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SPECIAL ISSUE PAPER

The intersection of sex and race in the presence of deep-level attributes

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the mechanisms by which decisions about others are affected by the information known about them. The authors argue that the availability of information about deep-level attributes diminishes the role of surface-level attributes in how people make decisions about others. The authors posit that individuals will make discriminatory decisions based on surface-level attributes when only this information is available; but, as predicted by the integration-and-learning perspective, the availability of information about deep-level attributes will reduce surface-level attribute discrimination. Although discrimination will not disappear completely, it will shift its focal point toward a person's deep-level attributes.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from subjects in two studies, with 52 subjects in Study 1 and 230 in Study 2. Paired-samples *t*-test and mixed effects GLS regression were used to test the hypotheses.

Findings – When presented with surface-level attributes of a target person, subjects demonstrated discriminatory behaviors based on race and sex. However, when subjects were presented with surface-level attributes along with deep-level attributes about a target person, subjects made decisions based on deep-level attribute similarities and disregarded surface-level information.

Research limitations/implications – The authors interpret the findings to mean that enhancing information about others shifts favoritism and discrimination based on surface-level attributes to “deeper” grounds.

Originality/value – This study demonstrates how multiple identities and values that individuals possess, and of which they become aware of in others, affect decision-making behavior toward others. It elucidates the mechanisms by which providing individuals with meaningful information about others can help them overcome, or at least reduce, surface-level discriminatory decision making.

Keywords Sex and gender issues, Decision making, Integration-and-learning perspective, Multiple identities, Racial discrimination, Dyads

Paper type Research paper

The same person can be, without any contradiction, an American citizen, of Caribbean origin, with African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a woman, a vegetarian, a long-distance runner, a historian, a schoolteacher, a novelist, a feminist, a heterosexual, a believer in gay and lesbian rights, a theater lover, an environmental activist, a tennis fan, a jazz musician, and someone who is deeply committed to the view that there are intelligent beings in outer space with whom it is extremely urgent to talk (preferably in English) (Sen, 2006, pp. xii-xiii).

It is almost trite to say that if people only had a chance to get to know one another better, stereotyping and discrimination based on race, sex and other easily observable



identities would weaken or entirely disappear. Instead, knowledge based on these surface-level identity categories would be replaced by mutual recognition of likes and dislikes and other shared, personal affinities; for example, preferences about the kind of music that makes one dance and fundamental beliefs about the world, or other identities that matter at a deeper level. Yet few studies have attempted to validate this seemingly widely-held belief. In this study, we use the integration-and-learning perspective (Ely and Thomas, 2001) and the social-categorization theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) to explore the combined effects of surface-level attributes, particularly sex and race, on decision making in dyads. We investigate whether the introduction of information about a person's deep-level attributes reduces discriminatory decision-making against them based on surface-level attributes and replaces it with favoritism based on deep-level attributes they may share with others.

The effects of surface- and deep-level similarity on behaviors and attitudes toward others have been long-studied by scholars. Almost without exception, research has shown that most individuals demonstrate preferences for others who are similar to themselves over those who are dissimilar; and, these preferences span across many identities and diverse contexts (e.g. Ben-Ner *et al.*, 2009; Jackson *et al.*, 2003; Riordan, 2000). However, this empirical evidence is mostly based on the presentation of single attributes, which are predominantly demographic. Researchers recognize that individuals possess multiple attributes, commonly classified into surface-level and deep-level attributes (Harrison *et al.*, 1998; Horwitz and Horwitz, 2007; Milliken and Martins, 1996). Surface-level attributes include race, sex and age, which are relatively easy to discern on the basis of visual observation and are generally immutable. Deep-level attributes include interests, beliefs and values that can generally be revealed to others through personal interactions over time, and are, to varying degrees, the product of evolving tastes, experiences and beliefs that are chosen by individuals (Horwitz and Horwitz, 2007).

Very little is known about how an individual's multiple attributes affect decision-making and behavior in dyads (Burke, 2003). The lack of research in this domain is partly a result of the assumption that one attribute becomes paramount in any given interaction and therefore of singular importance although this assumption is not supported by evidence. Most people tend to think about themselves as possessing multiple attributes and are treated by others according to this assumption (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Ben-Ner *et al.*, 2009). To understand how individuals interact, it is necessary to understand how they compare their multiple attributes, as well as how these comparisons affect decision-making behavior. In particular, it is important to understand whether favoritism and discrimination based on surface-level attributes are affected by the availability of information about deep-level attributes that are more malleable.

