



Leveraging Motivational Mindsets to Foster Positive Interracial Interactions

Mary C. Murphy^{1*}, Jennifer A. Richeson^{2,3}, and Daniel C. Molden²

¹ Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Chicago

² Department of Psychology, Northwestern University

³ Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University

Abstract

As the United States becomes increasingly diverse, interracial contact will become considerably less rare. Much research has suggested that interracial interactions are often stressful and uncomfortable for both Whites and racial minorities. Bringing together several bodies of research, the present article outlines a motivational perspective on the dynamics of intergroup contact. To this end, we consider the roles of three motivational mindsets that have the potential to shape interactions to be less cognitively depleting and more enjoyable for both interactants. In particular, we consider the effects of (i) approach and avoidance motivation (*Handbook of Motivation and Cognition: Foundation of Social Behavior*, 1990, New York: Guilford Press), (ii) promotion and prevention regulatory focus (*American Psychologist*, **52**, 1997, 1280), and (iii) learning and performance goals (*Psychological Review*, **95**, 1988, 256) in shaping the dynamics of interracial contact. We suggest that investigations into these motivational mindsets will offer further insight into how and why interracial interactions go awry and will assist in the development of strategies and interventions that facilitate more smooth and enjoyable contact experiences.

As the United States becomes increasingly diverse, interracial contact will become considerably less rare. Although increased interracial contact may have positive effects over time (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), interracial interactions are often experienced as distressing for both Whites and racial minorities (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Moreover, even brief interactions with those from different racial groups have been shown to impair, albeit temporarily, aspects of cognitive functioning (Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Richeson, Trawalter, & Shelton, 2005). Cognitive resources are important in interactions because they facilitate positive verbal and non-verbal behavior and promote interpersonal engagement during the interaction. Given the potential long-term benefits of intergroup contact – including meaningful reductions in prejudice (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) – it is important to identify strategies that people can employ during interracial interactions that will engender positive experiences while avoiding these affective and cognitive costs (Richeson & Shelton, 2007; Shelton & Richeson, 2006).

To that end, researchers have considered and even undertaken a number of interventions aimed at facilitating positive intergroup experiences and, ultimately, reducing prejudice (e.g., Allport, 1954; Brewer & Brown, 1998; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Studies have, for instance, manipulated the structural conditions of the contact experience (e.g., whether it is cooperative versus competitive; whether individuals' category memberships are salient, etc.) to ascertain which conditions foster positive experiences and the most prejudice reduction (for reviews, see Brown & Hewstone, 2005 and Pettigrew & Tropp,

2006). Studies have also investigated the influences of different affective and cognitive strategies for intergroup contact (e.g., perspective-taking; focus on similarities versus differences; imagined intergroup contact) and examined how different ideologies regarding diversity (e.g., colorblindness versus multiculturalism) affect intergroup contact dynamics (Crisp & Turner, 2009; Mallett & Wilson, 2010; Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009; Todd, Bodenhausen, Richeson, & Galinsky, forthcoming; Vorauer, Gagnon, & Sasaki, 2009).

In this article, we seek to further the search for interventions to improve intergroup contact by outlining a motivational perspective on the dynamics of interracial interactions. Unlike many of the interventions examined previously, the aim of a motivational approach is to identify strategies that will create positive experiences during interracial interactions. In other words, this paper considers the potential for acute interventions that target individuals' motivational orientations upon entering interracial interactions to make those contact experiences more positive. Specifically, we consider the effects of three motivational mindsets on interracial interactions: (i) approach and avoidance motivation (Carver & Scheier, 1990), (ii) promotion and prevention regulatory focus (Higgins, 1997), and (iii) learning and performance goals (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

