
Stigmatized Targets and Evaluation: Prejudice as a Determinant of Attribute Scrutiny and Polarization

Monique A. Fleming

University of California–Los Angeles

Richard E. Petty

Ohio State University

Paul H. White

University of Utah

The authors provide evidence for a new mechanism for the more polarized evaluations of stigmatized than nonstigmatized target individuals that often follow positive versus negative target descriptions. The current research suggests that polarization can occur because low-prejudiced perceivers think more about information describing stigmatized than nonstigmatized targets (i.e., have polarized thoughts). Mediation path analyses revealed that polarized thoughts fully accounted for the impact of prejudice on evaluative polarization. These findings are most consistent with the watchdog hypothesis that people scrutinize information describing stigmatized targets in order to guard against possibly unfair reactions by themselves or others.

Keywords: *evaluation; polarization; extremity; stigmatized others; prejudice*

Previous investigations have found that evaluations of stigmatized target individuals are sometimes more polarized or extreme in response to positive versus negative (or strong vs. weak) descriptions or behaviors than are evaluations of identically described nonstigmatized targets (e.g., Dienstbier, 1970; Gergen & Jones, 1963; Gibbons, Stephan, Stephenson, & Petty, 1980; Hass, Katz, Rizzo, Bailey, & Eisenstadt, 1991; Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987; Linville & Jones, 1980; Sargent & Bradfield, 2004). For example, in one well-known study, Linville and Jones (1980, Study 2) exposed Whites to a law school application from either a White or Black applicant that was either strong (described favorable credentials) or weak (described less favorable credentials). They found that the quality of the application had a greater impact on Whites' evaluations of the Black than White applicant on trait ratings relevant to law school

performance (e.g., intelligence, likability). That is, they observed a Target Race \times Application Strength interaction on evaluations such that the strength of the application had a larger effect on evaluations when the application described a Black than a White target. This pattern of evaluations has been termed *evaluative polarization* and *evaluative extremity*.¹

Two explanations of evaluative polarization are most prominent in the literature: ambivalence-response-amplification and complexity-extremity. Each of these

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explanations has received some support, suggesting that evaluative polarization can be produced by different processes. After reviewing prevailing perspectives and existing evidence relevant to the question of what can produce evaluative polarization when assessing stigmatized targets, we propose a new possibility drawn from the attitudes literature and describe a study designed to test this new perspective.

PREVAILING THEORIES

Ambivalence-response-amplification theory (Katz & Glass, 1979; see also Gergen & Jones, 1963) proposes that evaluations of stigmatized targets are sometimes more extreme than evaluations of nonstigmatized targets because people tend to be ambivalent in their attitudes toward minority groups that have been the victims of discrimination. For example, according to the theory, Blacks are often seen as deviant (e.g., lazy, aggressive) but also as disadvantaged by racial discrimination and thus as unworthy but less fortunate. This ambivalence is rooted in conflicting aspects of the self-image. People want to see themselves as humane yet discerning in their evaluations and treatment of others. Polarization occurs because receiving positive information about a stigmatized person and thus feeling positively toward an unworthy other threatens the self-image of being discerning. To reduce the threat, the perceiver may deny the self-image of discerning by overvaluing the stigmatized person. Likewise, receiving negative information about a stigmatized person and thus feeling negatively toward a less fortunate other threatens the self-image of being humane. To reduce the threat, the perceiver may deny the self-image of humane by extreme denigration of the stigmatized person. Thus, this theory proposes that ambivalence moderates the polarization effect such that polarization will occur when one is highly ambivalent toward the stigmatized group but not when one is low in ambivalence toward the stigmatized group.

There is some evidence supporting the ambivalence explanation. For example, in one study, Carver, Gibbons, Stephan, Glass, and Katz (1979) found that experimentally activated ambivalence about a stigmatized group (the physically handicapped) polarized evaluations of targets who were members of that group in response to positive versus negative descriptions compared to controls. Furthermore, Hass and colleagues (1991) found that under conditions shown in a separate study to produce polarized evaluations of a Black target compared to a similar White target, racial ambivalence was correlated with extremity of evaluations of a Black target such that high-ambivalent Whites were more likely to polarize evaluations of a positively described Black target than were low-ambivalent Whites (ambivalence was not related to polarization when the target

behaved negatively, however; see Note 1). Finally, there is evidence that ambivalent individuals only polarize evaluations of stigmatized others when ambivalence is viewed negatively, suggesting that polarization may be an attempt to reduce the negative feelings of ambivalence. If ambivalence is viewed positively, no polarization occurs (see Bell & Esses, 2002).

Complexity-extremity theory (Linville, 1982; Linville & Jones, 1980) proposes that evaluations of stigmatized targets are sometimes more extreme than evaluations of nonstigmatized targets because people generally hold a simpler cognitive schema of the stigmatized outgroup than of the nonstigmatized ingroup. This perspective proposes that more complex knowledge structures are associated with more moderate attitudes because more complex knowledge structures lead a perceiver to use a greater number of distinct dimensions to evaluate a stimulus, and "the greater the number of nonredundant aspects [dimensions] a person uses in thinking about a domain, the less likely it is that a given stimulus will be perceived as consistently good or consistently bad in all respects" (Linville, 1982, p. 196). Thus, this view proposes that schema complexity will moderate polarization such that polarization will occur when one's schema of the stigmatized group is simple but not when one's schema of the stigmatized group is complex. This theory also proposes that the number of dimensions used to evaluate a stimulus mediates the effect of complexity on evaluative extremity.

There is some evidence to support the complexity-extremity explanation as well. For example, in a study in which college-aged participants' evaluations of older targets were more extreme than evaluations of younger targets, Linville (1982, Study 2) found that participants' complexity of representations of older people was negatively correlated with extremity of evaluations of the older targets such that those with simpler schemas were more extreme in their evaluations than those with more complex schemas. Complexity of representations of older people was not related to extremity of evaluations of young targets. Furthermore, Linville (1982, Study 3; Linville & Jones, 1980) found that instructing individuals to evaluate an attitude object (e.g., a law school applicant by an applicant of unspecified race and gender) using many versus few dimensions can result in more moderate evaluations of that attitude object.

