LET ME TELL YOU A STORY: NARRATIVE MESSAGE EFFECTS IN THE COMMUNICATION OF STIGMA ON MIGRANT WORKERS IN CHINA

By

Xiaodi Yan

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ABSTRACT

LET ME TELL YOU A STORY: NARRATIVE MESSAGE EFFECTS IN THE COMMUNICATION OF STIGMA ON MIGRANT WORKERS IN CHINA

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Rural-to-urban migrant workers in China are a group who have significant impact on society. Studies have indicated that there is social stigma towards migrant workers. The goal of this study is to investigate the role narrative messages play in stigma communication to urban citizens. Based on a 2 (valence: positive or negative) × 2 (type: narrative or non-narrative) between-subjects factorial design, 305 participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions and one no-message control condition to assess their emotional reactions and stigma attitudes. The results showed that there are main effects of message valence on emotional reactions and stigma attitudes. Additionally, the effects of message type on stigma attitudes differed depending on message valence. There was a main effect of narrative message on stigma attitudes in positive conditions, while the effect was mediated by message believability in negative conditions. The results have both theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords: stigma communication, rural-to-urban migrant workers in China, narrative message, emotions, message believability

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INTRODUCTION

The label "rural-to-urban migrant workers" in China refers to the population of Chinese registered in rural areas according to the *Hukou System* (Chinese Household Registration System), but who leave their hometown to seek non-agricultural employment in urban areas (Guan, 2011; Zhang & Luo, 2012). The emergence of this social group has had significant impact, both positively and negatively, on various aspects of Chinese society (Guan, 2011; Wong, Chang, & He, 2007). Previous studies have identified that social stigma is experienced by migrant workers. These studies have been largely qualitative reports based on the experience of migrant workers (Chen et al., 2011; Guan, 2011; Guan & Liu, 2013; Lin et al., 2011; Wang, Li, Stanton, & Fang, 2010). The current study is intended to empirically measure urban citizens' emotional and attitudinal responses to migrant workers.

Communication plays a critical role in the enactment of stigma. Smith (2007) describes stigma as a communicative process that can induce relevant emotional reactions and stigma attitudes. Stigma is an affectively charged event (Smith, 2007). One type of message that is advantageous in eliciting emotions is narratives (Nabi & Green, 2015). Given the long human history of storytelling, narrative is described as an intuitive and comfortable mode to send and receive information (Murphy et al., 2015; Kreuter et al., 2007). The social influence potential of narrative messages has been demonstrated in many studies, while the influence of narrative in stigma communication is less clear (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2013; Braddock & Dillard, 2016; Chung & Slater, 2013; Oliver, Dillard, Bae, & Tamul, 2012).

The goal of the current study is to investigate the role that narrative messages play in stigma communication. Is a narrative message, compared to a non-narrative message, more effective in bringing intended outcomes predicted by either a positively or negatively valenced

message? This study first provides a conceptualization of stigma against migrant workers in China based on social descriptions of this group. The next section discusses the communication of stigma and outcomes. Then, a review of studies examining the social influence of narratives is provided, and the effects in stigma communication are hypothesized. Next, an empirical study tests the hypotheses, and the results are presented. Finally, implications, limitations, and directions for future research are discussed.

STIGMA ON MIGRANT WORKERS IN CHINA

Goffman (1963) defined stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting" (p. 3) and someone who bears such attributes is "disqualified from full social acceptance" (p. 11) and "reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (p. 12). The current study conceptualizes stigma by adopting Link & Phelan's (2001) model that stigma has four interrelated components: labeling, negative attributes, separating "us" from "them", and discrimination.

Labeling

Stigma begins with certain type of human difference being identified and labeled. The difference can be physical, social, or moral (Meisenbach, 2010). The difference can be visible or invisible, and can be concealable or disclosed. Previous studies showed that migrant workers self-report themselves being labeled as "cheap laborers" or "outsiders" by urban citizens (Guan, 2011; Guan & Liu, 2013). They hold the belief that they have less status than urban citizens in many aspects. They perceive themselves as unofficial to cities, and that they are treated as temporary employees hired to work in cities (Zhang & Luo, 2012). Migrant workers described that in urban citizens' eyes, the type of work they do is laborious, non-technical, hazardous and indecent (Wong et al., 2007; Zhang & Luo, 2012). Additionally, migrant workers reported that

some “visible” characteristics make them distinguishable. For instance, they think they appear untidy to urban citizens (Chen et al., 2011; Guan, 2011; Wang et al., 2010). Additionally, since migrant workers are not local to the place where they work, they are aware that they have strong foreign accents (Guan, 2011).

Negative Attributes

Once certain individuals have been identified and labeled, certain beliefs about the character of the stigmatized are likely to be assigned, such as negative personal characteristics, discredited moral character, deviant beliefs. Migrant workers believe that they are stereotyped as uneducated and low in intelligence (Guan, 2011; Wong et al., 2007). They are described as poor, inferior, and dirty by urban citizens (Guan, 2011; Zhang & Luo, 2012). Some migrant workers reported that they have been questioned about their health and hygienic condition (Chen et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2010). Additionally, migrant workers think they are identified with peril and threat in urban citizens’ opinions. They are thought to be responsible for increased crime rates and various events threatening social stability and security (Guan, 2011; Wong et al., 2007).

