Seeing Race and Seeming Racist? Evaluating Strategic Colorblindness in Social Interaction

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One strategy practiced by many Whites to regulate the appearance of prejudice during social interaction is to avoid talking about race, or even acknowledging racial difference. Four experiments involving a dyadic task investigated antecedents and consequences of this tendency. Observed colorblindness was strategic in nature: Whites' acknowledgment of race was highly susceptible to normative pressure and most evident among individuals concerned with self-presentational aspects of appearing biased (Study 1). However, this tendency was often counterproductive, as avoiding race during interracial interaction predicted negative nonverbal behavior (Study 1), a relationship mediated by decreased capacity to exert inhibitory control (Study 2). Two studies examining White and Black observers' impressions of colorblind behavior revealed divergent assessments of actors' prejudice in situations where race was clearly relevant (Study 3) but convergent assessments when race was less relevant (Study 4). Practical and theoretical implications for interracial interaction are considered.

Keywords: interracial interaction, regulatory behavior, nonverbal behavior, normative influence, executive function

Not long ago, one of the authors attended an engagement party. While mingling he happened upon a conversation with a guest who mentioned that she had just met the fiancée but could already tell that she was delightful. The author agreed and added that the hosts—a tall, red-haired, White man from New England and a short, Black woman from the southern United States—made a unique couple given their different backgrounds. The guest, a White female, was taken aback by this comment, saying that she did not think that the couple's racial background was relevant and that she had not even considered that the fiancée was Black until that very moment. Her reaction was sobering—the author worried that his remark had been insensitive—but it was also suspect: After all, he had simply alluded to "different backgrounds," and it

was she who had interpreted the comment in terms of race. Nonetheless, she clearly believed that talking about race or even acknowledging racial difference was inappropriate in this setting.

As this anecdote and a developing research literature illustrate, individuals often struggle with how best to manage interactions in which race is a potentially relevant topic. From media ambivalence about whether race is relevant to a news story (e.g., Sommers, Apfelbaum, Dukes, Toosi, & Wang, 2006) to confusion among laypeople regarding how to refer to particular ethnic groups (e.g., Sigelman, Tuch, & Martin, 2005), efforts to talk about race, like race-relevant interactions more generally, are fraught with the risks of misunderstanding and social sanction. We propose that when placed in the ambiguous and often threatening context of race-relevant social interaction, one approach many Whites adopt is *strategic colorblindness*: avoidance of talking about race—or even acknowledging racial difference—in an effort to avoid the appearance of bias.

Colorblindness has emerged as a norm endorsed by many Whites and evident across a wide range of domains: as a general set of ideological beliefs (Firebaugh & Davis, 1998; Plaut, 2002), in the form of educational initiatives to manage diversity (Pollock, 2004; Sue, 2004), as the focus of legal debate (Duncan, 2000; Norton, Sommers, Vandello, & Darley, 2006). However, one of the most important aspects of colorblindness remains unaddressed empirically, namely, its use as a strategy employed in the effort to appear unbiased during social interaction. In the present studies we explore the nature of this tendency by examining its situational and personal antecedents as well as its impact on interpersonal outcomes including the appearance of prejudice.

The recent movement in psychology toward a multidimensional, relational approach to studying race and social interaction (see Hebl & Dovidio, 2005; Shelton & Richeson, 2006) has reaffirmed the notion that powerful norms guide behavior in race-related contexts—in particular, Whites' motivations to avoid the appear-

ance of prejudice (Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Plant & Devine, 1998). This research has also been instrumental in linking Whites' efforts to regulate their appearance during race-relevant social interactions with a range of interpersonal outcomes. Though some studies have demonstrated that Whites' regulatory efforts to appear unbiased are rewarded in the form of out-group perceptions of warmth and social desirability (Shelton, 2003; Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005; Vorauer & Turpie, 2004), others suggest that such efforts carry costs including cognitive depletion (Richeson et al., 2003; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005) and undesirable nonverbal behavior (Devine, Evett, & Vasquez-Suson, 1996; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002).

We suggest that one reason these regulatory efforts can have both positive and negative consequences is that Whites use different strategies in their attempt to appear unbiased, and although some are effective—facilitating positive interaction and attenuating race-related concerns of out-group interaction partners—others can be counterproductive. Examining these strategies can illuminate the mechanisms that account for the varied outcomes of race-related regulatory efforts. Yet most previous research has focused on the consequences of such regulatory efforts rather than the specific regulatory strategies themselves. That is, perceptions of warmth and desirability are byproducts of regulatory motivations, but what are the actual behaviors Whites exhibit during race-relevant social interaction? We propose that strategic colorblindness is one instrument in the toolbox of Whites seeking to appear nonprejudiced. That avoiding interracial interaction altogether (see Ickes, 1984; Plant, 2004; Plant & Butz, 2006; Shelton & Richeson, 2005; Stephan & Stephan, 1985; Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2003) is often not viable in an increasingly diverse society underscores the importance of investigating Whites' efforts to avoid race *during* social interaction.

Contrary to the assertion of the party guest in our opening anecdote, research indicates that people are not, by any means, actually colorblind perceivers in most instances. In fact, of all the dimensions on which people categorize others, race is among the quickest and most automatic (Ito & Urland, 2003; Montepare & Opeyo, 2002). Nonetheless, recent work has shown that whereas Whites are skilled at categorizing others on the basis of race, they sometimes claim an inability to do so (Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura, & Ariely, 2006). This discrepancy between perception and acknowledgment of racial difference also emerges during social interaction: When engaging in a photograph identification task with a Black confederate, White participants often avoided mentioning race, a tendency that predicted decrements in affiliative nonverbal behavior (Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, et al., 2006). These findings provide preliminary evidence of Whites' tendency to exhibit colorblindness in social interaction as well as the potentially negative consequences of this strategy. But these results also raise important questions. What are the antecedents of strategic colorblindness? What are the mechanisms by which efforts to be colorblind negatively impact nonverbal behavior? Are the consequences of avoiding race during social interaction always negative? These questions are of theoretical importance to the study of regulatory efforts during social interaction, but they also carry implications for facilitating positive intergroup relations in the real world.

The Present Research

The present investigation focuses on two primary aims over four experiments. First, we characterize the precise nature of colorblind behavior in dynamic social interaction by examining the extent to which the tendency of many Whites to avoid talking about race is a strategic one susceptible to normative social influence (Study 1), is predicted by self-presentational concerns about racial bias (Study 1), and is perceived positively by individuals highly motivated by these concerns for appearing unbiased (Studies 3 and 4). Second, we assess the consequences of strategic colorblindness. We begin by testing two potential mechanisms through which the effort to appear colorblind may lead to negative interpersonal outcomes: decreased capacity to exert inhibitory control and heightened interaction anxiety (Study 2). Finally, we further assess the effectiveness of colorblindness for impression management by examining the extent to which Whites' and Blacks' judgments of such behavior are similar and favorable. We consider the possibility that perceptions of colorblind actors diverge between Whites who tend to engage in this behavior and Blacks in situations where race is clearly relevant (Study 3) but converge in situations when race is less relevant (Study 4). In short, we investigate the antecedents and consequences of Whites' tendency to avoid talking about race during social interaction.

Study 1

The central purpose of Study 1 was to explore the degree to which the tendency toward colorblindness in social interaction is strategic in nature. To the extent that a behavioral tendency is strategic, it should be susceptible to normative social pressure and associated with domain-specific concerns about self-presentation (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). As such, we manipulated both the race of a White participant's interaction partner and the norm that the partner established during the interaction. We expected that Whites would be highly responsive to normative precedent established by a Black partner, a prediction derived from comparable findings in other race-relevant contexts. For example, the views of Black versus White individuals have been found to be particularly influential for Whites' public assessments of campus-wide racism (Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, & Vaughn, 1994; Blanchard, Lilly, & Vaughn, 1991) and the perceived appropriateness of the death penalty in trials involving a Black defendant (Dovidio, Smith, Donnella, & Gaertner, 1997). We therefore predicted that Whites' tendency toward colorblindness would shift strategically to accommodate the norms established by their partner, and that this shift would be especially pronounced when this partner was Black. Not only did this design allow us to examine the situational malleability of such colorblindness, but it also created a dynamic dyadic experience reminiscent of the give-and-take of naturally occurring interracial interactions.

