

# **Do Prejudice Concerns Undermine Intimacy in Cross-Group Interactions?**

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## **Introduction**

Race relations in the United States can seem like an intractable problem. A long history of discriminatory policies and interpersonal attitudes have created deep separation between racial groups (Graff, 2015). Research shows that racial segregation shapes the lives of people in the United States (Phillipsen, 2003) and may increase the violence that occurs in the country today (Jacoby, Dong, Beard, Wiebe, & Morrison, 2018). However, exposure to people from different racial backgrounds has several benefits. For example, Bowman & Stewart (2014) found that when students were exposed to racial differences within their neighborhoods and school, they reported more positive racial attitudes and were more likely to maintain cross-group friendships in the future. In other words, exposure to different races can decrease prejudice and increase the quality of intergroup relations. It is therefore important to understand how and under what circumstances people can form meaningful relationships with people of other races.

### **The Promise of Intergroup Friendships**

Psychological research identifies few clear routes to reducing prejudice and improving intergroup relations but one is overwhelmingly supported: intergroup contact. Contact theory states that people's prejudices decrease when they have the chance to interact with people from different racial backgrounds (Allport, 1954). Contact reduces prejudice in various ways including an increase in knowledge about outgroup members, a reduction in intergroup anxiety, and an increase in perspective-taking (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Outgroup contact allows learning about other racial groups to take place, which in turn breaks down negative stereotypes, identifies commonalities between groups, and decreases prejudice. Furthermore, contact helps to reduce the anxiety surrounding cross-group interaction which leads to reductions in prejudice

(Shook & Fazio, 2008). Thus, intergroup contact can reduce prejudice and improve racial attitudes.

Intergroup contact yields the best results when people are able to form meaningful and intimate friendships with people of other races (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997; Wright, Brody, & Aron, 2005). Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright (2011), for example, found that measures of friendship intimacy, such as time spent with and self-disclosure to an outgroup friend, had strong associations with positive intergroup attitudes. The more intimate the cross-groups friendship, the more individuals develop positive attitudes towards those outgroup members in general and become less prejudiced toward those racial groups (Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton & Tropp, 2008).

The important role of intimacy in friendship formation is supported by the broader research on relationships as well. In classic research by Aron and colleagues (1997), for example, they developed a Fast Friends Procedure to create closeness in a laboratory setting and to study its consequences. Participants were paired into groups of two and assigned to a closeness condition or the small-talk condition. In the closeness condition, pairs were instructed to complete activities in which self-disclosure and intimacy were necessary and intensity grew over time (e.g., sharing a personal problem and asking their partner for advice on how to solve it). In contrast, the small-talk pairs completed activities where self-disclosure and intimacy were not as necessary or prevalent (e.g., describing their last visit to the zoo). This study found that pairs that participated in self-disclosure and relationship building activities generated more closeness than pairs that simply engaged in small-talk related activities (Aron et al., 1997). Thus, more intimacy among pairs generally created stronger feelings of friendship between them.

### **The Challenges of Intergroup Friendships**

Taken together, this research suggests that close cross-group friendships provide immense opportunity for improving race relations in the United States. However, forming cross-group friendships can be difficult (see Shelton & Richeson, 2006). There are several factors that can deter majority group members from forming meaningful and intimate relationships with outgroup members. For one, when people have opportunities to connect with those of different races, they often underestimate how interested members of the other groups are in interacting with them (i.e., pluralistic ignorance; Shelton & Richeson, 2005). Likewise, people experience feelings of anxiety and physiological indicators of stress when they interact with people of different races (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001; Shelton, Dovidio, Hebl & Richeson, 2009). Specifically, majority group members (i.e., Whites) often experience anxiety about being perceived as prejudiced by racial minorities (Plant & Devine, 1998). Ironically, these self-image concerns deteriorate the quality of intergroup interaction and lead Whites to appear more prejudiced to their partner (Plant, Devine, & Peruche, 2010). Together, past research indicates that prejudice concerns reduce the quality of intergroup interaction.

Further, previous research suggests that prejudice concerns can affect the different interpersonal strategies people use in cross-groups interactions. When interacting with someone for the first time, people can adopt different strategies in navigating conversations and forming friendships. On one hand, people may choose to take a more superficial approach by engaging in more distant behaviors in order to not reveal too much about themselves. Thus, they may adopt “surface-level strategies” in forming an interpersonal connection with someone else. On the other hand, people may choose to take a more intimate approach and engage in behaviors that generate closeness (McEwan & Guerrero, 2010). For example, self-disclosure has been identified as a key component in forming intimacy during an interaction. As self-disclosure increases,

intimacy increases as well (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). Therefore, people may also adopt more “deep strategies” in forming friendships with people of other races.

Unfortunately, the existing research suggests that in general, in cross-group interactions (vs. intragroup interactions), people tend to engage in less intimate interactions (Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2006). In other words, majority group members tend to adopt more superficial interpersonal strategies when interacting with people of other races versus ingroup members. For example, Shook and Fazio (2008) demonstrated that extended interracial interactions, such as being dormitory roommates, lead to less social engagement (i.e. time spent together) between majority and minority group members compared to same-race roommates. Even when intimate interracial interactions occur, they are still less desirable compared to same-race interactions. Towles-Schwen & Fazio (2006) further demonstrated that friendships developed through these interracial interactions tend to last for a shorter period of time compared to same-race interactions. Taken together, this suggests that majority group members’ tendency to engage in surface-level strategies may contribute to the difficulty of forming and maintaining meaningful cross-race friendships.

