



Opinion Science Podcast

Hosted by Andy Luttrell

Stereotypes at the Intersection with Chris Petsko

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Andy Luttrell:

Walter Lippmann was an American journalist in the early 20th century. He won a Pulitzer Prize in 1958...and then another one in 1961. And although he did a lot, he's especially known for his views about the role of news in a democracy. Sort of like these days, there were questions looming during Lippman's time about how we can trust a democratic process when the public is so often uninformed...or even misinformed. What's the role of news media in a functioning democracy? Those sorts of things.

In 1922 he wrote an influential book called *Public Opinion* where he explored these ideas. And it was in that book that he coined the term stereotype. Here's how he opens Part III of the book, which is titled "Stereotypes":

"Each of us lives and works on a small part of the earth's surface, moves in a small circle, and of these acquaintances knows only a few intimately ... Inevitably our opinions cover a bigger space, a longer reach of time, a greater number of things, than we can directly observe. They have, therefore, to be pieced together out of what others have reported and what we can imagine."

The main point of the book, as he writes, is that "The world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. It has to be explored, reported, and imagined." But this means that we end up relying on what he calls the "pictures inside our heads." We have a picture of war inside our heads. We have a picture of poverty inside our heads. But these pictures, naturally, are distortions, based on limited information that we're getting from the news, among other places.

So that's where we get the modern meaning of the word stereotype—Lippmann's point was about how stereotypes are basically the epitome of public opinion, which raises questions about democracy and media, but the use of that word has evolved a little bit, and now it mostly describes the assumptions people make about social groups. There are stereotypes that Jewish people are stingy, that Americans are loud, that Asian kids are good at math. It's the same idea—pictures inside our heads, abstractions based on limited, biased information. It's the knowledge we think we have about a person when we learn their race, their sexual orientation, their occupation, their political affiliation, whatever.

And this raises an intriguing question about our psychology. Because everyone you meet is defined by a whole bunch of identities—everyone can be thought of in terms of their race, or their gender, or their nationality, or even by a specific combination of those identities. Lots of possible pictures inside our heads. But which picture comes into clearest focus in the moment?

You're listening to Opinion Science, the show about our opinions, where they come from, and how they change. I'm Andy Luttrell. And I was really excited to talk to today's guest, Chris Petsko. Chris is a postdoc at Duke University, but before that he got his PhD in social psychology at Northwestern University. I've known Chris for a while, and he's the kind of guy you're always excited to see at a conference because he's super sharp and super friendly. And over the last few years, he's been developing what he calls a lens-based account of intersectional stereotyping. It's basically a way of thinking about when people jump to one stereotype or another when forming an impression of someone.

And we'll talk more about this in the conversation, but the idea of intersectional stereotyping is just that for example, someone might be thought of primarily as a woman, primarily as an Asian American person, or as the intersection: an Asian-American woman.

Anyway, we talk about all this stuff—the big picture and the minutiae. It's a fun conversation, and we jump straight in, so here's me and Chris Petsko talking about a lens model of intersectional stereotyping...

Andy Luttrell:

You know, one of the things that I find interesting about it is it's framed very much as this novel approach to understanding how intersectional identities get wrapped up in stereotyping, but my read of it actually is that it's more like a clear theory of stereotyping and social categories. And oh, it also happens to nicely account for this intersectional thing. But like ultimately, even if no one was paying attention to intersectionality, the model still is a contribution, right? Would you say that that's the case?

Chris Petsko:

I think so, yeah. I thought of the lens model as coming from an older theoretical tradition of thinking about stereotyping and how we process the people around us that made a clear contribution to reconciling the messy literature on intersectional stereotyping. But you're absolutely right that the model is broader than that particular... than expecting just that particular phenomenon. I think it can really explain all kinds of things related to personal perception, and stereotyping, and attitudes.

Andy Luttrell:

So, what's the ultimate challenge that this lens model aims to help clarify? What is it psychologically that we know people are doing but until now, we didn't have a firm grasp on how it was unfolding?

Chris Petsko:

Well, okay, so basically for the last 15 to 20 years, social psychologists have been increasingly studying intersectional stereotyping, and they've been basically doing it in a bottom-up kind of

way, where they ask the question, “How does this particular manifestation of sexism differ depending on a person’s racial group,” or, “How does this manifestation of racism differ depending on a person’s sexual orientation group?” And when you explore the topic of intersectional stereotyping in a bottom-up way like that, what you end up with is a literature that has contradictory findings that are difficult to reconcile from the prevalent theoretical assumptions in this research area.

So, basically one thing that we couldn’t really account for was why is it the case that sometimes we see evidence of intersectional stereotyping happening, whereas in other moments, we see that people seem to sharpen their focus on just one identity, like race? And the intersection in these moments doesn’t seem to be mattering. And the lens model provides an answer to that question, which is what’s happening here is people have intersectional lenses in their minds, but they also have simplistic lenses, and you would expect intersectional stereotyping to unfold when people are using an intersectional lens for viewing others, but you would expect it to completely fall to the wayside and to be replaced with something simpler when people use a simpler lens. For example, the lens of race.