Thus, prior research and theory has suggested that polarization of evaluations of stigmatized targets may be especially pronounced among those who feel ambivalent toward those stigmatized others and among those who have relatively simple cognitive representations of stigmatized others. Hass et al. (1991) found no correlation between complexity and ambivalence ($r = .12$, *ns*, Sample 1, $n = 32$; $r = .26$, *ns*, Sample 2, $n = 28$), suggesting

that ambivalence and complexity may be separate ways in which polarized evaluations of stigmatized targets can be produced. Consistent with this viewpoint, Linville and Jones (1980, p. 702) suggested that "there is no a priori reason to assume that polarization, insofar as it occurs, must have a single origin."

WATCHDOG HYPOTHESIS

Research in the attitudes literature suggests another possible explanation of evaluative polarization. Specifically, evaluative polarization may occur because those low in prejudice think more about information describing stigmatized than nonstigmatized targets. Research on persuasive communication has shown that majority-group individuals who are exposed to a message about a topic that is completely unrelated to stigma (e.g., implementing senior comprehensive exams) think more about the message when it is attributed to a stigmatized source (Black or homosexual) than a nonstigmatized source (White or heterosexual). Furthermore, consistent with much research on attitude change (see Petty & Wegener, 1998), this enhanced thinking resulted in more polarized attitudes toward the topic in response to strong versus weak arguments (Petty, Fleming, & White, 1999; White & Harkins, 1994). Considerable work in persuasion has shown that if a variable enhances the amount of thinking about a persuasive message, then one should see a greater polarization of both attitudes and valenced thoughts in response to strong versus weak arguments (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). This is because the more one thinks about strong arguments in favor of a position, the more convincing the arguments seem, with the result that one's thoughts and thus one's attitudes become more positive toward the position. In contrast, the more one thinks about weak arguments in favor of a position, the less convincing the arguments seem, with the result that one's thoughts and thus one's attitudes become more negative toward the position. Consistent with the notion that majority group individuals think more about persuasive messages from a stigmatized than a nonstigmatized source, Petty and colleagues (1999) and White and Harkins (1994) found a Source Stigma \times Argument Quality interaction indicating that argument quality had a greater impact on attitudes and valenced thoughts when the source was stigmatized than nonstigmatized. Further work has suggested that this increased thinking and resulting source polarization effect is confined to those who are low in prejudice toward the stigmatized source's group. Specifically, Petty and colleagues found a Source Stigma \times Argument Quality interaction on attitudes and valenced thoughts for those low in prejudice but not those high in prejudice.

An important goal of the current research is to examine whether this enhanced thinking effect extends to stigmatized targets in addition to stigmatized sources. First, it is important to consider why low-prejudiced individuals would think about messages from stigmatized sources more than those from nonstigmatized sources. Petty et al. (1999) proposed a "watchdog" explanation in which low-prejudiced individuals were said to be concerned that either they or others might base a judgment of the stigmatized source's position or message on negativity toward the source's group or might not pay sufficient attention to what a stigmatized source was advocating. That is, a stigmatized source's position or message might be too easily rejected or ignored regardless of the merits of the position taken. To guard against this, low-prejudiced individuals scrutinize the message carefully and base their judgments on the merits of the arguments the source presents.

If this is the underlying motivation for the enhanced scrutiny of messages by stigmatized sources, enhanced scrutiny might or might not apply to stigmatized targets. Because targets have no position or message to unfairly reject or ignore, low-prejudiced individuals might not scrutinize information describing stigmatized targets. Indeed, more than 20 years of well-developed theory and research on the target polarization effect appears to provide sufficient explanations of it (ambivalence and complexity-extremity), and a new explanation may not be needed.

On the other hand, perhaps the watchdog motivation is more general (e.g., Monteith, 1993). Perhaps low-prejudiced individuals are generally interested in watching out for stigmatized others and would think about information more carefully regardless of whether a stigmatized individual was the source or the target of the information. If low-prejudiced individuals scrutinized information about stigmatized targets to avoid treating them unfairly, polarized evaluations would result. Thus, examining whether watchdog scrutiny extends to stigmatized targets not only has the potential to shed light on another possible reason why evaluative polarization of stigmatized targets occurs, but it will also help us to better understand the nature of watchdog scrutiny itself.

To examine the viability of the watchdog perspective to explain polarized evaluations of stigmatized targets, college students who varied in racial prejudice were exposed to positive or negative information that was about a Black or White target. If watchdog scrutiny extends from stigmatized sources to stigmatized targets, we should observe a Prejudice \times Race of Target \times Attribute Quality interaction on evaluations of the target and on valenced thoughts in response to the information. This interaction should show that for low-prejudiced individuals, a Race of Target \times Attribute Quality interac-

tion occurs such that their evaluations and thoughts are more influenced by attribute quality when the target is stigmatized than nonstigmatized. The evaluations and thoughts of high-prejudiced individuals should not show this interaction pattern. In addition, the effect of prejudice on polarization of evaluations of the stigmatized target should be mediated by greater elaboration of information describing the stigmatized target. That is, people's polarized thoughts in response to the information should mediate their polarized evaluations. Thus, a watchdog explanation of target polarization proposes a new moderator (prejudice) and a new mediator (valenced thoughts) of polarized evaluations of stigmatized targets.

