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When I say 'Black Lives Matter,' why do some people hear 'Others Lives Matter Less'?

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Abstract: The statement "Black lives matter" is commonly construed as implying other lives matter less, even though the statement does not explicitly reference other lives. Bias is a common explanation for this construal. However, other factors may contribute. We hypothesized that the linguistic structure of "Black lives matter" plays an important role. "Black lives matter" takes the form of a generic, or statements in which a property is attributed to members of a set (e.g., "lions have manes"). Generics are often interpreted as implicit comparisons (e.g., "lions are more likely to have manes than other animals"). We report two experiments in which we find evidence that the statement "Black lives matter" is often construed as an implicit comparative claim, similarly to other generics. This research contributes to our understanding of generics, while providing a novel explanation for why when I say "Black lives matter," some people hear "Other lives matter less."