

Social Psychology of Prejudice:

*Historical and
Contemporary Issues*

Edited by

Christian S. Crandall

University of Kansas

Mark Schaller

University of British Columbia



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Seeing Race

Jennifer L. Eberhardt and Phillip Atiba Goff
Stanford University

*The facts we see depend on where we are placed, and
the habits of our eyes.* (Walter Lippmann, 1922)

Social psychological research on stereotyping and prejudice typically takes for granted people's visual perception of race. Observing a person's race is equated with observing that person's physical features. Both perceptions are understood as a straightforward visual process antecedent to stereotyping and prejudice. Thus, the perception of race itself frequently is assumed to be unworthy of social psychological investigation.

This chapter develops an alternative, or complementary, account of the relation between stereotyping and prejudice, on the one hand, and the perception of race, on the other. First, we contend that the perception of race should be viewed as a social, rather than simply visual, process. Second, we consider the possibility that the perception of race may follow from, rather than precede, the influence of stereotyping and prejudice. Although ostensibly at odds with the prevailing understanding, our approach in fact builds upon intuitions that are latent in a growing body of contemporary social psychological research. Moreover, our approach is consistent with the historical evolution of social psychology, as it accords ever more importance to the social and cultural sources of human behavior.

This chapter is organized as follows. The first part describes the dominant understanding of the relation between the perception of race and the operation of stereotypes and prejudice and briefly discusses some research findings arguably consistent with this understanding. In the second part we elaborate our alternative understanding of the perception-stereotyping relationship. We discuss research efforts informed by an approach similar to ours and also show that findings ostensibly consistent with the dominant approach might often be re-interpreted to bolster our alternative approach. Finally, in the third part we relate our approach to the historical development of social psychology as a field and to the emerging understanding of race among scholars in other fields. We conclude by identifying the benefits that could result from increased attention to the social influences affecting the perception of race.

The Dominant Approach

Most social psychological studies of stereotyping and prejudice assume that visual perception precedes social perception. The focus of

inquiry is not the visual perception of race, but rather the social or psychological consequences thought to follow from it. This approach assumes that judgments of race result from a straightforward perception and cataloguing of the physical features thought to signify one's racial group membership. This assumption necessarily incorporates two intuitions. One is that visual perception itself is primarily a physiological, rather than social, process (cf. Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2003). The other is that race is a "primitive" dimension that is invariably and readily used to categorize others because the physical traits associated with race are highly visible and habitually encoded (e.g., Brewer, 1988; Bruner, 1957; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). The dominant approach then understands race as a shorthand reference to a set of visually arresting physical features to which perceivers naturally attend.

The overwhelming majority of studies of stereotyping and prejudice completely bypass the question of how, why, and when perceivers sort individuals into one racial category or another. Whether one considers the large number of studies that employ racial priming paradigms (e.g., Devine, 1989; Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995; Lepore & Brown, 1997; Payne, 2001; Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 2001) or the implicit association test (e.g., Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001; Phelps et al. 2000), or even those that systematically manipulate the race of an experimenter or confederate (e.g., Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Lowery, Hardin, Sinclair, 2001; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974)—social psychological research takes for granted that participants will categorize others racially. These studies are focused on the stereotyping and prejudice thought to follow from the perception of race, and so do not examine the perception of race itself.

Those studies that do examine the perception of race appear to support the view that racial categorization judgments spontaneously flow from the basic physiological process of perceiving physical differences. Some studies support this view with the finding that participants almost immediately categorize others in terms of race. For example, researchers have found that when participants are shown faces and asked whether those faces are the faces of Black or White people, racial categorization decisions can occur within a fraction of a second (Levin, 1996; Zarate & Smith, 1990). Findings in social neuroscience also suggest that the perception of race is a hardwired physiological process. For example, Ito and Urland (2003) have used event-related brain potentials (ERPs) to examine more precisely the time course of racial categorization processes. They exposed participants to male and female Black and White faces. Participants were required to make either a racial or gender categorization judgment for each face as ERP components were measured. By measuring the amplitude of the ERP components implicated in early attentional processes (e.g., N100 and P200), Ito and Urland found that participants attended to the race of faces within the first 120 milliseconds

of stimulus onset. Attention to race occurred even before attention to gender. Moreover, they found no effects of the categorization task on early attentional processes and thus conclude that attention to race is “primarily attributable to properties of the specific stimulus, regardless of the task being performed” (p. 260). They argue that participants’ tendency to immediately categorize others along racial lines represents an automatic response to the observation of others’ physical traits.