PILOT STUDY

Before testing the watchdog predictions, we first examined whether prejudice is a proxy for ambivalence or complexity. If prejudice is related to these constructs such that those low in prejudice are higher in ambivalence or have a simpler cognitive representation of Blacks than those high in prejudice, then prior theories might account for any moderation effects that we would attribute to prejudice. In a pilot study, 211 White undergraduate students at a large midwestern university completed the Modern Racism Scale (MRS; McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981) and the Pro-Black and Anti-Black scales (Katz & Hass, 1988) from which we created a composite prejudice measure by adding each participant's Anti-Black score to their reversed Pro-Black score (see Petty et al. 1999, Experiment 1). For both prejudice measures, higher numbers indicate higher prejudice. From the Pro- and Anti-Black scores, we also calculated an ambivalence index in four ways using formulas outlined by prominent models of ambivalence: the cross-product model (Hass, Katz, Rizzo, Bailey, & Moore, 1992; Katz, Wackenhut, & Hass, 1986), the conflicting reactions model (Kaplan, 1972), the similarity-intensity model (Maio, Bell, & Esses, 1996; Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995), and the gradual threshold model (Priester & Petty, 1996). For all ambivalence scores, higher numbers indicate greater ambivalence. Finally, to assess complexity with respect to race, participants completed a measure of the number of independent conceptual dimensions with which they represent Blacks (Linville & Jones, 1980, Experiment 3). For this measure, participants sort traits that go together into groups when describing Blacks. The results of the trait sort are used to calculate Scott's (1962, 1969) *H*, interpreted as the minimum number of independent binary dimensions needed to produce a trait sort equal in complexity to that of a participant's. Higher *H* scores indicate greater complexity.

Replicating Hass et al. (1991), we found absolutely no correlation between complexity and ambivalence as cal-

culated by the cross-product formula ($r = .00, p = .98$) or other formulae (conflicting reactions: $r = -.01, p = .86$; similarity-intensity: $r = -.01, p = .92$; gradual threshold: $r = -.02, p = .77$). More important for the present investigation, we found that Scott's *H* was not significantly correlated with either the MRS ($r = -.06, p = .38$) or Katz and Hass composite prejudice ($r = -.01, p = .92$). And with the exception of one null relation, ambivalence was positively rather than negatively correlated with both the MRS (cross-product: $r = .04, p = .60$; conflicting reactions: $r = .19, p < .01$; similarity-intensity: $r = .30, p < .0001$; gradual threshold: $r = .20, p < .01$) and the Katz and Hass composite prejudice measure (cross-product: $r = .31, p < .0001$; conflicting reactions: $r = .51, p < .0001$; similarity-intensity: $r = .64, p < .0001$; gradual threshold: $r = .51, p < .0001$). These results suggest that those high in prejudice are higher in ambivalence than those low in prejudice. Thus, it does not appear that ambivalence or complexity could account for a finding indicating that low-prejudiced individuals show greater extremity in their evaluations of a Black target, should it be obtained, because low-prejudiced individuals are not more ambivalent nor do they have a simpler cognitive representation of Blacks.

OVERVIEW

To examine the possibility of a watchdog explanation of target polarization, Whites who were either high or low in prejudice towards Blacks were exposed to information that described either a Black or White target individual. The information contained a description of the target's behavior on the job as either positive or negative. The purpose of these descriptions was to provide information relevant to a possible salary increase for the target. After reading the description of the target as performing either relatively well or poorly, participants were asked to provide their evaluations of the raise and the target, and to list the thoughts they had in response to the descriptive information.

METHOD

Participants and Design

One hundred fifty-one White undergraduate students at the Ohio State University participated in the study for course credit in their introductory psychology class. The participants were randomly assigned to the cells of a 2 (race of target: Black or White) \times 2 (attribute quality: strong or weak) factorial design. In addition, participants' racial prejudice was measured and included as an independent variable, as described shortly.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from a sample of introductory psychology students who had completed the MRS in a larger survey questionnaire at the beginning of the academic quarter. Whites whose scores were in the top or bottom extremes of the prescreening sample distribution were contacted by phone several days before the experiment and asked to participate in a study on media evaluation. Those who could not be contacted were replaced by individuals whose scores were progressively less extreme until the study was completed. This procedure was used to overrepresent Whites who reported being either very high or very low in prejudice toward Blacks (see Petty et al., 1999). A White experimenter who was unaware of participants' prejudice levels conducted all sessions. Participants were seated in partitioned cubicles that contained a questionnaire booklet. The first sheet of the booklet explained that the study was being conducted to investigate how people evaluate different types of news stories. Participants were instructed that they would read newspaper articles and then would be asked about their impressions of them. Following this, everyone completed the booklet, which contained the race of target and attribute quality manipulations, an editorial describing the performance of a university president, and the evaluation and thought valence measures and manipulation check item, in that order. At the end of the study, participants were debriefed and thanked.

Independent Variables

Race of target. To manipulate the race of the target, a picture was included in the top left corner of the editorial and was identified as the target of the message, the president of Northern Oklahoma State University. Those in the Black target condition saw a photo of an African American man, whereas those in the White target condition saw a photo of a Caucasian man. Two pictures of Black men and two pictures of White men were used, which were matched for aspects of appearance other than race (e.g., age, clothing, attractiveness, and facial expression) and were counterbalanced across attribute quality conditions.

Attribute quality. Following the target race manipulation, participants read one of two versions of the target information in the form of a news editorial. The editorial described the actions of the (fictitious) president of Northern Oklahoma State University during his tenure as president to date and concluded that he should be given a salary increase. Participants in the strong attributes condition read a description containing six positive accomplishments of the president. For example, one statement about the president's accomplishments said,

"Students who graduated during [the president's] reign have *obtained higher paying jobs than their predecessors*" (emphasis added to highlight the manipulation of attribute quality). Other positive behaviors included that the graduation rate has increased by 15%; the president has successfully encouraged the faculty to be more creative and innovative in developing course curricula; students now have a greater number of class offerings to choose from, and the main campus library's hours have been extended; the school's ranking in the *US News and World Report* reached an all-time high of 10th place among midsize colleges and universities in the United States; and the University of California–Los Angeles, and the University of Illinois have contacted the president regarding positions at their schools. In contrast, participants in the weak attributes condition instead read a description containing six relatively unconvincing behaviors of the president. For example, one corresponding weak attribute read, "Students who graduated during [the president's] reign have *taken more part-time jobs than their predecessors* [italics added]." Other weak behaviors included that the dropout rate increased by 15%; the president has lunch at the faculty club and parties for the faculty at his home; the university's food service now has a more diversified menu, and the student union has more pool tables; the school's ranking in the *US News and World Report* reached an all-time high of 10th place among midsize colleges and universities in the state of Oklahoma; and Cape Cod Community College and Eastern Kentucky University have contacted the president regarding positions at their schools. The strong and weak descriptions were designed to be similar to those used in previous polarization studies, such that the strong behaviors provide reasons to favor a positive outcome for the target and the weak behaviors provide reasons to disfavor a positive outcome for the target. Pretesting without the race of target information with Ohio State University students revealed that the strong attribute information led to more positive evaluations of the raise and target and elicited more positive thoughts than did the weak attribute information when individuals were instructed to think about the descriptions (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, for a complete description of the pretesting procedures).

