



Reports

Attitude–goal correspondence and interracial interaction: Implications for executive function and impression formation

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HIGHLIGHTS

- We examined the consequences of emotion regulation during interracial interaction.
- Mismatch in implicit attitudes and expressive goals predicted cognitive depletion.
- Attitude–regulatory goal mismatch also predicted more negative interracial judgments.
- This pattern of effects was found for both high and low-prejudiced Whites.

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ABSTRACT

The present research examined whether mismatches in implicit racial attitudes and regulatory goals may contribute to well-documented cognitive depletion effects after interracial interactions. Consistent with a mismatch account of regulatory demands, both high and low implicitly-biased Whites showed evidence of cognitive depletion after interacting with a Black confederate, but as a function of oppositely-valenced emotion regulation prompts: Whereas high implicitly-biased Whites showed impaired subsequent performance on a Stroop task when instructed to suppress negative (but not positive) emotional expressions during an interracial interaction, low implicitly-biased Whites showed the opposite pattern. Additionally, attitude–regulatory goal mismatch was associated with more negative impressions of a Black confederate, independent of observers' impressions of the confederate. Implications of attitude–goal correspondence for intergroup interaction and the maintenance of intergroup bias are considered.

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Despite substantial improvements in racial attitudes in recent decades, interracial interactions remain challenging for both majority and minority group members in the United States (Bowman & Denson, 2011; Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002). Growing evidence suggests people may expend considerable effort to manage others' impressions during interracial exchanges (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010), and that these efforts can have detrimental consequences. For instance, Whites' attempts to avoid appearing racist by adopting a colorblind strategy in interracial interactions can backfire, fueling negative impressions by minority partners and reduced capacity for inhibitory control (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008). However, in their review of the interracial contact literature, Richeson and Shelton (2007) suggested that it may not be the goal to avoid bias, per se, but specific regulatory

goals (e.g., attentional vigilance, suppression) that individuals employ to navigate interracial interactions that may deplete cognitive resources (see also Plant & Devine, 2009; Vorauer, 2006). In the present research, we build on this work by investigating the impact of one such self-regulation strategy, *expressive suppression* – the inhibition of emotion-expressive behavior (Gross, 2008) – on Whites' cognitive functioning after an interracial interaction.

Models of executive control suggest that engagement in one task that requires self-regulation (e.g., inhibiting emotional expressions) can impair performance on subsequent tasks that utilize attentional resources (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). For instance, Richeson and Shelton (2003) found that Whites generally performed more poorly on the Stroop color-naming task – a measure of executive attentional capacity – after engaging in interracial compared to same-race interactions. Moreover, attempts to regulate negative affect may be especially taxing for Whites with negative implicit racial attitudes. Whites higher in implicit bias (assessed by the Implicit Association Test, IAT; Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003) work harder to

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control their nonverbal behavior during interracial interactions and show greater Stroop impairment after an interracial interaction compared to those lower in implicit bias (Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005; see also Richeson et al., 2003).

In the present research we focused on one particular type of self-regulation, the active inhibition of emotion cues, that may be especially relevant to interracial interaction. In research on expressive suppression by Gross and colleagues (see Gross, 2008, for a review), participants are asked to avoid showing emotions while observing emotionally-evocative stimuli or while engaging in conversation. Previous work on interracial interaction suggests that mismatches in what individuals are feeling and what they are attempting to express may be an important contributor to Whites' regulatory demands in these exchanges (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Hebl & Dovidio, 2005; Mendes & Koslov, 2013). Specifically, when situational constraints clearly define appropriate behavior, Whites may harbor negative implicit racial attitudes and experience negative affect in interracial interactions (e.g., anxiety, aversion; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Plant & Devine, 2003) but behave in ways to avoid appearing prejudiced (e.g., inhibit negative emotional expressions). These conflicting responses may exact cognitive and social costs. Generally, the attempted control of emotional expressions is a particularly taxing form of self-regulation (Gross, 2008; Richards & Gross, 2000), resulting in impaired cognitive functioning (e.g., on a Stroop task) and reduced neural activity in systems implicated in self-control (Inzlicht & Gutsell, 2007), as well as reduced feelings of rapport within social interactions (Butler et al., 2003).