The Cognitive Dynamics of Interracial Contact

Our interest in these motivational approaches to intergroup contact stems from a line of research that has demonstrated how effortful regulation of one's thoughts, feelings, and behavior affects individuals' interracial contact experiences. Most notably, a substantial body of research has now examined how the deployment of effortful self-control in the service of navigating interracial interactions depletes cognitive resources (see Richeson & Shelton, 2007). The extant data suggest that interracial contact is often perceived as a stressor, triggering physiological, emotional, and behavioral reactions (Blascovich et al., 2001; Page-Gould et al., 2008; Stephan & Stephan, 1985; Trawalter, Richeson, & Shelton, 2009). To cope with this stress, people deploy self-regulatory effort (i.e., self-control) to manage their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during the interaction. According to recent models of self-control, however, engagement in one task that requires self-control (e.g., suppressing negative thoughts, controlling one's behavior, self-presentation) impairs performance on subsequent tasks that tap the same resource (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007; Vohs et al., 2008). Thus, interracial contact impairs performance on tasks that require cognitive resources to the extent that individuals engage in self-control during the encounter (see Figure 1).

Over the past few years, considerable empirical support has bolstered this hypothesis (e.g., Apfelbaum & Sommers, 2009; Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Gailliot, Plant, Butz, & Baumeister, 2007; Richeson & Shelton, 2003; Richeson et al., 2005). Many of these studies, conducted primarily in North American contexts, involve White or racial minority participants engaging in brief, interview-like interactions with either a White or racial minority experimenter. Afterward, their performance on a task that is known to require executive control is measured. For instance, the Stroop color-naming task, which involves the inhibition of dominant responses and requires cognitive attentional capacity (Engle, 2002), may be administered after the interaction. Poor performance on the Stroop task following an interaction suggests that people are cognitively 'worn out' by the interaction. Consistent with the prediction that interracial contact consumes cognitive resources, research has shown that White individuals perform more poorly on the Stroop task after interracial, compared with same-race, contact (Richeson

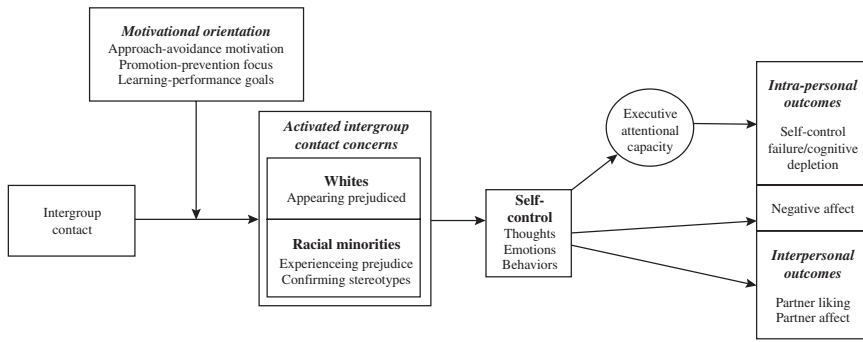


Figure 1 A working process model of proposed intergroup contact dynamics.

& Shelton, 2003). Furthermore, the greater both White and Black individuals' automatic racial bias, the worse their Stroop performance after interracial contact (Richeson et al., 2005).

In addition to these effects of racial attitudes, some of the difficulties that White individuals experience during interracial interactions have been linked to their concerns about appearing prejudiced (Plant & Devine, 2003). Research suggests that interracial interactions are especially likely to heighten concerns about appearing prejudiced for members of dominant racial groups (Shelton & Richeson, 2006; Shelton, Richeson, & Vorauer, 2006; Vorauer, 2006; Vorauer, Hunter, Main, & Roy, 2000). In order to avoid appearing prejudiced, Whites have been found to regulate their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (e.g., Monteith, 1993). Considering this work in tandem with Baumeister's strength model of self-control, concerns about appearing prejudiced should result in greater cognitive depletion after interracial interactions. Consistent with this prediction, Richeson and Trawalter (2005) found that increasing or decreasing Whites' prejudice concerns prior to interracial (but not same-race) contact resulted in a commensurate increase or decrease in their cognitive impairment following the interaction.

