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When good intentions backfire: Intergroup asymmetries in understanding

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**WHEN GOOD INTENTIONS BACKFIRE:
INTERGROUP ASYMMETRIES IN UNDERSTANDING**

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**A DISSERTATION
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Abstract

This dissertation examines how Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks may cause them to overestimate how well they understand Blacks' experiences with racial discrimination. Because Whites risk being perceived as prejudiced, particularly in contexts where race is salient, they may try to overcome this impression by wanting to affiliate with Blacks. One consequence of their desire to affiliate may be to overestimate how well they understand Blacks compared to how well Blacks feel understood. Five studies explore the psychological underpinnings associated with asymmetries in understanding between Whites and Blacks.

In Study 1, Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks predicted perceived understanding when race was salient (vs. less salient). In Study 2, Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks caused them to feel that they understood Blacks' racial experiences to a greater extent than Blacks felt understood. In Study 3, White and Black participants imagined a discussion where a Black student disclosed about a negative racial (vs. non-racial) experience and a White student responded by saying he understood (vs. didn't understand). For the racial experience only, Black participants preferred that the White student say he didn't understand, but White participants preferred he say that he understood. In Study 4, White participants discussed racial issues with a Black or White partner. Whites' desire to affiliate caused them to feel that they understood the Black (vs. White) partner better. In Study 5, White and Black students discussed a negative racial (vs. non-racial) college experience. When talking about race, Whites with high desire to affiliate with Blacks were significantly inaccurate about how well they understood their Black partner compared to how understood their Black partner actually felt.

Collectively, this research demonstrates the difficulties of achieving intergroup understanding when racial divides are salient and Whites want to affiliate with Blacks in order to avoid appearing prejudiced. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of investigating how

seemingly good intentions—such as the desire to affiliate—can contribute to adverse intergroup outcomes.

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Introduction

Decades of research attest to a seemingly fundamental aspect of the human condition: People prefer to interact with individuals from their own racial group. A recent meta-analysis spanning 40 years of psychological research discovered that interracial interactions elicit less positive attitudes, greater negative affect, less friendly nonverbal behavior, and lowered performance across various tasks compared to same race interactions (Toosi, Babbitt, Ambady, & Sommers, 2012). Beyond one-time encounters, interracial relationships tend to be less intimate (Trail, Shelton, & West, 2009), less satisfying (Shook & Fazio, 2008), less likely to develop (Kao & Joyner, 2004), and more prone to dissolution over time than same race relationships. Although society grows increasingly diverse and interactions across racial lines become more frequent, what factors account for the continued disparities between interracial and same race interactions?

Traditionally, researchers have identified Whites' prejudice toward racial minorities as the driving force behind negative interracial encounters (Dovidio, 2001; Duckitt, 1992; Shelton, 2000). The study of prejudice as the source of intergroup difficulties has been extremely fruitful: Whites' prejudice predicts numerous undesirable outcomes for the racial minorities who interact with Whites (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Sekaquaptewa, Espinoza, Thompson, Vargas, & von Hippel, 2003; Shelton, 2003; Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001). More recently, however, researchers have started to move beyond prejudice to investigate how seemingly benign motives can unexpectedly cause intergroup interactions to break down (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Plant & Devine, 1998).

This dissertation extends the historical framework of intergroup relations by examining how prejudice concerns can lead to the good intention of wanting to affiliate with outgroup members. This desire to affiliate, however, can inadvertently contribute to negative outcomes in interracial interactions. Although much work has found that negative motives (e.g., racial animus) can create

unpleasant intergroup interactions and that positive motives (e.g., motivation to control prejudiced reactions; Dunton & Fazio, 1997) result in improved intergroup interactions, few studies have examined how positive motives lead to negative intergroup consequences. Specifically, I examine how Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks can undermine interracial interactions by producing asymmetries in understanding between Whites and Blacks when racial divides are salient. In the next section, I discuss Whites' affiliative motive in interracial interactions in the context of the stereotype threat literature.

The Desire to Affiliate

Stereotype threat is a sense of threat that people may experience when they know they can be evaluated or discriminated against on the basis of a negative stereotype associated with one's group membership (Steele, 1992, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Women may experience stereotype threat while taking a mathematics exam when reminded of gender differences in mathematics ability (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999) and White men may experience stereotype threat during an athletic task when reminded of the seemingly superior athletic skills of Black men (Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999). Similarly, Whites may experience the stereotype threat of appearing racist during interracial interactions, particular when the salience of racial divisions between Whites and Blacks is high. Whites are uniquely stereotyped as being intolerant (Krueger, 1996), prejudiced, biased, unfair, and close-minded (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998). Furthermore, Whites recognize the existence of these negative stereotypes (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008) and demonstrate considerable care to not appear racist (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Plant & Devine, 1998; Vorauer, Hunter, Main, & Roy, 2000).

Given the threat of appearing prejudiced in interracial interactions, I predict that Whites will want to affiliate with Black interaction partners in order to avoid fulfilling this negative stereotype. Interpersonal motives are more salient when they are threatened (Leary & Kowalski, 1990) and

negative White stereotypes that come to mind while interacting with Blacks may drive Whites to elicit liking from interaction partners. Indeed, Whites in interracial interactions report that it is more important for them to be liked by their partner than to be respected (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010); consequently, Whites tend to engage in affiliative behaviors, such as smiling, nodding, agreeing with their partner, and providing flattery. Whites also look to racial minorities to confirm their morality and likableness especially when they perceive status disparities between racial groups to be illegitimate (Vorauer & Sakamoto, 2008). In short, Whites—more so than other racial groups—are likely to have a high desire to affiliate with others in interracial interactions in part due to their concerns about appearing racially prejudiced.

Interactions with low status racial minorities, such as Blacks, are especially likely to evoke Whites' desire to affiliate. Whites and Blacks have a longstanding history of dominance and subordination in the United States that continues to persist in the present day. Despite great strides in equality made since the Civil Rights era, to this day Blacks and Whites have some of the greatest disparities in markers of socioeconomic status, such as health, educational attainment, and income (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Compared to other racial minorities, such as Jews or Asian Americans, Blacks are perceived to be lower in status (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) and cause Whites to interact with them differently than with other racial minorities (Bergsieker et al., 2010). For these reasons, my dissertation will focus on interactions between Whites and Blacks.

Factors that vary the salience of racial divides may also influence the strength of Whites' desire to affiliate. The common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012) proposes that highlighting shared memberships (e.g., team, school, nation) or experiences (e.g., common fate) between two different groups alters group members' cognitive representations and behavior such that members of the outgroup are now conceived of and treated as ingroup members. In situations where racial boundaries are less salient, then, Whites may be less likely to be driven by their desire to

affiliate with Blacks because the threat of appearing prejudiced is reduced. By contrast, contexts that increase the salience of race may evoke Whites' concern of appearing prejudiced. Goff and colleagues (2008) found that Whites who anticipated talking with Blacks about a racial topic experienced greater concerns about appearing racist and they consequently distanced themselves from their Black partners. Similarly, I propose that in contexts where race is salient (vs. not), Whites will experience a greater desire to affiliate with Blacks as a function of their concerns about appearing prejudiced. Thus, this dissertation will examine the moderating role of racial salience by randomly assigning participants to discuss racial topics (e.g., racial discrimination) or non-racial topics (e.g., loneliness).

Intergroup Understanding

One consequence of Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks is that Whites may come to feel that they know and understand Blacks. This is likely to occur for three reasons. First, people generally tend to merge themselves with others they want to affiliate with by incorporating the target's attributes as being characteristic of the self. Slotter and Gardner (2009) asked people to identify traits (e.g., artistic, musical) that do not describe themselves very well. Later, when people discovered that one of these traits described an individual they liked, they suddenly began to perceive this trait as being descriptive of themselves as well. Similarly, people in satisfying relationships assimilate their romantic partners to themselves by perceiving commonalities that are not evident in reality (Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002). Thus, Whites' affiliative motive may affect their "interpretive filters" by causing them to feel that they can understand Blacks more than they actually do (Reis & Shaver, 1988).

Second, when people want to affiliate with someone they may come to adopt the perspectives endorsed by that person. Affiliative goals have been shown to produce social tuning, or the adopting the views espoused by targets of affiliation (Sinclair et al., 2005). Perspective taking

also leads people to adopt the traits and behaviors of others (Galinsky, Wang, & Ku, 2008).

Participants asked to take on the perspective of an elderly person, cheerleader, or a Black person adopted both the negative and positive stereotypes associated with these targets. Based on this work, Whites who want to affiliate with Blacks may come to feel that they too have experienced some of the same events and situations that Blacks have experienced—perhaps to the point of even conveying to Blacks that they understand. People engage in behaviors that indicate understanding, such as agreeing and nodding, when they want others to like them (Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986; Jones & Pittman, 1982). Whites with a high affiliative motive in interracial interactions may be more likely to display these behaviors and come to feel a sense of understanding compared to Whites who do not have this motive.

Third, Whites may claim understanding in order to prove that they are not prejudiced. Claiming understanding implies that Whites are paying attention to their Black partners and are connecting with what they're saying, behaviors that a stereotypically racist person would likely not exhibit. Furthermore, claiming understanding allows Whites to feel that they share commonalities with Blacks and enables them to draw attention away from their differences. In general, Whites and other high status group members prefer to talk about commonalities they share with low status groups and seek to avoid mentioning differences (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; Apfelbaum, Sommers, Norton, 2008; Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008). For example, Saguy and colleagues (2008) randomly assigned participants' memberships to advantaged or disadvantaged groups. Participants in advantaged groups generally preferred to talk about commonalities that the two groups shared versus talking about power differences, and this was especially the case the more people identified with their group. Likewise, by saying they understand how Blacks feel, Whites can draw attention away from the fact that they belong to different racial groups and by extension, avoid the possibility that they are racially prejudiced.

At first glance, Whites' desire to affiliate and the resulting perceptions of understanding may seem benign. After all, affiliative motive seems to be antithetical to prejudice, or "*antipathy* based upon a faulty and inflexible generalization" (Allport, 1954, p. 9). While seemingly preferable to racial prejudice, Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks may be problematic because it may cause them to inaccurately judge how well they understand Blacks. When Whites try to convey that they understand, Blacks may disagree and feel that Whites do not actually understand as much as they think they do. This asymmetry in understanding between Whites and Blacks may harm the quality of their interactions and prevent relationship development. In the next section, I discuss the importance of establishing understanding in interpersonal relationships and why Blacks may feel that Whites do not understand them as well as Whites think they do.

Asymmetries in Understanding

People strongly desire to be understood by others and seek relationships that fulfill their need to be understood. Reis and Shaver's (1988) model of the intimacy process theorizes that feeling understood, validated, and cared for by another person leads to greater intimacy with that individual. Indeed, interacting with others who understand and respond to one's needs and values helps maintain high quality relationships (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). The need to be understood is so prized that people strongly prefer to interact with others who verify the views they have about themselves, even when these views are unflattering (Swann, 2012). In addition to these relationship benefits, feeling understood leads to experiencing greater positive affect (Oishi, Koo, & Akimoto, 2008), satisfaction (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000), and better physical health (Lun, Kesebir, & Oishi, 2008; Sarason, Sarason, & Gurung, 1997). People actively seek out and benefit from relationships that foster feelings of understanding.

Despite the importance of feeling understood, establishing understanding between individuals may be hard to accomplish, particularly across group lines. Groups may simultaneously

underestimate how well they understand each other as well as overestimate understanding. Prior work has mostly emphasized a lack of understanding between groups. Negative attitudes (e.g., Dovidio et al., 2002; Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997), stereotypes (e.g., Katz & Braly, 1935), and metaperceptions (e.g., Vorauer et al., 2000; Vorauer et al., 1998; Yzerbyt, Judd, & Muller, 2009) about outgroup members may thwart genuine understanding between members of different groups. People may erroneously assume that outgroup members are too different from the self (Mallett, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008) and therefore less understandable. Perhaps members are even less willing to understand outgroup members in the first place; recent neural evidence points to an empathy gap for outgroup members, where people are less able to empathically experience the emotional and motivational states of outgroup (vs. ingroup) members (Gutsell & Inzlicht, 2012).

Whereas the previous examples describe instances where Whites and Blacks both demonstrate a lack of understanding, the present research proposes that Whites may overestimate how well they understand Blacks when faced with the possibility of appearing prejudiced. Whites are likely to overestimate understanding when racial salience is high because they are more strongly driven by their need to affiliate with Blacks in order to avoid appearing prejudiced. By contrast, Blacks are likely to feel less understood when racial salience is high because racial experiences are a significant component of Blacks' unique history, culture, and identity. The present research predicts that asymmetries in understanding will be particularly likely when Whites and Blacks discuss topics high in racial salience.

Throughout the studies of the dissertation, I manipulated racial salience by asking participants to talk about racial discrimination (high salience) or peer rejection (low salience). Ingroup understanding may be particularly difficult to achieve when discussing racial discrimination for several reasons. First, Whites and Blacks disagree about the extent to which both groups

experience racial discrimination. Whites tend to perceive less racial discrimination in general (Hochschild, 1995) and think that greater progress has been made toward achieving racial equality than Blacks do (Brodish, Brazy, & Devine, 2008; Eibach & Ehrlinger, 2006; Eibach & Keegan, 2006). However, when Whites do believe that racism persists, they feel that they too are victims of racial discrimination. In fact, a recent nationwide survey found that Whites feel that they are more racially discriminated against than Blacks are; by contrast, Blacks still believe that Blacks encounter more racial discrimination (Norton & Sommers, 2011). These perceptions, combined with Whites' desire to connect with Blacks, are likely to cause Whites to believe that they understand Blacks to a greater extent than Blacks think Whites do.

