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White Capital: Ways Racial Stereotypes are Symbolic Systems of Power*

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Abstract

Stereotypes yield maps of distinction that people draw from and apply in interaction. Because these distinctions are hierarchically differentiated, stereotypes are racially unequal. The main question, however, is in what ways are stereotypes inherently unequal and unfair? Drawing from primary data, I first illustrate how stereotypes disproportionately characterize some groups positively and others negatively. In particular, white stereotypes entail many more positive connotations, while stereotypes attached to people of color entail many more negative connotations. A second point I raise is how white stereotypes are more nuanced and complex compared to other groups' stereotypes. Stereotypes attached to people of color, especially blacks and Latinas/os, are more one-dimensional, singular, and monolithic compared to white stereotypes, which are more three-dimensional, plural, and contradictory. Following my analysis, I address what implications this has for the broader context of racial equity. Stereotypes merit analytic attention because they can, and often do, have self-fulfilling prophesies. Through interaction, they are often acted upon and become real in their consequences. When stereotypes represent symbolic assets for whites and liabilities for people of color, the status quo of white privilege can more readily be preserved and a racially just world remains out of reach.

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Almost an academic consensus, race is understood to have no scientific foundation. Rather it is a social construct that is under constant (re)negotiation. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) point out, race knows no fixed boundaries and examples throughout American history indicate that processes of determining who belongs to what racial category depends upon political context. Through historical analysis, George Lipsitz (1998) details processes by which racial boundaries are negotiated in struggles for material attainment. Such boundaries have expanded and contracted to yield racial privileges (or burdens) according to how individuals are classified in race-labeling processes because race is an inclusionary and exclusionary organizing principle that signifies difference (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Omi & Winant, 1994). In contrast to being a fixed category, race can be understood as a process entailing consequences, both material and symbolic, determined by contextual specificity. Amanda Lewis (2003) clarifies:

> Race is about who we are, what we do, how we interact. It shapes where we live, whom we interact with, how we understand ourselves and others. But it does so in specific ways based on our social and historical location. (p. 7)

While race remains a salient predictor of life circumstances and opportunities, it is also a product of interaction between racialized actors and institutions (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Lewis, 2003, 2004; Omi & Winant, 1994). As Lewis (2004) writes, "[Race] is something learned and achieved in interactions and institutions. It is something we live and perform" (p. 629). Despite its predictability value with regard to socioeconomic measures, race is too complex to be exhaustively operationalized as a variable. Rather, it is a process: "race is something we 'do'" (Lewis, 2004, p. 629).

The concept of "doing race," or the production of race in interaction, is not a new one. Race scholars who address it largely draw from feminist works about "doing gender" (e.g, Fenstermaker & West, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987). That is, race scholars borrow parallel concepts from "doing gender" and apply it to "doing race." Because such literature has such a profound influence on my argument below, I will briefly outline some key concepts of "doing gender" as it applies to "doing race."

Feminist scholars point out that "doing gender" is an ongoing interactive process of ascription and achievement (Fenstermaker & West, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Drawing from John Heritage's (1984) notion of accountability, Sarah Fenstermaker and Candace West (2002) contend that gender is expressed in everyday interactions where individuals evaluate how to act and react to others by considering normative gendered characteristics. When acted upon, gendered differences becomes naturalized and reinforced as normative gendered characteristics become both predictors and outcomes of behavior (Fenstermaker & West, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987). When such behavior is inequitable and reiterated, gendered inequalities crystallize

and social structures are consequently (re)produced. Thus, "doing gender" is a process executed by individuals, but it is also a process that simultaneously reaches beyond the scope of individuals. It both draws from and reinforces structures of hierarchal division (Fenstermaker & West, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Adapting the "doing gender" argument to "doing race," I argue that scholars need to take a more critical look at racial stereotypes. After all, stereotypes can often be the normative raced characteristics that people consider when interacting with others in everyday activities. In this way, stereotypes can be self-fulfilling if people act upon them because they become both the predictors and outcomes of behavior (Steele, 1997). When stereotypes are racially unequal, they serve as resources and liabilities for social groups because they can maintain the status quo of racial inequality. In this sense, stereotypes can be conceptualized as a form of capital.

