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Race and Perceptions of Nonprescription Stimulant Use

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Abstract

We analyzed the relationship between the perceived ethicality of nonprescription stimulant use, the situation it is taken in, and the role of the race of the person taking it. Ninety-seven participants were randomly assigned to a stereotypical Black name and a stereotypical White name. All participants read the same scenarios of a person engaging in nonprescription stimulant use in a social situation and an academic situation. Results revealed a significant difference between the participant's ratings, such that the stereotypical Black name was rated lower in approval than stereotypical White name. There was not a difference between the approval ratings of the academic situation and the social situation. However, there was an interaction, such that the stereotypical White name was rated higher in approval in the academic than the social situation, while there was not a difference between the stereotypical Black name and academic and social situation.

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Race and Perceptions of Nonprescription Stimulant Use

On college campuses throughout the United States, nonprescription stimulant use is growing to be a pressing issue (Bossaer et al., 2013). One study that followed 1,253 college students from their freshman year to ³their senior year found that 31% of their participants engaged in nonprescription stimulant use at least once during the duration of the study (Garnier-Dykstra et al., 2012). Because of its commonality, it is vital to investigate the factors that relate to the perception and rationalization of nonprescription stimulant use.

How people justify using a non-prescribed drug can depend on the situation (Dodge et al., ¹⁴2012, Lookatch et al., 2014, Pfund et al., 2018). Perceptions of nonprescription stimulant use are positively correlated with commonality. People are ⁷more likely to report lifetime and past year NPSU if they perceive NPSU as more common (Pfund et al., 2018). Further, NPSU is positively related to its perceptions of ethicality. People are ⁷more likely to report past use if they do not perceive using unprescribed Adderall as cheating (Pfund et al., 2018). Though many studies have examined the factors related to the perceptions of nonprescription stimulant use, they have failed to consider how race plays a role in the perceptions of nonprescription stimulant use. In our study, we investigate how race affects the perceptions of ethicality in NPSU on a college campus. College campuses around the United States are actively trying to reduce racial biases and stereotypes, so it seems necessary to evaluate whether someone's race can determine how students perceive nonprescription drug use.

Negative Effects of Racial Stereotypes

Implicit bias concerning racial stereotypes has a substantial negative effect on African Americans (¹⁹Beckett et al., 2006; Biernat et al., 2009; Burtson et al., 1995; Klement & Siggins, 2001). Burtson et al. (1995) asked participants to imagine what they saw as a stereotypical drug

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user, to which 95% of participants responded that they imagined the stereotypical drug user as African American. Likewise, arrest records reveal that a disproportionate number of African Americans are imprisoned for drugs compared to Whites in America (Beckett et al, 2006; Kennedy, 2003; Klement & Siggins, 2001). One study focused in Seattle found that Whites deliver the majority of hardcore drugs such as methamphetamine, cocaine, and heroin, and Blacks deliver only one primary hardcore drug, crack. However, Blacks are disproportionately arrested for such crime. Data shows that 64% of those arrested for a hardcore drug crime are Black, while the majority of those delivering the drugs are White (Beckett et al., 2006). This finding suggests implicit prejudice plays a larger role in public perception, not factual statistics.

Negative African American Stereotypes in Academia

There is also a well-known negative stereotype of African Americans in academia, such that they are viewed as less intelligent than their White colleagues (Biernat et al., 2009; Reid, 2010). Reid (2010) evaluated how African American professors are rated more negatively than White professors on RateMyProfessor.com at twenty-five highly ranked liberal arts universities. The reviews reported the Black professors were rated significantly lower in clarity, helpfulness, and quality than their White counterparts.

The "shifting standards" effect is the idea to which a person's standards of judgment can conform to their preconceived stereotype of what they are evaluating (Biernat et al., 2009). Biernat et al. (2009) ran three studies where judges assessed the academic strength of Black and White students through ACT scores and what they personally viewed as a better performance. The judges found that the White students performed better on the actual ACT scores, but due to their "shifting standards," the judges had a lower standard for Black students, rating their

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performance as higher than White students. Black individuals are seen as less intelligent and academically capable than Whites.

