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Investigating the Effects of Dynamic Social Norms and Conversations about Race on Racial
Attitudes and Norm Perceptions among White Americans

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

by

Peter Fisher

2023

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Investigating the Effects of Dynamic Social Norms and Conversations about Race on Racial
Attitudes and Norm Perceptions among White Americans

by

Peter Fisher

Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Tiffany N. Brannon, Chair

This dissertation integrates the literatures of social identity, intragroup processes, and cultural psychology to explore how dynamic norms can shift attitudes tied to White racial identity. Four empirical studies on the interplay between White identity, racial attitudes, ingroup conversations about race, and dynamic norms explore potential mechanisms for motivating attitude change within a privileged racial group. Two studies gathered baseline data on norm perceptions and tested the effectiveness of different dynamic norm appeal framings on feelings towards discussing race. Another two experimental conversation studies investigated the effects of brief conversations about race with another White person on behavioral intentions to engage in future conversations about race. There was no effect of a single unscaffolded conversation about race on attitudes toward White privilege. There was a marginal effect for dynamic norm appeals that

contextualized the benefits of discussing race on increasing interest in future conversations about race. A dynamic norm appeal and subsequent conversation with a White partner did not significantly influence racial attitudes or perceived normativity of discussing race. Conditional process analysis models revealed a potential mechanism for increasing interest in discussing race by focusing on positive ingroup feelings rather than avoiding potential anxiety and negative feelings. A novel psychological mechanism for studying and intervening on White intragroup processes that examines approach vs. avoidance motivations is discussed.

The dissertation of Peter Fisher is approved.

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2023

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother Sherry Fisher. This work represents the culmination of an academic journey that would not have been possible without her love, support, and generosity.

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Fisher, P. (2022, April 18). *Why are some White People so Angry about Critical Race Theory?* Psychology in Action. Retrieved from: <https://psychology-inaction.squarespace.com/psychology-in-action-1/white-people-critical-race-theory>

Fisher, P. (2019, August 27). *What Does Psychology Research Have to Say about Toxic Masculinity?* Psychology in Action. Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologyinaction.org/psychology-in-action-1/psychology-of-toxic-masculinity>

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Fisher, P.H. (2020, June 26-28). *Increasing Male Allyship and Reducing Sexism Through an Identity-Based Intervention*. SPSSI Conference, Denver, CO. <https://www.spssi.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&PageID=480> (Conference canceled)

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Fisher, P. H., Brannon, T.N. (2021). *An Identity-Based Intervention to Shift Attitudes about Traditional Masculine Gender Norms*. Poster presented at the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (Online conference).

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Fisher, P. H., Ospina, J. P., Galvan, M. J., Brady, S. T., & Walton, G. M. (2018). *Home is where the heart is: College-home integration moderates the relationships between social class stereotype threat, identity friction, and mental health*. Poster presented at the 30th Annual Convention of the Association for Psychological Science, San Francisco, CA.

Introduction

There has been a deafening silence when it comes to White people discussing the role that their own racial identities play in shaping American society. This silence underlies a pressing need to apply theories from social psychology to better understand the intragroup processes of privileged social groups. While the group processes of underrepresented and disadvantaged social groups have been thoroughly examined by psychological research, this same level of scrutiny has not been applied to privileged social groups until quite recently. Much of the extant literature on the psychology of privileged or majority groups has focused on their attitudes towards members of minority groups (e.g., Allport, 1954; Crandall et al., 2002; Dovidio et al., 2003; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Shelton & Richeson, 2005). The historical focus on attitudes and behaviors towards outgroup members has left several important dimensions of privileged social identities largely unstudied including the ingroup norms that dictate behaviors such as discussing race and racial identity.

White people, as members of a privileged social category, navigate a tightrope of identity management. If they engage with information about the privilege tied to their racial identity they can experience threat which in turn leads to feelings of discomfort, anxiety, guilt, and shame (Knowles et al., 2014). But if they do not engage with or actively deny this information, they fail to take into account how privilege shapes their lived experience and affects outgroup members (Phillips & Lowery, 2018). How can White people recognize the impacts of their racial identity while simultaneously maintaining a positive self-concept? How can group norms that downplay critical reflection of race and racism be influenced to motivate allyship from within privileged groups? This research addresses key aspects of these questions to better understand the ingroup processes of a privileged racial group in a diversifying world.

Through connecting research on social identity theory, dynamic social norms, and wise intervention, this work will build evidence for a potential attitude-change mechanism within all-White social contexts. Specifically, it will illustrate how combining approaches from research on dynamic norms and White ingroup processes can yield insights into how White people make sense of and discuss race and racism with other White people. Four empirical studies on norms tied to White racial identity and ingroup conversations about race explore the potential of a norm-based approach to changing racial attitudes and behaviors within White racial groups.

Literature Review

Social Identity and Social Categorization

Before exploring the intricacies of White racial identity, it is important to first understand the relevant theories of social identity and social groups. The literature on social identity theory (SIT) and social categorization provides a foundation to understand group dynamics and behaviors of racial groups. The core tenet of SIT is that one's feelings of positive distinctiveness and self-esteem are closely tied to their social identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This, in turn, leads to many different cognitive biases and heuristics that prioritize one's ingroup over outgroups. These include feeling more positive emotions towards one's ingroup (Otten & Moskowitz, 2000), seeing outgroups as less human (Vaes et al., 2003), and the tendency to see outgroups as more homogenous (Quattrone & Jones, 1980). It is also important to consider the positionality of different social groups within a society and how group hierarchies influence attitudes towards outgroups and one's ingroup. In the United States, for example, Black people tend to be stereotyped as less foreign but also inferior, while Asian people tend to be stereotyped as more foreign and superior, see Figure 1.

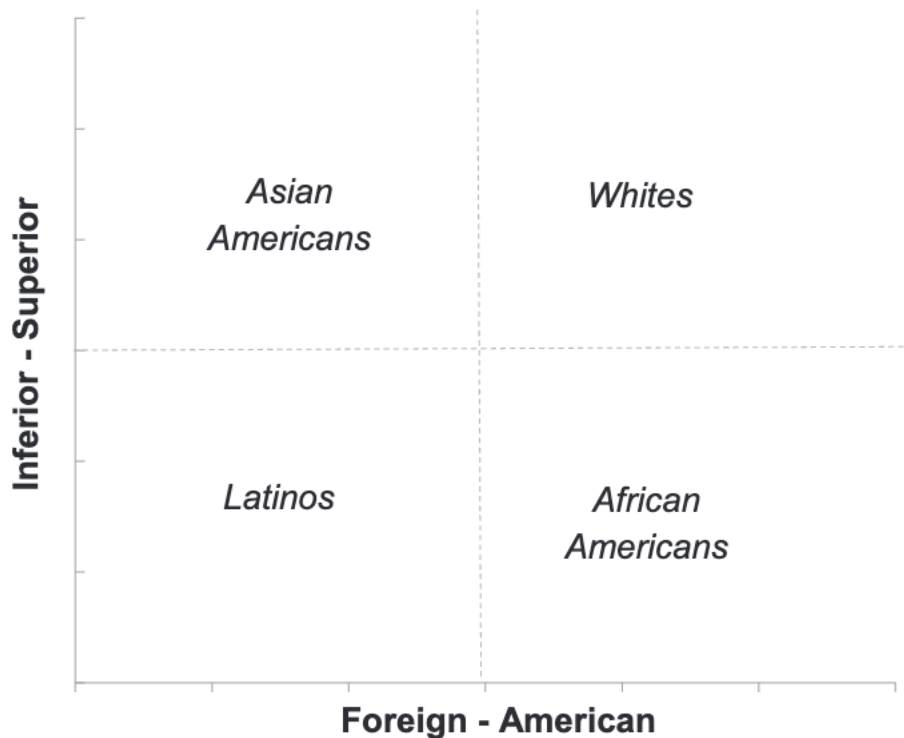


Figure 1. The “axes of subordination” predicted by the racial positioning model (Zou & Cheryan, 2017).

This model shows how group status is tied to salient stereotypes about race, and this holds true for other social identities such as gender (Carli & Eagly, 2001). Moreover, this model shows how members of socially privileged groups, such as White people, tend to compare other groups to themselves in a way that maintains their position as the dominant group. Positive distinctiveness for White Americans looks like being at the top of the racial hierarchy (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). Members of privileged groups often view their group as the benchmark to which other groups must be measured, sometimes without critically evaluating their own group’s characteristics in the same way (Markus & Moya, 2010; Wu, 2021). Social categorization theory offers a conceptual framework to understand some of the mechanisms that influence these ingroup processes.

Social categorization theory helps explain the roles that group salience, prototypicality, and status play in privileged identity maintenance (Brewer, 2001). Self-categorization is especially helpful in explaining the processes through which members of privileged groups maintain a positive self-image while simultaneously holding beliefs that uphold their privilege and disadvantage outgroups. For privileged groups, the process through which individuals maintain this image involves employing defense mechanisms that insulate the privileged individual from unearned benefits afforded by their social identity or identities. This results in herd invisibility: The collective ignorance that results from cognitive biases and societal norms established by White people to avoid engaging with information about racial privilege (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Phillips & Lowery, 2018; Wu, 2021). The mechanism that underlies this phenomenon is key to understanding how White people choose to engage or disengage with potentially threatening information about race.

Motivated Invisibility of Privilege

White people are socially privileged – meaning that individuals that hold this identity navigate the world from a position that does not require them to take into account the fact that their lived experience is not universal and may in fact be due to a system set up to specifically benefit them (McIntosh, 1988). The experience of growing up and being socialized as a member of a privileged group affects an individual’s beliefs about the world and behavior, potentially blinding them to the lived experiences of others outside of their social context (McIntosh, 1988). As described by Knowles and colleagues (2014) and others (e.g., Pratto et al., 1994; Danbold et al., 2022), members of dominant groups engage in specific psychological mechanisms when faced with threats to their status that lead them to rationalize and explain away threats to their worldview. For example, White people who more strongly endorse the concept of meritocracy

tend to deny the role of White privilege as a factor in their accomplishments because it is at odds with the self-concept defined by meritocratic norms (Knowles & Lowery, 2012). Herd invisibility is another result of this socialization. Rather than an unconscious process, it is the result of actively avoiding situations where the consequences of one's racial privilege could be exposed. This gives further cause for White people to avoid conversation's about race, racism, and their own racial identities (Phillips & Lowery, 2018).

A considerable amount of the literature on White responses to race and privilege focus on responses to threats from outgroups (Branscombe et al., 2007; Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998; Kinder & Sears, 1981). My dissertation studies focus on instances of everyday ingroup interactions that White people have with other White people when they talk about race and racial issues. Focusing on this ingroup space allows for a better understanding of the role that shared ingroup status plays when White people are exploring concepts tied to race and whether this mitigates the typical defensive reactions that stem from discussing race.

Relevant Psychological Constructs tied to White Racial Identity

To understand White racial identity, it is important to acknowledge the theories of racial egalitarianism, symbolic racism, and racial resentment from the field of political psychology (see Kinder & Sears, 1981; Wilson & Davis, 2011). These theories have been shown to drive the political behavior of White people in a variety of meaningful ways. However, it is the failure of racial resentment theory to fully explain White political behavior that motivates Ashley Jardina's 2019 book, *White Identity Politics*. By expanding the analysis of White identity to include ingroup processes focused on maintaining group status and power, Jardina explains political behavior in ways unexamined by previous frameworks that solely focused on outgroup attitudes. Jardina touches on various psychological characteristics of White identity but devotes a majority

of her book explaining how White peoples' drive to preserve their group status informs various political attitudes and behaviors in ways that are distinct from racial resentment:

Both white identity and racial resentment are related to more exclusionary views on American identity. They are both also predictive of perceptions of political and economic competition with racial outgroups, and the belief that whites have too little political influence. But racial resentment pulls whites in the opposite direction when it comes to attitudes about white privilege. More racially resentful whites deny white advantages, whereas more racially conscious whites embrace this belief. (Jardina, 2019, p. 154)

Applying an ingroup focus to the fundamental psychological mechanisms that motivate racial attitudes and behaviors among White people has the potential to yield additional insights into whiteness as a social identity.

Sociologists and critical theorists have done a great deal of work in mapping the broader societal effects of whiteness, creating a theoretical foundation which other social scientists use to study White identity. A touchstone sociological work on whiteness is *White Fragility: Why it's so hard for White people to talk about racism*, a book by Robin DiAngelo summarizing her years of research on the processes White people employ to maintain their racial superiority (DiAngelo, 2018). In the chapter titled "White Solidarity," DiAngelo describes it as "the unspoken agreement among White people to protect White advantage" (DiAngelo, 2018, p.57). The key word here is "unspoken", implying that even for the most racially liberal, "woke" White individuals, there are societal and psychological pressures to avoid confronting racism and turn a blind eye to one's racial privilege (e.g., see Phillips & Lowery, 2018). DiAngelo frames White solidarity as one mechanism through which racism is enabled, drawing attention to how White

people punish other White people who confront racism (violating a social norm) and do not punish White people who passively ignore racism (thus acting in line with normative behavior). These norms tacitly reinforce White supremacy and create White fragility due to White people's lack of exposure to meaningful racial discussion with other White people (Crandall et al., 2002). This is an important point – that ingroup processes that build solidarity and group cohesion can be predicated on norms and behavior that disadvantage outgroups, in this case people of color.

It is important to acknowledge some of the critiques of *White Fragility* that align with a broader critique of research that centers Whiteness. DiAngelo centers the White perspective and focuses on the feelings and reactions of White people instead of the people of color most affected by them. Many of the evidence-based techniques for addressing White fragility advanced in the book have been shown to have small effect sizes in real-world settings (Paluck et al., 2021; Paluck & Green, 2009). Additionally, many of the approaches focus on individual-level change rather than pushing for structural or institutional change. DiAngelo and other researchers justify this by stating that White people have to start somewhere and it is important to have conversations about these issues before moving onto large-scale changes (Bergner, 2020.). Yet this presents well-intentioned White people with the opportunity to view merely discussing race and privilege as an antiracist action in and of itself, resulting in moral licensing. Such a view may reward less impactful behaviors versus behaviors that actively work to dismantle systems of inequality. While talking more openly about race and racism is an important first step towards allyship, in isolation it does not represent meaningful antiracist action. More empirical work is needed on institutional and group-level interventions to promote antiracist attitudes and behaviors. Additional work is also needed on understanding the antecedents of such attitudes and behaviors.

So how can social scientists get White people “to the table” to engage in frank discussions about the role of race in American society? It is interesting to note that DiAngelo spends a great deal of *White Fragility* attempting to persuade readers that they should be talking about race – evidence in itself that this is not happening enough. Recent social psychological research has documented the barriers to these conversations happening organically within White social groups.

How White People Respond to Perceived Threats

Eric Knowles and colleagues explored White people’s responses to identity-threatening information in two important papers that made the case for studying whiteness as a psychologically meaningful (rather than invisible) racial identity (Knowles & Peng, 2005) and investigated the strategies White people use to manage their privileged identity (Knowles et al., 2014). Specifically, the denial and distancing response mechanisms that White people employ when confronted with threats to their group status may explain many of the political behaviors associated with high racial identification among White people. The denial response involves rejecting information that indicates being White affords privilege and status while the distancing response involves downplaying the importance of White racial identity to oneself (Knowles et al., 2014). For example, in chapter 5 of *White Identity Politics*, Jardina shares a collection of quotes that participants in her studies shared when asked about expressing their White identity. Two such quotes illustrate the denial mechanism: “With all the unrest today being White is considered a [sic] racist regardless of your beliefs”, “How its [sic] considered racist to say you’re proud to be White, while other ethnicities are praised for their cultural pride” (Jardina, 2019, p.137).

These quotes demonstrate how many White Americans take a colorblind stance on expressing racial pride or endorse myths of racial progress, thus distancing themselves from focusing on actual racial inequalities by promoting the perception that they are the ones being discriminated against (Kraus et al., 2022). This is similar to the protective mechanism at play when a White person accused of doing something racist responds with “But I’m not a racist!” This response stems from the privileged perspective of the White person, an honest feeling of misattribution such that they are worried about being labeled as prejudiced when in reality their mistake was assuming their perspective was the same as that of a non-dominant group member. There is still debate among journalists and scientists on the distinction between what should be labeled racism and what is more accurately labeled a byproduct of White privilege (e.g., Adam Serwer, 2019). Outgroup perceptions of White privilege should also be considered when studying this topic, especially if the most meaningful distinctions between outgroup prejudice and ingroup solidarity result in the similar manifestations of bias towards outgroup members.

The present research focuses on the ingroup processes that can serve to maintain White privilege (group norms, conversations with ingroup members) to shed light on how these processes influence attitudes towards racial outgroups. Investigating how ingroup solidarity motivations and processes differ can inform intervention approaches that target these processes as a means to shift White racial attitudes to be more equitable.

The Drive to Maintain Racial Supremacy

Knowles and colleagues (2014) cite James Baldwin’s “White Man’s Guilt” and Kenneth Clark’s “What Motivates American Whites?” to highlight how people of color have long known that White ingroup preservation processes were just as responsible for systemic racism as explicit prejudice (Baldwin, 1965; Clark, 1965). The dearth of non-White voices in the social

sciences is a major reason for the lack of insights into ingroup White identity processes (Roberts et al., 2020). For White people to turn a critical eye to processes that benefit them - what Knowles and colleagues (2014) refer to as the dismantle response (embracing behaviors that racial privilege) – they must first overcome the deny and/or distance responses and the urge to maintain a status quo that benefits them (Jost, 2020). As noted earlier, research on social dominance and social categorization suggests that this may be difficult as there are many incentives and pressures for maintaining group inequality in favor of the dominant group (Pratto et al., 1994).