By capital, I mean inequitable social relations and means of servicing power. This interpretation owes heavily to the work of Pierre Bourdieu (see Bourdieu, 1996; Swartz, 1997). Because stereotypes and their connotations are hierarchically differentiated by racial group, they exemplify a symbolic system that can shape differential statuses. My primary argument is that stereotypes represent symbolic assets for whites and liabilities for people of color in two ways. Drawing from primary data in which I asked white respondents to stereotype themselves and people of color, I found that whites are characterized much more positively and pluralistically compared to blacks and Latinas/os. That is, white stereotypes entail many more positive connotations and tend to describe whites in more three-dimensional, plural, and contradictory ways, whereas black and Latina/o stereotypes consistently elicit negative connotations in ways characterizing them as one-dimensional, singular, and monolithic. When stereotypes are differentiated in these ways, they serve as symbolic capital that can be converted in interactions and exchanged for other resources such as economic, cultural, or social capital. Representing symbolic assets and liabilities, racial stereotypes threaten to maintain white racial privilege because they politically function to impose, confer, deny, and approve other capital rewards.

Symbolic Systems and Stereotypes

According to Bourdieu (1977b), symbolic systems politically function as instruments of power because they yield hierarchal distinctions of various groups. This power is exercised when inclusive or exclusive classifications are acted upon, and thus hierarchal divisions are legitimated (Bourdieu, 1977b). For David Swartz (1997), symbolic systems offer a "map of social distinctions to be established between ingroups and outgroups" (p. 87) and in the right settings, symbolic capital can be exchanged for other forms of capital to maintain positions of domination and subordination. However, the possession of symbolic capital does not guarantee automatic benefits of access and resources. Annette Lareau and Erin McNamara Horvat (1999) contend that in order for capital to enforce inegalitarian relationships, it must

be possessed *and* effectively applied in particular contexts. But in the right circumstances, symbolic assets and liabilities can be transformed into other forms of power (Swartz, 1997).

With regard to race, stereotypes represent a symbolic system of power. As Gordon Allport (1954) points out, stereotypes offer distinctive characterizations of each racial group because they yield categories of perceived similarity and difference that overlooks individual variation. Walter Lippman (1922), the journalist who coined the term, contends that stereotypes offer a form of short-hand thinking that people come to rely on when absent of other information. They simplify a cumbersome real world that "is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting, for direct acquaintance" (p. 16). In short, stereotypes provide maps of social distinctions that can guide how someone "does race."

In everyday interactions, race says something about a person. It is, as Omi and Winant (1994) point out, among the first things someone notices when introduced to another person. And this is because race "provide[s] clues about *who* a person is" and guides how someone should intuitively interact (p. 58). It offers unspoken guidelines of behavior. Lewis (2003) expands on this idea as she writes, "Drawing on available information about skin color, facial features, language, and cultural styles, we determine how people we interact with fit into the available racial schemes" (p. 123). Such schemes have structural significance as they not only guide how individuals make racial meaning, but how the racial order crystallizes in everyday interaction (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). The racial order crystallizes because central to the idea of race are issues of sameness or otherness, and a sense of group position (Blumer, 1958).

But how does race offer unspoken guidelines of behavior? A partial answer lies in stereotypes. The power of stereotypes, as Lawrence Bobo (1998) argues, lies in their potential to influence how people perceive and interact with racial insiders and outsiders. In addition, racial stereotypes have the power to influence how people perceive and interact with themselves. Claude Steele (1997) shows that stereotypes often have a self-fulfilling nature. Their mere existence can threaten one's individual identity to conform to one's stereotypical group identity. According to Steele and Joshua Aronson (1995), people of color are placed in a predicament because their stereotypes carry significant social liabilities: If they remotely act in some stereotypical manner then that particular stereotype becomes more plausible not only to others but themselves. Though unreliable, and often distorted, stereotypes can influence racial actors to "do race" based upon false information as though it were true. In this sense, stereotypes become real because they are real in their consequences, and therefore, they merit more analytic attention.

