Priming Welfare Queens and Other Stereotypes: The Transference of Media Images into

Interpersonal Contexts

ABSTRACT. Specific stereotype portrayals of African American women were hypothesized to produce stereotype- consistent judgments made of a different African American woman. Participants (N = 76) observed a mammy, jezebel or welfare queen video-segment. Then they observed an African American woman in a mock job interview and rated the interviewee. Participants who observed a specific stereotype associated the interviewee more quickly with stereotype-consistent adjectives than with stereotype-inconsistent adjectives for all three stereotypes. For measures of how suitable the woman was for jobs that were related to the stereotypes, only the welfare queen prime produced significant effects.

Research on stereotyping has explored the role of cognitive processes (Devine, 1989), socialization processes (Eagly & Steffen, 2000), and categorization processes (Hugenberg, & Bodenhausen, 2004; Quinn, Macrae, & Bodenhausen, 2003). However, Schneider (2004) argues that questions about the *content* of stereotypes should be taken as seriously as questions about how and why they develop. The activation-recency hypothesis is used to test whether exposure to within-group stereotypes of African American women affect judgments made of another African American woman.

The activation-recency hypothesis states that individuals who are primed with media content use it for subsequent information processing in social situations (Hansen & Hansen, 1988; Dines & Humez, 2003). A limitation of most prior work with this hypothesis is that it overlooks *within*-group stereotypes. Collins (1991; 2004) argues that African American women are portrayed by media as nurturing asexual mammies, sexually aggressive jezebels, and lazy welfare queens (see also, Bogle, 2001; Gray, 1991).

In a study of within-group stereotyping (_____, 2005), participants observed a mammy, a jezebel or a non-stereotypic video clip. Participants then observed a mock employment interview involving either an African American or European American female. Indirect measures found participants primed with the jezebel stereotype responded more quickly to jezebel-consistent than to mammy-consistent adjectives when evaluating the African American interviewee. No findings were obtained for the mammy prime. The present study hypothesizes that exposure to stereotypic portrayals of African American women will result in subsequent stereotype-consistent judgments of a different African American woman. In addition, researchers argue explicit measures of prejudice and racial attitudes are not as effective as indirect measures because direct measures rely on participants' willingness to express socially undesirable attitudes (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Judd & Park, 1997). Thus, it is hypothesized that the effects of the within-group stereotypes will be stronger when using indirect measures than direct measures.

Methods

Design and Participants

A 3 (stereotype image: mammy, jezebel or welfare queen) x 2 (order of adjective judgments) between-subjects design was utilized. Seventy-six undergraduate students from communication courses received research credit. Approximately 62% were female, 87% were European American, 4% were African American; 9% reported a different ethnicity.

Stereotype Prime

Participants viewed one of three 2-min videotaped segments of a movie where an African American actress played a stereotyped role. The segment depicting a mammy stereotype came from the movie *To Dance with the White Dog*. The mammy character is reminiscing with a white family

about her long involvement with them and taking care of the now grown children. Her features (dark-skinned, asexual & stout) are consistent with a typical mammy representation (Collins, 1991). Collins describes the Jezebel as an African American woman with an "uncontrollable excessive sexual appetite" (1991, p. 77). The jezebel segment, from *Introducing Dorothy Dandridge,* portrays a physically attractive opportunist that desires the attention of men and takes pride in her sexual conquests. The welfare queen is a poor African American with many children, living on federal aid (Gilliam Jr., 1999) who appears to be hostile and lazy (Collins, 1991). The welfare queen segment, taken from *The Women of Brewster Place,* shows a slatternly dressed mother watching a soap opera as her several children play. Interrupted by a neighbor who informs her that her son is eating out of the garbage, she becomes aggressive, says she has plenty of food stamps, and slams the door.

Interview Tape

   A three min. videotape of a male interviewing an African American female for a sales representative position was used. The interviewer remained off camera. The interviewee, dressed in a navy business suit with conservative hair and makeup, was seated at a table and answered questions about her qualifications. The verbal content was adapted from interview scripts to reflect typical interview behavior (Wilson & Goodall, 1991).

Dependent Variables

   Indirect Measures.   Participants assessed whether an adjective "fit" the interviewee, and responses were timed in milliseconds. Adjectives associated with mammy, jezebel and welfare queen stereotypes that were taken from the literature on mediated representations (Bogle, 2001; Collins, 1991; Jones, 2000) whose data support the validity of the construct categories. Composite response time measures were formed by averaging the response time items for each stereotype (see Table 1 for

items). Reliability for the composite reaction time measures was adequate (mammy $\forall=.77$; jezebel

$\forall=.74$; welfare queen $\forall=.68$). Participants also rated 12 filler items.