We included measures of participants' internal and external motivations to avoid prejudice (IMS and EMS; Plant & Devine, 1998) as potential predictors of interaction behavior. We expected that in particular, the EMS would predict Whites' tendency to exhibit strategic colorblindness. EMS scores reflect concern for how *others* will react to the appearance of bias; similarly, we suggest that a primary rationale underlying colorblindness during social interaction is the belief that avoiding race precludes the

possibility that others will make attributions to racism. Indeed, research has shown that Whites with high EMS scores often feel constrained by pressures to appear politically correct (Plant & Devine, 2003), are concerned about their capacity to present themselves in an unbiased manner (Plant, 2004), and tend to believe that prejudice can be deduced from superficial tendencies and characteristics (Sommers & Norton, 2006). Moreover, Plant and Devine (1998) demonstrated that the EMS predicts other measures that tap strategic interpersonal tendencies such as fear of negative evaluation (Leary, 1983a; Watson & Friend, 1969) and interaction anxiousness (Leary, 1983b). Thus, we anticipated that Whites with high EMS scores—those individuals especially concerned with the self-presentational aspect of avoiding prejudice—would be most likely to employ a colorblind strategy. Predictions regarding IMS scores, which reflect internalized, personal standards for avoiding prejudice, were less clear cut because such standards are typically less susceptible to normative pressures and concerns about self-presentation.

Method

Overview

White participants were paired with either a White or a Black female confederate and asked to complete a photo identification task modified from Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, et al. (2006). One member of the dyad (the questioner) was seated in front of an array of 30 photographs of faces that varied on dimensions including race, gender, and background color. The questioner was instructed to ask as few yes–no questions as possible in order to identify the target photo held by the partner (the answerer). We varied whether the participant or the confederate was first to play the role of questioner. When the confederate was first, she established a normative precedent for talking about race by either asking about race early in the course of each trial or avoiding asking about race altogether; halfway through the session, she switched roles with the participant. In a control condition the participant was the first to play the role of questioner, yielding a 2 (confederate race: White vs. Black) × 3 (race-related norm: colorblind vs. race-acknowledged vs. control) between-subjects design.

Generally speaking, the paradigm was designed to provide a context in which racial group membership was relevant and diagnostic information but participants had a choice regarding whether to mention it. We expected that even in such an innocuous context—in which individuals were simply given the option to use race as a physical descriptor—Whites would often avoid acknowledging race.

Participants

One hundred four White undergraduates participated for partial course credit. Data from 3 participants were excluded because these individuals suspected their partner was a confederate. Of the remaining 101 (68 female), the mean age was 19.1 years ($SD = 3.07$).

Materials

Photo array. A photo array was composed of 30 4 × 6 in. photographs of faces (cropped at the shoulders), organized in three rows of 10. These photos differed across a range of perceptual categories, but the array only varied systematically with respect to five critical dimensions: gender, race (Black or White), background color (blue or red), labeled marital status (single or married), and labeled city of residence (Somerville or Cambridge).[1] For each of these five dimensions, half of the photos were members of one category (e.g., Black) and half were members of the other (e.g., White). A pretest ($N = 10$) indicated that participants were able to categorize the photographs on these dimensions with an accuracy rate greater than 97%. Target photo albums given to the answerer included four target photos selected at random with the sole constraint being that two were Black and two were White. The same target photos were used throughout the course of the study.

Postinteraction questionnaire. The questionnaire included a funneled suspicion check, which systematically probed participants about the stimuli, their partner, and the purpose of the study. This was followed by Plant and Devine's (1998) 10-item Internal and External Motivations to Respond Without Prejudice scales (IMS and EMS, respectively), presented on a 7-point response scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *neutral*, 7 = *strongly agree*), as well as demographic questions.

Procedure

Participants were recruited under the pretense that they would be engaging in a study with a partner. Upon arrival, participants were greeted by a White female experimenter, given a consent form, and told that they would need to wait for the other participant before beginning. A confederate entered the lab 2 min later. Several confederates (4 White and 2 Black) were utilized and kept blind to the hypotheses of the study.[2] After providing consent, participants were told that the purpose of the study was to explore "communication and cognition" and toward this end, they would be performing a task reminiscent of a popular children's board game.

A rigged drawing ensured that participants were assigned to the appropriate role of questioner or answerer (as determined by the condition to which they were randomly assigned). The experimenter provided detailed instructions about the two roles in the task. The questioner's goal was to ask the fewest number of yes–no questions possible in order to reduce the photograph array to the single target photo the partner held. This directive was stated twice. The answerer was simply instructed to respond to these questions by answering "yes" or "no." Each trial would end once the questioner had correctly identified the target photograph. After these instructions, the experimenter turned on a video camera and

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[1] Somerville and Cambridge are neighboring cities in Massachusetts' Middlesex County. They were selected because they are relatively comparable in population size and in ratio of White to Black residents, and because of their familiarity to this study's participant pool.

[2] There were no significant differences for any dependent measure among the White or Black confederates. Additionally, a manipulation check in the postinteraction questionnaire asked participants how effectively their partner had performed his or her role in the partnership (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *neutral*, 9 = *extremely*). Results suggest that both White ($M = 8.40$, $SD = 1.26$) and Black ($M = 8.59$, $SD = 0.93$) confederates were perceived positively and were not reliably differentiated, $t(99) = 0.86$, *ns*.

left the laboratory. It is important to note that at no time—during participant recruitment, obtaining consent, or the introduction to the task—was race ever mentioned in connection with the study.

Setting the norm. In the control condition, the rigged drawing led participants to be assigned to the questioner role and confederates to the answerer role. Participants were seated in front of the photo array, and four trials were completed before the final questionnaire was administered. For the colorblind and race-acknowledged conditions, the rigged drawing led participants to be assigned to the answerer role and confederates to the questioner role. Instructions were identical to those in the control condition except that the partners were told to switch roles after four trials. Confederates (in the role of the questioner) delivered a scripted list of questions. In the colorblind condition, confederates never asked about race. In the race-acknowledged condition, confederates asked "Is your person Black?" as the first question for three out of the four trials and as the second question for one trial. With the exception of the race question, the colorblind and race-acknowledged scripts were matched for question type and total number of questions and were counterbalanced for order. For both conditions, a role reversal took place after the completion of the four trials that served as the norm manipulation, followed by the four critical experimental trials with the participant as the questioner and the confederate as the answerer.

Results

No differences were obtained as a function of participant gender, so data were collapsed across this variable.

Normative Influence and the Acknowledgment of Race

Participants' questions during the interaction were analyzed for content. Questions were coded on the basis of a definition of the acknowledgment of race that included any term used to refer to specific racial groups (e.g., *Black*, *African American*, *White*, or *Caucasian*). Participants received an aggregate score, indicating the number of trials in which race was mentioned (0 = zero trials, 4 = four trials). This score was then divided by the total number of trials, yielding the frequency with which race was mentioned.

A 2 × 3 analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that the norm manipulation significantly influenced participants' mention of race during the interaction, $F(2, 95) = 37.03$, $p < .001$. Participants in the control condition—those not exposed to any norm—asked questions about race 62.9% ($SD = 44.2$) of the time. Participants exposed to a colorblind norm, however, acknowledged race just 26.5% ($SD = 31.9$) of the time, $t(95) = 4.76$, $p < .001$ (via planned contrast), whereas those exposed to a race-acknowledged norm asked about race in a full 91.2% ($SD = 13.6$) of trials, $t(95) = 3.76$, $p < .001$. In addition, there was an effect of confederate race that approached significance, such that participants asked about race 66.4% ($SD = 36.7$) of the time with a White confederate but only 53.6% ($SD = 45.9$) of the time with a Black confederate, $F(1, 95) = 3.41$, $p = .06$.[3]

Most important, these effects were qualified by the predicted interaction, $F(2, 95) = 3.54$, $p < .04$. As Figure 1 demonstrates, race-related norms were particularly influential when established by a Black confederate, supporting the contention that
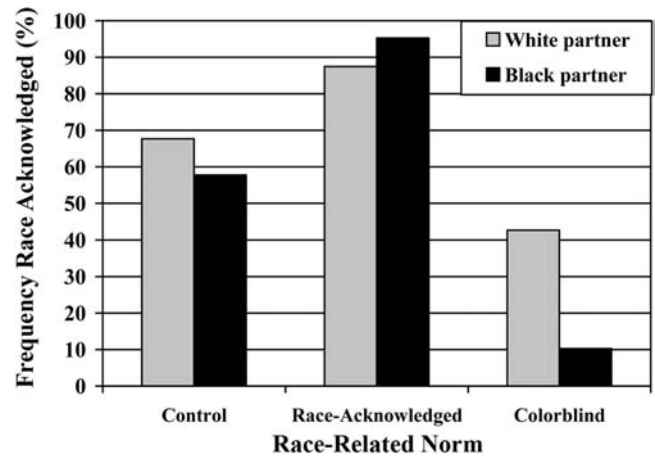