How does this maintenance of the racial hierarchy manifest among White Americans? Lowery and colleagues (2006) found that when White participants were presented with information about affirmative action policies framed as disadvantaging White people, they were less supportive of those policies. This effect was mediated by whether White people expected the policies to negatively impact other White people but was not mediated by the expected effect on outgroups. This finding is important because White people in America are faced with becoming a minority racial/ethnic group by 2045 (Vespa et al., 2020). Depending on how this information is framed, White people may react to it with increased anger and anxiety (Myers & Levy, 2018). This outcome is further explained by another set of studies that found that White people see racial progress as a zero-sum game – when one group gains rights and power another must lose it (Norton & Sommers, 2011). More work is needed on the socialization of zero-sum thinking and how closely tied this is with privileged group status. Interventions that target shift zero-sum beliefs are also urgently needed as research has shown that White people will support equality non-enhancing policies *that financially hurt them* over equality-enhancing policies *that financially benefit them* (Brown et al., 2022). Indeed, there is a great deal of evidence that shows

highly-identified White people will advocate for policies that hurt their own financial and personal interests if they see it as pushing back against racial equity (or more recently “woke ideology”). In *Dying of Whiteness* (2019), author Jonathan Metzler uses a combination of in-depth interviews and policy polling data to demonstrate this phenomenon across a variety of domains that are stratified by race including gun control, welfare, housing access, and affirmative action. Many White Americans are more invested in maintaining a status quo that actively harms them rather than support policies that advance racial equity.

These studies provide more evidence of how the deny/distance responses are the default responses for White people when they are confronted with threats to their racial privilege. They also fit with the assertion that “Whites’ whiteness is relevant primarily when they no longer feel as if their group’s dominant status is secure” (Jardina, 2019, p.31). A closer look at the processes that perpetuate this response among White people is needed.

Intragroup Processes

Intragroup processes may be the most understudied aspect of privileged social groups. These processes, including social norms, power dynamics, and group structure, shape both individual and group-level attitudes in a variety of domains (Dovidio, 2013). At the cultural level, these processes have been well-documented by psychologists. For example, in many western cultures there is an emphasis on the needs of the self over those of the group (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994, 2010) and this emphasis may be even greater for members of privileged groups. This ties in closely with the greater endorsement of a meritocratic values system and colorblind racial attitudes that are the norm for many White Americans (Knowles & Lowery, 2012).

Intergroup relations and intergroup contact have been studied exhaustively by social psychologists over the past 70 years (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2010). Similarly, intragroup processes have been investigated as largely a separate field of study. Yet insights from one field have not been applied to the other in a substantive way. In 2013, a Google Scholar search for “intergroup” yielded over 44,000 papers. A search for “intragroup” yielded over 19,000. A search for both terms together yielded just 365 (Dovidio, 2013). While intergroup contact between majority group and minority group members has been thoroughly investigated over the years (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), there still exists a great need for additional research on intragroup processes within privileged groups and their intergroup consequences (see: Powell et al., 2005).

Three specific ingroup processes have consequential impacts on attitudes and behavior tied to race and racism: 1) *Socialization* of White racial identity, 2) *social norms* that dictate the acceptability of discussing topics related to race, and 3) *conversations* between White people that explore such topics. By more closely examining these processes, we can begin to understand ways to intervene to shift norms tied to White identity to be equitable.

Socialization of White Identity

Socialization of White racial identity is a distinct ingroup process consisting of the accumulation of experiences and internalization of norms related to being White. As the dominant racial group in the United States, White people Ruth Frankenberg wrote that whiteness can be described as “a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (1993, p. 1). This nicely summarizes the cultural norms connected with whiteness, norms that sanction the discussion of topics that can threaten one’s feelings of group supremacy and identity consistency. A key aspect of the socialization of whiteness in the United States is the belief that a colorblind view of the world is egalitarian and just (Alexander, 2020). This begins

with how children are taught and raised to talk about, or rather, to avoid talking about race in America.

For most White children, it is normatively inappropriate to talk openly about the race of others (Norton et al., 2006). There is also evidence that racial biases in emotion reasoning that can manifest as early as infancy can have long-term effects, leading to higher numbers of miscommunication incidents, miscalculated social perceptions, and more negative interracial interactions (Ruba et al., 2022). There are real costs to the lack of experience in interracial communication that is the reality for many White adults in America. This is compounded by the common fear of being “canceled” for accidentally (or purposely) saying something prejudiced. This threat is magnified in the age of social media where videos of racist tirades regularly go viral on platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. The anonymity of the internet leads to incredible amounts of racist hate speech online (e.g., Awan, 2020), which is concerning as American children are spending increasing amounts of time online due to cheaper internet and the proliferation of smartphones. As the technological landscape shifts, so do cultural norms associated with public discourse.

Social Norms and Social Change

Social norm interventions have been shown to change behaviors across a variety of domains including healthcare, education, and sustainability (Miller & Prentice, 2016; Prentice & Paluck, 2020). Many of these interventions focus on individual norm perception rather than taking into account the broader group context in which the norm is being perceived, essentially forsaking the forest for the trees. Social norm interventions that focus on the group context closely related to a given norm more durably change behavior because the intervention taps into an underlying group psychological process, amplifying the intervention effect. One such

intervention approach involves weakening an existing norm by providing counterfactual information. This is especially effective at changing beliefs or behavior when there is pluralistic ignorance among the group that the norm is most relevant to (Prentice & Paluck, 2020). The norms tied to White racial identity that dictate the acceptability of discussing race are a prime candidate for such an approach. These norms are rarely, if ever, discussed openly by White people due, in part, to the discomfort that comes with not having experience discussing one's racial identity or its consequences (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021).

Dynamic norm appeals are a compelling new method of social influence. They have been employed to significantly increase environmentally-conscious behaviors such as ordering meatless meals and reducing water use during a drought (Sparkman & Walton, 2017). The mechanism underlying their effectiveness as a tool of social influence centers on drawing attention to how norms have changed over time, rather than stating a static descriptive norm. This leads individuals to recalibrate their perception of the norm, updating their beliefs about what is normative (Sparkman, 2021). This is powerful because norm perception has been shown to change social behavior in a variety of domains such as increasing recycling, decreasing intimate-partner violence, and decreasing peer harassment (Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Little research exists on applying dynamic norm appeals to change social norms tied to racial identity.

Conversations as Ingroup Processes

Conversations with other ingroup members about one's racial group or racial identity are an important aspect of group status maintenance. When ingroup members talk with one another about their shared group or cultural identity, it can be a way to reinforce group ties or update understandings of group norms (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). This has primarily been studied among minority populations in the contexts of identity formation (Butler-Barnes et al., 2019; Yip et al.,

2010), dealing with discrimination (Smart Richman & Leary, 2009), and cultural practices (Brannon & Walton, 2013). According to a 2019 Pew poll, White Americans discuss both challenges and advantages they experience due to their race at much lower rates compared to Black Americans (Pew Research Center, 2019). Even when White people do engage with information about race and privilege, the outcome may be increased prejudiced. Work by Branscombe and colleagues showed that reflecting on White privilege led some highly-identified White participants to score higher on the modern racism scale (Branscombe et al., 2007).

The overarching theories of intergroup relations and intragroup processes help explain some of the shared dynamics of privileged social groups such as social categorization and ingroup bias. Applying approaches traditionally used in intergroup contexts to study intragroup contact may yield novel results.

Ingroup Love Predicated on Out-Group Hate

While the behavior of dominant group members in situations where they perceive their status is being threatened is important to consider, situations where dominant group members are not under threat and are looking to connect with one another is also psychologically relevant. White people engage in ingroup favoritism and solidarity behaviors that end up harming minority outgroups, for instance, by telling racist jokes. The pressure to not confront someone telling a racist joke in an all-White setting can be immense due to the norm of preserving White solidarity (DiAngelo, 2018). White people use language and bonding behavior that reinforces group inequalities as a means to bolster their own ingroup belonging and are largely unaware of the outgroup consequences of their actions due to their privileged status (Phillips & Lowery, 2018). A first step to motivating allyship is to increase awareness of these outgroup consequences in ingroup settings, potentially by shifting perceptions of norms that could lead to

increased discussions of race-related topics. There has been some promising social psychological work in this space, such as one study that showed how providing accurate information about racial wealth gaps to White people helped them correct their misperceptions about wealth accumulation (Callaghan et al., 2021).

Intervention Strategies that Challenge the Blinding Effect of Privilege

White people are socially privileged – they navigate the world from a position that does not require them to take into account the fact that their lived experience is not universal and may in fact be due to a system set up to specifically benefit them (McIntosh, 1988). The experience of growing up and being socialized as a member of a privileged group shapes an individual’s beliefs about the world and behavior, potentially blinding them to the lived experiences of others outside of their social context (McIntosh, 1998; see also Phillips & Lowery, 2018). Members of socially dominant groups – even academics – face normative pressures to avoid critically analyzing any privileges they hold (McIntosh, 2019; Pratto & Stewart, 2012). For example, there has been a plethora of psychological research on the ingroup processes of minority racial groups (e.g., Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998; Bodenhausen & Richeson, 2010) yet only a handful of publications applying this same approach to dominant racial groups (e.g., Plant et al., 2010; Unzueta & Binning, 2012).

There are tangible consequences of holding a privileged racial identity, principally that White Americans sometimes *do not know what they do not know* when it comes to experiencing the world differently from racial minorities. Further, the consequences of simply not knowing or being unaware can be a barrier to addressing social issues and inequities across identity lines. That is, a failure to recognize social issues and inequities can incite backlash or impede support for mitigating efforts if such disparities and disadvantages are unseen and/or perceived as not

present (see Brannon et al., 2018). We must also consider the contexts in which these issues arise among members of privileged groups, such as discussing racial issues or policies that come up in the news. My dissertation research focuses on the ingroup processes that dictate how these interactions play out in these contexts.

As described by Knowles and colleagues (2014) and others (Pratto et. al., 1994), members of dominant groups engage in specific psychological “defense mechanisms” when faced with threats to their status that lead them to rationalize and explain away threats to their worldview. Interventions to make members of privileged groups aware of their privilege have to carefully frame their messaging to avoid triggering these defense mechanisms or another reactance response (Monteith et al., 1994). However, much of this work has focused on White responses to threats from racial outgroups (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Eberhardt & Fiske, 1998) and has not explored the potential of this information being shared by a member of the ingroup.

Recursive Ingroup Processes

The present research examines psychological processes present in everyday situations and interactions between White Americans. These moments could be catalysts for social equity but frequently are overlooked due to lack of awareness or privilege defense mechanisms. Situations such as conversations with friends about news stories on police violence or protests for racial equity or supreme court rulings on racial policies occur frequently, yet often little attention is paid to *systems* of privilege. Intervening in these moments provides the opportunity to change recursive processes that compound over time resulting in larger downstream changes (Walton, 2014; Yeager & Walton, 2011). This is a major strength of intervening on norms tied to a social identity – identity-relevant interventions can change how people make interpretations and attributions in ways that have meaningful downstream consequences (Brannon et al., 2020;

Walton & Wilson, 2018). The studies also incorporate theory related to backlash to inclusion efforts (Brannon et al., 2018) and dynamic norms (Sparkman & Walton, 2019) to investigate how to frame the shifting dynamics tied to a privileged group identity in a way that promotes positive attitude change. It is important to acknowledge that intragroup contact in isolation is not a solution for durably changing prejudiced racial attitudes. The ultimate goal of these studies is to increase our understanding of the intragroup processes that can shape racial attitudes in privileged group contexts. While intragroup contact itself may not be sufficient to durably shift racial attitudes, this work will show that it is an important piece of the puzzle.

Aims & Hypotheses

This dissertation focuses on investigating how White people perceive norms tied to their racial identity and make sense of these group processes through conversations with other White people. The effects of discussing racial identity with a racial ingroup member are explored in Study 2. The effects of dynamic framings of the social norms around the acceptability of discussing topics related to race with other White people are also tested across Studies 3 and 4. Study 4 tests the potentially compounding effects of 1) framing norms tied to privileged identities as dynamic and 2) conversations with ingroup members reflecting on these dynamic norms on perceptions of and attitudes towards norms that dictate the acceptability of discussing race.

Dissertation Study Research Questions Hypotheses

Study 1 Research Question: What are the baseline attitudes and perceptions of White Americans when it comes to having conversations about race and racism, and their own racial identities?

Study 1 Hypothesis: There will be high variance in the perceptions of how acceptable it is to discuss topics related to race. Social dominance orientation, political ideology, and racial

colorblindness will predict attitudes towards norms about discussing race such that participants with higher SDO scores, more conservative political beliefs, and higher racial colorblindness scores will view it as less acceptable.

Study 2 Research Question: What are the effects of White liberals talking about race, racism, and privilege on attitudes toward White privilege?

Study 2 Hypothesis: White liberals discussing race and privilege will lead to less denial and distancing from White privilege and increased interest in dismantling systems of privilege.

Positive feelings about how the conversation went will predict greater interest in having future conversations about race.

Study 3 Research Question: What are the effects of presenting dynamic norm framings to White Americans on their racial attitudes and perceptions of social norms around discussing topics related to race?

Study 3 Hypothesis: White Americans presented with different dynamic (vs. static) framings of White identity norms will report more interest in discussing race with other White people. The dynamic framings that frame the shift in norms as an opportunity for personal growth and educating oneself will produce the largest effects. These effects will be moderated by social dominance orientation such that individuals with lower social dominance orientation will show greater effects.

Study 4 Research Question: Will presenting White Americans with dynamic norms about discussing race before a conversation with another White person about race change their beliefs on the normativity of racial conversations and their interest in engaging in future conversations?

Study 4 Hypothesis: Relative to reflecting individually on a dynamically framed norm, having a conversation with another White person about the dynamic norm will increase interest in future

conversations about race, increase perceptions of these conversations as normatively appropriate, and decrease anxiety tied to discussing race. These effects will be moderated by social dominance orientation in the same manner as Study 3.

This work builds evidence for a potential mechanism through which White Americans make sense of and engage with social norms tied to White identity with other ingroup members. It also allows for a more targeted comparison of the tested intervention approaches between these groups while controlling for variables such as socioeconomic status, political ideology, gender, and age. There are many related questions that are outside of the scope of the current work but bear mentioning here. For example, what socialization occurs at an early age that leads to prevailing racial norms? What are the interactive effects of gender and racial privilege on behavior, e.g., are the effects additive or more complex? Do White men and White women experience norms tied to White racial identity differently? How does one's status within a privileged social group influence pressure to adhere to group norms? How do White people who are critical of whiteness effectively engage in allyship in ingroup contexts? These are questions that future empirical work must address. The findings presented here will provide a platform for launching such future inquiry.

Background Research: Descriptive Analysis of Racial Resentment and Feelings towards the Racial Ingroup among White Americans in a Nationally Representative Sample

Overview

The primary aim of this exploratory analysis was to examine the relationship between racial resentment, White identity centrality, and political ideology among White individuals using measures from the ANES 2020 dataset. Specifically, the analysis sought to determine whether racial resentment significantly predicts political ideology among White individuals in a

nationally representative US sample, and whether White identity centrality predicted political ideology in distinct ways from racial resentment. This is an important step to identify heterogeneity of racial attitudes among White individuals and how this can influence differential perceptions of norms tied to discussing race. More clearly understanding the relationships between racial resentment, political ideology, and White identity centrality will inform the design and analytical approach for the other studies in my dissertation. A stepwise multiple regression model and factor analysis were used to investigate the associations between these constructs. It was predicted that higher racial resentment scores will predict more conservative self-identification relative to participants with lower racial resentment scores. It was also hypothesized that higher White identity centrality would predict higher levels of conservatism, but this construct would explain more variance in political ideology than racial resentment alone. Better understanding how White Americans' beliefs about symbolic racism and group identity relate to each other allows for a more targeted approach when employing dynamic norms focused on discussing race.

Methods

Participants

The dataset used for this analysis is the ANES 2020 dataset (American National Election Studies, 2021), which provides data on various policy and racial attitudes for a representative sample of voting-eligible citizens in the United States. The ANES is conducted via phone interviews before and after presidential elections take place every 4 years. The present analysis focused specifically on the White sample within the 2020 dataset who completed the relevant racial resentment measures, $n=5638$. Participants in this sample had an average age of 53.5 years old ($SD = 17.1$) and 49% identified as men with 51% identifying as women. 32% identified as

liberals, 40% identified as conservative, and 21% identified as politically moderate. 46% of the sample reported having at least a bachelor's degree.

Measures

Racial Resentment. The racial resentment composite predictor variable consists of the average of three validated measures of racial resentment in the ANES 2020 dataset. This scale assesses individuals' attitudes and feelings towards racial and ethnic groups, capturing levels of symbolic racism they may hold towards minority groups. The individual items were selected from the full racial resentment scale developed for the ANES in the 1980s by Kinder & Sanders (1996), they include measures of outgroup warmth and interest in perspective-taking on a 1-5 scale where higher scores indicate greater racial resentment.

Political Ideology. The dependent variable is political ideology, which represents individuals' self-identified political beliefs as calculated from their responses to the question: “*Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?*” The options ranged from 1 – Extremely Liberal to 7 – Extremely Conservative, with an option for “*I haven't thought much about this*”.

Attitudes towards White Ingroup. Two items were analyzed to assess feelings towards the White racial ingroup: A feeling thermometer asking participants how they would rate White people on a scale from 0-Not warm at all to 10-Very warm, and a measure of White identity centrality asking participants to rank how important being White is to their identity on a scale from 1-Not at all to 7-Very important.