   Direct Measures. For the welfare queen, pilot participants selected which jobs (from a large list)

reflected the type of work a welfare queen would do. The jobs that rated highest on this list were

selected for this study. Items for jezebel and mammy were taken from _____ (2005), which used

similar pilot procedures.

   In the experimental study, items were measured on 1-7 strongly agree–strongly disagree scales.

Eight items were consistent with mammy (e.g., a good cook, housekeeper, $\forall=.79$). Eight items were

consistent with jezebel (e.g., clerk at Victoria's Secret, swimsuit model, $\forall=.71$). Eight items were

consistent with welfare queen (e.g., stuffing envelopes at home, seasonal employee at Wal-Mart,

$\forall=.79$). Exploratory factor analysis confirmed specific job items loaded on the appropriate factors.

The composite measures were created by averaging the items for each stereotype. Finally, as part of

the cover story, 20 items measured the interviewee's suitability for the sales representative job.

Procedures

   Participants were asked to sign up for two mini-studies as neither study took up enough time to

qualify for research credit. Each mini-study had its own consent and debriefing forms to support the

illusion that the studies were unrelated. Participants first were told they would help select movie clips

to develop a visual aide library for communication courses. After viewing one of the three stereotype

primes, participants gave their brief opinion of the video segment. After a false debriefing,

participants were immediately taken to a different room to watch a job interview. They then

completed the adjective response time items where they indicated (yes/no) whether an adjective

accurately described the job interviewee. Adjectives, presented via the Micro-Experimental Lab

program, were counterbalanced (order 1 or 2). A cover masked all keys except for two marked "yes"

and "no." Participants were advised to answer as quickly as possible and were given three practice

trials. They then completed the response time measures, the first 4 of which were filler adjectives.

Finally, they completed the job suitability items, were thanked, and debriefed about the deception.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Preliminary Analyses

   The efficacy of the jezebel film clip was demonstrated by pilot work reported in _____ (2005).

Thus this pilot study examined the two new clips that had not previously been tested: mammy and

welfare queen. Participants (N = 50) were randomly assigned to the order they watched and rated

two video clips. They rated the central character in each segment on ten five-point Likert scales

(strongly agree-strongly disagree). Five items were consistent with mammy (e.g., nice, nurturing,

responsible; mammy factor $\forall$=.98) and five were consistent with the welfare queen stereotypes (e.g.,

complaining, manipulative; welfare queen factor $\forall$=.81).   In a 2 (video clip) by 2 (order viewed)

ANOVA, order did not significantly interact with video clip. The mammy character ($m = 2.12$) was

judged significantly more similar to mammy judgments than was the welfare queen, $m = 4.42$, $\underline{F}(1,$

$94)=210.36$, $p<.001$, $0^2 = .69$). The welfare queen character ($m = 1.85$) was significantly more

similar to welfare queen judgments than was the mammy character, $m = 3.38$; $F(1, 94)=94.13$,

$p<.001$, $0^2 = .50$, thus, the manipulation was successful.

   The adjective response time data were entered into a 3 (stereotype primed: mammy, jezebel or

welfare queen) x 2 (adjective order) analysis of variance. No interaction or main effects for sequence

were found thus sequence order is not used in analyses below.

Tests of Activation Hypothesis: Direct and Indirect Measures

Direct measures. Analyses of variance for the three job suitability factors were computed with media stereotype primed as the independent variable. There were no significant priming effects for the mammy or jezebel. A significant effect for the welfare queen factor ($F(2, 75)= 4.38$, p = .02, $0^2 =$ .11) was obtained. Using paired-sample t-tests ($p < .05$), those primed with a welfare queen rated the interviewee as more appropriate for jobs consistent with that stereotype (m = 2.75, *s.d.* = 1.07) than did those who viewed a mammy (*m* = 2.92, s.d., = 1.04) or a jezebel stereotype (*m* = 3.15, *s.d.* = .97).

Indirect measures. A 3 (stereotype primed) x 3 (Response times to stereotype adjectives) repeated measures analysis of variance was utilized with response times measures within subjects and prime between subjects. The hypothesized interaction effect was obtained (Wilks 7 = .79, $F(4, 142)= 4.21$, $p = .003$, $0^2 = .11$), paired comparison *t*-tests ($p < .05$) within priming condition were used to examine stereotype specific priming effects. As seen in Table 2, those primed with a specific stereotype responded quicker to stereotype-consistent than to stereotype-inconsistent adjectives. Specifically, participants primed with the mammy stereotype responded significantly quicker to mammy-consistent adjectives than to welfare queen-consistent adjective, however, the difference in response times for mammy/jezebel terms was not significant. Participants primed with jezebel responded significantly quicker to jezebel-consistent than to mammy-consistent adjectives; however, the jezebel/welfare queen difference was not significant. Participants primed with a welfare queen responded quicker to welfare queen terms than to mammy or jezebel terms.

