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Authors

Mosley, Ariel J
Biernat, Monica
Adams, Glenn

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Sociocultural engagement in a colorblind racism framework moderates perceptions of cultural appropriation[☆]

Ariel J. Mosley^{a,*}, Monica Biernat^b, Glenn Adams^b

^a University of California Davis, United States of America

^b The University of Kansas, United States of America

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ABSTRACT

Cultural appropriation refers to an action whereby an individual makes use of, imitates, or takes possession of cultural products of an outgroup or source community. Compared to Black Americans, many White Americans do not differentiate between high (i.e., White) and low (i.e., Black) status actors when making judgments of cultural appropriation (Mosley & Biernat, 2021). The goal of the current research is to assess why some individuals exhibit a lack of recognition of structural and historical racism when making judgments of cultural appropriation. To answer this question, we draw on theoretical work on colorblind racism, a framework of racial ideologies that emphasize that group differences should be ignored, and that people should be treated as individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Three experiments investigate the *colorblind - racism hypothesis*: perceivers who are highly invested in a colorblind racism ideology—assessed along three dimensions including racial group identification, historical knowledge of racism, and endorsement of assimilationist ideologies—will see equal levels of appropriation in the actions of White and Black perpetrators. In contrast, perceivers low in a colorblind ideology will see White (versus Black) actors as more culturally appropriative. We see for evidence for this hypothesis among White (Studies 1–2) and Black (Study 3) perceivers. These findings suggest that endorsement in a colorblind ideology can facilitate ignorance of power differences between groups when perceiving cultural appropriation.

What kinds of actions constitute “cultural appropriation?” The term appropriation is based on the Latin word *proprium*, which means “property,” or “selfhood.” It refers to the use, imitation, or ownership of a cultural product associated with a group with whom one does not belong/identify (Rogers, 2006; Shugart, 1997; Ziff & Rao, 1997). One recent high-profile example is the cookbook and social media brand “Thug Kitchen,” created by White American entrepreneurs Matt Holloway and Michelle Davis, which incorporate African American Vernacular English and reference rap lyrics (Starostinetskaya, 2020). Some argue that such actions constitute appropriation of Black culture (Terry, 2014), while others characterize them as harmless (Green, 2015). Still others have argued that the use of cultural products of the dominant group by members of minoritized groups also falls under the category of cultural appropriation. When accused of engaging in cultural appropriation for his use of dreadlock extensions during a fashion show, White fashion designer Marc Jacobs responded that Black women straightening their hair constitutes cultural appropriation of “White culture” (Safronova, 2016; Smith, 2016). These cases point to ambiguity and

disagreement in how people construe acts of cultural appropriation, and to the importance of studying appropriation perceptions from a social psychological perspective.

The goal of the present research is to explore whether perceptions of cultural appropriation can be understood with reference to investment in cultural forms of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). We do not measure colorblind ideology directly (see Whitley, Luttrell, & Schultz, 2022 for a discussion of measurement issues). Rather, we focus on variables we expect to predict a pattern of colorblind appropriation judgments: Judgments that do not recognize the power dynamics that make the White use of Black cultural products more problematic than Black use of White cultural products. These variables include (White) racial identification, ignorance of history, and assimilationist racial ideologies.

1. Categorization and perception of cultural appropriation

Rogers (2006) argues that cultural appropriation should not be

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* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of California Davis, 135 Young Hall, Davis, CA 95377, United States of America.

E-mail address: ajmosley@ucdavis.edu (A.J. Mosley).

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defined by the *intent* of the actor, or even by the *magnitude* of harm. Rather, Rogers (2006) categorizes acts of cultural appropriation by the power differential between the actor and the source community, including acts of *cultural exploitation* (dominant group actors taking from lower power source communities) and *cultural dominance* (low power group actors assimilating to culturally dominant/mainstream norms). Racial power differentials imbue these forms with different meanings; seeing these actions as equivalent erases this important difference.

Whereas the meaning of “Black culture” may be clear, the notion of “White culture”—and the extent to which minoritized individuals are perceived as “appropriating it”—may seem odd given the construction of Whiteness as normative and universal (Feagin, 2020; Devos & Banaji, 2005; Phillips & Lowery, 2018). Nevertheless, particular cultural products are ascribed to White people in general (Bonilla-Silva, 2006B; Mills, 1997), including Anglicized names (e.g., “Alex” “Mark”); Zhao & Biernat, 2017, 2018, 2019; Milkman, Akinola, & Chugh, 2012), blonde hair (McMillan Cottom, 2023), certain foods (e.g., kale salad, grilled salmon, banana toast; Mosley & Biernat, 2021), academic achievement (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Fryer Jr & Torelli, 2010), professionalism (McCluney, Durkee, Smith II, Robotham, & Lee, 2021), genres of music (e.g., country, Southern rock, heavy metal; Hubbs, 2014; Wooten, 1995), square dancing (Fishkin, 1995; Patch, 2016), and even religious iconography (e.g., “White Jesus,” Howard & Sommers, 2015, 2017, 2019). Some perceivers may place a psychological boundary around mainstream culture as *exclusive* to dominant group members, denying the norms, history, and power differentials that require minoritized assimilation to the mainstream in order to cope with racial oppression (Phillips, Adams, & Salter, 2015; Versey, Cogburn, Wilkins, & Joseph, 2019) and successfully navigate “White” spaces (Berry, 1997; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007; Dovidio, Gaertner, Shnabel, Saguy, & Johnson, 2009; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2015; Kunst, Dovidio, & Dotsch, 2018; Hehman, Gaertner, & Dovidio, Mania, 2012; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Wenzel, Mummendey, & Waldzus, 2008, Wolsko, Park and Judd, 2006; Verkuyten, 2011).

The perception and experience of cultural appropriation is likely to differ for members of high-status groups (e.g., White Americans) and low-status groups (e.g., Black Americans¹), who occupy different sociopolitical positions. Culturally appropriative actions can be viewed as perpetuating a historical context of Western colonialism, which includes oppressive treatment, extraction of resources and physical labor, and forced imposition of dominant values, norms, and beliefs (Buescher & Ono, 1996; Riley & Carpenter, 2015). Groups subjected to a history of colonialism, slavery, and erasure through forced assimilation may be more readily able to identify cultural appropriation in the actions of dominant group members taking from minority cultures.

In contrast, those benefiting from a history of colonialism and systemic racial privilege may downplay the negative implications of this history of oppression (Adams et al., 2006), and feel that ingroup members are justified in taking or claiming outgroup cultural products (Buescher & Ono, 1996). As a result, they may be more likely to use a definition of cultural appropriation that is removed and abstracted from social and historical contexts.

Much research has shown that White Americans may deny the existence of societal discrimination and downplay the importance of race in order to mitigate threats to ingroup identity and avoid associated negative evaluative emotions such as collective guilt (Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005; Chow, Lowery, & Knowles, 2008; Knowles, Lowery, Chow and Unzueta, 2014; Marshburn & Knowles, 2018,

¹ Most empirical research on racism has focused on Black-White relations in the US (Sears, Citrin, & Van Laar, 1995), and we do the same. Oppression against a variety of minoritized racial groups may share themes (see Cortland et al. 2019), but it will be important to consider the distinctive histories of other minoritized groups to gain a deeper understanding of how cultural appropriation is experienced and perceived.

Shelton, Richeson, & Salvatore, 2005). And a large research literature indicates that Black Americans are more likely to perceive racism than White Americans (Adams, Fryberg, Garcia, & Delgado-Torres, 2006; Bonam, Nair Das, Coleman, & Salter, 2019; Carter & Murphy, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2014; Public Religion Research Institute, 2012; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Several factors likely contribute to these race-based perceptual discrepancies, including different comparison standards (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Eibach & Purdie-Vaughns, 2011), different group-based motivations (Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Shelton et al., 2005; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008), different knowledge of historical racism (Adams, Fryberg, et al., 2006; Bonam et al., 2019; Nelson, Adams, & Salter, 2013), and different lay theories regarding what “counts” as racism (Dovidio, Kawakami, Johnson, Johnson, & Howard, 1997; Sommers & Norton, 2006).

Similarly, Black and White perceivers tend to disagree in their perceptions of cultural appropriation. In a series of studies, Mosley & Biernat (2021) found that Black participants were generally more likely than White participants to “see” cultural appropriation in the actions of White actors engaged with Black culture. Additionally, Black participants saw more appropriation in the actions of White users of Black culture (e.g., a White-owned company selling dreadlocks; a White actor playing a Black character) than Black users of White culture (e.g., a Black-owned company selling blonde weave extensions; a Black actor playing a White character). White participants, however, generally did not differentiate between White and Black perpetrators in judging cultural appropriation.

We suggest that this denial of the relevance of racist history and racial power differentials in perceptions of culturally appropriative actions (i.e., seeing Black people’s use of White cultural products as identical to White people’s use of Black cultural products) may be understood through the lens of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Correlates of colorblindness should therefore moderate perceptions, such that those *less colorblind* should be more likely to recognize differences between Black and White use of outgroup cultural products. Past research has focused on distinctiveness threat as a factor contributing to perceiver race differences in perceptions (Mosley & Biernat, 2021). In this paper, we focus on colorblind-relevant moderators of appropriation judgments in both Black and White perceivers.

2. The colorblind hypothesis of cultural appropriation perceptions

Colorblind racism refers to a racial ideology that produces “raceless” explanations for all sorts of race-related affairs” (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, p. 1364). Central to colorblind racism is an abstract, decontextualized framing that minimizes racism, and discourse that disguises and denies racism or diverts attention away from race (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Bonilla-Silva, 2013). Dominant group members (White Americans) are more likely than minoritized group members (Black Americans) to subscribe to colorblind ideologies and prefer colorblind policies. By avoiding issues of race, White Americans also minimize concerns about appearing racist (Hehman et al., 2011; Jones & Dovidio, 2018; Rodriguez, 2006).

Applied to the case of cultural appropriation, colorblind ideology allows perceivers to ignore the history of racial oppression and instead promote the perception that all acts of outgroup cultural use carry the same meaning. By asserting essential sameness between racial groups, perceivers can ignore the fact that unequal societal locations and cultural histories meaningfully differentiate the actions of White and Black actors using outgroup cultural products.

In a study of the role of colorblind ideologies in White American appropriation of hip-hop music (a cultural form associated with Black culture); Rodriguez (2006) conversed with White teenagers attending hip-hop concerts. Most cited the irrelevance of race in their decision to engage in hip-hop spaces. For example, one participant said, “I don’t think music is ... what’s regarded as Black music or White music, it doesn’t really matter because it’s still music and it still exists not only for a certain

group of people, but also for itself ... a White person has just as much of a right to discover hip-hop and appreciate it as a Black person does" (p. 661). Colorblind ideologies facilitate the portrayal of cultural elements as culture- and race-neutral, thereby setting the stage for guiltless use of outgroup cultural products by dominant group members.

