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Stereotypy in Interpersonal Perception and Intercorrelation between Some Attitude Measures

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STEREOTYPY IN INTERPERSONAL PERCEPTION AND INTERCORRELATION BETWEEN SOME ATTITUDE MEASURES[1]

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A. INTRODUCTION

It has generally been assumed that a person's stereotypes about a group affect his perception of individual members of that group. The only studies that bear on this question have, however, all investigated the effects of stereotypes on the perception of photographs (3), recorded voices (6), or descriptions of people (2). One purpose of the present study was to test the above assumption with the use of live persons as the objects being perceived. Specifically, it was predicted that to the extent that a more definite stereotype exists towards a minority group (people from India) than towards the majority group (Canadians), the majority group member's evaluation of individuals from the minority group would be more dependent upon stereotyped reactions than would evaluations of majority group members. A secondary objective of the present investigation was to determine the intercorrelation between certain attitude measures relevant to interpersonal perception,

B. METHOD
1. Subjects

The Ss were 25 students from an undergraduate psychology class at the University of Western Ontario.

2. Procedure

The *Ss* were tested in two sessions. During the first session, they rated four individuals (two Indians and two Canadians) on 25 semantic differential scales (7) after they were interviewed individually concerning their views on films and books. The four interviewees were male graduate students between the ages of 24 and 30 years. The experimenter knew all four individuals who were quite different from one another. One Indian was very well built, neatly dressed, and rather reticent. He was wearing a turban and a beard and was about 24 years old. The other Indian had no turban and beard. He was rather bulky, talkative, very casually dressed, and was about 30 years old. Of the two Canadians, one was a short, very scientifically minded, graduate student of psychology, and the other was a tall, bald, graduate student in the Department of Philosophy.

To maintain the naturalness of the study the interviews were not completely structured. These four individuals were different from one another and it was in the interest of the study that these differences be conveyed to the subjects. To approximate everyday situations more closely, it was crucial that the subjects see how these four persons would naturally behave.

A week later the same subjects rated "the people from India in general" and "Canadians in general" on the same semantic differential scales used in the first session.

In addition, the subjects also responded to a Likert type rating scale which consisted of items from Dogmatism Scale (8, 9), Ethnocentrism Scale (1), and Attitude Toward Indians Scale (10).

The third task was to choose adjectives from a list (5) that the subjects believed characterized each of the two ethnic groups (Indians and Canadians). They were instructed to add any additional words which they felt necessary, even if they were not included in the list provided.

C. RESULTS

1. Those traits which account for the first most frequent *50* per cent of the choices for Indians were courteous, friendly, conservative, spiritualistic, very religious, artistic, honest, peace-loving, and tradition-loving. Those chosen similarly for Canadians were conservative, honest, friendly, intelligent, imitative, sportsmanlike, pleasure-loving, peace-loving, conventional, practical, materialistic, and reserved. Those traits common to both nationalities were honest, peace-loving, friendly, and conservative.

2. The mean number of words used per subject to characterize Indians and Canadians was 8.36 and 10.00 respectively. The difference between the two means was significant at less than .01 level ($t = 3.72$), indicating that the subjects used a significantly greater number of words to describe Canadians than to describe Indians.

3. The indices[2] of stereotyped perception were significantly lower (more stereotypy) for the Indian than for the Canadian interviewees for 12 ratings out of the 25, significantly higher in no cases.

4. When measures of attitude toward Indians, evaluation[8] of Indians, dogmatism, and ethnocentrism were intercorrelated, five significant relationships emerged, which are, in order of magnitude (see Table 1) : (*a*) a positive correlation between ethnocentrism and dogmatism *(r = .65)*, (*b*) a positive correlation between the evaluation of Indian interviewees, and "attitude toward Indians" {r = .58), (*c*) a positive correlation between the evaluation of Indian interviewees and the evaluation of "Indians in general" (*r* = .52), (*d*) a negative correlation between the evaluation of "Indians in general" and dogmatism (*r* = .44), and (***e)*** a positive correlation between the evaluation of "Indians in general" and "attitude toward Indians" (*r* = .41).