Separating “Us” From “Them”

After attributing negative stereotypes to human difference, the process of separating “us” from “them” is enacted. Migrant workers think that they cannot mingle in or be accepted by legitimate urban citizens (Guan, 2011; Zhang & Luo, 2012). One frequently encountered compelling case is that if migrant workers have a seat on the bus, despite available seats next to them, urban citizens tend to stand in the aisle and are not willing to sit next to the migrant worker (Guan & Liu, 2013). Migrant workers explained that urban citizens are different from migrant workers, so that urban citizens would not sit together with them. (Lin et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2010).

Discrimination

Often, stigmatized individuals are denied access to various social resources, and find themselves at the lower end of the social hierarchy (Link & Phelan, 2001). The stigmatized are likely to experience both individual and structural discrimination. Migrant workers perceive themselves being placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy in cities (Chen et al., 2011). They are excluded from various social resources, such as education, health care, employment, housing, adequate nutrition, etc. (Wong et al., 2007; Zhang & Luo, 2012). Additionally, discrimination of migrant workers occurs at both individual and institutional levels (Guan, 2011; Wong et al., 2007; Zhang & Luo, 2012). Discrimination can be seen in social interactions as well as in unfavorable policies and in the general social environment (Guan, 2011; Wong et al., 2007; Zhang & Luo, 2012).

Based on this description, rural-to-urban migrant workers perceive themselves to be stigmatized by urban citizens in China. Smith (2007) considered that stigma is enacted through spreading messages with stigma cues within one's communities. Communication is critical to stigmatization. It would be of significance to understand the communicative mechanism underlying the enactment of stigma towards migrant workers among urban citizens. Thus, the process of stigma communication and outcomes are discussed below.

COMMUNICATION OF STIGMA

Smith (2007) considered stigma as a communicative event. The enactment of stigma occurs through communication of "messages spread through communities to teach their members to recognize the disgraced and to react accordingly" (Smith, 2007, p. 464). Stigma messages induce certain emotional reactions and encourage the activation of relevant social attitudes and stereotypes (Smith, 2007).

Stigma Cues and Message Valence

According to Smith (2007), stigma messages include four content cues: mark, group labeling, responsibility, and peril. A mark refers to some undesirable trait, behavior or condition that defines people in a particular situation. Group labeling is description of the stigmatized group as a separate group entity. Responsibility refers to a perception of choice and control over the stigmatized condition and resulting group threat. Peril warns about danger and threat, and unmarked members must protect themselves through collective efforts to eliminate the stigmatized.

In this study, a negative message refers to a message with stigmatizing cues. A negative message emphasizes that migrant workers are marked and labeled negatively, are responsible for their situation, and are perilous to urban citizens. On the contrary, a positive message refers to a message with de-stigmatizing cues. A positive message opposes negative marks or labels attached to migrant workers, attributes their situation to factors beyond their control, and does not describe migrant workers as perilous to urban citizens.

Message Valence and Outcomes

Stigma messages deal with intergroup relations. When group identities become salient, people may assess a situation in terms of group benefits and harms. Depending on the message valence, indicated by content cues in the message, corresponding emotional and attitudinal reactions may be induced (Smith, 2007; Smith, 2014).

Emotional reactions. Stigma messages can elicit emotional reactions shaped by evolutionary pressure to push individuals to react automatically (Smith, 2007). A negative message with stigmatizing cues is likely to evoke various negative emotions. A negative message indicates that the proper group functioning is threatened. Different types of group threats can

evoke different discrete emotions (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). "Perceptions of contamination (physical or moral) are associated with disgust, obstacles evoking anger, and physical threats to safety suggest fear" (Smith, 2007, p. 472). By contrast, a positive message with de-stigmatizing cues is less likely to evoke these negative emotional responses (Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005).

Stigma attitudes. Stigma messages can help form and bolster stigma attitudes (Smith, 2007; Smith, 2014). Stigma attitudes consist of negative evaluations about the targets. A negative message with stigmatizing cues makes negative evaluations and judgments about the targets accessible to the stigmatizer (Smith, 2007). A negative message indicates that the targets are undesirable, stereotypes the targets with negative attributes, blames the target for responsibility, and warns the threats from the targets (Link & Phelan, 2001; Meisenbach, 2010; Smith, 2007). These negative evaluations about the targets contribute to form stigma attitudes toward the targets (Smith, 2007). On the contrary, a positive message with de-stigmatizing cues communicates positive evaluations about the targets. These positive perceptions and evaluations about the targets can contribute to reduce stigma attitudes toward the targets.

In this study, negative messages with stigmatizing cues and positive messages with de-stigmatizing cues are employed to investigate the effects of message valence on emotional reactions and on stigma attitudes. The first hypothesis for investigation is derived from the rationale presented.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): A negative message is likely to result in (a) more disgust, (b) more anger, (c) more fear, and (d) higher stigma attitudes, compared to a positive message.

