Stereotyped Narratives and Racial Interpretations of the Protagonist

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Abstract

Do people use their racial preferences to label characters while reading narratives? In the current study, I manipulated the behavior of the protagonist in a narrative to be either stereotypical of an African American, or non-stereotypical of any race. My predictions were that, compared to participants who read a non-stereotyped narrative, participants who read a stereotyped narrative would think more negatively about the protagonist, label the protagonist as African American, dislike the protagonist more, and be less transported (feeling involved in and affected by the story) into the narrative, suggesting an underlying prejudice. All participants were Caucasian undergraduates and had their racial preferences assessed. Results showed that subjects who read a non-stereotyped narrative liked the protagonist significantly more than those who read a stereotyped narrative. Furthermore, subjects who showed a strong preference for Caucasians over African Americans were more transported into the narrative with the stereotyped character than were those who showed other preferences for race.
Stereotyped Narratives and Racial Interpretations of the Protagonist

Narratives have long held an important place in the human experience, creating culture, influencing behaviors and attitudes, shaping meaning (Green, 2007) and fostering the use of imagination and creativity. Often, while reading a narrative, people visualize the characters and events that occur in the story, using both their understanding of the world and their imagination to create a visual match for the words that are being read. In addition to the important place that narratives hold in the human experience, they also have the ability to elicit stereotypes that a reader may hold about a specific group of people (Green, 2007). Through descriptive and thorough explanation of events, characters, and behaviors, narratives may elicit a visual version of these stereotypes in a reader, and have the ability to either reinforce or influence the stereotypes that readers hold based upon how familiar the events of the story are to the reader, as well as how similar the reader feels to the character (Green, 2007). Now, what if a narrative does not describe the visual appearance of a character, but only describes their behaviors and the events in which they are involved? What type of image would readers visualize when they think about the character? While it is impossible to know exactly what readers visualize while they are reading a narrative, it is possible through the use of strategic questions regarding transportation and projection, as well as testing for implicit biases, to gain better insight into the stereotypes that a person holds and be better able to predict the visual appearance of the character that the reader imagined.

Transportation into a Narrative

In order to understand how similar a person feels to an unidentified character or how mentally involved he or she was in the story, it is important to understand what type
of story draws a reader in. Green and Brock (2000) proposed a transportation theory that explains the effects of a story’s events on the reader’s real-world beliefs based upon the extent to which the reader is absorbed into the story. Green and Brock (2000) created the idea of transportation as a process in which “all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative” (p. 701). They also found that attachment to a character in a narrative is critical if the purpose of the narrative is to change the reader’s beliefs. Based upon the idea that readers become absorbed into a story, feel attachment to the character(s), and may experience strong emotions while reading the story, Green and Brock (2000) developed a scale that measures the level of transportation a reader achieves while reading a story. The main dimensions of this scale include “emotional involvement in the story, cognitive attention to the story, feelings of suspense, lack of awareness of surroundings, and mental imagery” (p. 703). An initial test of this scale provided evidence for the idea that transportation is correlated with reader beliefs that are similar to those presented in the story. In other words, readers will be more transported into a story if they feel that the behaviors and morals of the character match their own.

In addition to story-consistent beliefs, Green (2004) found that readers’ prior knowledge or experience related to the events in a story also affected how transported into the story the reader was because “individuals who have prior familiarity with story themes may be more motivated to immerse themselves in the story due to intrinsic interest or may have an easier time imagining story events” (p. 250). For example, the story that Green used in this study was about a homosexual man joining a fraternity at a large university. Individuals who were homosexual, had homosexual friends or family members, and/or were familiar with fraternities were more transported into the story than
those who were not as familiar with the material in the story. However, lack of familiarity with the material of the story did not mean that readers were not transported or engaged in the story; they were simply less engaged than those with relevant experience. Furthermore, the knowledge of homosexuality and fraternities produced higher transportation even when the topics of homosexuality and American fraternities were not presented in a positive way, suggesting that familiarity with themes or negatively portrayed events does not lower levels of transportation.

Furthermore, Green (2007) proposed an I-SELF model, in which the “I,” or the reader, begins to identify with the protagonist of the story, replacing their personal “I” with the “I” of the main character. Because much of this model depends on the personality and behaviors of the main character(s) of the story, it is important to increase transportation through those character(s) alone. Liking a character should increase the ability of that character’s attitudes and beliefs to persuade the reader’s, suggesting that a likeable character may foster belief change in readers. Furthermore, individuals may be affected by social learning if they view characters as friends and can also come to view disliked characters as enemies. These types of characters may become role models for behaviors to emulate or avoid. Green (2007) proposes that this I-SELF model should take into account that “individuals interpret stories according to their own background and goals” (p. 101), suggesting that this model’s attention to culture may be key when attempting to understand that individuals may adopt stories or representations and become more transported into stories that are important to their own culture.

