BLACK, NEGRO, OR AFRO-AMERICAN?
The Differences Are Crucial!

HALFORD H. FAIRCHILD

University of California, Los Angeles

Race names have long been associated with the development and maintenance of racial attitudes. Indeed, when the first Europeans "discovered" Africa and Africans, they were quick to label Africans "black" because this term maximized the perceived differences between African and European (Jordan, 1968). In this connection, Jordan (1968) and others (e.g., Longshore, 1979) have noted the long history of the negative connotations associated with the color black in the English lexicon. Similarly, the English language has a large number of positive connotations associated with the color white.

Several researchers have argued that these positive and negative connotations are influential in the evaluative favorability/unfavorability of the groups who have been associated

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This article was presented at the annual convention of the National Association of Black Psychologists, Denver, Colorado, August 1981. Correspondence should be addressed to Halford H. Fairchild, Department of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90024. This research was supported in part by a grant from the UCLA Academic Senate.

JOURNAL OF BLACK STUDIES, Vol. 16 No. 1, September 1985 47-55
© 1985 Sage Publications, Inc.
with these racial labels (e.g., Fairchild and Cozens, 1981; Longshore, 1979; Longshore and Beilin, 1980; Lessing and Zagorin, 1972; Williams, et al., 1971).

Research in racial and ethnic attitudes has well documented the fact that one's attitude toward a particular racial group is, in part, a function of the racial or ethnic label associated with that group. This is especially important in light of the recent changes in ethnic designations as a result of “minority consciousness” movements. There has been a “Negro-to-Black conversion experience” (Cross, 1978, 1980; Hall et al, 1972); Mexican-Americans have become more politically sensitive “Chicanos”; and Asians have experienced a movement of “Yellow power” and “Asian” identity (Kurokawa, 1971).

The notion that these racial names may have an impact on stereotyping behavior was suggested in an early study by Katz and Braly (1935), who argued that stereotypes are invoked by the “imaginary individual of nasty character” that is symbolized by the ethnic label. Campbell (1967) also suggested that ethnic labels that “enhance the contrast” between groups can affect the favorability of attitudes and stereotypes.

Several studies have examined the attitudinal differences in response to “Black” stimulus objects versus “Negro” stimulus objects. Early studies indicated that both black and white subjects evaluated “Negroes” more positively than “Blacks” (see Longshore, 1979, for a review), although more recent evidence has suggested that these differences have diminished (Longshore and Beilin, 1980). At the same time, some research has documented that the Black Consciousness Movement has had a positive impact on black subjects' conceptions of “Blacks” (Lessing and Zagorin, 1972; Longshore, 1979; Williams et al., 1971).

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the attitudinal responses of white subjects to the terms “Black,” “Negro,” and “Afro-American.” It was hypothesized that higher percentages of subjects would select negative traits for Blacks than for Negroes or Afro-Americans; and that higher percentages of subjects would select positive stereotypes for Afro-Americans than for Negroes or Blacks. It was also hypothesized that these race labels would affect the overall number of traits selected by subjects. In this respect, it was felt that these race names would differentially affect the amount of stereotypic responding. More specifically, it was hypothesized that subjects would report more negative stereotypes to Blacks than to Negroes or Afro-Americans, and that these subjects would report fewer positive stereotypes to Blacks than to Negroes or Afro-Americans.

**METHOD**

**SUBJECTS**

Subjects were 119 white university undergraduates who volunteered to participate in a study entitled, “Attitudes About Self and Other.” Students received partial credit toward an Introductory Psychology requirement of six hours of psychological experimentation. Of the sample, 41% were female.

**MATERIALS**

In the context of the larger attitude survey, subjects were administered the Katz and Braly (1933) stereotype measure. Here, subjects reviewed a list of 84 adjectives and wrote down those that they felt to be generally descriptive of the ethnic/racial group in question. In addition, subjects were asked to check the five traits that they felt were “most typical” of the ethnic/racial group.

**PROCEDURE**

Subjects were randomly divided into three groups. Group One (n = 40) responded to the stereotype measure with
TABLE 1

Percentage Selecting Traits Across Race Labels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Blacks (40)</th>
<th>Negroes (39)</th>
<th>Afro-Americans (33)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambitious</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrogant</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruel</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frivolous</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorant</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrious</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>30.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lazy</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quick-tempered</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rude</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sassy</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talkative</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Numbers in parentheses are n's used in the analyses, which vary due to differential response rates.
a. p < .05.
b. p < .01.

"Blacks" as the target group; Group Two (n = 40) had "Negroes" as the target group; and Group Three (n = 39) had "Afro-Americans" as the target group.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents several of the most frequently selected stereotypes for Blacks, Negroes, and Afro-Americans. Al-

though many of the differences in selection rates (frequencies) were not significant, many were in the anticipated direction: Blacks were more frequently stereotyped with negative traits, Afro-Americans less so. Of the significant differences (by the Chi-square test), the data indicated that Blacks were more frequently viewed as lazy, loud, and rude; Afro-Americans were least likely to be ascribed these characteristics. Also, Afro-Americans were more frequently described as talkative, relative to Negroes and Blacks.