Using functional magnetic resonance imaging, Golby, Gabrieli, Chiao, and Eberhardt (2001) have examined how the encoding of faces from different racial categories influences brain activation in a low-level face processing region called the fusiform face area (FFA). Simply exposing self-identified Black and White participants to Black and White male faces triggered greater activation in the FFA to same-race faces in comparison to other-race faces (see Figure 1). These differences were present even though participants were not required to categorize the faces by race. Attention to race seemed to arise spontaneously, affecting very early stages of perceptual processing. In examining brain functioning directly, these results (along with those of Ito and Urland) might be interpreted as providing even stronger support for the conclusion that the perception of race is a basic, physiological process unmediated by social variables.

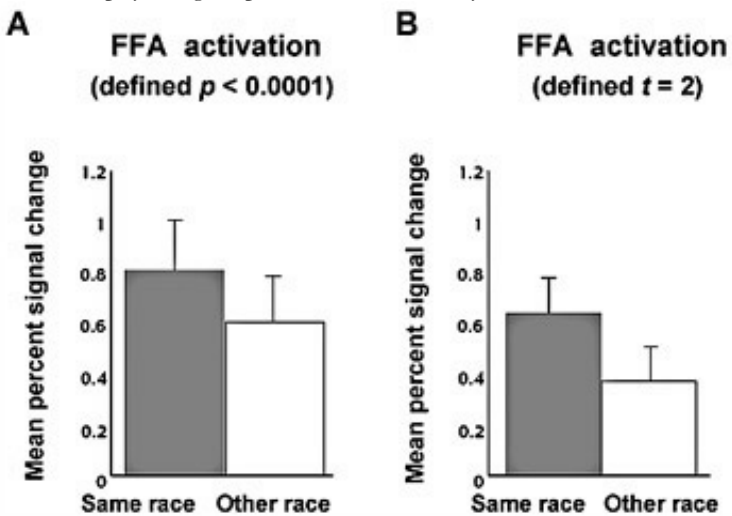


Figure 1. Greater signal change within the functionally defined FFA when viewing same-race faces as compared to other-race faces. This race effect is demonstrated using two different threshold criteria: (A) $p < .0001$ and (B) $t = 2$. Adapted from Golby, Gabrieli, Chiao, & Eberhardt (2001).

Finally, the tendency to view the perception of race as appropriately beyond the realm of social psychological inquiry has been bolstered by

findings that attention to race is not only automatic, but also highly resistant to change. For instance, Stangor, Lynch, Duan, and Glass (1992) demonstrated the chronic accessibility of race in several studies that employed a who-said-what paradigm (developed by Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978). They exposed participants to the names and faces of targets who made particular statements. In a surprise recall task, participants were asked to correctly match each statement to the person who made it. Even though participants were not asked to categorize the targets by race (or to make any explicit judgments of the targets at all), participants were more likely to confuse the statements made by targets of the same race than targets of a different race. Greater within-race confusions were apparent despite the fact that multiple social categorizations of the target stimuli were possible and despite direct manipulations to change racial category usage. For example, participants continued to rely on race even when the experimenters instructed them to attend to other bases of social categorization (i.e., gender) or increased the accessibility of other bases for categorization. Using the same paradigm, Hewstone, Hantzi, and Johnston (1991) similarly found that participants continued to categorize by race even when participants were motivated to attend less to race and the topic under discussion was unrelated to race. Notwithstanding manipulations of context, racial categorizations were spontaneously activated and habitually employed.

Researchers have also shown that the racial categorization process is fundamentally linked to stereotyping and prejudice. For example, several studies have found that categorization speed predicts stereotype application. Individuals who categorize targets by race most quickly are most likely to attribute stereotype-relevant traits to those targets (Zarate & Smith, 1990). Moreover, recent ERP studies aimed at examining the time course of social categorization and evaluative processes have revealed that the process of differentiating people as a function of their race occurs before the activation of beliefs and attitudes (Ito, Thompson, & Cacioppo, 2003). The implications of these findings are potentially far-reaching. Such findings seem to suggest that while there are individual differences in the speed of racial categorization, those categorization differences are not a consequence of stereotyping differences. Rather, those categorization differences, whatever their cause, provide the basis for the stereotyping processes that are the focus of social psychological inquiry.