Limitations of Whiteness Studies

Sociological literature is filled with holes when it comes to race, particularly when it concerns whiteness studies. While

these limitations are numerous, I will narrow my focus to three areas. First, whiteness studies remain absent of not only an empirical grounding but a sociological perspective. Second, past and present sociological studies on the general topic of race have followed narrow focus, omitting whiteness from the equation. Third, race scholars must overcome singular notions of race and develop ways of analyzing intergroup differences while accounting for intragroup variations. After surveying each of these problems, I highlight how my study addresses and overcomes these limitations.

If whiteness studies are to have more relevance in the discipline of sociology, then it needs to establish an empirical basis and a sociological perspective. As Ashley Doane (2003) acknowledges, "One major shortcoming of much of the existing literature on whiteness is its lack of empirical grounding" (p. 17). Whiteness studies remain unsubstantiated, and consequently, they are relevant to smaller audiences whose primary concerns are theoretically driven (Hartmann, Gerteis, & Croll, 2009). In addition, most scholars who study whiteness are not from the discipline of sociology. With a few notable exceptions, Margaret Andersen (2003) concludes that such "literature is being written by those in education, legal studies, history, psychology, and literature and by antiracist activists" (p. 22). Without an empirically grounded sociological presence, any sociological understanding of whiteness remains stunted.

Despite the literary richness of the sociology of race, matters of whiteness largely remain unaddressed or addressed in narrow fashion. This is problematic because when matters of whiteness remain silent, as Omi and Winant (1994) argue, scholars diminish the role it plays in (re)producing racialized inequality. As long as this literary absence persists, a holistic, more comprehensive understanding of racial oppression remains out of scope. Because race remains a relational concept, racial groups must be analyzed in context with one another (Blumer, 1958; Feagin & O'Brien, 2003; Lewis, 2004; Omi & Winant, 1994). However, much of the literature does not take this approach. Doane (1997) observes this, especially as it concerns traditional studies, by pointing out how the sociology of race has tended to focus on subordinated groups. While contemporary studies stray from this trend, they remain shortsighted. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Carla Goar, and David Embrick (2006) argue that while many studies are inclusive of how whites view other racial groups, few studies switch these roles and put whites and whiteness at center focus. Further, whites are rarely prompted to turn their focus inward on themselves (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2006; Doane, 1997; Gallagher, 1999). For those who do take this focus, however, the problem of essentializing whites and whiteness must be dealt with.

To avoid essentializing race, race scholars must develop ways to conceptualize whites as a collectivity and whiteness as a collective identity without implying that they share uniform experiences or singular understandings of their race (Lewis, 2004). At its core, essentialism is a fallacy of reductionist thinking (Collins, 2000). It overlooks individual variance within groups,

and instead places primary focus on differences between groups. To overcome convention, race scholars face the complicated task of simultaneously addressing intergroup difference while accounting for intragroup variation. In terms of whites, Lewis (2004) points out that "scholars must contend with the challenge of how to write about what is shared by those racialized as white without implying that their experiences of racialization all will be the same" (p. 623).

Much work remains if the gaps of whiteness studies and the sociology of race are to be filled. In my paper, I address these limitations and attempt to overcome them by seeking to lend more of an empirical basis to whiteness studies and provide a sociological perspective. Drawing upon qualitative data, I show how racial stereotypes serve as symbolic capital (or lack thereof) that can (re)produce inequality through processes of doing race. I do this by placing whiteness at center focus in the context of other racial groups. In other words, I compare and contrast white stereotypes with other groups' stereotypes, all from the vantage point of white participants. Such a focus on stereotypes as symbolic capital sidesteps the problem of race essentialism. I analyze stereotypes assigned to each group, and not the racial actors themselves. Thus, my analysis does not imply that whites share a uniformity of experiences or a singular understanding of race.

Methods

Each study is confined by its own design. In an attempt to minimize methodological limitations, I performed a 9-month pilot study. This exploratory study helped determine which methods were most relevant, and it allowed me to refine them for enhanced effectiveness. My primary goal was to document stereotypes that characterize whites in relation to other groups, all as perceived from white perspectives. To accomplish this task, my central research question was as follows: How do whites stereotype themselves and how do whites stereotype people of color? The pilot study helped me compare different modes of data collection, including open-ended questionnaires and interviews (both semi-structured and structured), and decide which would be most appropriate. After the pilot study, I chose the former mode over the latter.

