

Racism among the Well-Intentioned:

Bias without Awareness

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Reference:

Dovidio, J. F., Gaertner, S. L., & Pearson, A. R. (2016). Racism among the well-intentioned: Bias without awareness. In A. G. Miller's (Ed.), *The social psychology of good and evil* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

Preparation of this chapter was supported, in part, by NIH grants RO1HL 0856331-0182 and 1R01DA029888-01 to the first author.

### **Racism among the Well-Intentioned: Bias without Awareness**

Blatant expressions of bias continue to have a significant negative impact on the well-being of Black Americans, but overt prejudice has substantially declined in the United States. Public opinion polls have revealed significant decreases in expressions of prejudice by White Americans toward minority groups, and toward Blacks in particular (Bobo, 2001). Indeed, many have argued that Barack Obama's election as President of the United States is evidence that racism is "a thing of the past" and that America is currently a "post-racial" society. However, race still matters in the US. Significant racial and ethnic disparities persist in health (National Center for Health Statistics, 2012), income and wealth (Shapiro, Meschede, & Osoro, 2013), and opportunities for social advancement (Reeves, 2013), generally at a magnitude comparable to when Obama first assumed office.

In his influential book, *Racism without Racists*, Bonilla-Silva (2003) argued that new forms of racism may be less overt but just as insidious as old-fashioned racism. While Bonilla-Silva (see also Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011) emphasize institutional and cultural manifestations of color-blind racism, biases within individuals form the foundation for the perpetuation of societal disparities. In this chapter, we examine how aversive racism, a form of individual-level prejudice characterizing the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of the majority of well-intentioned and ostensibly nonprejudiced White Americans, contribute to the perpetuation of unfair racial disparities in the United States (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). Although we focus on race relations within the United States, we note that similar processes have been observed among members of advantaged and disadvantaged in other nations, such as Canada (Son

Hing, Chung-Yan, Hamilton, & Zanna, 2008), Portugal (De Franca & Monteiro, 2013), and the Netherlands (Kleinpenning & Hagendoorn, 1993), in which overt forms of prejudice are similarly recognized as inappropriate. We illustrate how good and well-intentioned people can contribute systematically to maintaining and reinforcing disadvantage in society.

We begin by describing the psychological underpinnings of aversive racism and then demonstrate its consequences for Whites' treatment of Blacks, the quality and nature of interracial interactions, and race relations more generally. We then consider how social policies that promote color-blindness can perpetuate subtle biases and discrimination by obscuring the role of race in these outcomes. Specifically, we explain how emphasizing color-blindness and commonalities between members of different groups that seemingly help promote positive intergroup relations can reinforce biases and hierarchical relations between Blacks and Whites. After that, we discuss the potential ways that aversive racism and color-blindness can operate in complementary and mutually reinforcing ways to perpetuate bias without awareness. We conclude by reviewing promising strategies and interventions, at the individual and societal level, to combat nonconscious forms of bias.

### **Contemporary Racial Attitudes and Aversive Racism**

Research from the 1920s through the 1950s typically portrayed prejudice as a psychopathology (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). For example, the classic work on the authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) described negative socialization experiences (e.g., involving excessively strict parental influence) that produced a general tendency to be biased against low status groups in ways that could erupt into aggression and large-scale violence. Other researchers

discussed how low levels of self-esteem promote prejudice and how threats to one's well-being arouse negative actions toward negatively valued groups, even when such groups do not contribute to the threat (i.e., scapegoating).

However, stimulated by developments in the area of social cognition, by the mid 1960s and early 1970s, much more attention was devoted to examining how *normal*, often adaptive, cognitive (e.g., social categorization), motivational (e.g., needs for status), and sociocultural (e.g., social transmission of beliefs) processes can contribute to the development of Whites' biases toward Blacks (see Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). Because racial distinctions between Whites and Blacks have played a central role in US history, social categorization by race within the US is largely automatic: The actual or imagined presence of a Black person is often enough to automatically activate racial categories without conscious effort or control (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). Social categorization spontaneously activates more positive feelings and beliefs about in-group members ("us") than out-group members ("them") (see Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012, for a review). Moreover, thinking of groups in this way spontaneously arouses motivations (e.g., for competition, us *versus* them) to demonstrate or establish the superiority of one's group over others (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In addition, intergroup processes, such as system-justifying ideologies as well as perceived competition over material resources, can also form a basis for negative racial attitudes (see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

At the same time, principles of egalitarianism and "justice for all" - core American values - are stronger today than ever before. As Bobo (2001) concluded in his review of US racial attitudes, "The single clearest trend in studies of racial attitudes has involved a steady and sweeping movement toward general endorsement of the principles

of racial equality and integration” (p. 269). This tension between a deep commitment to egalitarianism and often nonconscious negative feelings and beliefs that are byproducts of sociocultural influences (such as negative media portrayals of Blacks) and social categorization processes (which promote intergroup competition and attempts to establish the superiority of one’s group) is at the core of aversive racism.