In sum, much of contemporary social psychological research appears to support the view that participants automatically place others into racial categories based upon their observable, physical features. Because the physical features that signify race are so obvious, racial categorization almost always occurs immediately, irrespective of the context. The perception of race, in turn, activates the social beliefs and attitudes associated with race. Such is the dominant understanding within social

psychology of the relationship between the perception of race, on the one hand, and the activation of stereotyping and prejudice, on the other. This view is succinctly expressed by Hamilton, Stroessner, and Driscoll (1994), who note:

Stereotype formation rests on the perception of group differences, as these categorical distinctions must exist before different sets of beliefs (stereotypes) can become associated with them. By generating the initial perception of group differences, these cognitive mechanisms can constitute (or at least contribute to) the foundation for stereotype development (p. 305).

An Alternative Approach

This part of our chapter suggests an alternative understanding of the relation between the visual perception of race, on the one hand, and stereotyping and prejudice, on the other. More specifically, we consider the possibility that perception of, and attention to, race may be a consequence of beliefs and attitudes rather than a precursor. If this is the case, the dominant approach provides only a partial account of the race perception-stereotyping relationship. The alternative account suggests both that perception is itself a social process, and that the perception of race (e.g., the ways in which people categorize others racially) can reflect people's beliefs and attitudes about race.

The Social Nature of Perception

For decades, researchers have recognized that seeing involves more than the passive perception of an objective reality. Retinal images are inherently ambiguous and are resolved in the ways that are most functional and meaningful to perceivers. Thus, the process of visual perception is subjective, constructive, and interpretive (Goldstein, 1999).

The view that social processes, in particular, may influence visual perception has been examined by social psychologists at least since the New Look movement half a century ago. Proponents of the "New Look" approach believed that "*all* perception has a social component" and that visual perception is influenced by the desires, needs, and expectancies of perceivers (Bruner & Postman, 1948, p. 114). These researchers predicted that perceivers would attend most to those stimuli that are most meaningful to them and would perceive those stimuli in accord with their own values and beliefs. The claim was that something as basic as perceiving the size of an object could be influenced by perceivers' attitudes and beliefs. For example, researchers found that people consistently overestimated the physical size of emotionally laden symbols (such as swastikas and dollar signs) yet more accurately judged the size of neutral symbols (Bruner & Postman, 1948).

Other New Look research examined the extent to which individual differences in perceivers' attitudes affected the visual perception of faces (Allport & Kramer, 1946; Lindzey & Rogolsky, 1950; Lund & Berg, 1946;

Secord, 1959; Secord, Bevan, & Katz, 1956). For example, studies in which participants were asked to identify the faces of those who were Jewish, seemed to show that participants high in anti-Semitism were more accurate at detecting Jewish faces than participants low in anti-Semitism (e.g., Allport & Kramer, 1946; Lindzey & Rogolsky, 1950). The researchers reasoned that participants high in anti-Semitism would be more motivated to discern Jewish faces and therefore more accurate at doing so (in comparison to participants low in anti-Semitism). As it turned out, rather than more accurately identify Jewish faces, anti-Semitic participants simply identified more faces as Jewish, which increased both correct identifications and “false alarms” (see Scodel & Austrin, 1957 or Secord, 1959). Instead of shaping the visual perception of faces’ physical features, attitudes may have influenced the subjective judgment threshold at which each perceiver identified a face as Jewish.

In a classic New Look study, Allport and Postman (1947) showed participants a picture of a subway scene with a White man holding a deadly razor and a Black man holding nothing. More than half the participants recalled mistakenly that they saw the Black man holding the razor, a conclusion that reflected a common stereotype of the time. As with the anti-Semitism study, the razor study failed to demonstrate unequivocally that social stereotypes influence visual perception. The participants who wrongly described the black man as holding the razor may have misremembered a scene that they had, in fact, accurately perceived. Many researchers lost faith in their ability to develop methodologically rigorous studies to demonstrate that attitudes and beliefs directly influence visual perception (Erdelyi, 1974; Gilbert, 1998). Thus, the New Look movement began to fade.