Although these results may seem to imply that people should perhaps not attempt to regulate the expression of prejudice, other studies have convincingly demonstrated that individuals' self-regulatory efforts are integral to the ultimate elimination of their prejudiced attitudes (e.g., Monteith, 1993). Moreover, research has found that, at least under certain circumstances, these self-control efforts can yield positive interpersonal outcomes (Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005b; see also Gonsalkorale, von Hippel, Sherman, & Klauer, 2009). For example, Shelton et al. (2005b) found that Blacks liked higher-bias White interaction partners more than lower-bias partners because they were perceived to be more engaged during the interaction (cf. Vorauer & Turpie, 2004). Presumably, higher-bias Whites' efforts to regulate their behavior so as not to appear prejudiced resulted in the display of more engaged behavior during the interaction compared with lower-bias Whites. In other words, higher-bias Whites' self-control efforts can be effective in shaping more enjoyable interactions for their Black interaction partners.

Taken together, this work implies a fairly provocative dynamic. Self-regulation in the service of negotiating interracial contact often results in *negative* cognitive outcomes for the self (i.e., depletion) but relatively *positive* interpersonal outcomes (partner liking; Shelton, Richeson, & Salvatore, 2005a). Consequently, it is important to explore alternate means by which people might foster positive interracial interactions, without suffering the cognitive costs associated with effortful self-control. The present work considers whether

motivational orientations may be one such means to reduce people's reliance on effortful self-control processes yet engender the levels of interaction engagement that create positive interpersonal outcomes.

Fostering Positive Interracial Interactions through Motivational Mindsets

In this paper, we seek to consider the potential for motivational mindsets to alter the dynamics of interracial contact such that members of both majority and minority racial groups experience them more positively. Specifically, we consider three sets of motivational mindsets: (i) approach versus avoidance motivation (Carver & Scheier, 1990), (ii) promotion versus prevention focus (Higgins, 1997), and (iii) learning versus performance goals (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). In the sections that follow, we briefly review each motivational set and then consider the potential for each one to disrupt the aforementioned cascade of cognitive dynamics during interracial interactions and, perhaps, foster positive experiences for both interactants (see Figure 1).

Approach–avoidance motivation

Contemporary theoretical work characterizes an approach orientation as a mindset that involves reducing perceived distance between the self and a desired end-state or outcome – drawing the self closer to desired outcomes (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Elliot, 2006). In contrast, an avoidance orientation is a mindset that increases perceived distance between the self and an undesired end-state or outcome – distancing oneself from undesired outcomes (Carver & Scheier, 1990; Elliot, 2006). Research suggests that people often have heightened avoidance motives in anticipation of interracial contact (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). Both Whites and racial minorities report that they avoid intergroup contact because they are concerned about being rejected (Shelton & Richeson, 2005). Furthermore, as mentioned previously, White individuals are often concerned about being or appearing prejudiced during intergroup interactions (Plant & Devine, 1998) and such concerns have been shown to motivate a desire to avoid intergroup contact (Plant, 2004; Plant & Butz, 2006).

Avoidance mindsets are likely to encourage the adoption of effortful self-control strategies in order to prevent confirmation of these prejudice concerns. Such strategies – including the suppression of thoughts, affect, and behavior – will likely result in cognitive depletion. For instance, individuals may attempt to suppress any stereotypical thoughts or negative affect they experience during an interracial interaction. If, however, individuals can be motivated to enter interracial interactions with an approach mindset, the interactions could proceed quite differently. For instance, Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermsen, and Russin (2000) found that training White individuals to approach photographs of Blacks by pulling on a joystick led them to reveal lower levels of automatic racial bias toward Blacks. Such a reduction in automatic bias could result in a lowered need for effortful self-control during an interracial interaction (i.e., to suppress stereotypes) that should, in turn, reduce cognitive depletion afterwards. Similarly, it may be helpful to encourage individuals to approach intergroup contact by adopting cognitive strategies that involve considering interpersonal connections or similarities with one's interaction partner, rather than suppressing or ruminating about potentially biased thoughts and behaviors. Relative to avoidance motivation, therefore, approach motivation should result in less effortful self-control during, and less depletion after, interracial interactions.¹

