

Priming Prejudice

How Stereotypes and Counter-Stereotypes Influence Attribution of Responsibility and Credibility among Ingroups and Outgroups

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The research examines the effect of priming negative stereotypic and positive counter-stereotypic portrayals of African Americans (Study 1) and women (Study 2) on interpretations of actual media events. A counter-stereotypic portrayal of an African American male led participants to subsequently make more external or situational attributions of responsibility to other African American males involved in unrelated media events (i.e., Rodney King and Magic Johnson), whereas stereotypic portrayals led to more internal or personal attributions. Similarly, a counter-stereotypic portrayal of a female tended to increase the perceived credibility of females involved in unrelated media events (i.e., the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings and the William Kennedy Smith/Patricia Bowman rape trial) whereas stereotypic portrayals decreased their perceived credibility. Study 2 also revealed an ingroup-outgroup bias in the interpretation of media events, with females tending to be more sympathetic toward other females. Implications of these findings are discussed and suggestions made for future research.

Stereotypes are more than idle curiosities. Rather, they can dramatically shape the way we perceive and interact with members of different groups (Allport, 1954; Lippmann, 1922). In communication, work on stereotypes has primarily focused on identifying and quantifying stereotypic representations in the media (see Friedman, 1977; Gunter, 1986; Signorielli, 1985). Significantly less attention has been paid

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to the effects of stereotypic media portrayals on individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Herrett-Skjellum & Allen, 1996; Pickering, 1995). Almost completely ignored is an examination of counter-stereotypic media portrayals—representations that disconfirm or contradict prevailing cultural stereotypes (Montgomery, 1989; Seiter, 1986). Those studies that have attempted to examine the effects of media portrayals have largely been correlational in nature (Herrett-Skjellum & Allen, 1996) and thus cannot speak directly to the issue of causality. Even research that has employed experimental methodology, and thus could demonstrate causality, has typically concentrated on extreme representations, such as pornography and graphic violence, that are atypical of mainstream media content (Wyer, Bodenhausen, & Gordon, 1985).

One promising approach advocated by researchers interested in establishing the relationship between more mainstream representations and attitudes toward stereotyped groups is priming (Bargh, 1984; Berkowitz & Heimer Rogers, 1986; Wyer et al., 1985; Wyer & Srull, 1989). According to the priming paradigm, the activation of one category or schema—for example, a cultural stereotype—increases the likelihood that the same category will be used in subsequent judgments (Brewer & Nakamura, 1984; Fiske & Linville, 1980; Hastie, 1981; Higgins, 1989; Murphy, Monahan, & Zajonc, 1995; Murphy & Zajonc, 1993; Taylor & Crocker, 1981). The current research builds on previous work on stereotypes as well as the priming paradigm to investigate the effects of stereotypic and counter-stereotypic portrayals on subsequent judgments of unrelated media events. More specifically, the research involves two experimental studies that examine the effects of prior exposure to a negative stereotypic or a positive counter-stereotypic portrayal of an African American male (Study 1) or a female (Study 2). We examine the influence of these portrayals on participants' subsequent interpretations of unrelated media events that involve African Americans and women as central characters as well as their ingroup/out-group identification.

STEREOTYPES AND COUNTER-STEREOTYPES IN THE MEDIA

In *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippmann (1922) characterized stereotypes as constituting "a very partial and inadequate way of representing the world" (p. 72). Research has shown that this characterization is particularly true for mass media portrayals of African Americans and women (Berry, 1980; Campbell, 1995; Entman, 1994a, 1994b; McDonald, 1983; Tuchman, Kaplan-Daniels, & Benet, 1978). For example, in a content analysis of prime-time fictional programming from 1955 to 1986, Lichter, Lichter, Rothman, and Amundson (1987) found a strong association be-

tween crime, drug trafficking, and African American characters. Similarly, in a series of studies on reality-based news reports, Entman (1994a) suggested that television news "paints a picture of Blacks as violent and threatening toward Whites" (p. 29). Entman (1994b) also noted a dearth of positive portrayals of African Americans as contributors to American society.

The mass media's portrayal of women is equally stereotypic. In a content analysis of 620 episodes and 7,000 characters on prime-time network television from 1955 to 1985, Lichter, Lichter, and Rothman (1986) concluded that women were more likely to be portrayed as immature adults, as less well-educated than men, and as holding lower status jobs. Along related lines, Morgan (1982) noted that there were three times as many men as women on television. Those women who do appear have been largely confined to the home and family and excluded from the world of work (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1979; Signorielli, 1985). In sum, television portrayals of African Americans and women have fulfilled Lippmann's description of being partial and inadequate in their representation of the world.

It is important to note, however, that the range of representations of females and African Americans has noticeably broadened in recent years (Berry, 1980; Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Lichter et al., 1986). Often this diversification is accomplished by focusing on the positive elements of stereotypes, for example, highlighting the musical and athletic ability of African Americans. Unfortunately, increasing the salience of the positive aspects of a cultural stereotype tends to reify and lend credence to the negative elements of the stereotype as well. Perhaps a more constructive method of diversification might be achieved by the introduction of counter-stereotypes. In contrast to highlighting the positive elements of a stereotype, counter-stereotypes contain elements that *directly contradict or disconfirm* the cultural stereotype of the group (Montgomery, 1989; Seiter, 1986).