Andy Luttrell:

Yeah, so to understand what that all means, maybe we back up and say what is intersectionality. No, no, no. That was the right answer, but it reminded me we should probably clarify what this intersectionality concept means. So, what do we mean? And what’s interesting about it to me is how much it had been brewing in other fields before psychologists took it seriously, so like what’s the idea here? What is the bold claim of the intersectional framework?

Chris Petsko:

Okay. Right. Okay, so I want to say up front that the way that psychologists study intersectionality is more narrow than the way the term was meant to be used originally. So, originally intersectionality was a concept that came out of Black feminist scholarship in both the humanities and in legal scholarship, and it was meant to be a framework for thinking about the world in which you number one, recognize the fact that hierarchical institutions can sort of mutually inform one another. For example, the idea is that like sexist institutions serve to uphold racism and racist institutions serve to uphold sexism. And in which you, number two, question whether western systems of knowledge and western institutions can adequately capture the complexity of what it means to be multiply marginalized.

So, that was sort of the original framework. It was meant to be very broad. It was meant to be sort of a postmodern critical framework for thinking about legal studies, for thinking about institutions, for thinking about knowledge, and for thinking in particular about who gets left out of those spaces. In psychology, we use a little bit... a bit of a sort of more streamlined definition. In psychological science, I would define intersectionality as an approach in which you question whether psychological processes depend on the multiple groups that a person belongs to.

Andy Luttrell:

And what would be an example of thinking about multiple groups, or like the notion of identity? Let’s get even more to the bottom, right? The notion of identity and what it means.

Chris Petsko:

So, when I refer to groups here, I'm mostly referring to demographic groups. A person's racial group, a person's gender group, a person's sexual orientation group. And you can take an intersectional approach to psychological science in any domain of psychological study. People who do clinical assessment could look at whether diagnoses of depression depend both on the race and the gender of the person that they're interviewing rather than just race, for example. Or you can study this stuff in the context of stereotyping, which is what I do, and you can ask whether racial stereotypes depend not just on a person's race, but also on whether they are gay versus straight.

Andy Luttrell:

And so, the idea is like if we didn't have this appreciation for the fact that we are a product of several dimensions of identity at the same time, we would overlook some nuance that otherwise could exist, right? So, like if I'm trying to understand people's judgments of a Black woman applying for a job and I just go, "Well, we have these theories of racial bias. That should explain what is likely to happen when this woman applies for a job." So, are there examples like that? If you sort of could unpack why wouldn't just a broad strokes racial bias approach to understanding that question be enough? Or even... That's just one example, right? People have looked at this in other domains, too. But just to be concrete about what do we... What could happen?

Chris Petsko:

Okay. Yeah. So, basically you hit the nail on the head with what this addresses. So, essentially we don't really know to what extent psychological processes generalize across all people unless we take an intersectional look at those processes. We don't know whether, as you pointed out, racial bias evenly extends to both Black men and Black women, or whether the experiences of Black women might be categorically distinct from those that Black men face. So, the contribution of intersectionality in general is like an epistemological one. It helps us create a psychological science that is truly generalizable.

And to get to your second point, there are definitely situations where the kind of stereotyping you see for an intersection can be super surprising from what you would have expected based on the dimensions of identities along which a person is marginalized. An example that I've used before is like... So, if you look at the data on audit studies, where you send resumes out across the study, and where you make it so that a random half of these resumes uses a name that implies that a person is a Black man versus a resume that implies that a person is a white man, what you see in these audit studies is that systematically applicants who have stereotypically Black sounding names receive lower callback rates than applicants who have stereotypically white sounding names.

So, we know that there's a racial bias in hiring against Black men relative to white men. We know that if you do these same audit studies, but this time you send out resumes across the country and they all have white men's names, but now you make it so that a random half of them are implicated in being gay... The way that we do that is we typically say that the person was the president of their LGBT Alliance in college. We know from these kinds of audit studies, as well, that callback rates are lower for gay applicants than they are for ostensibly heterosexual applicants. But the limited experimental data that we have on how people stereotype applicants who are both gay and

Black suggests that actually in the context of hiring, it may be the case that gay Black men are viewed more favorably than men who are gay but not Black, or who are Black but not gay.

So, that's a really clear-cut example of like what you would expect based on just the simple knowledge of how racism works and how heterosexism works doesn't necessarily compute with what we ultimately see about how a member of an intersectional group tends to be stereotyped. At least in this one particular experimental context.

Andy Luttrell:

Yeah, because there's like a quantitative theory of it where you just go like, "Oh. Well, there are two marks against this person based on the racial bias literature, based on the sexual bias literature, therefore we should expect that applicant to be absolutely untouched in the market."