How might approach and avoidance mindsets affect the interpersonal dynamics of interracial interactions? Research has shown that both Whites and racial minorities often

behave in avoidant ways – for example, avoiding eye-contact and displaying closed body postures – during intergroup interactions (Ickes, 1984; see also Trawalter et al., 2009). The study by Kawakami et al. (2000) in which participants were trained either to approach or avoid Blacks also found that participants in the avoidance training condition sat farther away from a Black research confederate than did participants in the approach training condition. Similarly, Plant and Butz (2006) led non-Black participants to believe that they were unlikely to navigate an interaction with a Black individual well – a manipulation that increases the desire to avoid interracial contact – and found that these individuals behaved more anxiously and awkwardly when interacting with a Black research confederate.

During interracial interactions, how might people experience a partner who adopts an avoidance or approach mindset? Given the data suggesting that all people – but especially members of stigmatized groups – readily observe cues that others may avoid and/or reject them (Inzlicht, Kaiser, & Major, 2008; Murphy, Steele, & Gross, 2007), avoidance motivation is unlikely to result in positive contact experiences. Research has shown, for instance, that stigmatized group members are sensitive to avoidance-related cues such as vocal tone and reduced eye-contact during intergroup interactions (see, e.g., Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002). At best, therefore, avoidant mindsets and the behaviors they engender are likely to result in relatively negative experiences for interaction partners (Shelton et al., 2005b). At worst, avoidance mindsets could generate hostility from an interaction partner (Butz & Plant, 2006), resulting in an extremely negative encounter. In contrast, approach-related cues such as sustained eye-contact and smiling may alleviate rejection concerns, leading people to infer that their partner is interested and engaged during the interaction (e.g., Shelton et al., 2005b).

In summary, approach and avoidance mindsets are likely to have important consequences for both majority and minority group members during interracial interactions. Avoidance motivation is likely to increase the suppression of unwanted thoughts, increase avoidant behaviors, and increase people's attention to signs of rejection in their own – and their partner's – behaviors. These consequences are likely to deplete individuals' cognitive resources and decrease their desire for future intergroup contact. In contrast, an approach mindset could reduce cognitive depletion as people focus on the positive outcomes that can result from intergroup contact. Similarly, an interaction partner is likely to experience an approach-oriented partner as more engaged and friendlier than an avoidance-oriented one.

Regulatory focus

A related, but theoretically distinct motivational mindset that could influence the dynamics of interracial interaction is a focus on prevention or promotion (see Higgins, 1997). In addition to adopting goals of approaching desired outcomes (i.e., approach motivation) rather than avoiding undesired outcomes (i.e., avoidance motivation), people may also represent these goals in terms of an obligation (i.e., prevention) or in terms of an aspiration (i.e., promotion). For example, imagine two individuals anticipating an interracial interaction. Both are focused on approaching the positive end-state of having a pleasant encounter. However, whereas the first individual views this outcome as his/her obligation as a racially sensitive person, the second individual views it as an egalitarian ideal toward which he/she aspires. That is, although both individuals have approach motivations, the first has a prevention mindset and the second has a promotion mindset. Furthermore, both individuals' motivations are also clearly distinct from those of a hypothetical third

individual who is motivated to avoid the negative end-state of being rejected or appearing prejudiced.

A prevention orientation creates a focus on threat and security. Specifically, prevention focus produces preferences for *vigilant* cognitive and behavioral strategies that involve monitoring for threats in the environment and controlling one's behavior in order to maintain a sense of security, even at the risk of forgoing possible advances. In contrast, a promotion orientation creates a focus on gains and potential missed opportunities. Specifically, promotion focus produces preferences for *eager* cognitive and behavioral strategies that involve pursuing all opportunities for gains, even at the risk of unintentionally bringing about losses (Lieberman, Molden, Idson, & Higgins, 2001; Molden & Finkel, 2010; Molden & Higgins, 2008).