Figure 1. Frequency of acknowledgment of race during interaction as a function of confederate race and norm condition in Study 1.

colorblindness during interracial interaction is often based on strategic concerns about race. Among all-White dyads, participants asked about race 67.7% ($SD = 43.1$) of the time in the control condition, a rate that dropped significantly to 42.7% ($SD = 32.8$) in the colorblind condition, $t(95) = 2.34$, $p = .02$, and showed an increase that approached significance to 87.5% ($SD = 15.5$) in the race-acknowledged condition, $t(95) = 1.88$, $p < .07$. Among interracial pairs, Whites asked about race 57.8% ($SD = 46.3$) of the time in the control condition, a rate that dropped all the way to 10.3% ($SD = 21.8$) when the Black confederate established a colorblind norm, $t(95) = 4.38$, $p < .001$, and rose significantly to 95.3% ($SD = 10.1$) when the Black confederate established a race-acknowledged norm, $t(95) = 3.40$, $p = .001$. A planned contrast confirmed that the relative impact of a colorblind norm was greater among interracial versus all-White pairs, $t(95) = 2.77$, $p < .01$. These results underscore the susceptibility of colorblindness to normative influence, particularly in an interracial setting, as White

[3] It is worth noting that unlike our previous study (Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, et al., 2006), in the present control condition Whites were not significantly less likely to ask about race with a Black versus White partner, although means were in the correct direction (58% vs. 68%). This difference between studies appears to be attributable to the addition of nonracial dimensions to the present photo array. We introduced two new dimensions—marital status and city of residence—in order to decrease the unique diagnostic value of asking about race and, therefore, the baseline likelihood that participants would ask about race. This permitted us to gauge the bidirectional influence of our norm manipulation without encountering ceiling effects (as a full 93% of participants had asked about race when paired with a White partner in the previous study). These efforts were successful, but they rendered the control condition difference between interracial and all-White pairs nonsignificant. As evidenced by Study 2, however, when we removed these two dimensions from the array, we replicated the previous finding that Whites are significantly more likely to avoid asking about race with a Black versus White confederate.

participants followed the behavioral precedent established by their Black partner in all but a handful of trials.[4]

Who Acknowledged Race (and Who Did Not)?

We created composite IMS ($M = 5.97$, $SD = 1.02$) and EMS ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 1.35$) scores from responses to the Plant and Devine (1998) measure.[5] A regression analysis was conducted to determine whether acknowledgment of race was predicted by these individual differences. Scores on the IMS, the EMS, and the interaction between the two were centered and then simultaneously entered into a regression model. As expected, EMS emerged as a significant negative predictor of acknowledgment of race, $\beta = -.22$, $t(97) = 2.18$, $p = .03$, such that participants motivated to avoid the appearance of bias were less likely to ask about race during the interaction. Though the overall interaction between EMS and confederate race was not significant, $\beta = -.20$, $t(97) = -0.63$, $p = .53$, we conducted planned comparisons to test our a priori hypothesis that EMS would be particularly likely to predict colorblindness in interracial interactions, $\beta = -.31$, $t(47) = 2.18$, $p < .04$, as opposed to all-White interactions, $\beta = -.25$, $t(49) = 1.70$, $p = .10$. There were no other significant predictors in the model, nor did a separate regression indicate a significant interaction between EMS and norm condition. In sum, EMS emerged as a predictor of the tendency for colorblindness in interracial interaction, further supporting the prediction that this tendency is strategic.

Nonverbal Friendliness

To evaluate participants' nonverbal behavior, we cropped out the confederate and removed the audio track from the video of each session. Two naive White female judges independently evaluated 24 sessions, distributed evenly across experimental conditions, to establish interrater agreement (intraclass reliability coefficient = .74) on the 5-item composite measure of friendliness reported in Dovidio et al. (2002). The items were *pleasant*, *cruel*, *unfriendly*, *unlikable*, and *cold*, the last four of which were reverse scored. Ratings for these 24 trials were averaged between coders, and each coder then evaluated half of the remaining trials. All ratings were made using a 9-point response scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *neutral*, 9 = *extremely*).

A 2×3 ANOVA indicated that participants' nonverbal behavior appeared less friendly during interactions with Black ($M = 6.17$, $SD = 1.41$) versus White ($M = 6.85$, $SD = 1.19$) confederates, $F(1, 93) = 6.56$, $p < .02$. This effect was qualified by a significant Confederate Race $\times$ Race-Related Norm interaction, $F(2, 93) = 3.73$, $p < .03$. In the all-White condition, planned contrasts indicated that there were no significant differences in perceived friendliness between either the colorblind ($M = 7.28$, $SD = 1.01$) or the race-acknowledged ($M = 6.58$, $SD = 1.41$) condition compared with the control condition ($M = 6.68$, $SD = 1.05$), $ts(93) = 1.35$, $ps > .17$, nor was the difference between colorblind and race-acknowledged conditions significant, $t(93) = 1.60$, $p = .12$. When paired with a Black partner, however, participants appeared significantly less friendly after establishment of a colorblind norm ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.38$) than in the control condition ($M = 6.57$, $SD = 1.27$), $t(93) = 2.10$, $p < .04$. The mean in the race-acknowledged condition ($M = 6.35$, $SD = 1.45$) was

not significantly different from that of the control, $t(93) = 0.48$, *ns*, or colorblind condition, $t(93) = 1.61$, $p = .11$.

To conduct an even more straightforward test of the implications of avoidance of race for nonverbal behavior, we examined the relationship between colorblindness and perceived friendliness across experimental conditions. Regression analyses showed that participants who exhibited a colorblind strategy during the interaction were judged to be less friendly, $\beta = .24$, $t(97) = 2.40$, $p < .02$. The interaction with confederate race was significant, $\beta = .35$, $t(95) = 2.02$, $p < .05$, with separate regressions indicating that the negative effect of colorblindness on nonverbal behavior stemmed from interracial, $\beta = .38$, $t(47) = 2.81$, $p < .01$, rather than all-White interactions, $\beta = -.03$, $t(48) = 0.23$, *ns*. In sum, Whites' tendency to avoid asking a Black partner about race was not an effective strategy for producing positive social outcomes; in fact, this strategy backfired in interracial dyads, as those who employed it appeared less friendly.

Discussion

In the context of a dynamic interpersonal exchange, the Study 1 findings support the proposition that colorblindness during interracial interaction is often strategic in nature. Results provide clear evidence that Whites' behavior was influenced by the norm established by their interaction partner, and this influence was strongest when the partner was Black. In fact, in the interracial setting the influence of the race-related norm was so powerful that acknowledgment of race was virtually nonexistent after a colorblind norm was established. These results support the notion that, contrary to the typical finding that the behavior of *similar* others stimulates conformity (e.g., Hornstein, Fisch, & Holmes, 1968; Suls, Martin, & Wheeler, 2002), Whites may be more influenced by the opinions of Blacks when it comes to race-relevant issues (Crosby, Monin, & Richardson, 2008). That Whites' decision to avoid acknowledging race is often a strategic one was further demonstrated by the significant relationship between EMS and task performance in this study. Those participants especially concerned with how others would react to the appearance of prejudice were most likely to adopt a colorblind approach.

Analysis of nonverbal behavior suggested that Whites' efforts to make a positive impression through colorblindness were not successful. Strategic colorblindness was particularly likely among Whites motivated to engage in prejudice-related impression man-

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[4] Follow-up analyses were carried out to ensure that these effects were not dependent on our definition of acknowledging race. Participants' responses were reanalyzed according to two other plausible operationalizations. In one, acknowledgment of race was defined more broadly, including nonspecific race-related terminology (e.g., *light-skinned*, *dark-skinned*, *minority*). In a second, acknowledgment of race was defined more narrowly, limited to explicit mention of the term *Black* or *African American*. In accord with the reported results, there was a Confederate Race $\times$ Race-Related Norm interaction for both definitions, $F(2, 95) = 4.63$, $p = .01$, and $F(2, 95) = 3.01$, $p = .05$, respectively.