Second, talking about racial discrimination is likely to exacerbate asymmetries in intergroup understanding because Blacks feel that Whites are not qualified to provide advice on issues of discrimination and feel skeptical of Whites' claims to understand. Advice is more helpful when it comes from people who have experienced a problem firsthand (Dakof & Taylor, 1990). When people who lack the credentials to express opinions on a topic do so anyway, they risk censure from others (Miller & Effron, 2010). For example, people express confusion and discomfort when they encounter men who support abortion laws, even when they agree with the men's views, presumably because men are seen as having less at stake in the issue of abortion than women (Ratner & Miller, 2001). Whites' lack of standing on the topic of racial experience may arouse suspicions about Whites' beliefs, even if their views align with those of Blacks.

Third, Whites' desire to affiliate and Blacks' desire for respect in interracial interactions (Bergsieker et al., 2010) may cause both groups to leverage discussions of racial discrimination to satisfy their divergent goals. Whites may want to claim they understand racial discrimination because they believe doing so will help them thwart the impression of being prejudiced and also because they assume that Blacks will respond positively to their attempts to convey understanding.

Blacks, however, may perceive Whites who claim understanding for racial discrimination as overstepping sensitive boundaries that differentiate the experiences of Whites and Blacks from one another. Because Blacks, as well as other disadvantaged groups, want recognition and respect for real disparities that exist between themselves and more advantaged groups (Bergsieker et al., 2010; Saguy et al., 2008), they may feel that Whites truly do not understand experiences of racial discrimination and respond negatively when Whites profess to do so.

Do Whites and Blacks always misunderstand one another? I predict that asymmetries in understanding will be particularly likely when race is highly salient but that understanding can be achieved when race is less salient. When Whites and Blacks talk about topics that both can relate to and are common to both racial groups, they may be able to feel understood by the other person and feel like they, too, understand their partner. The lowered salience of race is likely to reduce Whites' concerns about appearing prejudiced and by extension, their desire to claim inappropriate levels of understanding, as well as reduce Blacks' desire to maintain boundaries. Overall, then, understanding can be achieved between Whites and Blacks but this is considerably harder to attain when racial salience is high.

Overview of Research

Across five studies, this dissertation will test three primary predictions about intergroup understanding.

Hypothesis 1: When race is salient, Whites' desire to affiliate causes them to think they understand Blacks.

Hypothesis 2: When race is salient, Blacks prefer Whites not claim understanding rather than

saying that they understand. By contrast, when race is not salient Blacks prefer claims of understanding. Whites, however, fail to recognize Blacks' social support preferences.

Hypothesis 3: When race is salient, Whites' desire to affiliate moderates how well Whites' accurately estimate how well they understand Blacks. At high (vs. low) desire to affiliate, Whites are less accurate about their ability to understand Blacks.

Study 1 investigates Whites' perceived understanding for a Black confederate's racial and non-racial problems. Furthermore, it examines perceived understanding as a function of the degree to which Whites want to affiliate with the Black confederate. Study 2 analyzes responses from both Whites and Blacks to test whether Whites overestimate how well they think they understand Blacks' racial (vs. non-racial) problems compared to how well Blacks feel understood. In addition, it seeks to establish Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks as the mechanism behind Whites' and Blacks' asymmetries in understanding. Study 3 establishes real-world validity by examining the processes described in Studies 1-2 in face-to-face dyadic interactions. White participants talk about racial topics with a Black or White participant and tests whether desire to affiliate predicts understanding in interracial interactions only or if similar processes apply to intraracial interactions as well. Study 4 probes the social support implications of asymmetries in understanding to determine whether Blacks (vs. Whites) prefer different types of social support for racial (vs. non-racial) problems. Finally, Study 5 investigates interactions between previously unacquainted Black and White participants to test how accurately Whites' judgments of understanding and supportiveness correspond to the extent to which Black participants actually feel understood and supported. Collectively, these studies probe the potential negative intergroup consequences when Whites desire to get along with Blacks.

Study 1: The Effects of Whites' Desire to Affiliate on Understanding

The objectives of Study 1 are twofold: (1) to test whether Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks predicts perceived understanding and (2) to test whether racial salience moderates this relationship. I manipulated racial salience by randomly assigning participants to listen to a disclosure about racial discrimination (high racial salience) or peer rejection (low racial salience). I predict that Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks will predict perceived understanding of Blacks, particularly when the discussion topic is high in racial salience. Making race salient may threaten Whites' image of being non-prejudiced and subsequently cause them to overcome this threat by claiming to understand racial discrimination.

Method

A total of 63 White undergraduates (38 women) participated in this study for course credit or monetary compensation. Participants were on average 19.7 years of age ($SD = 1.3$).

In the lab, participants were informed that they would be completing two separate studies: a word puzzle and a video chatting study with another student. In actuality, the two activities were part of a single study. Upon completion of the study, participants were thanked and debriefed. This study used a 2 (prime: high affiliation vs. low affiliation) x 2 (topic: racial vs. non-racial) between-subjects design.

Priming task

Participants completed a short word puzzle (see Appendix A) that was ostensibly a pretest for a different study. The word puzzle was designed to induce high vs. low desire to affiliate among participants based on goal-priming methods used in prior work (e.g., (Huntsinger, Lun, Sinclair, & Clore, 2009; Huntsinger & Sinclair, 2010). Participants were instructed to unscramble a series of words to form sentences that contained elements of affiliation or social distancing. Each word puzzle contained 20 sentences (15 critical, 5 neutral). Examples of high affiliation sentences

included, “I want to bond with him” and “I want to get along with others,” whereas examples of low affiliation sentences included, “I dislike her” and “I want to be alone today.” In order to make the goal of the prime less transparent, each set of words contained a filler word that did not need to be used to complete the sentence.

Video chatting

After the priming task, participants took part in an ostensibly separate video chatting study. Participants were told that they would complete the study in real time with another student in a separate room, although in actuality, they were watching a pre-recorded response given by one of two Black confederates who were the same gender as the participant¹. The confederate said that his name was Brian (or Brianna for females) and introduced himself as a freshman at Princeton. Next, the experimenter asked the confederate and participant to answer three questions in order to get to know each other better. These questions were adapted from Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, and Bator’s (1997) “small talk” condition: (1) “What is your favorite class at Princeton thus far and why?” (2) “Which foreign country would you most like to visit?” and (3) “What is your favorite holiday and why?” Confederates answered that they enjoyed social psychology, wanted to visit Italy, and that their favorite holiday was Thanksgiving. Participants always responded after listening to the confederate.

¹ A separate group of 125 (84 female) undergraduates rated the confederate videotapes. Confederates consisted of two Black males and two Black females. Participants rated on 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*) scales how *unfriendly*, *anxious*, *likable*, *attractive*, *nervous*, *intelligent*, *sad*, *warm*, *pleasant*, *natural*, *negative*, *upset*, *confident*, *awkward*, *like a typical Princeton student*, and *emotional* confederates seemed. In general, confederates of the same gender received comparable ratings to one another. In the introduction videos, the male confederates did not differ significantly on any of the items and the female confederates only differed on nervousness. In the racial video, the male confederates differed significantly on how upset, awkward, and emotional they appeared. The female confederates only differed on warmth. In the non-racial video, the male participants did not differ significantly from one another on any of the items, whereas female confederates differed significantly on pleasantness.

Next, participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to learn about potentially negative experiences that students encountered in college. The confederate was assigned to talk about his experiences first and participants responded afterwards. Prior to watching the confederate's response, participants saw a list of discussion topics that the confederate could select. Participants were randomly assigned to listen to the confederate talk about a negative racial incident with their roommate (high racial salience condition) or a negative non-racial incident (low racial salience condition). In the racial incident, the confederate overheard his roommate say that he felt uncomfortable around Black people and wished he had a White roommate instead. In the non-racial incident, the confederate overheard his roommate say that he felt uncomfortable around quiet people and preferred to have a more fun roommate. After watching the confederate's video, participants created a video response and answered some questions on the computer about the study.

Primary measures

Desire to affiliate. Participants answered 3 items to assess desire to affiliate: "How much did you want to get along with Brian (Brianna)?", "How much did you want to have a smooth interaction with Brian (Brianna)?", and "How much did you like Brian (Brianna)?" These items were averaged to form a composite measure of desire to affiliate ($\alpha = .88$), serving as a manipulation check for the priming manipulation.

Perceived understanding. Participants answered 6 items that were averaged to form a composite measure of perceived understanding ($\alpha = .85$): "How well did you know what it's like to be in Brian's (Brianna's) shoes?", "How well did you know what Brian (Brianna) was going through?", "How well did you 'get' how Brian (Brianna) felt?", "How well could you relate to Brian (Brianna)?", "How well did you feel what Brian (Brianna) felt?", and "How well did you understand Brian (Brianna)?"

Secondary measures

I sought to test whether affiliative desire relates to White participants' concerns about appearing prejudiced. Participants answered 7 items on their *motivation to control prejudiced responses* (Dunton & Fazio, 1997). Sample items included, "If I have a prejudiced thought or feeling, I keep it to myself," "It's never acceptable to express one's prejudices," and "In today's society it is important that one not be perceived as prejudiced." These items were rated on 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scales and were averaged to form a composite measure of motivation to control prejudiced responses ($\alpha = .84$). Participants also answered 9 items on their *concerns of being racially stereotyped*. Sample items included, "My being White did not influence how Brian (Brianna) acted with me," "I didn't think about the fact that I am White when I interacted with Brian (Brianna)," and "I worried that Brian (Brianna) might stereotype me because I'm White" (reverse-scored). These items were rated on 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scales and were averaged to form a composite measure of concerns of being racially stereotyped ($\alpha = .88$). Given that concerns about appearing prejudiced are likely to affect how anxious participants feel, I also asked 3 items on how jittery, nervous, and alert participants felt on 1 (*very slightly/not at all*) to 5 (*extremely*) scales. These items were averaged to form a composite measure of *anxiety* ($\alpha = .65$).

Results

Participants were removed from analysis for having univariate outliers exceeding 3 standard deviations from the mean ($n = 1$) and for failing to follow instructions ($n = 1$).

Manipulation check

To verify the effectiveness of the affiliation primes, participants' desire to affiliate was submitted to a 2 (prime: high affiliation vs. low affiliation) $\times$ 2 (topic: racial vs. non-racial) between-

subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA). Unexpectedly, the prime was unsuccessful. There were neither main effects nor a significant interaction on desire to affiliate. Participants primed with high affiliation did not report greater desire to affiliate than those primed with low affiliation in either the racial ($M = 5.80, SD = 1.05$ vs. $M = 5.87, SD = 0.76$) or non-racial ($M = 5.67, SD = 0.94$ vs. $M = 5.75, SD = 0.91$) topic conditions. Although researchers who have used similar primes have argued that the absence of finding significant differences in explicit measures indicates that the primes operated outside of conscious awareness (Huntsinger & Sinclair, 2010), the effectiveness of the primes remains uncertain. Due to the ambiguous results of this manipulation check, I treated participants' self-reported desire to affiliate as an independent variable. Given that prime, scenario, nor their interaction produced significant changes in desire to affiliate, it is reasonable to treat this measure as an independent variable.

Perceived understanding

Perceived understanding of the Black confederate's disclosure was submitted to a multiple regression analysis. In the model, desire to affiliate was a mean-centered continuous predictor and topic was an effects-coded ($-1 = \text{racial}, +1 = \text{non-racial}$) dichotomous predictor. I used effects coding in order to test the overall mean effect of affiliation across both topic conditions. Multiplying both predictors produced the interaction term. Results yielded a positive relationship between desire to affiliate and perceived understanding, $B = 0.36, SE B = 0.12, t(57) = 2.95, p = .005$. Participants reported greater perceived understanding for the non-racial (vs. racial) topic, $B = 0.42, SE B = 0.11, t(57) = 3.86, p < .001$. As predicted, there was also a significant affiliation $\times$ topic interaction, $B = -0.33, SE B = 0.12, t(57) = -2.66, p = .010$.

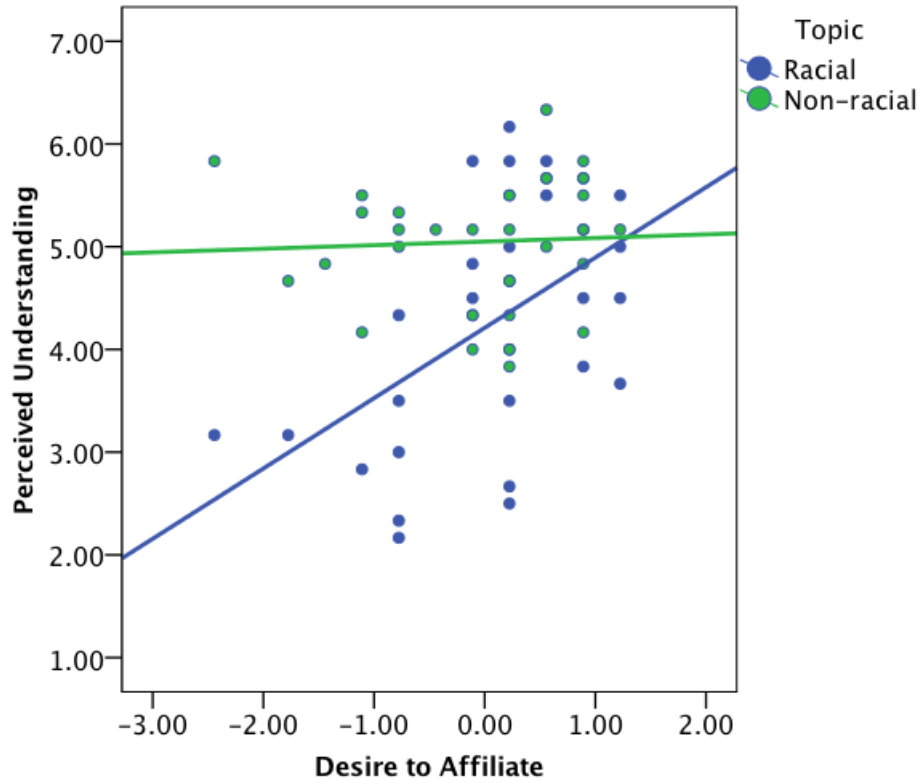


Figure 1. The interaction between desire to affiliate and topic on perceived understanding in Study 1.