A number of recent studies have revived the understanding of visual perception that animated the New Look movement (Fazio, Ledbetter, & Towles-Schwen, 2000; Niedenthal & Kitayama, 1994; Stapel & Koomen, 1997; von Hippel, Sekaquaptwa, & Vargas, 1995). For example, Fazio et al. (2000) have studied the effects of accessible attitudes on the perception of object change. They found that participants who were required to rehearse their attitudes about a target person as they examined the target’s photo were less able to detect changes to an altered photo of the target shown to them later in the study. Masuda and Nisbett (2001) have examined the role of cultural systems of thought on visual attention to objects in scenes. They found that Japanese subjects, as more holistic thinkers than Westerners, were more likely to attend to the background setting of an object, whereas Westerners were more likely to attend to the object itself. Such findings suggest that habits of thinking can affect habits of seeing.

Research on categorization is also consistent with the notion that the perception of race is influenced by social processes. Although not focused specifically on social processes, categorization researchers have,

for decades, highlighted the fuzzy, fluid, and context-dependent nature of categories of all types (Goldstone, Medin, & Halberstadt, 1997; Medin, 1989; Medin, Goldstone, & Gentner, 1993; Murphy & Medin, 1985; Rosch, 1978). They argue that category construction is not simply a matter of cataloguing stimulus features; perceivers place objects into categories in part based on their goals (Barsalou, 1982, 1983; Nosofsky, 1986, 1987), mood (Niedenthal, Halberstadt, & Innes-Ker, 1999), and past experiences (Smith & Heise, 1992).

Might *racial* categorization processes similarly reflect perceivers' needs, goals, and beliefs? Insight into this question can be gained from the research of Hirschfeld, who has examined the perception of race among children (Hirschfeld, 1996). Hirschfeld argues that although children certainly notice the physical differences associated with race, they learn about the social significance of racial categories before they learn how to sort individuals on the basis of the physical features thought to signify race. Consistent with Hirschfeld's reasoning, developmental psychologists have long demonstrated that young children (e.g., 4-year-olds) will give more weight to category labels than to perceptual similarities when deciding which objects should be placed into which categories (e.g., Gelman & Markman, 1986).

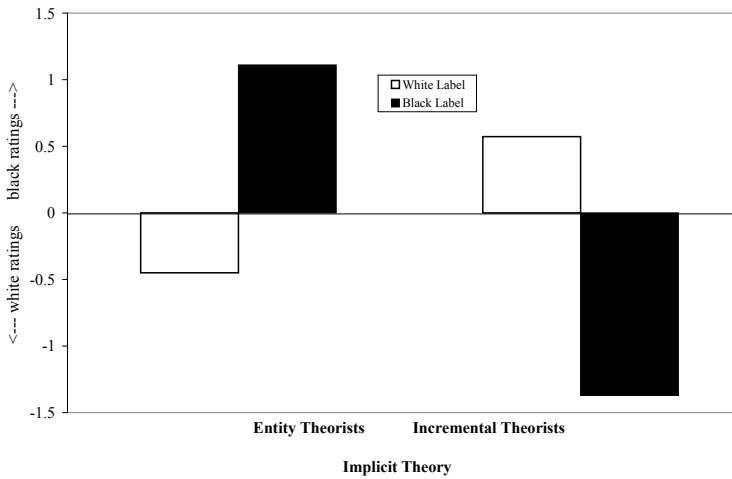


Figure 2. Judges' race judgments as a function of racial label and implicit theory. Drawing data were analyzed by dummy coding the judges' categorization judgments (-1=White, +1=Black) and multiplying these judgments by the judges' confidence (from 1-7) to create a continuous DV ranging from -7 (extremely confident that the drawing is of a White person) to +7 (extremely confident that the drawing is of a Black person). From Eberhardt, Dasgupta, & Banaszyński (2003).

Using an adult population, Eberhardt, Dasgupta, and Banaszynski (2003) recently have shown that racial labels and social beliefs can influence the visual perception of race. Eberhardt and colleagues (2003) exposed entity theorists (i.e., those who believe human traits to be fixed) and incremental theorists (i.e., those who believe human traits to be malleable) to an image of a racially ambiguous target face that was labeled White or Black. In contrast to the New Look studies, participants in this study were asked to draw the image while it remained on the screen for visual inspection. These drawings were then given to naïve judges who attempted to determine whether the face depicted in each drawing was of a Black or a White person. Although both entity and incremental theorists felt that the ambiguous target face did not fit the prototype of how Black and White faces are expected to look, Eberhardt and colleagues predicted that entity and incremental theorists would perceive this target face in dramatically different ways. As predicted, these researchers found that entity theorists were more likely to perceive and thus draw the ambiguous face in line with the racial category label provided, whereas incremental theorists were more likely to draw a face judged to be inconsistent with the racial label (see Figure 2). Social beliefs interacted with racial labels to alter participants' visual perception of race (see Figure 3).

