

AFFECTIVE AND PERCEPTUAL CONSEQUENCES OF MEDIA ACTIVATION OF THE  
BLACK FEMALE “PERMISCUOUS” STREEOTYPE:  
MODERATING ROLE OF TARGET RACE

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## ABSTRACT

The impact of exposure to promiscuous female rap on both subsequent judgments and empathetic responses towards Black females were investigated. Male and female participants were exposed to sexually explicit rap, sexually inexplicit rap, or neutral music samples. Participants next read a vignette focusing on a Black or White female in need. Finally, the participants answered a series of questions designed to quantify their empathetic responses, perceptions of the target, and their willingness to help. Main effects were found for all three dependant variables. Participants were less empathetic and less willing to help the target if she was Black. This finding was exaggerated in the promiscuous music condition and when the participants were male. The results indicated that the “Black female promiscuous” stereotype was activated in the group exposed to the misogynistic rap. It was evident that the stereotype was applied to the Black target only, suggesting that responses were not generalized to all females.

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CONSEQUENCES OF MEDIA ACTIVATION OF THE BLACK FEMALE  
“PROMISCUOUS” STEREOTYPE: MODERATING ROLE OF TARGET RACE

INTRODUCTION

The negative evaluations that mark prejudice often stem from negative beliefs called stereotypes. Specifically a stereotype is a belief or group of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people (Myers, 1993). This phenomenon has been explained cognitively as a way to simplify the world, emotionally as a by-product of frustration, aggression, or personality; and socially as a way to justify one's place in the world (Crocker & et al., 1987; Gilbert & Hixon, 1991). One relevant issue involves an assessment of the factors that might elicit stereotypical evaluations of other individuals. Previous research indicates that one of the major factors involves categorization processes (Fiske & Neuberg, 1989). Specifically, when categorizing people put others into groups based on their initial perceptions. Once categorized, the groups are perceived as being unique and distinct from one another. To bring things one-step further, people are often biased towards the particular group to which they belong. Placing each other into groups perpetuates a sense of separation from one another. In a sense, modern humans actually foster an “us verses them” atmosphere. When people view themselves as being a member of a group that they can identify with, they tend to generate in-group biases (Tajfel & Billings, 1974). Simple social categorization is just the beginning of a grander system. Once categorized, individual components of each categorical group run the risk of being effected by the out-group homogeneity effect. Individual components of a categorical group are often perceived as the mean of the group. There is a tendency to average the data and ignore each components unique disparity (Linville & Jones, 1980). Perhaps, most germane is the result of

the homogeneity effect on human race and gender categories. Human beings have a tendency to assume that there is a greater similarity among members of out groups than among members of in-groups. This is the very basis behind the “they are all alike” attitudes often harbored by members of this society (Allen & Wilder, 1979). An individual's propensity to generalize is a fundamental cognitive factor of stereotypical thought.

Studies have shown that when asked to estimate how many group members share a certain stereotypical characteristic, perceivers rated out-groups as sharing more characteristics than in-groups. Further, when asked to rate the differences within a population, subjects rate out-groups as being more similar than in-groups (Brehm, Kassin, & Fein, 1999). Evidence suggests that one cause of this phenomenon is that people often have less contact with members of out-groups, and as a result pay less specific attention to their subtle differences. Additionally, the average person may not encounter a representative sample of out-group members; as a substitute they notice the most unique or extreme members who may skew perceptions of the group as a whole (Linville et al., 1989; Quattrone, 1986; Rothbart et al., 1978). Once the self is defined as part of a group people assume that there are others not in that group. The existence of this separation fosters an in-group bias. This in-group/out-group attitude can be seen as a strong basis for prejudice. A number of studies have been done to support how susceptible people are to favoring “us” while discriminating against “them” (Brewer & Silver, 1978; Tajfel, 1982; Wilder, 1981). Wilder's (1981) classic study demonstrates this by giving grouped subjects the opportunity to divide 15 points among the other subjects. Subjects were more likely to give members of their group more points than members of another group. In fact, groups created on a basis as random as a coin toss continue to display in-group favoritism (Brewer & Silver, 1978).

In-group biasing can stem from either a liking of the in-group, a contrary dislike for the out-group, or a combination of the two. Research suggests that out-group stereotypes are most prevalent when people feel a strong in-group identity. In-group identity is bolstered when individuals are with their in-group (Wilder & Shapiro, 1991). For example, a young boy at a cub-scout camp-out would feel a stronger sense of in-group identity (and a greater sense of separation from girls) than if he were a guest at a brownie jamboree. In-group biases are fortified when the in-group is perceived as good (Brewer, 1979).

Emotional factors have been found to play a role in the formation of stereotypical evaluations. An example here involves self-esteem maintenance. Cialdini (1976) suggests that it makes people feel better about their selves to think they are a part of the better group. Because people are so inclined to generalize, they consider their selves winners on the basis of their involvement with the winning team. Even hearing words such as us or we has been found to elicit more positive emotions than words such as they or them (Perdue, 1990). These types of emotional factors play a critical role in understanding stereotype related behavior.

Discriminatory tendencies are often backed by feelings of frustration, aggression, and inferiority, or by certain personality factors. People with status needs, authoritarian disposition, or frustration are more likely to be racist (Crocker et al., 1987; Miller & Bugelski, 1948; Staub, 1989).

In efforts to maintain self-esteem, people who are scared or frustrated often blame the source of their misfortune on a scapegoat. For example the Jews have historically been the source of blame for hardships endured by ancient Christians and modern Germans alike. Miller and Bugelski (1948) confirmed the scapegoat theory with an experiment which compared the degree of prejudice in experimentally frustrated subjects to a frustration free control group.

Subjects were either granted or deprived a privilege and later asked their opinions on Japanese and Mexicans. They found that the experimentally frustrated group harbored a greater degree of prejudice than the unfrustrated subjects.

Other research on stereotyping has shown that distancing oneself from one's subordinates increases feelings of superiority. Prejudice is an effective way to impose this perceived distance. This desire for separation is often greater among members of lower, less secure, socio-economic groups than members of more affluent groups. Crocker (1987) found that members of a lower status sorority were more critical of other sororities than members of a higher status sorority (1987). Additionally, Meindl and Lerner (1984) found that reducing the status of some English speaking Canadians, by exposing them to an embarrassing experience, increased their hostility towards French speaking Canadians.

Fein and Spencer (1997) contend that stereotyping may actually raise a person's self-esteem. Research found that when a participant's self-image was threatened, they were more likely to evaluate a stereotyped target negatively which consequently resulted in an increase of the participant's self-esteem. Spencer and Fein suggest "that when people experience self-image threat, they often stereotype others to restore their own threatened self-image". Since the use of stereotyping can be such a salient and effective tool for self-image restoration, it can even be used as a convenient and efficient device to maintain a positive self-image. In fact, further research has found the *self-image restoration* motivation to be an automatic activator of stereotypes. Participants who received self-image threatening feedback had a high incidence of stereotype activation; whereas participants who did not receive negative feedback showed no evidence of automatic stereotype activation (Spencer et al., 1998).