According to studies on message effects, not only does message valence have an impact on related outcomes, the presentation of information in a message also has outcomes. Given the

important role of emotions in stigma, narrative messages should be especially relevant to this inquiry, since emotions are a fundamental part of the narrative experience (Nabi & Green, 2015).

Narrative messages have drawn increasing research attention in recent years, and have been shown to have promising social influence potential (Braddock & Dillard, 2016; McQueen, Kreuter, Kalesan, & Alcaraz, 2011; Moyer-Gusè, Chung, & Jain, 2011; Niederdeppe, Shapiro, & Porticella, 2011). Whether and how narrative messages influence the communication of stigma remains to be investigated. Thus, narrative message effects are discussed below.

NARRATIVE MESSAGE EFFECTS

Narrative Message

A narrative is defined as "a representation of connected events and characters that has an identifiable structure, is bounded in space and time, and contains implicit or explicit messages about the topic being addressed" (Kreuter et al., 2007, p. 222). What sets narratives apart from non-narratives is that a narrative is about concrete events occurring to specific characters in certain settings (de Graaf, Sanders, & Hoeken, 2016). Attitudes or opinions are oftentimes explicitly expressed in a non-narrative message compared to a narrative message.

Narrative is considered the basic mode of human communication (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2006). "Humans are innate storytellers, and storytelling has played a vital role in transmitting perspective and normative information in most cultures for thousands of years" (Murphy et al., 2015, p. 2117). It is the basic venue through which we learn about the world around us. Narratives are an intuitive way of sending and receiving information (Kreuter et al., 2007).

Social Influence Power of Narrative Message

The social influence potential of narrative messages has been well established. Narratives have been attested to be effective in bringing about intended outcomes in domains of politics,

policies, education, health, intergroup relations, etc. (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2013; Iguarta, 2010; Lemal & Van den Bulck, 2010; McQueen et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2015; Oliver et al., 2012). A meta-analysis conducted by Braddock & Dillard (2016) provided integrative evidence of positive relationships between exposure to a narrative and narrative-consistent beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors.

Studies have also provided evidence for the advantages of narrative messages over other types of messages in terms of social influence. McQueen et al. (2011) found that narratives produced stronger cognitive and affective responses than traditional informational messages. Lemal & Van den Bulck (2010) also found that participants exposed to a narrative message were more likely to perform the behaviors recommended in the messages compared to non-narrative conditions. Murphy et al. (2013, 2015) have yielded similar findings that compared to non-narrative messages, narrative messages were more effective in increasing related knowledge and attitudes. Results of Oliver et al. (2012) also showed that narrative-formatted stories produced more emotional reactions, intended attitudes and behavioral intentions.

Multiple processes are involved in the mechanism through which narrative messages have intended effects. The most cited process in narrative message effects is transportation (Appel & Richter, 2010; Banerjee & Greene, 2012; de Graaf et al, 2009; Hinyard & Kreuter, 2006; Murphy et al., 2013). Transportation is defined as an integrative melding of affective and cognitive resources with the story (Green, 2004). Transported individuals are so absorbed and immersed in the narrative world that they perceive the narrative more like an actual experience, so they tend to accept the message propositions (Appel & Richter, 2010; Green, 2004; Hinyard & Kreuter, 2006). Highly transported individuals are also more likely to experience higher emotional arousals, which could further contribute to corresponding evaluation and motivation

tendencies (Nabi & Green, 2015). Transportation is associated with changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Murphy et al., 2013).

Narrative Message Effects in Stigma Communication

The narrative message type is especially relevant to the issue of stigma. As message recipients experience transportation, they are affectively engaged and absorbed in the story world. Narrative is very effective in evoking emotions. Emotions are considered a fundamental part of narrative experience (Nabi & Green, 2015).

Emotions play an important role in the enactment of stigma (Smith, 2007). Emotional reactions can encourage cognitive reactions that make certain evaluations more accessible to individuals, and thus have influences on relevant attitudes. Studies show that discrete negative emotions, namely disgust, fear, and anger, are responsible for the development of stigma attitudes (Smith, 2007; Smith, 2014).

Narrative messages make certain emotional experiences more salient, and thus will result in more valence-predicted outcomes. In this sense, this study applies narrative message effects to the communicative processes of stigma. Narrative messages are compared with non-narrative messages to look at the message effects on emotional reactions and stigma attitudes. The study proposes that a narrative message is effective in bringing about intended outcomes, more so than a non-narrative message.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): A narrative message is likely to result in more valence-predicted outcomes compared to a non-narrative message, such that:

H2 (a): A negative narrative message is likely to result in (i) more disgust, (ii) more anger, (iii) more fear, and (iv) higher stigma attitudes, compared to a negative non-narrative message.

H2 (b): A positive narrative message is likely to result in (i) less disgust, (ii) less anger, (iii) less fear, and (iv) lower stigma attitudes, compared to a positive non-narrative message.