The effects of such disconfirming information in media messages has long been of interest to communication researchers. For instance, Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) examined what was termed *counternorm communications*, or messages that argue in direct opposition to group norms. The researchers found support for the hypothesis that individuals who value their group membership highly will be less influenced by communications contrary to the group norms. The present research draws on the concept of group membership as a mediating factor in the interpretation of stereotypic and counter-stereotypic representations.

Of all television programs containing counter-stereotypic characters, *The Cosby Show* has received the greatest amount of research attention (Fuller, 1992). Gray (1989) argued that the financial success demonstrated by the Cosby family's lifestyle and the lack of individual motivation

among the urban poor in a CBS documentary did not exist in isolation but rather operated intertextually. Intertextuality refers to the potential for one media representation to influence subsequent interpretations of related topics (Turner, 1990). Gray further suggested that television audiences can resolve the seeming inconsistency between these two representations of African Americans by focusing on the individual as the causal agent of his or her life circumstances. In a similar vein, Jhally and Lewis (1992) found that Anglo viewers did not regard race as a significant attribute of the Cosby family. In other words, by virtue of their upper-middle class social status, the Cosbys managed to transcend their racial category. Jhally and Lewis concluded that *The Cosby Show* constitutes an example of "enlightened racism," in that viewers do not view race as a barrier to social mobility.

Similar internal attributions of responsibility are made regarding non-fictional representations of African Americans. For example, Iyengar (1990) explored the extent to which the interpretive frame of race influences how people assign responsibility for poverty. The findings demonstrated that when the person featured in the news story was Anglo, individuals tended to attribute responsibility for poverty externally to societal factors. Conversely, when the person featured was African American, participants made internal attributions of responsibility, blaming individuals for their own plight.

Thus, it appears that when things go badly for Anglos, it is due to circumstances beyond their control. In contrast, when the same negative outcomes befall African Americans, the individuals themselves are held accountable. This raises an interesting question. Would exposure to a stereotypic individual lead people to judge other members of the stereotyped group as more responsible for negative events in which they are involved? Alternately, would exposure to a counter-stereotypic individual, who contradicts the group stereotype, lead to a decrease in attribution of responsibility toward a member of the stereotyped group? Study 1 examines the effects of a negative stereotypic and a positive counter-stereotypic prime of an African American male on patterns of attribution as they affect interpretations of actual media events.

PRIMING

Priming occurs when a certain category or schema is activated and applied to other, even unrelated, objects or events (Brewer & Nakamura, 1984; Fiske & Linville, 1980; Hastie, 1981; Taylor & Crocker, 1981). For example, in a study by Devine (1989), participants were presented with words related to the African American stereotype (i.e., lazy, athletic, musical) at an exposure threshold below conscious awareness. In a later

task, participants who had been primed subliminally with stereotypic traits were more likely to rate Donald, an unrelated target person, as hostile—in keeping with the racial stereotype—than participants who were subliminally primed with traits unrelated to the stereotype. Similarly, in a study by Greenberg and Pyszczynski (1986), individuals who overheard a racial slur subsequently evaluated an African American's performance more negatively than those who had not overheard the slur.

Gender stereotypes appear equally susceptible to cross-contextual priming. In one study by McKenzie-Mohr and Zanna (1990), men for whom gender was a salient category were shown a pornographic film. These men subsequently responded more stereotypically to a female they encountered in an ostensibly unrelated interview. Moreover, in comparison to men who had not viewed the film, these men were more likely to focus on and recall the woman's physical attributes and less likely to remember the content of the interview. Viewing rock music videos has likewise been shown to evoke stereotypic interpretations of male-female relationships (Hansen & Hansen, 1988).

Nor are these priming effects fleeting. The priming of a stimulus has been demonstrated not only across context but also across time (Higgins & King, 1981; Srull & Wyer, 1980). Participants in a study by Lewicki (1986) interacted with an experimental assistant who either had long or short hair and was either relatively pleasant or unpleasant. A week later, participants returned to the laboratory and interacted with a different assistant whose hair was either the same length or the opposite length as the person in the previous visit. Ratings of the second assistant showed a clear priming effect: When the hair length of the two assistants was similar, participants inferred similar personality traits. Indeed, the literature on priming suggests that "similarity to a previously known individual, whether consciously perceived or not, may create a sense of shared attitudes, attraction, predictability, or safety" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991, p. 169). If the seemingly innocuous physical cue of hair length can trigger such effects, what might we expect of more socially significant cues such as race and gender? It is entirely possible that the activation of a stereotypic or counter-stereotypic media portrayal in one context may have long-lasting effects in other unrelated contexts.

