interpersonal Factors: Social Tuning, Perspective Taking, and Cultural Orientation

In order to promote and enhance diversity, equality, and cultural understanding, a majority of my research investigates the transmission of stereotypic and egalitarian attitudes. In particular, I am interested in how relational motivations and the perceived views of others influence stereotyping and interpersonal relations. Namely, my research in this area focuses on three key factors: social tuning (aligning one's views with an interaction partner), perspective taking (considering another person's viewpoint), and cultural orientation (focusing on the self or one's larger social group).

Social Tuning. When interacting with others, individuals try to develop a sense of common ground (or shared reality) between themselves and others (see Hardin & Conley, 2001). Developing a shared reality can lead to more rewarding interpersonal relationships, and may lead individuals' to align their views to match the apparent views of their partner. My collaborators and I wondered if a desire for shared reality could lead people to align themselves with their partner's apparent views and consequently self-stereotype (Sinclair, Huntsinger, Skorinko, & Hardin, 2005). We found that those who had an affiliative motivation (e.g., desire to get along) were more likely to align their views with those of their partner than those with low affiliative motivation, even when this made them self-stereotype (e.g., see themselves as being gender traditional). In addition, we found that when people have low affiliative motivation, they reduce self-stereotyping by socially distancing themselves from their partner. Thus, people use their perceived views of others as basis for how they see themselves in a given interaction.

One question that emerged from this research was whether the perceived views of others needed to be explicit. To understand this, we examined the extent to which an experimenter's subtle endorsement (wearing a t-shirt) of an attitude towards feminine beauty (i.e., all body types are beautiful) influenced participants' implicit self-esteem. We found that when no endorsement was made (control/blank t-shirt condition), heavier women had lower implicit self-esteem than normal weight women. However, when the subtle endorsement was made, heavier women had higher implicit self-esteem than normal weight women (Weisbuch, Sinclair, Skorinko, & Eccleston, 2009). Thus, very subtle cues may align an individual's views with those of others, which can then influence implicit self-views, including self-esteem.

Perspective Taking. Stemming from my research in social tuning, I have become very interested in the process by which people pick up on the perceived views of their interaction partner. More specifically, I have begun to examine how perspective taking (or considering another person's viewpoint) influences attitudes, self-views, and perceptions of others. For instance, I found that perspective taking with a significant other (i.e., an older family member) increased the likelihood of adopting that person's views. In this study, perspective takers who

visualized an older family member picked up on the conservative attitudes of this target and reported enjoying an article about sex *less* than non-perspective takers who visualized an older family member (Skorinko, Sinclair, & Conklin, in press). This research demonstrates the powerful influence that perspective taking and perceived views of others can have on self-views. Extending this line of research, I investigated the extent to which perspective taking works as an implicit goal that motivates attitude transmission. We have found that when participants are primed to perspective take, they more readily adopt their interaction partner's attitudes (whether egalitarian or prejudiced), and consequently adjust their views towards their interaction partner more than non-perspective takers (Skorinko, Lun, Whitchurch, & DiGiovanni, in preparation). I also examined whether perspective taking influenced stereotyping of others. Past research shows that perspective taking can reduce stereotyping (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003). However, based on my research in social tuning, I wondered whether subtle contextual cues might moderate the reduction in stereotyping previously observed. More specifically, I wanted to know whether perspective takers reacted differently towards a target that immediately confirmed stereotypes of their group than a target who did not. The results showed that when the target confirmed stereotypes of their group, perspective takers anchored on these available stereotypes and stereotyped *more* than when the target did not confirm stereotypes of their group (Skorinko & Sinclair, under review). Thus, this line of research shows that perspective taking serves not only as a cue to other's views, but also is an important component in self-views, attitude transmission, and stereotyping. I am currently writing several grant proposals to help support the continuation of this research.

Cultural Orientation. In addition to perspective taking, cultural orientation may influence the extent to which individuals realize the views of others, consequently affecting attitude formation, transmission, and interpersonal relations. This topic is exceptionally important given the rise in cultural/ethnic conflicts (e.g., between the Uighurs and Hans Chinese in China, Israelis and Palestinians, etc.), and the lack of research on how these processes operate in the non-Western world (Fiske, 2000; Williams & Spencer-Rodgers, 2010). Relying on the social tuning model, my colleague and I examined the extent to which collectivists (i.e., Easterners) and individualists (i.e., Westerners) chronically adopted the perceived views of their interaction partner and engaged in social tuning. Hong Kong participants more readily engaged in social tuning and expressed more favorable views towards homosexuals than American participants. More surprisingly, priming cultural orientation replicated these effects. For instance, Hong Kong participants primed with an individualistic mindset were less likely to engage in social tuning than Hong Kong participants primed with a collectivist mindset (and vice versa with American participants; Skorinko & Lun, under review). I am currently applying for funding to examine possible underlying mechanisms, such as the desire to fulfilling social obligations, or the desire to adjust to social situations, that may account for this chronic social tuning in collectivists to better understand how culture plays a role in stereotyping and attitude transmission.