Drawing on this research, it seems reasonable to predict that many individuals enter interracial interactions with a prevention focus (e.g., Oyserman, Uskul, Yoder, Nesse, & Williams, 2007; Sassenberg & Hansen, 2007). For example, White's concerns about appearing prejudiced during an interracial interaction are likely to be represented as concerns about maintaining the standard that they 'ought' to be egalitarian. Similarly, racial minorities' concerns about behaving stereotypically likely include worries about maintaining the standard that they 'ought' to behave in ways that disconfirm negative stereotypes (e.g., Grimm, Markman, Maddox, & Baldwin, 2009). In order to achieve these goals, prevention-focused individuals are likely to vigilantly monitor their behavior and that of their interaction partners for expressions of prejudice or stereotypical behavior – a cognitively costly strategy.

Alternatively, individuals could be encouraged to represent their interracial contact goals in terms of achieving ideals and aspirations. Such a promotion focus should lead individuals to adopt different strategies for the interaction. For instance, White individuals should be willing to take chances and be less inhibited in their efforts to achieve their egalitarian ideals, even at the risk of unintentionally appearing prejudiced. Taken together, research on regulatory focus suggests that individuals who adopt a promotion mindset for interracial contact should be less concerned with monitoring and controlling their thoughts, affect, and behavior compared with individuals who adopt a prevention mindset. In other words, promotion mindsets should result in less effortful self-control during intergroup interactions and, thus, less cognitive depletion afterwards, compared with prevention mindsets.

Though no studies to our knowledge have examined these questions in the context of interracial interaction, some researchers have investigated the effects of these mindsets on people's behaviors toward outgroup members. Shah, Brazy, and Higgins (2004), for instance, found that when people adopted a prevention mindset, they were more interested in avoiding contact with outgroup members, felt more anxious about those interactions, and preferred to sit farther away from their interaction partner. In other words, regulatory focus could affect people's motivation to engage in intergroup contact at all, their feelings during contact, and their partner's perceptions of them. Regulatory focus research also suggests that promotion mindsets facilitate greater open-mindedness and creativity (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Friedman & Förster, 2001; Liberman et al., 2001) and greater flexibility and adaptiveness during goal pursuit (Lieberman, Idson, Camacho, & Higgins, 1999; Shah & Higgins, 1997). These qualities would likely be experienced by interaction partners as positive, engaging, and interested; thus, they might motivate partners to reciprocate efforts to make the interaction go smoothly.

Taken together, this research suggests that promotion focus may result in smoother, more positive interactions. However, it is also possible that the more eager interaction

styles that promotion-focused individuals adopt could backfire in an intergroup context. One can imagine, for instance, a person with a promotion orientation attempting to bridge an interracial divide by bringing up race-related topics, even though this may offend his/her partner far more than a person with a prevention orientation who may be more inclined to play it safe by staying away from the topic of race altogether. Of course, if the race-related conversation proceeds smoothly, then the promotion-focused individual's eager approach is likely to pay off in the form of a positive encounter. If, however, the race-related conversation leads to awkwardness or an unintentionally offending remark, then the interaction will quickly devolve. In other words, the eager strategies of self-regulation associated with a promotion focus may ultimately result in either more negative or more positive interpersonal outcomes compared with a prevention focus.

In sum, research suggests that regulatory focus is likely to shape the cognitive and affective experiences that individuals have during and after interracial interactions. A prevention focus is apt to increase people's vigilance to their own thoughts and behaviors, as well their tendency to carefully monitor their own, and their interaction partners', behaviors during the interaction. These effortful cognitive processes are known to deplete cognitive resources and may also undermine the expression of intimacy-building behaviors that lead to positive interpersonal dynamics, at least for some individuals (e.g., Vorauer & Turpie, 2004). A promotion focus, however, should result in considerably less cognitive depletion insofar as individuals eagerly attempt to accomplish the goal of being egalitarian. The extent to which people's reduced depletion will be accompanied by positive interpersonal outcomes, however, may vary. While in some cases an outgroup interaction partner will experience an individual in a promotion mindset as more engaged and less avoidant than one in a prevention mindset, it is also possible that the more eager interaction style pursued by promotion-focused individuals will lead them to unintentionally offend their outgroup interaction partners by bringing up matters of race in their attempts to appear egalitarian. It is possible, therefore, that a promotion focus could result in more extreme interpersonal outcomes, both positive and negative, compared with a prevention focus.