Majority group members’ prejudice concerns can also affect the quality of intergroup interaction. Trawalter and Richeson (2006) conducted a study in which White participants interacted with a Black partner. Before the interaction, participants were encouraged to focus on having a positive interaction, avoid being prejudiced, or told nothing. Participants who were told to avoid being prejudiced or told nothing performed worse on a cognitive task compared to those encouraged to focus on a positive interaction. This suggests that focusing Whites on prejudice concerns may deteriorate the quality of intergroup interaction. In another study, Trawalter & Richeson (2008) had White participants in either same-race or interracial pairs discuss race-

related or race-neutral topics. They found that White participants in interracial pairs displayed more anxious behavior (more so than their Black partner) during both types of discussions. Together, these studies provide causal evidence that when prejudice concerns are made salient to Whites, they perform worse in intergroup interaction.

### **Present Research**

In the present research, I examine how these prejudice concerns might affect the strategies people use in forming cross-group friendships. I build on past intergroup relations research by testing whether people's prejudice concerns affect the different interpersonal strategies people use in cross-group interaction. Specifically, I investigate whether Whites who are more concerned about appearing prejudiced choose to engage in more surface-level (versus deep) strategies. I hypothesize that Whites who are concerned about appearing prejudice (versus not) will adopt more negative outcome-avoiding, surface-level strategies when interacting with someone of a different race.

I will also examine the role that individual differences play in how self-image concerns affect interpersonal strategies. Beyond situational factors, one's own motivations may affect how successful (or not) interracial interactions are. Whites vary in their internal and external motivation to respond without prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998). Those who are higher in internal motivation (IMS) strive to not be prejudiced due to their own personal standards (e.g. prejudice is inconsistent with their moral values). On the other hand, those higher in external motivation (EMS) strive to not be prejudiced to comply with societal standards (e.g. prejudice is inconsistent with society's values). Internal and external motivation can also impact the strategies people use when engaging in cross-group interactions (Plant, Devine, & Peruche, 2010). People who are higher in internal motivation focus on strategies that create positive

interactive outcomes whereas those higher in external motivation focus on strategies that avoid negative outcomes. Thus, I made the further prediction that, when concerned about appearing prejudiced, those high in EMS would be especially likely to adopt surface level strategies in forming cross-group friendships.

### **Method**

In the present research, White participants interacted with a Black interaction partner during a study on first impressions and friendship formation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: a racism concern condition or a control condition. Participants in the racism concern condition ( $n = 32$ ) were explicitly told to avoid appearing racist during the interaction whereas those in the control condition ( $n = 37$ ) were told to avoid messy handwriting or speaking too quickly. After the manipulation, participants selected icebreaker questions to ask their partner. Critically, these icebreaker questions were rated by third-party raters on several dimensions including how intimate they were, how racially-loaded they were, etc. Afterwards, participants completed several self-report and individual difference measures. I hypothesized that those in the racism concern condition (vs. control) would ask less intimate icebreaker questions. Further, I hypothesized that this would be stronger among those high in external motivation to control prejudice.

### **Participants and Study Personnel**

In this study, two Black female research assistants served as confederates and engaged in an interaction with participants. I recruited 69 female undergraduate students from a large Midwestern university in exchange for course credit. Only female students were recruited to match the confederates' genders and to avoid creating a cross-race and cross-gender interaction. One participant was excluded for not identifying as non-Hispanic White. The final sample

consisted of 68 participants ( $M_{age} = 18.48$  years,  $SD = 0.78$ ), which provided a 66% chance to detect a true moderate effect ( $d = .5$ ; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007).

### **Procedure and Materials**

**Cover story.** Participants began the study alongside a Black female confederate, who was introduced as another student participant and their partner for the duration of the study. The experimenter explained that the study examined first impressions and friendship formation. In the racism concern condition, the experimenter added that the study was examining cross-race friendships and how people formed friendships with people of different races. First, participants learned that they would be led into separate study rooms where they would exchange written icebreaker questions with their partner in order to form a first impression. The experimenter then explained that, after exchanging icebreaker questions, both participants would return to the same room and engage in a conversation about several social topics. After receiving these instructions, the confederate was escorted out of the room and ostensibly into an adjacent study room.

**Manipulation.** The experimenter returned to the participant's room and explained the icebreaker activity. Specifically, participants were told, "Please select five icebreaker questions to ask your partner in order to learn a little more about them. After you select your five questions, please copy each question onto the blank side of a separate notecard." After providing these instructions, the experimenter then began to exit the study room, but suddenly stopped and made an ostensibly casual remark, which served as the primary manipulation. In the racism concern condition, the experimenter said: "Oh and just as a heads up—some of our past minority participants felt that their partner came across as a little racist toward them. So, if you could keep that in mind and try to avoid appearing racist, that should help." In the control condition, the experimenter instead said: "Oh and just as a heads up—some of our past participants felt that



their partner didn't communicate clearly. So, if you could keep that in mind and try to avoid messy handwriting or talking too fast, that should help." Thus, this manipulation raised a self-presentation concern for all participants, but raised a race-focused concern only in the experimental condition.

**Icebreaker questions.** Immediately following the delivery of the manipulation, participants selected five icebreaker questions to ask their partner. These five questions were selected from a list of 15 questions which varied on how intimate the questions were, how racially-loaded they were, and how likely they would be to elicit negative information, competence-related information, and warmth-related information. For the full list of questions and descriptive statistics on these dimensions, see Appendix A.