Melanie Green’s research on transportation is extremely helpful in understanding what makes narratives persuasive, vivid and emotional for readers. Aspects of a story
such as likeable characters and their behaviors, prior knowledge of the events or themes of the story, and similarity of beliefs are all tied to the level of transportation an individual feels while reading a story. It is important that readers feel transported into a story, because it may determine how much of the story they remember and can affect their beliefs and attitudes about the world. Because of this importance, Green (2008) proposed several tips on how to create a story that will increase the likelihood of transportation. For example, transportation is a generally likeable state, suggesting that readers are open to the idea of transportation and want to be transported into a story, which may be the first step to transporting a reader. Furthermore, a narrative should flow well, because individuals who enjoy the flow of a narrative are less likely to interrupt their reading experience. Also, readers may be more open or transported into a story that has a shocking aspect or something that they do not expect. Furthermore, creating a narrative that has plentiful detail and specific information helps individuals visualize and remember the story, and creating a narrative that is similar in some aspect to the reader’s experience will also encourage transportation. In accordance with this idea, recent studies conducted by Vaughn, Petkova, Trudeau, Hesse, McCaffrey, Candeloro and Smith (2007) suggest that narratives that take place in a similar setting as the reader will foster higher levels of transportation than if a narrative takes place in an unfamiliar environment.

**Narratives & Stereotypes**

Understanding how to create a story that will engage readers both mentally and emotionally is useful; in addition to transporting readers, it will be easier for them to create a vivid mental image of the events in the narrative. As discussed by Green and
Brock (2000), creating a character that is similar to the reader can cause a higher level of transportation into the story. Two studies by Ames (2004) suggest that feelings of similarity to someone may also affect processes like stereotyping. If similarity in the real world can be associated with stereotyping, then in narratives that seem vivid and real to readers, it is possible that feelings of similarity (or lack of) to a character in a story could also be associated with stereotyping. Ames (2004) suggested that perceivers take their own attitudes and behaviors and assume that others share them, but Ames’s similarity contingency model suggests that this assumption is incomplete. Projection was positively linked with perceived similarity, while stereotyping was negatively linked to perceived similarity. Thus, Ames’s model suggests that people are indeed guided by perceived similarity, relying heavily on social projection (assuming that others share one’s personal attitudes, behaviors and characteristics) for those who seem similar to them, but also rely on stereotyping for targets that seem different from them.

Another study by Ames (2004) focused more on mental state inferences, or “judgments about what others think, want and feel” (p. 340). This model focuses again on projection of mental state inferences, stating that perceivers often assume that others think, want and feel what they themselves also think, want and feel. It was found that perceivers engaged in high levels of projection and low levels of stereotyping for mental state inferences when they felt initially similar to the targets. It was also found that when participants realized that they did not share initial attributes with targets, they were more likely to rely on stereotypes of groups for mental state inferences. These two studies provide evidence to support the idea that perceived general similarity to a person, or a
character in a story, may decrease the likelihood of stereotyping that person, while perceived dissimilarity will increase the likelihood of stereotyping them.

In addition to the likelihood of stereotyping based on feelings of similarity, there are a few additional factors that are useful when writing a narrative specifically designed to elicit stereotypes. First, there seem to be different stereotypes associated with different traits, depending on what group the trait is describing. Kunda, Sinclair and Griffin (1997) found that stereotypes may affect the meaning of traits that are used to describe certain groups and their members. For example, it was found that identical trait descriptions (i.e., “aggressive”) have different meanings when applied to different groups of people. This example was illustrated through lawyers being thought to have different types of aggressive behaviors (i.e., verbally aggressive) than construction workers (i.e., physically aggressive) (Kunda, et al., 2007). These findings help support the conclusion that the same trait ratings may convey different expectations about behavior when applied to differently stereotyped groups of people. Thus, the group stereotype of a person described as “aggressive” can help determine whether that person is expected to engage in verbal aggressiveness or physical aggressiveness. Also, the group stereotype of extraversion can help determine whether or not a person is expected to entertain others or bully them. It is important when creating a narrative that one understands the behaviors that are expected of a group of stereotyped people so that they may be portrayed correctly in the narrative.

**Racial Stereotypes**

It is also important to understand how the stereotypes of a group are viewed and confirmed by others. Biernat and Ma (2005) had groups of African Americans and Caucasians judge traits that are usually associated with their own race, as well as traits
that are usually associated with the opposite race. Caucasian judges viewed African American targets as violent, aggressive and boastful, while African American judges viewed African American targets as religious, tough and suave. Caucasian judges viewed Caucasian targets as educated, successful and wealthy, while African American judges viewed Caucasian targets as adventurous, humorless, and dishonest. There was some agreement between the groups about certain stereotypes, but there also seemed to be some in-group favoritism that occurred, suggesting, for example, that if an African American person were to read a narrative with a character that seemed to be religious, tough or suave, he or she may assume that the character is also African American, similar to them. However, if a Caucasian person read a narrative where the character was violent, aggressive or boastful, he or she may assume that the character is African American, unlike them. This poses a difficult problem when trying to elicit stereotypes from the readers of a narrative because different races will always have different views of themselves that may not correlate with what other groups think of them. Thus, it is important that different races and the stereotypes they hold are studied separately in order to keep results accurate.