In this study we examine how knowledge of surface- and deep-level attributes influence discriminatory behavior in dyads. Specifically, we combine the integration-and-learning perspective (Ely and Thomas, 2001) with social-categorization theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) to investigate whether information about a person's deep-level attributes will diminish discriminatory behavior based on surface-level attributes. We also examine whether this depends on context. Specifically, we test to see if white individuals make decisions that favor black females when the context suggests a short-term (economic), social interaction, and whether or not white individuals will shift their favoritism toward whites when the context suggests a long-term social interaction. We then test if individual behavior shifts to favoritism based on deep-level attributes, as suggested by the integration-and-learning

perspective (Ely and Thomas, 2001), when individuals are presented with more information about the deep-level attributes of a target person.

This paper expands upon existing research on inclusion and exclusion in groups by focussing on the effect of similarity and dissimilarity in dyads on decision making. There is a growing awareness, especially in diversity literature, of the need to study the importance of multiple attributes using a combination of both surface- and deep-level attributes (Harrison *et al.*, 1998, 2002; Riordan, 2000; Thatcher and Patel, 2011). We therefore carried out two studies to address some of these lacunae. In Study 1 we present subjects with various “other people” who are described in terms of their surface-level attributes. We then ask the subjects how they would behave toward these individuals in two different contexts: a short-term (economic) social interaction and working with them (a long-term social interaction). In Study 2 we presented subjects with information about the surface- and deep-level attributes of other people. We then examine whether or not the importance of surface-level attributes in predicting favoritism and discrimination changes when individuals also receive information about a target person’s deep-level attributes.

This paper makes two principal contributions to existing research in the fields of identity and diversity. First, we show that discrimination and favoritism are context-dependent; discrimination based on surface-level attributes can shift to favoritism in a different context. Second, we show that acquiring information about deep-level attributes of another person weakens the effect of favoritism and discrimination based upon their readily observed surface-level attributes. This proposition is important to both scholars and organizations because it suggests that favoritism and discrimination in decision making may be weakened by facilitating meaningful interactions among demographically different individuals, so as to reveal their deep-level attributes (Amir, 1969, 1976). Affording individuals the opportunity to get to know each other can help overcome the effects of automatic stereotyping and associated prejudices and reduce the risk of potentially detrimental decision-making behavior.

Theory and hypotheses

Tsui *et al.* (1994) argue that “physical, observable, and immutable personal and background characteristics [...] play a critical role in the initial categorization process” (p. 8). Categorization, however, is context dependent. Blair (2002) has studied the malleability of automatic stereotypes and prejudice, showing that both are sensitive to configuration (context) of stimulus cues. It is thus possible that the same individual can favor a target person in one context and yet discriminate against the same person if the situation surrounding their interaction changes: that is, “a particular attribute could have one meaning in one context and a different meaning in another” (Blair, 2002, p. 252). Indeed, Wittenbrink *et al.* (2001) found respondents displayed automatic negativity toward blacks when their picture was shown against the background of a street and automatic positivity toward blacks when their picture appeared against the background of a church interior. Such experiments show that impressions based on racial stereotyping can be radically altered and even diminished by context. Similarly, racial stereotyping may be altered by the attributions individuals make in scenarios in which interactions take place. In a similar vein, we argue that the prevailing stereotypes of black women in the USA as poor, single mothers (Burton and Tucker, 2009; Gilens, 1999; Hunt, 2007; Vescio *et al.*, 2005) and at the same time as angry, lazy, domineering, vociferous and curt women (Durr and Wingfield, 2011) will result in white individuals’ bifurcated attitudes toward them: decisions will favor a black woman in

a short-term single (economic) interaction that entails altruistic decision making because such decisions are more likely to prime perceptions of black women as poor. However, when white individuals decide about a long-term social interaction it will result in discrimination because long-term social interaction that includes a close social relationship will prime perceptions of black women as angry, lazy, domineering, and curt. Specifically, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H1. Whites will be more likely to favor black females over whites in decisions that require a single (economic) transaction.
- H2. Whites will be more likely to favor other whites over black females in decisions where outcomes would require a longer-term relationship.

