Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 46 (2010) 356–360

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Experimental Social Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jesp

Report

Prototypes of race and gender: The invisibility of Black women

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 20 August 2009
Revised 22 October 2009
Available online 1 November 2009

Keywords:
Stereotyping
Prejudice
Gender
Race

ABSTRACT

Research on racial and gender stereotyping typically focuses on the role of one of these social categories at a time rather than race/gender combinations. We suggest that the relative *non-prototypicality* of Black women's race and gender results in their "invisibility" relative to White women and to Black and White men (Fryberg & Townsend, 2008; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Two studies address whether Black women go "unnoticed" and their voices "unheard," by examining memory for Black women's faces and speech contributions. We found that photos of Black women were least likely to be recognized (Study 1), and statements said by a Black woman in a group discussion were least likely to be correctly attributed (Study 2) compared to Black men and White women and White men. The importance and implications of invisibility as a unique form of discrimination are discussed.

Introduction

As a discipline, social psychology has been dedicated to studying racial and gender stereotyping and prejudice. However, the majority of research investigates *Black men* as targets of racism, and *White women* as targets of sexism, disregarding members of groups belonging to multiple-subordinate-group identities, such as Black women. Despite their rarity in laboratory studies of stereotyping, there has been some debate in the literature on the issue of whether Black women experience relative disadvantage or advantage due to their unique dual subordinate category membership.

The prominent theory arguing in favor of disadvantage is the "double jeopardy" hypothesis, which posits a "double hit" of racism and sexism (Beale, 1970). From this perspective, Black women are assumed to be worse off than White women and Black men because they are subject to both racism and sexism (Epstein, 1973; Reid & Comas-Diaz, 1990; Settles, 2006). Data supporting this hypothesis have been sparse and inconclusive, and only recently have researchers begun to empirically offer and test alternatives (e.g., Levin, Sinclair, Veniegas, & Taylor, 2002; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius & Veniegas, 2000; see also Kang & Chasteen, 2009). One such alternative to double jeopardy is the *subordinate-male target hypothesis* (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), which argues that Black males, rather than Black females, are primary objects of discrimination. Another is the *ethnic-prominence hypothesis* (Levin et al., 2002), which suggests that race trumps gender, such that women of color are more likely to experience discrimination because of their race than because of their gender.

Other relevant research has been descriptive, providing evidence that stereotypes of Black women differ from those of White women and Black men. For example, relative to White women, Black women tend to be viewed as more "masculine" (self-reliant, independent, assertive, strong) and less "feminine" (emotional, passive, dependent; Binion, 1990; Landrine, 1985; Robinson, 1983; West, 1995). And while some stereotypes of Black women are consistent with those of Black men (lazy, hostile, uneducated), others are in opposition to these stereotypes (see Niemann, Jennings, Rozelle, Baxter, & Sullivan, 1994).

These findings about differential stereotypes suggest that Black women are neither prototypical of "women" nor of "Blacks" (also see Goff, Thomas, & Jackson, 2008; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) and this *non-prototypicality hypothesis* guides the present research. The extent to which a group member or stimulus is prototypical of its category has been shown to affect basic categorization and memory processes (Rosch, 1975). For example, non-prototypical category members are less likely to be recognized than prototypical stimuli (Cantor & Mischel, 1977; Posner & Keele, 1968; Posner & Keele, 1970), are less quickly identified as members of the category (Ellis & Nelson, 1999), and are recalled later than prototypical members in a free recall paradigm (Silvera, Krull, & Sassler, 2002). In line with expected outcomes of being a non-prototypical group member (e.g., Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981), some research has suggested that perceivers are less efficient in categorizing Black women than White women and Black men. For example, Zárate and Smith (1990) found that White participants categorized Black targets more slowly than White targets (by race and gender), but especially when the targets were Black women (Study 2).

