

2008

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## Suggested Citation

Ferber, Lauren, "Pardon Our French: French Stereotypes in American Media" (2008). *All Volumes (2001-2008)*. 7.  
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## **Pardon Our French: French Stereotypes in American Media**

Lauren Ferber

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### **Abstract**

**According to the mental models approach to media effects, Americans with no French contact are more likely to believe media display a more accurate picture of the French culture than in reality. Forty undergraduate students participated in a study to test the following hypotheses: (1) Viewers without French contact will accept more stereotypical statements than viewers with French contact (2) Viewers with French contact will have a longer response latency when assessing the truth value of stereotypical statements. Twenty participants had previous knowledge or experience of French culture and 20 did not. The participants watched a film clip, answered questionnaires, and completed a reaction time test and Q-sort. The Q-sort data was analyzed with a principal components factor analysis and the results indicate partial support of contact influencing stereotype acceptance.**

While fighting for freedom, the political leaders of France, an American ally, abandoned America in the American people's endeavor. Since the start of the Iraqi war, Americans have been especially critical of the French. After all, the French refused to aid the United States with the war in Iraq. The war in Iraq is a battle against terrorism. Stereotypes of the French culture resurfaced vehemently in America. Americans proclaimed the French are arrogant, cold, disrespectful, temperamental, reluctant to change, etc. No longer did Americans want to use items associated with the French, therefore, U.S. lawmakers had french fries renamed to freedom fries and french toast renamed freedom toast. For many Americans, the media painted people's narrow perception of the French.

The variables in researching the topic of French stereotypes in American media are stereotypes, media stereotypes, schemas, and mental models. A stereotype pertains to the beliefs people have about another group's characteristics (Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron, 1994; Stroebe & Insko, 1989). While researchers use several terms (e.g., generalization, caricature, prototypical, prejudice) synonymous with stereotype, the experimenter will use the term stereotype throughout this paper. Pickering (2001) defines stereotyping as a way in which people impose order on the social world much like assigning categories, but without flexible thought about the categories to which the subject belongs. In other words, immediately placing people in a category from which a person cannot be removed. Especially since the advent of the Internet, such accessibility to a broad range of subjects creates the need for a person to group similar objects into one category to simplify all the knowledge the person possesses. Quick mental retrieval of a specific categorized fact increases self-confidence in the person who is better able to store and retrieve information. Americans, for example, picture French men as tall, thin males who wear black and white horizontally striped shirts and black berets while smoking cigarettes. The media ingrains the image of such a Frenchman in the American mind until Americans think most French men wear berets, though berets have become increasingly uncommon in France. Bug Out Service, a pest control company, has a bug mascot with a black-and-white-striped thorax, red scarf, glasses, and beret. Bug Out's mascot fits the stereotypes many Americans believe: that the French wear striped shirts and berets and are very artistic. Americans who assign French men to the strict category

of wearing berets with striped shirts might have difficulty distinguishing a picture of an Italian or other European from a French man without stereotypical features like a beret, striped shirt, and cigarette to guide in the recognition process.

In some cases, recognizing subjects based on a few outstanding characteristics can be beneficial. Americans commonly gain safety, knowledge, and confidence through media use. Safety, quick recall, and changing oneself to fit societal norms can all be advantageous to the person who stereotypes. Stereotyping, in many cases, is essential to survival. Positive stereotyping occurs when one acquires knowledge concerning a broad range of topics or is more cautious of strangers who fit the stereotypical image of a predator. Choosing not to walk by a man standing in a dark inner city alley, for example, is a safety precaution that saves lives. Time spent considering whether the person in the alley is harmless, is detrimental to the chances of escape were the man to attack.

In other cases, stereotyping is negative. American tourists perceiving French people as argumentative, for instance, may confuse French individuals who are simply trying to remove the public mask to know the tourists on a personal level. In the French culture, one uses arguments and insults to have a meaningful and lively conversation. Misunderstandings then result from having a narrow view of French people and culture. The desire to simplify the world is one explanation why a person, like an American, would stereotype. The French, on the other hand, must be aware that not all Americans are cowboys or actors, although the French are constantly exposed to American celebrities and antiquated Western movies.

Some people unintentionally stereotype the French, like the American tourists unaccustomed to the abrasive language of French people who are attempting to remove public masks. The American tourists label the French as argumentative and unfriendly when, in fact, the French people are trying to become friends. The comedic film *European Vacation*, for instance, features an American family that encounters rude and imperious French men and women in Paris, France. The family members are unfamiliar with French language and culture, thus they rely on stereotypes to help them understand the new surroundings. The family members believe the French men and women wear berets, prepare fabulous French cuisine, are artistic, and allow gratuitous nudity. People may intentionally stereotype because, according to the theory of social identity, people tend to derogate and discriminate other groups in order to raise the self-esteem of the group of people with which they identify (Bar-Tal, 2005). Psychological components, like derogation and discrimination, play a key role in why human conflicts result (Bar-Tal, 2005). If Americans ban together in disliking the French, then people humiliating a French woman can act as catharsis. Human conflicts arise because people are naturally inclined to “act on knowledge, images, attitudes, feelings, and emotions that [group members] hold about the conflict” (Bar-Tal, 2005, p. 1). When people encounter negative stereotyping characteristics, they recall “very negative attitudes, negative emotions (mostly fear and hatred), and negative behavioral intentions” (Bar-Tal, 2005, p. 376). When retired American soldiers recollect, for example, negative experiences of fighting in France after watching the realistic and graphic American World War II film *Saving Private Ryan*, the retirees may become enraged about the rudeness, carnage, and violence they encountered while visiting France. Over time, people exposed to negative media portrayals develop a mental repertoire of how an ethnic group should behave (Bar-Tal, 2005). Americans who do not have contact with the French cannot judge whether

