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WHEN RACE IS NOT ENOUGH: LESSONS LEARNED USING RACIALLY TAGGED NAMES

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ABSTRACT

Using racially tagged names is widely utilized across several literatures to explore and document pervasive racial inequality. In two experimental studies, we find evidence that solely using a racially tagged name may not be sufficient. Specifically, we find that using racially tagged names, coupled with the specific racial category, increased the accuracy of participants' recall of racial identification. However, while the accuracy of racial identification increased, almost 20% of participants still did not accurately recall race.

INTRODUCTION

A vast literature of empirical findings demonstrates the systematic racial inequality within the United States (e.g., Feagin & Bennefied, 2014; Mobasseri, 2019). When conducting these studies, names are often used to signal race. In this paper, we present results from two studies that utilized names to identify race to determine whether using names to mark race is an effective strategy. Our results indicate that solely using a racially-tagged name is insufficient for accurate recall of racial identification by participants. We examine the methodological lessons learned from utilizing names to signal race and the inability of some participants to remember the racial variable even when explicitly being told so.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A large body of research documents how the racial majority discriminates against names that are racially-tagged (Barlow & Lacey, 2018). Racially tagged names are widely used in audit (e.g., Hanson et al., 2016), vignette (e.g., Zhao & Rogalin, 2017) and experimental studies (e.g., Kugelmass, 2019) as a way to measure racial bias (Gaddis, 2017b). In their methodological design, many of these studies assume that research participants will respond to the race that is being signaled by the name (Butler & Homola, 2017).

To manipulate perceived race, researchers typically rely on the names used in previous studies or from government generated lists, such as state birth records, that record racial identity (Crabtree & Chykina, 2018; Gaddis, 2017a; Gaddis, 2017b). Crabtree and Chykina (2018) argue that a

potential problem that researchers could be ignoring is the fact that participants may not be perceiving the racially tagged name as intended, because there could be differences between participants in how they perceive an individual's name.

In correspondence audit studies, Gaddis (2017a; 2017b) asserts that researchers who use racially tagged names assume that there is a consensus on what is considered a distinctively "black" or "white" name. He cautions researchers about using names that have been used in past research because it is not clear whether participants perceive the signal of the race in the same way across time. Etaugh and Geraghty (2018) also echo this observation because, if names change over time, then the perception of the attributes attached to the names, such as race/ethnicity, gender, or SES, would change as well.

Furthermore, Gaddis (2017a; 2017b) argues that just because a name may be used within a subculture of the population, it does not mean that the name is unique to a particular race. He asserts that researchers must be critical when using racially tagged names in their research because names are "imperfect proxies of race" (p. 471).

Drawing on previous research, in this project, we set out to examine how well racially tagged names actually work in marking race in social science research. To do so, we rely on two studies that are part of a larger project. The larger project was aimed at gaining a better understanding of the perceptions of mothers who work outside the home and whether "the good mother" stereotype varied by race, employment status, and maternal satisfaction with employment decisions (Rogalin & DeLeon, 2019). The majority (58%) of participants in Study 1, where the mother's race was indicated by a racialized name, failed to recall the mother's race during a manipulation check. Study 2 attempted to address this issue by explicitly identifying the race of the mother. However, we still found that some participants could not correctly recall the mother's race even after we specifically told them the race of the mother in the vignettes they read. In trying to interpret our findings, we turned to the literature and found something problematic, similar to what Gaddis (2017a) found with the use of audit studies, in that many experimental studies do not complete manipulation checks to ensure that participants correctly identify the race signaled by the name that was intended by the researchers (e.g., Bay-Cheng et al., 2019; King et al., 2006; Kugelmass, 2019). Below we focus on two experiments and the methodological lessons learned from using racially tagged names in vignettes.

STUDY 1

Method

This study stems from a larger project (Rogalin & DeLeon, 2019). We conducted Study 1 to replicate and extend Gorman and Fritzsche's (2002) research on the "good mother stereotype." The "good mother stereotype" is the cultural ideal that a good mother is a woman who stays at home to raise her children rather than participate in the paid labor market, or at least wish that she was able to do so. A growing literature illustrates how hegemonic notions of motherhood do not equally apply to all mothers (Brooks & Rogalin, 2014). In this larger project, we explored how employment status, maternal satisfaction, and mother's race influenced the "good mother" stereotype. Using a Qualtrics-based experiment with a sample of undergraduate students