Learning–performance goals

The final set of motivational orientations that we consider is the distinction between learning and performance goals (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Elliot & Dweck, 1988). When people pursue performance goals, they seek to establish the adequacy of their abilities and to avoid giving evidence of their inadequacies. In a learning mindset, on the other hand, people construe situations as opportunities to increase their competence by acquiring new skills and extending their mastery. In the context of social interactions, people pursuing performance goals aim to achieve positive judgments and avoid negative judgments concerning their social attributes such as likeability and friendliness; that is, they strive to be seen as socially adequate by others (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Erdley, Caine, Loomis, Dumas-Hines, & Dweck, 1997). A performance goal during intergroup interaction is likely to involve trying to be judged positively (e.g., as non-prejudiced) by one's outgroup interaction partner. In contrast, people who adopt learning goals in a social interaction strive not only to develop their own social skills and competencies and develop relationships between themselves and others (Dweck & Leggett, 1988), they also perceive interactions as important opportunities for gaining experiences with individuals different from themselves (van Dick et al., 2004). Learning goals in the context of interracial

contact may, therefore, include efforts to improve and develop one's interpersonal skills and, perhaps, to get to know one's outgroup interaction partner.

Research suggests that most individuals enter interracial interactions with performance goals. As mentioned previously, many Whites are focused on demonstrating their egalitarian racial attitudes and many racial minorities are focused on demonstrating that they do not conform to negative group stereotypes (Shelton & Richeson, 2006; Shelton et al., 2006). The most direct way to pursue these performance goals is to engage in effortful monitoring and self-control strategies, such as thought suppression (Wenzlaff & Wegner, 2000), which, as we have discussed, often result in depletion of self-regulatory resources. If, instead of a performance mindset, individuals could be encouraged to enter interracial interactions with a learning mindset – by focusing on developing their understanding of different cultural groups, for example – this may reduce their evaluative concerns and their reliance on effortful self-control strategies. With a learning and development focus (as opposed to a proving and performance focus), in other words, individuals should engage in less suppression, and, thus, the interaction should be less cognitively depleting.

Consistent with this hypothesis, research has demonstrated several positive outcomes of adopting a learning goal prior to an interracial interaction. In one study, for instance, White students anticipated engaging in a face-to-face discussion of racial profiling with Black students (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008). Compared with a no-goal control group, participants who adopted learning goals prior to the discussion sat closer to their Black partner and reported fewer identity threat concerns. In a similar set of experiments, Migacheva and Tropp (under review) found that participants instructed to focus on learning (versus presenting themselves) prior to an intergroup interaction exhibited more positive non-verbal behaviors during the interaction such as maintaining eye contact, averting one's gaze less often, using fewer speech disfluencies, and fidgeting less. Moreover, in a survey of White undergraduates, those who had a greater focus on learning were also less concerned about being misunderstood by outgroup members (i.e., Asian-Americans, African-Americans, Latinos) and more interested in intergroup contact. Performance concerns, however, were negatively related to interest in contact and positively related to avoidance of intergroup contact (Migacheva, Tropp, & Crocker, forthcoming).

Taken together, these findings suggest that learning goals – adopted either chronically or immediately before an interaction – may reduce people's discomfort during intergroup contact compared to performance goals (Migacheva et al., forthcoming). It is likely that by reducing evaluative concerns and facilitating smooth interaction behaviors, the intergroup contact experience would be more pleasant and less cognitively depleting for both interactants when they adopt learning (versus performance) goals. This question, and others that explore the mechanisms by which learning and performance goals influence intergroup outcomes are ripe for empirical inquiry.

