

УДК 316.645

DOI: 10.24044/sph.2017.3.11

**RESEARCH METHODS FOR MEASURING STEREOTYPES
IN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY: INDIVIDUAL
AND COLLECTIVE APPROACHES**

T. L. Smolina

*Candidate of Psychological Sciences
assistant professor
St. Petersburg University of Humanities
and Social Sciences
St. Petersburg, Russia*

Abstract. This article examines the diversity of the empirical methods for measuring stereotypes in social sciences. Two major viewpoints in social psychology are analyzed as means for investigating this social phenomenon: the collective and the individual approaches. The result of the comparison of these contrasting perspectives is the emergence of an eclectic approach in studying social stereotypes. A new integrative approach is introduced as an attempt to broaden the understanding of the nature of stereotypes in the field of social psychology.

Keywords: stereotypes; collective approach; individual approach; social psychology.

In their everyday life most people do not pay attention to the use of different labels which have become widely known as stereotypes. What is more, the word ‘stereotype’ has become a part of a common language and it seems that everyone understands the meaning of it. However, most social scientists consider it to be an ambiguous term and continue to argue about the nature of stereotypes. One can distinguish two mainstreams in the social psychological tradition: the collective associated with McDougall (1920) and the individual framework which was developed by Allport in North America [6, p. 50]. Those two perspectives view stereo-

types in a different way. From the collective approach stereotypes are perceived as cultural phenomena. On the contrary, the individual approach suggests that stereotypes are mental representations of “individual-level beliefs” [13, p. 6]. Those two theoretical points of view have provoked the empirical interest in stereotypes and a lot of studies have been done in order to understand the nature of stereotypes. The aim of this article is to examine the relationship between those two opposite perspectives and to analyze how they can be integrated from the methodological point of view. Thus, methods for assessing stereotypes used by both approaches will be a

means for investigating theoretical as well as empirical prospects of stereotypes.

From the time stereotypes were introduced to social psychology they have been looked at from a collective perspective. The stereotypes were first defined by Walter Lippmann in 1922 as ‘pictures in our heads’ [5, p. 291]. However, Lippmann in his book “Public Opinion” did not assess stereotypes by any methods but simply introduced the term to social psychology. Yet, one cannot discuss stereotypes without taking into account the methodological issues due to the fact that only empirical studies supply the information about this phenomenon. Such an abstract theoretical concept as a stereotype is never directly seen but it can be measured through different methods available in social psychology. After all, psychology is not an exact science but it has developed its own procedures which are used to assess certain phenomena. The stereotypes or rather group differences were explored a long time before Lippmann’s notion. One of the earliest pre-scientific methods was known due to the existence of the diaries and notes of historians, journalists and simply ordinary people who traveled abroad at some point in their lives. Gordon Allport in his famous book “The Nature of Prejudice” (1979) named this method as ‘travelers’ reports’. He described it as “the most common source of information” about group differences [1, p. 90].

The first truly psychological and scientific study of stereotypes was

done by D. Katz and K. W. Braly in 1933 where they introduced an innovative technique of measuring stereotypes: and adjective check-list. This method of investigation had two stages. In the first part of the study the respondents (Princeton undergraduates) were asked to describe ten nationalities using adjectives in a free-response form. In the second part another sample of the students had a different task: participants of the study were obliged to check adjectives which they think can better describe a certain ethnic group from the trait list [11, pp. 204–210]. One might say that it is useful to emphasize this method and the way in which it was used for most of the subsequent experiments in this field.

In the adjective check-list method verbal stereotypes of the national groups were observed. As a consequence, the Katz and Braly procedure has become popular among social psychologists and a great number of studies have been repeated. Some of the research was identical to the previously described procedure [4], others with slight variations. In general, one can say that there were equal attempts to improve the method as well as simple replications of it in the past. Credit must be given to social psychology researchers who have gone further and tried to introduce different ways of assessing stereotypes.

For instance, Jones and Ashmore, while following the Katz and Braly tradition, were the researchers first to observe the relationship between characteristics in the list of adjectives.

They examined two dimensions of the traits (e.g., intelligent vs. stupid), and as a result, they proposed a scale to measure characteristics ascribed to various nationalities [12, p. 32].