Prejudice level. In completing the MRS, participants rated seven items on 5-point scales ranging from *disagree strongly* (1) to *agree strongly* (5). These items were embedded in a 30-item scale concerning various political opinions in order to reduce the obviousness of the items' association with attitudes toward African Americans. Composite MRS scores were computed for all participants by summing participants' ratings on the seven items, reverse scoring as necessary (Cronbach's [1951]

$\alpha = .88$). MRS scores ranged from 7 to 30 out of a possible range of 7 to 35, with a mean of 16.89 and a median of 16.

Dependent Measures

Evaluation. To measure target evaluations, we used a combination of ratings of the raise and traits of the target relevant to performance much as has been done in the prior literature (e.g., Jussim et al., 1987). Evaluations toward giving the target a raise were assessed with six questions. First, participants indicated the extent to which they agreed that the president should receive the proposed raise on an 11-point scale that ranged from *do not agree at all* (1) to *agree completely* (11). Next, they rated "the raise for the president" on five 9-point semantic differential scales anchored by *good-bad*, *beneficial-harmful*, *wise-foolish*, *deserved-undeserved*, and *just-unjust*. Evaluations of the target were assessed with two questions. Participants rated "their impressions of the president" on two 9-point semantic differential scales anchored by *intelligent-unintelligent* and *likable-unlikable*. The raw score evaluation measures were internally consistent (Cronbach's [1951] $\alpha = .94$) and thus were standardized and averaged to form one overall evaluation index.

Thought positivity. Following the evaluation measures, participants were asked to list the thoughts they had while reading the description of the university president. Participants were told to put only one thought per box and to ignore spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Ten boxes were provided to list individual reactions. After listing their thoughts for 2.5 minutes, they were instructed to go back and rate their statements as being either positive, negative, or neutral toward giving the president a raise (see Cacioppo & Petty, 1981, for additional details concerning the thought-listing and scoring procedure). A thought positivity measure was created by subtracting the total number of negative thoughts from the total number of positive thoughts.²

Manipulation check. To check whether participants correctly perceived the race of the target, they were asked to identify the race of the target in a multiple choice question reading: "The president of Northern Oklahoma State University is: a. Black; b. Caucasian; c. Asian; d. Hispanic; e. Other."

RESULTS

Manipulation Check

In response to the multiple-choice question about the race of the target, only 1 participant in the Black target condition incorrectly recalled the target's race as White. All participants in the White target condition correctly

recalled the target's race. Thus, participants were highly accurate in identifying the race of the target.

Evaluations

Evaluations were examined using a Race of Target (Black or White) \times Attribute Quality (Strong or Weak) \times Prejudice level between-subjects simultaneous multiple regression in which the first two variables were effect coded (Black = 1, White = -1; strong = 1, weak = -1), and prejudice scores were centered (i.e., the mean was subtracted from raw scores, setting the centered mean at zero) and entered as a continuous predictor (Aiken & West, 1991). Effect coding is preferred over dummy coding for examining interactions between a continuous and two or more categorical variables because it produces results that are comparable with standard ANOVA procedures. For example, effect coding produces main effects and interactions that are orthogonal as in ANOVA, whereas dummy coding produces correlations between the contrast vectors for the main effects and those for the interactions. This analysis revealed a main effect for Attribute Quality, $\beta = .38$, $t(1, 143) = 6.15$, $p < .0001$, such that evaluations were more favorable when the information about the president was strong rather than weak. Of greater interest, this effect was qualified by a significant three-way interaction of Race of Target \times Attribute Quality \times Prejudice, $\beta = -.02$, $t(1, 143) = -2.37$, $p < .02$. As illustrated in Figure 1, which plots the predicted means for evaluations at one standard deviation above and below the Prejudice mean, this interaction revealed that for high-prejudiced individuals (analyzed at +1 *SD*), the Race of Target \times Attribute Quality interaction was not significant, $\beta = -.21$, $t(1, 143) = -.59$, $p = .56$. For low-prejudiced individuals (analyzed at -1 *SD*), in contrast, a Race of Target \times Attribute Quality interaction occurred, $\beta = .97$, $t(1, 143) = 2.79$, $p < .01$, such that attribute quality had a greater effect on evaluations when the target was Black, $\beta = 1.38$, $t(1, 143) = 5.64$, $p < .0001$, than White, $\beta = .41$, $t(1, 143) = 1.67$, $p = .10$. Seen another way, this Race of Target \times Attribute Quality interaction suggested that in the strong attributes condition, low-prejudiced participants tended to evaluate the Black target more positively than the White target, although this contrast was not significant, $\beta = .32$, $t(1, 143) = 1.33$, $p = .19$, whereas in the weak attributes condition, they evaluated the Black target more negatively than the White target, $\beta = -.65$, $t(1, 143) = -2.59$, $p = .01$. Thus, the three-way interaction suggests that whereas the evaluations of low-prejudiced individuals were more polarized when the target was Black than White, the evaluations of high-prejudiced individuals were not differentially polarized by race.