Biernat et al. (2005) also found that when examining the stereotypes of both Caucasians and African Americans, few traits needed to be provided about a character to confirm a stereotype, while many traits needed to be provided to disconfirm a stereotype. Also, favorable traits are difficult to confirm for a stereotyped group, while negative traits are much more easily confirmed. For example, if a Caucasian person were reading a narrative in which an African American yelled at someone only once, he or she may assume that the African American character is aggressive, even if the same African
American character also showed signs of kindness, courtesy and sympathy on more than one occasion. It is important to understand how stereotypes are confirmed and disconfirmed so that the writer of a narrative can make sure that enough information is given to confirm a trait, while not giving enough evidence to disconfirm a trait, or vice versa.

In order to write a narrative with an ambiguous character who displays traits and behaviors stereotypical of a certain group, it is important to be familiar with the specific stereotypes that are associated with a particular group. It seems that most comprehensive research on stereotypes has been conducted on the African American race and how Caucasians feel about them. In Devine & Elliot (2009), Caucasian participants rated the traits that they believe were stereotypical of African Americans. The traits named most often were lazy, athletic, rhythmic, low in intelligence, poor and loud, suggesting that these are the most widely believed traits thought to be stereotypical of African Americans. Furthermore, there seem to be verbal stereotypes associated with different races. Studies by Ogawa (1971) and Leonard and Locke (1993) found that Caucasian students perceived African Americans as argumentative, emotional, aggressive, critical, ostentatious, hostile, argumentative, friendly and witty, and found that in general, African Americans’ speech patterns are believed to be louder and more hostile than Caucasian peoples’ speech patterns. A study by Popp, Donovan, Crawford, Marsh and Peele (2003) found that, in situations where a Caucasian or an African American target was to be imagined as speaking, the Caucasian target was rated as more socially appropriate, playful and less emotional, while the African American target was rated as more emotional and using more non-standard, or slang, speech patterns. Popp et al. (2003) also
found that Caucasian students perceive African American students’ speech as loud, argumentative, emotional and talkative, and overall less socially appropriate.

**Measuring Stereotypes**

With all of the information about the nature and manifestation of stereotypes and prejudice, these traits are still extremely difficult to measure accurately. Some people do not believe that they have a prejudice, even though they may show signs of it, and most people will not admit to having a prejudice against a certain group because they feel guilty or do not want to be looked down upon by others. Thus, commonly used self-report measures cannot be used to measure prejudice, posing a large problem for researchers. To date, the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee and Schwartz, 1998) is the most effective measure for looking at implicit preferences that participants may have for many different aspects of life, including race (i.e., black - white), sexuality (i.e., gay - straight) and weight (i.e., fat - thin). This test has participants match words with pictures as quickly as possible. Participants go through two trials where they match positive words with one aspect (such as “fat”) and then match negative words with the other aspect (“thin”), and then vice versa. It is thought that it will be easier to associate positive words with the aspect that is preferred, and thus, the participant will match the words faster with the associated aspect, automatically showing a preference for one aspect over the other. However accurate this test may be at picking out preferences, the Implicit Association Test does not measure dislike of one aspect or group over another, so the task cannot be used to determine feelings of stereotyping or prejudice, as it is often mistaken to do. This task is still useful, however, as a comparative device within
research, because preference may be linked to and support ideas of stereotyping and prejudice that are measured by other aspects in an experiment.

The Current Study

It is often difficult to provoke honesty about how individuals truly feel about a certain group of people or to admit to the stereotypes that they personally hold regarding that group. Through the knowledge of transportation, projection and stereotyping, the current study looks to test a new way of eliciting stereotypes from participants through narratives and a series of questionnaires to allow the measurement of different aspects of stereotyping and prejudice, such as transportation, projection and confirmation of traits, without actually asking the participants how they feel about the target race. Furthermore, if this method provides useful, it may be a breakthrough in the ability to change beliefs about stereotypes through narratives. Because a large amount of research has been done on stereotypes considered typical of African Americans, that race will be the focus of the current study.

I believe that, compared to participants who read a non-stereotyped narrative, Caucasian participants who read a narrative in which the protagonist behaves stereotypically of African Americans will feel dissimilar to the protagonist, not be as transported into the story, not like the protagonist as much, and will project their negative feelings of African Americans onto the protagonist more than those who read a narrative in which the protagonist behaves in non-stereotypical ways. Furthermore, those students who read a narrative with a stereotyped protagonist will choose an African American photo to look most like the protagonist they imagined while reading the narrative more often than those who read a non-stereotyped narrative. Lastly, students with a strong
preference for Caucasians over African Americans, as suggested by their IAT scores, will feel less transported into the stereotyped narrative than those who have other racial preferences.

