Media Images as Positive and Negative Exemplars of Race: Evoking Obama or Videogame Characters Changes Outcomes for Black Men

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Abstract
Mass media occupy the majority of young people’s free time and are powerful agents of socialization. An experiment compared the effects of exposure to negative videogame exemplars versus positive historical exemplars of Black men, including Barack Obama, on evaluations of an unknown Black or White political candidate and on pro-Black attitudes. Results revealed significant interactions of exemplar type and candidate race on favorability and capability candidate ratings and on pro-Black attitudes. These data, collected during Obama’s historic Presidential candidacy, demonstrate the power of mass media images of race to either help or harm minorities.
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When we have limited personal experience with members of a particular race, our knowledge is often derived from the source of social information that many of us spend the greatest amount of time with: the mass media (Gerbner, 1999). For American children of all ages, most free time is “screen time,” be it spent watching TV or movies, going online, or playing videogames. Indeed American children aged 2 to 18 spend more time using media than they spend in school. (Roberts & Foehr, 2004) Since approximately 12% of the American population is Black, compared to approximately 75% who are White (US Census Bureau, 2008), media messages about Blacks may actually be more readily available for some Whites than are real face-to-face interactions. The stories mass media tell about race are more important than ever both because they are a primary source of social information and because these portrayals influence the behaviors, thoughts and feelings of the audience (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Holtzman, 2000). Furthermore, the very nature of a mass media message suggests the projected stereotypes are shared, which has been shown to influence behaviors, attitudes and attitude accessibility, and to reinforce the attitude – behavior link (Clark & Kashima, 2003; Sechrist & Stangor, 2001).

Role of exemplars

One way that mass media affect behavior and attitudes is through priming of stereotypes through exposure to exemplars or attitude prototypes. However, this topic “has received only minimal attention from media researchers.” (Mastro, Tamborini, & Hullett, 2005, p. 325) A primary purpose of the current investigation is to compare the
effects of positive and negative attitude prototypes (exemplars) of Black men on subsequent judgments of an unrelated Black man. We predict that priming negative exemplars will negatively affect judgments while priming positive exemplars will positively affect judgments compared to judgments about a White candidate.

Past research suggests differential effects of priming positive and neutral Black exemplars. In one investigation (Bodenhausen, Schwarz, Bless, & Wanke, 1995, Study 1), researchers primed Oprah Winfrey and Michael Jordan as positive Black exemplars and primed Julia Roberts as a White, successful control stimulus. Results indicated that priming these likable and high-status Black exemplars altered participants’ beliefs about discrimination; the participants were less likely compared to controls to endorse the notion that discrimination is no longer a problem. In a second study, the researchers compared beliefs about discrimination following exposure to either the positive Black exemplars or to the more neutral, but still well known Black exemplars Spike Lee and Jesse Jackson. Results indicated that those exposed to Oprah and Michael Jordan were less likely to believe discrimination is no longer a problem compared to those exposed to Jesse Jackson and Spike Lee or to the White control condition. Interestingly, in a third study, when participants were reminded of the atypicality of the highly successful exemplars, the discrimination effect disappeared.

Other research has demonstrated that it is possible to prime specific stereotypes by using media exemplars. Brown Givens and Monahan (2005) primed two very different stereotypes of African American women: the “mammy” or the “jezebel” schemas. The jezebel prime was a scene in which actress Halle Berry portrayed singer Dorothy Dandridge, while the mammy prime was a compellation of scenes featuring actress
Juanita Moore from 1959’s *Imitation of Life*. Participants watched a 3-minute video of a young woman (either African American or White) interviewing for a position as a sales representative. Results indicated that participants associated the African-American interviewee more quickly with negative terms such as “aggressive.” Furthermore, the experimental manipulation showed an effect of exemplar prime on speed of response to schema-consistent words. The jezebel and mammy exemplars primed the associated schemas for the African American, but not the White female job applicant.

Brown Givens and Monahan’s results show how media stereotypes can be applied to another member of the same race. Ferguson and colleagues (Ferguson et al., 2005) studied gender stereotype application. These researchers showed tapes of either a promiscuous or non-promiscuous woman from the Jerry Springer show. When participants subsequently read and evaluated a case of sexual harassment against a woman, those in the promiscuous condition applied the primed stereotype of the promiscuous woman to this victim and rated her as more responsible for and less traumatized by the harassment.