[5] Separate 2 (confederate race) $\times$ 3 (race-related norm) ANOVA for scores on the IMS and EMS indicated that participants were not differentially influenced by experimental condition, $Fs(2, 95) = 1.82$, $ps > .17$, nor did these scores significantly differ from those of an independent sample ($N = 15$) taken from the same participant pool.

agement, but ironically, this tendency was also associated with appearing less friendly in an interracial setting. The primary objective of Study 2 was to explore the mechanism underlying this relationship.

Study 2

What is the process through which avoiding race can negatively impact nonverbal behavior? The extant literature concerning interracial interaction offers at least two plausible mechanisms. One is that inhibiting mention of race, particularly when race is perceptually salient and practically useful, is cognitively demanding. Engaging in regulatory behavior in interracial interaction can result in the depletion of executive attentional resources (Richeson & Trawalter, 2005), especially when such efforts are geared toward avoiding the appearance of bias rather than promoting positive outcomes (Trawalter & Richeson, 2006). Additionally, recent research suggests a possible link between regulatory capacity and nonverbal behavior: The tendency to control body movements during interactions with a Black experimenter has predicted subsequent regulatory deficits among Whites (Richeson & Shelton, 2003), and more generally, individuals with a diminished regulatory capacity have been found to be less capable of inhibiting socially inappropriate nonverbal behavior (von Hippel & Gonsalkorale, 2005). Therefore, Whites' less friendly nonverbal behavior in Study 1 may reflect a decreased ability to manage the regulatory demands of their interracial interaction while simultaneously engaging in a colorblind strategy. By this account, we might expect participants' capacity for executive function—as indicated by performance on the Stroop (1935) color-naming task—to mediate the relationship between acknowledgment of race and nonverbal friendliness in interracial interaction.

A second possibility is that individuals who tend to avoid race also experience heightened anxiety during interracial interaction, thus detracting from their nonverbal behavior. Research suggests that Whites' tendency to anticipate negative consequences when interacting with Blacks, including the possibility of appearing biased (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Sommers, 2006), can result in increased anxiety and avoidant behavior (Plant & Devine, 2003; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Furthermore, Whites prone to avoiding interracial interaction tend to convey fewer positive interpersonal behaviors (Ickes, 1984; Plant & Butz, 2006) and experience greater interaction anxiety (Plant & Devine, 2003), the latter of which is particularly evident among Whites focused on self-presentational aspects of appearing biased (Plant, 2004; Richeson & Trawalter, 2008)—those same individuals most likely to engage in strategic colorblindness. Therefore a second plausible explanation for the effects on nonverbal friendliness in Study 1 is that Whites' practice of colorblindness in interracial interaction coincides with heightened interaction anxiety.

Method

Overview

Study 2 was designed to examine potential mechanisms underlying the negative link between avoidance of race and nonverbal friendliness. White participants were paired with a confederate and asked to complete the same photo identification task employed in Study 1. As before, the confederate partner was either a White or a Black woman, but participants always served as the questioner and confederates as the answerer. Immediately after the interaction, participants completed a brief anxiety measure, followed by the Stroop color-naming task.

Participants

Forty-eight White undergraduates (22 female) ranging from 18 to 22 years old ($M = 19.77$, $SD = 1.37$) participated for partial course credit. Data from 1 participant were excluded because she suspected her partner was a confederate.

Materials

We decreased the number of systematic dimensions on which the array varied from five to three, removing marital status and city of residence. As before, for each dimension, half of the photos were members of one category (e.g., Black) and half were members of the other (e.g., White). As in Study 1, target photos were selected at random with the constraint that two were Black and two were White. The same target photos were included in the confederate photo album throughout the course of the study.

Procedure

Participants were again recruited under the pretense that they would be engaging in a study with a partner. Multiple confederates (3 White and 3 Black) were employed and kept blind to the hypotheses of the study.[6] A rigged drawing ensured that participants were assigned to the role of questioner and confederates to answerer. The experimenter provided instructions about the two roles, emphasizing that the questioner's goal was to ask the fewest number of yes–no questions possible in identifying the target photo. After these instructions, the experimenter turned on a video camera and left the laboratory.

Upon completion of the photo identification task, the experimenter reentered the laboratory and explained that the second phase of the study involved individual computer-based tasks. We deliberately scheduled interactions in a laboratory that contained only one computer to create a plausible basis for separating the partners; the experimenter always directed the confederate to an alternative location. Once alone, participants completed a brief measure of anxiety experienced in the interaction, immediately followed by the Stroop task. Last, we administered a funneled suspicion check as in Study 1.

Dependent Measures

Acknowledgments of race. As before, participants' questions during the interaction were analyzed for content.

Nonverbal behavior. The procedures employed to assess nonverbal friendliness were identical to those reported in Study 1. A different pair of naive White female judges independently evaluated the nonverbal behavior of each participant (intraclass reliability coefficient = .69).

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[6] There were no significant differences for any dependent measure among the set of White or Black confederates.

Anxiety. Participants completed a five-item measure of interaction anxiety, modified from Plant and Devine (2003), using a 7-point response scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *neutral*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they felt *awkward*, *anxious*, *nervous*, *comfortable*, and *relaxed* during the interaction. Responses to the last two items were reverse-scored before all five ratings were averaged to create an index of interaction anxiety (α = .86).

Executive function. Participants, seated at a computer, were instructed to quickly and accurately indicate the color of a stimulus presented in the center of the screen. In a modification of the procedures reported in Richeson and Shelton (2003), participants responded to each stimulus—either a color name (e.g., *blue*) or a nonword (e.g, *xxxx*)—using a four-button color-coded response device. Trials began with the presentation of a fixation cross for 1,500 ms, followed by presentation of the stimulus. A correct response advanced participants to the next trial. The task consisted of 24 practice trials, followed by seven blocks of 12 trials each for a total of 84 trials. Incompatible trials presented a color name printed in a color that differed from its semantic meaning (e.g., the word *blue* displayed in yellow); control trials presented nonwords (e.g., *xxxx* displayed in yellow). Raw latencies below 200 ms were recoded as 200 ms, and raw latencies greater than 1,500 ms (2.5 standard deviations above the mean) were recoded as 1,500 ms. Trimmed latencies were then averaged according to trial type (i.e., incompatible or control). Each participant received a difference score (mean incompatible latency − mean control latency) designating the degree of Stroop interference, an indicator of the extent to which executive function was impaired by the preceding social interaction.

Results

No differences were obtained as a function of participant gender, so data were collapsed across this variable.

Acknowledgments of Race

Consistent with previous research (Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, et al., 2006), participants asked about race significantly less frequently when interacting with a Black versus White confederate, $t(45) = 2.13$, $p < .04$. Participants asked about race 88.8% ($SD = 22.2$) of the time with a White partner, but only 66.7% ($SD = 42.2$) of the time with a Black partner.[7]

Nonverbal Friendliness

There were no between-groups differences in participants' nonverbal behavior. However, a more direct assessment of the consequences of colorblind behavior demonstrated that nonverbal friendliness was predicted by the acknowledgment of race, $\beta = .29$, $t(44) = 2.01$, $p = .05$. As in Study 1, the tendency to engage in colorblindness was associated with less friendly nonverbal behavior. Though the interaction between acknowledgment of race and confederate race was not significant, $\beta = .20$, $t(40) = 0.83$, $p = .41$, we conducted further analysis of group-based differences as a direct test of our a priori hypothesis. As anticipated, the positive relationship between acknowledgment of race and nonverbal friendliness was driven by interracial, $\beta = .43$, $t(24) =$

2.31, $p < .03$, and not all-White interactions, $\beta = .17$, $t(18) = 0.74$, $p = .46$. In sum, participants who avoided mentioning race in interracial interaction tended to display less friendly nonverbal behavior, as expected.

Anxiety

There was no significant difference in interaction anxiety among participants who interacted with a Black ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.33$) versus White partner ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.20$), $t(44) = 1.33$, $p = .19$, nor was anxiety associated with the acknowledgment of race or nonverbal friendliness ($ps > .36$); this absence of significant results is examined in more detail in the *Discussion*, below.

