

# Exploring Blacks' Perceptions of Whites' Racial Prejudice as a Function of Intergroup Behavior and Motivational Mindsets

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## Abstract

When Whites believe prejudice cannot change, they often adopt a behavioral style that is intended to reduce the possibility that they are seen as racist (i.e., performance-oriented behaviors). The present research tests the possibility that these performance-oriented behaviors may be interpreted, ironically, as racist. Across two studies, Black participants viewed performance-oriented behaviors as indicating racial prejudice. Additionally, when Black participants were led to believe that Whites' racial prejudice could not change, they perceived Whites as more prejudiced. This research highlights a potential source of misunderstanding in interracial interactions and offers implications for improving interracial interactions from target and perpetrator perspectives.

## Keywords

intergroup behavior, intergroup interactions, motivational mindsets, malleability beliefs, racial prejudice

Imagine a conversation that becomes tense and awkward. The person you are talking to becomes overly nice and then tries to end the interaction quickly. If you are Black and your interaction partner is White, what can you infer from these behaviors? Do these behaviors indicate racial prejudice? Previous research suggests two things: First, these behaviors may indicate whether your White interaction partner believes racial prejudice can change. Second, these behaviors do not necessarily reflect your White interaction partner's level of racial prejudice. However, ironically, these very behaviors may be interpreted by a Black interaction partner as indicating negative racial prejudice. In the present research, we argue that although Whites often engage in a very specific set of behaviors to demonstrate they lack racial prejudice, such as acting overly nice, these same behaviors may produce a counterintuitive outcome, communicating to racial minority interaction partners the presence of racial prejudice.

## Whites' Motivational Mindsets and Intergroup Behavior

The past two decades of research on interracial interactions reveals that in the United States, Whites tend to be concerned about appearing prejudiced (e.g., Plant & Devine, 2003; Shelton & Richeson, 2006) because they are stereotyped as racist (Frantz, Cuddy, Burnett, Ray, & Hart, 2004; Krueger, 1996), and are aware of this stereotype (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998) and strong norms against being racist (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002). As a result of this concern about

appearing prejudiced, Whites often engage in specific behaviors in challenging interracial interactions to facilitate smoother interactions—behaviors intended to prove that they are not racist or behaviors intended to improve the interaction and to understand their interaction partners (e.g., Murphy, Richeson, & Molden, 2011; Neel & Shapiro, 2012).

Recent research on Whites' mindsets regarding the malleability of racial prejudice helps predict which of these types of behaviors Whites will engage in during these challenging interracial interactions. That is, Whites vary in their beliefs regarding whether racial prejudice is something that is fixed and cannot be changed (a fixed mindset) or something that is malleable and can be changed (a malleable mindset; Carr, Dweck, & Pauker, 2012; Neel & Shapiro, 2012). These mindsets shape Whites' behaviors in challenging interracial interactions.

Whites with a mindset that prejudice is fixed see challenging interracial interactions as having the potential to show evidence to themselves or others that they are indeed prejudiced (Neel & Shapiro, 2012). As a result, when Whites believe prejudice is

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fixed, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that are *performance-oriented* or behaviors that are seen as providing proof that they are not prejudiced.

One set of performance-oriented behaviors that Whites often use is overcompensating to appear warm and likable to Black interaction partners, for example, by smiling and acting nicer than they normally would (e.g., Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010; Harber, 1998; Harber et al., 2012) or by withholding negativity (e.g., Croft & Schmader, 2012; Ruscher, Wallace, Walker, & Bell, 2010). Another set of performance-oriented behaviors are those believed to minimize the possibility of saying or doing something that could be interpreted as racist, including avoiding intergroup differences and focusing on intergroup similarities (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009), or avoiding or escaping interracial interactions entirely (e.g., Plant & Butz, 2006). Another way Whites attempt to avoid saying or doing something that can be interpreted as racist is engaging in strategic colorblindness. Strategic colorblindness is avoiding talking about or acknowledging race even when it is appropriate or essential to clear communication, as Whites often assume that they cannot be seen as racist if they did not notice race (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Norton, Vandello, Biga, & Darley, 2008).

In contrast, Whites with a mindset that prejudice is malleable do not see struggling in a challenging interracial interaction as a sign that they need to prove they are not racist. Instead, Whites with a malleable mindset see their struggle as a signal that they can be a better interaction partner, that there is an opportunity to improve their skills in interracial interactions, and that there is an opportunity to better understand their interaction partner (Neel & Shapiro, 2012). As a result, when Whites believe racial prejudice is malleable, they are more likely to engage in behaviors that are *learning-oriented* or behaviors that help them improve, grow, and learn.