In 1970, Kovel first distinguished between dominative and aversive racism. Dominative racism is said to reflect the traditional, blatant form. According to Kovel (1970), the dominative racist is the “type who acts out bigoted beliefs – he represents the open flame of racial hatred” (p. 54). Aversive racists, in contrast, sympathize with victims of past injustice, support principles of racial equality, and genuinely regard themselves as nonprejudiced, but at the same time possess conflicting, often nonconscious, negative feelings and beliefs about Blacks that are rooted in basic psychological processes. The negative feelings that aversive racists have toward Blacks typically do not reflect open antipathy, but rather consist of more avoidant reactions of discomfort, anxiety, or fear. That is, they find Blacks “aversive,” while at the same time find any suggestion that they might be prejudiced “aversive” as well.

Other frameworks for understanding contemporary racial bias, such as *modern racism* (McConahay, 1986), and *symbolic racism* (Sears, Henry, & Kosterman, 2000), also hypothesize a fundamental conflict between the denial of personal prejudice and underlying unconscious negative feelings and beliefs. However, whereas modern and symbolic racism characterize the attitudes of political conservatives, aversive racism characterizes the biases of those who are politically liberal and openly endorse egalitarian views, but whose unconscious negative feelings and beliefs are expressed in subtle,

indirect, and often rationalizable ways (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Nail, Harton, & Decker, 2003).

Aversive racists are characterized as having egalitarian conscious, or explicit, attitudes but negative unconscious, or implicit, racial attitudes (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). Methodological techniques for assessing implicit attitudes have become increasingly useful for differentiating aversive racists (those who endorse egalitarian values but harbor implicit racial biases) from individuals who are truly nonprejudiced (those who endorse egalitarian ideals but do not harbor negative implicit biases; see Son Hing, Chung-Yan, Grunfeld, Robichaud, & Zanna, 2005). Implicit attitudes are typically assessed using response latency procedures (the Implicit Association Task, or IAT; Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009), memory tasks, physiological measures (e.g., heart rate and galvanic skin response), and indirect self-report measures (e.g., biases in behavioral and trait attributions). Whereas a majority of Whites in the US appear nonprejudiced on self-report (explicit) measures of prejudice, a similar percentage of Whites typically show evidence of racial biases on implicit measures that are largely dissociated from their explicit views (Greenwald et al., 2009). For example, although most Whites now explicitly disavow negative stereotypes of Blacks, most White Americans implicitly and automatically activate stereotypes of Whites as intelligent, successful, and educated, and of Blacks as aggressive, impulsive, and lazy in response to the mere image or presence a member of that racial group (Blair, 2001). Thus, a substantial proportion of Whites in the US can be characterized as exhibiting reactions toward Blacks consistent with aversive racism.

Although people may not be fully aware of their implicit prejudice and stereotypes, these biases can have profound effects on behavior. For instance, because of generally cultural associations of Blacks with crime and violence, Whites tend to misperceive harmless objects (e.g., a wallet or comb) as a weapon (e.g., a gun). As a consequence, in simulations in which they have to make decisions in the role of a police officer to shoot or not shoot a suspect, they are more likely to erroneously shoot a Black than a White suspect holding a harmless object. Moreover, this effect is more pronounced among individuals higher in implicit bias (Payne, 2006). Because extensive training in this context can reduce the impact of race in erroneous decisions to shoot, police officers tend to display less of this bias than do college students or community members, but they still show some evidence of bias (Correll et al., 2007; Plant & Peruche, 2005), unless their duties (e.g., as special unit officers who routinely deal with minority gang members) tend to reinforce associations between Blacks and violence (Sim, Correll, & Sadler, 2013). Thus, bias, even if unconscious, can have profound social consequences.

### **Consequences of Aversive Racism**

In contrast to more traditional forms of racism, which are blatant and expressed openly and directly, aversive racism operates in more subtle and indirect ways. Specifically, whereas blatant racists exhibit a direct and overt pattern of discrimination, aversive racists' actions appear more variable and inconsistent: sometimes they discriminate (manifesting their negative feelings), and sometimes they do not (reflecting their egalitarian beliefs). Nevertheless, their behavior is predictable.

Because aversive racists consciously recognize and endorse egalitarian values and truly aspire to be nonprejudiced, they will *not* act inappropriately in situations with strong social norms when discrimination would be obvious to others and to themselves. Specifically, when they are presented with a situation in which the normative response is clear (e.g., right and wrong are clearly defined), aversive racists will not discriminate against Blacks. In these contexts, aversive racists will be especially motivated to avoid feelings, beliefs, and behaviors that could be associated with racist intent. However, the nonconscious feelings and beliefs that aversive racists also possess will produce discrimination in situations in which normative structure is weak, when the guidelines for appropriate behavior are unclear, when the basis for social judgment is vague, or when one's actions can be justified or rationalized on the basis of some factor other than race. Under these circumstances, aversive racists may engage in behaviors that ultimately harm Blacks but in ways that allow Whites to maintain a nonprejudiced self-image and insulate them from recognizing that their behavior is not color-blind.