It is also possible to prime positive exemplars, with positive effects. Duval, Ruscher, Welsh and Catanese (2000) exposed college women to either a younger or an older woman relating either stereotypic or counter-stereotypic stories about older women they knew. The same participants then took part in a supposedly unrelated study purported to analyze traits of voters in a past state gubernatorial election. They listened to recordings of these “voters” self-descriptions and then recorded verbal comments judging the voters’ traits. As predicted, both stereotypic and counter-stereotypic primes
influenced participants’ subsequent judgments of an unrelated older woman in the direction of the prime.

*The Present Investigation*

The current investigation explores the differential effects of exposure to positive and negative media exemplars of Black men on judgments of an unrelated Black man as compared to judgments of an unrelated White man. The Black and White targets were purported to be real political candidates. To prime positive exemplars, we presented images of high status, well-liked, successful Black men: Barack Obama and Martin Luther King, Jr. These data were collected during the Spring semester of 2008, during the heat of the presidential primary season in which Obama was the eventual democratic nominee.

The negative exemplar prime included images from current top-selling videogames. Recent research has shown that Black male videogame characters are presented in very negative, blatantly stereotypical ways. Specifically, Black male characters are likely to be portrayed as street criminals or “thugs,” and as using extreme weapons and less likely to be portrayed as soldiers than White male characters (Burgess, Dill, Stermer, Burgess, & Brown, under review). Videogame playing is a popular pastime with youth, and a share of the entertainment market that is growing very quickly (Dill & Thill, 2007). Past findings suggest that college students are aware of the content of videogames and of stereotypes in videogames, even if they are not avid players themselves (Dill & Thill, 2007). Thus the role of videogames in the socialization of young people is important to study.

*Theoretical Background*
The Stereotype Content Model

Susan Fiske, Amy Cuddy, Peter Glick and colleagues (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) have developed the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) that posits that stereotype content is categorized along two broad dimensions: warmth and competence. The basis of these two “universal dimensions of social cognition” (Fiske et al., 2007, p. 77) are their power to make the most important, functional and adaptive judgment about outgroup members: are they friends or foes?

The BIAS map (Cuddy et al., 2007) crosses these central traits of warmth and competence to form four quadrants or stereotype categories. Groups categorized as high competence/high warmth (e.g., Americans) elicit admiration; those categorized as low competence/low warmth (e.g, Welfare recipients) elicit contempt. The mixed groups are high competence/low warmth groups (e.g., Asians), which elicit envy, and the low competence/high warmth groups (e.g., the elderly), which elicit pity. Contempt predicts harm in the form of discrimination, whereas admiration predicts behaviors inconsistent with harm. Traditionally, the term prejudice describes negative emotions toward outgroup members based on group membership, while the term stereotype describes beliefs about these group members. According to the SCM, emotions predict behaviors, although cognitive appraisals are important too, and this is in part for the very reason that they predict emotions. In the current investigation, our negative and positive Black exemplars map onto the SCM’s unmixed stereotype groups – the admired “high highs” and the contemptible “low lows.”

Media and Aggressive Degradation (MAD) Theory
Keeping in mind the social psychological definition of aggression as harm, MAD Theory (Dill & Burgess, in press) explains how negative mass media images cause harm to the derogated group, and in doing so integrates the literatures on social biases and aggression. Many believe media images are “just harmless entertainment” and cause no negative effects (Brenick, Henning, Killen, O'Connor, & Collins, 2007). However, according to MAD theory, degrading a group member through a negative portrayal is itself a form of aggression and also encourages future aggression against members of the maligned group. For example, Dill, Brown and Collins (2008) showed college students either positive or negative images of women (US Senators or videogame characters, respectively) juxtaposed with images of men from the same genre. The students then read a real life story about a male professor sexually harassing his young, female student. Subsequent judgments indicated greater tolerance of sexual harassment by men who had seen the negative images of women compared to men who had seen the positive images.

