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## Research Statement

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### Research Overview

Do we stereotype all members of a racial group as being more or less the same? Or do our racial stereotypes about others depend on the additional identities they harbor—like their sexual orientation, their age, and their gender? The main emphasis of my research program is on the topic of intersectional stereotyping, or how it is that we stereotype others as a function of others' multiple social identities. The research literature on intersectional stereotyping has been rapidly expanding for the last fifteen years, and it has challenged the way organizational scientists think about racism, sexism, and the like. An issue with this literature, however, is that many of its findings contradict each other without satisfying explanations as to why. As a result, it can be difficult for scientists to answer questions related to intersectional stereotyping—like those posed above—definitively. A goal of my research program has been to create a theoretical framework that provides order to the scientific literature on intersectional stereotyping. This framework, called the lens model of intersectional stereotyping, is currently under invited revision at the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Petsko, Rosette, & Bodenhausen, invited revision). The research statement that follows describes the empirical findings that gave rise to the lens model, the theoretical assumptions that underpin this model, and how this model can be used to answer applied research questions—like whether and under what circumstances we can expect Black women and White women to be treated differently in the workplace.

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### Contradictory Research Findings

The lens model begins with the observation that there are contradictory research findings in the literature on intersectional stereotyping—findings that are difficult for prevalent theories of person perception to explain. For example, in some contexts, gay Black men and heterosexual Black men appear to be stereotyped in very different ways. This phenomenon was demonstrated in a series of experiments I published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2019a). In those experiments, participants were randomly assigned to list stereotypes about either gay Black men or heterosexual Black men. New participants, who knew nothing about the origins of these stereotypes, then rated these stereotypes on how “White” and how “Black” they seemed. Repeatedly, these experiments revealed that learning that someone is gay can change the way perceivers think about that person's race. Gay Black men are stereotyped as “less Black” and even as “Whiter” than their heterosexual counterparts.

A subsequent attempt at studying this phenomenon, however, revealed that in other contexts, gay Black men and heterosexual Black men appear to be stereotyped in very similar ways. In a set of experiments published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2019b), participants served as mock-jurors and were instructed to read about defendants who were either White or Black, and who were implicated in being either gay or heterosexual. When participants learned that defendants had been accused of stereotypically Black crimes (e.g., drive-by shooting, gang violence; Exp. 1), they exhibited strong evidence of a racial bias. In this context, participants condemned Black defendants more harshly than White defendants. However, in this context, participants exhibited no evidence of a sexual orientation bias. That is, the racial bias participants exhibited against Black defendants held to equivalent degrees regardless of whether the defendants had been implicated in being gay vs. heterosexual. Thus, whereas initial examinations revealed that gay vs. heterosexual Black men can be stereotyped in

divergent ways, a subsequent examination revealed that these men can likewise be stereotyped in nearly identical ways.

### **An Explanation for Contradictory Research Findings**

Results like those described in the preceding section raise an obvious question. Why would perceivers stereotype gay Black men and heterosexual Black men as distinct from one another in certain contexts, yet as indistinguishable from one another in other contexts? In a review paper published in *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* (Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2020), I argued for the possibility that perceivers' minds operate in a compartmentalized way. This is to say that perceivers may attend to targets' identities, or even to intersections of targets' identities, in a one-at-a-time fashion. The idea, for example, was that if perceivers sharpen their focus on race, they may exhibit a racial bias, but not—in these moments—any bias on the basis of targets' sexual orientation (Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2019b). In contrast, if perceivers sharpen their focus on sexual orientation, they may do the reverse. That is, in these contexts, perceivers may exhibit a sexual orientation bias, but not any bias on the basis of targets' race (Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2019a). This line of thinking provided an explanation for the contradictory research findings noted above, and it became the foundation for the lens model of intersectional stereotyping.

### **The Lens Model of Intersectional Stereotyping**

According to the lens model of intersectional stereotyping (Petsko et al., invited revision), perceivers have a repertoire of lenses in their minds that they can use as frameworks for thinking about others, and they *only use one lens at a time*. Lenses, in this perspective, are construed as identity-specific schemas for categorizing others. For example, perceivers have a lens for race, a lens for gender, a lens for sexual orientation, and the like. When one lens comes into focus, perceivers are expected to use that lens for stereotyping the targets of their perceptions, and to *stop* using alternative lenses. In addition, the model argues that lenses can be specifically intersectional—for example, a race-by-gender lens rather than a lens for race by itself. Thus, according to the lens model, how Black women are stereotyped, for example, will depend on which lens is made salient to perceivers. If the lens of race is made salient to perceivers, then perceivers ought to exhibit racial stereotyping against Black women, but not—in these moments—any gender stereotyping. In contrast, if the lens of gender is made salient to perceivers, then perceivers ought to do the reverse—that is, exhibit gender stereotyping against Black women, but not any racial stereotyping. Finally, if an intersectional lens is made salient to perceivers, then perceivers ought to stereotype Black women as Black women—not as women more generally or as Black people more generally, but as Black women.

If it is the case that perceivers use just one lens at a time when stereotyping intersectional targets, a relevant question concerns what it is that causes perceivers to use one lens over alternatives. In two of my papers (Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2020; Petsko et al., invited revision), I argued that there are four factors that ought to govern lens salience: *accessibility* (or the ease with which a lens can be retrieved from memory); *fit* (or the extent to which a lens “explains,” normatively or comparatively, patterns of intergroup behavior in a context); *perceiver goals* (or desired end states that motivate the use of some lenses over alternatives); and *distinctiveness* (or the extent to which a lens-associated identity is rare and thus attention-grabbing in a social context). Although there is theoretical support for the possibility that each of these factors plays a role in guiding which lenses perceivers use for thinking about others, these factors have, until recently, received only limited empirical support in the context of intersectional stereotyping.