Combining both social and cognitive factors, many researchers assert that stereotyping may be used as a method to process social information more efficiently. Cognitive efficiency has an adaptive value. Because of the complex nature of the real world, humans are presented with a constant influx of stimuli and information. In fact, people receive so much information, if they were unable to sort, organize, and simplify, they would run a serious risk of mental overload (Macrae, Strangor, & Hewstone, 1996). In many cases, people rely on their ability to simplify, categorize, and find patterns in the world. However, when individuals categorize they lose some information. For example, a certain amount of information is lost when Andrew, Freddy, and Janet are collectively referred to as Jacksons. Categorization for the sake of efficiency is often at the expense of accuracy.

Distinct cases are often used as a way to understand or describe larger related groups (Rothbart et al., 1978). Not all Black people can sing and dance, but because of a relative few who can, it is a commonly held belief among Whites that all Blacks are vocally and choreographically inclined. This very phenomenon can have negative consequences as well. Because people exaggerate both the good and the bad qualities of unique individuals, there is a tendency to blame novel characters for occurrences that happen in their presence (Taylor & Fiske 1978; Taylor et al, 1979). These two factors combine to form a powerful relationship. When a unique individual, for example, a Black male in a predominantly White neighborhood-store, commits a distinct event like a robbery, people not only assume that all robberies are committed by Blacks but that all Blacks commit robberies. As complex as this world can be, individuals can save time and effort by using peoples' group membership as a way to make inferences about them (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991; Kaplan et al, 1992)

## Stereotype Activation and Application

While there has been an extensive amount of attention given to the basis of stereotypical beliefs, researchers have only recently begun to focus on the distinction between *stereotype activation* and *stereotype application*. In this two stage model, stereotype activation precedes stereotype application. Specifically, stereotype activation refers to the enhanced accessibility of stereotype-associated information. Steele and Aronson's (1995) work is an excellent example of the power of stereotype activation. Specifically, they demonstrated how simple knowledge of a stereotype can affect performance. For example, two groups of Black subjects were given tasks which differed only in how they were labeled. Interestingly, the subjects who completed the task titled laboratory task outperformed those who completed the task labeled intellectual ability. Once a stereotype has been made salient through activation stereotype application may occur. Here, the salient stereotypical information is applied to attributional, perceptual, or evaluative operations (Johnson & Ferguson, 2003). Additional research supports the contention that the activation of a stereotype can affect subsequent judgments and perceptions in an applicable domain (Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982; Johnson, Jackson, & Smith, 1989).

Stereotypes can be activated through exposure to stereotype specific behavior of a few group members and later applied to other group members. An assessment of the consequences of White participant exposure to negative stereotype related behavior of a Black confederate (hostility towards the experimenter) revealed that those who were exposed to the hostile Black confederate reported greater global ratings of Black hostility than those who were not (Henderson-King & Nisbett, 1996). In related research, Johnson, Trawalter, and Dovidio (2000) assessed the effects of stereotypes activated through exposure to stereotype confirming music. The experimenters wanted to investigate whether exposure to violent rap music would influence

Black and White subjects' perceptions of a Black or White male target. The researchers found that when compared to the control and nonviolent conditions, those who were exposed to the violent rap music attached greater dispositional attributions to the Black target than the White target.

Later research by Lepore and Brown (1997) suggests that high and low prejudiced people react in a similar manner to direct stereotype activation, but differentially to category activation. In other words, high and low prejudiced people react similarly when specific stereotype consistent information is primed. Their study compared the responses of high and low prejudiced individuals after stereotype activation and after category activation. The experimenters hypothesized that high and low prejudiced individuals would respond similarly to stereotype activation but differentially to category activation. The results suggest that priming negative stereotypic information actually reduces the differences in automatic responses between high and low prejudiced individuals. The authors concluded that: Since high and low prejudiced people have the same knowledge of stereotypes about Black people their automatic responses when negative aspects of the stereotype are activated do not differ. However, high and low prejudiced individuals differ in their automatic responses when the general category of Black people is primed.

Additional research supports the stereotype activation/application process, but suggests that stereotypes activated by initial exposure to a stereotyped individual may dissipate with continued exposure. Participants observing an interview of a target Black male showed evidence of the activation of the Black-male stereotype following 15 s of observation but not following 12 min. of observation. Interestingly, the dissipated stereotype was made salient again after the discovery of a disagreement with the target about an ostensible court case. Participants who

were made aware of the disagreement showed evidence of activation of the stereotype of Black people; whereas those who were informed that the target agreed with them did not. Furthermore, participants who disagreed with the target Black male also applied the Black stereotype to him (Ziva et al., 2002). The process of stereotype activation/application has been demonstrated on dimensions other than race. More specifically, researchers have shown that these processes can play a role in judgments on dimensions such as age, gender, and weight (Bessenoff & Sherman, 2001; Chasteen, Schwarz, & Park, 2002; Chui et al., 1998).

### The Influence of Media

Social scientists have shown considerable interest in the role of media in perpetrating violent attitudes and/or beliefs. Such concerns are not surprising considering that the average child views 8,000 murders and over 100,000 acts of violence by the time they finish elementary school (DeAngelis, 1993). In addition to the research, there are a number of real-world examples supporting the contention that popular media can influence violent behavior. For example, one might consider the brutal murder of a store-shop owner in which Drano was poured down his throat. This gruesome method of killing was frighteningly similar to a scene in a Clint Eastwood movie previously watched repeatedly by the perpetrators (Leland, 1995). In fact, films ranging from *The Basketball Diaries* (1995), a biographical account of poet Jim Carroll's battle with heroin, to *Menace II Society* (1993), a coming of age film depicting the life of an inner-city youth, have been connected to subsequent violent acts and murders (Brehm, Kassin, & Fein, 1999).

Though it is difficult to blame specific acts of violence on certain media forms, research has been done to support the contention that there is a connection between violent media and

violent behavior. Work assessing the behavior of children and adolescence in the lunch-room, play-ground, and laboratory has concluded that exposure to violent films generally increases aggressive behavior (Wood et al., 1991). Zillman and Weaver (1999) found similar evidence with adults. On four consecutive days, participants were exposed to and asked to rate violent or nonviolent feature films. On the day after the last film participants were asked to take part in an ostensible task where they were met by an abusive or neutral confederate. Soon there after, participants were put in a position to retaliate at the confederate. Results of this study indicated that both provocation by the abusive confederate and exposure to violent films fostered increased hostile behavior. The researchers conclude that prolonged exposure to violent films is capable of escalating hostile behavior in provoked men and women, and more importantly, of influencing aggressive behavior in unprovoked men and women.