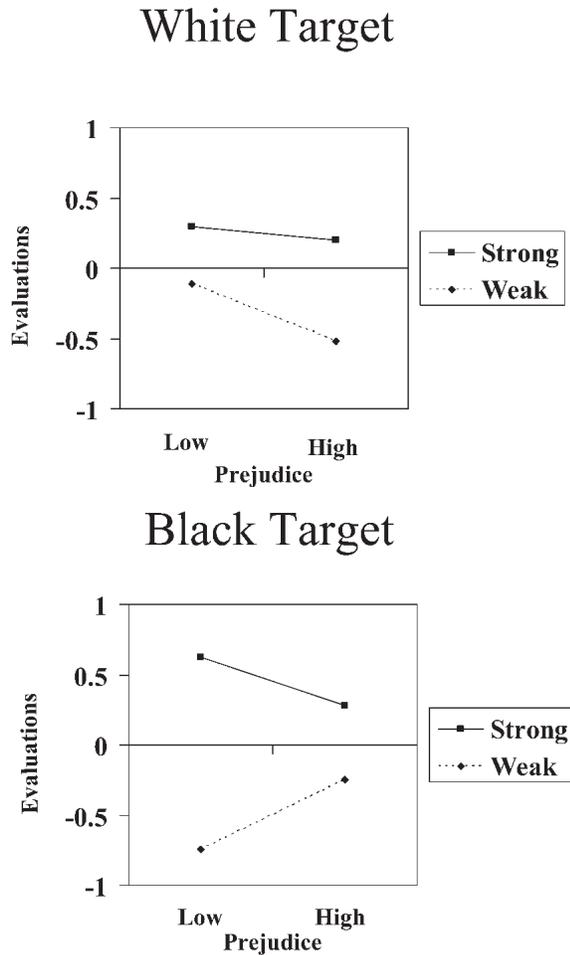


Figure 1 Standardized mean evaluations as a function of race of target, attribute quality, and prejudice level (plotted at +1 and -1 *SD* for prejudice).

The Race of Target \times Attribute Quality \times Prejudice interaction can also be probed by analyzing the prejudice simple slopes (Aiken & West, 1991). These tests reveal that when the target was White, the Prejudice \times Attribute Quality interaction was not significant, $\beta = .03$, $t(1, 143) = .87$, $p = .39$, indicating that the effect of attribute quality on evaluations of the White target was not affected by prejudice. In contrast, when the target was Black, a significant Prejudice \times Attribute Quality interaction emerged, $\beta = -.07$, $t(1, 143) = -2.52$, $p < .02$, indicating that attribute quality had a greater impact on the evaluations of the Black target when prejudice was low (analyzed at -1 *SD*), $\beta = 1.38$, $t(1, 143) = 5.64$, $p < .0001$, than high (analyzed at +1 *SD*), $\beta = .52$, $t(1, 143) = 2.06$, $p < .05$. Seen another way, this two-way interaction suggested that in the strong attributes condition, evaluations tended to become more positive as prejudice decreased, although this simple slope was not significant, $\beta = -.03$,

$t(1, 143) = -1.35$, $p = .18$, whereas in the weak attributes condition, evaluations became more negative as prejudice decreased, $\beta = .04$, $t(1, 143) = 2.24$, $p < .03$.

Thought Positivity

Three participants did not rate the valence of their thoughts and thus were not included in the analysis. This analysis revealed a main effect for Attribute Quality, $\beta = 1.06$, $t(1, 140) = 4.51$, $p < .0001$, such that thoughts were more favorable when the information about the target was strong rather than weak. Of greater interest, this effect was qualified by a significant three-way interaction of Race of Target \times Attribute Quality \times Prejudice, $\beta = -.08$, $t(1, 140) = -1.99$, $p < .05$ (see Figure 2). This interaction revealed that for high-prejudiced individuals (analyzed at +1 *SD*), the Race of Target \times Attribute Quality interaction was not significant, $\beta = -1.49$, $t(1, 140) = -1.10$, $p = .27$. For low-prejudiced individuals (analyzed at -1 *SD*), a marginal Race of Target \times Attribute Quality interaction occurred, $\beta = 2.33$, $t(1, 140) = 1.74$, $p = .08$, such that their thought valence was more affected by attribute quality when the target was Black, $\beta = 3.75$, $t(1, 140) = 3.98$, $p < .0001$, than White, $\beta = 1.42$, $t(1, 140) = 1.49$, $p = .14$.³ Seen another way, this Race of Target \times Attribute Quality interaction suggested that in the strong attributes condition, low-prejudiced participants' thoughts were only slightly more positive when the target was Black than White, $\beta = .64$, $t(1, 140) = .69$, $p = .49$, whereas in the weak attributes condition, low-prejudiced participants' thoughts tended to be more negative when the target was Black than White, $\beta = -1.70$, $t(1, 140) = -1.74$, $p = .08$, although neither contrast was significant. Thus, the three-way interaction pattern mirrored that obtained for evaluations. Whereas the thought positivity of low-prejudiced individuals was more affected by attribute quality when the target was Black than White, the thought positivity of high-prejudiced individuals was not differentially polarized by race.

Analyzing the prejudice simple slopes revealed that when the target was White, the Prejudice \times Attribute Quality interaction was not significant, $\beta = .08$, $t(1, 140) = .73$, $p = .46$, indicating that the effect of attribute quality on thoughts was not affected by prejudice. In contrast, when the target was Black, a significant Prejudice \times Attribute Quality interaction emerged, $\beta = -.23$, $t(1, 140) = -2.10$, $p < .04$, indicating that attribute quality had a greater impact on thoughts when prejudice was low (analyzed at -1 *SD*), $\beta = 3.75$, $t(1, 140) = 3.98$, $p < .0001$, than high (analyzed at +1 *SD*), $\beta = .94$, $t(1, 140) = .96$, $p = .34$. Seen another way, this two-way interaction suggested that in the strong attributes condition, thoughts tended to become more positive as prejudice decreased, $\beta = -.15$, $t(1, 140) = -1.87$, $p = .06$, whereas in the weak attrib-