Executive Function

Stroop interference scores ranged from −47.4 ms to 195.6 ms ($M = 48.0$), with greater values denoting poorer performance on the task. The effect of confederate race approached significance, as participants tended to display greater performance deficits after interracial ($M = 60.9$ ms, $SD = 51.8$) versus all-White interactions ($M = 30.5$ ms, $SD = 61.0$), $t(45) = 1.84$, $p < .08$. Further analysis indicated that acknowledgment of race was negatively associated with Stroop interference, $\beta = −.45$, $t(45) = 3.37$, $p < .005$, suggesting that avoidance of race predicted diminished capacity for executive function. Though the interaction between acknowledgment of race and confederate race was not significant, $\beta = .17$, $t(41) = 0.79$, $p = .43$, once again we conducted planned comparisons to test our a priori hypothesis that decrements in Stroop performance would be evident after avoiding race with a Black partner. As expected, results suggested that the negative relationship between acknowledgment of race and Stroop performance was observed in interracial interactions, $\beta = −.51$, $t(25) = 2.99$, $p < .01$; no significant effect emerged for all-White interactions, $\beta = −.24$, $t(18) = 1.07$, $p = .30$. These results demonstrate that those Whites who engaged in a colorblind strategy during interracial interaction did so at the cost of cognitive resources necessary to exert inhibitory control.

Mediation

Using the procedure outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986), we tested the possibility that participants' capacity for executive function—as indicated by Stroop interference—after interracial interaction mediated the relationship between the acknowledgment of race and nonverbal friendliness. As reported earlier for interracial interactions, the acknowledgment of race was a positive predictor of nonverbal friendliness and, in a separate regression, was a negative predictor of Stroop interference. Further analysis indi-

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[7] In light of previous findings that Whites' implicit racial bias sometimes predicts regulatory tendencies (e.g., Richeson et al., 2003), we also assessed whether racial bias itself—independent of motivations to control its appearance—would predict the tendency to avoid talking about race. After the Stroop task, participants completed the race version of the Implicit Association Test according to the procedures reported in Greenwald, Nosek, and Banaji (2003). Results indicated that implicit racial bias was not associated with acknowledgment of race, nor was it related to any of the process measures described subsequently in this section.

cated that Stroop interference was negatively related to nonverbal friendliness when added to the original model as a predictor, $\beta = -.47$, $t(24) = 2.39$, $p < .03$. Consistent with mediation, as displayed in Figure 2, this addition led to a significant reduction in the relationship between acknowledgment of race and nonverbal friendliness (Sobel $Z = 1.92$, $p = .05$). Stroop interference did not mediate this relationship for all-White interactions. This result illuminates a reliable mechanism underlying the negative relationship between strategic colorblindness and nonverbal friendliness in interracial interaction. It suggests that efforts to suppress mention of race left participants with a decreased capacity to simultaneously engage in affiliative nonverbal behavior.

Discussion

Study 2 demonstrated that Whites acknowledged race less frequently when paired with a Black versus White confederate on a dyadic task, even though race was clearly relevant to the interaction objective. Such colorblind behavior in interracial interaction diverted resources needed to exercise inhibitory control. Most important, this cognitive impairment significantly mediated the relationship between the acknowledgment of race and nonverbal friendliness in these interracial interactions. No such significant relationships were observed for all-White interactions, though this conclusion is tempered by the finding that omnibus tests of the interaction between confederate race and colorblind behavior were not statistically significant. Still, the present results clearly demonstrate that Whites who strategically avoided race in interracial interaction did so at the expense of resources essential for conveying positive nonverbal behaviors to their Black interaction partners (or, at least, essential for inhibiting negative ones).

We found no significant between-groups effects for self-reported anxiety, the other potential mediator under consideration. Of course, this does not imply that anxiety is unrelated to interracial interaction. Studies that have assessed anxiety before actual or ostensible interracial interactions (e.g., Plant & Butz, 2006) or in terms of more general experiences with interracial interaction over time (e.g., Plant, 2004) have found anxiety to play an important role in intergroup dynamics and outcomes. Because we assessed anxiety via postinteraction self-report, it is possible that participants were wary of acknowledging the extent of their anxiety after these interactions. Future investigations might address this issue by

Figure 2. Mediational model for the acknowledgment of race predicting nonverbal friendliness in the interracial condition of Study 2.

measuring this construct in a less reactive manner (e.g., Mendes, Blascovich, Lickel, & Hunter, 2002).

Study 3

Why would those Whites most motivated to have others view them as unbiased practice a strategy associated with appearing less friendly during interracial interaction? Presumably, these individuals genuinely believe that it is advantageous to avoid race when interacting with a Black individual, yet ironically, the results of Studies 1 and 2 suggest just the opposite. In addition to the nonverbal deficits identified above, there may also be less subtle negative consequences of strategic colorblindness. More specifically, perhaps Whites and Blacks differ in their explicit beliefs regarding the appropriateness of colorblindness during social interaction. Indeed, it is not difficult to imagine how an interpersonal approach based on the deliberate avoidance of a feature as salient and apparent as race might be met by some interaction partners with skepticism and overtly negative perceptions.

In Study 3, we assessed this possibility by asking both Black and White observers to evaluate the colorblind behavior of White actors in a context where race was clearly relevant. Examining the perceptions of both Black and White individuals affords a more comprehensive understanding of the potential consequences of such regulatory behavior for interracial interaction. More precisely, Study 3 evaluated the possibility that whereas Whites with an external motivation to avoid prejudice tend to have positive views regarding colorblindness in race-relevant contexts, Blacks, their potential partners in interracial interaction, often do not.

Method

Overview

We presented separate samples of Black and White participants with video clips of White actors engaging in either a colorblind or a race-acknowledged approach, as modeled by participants in Studies 1 and 2. To gain a full appreciation for the nature of these interactions, participants were first asked to examine the photo array used in Study 2. Because data from Study 1 suggested that the impact of race-related norms depends on the racial composition of an interaction, we varied whether the clips shown to participants were described as interracial or all-White dyads. In sum, we compared Black and White participants' perceptions of colorblind and race-acknowledged approaches to interactions that were ostensibly all-White or interracial.

Participants

Thirty-four Black undergraduate and graduate students (17 female) participated in a laboratory in groups of 2 to 4 or individually in common meeting areas across campus; their ages ranged from 18 to 26 ($M = 20.39$, $SD = 2.63$). A separate sample of 40 White undergraduate students (27 female) ranging from 18 to 22 years old ($M = 19.85$, $SD = 1.27$) participated in laboratory groups of 2 to 4. Participants were paid $10.

Procedure

Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to explore impressions of interpersonal interactions based on short
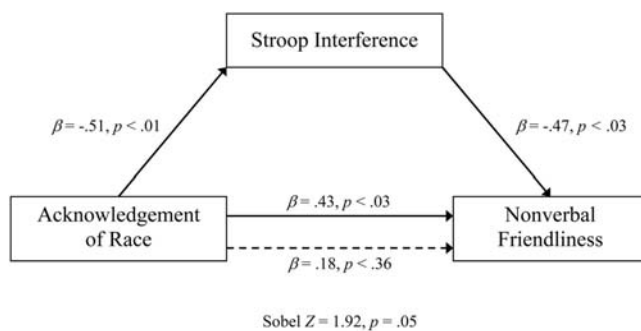
segments of behavior. As such, they were informed that they would watch brief clips of partners interacting in a photo identification task. Groups were randomly assigned to receive instructions stating that the partnerships were all-White or interracial. However, to minimize reactance to this manipulation, we included this information within a larger demographic profile that included a variety of other details about the partnerships (e.g., gender, age, class year). Next, participants were informed of the responsibilities of the questioner and answerer roles and the goal of the task; these instructions were identical to those given to participants in Studies 1 and 2. Participants were provided with a large image displaying the photo array from Study 2, in which half of the individuals were White and half were Black. They were told to look over the array and think about potential questions that could be asked.

The video was composed of six brief clips (~90 s each) ostensibly taken from six different pairs; it was presented on a television monitor to participants in the lab or via portable DVD player and headphones to individuals in other campus locations. Each clip was filmed so that only one partner (an actor playing the role of questioner) was visible. Two voices could be heard in each clip: the questioner asking yes–no questions and the answerer, who was not visible, answering them. Each of the six clips showed a different White female who always appeared in front of the photo array in the role of questioner. Actors in the video clips performed according to scripted lists of questions they had memorized prior to filming. These lists were created using actual participants' responses from the interactions in Studies 1 and 2.