Given that content analysis has shown that rap music tends to be inundated with themes of promiscuity, as well as high levels of violence, there have been extensive consequences of exposure to such media stimuli (Brown & Campbell, 1986; Sherman & Domonick, 1986). It should also be noted that the antisocial activities in such music are often portrayed under a positive light with no attention to the associated negative consequences, making these behaviors seem not only culturally modal but desirable (Hansen & Hansen, 1990, p. 358). Research suggests exposure to such media may not only increase the acceptance of antisocial behavior, but may also elicit negative attitudes toward females and Blacks (Hansen & Hansen, 1990; St. Lawrence & Joyner, 1991).

Accordingly, Rap music has been found to influence beliefs on a number of dimensions ranging from attitudes on violence to minority career goals. Johnson, Jackson, and Gatto (1995) assessed the effects of exposure to rap music on the attitudes and perceptions of male Black

youth. Boys were exposed to violent, nonviolent, or no (control) music videos. The participants next read two experimental vignettes involving: (a) a violent act against a man and a woman, and (b) a young man who chose to go to school to achieve success, whereas his unemployed friend, “mysteriously” obtained extravagant items (i.e., car, clothing, ladies). As expected, subjects in the violent video group expressed a greater acceptance of the use of violence and a higher probability that they would use violence toward the woman in the vignette. Additionally the group exposed to the violent videos was more likely to say that they wanted to be like the “unemployed” materialistic young man and were less confident that the other young man would achieve his educational goals.

#### Media and Stereotype Activation

Another major concern of public policy makers and the general public regards the potential for media stimuli, such as rap music, to activate negative stereotypes. Indeed, a number of studies have shown that exposure to violent rap music can influence stereotypical beliefs. In a recent study, Black and White participants who were exposed to violent Black male rappers subsequently perceived a target Black male as more violent than those participants who were not exposed to the violent music. It was concluded that exposure to violent rap activated the violent Black male stereotype, making the stereotype salient and more likely to affect subsequent judgments of the Black target (Johnson, Trawalter, & Dovidio, 2000). Similar work by Gardstrom (2000) involved exposing Black and White subjects to either violent or non-violent Black musicians. When compared to the control and non-violent exposure group, subjects exposed to the violent Black music reported violent attributions of a Black target male as more particularly dispositional than those of a White target male. The author also suggests that

exposure to violent rap music can generalize to judgments involving other stereotype related traits (intelligence) but not to non-stereotypical traits.

Rudeman and Lee (2002) examined the effects of exposure to violent and misogynistic rap on automatic associations and stereotypic judgments of White and Black targets. Participants were primed through exposure to violent and misogynistic rap or popular nonviolent music. Participants were next asked to fill out an Implicit Association Test which would be used to categorize subjects into either a high or low prejudiced group. Results for the first experiment indicate that violent and misogynistic rap increased the automatic associations underlying evaluative racial stereotypes in both high and low prejudiced subject groups. In the second experiment participants were given a seemingly unrelated person perception task directly after the priming manipulation. The task required subjects to rate Black or White targets described as behaving ambiguously. Here, primed subjects judged a Black target less favorably than a White target. Interestingly, subject's level of prejudice did not moderate judgments, attesting to the robustness of priming effects on social judgments.

There is a concern that the media may serve to activate sexual, as well, race related stereotypes. The media has a history of using "Scantily clad women posing as decorative objects" (Lavine et al., 1999). Investigations found females routinely displayed as sexual objects in advertisements and music videos (Hall & Crum, 1994; Rossi & Rossi, 1985; Sherman & Domonick, 1986). In fact, between the years of 1997 and 2000, sexual content increased from nearly half to more than two-thirds of television program content. Further, a fifth to one-half of all music videos was found to portray sexuality or some form of eroticism (Brown, 2002). A series of three experiments aimed at exploring the effects of massive exposure to sexually oriented prime-time television programming on teens revealed that heavy exposure to prime-time

programming containing sexual intimacy between unmarried people can result in altered moral judgment (Zillmann, Bryant, & Huston, 1994).

Zillmann & Bryant (1982) demonstrated that large amounts of exposure to pornography featuring sexually submissive females tended to elicit rape trivialization and more callous attitudes towards women. In fact, exposure to both violent and nonviolent pornography has been found to influence subsequent judgments of sexual aggression and increase the degree of the rape-myth acceptance (Allen et. Al., 1995; Ashburn & Reed, 1995). Additionally, short-term exposure to nonviolent sexual media has been found to produce cognitive changes in men, which may affect their subsequent behavior toward women. Here, male participants viewed 1 of 3 films which were both sexually-explicit and degrading to women, sexually-explicit but not degrading, or non-sexual. The men were next recorded while they interacted with women in problem solving dyads. Results indicate, men who watched either sexually explicit film displayed more dominance and anxiety than those exposed to the non-sexual stimuli. Those who watched the degrading sexual film displayed less anxiety but more dominance than did the men who watched the non-degrading film (Mulac, Jansma, & Linz, 2002). Further, in an experiment by Johnson & Ferguson (2003), some subjects were exposed to media involving promiscuous female behavior while others were exposed to media containing sexually neutral female behavior. When asked to make subsequent judgments on an unrelated female, members of the exposed group made less favorable judgments and perceptions than those who were not exposed to the promiscuous women.

Another experiment was designed to examine the influence of sexually violent rap on attitudes of men with minimal or no prior exposure. Specifically, the study focuses on commercially available sexually violent rap, and its influence on attitudes toward women. Male



participants with minimal previous exposure to sexually violent rap were exposed to sexually violent rap music, sexually violent lyrics, both, or neither. After assessing a participant's attitude measures on a number of dimensions it was found that neither lyrics alone nor lyrics with music resulted in significantly more negative attitudes towards women than the music only or the no treatment control condition. However, participants in the lyrics condition reported significantly greater adversarial sexual beliefs than participants in the no-lyrics condition. The experimenters conclude that brief exposure to sexually violent rap increases the belief that men and women have adversarial relationships (Westler et al., 1997). Related research explores the influence on misogynous rap on sexual aggression against women. One experiment investigates the effects of cognitive distortions concerning women on sexually aggressive behavior. Male participants listened to either misogynous or sexually neutral rap. Participants next viewed neutral, sexual-violent, and assaultive film vignettes and chose one to show to a female confederate. Among participants in the misogynous condition, 30% showed the female confederate the assaultive film and 70% showed her the neutral film. In the neutral condition, 7% showed the confederate the sexual-violent or assaultive film while 93% showed the neutral film. Additionally, participants who showed the sexual-violent or assaultive film perceived the female confederate as more upset and uncomfortable than did the participants who showed the neutral film vignette. The authors conclude that misogynous music facilitates sexually aggressive behavior and support the relationship between cognitive distortions and sexual aggression (Barongan, 1995).