This is an example of MAD’s tenet that media derogation can cause real-life harm. When you degrade a group member, you encourage others to devalue members of that group as well and you encourage harm directed against that group. Because media depictions carry with them the connotation of socially accepted beliefs, they have even more power. Merging the SCM and MAD, we predict images in the low warmth, low competence category—here our negative Black videogame images—will evoke harm and derogation to an unrelated, unknown Black political candidate as compared to images in the high warmth, high competence category—here, our positive Black political images. 

*Outcome Measures: Expectancy Violation, Global Favorability and Pro-Black Attitudes*
According to Expectancy Violation Theory (Jussim, Coleman, & Lerch, 1987), when people violate stereotypical expectations for their social group we evaluate them more extremely and the valence of the evaluation is in the direction of the expectancy violation. For example, Whites evaluate a high status Black man more positively than a White man of similar status because the Black man violates stereotypical expectations. This is explained in part by the augmenting principle of attribution in that the Black man is likely credited with overcoming social barriers to his achievement, suggesting a dispositional attribution for his success. Bettencourt, Dill, Greathouse, Charleton and Mulholland (1997) found that when Black male job candidates violated stereotypes by being extremely competent, White participants made more extreme affective ratings of these candidates than they made for extremely competent White candidates. Violated expectancies only affected global favorability ratings of the target, which are affective, but did not affect specific traits ratings. Based on the predictions of Expectancy Violation Theory and on the findings of Bettencourt et al., we predicted that the global favorability ratings would be more influenced by the exemplars than the trait/capability ratings.

We also measured long-term attitudes towards Blacks (the Pro-Black subscale of the Racial Ambivalence Scale) as an outcome measure, predicting a main effect of Exemplar on pro-Black attitudes such that those exposed to the Positive Exemplars would have higher pro-Black attitudes than those exposed to the Negative Exemplars. Finally, because the Negative Exemplars were videogame characters, we included a measure of long-term exposure to violent videogames for inclusion as a covariate in the analyses. Those exposed to greater levels of videogame violence would have more chronic exposure to images like those manipulated in our study.
Method

Participants

One hundred and fifty three college students (103 female, 50 male) participated in exchange for either extra credit or partial fulfillment of a course requirement in either a general or developmental psychology class. Ninety participants were from a medium sized regional university in the Midwest. Sixty-three participants were from a small private liberal arts college in North Carolina. Participants tested were 86.3% White. Only data from the White participants (N=131) were used in the analyses reported. All students were treated in accordance with APA’s guidelines for the ethical treatment of human subjects, including the giving of informed consent.

Design and Procedure

As described above, we manipulated the “high highs” (high warmth, high competence) and “low lows” (low warmth, low competence) from the Stereotype Content Model. We refer to these two primes as Positive Exemplars and Negative Exemplars respectively. The experimental design was a 2 (Exemplar Prime: Positive vs. Negative) x 2 (Target Race: Black vs. White) between-subjects factorial design.

After completing an informed consent form, participants were shown either the Positive or the Negative Exemplar slide presentation. We told students we were investigating memory for media images. To encourage attentiveness we told them there would be a memory test at the end and the highest scorers were eligible for a drawing for a $25 Target gift card. Following the presentation they were instructed that they needed to wait a few minutes to ensure the images were stored in their long-term memories and in the interim they would be asked to complete an evaluation of a political website for an
out-of-town media psychology colleague. To maintain this cover story, students completed another informed consent form before viewing and rating the web page. When the web page evaluation was completed, they completed a measure of violent video game exposure (the VGQ; Anderson & Dill, 2000), the Racial Ambivalence Scale and lastly, a demographic sheet which asked participants to report sex, race and party affiliation. They were debriefed, thanked and dismissed. Gift cards were awarded to the two students randomly selected from the highest scorers at each University.

Materials

Exemplar manipulation. The exemplars were presented with a looping PowerPoint presentation set to show each slide for one minute. Each slide was shown twice, for a total of 8 minutes for the manipulation. The Negative Exemplars were presented using four color slides of screen shots taken from the following video games: Resident Evil 4, Half Life 2, Saint’s Row 2 and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas (GTA: SA). The screen shots were pictures of Black men (Saint’s Row 2, GTA: SA) portrayed as aggressive and menacing. The screen shots of White men (Resident Evil 4, Half Life 2) were also aggressive.