(N=162) who read vignettes about middle-class mothers, we varied a mother's race by using names to signal race (i.e. Tanisha, Jennifer), employment status after childbirth (i.e., continued, discontinued) and her satisfaction with her employment decision (i.e., dissatisfied, satisfied) to investigate the role of these factors in the perceptions of mothers. We used names that previous researchers have empirically verified to signal race (Gaddis, 2017a), with Jennifer for a white mother and Tanisha for a black mother. Specifically, participants were told "**Jennifer/Tanisha** is a 32-year-old woman, who is wife and mother." [1]

Participants

Our sample (N = 162) was primarily comprised of white (82.1%), heterosexual (85.2%) females (65.2%) with an average age of 20.38 (SD= 4.84). Descriptive statistics for Study 1 are located in Table 1. In exchange for participation in the study, participants received research credit as part of the introductory psychology or sociology class.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Study 1

Variable	Range	Mean	Median	*SD*
Sex	1-3	1.35	1.00	0.49
Age	18-55	20.38	19.00	4.84
Marital Status	1-6	3.97	4.00	0.79
Political Affiliation	1-8	5.19	5.00	2.35
Year in School	1-7	2.15	2.00	1.38

Results

Prior to conducting analyses to test the hypotheses associated with the larger project (Rogalin & DeLeon, 2019), we conducted a manipulation check to determine if participants correctly identified the mother's race. After reading the vignette and answering several other questions, participants were asked to report their best guess of the race of the mother with the options of Asian, Black, Hispanic, White, Other or "I don't remember." The manipulation check revealed that only 42% (n = 68) of the participants correctly identified the mothers' races based on racially-tagged names. Of those participants who incorrectly identified the race of the mother, 32.7% reported the wrong race, while 25.3% indicated that they did not remember. The percentage of participants in Study 1 who correctly or incorrectly identified the race of the mother based on racially-tagged names only appear in Table 2. Our results indicate that our manipulation of race failed, which surprised us, given that we had intentionally selected names that had been previously shown to verify race (Gaddis, 2017a).

Table 2

Percentage of Participants in Study 1 Who Correctly or Incorrectly Identified the Race of the Mother Based on Racially-Tagged Names Only by Condition

	Condition								
	Jennifer, Discontinued work, Satisfied w/decision	Jennifer, Discontinued work, Dissatisfied w/decision	Jennifer, Continued work, Satisfied w/decision	Jennifer, Continued work, Dissatisfied w/decision	Tanesha, Discontinued work, Satisfied w/decision	Tanesha, Discontinued work, Dissatisfied w/decision	Tanesha, Continued work, Satisfied w/decision	Tanesha, Continued work, Dissatisfied w/decision	Total
Race Incorrectly Identified	20% n=4	15% n=3	15.8% n=3	19% n=4	33.3% n=7	65% n=13	45% n=9	47.5% n=10	32.7% n=53
Race Correctly Identified	55% n=11	75% n=15	42.1% n=8	52.4% n=11	33.3% n=7	15% n=3	30% n=6	33.3% n=7	42% n=68
I Don't Remember Indicated	25% n=5	10% n=2	42.1% n=8	28.6% n=6	33.3% n=7	20% n=4	25% n=5	19% n=4	25.3% n=41
									N=162

We created two different variables to indicate the correct identification of the mother's race.

Correct. We created a dichotomous variable, where 1= correct identification and 0 = incorrect identification (incorrect identification and did not remember the race of the mother).

Cannot remember. We created a categorical variable that separated those participants who incorrectly identified the race of the mother and those who reported that they did not remember. The range of responses were 0= incorrect identification, 1 = correct identification and 2 = did not remember the race of the mother.

A chi-square test of independence was performed to determine whether there was a relationship between assigned condition and the correct identification of the mother's race. There was a significant relationship between the assigned condition and the correct racial identification, both for *correct* (chi-square = 19.723, df = 7, $p < 0.01$) and *cannot remember* (chi-square = 31.079, df = 14, $p < 0.01$).

We also performed a chi-square test of independence to determine whether there was a relationship between the race of the mother and the correct identification of her race. The race of the mother did influence whether participants correctly identified her race, using *correct* (chi-square = 13.223, df = 1, $p < 0.001$). Of those participants who correctly identified the race of the mother, 56.3% were in the white mom condition, compared to 28% in the black mom condition. Of those who indicated the incorrect race of the mom, 72% were in the black mom condition, and only 43.8% were in the white mom condition. When we separated out the participants who reported not remembering the race of the mother from those who incorrectly identified the race of the mom, the race of the mother still influenced the results (chi-square = 18.913, df = 2, $p < 0.001$). Of those who indicated the incorrect race of the mom, 47.6% were in the black mom

condition, and only 17.5% were in the white mom condition. Participants who reported not remembering the race of the mother were equally split across the two conditions, with 24.4% in the black mom condition and 26.3% in the white mom condition. [2]

Discussion

Less than half of the participants in Study 1 (42%) correctly identified the race of the mother, despite our use of names that have been empirically validated to signal race. In addition, participants were more likely to remember the race of a white mother than a black mother.