the message they receive is true. People must understand their surroundings to recognize the images the mind is absorbing and applying from their culture's media, family, friends, and daily environment (Asch, 1952). Groups of people absorb messages from the surrounding environment, forming collective experiences that, in turn, become experienced reality. A cohesive group experiences situations together, purposefully excluding the outgroup (Bar-Tal, 2005).

The second variable, media stereotypes, is reliance upon manipulated and inadequate media representations to fulfill the need for reliable and sound knowledge (Pickering, 2001). Stereotyping is a device to construct social groups and categories that in turn give feelings of superiority, certainty, regularity, continuity or security (Pickering, 2001).

Harris (2004), mentions how Americans who view a large amount of television incorrectly perceive minority group portrayals such as African Americans, Native Americans, older adults, and people with disabilities because of the narrow depictions in the media. Dixon, Azocar, and Casas in 2003 studied racial depictions in local television news. Dixon et al. (2003) found that African Americans were twice as likely to be portrayed as perpetrators of crime than were Whites. African Americans were, furthermore, more likely to appear as perpetrators, while Whites were more likely to be portrayed as officers (Dixon, Azocar, & Casas 2003). Prior work confirms that Whites typically have positive or benign roles on local television news (Dixon et al., 2003).

Ethnic ridicule, furthermore, is prevalent in American media. Western movies, for example, depict Native Americans as bloodthirsty and savage (Harris, 2004). Collins (2006) writes in *The BG News* how songs written before the 1960s, according to Richard Aquila at Bowling Green State University, portrayed Native Americans as romantic, exotic, comedic, trust-worthy, and savage characters. After the civil rights movement, popular songs became more sympathetic and diverse, but the older stereotypes still remain (Collins, 2006). Bug Out conveying their French mascot as an object that should be exterminated sends a negative message to Americans. The mascot conditions Americans to believe the French are undesirable individuals that people are happy to abolish. A 97.9 KISS FM announcer, too, told a winning contestant to choose between bad food (London) or foul-smelling people (Paris). The contestant, interestingly enough, chose the trip to Paris.

Such ethnic stereotypes are not only in radio but also in television programs. The early television program *Amos and Andy*, featured African American characters, like Jack Benny's valet, who are constantly ridiculed (Harris, 2004). People's knowledge of a group might only come from the media, which become people's perceived reality. The higher degree of realism attributed to media, the more effects there are on people who perceive media as factual (Harris, 2004).

People need and believe stereotypes to not only simplify worldviews or boost self-confidence, but also because media activate all memories associated with the depicted group, like the French (Bryant & Thompson, 2002). By consistently stereotyping a culture, mass media reinforce a narrow representation of the French. People then form schemas about how French people should behave. A schema is an organized knowledge structure that guides the perception, processing, and storage of human memory (Bem, 1981). Schemas affect the information stimulated, how the information is categorized, fill in missing information, and influence memory (Fiske &

Taylor, 1991; Oliver, 1999). Mass media activate schemas, which ingrain stereotypical images. Ingraining stereotypical images further affects people's comprehension and memory (Harris, 2004). Schemas enable people to “draw inferences about people or events that are congruent with previously formed schemas” (Harris, 2004, p. 35).

Most Americans, however, do not have life experiences on which to evaluate the validity of portrayals of French people. Few Americans have personal contact with French people and not everyone has the means to travel abroad. University students on a tight budget, for example, cannot afford international travel, which would enable a student to gain life experience with a particular culture. A lucky few may visit and meet a couple of French men and women but not keep in touch with them. It is also possible to have contact with French foreign exchange students whom one sees for only a semester. This limited contact may not be enough to judge whether the schemas one has formed from the media are true. Most Americans live their entire lives without meeting a single French man or woman. Thus, they are not capable of critically analyzing the portrayals of French men and women in the media.

Media are partly responsible for the development of stereotypes. American media, in particular, feature a very limited amount of French culture. The few times French characters are in the media, writers usually ridicule them. The films *Just Visiting*, *French Kiss*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Cyrano de Bergerac*, for example, all feature stereotypical rude, romantic, seductive, and artistic French men and women. Although stereotyping is a necessity, media stereotyping can be both positive and negative. Americans with no French contact believe media display a more accurate picture of the French culture than in reality. Therefore, Americans with French contact experience less media effects than people who have no French contact from which they can evaluate French media portrayals.