Methods

Participants

Seventy-one students (24 men and 47 women) from a 100-level psychology course at a small, Midwestern, liberal arts college participated in this study and received course credit for doing so. All students were allowed to participate for credit, but for methodological reasons, only data from the students who identified themselves as Caucasian were used in the analysis.

Materials & Procedure

The experiment was conducted online through SurveyGizmo.com. Each participant was required to read and accept the informed consent before he or she could begin. As a cover story, students were told that their responses to the measures used during the study would help determine the kinds of information that would be successful in helping junior high students learn about values. Students were reminded that they could leave the experiment at any time without penalty and that they could leave any questions unanswered if they felt uncomfortable. After agreeing to participate, students were asked demographic questions about their age, sex and ethnicity. Next, students read one of four separate narratives that were very similar but varied in the behavior and gender of the main character, and then participated in several assessments that will be explained further.
Narrative Task. There were four versions of the narrative used in the study. I wanted the reader to feel as comfortable and similar to the main character as possible, so we had females read a narrative with a female character and males read a narrative with a male character, creating two versions of the narrative. Furthermore, I needed to vary the behavior, making the control narrative one where the main character did not behave in any stereotypical ways, and the experimental narrative one where the main character behaved in ways commonly believed to be stereotypical of African Americans, creating two more versions of the narrative. The behaviors used in the narrative that were considered stereotypical of African Americans were loud, lazy, poor student and aggressive, as suggested by Devine & Elliot (2009). Thus, four versions of the narrative were used: one with a male character who behaved in non-stereotypical ways, one of a male character who behaved in ways stereotypical of African Americans, one with a female character who behaved in non-stereotypical ways and one with a female character who behaved in ways stereotypical of African Americans. The main character in all four narratives was named Chris (Christopher or Christina) to be as gender-neutral as possible. The narrative took place on the campus in which the experiment was being conducted, set in the library. The basic plot of the narrative was that Chris was working on a paper, ran into a friend at the library, and ended up admitting to previously stealing a pair of shoes. As Chris got up to leave the library, another student accused Chris of taking her grandmother’s watch out of her school bag. Chris denies the incident, but campus security is called and they search Chris’s school bag for the watch. Appendix A includes full versions of the stereotyped and non-stereotyped narratives. The narrative ends abruptly, and after reading the narrative, each participant was asked to finish the story.
with what they think would have happened next. I had participants finish the narratives themselves in hopes of eliciting negative behaviors that could imply a stereotype from the reader. The endings were coded for whether or not the participant believed that the officer found a watch or not, as well as for any other positive or negative events associated with Chris’s situation.

**Transportation Scale.** Participants next completed a modified version of the Green Transportation Scale (Green & Brock, 2000) in order to assess how involved or “transported” the participant felt while reading the story. The scale was modified to include specific information about Chris’s character in the story and about the fact that the participants were asked to finish the narrative. The Green Transportation scale is comprised of twelve questions, and each question is rated on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). The scale consists of questions such as: “While I was reading the narrative, I could easily picture the events in it taking place” and “I was mentally involved in the narrative while reading it” to assess how involved the reader felt in the story. The questions modified to relate to our specific narrative were: “I enjoyed finishing the narrative myself,” “I found myself thinking of different ways I could finish the narrative,” and “I had a vivid mental image of Chris while reading the story.” The idea of transportation is that if readers feel similar to the character, they will become more transported into the story. This measure was used in order to determine if the Caucasian participants felt similar to the non-stereotyped character more than the stereotyped African American character. The modified transportation scale used in this study can be seen in Appendix B.
Character Assessment & Reading Check. Next, participants filled out a character assessment and reading check questionnaire in which they were asked questions about the story, such as “What was Chris supposed to be doing in the story?” “What was Chris accused of?” and “Where was Chris during the story?” Also, the measure included yes/no questions such as “Did you like Chris?” “Could you relate to Chris?” “Could you picture yourself being friends with Chris?” and “Did Chris seem like a realistic character?” This was done to assess whether the participants preferred the non-stereotyped character to the stereotyped character, as well as to make sure that they fully read the narrative.

Visual Assessment. Participants were next presented with four black and white pictures of college-aged students of different races (African American, Caucasian, East Asian and South Asian) that were matched to the gender of the participant. The pictures were selected by having students in a research methods course look at a total of 40 pictures (10 of each race) and rate their attractiveness on a scale from 1 (very unattractive) to 10 (extremely attractive). Men rated pictures of men, and women rated pictures of women. After the rating was finished, the total ratings for each picture were averaged, and then the final pictures for each race were chosen based on the similarity of the averages. For example, each male picture chosen for each race had an average rating of about six. Participants in the study were presented with these pictures and were asked to “choose the image that best represents what you thought Chris looked like while you were reading the story.” This assessment was given to determine what race they had imagined Chris to be while they were reading the story.

Implicit Association Test. Participants were given the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald et al., 1998) in order to determine if they had an automatic preference for
either the African American or Caucasian race and whether that preference is correlated with their responses from the rest of the tasks, as well as to determine different types of possible bias that may not have been present in their responses from the other tasks. After taking the test, the participants were asked to copy and paste their results into a text box in the survey.