Discussion

The present study extends the stereotyping literature by applying the activation-recency hypothesis to examine within-group stereotype effects. The activation-recency hypothesis states that individuals

who are primed with media content use it in subsequent information processing (Hansen & Hansen, 1988). In the present study of three within-group stereotypes primed, only the welfare queen prime affected *direct* judgments of the job interviewee: Those primed with a welfare queen video clip thought the job applicant was most suitable for jobs such as a seasonal position at Wal-Mart, stuffing envelopes or working in fast food. As predicted, when using indirect measures participants responded quickest to stereotype-consistent adjectives when primed with a given stereotype for all three stereotypes, however, the strongest effects were for the welfare queen stereotype.

Why were the strongest direct and indirect findings obtained for the welfare queen stereotype? One explanation may be because reliability was higher for welfare queen than for the other two stereotypes for the job suitability items. However, since the reliability for the welfare queen was the lowest of the response time measures, this may not be the most parsimonious explanation. A second possibility is that the welfare queen is the most salient stereotype for this sample. These college students began watching television in the 1980s, a time when the mammy and jezebel images were re-conceptualized to reflect more contemporary social roles (Collins, 2004). The welfare queen image became prevalent and is seen on shows ranging from *The Nightly News* to *Jerry Springer* (Gilliam Jr., 1999). Pilot participants could easily describe a welfare queen but described a jezebel or mammy with more difficulty. Thus, the effects for welfare queen may have been stronger because it was most accessible. Future work should measure accessibility of different within-group stereotypes.

A limitation of this work is that this was a one-shot experimental study where participants come into a laboratory to watch a short video and then we test its effects on judgments made in another situation. More longitudinal research needs to be done on the long-term effects of stereotypes, in terms of how they are formed and when they become automatic evaluations. The cumulative effect

of seeing hundreds of mediated images of welfare queens across one's life time may produce a very strong automatic evaluation of African American women that would be difficult to change.

We hypothesized that stronger effects would be obtained for the indirect than the direct measures. While stereotype prime predicted 11% of the variance in both the direct and indirect measures, significant effects for only the welfare queen were obtained using direct measures whereas significant priming effects for all stereotype primes were obtained using indirect measures. That significant results were obtained for all three stereotypes using indirect measures while only one stereotype was significant using direct measures is consistent with previous work finding explicit measures of prejudice and racial attitudes do not always accurately reflect actual attitudes (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Wittenbrink, et al., 1997). However, a weakness of the present work is that the only direct measures were the job suitability items. Subsequent research should employ a wider array of direct measures to examine whether these results will generalize to such other methods.

Macrae, Bodenhausen and Milne (1995) suggest that researchers should focus not only on a single category cue (e.g., the person was black) but multiple cues (e.g., the person was a black male police officer). The present study supports the need for such work by demonstrating that participants applied specific stereotypical primes of African American women when processing information about another African American woman. Future research examining mediated portrayals of African Americans should consider subtypes, conjunctive stereotyping, and within group differences.

<center>Endnotes</center>

1. In a previous study, the "yes" and "no" keys were counterbalanced to test for effects due to the dominant hand being associated with one key. In this study (_____, 2005), no effects for hand dominance were obtained and thus this factor was not included in the present study.

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Table 1   Adjectives associated with stereotypes used in response time task.

Stereotype	Adjective List					
Mammy	Strict	Nurturing	Affectionate	Maternal	Dedicated	Loyal
Jezebel	Erotic	Seductive	Provocative	Sexual	Enticing	Exotic
Welfare Queen	Lazy	Irresponsible	Undeserving	Ignorant	Dirty	Complaining

Table 2. Response Time to Stereotype-consistent Adjectives for each Stereotype Primed.

Stereotype Primed

Dependent Measure	Mammy	Jezebel	Welfare Queen
Mammy	1393.57$_a$ (315.58)	1323.67 (275.95)	1404.48$_a$ (434.04)
Jezebel	1507.15$_{ab}$ (456.57)	1208.93$_a$ (293.26)	1395.82$_a$ (265.28)
Welfare Queen	1577.05$_b$ (433.64)	1233.11$_a$ (326.65)	1243.12 (305.54)

Note. Response times are reported in milliseconds. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Shared subscripts indicate means that are not significantly different (within subject t-tests, $p < .05$).