After participants selected their five questions, they wrote each question on a notecard for their partner to answer. The experimenter then returned to collect their written questions and to ostensibly bring their selected questions to their partner. Afterwards, the experimenter returned with five pre-determined questions for participants to answer. These questions were ostensibly chosen by their partner; however, the same five questions were used for all participants. Participants were given a few minutes to provide a written response to their partner's questions. Afterwards, the experimenter returned, collected participants written responses, and provided participants with their partner's responses. Importantly, the confederate's responses were pre-determined, contingent on the questions participants chose to ask.

**Self-report and individual difference measures.** Next, participants completed a series of self-report measures in the order they are reported. First, reflecting on the icebreaker task, participants reported how authentic they felt, e.g., "I generally felt I could be myself" (adapted from Lopez & Rice, 2006; eight items;  $\alpha = .74$ ) and how self-protective they felt, e.g., "How

much did you want to avoid being vulnerable to them?" (adapted from Crocker et al., in prep; five items;  $\alpha = .68$ ). Next, participants reported their mood in anticipation of the ostensible in-person conversation, e.g., "I feel nervous" (adapted from Plant & Devine, 2003; 10 items;  $\alpha = .87$ ) and their positive expectations for the interaction, e.g., "I expect to like my partner" (three items;  $\alpha = .84$ ). To avoid making our interest in race and cross-group anxiety salient, I included the more targeted race and anxiety measures at the end. They reported their interest in future outgroup contact (adapted from Richeson & Shelton, 2006; five items;  $\alpha = .84$ ) and concern about appearing prejudiced during the study (our manipulation check; adapted from Vorauer, Maine & O'Connell, 1998; nine items;  $\alpha = .85$ ). Lastly, they reported their chronic internal and external motivation to respond without prejudice (Plant & Devine, 2003; (IMS) five items;  $\alpha = .85$ ; (EMS) five items;  $\alpha = .75$ ) and trait anxiety (Safren, Turk, & Heimberg, 1998; 10 items;  $\alpha = .92$ ).

**Conclusion.** Finally, to avoid influencing the suspicion probe at the end, the experimenter told participants that their partner had to leave early and that the study would therefore conclude. The experimenter then probed participants for suspicion using a funnel debriefing and explained the full purpose of the study.

## Results

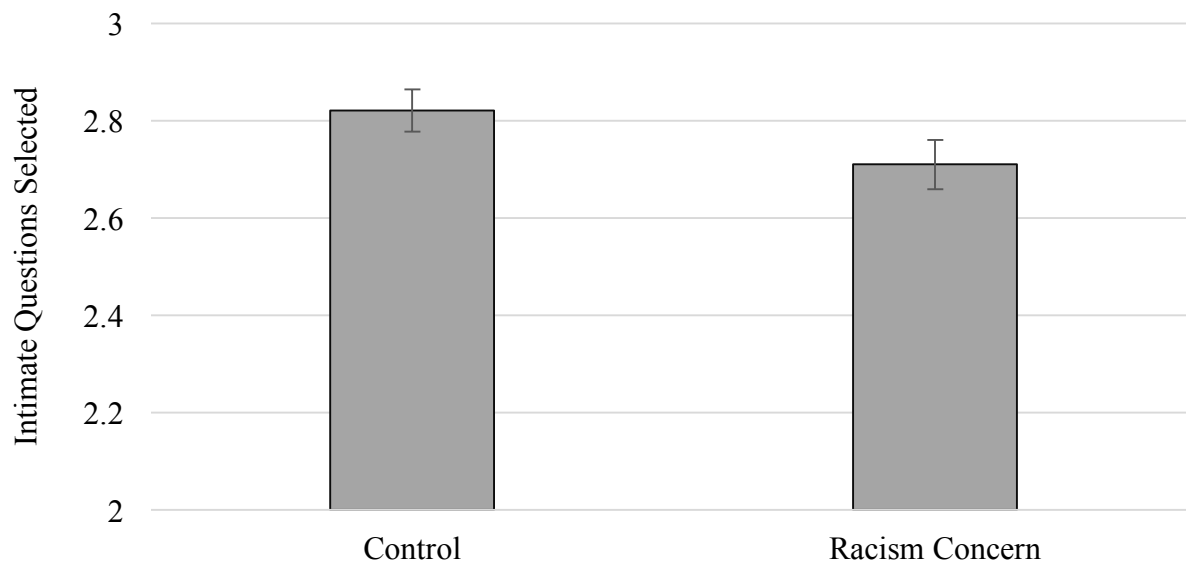
### Manipulation Check

I first examined differences by condition in participants' concerns about appearing prejudiced during the study. As expected, participants in the racism concern condition were more concerned about appearing prejudiced ( $M = 1.89$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ) than those in the control condition ( $M = 1.28$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ),  $t(67) = 3.30$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI [0.26, 0.95]. I observed no mean differences in the other self-presentation concerns assessed. A Levene's test indicated that there

was greater variance in participants' concern with appearing self-centered in the racism concern condition compared to the control condition,  $F(1, 67) = 11.84, p = .001$ ; however, there were no overall mean differences in concern with appearing self-centered,  $t(50.28) = 1.66, p = .103$ , 95% CI [-0.059, .616]. Participants in the two conditions were also equally concerned with appearing unfriendly,  $t(67) = 1.37, p = .189$ , 95% CI [-0.11, 0.53].