When participants were finished with the survey, their answers were electronically submitted, and they were taken to a debriefing page that provided them with the hypothesis and true nature of the study, the researcher’s information, as well as some sources that might be useful for understanding the study further. Participants were also provided with a hard copy of the debriefing.

Results

Reading Check

The reading check results suggest that all participants thoroughly read the narrative. All participants answered correctly when asked where Chris was located in the story (library), and all answered correctly when asked what Chris was accused of (stealing). When asked what Chris was supposed to be doing in the narrative, only two participants responded incorrectly that Chris was supposed to be doing homework rather than writing a paper. Because writing a paper for a class can also be considered homework, those incorrect responses were not enough to conclude that the participants were not paying attention to the narrative.

Reactions to the Protagonist

Four chi-square analyses were conducted. Results of these analyses show that participants who read the non-stereotyped narrative reported that they liked Chris
significantly more than those who read the stereotyped narrative, $\chi^2(1, N=71) = 4.84$, $p<.05$. There were no significant differences between the groups regarding how relatable Chris was, $\chi^2(1, N=71) = .41$, $p<.10$, but when asked if they would be friends with Chris, $\chi^2(1, N=71) = 2.72$, $p<.10$, or if Chris seemed realistic $\chi^2(1, N=71) = 3.22$, $p<.10$, there were trends towards significance, with participants in the non-stereotyped condition reporting that they would be friends with Chris and that Chris seemed more realistic. Though the last three chi-square analyses were not significant, it is interesting to note that, in two of the cases, those in the non-stereotyped condition did consider the protagonist to be more relatable and were more likely to be friends with the protagonist than those in the stereotyped condition. These results are illustrated in Figure 1.

**Story Completion**

Story completions were coded for whether or not the watch was found in Chris’s bag, as well as whether or not there were any other negative events that occurred when the story was completed (i.e., Chris failed his/her paper, was arrested, or his/her reputation was ruined). Thus, there were four possible outcomes: Chris found the watch and no other negative event occurred, Chris did not find the watch and no other negative event occurred, Chris found the watch and another negative event occurred, and Chris did not find the watch and another negative event occurred. Results from a chi-square analysis suggest that there were no significant differences in the responses given across the different stereotype conditions $\chi^2(4, N=71) = 1.86$, $p>.05$. Though this analysis did not provide statistically significant results, it is interesting to note that those in the non-stereotyped condition seemed to advocate for the protagonist in their responses (i.e.,
stating that the watch was not found and no other negative events occurred) more often than those in the stereotyped condition. These results are illustrated in Figure 2.

*IAT Results*

Each student was prompted to take the IAT to determine racial preferences. Several participants either did not complete the IAT or did not report their results. Possible outcomes for the IAT range from strong preference for Caucasians over African Americans to strong preference for African Americans over Caucasians, however the vast majority of participants reported results that showed either strong or moderate preferences for Caucasians over African Americans. Thus, we divided the IAT scores participants received into three categories: strong preference for Caucasians over African Americans (N=19), moderate preference for Caucasians over African Americans (N=23), and other preferences (N=14). Only one participant had IAT scores that showed a slight preference for African Americans over Caucasians.

*Transportation*

After running a reliability analysis on the modified transportation scale used to determine level of transportation into the narrative, it was found that, for our sample, the Cronbach’s Alpha did not meet standard levels of reliability (α = .62). However, I decided to proceed with our analysis using subjects’ score on this scale as a dependent variable. Scores on the transportation scale ranged from 12 to 84, with higher scores indicating greater reported levels of transportation into the narrative.

The first 2 (gender) x 2 (condition) ANOVA did not reveal any main effects of gender, $F(3,71)=.93, p>.05$, or condition, $F(3,71)=.81, p>.05$ on transportation into the
narrative. Results can be seen in Figure 3. There was also no significant interaction between gender and condition, $F(3,71)=.03, p>.05$.

A second 2 (IAT results) x 2 (condition) ANOVA also showed no main effects of IAT results, $F(5, 56)=.68, p>.05$, or condition, $F(5, 56)=1.36, p>.05$, on transportation into the narrative, and also showed no significant interaction between IAT results and condition $F(5, 56)=1.55, p>.05$. Although the interaction between IAT results and condition was not significant, a post-hoc t-test showed that subjects in the stereotyped condition who had a strong preference for Caucasians over African Americans, $M=5.07$, seemed to be more transported into the story than any other group in the analysis, $M=4.50$, $t(54)= 2.63, p<.05$. These results can be seen in Figure 4.

**Picture Task**

The picture task asked participants to choose one of four racially diverse photos (Caucasian, Asian, African American or Indian) to represent what they pictured the protagonist to look like while reading the story. Unfortunately, when exporting data from the survey website, the picture task did not come through, and thus, was unable to be analyzed.