The effect of information about surface-level attributes when information about deep-level attributes is available

Scholars make a distinction between deep-level and surface-level attributes. Surface-level attributes are “overt, biological characteristics that are typically reflected in physical features,” whereas deep-level attributes include attitudes, beliefs, and values (Harrison *et al.*, 1998, p. 97). Jackson and *et al.* (1995) similarly differentiate between demographic attributes and those that are “subject to construal and [are] more mutable” (p. 217). Deep-level attributes are a better indicator of who a particular person identifies themselves to be; they also enable the observer to move beyond the limitations of stereotyping another person on the basis of his or her demographic surface-level characteristics.

The integration-and-learning perspective (Ely and Thomas, 2001) suggests that the insights, skills, heuristics, and experiences individuals have developed as members of diverse groups are potentially beneficial to teams and workgroups and may allow them to achieve superior performance over less diverse groups. The integration-and-learning perspective further suggests that under certain conditions, individuals will take advantage of opportunities to learn about one another; with increased knowledge about one another they are more likely to make decisions that reflect the knowledge they ascertain rather than relying on surface-level attributes. As such, when individuals have information about both surface- and deep-level attributes they are likely to favor people with whom they share similar deep-level attributes. Similarly, although individuals tend to prefer others who are similar to them (Byrne, 1971; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), when richer information is available individuals will prefer those from whom they can obtain more access to information and knowledge (Weisinger and Salipante, 2000, 2005). Such knowledge-acquiring driven behavior is likely to induce individuals to favor those who possess similar deep-level attributes that are related to greater resources of knowledge and learning, thus discounting the value of less informative, surface-level attributes.

Only a few empirical studies have explored how similarity between individuals across multiple attributes is important and if some attributes are more meaningful than others to individuals. There is limited evidence that the importance ascribed to similarity in surface-level attributes dissipates while similarity in deep-level attributes increases over time (Harrison *et al.*, 1998, 2002). Schaubroeck and Lam (2002) have found that when deep- and surface-level similarities are assessed in tandem, deep-level similarity between a subordinate and a supervisor is a significant predictor of decisions about promotion while surface-level similarity has no significant effect. In sum, similarity, across different attributes, is related to favoritism. However, to date, there is also limited evidence supporting the notion that similarity in attributes that provide more specific information and learning opportunities about an individual is weighed more heavily.

We contend that while individuals are likely to make decisions based on surface-level attributes when those attributes are observable, information about deep-level attributes will weaken the effects of surface-level attributes on decision making:

- H3.* In decisions that involve a single (economic) transaction, individuals will likely favor persons who are similar to them on deep-level attributes over those who are dissimilar, discounting similarity in surface-level attributes.
- H4.* In decisions that involve long-term relationships, individuals will likely favor persons who are similar to them in deep-level attributes over those who are dissimilar, discounting similarity in surface-level attributes.

Study 1

Method

Tasks and procedures. Subjects were given a questionnaire in which they indicated their sex and race, and other demographical information. After completing the questionnaire, subjects were asked to engage in the first task: to allocate an endowment of \$10 between themselves and another person. The allocation could be in any amount from 0 to 10 in increments of \$1. This is a replication of the dictator game, as it is known in experimental economics (see Ben-Ner and Kramer, 2011). In our study, the endowment was hypothetical and the target persons involved were imaginary; research has shown that there is no significant difference in giving between experiments using actual money and real people vs hypothetical money and imaginary people (Ben-Ner *et al.*, 2008). The task was repeated 20 times; each time the other person was described using two attributes: their sex or race (black or white) in combination with their musical tastes (country music or rock music), family financial background (well off or hard up), religion (Protestant, Catholic, or no religion) and political views (conservative or liberal). In the second task, subjects were asked to rate their desire to work with each of the same 20 people on a scale of 1-4. We used 20 combinations of attribute pairs and not just the four sex and race combinations (white-female; white-male; black-female; and black-male). This was done because we did not want subjects to perceive that their decisions were being analyzed strictly in relation to sex and race discrimination and therefore alter their decision-making behavior by acting in a socially desirable manner.