To negate the effect of the narrow portrayals on American audiences, media must show counter-stereotypical portrayals in addition to stereotypical portrayals. One researcher found that counter-stereotypic portrayals of male African Americans encourage people to apply responsibility to African American males unrelated to the previously viewed African American male portrayals (Power, Murphy, & Coover, 1996). Airing television programs featuring a variety of French characters would help Americans associate the culture with more than just a beret and striped shirts. Continuous counter-stereotypical French coverage, furthermore, would encourage Americans to not ridicule, but respect the French. Viewing counter-stereotypes can dramatically affect what people learn from the media portrayals. Media must be careful to show every ethnic group playing a variety of roles, both good and bad, to give people a more rounded view of the minority group.

If media are the only sources of knowledge for a subject, such as the French, it is likely that American viewers are more likely to believe the media stereotype. Conversely, it is likely that American viewers who have personal contact with French culture are less likely to believe a stereotypical image presented in media. Research in the area of French stereotypes is scant. The mental models approach is forthcoming so research using the mental models method is minimal. This study seeks to contribute to knowledge of French stereotypes using the mental models approach. The data will answer the following questions: Does previous knowledge affect information-processing time? Do people with or without prior experience, more readily accept stereotypical

media portrayals? Is there a difference in acceptance levels and/or reaction time between people with personal contact and people without personal contact?

Mental models is a fairly new approach in communications. D. Roskos-Ewoldsen and his colleagues have recently proposed the application of mental models in media studies. Mental models are “dynamic mental representations of situations, events, and objects” (B. Roskos-Ewoldsen, Davies, & D. Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2004, p. 345). In addition to seeing, reading, and hearing, people comprehend by constructing mental models (B. Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2004). A person with mental models on a series of Rex Stout’s Nero Wolfe stories, for example, would remember New York City and the surrounding area during the mid-1900s. Using the new mental models approach, a researcher can better explore the relationship between media and culture, especially for cultivation effects (B. Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2004). The mental models approach explains not just media effects, but also how people understand and interpret the media (D. Roskos-Ewoldsen, B. Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Carpentier, 2002).

Other researchers have begun following D. Roskos-Ewoldsen and his colleagues in mental models research. Wyer and Radvansky, for example, have since studied the role of mental models in comprehension and verification time of statements. Wyer and Radvansky (1999) focused on priming, the process whereby mental models are activated in memory. Recent and frequent exposure temporarily increases a person’s ability to access a subject from memory. In Experiment 2, the researchers instructed 36 students to decide whether a series of statements were comprehensible. Wyer and Radvansky’s (1999) participants distinguished between meaningful statements (e.g. “Mozart wrote operas”) and anomalous statements (e.g. “A show played poker”) to determine comprehensibility by pressing “yes” and “no” buttons on a keyboard. Another 36 students were instructed to determine validity by judging whether a series of statements were true or false and pressing the corresponding computer keys. The researchers told participants to regard anomalous statements as false (Wyer & Radvansky, 1999). Wyer and Radvansky (1999) found comprehension time of general (category-referent) statements with strongly associated exemplars to be similar to comprehension time of category-referent statements that refer specifically to exemplars. Verification time varied little from comprehension time, unless the statement’s subject had not been primed. Without priming, additional thinking was required to validate (Wyer & Radvansky, 1999).

Priming explains why recently and frequently activated information is more often impacted by schemas. Priming, moreover, occurs regardless of whether a person endorses the primed stereotypes (Devine, 1989), though endorsement does increase the potency (Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, & Wright, 1996; Peffley, Shields, & Williams, 1996). The cognitive accessibility theory and spreading activation theory use the priming paradigm for further advancement (Iyengar, 1991). The cognitive accessibility theory suggests that shortcuts enable a person to quickly make relevant judgments, which insinuates that people evaluate primed stereotypes (Iyengar, 1991). Spreading activation suggests a network of opinion nodes or schemas are linked in memory, implying that the activation of one node spreads to all other linked nodes (Anderson, 1983; Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998; Domke, McCoy, & Torres, 1999; Fazio, 1986; Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Higgins & King, 1981; Valentino, 1999; Wyer & Srull, 1989). People, for example, may use gender–role perceptions to make judgments on “Equal work, equal

pay” policies.

Priming is popular among media effects research (Bryant & Thompson, 2002). Bryant and Thompson, among others, have studied the effects of priming. The researchers conclude priming may influence human behavior but not enough to cause aggressive thoughts or actions (Bryant & Thompson, 2002).

In a synthesis of all mental models research compiled by D. Roskos-Ewoldsen and his colleagues, however, priming in the media is found to impact later judgments and behavior (2002). The effects of priming are short term, thus, the priming effect usually lasts 15 or 20 minutes and occasionally lasts up to one hour (Srull & Wyer, 1979). D. Roskos-Ewoldsen and his colleagues (in press) in a meta-analysis confirm that violent media do prime violence and aggression-related concepts, contradicting the conclusion of Bryant and Thompson.

Media can also prime stereotypes that influence how people perceive the stereotyped group (D. Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2002). Reporters and other mass communication workers, as a result of having very little time and space to describe content, are frequently guilty of stereotyping. Counterstereotypical portrayals are one way to counteract the generalizing nature of media. Commercials, again a type of media, can prime stereotypes (D. Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2002).