Ethicality of Non-Prescription Stimulant Use

Research indicates a racial discrepancy in ¹⁷nonmedical prescription stimulant use, such that ¹⁴nonmedical stimulant use is higher among White males than any other race (McCabe et al., 2005; Pilkinton & Cannatella 2012; Oluwoye et al., 2017). Several researchers have examined the role of motivations and perceived ethicality behind nonprescription stimulant use, finding that when NPSU is for academic performance it is perceived as less negative than any other motivation (Dodge et al., 2012, ¹⁴Lookatch et al., 2014, Pfund et al., 2018). One study examined student's perception of ethics relating to misuse of unprescribed stimulants, specifically testing collective student approval ratings in ⁷a hypothetical situation in which a student took an Adderall to study for a test, or another student took steroids for athletic purposes. The results found that even when participants themselves did not engage in misuse of stimulants, they viewed the person who took the Adderall in the academic situation as more rational and saw it advantage to get ahead rather than the athletic situation (Dodge et al., 2012). In our study, we seek to expand on the situation in which the vignette uses Adderall. ⁷Research is needed to evaluate the relationship between common undergraduate NPSU acceptance and race of those commonly accepted.

Although past research focuses on the correlation between demographics, like gender, age, and race but fails to focus on the implicit racism in perceived nonprescription stimulant use (McCabe et al., 2005; Pilkinton & Cannatella 2012; Oluwoye et al., 2017). Previous research focuses on how African Americans have been negatively affected by racial drug stereotypes and how it can extend to other forms of drugs (Beckett et al., 2006; Burtson et al., 1995; Klement &

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Siggins, 2001). However, current research fails to investigate the relationship between the perceived ethicality of nonprescription stimulant use and the race and intention of those engaging in the behavior. We hypothesized that participants would be more likely to highly rate their approval of NPSU: (a) when NPSU was consumed in the academic situation instead of the social situation, (b) when NPSU was consumed by a White participant instead of a Black participant. We also predicted that when the participants ¹ read the academic scenario, their approval ratings would be significantly higher when presented with a stereotypical White name versus a stereotypical Black name.

Method

Participants

Participants originally included 107 participants, however we removed 9 participants because they ¹⁶ did not correctly identify the race of the stereotypical White or Black name. Participants included 98 students from Birmingham-Southern and volunteers from a website called Prolific (57 female, 36 male, 5 transgender/ non-binary; 2% Native American or Alaskan Native, 11.2% Asian, 10.2% Black, 67.3% White, 6% Multi-racial, 2% other, 1% not disclosed) who participated in exchange for course credit in their introduction to psychology class, or in exchange for money.

Stereotypical Racial Name

The manipulation of the stereotypical Black or White name was gathered from a study where participants examined Florida birth certificates and determined their race based on the name on the certificate (Barley & Lahey, 2018). Barley & Lahey (2018) found many different names associated with race, but for the relevance of our study, the results found that Cody was rated as White by participants and Deshawn was rated as Black.

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Materials and Procedure

Participants were given a link to our survey and completed it on their own electronic device. Participants were randomly assigned to either the stereotypical Black name condition, or the stereotypical White name condition. Within each race condition, Ps read two different scenarios wherein the target uses Adderall. The order of the scenarios was randomized. In one scenario, Cody (stereotypical White name) or Deshawn (stereotypical Black name), uses Adderall to let loose at a party. Thus, the situation was intended to depict use within a social setting. In the other scenario, participants read that Cody or Deshawn consumes Adderall to complete his biology 101 lab assignment, which is particularly important because it is worth 25% of his grade, and he is struggling in the class. After each scenario, participants rated the appropriateness of the drug use on a scale that ranged from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Specifically, Ps answered four questions as follows:

1. His use of the non-prescription stimulant in this situation is wrong.
2. I approve of his use of the non-prescription stimulant in this situation.
3. If I were I this situation I would engage in the same behavior.
4. I believe his use of the non-prescription stimulant in this situation may be unfair to others.

As a manipulation check, participants were then asked what they thought the race was of the person consuming the stimulant (Black, White, or other). Participants then completed demographic questions, including if they consumed stimulants in the past year, and if they have a prescription for stimulants. Finally, participants were debriefed at the end.

Results

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We first reverse coded two measurements (viewing the stimulant as wrong and viewing the stimulant as unfair) such that the higher values indicated higher approval of NPSU. A reliability analysis regarding the approval of the NPSU in the social situation revealed high internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .783$, as did the four-items within the academic setting (Cronbach's $\alpha = .852$). Therefore, we computed a single composite average of the four items for each scenario.

¹We ran a 2 x 2 mixed ANOVA with scenario being a within-subjects factor, and race being a between-subject factor to test our hypothesis that participants would approve of the use of the stimulant in the academic scenario significantly more than they will approve of the social scenario. However, there was not a significant main effect for the situation ⁵the Adderall was taken in, such that participants rated their approval of NPSU ⁵in the academic situation ($M = 2.61$; $SD = 1.57$) similarly to ⁵the social situation ($M = 2.45$; $SD = 1.40$), $F(1, 96) = .213$, $p = .645$.