Simple slopes analysis revealed that for participants listening to the non-racial topic, desire to affiliate did not significantly predict perceived understanding, $B = 0.04$, $SE B = 0.17$, $t(57) = 0.21$, $p = .838$, *ns*. Consistent with predictions, however, desire to affiliate positively predicted perceived understanding for participants listening to the racial topic, $B = 0.68$, $SE B = 0.18$, $t(57) = 3.92$, $p < .001$.

I followed procedures outlined by Aiken & West (1991) to further probe the significant interaction by analyzing differences in the predicted values at the mean value of desire to affiliate, at one standard deviation above the mean, and one standard deviation below the mean. Analyses revealed that participants reported greater perceived understanding for the non-racial topic at the mean value of desire to affiliate, $B = 0.83$, $SE B = 0.21$, $t(57) = 3.87$, $p < .001$, and one standard

deviation below the mean, $B = 1.40$, $SE B = 0.31$, $t(57) = 4.60$, $p < .001$. However, at one standard deviation above the mean, perceived understanding of the racial and non-racial topics did not differ significantly, $B = 0.25$, $SE B = 0.30$, $t(57) = 0.83$, $p = .409$, *ns*.

Table 1: *Correlations by topic.*

	Non-racial topic				Racial topic			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
1. Desire to affiliate	--				--			
2. Motivation to control prejudice	.11	--			.40*	--		
3. Stereotype concern	-.16	.04	--		.45*	.23	--	
4. Anxiety	.23	.26	-.09	--	.40*	.34 [†]	.31 [†]	--

* $p < .05$; [†] $p < .10$

Correlates of desire to affiliate

Based on the prediction that Whites' desire to affiliate relates to their desire to appear non-prejudiced, I conducted correlational analysis between desire to affiliate, motivation to control prejudiced responses, concerns of being racially stereotyped, and anxiety. I predicted that these constructs would correlate more strongly when racial salience was high (vs. low) due to the increased threat of Whites appearing prejudiced in this context. Analyses supported my predictions (see Table 1). Motivation to control prejudiced responses and anxiety correlated positively with Whites' desire to affiliate when the topic was racial only. Interestingly, however, Whites' desire to affiliate when discussing a racial topic was related to being less concerned about being viewed through the lens of racial stereotypes. The fact that this correlation exists, however, suggests that Whites were thinking

about racial stereotypes more when the topic was racial (vs. non-racial), indicating greater concern with the possibility of appearing prejudiced.

Discussion

This study provides preliminary evidence that White' desire to affiliate with Blacks predicts increased perceived understanding when talking about racial topics. White participants who were highly motivated to affiliate with the Black confederate felt that they understood the confederate's racial and non-racial problems equally, but White participants who were less motivated to affiliate with the Black confederate admitted less understanding for racial problems. At first glance, it may seem that reduced understanding for racial topics reported by lowly affiliated White participants is the deviant condition. Given that Whites generally have fewer firsthand experiences with racial discrimination, however, I expected White participants to acknowledge that they don't understand racial problems as well as they understand non-racial problems. Blacks may also anticipate less understanding when talking about racial discrimination because they perceive anti-White discrimination to be relatively rare (Norton & Sommers, 2011) and may react with surprise or even skepticism when Whites claim to understand their racial problems. Study 2 directly examines Black participants' perceptions of how well Whites understand racial and non-racial problems and compares them to White participants' own perceptions of understanding.

I also found evidence that Whites' affiliative desire is related to concerns about appearing prejudiced, particularly when race is highly salient. While desire to affiliate correlated positively with motivation to control prejudiced responses and anxiety when talking about a racial topic, it negatively correlated with concerns about being racially stereotyped. That is, White participants' desire to affiliate was related to having *less* concerns about being racially stereotyped, such that participants felt that they were seen as individuals and not in line with stereotyped associated with their racial group. The fact that a correlation exists at all, however, suggests that Whites' desire to

affiliate with Blacks relates in part to concerns about being viewed through the lens of White racial stereotypes—namely, concerns about appearing prejudiced.

One limitation of the present study is that the priming task failed to experimentally manipulate desire to affiliate with Blacks. Although our predicted results occurred when examining individual differences in White participants' desire to affiliate with Blacks, these findings do not establish causality between desire to affiliate and understanding. In the future, I seek to replicate the present results by manipulating White participants' desire to affiliate and testing whether increases in affiliative desire predict perceived understanding for racial topics.

Study 2: Desire to Affiliate and Understanding in Intergroup Relationships

The previous study found that in one-time interactions, Whites desire to affiliate with Blacks predicts perceived understanding of racial topics. Study 2 seeks to determine whether a similar process occurs among Whites and Blacks in pre-existing relationships. Participants were asked to think about a cross-group friend and imagine discussing a negative racial or non-racial problem with them. Consistent with the previous study, I predict that Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks will predict understanding for racial topics. Given that relationship closeness is correlated with understanding (Reis & Shaver, 1988) and people may differ in the degree to which they feel close to their friend, in all analyses I will control for baseline closeness to the selected cross-group friend.

In addition to replicating findings from Study 1, the present study also examines Black participants' responses. I predict that White participants will overestimate how much they understand racial discrimination—namely, that White participants think they understand racial discrimination to a greater extent than Black participants think they do. Finally, I predict that White participants' desire to affiliate with Blacks will mediate the relationship between discussion topic and the discrepancy between White and Black participants' perceptions of understanding.

Method

Twenty-six Black students (19 women) and 45 White students (24 women) participated in this study for course credit or monetary compensation. Participants were on average 19.5 years of age ($SD = 1.2$).

This study employed a 2 (participant race: White vs. Black) x 2 (scenario: racial vs. non-racial) between-subjects design. Participants arrived in the lab and were informed that they would complete a study regarding their friendships. In a computerized survey, participants completed demographic information about themselves and then read instructions (see Appendix B) asking them to name a same-gender friend who was a current student at their university. White participants

had to nominate a Black friend and Black participants had to nominate a White friend. Participants typed their friend's name so that subsequent study questions would refer to their friend directly by name. After participants completed measures about their friend's demographics, they indicated how close they felt to their friend so that their responses could be used as covariates in subsequent analyses.

Next, participants read a scenario involving themselves and their friend and answered questions about this scenario. White participants imagined listening to their friend disclose about a negative racial or non-racial classroom experience (see Appendix C), whereas Black participants imagined telling their friend about a negative racial or non-racial classroom experience (see Appendix D). After reading the scenario, participants answered questions regarding desire to affiliate and understanding. Because Whites imagined listening to a disclosure, they answered questions on how well they understood their Black friend. Because Blacks imagined telling a disclosure, they answered questions on how well they felt understood by their White friend.

Measures

Friendship closeness. Participants answered 5 items regarding how close they felt to their friend. Participants rated how well they knew their friend, how close they felt to their friend, and how close they felt to their friend relative to all their other friendships using 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) scales. In addition, participants indicated how close they felt to their friend using Aron's Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS; Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) measure. This measure consists of seven depictions of increasingly overlapping circles. One of the circles represents the self and the other circle represents the friend. Greater overlap between the two circles indicates greater relationship closeness. Participants had to choose which depiction most accurately captured their relationship closeness with their friend. Participants also indicated how they would characterize

their relationship with their friend using a 1 (*acquaintance*) to 5 (*my closest friend*) scale. All of these items were standardized and averaged to form a composite measure of friendship closeness ($\alpha = .95$).

Desire to affiliate. Participants answered 4 items regarding how much they desired to affiliate with their friend after reading the scenario. These items include, “How much would you want to get along with (friend’s name)?”, “How much would you want to connect with (friend’s name)?”, “How much would you want to feel close to (friend’s name)?”, and “How much would you like (friend’s name)?” Ratings were made on 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*) scales. These items were averaged to form a composite measure of desire to affiliate ($\alpha = .88$).

Understanding. White participants answered 6 items regarding how well they understood their friend using 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*) scales. These items were adapted from Study 1. Sample items include, “How much would you know what your friend is going through?” and “How much would you know what it’s like to be in your friend’s shoes?” Black participants answered 6 similar items regarding how well they felt understood by their friend using 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*) scales. The items were averaged to form a composite measure of understanding ($\alpha = .93$).

Results

One participant was removed from analysis for univariate outliers exceeding 3 standard deviations from the mean.

Desire to affiliate

Results were submitted to a 2 (participant race: Black vs. White) $\times$ 2 (scenario: racial vs. non-racial) ANCOVA with friendship closeness as a covariate. Closeness marginally predicted understanding, $F(1, 65) = 3.06, p = .085, \eta^2_p = .05$. No other main effects reached significance, but the predicted participant race $\times$ scenario interaction emerged, $F(1, 65) = 12.68, p = .001, \eta^2_p = .16$ (see Figure 2).

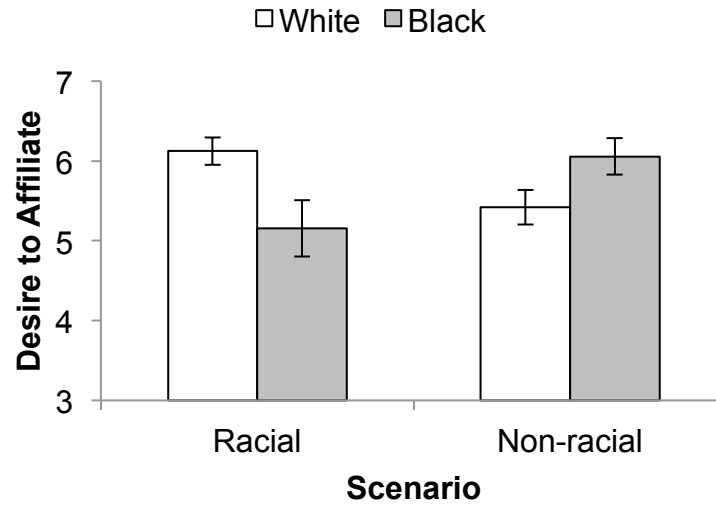


Figure 2. The effect of scenario and participant race on desire to affiliate in Study 2. Error bars depict 1 standard error above and below the mean of each condition. The graph depicts adjusted means.

Consistent with predictions, for the racial scenario White participants wanted to affiliate with their friend to a greater extent than Black participants did, $F(1, 65) = 12.23, p < .001, d = 1.23$. For the non-racial scenario, however, Black participants wanted to affiliate marginally more than White participants did, $F(1, 64) = 2.97, p = .089, d = .56$. In addition, White participants wanted to affiliate more in the racial (vs. non-racial) scenario, $F(1, 65) = 6.07, p = .016, d = .77$, whereas Black participants wanted to affiliate more in the non-racial (vs. racial) scenario, $F(1, 65) = 7.31, p = .009, d = 1.03$.

Understanding

Results were submitted to a 2 (participant race: Black vs. White) $\times$ 2 (scenario: racial vs. non-racial) analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with friendship closeness as a covariate. Closeness

significantly predicted understanding, $F(1, 65) = 4.47, p = .038, \eta^2_p = .06$. A main effect of scenario revealed that the non-racial scenario elicited greater understanding than the racial scenario ($M = 3.45, SD = 1.45$), $F(1, 65) = 18.28, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .22$. As predicted, these main effects were qualified by a significant participant race $\times$ scenario interaction, $F(1, 65) = 5.43, p = .023, \eta^2_p = .08$ (see Figure 3).

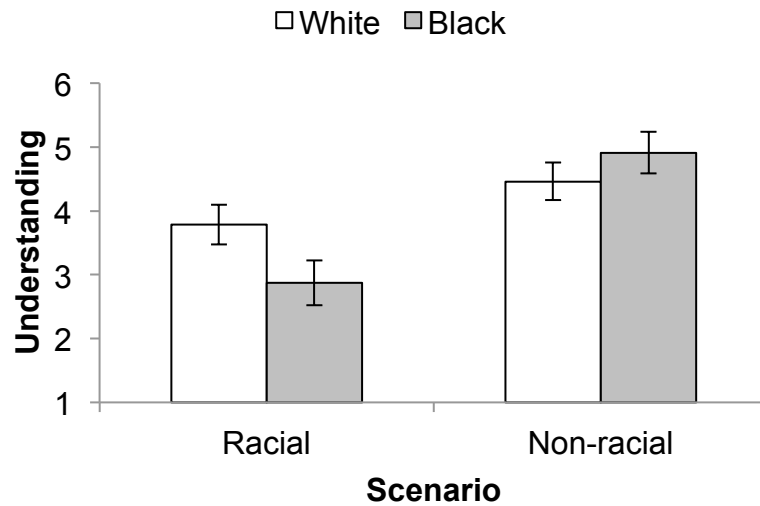


Figure 3. The effect of scenario and participant race on understanding in Study 2. Error bars depict 1 standard error above and below the mean of each condition. The graph depicts adjusted means.

Consistent with predictions, for the racial scenario White participants thought they understood their Black friend to a greater extent than Black participants felt understood by their White friend, $F(1, 65) = 4.59, p = .036, d = .96$. For the non-racial scenario, however, there were no significant differences by participant race, $F(1, 65) = 0.17, p = .685, ns$. In addition, White participants reported understanding their Black friend equally well in the racial and non-racial scenario, $F(1, 65) = 2.63, p = .109, d = .48$. Black participants, however, reported feeling more understood in the non-racial vs. racial scenario, $F(1, 65) = 17.98, p < .001, d = 1.66$.