The Role of Message Believability

Additionally, an important issue in social influence communication is to understand how message recipients perceive the information (Bettman, Payne, & Staelin, 1986). Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) stated that "…with persuasive communication, the major problem is to ensure that the receiver accepts (i.e., believes) the communication which attempts to link the object and the attribute." (p. 389). Furthermore, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) also emphasized that it is necessary for message arguments to be perceived as believable in order to influence attitudes.

The concept of believability was originally proposed by Beltramini (1982) in advertising context. Message believability focuses on the message content, but not the source. It suggests the message recipients' confidence in the truthfulness and perception of plausibility of the information (Andrews, Netemeyer, & Durvasula, 1990).

The relationship between message believability and attitude and behavior change has been explored in various contexts including advertising, political campaign, and social norm message studies (Beltramini, 1988; Glazer, Smith, Atkin, & Hamel, 2010; O'Cass & Griffin, 2006). However, the role of message believability in stigma communication is not clear. It is worthwhile to ask the following research question:

Research Question 1: Does message believability play a role in the effects of message valence and message type on emotional reactions and stigma attitudes?

METHOD

Participants

The study was conducted with 305 college students in Tianjin and Beijing, China. Most participants were of Han ethnicity with an average age of 20.15 years old (SD = 2.00). 34.43% of the participants were male. The cities of Tianjin and Beijing are major destinations of rural-to-urban migrant workers (Guan, 2011; Guan & Liu, 2013), so that the issue of stigma on migrant workers is likely to occur.

Design

This study is a 2 (message valence: positive or negative) × 2 (message type: narrative or non-narrative) between-subjects factorial design plus one no-message control group. Participants self-selected to respond to an online survey powered by *Qualtrics*, with the survey link distributed through an information board in universities. The survey was originally written in English, and was translated and back translated by two research assistants who are fluent in both English and Chinese (Brislin, 1970). Disagreements in translation were resolved.

Message Inductions

Before composing the messages, informal interviews with college students in Tianjin, China were conducted by the author, with an intention to collect college students' opinions and experience concerning migrant workers. Immersion and crystallization procedures (Borkan, 1999) were employed to examine the information obtained through the interviews. The most frequent themes categorized by the four stigma cues: mark, label, responsibility, and peril (Smith, 2007), were used to compose the message inductions.

For narrative and non-narrative messages respectively, the statements in a positive and a negative message are parallel, differing only in whether the content cues are de-stigmatizing or

stigmatizing. For positive and negative messages respectively, the arguments in a narrative and a non-narrative message are equivalent in terms of the thesis and the amount, differing only in whether the arguments are presented in a narrative or a non-narrative format.

The messages were originally written in English, and were translated and back translated by two research assistants fluent in both English and Chinese. Disagreements were resolved. The length of the four messages was the same both in English (142 words) and in Chinese (225 words). The messages were included in Appendix A.

A pre-test of the messages was conducted to evaluate the merit of the four message inductions prior to collecting data on the main study. Forty college students in Tianjin, China, were randomly assigned to read one of four messages, and were asked to rate the message on 7-point Likert scales (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) with items asking message valence, message type, and reading difficulty. Manipulation checks showed that positive messages were perceived as more positive than negative messages, that the distinction between narrative and non-narrative messages was clear, and that the four messages were comparably clear and easy to understand.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions or a no-message control condition. At the beginning of the survey, informed consent was obtained from participants. Except for the control group, participants were then exposed to one message randomly selected from the four messages. The message could be either positive or negative in valence, and could be either narrative or non-narrative in type.

After the message induction and manipulation check questions, participants were asked to indicate their emotional reactions, perception of message believability, and stigma attitudes on 7-point Likert scales. Demographic information was collected at the end of the survey.

Measurement

Emotional reactions. Participants were asked to rate on 7-point emotion scales (from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*). Emotions measured are disgust, anger, and fear. Each emotion was measured with three items obtained from Dillard & Shen (2007): disgust (*sickened, disgusted, and revolted*), anger (*irritated, angry, and aggravated*), and fear (*fearful, afraid, and scared*). Reliability of the disgust, anger, and fear scales are Cronbach's alpha = 0.87, 0.93, 0.91, respectively.

Stigma attitudes. The scale measuring stigma attitudes toward migrant workers was adapted from the Link & Phelan (2001) article, in which stigma was conceptualized to have four dimensions: label, negative attributes, separation, and discrimination. Response to this scale was marked on 7-point Likert Scales (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating higher stigma attitudes toward migrant workers (Appendix B).

Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the only valid factor was separation, measured with six items. Fit indices for this subscale of stigma attitudes are as follow: NFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.99, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.06. Reliability is Cronbach's alpha = 0.78. This sub-dimension, separation, was used in analyses to reflect stigma attitudes.

Message believability. Four 7-point semantic differential scale items adapted from Beltramini (1988) were included: *unrealistic---realistic, unlikely to happen---likely to happen, convincing---unconvincing* (recode), *reasonable---unreasonable* (recode). The last item was

excluded subsequently due to invalidity. Reliability of the message believability scale is Cronbach's alpha = 0.89.