Each actor was filmed completing one trial of the task using a colorblind approach and one trial using a race-acknowledged approach. In the colorblind condition, the trial was completed without race ever being acknowledged. In the race-acknowledged condition, "Is the person Black?" was asked as either the first or the second question of the interaction. All other questions were identical in content. To preserve the impression that the clips depicted real interactions, we varied the number of questions (from five to seven) asked by each actor, but the total number of questions asked per condition remained the same. We took several other design-related precautions to offset the potential for systematic differences in participants' experience.[8] Clips were edited after filming such that participants ultimately viewed a video with a total of six trials (three colorblind and three race-acknowledged), with one trial performed by each actor.

Dependent Measures

Warmth toward the actor. After viewing each clip, participants responded to four items regarding positive attitudes toward the actor. These responses were averaged to create an index of feelings of warmth toward a colorblind actor ($\alpha = .93$) and toward a race-acknowledged actor ($\alpha = .92$). The four items were "How likeable is this person?," "How friendly is this person?," "How approachable is this person?," and "How likely is it that you would become friends with this person?" Participants responded on a 9-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *neutral*, 9 = *extremely*).

Perceptions of prejudice. After all six clips were presented, participants were provided with photographs of each of the actors. On the basis of the clips, participants were asked to make relative judgments, ranking the actors by perceived level of racial prejudice (1 = *least prejudiced*, 6 = *most prejudiced*).

Individual differences. As in Study 1, the IMS and EMS were then administered to White participants. Given that these measures were designed to assess motivations to respond without prejudice toward Blacks, Black participants were given a different race-related individual-difference measure, the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997).

Results

Participants' responses to the three colorblind interactions and three race-acknowledged interactions were averaged to create mean colorblind and race-acknowledged scores for each dependent measure. Reflecting the fact that the Black and White samples were recruited and run separately, we first assessed the effects of our manipulations through separate 2 (racial composition framing: all-White vs. interracial) $\times$ 2 (approach type: colorblind vs. race-acknowledged) mixed-model ANOVA, with the latter a within-subject factor. We then compared Blacks' and Whites' perceptions by combining samples and conducting three-way ANOVA including participant race. Below, we first report Black and White participants' general perceptions of colorblind behavior before focusing on the extent of between-race convergence in their views.

Feelings of Warmth

Black observers. No significant main effects or interaction were found for Blacks' feelings of warmth. The Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity did not predict responses to this or any other dependent measure assessed; thus, it is not discussed further.

White observers. No main effects or interaction emerged for White observers' ratings of warmth. However, EMS was a significant predictor of relative warmth toward colorblind versus race-acknowledged actors, $\beta = .47$, $t(37) = 3.01$, $p = .005$.[9] The more concerned Whites were with appearing unbiased, the more warmth they expressed toward colorblind versus race-acknowledged actors.

Perceptions of Prejudice

Black observers. Even more important to the effort to assess the effectiveness of strategic colorblindness are participants' perceptions of racial prejudice. No main effects emerged for Blacks' ratings of prejudice, but the two-way interaction was significant, $F(1, 32) = 6.04$, $p = .02$. Black participants viewed colorblind

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[8] To address potential person confounds between actors, we used two versions of the video that reversed which actors displayed a colorblind versus race-acknowledged approach. In other words, the three actors who were colorblind in one version acknowledged race in the other version, and vice versa. Additionally, both versions were counterbalanced for clip order across trials. Actors were trained to be consistent in their nonverbal behavior across the colorblind and race-acknowledged versions of the task.

[9] To evaluate the relationship between the EMS and preference for colorblindness, we converted the two scores created by the within-subject manipulation to one difference score by subtracting the race-acknowledged value from the colorblind value for each dependent measure. Three predictor variables (scores on the IMS, the EMS, and their interaction) were centered and then entered into a regression model with this difference score—preference for colorblindness—as the outcome variable.

Whites as more prejudiced in ostensibly interracial ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.05$) versus all-White dyads ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.81$), whereas they viewed Whites who acknowledged race as more prejudiced in ostensibly all-White ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.80$) versus interracial dyads ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.93$).[10]

White observers. No main effects were found for Whites' perceptions of racial prejudice, but a significant interaction did emerge, $F(1, 37) = 4.17$, $p < .05$. As did Blacks, Whites viewed colorblind actors as more prejudiced when the interaction was framed as interracial ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.92$) versus all-White ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.79$), but they rated actors who acknowledged race as more prejudiced when the interaction was framed as all-White ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.79$) versus interracial ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.92$).

These analyses indicate little evidence of between-race divergence in perceptions of colorblind behavior. However, consideration of EMS scores indicated a different pattern: EMS was associated with the perception among Whites that colorblind actors were *less* prejudiced than actors who acknowledged race, $\beta = -.35$, $t(37) = -2.09$, $p < .05$. The interaction between EMS and the racial composition manipulation was also significant, $\beta = -.38$, $t(37) = -2.46$, $p < .02$. Follow-up regressions indicated that the predictive ability of EMS for ratings of prejudice stemmed from Whites' assessment of ostensibly interracial, $\beta = -.64$, $t(18) = -2.85$, $p = .01$, and not all-White pairs, $\beta = .02$, $t(16) < .10$. In other words, when the interaction was framed as interracial, high EMS scores predicted a tendency for Whites to perceive colorblindness as an effective means of appearing nonprejudiced.

Between-race comparison. The present analyses indicate general agreement between Blacks and Whites regarding the effectiveness of colorblindness as a strategy for avoiding the appearance of prejudice. However, as Study 1 demonstrated, it is a particular subset of Whites—those concerned about the appearance of racial prejudice—that is most likely to engage in colorblind behavior during social interaction. This finding highlights the importance of a more specific between-race comparison, namely, between Black individuals and Whites with high EMS scores. To the extent that these Whites—the individuals most likely to exhibit strategic colorblindness—and Blacks have divergent perceptions about the appropriateness of colorblindness, negative interpersonal outcomes are more likely to occur in interracial contexts.

To test for this possibility, we performed a median split on Whites' EMS scores ($Mdn = 4.20$; high EMS, $M = 5.47$; low EMS, $M = 2.70$), followed by a 3 (low-EMS Whites vs. high-EMS Whites vs. Blacks) × 2 (colorblind vs. race-acknowledged actor) mixed-model ANOVA in the interracial condition. As displayed in Figure 3, a significant interaction emerged, $F(2, 33) = 4.75$, $p < .02$. High-EMS Whites perceived colorblind actors as less prejudiced than those who acknowledged race, a pattern that was reversed for both Blacks and low-EMS Whites. No such interaction was observed in the all-White condition ($F < 1$). This different pattern of results among high-EMS Whites supports the conclusion that Whites who engage in colorblindness during interracial interaction believe that doing so conveys a lack of bias. Of course, this belief is at odds with the perceptions of low-EMS Whites and, perhaps most problematic, Blacks, who tend to view a colorblind strategy as indicative of bias.
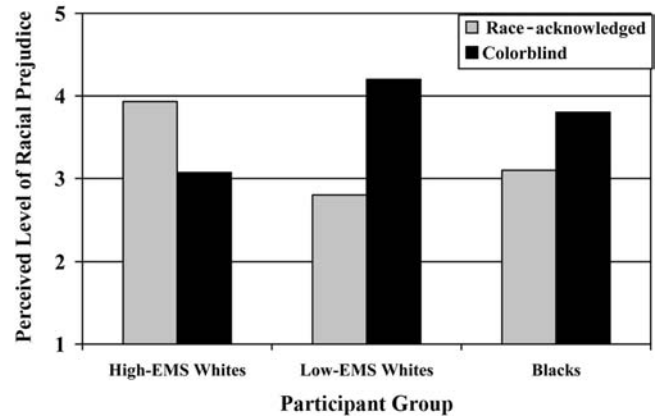

Figure 3. Whites' and Blacks' perceptions of prejudice in ostensibly interracial interactions as a function of approach type in Study 3. EMS = external motivation to avoid prejudice.

Discussion

Study 3 demonstrated that Whites' EMS scores predicted positive impressions of colorblindness during social interaction, the most noteworthy of which was the belief that those who exhibit colorblindness are less prejudiced than those who acknowledge race. That such effects emerged for perceptions of *others'* behavior suggests that the positive relationship between EMS and the tendency to exhibit strategic colorblindness results from more than reduced efficacy expectations for interracial contact among high-EMS Whites (e.g., Plant & Butz, 2006). The present data illustrate a more general belief shared by many high-EMS individuals that colorblind behavior is appropriate and adaptive in race-relevant interactions.