Participants. In all, 52 undergraduate students (59.6 percent male, all white), from a large public university in the Midwest of the USA were recruited to participate in the study. Subjects were students in the same class and were given the option to either participate anonymously in the study during their class, or not to participate at all. They received a participation fee of \$10. The study was approved by the university's Institutional Review Board Human Subjects Protection Committee.

Dependent variables. The first dependent variable represents a single (economic) transaction. It was operationalized using the amount of money, between \$0 and \$10, which the subjects decided to give to the target person. The second dependent variable represents a decision that involves a long-term relationship. It was operationalized using the indicated desire to work with each target person, between one (least desirable) and four (most desirable).

Independent variables. The independent variables represent the similarity of the subject to his or her target person in terms of sex and race. Because all subjects are identified as white, they could have been similar to the target person in both sex and race, or just race, when the target person was white, or dissimilar to the target person in both sex and race, or just race, when the target person was black.

Analysis

We compared the amount of money given and the desire to work with the target person using four different groups (similar in both sex and race; similar only in sex; similar only in race; and dissimilar in both sex and race). Specifically, we used paired-samples *t*-tests to compare the “amount of money given” and the “desire to work with” by white subjects with others who were described as “white males,” “white females,” “black males” and “black females.” The paired-samples *t*-tests allowed us to estimate whether there are significant differences, within-person, in giving and desire to work together with any of the four sex and race categorizations mentioned above.

Results

Table I presents the amount of money subjects gave to each demographic category and their desire to work with an individual from each category. We tested *H1* and *2* using a paired-samples *t*-test that allows us to compare the amount of money given by the same subject to target persons who vary in terms of sex and race. In *H1* we postulated that whites will be more likely to favor black females over white males in decisions that require a single (economic) transaction. This hypothesis was supported. Whites gave more money to black females (\$3.25) than to both white males (\$2.46; $p < 0.01$, $t = 4.14$) and black males (\$2.48; $p < 0.01$, $t = 4.45$) but they gave similar amounts to black (\$3.25) and white females (\$3.23; $p > 0.05$, $t = 0.14$). We also tested whether there are differences in money-giving between males and females (not presented) and found that giving patterns remained the same.

In *H2* we postulated that whites are more likely to favor other whites over black females in decisions where outcomes would require the formation of a longer-term relationship. The results support this hypothesis. We found that whites ranked their desire to work with a black female (2.79) as lower than their desire to work with white males (3.14; $p < 0.01$, $t = -3.39$) and white females (3.15; $p < 0.01$, $t = -4.79$) but there was no difference in their desire to work with black males and females ($p > 0.05$, $t = 0.16$). The results were identical when we analyzed the decisions of white males and females separately (not presented).

Our findings suggest that white subjects showed sex-based favoritism when making decisions regarding a single (economic) transaction, but demonstrated race-based favoritism in decisions that required a long-term relationship.

	White male	White female	Black male	Black female
White subject	2.46	3.23	2.48	3.25
White subject	3.14	3.15	2.78	2.79

Notes: White subjects gave significantly more money to white and black females than to white and black males ($p < 0.01$); white subjects desired to work significantly more with white males and females than with black males and females ($p < 0.01$)

Table I.
Amount of money
given and desire to
work with
demographically
similar and different
individuals (study 1)

Study 1 discussion

In Study 1 we established that favoritism and discrimination based on surface-level attributes can shift based on context, and that white subjects discriminate based on the sex of the target person when the decision involves a single (economic) transaction; and, discriminate based on the race of the target person when the decision involves a long-term relationship. Specifically, white individuals are likely to discriminate against males in short-term economic transactions and, at the same time, are likely to discriminate against blacks and favor other whites when making a decision about a long-term relationship with a target person. These results provide further support for the importance of context in decision making (Blair, 2002) and to the possibility that both negative and positive stereotyping can be used by the same person toward the same targeted individuals (Wittenbrink *et al.*, 2001). However, Study 1 presented subjects with very little information. Subjects were only aware of the sex and race of the individuals about whom they made their decisions. In Study 2 we examine whether providing subjects with information about deep-level attributes of the target person, in terms of their personal interests, beliefs, and values, alters the grounds upon which they make decisions – from relying on information about surface-level attributes to relying on information about deep-level attributes.