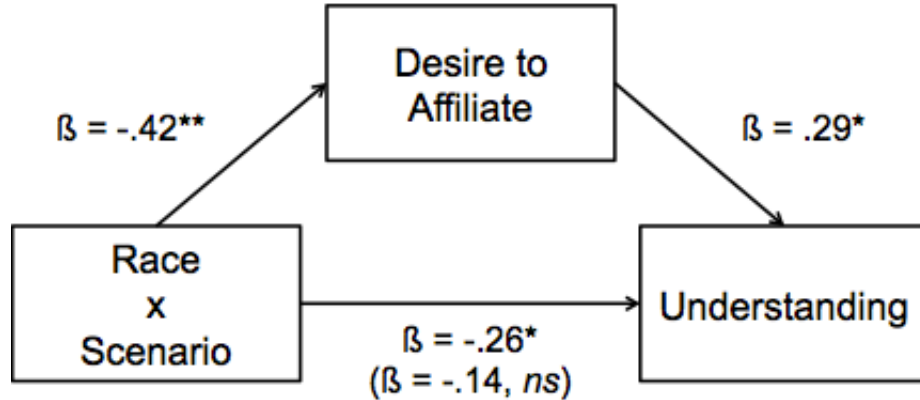


Figure 4. Mediated moderation model depicting desire to affiliate as the mediator for the relationship between participant race, scenario, and understanding in Study 2.

Mediated moderation

To test whether the desire to affiliate mediated the relationship between the participant race × scenario interaction and understanding, I conducted a mediated moderation analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Desire to affiliate significantly predicted understanding while controlling for the initial relationship between participant race, scenario, and understanding, $\beta = .29, p = .012$. With the inclusion of the desire to affiliate into the model, the interaction between participant and scenario no longer predicted understanding, $\beta = -.14, p = .24, ns$. A Sobel test indicated that the indirect path reached significance, $z = -2.10, p = .036$. Overall, the desire to affiliate fully mediated the relationship between participant race, scenario, and understanding (see Figure 4).

I conducted follow-up mediation analyses separately for the racial and non-racial scenarios. To test whether the desire to affiliate mediated the relationship between participant race and understanding in the racial scenario, I dummy-coded scenario (0 = racial, 1 = non-racial) and effects-coded participant race (-1 = Black, 1 = White). White participants reported understanding

their Black friend to a greater extent than Black participants felt understood by their White friend, $\beta = .41, p = .012$. White participants also reported wanting to affiliate with their friend to a greater extent than Black participants did, $\beta = .55, p = .002$. Desire to affiliate significantly predicted understanding while controlling for participant race, $\beta = .29, p = .012$. With the inclusion of the desire to affiliate in the model, the relationship between participant race and understanding dropped to non-significance, $\beta = .25, p = .137, ns$. A Sobel test indicated that the indirect path reached significance, $z = 2.04, p = .041$. See Table 2 for a summary of the mediation analysis for the racial scenario. In summary, White participants' greater desire to affiliate in the racial scenario caused them to feel that they understood their Black friend to a greater extent than Black participants felt understood by their White friend (see Figure 5).

Table 2: *Mediation analysis for racial scenario.*

Step	Predictor	Outcome	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
1	Race	Understanding	0.63	0.24	.41	2.58	.012
2	Race	Affiliation	0.59	0.18	.55	3.30	.002
3	Affiliation	Understanding	0.42	0.16	.29	2.60	.012
4	Race	Understanding	0.38	0.25	.25	1.51	.137

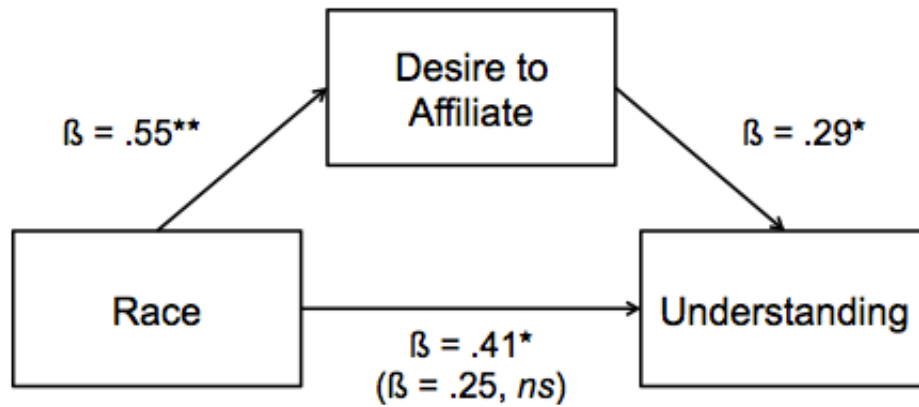


Figure 5. Mediation model for the racial scenario depicting desire to affiliate as the mediator for the relationship between participant race and understanding in Study 2.

A separate mediation analysis was conducted on the non-racial scenario. To test whether the desire to affiliate mediated the relationship between participant race and understanding in the non-racial scenario, I dummy-coded scenario (0 = non-racial, 1 = racial) and effects-coded participant race (-1 = Black, 1 = White). Participant race did not significantly predict understanding, $\beta = -.09, p = .565, ns$. Because this path failed to reach significance, mediation could not be assessed.

Discussion

Investigating the responses of both White and Black participants provided evidence of asymmetrical perceptions of understanding. Although Whites and Blacks perceived similar levels of understanding when discussing non-racial problems, they disagreed about how well they thought Whites truly understood racial problems. As predicted, Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks cause Whites to overestimate how well they understood Blacks' racial problems.

Disagreements about how well Whites understand racial problems pose negative consequences for the development of intergroup relationships. When Whites express understanding about racial problems, Blacks may question how well Whites truly understand. Feeling understood

is a key component of developing intimacy in relationships (Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988) and conflicting perceptions of how well Whites understand racial issues may prevent Whites and Blacks from forming interpersonal connections. In addition, Blacks may expect social support from Whites that do not involve Whites expressing understanding, such as providing emotional support or giving advice. According to the matching hypothesis (Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Horowitz et al., 2001), Whites will be the most supportive when the type of support they provide matches the type of support Blacks want to receive. To the extent that Whites express understanding for racial discrimination, however, Blacks may come to feel less supported. Study 3 will investigate this issue further by examining responses to Whites who claim to understand experiences of racial discrimination.

One drawback of the study methodology is that participants had to answer questions about a preexisting cross-race friend. People may differ widely in their relationships with their cross-race friend across a number of meaningful variables, such as relationship closeness or shared experiences. We attempted to address this issue by controlling for relationship closeness in all of the analyses. In addition, we circumvent this issue elsewhere in the dissertation by standardizing information about the cross-race targets participants interact with (Studies 1 and 4) and by pairing participants with previously unacquainted cross-race partners in dyadic interactions (Studies 3 and 5).

Study 3: Understanding in Interracial and Same Race Interactions

Thus far, the previous studies established that Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks causes them to believe they understand Blacks when race is salient. This study investigates whether Whites' desire to affiliate causes Whites to feel they understand Black interaction partners better than they understand White interaction partners. Given that people tend to have more contact and familiarity with members of their own group, they are more likely to understand fellow ingroup members better than they understand outgroup members. However, Whites are likely to be more motivated to affiliate with Blacks than Whites, particularly in contexts when race is salient and the threat of appearing prejudiced looms large. Thus, Whites' greater desire to affiliate with partners during interracial interactions may cause them to feel that they understand Blacks better than they understand Whites.

The present study also extends the generalizability of the previous findings in two ways. First, it assesses the responses of Whites and Blacks in real, face-to-face interactions with one another. Second, rather than having participants indicate how much they wanted to affiliate with their partner, participants reported how much they desired to be liked by their partner. Both constructs tap into the warmth dimension of social cognition (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007), alongside traits like friendliness, morality, and trustworthiness. The desire to be liked is also theorized to stem from Whites' goal of appearing non-prejudiced (Bergsieker et al., 2010), much like Whites' desire to affiliate. For these reasons, the present study examines whether Whites' desire to be seen as likable causes Whites to feel they understand Blacks.

Methods

A total of 110 university students completed the study for course credit or monetary compensation. The sample included 31 White/White and 24 White/Black dyads. Dyad members

were gender-matched (17 male). At the time of the study, participants had completed an average of 2.5 years of college ($SD = 1.2$).

When participants arrived in the lab, the experimenter informed them that this study was to understand people's opinions on various social topics.² Participants selected two topics to discuss from a rigged drawing that assigned them to share their thoughts on modern racism and ethnic diversity in schools (order counterbalanced):

Racism has played an influential role in shaping American history, from slavery, anti-immigration laws, and other policies that contributed to racial disparities. Some people argue that racism is a thing of the past, whereas others believe that it continues to exist in the present day. Discuss your thoughts and opinions about the state of racism in modern American society.

Although the population of ethnic minorities continues to grow in the United States, student populations among universities remain ethnically homogeneous. Discuss your thoughts and opinions about how universities can ensure an ethnically diverse student body.

Participants engaged in open-ended discussions on both topics. These discussions lasted 5 minutes per topic and were videotaped with participants' consent. After participants finished discussing the second topic, they returned to their separate rooms to complete questions about the interaction. Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with statements indicating that it was

² Because this study was originally designed to test a separate research question, participants were randomly assigned to read an editorial that either endorsed colorblindness, multiculturalism, or the importance of using locally grown foods. Data analysis controls for the effects of the editorial manipulation. Parts of this dataset have been published elsewhere (Holoien & Shelton, 2012), but the findings that I report here are new and have not been published.

important for their partner to see them as *fair*, *open-minded*, *a good person*, and *kind*. Ratings were made using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. These items were averaged to form a composite measure of desire to be liked ($\alpha = .88$). Although these items differed from the previous studies' measures of desire to affiliate, they overlap because these items are related to warmth, a dimension of social cognition related to friendliness and interpersonal connection (Fiske et al., 2007). Participants also completed a single item on how well they thought they had the ability to understand the other person's feelings during the interaction. Ratings were made using a 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much so*) scale.

Results

Data were submitted to dyadic data analysis (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Because the sample included White/White and White/Black dyads, participant race is a mixed variable and dyad members are indistinguishable (i.e., no meaningful dichotomous variable distinguishes them from each other); consequently, I estimated a covariance matrix with compound symmetry (CS) in SPSS, which constrained the error variances for both members of a dyad to be equal. Analyses may yield fractional degrees of freedom. I created two effects-coded contrasts and used White participants in interracial interactions as the reference group. When entered simultaneously, the *interracial contrast* (Blacks = 2, Whites in interracial dyads = -1, Whites in same race dyads = -1) compares White and Black participants in interracial interactions and the *White contrast* (Whites in same race dyads = 2, Blacks = -1, Whites in interracial dyads = -1) compares White participants in interracial vs. intraracial interactions. All analyses control for participant gender (men = 1, women = -1). One outlier was trimmed to within 3 standard deviations of the grand mean.

Dyadic analyses were conducted to test for differences in participants' desire to be liked (see Figure 6). The White contrast reached significance, $B = -0.28$, $SE B = 0.09$, $t(87.29) = -3.04$, $p = .003$, indicating that White participants in interracial interactions wanted to be liked to a greater

extent than White participants in same race interactions. In addition, the significant interracial contrast revealed that White participants in interracial interactions wanted to be liked to a greater extent than Black participants did, $B = -0.26$, $SE B = 0.09$, $t(53.00) = -2.58$, $p = .013$. Thus, Whites in interracial interactions had a higher desire to be liked by their interaction partner compared to all other participants. In addition, women had a higher desire to be liked than men did, $B = -0.38$, $SE B = 0.13$, $t(50.00) = -3.01$, $p = .004$.

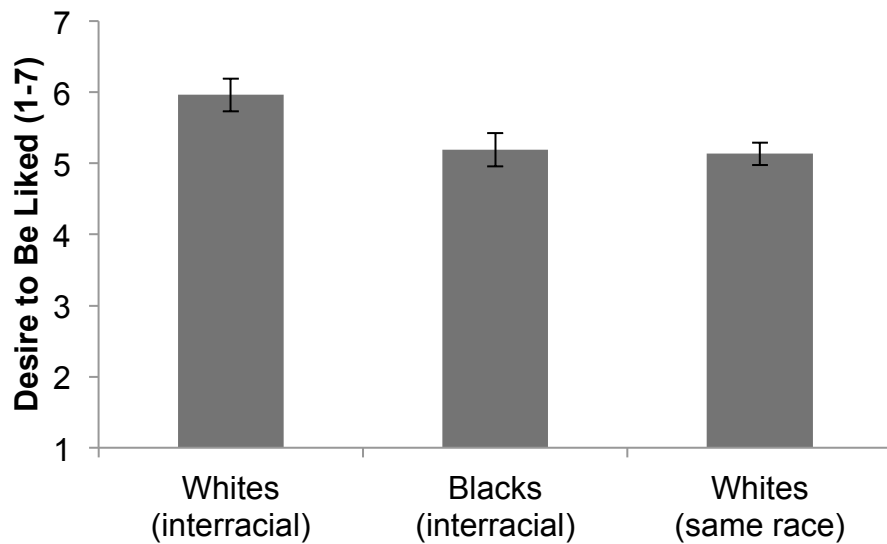


Figure 6. Adjusted means of participant race (by dyad composition) on desire to be liked in Study 4. Error bars indicate 1 standard error above and below the mean of each condition.

Next, analyses tested for differences in participants' understanding (see Figure 7). The White contrast reached significance, $B = -0.33$, $SE B = 0.17$, $t(82.84) = -1.98$, $p = .051$. White participants in interracial interactions reported understanding their partner better than did White participants in same race interactions. The interracial contrast did not yield significance, $B = -0.04$, $SE B = 0.17$, $t(53.00) = -0.26$, $p = .797$, *ns*.

