The Effect of Feeling Essentialized on Outcomes of Direct Confrontation

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Confronting bias can reduce prejudice (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006).
- But people are unlikely to confront (Kawakami, Dunn, Karmali, & Dovidio, 2009) because they fear backlash (Swim & Hyers, 1999), such as being disliked by the person who is confronted (i.e., the confrontee).
- The literature to date has not tested the effect of confrontation in the context of existing **relationships**. Feeling close to the confronter may reduce bias and backlash by the confrontee.

Understanding some characteristics and social categories as fixed, identity-determining essences (Gelman, 2003) is called **essentialism**.
- Essentialist beliefs can lead to viewing others as inalterable, possessing attributes that are informative of their true nature.
- Essentialist beliefs often predict stereotype endorsement and bias (Bastian & Haslam, 2005).
- White people are afraid of being seen as a racist (Bergseiker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010). When they are confronted for bias, White confrontees may perceive that strangers (vs friends) see them as essentially racist. This may, in turn, increase backlash.

This research tests how a confrontee's relationship with their confronter affects their feelings of being essentialized, and subsequent backlash against the confronter, biased attitudes, and intentions to control future bias.
- **Hypothesis:** Friendship with the confronter will reduce feelings of being essentialized, thereby reducing backlash and biased attitudes, and increasing intentions to control future bias.

245 White participants (165 women, 79 men, 1 nonbinary; age range: 18-82, M_{age}=42.19, SD=14.38) were crowd-sourced through Amazon's Mechanical Turk.
- We manipulated whether participants imagined being confronted for making a racist comment by their friend or a stranger.

The participants read a scenario in which they visited a restaurant in an unfamiliar part of town. They imagined themselves admitting to the waiter that they felt unsafe in the neighborhood, to which either a friend or a White stranger at the next table responded, **"I'm not gonna lie, that wasn't cool. Just because this neighborhood has a lot of Black people doesn't mean it's dangerous. That comment makes you seem like a racist, you know?"**
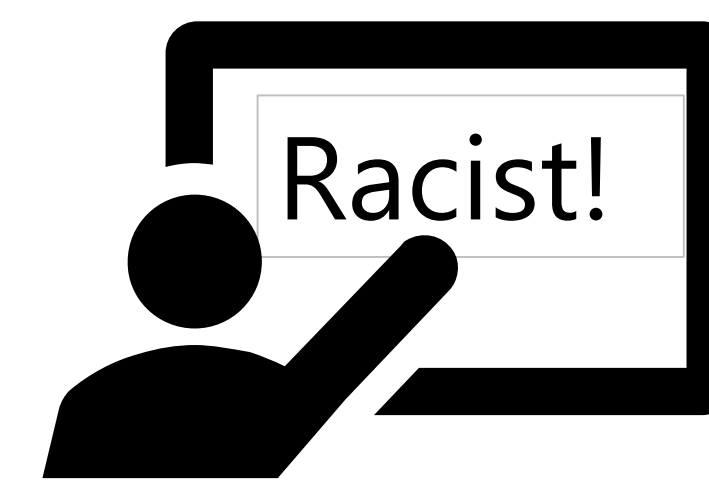
Essentialism 13 items; a = .74; [1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree*]
Higher scores = More feelings of being essentialized by the confronter;
"The other person would say that 'you are either a certain type of person or you are not'."
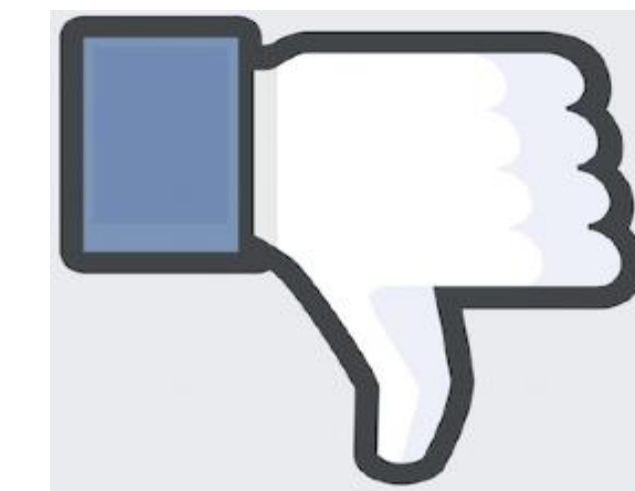
Backlash 7 items; a = .92; [1 *absolutely not* to 7 *absolutely*]
Higher scores = More backlash against the confronter;
"The person who replied to my comment is sensitive."