Results

Confirmatory factor analysis was run on the four measures of racial resentment and the measures of White identity centrality and feelings towards White people. This analysis checked

to see that the measures load onto two separate factors as shown in prior work. To examine the relationship between racial resentment, feelings towards the White ingroup, and political ideology, a stepwise linear regression analysis was conducted. This analysis determined the extent to which racial resentment predicted unique variance in political ideology among White Americans compared to feelings towards the White ingroup. Age, gender, and education level were included in the regression model as covariates.

Confirmatory factor analysis identified that the selected racial resentment measures and white centrality measures load onto separate underlying factors (see Table 1). This finding replicated prior work showing that racial resentment and attitudes towards White identity are unique constructs that predict distinct patterns of political behavior (Jardina, 2019).

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis of the White identity centrality, White feeling thermometer, and 3 racial resentment measures, n=5638. Factor loadings above .6 are denoted in bold. (R) indicates reverse coded.

Survey item	Factor loading	
	1	2
Factor 1: Racial Resentment		
V202453. How often do you try to take the perspective of other racial/ethnic groups?	.82	
V202452. How often do you have concerned feelings for other racial/ethnic groups?	.81	
V202490x. Does the federal government treat Whites or Blacks Better? (R)	.66	
Factor 2: Feelings towards White Identity		
V202482. How would you rate Whites?		.94
V202499x. How important is being White to your identity?		.43

Based on the results of the confirmatory factor analysis, the measures that loaded onto factors above .6 were used for the regression analysis.

A stepwise linear regression model examining how scores on racial resentment and feelings toward White identity predict political ideology among White individuals found that higher racial resentment significantly predicts political ideology, see Table 2.

Table 2. Results of stepwise regression with predictors racial resentment and feelings toward White ingroup and outcome measure political ideology.

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSE	R ² Change	F Change	df1	df2	p
1	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.72	0.00		0	4530	
2	0.59	0.35	0.35	1.39	0.35	2394.52	1	4529	< .001
3	0.61	0.37	0.37	1.37	0.02	170.39	1	4528	< .001
4	0.61	0.38	0.38	1.36	0.01	51.55	1	4527	< .001
5	0.62	0.38	0.38	1.35	0.01	30.68	1	4526	< .001

		Unstandardized coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized coefficient	t	p	95% CI	
							Lower	Upper
1	(Intercept)	4.15	0.03		162.50	< .001	4.10	4.20
2	(Intercept)	2.05	0.05		42.81	< .001	1.95	2.14
	Treatment by Govt	0.63	0.01	0.59	48.93	< .001	0.61	0.66
3	(Intercept)	1.52	0.06		24.56	< .001	1.40	1.64
	Treatment by Govt	0.57	0.01	0.53	42.48	< .001	0.55	0.60
	Outgroup Perspective	0.29	0.02	0.16	13.05	< .001	0.24	0.33
4	(Intercept)	1.00	0.10		10.59	< .001	0.82	1.19
	Treatment by Govt	0.56	0.01	0.52	41.60	< .001	0.53	0.59
	Outgroup Perspective	0.29	0.02	0.17	13.47	< .001	0.25	0.34
	White Feeling Therm	0.01	0.001	0.09	7.18	< .001	0.01	0.01
5	(Intercept)	0.89	0.10		9.17	< .001	0.70	1.08

	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized coefficient	t	p	95% CI	
						Lower	Upper
Treatment by Govt	0.55	0.01	0.51	40.02	< .001	0.52	0.57
Outgroup Perspective	0.19	0.03	0.11	6.82	< .001	0.14	0.25
White Feeling Therm	0.01	0.001	0.09	7.55	< .001	0.01	0.01
Concern for Outgroup	0.15	0.03	0.09	5.54	< .001	0.10	0.200

Note. The following covariate was considered but not included for the model: White identity centrality.

Discussion

Overall, the results demonstrated a significant relationship between racial resentment, feelings about White identity, and political ideology among White individuals. Higher levels of racial resentment and more positive feelings toward White identity were associated with more conservative political ideology. While racial resentment explained 36.6% of the variance in political ideology, this increased to 38.4% when feelings toward White identity were added into the model, a small but significant increase. Exploring how these predictors relate to specific zero-sum race-related policies may have uncovered larger effects in terms of variance explained. Still, the findings confirm previous work demonstrating the role of racial resentment in shaping political attitudes among White individuals and highlight the importance of considering these factors when examining discussions of racial dynamics. The results of this analysis show that both ingroup and outgroup racial attitudes among White people are significant predictors of political ideology, which is closely associated with social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994). Both political ideology and social dominance orientation influence racial attitudes in meaningful ways, including perceptions of systemic racial inequality (Marshburn et al., 2023).

This underscored the importance of examining experimental effects across levels of political ideology in subsequent studies, as well as ensuring that there is an even distribution of participants with different political beliefs in each experimental condition. Similarly, subsequent studies would also capture White identity centrality using a validated scale to control for its effects when examining main effects by condition. This analysis covered well-trodden ground but provided an important foundation from which the experiments in the present research could illuminate why ingroup and outgroup racial attitudes explain different variance in political ideology, and potentially other race-relevant beliefs.

Study 1: How do White People Perceive and Make Sense of Social Norms Tied to Discussing Race? What other Relevant Psychological Constructs are Related to Beliefs about these Norms?

Overview

The background research established that feelings towards the White ingroup and racial resentment indeed explain different portions of variance in White American political ideology, aligning with prior research findings. Study 1 examined how White Americans perceive the social norms that dictate the acceptability of discussing topics related to race and relevant racial attitudes. It used a descriptive approach to measure baseline norm perception and how these perceptions correlate with other racial attitude measures and demographic variables such as age, gender, and political ideology. This study also presented participants with the same racial resentment measures from the ANES that were used in the background research to correlate perceptions of norms with validated measures that have been shown to predict political beliefs and policy support.

This study was also used to pilot different dynamic norm appeals. Four different dynamic norm appeals were tested that each tapped into different aspects of social influence to increase the persuasiveness of the appeal. Each norm contained the descriptive statement:

“Recent research has shown that, over the past 3 years, 45% of White Americans have started more openly talking about race. That means that, in recent years, more than 4 in 10 White Americans have begun to talk about race who would not have before.”

The broad norm appeal gave only the dynamic norm statement above. The specific norm appeal further elaborated that White Americans from across the country and political spectrum were discussing race to preempt partisan attributions of the normative information. The demographic shift norm appeal highlighted that “*Many estimates predict that the United States will become a minority majority country by 2045 (White people will no longer be the majority)*” to elicit participant attention in attending to the norm. Finally, the education frame provided context that White Americans who engaged in discussions on race felt more confident and competent in their understanding of racial issues. Participant reactions to the different articles were assessed to understand which norm appeals were most liked, most easily understood, and generated the lowest levels of anxiety and discomfort.

Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited from two sources, online survey platform CloudResearch (n=308) and the UCLA psychology subject pool (n=32). Demographic screeners were put in place so that only participants who identified as White Americans were able to enter the study. Before analyzing study data, a data integrity script was run to check for inattentive participants and

nonsense responses. The *careless* package in R (Yentes & Wilhelm, 2018) was used to calculate the intra-individual response variation index, the number of consecutive survey responses with the same answer (longstring value), and Mahalanobis distance for each participant. These indices, along with coding of open response text entry questions for nonsense responses and whether participants passed a simple attention check survey item, were used to determine exclusion criteria for low-quality survey responses based on current best practices (Dunn et al., 2018; Marjanovic et al., 2015). Participants who had at least one nonsense response as judged by the author were excluded. Responses that had an intra-individual response variation index value greater than 20, longstring values greater than 10, and also failed the attention check were excluded. A total of 31 participants (10%) were removed from the CloudResearch sample for a final sample size of 277. A single participant was removed from the UCLA psychology subject pool sample for providing the same answer to 17 questions in a row resulting in a final sample size of 29.

Participants in the final sample from CloudResearch reported an average age range of 50-59 years old ($SD = 14.9$ years) and 35.7% identified as men with 63.9% identifying as women. 31% identified as liberals, 37.7% identified as conservative, and 31.4% identified as politically moderate. 38% of the sample reported having at least a bachelor's degree. There was an error in the survey logic for the UCLA psychology subject pool study such that only 1 in 5 participants saw the demographic questions. All participants still saw and completed the political ideology measure. Of the 6 participants who saw the demographic questions, they reported an average age range of 18-19 years old ($SD = 0$), and 33% identified as men with 66% identifying as women. 100% reported having a high school diploma. Of all 29 participants, 68% identified as liberals, 1% identified as conservative, and 28% identified as politically moderate.

Design & Procedure

The study was designed to capture baseline attitudes about perceptions and attitudes toward social norms dictating the discussion of race and other relevant racial attitudes. It also allowed for the piloting of different dynamic norm framings.

Upon entering the survey, participants were told they would be completing a survey on current social issues and attitudes toward discussing race. Participants completed the survey on Qualtrics online survey software on their personal computers. The study consisted of a consent form, and a battery of Likert-scale survey questions on attitudes towards White privilege, social dominance orientation, victimhood, colorblindness, ANES racial resentment measures, perceptions of norms on talking about race, and demographic measures. After completing the primary battery of psychological measures, participants were randomly assigned one of four dynamic norm appeal article vignettes (See Appendix A for full vignettes). After reading the norm appeal article, participants answered questions about how interesting they found the article, how the article made them feel, and how realistic the article felt. They were also given the opportunity to share additional thoughts in the form of an open response. Upon completing the study, CloudResearch participants received \$3 dollars and UCLA psychology subject pool participants received 0.5 course credits.

Measures

For the complete set of measures used in the study, refer to the link to the Study 1 Questionnaire in Appendix B.

Attitudes towards White privilege – 4-D scale. Participants completed measures of denial, distancing, defending, and dismantling White privilege that were adapted from scales developed by Shuman and colleagues and adapted from the framework developed by Knowles

and colleagues (Knowles et al., 2014; Shuman et al., 2022). The dismantle scale was developed by the author, Erik Santoro, and Kiara Sanchez from the original deny, distance, dismantle framework as a behavioral intent measure of taking antiracist action in response to being exposed to information about White privilege (Fisher et al., in prep; Knowles et al., 2014). The 4-D scale items asked participants to rate their agreement on a scale from 1-Strongly Disagree to 7-Strongly agree for statements including “*My life has been full of hardships because of my race,*” “*Being a member of my racial group is an important reflection of who I am,*” and “*The gaps between Black and White Americans reflect natural differences between the groups.*” The dismantle scale asked participants to rate how likely they were to engage in a list of behaviors in the following month. These behaviors include “*Read a book to educate yourself about race and racism*” and “*Donate to a nonprofit devoted to ending racism.*” Each scale was highly reliable in both samples, although slightly less so in the smaller UCLA psychology subject pool sample. CloudResearch: Deny Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$, Distance Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$, Defend Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$, Dismantle Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$. UCLA psychology subject pool: Deny Cronbach’s $\alpha = .94$, Distance Cronbach’s $\alpha = .69$, Defend Cronbach’s $\alpha = .60$, Dismantle Cronbach’s $\alpha = .70$.

ANES Racial Resentment Measures. To extend the findings from the background analysis in another sample and connect them to measures specific to norms related to discussing race, a selection of ANES measures of racial resentment were included in Study 1. These measures included adapted versions of the feeling thermometer towards Black people “*Do you feel warm, cold, or neither warm nor cold towards Black people?*” and warmth towards Black people measure “*How often have you felt admiration for Black people?*” Answer options were specific to each question and thus the ANES composite measure consisted of the average of the

z-scores of each of the 4 measures (CloudResearch Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$, UCLA psychology subject pool Cronbach's $\alpha = .60$).

Social Dominance Orientation. The 8-item version of the SDO₇ scale was used in this study to capture dominance and antiegalitarianism attitudes (Ho et al., 2015). SDO has been shown to predict support for a range of race-related attitudes including support for hostility towards immigrants and beliefs about the zero-sum nature of group conflict (Ho et al., 2012). For this scale, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a selection of statements on a 1-Strongly Agree to 7-Strongly Disagree scale. The eight statements included “*Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups,*” and “*No one group should dominate in society*” (reverse coded) for the dominance subscale, and “*Group equality should not be our primary goal*” and “*It is unjust to try and make groups equal*” for the antiegalitarianism subscale (CloudResearch Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$, UCLA psychology subject pool Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$).

Victimhood. A single-item measure of victimhood was included to capture feelings of reverse discrimination towards White people. The item asked participants to “*Please select an option below to complete the following statement: In society, compared with people of color, White people experience _____ discrimination.*” Answer options ranged from 1-Much Less Overall to 7-Much More Overall.

Attitudes towards Social Norms Dictating the Discussion of Race. Participants were asked to rate how much they agreed or disagreed on 9 statements mapping attitudes about social norms regarding the discussion of race on a 1-Strongly Disagree to 7-Strongly Agree scale. The items were developed by the author to map on to approach vs. avoidance beliefs about discussing race both with other White people and with people of color. These statements included “*I want to*

talk to White people about topics related to race” and “I want to talk to people of color about race and racism” for the approach beliefs and “When talking about topics related to race, I generally feel uncomfortable” and “I feel pressure to not bring up topics related to race when talking with my friends” for the avoidance beliefs. The items measuring approach attitudes and avoid attitudes were both highly reliable (CloudResearch Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$ and $.87$, respectively; $.80$ combined. UCLA psychology subject pool Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$ and $.87$, respectively; $.80$ combined).

Perceptions of Social Norms Dictating the Discussion of Race. In order to understand how participants feel about how normatively acceptable or unacceptable it is to discuss race-related topics, they were asked to select the percentage of White people in the United States who regularly have conversations about race with other White people, the percentage who feel comfortable talking about race, and the percentage who feel threatened talking about race/racism on sliding scales ranging from 0-100 percent (see Figure 2).

Reactions to Norm Framing Vignette. After reading the norm vignette at the end of the study, participants answered the question “*How are interested are you in having a conversation about race after reading this article excerpt?*” on a scale of 1-Not interested at all to 5-Very interested and the question “*How realistic do you think this article excerpt was?*” on a scale from 1-Not at all to 5-Very. Participants also rated their agreement on a 1-Strongly disagree to 5-Strongly agree scale that “*Reading this excerpt made me feel...* “ for the following feelings: Anxious, uncomfortable, motivated, guilty, interested, ambivalent. Participants were also invited to share other thoughts or reactions they had to the norm vignette in an open-response question.

Move the slider to select the percentage that you believe aligns with the statement.

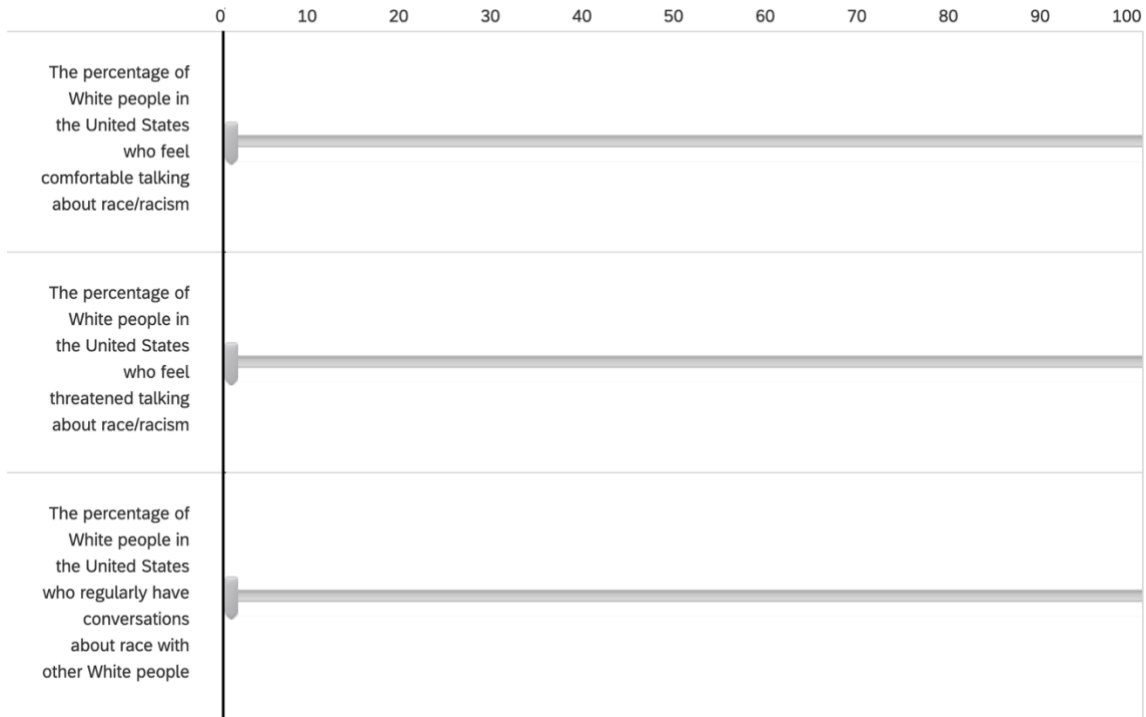


Figure 2. The instructions and sliding scale measures participants were asked to use to estimate percentages of White people in the United States who feel comfortable talking about race, feel threatened talking about race, and regularly have conversations about race.

Racial Colorblindness. A measure of colorblind attitudes was adapted from the short-form version of the Multidimensional Assessment of Racial Colorblindness (Whitley et al., 2022) to capture beliefs in the rejection of racial categorization. Participants were instructed to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following 4 statements on a 1-Strongly Agree to 7-Strongly disagree scale: “*I wish people in this society would stop obsessing so much about race,*” “*People who become preoccupied by race are forgetting that we are all just human,*” “*Putting racial labels on people obscures the fact that everyone is a unique individual,*” and “*Race is an artificial label that keeps people from thinking freely as individuals.*” There was high reliability across the 4 items (CloudResearch Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$,

UCLA psychology subject pool Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$). The scores were reverse coded so higher scores represented greater endorsement of racial colorblindness.