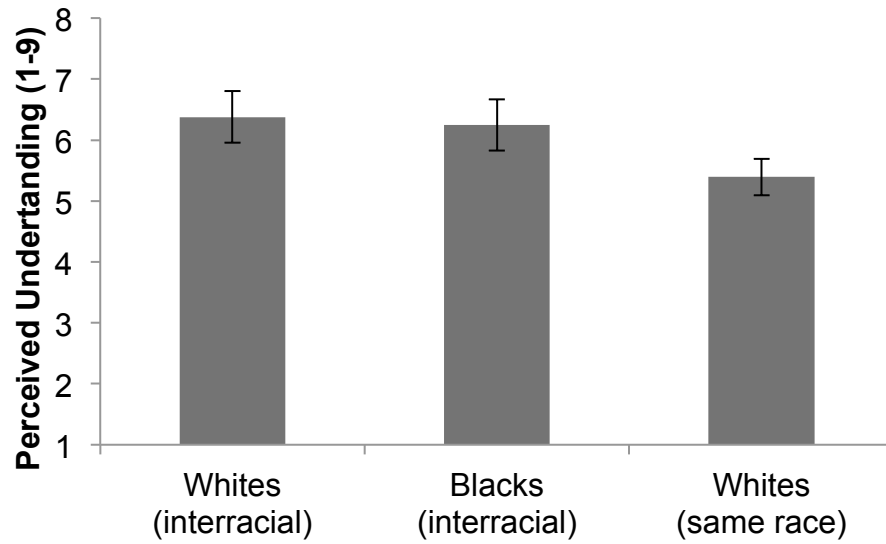


Figure 7. Adjusted means of participant race (by dyad composition) on understanding in Study 4.

Error bars indicate 1 standard error above and below the mean of each condition.

To test whether White participants' desire to be liked by their partner mediated the relationship between dyad composition and understanding, I conducted mediation analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986). As indicated above, dyad composition predicted White participants' understanding and desire to be liked. Desire to be liked significantly predicted understanding while controlling for the initial relationship between dyad composition and understanding, $B = 0.61$, $SE B = 0.17$, $t(100.66) = 3.65$, $p < .001$. With the inclusion of desire to be liked into the model, the initial relationship between dyad composition and understanding became non-significant, $B = -0.17$, $SE B = 0.16$, $t(86.03) = -1.07$, $p = .289$, *ns*. A Sobel test indicated that the indirect path reached significance, $z = 2.34$, $p = .019$. Overall, the desire to be liked fully mediated the relationship between dyad composition and understanding (see Figure 8).

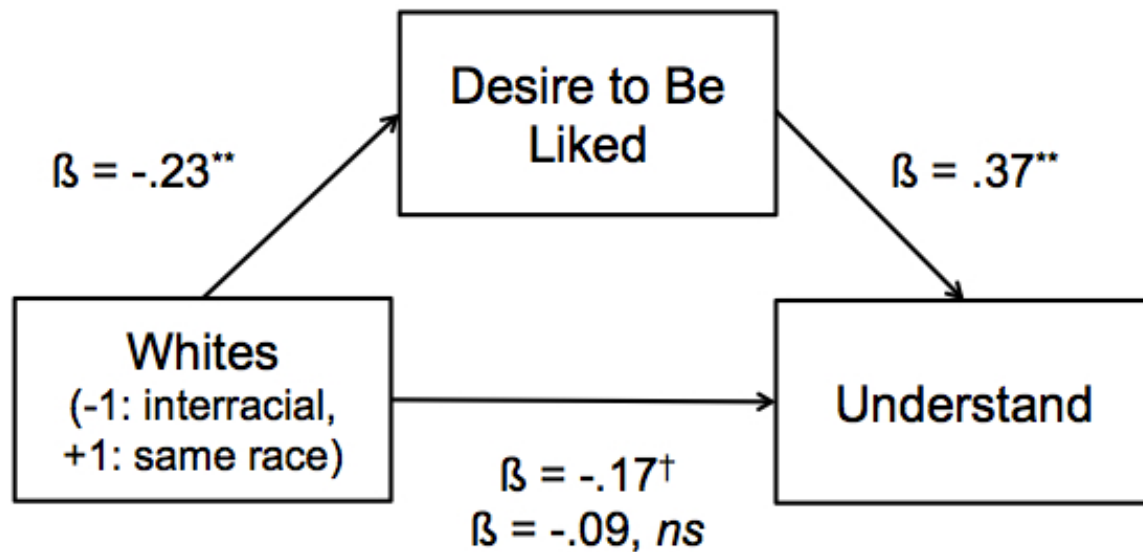


Figure 8. Mediation model depicted desire to be liked as the mediator for the relationship between dyad composition and understanding in Study 4.

Discussion

Although people tend to have more contact and familiarity with ingroup members, this study revealed that White participants reported greater understanding of Black versus White interaction partners due to their greater desire to be liked by Blacks. This raises the intriguing question of whether Whites truly feel they understand Blacks or if they are merely self-presenting in order to appear non-prejudiced. Regardless of whether Whites are consciously controlling their behaviors to maintain their self-image or not, I hypothesize that Whites' claims of understanding serve to fulfill Whites' goal of appearing non-prejudiced. It would be interesting to test whether Whites would similarly claim understanding when the threat of appearing prejudiced is lowered, such as when discussing a topic low in racial salience. If Whites admit understanding other White interaction partners better than (or at least equal to) Black partners when racial salience is low, this would

provide evidence that Whites' claims to understand Blacks is due in part to alleviating the threat of appearing prejudiced.

Given that Whites feel that they understand Blacks, perhaps to a greater extent than is warranted, how do Blacks react when Whites actually try to convey understanding? Would Blacks feel supported and understood by Whites' claims or conversely, will they question how well Whites' truly understand and feel unsupported by them? The following study is designed to answer these empirical questions.

Study 4: Effects of Claiming Understanding on Social Support

This study sought to examine asymmetries in Whites' and Blacks' responses to Whites' claims of understanding and the resulting implications for intergroup social support. Perhaps one reason why Whites may try to convey that they understand Blacks is because they feel this is supportive and desirable in the eyes of their Black interaction partners and they want to get along with Blacks. Despite Whites' good intentions, however, Blacks may interpret Whites' behavior negatively depending on whether Whites try to convey understanding for a racial vs. non-racial topic. For racial topics, the salience of racial divisions between Whites and Blacks remains high and Blacks may feel disrespected and suspicious when Whites try to cross the boundary between the groups by claiming understanding. For non-racial topics, the salience of racial divisions is lowered and both groups may be better able to achieve understanding. I therefore hypothesize that Black participants prefer that Whites say that they don't understand (vs. understand) racial experiences, but that they would prefer that Whites claim understanding for non-racial experiences. White participants, however, will not change their preferences regardless of whether the disclosed experience is racial vs. non-racial.

Method

A total of 127 undergraduate students (67 women) completed this study for candy. This sample included 70 Blacks and 57 Whites who were a mean age of 20.4 years ($SD = 2.4$).³

This study used a 2 (participant race: White vs. Black) $\times$ 2 (support: understand vs. don't understand) $\times$ 2 (topic: racial vs. non-racial) between-subjects design to investigate Whites' and Blacks' perceptions of socially supportive behavior. White and Black undergraduate students read a vignette that instructed them to imagine having a discussion in precept on problems that people

³ The mean age of the sample was calculated with only 121 participants because 6 participants omitted information about their age.

typically face in society. Participants imagined being part of a small discussion group with two other students, one Black and one White. These fictive students were the same gender as the participant. The Black student discussed a personal problem and the White student responded by talking about his own experiences in order to provide support. I manipulated the discussion topic by having the Black student disclose about their personal experiences with racial discrimination (racial topic) or loneliness (non-racial topic). I manipulated social support based on the White student's response in the vignette. In the *understand* condition the White student said, "I know exactly how you feel because I've had similar experiences" (see Appendix E). In the *don't understand* condition the White student said, "I don't know exactly how you feel because I haven't had similar experiences" (see Appendix F).

After reading the vignette, participants rated how much they thought the Black student could relate to the White student, how supportive the White student seemed, and how likable the White student seemed on 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very*) scales.

Results

Results were submitted to a 2 (participant race: White vs. Black) $\times$ 2 (support: understand vs. don't understand) $\times$ 2 (topic: racial vs. non-racial) between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA).

Black student's ability to relate

All main effects reached significance. White participants perceived the Black student to be more able to relate to the White student than Black participants did, $F(1, 119) = 9.14, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .07$. Participants perceived that the Black student would be better able to relate when the topic was non-racial, $F(1, 119) = 13.01, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .10$, and when the White student said he understood (vs. didn't understand), $F(1, 119) = 13.76, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .10$. The two-way interaction between support $\times$ topic also reached significance, $F(1, 119) = 9.53, p = .003, \eta^2_p = .07$. All lower order

interactions were qualified by the predicted race $\times$ support $\times$ topic interaction, $F(1, 119) = 8.81, p = .004, \eta^2_p = .07$ (see Figure 9).

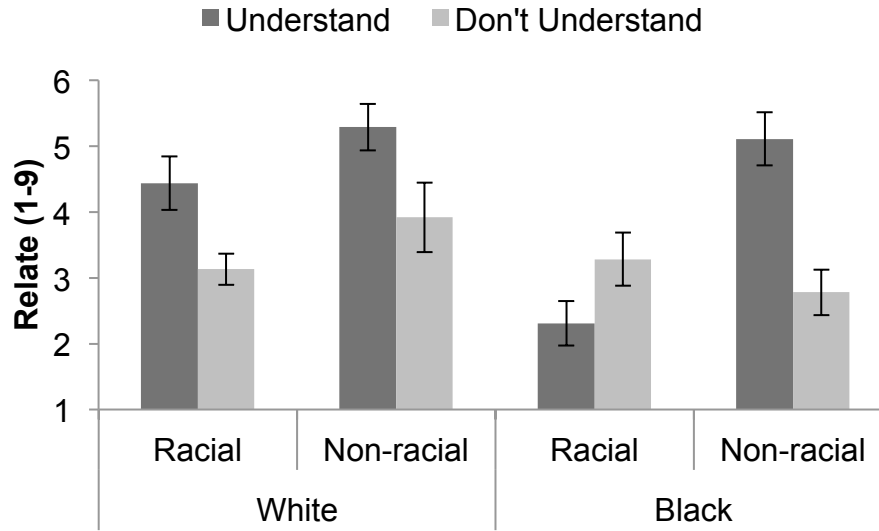


Figure 9. The effects of participant race, topic, and support type on perceptions of how well the Black student could relate to the White student in the vignette in Study 3. Error bars indicate 1 standard error above and below the mean of each condition.

As predicted, the two-way interaction between support $\times$ topic reached significance for Black participants, $F(1, 119) = 20.52, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .15$, but not for White participants, $F(1, 119) = 0.01, p = .936, \eta^2_p = .00, ns$, so simple effects analyses were conducted for Blacks only. As predicted, when the topic was racial, Black participants perceived the Black student as better able to relate if the White student said he didn't understand (vs. understood), $F(1, 119) = 3.41, p = .067, d = 0.64$. By contrast, when the topic was non-racial, Black participants saw the Black student as better able to relate if the White student said he understood (vs. didn't understand), $F(1, 119) = 21.17, p < .001, d = 1.50$. When the White student said he understood, Black participants saw the Black student as

better able to relate when the topic was non-racial (vs. racial), $F(1, 119) = 28.67, p < .001, d = 1.86$. This difference, however, was non-significant when the White student said he didn't understand, $F(1, 119) = 0.97, p = .326, d = 0.32, ns$.

Perceived supportiveness of the White student

There was a marginally significant main effect of race, with White participants perceiving the White student as more supportive than Black participants did, $F(1, 119) = 3.51, p = .063, \eta^2_p = .03$. I also found significant two-way interactions between race $\times$ topic, $F(1, 119) = 5.39, p = .022, \eta^2_p = .04$, and topic $\times$ support, $F(1, 119) = 16.13, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .12$. These lower order interactions were qualified by the predicted race $\times$ support $\times$ topic interaction, $F(1, 119) = 3.83, p = .053, \eta^2_p = .03$ (see Figure 10).

As predicted, the two-way interaction between support $\times$ topic reached significance for Black participants, $F(1, 119) = 19.97, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .14$, but not for White participants, $F(1, 119) = 1.92, p = .169, \eta^2_p = .02, ns$, so simple effects analyses were conducted for Blacks only. When the topic was racial, Black participants found the White student to be marginally more supportive if he said he didn't understand (vs. understand), $F(1, 119) = 3.69, p = .057, d = 0.60$. When the topic was non-racial, Black participants found the White student to be more supportive if he said he understood (vs. didn't understand), $F(1, 119) = 19.70, p < .001, d = 2.08$. When the White student said he understood, Black participants saw him as more supportive when the topic was non-racial (vs. racial), $F(1, 119) = 23.64, p < .001, d = 2.09$. This difference, however, was non-significant when the White student said he didn't understand, $F(1, 119) = 1.98, p = .16, d = 0.46, ns$.

