

**BOLSTERING OPPORTUNITY AND PREJUDICIAL EXPECTATION EFFECTS
ON RECALL WHEN APPRAISING PERFORMANCE POTENTIAL**

by

Stephen G. Atkins

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R. J. Harvey, Committee Chair
D. K. Axsom
R. J. Foti
N. M. Hauenstein
M. D. Hughes

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Robert J. Harvey, Chair

(ABSTRACT)

This research program investigated the reasonable possibility that differential information processing strategies can be manifestations of racist prejudgments. Our research design applies a technique often used in social cognition studies. This technique captures evidence of a rather habit-driven (though not instantaneous) decision made by subjects rapidly presented with information about (typically fictional) characters. These target characters are associated (in the context of the experiment) with some form of generalized expectancy (i.e., they are typically presented as a likable or unlikable person). This is accomplished either by creating the expectancy artificially, or by using targets that are members of a conspicuously or notably-stereotyped group. The rather non-conscious decision involved is one of *either* bolstering one's pre-conceived notions *or* engaging in inconsistency resolution (e.g., *either* marshaling evidence to bolster your prejudicial expectation *or* pondering more earnestly those pieces of information which are inconsistent with your expectancy or well-known prejudicial stereotypes).

Typically, the likelihood of pursuing one *strategy* or the other is manipulated in experimental settings by first providing an artificial expectation, then altering the structure of the person-memory task or adjusting the rate of information flow to the subjects. We hoped to reveal how a non-artificial *pre-existing* race-based prejudicial expectancy (of a largely **non-evaluative** as in **non-likable/dislikable** nature) might effect the pursuit of one strategy or the other. By and large, our five hypotheses were not supported. The first and second hypotheses have some visual support (i.e., recall proportions across sentence types start out roughly equal for low prejudicial expectation – PE — subjects then branch out; high PE subjects seem to treat sentence types differently from the start); however, these differences were not statistically significant.

Analysis of the third and fourth hypotheses was confounded because the candidate contaminating covariate failed to have consistent effects. This, coupled with the floor effect of the PE scale, the unexplained (and substantial) variability in recall behavior, and some other control issues (detailed below), made the use of the continuous DVs less than fruitful. The floor effect of the PE scale was especially problematic – with many subjects compressed at this floor, relations would be difficult to see even if present. In an attempt to detect weak effects of prejudice, we aggregated subjects by PE (as in

high and low prejudice). Aggregation probably made the floor effect-driven range restriction less problematic (the subjects lumped together on PE's floor are probably less-afflicted with well-practiced prejudicial expectations than the high half of PE scorers). This exercise generated weak support for the third hypothesis: the time interval data feebly indicates that high PE subjects manifest a negative impression-centered person-memory schema in their storage of sentences about a Black target – and, unlike the low PE subjects, they apparently do this starting with the earliest blocks of sentences.

The median split approach failed to generate support for the fourth hypothesis – where we expected to see bolstering replace inconsistency resolution (in the slow condition) since subjects were afforded the time. There was weak evidence, however, that more inconsistency resolution was occurring in the fast condition. This evidence was in the form of greater recall time interval differences seen when comparing high PE subjects and their schema-speeded versus non-speeded intervals. The bottom line for the first four hypotheses is still this: we failed to create a condition where prejudice would paradoxically favor recall of laudable or admirable inconsistencies associated with a fictitious Black target.

The fifth hypothesis was just intended to verify that racial prejudice does not predict recall behavior when the target is White and so are the subjects. So using a White target, we performed the same sort of tests seen above. Fortunately, relations with PE ranged from weak to very weak – and, of course, were non-significant. In sum, these outcomes suggest that Hastie-Srull associative network (H-SAN) processing *effects* may not reliably manifest themselves in the prejudiced rater/performance appraisal arena — at least not in designs similar to those used previously to illustrate H-SAN effects. There were a few exceptions, however, in our data. Taken together, our results suggest that H-SAN mechanisms may apply when appraising performance potential, but have a difficult time manifesting themselves in substantial ways.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to several important people, without whom this work would not have been possible. Most especially, it is dedicated to my lovely wife and fellow graduate student Erica R. Atkins, who never lost hope that my studies would someday come to a successful end. She put a distinctive sparkle into every day – especially those days when we could share brief moments together on campus. This effort is also dedicated to my chair and psychometrics advisor, R. J. Harvey, my social cognition advisor, Roseanne Foti, my chaplain, Rod Sinclair, and my own cheerleading parents, Harvey and Dorese Atkins. All of these cherished people shared my wife’s undying optimism. For a few years, I thought they were all deluding themselves. I cannot thank them enough for their support. I must also thank my delightful baby daughter – for enlarging the list of reasons I must continually improve my brain and take better care of my body.

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