Previous research has clearly shown that exposure to rap music featuring stereotypically violent Black male artists led to more stereotypic judgments of other Black males (Johnson et al., 2000). The authors suggest that the violent Black male stereotype was activated by the music and applied in subsequent judgments of other Black males. One limitation of the rap music and

stereotyping literature is that there has not been an investigation of whether similar processes would occur as a consequence of exposure to stereotypically sexual Black females. More specifically, one of the major purposes of the present study is to extend the literature in this area by: a) focusing on whether exposure to rap music involving stereotypically sexual group members can have an impact on subsequent sex related judgments of other group members; b) assessing whether exposure to stereotypical Black females can have an impact on subsequent judgments of other Black females; c) examining how exposure to stereotypical group members may affect stereotype unrelated processes, such as empathy.

### Empathy and Intergroup Responses

Empathy is defined as “the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of another of either the past or the present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner (Mish, 1996).” More functionally however, empathy can be seen as an “other-oriented emotional response congruent with the perceived welfare of another person (Batson, 1995).”

Empathy is generally described as being rooted in cognition or emotion. Cognitive empathy primarily refers to taking the perspective of another individual. Emotional empathy, on the other hand, is largely concerned with the emotional responses to another individual. Responses are often parallel empathy (similar to those the other person is feeling) or reactive empathy (a reaction to the emotional experiences of the other individual). Parallel empathy might be described as sharing the victims hatred for terrorists after viewing their accounts of the

September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. Reactive empathy on the other hand might be described as emotions felt after sympathizing with the victim's pain and fear (Stephan & Finlay, 1999).

Batson (1991) theorizes that both selfless and self-serving influences are involved in a person's decisions to help others. When people are exposed to and thereby distressed by another's suffering they seek to relieve their distress by either escaping the situation or helping the other person. Further, when exposed to another's suffering; two qualitatively distinct vicarious emotions with different motivational consequences are evoked. These congruent emotions are represented by personal *distress* and *empathy*. As stated, motivation to help is often a combination of the selfless and the selfish type. The sight or sound of someone in need elicits two emotions; self-oriented personal distress (upset, anxious) and other-oriented empathy (sympathy and compassion). In turn, these emotions elicit certain motivations. Empathy can be related to an egoistic motivation to reduce ones own discomfort, while simultaneously giving way to an altruistic motivation to reduce the sufferers distress. In the first case the behavior can be seen as the reduction of ones own distress which may or may not have helped the other individual. In the latter, the behavior can be viewed as reducing the others distress, a selfless act of helping (Batson et al., 1987).

Batson proposes that when people witness another person's suffering, the affective response of empathy is qualitatively distinct from the more egoistic response of personal distress. Batson's thesis also states that these distinct emotions evoke distinct types of prosocial motivation. Personal distress evokes a self-focused motivation to reduce ones own vicarious emotional arousal reduced. On the other hand, empathy evokes an altruistic motivation to reduce another's suffering (Batson et al., 1987).

Batson cleverly designed an experiment to draw a qualitative distinction between distress and empathy. In order to see if adjectives reflecting personal distress and adjectives reflecting empathy load on two different factors, participants' self-reported emotional responses to witnessing another's distress were factor-analyzed. Participants were asked to report how strongly (1=not at all-7=extremely) they felt each emotion described in a list of emotion-related adjectives. There were eight adjectives for distress (e.g., alarmed, grieved, upset, worried, disturbed, perturbed, distressed, troubled) and six adjectives for empathy (e.g., sympathetic, moved, compassionate, tender, warm, softhearted). The participants' ratings of the adjectives loaded on separate components in a principal components analysis; suggesting that distress and empathy are qualitatively distinct emotions (Batson et al., 1987).

Batson suggests that the greater the degree of attachment one feels towards the sufferer the more likely he is to help. Hence, empathy may be a solid motivation to help someone in need. The empathy-altruism hypothesis states that "empathetic emotion evokes altruistic motivation to benefit the person for whom empathy is felt" (Batson, 1987). There is extensive empirical evidence that empathy not only increases pro-social behaviors like helping but also decreases antisocial behaviors (Batson et al., 1995).

When one feels empathetic towards another individual he focuses less on his own distress and discomfort and more on the concerns and needs of the other person. When one subsequently makes a decision to help based on this empathy he is motivated more so by the other persons situation than his own.

There is indication that empathy can lead not only to greater altruistic response, but more favorable treatment towards certain individuals. This favorable treatment can occur even if it violates one's own moral standards. To illustrate, Batson et al. (1995) had participants serve as

“distributors” of resources to a group of target individuals. Initially, all subjects agreed that an equitable distribution would be a “fair and moral” thing to do. It was predicted that inducing empathy for one of the targets would lead subjects to show partiality to that target by allocating that individual more resources, thus violating their initial moral principal of equality. Results indicated that high empathy participants consistently broke their egalitarian morals and gave the needy target more resources than the rest of the group. In a very similar study by Batson and his colleagues (1997), participants were asked to make an allocation decision that affected the welfare of other individuals. Female participants were responsible for assigning one worker to a negative consequence task and the other to a positive consequence task. Empathy was induced in some participants by allowing them to read a note from one of the workers containing information about a recent break-up. Participants were then asked to listen to a taped interview of a child in need of medication. The major dependant measure involved a donation request at the end of the experiment in which participants were given a chance to give a donation to benefit the sick child. In the end, participants who were not induced to feel empathy held to their moral principal of justice and were more likely to favor an equitable distribution of resources. On the other hand, those who were induced to feel empathy were significantly more likely to violate this moral principal and show favoritism to the less fortunate target. Again, the findings indicate that high-empathy individuals who demonstrated partiality previously indicated that they perceived such an action to be unfair and less moral.

Likewise, empathy can lead to more favorable attitudes towards certain individuals and groups. One method of eliciting such empathetic feelings and subsequent favorable attitudes involves perspective taking. More specifically, empathetic feelings can often result when one takes the perspective of a person in need by imagining how that person is affected by his her

plight. Clore & Jeffrey (1972) had participants assume the role of a disabled person by traveling about campus in wheel chairs or watching a person in a wheel chair. In both cases they found significant improvements in participants' attitudes towards the disabled immediately after the experiment and four weeks later in a follow up. Another study found that introducing empathy can have effects on attitudes regarding helping across species. Interestingly, increased empathy for whales led to more positive attitudes expressed in intention and in action to help save whales (Shelton & Rogers, 1981).

Additional work by Batson et al. (1997) indicates that empathetic feelings can also elicit more positive attitudes towards stigmatized group members. In the first experiment, participants were exposed to an interview of a woman with AIDS. Consistent with previous research, high-empathy participants reported greater empathetic feelings towards the victim than those in the low-empathy group. Finally, and more important, high empathy participants also reported more favorable attitudes towards the victim and people with AIDS, in general. In a second experiment, the findings indicated that empathetic induction led to more favorable attitudes towards the homeless. Finally, in a third experiment, the authors demonstrate that empathy could lead to more favorable attitudes towards convicted murderers. In addition, these attitudes were shown to last for two weeks after the initial empathetic manipulation.