Although most of the researchers concentrated mostly on the Katz and Braly tradition for assessing stereotypes, a few of them tried to improve this method by using the Likert scale. Others, like McCauley and Stitt added the diagnostic ratio to the adjective check-list. The investigators asked respondents to rate the description of traits. In this study the ratio was expressed in the percentage of the target group divided to the rating of all people in the world [3, pp. 214–215].

Of all the changes which have been introduced in the previous years to the adjective check-list method described above, only one notion can be concluded: all of them reflect a collective approach to the understanding of stereotypes dealing mostly with their content and the degree of agreement among the participants of different studies.

The collective perspective in social psychology sees stereotypes as belief systems which are influenced by culture and stored in the society's shared knowledge. Stereotypes are viewed to be consensual between members of certain groups in cultural environment. Collective viewpoint stresses the importance of culture in acquiring and changing stereotypes. Processes of learning and transmission of stereotypes in this approach are believed to depend greatly on language. Therefore, the adjective checklist with its

emphasis on measuring verbal stereotypes provides an explicit source of information about stereotypes from language and communication focus. Clearly, verbal representations of stereotypical beliefs play an important role in measuring stereotypes from the collective perspective. In addition, the role of the mass media cannot be underestimated. Supporters of the collective approach point out that the mass media is a main form of stereotype transmission [13, pp. 10–12]. As a result, a new quantitative method evolved in order to analyze the products of the mass media which was termed as content analysis. This technique allows researchers to find the information that has been presented in newspapers, radio programs, magazines, novels, TV shows, etc. Using this method a contemporary researcher can code any message that has been transmitted through the mass media.

Despite all these studies of stereotypes, psychologists faced a methodological challenge in a way that “the exclusively quantitative approach fails to reveal what the individuals intended to convey by the prescribed, stereotypical responses that the procedure imposes upon them” [2, p. 234]. The main disadvantage of the described above methods are as follows:

- 1) participants of the study are not permitted to express their own views freely;

- 2) respondents' views are divided into several responses (procedure lacks means to show the whole picture of one's stereotypical beliefs of a certain group;

3) a quantitative method does not allow the investigator to examine the origin of stereotypes [2, p. 234].

It is certainly true that devotion to identical types of methodology produces similar results. Moreover, stereotypes in this case are not fully assessed due to the fact that they are seen only as collective beliefs. It is clear enough that stereotypes are presented in the mind of a particular subject. The individual perspective is based on the assumption that, in addition to representation in the mental structure of one's mind, stereotypes can be learned and changed at the level of the individual. The researchers of this approach concentrated mostly on the studies of individual perception and cognitive basis of processes of stereotypes' development, maintenance and change. Thus, the individual approach sheds new light on many facts that were considered and taken for granted or simply ignored by the collective view.

It was Allport, a well-known scholar, who probably first described a stereotype from a cognitive perspective as "an exaggerated belief associated with category [and] its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category" [1, p. 191]. This postulate was confirmed in the series of empirical studies conducted by researchers of cognitive psychology. The followers of cognitive tradition are usually associated with the individual approach to stereotypes. This general framework suggests three ways of approaching stereo-

types: stereotypes as schemas, as group prototypes and exemplars.

Several studies have been carried out to investigate how social schemas are represented in the subject's memory and how they influence his/her behavior toward a certain group. The following is a brief account of Perdue's study which perfectly illustrates research within a cognitive psychology tradition. Stereotypes in this study were seen as schemas – "abstract knowledge structures that specify the defining features and relevant attributes of a given concept" [13, p. 7]. First, Perdue and his colleagues constructed a list of words with in-group/out-group origin (e.g., us-them) and then added neutral words to it. After that, investigators carried out a classical conditioning experiment where participants were asked to indicate a real word among those pairs showed on a tachistoscope. There were 108 trials. In addition, respondents rated neutral words as pleasant or unpleasant. The results clearly indicated that neutral words which were paired with in-group words (e.g., us) were considered pleasant. On the contrary, out-group words (e.g., them) led participants to describe neutral words in a negative way. Thus, the experiment discovered that in-group words are evaluative and "a minimal element of a schema of group belongingness – a simple division into in-group and out-group – is laden with affect" [3, p. 217].

This study by Perdue and his associates, in particular, showed in detail how stereotypes are measured from

the view of modern cognition theory. Stereotypes as role schemas were investigated by many social psychologists [7, 9, 14]. By making use of a whole battery of tests, these studies helped to develop a deeper understanding of nature and functions of stereotypes.

