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THE SPONTANEOUS SUPPRESSION OF RACIAL STEREOTYPES

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Attempts to suppress social stereotypes often lead to an increase in the accessibility of those stereotypes, thereby increasing stereotypic influences on subsequent social judgments. The present research sought to determine whether such suppression effects occur in relatively naturalistic situations. Participants in Experiment 1 wrote a story about a typical day in the life of an African-American target person after receiving one of two sets of instructions. Participants in the control condition were simply told to write whatever they wanted. Participants in the spontaneous suppression condition were informed that the study was being conducted by an African-American political group. The results indicated that participants in the spontaneous suppression condition wrote less stereotypic stories than did those in the control condition. Participants in Experiment 2 first rated their attitudes toward African Americans under one of three conditions: a directed suppression condition, a spontaneous suppression condition, and a no suppression-control condition. In a subsequent task, participants formed an impression of a target person who behaved in an ambiguously hostile manner. The results indicated that participants in both the directed suppression and the spontaneous suppression conditions judged the target person to be significantly more hostile (i.e., stereotypic of African Americans) than did participants in the control condition. These results indicate that there are situational factors which motivate spontaneous stereotype-suppression attempts, leading to later increases in stereotype use.

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SPONTANEOUS SUPPRESSION

For both personal and social reasons, people often wish to inhibit stereotypic thinking. At the personal level, stereotyping violates the personal standards of individuals whose belief systems prohibit them from using stereotypes, often leading to feelings of compunction (see Devine, 1989; Monteith, 1993; Monteith, Devine, & Zuwerink, 1993). At the societal level, there has been a growing consensus in recent years that people should not be judged by their membership in various social groups (e.g., race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation), but rather should be evaluated on the basis of their individual characteristics. Those who openly espouse stereotypical views may be subject to both social and legal sanctions (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; McConahay, 1986; Sears, 1988).

Unfortunately, for those who wish to avoid using social stereotypes, attempts to suppress stereotypic thoughts often have unintended and undesirable consequences. A growing body of evidence suggests that the act of suppressing stereotypes may actually lead to an increase in their accessibility, which ultimately may result in greater stereotype use (Macrae, Bodenhausen, & Milne, in press; Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jellen, 1994; Wyer, Sherman, & Stroessner, 1998). Wegner and his colleagues (e.g., Wegner, Schneider, Carter, & White, 1987) provided an initial demonstration of the consequences of thought suppression. In this and subsequent studies (e.g., Wegner, Erber, & Zanakos, 1993; Wegner & Gold, 1995; also see Wegner, 1994, for a review), participants who suppressed or avoided a particular thought were found to think about it more after the experimentally induced suppression demands had been lifted than did those participants who had not attempted to suppress the thought.

Wegner (1994; Wegner & Erber, 1992) has recently proposed a model that provides an explanation for this and other counterintentional outcomes. The Ironic Process Model posits two distinct psychological processes that work together to accomplish thought suppression. The first of these processes is the Automatic Monitoring Process, which scans the suppressor's consciousness for the unwanted thought. The monitoring process requires, however, that the unwanted thought be kept accessible. In at some level so that any occurrence of the thought may be identified. In addition, because each detection of the unwanted thought draws the suppressor's attention (at least temporarily), the thought receives repeated activation. Thus, as a result of the monitoring process, the unwanted thought actually becomes more accessible than if suppression had never been attempted.

Upon detecting the unwanted thought, the monitoring process triggers the onset of the second process. The Controlled Operating Process systematically replaces the unwanted thought with other thoughts (i.e., distracters), thereby effectively achieving suppression. Successful suppression depends on the continuous execution of the operating process. However, the operating process requires that the suppressor have suffi-

cient cognitive capacity and motivation to be effective. If the suppressor is unable to replace the unwanted thought when it occurs, then its heightened accessibility may particularly be likely to influence subsequent processing, including the frequency of the unwanted thought's occurrence (e.g., Wegner et al., 1987).