Learning-oriented behaviors focus on developing relationships with one's interaction partners (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Murphy et al., 2011), strengthening one's understanding of another cultural group (Murphy et al., 2011), and getting feedback on one's own behaviors and biases (Murphy et al., 2011; Neel & Shapiro, 2012). For example, learning-oriented behaviors include engaging with an interaction partner, such as asking questions and affirming an interaction partner's comments (e.g., Trawalter, Richeson, & Shelton, 2009), asking what the other person is thinking and trying to take their perspective (Neel & Shapiro, 2012), showing interest in a friendship with an interaction partner (Migacheva & Tropp, 2013), and moving physically closer to an interaction partner (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008).

Importantly, Whites' mindsets about whether racial prejudice can change predict the use of performance- and learning-oriented behaviors over and above their actual racial prejudice (Carr et al., 2012; Goff et al., 2008; Neel & Shapiro, 2012). Thus, seeing a White person engage in performance-oriented behaviors may at times indicate not that the White

person is racist, but rather that the White person believes bias is fixed.

## Are Whites' Performance-Oriented Behaviors Seen as Evidence of Prejudice?

Despite the lack of a definitive link between performance-oriented behaviors and prejudice, there is reason to believe that Blacks may infer racial prejudice from performance-oriented behaviors. Unlike Whites' concern about appearing prejudiced in interracial interactions, Blacks tend to be concerned about being the target of prejudice in interracial interactions (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Richeson & Shelton, 2007). Thus, Blacks and other racial minorities have the goal of detecting bias in interracial interactions and are attuned to subtle cues that may reveal racial prejudice in their interaction partners during interracial interactions (Dovidio, 2001; Richeson & Shelton, 2005; Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001).

Performance-oriented behaviors, in particular, look very similar to behaviors that racial minorities associate with racial prejudice. For example, a common performance-oriented behavior Whites engage in is overcompensation or using extremely positive behaviors in interracial interactions. However, when Whites overcompensate, they are often seen as fake or patronizing by their racial minority interaction partners (Trawalter et al., 2009). Indeed, racial minorities are often suspicious of positive behaviors when they believe Whites are superficially motivated by the fear of appearing racist rather than by genuine egalitarian values (Lacoste et al., 2015; Major et al., 2016).

Another common performance-oriented behavior is avoiding interracial interactions entirely. Yet, when asked what types of behaviors indicate that a White person is nonprejudiced, Blacks mention behaviors such as seeking out interactions with minorities (Winslow, Aaron, & Amadife, 2011). And third, although strategic colorblindness is a common performance-oriented behavior used by Whites, Blacks perceive greater racial prejudice among Whites who ignore racial differences and race (e.g., Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009), and Blacks mention engaging in conversations about race and prejudice as another behavior that indicates a White person is nonprejudiced (Winslow et al., 2011).

Thus, although Whites' use of performance- or learning-oriented behaviors may not indicate their actual levels of racial prejudice, these distinct behaviors may communicate varying levels of racial prejudice to their racial minority interaction partners. That is, performance-oriented behaviors mirror behaviors that racial minorities associate with racial prejudice in Whites. Consequently, when Whites use these behaviors in challenging interracial interactions, Blacks may draw conclusions about Whites' racial prejudice from these behaviors. Specifically, we hypothesized that Blacks would perceive Whites who engage in performance-oriented behaviors as being more prejudiced than Whites who engage in

learning-oriented behaviors. We tested this hypothesis in two studies.

## Study I

### Method

#### Participants

Forty-nine undergraduates from a large southwestern university who self-identified as Black on a prescreening survey participated in exchange for a US\$10 Amazon gift-card<sup>1</sup> (29 women, 13 men, 7 did not indicate gender;  $M_{\text{age}} = 20.26$  years old, range = 18–26). A power analysis conducted with G\*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) shows that a sample size of  $n = 34$  is required for 80% power to detect a medium-sized effect ( $d = 0.50$ ) in a repeated-measures analysis.