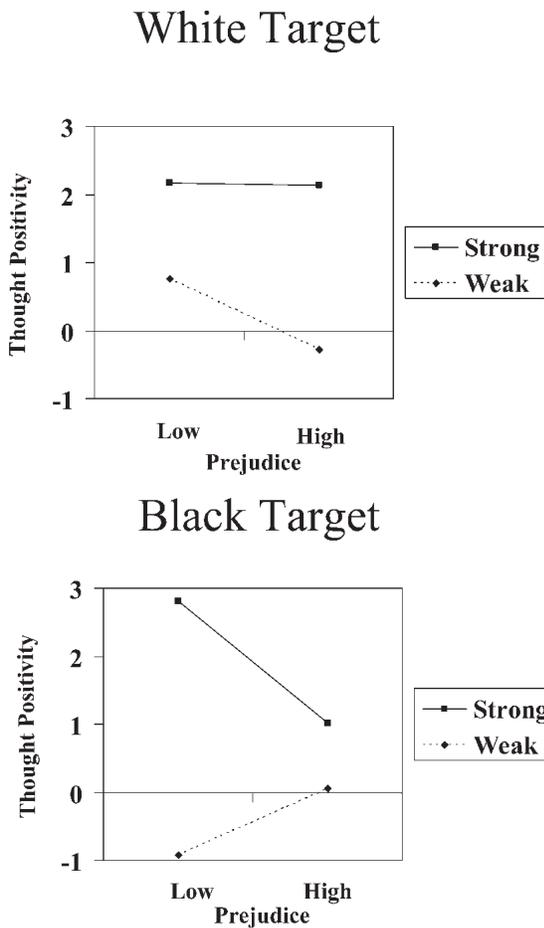


Figure 2 Thought positivity as a function of race of target, attribute quality, and prejudice level (plotted at +1 and -1 SD for prejudice).

utes condition, thoughts tended to become more negative as prejudice decreased, $\beta = .08$, $t(1, 140) = 1.08$, $p = .28$, although neither simple slope was significant.

Mediational Analyses

Prior research on evaluative polarization has shown that the extent of polarization of evaluations of stigmatized targets can be predicted by the extent of ambivalence toward the target's group (Hass et al., 1991) and the degree of complexity of representation of the target's group (Linville, 1982). According to the watchdog hypothesis, the extent of polarization of evaluations of stigmatized targets should be predicted by the level of prejudice, as was found in the regressions. That is, as prejudice decreases, polarization of evaluations of Black targets increases. Furthermore, the (negative) impact of prejudice on polarization of evaluations of Black targets is expected to be mediated by the polarization of

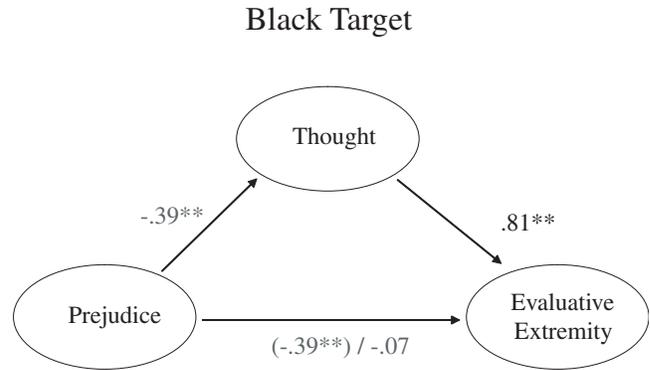


Figure 3 Path analyses for those in the Black target conditions. NOTE: Estimates not in parentheses are for simultaneous model; estimate in parentheses is for previous step. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

thoughts generated in response to the information describing Black targets.

To examine whether, in the Black target conditions, the effect of prejudice on evaluative polarization was mediated by the thoughts individuals generated in response to the information, we first reverse-scored evaluations and thought positivity for those in the weak attribute quality condition to create an evaluation extremity index and a thought extremity index in which higher numbers indicated more extreme evaluations and thoughts, respectively. We then conducted a path analysis for participants in the Black target conditions with LISREL 8.51 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996) to simultaneously estimate the three paths depicted in Figure 3. The variables entered into the model were prejudice, the evaluation extremity index, and the thought extremity index. The path coefficients in Figure 3 present the standardized results for individuals in the Black target condition. For these participants, when thought extremity was not included in the model, there was a negative effect of prejudice on evaluative extremity, indicating that those lower in prejudice had more extreme evaluations of the Black target. When thought extremity was included in the model, however, the effect of prejudice on evaluative extremity was no longer significant. Instead, prejudice had a significant negative effect on thought extremity, and thought extremity in turn affected evaluative extremity. That is, for those in the Black target condition, the lower in prejudice they were, the more extreme their thoughts were. The more extreme their thoughts were, the more extremely they evaluated the target. Consistent with this interpretation, the indirect effect of prejudice on evaluative extremity through thoughts was significant, parameter estimate = $-.32$, $t(1, 70) = -2.38$, $p < .01$. Thus, it appears that for

individuals in the Black target condition, the effect of prejudice on evaluative extremity was fully mediated by the thoughts they generated in response to the target attribute information. Of course, because prejudice was not related to polarization for the White target, there was no need to examine mediation by thoughts.⁴

DISCUSSION

Consistent with much prior work in this domain, the current research found that when prejudice was not considered, Whites overall tended to evaluate a Black target more extremely in response to strong versus weak descriptions than an identically described White target, $\beta = .10$, $t(1,143) = 1.55$, $p = .12$. Of greater interest, we found for the first time that this target polarization effect was confined to individuals who were relatively low rather than high in racial prejudice. Furthermore, we found that the positivity of thoughts in response to the information describing the targets followed the same pattern. Specifically, the thoughts of low-prejudiced individuals were more polarized in response to strong versus weak descriptions when the target was Black than White, whereas this interaction pattern did not occur for high-prejudiced individuals. Finally, we found that the (negative) effect of prejudice on polarization of evaluations of the stigmatized target was fully mediated by people's polarized thoughts in response to the information. Thus, these results reveal a new moderator of more polarized evaluations of stigmatized targets—prejudice, and a new mediator of more polarized evaluations of stigmatized targets—polarized thinking about the information presented. These findings are consistent with the postulated watchdog hypothesis, which suggests that evaluative polarization can stem from low-prejudiced perceivers thinking more carefully about information describing stigmatized than nonstigmatized targets. The proposed motivation behind the enhanced scrutiny of low-prejudiced perceivers is that they are attempting to guard against prejudice on their part or the part of others. Because in our pilot study racial prejudice was not related to racial complexity and was related, if anything, in a positive manner to racial ambivalence, the dominant prior accounts of racial evaluative polarization cannot account for the current findings.