Given these findings, we conducted Study 2 in which the racially-tagged names of the mothers remained the same, however this time we explicitly told participants the race of the mother in each vignette. In Study 2, we explored whether explicitly telling participants the race of the mother in each vignette would increase participant's correct identification and memory for the mothers' races in the vignettes while completing our questionnaires.

STUDY 2

Method

In Study 2, using a Qualtrics-based experiment with a sample of undergraduate students, we varied a mother's race (i.e., Tanisha, Jennifer), employment status after childbirth (i.e., continued, discontinued) and her satisfaction with her employment decision (i.e., dissatisfied, satisfied) to investigate the role of these factors in the perceptions of mothers. However, following the lead of O'Brien and Kiriat (2008), in Study 2, we also told participants the race of the mother in the vignette they were reading, Tanisha—a black woman or Jennifer—a white woman. Other than this change, Study 2 utilized the same methods and measures as Study 1.

Participants

Our sample (N = 221) was primarily comprised of white (64.7%), heterosexual (88.4%) females (65.2%) with an average age of 20.6 (SD= 4.18). Descriptive statistics for Study 2 are located in Table 3. Once again, in exchange for participation in the study, participants received research credit as part of the introductory psychology or sociology class.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Study 2

Variable	Range	Mean	Median	*SD*
Sex	1-3	1.35	1.00	.49
Age	18-45	20.60	19.00	4.18
Marital Status	1-6	4.10	4.00	.78
Political Affiliation	1-8	5.25	5.00	2.35
Year in School	1-7	2.38	2.00	1.51
Social Class	1-4	2.48	3.00	0.59
Race	2-6	4.49	5.00	0.93

Results

In Study 2, 84.6% (n=187) of the participants correctly identified the mothers' races after they were explicitly told the race of the mother in the vignette they read. Despite reading about a mother with a racially-tagged name and being explicitly told the race of the mother, 15.4% of participants still did not accurately remember the race of the mother when asked. Of those who did not correctly identify the race of the mother, 6.3% reported the wrong race for the mother and 9% indicated that they did not remember the race of the mother. The percentage of participants in Study 2 who correctly or incorrectly identified the race of the mother based on racially tagged names and identification of the mother's race in the vignette appear in Table 4.

Table 4

Percentage of Participants in Study 2 Who Correctly or Incorrectly Identified the Race of the Mother Based on Racially Tagged Names and Identification of the Mother's Race by Condition

	Condition								
	Jennifer, Discontinued work, Satisfied w/decision	Jennifer, Discontinued work, Dissatisfied w/decision	Jennifer, Continued work, Satisfied w/decision	Jennifer, Continued work, Dissatisfied w/decision	Tanesha, Discontinued work, Satisfied w/decision	Tanesha, Discontinued work, Dissatisfied w/decision	Tanesha, Continued work, Satisfied w/decision	Tanesha, Continued work, Dissatisfied w/decision	Total
Race Incorrectly Identified	0% n=0	0% n=0	0% n=0	3.6% n=1	21.4% n=6	14.3% n=4	0% n=0	10.7% n=3	6.3% n=14
Race Correctly Identified	89.3% n=25	81.5% n=22	85.2% n=23	75% n=21	78.6% n=22	85.7% n=24	96.3% n=26	85.7% n=24	84.6% n=187
I Don't Remember Indicated	10.7% n=3	18.5% n=5	14.8% n=4	21.4% n=6	0% n=0	0% n=0	3.7% n=1	3.6% n=1	9.0% n=20
									N=221

A chi-square test was performed to determine if there was a difference between the two studies in the identification of the mother's race. Whether participants were in Study 1 or Study 2 influenced the correct racial identification (chi-square 76.382, df = 1, $p < 0.001$). Of those participants who indicated the correct race of the mom, 84.6% in Study 1 compared to 42% in Study 1. Of those who indicated incorrect race of the mom, 58% in Study 1 and 15.4% in Study 2. We conducted this analysis again, separating out those who mis-identified the race of the mom from those who reported that they did not remember the race of the mother, with a similar result (chi-square = 78.232, df = 2, $p < 0.001$). Of those participants who indicated the incorrect race of the mom, 32.7% were in Study 1, and 6.3% were in Study 2. For those participants who indicated that they did not remember the race of the mother, 25.3% in Study 1 and 9% in Study 2.