Finlay & Stephan (2000) extended the empathy research by assessing how empathetic feelings might affect attitudes of stigmatized racial groups. White participants were asked to read a series of vignettes, written by Blacks, aimed primarily at describing every day acts of discrimination against them (false accusation, overhearing racial slurs, being denied privileges). The essays also included details of how the Black authors felt about their negative treatment. Empathy was controlled by instructing some of the participants to imagine how the author feels

and instructing the other participants to remain neutral and unattached to the writer. The major finding indicated that participants who were instructed to empathize with the victim reported less evaluative differences of Blacks and Whites than did the control group. Additionally, the high-empathy subjects' feelings related more to parallel empathy (anger, hostility, disgust).

### Overview of the Present Study

The present study examined the impact of exposure to stereotypical media depictions. Specifically, the media's impact on the participants' level of empathy and their willingness to help the target was measured. In addition, the relationship between participants' reported empathy and their willingness to help the target was examined.

Initially, participants were told that they will be participating in two separate experiments (to decrease the probability of demand bias). The first experiment, entitled "memory processes", involved participants listening to music featuring Black female artists which is pop (control), sexually explicit rap, or sexually inexplicit rap. Participants next engaged in a free recall task that ostensibly assessed their memory of the lyrics.

The second experiment, entitled "Decision Making" involved participants reading a passage focusing on a Black or White female college student who was requesting a late withdrawal from coursework due to pregnancy. Participants read a letter that the student wrote to the Dean explaining the difficult pregnancy and its effect on her coursework. Subsequently, participants were asked to: a) report their empathetic feelings for the students; b) make a judgment regarding whether the dean should grant the withdrawal; and c) make a judgment regarding the level of government assistance towards unwed mother. Thus, the design for the present study was a 3 (music condition-sexually explicit, sexually inexplicit, control) x 2

(target race-Black, White) x 2 (Participant gender) factorial. The three major dependent variables included: a) empathy; b) withdrawal support (support for the dean granting the withdrawal); and c) public policy response (amount of government financial support that unwed mothers should receive). In addition, any correlation between participants' reported empathy and their responses to public policy and withdrawal support questions were examined.

## Hypothesis

### Hypothesis One (Music Condition)

A significant main effect was expected for music condition. When compared to those in the control and sexually inexplicit music conditions, those in the sexually explicit music condition should report less target empathy, be less supportive of the withdrawal, and support a lower amount of government financial support. These findings were expected because of previous research indicating that exposures to stereotypical media depictions of stereotyped group members tend to elicit negative responses towards other stereotyped group members (Johnson et. al., 1987; Johnson, et al., 2000).

### Hypothesis Two (Target Race)

It was expected that there would be a main effect for target race. When compared to those in the White target condition, those in the Black target condition should report less target empathy, be less supportive of the withdrawal, and support a lower amount of government financial support. These findings were expected because of research that indicates that when compared to nonstereotyped group members, judgments of stereotypical group members tend to be more negative (Johnson et. al., 1987; Johnson, et al., 2000).

### Hypothesis Three (Music Condition x Target Race Interaction)



For those in the White target female condition, music type should not have an effect. Conversely, for those in the Black Female condition, those in the sexually explicit condition should report less target empathy, be less supportive of the withdrawal, and support a lower amount of government financial support than those in the sexually inexplicit or control conditions. This finding was expected because of previous research indicating that responses towards stereotypical group member vary as a function of exposure to stereotypical media stimuli, while such variation in media depiction had minimal impact on responses towards nonstereotyped group members (Johnson, et al., 2000; St. Lawrence & Joyner, 1991).

#### Hypothesis Four (The Role of Empathy)

Given the previous research suggesting that empathy is related to altruistic responding (Batson et al., 1997), it was expected that empathy would be significantly related to both withdrawal support and perceptions of the appropriate level of government support.

## METHODS

### Participants

Participants were 121 female and 73 male students from an introduction to psychology course at The University of North Carolina at Wilmington. They participated in the experiment for partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

### Design and Procedure

As a measure to reduce demand bias, participants were informed that they would be participating in two separate studies.

*Part 1 (Memory Study).* The ostensible purpose of the first study was to assess whether music was a powerful enough distracter to affect memory retention. The cover of the

experimental booklets included areas for the participants to list their; a) major; b) gender; c) birth date; and d) age. In addition to other irrelevant information the participants will also give this information in the “second experiment” so that their responses in the former can be matched with the latter.

The experimenter distributed the experimental booklets titled “Memory and Music”. The booklet will contain information regarding how memory has been tested in a number of stimulus domains. The instructions continue to inform the participants that little has been done to assess memory when distracters like music are present. Such a study was described as important because many advertisers use music in their ads and this might affect how well consumers remember their product. They were further instructed that the researchers have already focused on how other types of music (i.e., rock, country, and easy listening) may affect memory, but very little had been done on rap music. Given their popularity, rap and hip-hop are often used in advertising; the participants were thus informed that such an assessment was certainly warranted.

Participants then listened to 15 minute audio clips of various female artists with lyrics that were *sexually\_promiscuous\_rap*, *nonpromiscuous rap*, or *non-rap\_music* (control). Obscure, b-side tracks were selected in order to reduce any effects of familiarity. The sexually promiscuous condition included clips by Lil’ Kim, Tha Brat, and Foxy Brown. Songs in this condition were specifically chosen for their excessive use of explicit language and high sexual content. The nonpromiscuous condition included clips by Kellis, Lauren Hill, and Queen Latifa. Here, lyrics contained some graphic language but no sexual content. The control condition contained songs by Beyonce, Kellis, and Mary J. Blige. These were non-rap songs performed by Black female artists. The songs contained no graphic language or sexual content.

When the clips were complete, participants were asked to complete a free-recall memory task. Specifically, participants were asked to recall as many lyrics as possible from each audio clip. After completing the memory task, participants will be given an experimental credit slip and experimenter one will leave the room.

*Part 2 (Decision Making).* A second experimenter entered the room and passed out experimental booklets entitled “Decision-Making’ skills. The instructions in the booklets informed participants that they would be reading and answering questions regarding three passages. Two of the passages will be irrelevant, while the relevant passage will involve a young *Black* or *White* woman in college who had become pregnant. She was requesting a withdrawal, despite the fact that the withdrawal period was long past. Thus, the experimental design is a 3(Music Type- promiscuous, control, nonpromiscuous) x 2(Target Female Race- Black, White) factorial.

Participants then read a letter from the student to the dean indicating that she was on the pill but she took antibiotics which minimized the effectiveness of the pill. She also mentioned that it was a “tough pregnancy” and it was affecting her concentration. She stated that she tried to complete the semester, but the pregnancy was too much...She finally stated that she just needed a break this one time. In order to measure empathy, participants were given a series of six questions. Participants were asked to what degree they felt sympathetic, moved, compassionate, tender, warm, and softhearted (1=not at all-7=extremely). Adjectives previously verified by Batson et al. (1987) as distinctly representative of empathy were selected. The responses were averaged to create an overall empathy score.