In order to examine the rate of stereotypic responding by these subjects, each subject's questionnaire was coded in terms of the number of negative, neutral, and positive traits selected. This was done by assigning a positive, neutral, or negative valence to each of the 84 adjectives in the Katz and Braly (1933) list. These valence assignments were based upon the judgments of six graduate students and the author (lack of unanimity in judgment resulted in a neutral assignment). These data were then subjected to a one-way analysis of variance (anova) to examine the significance of the observed differences among the three groups. These results are summarized in Table 2.

As can be seen, subjects reported a larger number of positive traits to describe Afro-Americans than to describe Negroes or Blacks, although the mean differences were small and not
statistically significant. No appreciable differences emerged among the three groups with respect to the mean number of neutral adjectives selected. In contrast, students differed in the number of negative traits selected to describe Blacks (6.55), Negroes (5.85), and Afro-Americans (4.25), with an F (2, 108 df) of 3.183 (p < .05).

**DISCUSSION**

Whites' selection of race names for African peoples was originally intended to separate the European races from the African (Jordan, 1968). In addition, their use of the term "black" was a deliberate attempt to demean, subjugate, and dehumanize Africans in that it capitalized on a large set of negative connotations within the English language. The fact that this term is related to the maintenance of attitudinal hostilities received additional support in the results reported above.

White subjects were more likely to describe Blacks as loud, lazy, and rude, and were least likely to describe Afro-Americans in these ways. Several indications supported the first hypothesis—that Afro-Americans would be more favorably stereotyped than Negroes, and Negroes would be more favorably stereotyped than Blacks.

Of course, these data must be viewed with a degree of tentativeness because of capitalization on chance. With 84 possible Chi-square contrasts, the probability of obtaining "significant" relationships is substantial, even through chance factors alone. Additional support for the hypotheses, however, was obtained in the anovas that examined the number of positive, neutral, and negative stereotypes that the subjects made. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that the significant effects were only for the number of negative stereotypes, although nonsignificant trends in the number of positive stereotypes were in the predicted direction. This suggests that the race-label manipulation primarily affected the rate of negative stereotyping.

These results were predicted because it was the Europeans who derived most of the current term for naming Africans and Africans in the Americas. Thus it is no coincidence that many of the race names associated with Black Americans can be seen to be derived from the same Latin origin. In Latin, the term is niger; in Spanish and Portuguese it is negro; and in English it is black. In this way, it is clear that the "Negro-to-Black" conversion is really a change in one European-based language to another rather than a change in underlying constructs. In this connection, it is important to note that early black Nationalists were concerned with the negative connotations of "Black," and preferred the term "Negro." Marcus Garvey, for example, campaigned for an adoption of the term "negro" (rather than "black") because it connoted more dignity and respect (Tolbert, 1980).

It is also important to note that current race naming by Whites remains derogatory. The popular adoption of the term "minority" is a case in point. Here, the term minority is an obvious grouping of millions of diverse individuals into a single category. In this way, the term minority discriminates against the individuals to whom it is applied precisely because it is used indiscriminately to describe them. In addition, Gett (1981) pointed out that is derived from the root word "minor," and connotes an inferior role and importance. Even more biases may be seen in the term "nonwhite," which establishes "white" as the relevant frame of reference.

This research has important implications for the selection of race names by black Americans. Currently, "Black" is in, and the "Negro-to-Black" conversion is important and significant, especially as it relates to the underlying identity and consciousness of black people. Despite these positive advances, however, black Americans remain somewhat schizophrenic (multiple personality is a better analogy) when it comes to using own-race descriptors and labels. Currently in use are the terms
"Black" (capitalized or uncapsulated, which is an important issue in its own right), “Afro-American,” “African-American” (hyphenated or unhyphenated), “Negro,” "colored," "nigger" (although often used as a term of endearment according to Gettone, 1981), and so on. Several of these terms are really identical, except for a translation from one European-based language to another, as noted earlier.

Of the above terms, only “African-American” seems appropriate. Adoption of this term would serve at least four purposes. First, it would remove the ambiguity of the capitalization/noncapitalization issue. Second, it would formalize the “African Connection” and, perhaps, increase a consciousness in Pan-Africanism. Third, it could serve to attenuate whites’ attitudinal hostilities (although their behavioral hostilities are an entirely different question; see Longshore and Beilin, 1980, in this connection). Finally, it may serve to add dignity and self-respect to the people who adopt and use the term, with consequent effects on psychological well-being.

REFERENCES


Halford H. Fairchild received his Ph.D. in Social Psychology from the University of Michigan. He is currently an Associate Professor of Psychology at UCLA and a Faculty Associate with UCLA’s Center for Afro-American Studies. He has recent publications in the Western Journal of Black Studies, the Journal of Social Issues, and the Review of Public Data Use.