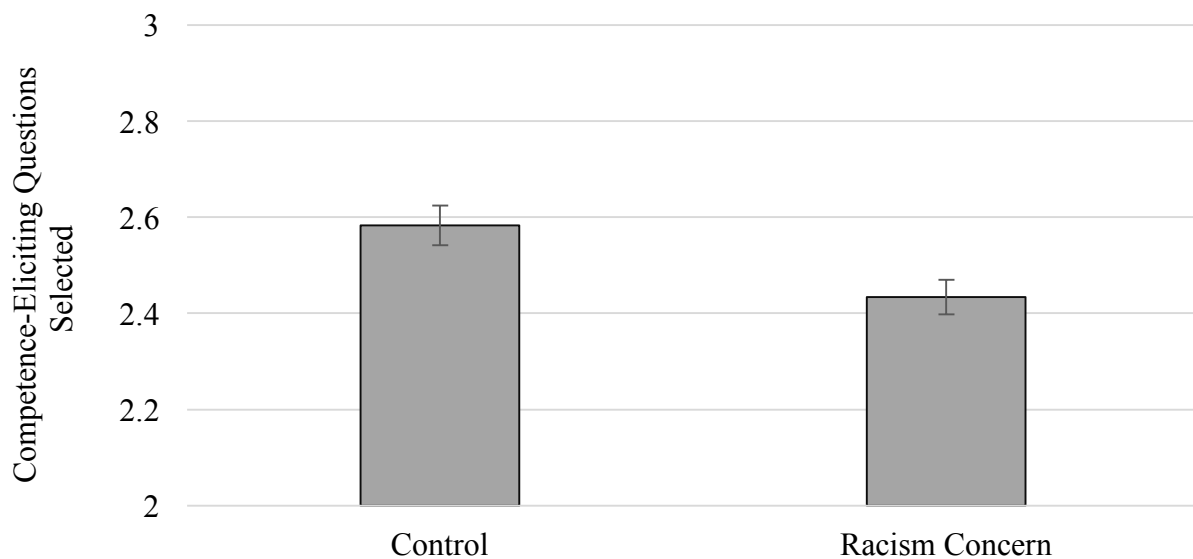
### Effects on Question Selection

Next, I examined differences by condition in the type and quality of icebreaker questions selected. I first compared the level of intimacy in the questions asked by participants in the racism versus control condition. I found mixed evidence in support of my hypotheses. As seen in Figure 1, those in the racism concern condition selected marginally less intimate questions ( $M = 2.71, SD = 0.29$ ) compared to those in the control condition ( $M = 2.82, SD = 0.26$ ),  $t(67) = -1.68, p = .098$ , 95% CI [-0.11, 0.07].



*Figure 1.* Effect of racism concern versus control on the selection of intimate icebreaker questions. Intimacy was rated in a pilot study on a 7-point scale and error bars represent  $\pm 1$  standard error.

I found no evidence for differences between conditions in the selection of racially loaded questions,  $t(67) = -0.99, p = .321, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.06, 0.02]$ . Similarly, I found no evidence for differences by condition in the selection of questions likely to elicit negative information,  $t(67) = -0.07, p = .945, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.08, 0.07]$ ; nor in questions likely to elicit warmth-related information,  $t(67) = -1.09, p = .281, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.13, 0.04]$ . Interestingly, regarding Figure 2, those in the racism concern condition were less likely to ask questions that revealed how smart or capable their partner was, ( $M = 2.44, SD = 0.21$ ), as compared to those in the control condition ( $M = 2.58, SD = 0.25$ ),  $t(67) = -2.57, p = .013, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.28, -0.03]$ .