Study 2*Method*

Task and procedure. Subjects completed a questionnaire online in which they indicated their sex and race as well as their musical tastes, religion, political orientation, and family's financial background. We focussed our analysis on musical tastes, religion, and political orientation, because previous studies have found these attributes are of particular significance in decision-making in regards to giving money, in the context of the workplace, and social interactions (Ben-Ner and Hill, 2008; Ben-Ner *et al.*, 2009; Jenkins, 2008). Subjects were then scheduled to attend a decision-making session approximately one week later. Upon arriving to the decision-making session, subjects completed two questionnaires in which they were asked to make a similar decision as that asked of subjects in Study 1 (subjects also engaged in several other unrelated studies). In Study 2, subjects made decisions regarding 12 different people who were described by sex and race (as in Study 1), but also by the following attributes: their family's financial background, religious identification, musical preferences and political orientation.

Participants. Subjects were recruited from the same large public university in the Midwest of the USA (different subjects from those in Study 1). Subjects were paid \$10 for their participation in the study. Complete data are available for 315 subjects who participated in the decision-making tasks.

Dependent variables. The two dependent variables represent a single economic transaction; the amount of money, between \$0 and \$10, which subjects gave each target person, and a long-term relationship; the desire to work with each target person that ranges from one (least desirable) to four (most desirable).

Independent variables. We constructed similarity dichotomous variables for each subject, and for each of the six attributes, with 1 indicating "similar" and 0 "dissimilar." For example, the first person to whom a respondent decided how much money to give was described as male, white, preferring country music, from a well-off family, with no religious affiliation, and having a conservative political orientation. Using the

information collected through the background questionnaire, we then created a similarity variable for each subject and also for each of the six attributes. For example, consider the six attributes obtained from one particular subject's background questionnaire and the ensuing similarity coding relative to the first target person (listed in parentheses): female (0), white (1), rated 3 on a one to six scale asking how much she loves country music (0), described her family financial background as fairly comfortable on a scale of 1 (very well-off) to 4 (fairly hard up) (1), is Protestant (0) and rated 2 on a scale of one to six concerning her political orientation (where 1 is very conservative and 6 is very liberal) (1). Based on the example above, the subject was similar to the first imaginary person with respect to race, family financial background, and political orientation and dissimilar with respect to gender, musical taste, and religion. We repeated this coding scheme for every subject matched with each of the 12 imaginary target individuals. Dichotomous coding was used because it allowed us to make clearer distinctions between similarity and dissimilarity. Of note is that our use of dichotomous variables is a conservative approach that is likely to underestimate the true effect of similarity on decision making.

Analysis

We use mixed effects GLS regression to analyze the data and to test if subjects use information about a target person's deep-level attributes when making their decision.

Results

Table II presents the descriptive statistics of our sample. For consistency with Study 1 we only use the decisions made by white subjects in the analysis. Of the 230 subjects, 52.6 percent are female and their average age is 22.42.

Similar to Study 1, each subject made decisions about a single (economic) transaction and a long-term relationship regarding each of the 12 individuals. However, in our analysis we used only five single (economic) transaction decisions made about target persons who were described as well-off; this is because subjects gave significantly more money to target persons who were described as coming from a hard-up family financial background ($p < 0.01$).

Results of our analysis are presented in Table III (mixed effects GLS regression) and support *H3* and *H4* (fixed effects GLS regression provides identical results; see Table AI). We find that subjects shifted from decision making based on surface-level attributes (Study 1) to decisions that are based on similarities in deep-level attributes. Specifically, during the single (economic) transaction decision-making process, both the sex and race of the target person had no significant impact on the subjects' decision. Instead, subjects preferred giving money to individuals who were similar to them in terms of deep-level attributes representing interests (musical taste; $z = 0.55$, $p < 0.01$) and values (political views; $z = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$). Combined together, subjects gave \$1.16 more to a target person who was similar to them in terms of these deep-level attributes, after accounting for similarity in terms of sex and race. Such differences in giving are substantial considering the average amount money given was only \$2.36. The results for decisions regarding a long-term relationship with a target person are even more striking. Subjects shifted from decisions that were based on race (Study 1) to decisions that were based on similarities in terms of deep-level attributes. Subjects showed a significantly higher desire to work with a target person who shared their interests (musical taste; $z = 0.14$, $p < 0.01$), beliefs (religion; $z = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$) and values (political views; $z = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$).