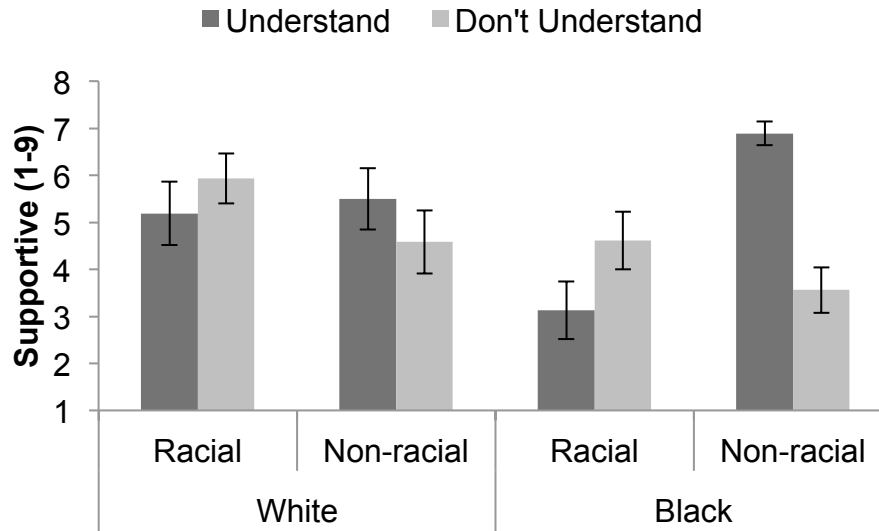


Figure 10. The effects of participant race, topic, and support type on perceptions of the supportiveness of the White student in the vignette in Study 3. Error bars indicate 1 standard error above and below the mean of each condition.

Liking for the White student

I found significant two-way interactions between race $\times$ topic, $F(1, 119) = 4.44, p = .037, \eta_p^2 = .04$, and support $\times$ topic, $F(1, 119) = 22.00, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$. These interactions were qualified by the predicted race $\times$ support $\times$ topic interaction, $F(1, 119) = 3.07, p = .082, \eta_p^2 = .03$ (see Figure 11).

The two-way interaction between support $\times$ topic reached significance for Black participants, $F(1, 119) = 23.23, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$. When the topic was racial, Black participants liked the White student more if he said he didn't understand (vs. understand), $F(1, 119) = 10.58, p = .001, d = 1.17$. When the topic was non-racial, Black participants liked the White student more if he said he understood (vs. didn't understand), $F(1, 119) = 12.75, p = .001, d = 1.48$. When the White student said he understood, Black participants liked him more when the topic was non-racial (vs. racial), $F(1,$

119) = 26.00, $p < .001$, $d = 1.97$. When the White student said he didn't understand, however, Black participants liked him more when the topic was racial (vs. non-racial), $F(1, 119) = 2.78$, $p = .098$, $d = 0.63$.

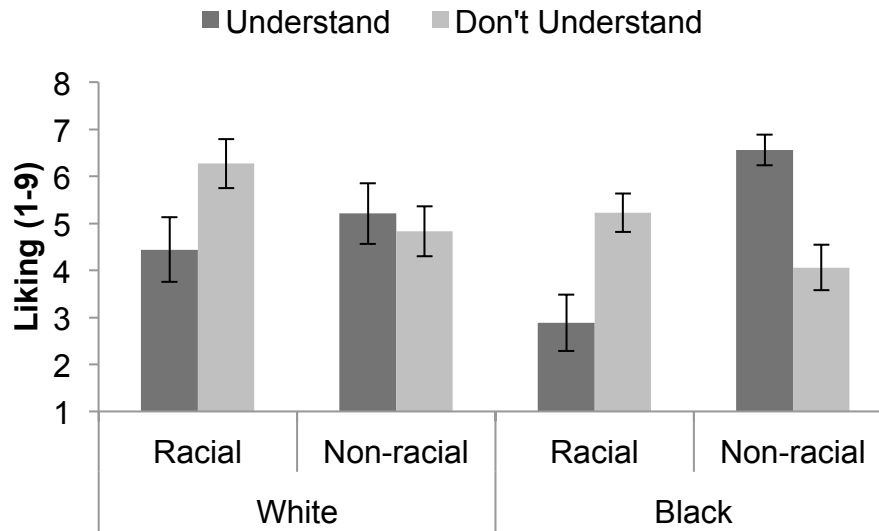


Figure 11. The effects of participant race, topic, and support type on how likable the White student in the vignette seems in Study 3. Error bars indicate 1 standard error above and below the mean of each condition.

Unexpectedly, the two-way interaction between support $\times$ topic yielded marginal significance for White participants, $F(1, 119) = 3.90$, $p = .051$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. When the topic was racial, White participants liked the White student more if he said he didn't understand (vs. understand), $F(1, 119) = 5.87$, $p = .017$, $d = 0.78$. Notably, however, White participants' liking for the White student failed to differ significantly when the topic was non-racial, $F(1, 119) = 0.65$, $p = .421$, $d = 0.18$, ns . When the White student said he didn't understand, White participants liked him more when the topic was

racial (vs. non-racial), $F(1, 119) = 3.10, p = .081, d = 0.77$. This difference, however, was non-significant when the White student said he understood, $F(1, 119) = 1.02, p = .314, d = 0.31, ns$.

Discussion

Consistent with predictions, the findings of this study demonstrate asymmetries between Blacks' and Whites' perceptions of supportiveness. When the topic was racial, Black participants preferred that Whites frankly acknowledge that they don't understand rather than claim understanding. When the topic was non-racial, however, Blacks participants appreciated Whites' attempts to convey understanding. By contrast, White participants' reactions remained relatively constant regardless of support type or topic. In short, Blacks participants' preferences were more sensitive to potential differences in the effectiveness of the support types depending on the racial or non-racial nature of the context.

Although Whites may approach Blacks with the best of intentions, the way in which they provide support can have dramatically different consequences. While expressions of understanding are effective when discussing non-racial problems, Blacks perceive Whites less favorably when Whites claim understanding for racial problems. Whites, however, may be oblivious to this reaction and continue to provide ineffective means of support. Taken in conjunction with findings from the previous studies, Whites who are strongly motivated to affiliate with Blacks may be particularly likely to express understanding for racial problems and face negative reactions from Blacks. Whites with less motivation to affiliate with Blacks, however, may counterintuitively be more supportive to Blacks because they acknowledge that they do not understand racial issues.

One theme that emerges throughout the studies thus far is that Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks causes them to claim understanding to a questionable degree when racial salience is high. How accurate, then, are Whites' perceptions of understanding? That is, does the extent to which Whites think they understand their partner accurately correspond to how understood their partners

actually feel? Perhaps Whites grossly overestimate or underestimate how understanding they are, or maybe their intuitions are spot on. Study 5 addresses this question by asking White and Black participants how much they thought they understood their partner and also how understood they felt by their partner. Furthermore, it randomly assigns White and Black participants to high vs. low racial salience conditions by manipulating the topic of discussion. This manipulation helps shed light on the contexts in which Whites' desire to affiliate may predict accurate judgments of understanding.

Study 5: Accuracy of Perceived Understanding in Dyadic Contexts

Study 5 examines understanding between previously unacquainted White and Black participants in dyadic interactions. Participants either talked about negative college experiences regarding racial discrimination or peer relationships. Collecting responses from both participants in the same interaction enables the comparison of how much participants think they understand their partner versus how much their partners actually feel understood. I predict that when talking about racial discrimination, White participants' desire to affiliate with their Black partner will cause them to overestimate how much they think they understand compared to how much Black participants actually feel understood.

A second purpose of this study is to further explore White participants' behavior during interracial interactions. When talking about race, do Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks manifest in noticeable behavioral outcomes? Because Whites' desire to affiliate stems from the threat of appearing prejudiced, Whites who want to affiliate with Blacks may become too self-focused with maintaining their impressions instead of focusing on what their Black partner is saying or doing. To test this prediction, three independent judges (including the author) watched videotapes of the interactions and coded the participants for how self-focused they seemed during the interaction.

Method

Sixty-four previously unacquainted dyads of White/Black gender-matched undergraduates (48 female) participated in this study for course credit or monetary compensation. Participants were on average 19.2 years old ($SD = 1.1$).

Participants arrived at the laboratory and were seated across from one another at a table. The experimenter introduced the participants to one another and explained that during this study, they would get to know each other better and talk about their college experiences. They would complete two discussions and answer questions on the computer.

First, participants completed a five-minute discussion designed to introduce themselves to one another. They answered five questions from the Fast Friends procedure (Aron et al., 1997) selected to be neutral in interpersonal intimacy (see Appendix G). Next, the White participant selected a discussion topic from a set of topic cards (see Appendix H) and the Black participant selected the order in which participants would take turns speaking. Unbeknownst to the participants, both were rigged drawings: The White participant always selected a non-racial or racial topic card and the Black participant always spoke first.

In separate rooms, the experimenter showed the topic card to the Black participant and gave him a few minutes to brainstorm what he would like to say. In the meantime, the White participant completed the priming task used in Study 1 (see Appendix A; Huntsinger et al., 2009; Huntsinger & Sinclair, 2010). The priming tasks consisted of a short word puzzle designed to induce high or low desire to affiliate with the other participant.

Once both participants finished their respective tasks, they were brought into the same room and completed the second discussion. The Black participant always went first and spoke about negative experiences with racial discrimination (racial topic) or peer relationships (non-racial topic). The White participant also had a chance to respond and talk about his own experiences. After 8 minutes, the experimenter placed participants in separate rooms where they completed some remaining questions on the computer.

Measures

Participants completed demographic measures, the measures below, and additional items that were not relevant to the research questions explored in this article.⁴

Desire to affiliate. Participants answered 3 items regarding how much they wanted to affiliate with the other participant during the second discussion task. These items include, “How

⁴ These items include measures of mood, ingroup attitudes, outgroup attitudes, and support.

much did you want to get along with [partner name]?", How much did you want to have a smooth interaction with [partner name]?", and "How much did you like [partner name]?" Ratings were made on 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*) scales. These items were averaged to form a composite measure of desire to affiliate ($\alpha = .88$).

Perceived understanding. Participants answered 7 items on how well they felt they understood the other person during the second interaction. These items were adapted from the understanding items from Study 1. The items included the following: "How well did you know what [partner's name] was going through?", "How well did you know what it's like to be in [partner's name]'s shoes?", "How well could you relate to [partner's name]?", "How well did you 'get' how [partner's name] felt?", "How well did you feel what [partner's name] felt?", "How well did you empathize with [partner's name]?", and "How well did you understand [partner's name]?" Ratings were made on 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*) scales and were averaged to form a composite measure of understanding ($\alpha = .90$).

Felt understanding. Participants answered 7 items on how well they felt understood by the other person during the second interaction. These items were similar to the perceived understanding items except they asked about how understood the participants felt. Sample items included, "How well did you feel understood by [partner's name]?" and "How much did you think [partner's name] related to your feelings?" These items were rated on 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*) scales and were averaged to form a composite measure of understanding ($\alpha = .94$).

Motivation to control prejudiced responses. Participants answered 7 items on the extent to which they want to control their prejudiced responses (Dunton & Fazio, 1997). Sample items included, "If I have a prejudiced thought or feeling, I keep it to myself," "It's never acceptable to express one's prejudices," and "In today's society it is important that one not be perceived as

prejudiced.” These items were rated on 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scales and were averaged to form a composite measure of motivation to control prejudiced responses ($\alpha = .86$).

Self-focus. Three independent judges (2 Blacks, 1 Asian) watched the dyadic interactions together and rated the participants on how self-disclosive (i.e., how much people talked about themselves) and how other-focused they seemed.⁵ Judges observed participants’ nonverbal and verbal behaviors in order to determine holistic ratings of self- and other-focus. After forming the initial ratings on 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*) scales, the judges resolved highly discrepant scores through discussion. The judges’ final ratings were highly reliable (self-disclosive: $\alpha = .94$ for Whites, $\alpha = .89$ for Blacks; other-focus: $\alpha = .91$ for Whites, $\alpha = .92$ for Blacks). The judges’ averaged rating for other-focus was subtracted from their averaged rating for self-disclosive in order to create a difference score with higher values indicating greater self-focus.

Results

Data were analyzed using the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) using the MIXED procedure in SPSS. APIM allows the testing of the relationship between participants’ own predictors and outcomes (actor effect) as well as the relationship between partner’s predictors and one’s own outcomes (partner effect). Analyses treated dyads as distinguishable (i.e., Black participants can be distinguished from White participants in a dyad). This allowed me to construct models with separate actor and partner effects for Black and White participants in each topic condition (i.e., a four-intercept model adapted from Kenny et al., 2006). Given that dyad members are distinguishable, we estimated a covariance matrix with heterogeneous compound symmetry (CSH) which allows for heterogeneity of variance between Whites and Blacks. Discussion

⁵ Additional codes that judges rated failed to yield significant results. These codes include *confident, hesitant, energetic, well-spoken, notes similarities, notes differences, prejudiced, downplays diversity, claims diversity, genuine, tries too hard to get along, interaction difficulty, friendly, smiling, rapport, awkward, deep, and on-topic*.

topic (-1 = peer relations, 1 = racial discrimination) and participant race (-1 = Black, 1 = White) were effects coded. Two dyads who knew each other “quite a bit” prior to the study were removed from analyses. Outliers were trimmed to 3 standard deviations of the mean. See Table 3 for means and standard deviations by participant race and topic and Table 4 for correlations.

Table 3: Means (and standard deviations) for each variable by participant race and topic in Study 4.

	Peer Relationships		Racial Discrimination	
	Black	White	Black	White
Desire to affiliate	5.66 (0.81)	5.82 (0.80)	5.78 (0.95)	6.09 (0.95)
Perceived understanding	5.17 (1.16)	5.01 (0.95)	4.36 (1.48)	4.15 (0.99)
Felt understanding	4.65 (1.36)	4.58 (0.92)	3.63 (1.57)	4.67 (0.96)

Table 4: Correlations for continuous variables in Study 4.

	1	2	3	4
1. Desire to affiliate	--			
2. Perceived understanding	.06	--		
3. Felt understanding	.46**	.51**	--	
4. Motivation to control prejudiced responses	.48**	.06	.25 [†]	--

[†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Manipulation check

To test whether the prime successfully manipulated White participants’ desire to affiliate with their partner following the second discussion task, participant race was dummy coded with

White participants as the reference group. The predicted interaction between participant race $\times$ prime $\times$ topic was not significant, $B = -0.04$, $SE B = 0.16$, $t(58.00) = -0.27$, $p = .787$, *ns*, indicating that the prime failed to successfully manipulate participants' desire to affiliate. Because the primes did not successfully manipulate desire to affiliate, for subsequent analyses I use participants' self-reported desire to affiliate with their partner as a predictor.

