DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 357 301                                          CG 024 851

AUTHOR          Belansky, Elaine S.; Coleman, Lerita M.
TITLE           Predicting Reconstructive Errors: The Role of Stigma
                in Women.
PUB DATE        Aug 92
NOTE            10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the
                American Psychological Association (100th,
                Washington, DC, August 14-18, 1992).
PUB TYPE        Reports - Research/Technical (143) --
                Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE      MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS     *Cognitive Processes; College Students; *Females;
                Higher Education; Memory; *Recall (Psychology); *Self
                Concept
IDENTIFIERS     *Stigma

ABSTRACT
        In the face of discrimination and oppression, women
have utilized self-protective strategies to maintain a positive sense
of self. These strategies include attributing negative feedback, when
possible, to discrimination rather than to the self. The present
study expands understanding of the relationship between stigma and
cognitive processes by focusing on reconstructive memory. Female
undergraduate students (N=34) completed the Women and Stigma Scale.
One week later, subjects read and recalled a story about a female job
candidate which included some positive and negative comments about
her academic credentials. Regression analyses indicated that as
expected, the more stigmatized a woman is, the more negative versus
positive reconstructive errors she makes when recalling a story about
a job applicant. This study has serious implications for how
stigmatization can negatively affect a woman's way of viewing the
world. Highly stigmatized women tend to reconstruct more negative
pieces of information about a female job applicant than those women
who are destigmatized. Future research will explore how this
phenomenon might extend to information processing about the self.
(ABL)

Predicting Reconstructive Errors:

The Role of Stigma in Women

Elaine S. Belansky & Lerita M. Coleman

Department of Psychology

University of Colorado

Boulder, CC 80309-0345

Paper presented for the Convention of the

American Psychological Association, Washington, D.C., August, 1992.

2

Abstract

The present study expands our understanding of the relationship between stigma and cognitive processes by focusing on reconstructive memory. Thirty four female undergraduate students each completed the Women and Stigma Scale (Belansky & Coleman, work in progress). One week later, subjects read and recalled a story about a female job candidate which included some positive and negative comments about her academic credentials. Regression analyses indicate that as expected, the more stigmatized a woman is, the more negative versus positive reconstructive errors she makes when recalling a story about a job applicant. Implications for how stigmatization can negatively affect a woman's way of viewing the world will be discussed.

Predicting Reconstructive Errors: The Role of Stigma in Women

The present study is an attempt to broaden our understanding of how stigmatization affects women. A stigma is any mark for which a person or group of people is devalued (Goffman, 1963). Women, for example, are devalued for their intelligence, independence, athletic abilities, and bodies. This devaluation, or stigmatization, of women affects the ways in which women use social information to understand themselves and the world around them (Crocker & Major, 1989; Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991).

Research on Women and Stigma. In the face of discrimination and oppression, women have utilized self-protective strategies to maintain a positive sense of self (Crocker & Major, 1989). These strategies include attributing negative feedback, when possible, to discrimination rather than to the self (Crocker et al, 1991; Dion, 1975; Testa, Crocker, & Major, 1988), using in-group members as a basis of comparison rather than using the advantaged out-group (Brickman & Bulman, 1977; Jones, Farina, Hastorf, Markus. Miller, & Scott, 1984), and valuing the dimension the in-group does well in, like caring for others, while devaluing the dimensions in which the in-group does poorly, like being competitive (Harter, 1986; Rosenberg, 1965).

Thus far, empirical studies have demonstrated a relationship between stigma and various cognitive processes including attributions, social comparison, and the selectivity of values (Crocker et al, 1991). The present study expands our understanding of the relationship between stigma and cognitive processes by looking at reconstructive memory. More specifically, we investigated how stigma is related to the memory of both positive and negative pieces of information pertaining to a female job applicant.

Hypothesis: A relationship is expected to exist between a woman's level of stigmatization and the kinds of information she reconstructs about another woman's experience. For example, a highly stigmatized woman, one who has internalized and

accepted the stigma, is expected to be more likely to make negative versus positive reconstructions about another female since she believes that women are not as worthy as men. In contrast, a destigmatized woman, one who has rejected the stigma of women, should be more likely to perceive women as worthy people; thus, she is expected to reconstruct more positive than negative information about women.