Although there are not many, a certain number of studies appeared in recent years that assess stereotypes as group prototypes, mainly using 'reaction time methodology', where participants are asked to verbally describe a prototype person of a certain nationality as fast as they can. Also, free-response formats instead of limited-response tests have been frequently used in this empirical tradition. In this case, within an individual framework group prototypes are viewed as "mental representations consisting of a collection of associations between group labels and the features that are assumed to be true of the group" [13, p. 8]. This means that a prototypical model of a certain group would be associated in one's mind with particular images which are kept in memory and can be transformed into verbal or non-verbal explicit labels.

Similarly, the notion of memory is important for the theory of exemplars, the other approach to stereotypes that sees them as mental representations of a certain individual with whom they had direct or indirect contact [13, p. 9]. However, it is not clear where these stereotypes come from if a subject has not met an individual of another nationality but still possesses some ethnic stereotypical beliefs. This approach does not

answer this question, but rather it examines exemplars' models and how they are represented in memory. Thus, stereotypes in this case are considered to be encoders of information within the cognitive structure of an individual; they can be activated at any time and lead toward a certain type of behavior (e.g., prejudice).

The exemplars' approach is demonstrated in the study conducted by Enlow, where facial types play a role of exemplars. According to physical anthropologists two major types of faces exist in the world: a "dolichocephalic" and a "brachycephalic" [15, p. 96]. The first facial type is narrow and long and, in general, looks more mature. The second, a "brachycephalic" is short, wide and resembles the face of a child. The study has shown that people prescribed more child-like traits to "brachycephalic" faces and more masculine characteristics to the other type of face. It appears that people tend to have a cognitive exemplar of a child's face and typical traits associated with it. As a result, they express stereotypical beliefs toward a person whose face resembles one of a child.

Obviously, different approaches to stereotypes even within just the individual perspective add unique results to this theoretical concept. Stereotypes as mental representations (schemas, prototypes, exemplars) provide an explanation of the stereotyping process. If the collective approach looks particularly at the content of stereotypical beliefs, the individual framework is more concerned with how stereotypes

are represented within the mind of an individual. Yet, the main disadvantage of the individual approach is that it underestimates the role of personal perception as a determinant of stereotypes in contrast to the collective approach which overemphasizes the role of group influence. These two approaches while being contrasting, at the same time serve one common goal: they enrich the psychological knowledge of stereotypes and processes connected with it.

Up to this point, there has been an assumption that viewpoints described above are considered to be opposite. However, it is not clear why they cannot be integrated. Surely, the productive interplay between the collective and the individual approaches will progress to the understanding of stereotypes. Hence, I would like to introduce a new approach which can be called an integrative perspective. This approach can combine methods as well as theoretical assumptions from both viewpoints and, as a result, produce new results and provide answers to the questions which were not addressed before. For instance, the attempt to explore individual cognitions about groups within a social context will help to get a more comprehensive view of stereotypes. It seems that only an integration of the two contrasting perspectives will stimulate an even broader look and will identify and explain new issues and concerns. It is evident from a review of the literature that every time a new method or a new theoretical viewpoint was introduced to the psychological field of

studying stereotypes, it encouraged the development of and added some new aspects to the theory of stereotypes. Therefore, it is necessary to design and execute studies that are more methodologically diversified.

However, there have been a few studies carried out which can be considered to be attempts to integrate individual and collective approaches together. For instance, projective drawing has been used as a means to assess stereotypes in a research by psychologist Ivanova, where she asked respondents to draw pictures of typical representatives of given nationalities [10, pp. 71–82]. After that, elements of the drawings were encoded and objectively scored. Projective drawing was originally developed as a psychotherapeutic technique but later on several clinical tests appeared (for instance, Rorschach Inkblot Test, House-Tree-Person, Draw-A-Person) which are “ambiguous and open to interpretation” [8, p. 291]. It is interesting to see how projective drawing is used for assessing stereotypes. On the one hand, this technique employs an individual’s inner perception where stereotypes are kept. On the other hand, projective drawing expresses the content of stereotypes. Therefore, stereotypes are studied from both approaches at the same time and provide unique outcomes. For example, in Ivanova’s research 32 % of the female respondents drew a woman as a typical representative of a given nationality, whereas male participants depicted only a man as a stereotypical representative [10, p. 81]. This finding

shows the difference in perception of other groups between men and women, bringing a greater attention to the gender aspect of stereotypes.