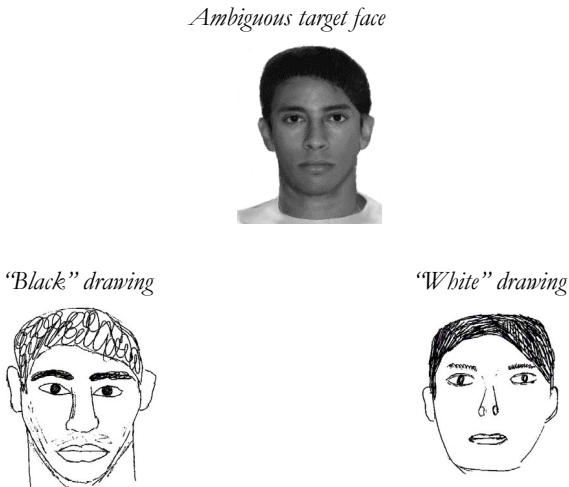


Figure 3. Sample drawings from two participants shown the identical target face. The drawing on the left was produced by an entity theorist in the Black label condition and the drawing on the right was produced by an entity theorist in the White label condition. Reprinted from Eberhardt, Dasgupta, & Banaszynski (2003).

Studies have found that individual differences in racial attitudes lead to differences in the use of race as a categorization tool (Fazio & Dunton, 1997; Stangor et al., 1992). For example, Stangor and colleagues found that highly prejudiced individuals are more likely to attend to race than individuals who are low in prejudice. Racial attitudes also have been shown to affect the speed of racial categorization decisions (e.g., see Blascovich, Wyer, Swart, & Kibler, 1997). Presumably, because individuals high in prejudice are more attentive to and concerned with preserving racial category boundaries than individuals low in prejudice, they take longer to decide how to categorize racially ambiguous targets. This evidence of individual differences suggests that motivational forces can influence the perception and racial categorization of physical features.

Other research has suggested that the primacy of racial categorization processes is based upon functionality. Using the same who-said-what paradigm (Taylor, et al., 1978) that previously had been employed to demonstrate the chronic accessibility of race (Stangor et al., 1992; Hewstone et al., 1992), Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides (2001) reduced the usefulness of racial categorization by exposing participants to targets from coalitional alliances that did not track targets' race or gender. Kurzban and colleagues found that when participants were asked to remember who said what, they tended to make errors based on target coalition rather than race. Within-race mistakes diminished substantially when race was no longer socially meaningful.

Even the neuroscience studies—which arguably provide the strongest support for the view that race perception is primordial—might also be interpreted as consistent with the alternative view. Consider how people categorize racially ambiguous faces. The same face might be categorized as either White or Black depending on the individual perceiver and the circumstances. The interesting neuroscience question, then, would be how the brain would respond to different packages of physical features and racial category labels. For example, would White participants register a racially ambiguous face labeled as White as a same-race face? If the identical face were labeled Black, would White participants register the face as an other-race face? Or, as the Eberhardt et al. (2003) study suggests, would some participants judge the race of a racially ambiguous face in contrast to the racial label? Whatever the specific outcomes, if the racial label exerts any effect on neurophysiological processing, it would be difficult to argue that racial categorization occurs before the activation of beliefs and knowledge about race. Indeed, the fact that the label influences judgments would suggest that racial categorization *only* occurs on the basis of beliefs and knowledge about race. In sum, a growing body of empirical evidence supports the view that judgments of race may be an outcome of social processes, rather than merely their foundation.

Situating the Alternative

The Approach of Other Disciplines

The view of race as an outcome of social processes has been embraced by scholars in fields as diverse as history, anthropology, sociology, political science, American studies, literary studies, legal studies, and cultural studies. Many scholars in these fields view race not as a matter of biological difference reducible to readily apparent physical differences, but instead as an outcome of social (Davis, 1991), cultural (Appiah, 1992), historical (Fields, 1990), legal (Haney-Lopez, 1994) and political processes (Omi & Winant, 1994). These scholars argue that notions of racial difference do not develop even when there are visible, physical differences between people unless there is a context that interprets those differences as meaningful. Conceptions of race provide that context, equipping people to focus narrowly on the specific physical differences (e.g., skin color, hair texture, nose width) that are understood as socially significant. As historian Barbara Fields (1982) comments:

Ideas about color, like ideas about anything else, derive their importance, indeed their very definition, from their context. They can no more be the unmediated reflex of psychic impressions than can any other ideas. It is ideological context that tells people which details to notice, which to ignore, and which to take for granted in translating the world around them into ideas about the world (p. 146).