Table II.
Descriptive statistics
for study 2

Variable	Mean (proportion)	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Mean giving	2.36	2.66								
2. Mean desire to work	2.69	1.05	0.24**							
3. Female	(0.53)	-	0.05	0.03						
4. Rock music lover	(0.92)	-	0.06	-0.03	0.06					
5. Country music lover	(0.31)	-	0.20**	0.12	0.14*	-0.04				
6. Protestant	(0.52)	-	0.09	-0.02	0.06	-0.14*	0.05			
7. Catholic	(0.32)	-	-0.12	0.05	-0.00	0.09	0.06	-0.72**		
8. Conservative	(0.29)	-	0.08	0.34**	-0.05	0.02	0.16**	-0.00	0.05	
9. Age	22.42	5.57	-0.18**	-0.08	-0.17**	-0.02	-0.09	-0.06	0.04	-0.19**

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

	Give to		Desire to work with	
	All	Female subjects	All	Female subjects
Similarity gender	-0.07 (0.10)	0.10 (0.13)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.05)
Similarity race	-0.10 (0.10)	-0.04 (0.13)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.05)
Similarity music	0.55 (0.12)**	0.58 (0.17)**	0.14 (0.04)**	0.19 (0.06)**
Similarity financial background	-0.25 (0.34)	-0.36 (0.42)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.05)
Similarity religion	0.08 (0.11)	0.02 (0.15)	0.10 (0.04)**	0.11 (0.05)*
Similarity political views	0.61 (0.10)**	0.58 (0.13)**	0.48 (0.03)**	0.36 (0.05)**
Constant	2.47(0.22)**	2.44(0.27)**	2.54(0.06)**	2.64 (0.08)**
<i>n</i> (groups)	1,006 (202)	540 (108)	2,372 (201)	1,104 (93)

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$

Table III.
Mixed effects GLS
regression for giving
to and desire to
work with another
person

Study 2 discussion

We found that when deep-level attributes of a target person were made available to subjects, they shifted from discriminatory decisions that are based on surface-level information to decisions that are based on shared deep-level attributes. This is in-keeping with the thinking behind social-categorization theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and the integration-and-learning perspective (Ely and Thomas, 2001). When presented with information about deep-level attributes, individuals in Study 2 disregarded surface-level information about a target person and demonstrated decision-making behaviors that reflect their similarities to the target person in terms of deep-level attributes.

General discussion

The results of these two studies indicate that an individual's capacity for discrimination and favoritism can vacillate between different demographics. This capacity for discrimination is also context-dependent and involves complex reasoning that takes into account a person's level of familiarity with the individual who is at the focal point of the decision being made. The results of Study 1 showed that the same individuals can favor a person in one context but discriminate against them in another, providing support for the notion of sensitivity of automatic stereotyping to context (Blair, 2002; Wittenbrink *et al.*, 2001). White individuals showed favoritism toward women and discounted race in a single economic decision; however, the same individuals showed favoritism toward whites and discounted sex in a decision that entails a long-term working relationship. In Study 2 we found that once individuals were aware of deep-level attributes of a target person, similarity in interests, beliefs, and values, affected their decision-making outcomes; neither race nor sex played any role in the decisions that these individuals made.

The results support the importance of context in decision making that uses automatic stereotyping, as well as social-categorization theory (Turner, 1987) and the integration-and-learning perspective (Ely and Thomas, 2001). Specifically, Study 1 has shown that when individuals need to make decisions about others, but can only ascertain information about their surface-level attributes, they will use this demographic information regardless of its relevance to the decision at hand. And while social-categorization theory is not useful in explaining individual decision making in the two contexts with which we presented subjects in Study 1, individuals do, however, use automatic stereotyping (Blair, 2002; Wittenbrink *et al.*, 2001). In a single economic transaction, categorization as a "woman" led to the assigning of this identity as having a social status of "poor"; or at least, poorer than a man. Additional evidence of the dependence of automatic stereotyping on the context is demonstrated by the decisions made by the same individuals to prefer working with whites rather than blacks in a long-term social interaction. In this context, individuals associate the identity of "white" with success, power, and status that make such team members favorable. A caveat, however, should be made: because all subjects used in the analysis were white, it is possible that this preference for whites over blacks may also be related to similarity.