#### Procedure and Materials

Participants completed the study online. They first completed a consent form. Consistent with previous research on performance- and learning-oriented behaviors in interracial interactions (Neel & Shapiro, 2012), participants were asked to recall a time when an interaction with a White person went poorly and to describe in detail what the other person said and did. It was important to have participants consider a challenging interracial interaction because performance- and learning-oriented behaviors are most likely to emerge in challenging, rather than easy, situations (e.g., Dweck, 1999). Next, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions about their perceptions of Whites' behaviors in interracial interactions. Finally, participants read a debriefing statement and were paid for their participation.

#### Measures

Participants were presented with a list of eight performance-oriented and four learning-oriented behaviors. These 12 behaviors were adapted from Neel and Shapiro's (2012) research examining Whites' behavioral strategies in challenging interracial interactions as a function of seeing prejudice as fixed versus malleable. Four of the performance-oriented behaviors assessed overcompensation and avoiding or escaping the interaction (e.g., "act extremely nice—nicer than they normally would be"; "end the interaction with me as soon as possible") and four performance-oriented behaviors assessed strategic colorblindness (e.g., "think that talking about race makes an interracial interaction go poorly"; "think that being in a situation where race is relevant makes an interracial interaction go poorly").<sup>2</sup> Sample learning-oriented behaviors included "ask me what I am thinking" and "try to understand things from my point of view." Performance- and learning-oriented behaviors were interspersed (see Supplementary Materials for all items). The measures are described in the order in which participants answered them.

*Perceived likelihood of Whites engaging in performance- and learning-oriented behaviors.* Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they thought Whites in general were likely to engage in each behavior (performance-oriented,  $\alpha = .66$ ; colorblind,  $\alpha = .93$ ; learning-oriented,  $\alpha = .88$ ). Participants responded using a 6-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

*Perceptions of Whites' racial prejudice as a function of performance- and learning-oriented behaviors.* Participants were asked to indicate how racist a White person would seem if they engaged in each behavior (performance-oriented,  $\alpha = .86$ ; colorblind,  $\alpha = .89$ ; learning-oriented,  $\alpha = .96$ ). Participants responded to these items using a 6-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (*not at all racist*) to 6 (*very racist*).

*Perceptions of Whites' racial prejudice malleability as a function of performance- and learning-oriented behaviors.* Participants were asked to indicate how capable of changing their racial prejudice a White person would seem if he or she engaged in each behavior (performance-oriented,  $\alpha = .68$ ; colorblind,  $\alpha = .92$ ; learning-oriented,  $\alpha = .90$ ). Participants responded to these items using a 6-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 (*not at all capable of changing*) to 6 (*very capable of changing*).

### Results

See Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and correlations among variables. Following Neel and Shapiro (2012), we analyzed strategic colorblindness separately from the other performance-oriented behaviors and anticipated that both measures of performance-oriented behaviors would function similarly.

For each dependent variable, we conducted repeated-measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and paired-sample *t*-tests. We first tested our central prediction that performance- and learning-oriented behaviors would be seen as indicating racial prejudice and then explored whether these behaviors are interpreted as indicating that Whites' racial prejudice can change and the perceived likelihood that Whites engage in these behaviors.

#### *Perceptions of Whites' Racial Prejudice as a Function of Performance- and Learning-Oriented Behaviors*

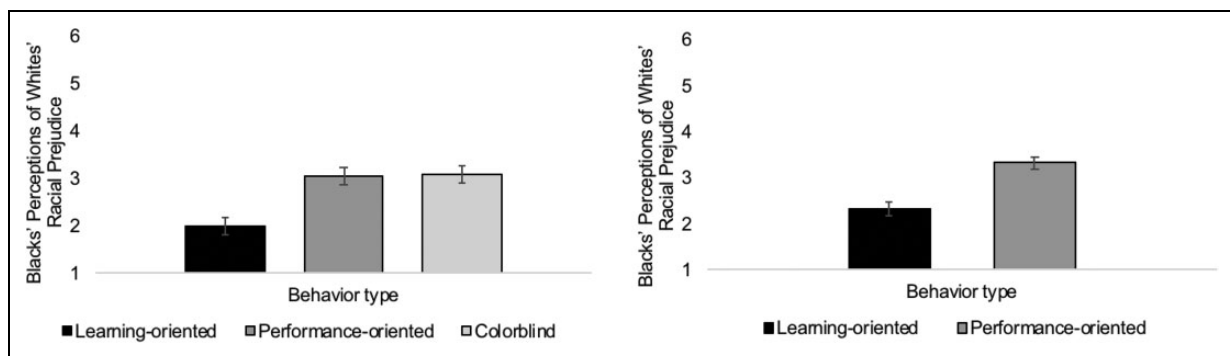
Participants reported differences in the racial prejudice indicated by each behavioral strategy,  $F(2, 84) = 20.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .33$ . Consistent with predictions, participants reported performance-oriented behaviors ( $M = 3.06$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ),  $t(43) = 5.61$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.85$ , 95% confidence interval (CI) [0.50, 1.20], and colorblind behaviors ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ),  $t(42) = 5.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.99$ , 95% CI [0.55, 1.44], as indicating more racial prejudice than learning-oriented behaviors ( $M = 1.99$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ).<sup>3</sup> Also consistent with predictions, participants did not report differences in how prejudiced performance-oriented and colorblind behaviors