Results

Descriptive statistics were first calculated on the measures for the study to establish baseline attitudes across both samples, they are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Means and standard deviations of outcome measures for both Study 1 samples.

Study Item (Scale)	CloudResearch		UCLA	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Attitudes towards White privilege (1-7)				
Deny	2.61	1.13	2.36	.81
Distance	3.15	1.22	3.70	.76
Defend	3.21	1.70	1.53	.80
Dismantle	3.65	1.75	4.34	1.08
Social Dominance Orientation (1-7)	2.68	1.19	1.98	0.89
Victimhood (1-7)	2.59	1.61	1.20	.48
Social Norms about Discussing Race (1-5)				
Attitudes – Avoid	5.15	.99	4.08	.74
Attitudes – Approach	2.87	.99	3.30	.71
Perceptions of Social Norms (0-100)				
Perceptions – % Like Discussing Race	45.01	21.46	40.97	18.11
Perceptions – % Avoid Discussing Race	52.94	23.64	53.97	21.36
Perceptions – % Regularly Discuss Race	41.36	24.68	36.5	21.56
Racial Colorblindness (1-7)	5.82	1.31	4.23	1.65

Given the smaller sample size of the UCLA psychology subject pool sample, only the CloudResearch results will be shown in the rest of this section. For full Study 1 UCLA results, see Appendix C. Next, the key measures from Study 1 were correlated together, see Table 4.

Table 4. Correlation matrix of outcome measures in CloudResearch Study 1 sample.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Deny	—							
2. Distance	.28***	—						
3. Dismantle	-.01	-.07	—					
4. Defend	.34***	.67***	-.18**	—				
5. Colorblind	-.01	.02	.15*	-.08	—			
6. SDO	.38***	.51***	-.28	.50***	.06	—		
7. Talk Race – Avoid	-.19**	-.23***	.12*	-.21***	.06	-.24***	—	
8. Talk Race – Approach	.07	.04	.63***	-.11	.16**	-.19**	.12*	—
9. Politics	.21***	.27***	-.27***	.32***	-.22***	.34***	-.10	-.30***

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

The hypothesis that higher scores on racial colorblindness, social dominance orientation, and conservative political ideology would negatively predict attitudes towards viewing discussions of race as normative was tested using standard OLS linear regression models. The hypothesis was supported. The results of these regression models are reported in Table 5 (next page).

Table 5. Linear regression analysis results for Study 1.

	Colorblindness	Social Dominance Orientation	Political Ideology
Talk Norms - Avoid	$\beta = .06$	$\beta = -.24^{***}$	$\beta = -.10$
Talk Norms - Approach	$\beta = .16^{**}$	$\beta = -.19^{**}$	$\beta = -.30^{***}$
Talk Norms - All	$\beta = .14^*$	$\beta = -.29$	$\beta = -.26^{***}$
R^2	.02	.08	.07
F	5.57*	25.06***	19.08
df	275	275	275

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

Principal component analysis of the 9 items revealed a two-factor structure that mapped the individual items cleanly onto beliefs about *avoiding vs. approaching* the discussion of race, see Table 6 (next page). These two factors can also be conceptualized as the extent to which participants viewed discussing race as normative (avoid) and behavioral intentions to engage in future conversations about race (approach).

Table 6. Results of principal component analysis showing the two factors underlying the social norm attitude measures for the CloudResearch Study 1 sample. Factor loadings above .6 are denoted in bold.

Survey item	Factor loading	
	1	2
<i>Factor 1: Avoid</i>		
I tend to avoid talking about race with people of color	.86	
Because of the way I was raised, it is hard for me to talk about topics related to race	.83	
I feel pressure to not bring up topics related to race when talking with my friends	.80	
I tend to avoid talking about race with other White people	.80	
When talking about topics related to race, I generally feel uncomfortable	.79	
<i>Factor 2: Approach</i>		
I want to talk to White people about topics related to race		.91
I want to talk to White people about topics related to race		.88
I want to talk to people of color about race and racism		.88
I feel comfortable talking about topics related to race, but I know most White people do not feel that way		.62

As shown in Figure 3 (next page), there was wide variation in the estimates of the normativity of discussing race across political ideology. When asked what percentage of White people in the United States who feel **comfortable** talking about race/racism, participants reported an average of 45.01% ($SD = 21.46$). When asked what percentage of White people in the United States who feel **threatened** talking about race/racism, participants reported an average of 52.94% ($SD = 23.64$). Participants reported the average percentage of White people in the United States who **regularly have conversations about race with other White people** as 41.36% ($SD = 24.70$).

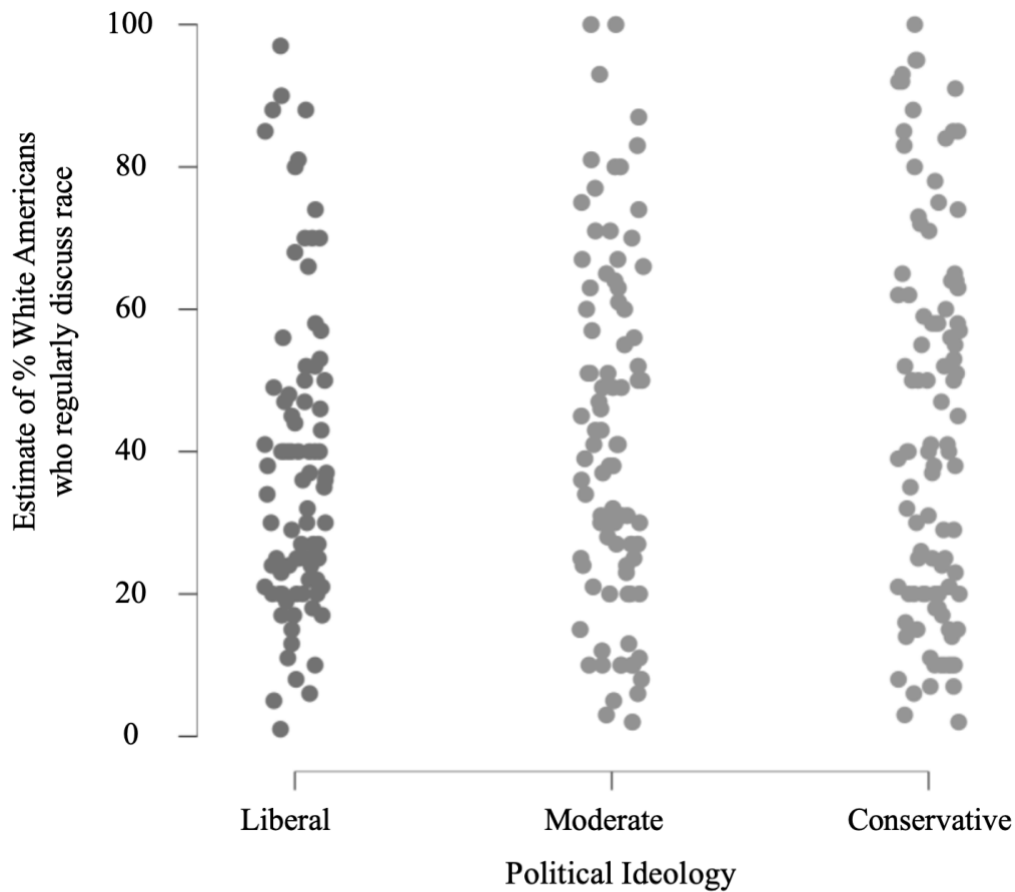


Figure 3. Study 1 participant estimates of the percentage of White Americans who regularly discuss race by political ideology.

There were no significant differences in participants' ratings of how interesting they found the different norm framing vignettes, $F(3,273) = 1.22, p = .30$, how anxious the vignettes made them feel, $F(3,273) = .089, p = .45$, or how realistic they found the vignettes, $F(3,273) = 1.45, p = .23$, see Table 7.

Table 7. Mean ratings of how interesting participants found the different dynamic norm appeals on a scale of 1-Not interesting at all to 5-Very interesting.

Dynamic Frame	n	Mean	SD	SE
Broad	70	2.56	1.14	0.14
Demog Shift	61	2.92	0.95	0.12
Education	69	2.78	0.97	0.12
Specific	77	2.77	0.96	0.11

Ad-hoc inductive coding of participant open responses to the question “*Please share any other thoughts or reactions to the story you just read*” found that many responses spontaneously mentioned colorblind attitudes (17%) and there were similar amounts of positive comments (12%) to negative comments (16%).

The same patterns of results presented here for the CloudResearch sample held true for the UCLA psychology subject pool sample across all analyses, see Appendix C for the UCLA results. The feelings toward the different dynamic norm framings were not tested in the UCLA sample due to insufficient sample size to obtain the requisite statistical power.

Discussion

The hypotheses for Study 1 were all supported. Participants who scored higher on racial colorblindness were less supportive of the normativity of discussing race, as were participants who scored higher on social dominance orientation and participants who self-identified as politically conservative. In both samples, there were high levels of variance in participant estimation of the percentages of White Americans who feel comfortable talking about, feel threatened talking about race, and regularly have conversations about race. This variation persisted when broken out across levels of political ideology, with no significant differences in estimates of these percentages between liberals, moderates, and conservatives. This lack of consensus provides evidence that there is no explicit, agreed-upon descriptive norm dictating whether it is acceptable to discuss race, and no clear understanding of how regularly these conversations occur among White Americans. It may also demonstrate the poor norm-inference ability of participants in this sample, however this itself could be evidence that participants simply do not think about discussing race or how many people discuss race.

Factor analysis showed that there are two clear factors underlying attitudes towards norms about discussing race: Avoid and approach motivations. This aligns with findings from earlier work on attitudes towards interracial conversations among White people (Plant et al., 2010), and shows that there is a similar pattern of concerns for intraracial conversations with other White people. To build on this finding, Study 3 used a conditional process model to test the role of anxiety about discussing race as a mediator of the relationship between beliefs about social norms dictating the discussion of race and behavioral intentions to engage in future conversations about race.

Analysis of participant ratings of the different dynamic norm framings revealed no significant differences in ratings of interest, feelings of anxiety, or feelings that the article was realistic. However, inductive coding of participants' open responses found that the education and specific frames performed well in terms of producing generally positive remarks (e.g., "*It was good [sic] article, but sad because more Americans should learn more including me*") with the least backlash. The demographic change and broad frames were the poorest performers in this regard, perhaps because of their respective threat-inducing pretext and lack of contextualizing information. While not coded in this study, there were enough spontaneous references to racial colorblindness (e.g., "[...] *we are all God's people. Why can't we get along*") that it was added to the qualitative coding scheme of responses in Study 3. The norm framings that elicited positive participant open responses provided identity-relevant reasons to adhere to the updated norm: The opportunity to either learn more about race from an ingroup vs. outgroup member *and* descriptive social pressure to stay in line with the group consensus on what is normatively appropriate.

Study 2: Conversations about Race and the Role of Ingroup Status among White Liberals

Overview

Research on conversations about race has examined the effects of anxiety and fear on communication quality, with studies indicating that individuals may avoid discussions about race with a racial outgroup member due to the discomfort associated with potential social consequences of saying or implying “the wrong thing”, although this anxiety is much lower when anticipating a conversation about race with a White conversation partner (Plant & Devine, 2003). White adults report higher levels of anxiety when anticipating conversations about race with a Black friend, although they report feeling closer to Black friends after engaging in a conversation on race (Sanchez et al., 2022). Anxiety and fear can also be the result of social identity threat (Branscombe et al., 1999). Indeed, even the mere act of thinking about White privilege can trigger identity threat for White people (Branscombe et al., 2007). This can, in turn, lead to sharp increase in support for ingroup-favoring policies such as legacy college admissions and a decrease in support for outgroup-focused policies such as immigration reform (Jardina, 2014; Pérez et al., 2023). Alleviating these concerns and avoiding threat triggers when it comes to conversations about race may be an important antecedent to changing norms about the acceptability of discussing race.

A White liberal sample was selected for Study 2 for two primary reasons. The first was to try to mitigate the chance of backlash and incidents of racial prejudice in the conversation as a result of the study manipulation. Unmoderated discussions on a politically charged topic such as racial inequality have been shown to lead to attitude polarization when there is a partisan divide between conversation partners (Mackie & Cooper, 1984; Myers, 1975). The second reason for selecting White liberals was to ensure that conversation partners shared at least two prominent

social identities, their race/ethnicity and political identity, to increase the likelihood that the other conversation partner was perceived as a member of the ingroup. Members of the ingroup may be more likely to approach potentially difficult topics such as race because the same threat of sanctions for “not getting it right” in interracial contexts is not as strong (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). However, this results in a conservative test of the effects of ingroup conversations about race and White privilege on shifting racial attitudes because White liberals may already have reflected on the consequences of their racial privilege and systemic racism and share similar beliefs to their conversation partner. A potential benefit to this experimental design is that the experimental manipulation and conversation prompt focus on specific aspects of race, namely White privilege, providing a more targeted focus for conversation.

Study 2 tested the effect of having a conversation about racism and White privilege on attitudes towards privilege, antiracist behavioral intentions, and attitudes towards social norms dictating the normativity of discussing race in a sample of White liberals. It was hypothesized that viewing a video on White privilege and systemic racism and then having a conversation with a fellow White liberal would lead to a decrease in denial and distancing of White privilege and an increase in interest in taking action to address systemic racism (dismantling). The goal of this study is to investigate what happens during a conversation about race between two White people who have a belief system that focuses on fairness and equality (Graham et al., 2009). This study will investigate whether a conversation about race can increase behavioral intentions to engage in future conversations about race.

Methods

Participants

Participants who self-identified as White American liberals were recruited using the CloudResearch online survey platform (n=222). 18 participants were dropped from the sample because they did not reach the manipulation materials and 30 participants were dropped from the conversation condition because they did not match with a conversation partner resulting in a final sample of 176. Participants in this sample had an average age of 42.5 years old ($SD = 13.7$) and 30% identified as men with 33% identifying as women (the remaining 36% of the sample did not see the gender demographic question due to a survey design issue). 100% identified as at least somewhat liberal. 47% of the sample reported having at least a bachelor's degree.

Design & Procedure

Study 2 used a two (time: pre vs. post) by two (condition: conversation vs. individual reflection) mixed design to test whether pairing White liberals up to have a 5-minute conversation reacting to a video about White privilege and systemic racism would have a greater effect on attitudes towards antiracist behavior and privilege compared to reflecting on the video individually. Participants entered the study via the CloudResearch online survey platform on their personal computers. After completing the consent form, participants were informed they would be completing a study on “discussing social issues” and were randomly assigned to either the conversation condition (watch + talk) or the individual reflection condition (watch only). Participants in both conditions completed pre-manipulation measures of racial attitudes and attitudes towards White privilege, read a filler article, then watched a video on White privilege and systemic racism. The video centered Black voices and experts on the subjects, providing definitions and examples of White privilege and systemic racism and their societal consequences. Following the video, participants in the conversation condition were matched with

another participant on the online text platform ChatPlat embedded into the Qualtrics survey. They engaged in a 5-minute text conversation reacting to the information in the experimental video. Participants in the individual reflection condition watched the experimental video then completed a written reflection about their reactions to the video. After the conversation or written reflection, all participants completed Likert-scale measures of key outcomes and demographics. See Appendix A for 1) the treatment video on White privilege and systemic racism that participants watched and 2) the instructions that participants in the conversation condition read before talking with another participant.

Measures

A selection of measures from Study 1 were used again in Study 2, including the same single-item racial attitude feeling thermometers towards Whites and Blacks, racial colorblindness, victimhood, racial resentment (Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$), and demographic items. The feeling thermometers towards Black people and White people were presented before the experimental manipulation, while the 3-D measures were presented before and after to create pre-post scores. For the full set of measures used in the study, see Appendix B. Measures that were added or modified from Study 1 are detailed below.

Attitudes towards White Privilege. To measure White privilege attitudes, participants completed pre- and post-manipulation measures of denial (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$, omitting item 4), distancing (Cronbach's $\alpha = .84$), or dismantling (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$) in response to White privilege – the three common responses that White people have when confronted with information about racial privilege (Knowles et al., 2014). Data was collected for this study in November 2021, prior to the publication of the 4-D paper that added the “defense” construct (Shuman et al., 2022). Thus, that measure was not included.

Feelings about Conversation with Partner. Immediately following the conversation reacting to the manipulation video, participants answered the question “*How did you feel while having the conversation?*” For each of the following feelings: Anxious, uncomfortable, motivated, guilty, interested, and ambivalent, participants responded on a scale from 1-Not at all to 5-Extremely. Similar to Study 1, the negative feelings “tense” and “nervous” ($r = .92, p < .01$) were collapsed into a negative feelings average and the feelings “motivated” and “inspired” ($r = .80, p < .01$) were collapsed into a positive feelings average.

Behavioral Intentions. All participants completed measures of behavioral intent by rating their agreement to items including “*I want to talk to other White people about the topics discussed in this study*” and “*I want to talk to people of color about the topics discussed in this study*”. These measures were highly reliable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$) and were averaged into a composite behavioral intention variable.

Results

To test the hypothesis that a conversation on race would decrease denial and distancing and increase interest in dismantling White privilege, a linear mixed effects model with random intercepts for time (pre-post) and conversation dyad with age, gender, and SES as covariates was run: $\text{Score} \sim \text{time} * \text{condition} + \text{age} + \text{gender} + \text{SES} + (1|\text{dyad}) + (1|\text{subject})$.