In the present research, we hypothesize that this race-neutral pattern of judgment will be associated with greater investment in the colorblind racism framework, manifested in high levels of White racial identification, low levels of Black racial identification, high levels of Black assimilationist racial ideologies (in Black perceivers), and low levels of historical knowledge of racism (in all perceivers). A denial of difference among those highly invested in colorblind racism could even contribute to a "reverse appropriation" effect, seeing Black actors as more appropriate than White actors (cf., Norton & Sommers, 2011). Conversely, we hypothesize that the racism-conscious pattern observed among Black perceivers in Mosley & Biernat (2021)—seeing more appropriation in White actors' use of Black cultural products—will be strongest among perceivers with less investment in colorblind racism (i.e., low levels of White racial identification, high levels of Black racial identification, high levels of historical knowledge of racism, and low endorsement of Black assimilationist racial ideology).

2.1. Racial identification as colorblindness

Group identification reflects the extent to which the self is categorized as a group member (versus an individual), and in many measures of group identification, the extent to which one values and esteems the group identity (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel, Billing, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, 1982). High group identification predicts more emotional investment in and concern with the welfare of the group (Barreto & Ellemers, 2000), and negative responses to ingroup identity threats (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999).

One form of investment in colorblind racism among White Americans is strong identification with being White. It may seem ironic that highly identifying as White (attaching oneself to a distinct racial group) is linked to colorblind thinking. But as Bonilla-Silva (2013) has discussed, colorblind ideology is essentially about maintaining the racial status quo; i.e., maintaining White dominance. Therefore, colorblind framing is likely to be particularly strong in White Americans who highly identify with their racial group.

Denying the difference between cultural exploitation (White people's use of Black cultural products) and cultural dominance (Black people's use of White cultural products) is emblematic of colorblind framing; we predict that this pattern should be particularly likely in White perceivers who highly identify with being White. In contrast, for Black Americans, high racial identification should increase the likelihood of seeing White people's use of Black cultural products as more appropriate than Black people's use of White cultural products. Black Americans who are strongly identified with their racial group may also experience more distinctiveness threat when exposed to White perpetrators taking from Black culture, leading to heightened perceptions of cultural encroachment (Mosley & Biernat, 2021). However, Black Americans low in racial identification, who are more dissociated from their racial identity, may be more likely to adopt values and beliefs of the mainstream group identity (Branscombe, Ellemers, et al., 1999; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), including colorblind thinking and an understanding of cultural appropriation that is abstracted from sociopolitical context.

2.2. Historical knowledge of racism

Another manifestation of engagement with colorblind racism is *lack of knowledge* about historical acts of injustice. White Americans have been described as engaging in the use of epistemologies of ignorance; the "cultural-psychological tools that afford the denial of and inaction about injustice" (Nelson et al., 2013; p. 213; see also Adams & Markus, 2004;

Mills, 1997). One frame of colorblind ideology is minimization of racism, something that can be accomplished via ignorance (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). Nelson et al. (2013) found that White perceivers had less knowledge of past incidents of racism (computed in signal detection terms as the ability to distinguish between actual and fake historical events) than Black perceivers, and this difference accounted for race differences in perceptions of racism. Bonam et al. (2019) replicated these findings and found that an intervention to increase awareness of racial history led White participants to perceive greater levels of racism in current events (cf., Strickhouser, Zell, & Harris, 2019).

Knowledge of historical racism is likely to matter for perceptions of cultural appropriation as well. We predict that knowledge should moderate perceptions of appropriation in both Black and White perceivers, with those higher in knowledge more likely to see White actors' use of Black cultural products as more appropriate than Black actors' use of White cultural products. The colorblind view, on the other hand, should be more likely in those perceivers—both Black and White—low in knowledge of the history of racial oppression.

2.3. Black racial ideologies

Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, and Chavous (1998) note that two Black individuals may be identified with their group to the same extent, but have different racial ideologies about what it means to be a member of that group. Four racial ideologies outlined in Sellers et al. (1998) Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MMPI) refer to personal philosophies about ways that Black Americans should live in and interact with society: *nationalist ideology*, *oppressed minority ideology*, *assimilationist ideology*, and *humanist ideology*. Two of these ideologies emphasize ethnic minority status identity (nationalism and oppressed minority), and two de-emphasize ethnic minority status identity (assimilation and humanism).

Nationalist ideology focuses on the uniqueness of the experience of being Black, and suggests that Black Americans should have full autonomy over their own destiny without influence from other groups; it develops out of an appreciation of Black culture and resistance to Blacks' marginalized status. *Oppressed minority ideology* emphasizes the similarities of the experiences of oppression between African Americans and other stigmatized social groups. *Assimilationist ideology* highlights the need for Black people to integrate within the mainstream system; to be (like White) Americans, and *humanist ideology* emphasizes the similarities of the experiences of Black Americans and all humans.

These ideologies have been tied to perceptions of discrimination. Black Americans who endorse nationalist and oppressed minority ideologies are more likely to see racism as part of the African American experience, and as a result are more likely to point to race as the cause of negative personal treatment (Sellers, Morgan, & Brown, 2001). Endorsement of a nationalist racial ideology positively predicts reports of experiencing discrimination, whereas endorsement of humanistic ideology negatively does so (Sellers & Shelton, 2003). Black Americans who highly endorse assimilationist ideologies are less likely to report experiencing racial discrimination on measures of daily life experiences with racism (Banks & Kohn-Wood, 2007).

Assimilationist ideology in particular can be linked to the colorblind racism framework in that it promotes a false consciousness that maintains disadvantage, denies the existence of racism, justifies minority groups' oppressed positions, and prevents collective action to produce systemic change (see Campon & Carter, 2015; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Phillips et al., 2015; Rangel, 2014; Versey et al., 2019). Neville, Coleman, Falconer, & Holmes (2005) found that to the extent Black Americans adopted colorblind racial beliefs, they were more likely to blame their ingroup for their own disadvantage, subscribe to hierarchical beliefs, and endorse racist stereotypes about Black people.

Extending these findings to the context of perceiving cultural appropriation, colorblindness (and assimilationism in particular) should predict Black perceivers' denial of difference in the meaning of White

and Black outgroup cultural product use. We predict that to the extent Black perceivers endorse assimilationist (and perhaps humanist) identity ideologies, they should be *less likely* to differentiate between the actions of White and Black users of outgroup cultural products (i.e., show a colorblind pattern of perception). In contrast, to the extent Black perceivers endorse nationalist and oppressed minority ideologies, they will view White perpetrators as more appropriative than Black perpetrators.

3. Overview of studies

The primary goal of this research is to extend findings regarding perceiver race differences in perceptions of cultural appropriation by examining the extent to which these differences are linked to and moderated by investment in a colorblind racism framework. We operationalize colorblind investment as (a) high White racial identification and low Black racial identification, (b) low historical knowledge of racism, and (c) high endorsement of Black racial ideologies that de-emphasize minority identity (e.g., assimilationism).

In the studies reported here, perceivers are asked to judge the extent to which scenarios depicting White actors using Black cultural products, or Black actors using White cultural products, can be characterized as cultural appropriation. In Studies 1 and 2, we focus only on racial identification and examine whether White Americans' racial identification moderates their appraisals of White and Black actors' use of outgroup cultural products. In Study 3, we assess the extent to which White and Black Americans' racial identification as well as their knowledge of historical injustice influences their appropriation perceptions. In Study 3, we also assess whether Black racial ideologies (e.g., *nationalist, oppressed minority, assimilationist, and humanist ideologies*) moderate Black Americans' perceptions of cultural appropriation.

We predict that racial identification will operate differently for White and Black participants, with high racial identity in White Americans predicting denial of difference between the actions of Black and White users of outgroup cultural products (colorblindness), and high racial identity in Black Americans predicting accentuation of the White-Black perpetrator difference. However, historical knowledge of racism should have the same effect on both Black and White perceivers, enhancing perceived difference in cultural appropriation perceptions of White users of Black cultural products and Black users of White cultural products. The racial ideologies hypothesis is only relevant to Black participants (Study 3). We examine the impact of all four ideologies, with the specific expectation that ideologies denying the importance of ethnic minority identity will facilitate colorblind perceptions of cultural appropriation.

4. Study 1

In Study 1, we tested the colorblind racism hypothesis among White participants whom we randomly assigned to consider scenarios that depicted either White actors engaged with Black cultural products or Black actors engaged with White cultural products. Participants judged the extent to which each scenario was culturally appropriative and justifiable. Investment in colorblind racism in this study was operationalized as White racial identification, which was measured at the beginning of the study. We predicted that the tendency to see White actors as more appropriative than Black actors would be greater among participants who are low rather than high in racial identification.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants

An a priori power analysis using G*Power software indicated a sample size of $n = 117$ to detect a medium interaction effect of race of perpetrator condition X moderator variable on appropriation perceptions ($f^2 = 0.136$), with $\alpha = 0.05$ and 95% power in a multiple regression

model with Perpetrator Race ($-1 = White$ perpetrators, $1 = Black$ perpetrators), mean-centered Racial Identification, and their interaction as predictors of cultural appropriation perceptions. Nevertheless, concerns about properly powering tests of statistical interactions (Giner-Sorolla, 2018) led us to recruit a total of 160 adult participants living in the United States via Amazon's Mechanical Turk.

We specifically targeted White American participants in the recruitment materials. To verify race, we used an honesty prompt at the end of the study that promised compensation even if participants did not identify as White; this led to five exclusions. We also excluded data from two participants who did not follow instructions, and from ten with duplicate IP addresses. This left a final analytic sample of 143. A sensitivity power analysis in G*Power indicated that a sample of 143 participants would be sufficient to detect a minimum effect size of $f^2 (1141) = 0.236$ or greater ($\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.80). These participants ranged in age from 19 to 73 years ($M = 35.35$, $SD = 10.77$); 73 (51.4%) identified as female, 69 (48.6%) identified as male, and one participant (0.7%) did not specify gender. The university Institutional Review Board approved all studies. In each study, we report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions.

4.1.2. Design and procedures

Participants read that the purpose of the study was to examine how people think about different social and cultural situations. They read a standard definition of cultural appropriation: "*Cultural appropriation refers to taking on elements of a culture other than one's own. This can involve taking or using intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artifacts from someone else's culture without permission.*" Participants read eight scenarios, presented in a counterbalanced order, that described situations where a Black or White actor used a cultural product from a White or Black outgroup (Mosley & Biernat, 2021). For each scenario, participants indicated perceptions of cultural appropriation and perceived justifiability. After exposure to the entire set of scenarios, we also assessed overall perception of racism.

4.1.3. Perpetrator race manipulation

Participants assigned at random to the *Black perpetrators* condition read 8 scenarios that described Black/African-American actors appropriating elements of White/Euro-American culture (e.g., a Black-owned company selling blonde weave hair extensions). Participants assigned at random to the *White perpetrator* condition read 8 scenarios that described White/Euro-American actors appropriating elements of Black/African-American culture (e.g., a White-owned company selling dreadlock hair extensions). These scenarios (also used in Mosley & Biernat, 2021) reflected real life exemplars of cultural appropriation across a number of domains (literature, music, movies, hairstyle, theatrical makeup, costume, art, and culture parties), and were matched as closely as possible between the Black and White perpetrator condition in content and word count. The full set of scenarios appears in the online supplement.