Another study focused on examining the dynamic quality of stereotypes by role-playing a job interview situation. A researcher named Word found that interviewers' non-verbal behavior differed if the interviewee was black and not white [5, pp. 302–303]. Moreover, the time dimension aspect showed that interviews with African Americans were usually shorter than with other participants of the study. The experiment has been repeated in almost an exact way but in a manner where the roles were in reversed order in order to examine the behavior of interviewees. It was discovered in the second part of the research that the subjects under study mirrored the behavior of interviewers. Taken from psychodrama, role-playing in that research was introduced as a technique for measuring stereotypes and helped to analyze the actual behavior of individuals who were stereotyped.

Despite the fact that stereotypes are measured in a variety of ways as was reviewed in this article, most of them fall into two main categories of understanding this phenomenon: the individual and the collective approaches. Which viewpoint is more appropriate and offers greater explanations? Each approach claims to be effective and to address different aspects. Examining the cognitive structure in regard to stereotypes is informative, but one should recognize the effect of cultural and societal be-

liefs on the individual. Evidently, a narrow focus on one perspective exclusively ignores crucial aspects of another. It is important to keep in mind that the ability to reach more meaningful conclusions rests on the assumption that the development of theory as well as empirical research is needed from both complementary viewpoints. An alternative strategy for this may be the emergence of an eclectic way of studying of stereotypes. The integrative approach will contribute to an even broader understanding of nature and functions of stereotypes. However, it can be accomplished only by synthesizing the divergent viewpoints from an empirical perspective. This presents a challenge for future research psychologists to introduce and employ a diversity of methods in measuring stereotypes.

Bibliography

1. Allport G. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Reading: Addison Wesley, 1979.
2. Asch S.E. *Social Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
3. Augoustinos M., Walker I. *Social Cognition. An Integrated Introduction*. London: Sage Publications, 1995.
4. Bartminski J. Poland's Neighbours in the Eyes of Polish students in Wallace, T. (Ed.) *Stereotypes and Nations*. Cracow: International Cultural Center, 1995.
5. Brown R. *Group Processes*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000.
6. Farr R. M. *The Roots of Modern Social Psychology*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
7. Fiske S. T., Taylor S. E. *Social Cognition*, New York: Random House, 1984.
8. Gwinn R. P., Norton P. B., Goetz P. W. (eds.) *Psychological Tests and Measurement in The New Encyclopaedia Bri-*

- tannica*, 26, pp. 289-293, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991.
9. Hamilton D. L., Gifford R. K. Illusory Correlation in Interpersonal Perception: a Cognitive Basis of Stereotypic Judgments in Aronson, E. and A. R. Pratkanis (Eds.) *Social Psychology*. Volume 1, pp. 392–407, Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 1976.
 10. Ivanova T. V. Izucheniye Etnicheskikh Stereotipov s Pomoschyu Proektivnykh Risunkov /Ethnic Stereotypes Study by Projective Drawings/ in *Voprosy Psikhologii* (“Questions of Psychology”), Vol. 2, pp. 71–82. Moscow, 1998.
 11. Katz D., Braly K. W. (1976). Verbal Stereotypes and Racial Prejudice in Aronson E. and A.R. Pratkanis (Eds.) *Social Psychology*. Vol. 3, pp. 204–210. Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
 12. Peabody D. National Characteristics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
 13. Stangore C., Schaller M. Stereotypes as Individual and Collective Representations in Macrae C. N., Stangor C. and M. Hewstone (Eds.) *Stereotypes and Stereotyping*. Pp. 3–37. New York: The Guilford Press, 1996.
 14. Weber R., Crocker J. Cognitive Processes in the Revision of Stereotypic Beliefs in Aronson, E. and A. R. Pratkanis (Eds.) *Social Psychology*. Vol. 1, pp. 240–256. Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 1993.
 15. Zebrowitz L. A. Physical Appearance as a Basis of Sterotyping in Macrae, C. N., Stangor, C. and M. Hewstone (Eds.) *Stereotypes and Stereotyping*, pp. 79–120. New York: The Guilford Press, 1996.

© Smolina T. L., 2017.