Because our manipulations related to social hierarchies, we took care to present each game character and political figure in juxtaposition with relevant others. For instance, both the images from Half Life 2 and Saint’s Row 2 included a woman to depict the status quo social hierarchy. Furthermore, Burgess and colleagues (under review) found that while most male videogame characters are portrayed as aggressive, the Black game characters are more likely to be portrayed as thugs and criminals while the White game characters are more likely to be portrayed in more respectable ways, for instance as
soldiers or in fantasy scenes. Therefore, the selected characters were intentionally used for their consistency with these characteristics reported by Burgess and colleagues.

The Positive exemplar slides were photographs of Barack Obama, John and Jacqueline Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. and Lyndon Johnson, and George W. Bush. The pictures of King and Kennedy were black and white and the pictures of Obama and Bush were in color. Like the videogame characters, each slide showed multiple people interacting. Obama was giving a speech, standing under a tree in front of a large crowd of mixed race. Johnson and MLK were seated in conversation at a table. The Kennedy’s were greeting White House guests. Soldiers saluted Bush as he was lead by an aid. This mix of exemplars interacting with each other, and the mix of slides with people of different races were designed to show a constellation of Black men and White men with high-status, thus suggesting Black men can have the respect afforded to high status White men.

Mock political web site evaluation. A professional librarian created a mock web site for this investigation. The website was created by combining features of several US Representatives’ home pages. The fictitious candidate was named Peter Smith and the only thing that differed between the websites was the candidate’s race (either Black or White). Participants were told this was a real candidate from another state and that they would be evaluating the effectiveness of his web site. Candidate images were selected to portray the respectable, professional look of a typical public servant. Instructions suggested that participants were evaluating the web site as a tool for the candidate rather than evaluating the candidate himself. This strategy, as well as the inclusion of White game characters and political figures was also designed to reduce suspicion that the study
was all about race. Additionally, the demographic questionnaire was administered last, and the Racial Ambivalence Scale next to last, so that these items were completed after the dependent measures.

**Web page evaluation.** The web-page evaluation was modeled after Bettencourt et al (1997). The global affective evaluations were rated with 6-point Likert scales anchored by the following word pairs: likable/unlikable, favorable/unfavorable, good/bad. Target qualifications were assessed with 6-point Likert scales anchored by the following word pairs: incapable/capable, motivated/unmotivated, and resourceful/unresourceful. A final question was a behavioroid measure that assessed likelihood of voting for the candidate based on this web-page. Directionality of valence varied across the items.

**Racial Ambivalence Scale**

The Pro-Black scale is a ten-item subscale of the Racial Ambivalence Scale (Katz & Hass, 1988) and has been used in past research as a measure of racist attitudes. Items are reverse scored as necessary so that higher scores indicate less racist attitudes. Sample items include statements such as “Black people do not have the same employment opportunities white people do,” and “Most Blacks are no longer discriminated against.” We predicted the Exemplar type would influence pro-Black attitudes such that those who saw the Negative Exemplars would espouse weaker pro-Black attitudes than those who saw the Positive Exemplars.

**Video Game Violence Exposure**

The VGVE (Anderson & Dill, 2000) is a scale designed to measure violent videogame exposure. Participants are asked to list their three favorite video games, rate the violence in the game on a scale of 1 (little or no violent content) to 7 (extremely
violent content), and indicate how frequently they play the game on a scale of 1 (rarely) to 7 (often). The VGVE score was computed by multiplying participant’s favorite game’s violent content by how often they reported playing it.

_memory Test_

Separate ten-item multiple choice memory tests, one for the political and one for the videogame condition, were created to assess the degree to which participants followed the instructions to pay close attention to the presentations. Questions were straightforward and addressed objects, gestures and behaviors represented in the slides. For example, one item asked what was on the table in front of MLK and LBJ.

_results_

_memo ry Test Scores_

Scores on the Memory Test were generally high. We used these scores as a check that participants were engaged with the images. Six of the participants had memory scores of 50% or below, while 125 had scores above chance. The 6 lowest scoring participants were removed from the dataset prior to analysis to avoid testing participants who were not paying sufficient attention to the task.