Participants then answered a question on a seven point scale that assessed the extent that they supported a withdrawal for the student (1-definitely no, 7-definitely yes). The exact

question was “Should the dean grant Susan the withdrawal?” Participant then read a brief “mini-passage” suggesting that there was controversy associated with the government’s role in supporting unwed mothers. They were then given a question regarding their perceptions of the appropriate amount of financial support that these unwed mothers should receive (1-\$0, 2-\$50, 3-\$75, 4-\$100, 5-\$125, 6-\$150, 7-\$175). The exact question was: “How much monetary support (per month) should a woman receive per child”?

## RESULTS

A 3(Music Type- promiscuous, control, nonpromiscuous) x 2(Target Female Race- Black, White) x 2(Participant gender) ANOVA was performed on reported empathy scores, support of decision to grant a withdrawal, and the amount of government support.

*Empathy.* The results (see Figure 1) indicated that there was a main effect of music type on reported empathy,  $F(2, 182) = 7.916, p < .001$ . When compared to those in the control and nonsexual conditions, those in the sexual condition reported less empathy. The interaction between music type and target race also reached significance,  $F(2, 182) = 7.43, p < .01$ . Reported empathy did not vary as function of target race in the control and nonsexual condition. However, in the sexual condition, those in the Black female condition reported less empathy than those in the White female condition. Finally, (see Figure 2) the interaction between target race and participant gender also reached significance,  $F(1, 182) = 6.89, p < .01$ . Reported empathy did not vary as a function of race for the females. However, for the males, those in the Black female condition reported less empathy than those in the White female condition.

*Withdrawal Support.* The results (See Figure 3) indicated that the main effect of music type on withdrawal support reached significance,  $F(2, 182) = 17.76, p < .001$ . When compared to those in the control and nonsexual conditions, those in the sexual condition reported less withdrawal support. The results also indicated that the main effect of target race on withdrawal support reached significance,  $F(1, 182) = 6.63, p < .05$ . When compared to those in the White female condition, those in the Black female condition reported less withdrawal support. The interaction between music type and target race also reached significance,  $F(2, 182) = 9.61, p < .001$ . Withdrawal support did not vary as function of target race in the control and nonsexual condition. However, in the sexual condition, those in the Black female condition reported less withdrawal support than those in the White female condition.

Finally, the interaction between target race and participant gender (See Figure 4) also reached significance,  $F(1, 182) = 5.91, p < .05$ . Withdrawal support did not vary as a function of race for the females. However, for the males, those in the Black female condition reported less withdrawal support than those in the White female condition.

*Public Policy Response.* The results indicated that the main effect of music type on perceptions of the appropriate amount of government support (See Figure 5) reached significance,  $F(1, 182) = 9.10, p < .05$ . When compared to those in the control ( $M = 4.93$ ) and nonsexual ( $M = 4.94$ ) conditions, those in the sexual condition ( $M = 3.75$ ) perceived less support as appropriate.

*The Role of Empathy.* As expected, reported empathy was related to both withdrawal support,  $R(191) = .57, p < .001$  and perceptions of appropriate government support,  $R(191) = .37, p < .001$

## DISCUSSION

Previous stereotype research has provided a great deal of information regarding the consequences of exposure to stereotypical media stimuli such as rap music (Johnson et al., 1995; 2000; Johnson, Jackson & Gatto, 1995; Rudeman & Lee, 2002). The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that media activation of the promiscuous female stereotype will have consequences related to affect and decision making, and that these consequences are moderated by the race of the target female and gender of the participant. Specifically, the major findings indicate that the race of the target does not significantly influence responses in the neutral or nonpromiscuous song conditions. However, in the promiscuous music condition, those exposed to a Black female target reported less empathy and showed less support for the withdrawal. This set of findings suggests that the Black female “promiscuous” stereotype was not activated in the neutral or nonpromiscuous condition. With no activation one should not see any differential affective responses to the black target. However, participants in the promiscuous music condition reported less empathy for the Black target when compared to the White target. Thus it seems that the Black female “promiscuous” stereotype was activated in this condition only. Consequently, empathetic responses to the Black target in the promiscuous music condition were reduced. More important, the significance of the interaction involving withdrawal support was

related to the level of empathy. This clearly demonstrates that the effects of race and music were heavily influenced by the participants' affective responses.

Another interesting finding involves gender and target race. Males reported less empathy and showed less support for withdrawal for the Black target than the White target. On the other hand, empathy or withdrawal support did not vary as a function of race for the female participants. Previous work has demonstrated gender differences on sex related responses. Specifically, research on teen dating violence indicated that males were more accepting of the rape myth and put greater responsibility on the victim (Johnson et al., 1995). Perhaps a preexisting female in-group bias was strong enough to out-weigh the effects of target race on empathy for the female participants. Females may more readily relate to the target's plight despite her race, and thereby be more likely to help. Interestingly, the data revealed participants were willing to give less support to the Black target than the White target. There may be a number of reasons explaining this outcome. Because the majority of participants were white, in-group bias may again be culpable. In addition, some participants were exposed to music that may have activated the Black female "promiscuous" stereotype; whereas, no participants were exposed to music intended to activate the White female "promiscuous" stereotype. This phenomenon suggests that when it comes to granting support to the target the stereotype was not generalized to all females, but restricted to Black females. Similarly, participants were more supportive of a withdrawal for the White target than the Black target. In-group bias could again be to blame but very difficult to test. Unfortunately, participant race was not a recorded variable and the majority of the participants were white.

A major concern of public policy makers and the general public regards the potential for media stimuli, such as rap music, to activate negative stereotypes. Indeed, a number of studies

have shown that exposure to violent rap music can influence stereotypical beliefs and have an effect on subsequent judgments of a target. Previous research has clearly shown that exposure to rap music featuring stereotypically violent Black male artists led to more stereotypic judgments of other Black males (Johnson et al., 2000). The authors conclude that the “violent” Black male stereotype was activated through exposure to violent rap and later applied in subsequent judgments of other Black males. Although interesting, these studies were limited in scope and could only tell us about stereotypes and behavior related to Black males (Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982; Gardstrom, 2000; Johnson & Ferguson, 2003; Johnson, Jackson, & Smith, 1989; Johnson, Trawalter, & Dovidio, 2000). Whether in school, at the work place, or in court, Black females make up a substantial portion of the population; warranting research on their behalf. The present research has effectively extended the data to include Black females and determined that race has an effect on all three dependant variables.