Macrae et al. (1994) extended these ideas to the domain of stereotyping. Participants who successfully suppressed their stereotypes of skinheads during the initial phase of an experiment were more likely to express the stereotype during a subsequent phase (Experiments 1 and 2). Macrae et al. further demonstrated that the skinhead stereotype was made highly accessible as a result of its suppression (Experiment 3). They interpreted the increase in stereotyping following suppression in terms of a basic priming effect (e.g., Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977; Srull & Wyer, 1979). They argued that the skinhead stereotype was activated by the Automatic Monitoring Process during the act of suppression. This activation was then demonstrated in subsequent tasks after suppression goals had been removed.

Wyer et al. (1998) have also obtained evidence suggesting that stereotype suppression functions to prime (i.e., increase the accessibility of) the suppressed stereotype. In Experiment 1, participants initially were asked to suppress stereotypic thoughts while writing a short story about a day in the life of an African-American or Asian-American target person. Subsequently, participants were asked to form an impression of a second target person whose race was unspecified, based on a somewhat ambiguous story about the person. The results demonstrated that participants who had initially suppressed the African-American stereotype formed impressions of the second target that were more stereotypically African American than did nonsuppressors. Similarly, participants who had initially suppressed the Asian American stereotype formed impressions of the second target that were more stereotypically Asia American than did non-suppressors. This research shows that suppression-induced priming effects extend to targets whose group identity is unknown.

SPONTANEOUS STEREOTYPE SUPPRESSION

It is apparent that efforts to engage in stereotype suppression often lead to the unintended consequence of increased stereotype use. Because explicit instructions to avoid using a stereotype are rarely encountered, it is important to identify naturally occurring situations that foster stereotype suppression. One factor that seems to encourage such spontaneous suppression is the presence of situational cues that make social norms against stereotyping salient. Indeed, many contemporary theories of prejudice take as their starting point the idea that social norms dictate a suppression of stereotypes (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; McConahay, 1986; Sears, 1988). Consistent with

SPONTANEOUS SUPPRESSION

these theories, Monteith, Deneen, and Tooman (1996) demonstrated that participants who had been exposed to a social norm opposing prejudice were less likely to express prejudiced beliefs, even when they privately endorsed those beliefs. Similarly, Fazio and his colleagues (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995) showed that participants' responses to the Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, 1986) were influenced by normative cues in the social context. Specifically, participants who were administered the scale by an African-American experimenter gave less prejudiced responses than did those whose experimenter was European American. Thus, it appears that increasing participants' awareness of a cultural norm against stereotyping and prejudice may elicit spontaneous efforts at stereotype suppression.

THE PRESENT RESEARCH

In the research reported in this article, we examined whether such situationally induced suppression attempts would lead to similar increases in stereotyping, as observed in studies by Macrae et al. (1994; in press) and Wyer et al. (1998). We tested whether the stereotype would be unintentionally primed and consequently would influence subsequent information processing. To test this idea, we created a social context that we believed would compel participants to spontaneously avoid using their stereotypes. We tested the effectiveness of this social context at eliciting spontaneous suppression in Experiment 1. In Experiment 2, our focus turned to the consequences of spontaneous stereotype suppression. Specifically, we sought to determine whether spontaneous stereotype suppression would ultimately result in increased stereotype use. By comparing the responses of participants in a spontaneous suppression condition to those of participants given explicit suppression instructions, or given no suppression instructions, we could determine whether the consequences of self-initiated stereotype suppression were similar to those of instructed stereotype suppression.

EXPERIMENT 1

OVERVIEW

The purpose of our first experiment was to determine whether contextual cues that increased the salience of antistereotyping norms would lead participants to spontaneously suppress their stereotypes. To accomplish this, we presented participants with a photograph of an African-American male and asked them to write a story about a typical day in his life. Approximately half of the participants were informed that the study was part of an ongoing research project conducted by a political group called "African Americans for Intercultural Understanding." This

instruction was designed to make social norms against stereotyping salient. Participants' stories were coded for stereotypic content. It was expected that participants who were told that the study was being conducted by the political group would be motivated to suppress their stereotypes, and thus these participants were expected to write less stereotypic stories than participants in a control condition.