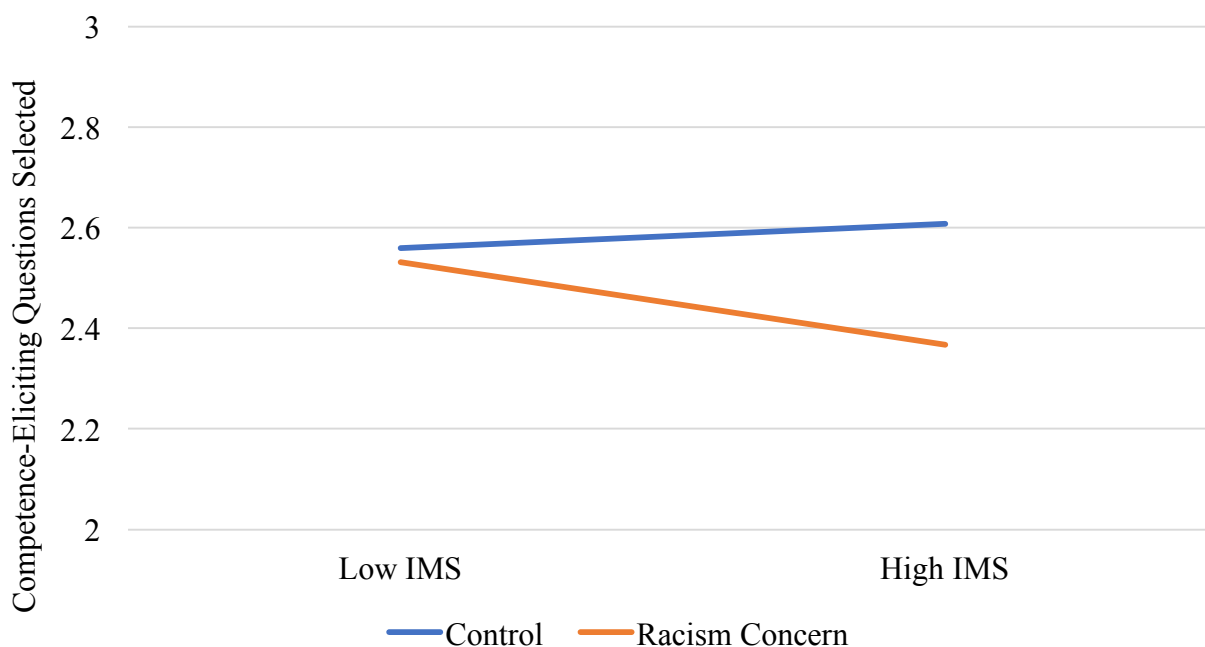


*Figure 2.* Effect of racism concern versus control on the selection of competence-eliciting icebreaker questions. Competence-eliciting was rated in a pilot study on a 7-point scale and error bars represent  $\pm 1$  standard error.

**Moderation by internal motivation to respond without prejudice (IMS).** Next, I tested whether the manipulation affected participants' internal motivations to respond without prejudice (IMS). I confirmed that IMS did not significantly differ by condition,  $t(67) = -0.45, p = .66, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.42, 0.27]$ . However, I found that external motivation to respond without prejudice (EMS) did differ by condition: EMS was elevated in the racism concern condition ( $M = 3.90$ ,

$SD = 1.12$ ) compared to the control condition ( $M = 3.29, SD = 1.23$ ),  $t(67) = -2.16, p = .035$ , 95% CI  $[-1.18, -0.05]$ . Therefore, I only tested interactions with IMS.

Testing the interaction between condition and IMS, I found no evidence that the effect of condition on intimacy depended on IMS,  $b = -0.11, SE = 0.12$ , 95% CI  $[-0.35, 0.12]$ ,  $t(68) = -0.96, p = .341, \beta = -0.13$ . I did find, however, that the effect of condition on selecting competence-eliciting questions depended on IMS,  $b = -0.21, SE = 0.10$ , 95% CI  $[-0.41, -0.01]$ ,  $t(68) = -2.14, p = .036, \beta = -0.27$ . As seen in Figure 3, the effect of threat on the likelihood of selecting competence-eliciting questions was most pronounced for those higher in IMS.

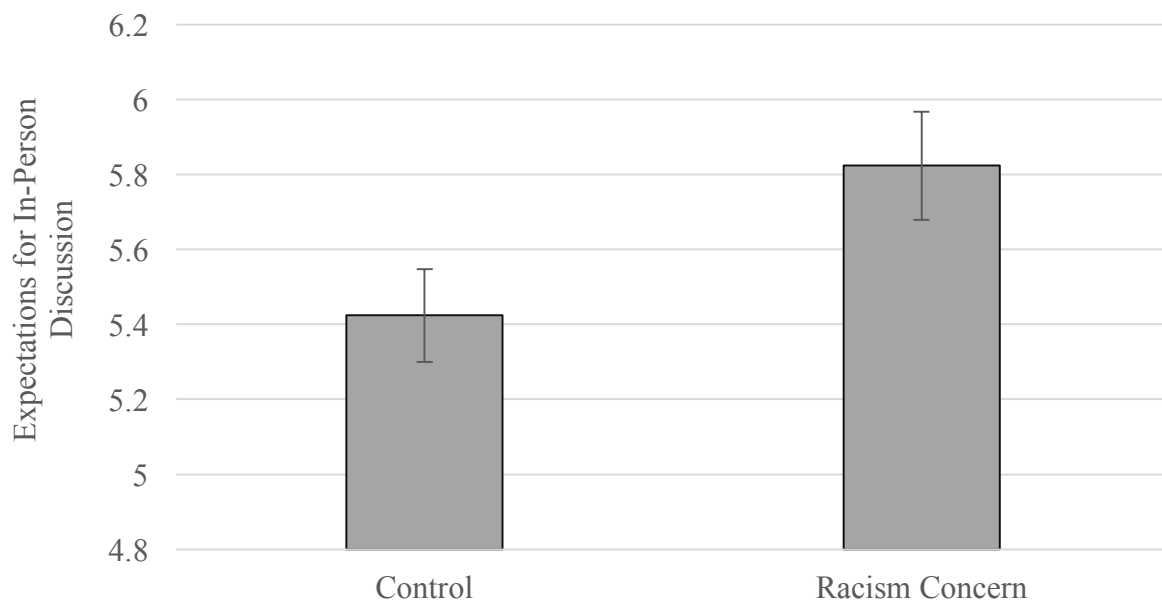


*Figure 3.* Interaction between condition and internal motivation to respond without prejudice (IMS) predicting the selection of competence-eliciting questions. IMS was measured on a 7-point scale. Low IMS was -1 SD from the mean. High IMS was +1 SD from the mean.