Motivating positive contact: a hopeful example

Research from our lab has begun to examine the efficacy of these motivational orientations in attenuating the depleting effects of intergroup contact while also engendering positive interpersonal dynamics. Specifically, Trawalter and Richeson (2006) examined a potential way in which White individuals can pursue their intentions to control the expression of prejudice during interracial interactions – without the accompanying cognitive depletion. Drawing upon the motivational mindsets reviewed previously, Trawalter and Richeson (2006) developed directives for participants regarding how to pursue an interracial interaction. Specifically, White participants were either instructed to try to

avoid behaving in a prejudiced way prior to an interracial interaction (a prompt likely to induce avoidance, prevention, and performance mindsets) or they were instructed to re-frame the interaction as an opportunity to have a positive intercultural exchange (a prompt likely to induce approach, promotion, and learning mindsets). No instructions were provided to a third group. After the interaction, participants completed the Stroop task as part of an ostensibly un-related study.

Results revealed that participants in the no-instruction condition performed as poorly on the Stroop task as participants who were explicitly instructed to avoid prejudice. These results suggested that attempting to avoid prejudice – and the accompanying avoidance, prevention, and performance mindsets that it triggers – is the default strategy that many Whites employ when engaging interracial interactions. What was encouraging, however, was that participants instructed to (re)frame the interaction as an opportunity for intercultural dialogue were significantly less cognitively depleted than participants in either the control condition or the ‘avoid prejudice’ condition. Furthermore, subsequent examination of participants’ behaviors during the interactions revealed that participants in the intercultural dialogue condition were more comfortable than those in the control and the avoid prejudice conditions. In other words, the results suggest that re-framing the interaction to be more approach-oriented, promotion-focused, and learning-oriented, may engender interactions that are less costly to people’s self-regulatory resources, without sacrificing interpersonal benefits.

Thus, the findings of Trawalter and Richeson (2006) offer initial evidence that the motivational orientations adopted just prior to interracial contact affect the dynamics that unfold during the interaction, and, most notably, attenuate the cognitive costs associated with interracial interaction. In other words, these data suggest that particular motivational mindsets might facilitate (or hamper) both the self- and interpersonal consequences of interracial interactions.

Limits and caveats

In this paper, we advocate for a motivational approach to the study of interracial interactions. A motivational approach could produce interventions that cause interracial interactions to proceed more smoothly, without cognitive and interpersonal costs. However, it is important to remember that for each motivational mindset discussed, there are likely to be limits. For example, in adopting an approach motivation, the approach would probably have to be viewed as genuine – not fake, or over-the-top – by an interaction partner. Oftentimes, people overcompensate during interracial interactions (Dutton & Lake, 1973) and this behavior can backfire. Similarly, aggressive approach tendencies (e.g., anger, hostility) are unlikely to foster positive interactions. Indeed, an approach orientation in concert with egalitarian goals is probably necessary to achieve positive contact.

We’d also like to point out that our focus here has been on fostering interracial interactions that are more enjoyable for both participants rather than on interactions that are more likely to trigger societal change. This distinction was nicely articulated by Saguy et al. (2009) in work revealing that manipulations intended to increase intergroup liking, such as focusing on communalities between majority and minority groups, do not necessarily increase (and sometimes undermine) attention to societal discrimination and unequal status. Hence, although we think that positive intergroup contact can foster societal change through the reduction of prejudice toward, increased comfort with, and the potential inclusion of racial minorities in domains where they are underrepresented, it is important to recognize that positive contact may not directly foster greater equality.

It is also important to point out that although we considered each motivational mindset separately, it is possible that they will interact with one another; effective interventions for interracial contact may need to trigger more than one mindset. Recall that Trawalter and Richeson (2006) changed White's interaction strategies from being focused on 'avoiding prejudice' to being focused on 'approaching intercultural exchange' – directives that likely activated all three mindsets previously discussed. Consistent with this possibility, Crocker and colleagues (e.g., Crocker, 2008; Crocker & Garcia, 2009; Migacheva et al., forthcoming) recently advanced a motivational perspective on the dynamics of intergroup contact that seems to implicate some of the motivational orientations discussed herein, albeit not explicitly. Specifically, they argue for the relevance of what they call egosystem goals (i.e., concerns for protecting self-esteem and self-image) and ecosystem goals (i.e., concerns for interaction partners and the interaction itself). Although not explicitly articulated by Crocker, it seems reasonable to suggest that egosystem goals are likely to include or engender prevention focus, performance goals, and perhaps, avoidance motivation, whereas ecosystem goals are likely to include or engender promotion focus, learning goals, and perhaps, approach motivation. It will be important for future research to understand whether any of these motivational mindsets (i.e., approach motivation, promotion focus, learning goals) is sufficient to reduce the depleting effects of interracial interactions alone, or, rather, whether a combination of motivations or the broader ecosystem perspective is required. Moreover, because each mindset is likely to shape interaction behaviors differently (e.g., approach motivation may lead to more self-disclosure, promotion focus to more risk-taking, etc.), it will be important to consider each motivation alone and together when creating interventions aimed at fostering positive interracial contact dynamics.