4.1.4. Dependent measures

After reading each scenario, participants answered a series of questions using $1 = Strongly Disagree$ to $7 = Strongly Agree$ response scales. To assess *perceived cultural appropriation*, participants completed five items from Mosley & Biernat (2021): "This person is appropriating Black/White culture," "This person is copying Black/White culture," "This person is taking from Black/White culture," "This person is displaying an element of culture that is not their own," and "This person is adopting elements of culture that is not their own." Scale reliability for each scenario ranged from 0.89 to 0.97 (overall index: $\alpha = 0.93$).

To assess *perceived justifiability* of the actor, participants completed 3 items: "To what extent do you think that what this person/company did was justified," "To what extent do you think that what this person/company did was acceptable?" and "To what extent do you think that what this person/company did was reasonable?" (Miron, Branscombe, &

Biernat, 2010; α range from 0.90 to 0.97, α for overall index = 0.94).

4.1.5. White racial identification

Immediately after consenting but prior to their exposure to other materials, participants also completed a four-item measure of White racial identification: “I often think about the fact that I am White American,” “In general, being White American is an important part of my self-image,” “I feel good about being White American,” and “In general, I am glad to be White American” (Miron et al., 2010; $\alpha = 0.83$). Participants then answered demographic questions before being provided more detail about the study.²

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Perceptions of cultural appropriation

To test whether White racial identification moderated the relationship between Perpetrator Race and perceptions of appropriation, we conducted multiple regression analyses with Perpetrator Race ($-1 =$ White perpetrators, $1 =$ Black perpetrators), mean-centered Racial Identification ($M = 4.66$; $SD = 1.39$), and their interaction as predictors of cultural appropriation perceptions. We report analyses of each scenario in the online supplement; here we focus on the index of perceived appropriation averaged across the 8 scenarios, $\alpha = 0.89$.³

The effect of Perpetrator Race was significant; at mean levels of identification, participants perceived less cultural appropriation in the actions of Black perpetrators than White perpetrators ($b = -0.38$, 95%CI $[-0.57, -0.19]$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(139) = -3.88$, $p < .001$). The effect of White Racial Identification was also significant (at the mean, or non-existent level of perpetrator race = 0, $b = 0.40$, 95%CI $[0.26, 0.54]$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(139) = 5.66$, $p < .001$), as was the hypothesized interaction between Perpetrator Race and White Racial Identification ($b = 0.20$, 95%CI $[0.05, 0.34]$, $SE = 0.07$, $t(139) = 2.74$, $p = .007$; see Fig. 1).

Consistent with the primary hypothesis, the Johnson-Neyman test indicated that the Perpetrator Race effect—that is, the tendency to see White perpetrators as more appropriative than Black perpetrators—was significant at low levels of identification, up to the 67.83 percentile (0.81 on the mean centered identification index). Those higher in racial identification did not differ in perceptions of appropriation as a function of perpetrator race. Further probing revealed that White racial identification positively predicted appropriation perceptions both when the perpetrator was Black ($b = 0.60$, 95%CI $[0.39, 0.81]$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(139) = 5.66$, $p < .001$) and (to a lesser extent) when the perpetrator was

² After rating all scenarios, participants also judged the extent to which the entire set of scenarios reflected “racism.” Analysis of this summary racism judgment (in Studies 1 and 2) is included in the supplement. As reported there, racism perceptions produced similar pattern to appropriation perceptions in terms of the predicted colorblind racism moderation effect. However, appropriation and racism perceptions can be empirically distinguished (Mosley & Biernat, 2021), and our interest is in the more rarely studied appropriation perceptions (measured more carefully, with multiple items across multiple scenarios in Studies 1 and 2).

³ We focus on the average index because we consider the scenarios as “items” in our general measure of appropriation. We expected the eight scenarios might differ in the extent to which they were perceived as appropriative (see Mosley & Biernat, 2021), but our hypothesis about the moderating role of identification did not differ by scenario, and our interest is not in differences across scenarios. As can be seen in the supplement, the Perpetrator Race X White Racial Identification interaction was significant ($ps < 0.04$) for 4 of the 8 individual scenarios, and $p = .0537$ for a fifth scenario. A MANOVA also indicated a significant omnibus interaction, $F(8,131) = 2.72$, $p = .0083$. Treating scenarios as repeated measures did reveal indicate significant scenario effects in Studies 1 and 3, but not in Study 2. Only in Study 1 was the key predicted interaction moderated by scenario, $p = .0373$, simply reflecting that some individual scenarios produced the predicted effect and others did not. In the two subsequent studies, no such moderation was indicated in the repeated measures approach (all $ps > 0.16$).

White ($b = 0.21$, 95%CI $[0.02, 0.81]$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(139) = 2.18$, $p = .031$, $[0.02, 0.81]$).

4.2.2. Perceived justifiability

We used the same analytic approach to test whether White Racial Identification moderated the effect of Perpetrator Race on perceived justifiability. We report analyses of each scenario in the online supplement; here we focus on the index of perceived justifiability averaged across the 8 scenarios.

The effect of Perpetrator Race was significant; at mean levels of identification, participants perceived actions as more justifiable in the case of Black perpetrators than White perpetrators ($b = 0.44$, 95%CI $[0.27, 0.61]$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(139) = 5.06$, $p < .001$). The effect of White Racial Identification was also significant ($b = 0.22$, 95%CI $[0.09, 0.34]$, $SE = 0.06$, $t(139) = 3.44$, $p < .001$), qualified by the hypothesized interaction with perpetrator race ($b = -0.13$, 95%CI $[-0.25, 0.00]$, $SE = 0.06$, $t(139) = -2.01$, $p = .047$; see Fig. 2).

Justifiability judgments mirror the perceived appropriation findings. The Johnson-Neyman test indicated that the Perpetrator Race effect—that is, the tendency to see White perpetrators as less justified than Black perpetrators—was significant at low-moderate levels of identification, up to the 81.81 percentile (value 1.49 on the mean centered identification index); those higher in White racial identification did not differ in perceptions of justifiability as a function of perpetrator race. Further probing revealed that White racial identification positively predicted justifiability in the case of a White perpetrator using Black products ($b = 0.34$, 95%CI $[0.18, 0.51]$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(139) = 4.07$, $p < .001$), but not in the case of a Black perpetrator using White products ($b = 0.09$, 95%CI $[-0.10, 0.28]$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(139) = 0.96$, $p = .337$).

4.3. Discussion

This first study provided initial evidence of the moderating impact of investment in colorblind racism (operationalized via White racial identification) on White perceiver appraisals of cultural appropriation and judgments of justifiability. Consistent with predictions, those high in White racial identification tended to interpret racially inflected events without reference to racial power, seeing White and Black perpetrators as equally appropriative and justified in their actions. Among White participants who reported low levels of White racial identity, we observed patterns of race-conscious perception similar to those of Black participants in previous research (see Mosley & Biernat, 2021); White actors using Black products were judged more appropriative and less justified than Black actors using White products.

Though less central to our predictions, we also examined effects of racial identification within each perpetrator race. Racial identification predicted increased perception that Black actors were culturally appropriative (and to a lesser extent, that White actors were as well). White racial identification also predicted increased perception that White, but not Black actors were justified in their actions. That is, high racial identification primarily increased the extent to which Black actors using White cultural products were viewed as appropriative but increased the perceived justifiability of White actors using Black cultural products. Overall, the results suggest that racial identification—a marker of engagement with colorblind racism—predicts colorblind perceptions of cultural appropriation.

5. Study 2

In Study 2, we sought to replicate Study 1 effects using a smaller set of scenarios, and with measurement of White racial identification at the end of the study. We were concerned that placing this measure early in Study 1 may have sensitized participants to the race-relevance of the research and therefore polarized reactions to the scenarios.

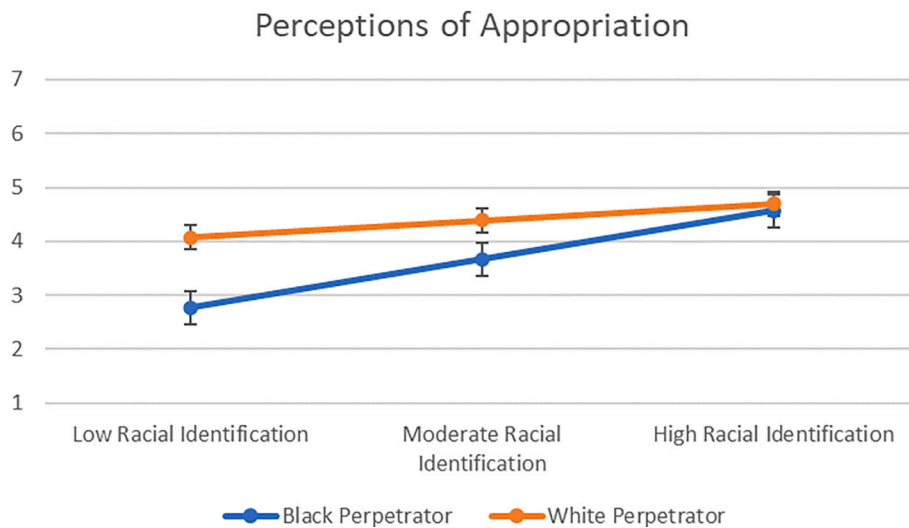


Fig. 1. White participants' perceptions of cultural appropriation as a function of Perpetrator Race and White Racial Identification, Study 1. Note: Error bars represent standard errors.

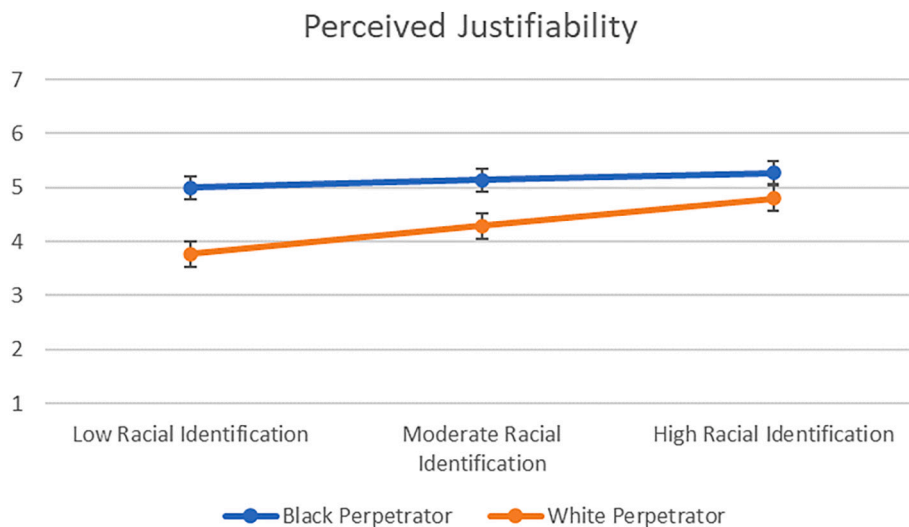


Fig. 2. White participants' perceptions of justifiability of actions as a function of Perpetrator Race and White Racial Identification, Study 1. Note: Error bars represent standard errors.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants

The same power analysis applied to Study 2, and again we sought a larger than recommended sample given that the key prediction was a statistical interaction. A total of 169 White adults living in the United States were recruited via [MTurk.com](https://www.mturk.com). Twelve participants who admitted they were not White in the honesty prompt (see Study 1) were excluded from analysis; additionally, one participant was excluded for not following instructions, 8 participants were removed for duplicate IP addresses address, and one did not provide responses to the racial identification measure, resulting in a final analytic sample of 147. A sensitivity power analysis in G*Power indicated that a sample of 147 participants would be sufficient to detect a minimum effect size of f^2 (1141) = 0.233 or greater ($\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.80). These participants ranged in ages from 18 to 61 years ($M = 31.68$, $SD = 9.91$), 82 were (55.4%) female, 65 (43.9%) were male, and one participant (0.7%) did not specify gender.