The linear mixed effects model found no significant changes in participant attitudes towards denying, distancing, or dismantling privilege between the conversation (Watch & Talk) and individual reflection (Watch Only) conditions across time points (see Figure 4, Table 8, next pages).

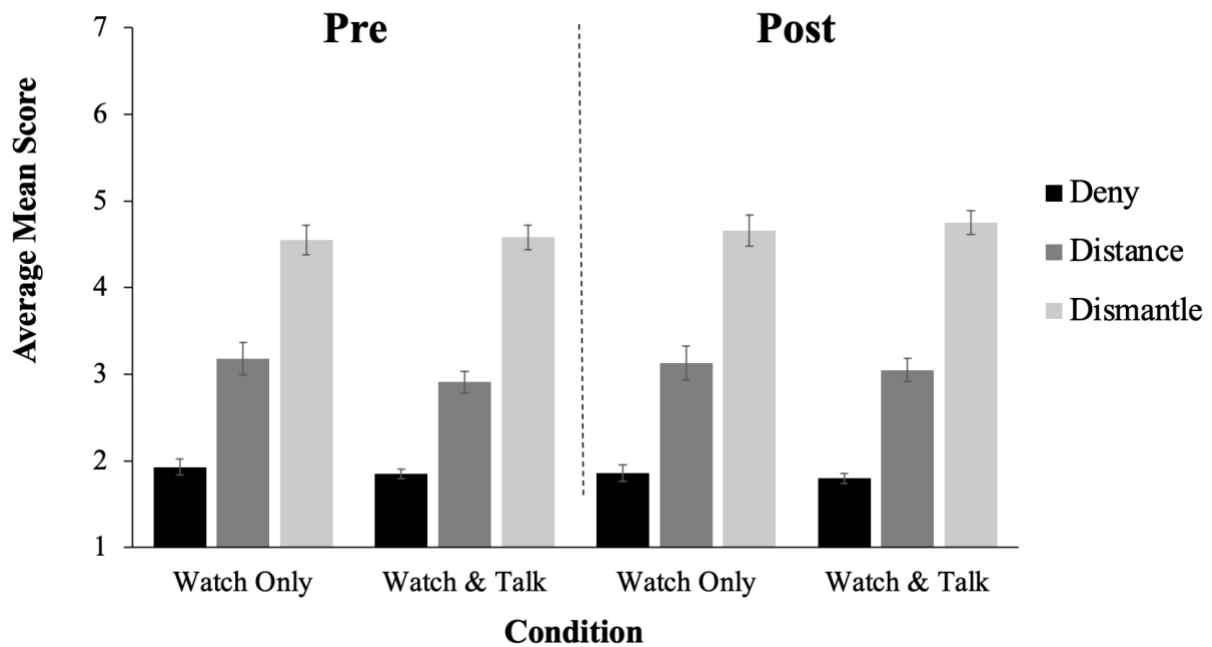


Figure 4. Mean scores of attitudes towards privilege before and after the manipulation in both the conversation (Watch & Talk) and individual reflection (Watch Only) conditions.

An independent samples *t*-test found no difference in average behavioral intentions to engage in future conversations about race between the conversation condition ($M=3.69$, $SD = 1.01$) and the individual reflection condition ($M=3.61$, $SD = .94$), $t(203) = .51$, $p = .61$, $d = .15$.

Although the sample was limited to liberals, political ideology was correlated with intentions to engage in conversations about race with other White people ($r = .21$, $p < .01$) and people of color ($r = .24$, $p < .01$) such that participants who identified as more liberal were more likely to express interest in engaging in such conversations.

Table 8. Results of linear mixed-effects model comparing attitudes towards White privilege across levels of time and condition.

	Standardized Coefficient (β)	<i>p</i>	<i>SE</i>
Deny			
Fixed effects			
Intercept	1.86	<.001	.08
Condition	-.06	.30	.06
Time	.06	.54	.10
Time*Condition	-.01	.87	.08
Distance			
Fixed effects			
Intercept	2.16	<.001	.68
Condition	-.12	.65	.27
Time	-.01	.95	.11
Time*Condition	-.18	.18	.14
Dismantle			
Fixed effects			
Intercept	3.00	<.001	.70
Condition	.04	.90	.27
Time	-.06	.53	.10
Time*Condition	-.10	.40	.13

Note: No random effects of individual or conversation group, $p > .05$, $n = 143$.

Discussion

This nonsignificant effect of condition in Study 2 suggests that a single unscaffolded conversation about racism and racial privilege with another White person who shares one's liberal political views is not enough to meaningfully shift attitudes towards racial privilege. The same pattern of results held when the sample was refined to only participants who exchanged at least three lines of text with their conversation partner. This indicates that, for White liberals, having a brief conversation about race and White privilege does not influence attitudes

significantly differently from reflecting on them individually. The prediction that attitudes towards White privilege may not have been supported in part because the conversation took place over text with a stranger instead of in-person with a social connection. Thus the salience of the conversation partner sharing White racial identity was lower than it would have been in a face-to-face conversation. Providing participants more scaffolding in the form of additional instructions or conversation starter questions may have improved the depth of the conversation quality. Approximately a third of the conversations were even shorter than the allotted 5-minute limit due to participants entering the ChatPlat conversation at different times. The feelings about how the conversation went could not be compared to feelings elicited by the manipulation article because they were only presented to participants in the conversation condition. These issues were addressed in the design of Study 4. Due to its correlation with behavioral intentions to engage in conversations about race, political ideology will be included as a covariate in Studies 3 and 4 to isolate the effect of condition.

This finding may also indicate that a scale measuring typical reactions to information about privilege may not fully capture the attitudes that liberal Whites have about privilege. The liberal sample for Study 2 may have resulted in ceiling effects on intent to dismantle and floor effects on denial. The fact that participants were at the midpoint on distancing from White identity may demonstrate how White liberals try to avoid centering their racial identity even in the context of discussing race. Emerging research has shown that feelings such as guilt and uncertainty towards racial privilege may be better barometers of determining support for racial justice among White people (Foster-Gimbel & Phillips, 2020). Measures of these feelings and White identity centrality were added to Studies 3 and 4 to more fully capture and understand the role they play in motivating or inhibiting belief in normative change.

Study 3: Testing the Effects of Dynamic Norm Appeals about Discussing Race

Overview

Study 2 investigated how a conversation on race does not significantly influence attitudes towards White privilege or engaging in future conversations about race for a White liberal sample. The design of Study 3 focuses on a different ingroup process: Social proof. How do White people update their views on the current consensus for racial group norms? Can perceptions of this consensus (or lack thereof) be manipulated to influence other racial attitudes?

Detailed vignettes can be powerful tools for setting descriptive norms and can also influence recursive processes tied to one's identity (Walton, 2014). These norms can be especially powerful when there is pluralistic ignorance or lack of awareness around what the proper norm should be, as is often the case for White people when asked how comfortable they are talking about race (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). This is also shown by the high standard deviation among responses to the question "*How acceptable is it to talk about race?*" in Study 1 - demonstrating a lack of agreement on a strong explicit norm. To take advantage of this potential presence of pluralistic ignorance around discussing race, Study 3 will involve participants reading different framings of dynamic norms demonstrating an increase in the number of discussions about race taking place among White Americans.

Interventions that change descriptive norms around toxic behaviors such as bullying have been shown to be effective at durably changing behavior (Paluck et al., 2016). Study 3 tested whether this holds true when the intervention targets a norm associated with White racial identity – how acceptable is it to talk about race. Prior work on dynamic norm interventions has shown that they can change attitudes in a variety of domains while preserving a high sense of self-efficacy (Sparkman & Walton, 2019). This is especially pertinent for White Americans who are

navigating both identity-threat and group-status threat when processing information related to race, and frequently react to this information in ways that preserve positive self-image (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Thus, dynamic norm framings were deployed here to test whether they can positively change attitudes and perceptions toward the normativity of discussing race with other White people. Additionally, the dynamic norm framings used the mean norm estimates of how many White Americans regularly discuss race provided by participants in Study 1 to ground them in reality. Participants completed a saying-is-believing task following the norm framings to ensure they attended to the dynamic norm deeply and engaged in self-persuasion to strengthen the effect of the norm appeal (Aronson, 1999; Bergquist & Ejelöv, 2022).

Methods

Participants

A power analysis conducted using G*Power software (Faul et al., 2007) found that the study required at minimum 265 participants to obtain a statistical power of 0.8 to detect an effect size of $d = .03$ using a six-condition between-subjects design. Participants were recruited using CloudResearch with the criteria that they self-identify as White and live in the United States. In total, 392 participants entered the survey with 358 completing the survey. After applying the same data cleaning process used in Studies 1 and 2, 83 low-quality or inattentive participants were dropped resulting in a final sample of 275 participants. Participants in the final sample had an average age range of 50-59 years old ($SD = 17.2$ years) and 39% identified as men with 60% identifying as women. 29% identified as liberals, 34% identified as conservative, and 37% identified as politically moderate. 39% of the sample reported having at least a bachelor's degree.

Procedure

Participants accessed the study via the online survey platform CloudResearch on their personal computers. After completing a consent form, participants were informed they would be reading an article excerpt on a current social issue and answering questions about their attitudes and identity. Participants completed a pre-manipulation measure of White identity centrality and were then randomly assigned to read one of six possible norm framings: Four different dynamic norm variations highlighting a recent increase in the percentage of White Americans discussing race (education focused, detailed, broad, or demographic shift), one static norm appeal detailing the *current* percentage of White Americans who believe it is important to discuss race, and a control article excerpt on the percentage of Americans talking about their food choices (see Appendix A for the complete norm framing manipulations). Each norm framing article excerpt was crafted by the researcher and was designed to emulate the header of a news article from Time magazine, with an author photo and description that made clear the White racial identity and nonpartisan background of the article author, see Figure 5 (next page).



IDEAS • RACE

More White People are Having Conversations about Race With Their White Friends and Relatives

[Time magazine illustration of people talking around a table]

Illustration by Dennis Brackley for TIME



BY ALEX SMITH MAY 9, 2023 7:00 AM EST

Smith is an author and contributor for Time. He has written extensively about American culture. He is currently a fellow at the nonpartisan Population Research Bureau.

Recent research has shown that, over the past 3 years, 45% of White Americans have started to learn about their blind spots when it comes to race. That means that, in recent years, more than 4 in 10 White Americans have started learning and seeking out information about race who would not have before. Many White Americans who have had these conversations report feeling more confident discussing race and also more competent in understanding racial issues at the national level.

Figure 5. Dynamic norm article manipulation. Note the author photo clearly indicates a White man, the author description highlights the nonpartisan background of the author, and the publication date of the article is within the past six months.

Participants spent at least 30 seconds on the page reviewing the article before the “Next” button appeared and they could advance in the survey. Following the article, participants in all conditions completed a saying-is-believing manipulation where they were instructed to share the key aspects of the manipulation article in their own words to someone in their network who they thought may not know about the information presented in the vignette (Aronson, 1999; Higgins & Rholes, 1978, see Appendix A for saying-is-believing task instructions). This exercise served two purposes: 1) It ensured that participants attended closely to the manipulation message and 2) it required participants to think through what having a conversation about race would look like. Thus, the exercise put participants in the psychological context of thinking about conversations on race while also serving as an opportunity for self-persuasion. Following the saying-is-believing exercise, participants completed survey measures and demographic questions in the form of a series of Likert-scales. At the conclusion of the survey, participants were debriefed and informed that the article excerpt they read was created by the researcher.

Measures

Many measures from Studies 1 and 2 were used again in Study 3, including the same measures of White identity centrality (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .75$, scale adapted from the multidimensional model of African American racial identity, Sellers et al., 1998), perceptions of norms dictating the acceptability of discussing race (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .74$), racial attitudes, attitudes towards White privilege (Deny Cronbach’s $\alpha = .91$ with life difficulties item dropped, Distance Cronbach’s $\alpha = .70$, Defend Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$, Dismantle Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$), racial colorblindness (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$), social dominance orientation (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$), a single-item measure of victimhood, and demographic items. Four new ANES measures were

added. For the full set of measures used in the study, see Appendix B. Measures that were added or modified from Study 1 are detailed below.

Racial Resentment. In addition to the four racial resentment measures used in Study 1, four additional measures were added that focused on feelings towards racial outgroups. These questions included: “*How often would you say you try to better understand people of other racial or ethnic groups by imagining how things look from their perspective?*” (answers ranged from 1-Never to 5- A great deal) and “*How often would you say that you have tender, concerned feelings for people from another racial or ethnic group who are less fortunate than you?*”(answers ranged from 1-Never to 5-Always). These measures were highly correlated with the original four racial resentment measures ($r = .65, p < .01$), and were more easily combined due to their shared 1-5 scale and improved reliability (Original ANES measures Cronbach’s $\alpha = .54$, new ANES measures Cronbach’s $\alpha = .65$ with government treatment item dropped).

Racial Attitudes. Explicit racial attitudes were measured using two feeling thermometers adapted from the 2020 ANES. Participants were asked to rate how warm or cold they felt towards White people (White feeling thermometer) or Black people (Black feeling thermometer) on a scale from 0-Very cold to 10-Very warm. Asking participants directly about their explicit racial attitudes has been shown to be an effective method of measuring them (Axt, 2018).

Reactions to Norm Framing Articles. Immediately following the norm framing article, participants answered the question “*How interested are you in having a conversation about race after reading this article excerpt?*” on a scale of 1-Not interested at all to 5-Very interested. Participants also rated their agreement on a 1-Strongly disagree to 5-Strongly agree scale that “*Reading this excerpt made me feel...* “ for the following feelings: Anxious, uncomfortable, motivated, guilty, interested, and ambivalent.

Perceptions of Social Norms Dictating the Discussion of Race - Manipulation Check.

As a manipulation check, participants were asked to provide their estimate of the percentage of White Americans who feel comfortable talking about race, the percentage of White Americans who avoid talking about race, and the percentage of White Americans who regularly have conversations about race on a 0-100 scale. Participant responses who saw the dynamic norm treatment article should align with the percentage detailed in the article (45%) and show a lower variance than participants in Study 1. These responses will be compared across conditions and to the mean percentages and standard deviations reported in Study 1.

Results

Participants were relatively evenly distributed across the six conditions and there were no significant differences in proportions of participant gender, political ideology, age, or education level across conditions, see Appendix D for crosstab tables detailing the demographic breakdown by condition and Appendix E for a correlation matrix of outcome measures with means and standard deviations.

Effects of condition were analyzed using one-way ANOVA models with Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc t-tests on interest in future conversations about race and perceptions of social norms. This analysis tests the hypothesis that interest in future conversations about race will be higher and seen as more normative for participants in the dynamic norm conditions. Age, gender, and political ideology will be included as covariates. The PROCESS conditional analysis R package (Hayes, 2012) was used to run a path analysis to explore the role of social dominance as a potential moderator of the mediated relationship between the predictor racial attitudes, mediator feelings of anxiety & uncertainty about discussing race, and outcome perceptions of the acceptability of discussing race. It was hypothesized that feelings of anxiety and discomfort will

mediate the effect of attitudes on the acceptability of discussing race and perceptions of the percentage of White Americans discussing race.

As a manipulation check, mean norm perception outcomes were plotted by condition. As shown in Figure 6 and Table 9 (next page), there was wide variation in the estimates of the normativity of discussing race within each condition, and one-way ANOVA analysis found there were no significant differences in norm perception across conditions for each of the three norm perception measures: Estimates of the percentage of White Americans who feel comfortable discussing race, the percentage of White Americans who feel anxious discussing race, and the percentage of White Americans who regularly have conversations about race.

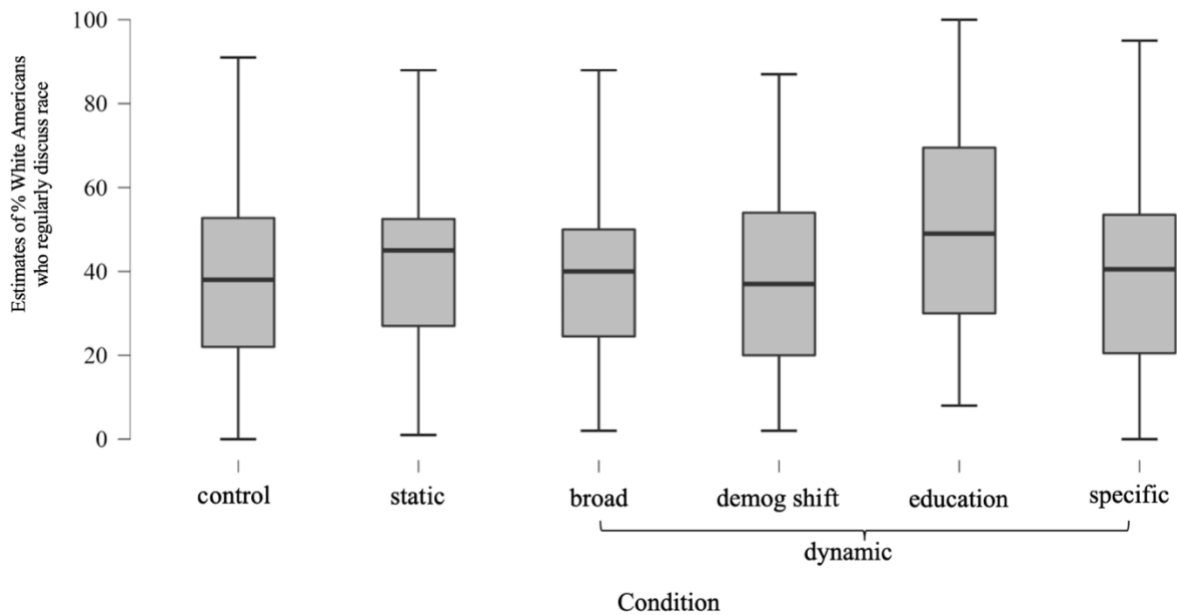


Figure 6. Participant estimates of the percentage of White Americans who regularly discuss race by condition. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics for participant estimates of the percentage of White Americans who regularly discuss race.

	control	static	broad	demog shift	education	specific
Valid	48	55	43	39	35	54
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean	40.67	43.20	40.30	38.90	50.03	40.00
Std. Deviation	24.10	21.78	23.34	21.11	26.37	22.08
Minimum	0.00	1.00	2.00	2.00	8.00	0.00
Maximum	100.00	100.00	100.00	87.00	100.00	95.00

A mediated moderation analysis was run using the PROCESS function in R (Hayes, 2012). This analysis investigated the relationship between predictor variables of feelings towards Black and White people, mediator variables positive and negative feelings about discussing race, and outcome variable beliefs about the normativity of discussing race. Due to the lack of effect of condition on the relevant outcome measures, the entire sample was used in the analysis. Tables 10-11 and Figures 7-8 (next pages) summarize the results of this analysis.