Whereas past work has largely focused on the regulatory demands of high implicitly-biased individuals (Richeson & Shelton, 2007), the present research investigated the consequences of emotion regulation as a function of both the valence of the emotional expression (i.e., positive or negative) participants are asked to suppress and their level of implicit racial bias. Specifically, we reasoned that *discrepancies* in implicit racial attitudes and emotion regulation goals (attitude–goal mismatch) may contribute to documented deficits in executive function after interracial interactions by initiating more effortful self-regulation. From this perspective, we hypothesized that even *low* implicitly biased Whites might show deficits in cognitive functioning after an interracial interaction to the extent their regulatory goal conflicts with their more positive implicit racial attitudes (i.e., when attempting to suppress positive expressions). Indeed, whereas research on emotion regulation has typically examined cognitive consequences of suppressing *negative* emotion, suppressing positive emotion may, in some contexts, be just as taxing (Kim & Hamann, 2007). Within interracial interactions, Mendes and Koslov (2013) found that Whites tend to smile and laugh more with Black compared to White partners. Bergsieker et al. (2010) similarly found that Whites showed more ingratiation behaviors, such as smiling, in interracial compared to same-race interactions. Thus, we posited that efforts to suppress positive expressions in interracial interactions may also be cognitively demanding, and particularly for Whites with more egalitarian implicit attitudes.

Richeson and Shelton (2003) and Richeson and Trawalter (2005) have documented systematic effects of Whites' implicit, but not explicit, racial attitudes on Stroop performance after interracial interaction, consistent with relatively high implicitly biased Whites' greater efforts to appear nonprejudiced (see also Dovidio, Kawakami, et al., 2002). Thus, in the present research we focused on correspondence between Whites' *implicit* attitudes and emotion regulation goal. In the present study, White participants, whose levels of implicit bias were assessed in an ostensibly separate study, interacted with a Black partner. Prior to the interaction, participants were administered an expressive suppression procedure adapted from prior studies on emotion regulation (Butler et al., 2003; Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007; Gross, 1998) in which they were instructed to either avoid expressing negative emotion (negative emotion suppression goal) or avoid expressing positive emotion (positive emotion suppression goal) during the interaction, or received no suppression instructions (control). Cognitive functioning

was assessed with a standard measure of inhibitory control, Stroop interference, used in prior research on executive functioning in interracial interaction (e.g., Richeson & Trawalter, 2005), as well as participants' self-reported difficulty complying with the suppression instructions.

We hypothesized that White participants' cognitive functioning would be impaired under conditions of a *mismatch* in implicit racial attitudes and regulatory goal when interacting with a Black partner. Because of their negative affective orientations toward Blacks (Amodio et al., 2003; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004), we expected that White participants relatively high on implicit bias would show greater cognitive impairment when attempting to suppress negative compared to positive emotional expressions during an interracial interaction. In contrast, because White individuals lower in implicit racial bias display more positive affect in interracial interactions, including smiling and spontaneously initiating more eye-contact (Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997; McConnell & Leibold, 2001), we hypothesized that suppressing positive expressions would be particularly effortful for these individuals, and that they would show greater cognitive depletion when instructed to suppress positive (versus negative) expressions as a consequence.

Finally, given the importance of impression management in intergroup interaction (Bergsieker et al., 2010), we included an additional outcome measure — participants' impressions of the Black confederate. Generally, *processing fluency*, the subjective ease of a given cognitive task, has been shown to affect judgments across a diverse array of instantiations. For example, stocks with easy-to-pronounce names are preferred to those with more disfluent names (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2006) and authors of easy-to-read text are perceived as more intelligent than those of hard-to-read text (Oppenheimer, 2006). Whereas processing ease tends to promote liking, disfluent processing leads to more negative evaluations and lower trust (see Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009, for a review). To the extent implicit attitude–regulatory goal mismatch reflects a more effortful form of self-regulation, it might also thus prompt more negative impressions of an interaction partner.

Within the intergroup interaction domain, there is some evidence to suggest that regulatory effort may negatively impact impressions. Shelton, Richeson, and Salvatore (2005), for instance, found that racial minority participants who anticipated racial prejudice showed greater behavioral engagement (positive expressiveness) during an interracial interaction but reported liking their White partner less, compared to those who had no such prejudice expectation. Similarly, Frible, Blackstone, and Scherbaum (1990) found that in interactions with stigmatized (Black or obese) partners, nonstigmatized individuals engaged in positive compensatory behaviors (talking, smiling) but simultaneously reported liking their partner *less* than nonstigmatized partners. Frible et al. suggested that perhaps nonstigmatized participants did not like their stigmatized partner as much because they felt that they were doing most of the work of making the interaction run smoothly. Consistent with these prior findings (Frible et al., 1990; Shelton et al., 2005) and research on fluency more generally, we hypothesized that implicit attitude–regulatory goal mismatch would also predict more negative impressions of a Black interaction partner.

Method

Participants

Eighty-four self-identified White introductory psychology students (60% female) participated in exchange for partial course credit.

Procedure

Participants were informed that they would engage in a brief “get-to-know-you” conversation with another participant and were

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