D. Roskos-Ewoldsen and his colleagues (2002) propose incorporating priming and chronic accessibility into “a larger theoretical frame that involves mental models of memory” (13). Concepts that are easily and consistently accessible from memory are said to be chronically accessible (D. Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2002). Priming can make chronically accessible concepts even more accessible or simply make a concept temporarily accessible from memory (D. Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2002). The immediately applicable information is used for current thought while inapplicable information primes a concept for later retrieval. Priming affects how new information is interpreted (D. Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2002).

To study the effects of French portrayals in American media, participants in the current study responded whether a statement about French culture was true or false while a computer program measured the time taken by participants to answer the question. In theory, if a statement is inconsistent with prior beliefs, the participant will take longer to respond. The participants initially categorized note cards containing stereotypical and counter-stereotypical statements about French culture into two piles: agree or disagree (see Appendix A for the list of stereotypes and counter-stereotypes). A sheet of paper containing blank boxes in the form of a triangle lay on the table (see Sample B3). The participants then placed the statements with which they felt most intense in the extreme columns on the paper, thus creating an inverted bell curve. The statements with which the participants strongly agreed were placed in the blank rectangles on the left while the statements with which the participants strongly disagreed were placed on the right end of the fill-in-the-blank triangle. The participants with French contact will most likely place analogous statements in the same blanks in addition to participants without French contact keeping the same type of statements within the same area of the triangle. Each group is expected to create similar inverted bell curves.

Two hypotheses were tested. The hypotheses stem from previous researchers finding that if media provide the only source of knowledge to a person about a particular subject, then the person is more likely to accept the media portrayals. Researchers have

also found that people viewing media messages consistent with the people's current beliefs yield faster reaction times (to answering questions).

I hypothesize that after viewing French media portrayals:

H1 A: Viewers who have personal contact with French culture will accept more counter-stereotypical statements than stereotypical statements in the Q-sort.

H1 B: Viewers without personal contact with French culture will accept more stereotypical than counter-stereotypical statements in the Q-sort.

H2 A: Viewers with personal contact with French culture will have a longer response latency when assessing the truth value of stereotypical statements.

H2 B: Viewers without personal contact with French culture will have a shorter response latency when assessing the truth value of stereotypical statements.

## **Method**

### Participants

The experiment involved undergraduates from Jacksonville, Florida. Forty undergraduate students from the University of North Florida volunteered to participate in a study about foreign travel designed to determine how French stereotypes are depicted in American media. Twenty UNF participants in the first group, Group A, had contact with French individuals. Another 20 UNF participants in the second group, Group B, were without French contact. Most participants with French contact are French language students at the University and were able to obtain contact with French individuals through study abroad. Having French contact was not a prerequisite for participating in the study, though it was a prerequisite to join Group A. The experimenter matched participant characteristics such as age, gender, and race of both groups so that with the exception of French contact, both groups contained the same participant characteristics. Some participants received extra credit from professors.

The participants were predominately white. Other students were African American, Asian, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, and Multiracial (other). The ratio of female to male participants was equal in the experiment. The experimenter purposely selected the participants for contact with French culture.

The experimenter also obtained informed consent from participants in writing. The treatment of participants was in accordance with the ethical standards of the APA (American Psychological Association, 2001). The experimenter debriefed every participant and obtained Institutional Review Board approval before collecting any data.

### Procedure

For the purposive sample, the experimenter used a reaction time test in conjunction with Q-methodology. The reaction time test measured response latency on a computer while the participants answered a questionnaire regarding thoughts about French culture (see Sample B4 for the questionnaire). Participants agreed or disagreed with the statements by pressing keys for true or false on the computer. Response latency is the time taken between mentally processing information and pressing the key. According to the reaction time test, if a statement is inconsistent with previous thoughts a participant will take longer to press the key. If a statement matches previous beliefs, deciding the truth-value is easier and thus quicker.

In Q-methodology, the experimenter first forms a concourse based on a range of viewpoints and feelings about a subject (Barbosa, Willoughby, Rosenberg, & Mrtek, 1997). The participants then perform the Q-sort. Q-methodology next uses factor



analysis to identify relationships among seemingly uncorrelated variables. In this study, I used factor analysis according to Q-methodology, which correlates people not responses. Thus, the factors represent types of people. The experimenter analyzes the individuals enrolled in a study, combining quantitative and qualitative principles. The variables measured are individual traits assumed to be possessed by each individual studied (Barbosa et al., 1997). The objective is to study each individual's psyche rather than a population's collective psyche. The individuals are "correlated to each other and factored into groups according to similarities in the way they rank a set of stimuli (sentences, images, sounds, etc.) about a subjective topic" (Barbosa et al., 1997, p. 1033). The experimenter tested the results using principal components analysis and varimax rotation. Principal components extraction reduces the size of a data file, from ten variables to three components for example, whereas varimax is a type of rotation that aids in interpretation.