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations among Study 1 Variables.

| Measure  | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4     | 5    | 6     | 7   | 8    | 9  |
|--|----------|-----------|--------|--------|--------|-------|------|-------|-----|------|----|
| Perceptions of racial prejudice as a function of behaviors                 |          |           |        |        |        |       |      |       |     |      |    |
| 1. Performance-oriented  | 3.06     | 1.21      | —      | 43     | 44     | 39    | 39   | 38    | 44  | 44   | 44 |
| 2. Colorblind  | 3.08     | 1.22      | .46**  | —      | 43     | 38    | 38   | 38    | 43  | 43   | 43 |
| 3. Learning-oriented   | 1.99     | 1.30      | .49**  | .14    | —      | 39    | 39   | 38    | 44  | 44   | 44 |
| Perceptions of racial prejudice of malleability as a function of behaviors |          |           |        |        |        |       |      |       |     |      |    |
| 4. Performance-oriented  | 3.33     | 1.13      | -.47** | -.35*  | -.18   | —     | 39   | 38    | 39  | 39   | 39 |
| 5. Colorblind  | 3.32     | 1.30      | -.35*  | -.74** | -.29   | .54** | —    | 38    | 39  | 39   | 39 |
| 6. Learning-oriented   | 4.70     | 1.32      | -.03   | .26    | -.62** | .15   | .09  | —     | 38  | 38   | 38 |
| Perceived likelihood of behaviors  |          |           |        |        |        |       |      |       |     |      |    |
| 7. Performance-oriented  | 3.62     | 0.95      | .18    | .02    | .17    | -.15  | -.21 | -.11  | —   | 46   | 48 |
| 8. Colorblind  | 3.72     | 1.21      | .41**  | .33*   | .17    | -.15  | -.19 | .07   | .28 | —    | 46 |
| 9. Learning-oriented   | 2.85     | 1.13      | -.02   | -.18   | .27    | -.15  | -.04 | -.35* | .03 | -.15 | —  |

Note. Numbers in the top half of the table reflect the sample size for the corresponding correlation.

\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ .



**Figure 1.** Blacks' perceptions of Whites' racial prejudice as a function of Whites' behaviors in challenging interracial interactions (Study 1 and Study 2). Error bars represent standard errors.

seemed,  $t(42) = -0.48$ ,  $p = .64$ ,  $d = -0.08$ , 95% CI [-0.39, 0.24], see Figure 1, left panel.

colorblind behaviors,  $t(38) = 0.07$ ,  $p = .95$ ,  $d = 0.01$ , 95% CI [-0.29, 0.31].

### Perceptions of Whites' Racial Prejudice Malleability as a Function of Performance- and Learning-Oriented Behaviors

Participants reported differences in the racial prejudice malleability indicated by behavioral strategy,  $F(2, 74) = 18.66$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .34$ . Participants reported performance-oriented behaviors ( $M = 3.40$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ),  $t(37) = -5.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -1.08$ , 95% CI [-1.56, -0.60], and colorblind behaviors ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ),  $t(37) = -4.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -1.02$ , 95% CI [-1.50, -0.53], as indicating less ability for Whites to change their racial prejudice than learning-oriented behaviors ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ). Participants did not report any difference in Whites' ability to change their racial prejudice between performance-oriented behaviors and

### Perceived Likelihood of Whites Engaging in Performance- and Learning-Oriented Behaviors

Participants reported differences in Whites' likelihood of engaging in the behavioral strategies,  $F(2, 90) = 8.10$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .15$ . Compared to learning-oriented behaviors ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), participants believed that Whites were more likely to engage in performance-oriented behaviors ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ),  $t(47) = 3.65$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $d = 0.73$ , 95% CI [0.31, 1.15], and colorblind behaviors ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ),  $t(45) = 3.15$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $d = 0.70$ , 95% CI [0.24, 1.16]. Participants did not report any difference in the perceived likelihood that Whites would engage in performance-oriented compared to colorblind behaviors,  $t(45) = -0.39$ ,  $p = .70$ ,  $d = -0.07$ , 95% CI [-0.42, 0.28].