The priming phenomenon speaks directly to the potential effects of the daily bombardment of both fictional and nonfictional media stereotypes. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) demonstrated that the news media, by drawing viewers' attention to some matters while ignoring others, can set the standards by which we judge our political candidates. Thus, by featuring numerous crime stories and ignoring environmental issues, the media can set the public's agenda toward seeking a candidate who is tough on crime and consequently sway the outcome of the election. Among fictional media representations, the long-standing practice of "typecasting" or

"stock characters" exemplifies the use of stereotypes as a heuristic, cuing the audience to the underlying motivations and identity of the character. The image of a middle-aged female in a housecoat, fuzzy slippers, and curlers easily evokes our "frumpy housewife" schema. It allows the viewer to go beyond the information given explicitly in the text and infer all manner of traits in the character (Bruner, 1957).

The success of such stock characters relies heavily on the cognitive accessibility of the stereotype. In other words, if a stereotype is not pervasive within a culture, then the relevant category or schema cannot be easily accessed or activated (Bargh, Lombardi, & Higgins, 1988; Higgins & Brendl, 1995). This may have implications for counter-stereotypic representations, which unlike existing stereotypes, cannot benefit from such established mental representations. One implication may be that a counter-stereotypic representation, because it does not draw on preexisting schema, does not have the same potential as a stereotypic representation to produce similar shifts in judgment.

Media scholars have expressed a similar concern about the ease and frequency with which stereotypic representations call up preexisting cultural stereotypes in the mind of the individual (Entman, 1994b). For example, Gandy (1994) argued that

Because of the media's role in the cultivation of social perceptions, there is reason to be concerned about the tendency for African Americans and Hispanics to be represented in media roles that define them as violent criminals. Not only do such representations operate to reproduce racism, but the cumulative impact may be a reduction in the general audience's willingness to support public policies designed to help blacks escape poverty and criminal victimization. (p. 41)

Currently, however, scant empirical evidence exists to suggest that stereotypic media representations actually influence subsequent evaluations of members of the stereotyped group more generally. The focus of the current research was to test whether exposure to a counter-stereotypic or stereotypic portrayal of an unknown African American male can sway individuals' subsequent interpretations of actual events involving African American males. More specifically, in Study 1 we tested the following hypotheses:

- H1: Exposure to a stereotypic or counter-stereotypic portrayal of a member of a stereotyped group will prime subsequent judgments of responsibility toward a member of the same stereotyped group involved in an unrelated media event.
- H1a: Exposure to a negative stereotypic portrayal of an African American male will result in more internal or dispositional and less external or situational attributions of responsibility toward an African American male involved in an unrelated media event.

H1b: Exposure to a positive counter-stereotypic portrayal of an African American male will result in more external or situational and less internal or dispositional attributions of responsibility toward an African American male involved in an unrelated media event.

STUDY 1

Method

Stimulus Material

Fifty-one students enrolled in a communication program at a major West Coast university participated in a pilot study to identify the most common elements of the cultural stereotype of African Americans and women. The students were asked to complete a Cultural Stereotype Survey, in which respondents listed four positive and four negative traits generally attributed to 22 specific social groups (e.g., men, women, people older than 60 years, African Americans, smokers, Jews, etc.). It was strongly emphasized to the participants that the purpose of the survey was to report "what you believe society's stereotypes of these groups to be," rather than the subject's own beliefs in the validity of the stereotypes. All mentions of stereotypes were ordered into categories. The frequencies associated with each category were used to identify the four strongest overall attributes for each group. The four most frequently mentioned negative stereotypic attributes for African Americans were lazy, unintelligent, aggressive, and socially destructive. These same traits have previously been identified as constituting the African American stereotype (Devine, 1989; Katz & Braly, 1933, 1935; Stephan & Rosenfield, 1982). The counter-stereotypic traits were determined by selecting the semantic opposites for the negative stereotype. Thus, the counter-stereotypic traits used in the present study were hard-working, intelligent, gentle, and socially constructive.

The four negative traits were integrated into a stereotypic autobiographical essay ostensibly written by a male African American student named Chris Miller, whose photograph appeared in the upper left-hand corner of the text. Similarly, the four positive traits were integrated into a counter-stereotypic autobiographical essay. These stimulus materials were designed to be subtle, nonobvious manipulations such that none of the aforementioned trait terms appeared in the text, thus reducing demand characteristics.

These essays were featured in a newsletter created for the purposes of this study.¹ This newsletter, entitled *People and Places*, was introduced as the pilot version of a continuing newsletter that would feature a different

autobiographical profile of a student and a different place on campus each month. Participants were unaware that Chris Miller, the person featured, varied across versions of the newsletter with respect to portrayal (counter-stereotypic and stereotypic).

In the counter-stereotype condition, the text of the autobiographical sketch implied that Chris Miller was hard-working (spends a great deal of time and effort studying), intelligent (takes very challenging courses such as chemistry and philosophy), and gentle (consoled a person who backed into and damaged his car), and that he engaged in socially constructive acts (volunteers at a homeless shelter). In contrast, the stereotypic text suggested that Chris Miller was lazy (did not invest much time or effort in studying), unintelligent (was failing at least one class), and aggressive (became enraged over a busted headlight and threatened violence) and that he engaged in socially destructive behavior (hangs out every weekend, drinking and looking for some action). A neutral text that was of similar length but did not prime the race or gender of the author was constructed for the control condition.