Support for the aversive racism framework has been obtained across a broad range of experimental paradigms and participant populations, including emergency and nonemergency helping behavior inside and outside of the laboratory, selection decisions in employment and college admission, interpersonal judgments, and policy and legal decisions (see Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Knight, Guiliano, & Sanchez-Ross, 2001; Sommers & Ellsworth, 2000). For example, Dovidio and Gaertner (2000) examined White college students' support for hiring Black and White applicants for a selective campus position within the same college in the years 1989 and 1999. When the candidates' credentials clearly qualified or disqualified them for the position, there was no

discrimination against the Black candidate (i.e., the highly-qualified Black candidate was just as likely to be hired as the highly-qualified White candidate). However, when candidates' qualifications for the position were less obvious and the appropriate decision was more ambiguous (moderate qualifications), White participants recommended a Black candidate significantly less often than a White candidate with exactly the same credentials. Whereas overt expressions of prejudice (measured by items on a self-report scale) declined over this 10-year period, the pattern of subtle discrimination in selection decisions remained essentially unchanged.

Additional research offers further insight into processes that underlie these effects. When ambiguous or mixed credentials are involved, people systematically weigh credentials differently based on their unconscious biases. For example, when providing input to college admission decisions for candidates with mixed credentials (e.g., strong high school grades but modest standardized scores, or vice-versa), White college students emphasized the credential that White candidates were stronger in relative to Black candidates as being the more valid predictor of success in college. This differential weighting of the credentials, in turn, justified students' stronger recommendations of White than Black candidates for admission (Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002; see also Brief, Dietz, Cohen, Pugh, and Vaslow, 2000, for employment bias against Blacks; Rooth, 2007, for hiring biases against Muslims).

In general, explicit attitudes, which are consciously endorsed, shape deliberative, well-considered responses in which the costs and benefits of various courses of action are weighed. By contrast, implicit attitudes, which are automatically activated often without awareness, typically influence spontaneous actions or behaviors that people are not aware

of as expression of bias (e.g., decisions that can be justified on the basis of some factor other than race, or less controllable responses, such as averting one's gaze or appearing unduly anxious in the presence of a Black person).

Consistent with this distinction and paralleling the findings of subtle bias against Blacks in the US, a study by Son Hing et al. (2008) with a Canadian sample found that when assessing candidates with more moderate qualifications, evaluators recommended White candidates more strongly for a position than Asian candidates with identical credentials. However, when evaluating candidates with exceptionally strong qualifications, no such selection bias emerged. Moreover, the researchers found that implicit bias against Asians (as measured by an IAT), but not explicit prejudice, predicted weaker support for hiring Asian candidates who had moderate qualifications. However, when the Asian candidate had distinctively strong qualifications, neither implicit nor explicit prejudice predicted the hiring decision. Divergent effects of implicit and explicit racial attitudes can also fuel divergent perspectives and experiences of Blacks and Whites in interracial interactions. For example, Dovidio, Kawakami, and Gaertner (2002) demonstrated that whereas Whites' explicit (self-reported) racial attitudes predicted their relatively controllable verbal expressions in their interactions with Blacks, Whites' implicit attitudes, which were generally negative, predicted their nonverbal behaviors (e.g., looking less directly at the Black interaction partner). Moreover, Black interaction partners weighed the nonverbal behavior more heavily than the verbal behavior in their impressions of the White partner and the interaction. Thus, Whites and Blacks had divergent perspectives in their interactions, and Blacks' awareness of conflicting positive verbal behavior (e.g., politeness) and negative nonverbal behavior (averted gaze, cues of

discomfort, such as higher rates of blinking) undermined how trustworthy they saw the White interaction partner. In general, Blacks are sensitive to a range of nonverbal behaviors as cues of Whites' racial bias. These cues include standing or sitting at a greater than normal distance, less direct posture, speaking quickly with disfluencies (e.g., "um"), less direct and sustained looking, and tense rather than relaxed posture and gestures.

The dynamics associated with implicit biases can ultimately have a substantial impact on the health and well-being of Blacks. White physicians generally see themselves as nonprejudiced and color-blind (Epstein, 2005; Sabin, Rivara, & Greenwald, 2008) but also harbor negative implicit racial biases toward Blacks (Sabin, Nosek, Greenwald, & Rivara, 2009; Sabin et al., 2008). Physicians' implicit biases predict medical recommendations, including lower quality of coronary care for Black patients (Green et al., 2007) and less willingness to prescribe narcotics to ease the pain of Black patients (Sabin & Greenwald, 2012), in ways independent of explicit racial bias. Moreover, consistent with research on the influence of implicit racial bias in social interactions (Dovidio et al., 2002), doctors higher in implicit bias speak faster to and have shorter visits with Black patients (Cooper et al., 2012), and they display less warmth in their medical interactions (Penner et al., 2010). Overall, physicians higher in implicit bias are less patient-centered in their care of Black patients (Blair et al., 2013; Cooper et al., 2012).

Black patients' responses to these interactions directly relate to doctors' implicit biases. Following their interactions, Black patients have less respect for, confidence in, and trust in the advice of medical professionals higher in implicit bias (Cooper et al.,

2012). This distrust predicts lower levels of adherence to the doctor's prescriptions and recommendations, which ultimately adversely affects health. Thus, even among highly educated individuals in helping professions, who are deeply committed to the welfare of patients and espouse nonprejudiced views, implicit biases produce systematic disparities in healthcare and, ultimately, contribute to racial disparities in health.