METHOD

Participants. Participants included 45 undergraduate students at the University of California, Santa Barbara, who took part in the experiment in exchange for partial credit toward a course requirement. Participants were run in two groups, corresponding to the spontaneous suppression ($N = 23$) and control ($N = 22$) conditions. No African Americans participated in this experiment.

PROCEDURE

Upon arrival at the laboratory, participants were greeted by a female experimenter who informed them that they would be taking part in a study on how people form first impressions of others. Participants were further told that the experiment was specifically concerned with how people evaluate others based on first sight. Thus, participants were shown a photograph of an African-American male, and were asked to write a story describing a typical day in his life. Participants in the control condition were instructed to write whatever came to mind. Participants in the spontaneous suppression condition were also told to write whatever they wanted, but they were also informed that the study was being conducted by the political group "African Americans for Intercultural Understanding."

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The stereotypicality of participants' stories was rated by two naive coders on a scale from 1 (not at all stereotypic) to 7 (extremely stereotypic). Interrater reliability was satisfactory ($r = .77$); thus, averages of the two ratings were analyzed. These ratings indicated that participants in the spontaneous suppression condition did, in fact, write less stereotypic stories ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.15$) than did participants in the control condition ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 1.11$), $t(43) = 2.52$, $p = .015$.

This finding suggests that people may be sensitive to social cues which highlight the social norm of avoiding stereotype use. Participants in spontaneous suppression condition of this experiment were given information which implied that their stories about an African-American target person would be read by members of an African-American political

SPONTANEOUS SUPPRESSION

group. This information made social norms against using the African-American stereotype particularly salient, which resulted in participants' taking it upon themselves to censor their use of racial stereotypes.

EXPERIMENT 2

OVERVIEW

In Experiment 2, we sought to determine whether spontaneous efforts to engage in stereotype suppression (such as those observed in Experiment 1) result in similar stereotype rebound effects as have been demonstrated under directed suppression conditions (Macrae et al., 1994, in press; Wyer et al., 1998). Specifically, we wanted to test the hypothesis that participants placed in a situation in which antistereotyping norms were salient, as well as those explicitly instructed to avoid stereotypic thinking, would engage in greater stereotype use on a subsequent impression-formation task than participants in a nonsuppression control condition.

In order to accomplish this, we administered a questionnaire on attitudes toward African Americans. Participants were presented with one of three sets of instructions prior to completing the survey, including one explicitly instructing them to suppress their African American stereotypes, one intended to activate a social norm against stereotyping African Americans, and one encouraging participants to respond honestly and accurately. After responding to the survey, all participants were introduced to a presumably independent experiment in which they were asked to form an impression of a target person who behaved in an ambiguously hostile manner. Ratings of this target reflected the extent to which the stereotype had been activated by suppression in the initial task.

METHOD

Participants. Sixty-nine undergraduates enrolled in an introductory psychology course at the University of California, Santa Barbara, participated in exchange for partial course credit. Participants were run in groups of 2 to 6 per session. No African American participants were included in the experiment.

PROCEDURE

The experiment consisted of two separate phases, each described to participants as a different experiment. The two phases of the experiment were conducted by different experimenters and took place in different rooms.

Upon arrival at the laboratory, participants were informed that they were going to engage in an experiment on impression formation, but that

another experimenter wanted them to respond to a survey on the computer before they started the impression formation study. Participants were then seated at individual computer terminals. They were told that the survey was self-explanatory and that they would receive all instructions on the computer screen. The survey asked participants to rate their agreement with 23 statements about African Americans (see Appendix). These statements included some describing an endorsement of the cultural stereotype (e.g., "Most young black males join gangs in order to get by") whereas others described specific beliefs about African Americans (e.g., "Blacks are becoming more influential in their fight for equal rights"). We constructed the survey for use in this experiment. The survey items were presented on a computer that recorded participants' ratings of agreement with each statement.