Participants

One hundred and ten Anglo undergraduate students at a major West Coast university participated in Study 1 with roughly equal numbers assigned to each of the three portrayal conditions.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to complete what they believed to be two unrelated surveys. To minimize experimental demand characteristics for the racial and gender issues addressed in this research, Study 1 and Study 2 were presented to the participants by an Anglo male.

In each study, the two surveys were described as two different research projects being conducted by different researchers at the university. The first survey dealt with an evaluation of the proposed campus newsletter, *People and Places*. After reading the newsletter, participants were asked a series of questions regarding how effective and attractive they found the format and how interesting they considered the articles. Immediately afterward, participants were asked to complete a second, ostensibly unrelated "attitude" survey dealing with their evaluations of two media events—the Rodney King beating and Magic Johnson's disclosure of his HIV status—as well as their attitudes toward African Americans and women more generally.² It is important to note that our use of the term *media events* is not the same as that employed by Dayan and Katz (1990), who focus on the capacity of media coverage of public events to facilitate solidarity among television viewers.

Dependent Measures

For present purposes, the items of interest were participants' evaluations of Rodney King and Magic Johnson as either innocent victims (external attribution) or as having brought the circumstances on themselves (internal attribution). These measures were assessed using the following questions:

During the past year, there have been several events that have brought issues regarding women and minorities to the forefront of the public's attention. Please indicate your views regarding the following:

Last year a videotape of the arrest of Rodney King by members of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) received national attention. Some people believe that King was an innocent victim of police brutality while others believe that King brought it upon himself by his unresponsiveness and failure to stop when pulled over. On a scale from 1 to 10, (where 1 implies he was an innocent victim and 10 implies he brought it on himself), please circle the number that corresponds to your position with regard to this incident.

Another story that has had a lot of media attention is Magic Johnson's disclosure of his HIV positive status. Some people consider him to be an innocent victim of a terrible tragedy while others believe that he brought it upon himself through his promiscuous behavior. On a scale from 1 to 10, (where 1 implies he was an innocent victim and 10 implies he brought it on himself), please circle the number that corresponds to your position with regard to this incident.

In both the verbal introduction and in the survey cover letter, it was stressed that participants' responses to these and other items would remain completely anonymous. Students were subsequently debriefed in a class lecture on stereotyping, provided with the names and telephone numbers of the researchers, should they have further questions, and thanked for their participation.³

Results

Manipulation Check

It was important to demonstrate that the portrayal manipulation had actually primed the relevant stereotype or counter-stereotype as opposed to simply priming a negative or positive affective state. To ensure that this was indeed the case, after participants had completed the questions regarding the events, those in the stereotypic and counter-stereotypic conditions were then asked to rate the extent to which various traits were

representative of African Americans as a whole. This list included the four negative stereotypic traits manipulated in the portrayal (lazy, aggressive, unintelligent, and socially destructive), as well as some stereotypically irrelevant traits (i.e., weak, overemotional, self-centered). Mean composite scores of the negative stereotype-relevant traits—aggressive, lazy, unintelligent, and socially destructive—were significantly influenced by participants' prior exposure to a stereotypic or counter-stereotypic portrayal, $M = 5.69$ versus $M = 4.52$, $t(59) = 2.91$, $p < .001$. Judgments of negative stereotype-irrelevant traits were not significantly influenced by the portrayal manipulation, $M = 4.49$ for stereotypic portrayal and 4.09 for counter-stereotypic portrayal, $t(59) = 1.09$, $p < .28$. These findings suggest that the stereotype and counter-stereotype—rather than a general affective state—had been primed.

Analyses

H1 stated that exposure to a stereotypic or counterstereotypic portrayal of a member of a stereotyped group will prime subsequent judgments of responsibility toward a member of the same stereotyped group involved in an unrelated media event. To address this question, participants' responses to the media events were first analyzed in a 2 (sex of subject) by 3 (portrayal: counter-stereotypic, control, stereotypic) by 2 (media event: Rodney King, Magic Johnson) analysis of variance, with media event treated as a within-subject repeated measure. The results revealed a significant main effect for newsletter portrayal, $F(2,107) = 8.49$, $p < .001$. As shown in Table 1, participants who had received the stereotypic portrayal were the most likely to blame the individual involved in the event whereas those who received the counter-stereotypic portrayal were the least likely to do so, with the control group falling in between. Overall, these findings support H1.