We proceeded to conduct the same analyses as we did in Study 1. Unlike in Study 1, we only found a significant relationship between the condition and the correct racial identification when we separated out the participants who incorrectly identified the race of the mother from those who indicated that they did not remember her race (chi-square = 37.271, df = 14, $p < 0.001$). There was not a significant association between the condition and the correct racial identification of the mother when compared to those who remembered correctly versus those who did not (incorrect identification and did not remember) (chi-square = 6.336, df = 7, $p = 0.501$).

The chi-square results investigating whether the race of the mother influenced the correct racial identity of the mother for Study 2, followed the same pattern. Unlike in Study 1, there was only a significant association between the race of the mother and the correct identification of her race when we separated out those who indicated the race of the mother from those who reported "I don't remember" (chi-square = 23.215, df = 2, $p < 0.001$). Of those participants who indicated the incorrect race of the mom, 11.7% were in the black mom condition, and only 0.9% were in the white. For those respondents who indicated that they did not remember, 16.4% in the white mom condition and 1.8% in the black mom condition. There was not an association between the race of the mother and *correct* (chi-square = 0.600, df =1, alpha = 0.439). Of those participants who indicated the correct race of the mom, 82.7% were in the white mom condition, compared to 86.5% in the black mom condition. Of those who indicated the incorrect race of the mom, 13.5% were in the black mom condition, and 17.3% were in the white mom condition.

Discussion

Results from Study 2 indicate that using racially tagged names is not sufficient for having participants accurately recall race. By adding the racial category next to the mother's name in the vignette, we increased the percentage of correct racial identification from 42% (in Study 1) to 84.6% (in Study 2).

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

Study 2 illustrates that using a racially-tagged name and explicitly stating the target's race increases participants' accurate recall of the target. This finding calls into question studies that rely solely on racially-tagged names, especially those that do not rely on manipulation checks to ensure participants' accurate recall. Existing studies do not always use manipulation checks (e.g., Bay-Cheng et al., 2019; Kugelmass, 2019)

In retrospect, following the suggestion of Gaddis (2017b), we should have pre-tested the names first to ensure that participants accurately were recalling the race of the mother. We take comfort in that existing studies that use manipulation checks have a similar percentage of correct recall to ours (e.g., Abascal, 2015).

Future research should investigate whether the race of the participant influences accurate recall of racial identification. Unfortunately, the samples of both our studies were majority white, so we were unable to conduct this analysis.

Our results underscore that we must be cautious in future studies when using names to signal race and ethnicity—using names to signal race and ethnicity is not always sufficient (Gaddis, 2017b). By simply adding the racial category, in addition to using racially tagged names, increased the accuracy of racial identification.

At the same time, our studies also revealed that the significance of race is not always recalled by participants while they are completing measures. Even in Study 2 where we explicitly told the participants the race of the mother in the vignette, 20 % of Study 2 participants still did not correctly identify the race of the mother in the vignette during the manipulation check.

In order for participants to remember the content of vignettes, they first need to pay attention to the details provided within the vignette. One possible explanation for why 20% of the participants in Study 2 did not remember the race of the mother for the manipulation check was because the details within it were never encoded to begin with due to a lack of attention (Baddeley, Eyseneck, & Anderson, 2020). Forgetting details about the vignettes could have also occurred due to the amount of time it took participants to complete the study. Forgetting occurs relatively quickly after learning has occurred (Baddeley et al., 2020; Fisher & Radvansky, 2018). It is possible that by the time our participants reached the manipulation check question, they had simply forgotten the race of the mother in the vignette. Finally, forgetting could have occurred due to interference from additional information provided to the participants in the vignettes. There was quite a bit of information presented to participants in the vignette that they needed to remember. It is possible the information competed with each other to be recalled and interfered with the ability to be remembered. For example, perhaps certain participants could recall the mother's name or employment status, but not her race (Anderson, Bjork, & Bjork; Baddeley, et al., 2020).

Our findings and the literature on forgetting demonstrates that if researchers want to understand the impact of race in experimental work, it is important for them to explicitly remind their participants throughout the study because it is likely that participants may not remember the racial variable(s) being signaled.

We hope the methodological lessons learned from our studies will inform future researchers. Our findings demonstrate the importance of using manipulation checks and of reminding participants throughout a study where race is being used as a variable.

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ENDNOTES

[1] For more details about the larger study and the associated study materials, please contact the first author.

[2] Given the demographics of our sample, with only 6.2% of the sample being black, we were not able to analyze whether the race of the participant influenced whether they correctly identified the race of the mother.

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