Chris Petsko:

Exactly. And you know what? That probably happens in a lot of scenarios. It just doesn't always happen. Yeah. That hypothesis that you just raised, we often call that the double jeopardy hypothesis, which is like if you're marginalized along one group membership, as well as along another, then it stands to reason that you probably face some kind of doubly intense marginalization relative to if you were only marginalized along one of those groups.

Andy Luttrell:

Whereas the intersectional theory approach is to say that there's something qualitatively different. It's not a quantitative combination of marks against you, but you actually occupy a qualitatively different category in people's minds.

Chris Petsko:

Exactly. With its own set of stereotype content, with its own set of evaluations that they might have toward you.

Andy Luttrell:

So, what your work then wants to do is go like, "Well, I'm evaluating this person for a job. Do I exercise a racial bias that might occur in me? Do I exercise a sexual orientation bias that I have within me? Or am I leaping to that qualitatively distinct intersectional theory in my brain about what it is that this applicant is like?" And so, to sort of preface where your perspective is, what were the other ways that people have talked about how an individual would approach that kind of judgment scenario?

Chris Petsko:

Well, let me first maybe start by saying what my model would predict, and then I could possibly compare that with the other perspectives. Okay, so basically I've been creating this lens model of intersectional stereotyping, and the basic argument of the model is that we all have a repertoire of lenses in our heads that we can use for thinking about the people around us. Some of these lenses bring just one identity into focus. Race by itself, or gender by itself, or age by itself. And then other lenses bring specific intersections of identities into focus. Maybe race and gender in combination or race and sexual orientation in combination.

But the argument of the lens model is that people probably only use one lens at a time in a social environment. And what this means is if you're in a social environment that forces you to use the lens of race, you should be exhibiting a racial bias, but probably no bias in these moments on the basis of sexual orientation. If in contrast, you were in a situation that caused you to use the lens of sexual orientation, you should do the reverse. Exhibit in this moment evidence of a sexual orientation-based bias, but maybe not any evidence whatsoever of a race-based bias.

And then if you were using an intersectional lens specifically, here we would expect these intersectional patterns to unfold, the kind like I told you about previously. So, according to my model, whether you exhibit just generic racial bias, or generic sexual orientation bias, or some kind of intersectional bias, might depend just on the job. You know, if it's a job for which you think race is really a relevant criteria to pay attention to, you're probably gonna use the lens of race and you might overlook orientation. If a job seems like it's like... If it's a job for the president of an LGBT Council at a university, you might in this moment think that sexual orientation is relevant, and here you might overlook race. And if it's sort of a more generic position, like the one I told you about previously in the experimental data on this topic, you might just sort of inherently use an intersectional lens which could lead to something very different from if you had been using sort of a race lens by itself or a sexual orientation lens by itself.

So, that's what my model predicts about this situation. The thing that makes this particular perspective different from what else is out there is that basically the other perspectives either tend to suggest that we inevitably pay attention to one identity more than others, or they suggest that we inevitably pay attention to everything at once, and I'm saying I don't really think either of those is right. I think it's actually that whether we pay attention to everything at once or to something in particular is all dependent on which lens the context has brought into focus.

Andy Luttrell:

So, the version where people only pay attention to one, my impression of it was that it's also just like there's a hierarchy of labels in my Rolodex, and if race is relevant, that's always the one that I'm gonna go to. As opposed to like if it's lower on the chain it just never gets touched, right? Predominantly people are biased in terms of a few distinct categories and the other ones only come into play if they're super unique in that situation.

Chris Petsko:

Yeah, that's exactly right. Yeah. I mean, there are multiple different theoretical perspectives that have argued for something like this, and they don't all agree with each other on what are the essential categories. So, for example, there's one hypothesis called the ethnic prominence hypothesis, and this hypothesis is that no matter what, ethnicity is going to take prevalence in your mind when you're thinking about other people, when you're forming an evaluation of them, when you're thinking about how to stereotype them, and that other things are less essential. But evolutionary perspectives argue kind of the opposite. They argue that here, what's essential is a person's ostensible sex group and a person's ostensible age group, but for evolutionary models race is not quite as essential. It shouldn't be the kind of thing that inevitably shapes your impression.

So, there are different variations of these models, but yeah, the central argument is that... You're exactly right. They argue that there are certain identities that are just at the top of the hierarchy. They should play a huge role in shaping how we think about people around us.

Andy Luttrell:

The evolutionary model makes sense, like the prediction makes sense, in that there's a function to it, right? Presumably, there's some adaptive reason why we would pay attention to these dimensions all the time.

Chris Petsko:

Like mating goals would be the evolutionary argument for why those two. Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

For the ethnicity dominance one, is there a strong sense of why that should necessarily rise to the top?

Chris Petsko:

I truly don't know enough about that hypothesis to say for sure. I will say I've been calling it the ethnic prominence hypothesis in particular, because it's a hypothesis. It's not like... Whereas the evolutionary, like the theory of evolution, is what explains the other, whereas I'm not sure that the ethnic prominence hypothesis is a full-fledged theory that has an explanation as to why we do that. I think it's sort of observing that there do seem to be contexts in which race looks like it's the most salient.