Another concern is that the media may serve to activate sexual as well as race related stereotypes. Researchers have explored the influence of pornographic and misogynistic media on peoples beliefs and judgments of females. This data suggests that exposure to these forms of media will have a negative impact on subsequent judgments and treatment of females. For example, Zillmann & Bryant (1982; 1985) demonstrated that large amounts of exposure to pornography featuring sexually submissive females tended to elicit rape trivialization and more callous attitudes towards women. In fact, exposure to both violent and nonviolent pornography has been found to influence subsequent judgments of sexual aggression and increase the degree of the rape-myth acceptance (Allen, et. al., 1995; Ashburn & Reed, 1995). Further, in an experiment by Johnson & Ferguson (2003), some subjects were exposed to media involving promiscuous female behavior while others were exposed to media containing sexually neutral



female behavior. When asked to make subsequent judgments on an unrelated female, members of the exposed group made less favorable judgments and perceptions than those who were not exposed to the promiscuous women. The present study extends this research by focusing specifically on the effects of exposure to promiscuous rap performed by Black females. By including sexually explicit and misogynistic rap, the Black female “promiscuous” stereotype was theoretically activated in some of the experimental groups. The results support the contention that media activation of the Black female “promiscuous” stereotype negatively impacts beliefs and judgments of the target. Results indicate that participants exposed to the promiscuous music were less empathetic and less willing to help the target despite her race. Interestingly, the effect was greater when the target was Black, suggesting that the Black female “promiscuous” stereotype was specifically activated by the music and not generalized to all females.

It has been demonstrated that there are a number of factors that may influence how empathetic one individual might feel for another. For example, Batson (1991) suggests that the greater the degree of attachment a person feels for the sufferer the more likely they are to help. Further, this attachment can be controlled by the information given about the sufferer. Specifically, people are less likely to help an individual perceived as being to blame for their plight or for whom they may think deserved their situation (1995). Batson (1997) also suggests that a greater understanding of a member of a stigmatized group can improve feelings toward the group as a whole and thereby be the impetus for increased empathy towards members of that group. The present study has extended the literature by demonstrating that the target’s racial membership will also influence empathy. The data demonstrates that target race influences empathy such that Black targets received the least empathy. Further, it was found that males

were more influenced by race. Perhaps the race effect was decreased in the female population because of their association with the female target.

Traditionally, empathy has been elicited by direct instruction. Participants may be asked to take the perspective of a person in need by imagining how that person is affected by his or her plight. For example, participants may be asked to “imagine themselves in the shoes” of the target. Clore & Jeffrey (1972) even had participants assume the role of a disabled person by traveling about campus in wheelchairs. Other methods might include having some participants read a vignette with material intended to elicit empathy for a target before making decisions about him or her (Batson et al., 1997). These strategies of induction have been successful in most cases. However, most of these techniques all but directly instruct the participant to empathize with the target. Because the participants are approached so directly, these methods leave potential for demand bias. A unique characteristic of this experiment allows empathy to be effectively controlled by a less direct technique. The data revealed a direct relationship between music type and level of empathy such that participants exposed to the promiscuous rap demonstrated the least empathy. The groups who were exposed to the promiscuous rap were notably less empathetic. It is no coincidence that the less empathetic participants had the promiscuous Black female stereotype activated through media exposure.

There are a few obvious limitations to the study. The data is restricted to the Black female “promiscuous” stereotype. It would be interesting to see if the same music activates other Black female stereotypes in parallel. A simple resolve might require additional questions regarding the target’s views on welfare, involvement with crime, or work ethic. Based on similar research, I predict that participants exposed to the promiscuous music would find the target to be more accepting of welfare and crime and less interested in work than the other participants.

Unfortunately, participant race data was not collected. This data would have been valuable in a discussion revolving around empathy. The literature suggests that a person's ability to relate to a target individual has an effect on their level of empathy. In the same way that female participants were more empathetic to the target, I predict that Black participants, especially Black female participants, would show greater empathy and in turn demonstrate increased support for the Black target. Another issue involves the target race variables. As a matter of practice, a control variable might have proven valuable. A third vignette might be employed whereby the target race was not mentioned. Members of this group would receive an additional question asking the race of the target. It is predicted that participants who imagined the ambiguous target to be White would be more empathic than those who assumed she was Black. It would be interesting to see if music type could predict the target's perceived race. It is likely that those exposed to the more potent lyrics would perceive the ambiguous target as Black. Despite these issues, the study provides a number of clear results. I conclude that exposure to prejudice affirming media can influence affective and perceptual responses towards Black females. Further, I surmise that empathy can be reduced by exposure to certain media and that this empathy can mediate the resulting affective and perceptual responses. Someone's likelihood of a promotion or extent of legal reprimand could be regulated by what was on the radio earlier that day. This information is valuable in a world where judges, jurors, employers, and the general public are constantly bombarded with potent and unfiltered media.

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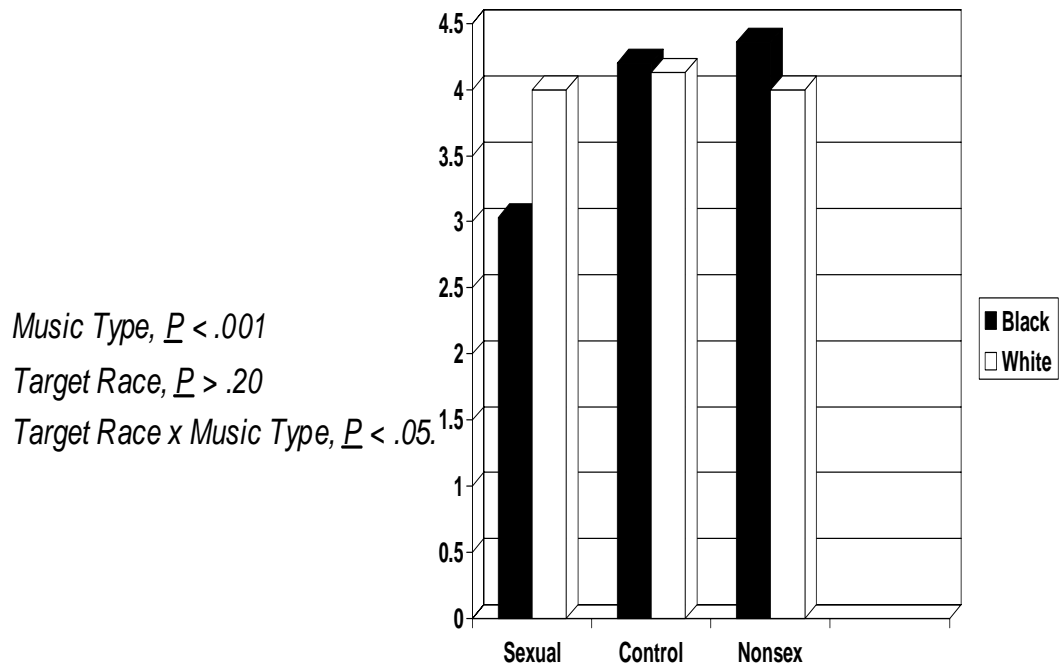
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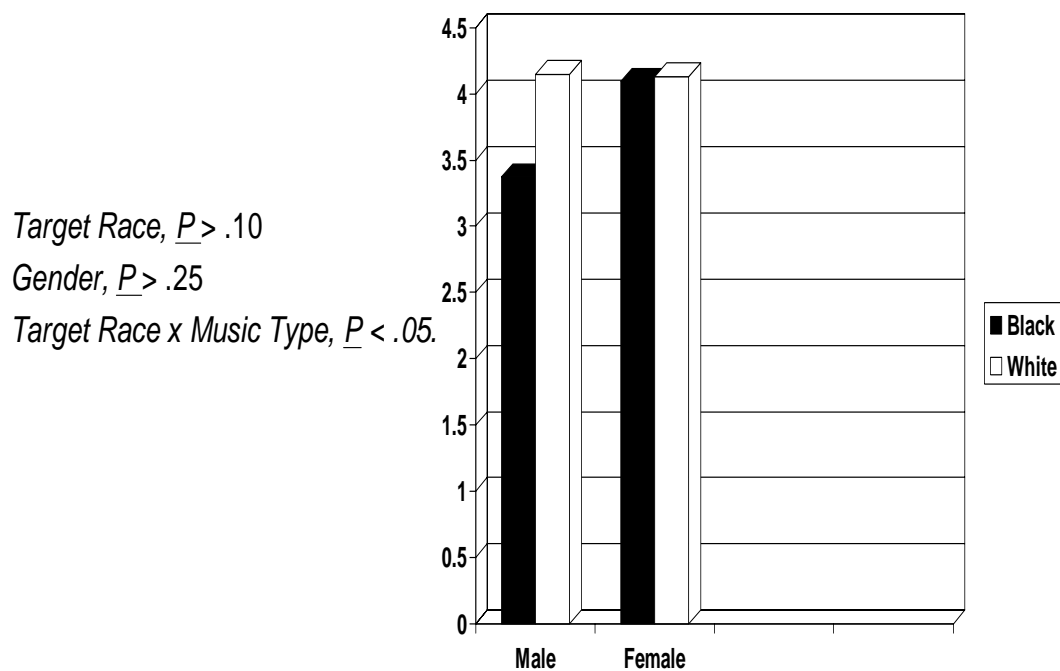
# Individual Empathy (for Susan) as a Function of Target Race and Music Type