5.1.2. Design and procedures

This study adopted the same two condition (Race of Perpetrator: White American vs. Black American) between-subjects design as in Study 1, with White racial identification (measured at the end of the study) as a moderator. Participants considered *four* possible cases of cultural appropriation (hair, literature, characters in movies, and art). They made judgments of *perceptions of appropriation* and *justification* for each case using the same measures as in Study 1. However, in the current study, only perceptions of appropriation were measured after each scenario; *justifiability* of the actions was measured once, after exposure to all four scenarios. The procedures and manipulations were the same as in Study 1, with scenarios presented in a counterbalanced order.

5.1.3. Dependent measures

After reading each scenario, participants indicated their agreement (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*) with the same measure of *perceived cultural appropriation* as in Study 1. Reliability was assessed for each of the scenarios (α s ranged from 0.89 to 0.94, average $\alpha = 0.92$). After judging all 4 scenarios, to assess *perceived justifiability* of the actors in the scenarios, participants completed the following two items: "To

what extent do you think that the people in the scenarios that you read were justified in their behavior? (1 = *Not at all justified* to 7 = *Very justified*) and “To what extent do you think that the people in the scenarios that you read were acceptable in their behavior?” (1 = *Not at all acceptable* to 7 = *Very acceptable*; $\alpha = 0.93$).

5.1.4. White racial identification

Immediately after completing these judgments of the four scenarios, participants also completed the same 4-item measure of White Racial Identification as in Study 1 (Miron et al., 2010; $\alpha = 0.69$), and provided demographic information.

5.2. Results

Because White Racial Identification was measured at the end of the study, we first assessed whether Perpetrator Race influenced the extent to which participants identified with their (White) racial group. It did not, $t(1,145) = 0.62$, $p = .533$. We therefore treated White Racial Identification as a moderator in the same manner as in Study 1.

5.2.1. Perceptions of cultural appropriation

We regressed perceived appropriation (the index averaged across all four scenarios, $\alpha = 0.86$) on Perpetrator Race ($-1 =$ *White perpetrators*, $1 =$ *Black perpetrators*), mean-centered White Racial Identification ($M = 4.45$; $SD = 1.31$), and their interaction, (see the online supplement for analysis of each scenario separately).⁴

As in Study 1, the effect of Perpetrator Race on perceived appropriation was significant; at mean levels of identification, participants perceived less cultural appropriation in the actions of Black perpetrators than White perpetrators ($b = -0.28$, $95\%CI [-0.50, -0.05]$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(143) = -2.45$, $p = .016$). There was no main effect of White racial identification ($b = 0.14$, $95\%CI [-0.03, 0.31]$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(143) = 1.61$, $p = .11$), but the hypothesized interaction with Perpetrator Race was significant ($b = 0.24$, $95\%CI [0.07, 0.43]$, $SE = 0.09$, $t(143) = 2.78$, $p = .006$; see Fig. 3).

Consistent with the primary hypothesis, the Johnson-Neyman test indicated that the Perpetrator Race effect—the tendency to see White perpetrators as more appropriative than Black perpetrators—was significant at low levels of identification (up to the 54.42 percentile, or 0.21 on the mean centered White Racial Identification index). Those higher in racial identification did not differ in perceptions of appropriation as a function of perpetrator race. Further probing revealed that White Racial Identification predicted appropriation when the perpetrator was Black ($b = 0.38$, $95\%CI [0.14, 0.62]$, $SE = 0.12$, $t(143) = 3.09$, $p = .002$), but not when the perpetrator was White ($b = -0.10$, $95\%CI [-0.34, 0.14]$, $SE = 0.12$, $t(143) = -0.84$, $p = .389$).

5.2.2. Justification

In a comparable analysis of perceived justification (measured only once in relation to the set of four scenarios), we observed a significant effect of Perpetrator Race ($b = 0.24$, $95\%CI [0.04, 0.44]$, $SE = 0.10$, $t(143) = 2.40$, $p = .018$), racial identification ($b = 0.27$, $95\%CI [0.11, 0.42]$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(143) = 3.47$, $p < .001$), and the Perpetrator Race X Racial Identification interaction ($b = -0.19$, $95\%CI [-0.35, -0.039]$, $SE = 0.08$, $t(143) = -2.48$, $p = .01$; see Fig. 4).

The Johnson-Neyman test indicated that Black perpetrators were seen as more justified than White perpetrators at lower levels of identification (up to the 54.42 percentile, $M = 0.22$ on the mean centered index). At higher levels of racial identification, White perceivers saw Black and White perpetrators were seen as equally justified. Racial

identification positively predicted justification when the perpetrator was White ($b = 0.46$, $95\%CI [0.24, 0.67]$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(143) = 4.23$, $p < .001$), but not when the perpetrator was Black ($b = 0.08$, $95\%CI [-0.14, 0.29]$, $SE = 0.11$, $t(143) = 0.70$, $p = .488$).

5.3. Discussion

Study 2 replicated Study 1, providing support for the hypothesized moderating impact of White racial identification on the effect of perpetrator race on perceptions of cultural appropriation and justifiability. The colorblind racist tendency to interpret racially inflected events without reference to racial power was again evident only among participants who reported high levels of White racial identity. Among participants who reported low levels of White racial identity, we again observed patterns of racism-conscious perception similar to those of Black participants in previous research (see Mosley & Biernat, 2021). Whether measurement of identity occurred prior to (Study 1) or after exposure to the scenarios (Study 2), the most highly racially identified Whites perceived Black use of White cultural products identically to White use of Black cultural products.

Study 2 also replicated the relationship between White racial identification and the tendency to see Black use of White cultural products as appropriative. In this Study, racial identification did not predict perceptions of the White perpetrator. The converse pattern was observed for perceived justifiability of actions: With higher White racial identification came greater perceived justifiability of the actions of White, but not Black users of outgroup products. In both studies, White racial identification mattered more for the perception of appropriation in Black actors, but for perceived justifiability of White actors.

6. Study 3

Study 3 included two important changes. First, we recruited samples of Black as well as White perceivers, measuring racial identification in both. Second, we considered other markers relevant to investment in colorblind racism—historical knowledge of racism and endorsement of Black racial ideologies—as potential moderators of perceptions.

We expect ingroup racial identification to have opposite effects on Black and White participants: High racial identification among White Americans suggests investment in colorblind racism, but among Black Americans, low racial identification is likely tied to this ideology. Thus, a 3-way interaction should emerge such that White perpetrators are judged more appropriative than Black perpetrators by White perceivers low in White racial identification and Black perceivers high in Black racial identification. Lack of differentiation between White and Black perpetrators should occur for White perceivers high and Black perceivers low in racial identification.

Historical knowledge of racism, on the other hand, should have similar effects among Black and White perceivers, such that that for both racial groups, those high in historical knowledge will perceive more appropriation in White than Black perpetrators, whereas those low in historical knowledge will judge Black and White perpetrators equally appropriative (a 2-way interaction). Strong knowledge suggests engagement with understanding of race-based power differentials, oppression, and context, such that the interpretation of outgroup cultural product use by Black and White actors differ.

We measured Black racial ideologies only in Black participants. We expect that Black perceivers high in nationalist and oppressed minority ideologies will be particularly likely to view White perpetrators as more appropriative than Black perpetrators, whereas those high in assimilationist and humanist identity ideologies will be particularly unlikely to distinguish between the actions of White and Black perpetrators.

⁴ As seen in the supplement, the interaction between perpetrator race and White racial identification was significant for 3 of the 4 scenarios, $ps < 0.03$, and $p = .0583$ in the fourth case. In a MANOVA, the interaction effect was $F(4,140) = 2.08$, $p = .0863$.

6.1. Method

6.1.1. Participants

An a priori power analysis using G*Power software indicated a sample size of $n = 223$ to detect a medium interaction effect of race of participant X race of perpetrator condition X moderator variable on appropriation perceptions ($\Delta R^2 = 0.05$) with $\alpha = 0.05$, and 80% power in a multiple regression model, and again we sought a larger than recommended sample (aiming for at least 182 participants of each race). A total of 495 adults living in the United States were recruited via [MTurk.com](https://www.mturk.com). We specifically targeted White and Black participants in the recruitment materials, and the race honesty prompt led to the exclusion of 13 participants admitted they were not White, and 22 participants who admitted they were not Black. Twenty participants with duplicate IP addresses were also removed, 3 participants were removed for not following instructions, and 13 did not provide responses to the critical knowledge measure, resulting in a final analytic sample of 424 participants (222 Black and 202 White). These participants ranged in age from 19 to 66 years ($M = 32.91$, $SD = 9.576$); 208 (49.4%) were female, 211 (50.1%) were male, and 2 (0.5%) participants reported "Other". Based on a sensitivity power analysis in G*Power, this sample size provided 0.99 power to detect an effect of race of participant X race of perpetrator condition X moderator variable on appropriation perceptions with a minimum effect size of $f = 0.25$ or greater.

6.1.2. Design and procedures

Participants were asked to consider and evaluate the same four possible cases of cultural appropriation as in Study 2 (either the White or Black perpetrator versions) presented in counter-balanced order.

6.1.3. Dependent measure

After reading each scenario, participants indicated their *perceptions of cultural appropriation* (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*), using 4 of the 5 items from Studies 1 and 2 (we omitted the "adopting" item). Reliability was assessed for each of the scenarios (as ranged from 0.91 to 0.94; average $\alpha = 0.92$). This was the only dependent measure assessed in this study.

6.1.4. Moderators

We measured potential moderators after participants rated the four scenarios. To assess the generalizability of the Racial Identification effects in Studies 1 and 2, we used a different measure of racial identification in this study, adapted from [Sellers et al. \(1998\)](#). Participants answered six questions from the "private regard" subscale, adapted to be relevant to White/Black Americans: including "I am proud to be White/Black" and "I feel good about White/Black people" ($\alpha = 0.83$).

As a measure of *Historical Knowledge*, participants completed a True/False "Black History" quiz from [Nelson et al. \(2013\)](#). The quiz included 5 true statements about past racism (e.g., "In 1963 White supremacist terrorists bombed a church in Birmingham, Alabama, during a Sunday school class, killing four young Black American girls"), and 5 false statements (e.g., "In 1887, the US Supreme Court upheld an Alabama court decision (Marshall v. Marbury) affirming the constitutionality of laws requiring racial segregation in public spaces"). We used signal detection analysis to calculate reality attunement, the discrimination index (d'): $z[\text{Hits}] - z[\text{False Alarms}]$, after correcting for perfect and 0 hit and false alarm rates (perfect rates were transformed to 0.90, and 0 rates to 0.10, per recommendations by [Wickens, 2002](#)).