In addition to differential stereotype content and slower categorization, we argue that another symptom of non-prototypicality is the "invisibility" of Black women (Fryberg & Townsend, 2008;

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doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2009.10.016

Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Invisibility is typically defined as an absence of, or erroneous representations of, oppressed groups and/or individuals (Fryberg & Townsend, 2008). We define it here as a *lack of individuation* of or *lack of differentiation* between group members, which is evident in Black women's faces going "unnoticed" (being poorly recognized), and their voices going "unheard" (i.e., misattributed to others), relative to those of White women and Black and White men. Importantly, we are not suggesting that Black women are *literally invisible*, such that they are literally not seen and literally not heard. Much research suggests that gender, race, and age are quickly encoded and used in judgments upon encountering individuals (Allport, 1954; Brewer, 1988; Devine, 1989; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Talyor, Fiske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978), and thus we assume that when a Black woman enters a room, perceivers can readily "see" her. Instead, we suggest that Black women's faces are less readily distinguished from each other, a prediction we examine in Study 1, and that their contributions to a group discussion are more readily misattributed (Study 2).

The idea that Black women are "invisible" has long been a theme in feminist writings (Bell, 1992; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981; King, 1988), and has appeared in recent theoretical work as well (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Describing the experiences of individuals with multiple-subordinate-group identities (such as Black women), Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) suggest that these individuals experience "intersectional invisibility" and are subject to *different* outcomes than their more prototypical counterparts – both advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that Black women may be less likely to be targets of discrimination than more prototypical members (Black men; see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). However, a disadvantage is that non-prototypical subordinate group members struggle to be visible and have their voices heard, and are thus more likely to be marginalized. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) discuss invisibility predominantly in terms of the *experiences* of Black women. However, embedded in this analysis is the assumption that individual belonging to multiple-subordinate-group identities are *perceived* by others as non-prototypical group members and thus are subject to outcomes related to invisibility. Our work focuses on this end of the analysis, and investigates whether, in fact, Black women are "invisible" to Whites.

In Study 1 we hypothesized that White perceivers would be less successful in recognizing Black women's faces compared to those of Black men, White women, and White men. We adapted Shepard's (1967) basic memory paradigm by exposing participants to a series of photos depicting Black/White women and men. In a second phase they were shown the same photos along with foils and were asked simply to indicate "yes" if they saw the photo before, or "no" if they had not. We hypothesized that participants would be the least sensitive (in signal detection terms, correctly distinguishing between a 'new' and 'old' faces) in identifying Black women compared to the other groups. In Study 2, we use a "who said what" paradigm (Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978) to investigate memory for the speech contributions of Black women. We expected Black women to be implicated in more memory errors, such that their contributions would be misattributed more often than those of any other group.

Study 1

Method

Participants and design

Participants were 131 White undergraduates enrolled in an introductory psychology course who received course credit for their time (50 females; age, $M = 18.93$, $SD = 1.16$). Participants were run alone or in pairs; each was seated at an individual computer. Participants were exposed to faces and later completed a recognition memory test. The face manipulations produced a 2 (target race: Black, White) × 2 (target gender: female, male), within-subjects design. Participant gender was also examined as a potential moderator but as it produced no effects it will not be discussed further.

Table 1
Hits, false alarms, sensitivity and bias, Study 1.

	Black women	White women	Black men	White men
Hits	.71 (.18)	.73 (.19)	.72 (.17)	.75 (.16)
False alarms	.20 (.16)	.15 (.14)	.17 (.15)	.17 (.14)
d'	1.64 (.83)	1.90 (.80)	1.76 (.78)	1.85 (.81)
β	.30 (.69)	.40 (.75)	.36 (.72)	.28 (.67)

Note: Numbers for hits and false alarms are proportions; standard deviations are in parentheses.