Many researchers have used Q-methodology to study personal subjective feelings. The researcher and creator of Q-methodology for psychology, W. Stephenson (1935), used the factor technique to study predilection for color. Participants ranked an assortment of colors on a scale ranging from 10 to 0 (Stephenson, 1935). The participants assigned a rank of 10 for the most liked color and 0 for the least liked color. Stephenson found the artistic participants preferred subtle colors, while the inartistic participants preferred vivid colors. Stephenson described the inartistic participants as having a child-like attraction to vivid colors whereas the vivid and bright shocked artistic participants. Barbosa et al. (1997) used the study of opinions toward computers and computer education to exemplify Q-methodology. The example outlined the process of identifying a range of possible feelings regarding a subjective topic, selecting a representative of possible feelings, using a metric to measure possible feelings, and performing data reduction through by-person factor analysis (Barbosa et al., 1997).

In this experiment, the participants ranked statements about French culture. The participants physically laid note cards containing statements about French culture on a table in stacks representing true or false. The statements were both stereotypical and counter-stereotypical. Some statements, for example, were "The French are arrogant," "The French are romantic," "The French are argumentative," "The French are artistic," "The French show a great amount of affection in public."

A concourse is a representation of a variety of perspectives and emotions, both positive and negative, people have concerning a particular subject. The statements in the concourse are not exhaustive but representative of a range of viewpoints and feelings about the subject (Barbosa et al., 1997). I formed the concourse by reading French culture books like *Culture Shock! France* and *Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong*, having conversations with individuals, and examining my experiences with French culture. The resulting concourse is a set of 63 statements that are subjective, not factual (see Appendix A).

The experimenter first led each participant individually into a University of North Florida lab. The experimenter instructed the participants to answer a pre-test questionnaire, watch an 18-minute film clip, and answer a post-test questionnaire afterward. The purpose of the film clip excerpted from *European Vacation* is to activate mental models of French culture. The film has a segment in which an American family visits Paris, France. The American family does not know the language and culture so it encounters many mishaps. Some mishaps include the family buying traditional berets,

which are no longer popular, in a moot attempt to blend with the locals. A rude French waiter voices unpleasantries and insults knowing the family does not comprehend. Arrogant staff members of a high-class hotel also look down upon the American family, laughing condescendingly at the family's passport pictures. Such incidences should activate the stereotypes that the French are rude, imperious, artistic, and wear berets. The clip provides an excellent array of stereotypes presented in a humorous fashion. The 18-minute clip quickly highlights many stereotypes associated with French culture such as hating Americans and gratuitous nudity with the added benefit of maintaining participant attention with comedic entertainment. The participants then performed a Q-sort in the lab, rating how much they agreed or disagreed with 63 statements regarding French culture. Finally, the experimenter debriefed each participant (see Sample B1 for the script).

### **Results**

The experimenter tested the hypotheses using factor analysis. Factor analysis attempts to identify factors, or underlying variables, that explain the correlations within a set of variables (George & Mallery, 2006). In this study, I used factor analysis according to Q-methodology, which correlates people not responses. The study focuses on two groups of people: those with French contact and those with no French contact. The experimenter specifically used principal components analysis and varimax rotation.

I hypothesized that people with no French contact will tend to accept stereotypical media messages while those with French contact will tend to disregard the stereotypical statements. Furthermore, people with French contact will have longer response latency to the stereotypical statements due to a disconnect in experiences and the media messages. People with no French contact have no experience on which to evaluate the validity of the media portrayals. The hypotheses stem from researchers finding that people accept media portrayals when the images are the only source of knowledge for the subject and people demonstrate faster reaction times when the media messages are identical to the people's current beliefs.

Without forcing factors, the original factor analysis yielded 10 factors. The 10 factors classified 10 groups of people within the entire 40-participant pool. Ten factors are statistically good given that 75 percent of the variance is explained by contact and no contact. Those 10 factors, however, are not sound because the study categorized the participants into two groups, not ten. The solution, therefore, had too many factors.

When the experimenter forced a two-factor solution, the variance is reduced to 50 percent. Forcing factors is theoretically justified because the study only involves two groups: group A (French contact) and group B (no French contact). Theoretically we should expect the participants in group A to cluster the same and the participants in Group B to cluster the same. The data as a whole, conversely, showed no difference in French contact and the believability of stereotypes. Both groups contained a mixture of participants who agreed and disagreed to the same statement. Groups A and B did not cluster properly and the result does not corroborate the hypothesis that exposure to French culture will reduce the likelihood of accepting stereotypical statements.

Fifty percent of the variance is explained by French contact and no French contact. Fifty percent is again statistically acceptable though not theoretically sound because the result indicates there is no difference between the contact and no contact groups. Another 50 percent is explained by an unknown factor.

Factor analysis as used in this study correlates people and attempts to explain individual or group psyche. The factor analysis may not have produced clean clusters because each participant interprets a question differently based upon past experience and each participant reacts differently to the stereotypes viewed in the film clip.

One possibility for variance is the type of question the researcher asked. A researcher expects clustering between groups, however, group A and group B clustered similarly. The groups did not cluster by type of question, as expected. Fifty percent of variance in participant responses is explained by the questions asked. The initial factor analysis did not produce significant results, thus the experimenter tried other testing methods.