## Discussion

Although previous research reveals that Whites who believe racial prejudice is fixed favor performance- to learning-oriented behaviors in challenging interracial interactions as a way in which to demonstrate their lack of prejudice (Carr et al., 2012; Neel & Shapiro, 2012), the present study finds that Blacks infer more prejudice from performance-oriented behavior compared to learning-oriented behavior. In addition, exploratory analyses revealed that Black participants inferred that performance-oriented behaviors indicate less ability to change racial prejudice than learning-oriented behaviors, and Black participants rated Whites as more likely to engage in performance-oriented than learning-oriented behaviors in challenging interracial interactions. Interestingly, we also found that the more participants rated a particular behavior as indicating that a White person's prejudice is fixed, the more they also rated that behavior as indicating prejudice (see correlations in Table 1). This suggests a possible link at the participant-level between believing prejudice is fixed and greater perceptions of prejudice. We directly test this link in Study 2.

### Study 2

Study 1 finds that Blacks see Whites' performance-oriented behaviors, compared to learning-oriented behaviors, as indicating greater racial prejudice. In Study 2, we sought to replicate this central finding with another, larger sample. In addition, Study 2 was designed to test another hypothesis about the relationship between mindsets and prejudice: that Blacks who are led to believe that Whites' prejudice is fixed, compared to malleable, will see Whites as more racially biased. That is, if Blacks tend to believe that Whites' discrimination and prejudice toward Black people is pervasive and deep-rooted in society (Nelson, Adams, & Salter, 2013; Norton & Sommers, 2011; O'Brien et al., 2009; Pew Research Center, 2016), then learning racial prejudice is fixed (vs. malleable) may create a stronger belief that Whites are prejudiced. This would echo the finding from Study 1 that the more participants saw a behavior as indicating a White person's prejudice is fixed, the more they saw that behavior as indicating that the White person is prejudiced.

We did not anticipate that manipulating Blacks' mindsets regarding the fixed versus malleable nature of Whites' prejudice would affect Blacks' inference of racial prejudice from performance- and learning-oriented behaviors. Consistent with Study 1, we anticipated that Blacks would infer more prejudice from performance-oriented compared to learning-oriented behaviors, regardless of whether they are led to believe that Whites' prejudices are fixed or malleable. That is, as described above, if Blacks believe Whites' prejudice is fixed, they may expect that Whites will be more likely to engage in (prejudice-indicating) performance-oriented behaviors. But, when Blacks see Whites engage in performance-oriented behaviors, even Blacks who believe Whites' prejudice can change, they are likely to interpret these behaviors as indicating prejudice.

Thus, Blacks' mindsets may affect their perceptions of Whites' general racial prejudice but not whether Whites' performance-oriented behaviors indicate Whites' prejudice.

## Method

### Participants and Design

One hundred forty-four Black Americans were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk and participated in exchange for a small monetary payment. We excluded 19 participants from data analysis because they failed to follow instructions by writing about something unrelated to the experimental manipulation, leaving a sample of 125<sup>4</sup> (79 women, 46 men;  $M_{\text{age}} = 32.32$  years, range = 19–65). A power analysis suggested  $n = 128$  for 80% power to detect a medium-sized between-subjects effect ( $d = 0.50$ ). The design was a two-group (Blacks' mindset of Whites' racial prejudice: fixed vs. malleable) between-subjects design with random assignment to condition.

### Procedure and Materials

Participants completed the study online. Potential participants first completed a short demographic survey and those who identified their race as African American/Black American were given the opportunity to complete the study for a bonus payment.

After giving consent, participants read a *Psychology Today* article describing Whites' racial prejudice as either fixed or malleable (adapted from Neel & Shapiro, 2012; see Appendix), which served as the experimental manipulation. Consistent with past research (Neel & Shapiro, 2012), after reading the article, participants wrote a few sentences about an experience they have had that supports the article's point regarding the nature of Whites' racial prejudices (fixed vs. malleable, depending on the experimental condition).