Stigmas As a Factor in the Workplace, Courtroom, Policies, and Beyond

Ramifications of Stigmas. While my research on interpersonal factors investigates the transmission of stereotypic and egalitarian attitudes, another line of research focuses on the effects that stigmas and stereotypes have on interpersonal interactions, especially interactions in the workplace or courtroom. For instance, in one set of studies, I examined whether thinking about a positive experience with a stigmatized friend or acquaintance influenced perceptions of

discriminatory workplace environments and policies. The results showed that writing about a positive experience with a Black friend actually increased support for more discriminatory workplace environments and policies than writing about a positive experience with a Black acquaintance (Bradley-Gist, King, Skorinko, Hebl, & McKenna, 2010). In other words, thinking about positive experiences with a friend from a stigmatized group increases individuals' sense of moral good, and gives them a license to be more discriminatory in subsequent situations. This can have serious implications for workplace policies.

Looking more specifically at workplace policies, many diversity and anti-discrimination policies place the impetus of discussing one's stigma in the hands of the applicant. However, the ramifications of discussing one's stigma, especially during an interview, were unclear. Thus, I investigated whether acknowledging an overt stigma (e.g., a physical disability) could reduce stereotyping and discrimination. Applicants who acknowledged their stigma sooner in an interview were viewed more favorably and recommended for hire more so than those who acknowledged their stigma later (or not at all) in an interview (Hebl & Skorinko, 2005). Thus, even though acknowledging the disability early may seem rushed to an applicant, the findings from this study suggest that acknowledgments, especially those made early, help stigmatized individuals in an already competitive situation. My students and I are currently following up on this line of research by examining if diversity policies encourage stereotype suppression—and preliminary findings suggest they do! (Skorinko, Eliezer, & Miller, invited manuscript in preparation).

Another arena in which stigmas may have serious consequences on stigmatized individual's outcomes is in the courtroom. I was specifically interested in how crime stereotypes influence mock juror's memories, decisions, and attitudes towards immigration policies. This research showed that certain crimes were associated with different groups of people. More importantly, when the crime was stereotypic in nature (e.g., a White defendant committing a White crime), mock jurors' demonstrated more biased decisions, false memories, and negative attitudes towards immigration than when the crime was not stereotypic in nature (e.g., a Black defendant committing a White crime; Skorinko, John, Spellman, & Dovidio, in preparation). Thus, the stereotypes associated with a crime can have important implications for a defendant—even though jurors are supposed to be impartial.

Stereotype Reduction. In addition to looking at when stigmas may negatively influence decisions, I am also interested in discovering ways to combat these negative ramifications. In one line of research, we applied knowledge from the marketing world to see if we could change attitudes. More specifically, marketing research shows that consumers value products that are expensive more than less expensive items. Stemming from this, we wondered whether alterations in relative ticket pricing could improve consumer's opinions of women's sporting teams. We manipulated whether the women's basketball game ticket price was higher, lower, or equal to the men's ticket price, and found that people undervalued the women's team when their ticket price was less than the men's price. However, raising the price of the women's tickets to be higher than the men's tickets increased the value placed on the team (Hebl, Guiliano, King, Knight, Shapiro, Skorinko, & Wig, 2004)! This research showed that something as subtle as a ticket price can dramatically influence how much we value others. I also wondered whether having something in common with an outgroup member (e.g., sharing an alma mater) would help reduce discrimination. To examine this, faculty members received a CV to review for an assistant professor position. We manipulated the gender, quality (good or very good), and alma mater (same or different) of the candidate. Faculty members recommended hiring the very good

female candidate who shared their alma mater more than any other candidate. However, they recommended hiring the good female candidate who shared their alma mater the *less* than any other candidate (Skorinko, Ruggs, Miller, & Hebl, under review). Taken together, my research on stigmas and stereotypes demonstrates that stigmas greatly influence decisions and perceptions of others. Moreover, stereotyping and stereotype reduction is effected by subtle contextual factors such as value, similarity, and perceived quality.

Conclusion and Future Directions

My research projects will continue to be driven by my desire to understand how these different, and often subtle, factors influence attitudes, decisions, and interactions. While much of my research focuses on understanding how these subtle influences shape perspectives, I am also devoted to research that attempts to understand and develop efforts aimed at reducing social inequality. In particular, I have developed a strong interest in perspective taking and cross cultural differences, and I am excited to continue my research examining how subtle influences, including perspective taking and culture, shape decisions, attitudes, and interactions. Moreover, I am devoted to discovering new techniques to help lead to reductions in social inequality and increase cultural and ethnic understanding.