Alternative Explanations

In addition to the dominant ambivalence and complexity-extremity theories, two other theories have been proposed to account for greater polarization of evaluations of stigmatized than nonstigmatized targets in response to positive versus negative descriptions. First, expectancy violation theory suggests that when information about a target individual violates stereotype-based expectations, evaluations should be more extreme in the

direction of the expectancy violation (Jussim et al., 1987). Because a stigmatized target who is described positively is particularly likely to violate expectations, expectancy violation predicts that a stigmatized target will be evaluated more favorably than a nonstigmatized target when described positively and that stigmatized and nonstigmatized targets will be evaluated similarly when described negatively. Furthermore, expectancy violation would predict that those with stronger negative expectations for Blacks' performance (e.g., high-prejudiced individuals; Devine & Elliott, 1995) should be more likely to show polarization.⁵

Second, the shifting standards model (Biernat, Manis, & Nelson, 1991) suggests that evaluative polarization may also be produced by social comparison with a within-group standard or expectation that shifts from one group to another. According to this model, a Black target may be seen on an objective scale as less intelligent than a similarly performing White target due to the application of a stereotype "Whites are more competent than Blacks." However, the high-performing Black target might be evaluated more favorably on a subjective scale than the high-performing White target, despite the application of the group stereotype, because the White target might be evaluated against a more demanding set of standards (i.e., the anchor of high ability for Whites might be greater than that for Blacks). The low-performing Black target might be evaluated less favorably on a subjective scale than the low-performing White target, through application of the group stereotype, if the anchor of low ability is the same for both groups. Shifting standards would predict that those who endorse and apply negative stereotypes about Blacks (e.g., high-prejudiced individuals; Devine & Elliott, 1995) should be more likely to show evaluative polarization than those who do not.

The expectancy violation and shifting standards explanations of evaluative polarization would seem to have difficulty accounting for the finding that evaluative polarization only occurred for low-prejudiced individuals. In addition, it is not clear how either perspective can account for the finding of mediation of evaluative polarization by thoughts. Thus, it appears that no prior theories of greater polarization of evaluations of stigmatized than nonstigmatized targets provide a plausible alternative account of the current findings.

Implications

Thus, the current findings provide evidence for a new explanation of why evaluations of stigmatized target individuals can be more polarized than evaluations of nonstigmatized targets in response to positive versus negative descriptions. In this research, we found that prejudice moderated polarization such that low-

prejudiced individuals demonstrated more polarized evaluations of the stigmatized than nonstigmatized target following exposure to strong versus weak information, whereas high-prejudiced individuals did not. Furthermore, the effect of prejudice on polarization of evaluations of the stigmatized target was mediated by the valenced thoughts perceivers generated in response to the information describing the stigmatized target. What is clear from these findings is that evaluative polarization can result from increased thinking about information describing stigmatized than nonstigmatized targets. What is less clear is why low-prejudiced individuals in particular engage in this increased scrutiny. We have proposed one possibility: It is because low-prejudiced individuals are motivated to prevent the stigmatized target from being discriminated against by themselves or others. The current findings do not rule out existing explanations of evaluative polarization but rather, for the first time, provide support for a previously unresearched reason why it occurs: watchdog scrutiny.

In addition to this contribution to our understanding of evaluative polarization, the current work also sheds light on why low-prejudiced individuals scrutinize persuasive messages from stigmatized sources. The current work extends this enhanced thinking effect from information presented by stigmatized sources (Petty et al., 1999) to information about stigmatized targets. In so doing, these results render less plausible the idea that low-prejudiced individuals scrutinize messages from stigmatized sources because they are concerned that a stigmatized source's position or message might be unfairly rejected or ignored. Unlike research on stigmatized sources, in the current research, targets had no position or message to unfairly reject or ignore. By demonstrating that low-prejudiced individuals' increased scrutiny extends to information describing stigmatized targets, the current work suggests instead that the scrutiny occurs because low-prejudiced individuals are generally interested in watching out for stigmatized others and think about information associated with stigmatized individuals more carefully in order to do so. Prior to the current findings, because more than 20 years of well-developed theory and research on the target polarization effect appeared to provide sufficient explanations of it (ambivalence and complexity-extremity), it was reasonable to expect that watchdog scrutiny might not extend to the domain of targets. If it had not, such an important boundary condition would have suggested that watchdog scrutiny was due to something about stigmatized sources *per se*, such as concerns about reactions to the position they were advocating or the message they were communicating. The finding that watchdog scrutiny appears to extend to descriptions of targets

suggests that examining more general watchdog motivations would be fruitful.

The watchdog explanation of the current findings may also shed light on the "black sheep effect" (Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). The black sheep effect has examined polarization of evaluations of ingroup versus outgroup targets rather than stigmatized versus nonstigmatized targets. For example, Branscombe, Wann, Noel, and Coleman (1993) examined University of Kansas Jayhawk fans' evaluations of a fellow Jayhawk fan or an Oklahoma Sooner fan. Work on the black sheep effect has found that evaluations of ingroup targets are more polarized in response to positive versus negative descriptions than are evaluations of identically described outgroup targets (Marques, 1990; Marques et al., 1988; Marques, Robalo, & Rocha, 1992; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988). The prevailing explanation of this ingroup evaluative polarization is that it is a form of ingroup favoritism, in which individuals favor ingroup members over outgroup members as a strategy of self-enhancement through their social identity. Rejection of a negative ingroup member—a black sheep—is a sophisticated form of ingroup favoritism aimed at protecting the positive distinctiveness of the ingroup as a whole (Marques et al., 1988). Keeping the distinction between ingroup and outgroup versus stigmatized and nonstigmatized targets in mind, if one expands the watchdog hypothesis to suggest that increased thinking and resulting evaluative polarization will occur when perceivers view a target as threatened and want to protect the target, then the watchdog hypothesis would predict that evaluations of an ingroup member would be more polarized than evaluations of an outgroup member, especially when the ingroup was threatened, and perceivers cared about the ingroup (e.g., were highly identified) and thus wanted to protect the ingroup. In contrast, evaluations of an outgroup member would be more polarized than evaluations of an ingroup member when perceivers cared about the outgroup and when the outgroup was threatened (which presumably can usually be assumed, because it is an outgroup). This is exactly what Branscombe et al. (1993) found in their examination of the black sheep effect: Ingroup polarization (i.e., the black sheep effect) occurred when perceivers were high in identification with the ingroup, and the ingroup was threatened (i.e., the Jayhawks lost). Outgroup polarization occurred when perceivers were low in identification with the ingroup and thus presumably lower in prejudice toward the outgroup. Thus, the watchdog hypothesis can also provide an explanation of the black sheep effect data by bringing it under the watchdog conceptual umbrella. This possible integration suggests intriguing directions for future research.