Although there was a nonsignificant main effect for sex of subject, $F(1, 107) = 2.19$, $p < .142$, there was a significant portrayal by gender interaction, $F(2, 107) = 9.93$, $p < .001$, such that women's judgments were far more influenced by a counter-stereotypic portrayal than their male counterparts. The within-subject factor of event also revealed a significant main effect such that participants' attributions with regard to Rodney King ($M = 4.34$) were far more sympathetic (external) than their attributions toward Magic Johnson, $M = 6.34$, $F(1, 107) = 37.49$, $p < .001$. There was also a significant interaction between the sex of the subject and the event such that women tended to be more sympathetic toward Rodney King ($M = 5.04$ for males and $M = 3.62$ for females) and less sympathetic (more internal) toward Magic Johnson, $M = 6.07$ for males and 6.63 for females, $F(1, 107) = 13.13$, $p < .001$.

TABLE 1
Mean Ratings of Attribution of Responsibility Following
Exposure to the African American Newsletter as a Function
of Portrayal and Event (Study 1)

| <i>Portrayal</i> | <i>Event</i> | |
|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| | <i>Rodney King</i> | <i>Magic Johnson</i> |
| Counter-stereotype | 3.15 _a | 5.65 _{b,c} |
| Control | 4.87 _b | 6.04 _c |
| Stereotype | 5.51 _{b,c} | 7.04 _d |

NOTE: $N = 110$. Higher numbers denote more internal or dispositional attributions (brought it on himself), whereas lower numbers denote more external or situational attributions (innocent victim). Means with the same letter subscript are not significantly different as indicated by t tests at the $p < .05$ level.

Because respondents' reactions seemed to differ somewhat by event, the more specific directional hypotheses, H1a and H1b analyzed the two events separately. Recall that H1a predicted that exposure to a negative stereotypic portrayal of an African American male will result in more internal or dispositional and less external or situational attributions of responsibility toward an African American male involved in an unrelated media event. To test this hypothesis directly, participants who received the stereotyped portrayal were compared to those who received the neutral control portrayal. A one-way analysis of variance revealed that with regard to judgments of Magic Johnson, $F(1, 66) = 11.98, p < .001$, those who received the stereotypic portrayal made significantly more internal attributions of responsibility than participants who received the control version. Judgments of Rodney King showed a marginally significant trend in the same direction, $F(1, 66) = 2.29, p < .06$, suggesting that stereotypic portrayals do, in fact, result in more internal attributions of responsibility.

H1b predicted that exposure to a positive counter- stereotypic portrayal of an African American male will result in more external or situational and less internal or dispositional attributions of responsibility toward an African American male involved in an unrelated media event. A one-way analysis of variance found that participants who received the counter-stereotypic version of the newsletter were significantly more likely to make external or situational attributions of responsibility with regard to Rodney King than those in the control condition, $F(1, 66) = 11.98, p < .001$. Participants who received the counter-stereotypic portrayal were also more likely to see Magic Johnson as an innocent victim of circumstance compared to those in the control group, although this trend was not statistically significant, $F(1, 66) = 1.42, p < .13$. Thus H1b received mixed support.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 demonstrate a relationship between exposure to a counter-stereotypic or a stereotypic portrayal of an African American male and subsequent judgments of an unrelated African American male involved in a controversial media event.

Individuals who read a stereotypic portrayal of Chris Miller were the most likely to blame Magic Johnson and Rodney King for their plight. In contrast, participants who were exposed to the counter-stereotypic portrayal were more likely to make external or situational attributions, viewing both Rodney King and Magic Johnson as innocent victims rather than bringing their circumstances on themselves.

It is interesting to note that there was a main effect for event such that regardless of portrayal, individuals were more likely to blame Magic Johnson for his HIV status. There are two plausible explanations for this finding. First, by admitting that he had contracted HIV through his own promiscuous behavior, Johnson may have led the public to make a more internal attribution of responsibility. Previous research by Kanter (1977), however, suggests an alternative explanation—that females and minorities who are exceptionally successful are more heavily penalized for their subsequent failures. Perhaps individuals juxtaposed Magic Johnson's enormous success and popularity with his irresponsible behavior and as a result judged him more harshly than if he had been unknown.

Because all of the participants in Study 1 were Anglo and thus not members of the stereotyped group, we are unable to address the following question: How might members of a stereotyped group respond when primed with stereotypic and counter-stereotypic portrayals of their own ingroup? Intergroup research suggests that stereotyping is an integral part of the process by which ingroup and outgroup attributions are made (see Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994, for a review). Tajfel (1969, 1982) demonstrated that the mere categorization of individuals into groups on an arbitrary criterion (the results of a coin toss) led to prejudice against outgroup members and preferential treatment toward members of the ingroup. Tajfel (1978) used the term *social identity* to refer to the central role that such social categorization plays in one's self definition. Social identity is "that part of an individuals' self concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 63).

STUDY 2

Study 2, in which participants were presented with stereotypic and counter-stereotypic gender portrayals, was designed to test the hypothe-

sis that individuals evaluate media events based on ingroup/outgroup membership. Two media events that polarized the public were the trial involving William Kennedy Smith, who was accused of raping Patricia Bowman, and the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings. The discourse surrounding these events broke down heavily along gender lines, with men tending to ascribe to Thomas's and Kennedy Smith's version of events and women tending to believe the females involved. Thus, unlike the events in Study 1, which questioned an individual's responsibility for documented events, one's judgments of these two events—whose very occurrence was highly contested—hinged on the issue of credibility. For present purposes, judgments of credibility as well as responsibility are theorized, as in prior research (Bodenhausen & Wyer, 1985; Wyer et al., 1985), as manifestations of a single underlying dimension of prejudice.