While structured and semi-structured interviews provided a viable means of answering the research question, my field notes indicated that they also posed considerable concerns. Among these concerns is that race is a publically sensitive topic. During the interview processes, I observed several participants display signs of discomfort and unease. Consider one interview I conducted with a 21-year-old white male respondent from Southeastern, United States. After answering several stereotype-focused questions, his voice became shaky and crackled, and his body movement was unsettled and shifty. When asked to compare and contrast white stereotypes to other groups' stereotypes, the respondent answered the question but immediately followed by saying, "Those questions … well … I feel really racist and guilty from the answers I gave." This reaction was an extreme one among

preliminary participants, but similar, more subtle occurrences happened with numerous other respondents. With such occurrences, I became skeptical of the reliability that interviews could offer in addressing my research question. As Bonilla-Silva (2006) points out, asking questions in the wrong way can capture artificial representations of reality because participants may provide "correct," not "authentic," answers so that their responses reflect public norms. Based on conclusions drawn from the pilot study, I opted to utilize a self-administered, open-ended survey to guard against these concerns.

During the pilot study, open-ended surveys collected consistent data compared to structured and semi-structured interviews. But unlike the interviews, the questionnaires yielded a more discrete, clinical method of obtaining data without placing participants "on the defense." Theoretically, this better permits the gathering of unaltered, censor-free responses. Another approach that helped collect unaltered, censor-free responses is the inclusion of open-ended questions. These prevent respondents from selecting the most appropriate, filtered option (as in close-ended surveys which are multiple choice in nature), and instead prompt independent articulations of the respondent (McDermott, 2006).

Different methods of inquiry are accompanied by inherent strengths and weaknesses. Two central strengths of this study include trustworthiness and transferability. Carol Bailey (2007) contends that in qualitative research, a certain level of trust is required between the researcher and reader. For this study, I attempt to build such trust by acknowledging several research design limitations (e.g. selective inclusion and generalizability). In addition, Bailey (2007) argues that trust is built between reader and writer as qualitative research typically involves more transparency. For instance, decisions made during the research process are included and explained in detail. Ruth Frankenberg (1993) maintains that such inclusion consequently encourages criticism of the logic and reasoning behind the study's design, and it allows greater possibilities for drawing multiple interpretations from what is presented. The other mentioned strength is transferability, which refers to a study's capability to apply its results and conclusions outside the studied population and setting (Bailey, 2007; Stake, 1994). Unlike the generalizing nature of quantitative research, transferability empowers readers to draw their own conclusions and apply them to different settings and broader populations.

The study was conducted at "Semiurban University," located in Southeastern, United States. This choice was motivated by practical and theoretical concerns. Location made this mid-sized university accessible, but this site was chosen for other reasons. The university's student population is racially diverse and reflective of the nation, as reported by the 2000 U.S. Census (see Gallagher, 2007). Such a sampling frame decreases the likelihood of spatial isolation between the various racial groups, and consequently increased the probability of intergroup contact. While no field site is ideal, this

location was selected for these mentioned practical and theoretical advantages.

The sampling method consisted of purposeful selection. Initial contact began by soliciting students from "Semiurban University" at the campus' three most trafficked buildings. I selected these three buildings to expand the sampling frame and increase my probability of tapping a wide range of respondents. To further increase the likelihood of a diversified sampling frame, potential participants were solicited at each site during various times throughout the day (early morning, afternoon, and late evening). Each of these potential participants was solicited on the basis of their racial identity, which was determined by ascription and achievement processes. That is, potential participants were approached if I assumed them to "be white," and then this assumption was verified by asking each respondent to confirm their racial identity in the questionnaire. For a more in-depth profile of the sample population, see Table One.