## Empirical Tests of the Lens Model

The first tests of the lens model examined whether a *comparative fit* manipulation could influence lens salience (Petsko et al., invited revision, Exp. 1a and 1b). According to the principle of comparative fit, perceivers will sharpen their focus on a specific lens to the extent that the lens is useful for understanding patterns of intergroup behavior in a given context. In one experiment, for example, participants watched a conversation in which either (a) men and women (regardless of race) disagreed with one another, or in which (b) Black and White people (regardless of gender) disagreed with one another, instead. Participants' tendency to categorize targets by gender and race was then surreptitiously measured by assessing their memories for who said what. The logic of the task is that if participants were categorizing targets by race, they should confuse Black women with other Black people more often than with other White people. Likewise, if participants were categorizing targets by gender, they should confuse Black women with other women more often than with other men. The results of this experiment were striking. When participants saw the version of the conversation that comparatively fit the lens of gender, they categorized Black women as women, but showed no significant tendency to categorize Black women as Black. Conversely, when participants saw the version of the conversation that comparatively fit the lens of race, they categorized Black women as Black, but barely paid any attention to whether Black women were women. Thus, when the lens of gender came into focus, the lens of race fell out—and vice versa.

Subsequent tests of the lens model examined whether *perceiver goal* manipulations could influence lens salience (Petsko et al., invited revision, Exp. 2a-3b). For example, in one illustrative experiment, participants completed a gender-science implicit association test (IAT). Gender-science IATs compare the speed with which participants can associate men with science—and women with liberal arts—to the speed with which participants can complete the reverse of these associations. Typically, participants exhibit a male-science bias on this test, meaning they are faster to associate men with science than they are to associate women with science. In my version of this test, participants saw a mix of older and younger men and women, and they were asked either to categorize these individuals by gender (male, female) or by age (old, young). The findings revealed that when participants were given the explicit goal of categorizing faces by gender, they exhibited evidence of a male-science bias. However, when participants were given the explicit goal of categorizing faces by age, they exhibited no male-science bias whatsoever. Other experiments replicated and extended this finding. For example, one experiment revealed that participants implicitly associated Black children with weapons when categorizing them by race (i.e., as Black), but not when categorizing them by age (i.e., as children). Another experiment revealed participants implicitly associated older women with church concepts more strongly when categorizing them intersectionally (i.e., as old women) than when categorizing them either by age alone or by gender alone (Petsko et al., invited revision). Thus, findings suggest (a) that perceivers *do* use one lens at a time for stereotyping other people, and (b) that the lenses themselves can bring either singular or intersectional identities into focus.

## Future Directions

The experiments described above manipulated just two factors that are thought to govern lens salience: comparative fit, and perceiver goals. However, as noted previously, there are two other factors that ought to govern how it is that intersectional targets are stereotyped in a given context (i.e., accessibility, distinctiveness; Petsko & Bodenhausen, 2020). Thus, a future direction for my

research is to empirically examine these other factors that are implicated in lens salience. As a quick example, one of my papers, which is under review at *Social and Psychological Personality Science* (Petsko, Silva, & Vogler, under review), suggests that perceivers question the heterosexuality of men more than the heterosexuality of women when these individuals engage (vs. do not engage) in same-sex sexual behavior. Interestingly, this gender bias appears to occur in equal measure regardless of whether the targets are Black vs. White. However, according to the principle of accessibility, this tendency ought to vary according to which lens is made easily retrievable from memory. If, for example, an intersectional lens had been primed in this context, the findings might have revealed that the tendency to question men's heterosexuality more than women's was exaggerated when the targets were Black vs. White. Testing questions such as these would be fruitful for understanding how intersectional stereotyping operates.

Another future direction for my research program concerns examining intersectional stereotyping in the context of organizational behavior. For example, another one of my papers, which is under invited revision at *Journal of Applied Psychology* (Petsko & Rosette, invited revision) documents that people implicitly think of leaders, more than employees, as being White by default. Given that those who seem more prototypic of leaders tend to receive more positive leadership evaluations, a consequence of this bias is that White people are likely to receive more positive leadership evaluations than are non-White people—even if their credentials are exactly the same. However, according to the lens model, racial biases like these may be conditional on perceivers using the lens of race to think about the targets of their perceptions. Thus, while racial bias in leader selection and evaluation may occur when perceivers are using the lens of race, it may *not* occur when perceivers are using competing lenses, like the lens of gender or the lens of age. Testing of such hypotheses would help to bolster the claims of the lens model, and it would likewise underscore the relevance of these claims to the wider world.

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### **Summary of Research Contribution**

A wide variety of organizational findings may depend on which lens a social context invites perceivers to use for thinking about others. For example, in the context of hiring, there is some evidence that gay Black men are evaluated more favorably than heterosexual Black men. In the context of leadership evaluations, there is some evidence that evaluations of Black women diverge from those of White women—sometimes for better, and sometimes for worse. My research suggests that intersectional discrimination patterns such as these may not be inevitable. Rather, intersectional patterns of discrimination, from positively evaluating gay Black men to overlooking the contributions of Black women in the workplace, may depend fundamentally on whether perceivers are using an intersectional lens in a social environment. For example, it may be the case that gay Black men are more likely to be hired than heterosexual Black men when hiring managers are thinking intersectionally about these men, but not when they are instead viewing these men through the lens of race. Similarly, it may be the case that evaluations of Black women leaders diverge from those of White women leaders when these leaders are viewed through an intersectional lens, but not when these leaders are viewed through the lens of gender. Predictions such as these are derivations from the lens model, and they should be tested both for practical reasons and theoretical reasons. Such testing could help to organize the existing literature on intersectional stereotyping, and it could propel this research literature forward.