**Discussion**

**Theoretical Explanations**

In the present study, it was hypothesized that Caucasian subjects who read a narrative in which the protagonist behaved stereotypically of an African American would feel dissimilar to the protagonist, not be as transported into the story, not like the protagonist as much, and would project their negative feelings of African Americans onto the protagonist more than those who read a narrative in which the protagonist behaved in
non-stereotypical ways. Also, I hypothesized that those who read a stereotyped narrative would choose an African American photo during the photo task, and those who had a strong preference for Caucasians over African Americans would be less transported into the story than others. Lastly, students with a strong preference for Caucasians over African Americans, as suggested by their IAT scores, would feel less transported into the stereotyped narrative than those who have other racial preferences.

The hypotheses were generally unsupported. It was found that the participants in the non-stereotyped condition reported liking Chris significantly more often than those in the stereotyped condition, suggesting that Chris’s behavior in the stereotyped narrative may have caused participants to dislike the character. Although these results broadly suggest that being loud, lazy, aggressive, and/or a poor student could cause others to dislike someone, one limitation to this explanation is that it is impossible to tell which behaviors led to the outcome because there were several behaviors exhibited by the protagonist in the story that could have caused the participants to dislike the protagonist in the stereotyped narrative.

Furthermore, one finding is consistent with the findings of Green and Brock (2000), which suggests that the more similar a reader feels to the character, the more transported he or she will be. Although in the case of our study, the readers were not more transported in the non-stereotyped condition, they did report liking the character more, which suggests that feeling similar to a character provides an easier pathway for getting to know the character and eventually liking the character, similar to how new friendships are created. Also, Green (2007), in the proposed I-SELF model, suggests that
if individuals view a character as a friend, the character’s attitudes may influence the reader’s attitudes.

It is widely accepted that theft is an undesirable behavior, and although the protagonists in both narratives admitted to stealing in their past, the character in the non-stereotyped story was still liked more, suggesting that people’s past behaviors do not necessarily affect their current attitudes. This result is also consistent with the idea presented by Biernat et al. (2005), which suggests that for an ingroup, it is difficult to confirm negative traits, but for an outgroup, it is easy to confirm negative traits. If the idea of trait confirmability is consistent with our findings, it would suggest that the subjects who read a non-stereotyped narrative and liked the protagonist significantly more considered the character a member of their general behavioral ingroup, and that the subjects who read a stereotyped narrative did not consider the protagonist a member of their general behavioral ingroup. Although I am not suggesting that those who liked the protagonist significantly more engaged in shoplifting behaviors, the findings suggest that some aspect or aspects of the protagonists’ behavior are what cause the subjects to consider them a member of their ingroup.

Though not significant, those in the non-stereotyped condition reported more often that they found the protagonist relatable, that they would be friends with the protagonist, and that they thought the protagonist was realistic. These findings suggest that with a larger sample or more prominent protagonist behaviors, a significant result may be possible, which would further suggest that feeling similar to a character can create feelings of friendship and likeability.
The results for the IAT by condition ANOVA showed that those who had a strong preference for Caucasians over African Americans in the stereotyped condition were more transported into the story than the participants with other preferences. This is unique, considering that those who have a strong preference for Caucasians over African Americans would seemingly be more likely to dislike a character that acts more stereotypically of an African American. One explanation for this phenomenon is that those who have strong preferences are also more opinionated. Thus, they would be more inclined to make opinionated decisions regarding the protagonist and the events taking place in the story, which would lead them to become more transported into the story because they become emotionally linked with it. However, according to Green (2007), it is also possible that those who had a strong preference for Caucasians over African Americans were intrigued by the story or felt similar to the stereotyped character in some behavioral way because the setting of the narrative was similar to the participant’s setting, and the academic behaviors and feelings that the character portrayed were similar to behaviors and feelings that college students often engage in. Furthermore, the participant may have had an experience similar to what the protagonist faced during the story, which may have led the reader to identify with the protagonist, and thus would lead to higher levels of transportation. Finally, Green (2004) suggested that negative portrayals of events within a narrative does not necessarily decrease transportation, and in this case, may have actually increased it. Nonetheless, these results suggests that transportation into a story is not necessarily connected to liking a character, which are contradictory to the findings of Green & Brock (2000).
Finally, though not significant, the gender by condition ANOVA suggests that both men and women who read the stereotyped narrative were more transported into the story than were those who read the non-stereotyped narrative. Thus, it is possible that the behaviors in the stereotyped narrative had some effect on the level of transportation felt by the readers.

Methodological Limitations and Future Directions

There are some additional explanations available for why the hypotheses were generally unsupported. First, the transportation scale was not reliable for our sample, which could have affected the results. Acquiring a larger sample or creating a longer, more in-depth story would allow more reliable transportation and may lead to more significant results.