Racial reactivity, which refers to how the interviewer's and interviewee's racial backgrounds impact data collection, is a longstanding methodological concern (see Hyman, 1954; Merton, 1972; Twine & Warren, 2000). Given that I collected all the data and I am someone who occupies a white racial location (amongst a host of other social locations), this influenced how questions were presented, interpreted, and ultimately answered. I attempted to manage, or at least be introspective about, this reactivity through all phases of the research project (e.g., performing a pilot study, testing multiple modes of data collection, practicing triangulation). It should be noted, however, that racial reactivity does contaminate what data are collected. As Merton (1972) critiqued, this position falsely privies some information and overlooks how racial "insiderness" and "outsiderness" is accommodated by unique sets of advantages and disadvantages. It lends itself to qualitatively different types of answers in qualitatively different types of contexts. The point I am making is that the racial status of the interviewer and interviewee reveals different kinds of knowledge, not superior or inferior kinds, and it testifies to the fact that data is something that is co-constructed by both the researcher and researched.

Data collection spanned four weeks, in which a 60 percent response rate was achieved. My sample size consisted of 20 participants. While this number is not generalizable to the greater white population, the data these participants provided allows for a thorough examination of recurring and divergent themes. To an extent, this data's richness satisfies a point of "saturation." Greg Guest, Arwen Bunce, and Laura Johnson (2006) define this as "the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook" (p. 65). For the purposes of my study, 20 participants were a sufficient sample size to collect a near-exhaustive list of stereotypes.

Table One **Population Profile (n=20)**

Age	Median = 20 yrs	Mean = 20.4 yrs				
Gender	Male = 50%	Female = 50%				
Population Density of Origin	Rural = 50%	Urban = 50%				
Racial Composition of Neighborhood	Segregated / Isolated = 60 %	Somewhat Diverse = 20%	Integrated / Diverse = 20%			
Region of Origin, U.S.	Southeast = 80%	Midwest = 10%	Northeast = 5%	Unknown = 5%		
Household Income (in thousands)	14.9 or below =5%	15-29.9 = 10%	30-44.9 = 15%	45-59.9 = 30%	60-74.9 = 15%	75 or above = 25%

To maintain confidentiality, data was collected in a private university office where each participant was briefed of the study purpose and what it entailed. I provided a consent form to each participant describing the study's general nature including confidentiality, the use of pseudonyms, the voluntary nature of participation, the potential risks and benefits, and a human subject statement. Upon obtaining consent, surveys were administered. After completing data collection, analysis was performed.

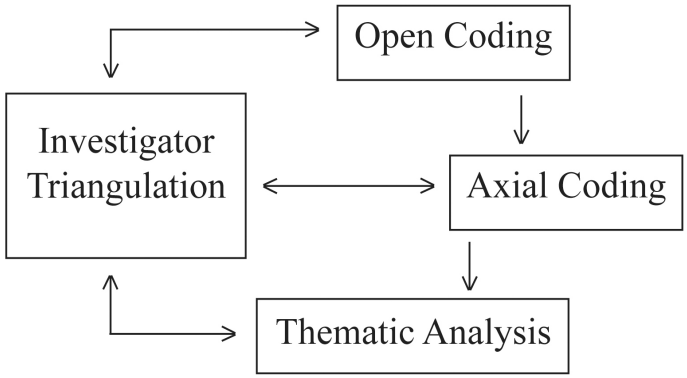
Various analytic techniques were applied including investigator triangulation, open and axial coding, and thematic analysis. Investigator triangulation refers to the inclusion of a supplemental investigator reviewing the collected data (Denzin, 1978). This additional analytic eye lends accountability and prevents the research from reflecting one investigator's bias (Denzin, 1978). It enhances the credibility and execution of analysis. With respect to this study's analytic cycle, I performed open coding, axial coding, and thematic analysis in accordance with the secondary investigator. To see how this process was performed, see Table Two.

Analysis began with open coding. Bailey (2007) describes this type of coding as grounded and performed by repetitively reading the data. In this stage, various stereotype categories were created. Some were self-explanatory and explicitly expressed. For example, one respondent directly said blacks are stereotyped as lazy and poor. Other stereotypes, however, were provided indirectly with respondents providing an example indicative of some stereotype. For example, when asked about Latina/o stereotypes one participant responded, "They'll steal your stereo." This response suggests a larger stereotype of

deviance or criminal-mindedness. Other examples include comments characterizing Arabs or Middle Easterners as: "They treat women poorly" or "The men have multiple wives." Such comments are not explicit stereotypes, but they can be associated with a larger stereotype–"patriarchal culture." As I performed open coding, memos were written to develop nascent stereotype categories. These categories were refined in the following stage of analysis.