6.1.5. Racial ideologies

Black participants only also completed the four racial ideology subscales from [Sellers et al. \(1998\)](#), including: *Nationalist identity ideology* ("A thorough knowledge of Black history is very important for Blacks today," 9 items, $\alpha = 0.82$), *assimilationist ideology* (e.g., "Because America is predominantly White, it is important that Blacks go to school so that they can gain experience interacting with Whites," 9 items, $\alpha =$

0.83), *oppressed minority ideology* ("The racism Blacks have experienced is similar to that of other minority groups," 9 items, $\alpha = 0.86$), and *humanist ideology* ("Blacks should judge Whites as individuals and not as members of the White race," 9 items, $\alpha = 0.77$). All participants then provided demographic information before additional information about the study was provided.⁵

6.2. Results

We first examined whether Black and White participants differed in their levels of racial group identification and historical knowledge, and whether the race of the perpetrator to which participants had been assigned affected identification and knowledge measured at the end of the study. The Participant Race X Perpetrator Race ANOVA on racial group identification produced only a significant Participant Race effect, $F(1, 420) = 29.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.065$. Black participants ($M = 5.95$, $SD = 1.02$) reported higher levels of racial identification than White participants ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.04$). Neither the perpetrator race effect, $F(1, 420) = 0.00$, $p = .962$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$, nor the interaction, $F(1, 420) = 0.06$, $p = .812$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$, was significant. There was no difference in racial historical knowledge (d') between Black and White participants, $F(1, 420) = 0.56$, $p = .455$, and the effects of Perpetrator Race, $F(1, 420) = 0.13$, $p = .722$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$, and the interaction, $F(1, 420) = 0.77$, $p = .381$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.002$, were also non-significant. Among White participants, racial identification and knowledge were negatively correlated ($r(202) = -0.17$, $p = .013$), but among Black participants, this correlation was positive ($r(222) = 0.26$, $p < .001$).

Turning to our primary analyses, we focus again on the average perceived cultural appropriation across the four scenarios, $\alpha = 0.89$; we report analyses for each individual scenario in the supplement.⁶ We regressed appropriation judgments on Participant Race ($-1 =$ White, $+1 =$ Black), Perpetrator Race ($-1 =$ White, $+1 =$ Black), Racial Identification (centered), Historical Knowledge (centered) and all interactions. Full regression results appear in [Table 1](#).

In addition to main effects, [Table 1](#) indicates that the only other significant effects were the two predicted interactions (italicized in the table): Perpetrator Race X Knowledge, and the orthogonal Participant Race X Perpetrator Race X Racial Identification interaction. We did not predict a four-way interaction, and indeed, it was not significant.⁷

6.2.1. Moderating effect of historical knowledge

The interaction between perpetrator race and knowledge is

⁵ We also explored several contact-related potential moderators, including degree of interracial contact, quality of contact, and number of Black and White friends. Contact did not moderate effects of perpetrator race for either Black or White participants.

⁶ The analyses of individual scenarios reported in the supplement indicate that the predicted Perpetrator Race X Knowledge interaction was significant in 3 of the four cases, and this effect was never moderated by participant race. The predicted Participant Race X Perpetrator Race X Racial Identification interaction was significant in all four cases. In a MANOVA approach, the same overall patterns were supported: Perpetrator Race X Knowledge, $F(4,405) = 2.79$, $p = .0262$, Participant Race X Perpetrator Race X Knowledge $F(4,405) = 1.19$, $p = .3137$, Participant Race X Perpetrator Race X Racial Identification $F(4,405) = 5.32$, $p = .0004$.

⁷ We also ran separate 3-way regressions to separately test the effects of historical knowledge and racial identification (without controlling for the other). Results are very similar to those reported in [Table 1](#). In the Participant Race X Perpetrator Race X Knowledge regression (without racial identification included), the predicted two-way interaction was significant, $B = -0.333$, $SE = 0.094$, $t(416) = -3.54$, $p = .0004$ (3-way $p = .2398$); in the Participant Race X Perpetrator Race X Racial Identification regression (without knowledge included), the predicted three-way interaction was significant, $B = -0.672$, $SE = 0.146$, $t(416) = -4.599$, $p < .00001$. Graphical depictions of the data are virtually identical whether the moderators were separately considered or not.

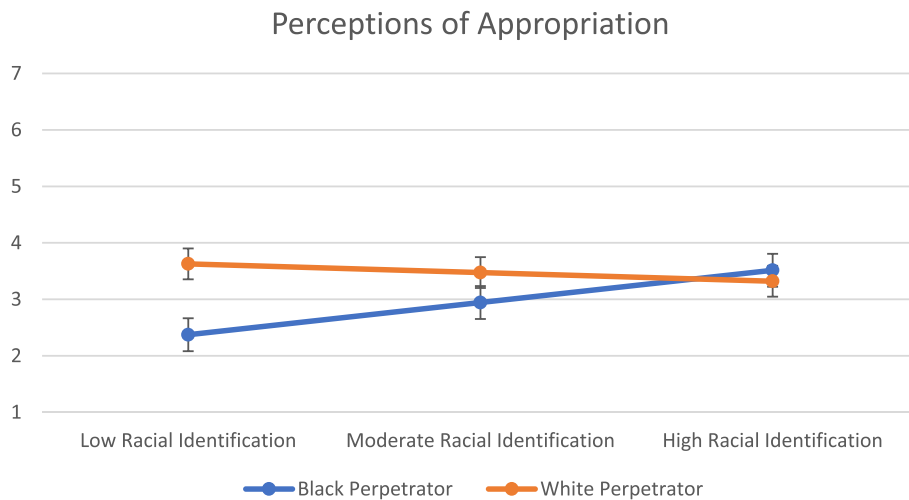


Fig. 3. White participants' perceptions of cultural appropriation as a function of Perpetrator Race and White Racial Identification Study 2. Note: Error bars represent standard errors.

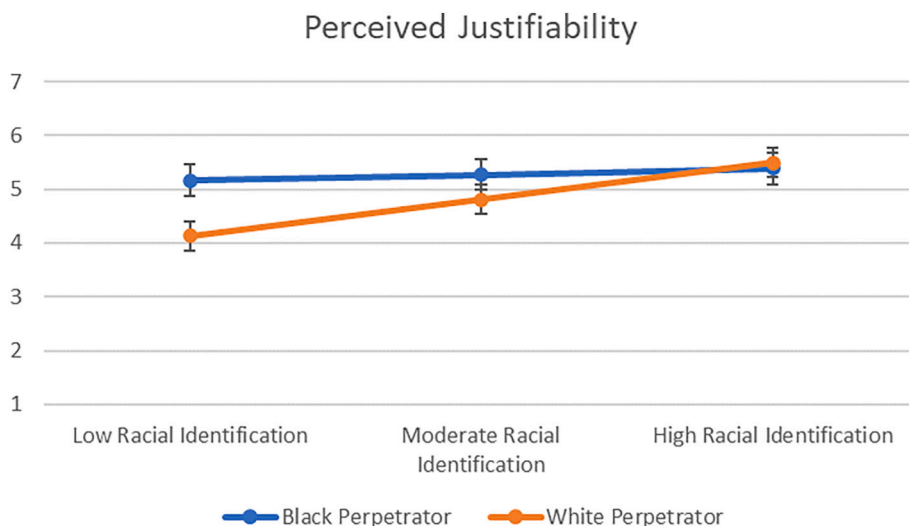


Fig. 4. White participants' perceptions of justifiability of actions as a function of Perpetrator Race and White Racial Identification Study 2. Note: Error bars represent standard errors.

graphically presented in Fig. 5. The tendency to see White perpetrators as more appropriate than Black perpetrators was significant at moderate and high levels of historical knowledge, according to the Johnson-Neyman test (above the 23.11 percentile, or $M = -0.59$ on the mean centered index). Participants who scored lower in knowledge did not differ in perception of appropriation as a function of perpetrator race, demonstrating the pattern of colorblind racism typical of (highly identified) White participants in Studies 1 and 2. Further probing revealed that historical knowledge was negatively related to perceptions of appropriation when the perpetrator was Black, $b = -0.59$, 95%CI [-0.86, -0.32], $SE = 0.14$, $t(408) = -4.29$, $p < .001$, but was unrelated to perceptions of appropriation when the perpetrator was White, $b = -0.04$, 95%CI [-0.31, 0.22], $SE = 0.14$, $t(408) = -0.32$, $p = .749$. As reported in Table 1, participant race did not moderate this pattern. The moderating impact of knowledge on perceptions of appropriation was comparable for both Black and White perceivers.

6.2.2. Moderating effects of racial identification

The Participant Race X Perpetrator Race X Racial Identification interaction is presented in Fig. 6. Among White participants, we again observed the hypothesized Racial Identification X Perpetrator Race

interaction as in Studies 1 and 2, $b = 0.53$, 95%CI [0.32, 0.73], $SE = 0.11$, $t(194) = 4.99$, $p < .001$ (Fig. 6, top panel). The tendency to see White perpetrators as more appropriate than Black perpetrators was significant at lower but not higher levels of White racial identification (according to the Johnson-Neyman test, up to the 56.93 percentile, $M = -0.04$ on the mean centered index). In fact, at very high levels of identification (above the 87.13 percentile or 0.99 on the mean centered index), the pattern reversed such that Black users of White products were judged more culturally appropriate than White users of Black products. White racial identification also predicted heightened perception of appropriation when the perpetrator was Black ($b = 0.40$, 95%CI [0.12, 0.68], $SE = 0.14$, $t(194) = 2.80$, $p = .006$), as in Studies 1 and 2. But this is the first study in which White racial identification also predicted lower perceived appropriation when the perpetrator was White ($b = -0.66$, 95%CI [-0.96, -0.38], $SE = 0.16$, $t(194) = -4.20$, $p < .001$).

Among Black participants (Fig. 6, bottom panel), the Racial Identification X Perpetrator Race interaction was not significant, $b = -0.09$, 95%CI [-0.30, 0.13], $SE = 0.11$, $t(214) = -0.80$, $p = .424$. Regardless of identification level, Black participants perceived greater appropriation in the case of White perpetrators ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.48$) than Black perpetrators ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.73$), Perpetrator Race $b = -1.001$, 95%

CI [-1.43, -0.59], $SE = 0.21$, $t(218) = -4.74$, $p < .001$.

6.2.3. Moderating effects of racial identity ideologies

The preceding analysis suggests that scores on an *etic* or context-general measure of group identification applied to the case of Black racial identity did not moderate differences in perception of cultural appropriation as a function of perpetrator race. To test the racial identity moderation hypothesis with a more *emic* or context-specific measure of Black identification, we included racial ideology subscales of the MIBI in the procedure for Black participants only.⁸

We regressed the overall appropriation index on Perpetrator Race, the four ideologies (each mean-centered), and the four two-way interactions between each ideology and Perpetrator Race. Full regression results appear in Table 2.