Materials

Fifty-six photos (14 of each gender/race category) were selected from a bank of headshots created by Nosek and Banaji (2001). Each photo depicted a close up head shot of a person looking straight ahead smiling with a blue background. In order to avoid particularly distinctive faces (those that might stand out in crowd or be particularly memorable; Brandt, Macrae, Schloerscheidt, & Milne, 2003) and to equate faces on attractiveness, a separate sample of 10 participants rated each potential photo on distinctiveness (1 = typical to 7 = distinctive) and attractiveness (1 = not all attractive to 7 = very attractive). Those selected for this study were judged roughly average on both dimensions (both $Ms = 3.68$), and Target Race × Target Gender repeated measures ANOVAs showed that distinctiveness and attractiveness did not differ across the race and gender categories (all Fs *ns*).

Procedure

Participants were told we were interested in memory for faces during the process of first impressions and were then paced through the procedure on computers using MediaLab software (Jarvis, 2006). In phase 1, participants viewed 32 photos (eight of each gender/race group); each presented for 2 s, followed by a red X in the center of the screen. Photos were presented in one of three random orders for each participant. After completing phase 1, participants completed a filler task in which they were asked to list as many cities as they could think of in 3 min. In phase 2, participants were shown the same 32 photos they had seen before along with 24 new foils (six of each gender/race group). Participants were asked to indicate if the photo was "new" or "old" (Shepard, 1967). Three different fixed order conditions were created, each involving a randomized order of photos and mixing of photos between the first and second (foil) phases.

Results

Participants had a 78.3% accuracy rate overall (M errors = 12.15 out of 56 identifications, $SD = 4.73$). We first computed hits and false alarms (see Table 1),[1] then used signal detection analysis to calculate a sensitivity index or d' ($z_{\text{hits}} - z_{\text{false alarms}}$) which captures the extent to which participants distinguish between new and old faces (higher values = more sensitive), and a bias index, β, which

[1] To be able to compute proportions in cases when no errors were made, we followed conventions and changed false alarm rates of 0–.05 (this affected 225 cases [out of 131 participants × 4 types of targets = 524 possible]). Also per convention, perfect hit rates were changed to .95 (affecting 73 cases; see Wickens, 2002).

captures the willingness of a respondent to say that a target photo was present in the original set (higher values means higher standards to make the judgment). We hypothesized that participants would be least sensitive in response to photos of Black women compared to the other three groups, but did not make specific prediction about bias as the invisibility hypothesis does not seem relevant to the question of standards for recognition. D' and β for each of the four types of targets were submitted to Target Race × Target Gender repeated measures ANOVAs.

For d' there was a target gender effect, $F(1, 129) = 11.58$, $p < .001$, $d = .33$,[2] and a marginally significant interaction, $F(1, 129) = 2.82$, $p < .10$, $\eta_p^2 = .021$. As can be seen in Table 1, participants were worst at distinguishing "old" from "new" faces in the case of Black women (Table 1). Sensitivity scores were significantly lower for Black women than White women, $t(130) = 3.39$, $p < .001$, $d = .33$, and tended to be lower for Black women than for Black men, $t(130) = .16$, $p < .08$, $d = .15$, one-tailed. A three versus one contrast, in which sensitivity for Black women was compared to the mean sensitivity for the other three groups, was significant, $t(130) = 3.15$, $p < .001$, one-tailed, $d = .27$.[3] For β, as predicted, the target race × target gender interaction was not significant, $F(1, 129) = 2.43$, $p = .121$ (Table 1).