Next, participants answered questions regarding perceptions of Whites' behaviors in challenging interracial interactions and perceptions of Whites' racial prejudice. We also included exploratory measures of three potentially relevant individual differences: Black participants' racial identity (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) and perceptions of Whites' internal and external motivation to appear nonprejudiced (Major, Sawyer, & Kunstman, 2013). Analyses of these variables are included in the Supplementary Analyses. As a manipulation check, participants indicated their perceptions of Whites' mindsets of racial prejudice. Lastly, participants read a debriefing statement and were paid for their participation.

### Measures

*Perceptions of Whites' racial prejudice as a function of performance- and learning-oriented behaviors.* Consistent with past research, participants were asked to imagine an interaction between a White and Black person that was going poorly and becoming racially tense. Participants were asked to indicate the extent

**Table 2.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Study 2 Variables.

| Variable   | M    | SD   | 1    | 2   | 3 |
|--|------|------|------|-----|---|
| 1. Perceptions of racial prejudice as a function of performance-oriented behaviors | 3.32 | 1.41 | —    |     |   |
| 2. Perceptions of racial prejudice as a function of learning-oriented behaviors    | 2.33 | 1.74 | .39* | —   |   |
| 3. Perceptions of Whites' general racial prejudice                                 | 3.92 | 0.89 | .001 | .13 | — |

\* $p < .01$ .

to which they thought each of nine behaviors suggests that the White person was racist on 6-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*not at all racist*) to 6 (*very racist*), with learning- and performance-oriented behaviors interspersed. The same four learning-oriented behaviors used in Study 1 were used here ( $\alpha = .78$ ). To make the number of items measuring performance-oriented and learning-oriented behaviors more equal in Study 2, we dropped the measures of strategic color-blindness for this study. The remaining four performance-oriented behaviors used in Study 1 were used here. Because Study 1 only had one overcompensation item, one additional overcompensation item was added to this measure: "Trying to smile more than usual" (5 items total;  $\alpha = .67$ ).

**Perceptions of Whites' general racial prejudice.** Adapted from the Social Distance and Affective Reaction subscales of Brigham's (1993) Attitudes Towards Blacks Scale, participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with each of the 11 statements about Whites' prejudices on 6-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .88$ ). Example items include: "It would not bother most White people if their new roommate was Black" and "Most White people get very upset when they hear a White person make a prejudicial remark about Black people" (both reverse-scored).

**Mindset manipulation check.** Participants completed a 3-item mindsets of racial prejudice manipulation check from Neel and Shapiro (2012), ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Items included: "White people have a certain amount of racial bias and they really can't do much to change it"; "White people's racial bias is something very basic about them and it can't be changed very much"; and "There is not much that can be done to change a White person's racial bias" ( $\alpha = .93$ ). Higher scores on this scale indicate greater belief that Whites' racial prejudice is fixed.

## Results

See Table 2 for means, standard deviations, and correlations among dependent variables.

## Manipulation Check

A one-way ANOVA predicting the mindset manipulation check shows that the manipulation (fixed vs. malleable) was effective: Participants in the fixed condition indicated that Whites' racial prejudice was more fixed ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) than participants in the malleable condition ( $M = 2.38$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ),  $F(1, 122) = 23.39$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.87$ , 95% CI [0.50, 1.24].

## Perceptions of Whites' Racial Prejudice as a Function of Performance- and Learning-Oriented Behaviors

A mixed-design ANOVA with perceived racial prejudice of Whites' behaviors as the dependent variable, Whites' behavior type (performance- vs. learning-oriented) as a within-participants factor, and mindsets (fixed vs. malleable) as a between-participants factor produced only a significant main effect of behavior type,  $F(1, 123) = 38.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.62$ , 95% CI [0.41, 0.83]. Replicating Study 1's central finding (see Figure 1, right panel), participants viewed performance-oriented behaviors as indicating more prejudice ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ) than learning-oriented behaviors ( $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = 1.74$ ). There was no main effect of the mindset manipulation ( $F < 1$ ) or interaction between behavior-type and mindset,  $F(1, 123) = 1.60$ ,  $p = .21$  (see Table 3 in Supplementary Materials for cell means).

## Perceptions of Whites' General Racial Prejudice

A one-way ANOVA with mindsets as the independent variable and perceptions of Whites' general racial prejudice as the dependent variable revealed a significant effect of mindsets,  $F(1, 123) = 7.22$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $d = 0.48$ , 95% CI [-0.84, -0.12]. Participants led to believe that Whites' racial prejudice is fixed ( $M = 4.13$ ,  $SD = 0.83$ ) rated Whites as more racially prejudiced than participants led to believe that Whites' racial prejudice is malleable ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ).