Andy Luttrell:

Yeah. And what's cool, too, about I think the lens model, and I want to ask you about the name in a second-

Chris Petsko:

Oh, sure. Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

... is that yeah, it's a one at a time, right? And it's if, for whatever reason, I'm leaping to gender in this moment, it means that I'm not accounting for the other things that characterize this person that I'm evaluating, right?

Chris Petsko:

Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

It's I pick my one, I got my ticket, and that's the one that I'm going with.

Chris Petsko:

Yep. This is the ticket for right now. Yep.

Andy Luttrell:

And in terms of the data, the evidence that you have for this, so like how do we know that this happens, that people use one category at the expense of the other?

Chris Petsko:

The most compelling data that I have so far come from a couple of experiments in the paper you're referring to that used the implicit association test, I think. So, in one of these experiments, what we were measuring was whether or not people would exhibit a pattern of implicit gender stereotyping that we usually see all around the world, where people in most locations are faster to associate men with science than women. We were looking at that particular bias, it's a very robust bias, and our question was might that pattern of stereotyping depend on whether or not you are using the lens of gender. And what we also asked was what if you stopped using the lens of gender? What if you started using the lens of age? Might gender stereotyping completely disappear? This kind of stereotyping that emerges all over the world, might it completely disappear, and might it be replaced with a different kind of stereotyping that's based on age? And we found evidence of that.

What we basically found in that particular study was that if we told people pay attention to gender, go ahead and focus on who's a man and who's a woman, what we found here was that in these moments, people exhibited a gender bias such that they associated men with science more than women. They did so to equal degrees, regardless of whether the women and men were older versus younger. But if we instead said to them, "We don't want you to pay attention to gender. We want you to go ahead and just focus on age." Here, what we found was that if we look at their reaction times, they no longer exhibit any gender bias whatsoever. No longer is it the case that they associate men with science more than women, but instead what we actually saw in that particular paradigm was an age bias.

Here, we didn't expect this, but here what we actually found was that people seem to have an automatic association that links older folks with science more readily than younger folks. So, we did that experiment. We actually followed up with a second experiment that tested the same conceptual question but with a totally different set of target groups.

In the second experiment, what we looked at was how do people stereotype people who are both Black and children, so we looked at that intersection of both age and race. And there is evidence from another research lab that there are moments where sometimes people pay attention to race so strongly that they exhibit as much racial bias against Black kids as they do toward Black adults. So, that's already been established. Sometimes it looks like race is just coming so sharply into focus that we don't see an intersectional pattern. We really see this really scary, alarming pattern where kids are not even recognized as kids. They just face racial bias.

So, what we looked at in my second experiment was whether that also depends on what people are paying attention to, and what we found was that if we had people categorize Black and white kids and adults by their racial groups, we replicated the pattern I just described to you. Here, we found that people associated Black individuals with weapons more quickly than white individuals, and we found that they did that to equal degrees for both children and adults. But what we also found

is that if people pay attention to age, that racial bias completely goes away and now what you see is that people associate adults with weapons more readily than children.

So, in a sense here, kind of what's happening is that people just don't notice race at all when they pay attention to age. And if anything, what they do in these moments is they correctly categorize children as children, and in a sense, they associate them with innocence, and it's harder for them to associate them with weapons.

Andy Luttrell:

Yeah, so I'm trying to think about what does that mean for the original finding, right? So, like the how you would originally interpret that idea is just like people approach, or even you might be tempted to segment out the groups and say that people have a bias specifically that pairs Black children with weapons more than white children. And what you're saying is it's not necessarily specific to... That's the intersectional version, right? That would imply that that's something that comes with its own baked-in stereotype. But instead, what's happening is people are drawing upon sort of a generic racial stereotype and they're not even in that moment bringing to mind the fact that these are kids.

Chris Petsko:

Right.

Andy Luttrell:

That's kind of what you're saying, right?

Chris Petsko:

Yeah, basically I... So, the paradigm that I just described and the data that I have only speaks to what happens if you use the lens of race versus age. It doesn't really speak to what happens if you're using an intersectional lens. I actually don't know what people's intersectional lenses of Black children specifically might be, but what I do know is that when people are motivated to use the lens of race, they will forget to notice whether children are children. Yeah. Yeah.

Yeah, and I think this can happen to everybody. I think everybody can be in certain social contexts reduced in the eyes of others down to something really simple. And sometimes something really dangerous. Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

So, what does that mean? I mean, the fact that the original research found only the race bias suggests that there's something that either as a dominant category, or that activity of doing this IAT evoked race.

Chris Petsko:

I can tell you I think what happened. I mean, so in the original paper that I'm aware of, this was a paper by Andy Todd and his colleagues, that particular paper used a paradigm called the weapons identification procedure, and in this procedure what you're doing is you quickly show people a face, and then after that you show them an object, and the object is either a weapon or a tool. And you measure how quickly people recognize weapons as weapons. And the finding on the task is

that when we use crimes before those weapons that are either Black men's faces or white men's faces, what we typically see on that task is that people are quicker to recognize weapons as weapons when they've been followed by Black men's faces than white men's faces.