Only the Assimilation Ideology X Perpetrator Race interaction was significant (see Fig. 7). The tendency to see White perpetrators as more appropriate than Black perpetrators was significant at low to moderate, but not high levels of Assimilationist Ideology (according to the Johnson-Neyman test, up to the 68.20th percentile, $M = 0.61$ on the mean centered Assimilation Ideology Index). Controlling for the other variables, endorsement of Assimilationist Ideology predicted higher appropriation perceptions when the perpetrator was Black, $b = 0.59$, 95%CI [0.23, 0.94], $SE = 0.18$, $t(207) = 3.28$, $p = .001$, but did not predict perceptions of the White perpetrator, $b = -0.17$, 95%CI [-0.59, 0.25], $SE = 0.21$, $t(207) = -0.80$, $p = .423$.⁹

6.3. Discussion

Results of Study 3 replicate and extend results of Studies 1 and 2 in ways that generally supported the overarching colorblind moderation hypothesis. We again found evidence for the hypothesized moderating impact of White racial identification (using a different measure), on differences in perception of cultural appropriation as a function of perpetrator race: White perpetrators were seen as more appropriate than Black perpetrators among White perceivers low in White racial identification.

White racial identity also positively predicted appropriation perceptions when the actor was Black, as in Studies 1 and 2. However, Study 3 was the first to find that identification also *negatively* predicted appropriation perceptions of the White actor. Much research on the perception of racism has documented that racial identification predicts denial of White people's anti-Black racism (Adams, Fryberg, et al., 2006; Bonam et al., 2019; Carter & Murphy, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2014, Public Religion Research Institute, 2012; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). In this study, we also found minimization (based on racial identification) in the case of cultural exploitation, along with amplification of appropriation perceptions in the case of cultural domination.

Beyond replication, we also extended Studies 1 and 2 by considering

⁸ We observed modest to strong positive correlations between three of the four racial ideologies: oppressed minority, assimilationism, and humanism ($r_s = 0.39-0.70$, $ps < 0.0001$). Nationalism was distinct in that it correlated weakly with oppressed minority ideology, $r = 0.17$, $p = .0129$, and slightly negatively with humanism, $r = -0.15$, $p = .0249$, and assimilationism, $r = -0.10$, $p = .1248$.

⁹ In an analysis including both Historical Knowledge (d') and Assimilation Ideology as simultaneous moderators of the Perpetrator Race effect on perceived appropriation, the three-way interaction was significant, $b = 0.320$, 95%CI [0.06, 0.58], $SE = 0.13$, $t(210) = 2.39$, $p = .018$. The Perpetrator Race X Knowledge interaction was significant at low and moderate levels of Assimilation Ideology, but not at high levels of Assimilation Ideology; the Perpetrator Race X Ideology interaction held at moderate and high, but not low levels of knowledge. Detailed analysis and a graph depicting this interaction appear in the online supplement. Knowledge (d') and assimilation ideology were uncorrelated, $r = 0.04$.

the moderation hypothesis in a sample of Black participants. We did not find the expected opposite effect of racial identification among Black participants when we assessed racial identity via the *etic*-oriented, measure of private regard. Whether Black participants scored low or high on this measure, they tended to show the pattern of racism conscious perception—differentiating assessments of cultural appropriation as a function of perpetrator race—as did Black participants in previous research (Mosley & Biernat, 2021). Black participants reported higher levels of racial identification than did White participants in Study 3. This race difference in racial identification is consistent with past research (e.g., see Wong & Cho, 2005), and raises the possibility that the lack of racial group identification effects may be due to a ceiling effect among Black participants. However, there was equal variability in the two samples, and the range of scores in Black participants (3.5–7) was comparable to that of White participants (2.7–7). Thus, the lack of moderation in Study 3 is unlikely to be due to restriction of range on the identification variable.

We did find some support for the moderation hypothesis when we assessed it via more *emic*-oriented, context-specific measures of racial identity ideologies. Perpetrator race differences were more evident in the current study among Black participants who scored *lower* on the measure of assimilationist ideology. Black Participants who highly endorsed assimilationist ideology—indicating a belief that Black people in the U.S. are Americans foremost and need to integrate within the dominant (i.e., White) cultural system (Sellers et al., 1998)—were colorblind, equating the actions of White and Black users of outgroup cultural products. The other measured ideologies did not moderate appropriation perceptions; only the specific acceptance of assimilation—clearly linked to colorblindness—mattered.

Finally, we extended Studies 1 and 2 by considering another form of engagement with colorblind ideology, (low) historical knowledge about racism. We observed the hypothesized moderation pattern such that White users of Black cultural products were seen as more appropriate than Black users of White cultural products only at higher levels of historical knowledge. Among participants who scored poorly on the test of historical knowledge, we observed the colorblind pattern; no differentiation between Black and White actions.

The predictive effects of assimilationist ideology (among Black participants) and historical knowledge (among all participants) were also more evident in judgments of the Black user of White cultural products than the White user of Black cultural products. This pattern raises the intriguing possibility that variation in perception of appropriation may be less about denial of potentially problematic behavior in culturally exploitative manifestations (White on Black actions) than it is claiming that cases of cultural dominance (Black on White actions) are equally problematic. We return to this possibility in the General Discussion.

7. General discussion

The goal of this research was to examine the extent to which investment in a framework of colorblind racism contributed to differential perceptions of cultural appropriation among racially dominant (e.g., White American) and subordinated (e.g., Black American) perceivers. Three factors were conceptualized as multidimensional contributors to this investment: Identification with one's racial group, knowledge of racial history, and endorsement of Black racial ideologies.

With regard to racial group identification, we expected that White perceivers low in racial group identification and Black perceivers high in racial group identification would show race-conscious perception, perceiving greater appropriation in White than Black perpetrator actions. Highly-identified White and low-identified Black perceivers were expected to be colorblind, perceiving White and Black actors as equally appropriate.

Across three studies, the predicted pattern emerged among White perceivers. Those low in White racial identification judged the actions of White perpetrators as more appropriate than the actions of Black

Table 1

Full regression results predicting perceived cultural appropriation from participant race, perpetrator race, racial identification, historical knowledge, and all interactions, Study 3.

Predictor	Parameter Est/B	SE	t(408) (p)	95% CI
Intercept	3.674	0.078	46.82 (< 0.001)	3.52, 3.83
Part race (-1 = W, 1 = B)	0.307	0.078	3.91 (< 0.001)	0.15, 0.46
Perp race (-1 = W, 1 = B)	-0.341	0.078	-4.35 (< 0.001)	-0.50, -0.19
Hist knowledge (centered)	-0.316	0.096	-3.28 (< 0.001)	-0.51, -0.13
Racial ID (centered)	-0.167	0.076	-2.20 (0.028)	-0.32, -0.02
Part race X Perp race	-0.150	0.078	-1.91 (0.056)	-0.30, 0.00
Part race X Hist knowledge	0.005	0.096	0.05 (0.957)	-0.18, 0.19
Part race X Racial ID	-0.039	0.076	-0.51 (0.610)	-0.19, 0.11
Perp race X Hist knowledge	-0.273	0.096	-2.83 (0.005)	-0.46, -0.08
Perp race X Racial ID	0.219	0.076	2.89 (0.004)	0.07, 0.37
Hist knowledge X Racial ID	0.062	0.091	0.68 (0.497)	-0.12, 0.24
Part race X Perp race X HK	-0.150	0.096	-1.55 (0.122)	-0.34, 0.04
Part race X Perp race X RID	-0.307	0.076	-4.04 (< 0.001)	-0.46, -0.16
Part race X HK X RID	-0.079	0.091	-0.87 (0.385)	-0.26, 0.10
Perp race X HK X RID	-0.044	0.091	-0.48 (0.632)	-0.22, 0.14
Four-way interaction	0.055	0.091	0.60 (0.546)	-0.12, 0.23

Notes: Part = Participant, Perp = Perpetrator, Hist Knowledge and HK = Historical Knowledge, RID = racial identification.

perpetrators, whereas those highly identified White perceivers tended to see no difference in the actions of Black and White perpetrators. White racial identification particularly predicted seeing Black perpetrators as appropriative. These results corroborate and extend past research on the tendency for White Americans to define constructs such as “racism” in ways that are safe or non-threatening to their privileged identity (Adams, Tormala, & O’Brien, 2006; Bonam, Taylor, & Yantis, 2017; Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007; Nelson et al., 2013). To the extent that White Americans felt connected with their racial identity, they were colorblind and context-dismissive, viewing White actors as no more problematic than Black actors using outgroup cultural products.

Contrary to the findings for White participants, among Black participants (Study 3), racial identification did not interact with perpetrator race to influence perceptions of cultural appropriation. Regardless of identification level, Black participants saw the White perpetrators as more appropriative than Black perpetrators. Considerable research has documented links between Black racial identification and racism perceptions (Kaiser & Wilkins, 2010; Nelson et al., 2013; Sellers & Shelton, 2003), but perceptions of cultural appropriation do not seem to follow this pattern. More research will be needed to examine this issue, but in this single study, among Black Americans, racial identification did not prompt particular vigilance to potential acts of racial oppression, and low identification did not prompt colorblindness.

We also predicted that historical knowledge of racism would affect Black and White respondents similarly, with perpetrator race effects emerging most strongly among those with greater historical knowledge. This hypothesis was supported in Study 3, and the Perpetrator Race X Knowledge interaction was driven by the tendency for those with high knowledge of the history of racism and injustice to be particularly

unlikely to label Black actors using White cultural products as appropriators.

7.1. Extending research on identification and knowledge effects

This research corroborates assertions of the motivated cognition approach (Kruglanski, 1996; Kunda, 1990; Kunda & Spencer, 2003), and work on justice-related judgments (Adams, Tormala, & O’Brien, 2006; Lowery et al., 2007; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008), by offering evidence that judgments of cultural appropriation can be motivated by racial group identity concerns, particularly for dominant group members. The nature of this motivation is to construe acts of outgroup cultural use as power neutral, and therefore, race neutral. This construal of appropriation likely protects White identity; it allows for denial of the asymmetrical privilege that dominant groups have to exploit cultural resources from minority groups is denied, and the harms that cultural exploitation can have for the source community (Rogers, 2006; Scafidi, 2005; Ziff & Rao, 1997).

Highly identified White perceivers likely come to believe that White people are just as likely to be the targets of discrimination and appropriation as minority groups and may even perceived that they face “reverse discrimination/appropriation” (Norton & Sommers, 2011). In Study 3, this reverse perception was evident among the most highly identified White participants, those above the 84th percentile of racial identification in that sample. Though not a common occurrence, the consequences of White Americans perceiving that “reverse appropriation” exists are likely to be even more harmful to the Black community.

The current research also extends research on the importance of historical knowledge for racism perceptions to the domain of cultural appropriation (Bonam et al., 2017; Nelson et al., 2013). Historical knowledge of racism can be used as a normative standard for attunement to reality; our results indicate that both White and Black participants better attuned to this standard *do not* describe Black use of White cultural products as appropriative, but do see appropriation in White use of Black cultural products. Increased historical knowledge for both White and Black Americans may facilitate critical and in-depth thinking about race relations that disrupts epistemologies of ignorance, recognizes the reality of racism, and challenges the colorblind framework. On the other hand, bolstering investment in colorblind ideology may reduce willingness to interact with different forms of historical knowledge.