Understanding

What factors predict perceived understanding, or the perception that the self understands the partner? To test this question I regressed actor's perceived understanding on participant race, discussion topic, desire to affiliate (actor and partner), felt understanding (actor and partner), and interactions between these variables. The analyses below are controlled for dyad gender and motivation to control prejudiced responses.

Several main effects reached significance. Black participants reported understanding their partner marginally better than White participants did, $B = -0.30$, $SE B = 0.15$, $t(44.11) = -2.08$, $p = .043$. The extent to which participants felt understood positively predicted the extent to which they thought they understood their partner, $B = 0.71$, $SE B = 0.10$, $t(75.50) = 6.91$, $p < .001$. Participants reported understanding their partner marginally better when discussing a non-racial (vs. racial) topic, $B = -0.22$, $SE B = 0.13$, $t(43.26) = -1.75$, $p = .087$.

These main effects were qualified by the predicted 4-way interaction between actor race $\times$ partner felt understanding $\times$ actor desire to affiliate $\times$ topic, $B = -0.24$, $SE B = 0.12$, $t(64.23) = -2.03$, $p = .046$ (see Appendix I). No other higher order interactions reached significance. For White participants discussing racial discrimination, there was a trending partner felt understanding $\times$ actor desire to affiliate interaction, $B = -0.21$, $SE B = 0.15$, $t(42.00) = -1.43$, $p = .16$. Although this effect was not significant, I further analyzed the simple effects due to a priori hypotheses. As predicted,

when Whites discussing racial discrimination highly desired to affiliate with Blacks (+1 SD), they were marginally inaccurate in judging how well they understood their partner compared to how understood their partner felt, $B = -0.30$, $SE B = 0.16$, $t(42.00) = -1.94$, $p = .059$. Specifically, there was a negative relationship between how much Whites think they understood their partner and how much their partners actually felt understood, such that some Whites overestimated how well they understood Black partners whereas other Whites underestimated their understanding. At low levels of affiliation (-1 SD), however, there was a non-significant relationship between how well Whites thought they understood their partner and how understood their partners felt, $B = 0.07$, $SE B = 0.22$, $t(42.00) = 0.30$, $p = .767$, *ns*. By contrast, for White participants discussing peer relationships there was a non-significant partner felt understanding $\times$ actor desire to affiliate interaction, $B = -0.12$, $SE B = 0.17$, $t(42.00) = -0.68$, $p = .503$, *ns*. Similarly, for Black participants there was a non-significant partner felt understanding $\times$ actor desire to affiliate interaction when discussing racial discrimination, $B = 0.44$, $SE B = 0.35$, $t(42.00) = 1.28$, $p = .207$, *ns*, as well as when discussing peer relationships, $B = -0.42$, $SE B = 0.26$, $t(42.00) = -1.62$, $p = .114$.

Self-focus

Three judges watched the videotaped interactions to code for how self-focused participants came across. All judges were blind to how much participants wanted to affiliate with their partner. Due to time constraints, however, the results below pertain only to dyads that discussed the racial topic; coding of the non-racial discussions is currently underway.

Black participants appeared significantly more self-focused than White participants did, $B = -0.74$, $SE B = 0.20$, $t(31.29) = -3.68$, $p = .001$. This is reasonable given that the experimental procedure involved Black participants talking about a negative racial experience while White participants listened and provided feedback. This main effect was qualified by the prediction interaction between actor race $\times$ actor desire to affiliate, $B = 0.49$, $SE B = 0.14$, $t(44.94) = 3.50$, p

= .001. For Black participants, their desire to affiliate negatively predicted self-focus, $B = -0.49$, $SE B = 0.21$, $t(30.67) = -2.39$, $p = .023$. By contrast, consistent with predictions White participants' desire to affiliate positively predicted self-focus, $B = 0.44$, $SE B = 0.20$, $t(30.49) = 2.25$, $p = .032$. In summary, during discussions where race is highly salient, Blacks' desire to affiliate with their partner caused them to focus more on their partner whereas Whites' desire to affiliate with their partner caused them to focus more on themselves.

Motivation to control prejudiced responses

I predicted that contexts where race is salient causes Whites to be more concerned about appearing prejudiced in comparison to contexts where race is less salient. One consequence of this is that Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks when discussing a racial topic stems in part from the goal of not appearing prejudiced. For Blacks, however, their desire to affiliate with Whites is unrelated to concerns about appearing prejudiced because this is not a stereotype associated with Blacks.

Correlational analysis between participants' motivation to control prejudiced responses and desire to affiliate for each participant race and topic condition supported my predictions. Motivation to control prejudiced responses and desire to affiliate is non-significantly correlated for Black participants, regardless of whether the discussion topic is non-racial, $r(29) = -.08$, $p = .684$, *ns*, or racial, $r(29) = .09$, $p = .649$, *ns*. By contrast, motivation to control prejudiced responses and desire to affiliate are moderately correlated for Whites when discussing a non-racial topic, $r(29) = .40$, $p = .024$, and more strongly correlated when discussing a racial topic, $r(29) = .53$, $p = .002$. These findings suggest that desire to affiliate reflects differing psychological constructs for Whites and Blacks depending on the racial salience of the context. Whereas Blacks do not tend to want to affiliate with Whites in order to avoid appearing prejudiced, Whites' desire to affiliate is linked to

their desire to not appear prejudiced, particularly in contexts where racial salience is high and the threat to their egalitarian self-image looms large.

Discussion

As predicted, Whites who are highly motivated to affiliate with Blacks during discussions of racial discrimination inaccurately judge how well they understand their partners compared to how understood partners feel. This finding indicates two kinds of inaccuracy: Whites simultaneously *overestimate* and *underestimate* their level of understanding relative to Blacks' judgments. The harms associated with Whites' overestimation of understanding have been explored in the previous studies of this dissertation. Whites believe they are conveying understanding in the hopes of providing social support, yet Black interaction partners feel that they are not actually understood. The lack of effective social support may in turn exacerbate intergroup tensions by causing Blacks to seek support from non-Whites and reject future attempts from Whites to provide support.

What harms are associated with Whites' underestimation of understanding? Whites' underestimation of their understanding may also produce negative consequences primarily for the self. Whites who erroneously believe they cannot understand Black peers may experience frustration and distress at their perceived inability to provide adequate support. This may lead Whites to express negative affect or give up their attempts to provide support, turning away from discussions of racial problems with Blacks. This is problematic because it denies opportunities to build intimacy between Whites and Blacks and removes sources of support for Blacks who undergo racial discrimination. Future work should address the ways in which Whites can achieve accurate self-perceptions that reflect Blacks' judgments and the implications for accuracy on relationship quality, intergroup attitudes, and intrapersonal affect.

This study also investigated how desire to affiliate shapes actual interactions. Independent judges found that when racial salience is high, Whites who desire to affiliate with Blacks are more

self-focused whereas Blacks who desire to affiliate with Whites are more other-focused. These findings may help explain why Whites with high affiliative desire are inaccurate about their judgments of understanding. Because Whites who want to affiliate with Blacks are too self-focused, they fail to adequately take into account their partner's perspective on how understood they feel. Perhaps by taking the focus off of themselves, Whites can become more attuned to how Blacks actually feel and make more accurate judgments about understanding, a vital component of the intimacy building process.

General Discussion

Three themes emerge from the studies of this dissertation. First, this work suggests that Whites' good intentions can lead to interracial difficulties. This perspective extends prior work on intergroup relations by examining how positive factors, such as Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks, may unwittingly disrupt successful interracial encounters. Blacks disagree with Whites about how well Whites can truly understand racial discrimination (Study 2), which may prevent Whites from being able to effectively provide social support to Blacks (Study 4). Whites' desire to affiliate also causes them to be significantly inaccurate in judging how well they truly understand Blacks' racial experiences (Study 5). This work contributes to the small but growing empirical literature that looks beyond prejudice (e.g., Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Siy & Cheryan, 2013) in order to explain how intergroup interactions break down.

A second theme is that interracial interactions need not always be fraught with misunderstandings; at times, Whites and Blacks can experience harmonious relationships. When Whites and Blacks talk about experiences that are common to both groups, such as feeling lonely (Studies 1-2), they can achieve mutual understanding and benefit from effective social support. In fact, Study 4 shows that Blacks are particularly appreciative of Whites' efforts to show understanding (vs. not understanding) when providing support for loneliness. These findings dovetail with work on the common ingroup identity and how focusing on shared experiences and other similarities can smooth difficulties between ingroup and outgroup members (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012). When both groups focus on commonalities, they start to treat outgroup members with the same positive regard as they do ingroup members. There are times, however, when overemphasizing commonalities at the expense of noticing real differences may backfire. Whites, like other high status groups in society, are likely to focus on commonalities between themselves and Blacks (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009; Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008) and prefer "colorblind"

ideologies that minimize differences between themselves and other groups (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura, & Ariely, 2006; Ryan, Hunt, Weible, Peterson, & Casas, 2007) in order to avoid appearing racist. Study 4 suggests that Whites' desire to assert commonalities with Blacks may be so strong that it causes them to believe that they understand Black interaction partners better than they understand White interaction partners. Blacks, however, want to recognize meaningful differences that separate the experiences of Blacks and Whites—such as racial discrimination—and don't want Whites to minimize these differences by saying they understand. Whites who try to convey understanding for racial discrimination risk negative evaluations from Blacks despite their intentions to be supportive (Study 4).

Finally, a third theme is that because Whites and Blacks have divergent preferences, ideas, and experiences that may at times conflict to produce negative interracial interactions, the psychological processes of both groups need to be studied in tandem. For example, Study 5 shows that Whites who desire to affiliate with Blacks when discussing racial discrimination simultaneously overestimate and underestimate how well they understand Blacks compared to how well Blacks feel understood. This result could not have been found without examining both Whites and Blacks together. Similarly, the disparity between Whites' perceived understanding and Blacks' felt understanding (Study 2) and the gap between Whites' and Blacks' preferences regarding social support (Study 4) could not have been discovered if not for the examination of both parties. Although research has generally moved beyond solely examining Whites as the agents in interracial interactions (Shelton, 2000), fewer studies have examined Blacks and Whites simultaneously in real interpersonal encounters (Toosi et al., 2012).

Understanding and Positive Illusions

This dissertation shows that Whites may be positively biased in their estimates of how well they can understand Blacks when race is salient. Although Study 4 presents the potential harms

associated with Whites' overestimation of perceived understanding, not all biases need be negative; in fact, several studies find that relationships can benefit from positive biases. Seeing romantic partners in an idealized light predicts greater relationship satisfaction (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a) and decreased relational conflicts (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996b) in both marriage and dating contexts (Murray & Holmes, 1997). This is the case when people have more idealized views compared to partners' self-views as well as when compared to the views that close friends have of the partner (Murray, Holmes, Dolderman, & Griffin, 2000). Why do positive illusions lead to negative outcomes in the dissertation yet benefit romantic relationships?

First, my findings suggest that Whites hold positive biases regarding the self whereas in the close relationships literature, people hold positive illusions about their partners. Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks causes inaccurate judgments of understanding when the threat of appearing prejudiced emerges, suggesting that Whites are biased to feel that they understand Blacks in order to present a more egalitarian image. These biases are more self-oriented and have to do with maintaining egocentric goals. By contrast, in close relationships people harbor more other-centric biases by idealizing their partner in order to fulfill relational goals. The difference in the target of illusions and the goals these illusions service may explain why positive illusions lead to negative outcomes in intergroup settings but beneficial outcomes in romantic relationships.

Second, the implications of positive illusions differ between romantic relationships versus interracial interactions. People may feel positively when romantic partners have idealized images of them. In fact, people oftentimes go out of their way to construct a positive image in order to appeal to romantic partners (Griskevicius, Tybur, Sundie, Cialdini, Miller, & Kenrick, 2007). Being held in high regard by romantic partners may not necessarily be undesirable. By contrast, Blacks are likely to negatively evaluate Whites who overestimate how well they understand racial discrimination. Many Whites question the prevalence of racial discrimination against Blacks and claim that Whites

face even more discrimination than Blacks do, which is in marked contrast to Blacks' perceptions of the state of racism in modern society (Norton & Sommers, 2011). Whites' denial of Blacks' racism can be costly because it may downplay real instances of racial discrimination and thwart policies and interventions to improve social disparities between Whites and Blacks. In short, positive illusions in interracial versus romantic relationships vary in the risks associated with them and the desirability of these illusions.

Race, Status, and Other Intergroup Contexts

Given that the present work focused on interactions between Whites and Blacks, to what extent can these findings generalize to other groups? These findings are likely to apply to other intergroup contexts to the extent that (a) group boundaries are impermeable, (b) the groups are marked by a status divide, and (c) the higher status group risks being seen as immoral.

First, group membership should be fairly impermeable. Although the multiracial population is a growing community, the experiences and histories of Whites and Blacks are so different that people tend to identify more strongly with one group over the other. To the extent that group membership is mutually exclusive, gaps in misunderstanding are more likely to arise because it is hard to conceive of outgroup members as being able to understand the experiences of ingroup members. Thus, asymmetries in understanding are more likely to occur when individuals cannot easily change from one group to another.

Second, groups who differ in status are more likely to experience asymmetries in understanding. Because high status groups tend to control the norms of the culture, their lifestyles and experiences may be more knowable and transparent to lower status groups than vice versa. By contrast, the lower status group oftentimes experience difficulties and injustices that higher status groups do not see, causing high status groups to believe that they understand low status groups whereas low status groups feel misunderstood. To the extent that status divides are associated with

longstanding and pervasive experiential differences, the more likely asymmetries in understanding between high and low status groups will occur.