Table 10. Moderated parallel mediation analysis – Feelings toward Black people on attitudes towards social norms about discussing race as mediated by positive and negative feelings towards racial conversations with SDO moderating the effect of feelings towards Black people on positive and negative feelings.

	Beta Coefficient	SE	p	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Predictor – Black Feel Thermometer	-.02	.02	.21	-.06	.04
Mediator – Positive Feelings	.10	.03	<.001***	.04	.15
Mediator – Negative Feelings	.04	.03	.03*	-.07	-.01
Indirect effect of X on Y via Pos. Feelings	-.01	.01	.58	-.01	.01
Indirect effect of X on Y via Neg. Feelings	-.01	.01	.32	-.01	.01
Black Feel Therm * SDO on Pos. Feelings	-.06	.03	.05*	-.01	-.01
Black Feel Therm * SDO on Neg. Feelings	-.05	.03	.05*	-.14	-.03

Note: X = predictor variable, Y = outcome variable. Percentile bootstrap confidence intervals were calculated using 50,000 bootstrap samples and a 95% confidence level.

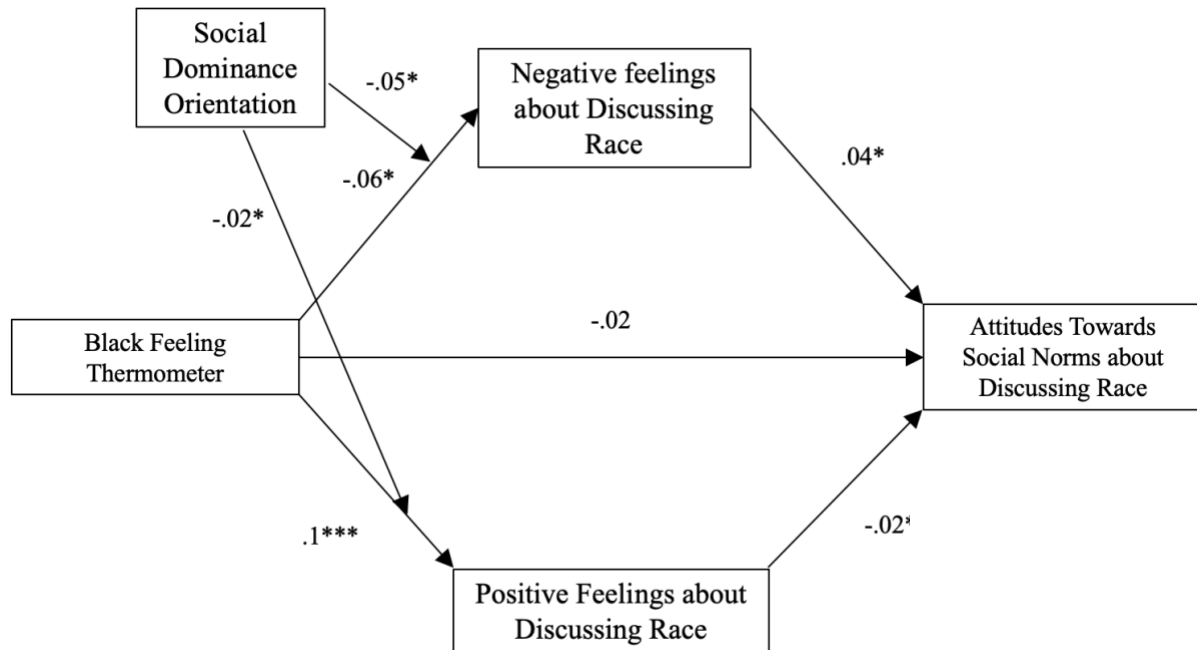


Figure 7. Conceptual diagram of moderated parallel mediation analysis – Feelings toward Black people predicting attitudes towards social norms about discussing race as mediated by positive and negative feelings towards racial conversations with SDO moderating the effect of feelings towards Black people on positive and negative feelings. Significance of $p < .05$ indicated by *, $p < .01$ by **, and $p < .001$ by ***.

Table 11. Moderated parallel mediation analysis – Feelings toward White people predicting attitudes towards social norms about discussing race as mediated by positive and negative feelings towards racial conversations with SDO moderating the effect of feelings towards White people on positive and negative feelings. Covariates included age, gender, and political ideology.

	Beta Coefficient	SE	p	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Predictor – White Feel Thermometer	-.05	.02	<.01**	-.08	-.02
Mediator – Positive Feelings	.07	.03	.01*	.02	.13
Mediator – Negative Feelings	-.01	.03	.82	-.07	.05
Indirect effect of X on Y via Pos. Feelings	.02	.01	.03*	.01	.03
Indirect effect of X on Y via Neg. Feelings	-.01	.01	.84	-.01	.01
White Feel Therm * SDO on Pos. Feelings	.02	.03	.63	-.06	.05
White Feel Therm * SDO on Neg. Feelings	.02	.03	.41	-.01	.03

Note: X = predictor variable, Y = outcome variable. Percentile bootstrap confidence intervals were calculated using 50,000 bootstrap samples and a 95% confidence level.

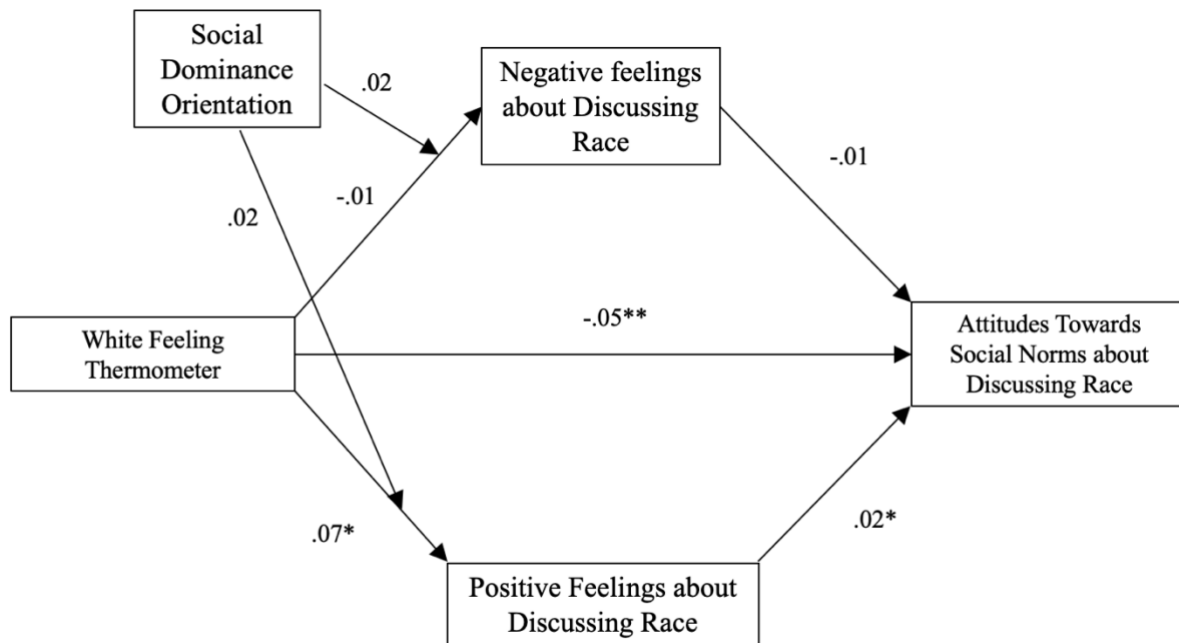


Figure 8. Conceptual diagram of moderated parallel mediation analysis – Feelings toward White people predicting attitudes towards social norms about discussing race as mediated by positive and negative feelings towards racial conversations with SDO moderating the effect of feelings towards White people on positive and negative feelings. Covariates included age, gender, and political ideology. Significance of $p < .05$ indicated by *, $p < .01$ by **, and $p < .001$ by ***.

Participant ratings of interest in having a future conversation about race were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA with Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc t-tests examining differences across conditions. There was no significant effect for the overall model, $F(5,268) = 1.81$, $p = .11$, $\eta^2 = .03$, but post-hoc t-tests showed that participants in the specific dynamic norm appeal condition ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.25$) reported marginally significantly higher interest in having a conversation about race compared to participants in the control condition ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.38$), $t = 2.94$, $p_{bonf} = .054$ (see Figure 9 below).

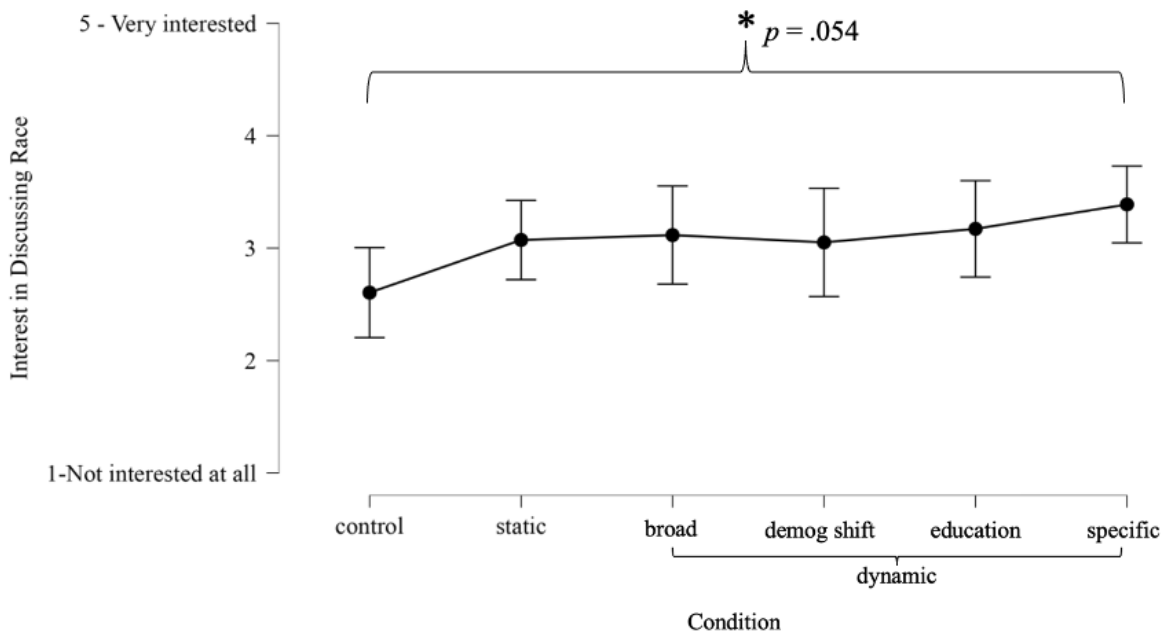


Figure 9. Participant ratings of interest in having a conversation about race by condition. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Participant attitudes towards social norms about discussing race were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA with Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc t-tests examining differences across conditions. There was no significant effect for the overall model, $F(5,268) = .28$, $p = .93$, $\eta^2 = .01$, and post-hoc t-tests showed significant no difference between specific conditions, see Table 12 (next page).

Table 12. Means and standard deviations of participant attitudes towards social norms dictating the discussion of race in Study 3 (1-5 scale, higher scores indicate greater normativity of discussing race).

Condition	n	Mean	SD	SE
Control	48	3.02	1.08	0.16
Dynamic - Broad	43	2.97	0.92	0.14
Dynamic – Demog Shift	39	3.08	0.98	0.16
Dynamic - Education	35	2.93	0.96	0.16
Dynamic - Specific	54	3.09	0.85	0.12
Static	55	3.12	0.80	0.11

Qualitative coding of the saying-is-believing task responses used a deductive approach to denote responses that 1) followed the instructions for the activity, 2) mentioned themes of racial colorblindness, or 3) demonstrated backlash against the study manipulation or activity instructions. The lead author manually coded responses. Of 263 open responses across conditions, 69% followed instructions, 21% mentioned racial colorblind themes, and 11% had themes of backlash towards the study or article itself. See Appendix F for counts of each coding category, descriptive statistics, and chi-square analysis by condition. See Table 13 (next page) for example responses from each coding category.

Table 13. Example participant responses for each coding category in Study 3.

Coding Category	Condition	Example Participant Response
Followed Instructions	Dynamic – Broad	<p>“So I'm talking to my younger brother in this [scenario], and we're discussing things like the Black Lives Matter movement, and the discrepancy between how minorities are treated differently from white people. And I guess I would just explain to them that this is something that we need to discuss amongst ourselves, and society as a whole. More and more white people, 45% according to the article, are becoming more open about discussing race in America. This is incredibly important, because more and more often we're being confronted directly by this clear divide in how people are treated based on their skin color. Before almost everyone was carrying a camera and video recorder on them all the time, most of these interactions were based on hearsay, and we had to take one sides interpretation of the events over the other. But now that we've been forced to come face to face with it, it's overwhelmingly clear that minorities, and in particular black minorities, are treated far less favorably by society and authority figures than white people.”</p>
	Dynamic - Education	<p>“Sadie, I read this article earlier about how more white people are having open discussions about race. When I was your age race wasn't really discussed until Rosa parks and martin Luther king and the riots in Detroit [happened]. That's when my family and friends started talking about race. We had friends from many different backgrounds and races when I was growing up but we didn't have discussions like you probably are now.”</p>
Racial Colorblindness	Dynamic – Broad	<p>“I don't think race should be emphasized all the time because God made us all but I do discuss race sometimes with my family members and we mostly agree that race does not determine a person's value or character. I have had people help me in times of need and they weren't always white”</p>
	Dynamic - Specific	<p>“[Fortunately], race is not as taboo a subject as it was when I was young. I remember people always labeling people by race first and foremost. Now, conversations begin with what type of person you are. Although your race and ethnicity are part of who you are, it is more important to [embrace] others differences and celebrate each other.”</p>

Backlash	Dynamic – Broad	“I think the person that wrote the article is way off . I don't think people set around and discuss other [nationalities] . I don't they are ridiculed and put down at any discussion. I think he should do more research before writing such a statement”
	Dynamic - Education	“I think that our government is the trying to decide this country worse than what the did during Obama time in office, They have made everything racist. They have used food, movies and just talking to blacks people is rasist [sic].”

Discussion

The hypothesis that dynamic norm appeals would change attitudes towards norms about discussing race was not supported, although there was a marginal effect of the specific frame on fostering great interest in future conversations about race. Additionally, there was some evidence that the education and specific frames performed better in terms of eliciting positive emotions, interest, and higher-quality open responses relative to the control condition. Qualitative coding found that the specific and education norm appeals elicited the lowest rates of backlash in open responses and the highest rate of instruction adherence among the different dynamic norm frames. Conditional process analysis found that warmer feelings towards Black people were associated with *lower negative feelings* about discussing race, which in turn predicted increased beliefs in the normativity of discussing race. Conversely, warmer feelings towards White people were associated with *greater positive feelings* about discussing race, which in turn predicted increased beliefs in the normativity of discussing race. This finding is interesting because it suggests two pathways to focus on when designing normative appeals: Increasing positive feelings about discussing race or decreasing negative feelings. This pathway was furthered explored in Study 4.

There were similar amounts of variance in participant estimates of the percentages of White people who talk about race compared to Study 1. Keeping the large error variance in mind, it appears participants in the demographic shift dynamic norm condition tended to *underestimate* the percentage of White Americans who regularly discussed race ($M=38.90$, $SD = 21.11$) while participants in the education dynamic norm tended to *overestimate* the percentage ($M=50.03$, $SD = 26.37$). This could be due to the demographic shift condition introducing group-status threat and the education condition fostering a more growth-oriented mindset. This aligns with the evidence that positive feelings about conversations on race mediates the relationship between attitudes towards White racial group and beliefs about the normativity of discussing race.

While no statistically significant differences emerged between the static norm, control, and dynamic norm conditions, the different feelings associated with discussing race provide a focal point for combining dynamic norm appeals with a targeted conversation about race with another White person. Such a design will allow for exploring whether a dynamic norm appeal can turn a brief conversation about race into an instance of norm updating. Study 4 tested this theory.

Study 4: Exploring the Combined Effects of Dynamic Norms and Conversations about Race on Attitudes and Intentions towards Discussing Race

Overview

This study combined elements of the two prior studies to test the effects of dynamic norm appeals and conversations about race in tandem. Outcome measures again focused on attitudes

towards the normativity of discussing race, attitudes towards Black and White racial groups, and feelings elicited when discussing race.