Outcome Measures

Following Bettencourt et al. (1997), we created a global favorability composite using the likable, good, and favorable ratings and a trait/capability composite using the capable, motivated and resourceful ratings (same scoring system), expecting global favorability ratings to be more affected by the experimental manipulation than trait/capability ratings. We also calculated a composite score reflecting an overall rating of the candidate by summing the seven web page evaluation items, reverse scoring as
necessary so that higher scores indicated more positive feelings about the candidate. Finally, composite scores for the Pro-Black subscale of the Racial Ambivalence Scale were calculated.

**Broad Model**

We performed a principal components factor analysis on the 7-item web candidate evaluation. Results indicated a one-factor solution with all 7 items loading on the same factor. Cronbach’s alpha for this overall composite was .919. Mean response on theses seven items were used as an overall candidate evaluation score, which was used as the outcome measure in the broad analyses reported next.

A 2 (Exemplar: Positive vs. Negative) x 2 (Candidate Race: Black vs. White) ANOVA was conducted with overall candidate evaluation as the dependent variable and prior violent videogame exposure as a covariate. This model was significant $F(3, 121)=2.755, p<.05, \eta^2=.084$ – $R^2$(model)=.084, but the videogame exposure covariate was not a significant factor in the model ($p>.05$). Therefore we dropped the videogame covariate from further analyses. We also found the predicted Exemplar by Candidate Race interaction on overall candidate evaluation, $F(1,121)=9.764, p<.01, \eta^2=.075$. Recall that means could range from 1 to 6, with items reverse scored as necessary to make higher scores indicate more positive evaluations. As predicted, the Black candidate was rated more poorly ($M=4.67$) than the White candidate ($M=5.34$) following exposure to the Negative Exemplars. In a reverse pattern, the White candidate was rated more poorly ($M=4.91$) than the Black candidate ($M=5.36$) following exposure to the Positive Exemplars.

*Main Hypothesis Tests*
Global favorability. We hypothesized a significant interaction between Exemplar and Candidate Race such that Black candidates would be rated more favorably after viewing Positive Exemplars and less favorably after viewing Negative Exemplars compared to ratings of White candidates. Our main predictions concerned the global favorability and trait/capability ratings. We predicted the manipulations would affect global favorability moreso than trait/capability. To test these main predications, we first ran a between-subjects ANOVA with global favorability as the dependent measure, and Exemplar (Positive vs. Negative) and Candidate Race (Black vs. White) as the two experimental independent variables. Results indicated that the overall model was significant, Model $F(3, 122)=3.043, p<.05, \eta^2=.072 – R^2(model)=.070$. As predicted, the Exemplar by Candidate Race interaction was also significant, $F(1,122)=8.890, p<.01, \eta^2=.068$. As predicted, the Black candidate ($M=4.58$) was rated more highly on global favorability than the White candidate ($M=4.27$) after viewing the positive Black male exemplars. In a reversal, the White candidate ($M=5.34$) was rated more highly on global favorability than the Black candidate ($M=4.67$) after viewing the negative Black male exemplars. This interaction is shown in Figure 1.

Trait/capability. Next, we ran the same model, but this time with Trait/capability as the dependent measure. Again, the overall model was significant, $F(3, 121)=3.151, p<.05, \eta^2=.072 – R^2(model)=.072$. The predicted Exemplar by Candidate Race interaction was also significant, $F(1,121)=8.54, p<.01, \eta^2=.066$. This interaction is also depicted in Figure 1, which compares the results on the global favorability and trait/capability outcomes. Contrary to predictions, the trait/capability results were not weaker than the global favorability results. However, the shape of the interactions
differed in interesting ways. As Figure 1 shows, of all 8 ratings, the highest was for the rating of Trait/capability for the Black candidate, following exposure to the Positive Exemplars. Interestingly, the lowest was for the Trait/capability rating of the Black candidate following exposure to the Negative Exemplars. So the trait ratings showed the greatest extremes, and these extremes were for the Black candidate.

*Pairwise Comparisons.* Table 1 displays the results of post-hoc pairwise comparisons. There are a number of significant results, but space does not permit discussing them all. A few results to highlight: These are crossover interactions. For the political prime, Blacks were rated higher than Whites, whereas for the videogame prime the reverse was true. For the global favorability ratings, the extreme ratings were for the videogame prime conditions. Whites were rated more positively and Blacks rated more negatively in the videogame condition than in the political condition. For the trait/capability ratings, there was still a reversal interaction, but the extremes were for Black candidate ratings with the lowest numbers following the videogame prime and the highest numbers following the political prime.