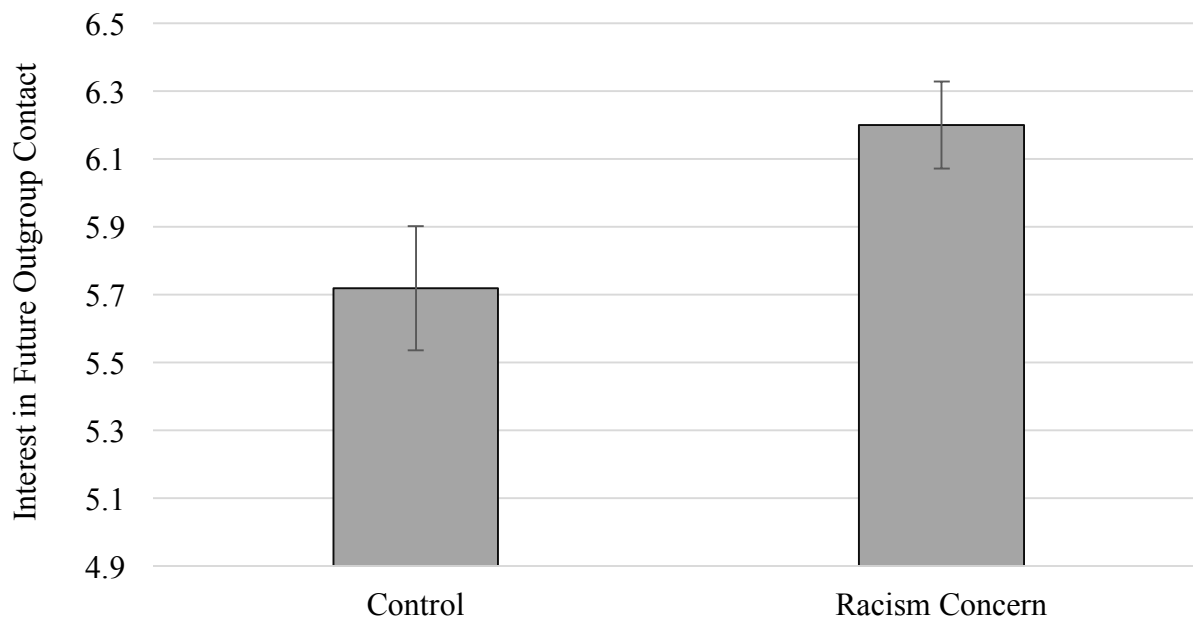
### Effects on Self-Report Measures

Finally, I examined differences by condition on our self-report dependent variables. First, when reflecting back on their icebreaker question exchange, I found no evidence for differences

in reported authenticity,  $t(67) = 1.12, p = .266, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.16, 0.57]$ ; nor in self-protectiveness,  $t(67) = -0.76, p = .447, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.44, 0.20]$ . Similarly, I found no differences by condition in mood in anticipation of the in-person conversation,  $t(67) = 0.07, p = .941, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.60, 0.65]$ . Interestingly, regarding Figure 4, I found that those in the racism concern condition reported more positive expectations for the in-person discussion ( $M = 5.82, SD = 0.81$ ) compared to those in the control condition ( $M = 5.42, SD = 0.75$ ),  $t(67) = 2.13, p = .037, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.02, 0.77]$ . Regarding Figure 5, I also found that those in the racism concern condition reported greater interest in future outgroup contact ( $M = 6.20, SD = 0.73$ ) compared to those in the control condition ( $M = 5.72, SD = 1.11$ ),  $t(67) = 2.09, p = .041, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.02, 0.94]$ .



*Figure 4.* Effect of racism concern versus control on expectations for the ostensible upcoming in-person discussion with their Black partner. Expectations were measured on a 7-point scale and error bars represent  $\pm 1$  standard error.



*Figure 5.* Effect of racism concern versus control on interest in future outgroup contact. Interest in future outgroup contact was measured on a 7-point scale and error bars represent  $\pm 1$  standard error.

### General Discussion

This study provided weak supportive evidence for the hypothesis that heightened concern about appearing prejudiced leads to less intimate interracial interactions. Relative to the control condition, participants in the racism concern condition reported more concern about appearing prejudiced, yet no greater self-presentation concerns otherwise. As further corroboration for the efficacy of the manipulation, participants in the racism concern (vs. control) condition also reported higher EMS. Together these suggest that the novel manipulation I employed was successful. I created the intended threatening psychological state – participants in the racism concern condition exhibited increased concerns about being perceived as prejudiced by their partner. Therefore, we next examined if this manipulation produced the expected results.

When attempting to avoid appearing racist (vs. not), White participants selected less intimate icebreaker questions to ask their Black conversation partner, although this difference was not statistically significant. Furthermore, this effect was not moderated by participants'

motivations to respond without prejudice. Thus, these findings did not support our primary hypothesis that EMS would have an impact on participants' selection of less intimate questions when they were concerned with appearing prejudice.

Interestingly, although not predicted, participants in the racism concern (vs. control) condition were less likely to select icebreaker questions that would elicit information about their Black partner's level of competence. This effect was particularly strong for those higher in IMS. Specifically, the effect of threat on the likelihood of selecting questions that revealed their partner's competence was greatest among those higher in IMS. These findings suggest that those who were more motivated to not be prejudiced based on their own values or morals were refraining from asking questions that would reveal whether their partner was smart or capable. One reason for this could be that these participants were apprehensive about asking these questions to avoid putting their partner in situations that could potentially activate stereotypes. Because it is assumed that these participants do not want to be prejudiced based on their own standards, perhaps they were avoiding these competence-eliciting questions not to dismiss their partner's capabilities, but with the intention to protect them.