### **Color-Blind Inclusiveness**

The challenge of combating unconscious biases is that people are often not aware that they possess these biases, and when they consciously monitor their behavior, their actions reinforce their egalitarian self-image. How, then, can the effects of unconscious biases be addressed? One technique has targeted a core process at the psychological root of the problem: social categorization. The process of categorizing people into groups automatically activates stereotypes and biases toward members of those groups, and increases affinity to members of one's ingroup. The principle behind the Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012) is that inducing people to recategorize ingroup and outgroup members within a common group (a one-group representation based, for example, on common school, organization, or national identity) can redirect the motivational and cognitive processes that produce ingroup favoritism to include former outgroup members. The Common Ingroup Identity Model for improving intergroup attitudes has received considerable empirical support internationally (see Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012).

An important variant of a common ingroup identity that may be viewed as less threatening and more inclusive by members of disadvantaged groups is the development of a common identity that also includes aspects of a subgroup identity. Indeed,

individuals may activate two (or more) of their multiple social identities simultaneously (Roccas & Brewer, 2002) or sequentially (Abrams & Hogg, 2010) – a dual identity. For example, people can conceive of two groups (e.g., science and art majors) as distinct units within the context of a superordinate social entity (e.g., university students).

Although both forms of recategorization, substituting separate group identities with a common ingroup identity or creating dual identities, can produce more positive intergroup attitudes (see Gaertner & Dovidio, 2012, for a review), we illustrate how there can be a “darker side” of intergroup harmony achieved solely by emphasizing a common identity. Creating a sense of common identity can deflect attention away from group-based disparities, reducing the likelihood that members of high status groups perceive social injustice, and promote a feeling of harmony and optimism that undermines collective action by members of low status groups. Moreover, recategorization in the form of a single common ingroup identity (vs. a dual identity), relating directly to the concept of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), may be a strategy employed by members of majority group members to reinforce the status quo that benefits their group.

In the next two sections, we examine (a) differences in preferences of members of high status and low status groups for different representations (one group or dual identity) and associated cultural ideologies (color-blind or multicultural), and (b) how a one-group representation can improve attitudes but undermine action to achieve social equality.

### **Group Status and Preferences for Common Identity versus Dual Identity**

In his classic acculturation framework, Berry (1997; see also Sam & Berry, 2010) presents four forms of cultural relations in pluralistic societies that represent the intersection of “yes - no” responses to two relevant questions: (a) Are cultural identity

and customs of value to be retained?; and (b) are positive relations with the larger society of value, and to be sought? These combinations reflect four adaptation strategies for intergroup relations: (a) *integration*, when cultural identities are retained and positive relations with the larger society are sought; (b) *separatism*, when cultural identities are retained but positive relations with the larger society are not sought; (c) *assimilation*, when cultural identities are abandoned and positive relations with the larger society are desired; and (d) *marginalization*, when cultural identities are abandoned and are not replaced by positive identification with the larger society.

Although this framework has been applied primarily to the ways in which immigrants acclimate to a new society, it can be adapted to apply to intergroup relations between high status and low status groups generally. Substituting the separate strengths of the subgroup and subordinate group identities for the answers to Berry's (1997) two questions, the combinations map onto the four main representations considered in the Common Ingroup Identity Model: (a) *dual identity* (subgroup and superordinate group identities are high, representing a form of integration); (b) *separate groups* (subgroup identity is high and superordinate identity is low, reflecting separatism); (c) *one group* (subgroup identity is low and superordinate group identity is high, similar to assimilation; and (d) *separate individuals* (subgroup and superordinate group identities are low, as with marginalization).

Two of the ideologies that have received the most attention in the study of intergroup relations are assimilation, which involves a form of common identity, and integration in terms of multiculturalism, which reflects a dual identity. Whereas assimilation requires minority-group members to conform to dominant values and ideals,

often requiring the abandonment of racial or ethnic group values, multicultural integration, by contrast, strives to be inclusive by recognizing, and even celebrating, group differences and the unique contributions of different groups to society.

Research in the area of immigration suggests that members of host society (the high status group) and immigrant groups (low status groups) often have different preferences for assimilation and multicultural integration. For example, Verkuyten (2006) summarized the results of eight studies of adolescents and young adults in Europe, consistently finding that minority group members supported multiculturalism (integration) more than did majority group members (see also Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012). These preferences also apply to the preferences of Whites and racial and ethnic minorities. In the United States, Whites prefer assimilation, whereas racial and ethnic minorities favor multiculturalism (Ryan, Hunt, Weible, Peterson, & Casas, 2007).

In intergroup interactions, members of high status and low status groups are often motivated to shape discourse in ways that emphasize their preferred representation. Across two studies, one with laboratory groups varying in control over a valued resource (credits for experimental participation) and the other with ethnic groups varying in status in Israel (Ashkenazim, high status; Mizrahim, low status), Saguy, Dovidio, and Pratto (2008) found that whereas members of high status groups preferred discourse that focused virtually exclusively on commonality rather than on group differences, members of low status groups showed equivalently strong preferences for talking about commonality *and* difference (the two critical elements of a dual identity). Moreover, low-status group members' greater desire to discuss points of difference, relative to that

of high-status group members, occurred because they had a greater motivation for a change in the power structure.

These different preferences for members of high status and low status groups appear to be strategic perspectives that promote the interests of one's group. Hehman et al. (2012) studied the preferences of Whites and Blacks at two public universities in the US, one a state college in which Whites represent the majority (85%) of the student body and one a historically Black college in which Blacks are the majority (76%). This contextual status significantly affected identity preferences. White students showed a much stronger preference for multiculturalism when they were in the institutional minority than in the majority; Black students exhibited stronger endorsement of assimilation when they were the majority than when they were the minority.