Scholars have attempted to document the socially constructed nature of race using a variety of groups as examples. For instance, some historians have noted that before the mid-20th century, Jewish Americans were commonly viewed as a separate racial group, physically distinct from White Americans (Gilman, 1998; Jacobson, 1998). After the European Holocaust, however, Jewish Americans became accepted as a White ethnic group in the United States. With this new acceptance, the possibility of detecting Jewish identity on the basis of physical traits was thrown into question (Jacobson, 1998). As the social perceptions of Jewish Americans began to shift, the perception of the physical traits attached to Jews began to shift as well. Changes in the beliefs and attitudes about race produced changes in the visual perception of race.

The Historical Trajectory of Psychology

Our alternative view of the perception of race as an outcome of social processes may also be in keeping with the historical development of social psychology toward ever greater emphasis on the social roots of racial phenomena.

A hallmark of contemporary social psychology is its focus on racial attitudes. Prior to the ascendance of the social cognition approach, researchers explored the sociocultural sources of racial attitudes, and before that their psychodynamic causes. Whereas the sociocultural approach viewed individuals' racial attitudes as an expression of a broader

social and cultural context, the psychodynamic approach attempted to explain differences in racial attitudes on the basis of differences in individuals' intrapsychic conflicts. Much has been written about the similarities and differences of these approaches. The progression from psychodynamic to sociocultural to social cognition is sometimes offered as a history of the social psychological study of race (for a review, see Fiske, 1998).

But this history is incomplete, for it begins after what may be the most monumental transformation within social psychology, the shift that, in fact, made possible the research programs that we associate so intimately with the study of racial attitudes. The predecessors of contemporary social psychologists did not always view racial attitudes as an appropriate object of inquiry. Prior to the 1920s, researchers viewed racial attitudes as instinctual (for a review, see Duckitt, 1992 or Samelson, 1978). Attitudes were treated as reflexes, responses automatically triggered by the object of perception. Antipathies towards Blacks, in particular, were understood to be straightforward, uncontrollable reactions to a backward and inferior group (Duckitt, 1992). This view of attitudes obviated any need to study them. Researchers would, of course, document racial attitudes, but primarily as a way to assess, or as indicators of, the group differences that presumably gave rise to the attitudes. So, rather than investigate the social sources and components of beliefs in Black inferiority, for example, scientists sought instead to document the racial differences that such beliefs were presumed to accurately reflect. The reigning paradigm of the period prompted researchers to frame their explanations of social phenomena not in terms of perceivers, but in terms of the objects of their perception.

Contemporary social psychological researchers might understandably disclaim any connection to those who "documented" racial differences in temperament, intelligence, and promiscuity as a way of explaining racial attitudes. The work of such researchers might be relegated to some netherworld separate and apart from social psychology, or viewed as an era that preceded the genuine embrace of fundamental social psychological principles. While the inclination to disown such research is understandable, there is also something to be gained from recognizing the potential continuity between this work and ours. Situating the shift in researchers' ideas about attitudes not as something that preceded the field, but as an important development in the transformation of the field may yield insight into the assumptions that continue to inform current research about racial stereotyping and prejudice.

The shift toward treating racial attitudes as a focus of study cannot be explained primarily through reference to the internal logic of research models or questions. Rather, to understand this shift requires attention to the ways in which the world outside of psychology (the political world

but also the world of other disciplines) changed during the middle of the previous century (Duckitt, 1992).

During the 1920s and 30s, beliefs about race and racial attitudes began to change (Duckitt, 1992; Samelson, 1978). In the United States, the Black social protest that would culminate in the civil rights movement had begun. In Europe, Hitler assumed power, and promulgated an ideology of Aryan superiority that both relied on and placed in stark relief the assumptions that animated the pre-1920s research on race. During this period, the doctrine of Aryan superiority was not thought to reflect a troubling set of attitudes or beliefs that should be changed or even investigated by social science researchers. Instead, the belief in Aryan superiority represented a straightforward and natural response to the “fact” of racial difference. The Holocaust dramatized the horrific implications of a logic that most early 20th-century people, including the most prominent psychological researchers, had taken for granted. As some commentators have incisively remarked, “Hitler gave racism a bad name.”