Summary and conclusions

A substantial body of work has shown that the goals and motives that individuals pursue create the psychological mindsets within which people interpret and react to events (Ames & Archer, 1988; Carver & Scheier, 1998; Higgins, 1997). This article considers how the types of mindsets created by such goals might affect intergroup interactions. Specifically, we propose that motivational mindsets that people adopt when entering interracial interactions (approach–avoidance motivation, promotion–prevention focus, and learning–performance goals) may alter the cognitive, behavioral, and affective dynamics of the contact experience. While the framework we propose primarily arises from research in North American contexts where interpersonal concerns during interracial interaction are situationally and historically bound, we believe a motivational framework could be applicable anywhere that intergroup relations are impaired by people's reluctance to approach, learn about, and take risks regarding outgroup members. Taken together, we believe that research and interventions that consider the role of motivation in shaping interracial contact dynamics will provide new insight into how best to foster interactions that are more enjoyable and less cognitively costly.

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Short Biographies

Mary C. Murphy's research focuses on prejudice, stereotyping, and the situational cues in academic, organizational, and group settings that trigger social identity threat. Her work focuses on identifying and shifting situational cues and motivations to make environments and intergroup interactions more comfortable and safe for negatively stereotyped groups. She has authored or co-authored papers in these areas in *Psychological Science*, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, and *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. She has held fellowships from the National Science Foundation and the Spencer Foundation. She holds a BA in Psychology and Government from the University of Texas at Austin and a PhD in Psychology from Stanford University. After receiving her PhD in 2007, Murphy completed a postdoc at Northwestern University before beginning her current position as an Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Jennifer A. Richeson's research focuses on prejudice, stereotyping, and intergroup relations. Much of her work investigates cognitive, affective, and behavioral dynamics and consequences of interracial contact. Richeson's research has been published in various scholarly journals including, *Psychological Science*, the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Nature Neuroscience*, and the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. Richeson is currently a Professor in the Department of Psychology and Faculty Fellow at the Institute for Policy Research both at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. Prior to Northwestern, Richeson taught at Dartmouth College and was a visiting scholar as the Research Institute of Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity at Stanford University. In 2006 she won the prestigious John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. Richeson earned a Bachelor of Science degree at Brown University in 1994 and a Doctor of Philosophy at Harvard University in 2000.

Daniel C. Molden's research examines how people's motivations influence the way in which they (i) gather, integrate, and interpret social information; and (ii) pursue, represent, and react to social interaction. His work has been featured in outlets such as the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Psychological Science*, and *American Psychologist*. Before taking his current position as an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Northwestern University, he earned his BA in Psychology and Biology at Emory University, and his PhD in Social Psychology at Columbia University.

Endnotes

* Correspondence address: Department of Psychology, University of Illinois at Chicago, 1007 West Harrison Street (M/C 285), Chicago, IL 60607, USA. Email: mcmpsych@uic.edu

¹ Although strategies that enhance approach motivation, such as focusing on connections or similarity with one's partner, should buffer cognitive resources during interracial interaction, it is unclear whether they will reduce intergroup prejudice. Given that a focus on similarities may lead individuals to re-classify their outgroup interaction partner as 'one of us', it may also undermine the generalization of positive feelings about the interaction partner to the entire out-group (e.g., Brown & Hewstone, 2005).

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