The types of questions asked were divided into four groups to see if the contact and no contact groups answered diversely. Group one contained questions about the socialization of the French in personal relationships. Example statements include “The French are seductive” and “The French are temperamental.” The total variance explained was 50 percent (see Table 1). Group two were socialization patterns for group behavior such as “French women do not shave” or “The French are uninhibited about public displays of affection.” The total variance was 46 percent (see Table 2). Group three were questions addressed in the short film clip taken from the movie *European Vacation*. The film alluded to such statements as “The French are artistic” and “The French think they are superior.” Group three’s variance was 51 percent (see Table 3). Group four, on the other hand, contained statements not found in the film segment. The clip did not suggest the statements “The French smell bad” or “The French go on strike about every little inequity in society.” The total variance was 59 percent (see Table 4).

The experimenter conducted a t-test to measure the reaction time data. Participants in Group A, on average, read and decided the validity of stereotypical statements slower ( $M = 2623.64$  ms,  $SD = 794.42$ ) than Group B ( $M = 2289.74$  ms,  $SD = 778.95$ ) and the difference was marginally significant ( $p = .10$ ). The experimenter expected the participants with contact to have a longer reaction time to French stereotypes. The experimenter did not predict Group B to assign truth-values to counter stereotypes more quickly ( $M = 2343.20$  ms,  $SD = 787.04$ ) than Group A ( $M = 2769.82$  ms,  $SD = 910.56$ ) with marginal significance ( $p = .08$ ).

Table 1.  
Factor Loadings for Socialization in Personal Relationships

Condition	Factor	
	1	2
B	.90	.10
A	.82	-.25
A	.81	-.08
A	.79	-.32
B	.77	.24
B	.74	.36
B	.71	-.44
B	.70	-.04
A	.68	.08
A	.64	-.13
A	.63	-0.10
B	.58	.13
B	-.57	.50
B	.56	-.24
B	.54	.14
A	.51	.17
A	.48	-.16
A	.47	.21
B	.44	.26
A	.44	.03
B	.36	.25
B	.35	-.21
A	.34	.29
B	-.06	.91
A	.12	.91
B	-.23	.90
B	-.17	.90
A	.05	.87
A	.27	.83
A	-.19	.76
B	.18	.72
B	.35	.70
A	-.02	.67
A	.53	-.65
A	.11	.63
B	.37	-.55
A	.51	-.53
B	.40	-.43
A	.31	.41
B	.02	.33

Table 2.  
Factor Loadings for Cultural Practices

Condition	Factor	
	1	2
B	.85	-.08
A	.78	.33
A	.78	.10
A	.74	.27
B	.73	.15
B	.72	.27
A	.72	.34
A	.69	-.26
A	.68	-.28
A	.67	.16
A	.66	.47
A	.65	-.16
A	.63	.48
B	.61	.006
A	.55	.36
A	.51	.23
A	.50	.39
B	-.49	-.10
A	-.40	.40
B	.32	.26
B	.31	-.03
B	-.26	-.11
B	-.37	.88
A	.26	.81
B	.28	.79
A	.38	.71
B	.01	.71
B	-.50	.68
B	.04	.65
B	.45	.63
A	-.32	.61
B	.29	.60
B	.18	.54
A	-.18	.54
B	.17	.50
B	.06	.47
B	.22	.45
B	.37	.38
A	.22	.35
A	.16	.20

Table 3.  
Factor Loadings for Stereotypes Not in Film

Condition	Factor	
	1	2

B	.96	.17
A	.95	-.20
A	.91	.07
A	.87	.13
B	.85	.23
B	.82	.11
B	.78	.20
B	.78	.26
A	.78	-.09
A	.74	.10
A	.73	.17
B	-.72	.04
A	.72	.05
A	.67	.29
B	.64	-.24
A	.63	.07
B	-.59	.28
B	.55	.03
B	.54	.16
A	.53	.40
B	.42	.26
A	.39	.33
B	.38	.33
B	-.23	.78
B	.22	.76
B	.35	.73
B	.49	.70
A	.00	.69
A	.08	.69
A	.48	.68
A	.19	.65
B	.29	.58
A	-.11	.55
A	.28	.55
A	.42	.52
A	.49	.50
A	-.22	.48
B	.34	.39
B	-.14	.37
B	.07	-.28

Table 4.  
Factor Loadings of Stereotypes in Film

Condition	Factor	
	1	2
A	.97	.04
B	.93	-.02

A	.92	.20
A	.91	.11
A	.90	.19
A	.88	-.07
B	.81	.29
A	.81	-.14
B	.79	.58
A	.74	.50
B	.74	-.18
B	.74	-.22
A	.70	.58
A	.70	.68
A	.68	.30
B	.66	.01
B	.64	.43
B	.63	.39
A	.61	.22
B	.58	.28
A	.52	.27
B	-.51	-.15
A	.48	-.23
A	.31	-.28
A	-.26	.21
B	.22	.10
B	-.08	.95
B	-.22	.89
B	.15	.81
B	.15	.78
B	-.24	.77
A	-.15	.75
B	.41	.74
A	.39	.70
B	.26	.70
B	.55	.65
A	.50	-.60
A	.08	.54
B	-.31	-.47
A	.19	.39

Based upon the evidence, the results are in the right direction and constitute partial support of my hypotheses. The amount of contact could explain why the results are only slightly significant. The Group A participants did not have a significant amount of exposure to French culture (at least a year) and there was not enough variance between the participants with French contact and the participants without French contact. Group A is essentially analogous to Group B since a majority of the participants spent less than 30 days in France. A much bigger difference is needed to distinguish between the groups. By using the high proportion of people with Spanish knowledge or experience in Florida, a researcher might better substantiate stereotyping and the amount of contact with a particular culture. Based upon the evidence, the results are in the right direction and constitute partial support of my hypotheses.