Method/Materials/Procedure. Thirty four female undergraduate students completed a packet of questionnaires including the Women and Stigma Scale (Belansky & Coleman, work in progress) and other individual difference measures such as feminism, depression, anger, instrumentality, expressivity, and feelings of inadequacy. One week later, subjects read a story about a female job candidate. This story detailed a female job applicant's interview for a faculty position. In the story, two faculty members commented on their impressions of the applicant after hearing her job talk. One made seven positive comments (e.g., "She has terrific research ideas; she has good social skills for interacting with others."). The other faculty member made seven negative comments (e.g., "She lacks the confidence that is needed of a professor; she seemed disorganized."). Subjects were asked to read the story and were told that later on in the session they would be asked some questions about it. After reading the story, subjects engaged in several distraction tasks lasting 15 minutes. Next, subjects were asked to remember the story that they read at the beginning of the session by writing it out on a sheet of paper.

Coding. Two coders independently rated the prose material recall. Idea units were classified as either accurately recalled from the prose or as reconstructive errors. Reconstructive errors were identified as those idea units which did not actually appear in the story. Reconstructions were then coded as being either positive, neutral, or negative.

Results. As can be seen in Figure One, overall, women had more reconstructions in their memory than accurate recall; $F(1,34)=68.23$, $p<.0001$.

However, there was no overall difference in valence of memory. A memoryXvalence interaction was highly significant; $F(1,26)=21.38$, $p<.0001$. More specifically, women made more positive than negative reconstructions. However, women accurately recalled more negative than positive information.

As can be seen in Figure Two, regression analyses indicate that as expected, the more stigmatized a woman is, the more negative versus positive reconstructive errors she makes when recalling a story about a job applicant; $F_{(1,27)}=7.036$, $p<.01$; $R^2=.21$. In other words, a highly stigmatized woman is likely to reconstruct more negative information about a female job applicant than a destigmatized woman. Stigmatization accounts for 20% of the variance in predicting the kinds of information women reconstruct.

When controlling for all individual difference variables (noted earlier) in predicting positive versus negative reconstructive errors, 52% of the variance is accounted for; $F_{(8,19)}=2.607$, $p<.04$. When controlling for depression, instrumentality, expressivity, anger, feminism. and inadequacy, stigma still predicts the type of reconstructive errors women made. Above and beyond the predictive ability of the other measures highly stigmatized women are likely to reconstruct more negative than positive information about a female job applicant.

Conclusion. The present study has serious implications for how stigmatization can negatively affect a woman's way of viewing the world. Highly stigmatized women tend to reconstruct more negative pieces of information about a female job applicant than those women who are destigmatized. Future research will explore how this phenomenon might extend to information processing about the self. For instance, highly stigmatized women may remember more of their own negative versus positive qualities.
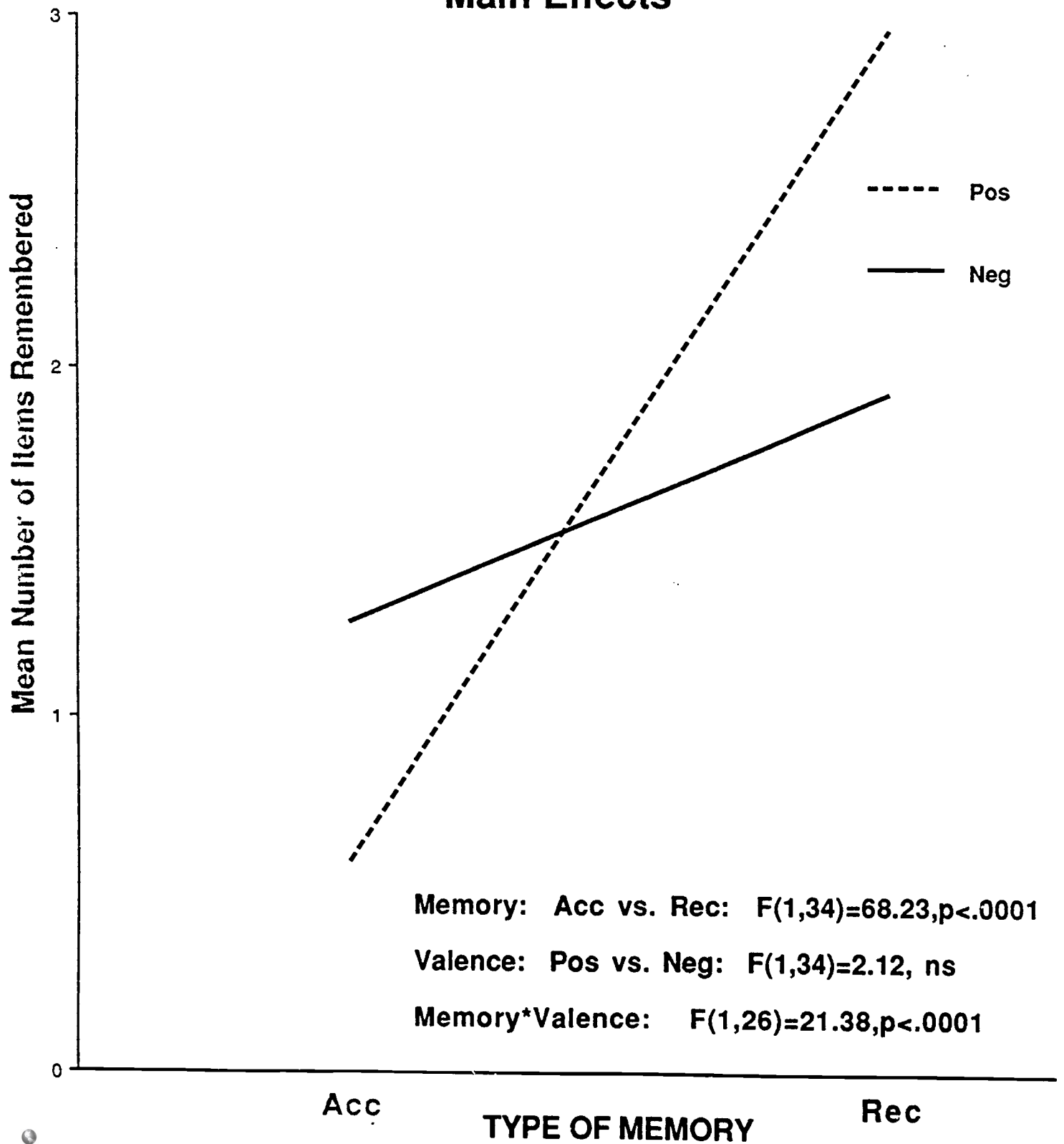
# References