Study 2 shows that individuals assign greater weight to similarities in deep-level attributes, as predicted by social-categorization theory (Harrison *et al.*, 1998) and the integration-and-learning perspective (Ely and Thomas, 2001). Furthermore, the effects of sex and race found in Study 1 became non-significant once individuals became aware of a target person's deep-level attributes. This pattern of decision making is in line with the integration-and-learning perspective (Ely and Thomas, 2001) that places

an emphasis on individuals learning from one another. We used musical tastes as an interest to which individuals would be able to relate, religion as a belief that individuals can compare to their own, and political views to indicate values held by the target person. By no means do we argue that these are the only deep-level attributes that exist; still, individuals in our study made decisions that were significantly more favorable to those who were similar to them in these deep-level attributes. The lack of any similar effect in terms of sex and race to findings in Study 1 supports the importance of learning about, and “getting to know,” the other person (Ely and Thomas, 2001).

In our study, the process of learning about other people’s deep-level attributes was done artificially and initiated by providing key information about a target person. In an organizational setting, acquiring such information and knowledge about other people – coworkers, clients or employees – can only be done over time, through repeated interactions that are positive and meaningful (e.g. Allport, 1954; Amir, 1969, 1976; Weisinger and Salipante, 2000, 2005). We find that “getting to know” another person shifts decision making from being founded upon information regarding surface-level attributes to deep-level attributes. This implies that in organizational settings, an integration-and-learning culture may be achieved by facilitating positive and meaningful interactions between diverse individuals that reveal deep-level attributes and move beyond basic information meant simply to overcome demographic stereotypes in favor of strengthening working relationships where individuals can cultivate greater connections, and feel secure enough to articulate values and beliefs.

We conclude that discriminatory decision making and favoritism are part of human behavior. Individuals will use any information they have about another person – whether it is relevant or irrelevant to the decision at hand – to make preferential decisions. When an individual possesses surface-level information about others, they will use these non-malleable attributes to make potentially discriminatory decisions. Individuals may choose to discriminate based on similarities with another person or based on automatic stereotyping of a dissimilar demographic category. However, based on our study, individuals demonstrated preferences for attributes that are more malleable, and provide more opportunities for learning and knowledge about who a target person actually is, when making decisions. This is of obvious potential value in diverse societal contexts, from the classroom, the shop floor to the boardroom, as well in the efforts made by institutions, policy makers and employers to provide greater unity and cohesiveness among diverse populations. Hence, we conclude with an optimistic view of human nature: when given the opportunity to know another person, stereotype-driven decision making can be replaced by likes and dislikes based on the kind of music that makes one dance, our fundamental beliefs about the world, and what people perceive as values they share with others.

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Further reading

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(The Appendix follows overleaf.)

Table A1.
Fixed effects GLS
regression for giving
to and desire to
work with another
person

	Give to		Desire to work with	
	All	Female subjects	All	Female subjects
Similarity gender	-0.08 (0.10)	0.10 (0.13)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.05)
Similarity race	-0.09 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.13)	-0.02 (0.03)	0.00 (0.05)
Similarity music	0.51 (0.13)**	0.52(0.17)**	0.14(0.04)**	0.08 (0.06)
Similarity financial background	Omitted	Omitted	-0.02 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.05)
Similarity religion	0.08 (0.11)	0.01(0.15)	0.10 (0.04)**	0.10 (0.05)*
Similarity political views	0.61 (0.10)**	0.59 (0.13)**	0.48 (0.03)**	0.58 (0.04)**
Constant	2.39 (0.12)**	2.37 (0.16)**	2.54 (0.05)**	2.51 (0.07)**
<i>n</i> (groups)	1,006 (202)	540 (108)	2,372 (201)	1,268 (108)

Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

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