Notably, such beliefs among high-EMS Whites diverged from Blacks' perceptions of these same behaviors. In an ostensibly

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[10] Unlike ratings of warmth, these ratings of prejudice reflect relative judgments made after presentation of the entire set of video stimuli. Therefore, we also examined a second, conceptually similar dependent measure participants had completed using a 9-point scale immediately after viewing each clip. Participants responded to two items regarding how disingenuous each actor's behavior appeared to be: "To what extent was this person's behavior awkward?" "To what extent was this person's behavior genuine?" Responses to the second item were reverse-scored and then averaged with responses to the first item to create an index of disingenuousness for colorblind ($\alpha = .70$) and race-acknowledged behavior ($\alpha = .68$). The overall pattern of results for this composite measure was comparable to that of perceptions of prejudice. Whites rated colorblind behavior as more disingenuous ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.36$) than race-acknowledged behavior ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.13$), $F(1, 38) = 6.89$, $p = .01$. Yet higher EMS scores among Whites were associated with the perception that strategic colorblindness was less disingenuous than was acknowledging race, $\beta = -.57$, $t(38) = 3.96$, $p < .001$. Among Black observers, a colorblind approach was seen as more disingenuous when framed as an interracial ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.65$) versus all-White interaction ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.13$), whereas a race-acknowledged approach was seen as more disingenuous when framed as an all-White ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 0.98$) versus interracial interaction ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.11$), $F(1, 32) = 11.34$, $p < .005$. In sum, these results converge with those obtained for perceptions of prejudice, reinforcing the validity of the latter measure.

interracial interaction, Black participants interpreted a colorblind strategy as indicative of prejudice, perhaps indicating their suspicion regarding the genuineness underlying Whites' treatment of race during the interaction (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008; Shelton, 2003; Tropp, Stout, Boatswain, & Pettigrew, 2006). These findings illustrate a clear disconnect between the interracial interaction perceptions of high-EMS White individuals and Blacks. Moreover, these results suggest a paradox of intent and consequence for high-EMS Whites, as their motivation to achieve a nonprejudiced appearance through colorblindness was associated with social costs, including the potential to appear more biased in the eyes of Black interaction partners.

Study 4

Though the first three studies illustrate that engaging in strategic colorblindness can result in a range of negative outcomes, the results of Study 3 suggest that efforts to avoid race may be adaptive in some contexts. When viewing an ostensibly all-White dyad, for example, White and Black participants perceived colorblindness to be less indicative of prejudice than the tendency to acknowledge race. Under circumstances where race is not so clearly relevant (e.g., in an all-White interaction, in a task in which race is a less diagnostically important feature), it may be that a colorblind strategy is effective. In fact, when race does not seem particularly relevant, Whites who do not practice a colorblind strategy (and explicitly talk about race) could heighten Blacks' feelings of distrust (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002; Tropp et al., 2006) and concerns about being judged on the basis of their racial membership (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999).

In Study 4, we thus examined the contextual relevance of race as it relates to impressions of a colorblind strategy, particularly with regard to perceptions of prejudice. We employed the same methodology as in Study 3—asking Black and White observers to judge colorblind and race-acknowledged actors—but we reduced the centrality of race in the photo identification task associated with the actors' behavior. We anticipated that in this new context, Blacks and high-EMS Whites would share relatively favorable views of a colorblind strategy in interracial interaction. Such a finding would be consistent with previous demonstrations of situational variability in the salience of social categories (e.g., Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner & Oakes, 1989) and would illustrate the context dependence of the between-race divergence in perceptions observed in Study 3.

Method

Participants

Thirty-three Black undergraduate students (19 female) ranging from 18 to 25 years old ($M = 20.88$, $SD = 1.60$) and a separate sample of 45 White students (28 female) ranging from 18 to 22 years old ($M = 19.64$, $SD = 1.07$) participated in exchange for partial course credit or payment ($10).

Procedure

In all but one respect, the design and procedure of Study 4 mirrored those of Study 3. Once again, the photo task was ex-

plained to participants and we manipulated whether the interactions were framed as all-White or interracial. But in distinction, participants received a different image of the photo array ostensibly used in the video interaction—an array in which race was a far less central feature. This modified array consisted of 30 photos: 27 of White individuals and only 3 of Black individuals (as opposed to 15 of each as in Study 3). Because the array no longer differed systematically with respect to race, new photos of Whites were selected such that, in the final array, half the photos depicted individuals who were smiling and half did not. Thus, the array varied systematically on the same number of dimensions as in Study 3. The procedure used for creating the video stimuli was identical to that of Study 3, with the exception of slight modifications needed to make the questions asked by each actor compatible with the new photo array. As before, participants viewed a video with a total of six trials (three colorblind and three race-acknowledged) in which six White female actors each performed one trial.

Results

Feelings of Warmth

Black observers. A main effect emerged for Blacks' ratings of warmth such that they perceived colorblind actors ($M = 5.36$, $SD = 1.68$) as warmer than race-acknowledged actors ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.17$), $F(1, 31) = 14.59$, $p < .001$. No other significant effects were found for Blacks' ratings of warmth.

White observers. No main effects or interaction emerged for Whites' ratings of warmth toward a colorblind actor. However, once again, EMS was a significant, positive predictor of the relative warmth expressed toward colorblind versus race-acknowledged actors, $\beta = .32$, $t(42) = 2.09$, $p < .05$.

Perceptions of Prejudice

Black observers. A significant main effect emerged for Blacks' ratings of prejudice such that participants viewed colorblind actors as less prejudiced ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.89$) than actors who acknowledged race ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.88$), $F(1, 30) = 14.54$, $p < .001$. There were no other significant main effects or interactions for Blacks on this measure.

White observers. Overall, Whites' perceptions of prejudice were comparable to those of Blacks. A main effect of approach type emerged such that Whites viewed colorblind actors ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.95$) as less prejudiced than actors who acknowledged race ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.94$), $F(1, 42) = 8.16$, $p < .01$. The effect of racial composition framing and the two-way interaction were not significant.

As in Study 3, high EMS scores were associated with the perception that colorblind actors were less prejudiced than actors who acknowledged race, $\beta = -.40$, $t(40) = 2.73$, $p = .01$; unlike Study 3, this result was consistent with the pattern demonstrated by Whites more generally. The interaction between EMS and the racial composition manipulation approached significance, $\beta = .83$, $t(40) = 1.81$, $p < .08$. Follow-up regressions indicated that, consistent with Study 3, the predictive ability of EMS for ratings of prejudice stemmed from Whites' assessment of ostensibly interracial, $\beta = -.60$, $t(21) = 3.28$, $p < .005$, rather than all-White

pairs, $\beta = -.17$, $t(18) = 0.59$, $p = .31$. In other words, when the interaction was framed as interracial, high EMS scores predicted Whites' tendency to perceive colorblindness as an effective means of appearing unbiased, a tendency shared to a lesser extent by Whites more generally.

Between-race comparison. Once again, we used between-race comparisons to test the effectiveness of colorblindness as a strategy for appearing unbiased in interracial interaction. We performed a median split on Whites' EMS scores ($Mdn = 3.40$; high-EMS, $M = 4.72$; low-EMS, $M = 2.24$), followed by a 3 (low-EMS Whites vs. high-EMS Whites vs. Blacks) $\times$ 2 (colorblind vs. race-acknowledged actor) mixed-model ANOVA in the interracial condition. As displayed in Figure 4, there was relative agreement between Blacks and high-EMS Whites, as both judged colorblind actors to be less prejudiced than actors who acknowledged race. This consensus appeared to be attributable to a different pattern observed among Black participants as compared with Study 3: Blacks in the present study viewed actors as *less* prejudiced when they adopted a colorblind strategy.