In the paper that I'm referring to, Andy followed up and looked at whether or not the same thing would happen if the faces were of five-year-old children, white versus Black children, and he found that there was an equivalent level of racial bias toward these children as there was toward fully-grown adults. But the reason I think that pattern emerges in that particular context is because the paradigm itself is related to the concept of crime, and the concept of crime in our culture is much more stereotypically linked with the concept of race than it is with the concept of age. So, I actually think that the reason we see a pattern like that unfolding where race appears to dominate judgment is because the paradigm itself makes the lens of race more salient than it makes the other lenses salient.

Andy Luttrell:

So, how then do we apply this? Oh, let me go back to the point I was gonna make before, which is the name, the lens model.

Chris Petsko:

Oh, sure.

Andy Luttrell:

That was not always the name that you had been giving to this, right?

Chris Petsko:

No.

Andy Luttrell:

Okay.

Chris Petsko:

No. It was always called the lens. So, it always was a lens model. At first I wanted to call it intersectional categorization theory, so when I wrote my dissertation, so the lens model draws really heavily on the ideas that come out of self-categorization theory and social identity theory. I really love those two theories and I love the whole European tradition of thinking about stereotyping, and prejudice, and intergroup dynamics, so I thought like wouldn't... And you know, other people, like Michael Hogg has created spinoffs of self-categorization theory that also kind of use the name, so for example he has something called uncertainty identity theory and the social identity theory in leadership.

So, I was like, "Okay. Well, if Michael Hogg has done it, maybe I can do it. Maybe I could call this like intersectional categorization theory." So, that was the original title that I had in mind for it when I was finishing up my PhD and trying to impress people with a cool dissertation title, but at the crux of the model, the model always used the metaphor of social lenses to explain the complicated business of stereotyping. So, that was always integral to it, and essentially I just

dropped the part of the title that wasn't gonna be helpful or informative to people and I just kept the lens part, because I think that's really the heart of the model.

Andy Luttrell:

So, if I'm to press the metaphor, like what are you picturing when you talk about these as lenses? Like what does it mean that these are lenses?

Chris Petsko:

Well, I guess listeners can't see this. I'm gonna use my hands. I kind of think of like you sort of have this cognitive repertoire of lenses in your minds, and in a particular social situation, one of these lenses comes sharply into focus, almost like it's standing between you and the targets of your perceptions, and in my view it sort of constrains what it is that you pay attention to about the targets of your perceptions. And it sort of causes everything else, every other demographic feature that's irrelevant to the lens, to become sort of a blurry background feature in the moment.

So, I think of it as something that's sort of... Lenses sharpen our focus on certain attributes, and they simultaneously cause us to lose focus on others. When you use the lens of gender, you sharpen your focus on gender. You exhibit gender bias, gender stereotyping. But in these moments, you allow your attention to a person's race or their ability status to become blurred background features.

That's the way I see the metaphor in my head.

Andy Luttrell:

Yeah. I also picture a little bit, you know, when you go to the eye doctor, and they have that massive Steampunk apparatus that comes over your face-

Chris Petsko:

Yep.

Andy Luttrell:

And they're switching out the lenses, right? It's one at a time and can I see what's in front of me or can I not see what's in front of me.

Chris Petsko:

Exactly. Yeah. No, that's really-

Andy Luttrell:

So, sort of like-

Chris Petsko:

That's a great way to explain the one at a time piece of it. Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Andy Luttrell:

And a hybrid of that and then like macro photography, right? I think that's kind of what you're saying, where it's like there's a depth of field, and my lens is gonna zoom in only on the two

centimeters in front of me, versus four centimeters, and whether I'm focused on this slice of the world means I can't see the other slices of the world. I can only see this one.

Chris Petsko:

You know what's funny about this metaphor, is I... Okay, so when I posted about this lens model online for the first time, people kept saying really positive things about it and I felt really happy about that, but then I had one internet troll who was like, "The concept of a lens is a really stupid metaphor. The metaphor you mean to use is the metaphor of a filter." And at the time, I was like, "Well, forget that guy. He sucks." And I just didn't really think about it. I think I screenshotted it and I shared that to my friends.

And then I did a job interview not too long ago and I was talking with a couple of cognitive psychologists who study attention, and by the way, this all jives really well with what we've known about attention for a very long time. We have limited attentional resources and if you, they say, the parlance that they use is that if you configure the attentional system to focus on certain kinds of stimuli, you will do so so strongly that you will completely overlook other things that previously would have been really distracting to you.

So, like what I've applied to the topic of stereotyping is very much something that we know seems to hold up just about how the mind works more generally. But in any event, I'm talking to them about the lens model and I'm telling them about the metaphor, and I'm sitting in the car with the chair of the department. He's driving me to dinner. And he's like, "My one issue with the lens model is that you kind of used the wrong metaphor. I think what you really mean is filter."