Although identification mattered less for Black participants’ perceptions of cultural appropriation, Study 3 did suggest that the *meaning* that one places on being Black can have consequences for perceptions of cultural appropriation. Black participants who highly endorsed an assimilationist ideology did not differentiate between White and Black users of outgroup cultural products. Black Americans with this “melting pot” ideology or lens resemble highly identified White perceivers, particularly in their increased labeling of Black actors as appropriative and their representation of cultural appropriation as any act of outgroup cultural use. To the extent that assimilationist ideologies de-emphasize minority racial identity, they may reinforce the status quo, deflect attention away from group-based disparities (Banfield & Dovidio, 2013; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004), and place responsibility on minoritized individuals to “fit in” to a dominant (White) culture whose characteristics they may be unable to embody (Koval & Rosette, 2021; Opie & Phillips, 2015; McCluney et al., 2021; Versey et al., 2019).

The assimilation ideology findings also resonate with theories of appropriated racial oppression (Campon & Carter, 2015; Rangel, 2014; Tappan, 2006; Versey et al., 2019). For minoritized group members, taking on beliefs of the dominant group can help facilitate a sense of individual efficacy by allowing them to psychologically cope with the threats of identity-based oppression (Schmitt, Branscombe, Postmes, & Garcia, 2014; Phillips et al., 2015). In this way, minoritized group members can adopt the ways that dominant group members “learn to, relate to, and buy into the tools of oppression” (Banks & Stephens, 2018, p. 97), as well as the societal messages that are embedded in the broader

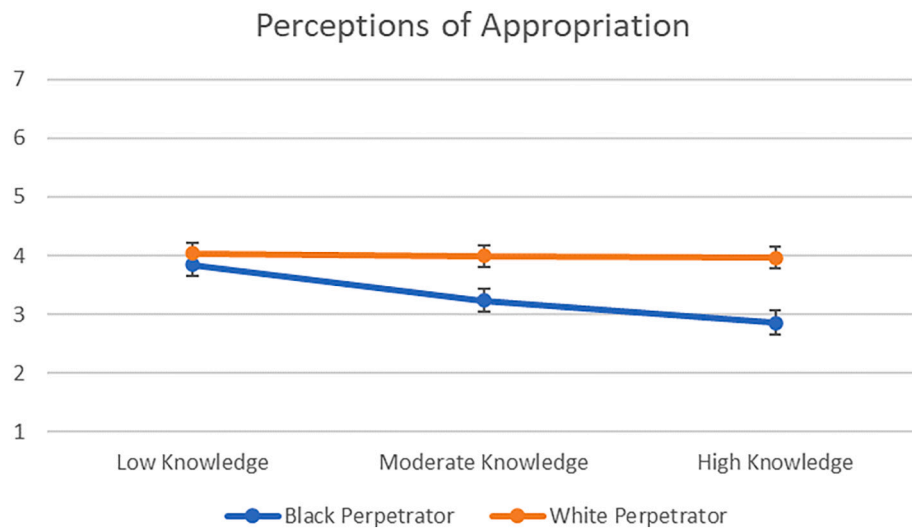


Fig. 5. Perpetrator Race X Historical Knowledge interaction on perceptions of appropriation (no interaction with Participant Race), Study 3. Note: Error bars represent standard errors.

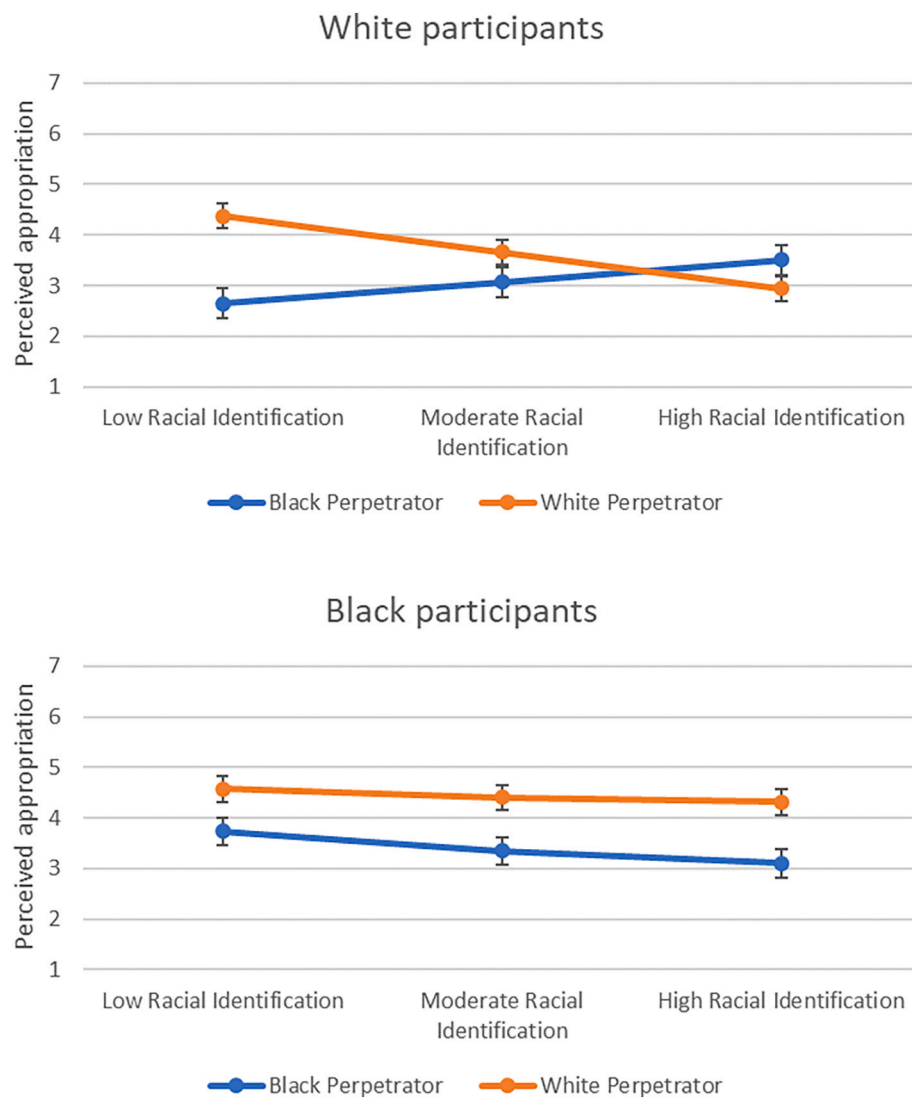


Fig. 6. Perpetrator Race X Racial Identification interaction on perceptions of appropriation among White participants (top panel) and Black participants (lower panel), Study 3. Note: Error bars represent standard errors.

Table 2

Full regression results predicting perceived cultural appropriation from perpetrator race, each of four racial ideologies, and ideology interactions with perpetrator race, Black participants only, Study 3.

Predictor	Parameter Est/B	SE	t (207) (p)	95% CI
Intercept	3.938	0.094	42.07 (< 0.001)	3.75, 4.12
Perp race (-1 = W, 1 = B)	-0.482	0.094	-5.15 (< 0.001)	-0.67, -0.30
Assimilationism (centered)	0.208	0.139	1.50 (0.136)	-0.07, 0.48
Nationalism (centered)	0.721	0.085	8.51 (< 0.001)	0.55, 0.89
Humanism (centered)	0.021	0.141	0.15 (0.882)	-0.26, 0.30
Opp minority (centered)	-0.072	0.108	-0.67 (0.503)	-0.28, 0.14
Perp race X Assimilationism	0.379	0.139	2.73 (0.007)	0.10, 0.65
Perp race X Nationalism	-0.048	0.084	-0.56 (0.574)	-0.22, 0.12
Perp race X Humanism	-0.016	0.141	-0.12 (0.907)	-0.29, 0.26
Perp race X Opp minority	-0.174	0.108	-1.61 (0.108)	-0.39, 0.04

Notes: Opp = oppressed.

system that blames minoritized groups for their outcomes (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Campon & Carter, 2015; Rangel, 2014, Versey et al., 2019; Tappan, 2006).

7.2. Investment in colorblind racism processes in group-based perceptions of cultural appropriation

The present studies supported our core hypothesis that engagement with a colorblind racism framework increased the likelihood that Black and White actors were seen as equally appropriative, driven primarily by an increased perception that Black actors engaged with White culture were appropriative. Greater identification with a White racial identity (Studies 1–3), lower historical knowledge of racism (Study 3), and greater endorsement of Black assimilationist ideologies (Study 3) supported race-neutral views of outgroup cultural product use. These findings echo non-experimental research examining the connection between colorblind racism and perceptions of cultural appropriation (e.g., Rodriguez, 2006), and demonstrate the potentially harmful consequences of colorblindness for intergroup relations (see Banfield &

Dovidio, 2013; Fryberg & Stephens, 2010; Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004).

When making judgments about cultural appropriation, perceivers can remove racially coded meanings by viewing the target cultural product as “cultureless” (Perry, 2001); decontextualizing the product from the cultural history and experience from which it arose. This is particularly likely to occur in the case of White use of Black cultural products. In contrast, when judging Black actors using White cultural products, perceivers can add on racially coded meanings, construing “White culture” as clearly bound and defined to a specific heritage and legacy with practices and values that should be preserved and protected (Bonilla-Silva, Goar, & Embrick, 2006; Bourdieu, 1984; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this way, colorblind ideologies can be deployed locally and flexibly to construe intergroup behavior, and leverage racial power to strategically use “cultural appropriation” as a label when it benefits and upholds the status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; 2013; Rodriguez, 2006).

Previous examinations of cultural appropriation in cultural, critical rhetorical, and critical media studies have typically focused on events that Rogers (2006) labeled cultural exploitation (White use of outgroup products; Buescher & Ono, 1996; Shugart, 1997). However, the current research demonstrates the importance of studying perceptions of cultural dominance as well (i.e., minoritized group members’ use of dominant group cultural products). This comparative approach allows researchers to detect and explain variability in both dominant and minority group perceivers’ recognition of the power advantage that one group (e.g., White Americans) has over less powerful groups (e.g., Black Americans). Colorblind ideologies allow perceivers to gloss over past and current patterns of racial oppression (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Rogers, 2006; Shugart, 1997). Investment in colorblindness also ignores the social norms that actively encourage minority group members to adopt elements from the dominant culture to manage intergroup tensions and avoid potential discrimination (Brown-Iannuzzi, Payne, & Trawalter, 2013; Goffman, 1961; Holmes IV, 2020; McCluney et al., 2021; Phillips et al., 2015; Rabelo, Robotham, & McCluney, 2021; Versey et al., 2019).