NOTE: Greater values equal greater reported empathy

Figure 1

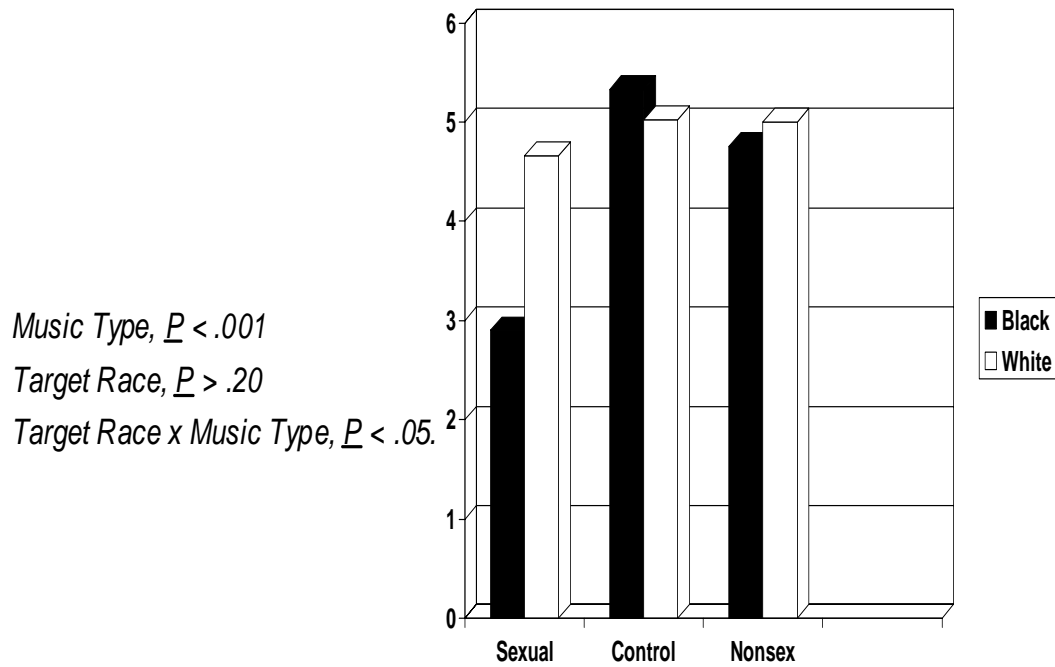
## Reported Empathy as a Function of Target Race and Participant Gender



NOTE: Greater values equal greater reported empathy

Figure 2

## Withdrawal Support as a Function of Target Race and Music Type

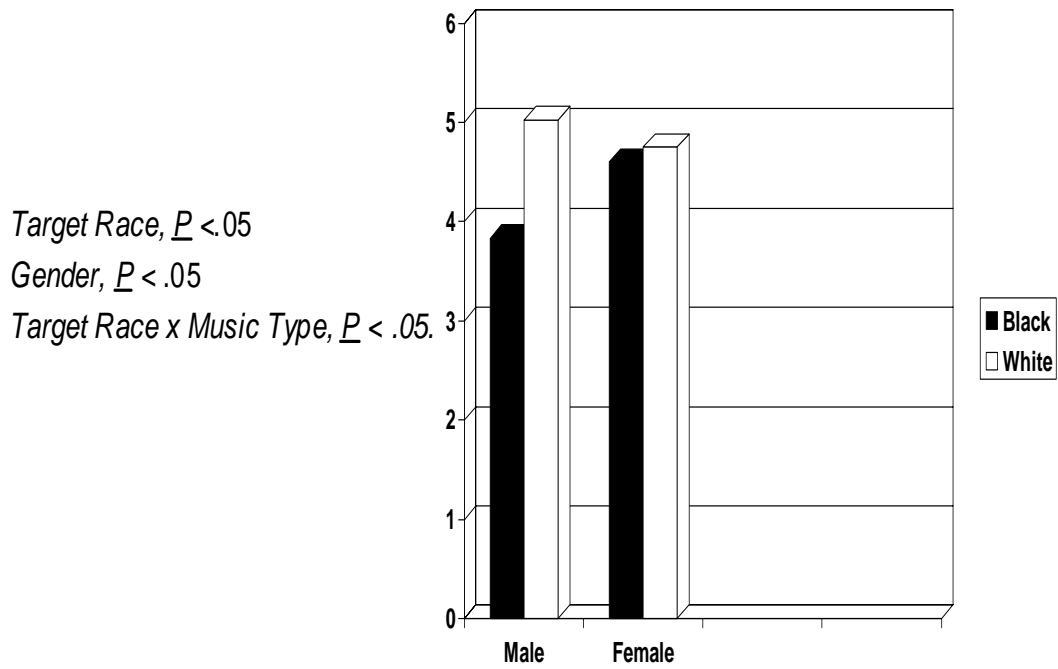


NOTE: Greater values equal greater reported support

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Figure 3

# Withdrawal Support as a Function of Target Race and Participant Gender



NOTE: Greater values equal greater reported support

Figure 4

# Public Policy Response as a Function of Music Type

Music type,  $p < .05$ .



Figure 5