Andy Luttrell:

I found my troll.

Chris Petsko:

So, I was like, "No!" So, yeah, maybe somebody who's a specialist in cognitive psychology wouldn't agree with the metaphor, but basically I chose that because I think it's relatable. I think it's accessible. I think it kind of gets the point across that I'm talking about the process of person perception, and I just like it.

Andy Luttrell:

Yeah. My alternative metaphor that I come up with is like a... You know, like those old recipe boxes that grandmothers have, of little index cards with recipes written on it, and it's a little box, and it's filled with them. And I sort of imagine like each of those index cards is a social category and written on that card is a bunch of assumptions I have about this category, and when I come to meet someone, I'm forced to pick one of these cards. I can only follow one recipe at a time. I can't make multiple things. I have to pull one recipe.

Chris Petsko:

No, no. You gotta pick the intersectional recipe, or the gender recipe, yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

Right. And what is important I think about it comes to... Not to say like please rewrite your paper with my metaphor, but-

Chris Petsko:

No, go ahead. Please. I will.

Andy Luttrell:

But what it raises, and the lens one does this just fine, is that you have to have that card in your box to use it. You have to have that lens in wherever you're storing your lenses to use it.

Chris Petsko:

Yes.

Andy Luttrell:

Which brings up the question that always has made me wonder about the intersectional perspective, which is where do we draw the line, right? My impression of some of the other work in that world is it's qualitative and you cannot understand someone until you know the exact qualitative distinction about that unique configuration of identities. But there has to be some logical limit before I go like, "Where is the meaningful cutoff for people?"

Chris Petsko:

Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

Is it at age and race? Okay, I could account for that. Is it age, race, and sexual orientation? Okay, maybe people have stereotypes about Black gay men, and then is it then further moderated by how old you are? So, what I wonder is do I need to have that recipe card in my box for it to be useful at all? And what happens if I don't have the recipe card?

Chris Petsko:

Or like how complicated can the recipe become before you couldn't even be putting it on a card?

Andy Luttrell:

Yeah, right. Before I go like, "This is just I'm improving a recipe."

Chris Petsko:

Okay. All right. So, let me... There's a couple things to unpack. I'll start with the question of where lenses come from. So, I'm not a developmental person, but there is a really fantastic developmental perspective that I write about in my paper called developmental intergroup theory, and essentially my understand of that theory is that it argues that children are socialized from a really early age, both through active socialization processes, but also just through implicit learning based on what they see in the wider world. Which groups, which social groups are the important bases of sorting the people around them? And it comes from everywhere. It comes from teachers saying, "Good morning, boys and girls," at the start of each class time, to them driving through neighborhoods and noticing that we live in a world of de facto racial segregation in which you can

see certain neighborhoods being visibly better resourced or less resourced than others, and you can see in your mind whether or not that appears to correlate with people's ethnic background or their racial background.

And even if adults don't specifically talk about race, kids might right away be like, "Well, that seems like it matters." And so, basically my assumption about lens, where lenses come from, is that they come through these basic socialization acquisition processes. If we live in a world where we believe that something matters as an important bases for sorting others, we may come to form really clear-cut stereotypes related to that particular identity.

So, that's sort of the thought I had about where it comes from, and then I believe that we really only maintain the recipe card or lenses in our repertoires to the extent that they continue to serve a function for us. Like if we lived in some kind of world where there was true parity between people who were straight and who were queer, it might become less and less relevant to regularly sort the people around you based on their sexual orientation groups, and you could imagine that some people start to throw away the recipe. So, that's the thought about where these things come from.

The second issue that you raised, which was like the question of what are the upper limits of intersectional stereotyping, that's a harder question to answer. I basically think that in principle, intersections could be... In principle, they could be infinitely complex. I think in practice, it's probably rare for people to have clear cut crystallized stereotypes in their minds about what queer, Black, able-bodied women who are Midwesterners are like, you know? I think if you make the intersection complex enough, at a certain point people are no longer gonna... They won't have lived in a world where they had enough socialization experiences to have a clear understanding of that particular subgroup of people, so that's one issue with sort of the what happens when identities become too complex.

Another issue with it is that at a certain point, if you let identities become increasingly, increasingly, increasingly complex, you have to also ask the question at what point am I no longer even stereotyping somebody, and at what point am I just individuating them. Seeing them as the individual that they are rather than putting them into a box. If I'm paying attention to everything, you could argue that I'm actually not stereotyping them at all, but what I'm actually doing instead is seeing them as the individuals that they are.

So, I've talked a lot. My basic sort of view on this is that more frequently discussed intersections within a culture are probably more likely to be prevalent bases along which we categorize and think about the people around us. I think most people probably do have a race by gender lens in their minds. A clear-cut understanding of what Black women are stereotyped as being like, for example. At least in the United States. I'm less confident about whether they have more complicated intersectional understandings of what it means to be a Black woman than that.