Participants received one of three sets of instructions for completing the survey. In all three conditions, participants were informed that the survey was concerned with assessing their attitudes toward African Americans. Participants in the "directed suppression" condition were asked to avoid thinking about the stereotype of African Americans while responding to the survey. Those in the "spontaneous suppression" condition were informed that the survey was being conducted by a political group called "African Americans for Intercultural Understanding." Participants in the control condition were simply asked to be as honest and accurate as possible in their responses.

After completing the survey, participants were taken into another room and introduced to the "impression formation study" by a new experimenter. Participants were informed that they would read a story about a man named Donald. They were asked to form an impression of Donald based on the information in the story. They were also told that they would be asked some questions about their impression after they had read the story. The story was identical to the one used by Sull and Wyer (1979) and by Devine (1989) in their studies on priming. In the story, Donald (whose race is unspecified) engages in a number of ambiguously hostile behaviors, a trait traditionally associated with the African-American stereotype (Devine, 1989; Devine & Baker, 1991). After reading about Donald, participants were asked to rate him on a number of traits, including some related to hostility (i.e., hostile, dislikeable, unfriendly, thoughtful, kind, considerate). Participants indicated their ratings on Likert-type scales anchored at 1 (not at all) and 10 (extremely).

RESULTS

A composite index of stereotype use was computed for each participant. This score consisted of the average ratings of Donald on the hostility-related traits (reverse scored for the traits inversely related to hostility), $\alpha = .77$. A

one-way ANOVA on this measure yielded a significant main effect of condition, $F(2, 68) = 3.33, p < .05$. Planned contrasts were then conducted in order to test our hypothesis that participants in both the directed suppression and the spontaneous suppression conditions would make more stereotypic ratings than participants in the control conditions. Consistent with this prediction, participants in the directed suppression ($M = 7.92, SD = .98$) and the spontaneous suppression ($M = 7.80, SD = 1.15$) conditions rated Donald as significantly more hostile (i.e., in a manner more consistent with the African-American stereotype) than did participants in the control condition ($M = 7.08, SD = 1.42$), $t(66) = 2.56, p < .05$. Furthermore, participants in the directed and spontaneous suppression conditions did not significantly differ from each other, $t(66) = .75, p = .72$.

DISCUSSION

One reason why it is particularly important to understand stereotype suppression is that people often try to inhibit stereotypic thoughts

1. Participants' responses to the initial attitude survey were explored for evidence of stereotype suppression. A stereotyping index was calculated by computing the average of participants' responses to the questionnaire (reverse scoring when appropriate). A one-way analysis of variance did not yield any significant differences among these instruction conditions, $F(2, 65) < 1$. Although this may suggest that our manipulations did not successfully induce stereotype suppression, there are a number of reasons to reject such a conclusion. First, the fact that there were no differences in the responses of participants in the directed suppression and control conditions suggests that the attitude survey we constructed and used may simply not be sensitive to variations in stereotype use and suppression. Based on past research, there is every reason to believe that participants in the explicit suppression conditions did, in fact, suppress their stereotypes. Using almost identical instructions, both Macrae et al. (1994) and Wyer et al. (1998) showed that participants given an explicit suppression demand used their stereotypes less when describing a member of a stereotyped group than did participants in a control condition. Indeed, it is hard to conceive why participants would not follow such explicit instructions to suppress. Second, in considering the spontaneous suppression condition, our pretest demonstrated that this manipulation was effective in inducing stereotype suppression. That is, the spontaneous suppression manipulation elicited stereotype suppression on a task (the "day in the life" story-writing task) already known to be sensitive to variation in stereotype suppression—(again, as demonstrated by Macrae et al. [1994] and Wyer et al. [1998]).