When reflecting on the icebreaker task, however, participants in both conditions reported feeling similarly authentic and self-protective during the icebreaker task. Surprisingly, however, those in the racism concern condition (vs. control), reported more positive expectations for the upcoming interactions with their partner. Similarly, they reported greater interest in future outgroup contact with outgroup members. Because these participants were told that past minority participants found their partners to be racist, they may have lowered their standards of what a good interaction would be. If they judged a good interaction to be simply based off not coming off as prejudiced, perhaps they became more confident in their ability to not be seen as such,



despite these self-image concerns. If such was the case, their expectations and interests may have been less linked to their concerns and more connected to their ability to not come off as prejudiced to their partner unlike participants in the past.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

While these were very interesting preliminary findings, they should be interpreted with caution. Because I am relying on just one study, specific stimuli such as the icebreaker questions or the particular confederates used in this study could bias the reported results (Judd, Westfall, & Kenny, 2012; Yarkoni, 2019). For example, there could be idiosyncrasies with the specific intimate and competence-eliciting questions I included that contributed to them being selected less in the racism concern (vs. control) condition. Future research should aim to replicate this study with different manipulations of self-image concerns and different measures of intimacy. For example, one future study could ask participants to write their own icebreaker questions as a key dependent variable. This design would increase external validity while also developing a greater sense of realism for participants.

In addition, although I confirmed the efficacy of the manipulation, it is possible that the measurement of intimacy could have been more sensitive. When examining the correlation between the manipulation check and the dependent variables, I found a marginal correlation between how concerned participants were about appearing prejudiced and the perceived intimacy of the questions they chose to ask their partner,  $r(69) = -.22, p = .072$ . One reason the measure of intimacy may have been less sensitive is that respondents from the pilot study were American adult workers on Amazon's Mechanical Turk whereas participants for this study were undergraduate college students. In the pilot study, adult participants rated the list of icebreaker questions that the college students used during this study. Given that the views and

interpretations within these samples may vary significantly from one another, it is possible that the pilot participants evaluated the icebreaker questions differently than the college students would have. Therefore, participants in the primary study may have seen themselves as choosing questions that were more intimate or revealing of their partner's competence, but this may not have been detected. Further research could match the pilot sample to the primary sample in order to increase the construct validity of this research or use a new measure of intimacy as noted above.

My primary research question centered around the ways in which appearing prejudice impacts cross-group friendships. Because only White female participants were recruited, results only begin to tell half of the story. As of now, it is unclear how Black people would approach this interaction, what questions they would ask, and how they would interpret the questions asked by a White partner. While White people may be concerned with appearing prejudice, this is not necessarily the case for Black people. Indeed, research shows that majority group members often enter intergroup interaction with concerns about being seen as prejudiced or disliked, while minority group members primarily have concerns about being disrespected (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010). Therefore, the reasons why White participants chose to ask less intimate questions when under threat may not be the same reasons Black participants would choose to do so. Black participants may choose to ask less intimate questions to avoid revealing information that could confirm negative stereotypes about their group (e.g., growing up in single-parent home, living in a low socioeconomic neighborhood, etc.). Future research could expand on the ways in which Black people approach intergroup interactions. Similarly, further research could replicate this study with both a Black and White participant to examine both sides of this

interaction at once allowing the opportunity to better understand how these approaches impact friendship quality.

### **Theoretical Contributions**

When examining how people form cross-group friendships, past research has found that in general, majority group members often engage in less intimate interactions with outgroup members (Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2006). Findings from the current study are somewhat consistent with these findings as those who were more concerned with appearing prejudice tended to ask less intimate questions. It is important to note that the findings for intimacy were mixed and highly preliminary; however, if Whites already engage in less intimate approaches to interactions with Black people, it may be that the threat of appearing prejudiced amplifies the superficiality of these interactions.

Previous research has revealed that feelings of friendship and intimacy are closely related (Aron et al., 1997). The idea is that as intimacy increases, stronger feelings of friendship should be created. However, the findings from this study somewhat contradict this as those who were concerned with appearing prejudiced asked less intimate questions, but had greater expectations for their upcoming interactions as well as more positive attitudes towards future outgroup contact. They may be more confident in their approach to these interactions because they are successfully avoiding their concerns of prejudice by using more surface-level strategies.

### **Societal Implications**

Many cues in everyday life may heighten White people's concern about appearing prejudiced. Ironically, the vigilance accompanying this self-presentation concern can prove to be a barrier for interracial friendship formation and thus undermine an opportunity for real prejudice reduction (Plant, Divine, & Peruche, 2010). The present research provides further evidence of

these ironic effects of prejudice concerns. We see that those who are more concerned with appearing prejudice ask less intimate questions. Intimate questions can generate closeness (Aron et al., 1997) and asking fewer of these questions may decrease the opportunity for individuals to get to form meaningful friendships. As past research has shown, intergroup contact yields effective results when people are able to form these meaningful relationships with those of other races (Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997; Wright, Brody, & Aron, 2005; Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011) Therefore, if such cross-group friendships are stunted, intergroup contact may yield less effective results (e.g. less positive attitudes toward outgroup members).

There is a growing body of research surrounding the different perspectives Whites and minorities possess in interracial interactions. On average, minorities in the United States, specifically Black people, pursue goals that elicit respect whereas White people pursue those that elicit likeability when compared to each other (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010). Being that those who were more concerned with appearing prejudice asked less questions that revealed how smart and capable their partner was, this could obviously present an issue when forming interracial friendships for the first time. If Whites are asking less competence-eliciting questions, they may be limiting the opportunity for their Black counterparts to display these talents. Therefore, Black people engaging in these interactions may feel as though their White partner does not respect them. Lack of respect may be processed as prejudice, thus neither partner is reaching their pursued goal of being respected or liked. Interestingly, those who were higher in IMS asked these questions less often. This shows that while one may have good intentions when approaching an interaction, they may fall short in having effective interactions due to this lack of understanding.