Also, there was no manipulation check done to make sure that the behaviors of the non-stereotyped protagonist compared to the stereotyped protagonist were noticeable or that the behaviors of the stereotyped protagonist were truly associated with stereotypical behaviors of African Americans. A simple assessment in which the participants are asked whether they thought the character was loud, lazy, a poor student and slightly aggressive would serve as a manipulation check in future studies. The lack of a manipulation check in this experiment did not allow us to examine if the stereotyped behaviors were effective for the readers. If the behaviors were not associated with the stereotype of African Americans, then the independent variable for our experiment was invalid, causing other results to be insignificant.

Furthermore, there was no check for physical racial bias because the picture task results were unable to be exported out of the survey website. Without the picture task, it
is impossible to know whether students associated a specific race with the protagonist in either narrative. Thus, future directions for this research need to include a more reliable transportation scale, a manipulation check for stereotypical behaviors, as well as a re-trial of the visual assessment task. Also, future studies can investigate how other races respond to these types of narratives, rather than simply focusing on Caucasians, as well as varying the types of behaviors presented in the narratives to see what types of behaviors are acceptable or unacceptable in society.

This type of research is important for many reasons, including understanding the impact of narratives on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of individuals, as well as the impact of a character’s behaviors in a narrative on the reader’s impression of them. However, one of the most important aspects of this research is that it has the potential to pinpoint the specific behaviors and attitudes that cause racial prejudice without allowing the participants to know the true nature of study, leading to more reliable results. Realizing how difficult it is to gain insight into a person’s true prejudices about a group of people, this type of research method, using narratives and their characters to elicit these types of prejudices, may be a new, accurate and novel way to conduct research in this field as well as an important way to change beliefs about stereotypes.
References


Figure 1

Reactions to Protagonist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responses about Protagonist</th>
<th># Responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Like</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatable</td>
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- Stereotyped
- Non-Stereotyped
Figure 2

Story Completion Outcome

<table>
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<th># Responses</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Found watch, other negative</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No watch, no negative</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>No watch, other negative</td>
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</table>

- Stereotyped
- Non-Stereotyped
Figure 3

Transportation into Narrative by Gender and Condition

<table>
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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Stereotyped</th>
<th>Non-Stereotyped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4

Transportation into Narrative by IAT and Condition

- Stereotyped
- Non-Stereotyped

IAT Score

Mean Transportation

Strong Preference
Moderate Preference
Other Preference
Appendix A

**Non-Stereotype Narrative (Male)**

Chris sat in Oesterle Library, staring at the blank word document on his computer screen. He was tired from spending hours finishing homework the night before. He looked around the library. The sun came streaming through the windows, making him wish that he could go outside and enjoy one of the last cool, fall days before the bitter Midwest winter began. The leaves on the trees had mostly turned from their vibrant reds and yellows to ugly browns, and had begun to fall off the branches. He could hear people talking and laughing outside through the open library windows, only making him wish more that he could spend his time elsewhere. There were other students in the library, loud and inconsistent typing noises coming from their keyboards, most of them working on homework and research papers, or surfing the web. His attention was pulled back to the reason why he had come to the library in the first place. He had a paper of his own to finish for a class that was coming up later that afternoon. It wasn’t his favorite class of the term, though he was doing very well in it, and this paper was worth a big chunk of his grade, so he knew he needed to finish it so that he could get the A he’d been hoping for in the class.

Chris looked towards the doors to the library, and noticed a friend walking in. He smiled and waved to catch their attention. He waited for his friend to walk over before he spoke. “Hey, what’s up?” he asked as his friend took the seat in front of the empty computer beside him.

“Hi” His friend smiled back. “I’m just here to kill some time before class, what are you doing? And hey, your shoes are sweet, where did you get them?”

“Oh, um, I actually stole them from a shoe store when I was in high school, but I’m here because I have to finish a paper for later today” he responded awkwardly.

“Oh, sounds like loads of fun” his friend said sarcastically, “Did you get in trouble for stealing those?”

“No, actually, I never got caught, but I don’t think I’d do it again” Chris said as he looked back to his computer screen. “I really can’t focus here. I think I need to go back to my room to finish this paper.”

“Okay” his friend said. “See you later!”

Chris logged off of his computer, put his belongings back in his school bag, and started walking towards the doors. All of a sudden there was a commotion behind him.

“Where did my watch go? I left it right here!” frantically cried the girl who had been sitting at the computer across from Chris. “That was an expensive watch, a family heirloom from my grandmother!” The girl shouted as she started to cry.

She turned to look at Chris, who was standing a few feet away from her.

“You took it didn’t you, I saw you eyeing it earlier!” She accused loudly. The other students in the library were starting to stare in their direction, whispering to one another.

Chris gaped at her accusation, immediately embarrassed.  “I have no idea what you’re talking about. I didn’t even see you sitting there” he whispered as he walked over to the girl.

“I don’t believe you, I’m calling campus security!” the girl shouted angrily.

“Look, I’m sorry, but I don’t have your watch!” Chris replied frantically, he didn’t want to get campus security involved.
“Too late” the girl said as she ran past Chris towards the doors to the library, where a campus security officer happened to have just walked in.