In summary, members of high status groups, who are motivated to maintain the status quo, show a preference for focusing on commonalities to the exclusion of differences and greater support for assimilation over multiculturalism. Members of low status groups, who desire to alter the status quo to improve their group's position, exhibit both a desire to discuss commonalities between groups as well as to talk about differences, and show greater endorsement of multiculturalism compared to assimilation.

Thus far we have discussed the different preferences of members of high status (or majority) and low status (or minority) groups for different group representations and ideologies, as well as the conditions and goals that moderate these preferences. Next, we examine the possibility that factors that promote common identity (e.g., positive intergroup contact), assimilation, or color-blindness may undermine the motivation of

both high and low status group members to engage in collective action to address inequality.

### **The Irony of Harmony**

As we noted earlier, the subtle nature of contemporary bias typically limits recognition of unfair treatment. Subtle bias is more difficult to detect and respond to than blatant bias even for low status group members (Ellemers & Barreto, 2009), and high status group members are less attuned to cues of subtle discrimination than are members of low status groups (Salvatore & Shelton, 2007). Thus, focusing only on commonalities between groups may decrease the likelihood that high status group members will recognize and respond to injustice, and particularly subtle biases, against minority-group members (see Saguy & Chernyak-Hai, 2012).

We (Banfield & Dovidio, 2013) examined this issue in a study in which White participants in the US were exposed to a manipulation that emphasized common-group (American) identity of Blacks and Whites, separate racial-group memberships, or a control condition that did not emphasize identities. Participants then read a hiring scenario that involved either subtle or blatant discrimination, in which a Black candidate was not offered a job (Salvatore & Shelton, 2007). The outcomes of interest were perceptions of discrimination and expressions of willingness to protest on behalf of the applicant who was denied the job.

Because emphasizing only common ingroup identity can distract people from attending to race-based differences, when the bias witnessed was subtle White participants for whom common identity was emphasized perceived lower levels of racial bias than those for whom separate identities were emphasized and those in a control

condition, and these perceptions mediated less willingness to protest a negative outcome for a Black person who was disadvantaged. That is, thinking primarily about Americans as just one group makes it easier to overlook, perceptually and behaviorally, race-based bias that is not obvious or overt. By contrast, when discrimination was blatant, emphasizing a common identity produced greater perceptions of bias and moderately more willingness to engage in collective action.

In another set of studies, we investigated the effects of commonality frames on the perceptions and responses of members of low status, disadvantaged groups. In a laboratory study (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009, Study 1), power was manipulated between two randomly assigned groups by giving the high-status group the position of assigning extra course credits to the two groups (see Saguy et al., 2008). Before the members of the high status group allocated the credits, members of both the high status and low status groups interacted with instructions that prompted them to focus on either intergroup commonalities or differences.

As expected, commonality-focused interaction produced more positive intergroup attitudes for high-status and low-status group members than did difference-focused contact. In addition, for both groups, attention to inequality between groups was lower in the commonality-focused condition. Moreover, members of the low status group expected the high status group to be fairer in allocating the resources and to distribute the credits in a more equitable fashion following commonality-focused, rather than differences-focused, interaction. These effects were mediated by more positive intergroup attitudes and decreased attention to inequity during the interaction.

However, when the low-status group members' expectations were compared to the high status group's actual allocation, there was a significant discrepancy. As the members of the low status groups anticipated, high status groups were substantially biased against the low status groups in the allocation of credits after differences-focused contact but, unexpectedly from the perspective of low-status group members, high status groups were just as biased in allocating the credits after commonality-focused interaction. The more positive intergroup attitudes of high-status group members in the commonality-focused, versus differences-focused, condition did not translate into more material support to achieve equality, and the high status groups' allocation fell significantly below what low status groups anticipated. These findings therefore indicate that focusing on what different groups have in common effectively improves the attitudes of members of high status groups toward low status groups and promotes feelings of intergroup harmony, which is a primary goal for members of high status groups in interaction with members of low status groups (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010). However, perhaps because their main goal to achieve harmony has been satisfied, the improved attitudes of members of high status groups do not necessarily translate into fairer treatment. Harmony has been established without requiring them to give up their privilege or resources. This relaxed motivation to provide the low status group with the resources they need to achieve true equality reflects the darker side of harmony achieved through common identity.

Another study investigated these processes in a naturalistic intergroup context. A study of Arabs in Israel (Saguy et al., 2009, Study 2) examined correlations among friendships with Jews (a type of positive contact that is particularly likely to involve a

focus on commonalities), attitudes toward Jews, awareness of inequality, and perceptions of Jews as fair. It further measured Arabs' support for social change toward equality.

Saguy et al. hypothesized that, because more positive connections with Jews would produce less attention to illegitimate aspects in the inequality between Arabs and Jews in Israel, more positive intergroup contact would relate to *weaker* support for social action for change among Arabs.