The fact that participants in the racism concern condition reported more positive expectations for the in-person discussion and greater interest in future outgroup contact could reinforce the idea that individuals alter their behavior to attain goals. In this case, participants wanted to be liked and to avoid appearing prejudiced during intergroup interaction. Perhaps reporting these positive expectations and greater interests was a way to buffer their concerns of their partners seeing them as prejudiced and attain overall social desirability. The awareness of this concern could have made these participants more mindful of how their responses would reflect them overall. Therefore, this awareness may have played a role in how they responded to items especially those that could either confirm or deny prejudice attitudes. If Whites who are concerned with appearing prejudice seek out more opportunities to interact with minorities in order to avoid their prejudice concerns, this could explain why we continuously see these interactions going poorly.

If White people continue to assume what their minority partners want out of their intergroup interactions or how they are being perceived within them, these interactions may continue to go poorly. One question that could be raised is whether White people are aware that they are asking less intimate and competence-eliciting questions to avoid negative interaction outcomes. Another question that could be considered is whether they are aware that doing so could be creating unfulfilling interaction experiences for their partner. If not, it may be interesting to test whether having knowledge about those things can assist White people in correcting for them and lead to better interactive experiences for both White people and their Black interaction partners.

## **Conclusion**

The present research represents an important step in understanding why intergroup interactions go poorly and how to begin to improve them. A lack of intimacy being generated between the participants in these intergroup interactions along with a decreased likelihood in Black people receiving respect through competency, less meaningful friendships may be formed. However, further research on these topics could allow key improvements to be made. Understanding intergroup interactions can empower people to develop more meaningful cross-group friendships in their everyday lives and improve race relations as a whole.

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## Appendix A

### Question Inventory and Dimension Ratings

In a pilot study, I recruited 200 participants via Amazon's Mechanical Turk to evaluate a list of 40 icebreaker questions (self-created or adapted from the Fast Friends procedure; Aron et al., 1997). Participants were asked to imagine they were meeting someone for the first time and considering questions to ask this person. Given this premise, they were then randomly assigned to rate the 40 questions on one of the five dimensions below.

- Intimate: "Please rate how likely each question would be to reveal something **deeply meaningful or personal** about your conversation partner."
- Negative: "Please rate how likely each question would be to reveal something **negative** about your conversation partner."
- Racially-loaded: "Please rate how likely it is that you might come across as **racist** by asking each question." Note that, for this dimension, participants were also asked to imagine that the person they were meeting happened to be Black.
- Warmth-eliciting: "Please rate how likely each question would be to reveal how **nice or likeable** your conversation partner is."
- Competence-eliciting: "Please rate how likely each question would be to reveal how **smart or capable** your conversation partner is."

At the completion of the pilot study, I selected 15 icebreaker questions from the original 40 which demonstrated a wide range of values on intimacy ratings and other dimensions. These 15 icebreaker questions included in the full study, along with their average dimension ratings, are provided in Table 1. For correlations among the five dimensions, see Table 2.

Table 1

*Icebreaker Questions and Average Dimension Ratings*

Question	Intimate	Negative	Racially loaded	Warmth-eliciting	Competence-eliciting
What are three of your deepest values?	3.93	2.68	1.39	3.87	3.76
What was the most significant turning point in your life?	3.88	2.43	1.46	3.42	3.32
For what in your life do you feel most grateful?	3.73	1.95	1.49	3.82	2.95
How close are you with your family members?	3.51	2.58	1.46	3.71	2.37
What has helped you most in overcoming the adversities in your life?	3.44	2.35	2.05	3.50	3.58
If you could change anything about yourself what would it be? Why?	3.34	3.05	1.68	3.45	3.24
What religion did you grow up with, if any? How has this shaped your beliefs and experience of life now?	3.22	2.35	1.73	2.76	2.42
What job would you be terrible at?	2.68	3.30	1.51	2.74	3.26
Where have you lived? Where do you feel, you are "from"?	2.68	1.98	2.07	3.00	2.34
What sport(s) do you like to play?	2.44	1.95	1.95	3.03	2.08
What language(s) do you speak? What language(s) do you wish you could speak?	2.41	1.83	1.80	2.68	2.97
If you had to move from Ohio, where would you like to live? What would you miss about Ohio?	2.37	1.93	1.32	2.92	2.26
What is your favorite home-cooked meal? What food is your guilty pleasure?	2.37	2.23	1.59	3.18	2.24
What was your first impression of OSU the first time you ever came here?	2.27	2.18	1.37	2.79	2.11
What is the most overrated TV show? What is your favorite?	2.15	2.55	1.54	2.87	1.89

*Note.* Dimension ratings for the 15 icebreaker questions selected for the full study, ordered from most to least intimate.

Table 2

*Bivariate Correlations of Icebreaker Question Dimensions*

Dimensions	1	2	3	4	5
1. Intimacy	-			.	.
2. Negativity	.32**	-			
3. Racially loaded	-.03	-.29*	-		
4. Warmth-eliciting	.89***	.20	-.09	-	
5. Competence-eliciting	.77***	.47***	.01	.57***	-

*Note.* Correlations of the five dimensions for the 15 icebreaker questions included in the full study.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$