Study 2

Study 1 provided evidence that White participants are less able to distinguish "old" and "new" Black female faces compared to those of any other group. That is, photos of Black women appeared to be the least memorable, a symptom of "invisibility". In Study 2 we investigate whether spoken statements made by Black women are less likely to be correctly identified compared to those of Black men, White women and White men. Researchers interested in studying the intersections of multiple categories (such as race and gender) have often used the "who said what" paradigms to try and disentangle which category is perceptually salient and under which conditions (e.g., Klauer, Ehrenberg, and Wegener, 2003; Stangor, Lynch, Duan, & Glass, 1992; Taylor et al., 1978). In Study 2, we adapt this task not to investigate category salience per se, but rather to examine whether the contributions of Black women are more likely than those of any other group to go "unheard" such that they are more likely to be misattributed to other speakers. Specifically, Study 2 participants completed a "who said what" (Taylor et al., 1978) task in which they heard a conversation among eight targets (two Black females, two Black males, two White females, two White males). They were then asked to match each statement with the person who said it. Using this type of paradigm not only allows us to investigate if a Black woman's statements are less likely to be correctly recognized as having being said by a Black woman, but it also allows us to examine to whom her statements are misattributed. There are four types of possible errors: within-race/within-gender, within-race/between-gender, between-race/within-gender, and between-race/between-gender. We predicted that Black women would be implicated in each type of error; they should be *least* likely to be given credit for the statements they contributed. In other words, perceivers should be less likely to correctly distinguish which statements were said by a Black woman compared to Black men, White women, and White men.

Method

Participants and design

Participants were 65 predominately White (81.54%) undergraduate students (40 females; age, $M = 19.17$ $SD = 1.57$) who were compensated with course credit. Participants viewed a discussion among eight targets and were later tested for memory of "who said what." Target race and gender were again manipulated within-subjects, and participant gender was examined as a potential moderator.

Materials

To develop the group discussion, volunteers role-played conversations about obtaining a job after graduating from college. These conversations were used as a template for the group discussion created for the main study. Sixteen statements about job-seeking were selected, in which the discussants were described as college senior business students trying to get a job in the corporate world. Example statements included, "So I've been going to a lot of interviews lately; they always ask the same questions," and "Yeah they do, 'tell me a little about yourself,' is always the first question."

Statements were distributed such that each target said two statements and each statement was paired with a stimulus face. Headshots of Black and White women and men (two of each race and gender combination) were taken from NimStim Face Stimulus Set. Research Network on Early Experience (2005). All faces were categorized as "open-mouth happy faces," skin color was consistent within races, and all faces were rated as equal in attractiveness and facial expression.[4]

To mimic a naturally occurring situation, voices were recorded using volunteers who were of the same race and gender as the photographed targets, and audio voice recordings were always paired with the same target photo. Each participant heard the group discussion in the same order, but which target said which statement was randomly varied for each participant. Experimental procedures were presented using MediaLab software (Jarvis, 2000).

Procedure

Participants were told they would hear a conversation among eight college business seniors discussing their current and upcoming interviews in the corporate world. To make the presentation of the faces more believable, participants were told the conversation was taped by audio only, but that we wanted them to feel as engaged in the conversation as possible so we would show a picture of the person who said each statement simultaneously with the audio of the statement.

Participants then followed the instructions given on the computer and began the "who said what" task. First they heard the conversation with a face simultaneously paired with each statement (7 s each). After the conversation, participants were shown 32 statements, one at a time (the 16 original statements plus 16 foils; see Klauer & Wegener, 1998). Participants were first asked if they had heard this statement in the previous conversation (yes or no). If they answered no, a new statement was presented. However, if they answered yes, a screen popped up with the eight pictures of the targets they had just seen with an assigned number under each picture. Participants were asked to select who said the statement by entering the corresponding number of the target

[2] Repeated measures effect sizes were computed using the following equation: $d = t[2(1\text{-}r)/n]^{1/2}$, where t is the pairwise t-test, r is the correlation between pairs of measures, and n is the sample size (see Dunlap, Cortina, Vaslow, & Burke, 1996).

[3] Hits and false alarm rates analyzed separately showed similar patterns – hit rates were lower and false alarm rates were higher for Black women than for any other group (three versus one contrast $p < .06$, on-tailed, $d = .12$ for hits, and $p < .01$, one-tailed $d = .23$ for false alarms).

[4] Development of the NimStim Face Stimulus Set was overseen by Nim Tottenham and supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Early Experience and Brain Development. Please contact Nim Tottenham at tott0006@tc.umn.edu for more information concerning the stimulus set.

person.