Table Two **Model of the Analysis Process**

The graphic below labels the various analytic techniques and the process in which they were performed. Open coding, axial coding, and thematic analysis were applied in sequential order, while investigator triangulation was employed concurrently with all analytic techniques.



Axial coding involves coding the data a second time, but this process involves evaluating the initial coding in addition to the raw data (Mertens, 1998). In this stage, stereotype categories were collapsed and expanded, then given operational precision. For example, when asked about white stereotypes, several participants generalized whites as powerful and dominant. Such responses were accompanied by comments describing whites as rich, wealthy, privileged, and educated. In the open coding stage, these data were coded under a broader category of dominance. However, in the stage of axial coding this category was divided into subcategories, material attainment and cultural dominance, to provide more specificity. In short, this stage operationalized the various stereotype categories and informed the next stage of analysis.

Thematic analysis refers to recognizing common patterns, which are created by identifying similar and overarching responses among the data (Bailey, 2007; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Such common patterns were identified with reference to the operationalized stereotype categories created and refined in the open and axial coding processes. For this study, thematic analysis consisted of color coding the data, thereby identifying and differentiating each constructed stereotype category.

Dominant Stereotypes for Whites and People of Color

My findings are detailed in Tables Three and Four. These tables list each group, their corresponding stereotypes, and a brief clarification of their meanings. These clarifications are summary explanations derived from thematic responses collected from the field. Data were collected detailing stereotypes for a variety of racial groups, but I have selectively juxtaposed white stereotypes with black and Latina/o stereotypes to better illustrate how they fall into broadly distinct patterns. Similar patterns were observed for Asians, Native Americans, and Arabs, but these groups did not elicit nearly as many stereotypes from white respondents compared to the stereotypes offered for blacks, Latinas/os, and whites.

Table Three **Dominant White Stereotypes**

Culturally Dominant and Powerful
: controlling or having great authority over what is considered normative practices, ideas, customs, behaviors, and beliefs

Rich, Wealthy
: being rich and wealthy refers to the dominant position whites hold within the materialized racial hierarchy and possessing assets, both accumulated and accumulating

Normative, American
: considering whiteness as the established authority and standard reference point

Meritocratic
: characterizing whites as harboring qualities of ability, hard work, and determination

Christian, Religious-Minded
: vaguely described, this stereotype synonymously equates whites with being Christians and placing great importance on religiously-minded values

"Redneck," "White Trash"
: broadly defined, this characterization described whites as lacking sophistication, ignorant, "trashy," "cowboys," and simple or closed-minded

Conservative, Traditional, Resistant to Change
: favoring cultural values of modesty and preservation

Prudish, Pretentious
: owning arrogant beliefs of importance and properness, and consequently assuming superiority over other groups

Oppressive towards Other Groups (e.g., prejudice, discrimination, racism)
: repressing other groups through the unjust use of power, position, and authority

In Table Three, nine white stereotypes are listed and arranged in a general hierarchal order. Stereotypes at the top of the table are ones that can be understood to connote symbolic assets, whereas the ones at the bottom tend to connote symbolic liabilities. (Each stereotype's implications, however, varies

according to locally situated contexts. This is discussed in further detail below). These stereotypes range broadly and characterize whites as culturally dominant and powerful, rich and wealthy, "American" and the normative point of reference, religiously-minded Christians, rednecks and white trash, traditional and conservative, prudish and pretentious, and racist towards other groups.

Table Four lists black and Latina/o stereotypes. For each respective group, respondents provided ten distinct stereotypes but some of these are shared by both groups. Stereotypes described blacks as identifying with a loud culture, eating racial-specific foods, practicing deviant and criminal-minded behavior, personifying a "ghetto" or "gangsta" rap lifestyle, living as poor and poverty-stricken, being aggressive and prone to violence, preferring to be lazy and lethargic, subscribing to a dependency mentality, practicing anti-white racism, and lacking intelligence and a sharpness of mind. The dominant stereotypes for Latinas/os characterize them as having a hard work ethic, prioritizing family above all, being culturally and socially insulated, practicing deviant and criminal-minded behavior, without citizenry, exhibiting excessive sexual drive, lacking intelligence and a sharpness of mind, all descending from Mexico, endangering the economic well-being of "Americans," and preferring to be lazy and lethargic.