*Likelihood of voting behavioroid measure.* A behavioroid measure is measure of intended or hypothetical behavior. We asked participants to speculate about how likely they would personally be to vote for the candidate. Results indicated a significant Exemplar by Candidate Race interaction on the behavioroid measure Likelihood of Voting, $F(1, 121)=4.733, p<.05, \eta^2=.038$.

*Candidate Likeability.* We felt that candidate likeability was a good specific affective measure, so we ran an analysis just for likeability, which showed a significant interaction like those reported above, $F(1, 122)=11.132, p<.001, \eta^2=.084$. The pattern of
means for the likeability rating showed the largest spread between those who had seen the videogame prime and rated the Black and White candidates (difference=−.706, p<.01).

Pro-Black Attitudes. Next, we examined the more long-term measure of racial attitudes, the composite mean of the Pro-Black attitudes subscale of the Racial Ambivalence Scale. We used the same model described above, this time with Pro-Black attitudes as the dependent measure. Results showed a significant overall model, $F(3, 119)=2.356$, $p=.07$, $\eta^2=.057 – R^2$(model)=.057. This time there was also a main effect of Candidate Race, $(1, 119)=4.429$, $p<.05$, $\eta =.036$ with those exposed to the website of a White candidate showing stronger pro-Black attitudes than those exposed to the website of a Black candidate. There was also a significant interaction between Candidate Race and Exemplar, $F(1,121)=3.809$, $p=.05$, $\eta^2=.031$. This time the nature of the interaction was different. The means for Pro-Black attitudes were virtually identical in the Black ($M=18.81$) and White ($M=18.93$) candidates groups after the Positive Exemplar prime. However, Pro-Black attitudes were significantly lower in the Black ($M=17.88$) than the White ($M=21.04$) candidate group following exposure to the Negative Prime. In other words, if participants saw positive images of Blacks and Whites, they reported similar levels of pro-Black attitudes. However the negative prime was polarizing with the effect of causing relatively low pro-Black ratings for those who saw the website of the Black candidate compared to relatively high pro-Black ratings for those who saw the website of the White candidate. This interaction is shown in Figure 2.

Party affiliation. Finally, we made no predictions for participant’s political affiliation, but ran an exploratory analysis. Note that there was unequal representation of parties--33 Democrats, 23 Independents and 66 Republicans. Adding party affiliation to
the model did not alter the overall pattern of results. Post hoc analyses revealed a marginally significant ($p=.07$) trend for Democrats ($M=5.31$) to rate both candidates more highly than Republicans ($M=4.92$) with Independents’ ($M=5.13$) ratings falling in the middle.

Discussion

This experiment demonstrated that media images make a difference in how we view other people. Evoking positive images of Black leaders such as Barack Obama and MLK caused Whites to more positively evaluate an unknown Black political candidate compared to a White candidate with the same credentials. On the other hand, evoking the negative stereotype of the Black male videogame thug--the “dangerous minority” stereotype--caused harm to an unrelated Black political candidate, lowering his ratings relative to a White candidate with the same credentials. Results were significant whether analyzing judgments about global favorability or trait/capability. This indicates that the positive and negative primes changed both beliefs about the candidate’s capabilities as well as feelings towards him as a likeable person.

In terms of more global attitudes towards Blacks, we found a different pattern of results. Those who saw warm, competent Blacks and Whites were equal on Pro-Black attitudes whether they had rated a White or a Black political candidate. However, the negative videogame prime paired with exposure to a Black candidate caused a general lowering of attitudes about Blacks, whereas the same prime coupled with exposure to a White candidate effected a relative rise in pro-Black attitudes. This was an unpredicted outcome whose cause is unknown. Perhaps it related to specific features of the stimuli used in this study. Future research could profitably explore these issues further.
Strengths and Limitations

There are a number of limitations to the current investigation. In choosing to use media images with characters interacting, we gain the ability to prime social interactions between people of different social categories. We think this juxtaposition reminds participants about real social hierarchies. However, at the same time, we necessarily complicate our manipulation. Because they contained complex social information, participants may have interpreted our images in unpredicted ways and these may have influenced the outcomes in ways we do not fully understand.