Results

Within- and between-race and gender errors: demonstrating the use of race and gender categories

Our first step was to document categorization based on race and gender as in past "who said what" research. Four types of errors were computed – within-race/within-gender; between-race/between-gender, within-race, between-gender, and between race-within gender. All means represent counts of number of errors (16 possible errors per participant). For within-race/within-gender errors there is only one possible incorrect target, but for every other error type there are two possible incorrect targets. To correct for these unequal possibilities, within-race/within-gender errors were multiplied by two (see Taylor, et. al., 1978).

Errors were submitted to Race Error (within-between) × Gender Error (within-between) repeated measures ANOVA. Replicating past work using this paradigm, participants made more within-race ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.59$) than between-race errors ($M = 1.52$, $SD = 1.59$), $F(1, 64) = 16.91$, $p < .001$, $d = .71$, and more within-gender ($M = 2.39$, $SD = 1.64$) than between-gender errors ($M = 1.44$, $SD = 1.20$), $F(1, 64) = 31.68$, $p < .001$, $d = .91$. Further, the race × gender error interaction was significant, $F(1, 64) = 21.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .25$. Participants were more likely to make within-race/within-gender errors ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 1.97$) than any other error type: within-race/between-gender ($M = 1.43$, $SD = 1.21$), between-race/within-gender ($M = 1.60$, $SD = 1.32$), and between-race/between-gender errors ($M = 1.45$, $SD = 1.19$), $ps < .0001$ (there were no differences among within-race/within-gender, between-race/within-gender, and between-race/between-gender errors, all $ps > .05$).

Errors involving Black women versus others

Our key interest was in whether Black women were more implicated in each type of error, and therefore we examined the effect of race and gender within each of the four error types.

Within-race/within-gender errors

The predicted Target Race × Target Gender interaction on uncorrected number of within-race/within-gender errors was marginally significant, $F(1, 64) = 3.21$, $p < .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .048$. The two Black female faces ($M = .52$, $SD = .64$) were the most likely to be confused, compared with the two Black male faces ($M = .32$, $SD = .50$), the two White female faces ($M = .34$, $SD = .57$), and the two White male faces ($M = .40$, $SD = .52$). The Black female mean was statistically different only from the Black male error rate, $t(64) = 1.86$, $p < .04$, one-tailed, $d = .35$, but a three versus one contrast, in which errors for Black women was compared to mean errors for the other three groups, was significant, $t(64) = 1.75$, $p = .04$, one-tailed, $d = .35$.

Within-race/between-gender errors

We predicted that Black women and men would be more likely to be confused than White women and men. We collapsed errors in which a Black woman's comments were attributed to a Black man BW → BM, and vice versa, BM → BW, as well as WW → WM and WM → WW errors. A paired-sample t-test indicated that Black women and men ($M = .85$, $SD = .87$) were more likely to be confused with each other than White women and men ($M = .58$, $SD = .75$), $t(64) = 1.95$, $p < .03$, one-tailed, $d = .32$.

Between-race/within-gender errors

As predicted, Black and White women ($M = .92$, $SD = .91$) were more likely to be confused with each other than Black and White men ($M = .68$, $SD = .85$), $t(64) = 1.71$, $p < .05$, one-tailed, $d = .28$.

Between-race/between-gender errors

Also consistent with predictions, Black women and White men ($M = .89$, $SD = .77$) were more likely to be confused than White women and Black men ($M = .55$, $SD = .69$), $t(64) = 3.20$, $p < .001$, $d = 46$.[5]

Overall errors by target race and gender

We also examined the overall number of errors made for each type of target, regardless of the type of misattribution, by summing across the four types of errors described above. The Target Race × Target Gender interaction was significant, $F(1, 64) = 3.87$, $p = .053$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. Participants were more likely to incorrectly attribute statements made by Black women ($M = 1.77$, $SD = 1.06$) to other targets than they were to misattribute White women's ($M = 1.34$, $SD = 1.00$), Black men's ($M = 1.45$, $SD = 1.03$), or White men's statements ($M = 1.51$, $SD = .92$; all $ps < .05$, one-tailed; $ds = .42$ and $.31$ respectively). A three versus one contrast also supported the pattern of Black woman implicated in more errors than any of the other targets, $t(64) = 2.45$, $p < .01$, one-tailed, $d = .37$.