Judgments of credibility regarding the William Kennedy Smith rape trial and the Clarence Thomas hearings afford the opportunity to examine the effects of priming stereotypic and counter-stereotypic portrayals of an unrelated female on the relative credibility of the males and females involved in these two events. We expected that a stereotypic portrayal of a female would lower the perception of credibility of Anita Hill and Patricia Bowman and that a counter-stereotypic portrayal would have the opposite effect. We further predicted that men and women would demonstrate an ingroup/outgroup bias in their interpretation of these events. Study 2 was designed to test the following hypotheses:

- H2: Exposure to a stereotypic or counter-stereotypic portrayal of a female will prime subsequent judgments of credibility toward another female involved in an unrelated media event.

More specifically, for present purposes:

- H2a: Exposure to a negative stereotypic portrayal of a female will decrease the perceived credibility of a female relative to a male in the interpretation of an unrelated media event.
 H2b: Exposure to a positive counter-stereotypic portrayal of a female will increase the perceived credibility of a female relative to a male in the interpretation of an unrelated media event.
 H3: Ingroup members will tend to attribute greater credibility to other ingroup members involved in media events.

To investigate the effects of stereotypic and counter-stereotypic portrayals of females on ingroup and outgroup reactions and perceptions of credibility, Study 1 was replicated using a female Chris Miller.

Stimulus Materials

Using the results of the Cultural Stereotypes Survey described earlier, a similar text was constructed integrating the four most frequently mentioned negative traits for females—bitchy/shrewlike, unintelligent, overemotional, passive/weak. These traits have been identified in earlier studies as being stereotypic of females (Beirnat & Manis, 1994; Goldberg, 1968; Ruble & Ruble, 1982). In the stereotypic version of the text, it was inferred that Chris Miller was shrewlike or bitchy (after I move out, we might do lunch, but I doubt it), unintelligent (almost failing one class), overemotional (crying when someone busted the taillight of her car), and passive/weak (feeling inhibited in social situations and too worn out to join a club). In the counter-stereotypic version of the text, Chris Miller is described as compassionate (making an extra effort for her roommate, who is living far from home), intelligent (takes challenging courses such as chemistry and philosophy), levelheaded (accepting that unexpected inconveniences such as a broken taillight occur and one just learns to deal with them), and active/strong (considering joining the intramural sailing and/or field hockey teams). Chris Miller's gender was cued by the presence of a photo of a female in the upper left-hand corner of the newsletter. The text for the control condition, which did not prime either the race or gender of the author, was identical to that used in Study 1.

Participants

One hundred and one additional students at a large West Coast university (50 males, 51 females), participated in Study 2 with roughly equal numbers in each of the three conditions.

Procedure

Procedures similar to those described in Study 1 were employed in Study 2. The same stimuli were employed in the control condition, namely, a relatively benign text that primed neither race nor gender and had no picture of Chris Miller. In the experimental conditions, however, participants were presented with a set of stimulus materials that identified Chris Miller by photograph as a female; the accompanying text integrated either stereotypic or counter-stereotypic traits into different versions of her autobiographical essay.

Dependent Measures

The dependent measures of interest for the present study were evaluations of the Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings and the William Kennedy Smith rape trial. The questions were worded as follows:

The Clarence Thomas / Anita Hill hearings raised serious questions regarding sexual harassment in the workplace. Some believed Hill's testimony while others believed Thomas's testimony. On a scale from 1 to 10, (where 1 implies believing Hill and 10 implies believing Thomas), please indicate whose testimony you believe.

William Kennedy Smith was recently acquitted of raping Patricia Bowman. Some people believe Bowman's testimony while others believe Kennedy Smith's testimony. On a scale from 1 to 10, (where 1 implies believing Bowman and 10 implies believing Kennedy Smith), please indicate whose testimony you believe.

Results

Manipulation check

Once again it was necessary to establish that the portrayal had primed the specific stereotype or counter-stereotype as opposed to a general affective state. As in Study 1, participants in each portrayal condition were asked to what extent each of a list of trait terms was representative of females in general, using a 10-point Likert scale ranging from *not at all* to *extremely*. As in Study 1, stereotypic traits (self-centered, weak, overemotional, and unintelligent) were more likely to be endorsed by participants in the stereotypic portrayal condition ($M = 4.94$) than those in the counter-stereotypic portrayal condition, $M = 2.75$; $t(63) = 5.81$, $p < .001$. There was no significant difference on ratings of traits irrelevant to the female stereotype, such as lazy, socially destructive, and irresponsible, $M = 3.21$ and 3.18 for the stereotype and counter-stereotype conditions, $t(63) = .10$. As in Study 1, then, it appears that the portrayal manipulation was successful in priming the relevant stereotype or counter-stereotype as opposed to a more general positive or negative affective state.