Chris watched, completely speechless, as the girl exchanged emotional words with the officer, and then pointed straight at him. He stood frozen in the library as the officer motioned for him to come over to where he was talking with the girl.

Chris walked out to the library lobby. “Look,” he said as calmly as possible as he approached the officer, “I have no idea who she is, and I didn’t touch any of her stuff.”

“That may be the case, but I’m still going to have to check your bag” he said.

“Okay” Chris said, handing his school bag over. There was nothing in there but pencils and books.

The officer turned to look at the girl who had accused Chris of stealing her watch. “Now what did this watch look like?”

“It was white gold, with diamonds around the face” She said as tears were streaming down her cheeks. “My mom is going to kill me, it was her mother’s.”

The officer rummaged through Chris’s bag as the girl said this, stopping as he looked in one of the front pockets.

**Stereotyped Narrative (Male)**

Chris sat in Oesterle Library, staring at the blank word document on his computer screen. He was tired from spending hours out late with his friends the night before. He looked around the library. The sun came streaming through the windows, making him wish that he could go outside and enjoy one of the last cool, fall days before the bitter Midwest winter began. The leaves on the trees had mostly turned from their vibrant reds and yellows to ugly browns, and had begun to fall off the branches. He could hear people talking and laughing outside through the open library windows, only making him wish more that he could spend his time elsewhere. There were other students in the library, loud and inconsistent typing noises coming from their keyboards, most of them working on homework and research papers, or surfing the web. His attention was pulled back to the reason why he had come to the library in the first place. He had a paper of his own to finish for a class that was coming up later that afternoon. It wasn’t his favorite class of the term, he was doing very poorly in it, and even though this paper was worth a big chunk of his grade, he felt like working on this paper was pointless, since he was probably going to fail the class anyway.

Chris looked towards the doors to the library, and noticed a friend walking in. He smiled and waved to catch their attention.

“Hey, what’s up?” he yelled across the library as his friend walked over and took the seat in front of the empty computer beside him.

“Hi” His friend smiled back. “I’m just here to kill some time before class, what are you doing? And hey, your shoes are sweet, where did you get them?”

“Oh, um, I actually stole them from a shoe store when I was in high school, but I’m here because I have to finish a paper for later today” he responded awkwardly.

“Oh, sounds like loads of fun” his friend said sarcastically, “Did you get in trouble for stealing those?”
“No, actually, I never got caught, but I don’t think I’d do it again” Chris said as he looked back to his computer screen. “I really can’t focus here. I think I need to go back to my room to finish this paper.”

“Okay” his friend said. “See you later!”

Chris logged off of his computer, put his belongings back in his school bag, and started walking towards the doors. All of a sudden there was a commotion behind him.

“Where did my watch go? I left it right here!” frantically cried the girl who had been sitting at the computer across from Chris. “That was an expensive watch, a family heirloom from my grandmother!” The girl shouted as she started to cry.

She turned to look at Chris, who was standing a few feet away from her.

“You took it didn’t you, I saw you eyeing it earlier!” She accused loudly. The other students in the library were starting to stare in their direction, whispering to one another. Chris gaped at her accusation and immediately felt his temper rise. “I have no idea what you’re talking about. I didn’t even see you sitting there” he said loudly in his defense as he stormed up to the girl.

“I don’t believe you, I’m calling campus security!” the girl shouted angrily.

“Look, I’m sorry, but I don’t have your watch!” Chris yelled angrily, he didn’t want to get campus security involved.

“Too late” the girl said as she ran past Chris towards the doors to the library, where a campus security officer happened to have just walked in.

Chris watched, feeling aggressive, as the girl exchanged emotional words with the officer, and then pointed straight at him. He stood frozen in the library as the officer motioned for him to come over to where he was talking with the girl.

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“That may be the case, but I’m still going to have to check your bag” he said.

“Okay” Chris said, handing his school bag over. There was nothing in there but pencils and books.

The officer turned to look at the girl who had accused Chris of stealing her watch. “Now what did this watch look like?”

“It was white gold, with diamonds around the face” She said as tears were streaming down her cheeks. “My mom is going to kill me, it was her mother’s.”

The officer rummaged through Chris’s bag as the girl said this, stopping as he looked in one of the front pockets.
Appendix B

(Modified) Narrative Questionnaire

Circle the number under each question that best represents your opinion about the narrative you just read.

1. While I was reading the narrative, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all very much

2. While I was reading the narrative, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all very much

3. I could picture myself in the scene of the events described in the narrative.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all very much

4. I was mentally involved in the narrative while reading it.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all very much

5. After the narrative ended, I found it easy to put it out of my mind.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all very much

6. I enjoyed finishing the narrative myself.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all very much

7. The narrative affected me emotionally.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all very much

8. I found myself thinking of different ways I could finish the narrative.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all very much

9. I found my mind wandering while reading the narrative.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all very much

10. The events in the narrative are relevant to my everyday life.
    1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. The events in the narrative have changed my life.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all very much

12. I had a vivid mental image of Chris while reading the story.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   not at all very much