The fact that some perceivers view Black use of White cultural products as appropriative is inconsistent with the idea that minoritized group members actors who engage in dominant culture behaviors are praised for assimilation (Berry, 1997; Dovidio et al., 2007; Dovidio et al., 2009; Dovidio et al., 2015; Kunst et al., 2018; Hehman et al., 2012; Hornsey & Hogg, 2000; Wolsko et al., 2006; Verkuyten, 2011). The ingroup projection model (Wenzel et al., 2008) suggests that groups gain positive value when they are closer to the prototype of the superordinate group. But Black users of White cultural products—despite assimilating to White cultural standards—were viewed as appropriative and unjustified in their actions by perceivers highly invested in a colorblind

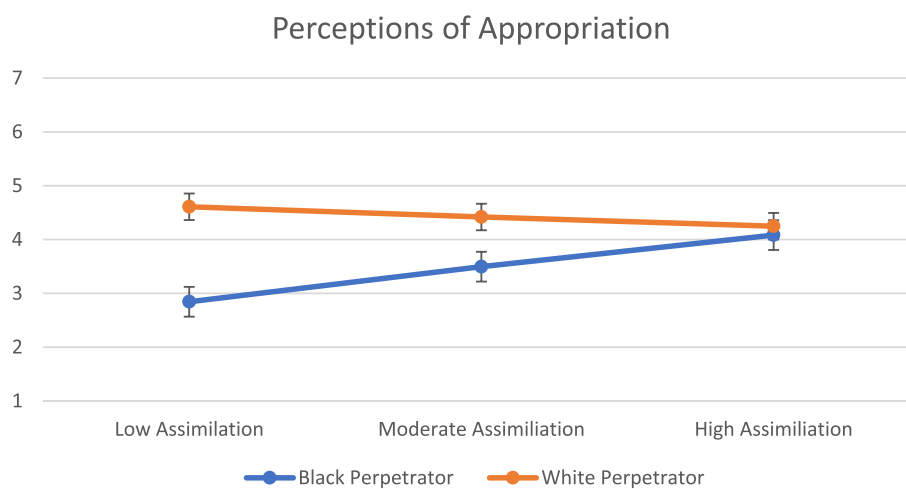


Fig. 7. Black participants’ perceptions of appropriation as a function of Perpetrator Race and Assimilationist Ideology Endorsement, controlling for other ideologies, Study 3.

Note: Error bars represent standard errors.

racism framework, a clearly negative interpretation. Limiting the access that minoritized group members have to the dominant culture and dominant cultural spaces may play a crucial role in reinforcing, maintaining, and enhancing power differentials (Bonam et al., 2017; Kunst, Lefringhausen, Sam, Berry, & Dovidio, 2021). Cultural products can be used to preserve group identity, reinforce social norms and beliefs (Hogg & Giles, 2012), and establish group boundaries (Dragojevic & Giles, 2016; Keblusek, Giles, & Maass, 2017). Studying how their use by outgroup members is perceived can contribute to the broader literature on acculturation (Berry, 1997; Zagefka et al., 2022).

7.3. The link between racial identification and historical knowledge of racism

Study 3 also highlights the link between knowledge about past racial injustices and racial identity: Among White perceivers, the highly racially identified were less knowledgeable about historical racism ($r = -0.17$), but among Black perceivers, the highly identified were more knowledgeable ($r = 0.26$). People's cultural worlds promote racialized ways of understanding; people (and institutions) preferentially select some representations of history, while denying others (Adams, Estrada-Villalta, & Gómez, 2018; Lipsitz, 2006; Salter & Adams, 2016). Social representations of history (e.g., history textbooks, museums, memorials) tell a particular story about a collective past, which can scaffold ongoing understandings about racial incidents in a way that reduces threats to ingroup identity (Kurtiş, Adams, & Yellow Bird, 2010).

Among White Americans, greater identification as "White" may indicate greater cultivation of tools of ignorance (Branscombe, Ellemers, et al., 1999; Salter & Adams, 2016; Salter, Adams, & Perez, 2018). Standard teaching in grade school curricula about racism communicates a sanitized version of race relations in American society that promotes a narrative of a nonracist society (Adams, Biernat, Branscombe, Crandall, & Wrightsman, 2008). Predominantly White high schools are more likely to display representations of Black History that deny systematic racism, and White students are more likely to prefer these types of representations over representations that acknowledge racism (Salter & Adams, 2016). As a result, when they are exposed to the realities of racism, White Americans may be vulnerable to such outcomes as outgroup fear and guilt, feelings of helplessness, or greater motivation to deny racism all together (Spanierman & Heppner, 2004; Spanierman & Clark, 2021; Versey et al., 2019). The developmental and cultural processes that lead to high White identification may also lead to lower motivations to seek historical knowledge of race issues.

In contrast, Black Americans are more likely than White Americans to be socialized with implicit and explicit messages about race and racial bias to promote a positive racial identity and prepare minority children to combat racial injustice in their own lives (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Neblett, Smalls, Ford, Nguyen, & Sellers, 2009). Highly identified Black Americans may be more likely to seek and gain knowledge regarding racial injustices, and therefore develop the knowledge base that allows them to recognize the power dynamics and implications of cultural appropriation (e.g., Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Sanders Thompson, 1994; Sellers et al., 1998). In contrast, low racial identification among Black Americans may indicate greater identification with epistemologies of ignorance akin to White Americans (e.g., Baldwin, 1984; Versey et al., 2019), and lesser motivation to seek information about racial issues (Branscombe, Ellemers, et al., 1999; Phillips et al., 2015).

But Black and White participants in our studies did not differ in their levels of historical knowledge about racism. These findings are counter to previous work demonstrating higher knowledge in Black than White participants (Bonam et al., 2017; Nelson et al., 2013), but consistent with recent findings by Strickhouser et al. (2019). These other studies sampled participants from different populations (though all university students) that varied in terms of the racial diversity of the campus and broader ecological context. MTurk samples, the source of data in our studies, tend to be older, more educated, and more geographically

diverse than undergraduate samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013), and as a result, White participants recruited via MTurk may have greater historical knowledge of racism than college students on White campuses. Black MTurk workers, on the other hand, may have less historical knowledge than Black students at HBCUs (the data source in Nelson et al., 2013). It is also possible that racial differences in historical knowledge of racism will decrease further given the prominence of the Black Lives Matter Movement and recent global attention to publicized police murders of Black Americans, systematic forms of racism, and other racial injustices. At the same time, political backlash (including bans on teaching critical race theory) may reduce these knowledge gains.

7.4. Limitations and future directions

Our research relied on a particular set of cultural appropriation scenarios used in prior studies (Mosley & Biernat, 2021). But cultural appropriation can take many forms (Young, 2010), and it will be important to examine the generalizability of our findings to a broader array of exemplars (see Mosley, Heiphetz, White, & Biernat, 2023). We found that the moderating effect of racial identification on appropriation perceptions in White perceivers replicated whether identification was measured before (Study 1) or after target scenarios were presented (Studies 2 and 3), but measuring all variables at the same time may have increased correlations among them. Future research should involve measuring the moderators (e.g., identification, knowledge) and appropriation perceptions at separate time points (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

We also made the decision to focus solely on Black and White perceivers, but perceptions of cultural appropriation among other racial/ethnic minority groups should also be considered. Differential status is central to our ideas about Black-White appropriation, so similar patterns might unfold in White relations with other lower status groups (e.g., Native Americans, Latinx Americans). For Asian Americans, stereotyped as "foreign" but high in status (Zou & Cheryan, 2017), reactions to outgroup use of ingroup cultural products may differ. Asian Americans often experience unique forms of identity denial (e.g., "Where are you really from?"), and this may prompt greater assertion of American identity via claims of greater knowledge of and participation in American culture (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Guendelman, Cheryan, & Monin, 2011). Future research should examine whether Asian Americans see White use of ingroup (Asian) culture as less problematic than Black perceivers do, in that it may imply integration into American society. Future research should also consider whether intraminority acts of cultural appropriation may lead to less negative reactions compared to White use of minority cultural products.

Another limitation is that only one of our three studies focused on Black Americans, and therefore the replicability of these findings is unknown. We chose to focus on White Americans in this research because their views are more problematic for race relations, and because earlier research suggested White perceivers are relatively blind to the power dynamics involved in cultural appropriation (Mosley & Biernat, 2021). Nevertheless, it would benefit this work to further examine how Black Americans' attitudes and ideologies inform their perceptions of and reactions to cultural appropriation. Other research has highlighted distinctiveness threat (Mosley & Biernat, 2021) as a contributor to Black-White race differences in perception, and the current studies emphasize the role of engagement with colorblind racism. But additional research is needed to fully develop a conceptual framework that considers factors that lead both White and Black Americans to perceive and respond to cultural appropriation.

To examine the extent to which appraisals of cultural appropriation represent a motivated process for dominant groups, future research should examine judgments of cultural appropriation when one's own social identities are not implicated (i.e., third party appraisals). Members of non-Black minority groups exposed to the scenarios in this

research may still be more likely to “see” cultural appropriation in White than Black actors using outgroup cultural products because they may be more embedded within sociopolitical spaces that predispose them to the realities of racial inequality. White Americans exposed to scenarios not involving White actors or “White culture” may also be more likely to “see” cultural appropriation than in the case when their own group is implicated. It would also be useful to experimentally examine how affirmations of one’s social identity can assuage potential threats, and thus allow for White Americans to construct contextualized views of cultural appropriation that reflect the realities of power differentials and ongoing racism (Adams, Tormala, & O’Brien, 2006; Knowles et al., 2014; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008; Lowery et al., 2007).

We made the decision to focus exclusively on perceived acts of cultural appropriation. However, it will be important to examine when acts of outgroup cultural use can be categorized as “appreciative” in ways that can truly improve intergroup relations and facilitate intercultural relationships (e.g., Brannon & Walton, 2013; Page-Gould, Harris, MacInnis, Danyluck, & Miller, 2022; West, Naeimi, Di Bartolomeo, Yampolsky, & Muise, 2022). Appreciation presumably implies that the actor is not “taking” cultural property; associating the product or culture with the self (e.g., as in the case of self-expansion, Aron & Aron, 1996), or using it as a means of self-expression (Thi Nguyen and Strohl, 2019). Instead, to truly be appreciative, the act should increase the cultural visibility of the source community. The actor should not only take time to understand the origin and significance of the cultural object (Rogers, 2006), but also clearly attribute ownership to the source community (Fryberg & Eason, 2017; Fryberg & Townsend, 2008). When an act benefits the source community (in terms of economic and social capital), it may be more likely categorized as “cultural appreciation” (Scafidi, 2005).

However, in a consumer culture where Americans often seek to selectively procure cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Scafidi, 2005), and exploit racial capital (Bhattacharyya, 2018), caution is needed in applying the alternative categorization of “cultural appreciation” or “celebration,” as claims of “honoring” or “connecting” with an outgroup culture may be superficial and performative (Rogers, 2006). Future research should continue to explore when acts of outgroup cultural use could truly lead to positive outcomes for the actor and the source community.

7.5. Summary and conclusion

The three studies reported here provide evidence that perceptions of cultural appropriation are influenced by perceivers’ investment in a colorblind racism framework. For highly racially identified White perceivers, for White and Black perceivers with low historical knowledge, and for Black perceivers high in assimilationist ideology, the act of cultural appropriation is understood in a psychological vacuum, removed from context and histories of group-based oppression. In contrast, among White perceivers who lower in racial identification, among White and Black perceivers with high historical knowledge, and among Black perceivers who reject assimilationism, cultural appropriation may be better understood against a backdrop of normative representations of racial hierarchies and group-based oppression.

Open practices

The studies in this article earned Open Materials and Open Data badges for transparent practices. Materials and data for the experiment will be available at the corresponding author’s OSF Page (<https://osf.io/pgdqj/>) upon receipt of acceptance.

Author note

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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2023.104487>.

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