## Discussion

Study 2 replicated Study 1's central finding that Blacks evaluated Whites' performance-oriented behaviors as indicating greater racial prejudice than learning-oriented behaviors. Importantly, this finding emerged regardless of whether Blacks were led to believe that Whites' racial prejudice can change: When Blacks considered Whites engaging in performance-oriented behaviors, they were likely to interpret these behaviors as indicating prejudice, even Blacks who believed Whites' prejudice can change. It is unlikely that the null effect of mindset was due to a failure of the manipulation because the manipulation produced differences on both the manipulation check and another dependent variable.

Study 2 also found that when Whites' racial prejudice was described as fixed, compared to malleable, Blacks saw Whites as more prejudiced. Thus, even if Blacks' mindsets regarding Whites' prejudice malleability do not affect whether they interpret Whites' performance-oriented behaviors in challenging

interracial interactions as indicating prejudice, Blacks' mindsets regarding Whites' prejudice malleability do affect their perceptions of Whites' general racial prejudice.

## General Discussion

Across two studies, we find that Whites' performance-oriented behaviors in challenging interracial interactions (e.g., acting extremely nice, avoiding the topic of race, ending interactions early), compared to learning-oriented behaviors (e.g., asking questions, taking the interaction partner's perspective), are interpreted by Blacks as indicating greater racial prejudice. Interestingly, previous research on challenging interracial interactions finds that Whites who see racial prejudice as fixed will engage in performance-oriented behaviors as a way to demonstrate a *lack* of racial prejudice (Carr et al., 2012; Neel & Shapiro, 2012). Considered in the context of this previous research, the present findings suggest that Whites' use of performance-oriented behaviors, intended to communicate an absence of racial prejudice, will ironically be seen by racial minority interaction partners as evidence of racial prejudice.

## Implications

The findings from the present research have important implications for interracial interactions, which are often rife with misunderstanding, miscommunication, and misperceptions (e.g., Bergsieker et al., 2010; Holoien, Bergsieker, Shelton, & Alegre, 2015). Based on the present findings, a Black person may see Whites' performance-oriented behaviors as indicating racial prejudice, regardless of a person's actual racial prejudice. This insight has been suggested, but not directly tested, in past research (e.g., Carr et al., 2012), and thus the present studies offer an important extension of past work on racial prejudice malleability and interracial interactions.

We do not recommend, based on our research, that Blacks should necessarily change their interpretation of performance-oriented behaviors as indicating potential prejudice. Although past mindset research makes clear that performance-oriented behaviors are used by Whites with fixed mindsets to appear nonprejudiced, Whites may indeed display some of the same behaviors as a function of actual prejudice (Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997; Trawalter et al., 2009). Performance-oriented behavior may not be a pure indicator of prejudice (just as most behavior can be multiply determined), but assuming performance-oriented behaviors indicate prejudice may be adaptive for Blacks to anticipate and prepare for potentially costly effects of racial discrimination (Feldman-Barrett & Swim, 1998; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002; Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

The current research does suggest that Whites may benefit from learning that performance-oriented behaviors are seen

to indicate prejudice—especially those Whites who are (ironically) employing this behavior in order to reduce the likelihood that they will be seen as prejudiced. Our research suggests that in addition to encouraging Whites to believe racial prejudice can change (Carr et al., 2012; Neel & Shapiro, 2012), or instilling learning goals (Goff et al., 2008; Migacheva & Tropp, 2013; Murphy et al., 2011), another route to improving challenging interracial interactions may be to convey to Whites that performance-oriented behavior communicates prejudice. Any of these three routes may be likely to produce learning-oriented behavior, potentially improving intergroup interactions. However, the extent to which each of these three potential interventions is effective and scalable for real-life interracial interactions awaits empirical test.

## Limitations and Future Directions

The participants in the current studies recalled past intergroup interactions. Future research should investigate how Blacks perceive Whites' learning- and performance-oriented behaviors in face-to-face interactions. It is also important for future research to examine how Whites interpret performance- and learning-oriented behaviors. As noted above, if Whites have insight into the fact that performance-oriented behaviors seem to indicate racial prejudice, they may be motivated to engage in more learning-oriented behaviors, even if they are concerned with appearing prejudiced. Finally, here we have examined only two groups for whom interactions may be challenging: Whites and Blacks in the United States. It will be important for future research to examine when performance- and learning-oriented behaviors are favored, and how they are interpreted, by other racial groups in the United States (e.g., Latinos, Asians, Native Americans) or other potentially stigmatized groups (e.g., sexual or religious minorities), as well as in other global contexts where expression of prejudice is a potential concern in intergroup interactions.