Consistent with the results of the laboratory experiment, more positive contact with Jews was associated with more positive attitudes toward Jews and with reduced awareness of inequality between Jews and Arabs. In addition, improved attitudes were associated with increased perceptions of Jews as fair. Moreover, and consistent with our theorizing, both perceptions of Jews as fair and reduced awareness of inequality were associated with reduced support for social change, including less willingness to engage personally in political activities to improve the social and economic opportunities for their group. Thus, through its effects on the way low-status group members viewed social inequality and members of the other group, positive contact was associated with a *decrease* in support for social change.

In summary, the subtlety of contemporary bias makes it particularly likely that unfair disadvantage will be overlooked or dismissed when there is a focus on common identity (or, relatedly, assimilation or color-blindness). Focusing on only a common identity distracts attention away from group-based disparities (see also Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, & Bluemel, 2013), and when disparities are detected by members of low status groups, feelings of common identity can reduce motivation to take action because of greater trust in the system (e.g., Kay et al., 2009). Nevertheless, when members of high

status groups recognize that the disadvantage of low status groups is unfair, they can be genuinely motivated to restore equity (Saguy et al., 2008, Study 2).

### **Color-Blindness, Subtle Bias, and the Perpetuation of Disadvantage**

Our focus, thus far, has been on processes that perpetuate racial bias among Whites in its contemporary form, in terms of Whites' assessments, decisions, and interactions. This bias is typically exhibited in subtle ways, often cloaked by a commitment to color-blindness at a personal and societal level. These individual- and institutional-level processes can operate in reciprocal and mutually reinforcing ways. At the individual level, to maintain an egalitarian self-image, aversive racists are motivated to emphasize factors other than race to justify negative intergroup actions (e.g., discrimination). At a societal level, Whites endorse a colorblind perspective in social and institutional policies (e.g., organizational practices; Plaut et al., 2009); denying racial differences insulates Whites from perceiving their actions as racially motivated.

In general, because they are typically sincerely committed to behaving in a moral and fair manner, Whites are usually motivated to avoid seeing themselves as biased. However, efforts to be unbiased can sometimes produce "rebound effects," causing biases to become activated even more. Because suppressing unwanted thoughts is cognitively taxing, implicit biases, which are automatically and effortlessly activated, may exert a particularly strong effect (the rebound effect) when people are cognitively fatigued or relax their efforts to control their biases. Indeed, Uhlmann and Cohen (2005) found that participants who were more confident in the objectivity of their judgments were also more likely to discriminate against equally qualified female candidates for a stereotypically-male job (chief of police), inflating criteria that favored male over female

candidates. Normally, this form of bias occurs without conscious awareness; indeed, making people aware of their subtle bias usually distresses people and motivates compensatory efforts to address the immediate injustice. However, the subtle nature of this bias – emphasizing criteria that justifies, for oneself and to others, that the decision is appropriate and fair – reduces the likelihood that the selection process was systematically discriminatory.

Moreover, the act of affirming a nonprejudiced self-image can, ironically further increase the likelihood that even ostensibly nonprejudiced individuals will discriminate. Monin and Miller (2001) found that, when given the opportunity to disagree with a prejudicial statement (and, thus, affirm a non-prejudiced self-image), individuals were *more* likely to discriminate against women or a racial minority group when making a subsequent hiring decision. The authors reasoned that the opportunity to reinforce one's egalitarian image (even when done privately) gave participants a "license" to act in a discriminatory manner (see also Effron, Cameron, & Monin, 2009). As Monin and Miller explain, this license allows people to engage in subtle discrimination because demonstrating their egalitarianism in one context subsequently allows them to dismiss personal bias as an explanation for their current or future behavior.

At an institutional level, a dominant color-blind ideology exerts a cultural influence that can affect the thoughts and actions of minority-group members, as well as majority-group members, in ways that perpetuate disadvantage. Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich (2011) observed that "the ideology of color-blindness is increasingly affecting even those who are at or near the bottom of the economic and social hierarchies in the United States: blacks and Latinos" (p. 195). A social psychological approach offers a

complementary perspective to Bonilla-Silva's (2003) structural approach (see also Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011), which emphasizes the role of policies and cultural standards independent of the intentions or actions of a given individual, by identifying psychological mechanisms and propensities which that may underlie the enactment of individual actions that enforce and transmit these cultural frames. Specifically, social psychological research has revealed a tendency to perceive prevailing hierarchies and disparities as what "should" be (Kay et al., 2009), as well as a general motivation to preserve the status quo, even at a high cost to one's group (see System Justification Theory; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2013).

These psychological processes can help to explain why members of disadvantaged groups may endorse color-blind racism. In one study (Kay et al., 2009, Study 3), female Canadian participants read a brief description of the responsibilities of Canadian members of Parliament, accompanied by a graph showing that only 20% of the members of Parliament were women. As hypothesized, women who were led to believe that they were more highly dependent on the government were more likely to defend the status quo. These women were less likely than those who believed that they were low in dependency to endorse statements that there should be more women in politics and in Parliament. From their perspective, having women account for only 20% of the members of Parliament was fair and acceptable. Women were highly motivated to preserve the status quo, even at a high cost to themselves and fellow group members. In a subsequent study (Kay et al., 2009, Study 4), women who felt more dependent on the current social system, and thus more motivated to justify the system, actively derogated a woman whose ambitions in business threatened the status quo of gender relations. These

processes may help members of disadvantaged groups cope with their situation, at least in the short term, by preserving a sense of justice, while shaping their behavior in the longer term in ways that reinforce the low social status of their group.