### **Discussion**

Media are partly responsible for the development of stereotypes. American media, in particular, feature a very limited amount of French culture. The few times French characters are in the media, writers usually ridicule them. The films *Just Visiting*, *French Kiss*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Cyrano de Bergerac*, for example, all feature stereotypical rude, romantic, seductive, and artistic French men and women. Although stereotyping is a necessity, media stereotyping can be both positive and negative. Theoretically, Americans with no French contact are more likely to believe media reflect a more accurate picture of the French culture than in reality. Therefore, Americans with French contact experience less media effects than people who have no French contact from which they can evaluate French media portrayals.

I hypothesized that after viewing French media portrayals, people with no French contact will likely accept stereotypical media messages while those with French contact will likely disregard the stereotypical statements. People with French contact will have longer reaction times to the stereotypical statements because the media messages and personal experiences are not comparable.

The hypotheses stem from previous researchers such as D. Roskos-Ewoldsen and his colleagues finding that if media provide the only source of knowledge to a person about a particular subject, then the person is more likely to accept the media portrayals. Wyer and Radvansky have also found that people viewing media messages consistent with the people's current beliefs yield faster reaction times (to answering questions). According to the mental models approach to media effects, Americans with no French contact are more likely to believe media reflect a more accurate picture of the French culture than in reality.

The researcher studied a total of 40 University of North Florida undergraduate students. Participants were selected by choosing 20 UNF volunteers who had French contact to be in Group A. Group B consisted of 20 UNF volunteers without French contact. French contact means they had at least some insider knowledge or experience with French culture. They may, for example, have taken French classes, taught French classes, have visited France, or lived in France for a period of time. The participants watched an 18-minute film clip, answered questionnaires, and completed a reaction time test and Q-sort.

The experimenter analyzed the Q-sort data with a principal components factor analysis and response latency with a t-test. The results provided limited support for my



hypotheses. The amount of contact could explain why the results are only slightly significant. The Group A participants did not have at least a year's worth of exposure to French culture so there was not enough variance between the participants with French contact and the participants without French contact. Groups A and B are essentially alike since a majority of the participants spent less than 30 days in France. A much bigger difference is needed to distinguish between the groups. A researcher might instead study the correlation between stereotyping and amount of contact by utilizing the prevalence of Spanish culture in Florida. Had the study shown greater significance, perhaps with higher stipulations for Group A, the results may have very well concluded that the media do greatly impact those with little or no knowledge of a particular subject.

Alternate factors, in addition to amount of contact, can explain the results. Various limitations of the study, such as small sample size, could affect results. Reaction time tests need a large sample to show even a subtle effect. The study suggests that with a larger sample size, the results could show significance. Random encounters versus intentional contact, likewise, are limitations. What if the participant meets a French person during the study? Would perceptions change? Personality and expectations can affect results. Is a person's personality why they reject stereotypes of cultures? Do expectations reduce culture shock and therefore ethnocentrism or disdain for another culture? Using just one film clip of one culture is a limitation. The film clip is a comedy that could have either lent itself to activating French stereotypes or not being taken seriously. Which effect the humorous context had is uncertain. Only the French culture was investigated and perhaps another more familiar culture such as Spanish could yield different results. Studying stereotypical views toward more than one culture could produce diverse results as well. Do people who travel in the United States reject stereotypes, too? A number of alternate factors can explain the results.

Researchers can use the study to further investigate French stereotyping or cultural stereotyping in general. Future directions could include pre- and post- Iraqi War and French media producers. Has the Iraqi War changed people's perceptions of the French? Will an American soldier believe French stereotypes after having fought in the Iraqi War? Have French media representations changed since the start of the Iraqi War? Perhaps stereotypical perceptions would dissipate if more media were produced by the French. Are French media portrayals more or less accurate depending on whether a French person is involved in the production of the media?

If the theory remains true, then a greater amount of contact will reduce cultural stereotyping and increase understanding. Such an implication stresses the importance of frequent travel and personal exposure to various cultures. With increased awareness, all people can avoid negative and unhealthy stereotyping all together. Deficiency in contact could be the root of cultural stereotyping.

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Appendix A  
Table A1. Stereotypes of French Culture.

The French are romantic
The French are seductive
The French are unapproachable
The French are unfriendly
The French are cold
The French are arrogant
The French think they are superior
The French are bossy
The French believe that if God lived on Earth, He would live in France
The French smell bad
French women do not shave
The French have a different idea of personal hygiene
The French have discussions without making decisions
The French seek perfection before action
The French are temperamental
The French are argumentative
The French are confrontational
The French are status-conscious
The French are reluctant to change
The French have no respect for rules, procedures, or deadlines
The French are negative
The French are artistic
The French go on strike about every little inequity in society
The French only care about themselves
The French are immoral
The French show a great amount of affection in public
The French are uninhibited about public displays of affection
All French know how to speak English, they just refuse to do so
French chefs are the best in the world
The French know proper etiquette better than other cultures
The French are elegant
The French are fashionable
The French eat sugary and rich foods constantly, yet remain slim
The French smoke and drink excessively
The French can't dance

Table A2. Counter-stereotypes of French Culture.