TABLE 1
Correlation Matrix of Attitude Measures

	1	2	3	4	5
Attitude toward Indians	x	41*	.58**	.22	—.07
Evaluation of Indians in general		x	.52**	—.08	—.44*
Evaluation of Indian interviewees			x	.14	.03
Ethnocentrism Scale				x	.65**
Dogmatism Scale					x

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

D. DISCUSSION

Since the actual design of the study involves the comparison of Canadians' perceptual judgments of individuals from India and Canada, it is first necessary to determine whether a more definite stereotype exists among them concerning people from India than concerning Canadians.

Katz and Braly (4) define one index of ethnic stereotypes as those adjectives, most frequently chosen from an adjective checklist, which account for *50* per cent of the group's total selections. They measure the "definiteness" of an ethnic stereotype by the number of adjectives included in the index. They suggest that if a number of subjects agree on the adjectives which describe an ethnic group, then their stereotype of that group is more definite than their stereotype of another group about which there is less agreement. In this study, fewer adjectives were included in the index for "people from India" (nine) than for Canadians (twelve). Although appropriate statistical tests are not available for this index, it is clear that somewhat more agreement existed on what Indians are like than on what Canadians are like. This observation is further supported by the analysis in terms of the mean number of words used per subject to characterize Indians and Canadians. The subjects used a significantly greater number of words to describe Canadians than to describe Indians *(p < .01)*.

Because of this greater definiteness of the Indian stereotype, it is reasonable to expect that the subjects' perception of Indian individuals will be more strongly influenced by the stereotypes than will their perception of Canadians. The results presented in Table 1 tend to confirm this expectation. On 12 out of 25 semantic differential scales, the tendency to stereotype one's perception of Indian individuals was significantly greater than for one's perception of Canadian individuals.

The composite picture suggested by these above-mentioned 12 scales is consistent with the composite stereotype suggested by those adjectives selected from the checklist to characterize people from India. This finding, it should be emphasized, is independent of the design of this study, since the measures of stereotyped perception were concerned with each subject's evaluation (or stereotype) of the outgroup. It appears that although an individual may have private stereotypes about an ethnic group, these stereotypes will not be sufficiently strong to influence his perception of members of that group.

If the above generalization is valid, it may be attributable to the fact that an individual's stereotype which is shared by most members of his group is strengthened because it is frequently reinforced by them, while private stereotypes are generally not reinforced and consequently remain less strong. In situations which allow stereotypes to be elicited, perhaps only those stereotypes which are shared by members of the group are sufficiently strong to withstand the effects of contradictory perceptual cues, while private stereotypes may be disregarded in the light of some contradictory

stimulus information which the subject views as further evidence of the possible inaccuracy of his stereotype.

In the literature it has been implicitly assumed that one's attitude toward an ethnic group reflects his attitude toward the individual members of that group. The results presented in Table 1 tend to support this assumption, although they cast some doubt on other assumptions concerning the nature of attitudes. It is clear that favorable attitudes toward Indians, evaluation of the concept "People from India," and the evaluation of two Indian individuals, are all significantly and positively intercorrelated, suggesting that one's attitude toward Indians is consistent at both the group level and the individual level. The implication is that having ascertained an individual's attitude toward a particular ethnic group, one can make a fairly sound prediction concerning how he will evaluate particular members of that group in situations where he obtains some minimal information about them. The remaining correlations presented in Table 1 strongly suggest the need for further research before any assumptions concerning the nature of attitudes are accepted.

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NOTES

1 A different analysis of a portion of the data discussed here has been published elsewhere (11). The writer wishes to express his sincere appreciation to Dr. R. C. Gardner for his advice and assistance throughout the course of the investigation.

2 On a given trait, a subject's index of stereotyped perception for each interviewee was determined by the formula: $(X - X_g)^2$, where X = the subject's rating of the interviewee, **and** X_g = the subject's rating of the ethnic group to which the interviewee belongs.

3 For this only the scores on those semantic differential scales that seemed to be evaluative in nature were considered.