Demographic information. Participants were asked about their age, gender, ethnicity, and major in college.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analysis

Among the total 305 participants who entered the online study, 37 of them dropped out after answering only a few questions, and 7 of them reported an age under 18. These responses were excluded from further consideration. The numbers of cases in the five conditions are 50, 51, 54, 52, and 54, respectively. These 261 usable responses were analyzed by SPSS.

One-way ANOVAs were conducted to ensure randomization by entering demographic variables as dependent variables, condition as factor. The results showed that there is no significant difference for participants' demographics among conditions. This showed that participants in the five conditions were comparable.

Descriptive statistics of all variables by condition, and the overall correlation matrix were presented in Table 1 and Table 2. Stigma attitudes toward migrant workers in the control condition was a little above the midpoint of the scale (M = 4.17, SD = 0.59), which means that without manipulation, respondents did not express strong stigma attitudes toward migrant workers in this study. Mean scores for disgust, anger, and fear responses in control condition were 1.50 (SD = 0.79), 1.45 (SD = 0.74), and 1.53 (SD = 0.89), respectively, meaning that without manipulation, respondents showed little negative emotional reactions to migrant workers.

Hypothesis Testing

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to test H1(a), H2(a)(i) and H2(b)(i), which are concerned with the main effect of message valence and the interaction effect of message valence by message type on disgust response. The data showed that message valence had a significant main effect on disgust response, $F(1, 203) = 70.66$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.26$. Participants who received the positive message ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.31$) had significantly less disgust response compared to those who received the negative message ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.53$), consistent with H1(a). However, there was no main effect of message type or interaction effect of message valence by message type on disgust response. Therefore, the data are inconsistent with H2(a)(i) and H2(b)(i).

To test H1(b), H2(a)(ii) and H2(b)(ii), which are concerned with the main effect of message valence and the interaction effect of message valence by message type on anger response, a two-way ANOVA was conducted. The data showed that message valence had significant main effect on anger response, $F(1, 203) = 51.72$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.20$. Participants who received the positive message ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.39$) had significantly less anger response compared to those who received the negative message ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.52$), consistent with H1(b). However, no main effect of message type or interaction effect of message valence by message type on anger response was found, inconsistent with H2(a)(ii) and H2(b)(ii).

Similarly, a two-way ANOVA was conducted to test H1(c), H2(a)(iii) and H2(b)(iii), which are concerned with the main effect of message valence and the interaction effect of message valence by message type on fear response. The data showed that message valence had a significant main effect on fear response, $F(1, 203) = 20.17$, $p < 0.005$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$. Participants who received the positive message ($M = 1.65$, $SD = 1.07$) had significantly less fear response

compared to those who received the negative message (M = 2.28, SD = 1.51), consistent with H1(c). However, there was no main effect of message type or interaction effect of message valence by message type on fear response. Thus, the data are inconsistent with H2(a)(iii) and H2(b)(iii).

To test H1(d), H2(a)(iv) and H2(b)(iv) about the main effect of message valence and the interaction effect of message valence by message type on stigma attitudes, a two-way ANOVA was employed. The results showed that there was a significant main effect of message valence on stigma attitudes, $F(1, 203) = 47.43$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.39$, consistent with H1(d). Additionally, there was a significant interaction effect of message valence by message type on stigma attitudes, $F(1, 196) = 2.97$, $p < 0.005$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$. To further specify the interaction effect, independent sample t-tests were conducted separately for positive and negative conditions. The results showed that in positive conditions, participants who read the narrative message reported significantly lower stigma attitudes (M = 2.99, SD = 0.66) compared to those who read the non-narrative message (M = 3.32, SD = 0.48). However, no significant difference between the effects of narrative and non-narrative messages on stigma attitudes was found in negative conditions. Therefore, H2(b)(iv) was supported, while H2(a)(iv) was not.

Research Question Exploration

Message believability was found to significantly differ depending on message valence and message type. To specify, message believability was perceived to be significantly higher in positive conditions (M = 4.95, SD = 1.29) than negative conditions (M = 3.51, SD = 1.28). Additionally, narrative messages (M = 4.11, SD = 0.94) were perceived to have significantly higher message believability than non-narrative messages (M = 2.89, SD = 1.29) in negative conditions, but not in positive conditions.

There was also a significant correlation between message believability and stigma attitudes in negative conditions ($r = 0.30$, $p < 0.005$), but not in positive conditions. In negative conditions, narrative messages were associated significantly with higher message believability ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$), which further was associated significantly with higher stigma attitudes. However, in negative conditions, narrative messages did not result in significantly higher stigma attitudes directly. Therefore, it is plausible to conjecture that in negative conditions, the effect of narrative messages on stigma attitudes was mediated by message believability. To test this mediation model (Figure 1), a path analysis was conducted with *PATHE*. The obtained correlation ($r = 0.14$) between message type and stigma attitudes equals the predicted correlation ($r = 0.14$) between them, which produces an error of zero. Therefore, the data are consistent with this mediation model.