Another limitation is the use of only White participants in the analyses. This is a persistent problem in race research when unequal group sizes and low numbers of minority members preclude between-groups inferential analyses.

One strength of the current investigation is that it is a test of the SCM. We particularly examined how the unmixed stereotype categories affect attitudes, judgments and behavioral intentions towards targets. We found that the “high high” or admired quadrant of the SCM (e.g., Obama and MLK) elicited positive attitudes, judgments and behavioral intentions towards an unrelated Black candidate, and the “low low” or contempted quadrant (Black videogame characters) elicited more negative responses towards the Black candidate relative to White candidates. Exposure to the negative (videogame) exemplars also evoked changes in long-term racial attitudes, causing a reduction in pro-Black attitudes to those exposed to the Black candidate.

Historical context. Another strength of this experiment is that the data were collected at a time in our nation’s political history that is forever gone. These data capture a snapshot, among other things, of how Barack Obama and MLK’s images changed how
young White students viewed another Black political figure relative to White candidates. Because Obama was the US’s first serious Black presidential candidate, accepting the Democratic nomination for the Presidency on the 45th anniversary of MLK’s “I have a Dream,” speech to tears of joy from those in the audience who thought they were seeing part of that dream come true, it gives us insight into a moment in history for American politics and American race relations. Because videogames are at an all time high in popularity, and because the games regularly send out negative messages about Black men to young players, this is also an important time in history to study a negative media influence that has received little attention to date. In effect, we are taking a snapshot of the mixed messages young people receive from the media. They simultaneously see real people proud of our country’s selection of the first African American presidential nominee, juxtaposed with demeaning images of Black men in videogames, one of the most popular forms of American media with young people.

Why Media Stereotypes of Race Matter

These results of the current investigation suggest broadly that the images of race that we see in the mass media make a difference in the judgments we make, the attitudes we hold, and the behaviors we would choose to do. Some past research has indicated that people do not believe that media can influence attitudes or behaviors. Brenick et al. (2007) found that young men and women were apt to believe that violent and sexist videogame content does not negatively affect the behaviors and attitudes of those exposed, though they did believe children were more likely to be influenced than older players. In contrast, Burgess, Dill and Wright (in press) found that predominantly White college students believed rap music lyrics that degrade women negatively influence
listeners. These attitudes were expressed after the participants were asked to report in detail how rappers talk about women in rap music.

Videogames, race, and aggression. Videogames have been associated with racial stereotyping both in academic research and in the popular media. For example, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* was criticized publicly for its negative depictions of Haitians. Past research has shown that videogames stereotype Black men as criminals and thugs (Burgess et al., under review). Furthermore, Middle Eastern males are more likely to be depicted as targets of violence in videogames (Dill, Gentile, Richter, & Dill, 2005).

Perhaps in part because of the association between violent videogames and negative racial depictions, research has shown a tendency towards aggression against minorities in videogames. For example, using the “shooter bias paradigm,” Correll and colleagues (Correll, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2002), found that people used a lower criterion when deciding whether to shoot a Black man than a White man resulting in more false positives, more frequently shooting unarmed Black men. Burgess et al. (under review) found Black male videogame characters were overrepresented as aggressors, particularly as thugs and as representatives of the “dangerous minority.” In an experiment, Burgess et al. found that on the weapons identification task (Payne, 2001) White participants classified violent stimuli faster after exposure to Black videogame characters, and non-violent stimuli faster after exposure to White videogame characters, suggesting an association between aggression and Black men in the context of videogames. Unkelbach, Forgas and Denson (2008) elaborated on Correll et al.’s findings as related to the power of emotions to evoke aggressive responses. Unkelbach et al. found that participants were more likely in general to shoot at turban-wearing targets
in videogames. Furthermore, participants in a positive mood were more likely to shoot at turban-wearing targets than non-turban wearing targets than those in neutral or angry moods. Those in angry moods shot more targets generally, but there were no differential effects of race.