Together, these considerations strongly suggest that the attitude survey was simply not sensitive to differences in stereotype suppression. In fact, this survey was not developed or pre-tested with an eye toward construct validity. It was simply created for the purpose of presenting a relevant situation in which the suppression instructions would make sense to participants. In this regard, we recently collected pilot data from participants ($N = 50$) who responded to the items we used in our survey, as well as items from the Modern Racism Scale (MRS). These data showed that responses on our survey were not correlated with responses on the MRS ($r = .148, p > .30$), a measure of racial attitudes that has been validated, and which has demonstrated sensitivity to social contextual factors (Fazio et al., 1995). This further suggests that we should not expect to find evidence of differential stereotype suppression on the survey we constructed.

without being told to do so. If the social context suggests that stereotyping should be avoided, people may spontaneously suppress their stereotypes. Our research demonstrates that such situation-induced suppression attempts lead to similarly ironic consequences as a result of explicit suppression demands. Participants explicitly instructed or subtly induced to suppress their stereotypes of African Americans rated a subsequent race-unspecified target in a manner more consistent with the African-American stereotype than did participants who were not induced to suppress their stereotypes. These results demonstrate that the priming effects of stereotype suppression found in prior research (in which suppression was explicitly demanded) can be generalized to situations in which more subtle cues exist.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our research adds to a growing body of evidence that, when social norms against stereotyping are made salient, people often attempt to suppress their stereotypes (Fazio et al., 1995; Monteith et al., 1996). This suppression may result from perceivers' desires to avoid violating these norms and incurring social sanctions (Fazio et al., 1995; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; McConahay, 1986; Monteith et al., 1996; Sears, 1988). Situations that make social norms against stereotyping salient may also increase people's awareness of their own personal standards against stereotyping, which may further increase the likelihood of spontaneous suppression (e.g., Devine, 1989; Macrae et al., in press; Monteith, 1993; Monteith et al., 1993). In fact, Macrae et al. (in press) demonstrated that suppression which follows from the activation of personal antistereotyping norms leads to the same kinds of ironic effects demonstrated here and elsewhere (e.g., Macrae et al., 1994; Wyer et al., 1998). In the present research, it is unclear the extent to which suppression in the spontaneous condition resulted from concerns over violating social versus private standards. In all likelihood, both factors contributed to our results. One goal for future research will be to identify conditions that encourage social norm- and personal norm-based stereotype suppression, and when such attempts at suppression occur, what factors will influence success and whether rebound effects will follow.

One important factor to consider is the extent to which individual differences in egalitarian beliefs affect stereotype suppression. More than others, unprejudiced individuals may be expected to spontaneously suppress their stereotypes in response to both salient personal and social standards. However, through practice at suppressing these stereotypes and simultaneously activating egalitarian ideals, these in-

SPONTANEOUS SUPPRESSION

dividuals may become more successful than others at suppression. For these individuals, the operating process replacing unwanted thoughts may become as efficient as the monitoring process seeking them out. In support of this argument, Kelly and Kahn (1994) demonstrated that people could successfully suppress their own frequently occurring intrusive thoughts without incurring rebound effects. In contrast, attempts to suppress more novel experimenter-provided thoughts (e.g., white bear) produced rebound effects. Thus, through years of practice, low prejudice individuals may develop the ability to suppress stereotypic thoughts without experiencing an increase in the accessibility of those thoughts.