DISCUSSION

Since the implementation of Reform and Opening-Up policy in 1980s, Chinese society has been experiencing huge social transitions in various domains, where all kinds of social changes, conflicts, and problems are intensified. Social transitions are still taking place today in China. The social group of rural-to-urban migrant workers has been a double-edged sword to the development of China (Guan, 2011; Lin et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2010). On the one hand, migrant workers serve as an indispensable labor force contributing to rapid economic growth and urbanization progress. On the other hand, their marginalized, disadvantaged, and embarrassing social situations in urban cities have posed great challenges not only to their wellbeing, but also to the operation and management of the whole society (Wang et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2009). Additionally, large-scale population migration caused by this social group have had significant impact on social structure, mobility, and stability.

Migrant workers in China have received a lot of attention. Studies were conducted to investigate various sociological issues related to migrant workers (Chen et al., 2011; Guan, 2011; Lin et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2010; Wong et al., 2007; Zhang et al., 2009; Zhang & Luo, 2012). Previous studies were predominately qualitative inquiries of perceived stigma from the perspective of migrant workers themselves (Guan, 2011; Guan & Liu, 2013; Wang et al., 2010). The current study adds to the knowledge about social stigma towards migrant workers from perspective of the stigmatizer, providing quantitative empirical evidence for ways in which migrant workers are stigmatized.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The results of the current study showed that in the control condition, participants did not express strong stigma attitudes. This result contradicts claims made in existing qualitative studies (Guan, 2011; Guan & Liu, 2013; Wang et al., 2010). One possible explanation is that there is a discrepancy between enacted stigma by urban citizens and perceived stigma by migrant workers. Discrepant results between stigmatizer's enacted stigma and recipients' experience of stigma are often reported in stigma studies (Lekas, Siegel, & Schrimshaw, 2006). Another plausible explanation is that participants in this study suppressed their stigma attitudes from explicit expression, in consideration of social desirability. It is also possible that college student sample may not share a broader stigma held by other segments of the Chinese urban population.

The effects of message valence on emotional reactions and stigma attitudes found in this study were consistent with previous research (Smith, 2007, 2010). Participants who received positive messages with de-stigmatizing cues reported significantly lower disgust, anger, and fear responses, as well as lower stigma attitudes, compared to those who received negative messages with stigmatizing cues. The effect sizes found in this study are very considerable. Additionally,

comparisons with the control condition indicate that while negative messages are more effective in inducing negative emotional responses, positive messages are more effective in reducing stigma attitudes.

Another finding worth noticing is that narrative messages were not able to significantly elicit more valence-consistent emotional responses than non-narrative messages. This result is inconsistent with previous literature on the important role of emotions in narrative message effects (McQueen et al., 2011; Nabi & Green, 2015; Oliver et al., 2012). One plausible explanation is concerned with the participants in this study being a Chinese population. In Chinese culture, it is not appropriate to display or verbalize intense emotions, especially for negative emotions. Studies on display rules have demonstrated different cultural norms for emotional expression (Matsumoto, 1990; Matsumoto et al., 2008). It is possible that participants who read narrative messages did experience higher level of emotional responses, but they did not explicitly express or verbalize them in self-report measures, in accordance to cultural norms of emotional display. However, this explanation requires additional investigation.

The effects of message type on stigma attitudes were very interesting. On the one hand, narrative messages have significant direct effects in reducing stigma attitudes in positive conditions, which provided some support for the social influence power of narrative messages in attitude change (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2013; Braddock & Dillard, 2016; McQueen et al., 2011; Moyer-Gusè et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2015; Niederdeppe et al., 2011; Oliver et al., 2012). To reduce stigma attitudes through communicating positive messages, narrative is more effective than a non-narrative type of message. In other words, it is justified in this study to employ narrative messages in developing relevant interventions to combat stigma attitudes toward rural-to-urban migrant workers in China.

On the other hand, narrative messages demonstrated an indirect effect mediated by message believability in inducing stigma attitudes in negative conditions. This result provided a new understanding of the mechanism under which stigma is communicatively enacted. Zhu & Smith (2016) discussed rumor as a mechanism of stigma communication, as interpersonal sharing of stigma messages contributes to the diffusion and adoption of stigma through communities. The current study adds to this knowledge. In order to elicit stigma attitudes, stigmatizing messages need to be perceived as believable, and a narrative type of message can increase the perception of message believability. This explains why many rumors take the form of storytelling to appear more believable, and further influence people's perceptions and attitudes.