Finally, high status groups may be driven by the goal to affiliate with low status groups when they risk being seen as immoral. Vorauer and Sakamoto (2008) found that high status members care more about low status members' opinions when the legitimacy of their group status difference is seen as illegitimate because low status members are seen as judges of moral goodness. High status members may make efforts to appear moral and elicit liking—perhaps by showing that they understand and can connect with low status members. For example, Whites risk being seen as prejudiced in interracial interactions and consequently, they strongly desire to be liked by Blacks and Latinos in interracial interactions. The present work shows that Whites may signal that they are non-prejudiced by conveying that they understand Blacks' experiences with racial discrimination. Similarly, the desire to affiliate with low status groups may drive perceive understanding to the extent that high status groups risk being seen as unlikable in some way.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although the strengths of this dissertation include contributions to a small but growing literature on the negative intergroup consequences caused by positive intentions (e.g., Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Siy & Cheryan, 2013) using a wide range of methodological designs and statistical analytic strategies, there are several limitations to the present work. Foremost, the studies did not successfully manipulate desire to affiliate, raising the question of why certain individuals were higher or lower on affiliative motivation. Although several studies tried to address this limitation by providing meditational evidence of affiliative motivation, future research should randomly assign participants to high or low levels of desire to affiliate.

Currently, I am running a study that attempts to manipulate White participants to seek high vs. low affiliation with Blacks. Similar to Study 1, White participants arrive in the lab and are led to

believe that they are video chatting with a Black student. During the experiment, the Black student either talks about a negative racial experience he had or a negative non-racial experience. Prior to the conversation, however, the experimenter either instructs students to have *high* or *low* desire to affiliate:

Sometimes it can be hard to talk with someone you don't know or someone who seems different from you. I encourage you to try hard to get along with this person and try to really connect with them. I've found that the best way to have a smooth interaction is to get this person to like you by being friendly.

Sometimes it can be hard to talk with someone you don't know or someone who seems different from you. I encourage you to not worry about getting along with this person or trying hard to connect with them. I've found that the best way to have a smooth interaction is to not stress out about it and just have a conversation with the other person.

I predict that when talking about a non-racial topic, the affiliation instructions Whites received will not yield significant differences in how well Whites think they understood their Black partner. However, I predict that when talking about a racial topic, Whites who received the high affiliation instructions will feel like they understood the Black partner to a greater extent than will Whites who received the low affiliation instructions. Again, this is because Whites may claim understanding in order to prevent appearing prejudiced. To the extent that Whites want to affiliate with Blacks in the racial condition, they may be more inclined to claim that they understand. For Whites in the non-racial topic condition, however, the threat of appearing prejudiced is reduced so Whites' desire to affiliate may not necessarily lead to greater claims of understanding.

In addition, I am interested in pursuing two different lines of future research. First, what other consequences do Whites' desire to affiliate pose for interactions with Blacks? I predict that in situations where the threat of appearing prejudiced is high, Whites will be less able to direct their attention to Blacks and become more self-focused due to their preoccupation with maintaining an egalitarian image. Specifically, Whites' desire to appear non-prejudiced may mediate the relationship between discussion topic (high racial salience vs. low racial salience) to predict less attention to Blacks, less eye contact, less memory for what Blacks said, and more time spent talking about the self rather than asking about the Black person's experiences. While Whites may not be aware of their self-focus, Blacks may be able to detect that Whites are not fully paying attention to them and the two individuals may have asymmetric perceptions of how well they were able to establish understanding and have a smooth interaction. Specifically, Whites may be more willing to say that the interaction went well and that they understood the Black partner, whereas Blacks may say the interaction went poorly and that they did not feel understood.

Second, I am also interested in interventions that may prevent asymmetries in understanding between Whites and Blacks from occurring. Self-affirmation—or affirming important aspects of the self—has been found to reduce defensiveness in the face of threatening information by producing more positive other-directed feelings (Crocker, Niiya, & Dominik, 2008). Self-affirmation may reduce Whites' fears of appearing prejudiced, thereby causing Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks to be purely about making an interpersonal connection with Blacks instead of making it a calculated attempt to project an egalitarian image. Experimentally inducing Whites to write about a value that is important to them (vs. an unimportant value) may cause Whites to be better able to accept that there are racial experiences that they may not necessarily understand due to the fact that they are White. Because admitting that they don't understand racial issues may cause Whites to feel that they may be racially prejudiced, Whites may want to claim understanding in order to mitigate the threat of

appearing racist. By affirming other important values to the self prior to exposing Whites to information about racial discrimination, Whites may be more willing to admit that they don't understand Blacks' racial issues instead of claiming to understand.

Conclusion

Whites' desire to affiliate with Blacks may stem from the seemingly well-intentioned purpose of not appearing prejudiced. Unbeknownst to Whites, however, their good intentions can backfire and cause asymmetries in understanding between Whites and Blacks. Whites may feel that they understand Blacks because they want to connect with them and prove that they are not prejudiced, yet Blacks may find this off-putting because they disagree about how well Whites can truly understand Blacks' negative racial experiences. The goal of the present research was to document the reasons why these asymmetries in understanding may occur and the resulting effects of these asymmetries on interpersonal psychological and behavioral outcomes. By better understanding how and why intergroup relationships can fall apart—despite the presence of benevolent motives to get along with one another—I hope to contribute to existing research on how to improve interpersonal encounters between people of different racial and cultural backgrounds.

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Appendix A: Affiliation Primes (Studies 1 & 5)

Low Affiliation Prime

1. distant can from Jane Adam feels
2. I to her get away considered wanted from
3. dislike I her him
4. Peter observes occasionally television watches
5. Christine Joey disagrees guess with
6. sent I email it over letter
7. Jane dislikes distance him
8. I friend her want don't to be train
9. sky I to relate cannot him
10. Mary disagreed style John with
11. dislikes Joe really going jam
12. style we of difference have a
13. Christine dinner dislikes Thanksgiving children
14. I through with her bickered
15. bump she I and heads wakes
16. I train the dinner took
17. a Lauren is style cook bad
18. him I had a between with fight
19. I be alone that want to today
20. train I dislike Jeremy's his

High Affiliation Prime

1. close can to Jane Adam feels
2. I to her get along considered wanted with
3. like I life outlook Rachel's
4. Peter observes occasionally television watches
5. I feel Joey comfortable guess with
6. sent I email it over letter
7. maintain others I get along to with want
8. Lisa friend Mary's wants story to be
9. sky Lauren is friend good a
10. eating like together I with friends
11. likes Joe really going jam
12. birds she with me cooperates
13. Christine feels Joey close guess to
14. I smooth blimp interactions with want to have him
15. know she travel wanted him with to
16. Jane friend Sarah's wants story to be
17. a Lauren is style cook bad
18. to Sally is Harry similar style
19. I relate that can to today
20. bond I with him picture want to

Appendix B: Friend Selection Grid (Study 2)

Please think of a friend or an acquaintance who fits the characteristics in orange. Please complete the remainder of the study with this person in mind.

SCHOOL:	Princeton	Not Princeton		
GENDER:	Male	Female		
RACE:	Asian	Black	Latino	White

Appendix C: Vignette for White Participants (Study 2)

Imagine that you run into [friend's name] on campus. You notice that he looks like there's something on his mind, so you ask how he is doing. [Friend's name] explains that after the first week of the semester, he realized that he was the only **Black student (student from his residential college)** in all of his classes. At first this didn't bother him too much, but he is starting to feel left out when he hears about other students hanging out together and forming study groups. It seems like he doesn't belong and he feels very isolated from the rest of the students. A part of him wonders if this is because all the other students are **White and he's not (from a different residential college from him)**. He feels left out and now dreads going to class.

Appendix D: Vignette for Black Participants (Study 2)

Imagine that you run into [friend's name] on campus and he asks you how you are doing. Something has been on your mind and bothering you lately, so you decide to tell [friend's name] how you feel. After the first week of the semester, you realized that you were the only **Black student (student from your residential college)** in all your classes. At first this didn't bother you too much, but you're starting to feel left out when you hear about other students hanging out together and forming study groups. It seems like you don't belong and you feel very isolated from the rest of the students. A part of you wonders if this is because all the other students are **White and you're not (from a different residential college from you)**. You feel left out and now dread going to class.

Appendix E: Understanding Vignette (Study 4)

You are sitting in precept, and your preceptor divides the students into groups of three to discuss a paper that the preceptor has read. The paper was about social issues, and the preceptor instructs students to draw from the reading and personal experiences to discuss other social issues that people face. You are put in a group with a White student and a Black student. You've seen each other in precept, but you haven't talked with each other before. You introduce yourselves to each other and brainstorm about the different problems that people face. The Black student starts the discussion by disclosing about his experiences with **racial discrimination (loneliness)**. As he continues to talk, it becomes clear that he is feeling upset and could use some support. In response, the White student says, "Wow, that sounds awful. I know exactly how you feel because I've had similar experiences with **racial discrimination (loneliness)** just like you. That's really terrible."

Appendix F: Not Understanding Vignette (Study 4)

You are sitting in precept, and your preceptor divides the students into groups of three to discuss a paper that the preceptor has read. The paper was about social issues, and the preceptor instructs students to draw from the reading and personal experiences to discuss other social issues that people face. You are put in a group with a White student and a Black student. You've seen each other in precept, but you haven't talked with each other before. You introduce yourselves to each other and brainstorm about the different problems that people face. The Black student starts the discussion by disclosing about his experiences with **racial discrimination (loneliness)**. As he continues to talk, it becomes clear that he is feeling upset and could use some support. In response, the White student says, "Wow, that sounds awful. I don't know exactly how you feel, though, because I haven't had similar experiences with **racial discrimination (loneliness)**. That's really terrible."

Appendix G: Getting to Know You Questions (Study 5)

1. Where are you from? Name all of the places you have lived.
2. What did you do this past summer?
3. What is your favorite class at Princeton so far? Why?
4. What is your favorite holiday? Why?
5. What is the best restaurant you've been to in the last month? What did you like about it?

Appendix H: Discussion Topic Cards (Study 5)

Although college experiences can be extremely rewarding, many students encounter stressors that affect them negatively. We would like to learn about negative experiences that you have had regarding the **bolded topic** below. Please be as descriptive as possible. What happened? What consequences did it have for you and others involved? How did you feel?

Academics	Appearances	Family
Finances	Peer Relations	Future
Health	Racial Discrimination	Romantic Relations

Although college experiences can be extremely rewarding, many students encounter stressors that affect them negatively. We would like to learn about negative experiences that you have had regarding the **bolded topic** below. Please be as descriptive as possible. What happened? What consequences did it have for you and others involved? How did you feel?

Academics	Appearances	Family
Finances	Peer Relations	Future
Health	Racial Discrimination	Romantic Relations

Appendix I: Regressions for Judgments of Accuracy in Understanding (Study 5)

Parameter	B	SE B	t	p
Intercept	-0.08	0.34	-0.22	.826
Gender	0.26	0.18	1.42	.164
Race	-0.30	0.15	-2.08	.043
Felt Understanding (A)	0.71	0.10	6.91	.000
Felt Understanding (P)	0.11	0.11	0.99	.327
Affiliation (A)	-0.15	0.15	-1.02	.310
Affiliation (P)	0.02	0.14	0.13	.900
Topic	-0.22	0.13	-1.75	.087
Race * Felt Understanding (A)	-0.01	0.10	-0.11	.911
Race * Felt Understanding (P)	-0.11	0.11	-1.07	.288
Race * Affiliation (A)	-0.02	0.16	-0.12	.909
Race * Affiliation (P)	0.17	0.15	1.13	.263
Race * Topic	-0.23	0.15	-1.58	.120
Felt Understanding (A) * Topic	0.09	0.10	0.90	.371
Felt Understanding (P) * Topic	0.03	0.11	0.30	.762
Affiliation (A) * Topic	-0.23	0.15	-1.58	.119
Affiliation (P) * Topic	-0.07	0.14	-0.48	.631
Felt Understanding (A) * Affiliation (A)	0.01	0.12	0.12	.908
Felt Understanding (A) * Affiliation (P)	0.00	0.12	0.03	.976
Felt Understanding (P) * Affiliation (A)	-0.08	0.12	-0.62	.539
Felt Understanding (P) * Affiliation (P)	-0.03	0.12	-0.27	.786
Race * Felt Understanding (A) * Topic	0.06	0.10	0.61	.544
Race * Felt Understanding (P) * Topic	-0.14	0.11	-1.33	.187
Race * Affiliation (A) * Topic	-0.06	0.15	-0.37	.711
Race * Affiliation (P) * Topic	-0.02	0.15	-0.16	.876
Race * Felt Understanding (A) * Affiliation (A)	0.01	0.12	0.11	.916
Race * Felt Understanding (A) * Affiliation (P)	0.09	0.11	0.80	.426
Race * Felt Understanding (P) * Affiliation (A)	-0.09	0.12	-0.73	.465
Race * Felt Understanding (P) * Affiliation (P)	0.11	0.12	0.92	.363
Felt Understanding (A) * Affiliation (A) * Topic	-0.05	0.12	-0.44	.660
Felt Understanding (A) * Affiliation (P) * Topic	-0.02	0.12	-0.21	.836
Felt Understanding (P) * Affiliation (A) * Topic	0.19	0.12	1.59	.117
Felt Understanding (P) * Affiliation (P) * Topic	-0.14	0.12	-1.16	.251
Race * Felt Understanding (A) * Affiliation (A) * Topic	0.09	0.12	0.72	.472
Race * Felt Understanding (A) * Affiliation (P) * Topic	0.12	0.11	1.05	.298
Race * Felt Understanding (P) * Affiliation (A) * Topic	-0.24	0.12	-2.03	.046
Race * Felt Understanding (P) * Affiliation (P) * Topic	0.03	0.12	0.21	.836