Analyses Across Studies 3 and 4

The above results suggest that the relevance of race to a particular social interaction may constitute an important boundary condition for the ability of strategic colorblindness to facilitate positive interracial interaction. While Studies 3 and 4 were run independently—at different times with separate samples—their methodological similarity (and the lack of compelling evidence for a history effect) presents an opportunity to make comparisons across studies using race relevance as a de facto independent variable. Though such a cross-study comparison must be treated with caution, in the present investigation it provides the most straightforward assessment of potential boundary conditions for the social effectiveness of colorblind behavior. Although the overall interaction between race relevance and participant group (low-EMS Whites, high-EMS Whites, and Blacks) was not significant, $F(2, 70) = 1.77$, $p = .17$, an interaction contrast indicated that race relevance moderated the divergence in perception between Blacks

Figure 4. Whites' and Blacks' perceptions of prejudice in ostensibly interracial interactions as a function of approach type in Study 4. EMS = external motivation to avoid prejudice.

and high-EMS Whites regarding whether a colorblind strategy in interracial interaction signals prejudice, $t(70) = 1.95$, $p = .05$.

Discussion

The results of Study 4 suggest that the relevance of race to an interaction context predicts perceptions of colorblindness, particularly for Black observers. In contrast to their general skepticism regarding colorblindness in Study 3, Blacks viewed this behavior fairly positively when race was less relevant to the interaction, rating it as warmer and less indicative of prejudice. Such beliefs among Blacks converged with those of high-EMS Whites, who expressed stable preference for a colorblind strategy across both Studies 3 and 4. In sum, these results extend previous findings by illustrating that the contextual relevance of race has a moderating influence on the effectiveness of strategic colorblindness, especially regarding its ability to convey a lack of bias during interracial interaction. Such conclusions converge with recent work suggesting that the perception among Black professionals that race is a relevant consideration in corporate evaluations can predict the effectiveness of colorblindness as an institutional philosophy (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). The present studies do not examine perceptions of situations in which race is of intermediate relevance or the question of whether the threshold for concluding that race is relevant to a particular situation differs among majority and minority group members, both of which are worthy of further investigation. However, the results of Studies 3 and 4 do suggest that whereas Whites' efforts to avoid appearing biased through colorblind behavior backfire in many instances, under other circumstances this tendency may be socially adaptive.

General Discussion

Across four studies, the present research investigated the antecedents, consequences, and cognitive mechanisms associated with strategic colorblindness, a tendency among many Whites to avoid acknowledging race during social interaction in the effort to appear unbiased. Findings were consistent with the proposition that such avoidance of race during social interaction is often strategic in nature. Colorblindness was highly susceptible to normative precedent established by a Black interaction partner (Study 1), was practiced most frequently by Whites concerned with self-presentational aspects of appearing biased (Study 1), and was perceived most favorably by Whites possessing these same concerns (Studies 3 and 4). These are precisely the type of situational and personal antecedents one would expect to find for a behavioral tendency characterized by purposeful impression management.

Findings were also generally consistent with the hypothesis that Whites' intention of using colorblind behavior to prevent the appearance of prejudice—and, more generally, to promote positive interracial interaction—often backfires. Avoidance of race predicted decrements in nonverbal friendliness during interracial interaction (Studies 1 and 2), a result mediated by decreased capacity to exert inhibitory control after engaging in a colorblind strategy (Study 2). Whites' avoidance of race during interracial interaction also led to negative interpersonal perceptions on the part of Black observers, the most noteworthy of which was the belief that such an approach was actually indicative of *greater* racial prejudice (Study 3). It was only in a context where race was not particularly
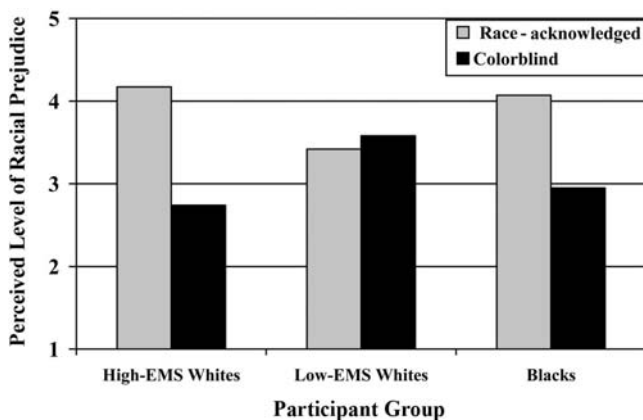
relevant that Whites and Blacks shared the perception of color-blindness as a favorable intergroup approach (Study 4).

One practical implication of these findings for intergroup relations is straightforward: in situations where race is potentially relevant, Whites who think that avoiding race altogether will shield them from being perceived as biased should think again. Though the present studies were conducted in the context of a single experimental paradigm—a noteworthy consideration for assessing their generalizability—their results suggest not only that such a belief is inconsistent with the explicit perceptions of prospective Black interaction partners but also that such efforts can impair Whites' capacity to convey friendly interpersonal behaviors. These consequences might not only detract from the quality of ongoing interracial interaction but also lead Whites to attribute the chilly reception received during such encounters to their partner's intentions or disinterest (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Shelton & Richeson, 2005), thus creating barriers to future positive interactions.

But while the present research offers evidence that strategic colorblindness can be problematic for the effort to foster interracial rapport, we do not suggest that the tendency is wholly without merit. First, the present findings identify a boundary condition for the ineffectiveness of such behavior, namely, that such an approach has potential benefits in circumstances where race is not relevant or when high-EMS Whites interact with like-minded individuals. Second, we also suggest that many of the Whites who exhibit strategic colorblindness possess a vital piece of the puzzle toward facilitating positive intergroup contact: a motivation to control prejudice (Devine, Plant, Amodio, Harmon-Jones, & Vance, 2002; Monteith, 1993). We suspect that many individuals who exhibit colorblindness are not "racists" seeking to hide bias but rather relatively well-intentioned individuals who genuinely believe that colorblindness is a culturally sensitive approach to intergroup contact. Of course, the present findings indicate that this belief is often misplaced. Whites likely would be better served by employing alternative strategies, such as simply talking about race when it is clearly relevant or, more generally, engaging in affiliative behaviors in order to communicate positive interracial intentions (see Shelton & Richeson, 2006).

The present results also offer useful contributions to the broader examination of interpersonal processes, particularly for the investigation of normative influence and social interaction. Historically regarded as a fundamental component of human interaction (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Pepitone, 1976; Sherif, 1936), the influence of normative cues on behavior has infrequently been examined in race-related domains. Yet the findings reported herein suggest that the intersection of these areas of interest—normative social influence and race-relevant interaction—has the potential to produce research of theoretical and practical import. Consider, for example, the dramatic influence of race-related norms established by a Black interaction partner in Study 1. These normative effects emerged even though the experimental task—adapted from a board game geared toward children in grade school—was fairly innocuous. Despite repeated instructions to strive for efficiency, many participants avoided asking about race even though such information carried clear diagnostic value. That Whites were so susceptible to normative cues in simply deciding whether to acknowledge the racial category membership of photos suggests that in more substantive and threatening interracial interactions—in

which, for example, controversial race-relevant political issues are discussed or allegations of racism considered—such social influence may be even more pronounced.

Another noteworthy implication involves the results of Study 2 concerning the cognitive mechanism underlying the negative relationship between strategic colorblindness and nonverbal behavior. That engaging in a cognitive suppression strategy (i.e., avoiding race in the photo task) came at the expense of simultaneous efforts to control nonverbal behavior in interracial interaction suggests that these processes draw from a common limited resource—a conclusion consistent with Baumeister and colleagues' "strength" model of self-control (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007; Muraven & Baumeister 2000). Whereas a growing body of research on self-control has underscored the various interpersonal tendencies that can result in diminished regulatory capacity (e.g., Finkel et al., 2006; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005), the current study addresses the implications of such deficits for the fluid experience of individuals in the midst of actual interracial interaction. The present findings indicate that one interpersonal cost of self-control exertion among Whites is the reduced capacity to simultaneously regulate nonverbal behavior during interracial interaction. This conclusion converges with recent work suggesting that diminished regulatory capacity may result in less effective self-presentation (Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005) and inhibition of social inappropriateness (von Hippel & Dunlop, 2005).

Conclusion

The present investigation identifies several factors that impact both the practice and the perception of a colorblind approach to social interaction. These studies demonstrate that the social consequences of Whites' efforts to avoid talking about race differ depending on who their interaction partner is, how this partner talks about race, and the context in which this interaction takes place. Perhaps most notably, across four studies the data converge on the conclusion that White individuals' intuitions regarding effective strategies for navigating the perceived minefield that is race-relevant interaction are sometimes inaccurate and can even be counterproductive. Whereas the attainment of a truly colorblind society remains an objective to which many continue to aspire, bending over backward to avoid even mere mention of race can create more problems than it solves.

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