So, that's what I think from the perceiver end of things. I have one more thing to say about this. I'm sorry for going on.

Andy Luttrell:

No, I asked you.

Chris Petsko:

The other thought, though, is that I do think what the lens model talks about is how we perceive other people. What it doesn't talk about is how we perceive ourselves or our own life narratives. I do believe that people's life narratives, like the sort of complex world in which they live, the location of the universe that they habit, I do believe that that is shaped in potentially infinitely complex ways as a function of every identity you harbor. And that's because time happens. There are moments where you become just your racial group in the eyes of others, or just an intersection in the eyes of others, or the individual that you are in the eyes of others, and it bounces around for you as a function of the unique constellation of social identities that you inhabit.

So, even if the model can't speak clearly to moments in which people use super, super, super complex lenses, that doesn't mean that the experiences of individuals living in the world isn't itself super, super, super complex.

Andy Luttrell:

Okay. Great.

Chris Petsko:

Sorry-

Andy Luttrell:

And then, so I have two thoughts in response to that, and one is in response to that specific thing that you just said, which I was wondering about the self-categorization part, right? Because so much of it was inspired by that. And I wonder if we bring it back to that, is the implication that like in this moment, I can see myself as an intersectional identity, right? Like white, and male, and that intersection is how I view myself in this moment to the exclusion of other things that also characterize me. Is that the implication? That even when my actual reality, as you mentioned, is a product of all the many things that make me who I am, but as I perceive myself in this moment, as I make a prediction about whether I will be successful at something, as I'm about to take a math exam in a stereotype threat context, as I think about myself, does the same lens model apply?

Chris Petsko:

I think so. I think in certain ways it does, yeah. Yeah, to the example that you just raised, Margaret Shih has that really famous experiment showing that if undergraduate East Asian women think about themselves in terms of their gender, they experience stereotype threat. If they think of themselves in terms of their ethnic background, they experience not stereotype threat. But if anything, sort of a stereotype lift. So, definitely I do believe that these compartmentalized processes of thinking of other people can be processes that we apply to ourselves, but that's just my theoretical opinion. I don't have good data on that.

Yeah, so I think so is my short answer.

Andy Luttrell:

And so, the other things that in terms of the stereotype part and judging others, the intersectional identity has to be a category label that carries some meaning, right? Like you're saying? But maybe that isn't true of everyone, right? And so, I'm kind of wondering what happens when people are encouraged to use that intersectional label for someone, but they do not have any assumptions? It sort of reminds me of these issues in public opinion where we go, "I'm answering a survey. You've asked my opinion about the war in this country. I have no idea. I have no information. Nevertheless, I can concoct an opinion in this moment based on what comes to mind as aroused by that question."

So, I just wonder if there's a process of like stereotype integration that people have lay theories about, like I guess it will be an additive quantitative version of this if I don't already have a qualitative category.

Chris Petsko:

I think you hit the nail on the head. Yeah. I think that in these moments, or what I thought of when you were raising that question was those experiments that I think Ziva Kunda did on what people think about Harvard-educated carpenters. So, you take two totally different categories, and you combine them and just see what people do, and they generate new creative content to try and make sense of the different category labels.

Yeah, basically though, what I was gonna say is I think that they do do some sort of category integration like you're describing, and there's really great theoretical models that explain this process. I think Jon Freeman's dynamic interactive model of person construal is a really great example of this. Basically, in that perspective, if you encounter somebody but you don't have a particular intersectional stereotype per se, but you recognize their race and their gender, you could allow in the moment both their race and their gender to constrain in some kind of parallel constraint fashion the ultimate impression that you have of that person. So, yeah, I do think that if you don't have the intersectional stereotype, you probably use whatever's available to you at hand, and you kind of try and mentally integrate it, sometimes in ways that could be surprising like the Harvard-educated carpenters.

Andy Luttrell:

Which means also that that category can capture my attention. That intersectional category can capture someone's attention even absent a prepared stereotype response, right?

Chris Petsko:

Yeah. Possibly.

Andy Luttrell:

If you think about the ways that you outline why might someone pay attention to this category at the exclusion of the other, one is like what is it that makes them distinct in this moment from the social context? Who is saying... I'm forgetting. You could expand on these better than I could.

Chris Petsko:

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Andy Luttrell:

But is it possible that people could attend to an intersectional category even if they don't have any real backlog?

Chris Petsko:

Probably. That's probably how intersectional stereotypes form, like you have to start from a place. So, you're a kid, you don't know anything yet, and you're recognizing all the different ways in which people are segregated and hierarchically organized, and you over time start to come up... I mean, you might first start with very general groupings of people. Men and women and your perceptions of men and women, and your perceptions of white individuals versus Black individuals, but then eventually you start to sort of have more exposure to more complexity of the human experience, and you start to form intersectional stereotypes, and I would be willing to wager that to get to that stage, and having crystallized intersectional stereotypes, you have to start with the stage that you brought up. Which is where you got this new person, who's a new intersection, and you're just trying to integrate the best that you can what it is that you know about this person in a stereotypic kind of way.