Study 4 employed a three-condition between-subjects design where participants in the dynamic norm appeal + conversation condition viewed a dynamic norm then engaged in an 8-minute conversation on race via the online text platform ChatPlat, participants in the dynamic norm only condition viewed a dynamic norm, and participants in the control condition viewed a psychologically neutral article. Based on the results of Study 3, the education and specific dynamic norm appeals were selected for the experimental conditions. These norm appeals showed the most promising results in terms of minimizing backlash and maximizing participant engagement (in terms of the percentage of participants coded as following the saying-is-believing instructions following those norm appeals).

It was predicted that participants in the dynamic norm plus conversation condition would show an increase in beliefs that discussing race is normative and increased estimates of the percentages of White Americans discussing race, and these effects would be mediated by lower anxiety and greater positive feelings about discussing race relative to participants in the other conditions. These effects would be moderated by social dominance orientation such that participants higher on social dominance will show weaker effects.

Methods

Participants

A power analysis for a three-condition between-subject dyadic design indicated that at least 180 participants (30 dyads in the norm + conversation condition) would be required to obtain a statistical power of 0.9 to detect a medium effect size ($d = .3$). CloudResearch, an online participant recruitment platform, was used to screen and recruit 354 self-identified White

Americans (Litman et al., 2017). After conducting the same data integrity cleaning process as earlier studies, 27 participants were dropped due to inattentiveness or nonsense responses resulting in a final sample of 327 participants. Due to logistical issues with the survey, there were only 34 dyads in the dynamic norm + conversation condition, with 90 participants in the dynamic norm only condition and 92 in the control condition. Of the 34 dyads in the dynamic norm + conversation condition, 7 were dropped because they exchanged fewer than three lines of text in their conversation resulting in 27 usable dyads in the final sample. This sample allowed for inferences about how discussions of race play out among a sample heterogeneous in terms of age ($M_{\text{range}} = 40\text{-}49$ years old, $SD = 10.66$), gender (27% identified as men, 41% identified as women, 31% declined to state their gender), and political ideology (27% identified as liberal, 34% as moderate, and 35% as conservative). The sample skewed lower than the other studies in terms of education, with only 31% of the sample having completed a college degree.

Design & Procedure

In Study 2, several participants were never matched with another conversation partner or only had a few minutes to chat due to the five-minute conversation time limit on ChatPlat. The conversation time limit in Study 4 was extended to eight minutes to ensure that participants had sufficient time to be connected to a conversation partner, reflect on the dynamic norm, and meaningfully engage with their conversation partner. Importantly, the conversation instructions and prompt again made salient the conversation partner's White racial identity, ensuring participant awareness of their racial ingroup status.

Study 4 used a three condition between-subjects design with two experimental conditions and a control. In the dynamic norm plus conversation condition, participants first read a dynamic norm appeal about the increasing number of White people in America openly discussing race and

then had a conversation with another participant, see Appendix B for the manipulation articles. In the dynamic norm only condition, participants solely read a dynamic norm appeal. In the control condition, participants read an article excerpt about a psychologically neutral topic (food choice). Immediately after completing the manipulation, all participants completed a battery of survey measures. Only the education and specific dynamic norm appeals were used, and they were collapsed into both the experimental conditions rather than analyzed separately due to the lack of significant differences between them in Study 3.

Measures

The primary measures from Study 3 were again used in Study 4: Measures of perceptions of White identity centrality (Cronbach's $\alpha = .74$), norms dictating the acceptability of discussing race (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$), explicit racial attitudes in the form of single-item Black and White feeling thermometers, racial colorblindness (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$), victimhood, social dominance orientation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$), and demographic items. For the full set of measures used in the study, see Appendix B. Measures that were added or modified from Study 3 are detailed below.

Attitudes towards White privilege (4-D scales). Due to the lack of significant movement on the attitudes towards White privilege scales in the prior studies, and the lack of an explicit experimental focus on privilege, the deny, distance, and defend scales were removed. The dismantle scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$) was kept as a measure of behavioral intentions to engage in antiracist action.

Behavioral intention to engage in future conversations about race. The three-item "approach" subscale of the attitudes towards norms dictating the discussion of race was analyzed separately from the "avoid" subscale as a behavioral intention measure (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$). Scale items included: "*I want to talk more about racial privilege with other White people, I want*

to talk to White people about topics related to race, I want to talk to people of color about topics related to race.” Participants rated how much they agreed or disagreed with each item on a 1-Strongly disagree to 7-Strongly agree scale.

Perceptions of Social Norms Dictating the Discussion of Race - Manipulation Check.

As a manipulation check, participants were asked to provide their estimate of the percentage of White Americans who feel comfortable talking about race, the percentage of White Americans who avoid talking about race, and the percentage of White Americans who regularly have conversations about race on a 0-100 scale. Participant responses who saw the dynamic norm treatment article should align with the percentage detailed in the article (45%) and show a lower variance than participants in Studies 1 and 3.

Participants were also asked what they learned from the norm framing article and their conversation as a manipulation check.

Analysis Plan

Quantitative survey items for each measure were averaged into composites and analyzed using a linear mixed effects to calculate an individual’s score on a given dependent variable as a function of condition with random intercepts for individual and conversation dyad. Age, gender, White identity centrality, and political ideology were included as covariates in the model to focus on the effect of condition. This model will allow for the interpretation of effects of experimental condition at the individual and dyad level. These variables were also used as covariates in the mediation analysis. Ad-hoc coding of conversation text in the dynamic norm plus conversation condition was conducted to code for colorblind themes and instruction following.

Results

Measures were first correlated together to establish their associations, see Table 14 (next page).

Table 14. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Key Outcome Measures for Study 4.

Variable	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		Behavioral Intent	Talk Race Norms	Dismantle	White ID Centrality	SDO	Pos. Feelings
1. Behavioral Intent	227	2.88	.84	<i>r</i>	—					
				<i>p-value</i>	—					
2. Talk Race Norms	225	2.85	.95	<i>r</i>	0.26	—				
				<i>p-value</i>	< .001***	—				
3. Dismantle	226	3.84	1.66	<i>r</i>	0.63	0.04	—			
				<i>p-value</i>	< .001***	0.54	—			
4. White ID Centrality	319	2.76	.70	<i>r</i>	0.18	0.18	0.04	—		
				<i>p-value</i>	<.01**	<.01**	0.58	—		
5. SDO	165	2.59	1.08	<i>r</i>	-0.16	0.15	-0.20	0.40	—	
				<i>p-value</i>	0.04*	0.06	<.001***	< .001***	—	
6. Pos. Feelings	50	2.72	1.13	<i>r</i>	0.64	0.04	0.61	0.42	0.06	—
				<i>p-value</i>	< .001***	0.81	< .001***	<.001***	0.72	—
7. Neg. Feelings	49	1.37	.78	<i>r</i>	0.16	0.52	.01	0.14	0.07	.01
				<i>p-value</i>	0.27	< .001	0.99	0.34	0.69	0.99

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

To test the hypothesis that pairing a dynamic norm and conversation with a White ingroup member will increase perceptions of racial conversations as normative, a linear mixed effects model was run with random intercepts for conversation dyad and individual participants: Score ~ condition + age + gender + white ID + political ideology + (1|dyad) + (1|subject). See Table 15 (next page) for results.

Table 15. Results of linear mixed effects model in Study 4.

	Standardized Coefficient (β)	<i>p</i>	<i>SE</i>
Attitudes towards Norms			
Fixed effects			
Intercept	2.63	<.001	.38
Condition (dynamic talk vs. dynamic only)	.01	.98	.15
Condition (dynamic talk vs. control)	.10	.69	.15
Behavioral Intention to Discuss Race			
Fixed effects			
Intercept	2.98	<.001	.33
Condition (dynamic talk vs. dynamic only)	.34	.01**	.13
Condition (dynamic talk vs. control)	.20	.13	.13
Dismantle (Take Antiracist Action)			
Fixed effects			
Intercept	4.91	<.001	.66
Condition (dynamic talk vs. dynamic only)	.47	.09	.27
Condition (dynamic talk vs. control)	.50	.06	.27

Note: No random effects of individual or conversation group, $p > .05$, $n = 216$. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

There was a significant effect of condition on intentions to talk about race such that participants in the dynamic norm plus conversation condition ($M = 3.04$, $SD = .72$) were more likely to report greater interest in discussing race compared to participants in the dynamic norm only condition ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .93$), $\beta = .34$, $p < .01$, $df = 216$, but did not differ significantly from the control condition.

A parallel mediation analysis was run to test the relationship between attitudes towards norms about discussing race, feelings about discussing race, and behavioral intention to talk about race. Social dominance orientation was not included as a moderator because it did not

significantly correlate with attitudes toward norms about discussing race in this sample. See

Table 16 and Figure 10 for the results of the mediation analysis.

Table 16. Parallel mediation analysis – Attitudes towards social norms about discussing race predicting behavioral intentions to discuss race as mediated by positive and negative feelings towards racial conversations. Covariates included age, gender, White identity centrality, and political ideology.

	Beta Coefficient	SE	p	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Predictor – Attitudes towards Social Norms	.20	.02	<.01**	-.08	-.02
Mediator – Positive Feelings	.05	.03	.15	-.02	.10
Mediator – Negative Feelings	.40	.03	.01*	.07	.45
Indirect effect of X on Y via Pos. Feelings	.01	.07	.83	-.10	.20
Indirect effect of X on Y via Neg. Feelings	.02	.07	.91	-.09	.12

Note: X = predictor variable, Y = outcome variable. Percentile bootstrap confidence intervals were calculated using 50,000 bootstrap samples and a 95% confidence level.

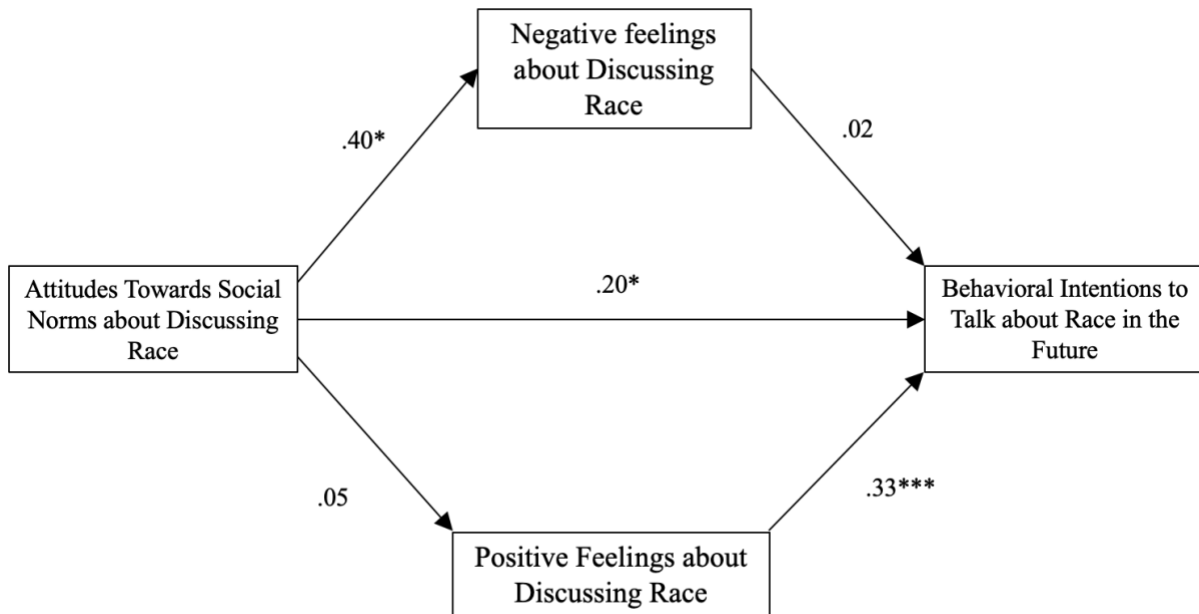


Figure 10. Conceptual diagram of parallel mediation analysis – Attitudes towards social norms about discussing race predicting behavioral intentions to discuss race as mediated by positive and negative feelings towards racial conversations. Covariates included age, gender, and political ideology. Significance of $p < .05$ indicated by *, $p < .01$ by **, and $p < .001$ by ***.

There were no significant differences in perceptions of White Americans who regularly discuss race by condition, $F(2, 168) = .95, p = .39, \eta^2 = .01$. Collapsing across conditions, participants reported the average percentage of White people in the United States who **regularly have conversations about race with other White people** as 43.91% ($SD = 24.50$). This error variance is approximately the same as participant estimates from Study 3 ($SD = 23.307$).

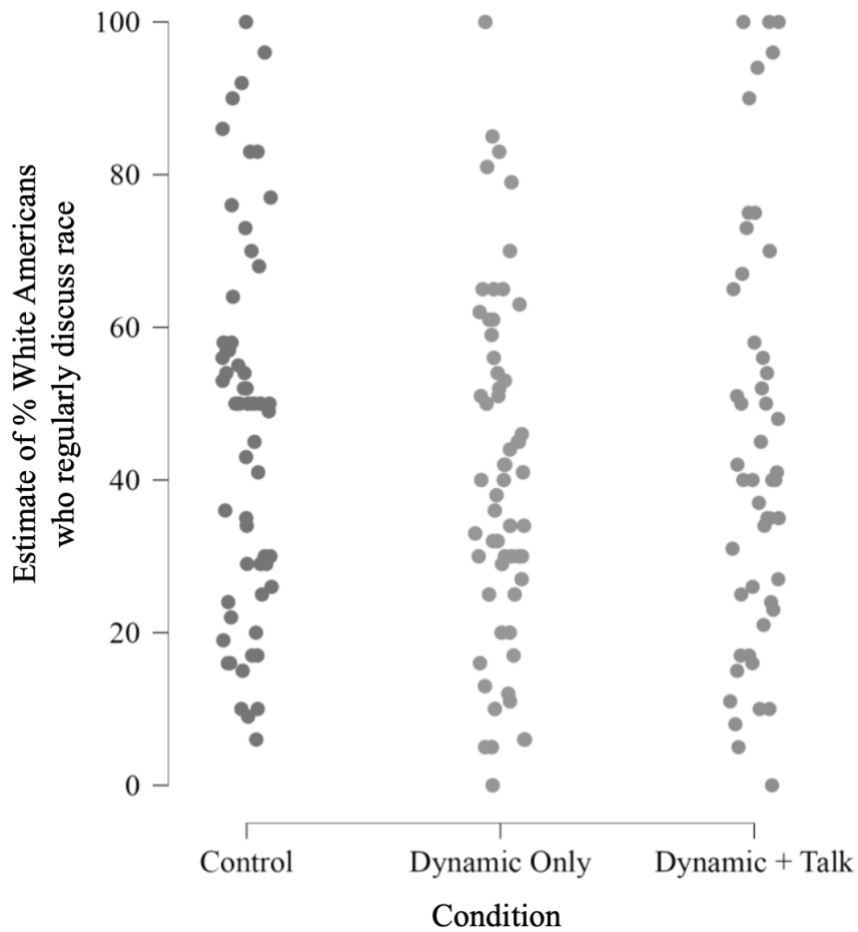


Figure 11. Study 4 participant estimates of the percentage of White Americans who regularly discuss race by condition.

Deductive coding of conversations in the dynamic norm plus conversation condition using the same scheme as Study 3 found that 31% mentioned racial colorblindness and 53% of

conversations followed the experimental instructions (for an example of a conversation with colorblind themes, see Figure 12).

(20:03:48) User 2: Hope you are doing good
(20:03:56) User 1: Trying to are yiu?
(20:04:28) User 2: What is your view about white race
(20:04:40) User 1: Too privileged
(20:04:44) User 1: Yours
(20:05:04) User 2: It's more unique compared to other races
(20:05:19) User 1: Yeah
(20:05:41) User 2: But we're supposed to be equal
(20:05:53) User 1: We should be equal
(20:06:11) User 1: What really makes us different just because we don't have the same skin color
(20:06:22) User 1: In the end we all still bleed the same
(20:06:32) User 2: Exactly
(20:06:49) User 1: So why do we need to treat them any different

Figure 12. Example of a conversation in the dynamic norm plus conversation condition in Study 4 where both participants endorse racial colorblindness.

Discussion

Study 4 found no evidence that pairing a dynamic norm appeal with a conversation on race changed attitudes about norms, or norm perceptions, but there was a significant effect on intentions to engage in future conversations about race such that participants in the norm plus conversation condition were more likely to express intent to have future conversations about race relative to participants in the norm only condition. This finding suggests that there is potential for combining the effects of a dynamic norm appeal and an ingroup conversation for changing intentions to engage in future behavior. However this may be a fragile effect given that attitudes towards the normativity of discussing race were not affected.

A parallel mediation analysis investigating the mediating effects of positive and negative feelings towards discussing race partially supported the hypothesis in that seeing discussing race

as normative predicted more negative feelings about discussing race, and more positive feelings about discussing race predicted greater behavioral intent to engage in future conversation about race, but the indirect paths for both positive and negative feelings were not significant.

Participant variance in estimates of the percentage of White Americans who regularly discuss race was similar if not greater to Studies 1 and 3, and the accuracy and variance of these estimates were not affected by condition.

General Discussion

This work delved into the identity and group processes that influence attitudes related to norms about discussing race among White people. A potential pathway for positive feelings towards vs. negative feelings towards conversations on race was unearthed, and perceptions of norms dictating the discussion of race were found to be very high in variance (Study 1). A single conversation on White privilege was shown to not be enough to change attitudes related to White privilege and dismantling systemic racism (Study 2). Dynamic norm appeals that highlight the increasing number of White people discussing race were found to be most effective when framed as an opportunity for learning about racial identity, and a potential mechanism underlying the effect of dynamic norm appeals was also explored (Study 3). Finally, initial evidence of the effects of pairing dynamic norm appeals and conversations with a racial ingroup member were found to have potentially promising effects on intent to engage in future conversations about race (Study 4).