In summary, the current findings provide evidence for a new moderator and a new mediator of the often observed target stigma evaluative polarization effect. In so doing, it provides evidence for a new explanation of the effect, watchdog scrutiny, and increases our understanding of the contexts in which low-prejudiced individuals engage in increased scrutiny of information associated with stigmatized individuals.

NOTES

1. When decomposed further, in prior research this interaction was sometimes driven more by the positive description condition and sometimes by the negative description condition. That is, in some studies the stigmatized target has been found to be evaluated significantly more positively than the nonstigmatized target when the description is positive but similarly to the nonstigmatized target when the description is negative (e.g., Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987). In other studies, however, the stigmatized target has been found to be evaluated similarly to the nonstigmatized target when the description is positive but significantly more negatively than the nonstigmatized target when the description is negative (e.g., Hass, Katz, Rizzo, Bailey, & Eisenstadt, 1991). Interestingly, it is rare for both target stigma contrasts to be significant when they are reported. Thus, the polarization interaction is best described by noting that the impact of description valence or quality on evaluations of stigmatized targets is greater than that for nonstigmatized targets.

2. Thought valence is used as an indicator of extent of thinking about the target description rather than mere number of thoughts because people can still write down thoughts about the topic even if they paid no attention to the specific attribute information presented. Indeed, persuasion studies have found that thought valence is more polarized in response to strong than weak arguments in high than low thought conditions (e.g., high vs. low personal relevance of the message topic; e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1979), whereas people typically write down the same number of thoughts in high versus low thought conditions (see Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, chap. 2, for a review and discussion of this issue). The fact that thought valences tend to predict attitudes better in high-versus low-thinking conditions argues against the possibility that the thought measure is simply redundant with the attitude measure.

3. Tests of the Race of Target \times Attribute Quality interaction on thought positivity at specific scores of prejudice (see Aiken & West, 1991, pp. 132-133) revealed that this interaction was significant for the lowest prejudice score (raw score of 7), $\beta = 3.48$, $t(1, 140) = 1.94$, $p = .05$, consistent with the watchdog hypothesis. Also consistent with the watchdog hypothesis, decomposing the three-way interaction on thoughts by analyzing the Race of Target \times Attribute Quality interactions for high- and low-prejudiced participants separately, as determined by a median split (see Petty, Fleming, & White, 1999), revealed that a significant Race of Target \times Attribute Quality interaction occurred for low prejudiced individuals, $F(1, 69) = 3.88$, $p < .05$.

4. For exploratory purposes in this study, some participants received information about the race of the author of the description of the target, whereas others did not. Participants in the source race-specified condition read a short biography of the author of the editorial before being exposed to the description of the target. A picture was included that was identified as the *Tulsa Daily News* editor who wrote the editorial. Some saw a photo of an African American man, whereas others saw a photo of a Caucasian man. Participants in the source race-unspecified condition did not receive any information regarding the source. Results were not moderated by whether the source's race was specified. Although not the focus of this investigation, we wanted to see if, in the conditions in which the source's race was specified, source race effects replicated our previous work (Petty et al., 1999). This work would predict a three-way interaction of Race of Source \times Attribute Quality \times Prejudice level indicating that for low prejudiced individuals,

a two-way Race of Source \times Attribute Quality interaction occurs such that evaluations are more polarized when the source is Black than White. However, high-prejudiced individuals should not show this pattern. To examine this possibility, evaluations of those in the conditions in which the source's race was specified were examined using a Race of source (Black or White) \times Attribute Quality (Strong or Weak) \times Prejudice level between-subjects simultaneous multiple regression in which the first two variables were effect coded and prejudice scores were centered and entered as a continuous predictor (Aiken & West, 1991). As expected, a Race of Source \times Attribute Quality \times Prejudice level interaction occurred, $\beta = -.03$, $t(1, 106) = -2.34$, $p < .02$. This interaction revealed that for high-prejudiced individuals (analyzed at $+1$ SD), the Race of Source \times Attribute Quality interaction was not significant, $\beta = -.27$, $t(1, 106) = -.65$, $p = .52$. For low-prejudiced individuals (analyzed at -1 SD), in contrast, a Race of Source \times Attribute Quality interaction occurred, $\beta = 1.11$, $t(1, 106) = 2.69$, $p < .01$, such that attribute quality had a greater effect on evaluations when the source of the information was Black, $\beta = 1.58$, $t(1, 106) = 5.25$, $p < .0001$, than White, $\beta = .47$, $t(1, 106) = 1.67$, $p < .10$. Thus, when the source's race was specified, low-prejudiced individuals' evaluations were more affected by attribute quality when the source was Black compared to when the source was White, whereas evaluations of high-prejudiced individuals were not differentially polarized by source race. This suggests that the pattern found by Petty et al. (1999) for source race was replicated in the appropriate conditions of the current study.

5. The multiple process model has also been proposed as an explanation of this pattern of polarization (Jussim et al., 1987). In this model, expectancy violation and complexity-extremity are proposed as joint processes leading to more positive evaluations of a stigmatized than nonstigmatized target when descriptions are favorable, but similar evaluations when descriptions are unfavorable—if the negatively behaving nonstigmatized target violates expectancies—because the processes cancel one another out. The multiple process model would seem to predict that those with stronger negative expectations for Black's performance and stronger positive expectations for Whites' performance (e.g., high-prejudiced individuals; Devine & Elliott, 1995) and with less complex representations of Blacks should be more likely to show polarization.

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