Analyses

H2 predicted that exposure to a stereotypic or counter-stereotypic portrayal of a female would prime subsequent judgments of credibility with regard to another female involved in an unrelated media event. To test this hypothesis, participants' responses to the media events were analyzed in a 2 (sex of subject) by 3 (newsletter prime: counter-stereotypic, control, stereotypic) by 2 (media event: Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas

TABLE 2
Mean Ratings of Perceived Credibility Following Exposure
to the Female Newsletter as a Function of Portrayal
and Sex of Subject (Study 2)

| <i>Portrayal</i> | <i>Sex of Participant</i> | |
|--------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| | <i>Female</i> | <i>Male</i> |
| Counter-stereotype | 2.70 _a | 4.58 _{b,c} |
| Control | 3.38 _{a,b} | 4.77 _c |
| Stereotype | 3.77 _b | 6.20 _d |

NOTE: $N = 101$. Higher numbers denote more male relative to female credibility. As there were no significant differences by event, the above data collapses over both events (Bowman/Kennedy Smith and Hill/Thomas). Means with the same letter subscript are not significantly different as indicated by t tests at the $p < .05$ level.

versus Bowman/Kennedy Smith) analysis of variance. This analysis revealed a significant main effect for newsletter portrayal, $F(2, 95) = 2.83$, $p < .03$, such that individuals who had previously been exposed to a stereotypic portrayal were the least likely to believe the females involved in the two events, whereas those who had been exposed to the counter-stereotypic portrayal were the most likely to believe Hill and Bowman, with those exposed to the control condition falling in between these two extremes, as shown in Table 2.

With regard to the within-subjects factor of event, there were no significant differences between participants' responses to the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas controversy and their evaluations of the Bowman/Kennedy Smith case, $F(1, 95) = .66$, $p < .417$. Moreover, there were no statistically significant interactions involving event. Consequently, the two events were subsequently collapsed in further analyses and in Table 2 in the interests of simplicity.

H2a predicted that exposure to a negative stereotypic portrayal of a female would decrease the perceived credibility of a female relative to a male in the interpretation of an unrelated media event. To test the hypothesis directly, a one-way analysis of variance compared participants in the control group to those in the stereotypic portrayal condition. As noted in Table 2, the judgments of participants in the stereotype portrayal condition were significantly higher (implying that they tended to find the male involved in the event relatively more credible) than those in the control condition, $F(1, 59) = 3.32$, $p < .04$. Thus these data support H2a.

H2b predicted that exposure to a positive counter-stereotypic portrayal of a female would increase the perceived credibility of a female relative to a male in the interpretation of an unrelated media event. A one-way analysis of variance revealed that, although those in the counter-stereotype

condition were more likely than those in the control condition to view Hill and Bowman as credible, the trend was not statistically significant, $F(1, 68) = .86, p < .17$. However, in interpreting these results, it is important to note that the effects of portrayal were heavily determined by the sex of the subject as described below.

Sex of Subject: Ingroup/Outgroup Effects

It was hypothesized that the sex of the individual may form the basis for an intergroup bias such that ingroup members tend to be more sympathetic toward other ingroup members and less sympathetic to outgroup members. A 2 (sex of subject) by 3 (newsletter prime: counter-stereotypic, control, stereotypic) analysis of variance revealed an overall main effect for sex of subject, $F(1, 95) = 29.56, p < .001$. In short, females were more likely to believe the females involved in the media events and the males to believe the males. H3, therefore, was confirmed. Interestingly, there was also a sex of subject by portrayal interaction, $F(2, 95) = 3.03, p < .05$, such that males were particularly susceptible to the stereotypic female portrayal, whereas females appeared to be more influenced by the counter-stereotypic portrayal.

Discussion

H2 was confirmed by a significant main effect for portrayal across both events on perceptions of credibility. More specifically, as tested in H2a, participants exposed to a stereotypic female were significantly less likely to believe Anita Hill and Patricia Bowman. In contrast, those who read a counter-stereotypic portrayal gave Hill and Bowman the highest ratings of credibility, although these ratings were not significantly different from those of individuals in the control condition. These results must be interpreted cautiously, however, because the effect of portrayal was heavily influenced by the sex of the individual. In other words, female participants, regardless of which version of the newsletter they read, were more likely to believe the women involved in the events. This finding provides support for H3, indicating that ingroup members attribute greater credibility to other ingroup members.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent from the results of both studies that being exposed to stereotypic or counter-stereotypic portrayals subsequently cued specific interpretations of actual media events. The results in Study 1, where participants read about an African American Chris Miller, revealed differ-

ences in the internal versus external attributions of responsibility such that those who read stereotypic portrayals of an African American male were more likely to hold Rodney King and Magic Johnson responsible for their own plight whereas those who read a counter-stereotypic version tended to attribute their problems to more external causes. A similar pattern emerged in Study 2. Those who read a version of the newsletter depicting a stereotypic female were significantly more likely to believe Clarence Thomas's and William Kennedy Smith's version of the events. Of the three portrayal groups, individuals exposed to a counter-stereotypic female gave the highest credibility ratings to Hill and Bowman, although these ratings were not significantly different from those generated by the control group. This is due to an overwhelming sex-of-subject effect. Taken together, these findings speak to the potential for counter-stereotypic portrayals to counter prevailing prejudice. Moreover, these results provide evidence of what Gray (1989) describes as *intertextuality*, where one representation influences the interpretation of subsequent representations that pertain to similar target persons (see also Turner, 1990).