Bias against Black People 14 items; a = .96; [1 *not well at all* to 7 *extremely well*]
Higher scores = Less biased attitudes;
"Please indicate how well each of the following words describe most Blacks (e.g., Friendly, Violent, Lazy)"

Intentions to Control Future Bias 10 items; a = .96; [1 *not at all true* to 7 *completely true*]
Higher scores = More intentions to control future racial bias;
"After what I learned today, I will be more on guard for racially biased behavior."
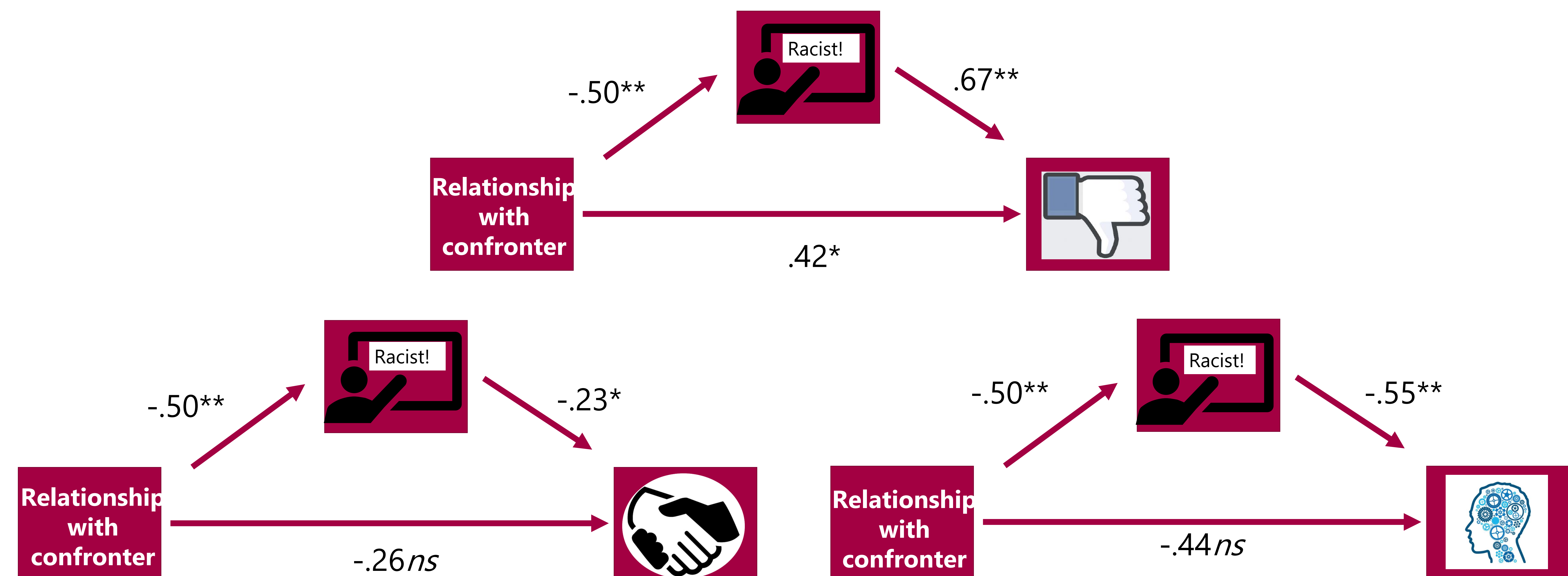
Relationship coded as: 0 = Stranger, 1 = Friend   *p<.05; **p<.001; *ns:* not significant

People feel less essentialized after being confronted for racism by a friend versus a stranger. Feeling less essentialized by a confronter reduces backlash against the confronter and biased attitudes, and increases intentions to control future bias.

Future research could examine the level of intimacy and knowledge in a relationship necessary to reduce feelings of being essentialized; different types of **relationship contexts** (e.g., workplace, familial), **power dynamics** within relationships, and **shared values. Determining factors that reduce backlash while preserving bias reduction is key to combatting prejudice.**