Why are there different paths through which narrative messages influence stigma attitudes in positive and negative conditions? To paraphrase, why does message believability matter in negative conditions? One possible explanation is to balance the consequences of message processing. It is assumed that reading a message can potentially lead to changes in the recipients, including attitudes, beliefs, and affects. Processing of messages can have either positive or negative hedonic consequences for the recipients, and that people tend to achieve or maintain positive states (Wegener & Petty, 1994; Wegener, Petty, & Smith, 1995). In this study, participants in the control condition had almost no negative emotional responses and low stigma attitudes. When participants received negative messages, which signals potential negative changes in affects and attitudes, participants are likely to employ coping strategies to maintain their relatively positive states. There are two possible strategies: one is to disengage oneself from careful processing of the message; the other is to critically evaluate the message with an intention to counter-argue (Nabi, 2002). However, stigmatizing messages signal serious threats

to group functioning. From the evolutionary perspective taken by Smith (2007), negative messages with stigmatizing cues are more important for one's survival so that people should pay attention. In this case, the second strategy, to process negative messages in more critical ways, is employed. One way to do so is to evaluate the believability of the message. If the message believability is high, the signaled potential group threats should not be neglected, and the intention to maintain positive states becomes secondary. If the message believability is low, the signaled potential group threats are ignored, and one's positive states are maintained. On the contrary, when participants received positive messages, since their states can change in positive directions, they would not engage in critical evaluation of message believability.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations existing in the current study. Firstly, the stigma measure in the current study is a self-report explicit measure. However, participants may be unlikely to self-report they have stigma because of social desirability. Future studies are encouraged to include implicit measures of stigma as well, such as Implicit Association Test (Stier & Hinshaw, 2007; Wang, Brownell, & Wadden, 2004). Similarly, for emotional response measures, self-report has similar limitations.

Secondly, there is a question of whether narrative messages are equivalent to non-narrative messages, since the character in the former type of message is an individual, while the character in the latter is a group. Although it is a potential threat to internal validity of the study design, it serves the ecological validity in that it represents the character included in each type of message in the real world. In this sense, the choice between internal and ecological validity in the current study is understandable, but future studies could explore to address this issue.

Thirdly, three of the four dimensions in the stigma attitudes scale are invalid in this study. On the one hand, it could be that the items in the three invalid dimensions need improvement. On the other hand, it is possible that the construct of stigma is not culturally equivalent. In other words, the conceptualization by Link & Phelan (2001) is based on a western perspective, which may not be the same in Chinese contexts. The cultural equivalence of stigma as well as developing a culturally appropriate measure of stigma are worth exploring in future studies.

There is also a limitation existing in current experimental design. Participants in the negative conditions are elicited with negative emotional responses by the experimental inductions. It is suggested in future studies that participants be debriefed after the experiment. A positive message can be presented at the end to those participants in the negative conditions in order to reduce negative impacts of the experimental inductions on the participants.

Additionally, the current study was not able to include possible covariates such as familiarity with migrant workers, prior experience with migrant workers, prior message exposure, existing stigma attitudes, etc. Although they are not the major interests of current study, and they are assumed to be randomly distributed among conditions, it would be very interesting to include these variables in future inquiries.

Finally, the use of a college student sample limits the external validity of the research findings. In terms of the issue of stigma against rural-to-urban migrant workers in China, the stigmatizer population are urban citizens. College students are not representative of the population in terms of age, education, occupation, social relations with migrant workers, etc. This population likely affected the magnitude of the scores for dependent variables as well. Future studies could use a more representative sample to see if the research findings in current study are replicable and generalizable.

CONCLUSION

While participants in the control condition did not report strong stigma attitudes and high negative emotional reactions (i.e. disgust, anger, and fear) toward migrant workers in this study, experimental inductions did show interesting effects. First, message valence had significant main effects on emotional reactions and stigma attitude. Positive messages with de-stigmatizing cues led to significantly lower stigma attitudes and less negative emotional reactions, compared to negative messages with stigmatizing cues. Second, there was an interaction effect of message valence by message type on stigma attitudes. Narrative messages led to significantly lower stigma attitudes, compared to non-narrative messages, in positive message conditions. Third, in negative message conditions, the effects of narrative messages in predicting stigma attitudes were mediated by the perception of message believability.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Message Inductions

I. Non-narrative Message

A. positive condition

Migrant workers are usually hard-working people. The reason why their clothes might be dirty is that they are usually employed in laborious jobs with a dirty working environment. Migrant workers do a great favor to urban citizens by doing these jobs. These jobs are undesirable for urban citizens, but they are necessary for the proper functioning of the society. The disadvantageous situation of migrant workers in urban cities is resulted by factors beyond their control. Since migrant workers come from rural areas, they are very modest and tend to consider other people's convenience before their own. Migrant workers are also very innocent, honest and kind-hearted people. They are a group of people very easy to get along with. Urban citizens are encouraged to have interactions with migrant workers. Urban citizens could even learn something from the good qualities that migrant workers possess.

B. negative condition

Migrant workers are usually cheap laborers. The reason why their clothes might be dirty is that they are dirty and inferior people. Urban citizens do great favors to migrant workers by providing them with these job opportunities. These jobs do not require any skill and do not contribute to the proper functioning of the society. The disadvantageous situation of migrant workers in urban cities is resulted by their own choices. Since migrant workers come from rural areas, they are just uneducated and rude and tend to behave in very selfish and inconsiderate ways. Migrant workers are also greedy, dishonest, and dangerous people. They are a group of people that urban citizens should keep distance from. Urban citizens are warned to avoid any contact with migrant workers.