A major finding was the significant divergence in perceptions of credibility based on the sex of the subject for both Hill-Thomas and Bowman/Kennedy Smith. Similar results were obtained by Wyer et al. (1985) in a study in which male participants who were primed with portrayals of women as sex objects were significantly less likely in a subsequent task to perceive a rape victim as credible and more likely to hold her responsible for the incident. This pattern had the opposite effect on female participants' judgments. Likewise, Henley, Miller, and Beazley (1995) found that male college students who had read mock news reports of crime using the passive voice attributed less victim harm and perpetrator responsibility than their female counterparts.

The differences between male and female responses to these texts raise some intriguing possibilities regarding the relationship between media content and their audiences. The notion of a uniform homogeneous audience was long ago abandoned by media researchers. It has been replaced by a variety of concepts that reflect the diversity of the audience, including the notion of taste publics or taste segments (Cantor & Cantor, 1986; Gans, 1982). More recently, the issue of how the audience relates to media content has been characterized in a more complex form by reception theory (Crane, 1992). Reception theory contains three important elements. First, content is conceived as indeterminate and thus allows for multiple interpretations (Iser, 1978). Second, reception theory argues that media content invites certain interpretations and consequently "positions" readers to interpret the content from a dominant, oppositional, and negotiated point of view (Hall, 1982; Hartley, 1982; Parkin, 1972). Finally, reception theory posits that audience members belong to interpretive

communities, where content is understood in similar ways based on group membership. The central idea in reception theory of interpretive communities is that audience members will cluster together on different criteria based on identity and experience as it relates to different content. Our results suggest that gender may constitute one of many possible interpretive communities to which individuals belong.

Because our sample did not contain African Americans, we are unable to speak directly to the issue of interpretive communities based on race. However, the public discourse surrounding recent events such as the O. J. Simpson trial provides anecdotal evidence that similar ingroup/outgroup sentiments could easily develop along racial lines. It should be noted that although the research reported here focuses on race and gender, future studies should incorporate a wider range of audience characteristics to further explore the concept of interpretive communities.

We concur with the concerns of Gandy (1994) and Entman (1994b), described earlier, regarding the potential for audience members to bolster the cultural stereotype by combining media representations that are individually accurate. However, it is unclear from our results the extent to which different portrayals are additive, particularly counter-stereotypic portrayals. Rothbart (1981) describes three models of stereotype change: bookkeeping, conversion, and subtyping. The bookkeeping model proposes that each discrepant encounter changes the existing stereotype incrementally. Thus only repeated exposures would result in a gradual additive effect. The conversion model, on the other hand, proposes that even a single incongruent encounter can radically change a stereotype. Similar to a religious conversion, an isolated incident can alter one's worldview utterly and irrevocably. Finally, the subtyping model suggests that incongruence may cause the perceiver to form subcategories within the overall stereotype—in other words, to see counter-stereotypes as the exception to the rule. Because our experimental manipulation involved a single portrayal, we are unable to distinguish between these three models. To do so, future research must incorporate multiple exposures to different counter-stereotypic examples.

Although our design does suggest a priming effect between stereotypic and counter-stereotypic portrayals and measures of responsibility and credibility in unrelated media events, we are also unable to comment on the longevity of these effects. In other words, we do not know if a single exposure to a counter-stereotypic representation would persist over time or quickly wither away and lose its potency. Further research, therefore, should attempt to ascertain similar priming effects at various points in time.

Understanding the potential for stereotypic and counter-stereotypic images from one media portrayal to prime judgments in a seemingly unrelated domain is critical. All too often, judgments of actual media

events have very real consequences. Moreover, it may be the case that the effects of stereotypic and counter-stereotypic portrayals are even more powerful when projected onto completely unfamiliar events about which the public has no preconceived opinions. Despite a relatively mild manipulation, our findings suggest that people's prior exposure to what are assumed to be unrelated and, therefore, innocuous media portrayals alters subsequent perceptions of responsibility and credibility. The potential of media portrayals to prime individual's subsequent judgments has serious implications not only for the legal and political systems but for society more generally.

NOTES

1. The complete text of the stimulus materials is available from the authors.
2. The results of this part of the research are available from the authors.
3. It is worthwhile to note that when participants were probed as to whether they suspected that the two surveys (the evaluation of the newsletter and the survey on media events) were related, only one subject responded in the affirmative.

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