Among the many consequences of the re-interpretation of certain racial attitudes as racism was the transformation of social psychology. As Duckitt (1992) states:

Overall, these historical developments seem to have influenced a rapid shift...away from beliefs in White racial superiority and the inferiority of other races. This, however, raised a crucial question. If other races were not inferior, how could their deprivations, and particularly their stigmatization by Whites, be explained (p. 1185).

One possibility was that their deprivation and stigmatization were caused by Whites’ racial attitudes rather than White superiority. As social psychologists began to explore this possibility, they became interested in how Whites came to hold the attitudes they did. What was the root of racial prejudice? As Samelson (1978) notes:

Researchers in a score of studies on prejudice sought the intrapsychic roots of bigotry and intolerance, forgetting that not long ago psychological science had certified the inferiority of the rejected groups....the issue had moved from one pole to the other, from the real race superiority of the Anglo race...to irrational prejudices (p. 269-270).

The rest of the story is well known. Since that monumental shift less than a century ago, social psychologists have employed one method after another to explain any of a multitude of racial attitudes. The underlying theme that links the ostensibly disparate approaches is that they all do view attitudes as an important social psychological phenomenon, not as an unproblematic expression of the recognition of racial difference. That this theme represents a particular approach at all only becomes apparent when one juxtaposes contemporary research questions and those

embraces by the early 20th-century predecessors of current researchers. The focus on attitudes is a defining feature of contemporary social psychological research. It was not always so. Contemporary social psychology has, fortunately, rejected the understanding of racial attitudes that animated pre-1920s research. It was the rejection of that prior assumption that has made possible the field as we know it today.

Nevertheless, social psychology has only rejected one part of the pre-1920s worldview. For researchers of that era did not only view racial attitudes as a pre-social given, they viewed the perception of race that way as well. It is easy to see how these two assumptions work together, and, indeed, how the view of race as some primordial distinction justified and legitimized the view of racial attitudes as a natural, even instinctual, response to the fact of racial difference.

Thus, current research efforts rest upon an asymmetry. We have made attitudes a major focus of inquiry even as we have taken the perception of race for granted. We treat racial attitudes as facts about the perceiver that emerge out of a social context, yet we continue to treat the perception of race as a fact about the object of perception.

Our failure to take a perceiver-centered approach to both the perception of race as well as to racial attitudes does not mean that contemporary social psychologists endorse the views of race embraced by our early 20th-century forebears. Quite the contrary, psychological studies of prejudice and stereotyping are clearly allied with the race-as-social-construction view. Researchers no longer conceive of race as a fundamental biological distinction akin to a subspecies. Instead, they view race as a matter of highly visible physical differences. In an odd way, however, this understanding of race also promotes the view that the perception of race is not itself worthy of study. Just as the 1920s researcher viewed race as an inappropriate object of social psychological inquiry because it represented, simply, a biological reality, contemporary researchers take race for granted because it represents, simply, a superficial physical difference in appearance. If, as the prevailing social psychological assumption posits, race is simply a matter of highly visible physical characteristics, then the perception of an individual's race and the determination of racial groupings would seem a straightforward process, the study of which would offer little benefit to social psychology.

The post-1920s transformation in researchers' views of racial attitudes opened exciting new lines of research whose trajectories could scarcely have been imagined at that time. We contend that emphasizing the social processes involved in the perception of race would benefit social psychology as well. The overriding orientation of such a transformation would be to view the perception of race as an outcome of social psychological processes rather than the starting point. For example, researchers might examine how the activation of racial stereotypes influences the visual perception of race. How might stereotype activation

affect the decision to categorize a racially ambiguous face as White or Black? How might stereotype activation affect how racially unambiguous faces are seen? For example, could it affect people's judgment of the skin tone or nose width of a face perceived as unambiguously Black? Further, might the activation of racial stereotypes determine which faces capture our visual attention at all? Rather than simply manipulate the race of a prime or target to examine the consequences for stereotype activation (as is standard), why not manipulate the accessibility of stereotypes and attitudes to examine the consequences for perceiving and categorizing others by their race? Such an approach would require examining race as a dependent variable as well as an independent variable. It would require approaching social psychological research with an underlying assumption that race is not something we are given; rather, race is something we socially and visually construct.

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