### **Addressing Biases among the Well-Intentioned**

Thus far, we have considered how biases that operate at both the individual and societal level (e.g., color-blindness) can contribute to group-based inequities and disadvantage. In this section we explain how subtle biases can be addressed effectively by strategic interventions. Indeed, because aversive racists are well-intentioned and color-blindness may often be motivated by egalitarian intentions, illuminating the cognitive and motivational processes that contribute to subtle biases is a critical step in combating their effects.

Prejudice-reduction techniques have traditionally been concerned with changing conscious attitudes (overt racism), however, because of its subtlety and complexity, conventional interventions and practices for eliminating racial bias are often ineffective for combating aversive racism. Nevertheless, to the extent that implicit attitudes and stereotypes are learned through socialization (Karpinski & Hilton, 2001), they can also be unlearned or inhibited by well-learned countervailing influences (Lai, Hoffman, & Nosek, 2013; Lai et al., 2014).

### **Individual-Level Interventions**

As described earlier, aversive racism is characterized by conscious (explicit) egalitarian attitudes and negative unconscious (implicit) attitudes and beliefs. To the extent aversive racists are made aware of their nonconscious biases, it may thus be possible to recruit their conscious egalitarian values to help control or compensate for the

potential effects of implicit bias. Son Hing, Li, and Zanna (2002) tested this possibility by examining responses of people identified as aversive racists (low in explicit prejudice but high in implicit prejudice) to self-awareness of their own hypocrisy. In a study conducted in Canada with Asians as the target minority group, participants were assigned to either a hypocrisy condition, in which they reflected on situations in which they had reacted negatively or unfairly toward an Asian person, or to a control condition in which they were not asked to write about such situations. The researchers predicted that making people aware of violations of their egalitarian principles would arouse more guilt among aversive racists (who harbor negative feelings toward Asians) than among people who were nonprejudiced (low in both explicit and implicit prejudice) and thus produce compensatory behavior among aversive racists when recommending funding for Asian student groups among aversive racists but not among nonprejudiced participants.

The results supported the predictions. Aversive racists in the hypocrisy condition experienced uniquely high levels of guilt and displayed the most generous funding recommendations for the Asian Students' Association. The funding recommendations of truly low prejudiced participants, however, were not affected by the hypocrisy manipulation. Son Hing et al. (2002) concluded that making people aware of their biases is particularly effective at reducing bias among people who explicitly endorse egalitarian principles while also possessing implicit biases – aversive racists.

Similarly, work by Monteith and colleagues (see Monteith, Arthur, & Flynn, 2010, for a review) also reveals that when people low in explicit prejudice recognize discrepancies between their behavior (i.e., what they *would* do) and their personal standards (i.e., what they *should* do) toward minorities, they feel guilt and compunction,

which motivates them to respond without prejudice in the future. With practice, these individuals learn to reduce prejudicial responses and respond in ways that are consistent with their nonprejudiced personal standards. Over time, this process of self-regulation can produce sustained changes in even automatic negative responses. For example, extended practice can create *implicit* motivations to control prejudice, which can inhibit the activation of spontaneous racial biases (Park, Glaser, & Knowles, 2008). Moreover, Moskowitz and colleagues (see Moskowitz & Ignarri, 2009, for a review) found that interventions that enhance motivations to be egalitarian (e.g., having participants describe a personal incident in which they failed to be egalitarian towards African Americans) can not only attenuate, but actively *inhibit*, nonconscious stereotyping.

Research on nonconscious goal pursuit suggests additional ways to address implicit bias. For example, work by Aarts, Gollwitzer, and Hassin (2004) on goal contagion reveals that goals such as motivations to not be prejudiced can become automatically activated simply in the presence of egalitarian-minded others, suggesting the importance of observing others' egalitarian behavior and egalitarian social norms more generally for controlling automatic biases. Other research reveals that some goals that may not seem directly relevant to egalitarianism but which can interfere with the processes contributing to bias may be effective in combating implicit bias. Sassenberg and Moskowitz (2005), for example, showed that priming creativity (a goal that conflicts with the energy-saving and simplifying features of stereotyping) also reduced stereotype activation, suggesting that any goal that is incompatible with stereotyping (in this case, the goal to form atypical associations) may contribute to successful bias control. Thus, just because implicit biases may be activated automatically and often without awareness

among people who believe that they are egalitarian does not mean that implicit bias is inevitable or immutable. However, simply becoming aware of one's implicit bias is not enough; assuming responsibility for addressing this bias is a necessary step.

Understanding the psychological dynamics of aversive racism can thus help guide effective interventions for combating subtle bias.

### **Cultural Frame Interventions**

Successfully addressing group-based disparities also requires being conscious of subgroup identities. As we illustrated earlier, emphasizing only the common ingroup identity of American in a way that distract attention way from socially relevant racial identities, such as Black Americans or White Americans, reduces sensitivity to race-based bias and efforts to address this bias (Banfield & Dovidio, 2013). By contrast, acknowledging both common (American) and racial subgroup identities (Black, White American) facilitates recognition of group-based disparities and differences but in a context of interdependence and positive connection. Specifically, a common, inclusive identity helps people view differences between groups as complementary resources that can benefit all. In addition, when both common and subgroup identities are simultaneously salient, unfair treatment of one subgroup is seen as a threat to the integrity of the larger group, motivating both dominant and nondominant group members to restore justice (Tyler & Blader, 2003).