Study 1 found that individuals who scored higher on racial colorblindness, social dominance orientation, and those who self-identified as more politically conservative were less supportive of discussing race as a normative topic. Notably, there was a high level of variability in participants' estimations of White Americans' comfort, perceived threat, and frequency of

conversations about race. This variability was consistent across different political ideologies, indicating a lack of a clear consensus on this issue. Factor analysis in Study 1 identified two primary factors underlying attitudes towards norms about discussing race: "Avoid" and "Approach" motivations. This finding echoed previous research on interracial conversations (e.g., Plant et al., 2010) and suggested that similar concerns extend to intraracial conversations among White individuals. These results laid the foundation for further investigation into the role of anxiety about discussing race as a mediator of the relationship between beliefs about social norms and behavioral intentions.

Study 2 extended the examination of attitudes towards discussing race by focusing on the impact of unscaffolded conversations about racism and racial privilege among White liberals. The study found that such conversations did not significantly shift attitudes towards racial privilege, suggesting that brief, text-based interactions between White liberals may not be sufficient to induce meaningful attitude change. Qualitative coding of these conversations revealed the prevalence of racial colorblindness themes, a common technique to avoid thinking about racial inequality.

Furthermore, Study 2 highlighted the potential limitations of existing measures of typical reactions to information about privilege, suggesting that alternative measures such as feelings of anxiety and uncertainty may better predict attitudes towards discussing race among White individuals. These findings led to the incorporation of these new measures in Studies 3 and 4 to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their role in shaping beliefs about normative change.

Study 3 focused on dynamic norm appeals and their impact on attitudes towards discussing race. While the initial hypothesis that dynamic norm appeals would change attitudes

was not supported, the study identified that the education and specific frames performed better in terms of eliciting positive emotions and higher-quality open responses. Additionally, conditional process analysis revealed a significant relationship between feelings towards Black and White racial groups and beliefs about the normativity of discussing race as mediated by positive but not negative feelings towards racial discussions, highlighting the importance of positive emotional responses in shaping attitudes about discussing race. Study 3 again showed the pattern of high variability in participants' estimations of the percentages of White Americans discussing race. These findings set the stage for investigating whether dynamic norm appeals could transform brief conversations about race into instances of norm updating, a theory tested in Study 4.

Study 4 examined the combined effects of dynamic norm appeals and conversations about race on attitudes and intentions. While the study found no evidence that this combination changed attitudes about norms or norm perceptions, it did reveal a significant effect on intentions to engage in future conversations about race relative to the dynamic norm only condition. Participants in the norm plus conversation condition were more likely to express intent to have future conversations about race, indicating the potential for combining these two elements to influence behavioral intentions. A parallel mediation analysis identified correlations between seeing discussing race as normative, emotional responses towards discussing race, and behavioral intent. While the direct paths were not significant, viewing discussing race as normative predicted more negative feelings while positive feelings predicted increased behavioral intentions to discuss race.

Shared Themes

An emergent theme across the four studies involved the role of positive feelings about discussing race predicting attitudes towards racial conversations and behavioral intentions to

engage in such conversations. Attitudes towards a racial outgroup (Black people) predicted avoiding negative feelings when discussing race, and attitudes towards one own racial group (White people) predicted increased positive feelings when discussing race. To take advantage of the positive feelings pathway, conversations about race should be framed in terms of *how they benefit the White people* having the conversation. This may change the appraisal of discussing topics related to race as anxiety-inducing and instead see it as an opportunity for positive growth. Ensuring normative appeals to talk about race more are identity-consistent and address the dominant narrative of racial colorblindness will be an important next step in this line of research.

Collectively, these studies provide a nuanced understanding of attitudes toward discussing race among White Americans. Key themes include the role of political ideology, emotional responses, and the variability in perceptions of normativity. These studies shed light on the need for scaffolding in conversations about race, the potential limitations of existing measurement tools examining White privilege, and the importance of emotional factors in shaping attitudes and intentions with regard to racial conversations.

This dissertation's findings have implications for interventions aimed at promoting discussions about race among White Americans. They suggest that strategies should consider the emotional context, provide adequate scaffolding, and acknowledge the dominant racial colorblindness narrative within this population. Additionally, the identification of positive and negative feelings as unique potential mediators opens new avenues for future research in this space.

White racial identity is just one of many other, more salient identities than White people hold. An example of the importance of considering the intersection of race and gender involves how White women respond to racism. White women may respond to threatening racial

discussions by crying, thus drawing attention to themselves and away from the racial topic being discussed or people of color involved in the discussion (DiAngelo, 2018). This meshes with the distancing response mechanism presented by Knowles and colleagues (2014): Women put psychological distance between themselves and the uncomfortable topic through their emotional response. On the other hand, some White men respond to discussions about race by attempting to dominate or intimidate the other speakers. For example, a White man may interrupt the conversation to loudly voice his opinion or attempt to explain away any instances of racism being discussed. This fits with the psychological mechanism of denying, wherein White people seek to change the social landscape so that it reflects that they are competent and have done nothing wrong (Knowles et al., 2014).

The above example demonstrates how responses to racial discussions are gendered such that White women and White men respond differently – but still in line with theory on both White identity threat and gender roles (Frankenberg, 1993; Knowles et al., 2014; Spence & Buckner, 1995). This further motivates an intersectional approach to better understand exactly how social identities such as race and gender interact in situations that present a threat to race-based privilege. This is especially important to consider given the recent weaponization of victimhood by White women publicly accused of racist behavior, such as the woman who called the police on birdwatcher Christian Cooper, a Black man, who asked her to control her dog in Central Park (Gross, 2023). Future studies on the ingroup processes of White social groups should examine effects across age, gender, regional identity, and political ideology to better understand this heterogeneity within White racial identity. While gender was used as a covariate in the present research to focus on the effects of condition, it should be examined more closely in

tandem with race to better understand the role intersecting identities play in shaping norm perceptions (Nash, 2008).

Limitations

A clear limitation of Studies 2 and 4 is that the conversations were via text. In-person conversations provide more feedback cues about emotions a conversation partner is feeling. Participants can be sure the person they are talking to is real, and whether they share any obvious identities. While ChatPlat allowed for easy transcription of conversation chat logs, but this came at the cost of a less natural, psychologically meaningful social interaction compared to a Zoom or in-person conversation. The study design still relates to the real-world experience of chatting via text, email, or social media. Yet in the experimental context, this anonymous digital façade can be a barrier to meaningful social interaction between participants. Another issue with the ChatPlat design is that there were technical issues where individuals were not paired to have a conversation due to timing or other participants leaving the chat early. This resulted in a split sample with some of the conversation conditions not receiving the same experience with the experimental manipulation. While not analyzed in Study 2, rerunning the linear mixed effects model on only the intent-to-treat sample in Study 4 compared to including participants who did not have conversations found nonsignificant shifts in mean values across outcomes. Analysis plans should be set in place to account for this common issue and compare intent-to-treat samples with the full sample.

An issue with the dynamic norm appeal messages in these studies is that it comes from a mainstream media source: Time magazine. While generally considered an objective news source, participants who are more skeptical of the media may have immediately discounted whatever information the manipulation article was attempting to convey. One possible solution is to forego

using a news source as the vehicle for messaging the norm and instead use testimonial vignettes attributed to someone who matched the participant on multiple identity-salient dimensions, such as the participant's geographic region, education status, and/or age. This could circumvent the negative feelings resulting from the attribution of the message, create stronger feelings of a shared ingroup connection, and lead to greater engagement with the manipulation.

The large variance in participant estimates of the percentages of White Americans who feel comfortable discussing race, feel anxious discussing race, and who regularly discuss race may indicate that participants in the sample are simply poor at estimating base rates. It is well-known that people tend to ignore base rates when making probability judgments (Bar-Hillel, 1980), and this could be especially true for social norms that are not frequently discussed or reflected upon. Thus, more research is needed on how social norm perceptions of the acceptability of talking about race are formed and how these perceptions align with reality.

Future Directions

Ultimately, the different dynamic norm appeals tested in this work may have failed to shift attitudes because of the focus on a single pathway of social influence – the dynamic norm itself. While this focus allowed for a nuanced examination of the relevant psychological mechanism, it may have achieved this at the cost of diminished persuasiveness. More influence techniques such as using a quote from a celebrity figure to tap into familiarity and liking, using a commitment and consistency appeal (e.g., “If you care about reducing inequality, you should...”), or a more targeted, identity-consistent social proof appeal could be incorporated into the norm framing manipulations to increase their persuasiveness (Cialdini, 2009; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Additionally, political ideology and social dominance orientation proved to be strongly correlated with beliefs about the normativity of race. Building from work on moral reframing

(Feinberg & Willer, 2019), presenting dynamic norm appeals framed using the moral values that align with a participant's political ideology may lead to greater engagement and lower skepticism about the normative information.

The conversation prompts in Studies 2 and 4 were purposely kept broad to invite a range of dialogue and exchange between participant conversation pairs. However, this lack of specific instructions and guidance resulted in a high frequency of participants focusing on racial colorblindness or meritocratic beliefs, leading to attitude reinforcement rather than engagement of critical thinking about White racial identity. Another limitation of intervening on conversations about race is their baseline infrequency. Even if the dynamics of the conversations and the normative inferences and attributions made by both conversation partners shift, these effects may fade by the next time they have a conversation about race. Thus, future research should focus on creating incremental approaches that use mobile sensing and longitudinal analysis to motivate more conversations over time, and clearly infuse the benefits of taking a multicultural perspective vs. a colorblind approach.

There has been a clear shift in norms in a variety of domains due to high profile events in the United States over the past decade. Paramount among those is the election of Donald Trump to the presidency, which heralded a marked increase in racial prejudice among American White people (Crandall et al., 2018). There is other evidence that the social contract in the United States has shifted in recent years, largely due to COVID and political polarization, and that previously non-normative behavior such as causing disruptions on flights and being rude to servers at restaurants has increased in the past few years (Federal Aviation Administration, 2023; Sidman, 2023). The consolidation of news sources and stratification of news in polarized social media bubbles may have contributed to the skepticism and backlash that participants reacted with when

presented with the study manipulation norm framing articles. To avoid triggering this, a potential solution is to focus on peer influence as a pathway for delivering normative information.

Intervention studies that have selectively intervened on social referents within a given social network have found that they can lead to large shifts in group norms (Dimant & Gesche, 2021; Paluck et al., 2016). Tapping into existing social networks and sharing normative information between *trusted* in-group members better harnesses the advantages of ingroup context by increasing the salience of shared ingroup status. In lieu of using existing social connections, future research could employ the fast-friends exercise to create a bond between participants before experimental manipulations involving discussions of race (Aron et al., 1997). The present research provides a launchpad for many potential experiments that combine social influence approaches with an intragroup focus. Wise interventions provide models for intervention that target recursive psychological processes that could be applied to perceptions of norms associated with race in many exciting ways (Walton & Wilson, 2018).

Cultural context is also important to consider when studying norms tied to race (Hamedani & Markus, 2019). Would dynamic norm appeals tied to racial identity be more effective in more interdependent, group-focused cultures? For whom are these normative appeals most relevant? Cross-cultural research has shown that individuals are much more sensitive to normative shifts in countries with a greater expectation of norm adherence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Future work should use cross-cultural samples when testing dynamic norm appeals tied to racial group norms to investigate the role of high-level cultural ideals in shaping individual- and group-level norm perception and adherence.

Conclusion

These studies contribute valuable insights to the field of social psychology by advancing our understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding discussions about race among White Americans. The findings provide a foundation for developing more effective strategies to promote dialogue and encourage normative change in this critical area of social interaction. Dynamic norm appeals must contextualize the benefits of discussing race and in-group conversations about race must be scaffolded to address post-racial and colorblind attitudes. There is potential for White people to overcome their avoidance of conversations about race, and the present evidence suggests that seeing racial conversations not as problems, but as solutions, may prove fruitful in making conversations about race more normalized in White ingroup contexts.

Appendices

Appendix A – Study Manipulation Articles and Videos

Study 1 Norm Framing Excerpts:

<https://osf.io/v3ezu>

Study 2 Experimental Conditions Video:

<https://youtu.be/rVUUazXOyjM>

Study 2 Conversation Instructions/Prompt:

<https://osf.io/2p57c>

Study 3 Norm Framing Manipulations:

<https://osf.io/vpj3u>

Study 3 Saying-is-Believing Activity Instructions:

<https://osf.io/knz57>

Study 4 Norm Framing Manipulations:

<https://osf.io/sy4j8>

Study 4 Conversation Instructions/Prompt:

<https://osf.io/s96gf>

Appendix B – Full Survey Questionnaires with Measures

ANES 2020 Election Survey Codebook:

<https://osf.io/eq5wx>

Study 1 Survey Questionnaire:

<https://osf.io/3jvqc>

Study 2 Survey Questionnaire:

<https://osf.io/aym7r>

Study 3 Survey Questionnaire:

<https://osf.io/chjvy>

Study 4 Survey Questionnaire:

<https://osf.io/psqt5>

Appendix C – Study 1 UCLA Psychology Subject Pool Analyses

Study 1 UCLA psychology subject pool results output:

<https://osf.io/yvt9d>

Appendix D – Study 3 Demographic Breakdown by Condition

	condition						Total
	gender control	dynamic_broad	dynamic_diversity	dynamic_edu	dynamic_specific	static	
Male	22	19	16	13	12	26	108
Female	26	24	23	21	42	29	165
Other	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	48	43	39	35	54	55	274

	Value	df	p
X ²	16.279	10	0.092
N	274		

politics	condition						Total
	control	broad	demog shift	education	specific	static	
Liberal	8	9	11	8	22	20	78
Moderate	22	17	11	14	22	15	101
Conservative	18	17	17	13	10	20	95
Total	48	43	39	35	54	55	274

Chi-Squared Tests			
	Value	df	p
X ²	16.736	10	0.080
N	274		

age	condition						Total
	control	broad	demog shift	education	specific	static	
18-19	0	0	1	2	0	0	3
20-29	0	2	6	2	7	4	21
30-39	9	8	6	6	3	3	35
40-49	5	7	6	5	7	15	45
50-59	12	9	4	5	15	9	54
60-69	9	5	5	8	9	13	49
70-79	9	11	7	7	9	10	53
80+	4	1	4	0	4	1	14
Total	48	43	39	35	54	55	274

	Value	df	p
X ²	48.895	35	0.060
N	274		

Education level	Value		df	p	condition			Total
	control	broad	demog shift	education specific	static			
Less than high school	1	1	2	0	0	2	6	
High school graduate	12	12	11	9	18	18	80	
Some college, no degree	10	9	4	6	9	11	49	
Associate's degree (2-year)	4	6	7	3	5	7	32	
Bachelor's degree (4-year)	16	7	7	7	13	10	60	
Master's degree	4	5	6	8	7	4	34	
Doctoral degree	1	0	1	1	1	1	5	
Professional degree (JD, MD)	0	3	1	1	1	2	8	
Total	48	43	39	35	54	55	274	

	Value	df	p
X ²	24.299	35	0.913
N	274		

Appendix E – Study 3 Outcome Measure Means, Standard Deviations, Correlation Matrix

<https://osf.io/zv5tf>

Appendix F – Study 3 Qualitative Coding Counts and Chi-Square Results

Follow Instructio ns?		condition						Total
		control	static	broad	demog shift	education	specific	
No	Count	10.00	26.00	16.00	16.00	9.00	16.00	93.00
	% within column	20.83 %	47.27 %	37.21 %	41.03 %	25.71 %	29.63 %	33.94 %
Yes	Count	38.00	29.00	27.00	23.00	25.00	38.00	180.00
	% within column	79.17 %	52.73 %	62.79 %	58.97 %	71.43 %	70.37 %	65.69 %
Missing	Count	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	1.00
	% within column	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	0.00 %	2.86 %	0.00 %	0.36 %
Total	Count	48.00	55.00	43.00	39.00	35.00	54.00	274.00
	% within column	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %

Chi-Squared Tests

	Value	df	p
χ^2	17.26	1	0.07
N	274		

Mention racial colorblindness?		condition						Total
		control	static	broad	demog shift	education	specific	
No	Count	46.00	42.00	33.00	33.00	24.00	40.00	218.00
	% within column	95.83 %	76.36 %	76.74 %	84.62 %	68.57 %	74.07 %	79.56 %
Yes	Count	2.00	13.00	10.00	6.00	11.00	14.00	56.00
	% within column	4.17 %	23.64 %	23.26 %	15.38 %	31.43 %	25.93 %	20.44 %
Total	Count	48.00	55.00	43.00	39.00	35.00	54.00	274.00
	% within column	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %

Chi-Squared Tests

	Value	df	p
X ²	12.58	5	0.03
N	274		

Contingency Tables

Backlash?		condition						Total
		control	static	broad	demog shift	education	specific	
No	Count	44.00	49.00	37.00	34.00	29.00	52.00	245.00
	% within column	91.67 %	89.09 %	86.05 %	87.18 %	82.86 %	96.30 %	89.42 %
Yes	Count	4.00	6.00	6.00	5.00	6.00	2.00	29.00
	% within column	8.33 %	10.91 %	13.95 %	12.82 %	17.14 %	3.70 %	10.58 %
Total	Count	48.00	55.00	43.00	39.00	35.00	54.00	274.00
	% within column	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %

Chi-Squared Tests

	Value	df	p
X ²	5.28	5	0.38
N	274		

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