The French are unromantic
The French are friendly
The French are kind
French women shave
The French make a decision after discussing all the possibilities
The French seek action before perfection
The French are calm
The French are non-confrontational
The French easily agree with people
The French are unsegregated
The French accept change readily
The French are spontaneous
The French like variety
The French highly respect rules, procedures, and deadlines
The French are positive
The French are inartistic
The French rarely go on strike
The French are giving
The French view nudity as art
The French are moral
The French are discrete
The French display affection in private
Not all French know how to speak English
Some French chefs are among the best in the world
The French are informal
The French do not have good fashion sense
The French eat healthy, yet some are overweight
The French dance well

Appendix B  
Sample B1. Script.

Hi, thank you for coming. First, you are going to fill out a questionnaire and watch a short, 18-minute clip on traveling.

[Hand out pre-test questionnaire and show the film clip.]

Next, you will sit at this computer and decide which statements you feel are true and which you feel are false by pressing the corresponding keys (point to true and false keys). If a statement is true, press the true key and if it is false, press the false key. There are no right or wrong answers. This is only your opinion.

[Wait until the participant has completed the reaction time test.]

At this table is a stack of note cards containing the same statements as on the computer. You will initially separate the note cards into two approximately equal stacks of true and false. Then, place the cards with which you most agree on the outer right column and most disagree on the outer left column of this fill-in-the-blank pyramid. Place those cards with which you feel less strongly toward the center of the pyramid. Continue until all note cards are assigned to each blank rectangle in the pyramid. Do you have any questions?

[Answer all questions and wait until the participant has completed the Q-sort.]

Here is a questionnaire to gather information about you and your traveling experience. Please do not put your name on this sheet in order to ensure anonymity.

[Hand out sheet and wait until participant has completed the questionnaire.]

Thank you so much for your willingness to participate. I appreciate all the work you completed today. This study is about French stereotypes in American media and the effect French contact has regarding the believability of media messages. The purpose of the film clip was to expose you to French stereotypes, not to inform you about traveling in general. The computer measured how quickly you decided the truth-value of the statements. When the study is published, you may read about the results you helped create. Do you have any more questions?

[Answer all questions.]

Thanks again, good-bye.







Sample B4. Post-test Questionnaire.

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Sex: Male Female
3. Race: Caucasian African American Asian  
Hispanic Middle Eastern Multiracial (Other)
4. If other, please specify. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Year: Freshman- Graduate Not currently a student
6. I travel a lot.  
(Never) 1 2 3 4 5 (Regularly)
7. I travel within the United States.  
(Never) 1 2 3 4 5 (Always)
8. I travel abroad.  
(Never) 1 2 3 4 5 (Always)
9. I travel to Europe.  
(Never) 1 2 3 4 5 (Always)
10. I have traveled elsewhere.  
(Never) 1 2 3 4 5 (Always)
11. Which countries have you visited? \_\_\_\_\_
12. In which country did you stay the longest? \_\_\_\_\_
13. How long did you stay there? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Which European countries have you visited? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Have you visited France? If so, how long? \_\_\_\_\_
16. Have you visited Germany? If so, how long? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Have you visited Spain? If so, how long? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Have you visited Italy? If so, how long? \_\_\_\_\_
19. Have you visited Portugal? If so, how long? \_\_\_\_\_
20. Did you travel alone or with others?  
Alone In Group Both
21. Did you travel with friends and family or with a school?  
Friends/Family School Both
22. Have you lived with a host family? Yes No
23. Where did you live with a host family? \_\_\_\_\_
24. Do you speak a second language? \_\_\_\_\_
25. What languages do you speak? \_\_\_\_\_
26. How fluent are you in a second language?  
(Beginner) 1 2 3 4 5 (Fluent)
27. Have you spoken a foreign language when visiting?  
Yes No
28. Which countries did you visit and speak the language? \_\_\_\_\_
29. How often did you speak the foreign language?  
(Never) 1 2 3 4 5 (Every day)
30. Did you befriend any people from that country? Yes No
31. Where did you befriend residents of the country? \_\_\_\_\_
32. How close were you to the closest resident?  
(Strangers) 1 2 3 4 5 (Best Friends)

33. Do you have friendships still?  
 (None) 1 2 3 4 5 (Many)
34. How pleasant was the interaction with native speakers?  
 (Unpleasant) 1 2 3 4 5 (Pleasant)
35. Did you enjoy speaking to the people?  
 (Never) 1 2 3 4 5 (Always)
36. Do you still have contact with them?  
 (Never) 1 2 3 4 5 (Every day)
37. Have you previously seen the movie *European Vacation*?  
 Yes No I don't know
38. How many times have you viewed the movie *European Vacation*?  
 1 2 3 4 5