## Conclusion

In the last several years, researchers have begun to investigate how factors other than prejudice, such as mindsets and goals, influence Whites' behavior in interracial interactions. However, minority group members' perceptions of these behaviors, mindsets, and goals remain understudied. The present studies investigated how behaviors commonly used by Whites to avoid appearing racist in interracial interactions—performance-oriented behaviors—may ironically be interpreted by Blacks as racist. Understanding performance- and learning-oriented behaviors from both target and perceiver perspectives may help to build interventions that can improve the quality of interracial interactions.



## Appendix

### Malleable prejudice manipulation for Study 2

“Being present is the next big thing.”

Russell C. Smith and Michael Foster

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### The Origins of Bias: Is the Nature-Nurture Controversy Resolved?

by Daniel Berglund

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Psychologists have long been interested in how prejudice develops over a lifetime, and whether a person's early exposure to stereotypes can be overridden later in life. Racial attitudes of White Americans, in particular, used to be thought of as a set-in-stone aspect of personality that remained stable over a lifetime. Now, the emerging scientific consensus shows that early social experiences can have little relation to Whites' adult attitudes, and that it is possible to change or override the imprint left in childhood.

In his keynote address at the Association for Psychological Science's annual convention held in May, Dr. George Medin (Princeton University) stated that 'in most of us, our racial bias changes as we develop, meet new people, and are exposed to new ways of thinking. People may be born with a given level of racial bias, but research suggests that this changes with different life experiences and effort.' He pointed to studies of "hidden" bias that show that Whites' nonconscious attitudes can be changed through effort and experience. He also reported several large longitudinal studies that show that people can change their racial bias, and shared research findings showing that people's racial bias can be changed even in their late forties.

*Daniel Berglund is a science writer from Los Angeles. He is a frequent contributor to Psychology Today.*



## Fixed prejudice manipulation for Study 2



**Psychology Today** "Being present is the next big thing." Russell C. Smith and Michael Foster

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## The Origins of Bias: Is the Nature-Nurture Controversy Resolved?

by Daniel Berglund

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Psychologists have long been interested in how prejudice develops over a lifetime, and whether a person's early exposure to stereotypes can be overridden later in life. Racial attitudes of White Americans, in particular, used to be thought of as a malleable aspect of personality that continued to change over a lifetime. Now, the emerging scientific consensus shows that early social experiences set a course that shapes Whites' adult attitudes, and that the imprint left in childhood is very hard to change or override.

In his keynote address at the Association for Psychological Science's annual convention held in May, Dr. George Medin (Princeton University) stated that 'in most of us, by the age of ten, the foundation of our racial bias has set like plaster and will rarely ever soften again.' He pointed to studies of "hidden" bias that show that Whites may try to change their outward prejudice, they rarely change their nonconscious attitudes. He reported numerous large longitudinal studies which show that people 'age and develop, but they do so on the foundation of enduring attitudes.' He also reported several large longitudinal studies that show that people's racial bias can change somewhat, but rarely changes substantially, and shared research findings showing that people's racial bias very rarely changes after their late forties.

*Daniel Berglund is a science writer from Los Angeles. He is a frequent contributor to Psychology Today.*

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**Supplemental Material**

The supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

**Notes**

1. Although a power analysis suggests that this sample size is adequate to detect a medium effect and our within-participants design

increases our ability to detect an effect with a small sample, we recognize that the sample would ideally be larger. However, studying minority or underrepresented populations can pose limits to the size of the sample that can be obtained (see Cortland et al., 2017, for discussion).

2. Although strategic colorblindness is considered a performance-oriented behavior, previous research measures it separately from overcompensation and escape/avoidance behaviors (Neel & Shapiro, 2012). Thus, to remain consistent with previous research (and due to the number of items used by previous research to capture both types of performance-oriented behaviors vs. learning-oriented behaviors), we measured these behaviors separately.
3. All 95% confidence intervals reported are around the effect size.
4. Results do not change substantially with the inclusion of these 19 participants.

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