General discussion

Perceptions of Black women (and perhaps others who belong to multiple-subordinate categories) may be affected by their non-prototypicality. One outcome is invisibility (Fryberg & Townsend, 2008; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). The two studies presented here addressed the invisibility hypothesis in samples of White perceivers by examining whether Black women go "unnoticed" (their faces poorly recognized and distinguished) and their voices go "unheard" (their contributions incorrectly attributed), relative to Black men and to White women and men. Study 1 indicated that White participants were least likely to correctly recognize Black women in comparison to the other groups: They were relatively unable to distinguish a Black woman they had seen before from a "new" Black woman. In Study 2, Black women tended to be implicated in every error type: Their contributions were confused with those of other Black women, and of every other group. Overall then, Black women were seen as relatively interchangeable (Study 1, and within-race/within-gender errors in Study 2), *and* their contributions were misattributed to others and others' comments misattributed to them (within/between category errors in Study 2). These effects cannot be attributed to particular features of the targets, as careful pretesting was conducted to ensure equal age, attractiveness, facial expression, and distinctiveness. Instead, these studies provide evidence of Black women's relative invisibility, at least among college-aged White samples on a predominantly White campus.

Feminist scholars have long argued that Black women have been left out (e.g., of the civil rights and feminist movements, research on gender and race) and gone unnoticed (Bell, 1992; Brown-Collins & Sussewell, 1986; Davis, 1981; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; King, 1988). As bell hooks (1981) eloquently stated:

[5] Participant gender moderated this effect, $F(1, 63) = 9.00$, $p = .004$: The predicted pattern emerged only among female participants. As this was the only case in which participant gender mattered across the two studies, we attribute it to chance.

> No other group in America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. We are rarely recognized as a group separate and distinct from black men, or as a present part of the larger group "women" in this culture. When black people are talked about, sexism militates against the acknowledgment of the interests of black women; when women are talked about racism militates against a recognition of black female interests. When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black *men*; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on *white* women (p. 7).

But to our knowledge, little empirical research has directly examined this idea from a social cognition framework. Along with other "invisibility" researchers (Fryberg & Townsend, 2008; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008), we suggest that invisibility is a unique form of discrimination. It does not assume either advantage or disadvantage of dual subordinate category membership, but rather suggests that Black women may experience a *qualitatively different form of discrimination* in which their non-prototypicality contributes to their not being recognized or correctly credited for their contributions. As noted earlier, in using the term "invisibility," we do not mean to suggest Black women literally go unnoticed and unheard; that their presence is undetectable. Rather, they are treated as interchangeable and indistinguishable from each other, and in this sense are less "visible" compared to other groups.

Future research should examine the invisibility hypothesis in other ways. For example, one limitation of the "who said what" paradigm used in Study 2 was that participants were all aware that every discussant—including the Black women—said *something*, and in this sense they were forced to match at least one of the statements to each target. To examine other ways in which Black women's statements go "unheard," it would be useful to use a free recall paradigm in which participants are asked to simply summarize what was said in a conversation. The invisibility hypothesis would predict that Black women's contributions would be less readily recalled. Of course, this research only examined invisibility from the perspective of perceivers; future research should investigate the consequences of these perceptions for the experiences of Black women. We also suggest that the effects of non-prototypicality (such as invisibility) should apply to other members belonging to multiple-subordinate-group identities (e.g., Latina and Asian women).

We hope this work will add to the existing stereotyping and discrimination literature and encourage researchers to not only investigate Black men as targets of racism and White women as targets of sexism, while assuming Black women are subject to the same sorts of evaluations and outcomes. Instead we hope researchers will begin to more fully understand the unique form of discrimination Black women (and members of other dual-subordinate groups) may face.

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