Andy Luttrell:

Which is a natural segue to ask what's the future of this work, right? What is left undone? We said... I don't know if it was before we started this, but that-

Chris Petsko:

Well, okay, so basically at this stage, what I'm basically doing as a scientist is I'm wildly speculating about a model that really only has a couple of experiments of support so far. So, a few basic extensions of this are just continuing to test the basic assumptions of the model in the context of intersectional stereotyping. I'd love to do this in contexts that are more applied settings, as well, like I told you before that there's that example where sometimes people exhibit more favorable hiring evaluations of gay Black men than they do of Black men who aren't gay or of gay men who aren't Black. That should depend on which lens we're using, so it'd be nice if I could get in there and sort of show that that particular finding probably depends a lot on the position that you're hiring for, or what has been made temporarily salient to you. That's one thing.

The direction that I'm the most excited about for this model, though, was actually spurred to me by a person who was a reviewer on the paper. The person who was a reviewer on the paper was like, "Okay, so you showed that sometimes racial bias just completely flatlines when people pay attention to age. Could this be a tool for antibias interventions?" And at first I went to my co-authors, and I was like, "What should I say? I feel like we should say don't use this as an antibias tool. There's not enough data to stand behind that as a real possibility." But then we talked about it more and I ended up thinking in principle... Okay, so what I didn't want people to do was I didn't want people to try and design interventions where essentially you try to get them to stop being racist by getting them to attend to a different demographic group.

I don't think it's super helpful if you try to get people to stop being racist, but maybe start being ageist, because that's less problematic.

Andy Luttrell:

Right. Why be racist when you can be sexist?

Chris Petsko:

Right. Exactly. Yeah, I didn't want that situation. But then as we talked more about what a lens could sharpen your focus on, what we realized was that in principle, any identity could serve as the basis for a lens. And these could be demographic groups, but they could also be other things, like the shared professional identity that you and your coworkers have. You and I are both social psychologists and we could in the moment come to view each other through that lens, and we're probably both sort of doing that a bit right now. And the prediction of the model is that if I was to make this particular lens related to our shared identity salient enough, then you and I should stop caring at all about the things that divide us.

And so, I think that that is a super cool idea and it's not even necessarily in the realm of intersectional stereotyping. It's more just like a basic application of the lens model to just general stereotyping and discrimination. But I'd love to see if that ends up being the case, because I think it could be really compelling if it were.

Andy Luttrell:

It's just reminding me when I did the episode on the contact hypothesis for this, one of the origins of the notion that we could sort of ease racial bias through contact was in World War II, when Black and white soldiers were fighting alongside each other. There were like constraints in the military, they had to combine troops together. Ordinarily, there were Black troops, there were white troops, they didn't integrate, but they kind of just were forced to make it happen. And everyone was worried like, "Oh, this is gonna be a train wreck. Everyone's gonna be at each other's throats." No big deal. Got along fine.

So, that is evidence that like, "Oh, bring people together and these prejudices will ease." But there is some indication that when these white soldiers went home, they didn't... This attitude did not persist or generalize. And it could just be because in this moment, to the exclusion of race, I'm thinking only about our shared identity as Americans fighting in this war.

Chris Petsko:

Right.

Andy Luttrell:

But take that identity away, take that lens out of my tool kit when I go back home and the war's over. I have no good reason to bring that back into the equation.

Chris Petsko:

I think that's exactly right. That's what I was gonna respond to you if you hadn't said it. Yeah, I think it's like-

Andy Luttrell:

Sorry, I should have let you.

Chris Petsko:

No, it's okay. This is your podcast. I mean, yeah, I think you're in this environment that makes the shared identity salient, and it does. It does so to the exclusion of race. And then like you said, you go back into the wider world, and that lens isn't chronically salient anymore. And so, racism comes back.

Yeah, so that's another thing that is worth critiquing the lens model over, which is that it can never be a permanent solution to the problem of stereotyping. At best, what it can be leveraged for is getting rid of problematic stereotypes and replacing them with things that could be more favorable, like positive feelings you have toward professional ingroup members or something. But at the end of the day, no matter what, you're always stereotyping in the lens model. The lens model doesn't answer the question that other people try to answer with their models, which is like when do we individuate versus stereotyping altogether? And that might actually be the more fruitful direction to explore when it comes to antibias interventions.

Andy Luttrell:

Very cool. I will keep my eyes out for whatever new is coming down the pipeline, but I just wanted to say thanks for taking the time to share all this.

Chris Petsko:

Thank you so much. This has been a lot of fun.

Andy Luttrell:

Alright that'll do it for this time. Big thanks to Chris for sharing his work. You can check out the show notes of this episode for links to his website and to the research we talked about.

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Okay, I think that's all I've got. See you in a couple weeks for more Opinion Science. Buh bye...