Urban citizens should be wary of migrant workers to protect themselves from being victims of crimes.

II. Narrative Message

A. positive condition

Once I was riding on the subway, a young man in a uniform with *City Construction* logo got on. I noticed that his uniform was covered with mud. I was quite sure that he was a migrant worker building the overpass bridge near campus, initiated for traffic safety. His job must have kept him from dressing tidy. There were many people on the subway, and the only available seat was right next to me. As soon as the migrant worker sat down, he shrank his body to avoid contaminating my clothes with the mud on his uniform. A while later, I left my seat to get off. Then, I heard someone calling me, "madam, I guess this is your cellphone." I realized the migrant worker was returning my cellphone that I left on my seat. I smiled and tapped on his shoulder.

B. negative condition

Once I was riding on the subway, a young man in a uniform with *City Construction* logo got on. I noticed that his uniform was covered with mud. I was quite sure that he was a migrant worker building the overpass bridge near campus, which had resulted in many inconvenient detours. He could have dressed himself tidy. There were many people on the subway, and the only available seat was right next to me. As soon as the migrant worker sat down, I smelled terrible body odor, and his dirty clothes were contaminating my clothes. A while later, I felt a tug on my pocket and realized the migrant worker was trying to steal my cellphone. I gave him a stare, and he said rudely, "What? Is there a problem with you?" I knitted my brows and ran away from him quickly.

APPENDIX B:

Scale of Stigma Attitudes toward Migrant Workers in China

(Rate from 1=Strongly Disagree to 7=Strongly Agree)

Label

1. People think migrant workers are foreigners.

2. People think migrant workers are cheap labor.

3. People think being migrant workers are criminals.

4. People think being migrant workers are a burden on society.

Negative Attributes

5. People think migrant workers are uneducated.

6. People think migrant workers are inferior.

7. People think migrant workers are dirty.

8. People think migrant workers are dangerous.

9. People think migrant workers are rude.

10. People think migrant workers are unhealthy.

Separation

11. People like me are not willing to have a meal with a migrant worker.

12. People like me are very different from migrant workers.

13. People like me are not willing to have a romantic partner who is a migrant worker.

14. Migrant worker should keep distance from people like me.

15. People like me feel uncomfortable being around a migrant worker.

16. Migrant workers do not belong to the same group with people like me.

Discrimination

17. Migrant workers are financially disadvantaged.

18. Migrant workers live in the bottom of the social hierarchy.

19. Migrant workers are excluded from access to various social resources.

20. Migrant workers experience discrimination.

21. The overall social environment is unfavorable for migrant workers.

22. Many policies are disadvantageous for migrant workers.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for All Variables by Condition

		Disgust	Anger	Fear	Stigma	Message Believability
Positive	Non-Narrative	1.96 (1.42)	2.14 (1.51)	1.73 (1.19)	3.32 (0.48)	4.84 (1.40)
Positive	Narrative	1.81 (1.21)	1.90 (1.28)	1.58 (0.94)	3.00 (0.66)	5.06 (1.19)
Negative	Non-Narrative	3.71 (1.65)	3.72 (1.56)	2.04 (1.37)	4.04 (0.50)	2.89 (1.29)
Negative	Narrative	3.40 (1.40)	3.22 (1.45)	2.52 (1.61)	4.19 (0.54)	4.11 (0.94)
Control		1.50 (0.79)	1.45 (0.74)	1.53 (0.89)	4.17 (0.59)	---- ----
Overall		2.46 (1.59)	2.47 (1.57)	1.88 (1.27)	3.74 (0.77)	4.23 (1.47)

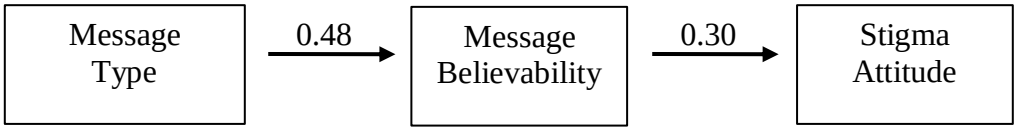
Note. Standard deviations are in the parentheses. N = 261.

Table 2: Overall Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
(1) Valence	1.00						
(2) Type	.01	1.00					
(3) Disgust	-.51**	-.08	**.87**				
(4) Anger	-.45**	-.12	.87**	**.93**			
(5) Fear	-.24**	.06	.60**	.63**	**.91**		
(6) Stigma	-.63**	-.07	.18**	.11	.11	**0.78**	
(7) Message Believability	.49**	.25**	-.47**	-.43**	-.12	-.24**	**.89**

Note. For valence, 1 = negative, 2 = positive. For type, 1 = non-narrative, 2 = narrative. For others, higher scores mean higher level of respective variables. Reliabilities of scales are in the diagonal. ** $p < 0.005$ (2-tailed).

Figure 1: The Effect of Message Type on Stigma in Negative Conditions



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