We also hypothesized that participants who read the scenarios with the stereotypical Black name would approve of the stimulant use significantly less than participants who read the scenarios with a stereotypical White name. Consistent with our hypothesis, there was a main effect for the race of the imagined person taking the Adderall, such that participants rated their approval of NPSU with the stereotypical White name, Cody, as higher ($M = 2.80$; $SD = .167$) than the stereotypical Black name, Deshawn, ($M = 2.28$; $SD = 1.81$), $F(1, 96) = 4.45$, $p = .038$, 95% CI [.31, 1.008], Cohen's $d = 0.40$.

¹Finally, we hypothesized that ¹when the participants read the academic scenario, their approval ratings ¹would be significantly higher when presented with a stereotypical White name versus a stereotypical Black name. In the same way, when the participants read the partying scenario, ¹their approval ratings will be significantly higher if the name is stereotypically White

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versus stereotypically Black. There was a significant interaction between the situation the Adderall was consumed in and the race of the individual consuming it, $F(1, 96) = 7.066$, $p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .069$. Simple effects analyses revealed that when the individual had a stereotypical Black name, there was not a significant difference between approval ratings for nonprescription stimulant use between the academic situation ($M = 2.11$; $SD = 1.35$) and the social situation ($M = 2.45$; $SD = 1.40$), $p = .139$. However, when the individual had a stereotypical White name, there was a significant difference in approval ratings for nonprescription stimulant use, such that the stereotypical White name was rated higher in approval ratings in the academic situation ($M = 3.04$; $SD = 1.64$) than the social situation ($M = 2.56$; $SD = 1.29$), $p = .023$, 95% CI [.065, .0]

Discussion

As hypothesized, participants rated their approval ratings of the White stereotypical name “Cody” as higher than the stereotypical black name “Deshawn.” However, our hypothesis was not congruent with the situation in which the person took the stimulant. There was no difference between the ratings of the academic situation and ratings of the social situation. Additionally, we hypothesized ratings would be significantly higher when presented with a stereotypical White name versus a stereotypical Black name. In the same way, when the participants read the partying scenario, their approval ratings will be significantly higher if the name is stereotypically White versus stereotypically Black. However, our results indicates that the stereotypical black name had no difference between the social situation and the academic situation, while the stereotypical White name was rated higher in approval for academic situation than the social situation. In the remainder of this discussion, the following will be evaluated: consistencies in research and divergences, limitations of our study, and implications for future research.

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Our findings are consistent with motivating factors of nonprescription stimulant use. Previous research has noted that NPSU for academic purposes is viewed as more ethical than NPSU for other purposes (Dodge et al., 2012, Lookatch et al., 2014, Pfund et al., 2018). Specifically, our study expands upon the situation in which stimulants are used. In the imagined stereotypical White name scenario, participants rated the academic scenario as more ethical than the social scenario.

Moreover, our findings are also consistent with the idea that African Americans are judged more harshly for drug use than White Americans. Previous research found that more African Americans are arrested for drug use than White Americans, despite the fact that there are more White drug users than African Americans (Beckett et al., 2006; Kennedy, 2003; Klement & Siggins, 2001). In our study, we found a significant difference between the stereotypical White name scenario, such that participants viewed NPSU in the academic situation as more ethical than the social situation. However, in the stereotypical Black name scenario, participants did see any situation with NPSU as ethical. The difference in the participants' perceptions of NPSU demonstrates the implicit bias that remains in the college community today.

Further, our findings expand on prejudice against African Americans in the field of academia. One study found how African Americans are expected to perform worse on ACT scores, so they expected less from them (Biernat et al., 2009). This expectation is known as the shifting standard's effect. However, our study was not consistent with this effect because the participants in our study did not have lower standards for African Americans, which gave them an advantage, but they judged them more harshly, giving them less lead way to participate in nonprescription stimulant use. In the imagined stereotypical Black name scenario, there was no difference between NPSU for the social or the academic situation.

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The main limitation in our study was the lack of diversity in our sample. Our sample was 67% White. It is unknown whether our results would generalize to a more diverse population. Additionally, our participants were gathered from a convenient sample, so it is not representative of all Birmingham-Southern student's perceptions of NPSU.

Future research is needed to expand upon our findings that African Americans are judged more harshly for using a nonprescribed drug than White Americans. Manipulating the situation in which the drug is used would also be interesting to evaluate. Importantly, researchers could change the drug in the scenario to see if our findings expand beyond NPSU to other controlled substances like Xanax.

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