However, other unprejudiced individuals, those motivated to suppress but lacking the skills to do so, may be more susceptible to suppression-induced priming effects. These individuals may be likely to suppress their stereotypes in response to salient personal and social standards of egalitarianism, but are not proficient enough to avoid the unintended consequences of such suppression (e.g., Devine, Evelt, & Vasquez-Susson, 1996; Fazio et al., 1995). Finally, highly prejudiced individuals will be unlikely to suppress their stereotypes at all in the absence of very strong social demands. In fact, Lambert, Cronen, Chasteen, and Lickel (1996) demonstrated that prejudiced participants actually reported more prejudiced attitudes in conditions where they expected to discuss those attitudes with an audience. This occurred even when the audience was believed to hold unprejudiced views. Lambert et al. argued that this was due to participants bolstering their opinions in anticipation of having to defend them. Thus, spontaneous suppression among highly prejudiced individuals may be rare indeed. However, when these individuals find it necessary to suppress their stereotypic beliefs, they may have considerable difficulty given their lack of suppression skills and experience, and may demonstrate particularly strong rebound effects. To be sure, many questions remain before we can begin to gain an appreciation of the full complexity of how personal beliefs and situational context interact to influence stereotype suppression.

APPENDIX

Attitude Survey Items

1. In recent years, blacks have made significant progress toward improving their situation in the United States.
2. Blacks are becoming more influential in determining social policies that are relevant to them.
3. Standardized tests are culturally biased, and therefore are not valid measures of abilities for minorities.
4. Desegregation has proven to be beneficial for both blacks and whites.
5. White supremacist groups are not as prevalent today as they used to be.
6. Today there are more successful black figures in society who provide positive role models for black youths.
7. The degree of racial inequality in the United States has been steadily decreasing.
8. There needs to be an increased emphasis on ethnic studies at the university level.
9. Affirmative action has proven to be an effective policy for improving equality in education and in the workplace.
10. Black leaders have inspired the black community to unify in their movement to increase racial equality.
11. Recent attempts by black gangs to reduce the amount of violence committed by blacks toward blacks have been effective.
12. The majority of people in American society currently believe that blacks are not inferior to whites.
13. Most violent crime in America is committed by blacks.
14. Blacks have more musical talent than most people.
15. Most blacks are very assertive when it comes to going after something they want.
16. Blacks in America face many obstacles which they must overcome in order to succeed.
17. Most young black men in the inner cities join gangs in order to get by.
18. Urban ghettos are composed primarily of poor or homeless blacks.
19. Most blacks are concerned with maintaining the appearance that they are not bothered by their circumstances.
20. Religion plays an especially important role in the lives of most blacks.
21. Blacks tend to be physically stronger than most other people.
22. Blacks tend to be very strong-willed in defending their opinions and attitudes, even in the face of contradictory information.
23. Blacks are naturally more athletic than whites.

SPONTANEOUS SUPPRESSION

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DIRECTION OF COMPARISON ASYMMETRIES IN RELATIONAL JUDGMENT: THE ROLE OF LINGUISTIC NORMS

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This research documented a linguistic norm account of direction of comparison asymmetry effects in relational judgments (e.g., seeing hyenas as more similar to dogs than dogs are similar to hyenas). The asymmetry effect is magnified by discrepancies in prominence between subject and referent, and has previously been explained using Tversky's (1977) feature-matching model. Given a linguistic norm to place more prominent objects in the referent position, violation of this norm might reduce sentence clarity, which then weakens the magnitude of subsequent relational judgments. This research showed that clarity perceptions predict the magnitude of relational judgments independently of the cognitive manipulation of the features of the compared objects. The pattern of findings suggests that a linguistic norm interpretation may account for variance in relational judgments independently of Tversky's (1977) feature-matching model.

Is Canada similar to the United States? Is the United States similar to Canada? Across many experimental demonstrations, questions such as these—differing only in the order of objects to be compared—have yielded various answers. Many see greater similarity when the question is phrased as in the first case rather than the second case. Differences in the prominence or centrality of the two comparison objects predicts this asymmetry. Individuals tend to see greater similarity when a less prominent object is compared to a more prominent object than vice versa (Tversky, 1977). Logically, no such asymmetries should exist, spurring various theoretical attempts to account for them. For present purposes,

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