Belansky, E. & Coleman, L. (1992). Validation of the Women and Stigma Scale. Work in Progress.

Brickman, P., & Bulman, R.J. (1977). Pleasure and pain in social comparison. In J.M. Suls & R.L. Miller (Eds.), Social comparison processes: Theoretical and empirical perspectives (pp. 149-196). Washington DC: Hemisphere.

Crocker, J. & Major, B. (1989) Social Stigma and Self-Esteem: The Self-Protective Properties of Stigma. Psychological Review, 96, 608-630.

Crocker, J., Voelkl, K., Testa, M., & Major, B. (1991). Social Stigma: The Affective Consequences of Attributional Ambiguity. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 60, 218-228.

Dion, K.L. (1975). Women's reactions to discrimination from members of the same or opposite sex. Journal of Research in Personality, 9, 294-306.

Eccles, J. (1987). Gender roles and women's achievement-related decisions. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 11, 135-172.

Fiske, Susan T., & Taylor, Shelley, E. (1991). Social Cognition. (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Goffman, E. (1963). Stigma: Notes on a spoiled identity. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Harter, S. (1986). Processes underlying the construction, maintenance, and enhancement of the self-concept in children. In J. Sules & A.G. Greenwald (Eds.), Psychological perspectives on the self (Vol. 3, pp. 136-182). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Jones, E.E., Farina, A., Hastorf, A.H., Markus, H., Miller, D.T., & Scott, R.A. (1984). Social stigma: The psychology of marked relationships. New York: Freeman.

Markus, H. (1977). Self-schemata and processing information about the self. Journal of Social Psychology, 42, 38-50.

Rosenberg, M. (1965). Society and the adolescent self-image. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Taylor, S.E. & Crocker, J. (1981). Schematic bases of social information processing. In E.T. Higgins, C.P. Herman, & M.P. Zanna (Eds.), Social cognition: The Ontario Symposium (Vol. 1, pp. 89-134). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Testa, M., Crocker, J., & Major, B. (1988, April). The self-protective function of prejudice: Effects of negative feedback and evaluation prejudice on mood and self-esteem. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago.

**Main Effects**

Mean Number of Items Remembered (y-axis)

TYPE OF MEMORY (x-axis): Acc — Rec

- - - - - Pos
——— Neg

Memory:   Acc vs. Rec:   $F(1,34)=68.23, p<.0001$

Valence:  Pos vs. Neg:   $F(1,34)=2.12$, ns

Memory*Valence:     $F(1,26)=21.38, p<.0001$

9

# The Relationship between Stigma and Positive vs. Negative Reconstructive Errors



PRE=.21
F(1,27)=7.036, p<.01

............ Positive Rec

———— Negative Rec

STIGMA