Table Four **Dominant Black and Latina/o Stereotypes**

Black Stereotypes

Loud Culture
: embodying culture that is intensely loud, such as speaking at high volumes or wearing obnoxiously bright clothing

Eat Racial-ethnic Specific Food
: being predisposed to particular foods (e.g., watermelon, fried chicken), or eating what deviates from "mainstream" staple foods

Deviant, Criminal-Minded
: subscribing to a subversive lifestyle of crime, deviating from accepted social norms and legal codes

"Ghetto," Hip-Hop and "Gangsta" Rap Image
: personifying negative lifestyles portrayed by some recording industries and rap artists, such as the glorification of drugs, violence, and sex

Poor, Poverty-Stricken
: living in socioeconomically disadvantaged situations, being poor or earning low income

Aggressive, Prone to Violence
: practicing dangerous behavior that is aggressive and violent

Lazy, No Work Ethic
: preferring idleness, inactivity, or lethargy; disinclined to work

Dependency Mentality
: electing to live a dependent lifestyle that freeloads off others

Table Four continued **Dominant Black and Latina/o Stereotypes**

Spiteful Towards Whites
expressing anti-white attitudes that are hostile and resentful
Ignorant, Lack Intelligence, Uneducated
lacking a quickness and keenness of mind, characterized by willful ignorance

Latina/o Stereotypes
Hard Work Ethic
laboring diligently with much energy and effort
Familial, Family-Centered
prioritizing family (both immediate and extended members) as life's central commitment, obligation.
Culturally and Socially Isolated or Removed
practicing cultural and social customs secluded from "mainstream" ways of life (e.g., speaking Spanish, working "Latina/o-only" jobs, and self-segregating through housing choices)
Deviant, Criminal-Minded
subscribing to a subversion lifestyle of crime, deviating from accepted social norms and legal codes
Illegal Immigrants
lacking the status of citizenry due to unlawful migration to the United States
Ignorant, Lack Intelligence, Uneducated
lacking a quickness and keenness of mind, characterized by willful ignorance
Oversexualized
exhibiting excessive sexual drive, related to loose ethics and hyper-femininity/masculinity
All of Mexican Origin
descending from Mexico, every Latina/o
Economic Threat
endangering "Americans'" economic well-being with job competition and draining social services
Lazy, No Work Ethic
preferring idleness, inactivity, or lethargy; disinclined to work

How Stereotypes are Symbolic Assets and Liabilities

In what ways do racial stereotypes serve as symbolic assets and liabilities? Below, I address this question by focusing on two ways in which stereotypes are racially unequal. First, I discuss how stereotypes disproportionately characterize some groups in ways that symbolically privilege some groups over others. Because whites are more frequently characterized by stereotypes that confer socially desirable attributes, they represent symbolic assets to white group members. Black and Latina/o stereotypes, on the other hand, more frequently characterize these groups with stigmatizing attributes that represent a social liability to these group members. Second, I highlight how white stereotypes are more

nuanced compared to other groups' stereotypes. That is, black and Latina/o stereotypes are more one-dimensional, singular, and monolithic compared to white stereotypes, which are more three-dimensional, plural, and contradictory. Below, each of these themes is explained in more depth.

Stereotypes cannot be reduced to mere generalizations that entail neutral descriptions of a particular group. In contrast, they carry much more meaning. Eleanor Rosch (1978) contends stereotypes have connotations that often reflect positively or negatively upon a given group, and such connotations are often axiomatic and possess readily recognizable meanings. Stereotypes in action, however, manifest in much more fluid and dynamic ways than Rosch's theory suggests. Stereotypes are better conceptualized as symbolic capital, because their meanings are contingent upon the localized context. They change depending upon the situation and the people involved, but they nonetheless have the ability to confer or deny other social, economic, and cultural rewards.