MAD theory (Dill & Burgess, in press) predicts that derogatory images in the media beget derogatory treatment of members of the maligned social group. In this experiment, MAD theory would predict that exposure to the negative Black exemplars would result in lowered ratings of the unrelated Black politician. This is precisely what was found. This illustrates that a strength of MAD theory is to dovetail the social bias (stereotyping and prejudice) literature with the aggression literature in the domain of media research. Here we used the SCM from the social bias literature and fused it with the theoretical underpinnings of the media violence literature, studying harm as an outcome.

One goal we have for MAD theory is to frame media images that derogate groups as a form of aggression. When companies make videogames where Black men are portrayed as contemptible people they are harming Black men. A degrading portrayal is aggressive because it demeans and insults the group, lowering their relative social status.

The SCM uses the word “contempt” as one of the two most important characteristics of social biases. What does it mean to be held in contempt? The dictionary defines contempt as: (contempt, n.d.) “1. The feeling or attitude of regarding someone or something as inferior, base, or worthless; scorn. 2. The state of being despised or dishonored; disgrace.” According to MAD theory, aggression is often a power play, designed to lower a group in status, and this can be aided by publishing derogatory
images in the media. Those who do this are in effect spreading the word that this group is “inferior, base, or worthless” and deserve to be treated accordingly. This also serves to preserve the hegemony of the dominant group.

As we have demonstrated here, priming this attitude prototype of Black men as thugs and dangerous criminals not only is an act of aggression, but also it causes more aggression against other Blacks. By priming this “low low” stereotype of Black men, you make that particular schema about Black men available to be used for making judgments about other members of that group. In effect, you are sending the media message “that’s what Black men are like,” and encouraging the application of that stereotype to others. It is important to consider more closely the implications of media causing harm. The social psychological definition of aggression is intentional behavior that harms another person (Aronson, Wilson, Akert, 2005). Derogation is a common form of harm perpetrated by the media; derogation of women and minorities is an aggressive act that is typically accomplished by lowering the status of the derogated group relative to the majority group (Dill & Burgess, in press) thereby strengthening the status quo of the majority group as higher/better.

In order to minimize the racial nature of this experiment, we paired positive and negative Black exemplars with comparable White men. The negative Black exemplars were hypermuscular, bearing extreme weapons and appeared violent without sign of any environmental threat to their well-being. The negative White exemplars were clearly capable of violence, but slender and less menacing, with the suggestion of an imminent threat from the environment. This contrast of being the environmental threat (Black) versus responding to an environmental threat (White) is typical of the derogation of
Black males found in video games; this type of derogation lowers the status of the Black males relative to the White males (Burgess et al., under review).

This experiment illustrated just how profound an effect the juxtaposition of status can have on Black and White men. Following the negative exemplar primes, White participants not only rated the Black politician lower, but rated the White politician higher. These derogatory images of Black men, relative to White men, result not just in constraining unrelated Black men, but also in elevating the majority group. We see then how negative exemplars preserve the racial status quo, with White males being hegemonic.

Second, and more encouraging, while work like MAD theory (Dill & Burgess, in press) and the SCM (Fiske et al, 2002) have described the harm that results from negative exemplars of a social category, this work illustrates that positive exemplars can yield equally strong benefits. The finding that an unrelated Black man was rated as more favorable following exposure to positive Black exemplars illustrates the power for good that mass media can have. By presenting exemplars of a particular social group, be it women or ethnic minorities, as competent and warm individuals, mass media has an opportunity to foster positive social relations and compassion between social groups. If we truly want to work towards social justice, then individually and collectively, we must call for more positive and less negative media representation of minorities.
References


Ferguson, T., Berlin, J., Noles, E., Johnson, J., Reed, W., & Spicer, C. V. (2005). Variation in the application of the “promiscuous female” stereotype and the
nature of the application domain: Influences on sexual harassment judgments after exposure to the Jerry Springer Show. *Sex Roles, 52,* 477-487.


Figure 1

Comparison of the Global Favorability (Top) and Trait/capability (Bottom) Interactions

Estimated Marginal Means of globalfav

Estimated Marginal Means of traitcapability
Figure 2

Effect of Exemplar and Candidate Race on Pro-Black Attitudes
Table 1

Pairwise Comparisons on Global Favorability and Trait Capability Composites

**Global Favorability**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Comparison Condition</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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**Trait Capability**

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KEY: VG=Videogame ; **=significant, p<.01, *=significant, p<.05, #=marginally significant, p=.06