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Main Effects Do Not Discrimination Make

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Although several ideas presented by Landy (2008) warrant further consideration, we must take issue with the contention that evidence of small main effects suggests that stereotypes do not have an impact on evaluative personnel decisions. Specifically, Landy suggests that the effect sizes for race and gender differences in studies examining performance evaluations conducted in work settings are quite small and that this is evidence for stereotypes having a relatively small impact on real-world settings. Based on over 20 years of research that has examined the impact of stereotype endorsement on evaluative workplace outcomes (i.e., performance ratings), we must raise issue with this viewpoint.

We suspect that such meager effects sizes are based on main effect differences between two target groups' ratings on an evaluative workplace outcome, such as a rating of performance potential. Main effect differences such as these represent a weak form of the argument either for or against the influence of stereotypes on discrimination in evaluative workplace outcomes, and studies applying this method for inferring the presence of stereotypes often do result in small effect sizes (e.g., Avolio & Barrett, 1987; Cleveland & Landy, 1983). As a means of explaining these small main effects, some researchers have examined individual differences in the endorsement of negative stereotypes (e.g., Baltes, Bauer, & Frensch, 2007; Bauer & Baltes, 2002; Dobbins, Cardy, & Truxillo, 1988), and this research (along with a fair amount of research in social psychology; e.g., Devine, 1989) has consistently shown that there are large individual differences in people's endorsements of stereotypes. Taking into account such individual differences in the endorsement of negative stereotypes leads to two basic hypotheses when considering a performance rating context. First, only individuals who endorse a particular negative stereotype would be likely to have their ratings affected by that stereotype. Second, a main effect on performance ratings based on group membership (e.g., target race, target sex) would only be expected if the majority of raters in a sample endorse the stereotype.

With respect to the first hypothesis, it has been demonstrated in several studies that the endorsement of negative stereotypes is very strongly related to performance ratings (e.g., Baltes et al., 2007; Bauer & Baltes, 2002; McConahay, 1983; Stewart & Perlow, 2001). For example, Baltes et al. found a correlation of $r = .48$ between stereotype endorsement scores and performance ratings. Specifically, individuals who endorsed a negative stereotype toward Black males gave much lower performance ratings to Black targets than those who did not endorse the stereotype. Furthermore, Baltes et al. found that biased individuals (i.e., those endorsing

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a negative stereotype toward Black male managers) rated Black managers much lower than White managers, even though the managers were exhibiting identical performance levels (the effect size for the difference was $d = .92$, which is considered a large effect; Cohen, 1988). Similar group differences have been found for performance ratings of women (i.e., women were rated much lower by biased raters than by unbiased raters) when gender stereotypes were examined (Bauer & Baltes, 2002). Interestingly, and contrary to the suggestions of Landy, the results of the studies mentioned above (e.g., Baltes et al., 2007; Bauer & Baltes, 2002) were obtained in a paradigm in which raters had access to both positive and negative performance-relevant information (e.g., Sulsky & Day, 1994). Thus, Landy's contention that exposure to positive information causes stereotypes to dissipate seems questionable in light of such results.

Conclusions

In sum, if one is unlucky enough to be evaluated by an individual who endorses a negative stereotype toward one's group, then the negative effect on one's ratings will be quite large. Taking into account individual differences in rater stereotype endorsement allows one to understand how specific instances of discrimination can occur even when main effect differences are not observed. Interestingly, these effects have been observed in laboratory studies (e.g., Bauer & Baltes, 2002) and field studies (e.g., Dobbins et al., 1988). Furthermore, this systematic error variance that is introduced via such stereotypes reduces the potential validity of these types of performance ratings (e.g., interview scores) for predicting subsequent workplace outcomes. Thus, the relationship between stereotype endorsement and performance ratings raises ethical, fairness, and methodological concerns (i.e., potential validity) for organizations.

As a concluding point, consider the following example: In studies that have evaluated individual differences in both racial and gender stereotypes as they are related to workplace evaluations, approximately 15–20% of participants have been found to endorse negative stereotypes toward stigmatized groups (e.g., Baltes et al., 2007). Given that such studies were conducted with diverse samples on a college campus in an urban setting, we would argue that this is probably a conservative estimate of stereotype endorsement in the United States in general. However, even taking this conservative estimate into account, as many as one in five individuals within a given sample may be likely to endorse negative stereotypes and apply them in a given rating context. We would argue that these odds are more than high enough to cause concern for both ratees and organizations and to justify continued research investigating the role of stereotype endorsement on evaluative workplace decisions.

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