Consider some of the above-mentioned stereotypes for example. When whites are stereotyped as rich and wealthy, it is reasonable for such attributes to be highly valued in many contexts, which can then be seen as an asset. Whereas blacks are stereotyped as deviant and criminal-minded, it is reasonable for such attributes to hold little to no value or even considered a debt in the mainstream society and thus a liability. These stereotypes, however, do not carry static connotations that can be applied universally. For instance, stereotypes associating blacks with hip-hop or "gangsta" rap images could have damaging consequences in a job interview conducted by a white human resource manager (mainstream), but this same stereotype could yield entrée in interactions amongst peers. Connotations assigned to stereotypes are dynamic. They depend upon the situation and involved racial actors, and therefore any comparison of stereotypes is more heuristic than definitive. Despite these situational discrepancies, it is reasonable, though simplistic, to conclude: Some stereotypes are "assets," others are "liabilities," and some have better or worse consequences than others. In other words, racial stereotypes are not equivalent.

The values associated with stereotypes disproportionately describe some groups with symbolic benefits and other with symbolic liabilities. This is significant because it marks hierarchal differences in which whites are characterized by more desirable stereotypes and people of color are labeled otherwise. Consider the following point: Being stereotyped as culturally dominant, wealthy, normative, meritocratic, and religiously-minded (all of which are white stereotypes) can generally provide greater social benefits and more public deference than being stereotyped as deviant, culturally detached, ignorant, and lazy (all of which are Latina/o stereotypes) or as criminal-minded, "ghetto," poor, violent, lazy, dependent, and ignorant (all of which are black stereotypes).

While whites are more frequently stereotyped with socially desirable

attributes, it is worth noting that several white stereotypes diverge from this trend. Consider being stereotyped as "white trash" or oppressive toward other groups for instance. The connotations these elicit are hardly desirable attributes, and therefore can constitute symbolic liability. Other white stereotypes present inconsistent characterizations of whiteness. Consider the stereotypes of being prudish to being morally-minded Christians, or being rich and wealthy to being uneducated or unsophisticated. Implications of these juxtaposed stereotypes are contrasting and counter-intuitive. In this way, white stereotypes are more pluralistic and contradicting compared to other groups' stereotypes.

Unlike whites, blacks and Latinas/os are described in a more singular and monolithic manner. Consider the listed black stereotypes for example. They include being deviant, "ghetto," poverty-stricken, violent, lazy, loud, racist, ignorant, and having a dependency mentality. These black stereotypes do not counter or contradict each other in the same manner that white stereotypes do. Whereas black stereotypes tend to overlook the variations within each of these groups, the pluralistic and contradictory nature of white stereotypes prevents whites from being characterized in a one-dimensional manner. Instead, white stereotypes are sub-group references, whereas black and Latina/o stereotypes are blanket generalizations of the group. In this sense, stereotypes undermine singular notions of whiteness while crystallizing monolithic notions of race regarding groups of color.

Future Directions of Inquiry

Stereotypes are racially unequal because they privilege whites, while demarcating others. Thus, stereotypes represent white capital that can be drawn upon as a resource and converted in interaction to preserve racial dominance. It is central to processes of "doing race," which is about interactive processes of achievement and ascription, because stereotypes yield maps of distinction that people can draw from and apply in exchanges with others and one's self. These maps of distinction can maintain status differentials because stereotypes are racially unequal. Each group faces varying degrees of privilege and burden, but it is virtually inarguable that whites are most privileged by stereotypes on two counts: White stereotypes more frequently connote socially desirable attributes, and their pluralistic, multidimensional character lends more room for intragroup variation among whites. Unlike most black and Latina/o stereotypes, white stereotypes serve as symbolic assets that can be transformed to impose, confer, deny, and approve other capital rewards in everyday interaction.

Stereotypes preserve white privilege. This is because stereotypes' symbolic meanings become real when they are acted upon, thereby transforming them into concrete, tangible racial consequences. Therefore, I problematize stereotypes because they entail consequences that can further crystallize differentiated racial statuses by reinforcing each group's hierarchal location. In closing my argument, there are a number of questions to be further

addressed: In what context is white capital established? And what methods can we, as sociologists, come up with to measure these processes of racism? Much work remains if these questions are to be answered, and these questions need to be taken up by others if racial oppression is to be better understood. After all, understanding a problem is an initial step towards addressing it.

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