From the perspective of members of high status groups, recognition of a subgroup identity (as in multiculturalism) conveys greater respect for their group than focusing only on a common identity, and thus satisfies a basic need of low-status group members in intergroup relations (Bergsieker et al., 2010; Shnabel, Nadler, Canetti-Nisim, &

Ullrich, 2008). These feelings of respect, along with the sense of belonging and inclusion conveyed by common ingroup identity, can both improve intergroup attitudes and empower members of low status groups. For example, in a study of racial/ethnic minority-group members in the US, Glasford and Dovidio (2011) found that emphasizing multicultural values within a shared American identity (a dual identity), compared to assimilation within a common American identity, generally elicited more positive attitudes. The condition emphasizing dual identity, relative to common identity, also produced greater willingness to engage in contact while maintaining a strong motivation for social change toward equality. Relative to a common identity, a dual identity elicited stronger feelings of shared values and optimism about future relations, which mediated greater interest in contact and willingness to engage in action to achieve equality.

As discussed earlier, one of the challenges for intergroup relations is that members of high status and low status groups typically prefer different representations and ideologies: Members of high status groups typically prefer a single common identity, color-blindness, and assimilation; members of low status groups generally prefer a dual identity, multiculturalism, and integration. This discordance in preferred identity representation preferences and acculturation ideologies between members of the host society and immigrant groups, in itself, can produce negative intergroup outcomes. According to the Interactive Acculturation Model (Bourhis, Montreuil, Barrette, & Montaruli, 2009), immigrants' adjustment is better and intergroup relations less strained when acculturation ideologies of members of the host society and of immigrants converge (see also Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009; Pfafferott & Brown, 2006).

Although greater convergence may generally improve attitudes, we propose that whether the convergence in preference is for common or dual identity can further influence the basic motivations experienced in intergroup relations. When there is a mutual focus on dual identity or multiculturalism, group differences are acknowledged and potentially valued. By contrast, a mutual focus on assimilation, or color-blindness, may produce positive attitudes but may lead to complacency with respect to the status quo, because people fail to attend to disparity (Saguy et al., 2009). Consistent with this idea, Vorauer, Gagnon, and Sasaki (2009), who prompted both members of these intergroup dyads to adopt a corresponding ideology, found that a mutual focus on multiculturalism produced greater positive, other-directed behavior in the intergroup interactions than a mutual focus on color-blindness. Thus, whereas common identity when solely emphasized may create a superficial and potentially unstable form of harmony, a truly inclusive form of recategorization – a dual identity that recognizes and values different subgroup identities as an integrated element of a common ingroup identity – can promote positive attitudes and facilitate positive action for equality among high-status, as well as low-status group members.

### **Conclusion**

Both aversive racism and color-blindness can represent well-intentioned intergroup orientations, but they may play important, complementary roles in perpetuating racial hierarchy and disparities, often without conscious awareness. In practice, understanding the nature of subtle bias at the individual level and the automatic processes that underlie it can help illuminate how well-meaning interventions can create a veneer of tolerance while reinforcing structures that perpetuate injustice in the United

States. The influence of aversive racism is pervasive, and it persists because it remains largely unrecognized and thus unaddressed. In mind, aversive racists truly believe that they are nonprejudiced, but in action they discriminate in subtle but consequential ways. Without sufficient recognition of the subtle nature of contemporary biases and without the appropriate tools for combating these particular biases, significant progress toward a truly just society will be difficult to achieve.

Nevertheless, aversive racism can be combated with approaches and strategies that are uniquely targeted at unconscious racial prejudice. For example, because aversive racists are motivated to be nonprejudiced, making them aware of their unconscious biases (in a nonthreatening way) can arouse powerful motivations for change. Increasing sensitivity to the discrepancy between their genuine commitment to egalitarian principles and the nature of their biased actions produces self-regulatory responses that can help aversive racists control their bias in the short run and, with practice and effort over time, reduce their unconscious biases in the long run.

Color-blindness may have broad appeal in principle because it seems to represent, at least superficially, the core American value of equal treatment and is consistent with an acculturation tradition emphasizing assimilation. At an individual level, emphasizing color-blindness through commonality may represent a step toward reducing intergroup tensions and thus appear to be a well-intentioned effort. However, adopting this perspective permits the perpetuation of systems that reinforce existing racial dominance that appear to be fair on the surface but which are actually unjust. Thus, although color-blindness may have immediate benefits for alleviating intergroup tensions and promoting

harmony, it has a darker side that can reduce recognition of unfair group-based treatment or outcomes and, consequently, inhibit action to ameliorate injustice.

Addressing racial inequalities at both the societal- and individual-levels requires being race conscious, not color-blind, to recognize racial disparities and to understand their basis in unfair treatment. Good intentions by themselves are not sufficient to guarantee fairness. Bias commonly occurs without awareness, despite conscious well-meaning intentions. Nevertheless, good intentions, if “wise” to underlying psychological processes that impede them, can also be realized to form a more socially responsible, just, and fair society.

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