BLACK AND WHITE AMERICANS' REACTIONS TO PARTNER CONTENT STRATEGIES IN INTERRACIAL INTERACTIONS

A Thesis Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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August 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my family, who has encouraged me in my work, helped care for baby while I wrote, and supported me in finding the time and space I needed to be focused; and to my advisor, Michael Olson, PhD, for his help with data preparation for and feedback on this thesis: A thousand thank-yous! This thesis was only written because of your support!

ABSTRACT

Self-disclosure in interracial interactions can foster friendship and reduce prejudice. However, it is unclear how individuals respond when self-disclosure is solicited from a different-raced interaction partner. Such solicitations may communicate interest and liking (thus fostering positive impressions) or they may violate social norms discouraging intimacy in interracial interactions (thus fostering negative impressions). We tested these competing hypotheses among Black Americans and White Americans, who were led to believe they were about to engage in an interaction with either a Black or White partner who either invited self-disclosure or did not based on the topics they asked the participant to discuss. A series of Partner Race x Conversation Topic interactions revealed that Black participants did not form more negative impressions of White partners who broached intimate topics but formed more negative impressions of White partners who avoided intimacy. White participants' impressions of White partners did not vary as a function of intimacy level. However, White participants formed less positive impressions of Black partners who posed high relative to low intimacy questions.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

A Bird's-eye View

Prejudice, racial discrimination, and inequity persist in the United States and around the world. Whether these problems appear as subtle biases in hiring and housing or overt acts of violence and hate crimes, they harm individuals and undermine trust and cohesion in interracial interactions, which are often fraught with anxiety and conflict. What strategies, then, can we use to encourage harmonious interracial interactions and reduce prejudice and conflict? Fostering the formation of interracial friendships is one approach that can humanize and decategorize members of the outgroup, challenge negative stereotypes, and reduce prejudice. Interracial friendships allow people to learn about and develop understanding and empathy for one another. However, forming friendships requires engaging in self-disclosure, and there are barriers to self-disclosure in interracial interactions. We must explore how to create valuable intergroup interactions that promote continued interactions with potential for friendship formation.

Consider this thought experiment. *Scenario 1*: A Black person and White person meet, and one asks the other about their favorite comic strip character, if they have pets, and where they are from. *Scenario 2*: A Black person and White person meet, and one asks the other questions about their relationship with their parents, their favorite romantic gesture, and whether making friends is difficult for them. From which of these interactions will the asked see the asker as a potential friend, choose to continue interacting with the asker, and eventually make strides in reducing prejudice towards and having positive interactions with others in the asker's racial group?

Although intergroup interactions provide opportunity for prejudice and conflict, they also provide opportunity for friendship formation and prejudice reduction. The content of an interaction can determine whether the interaction produces discomfort or negative feelings and increases intergroup anxiety or instead fosters knowledge of one another and potential for friendship. In interracial interactions, self-disclosure operates as one means of creating positive relationships and reducing conflict and prejudice (Ensari & Miller, 2002). When we learn about one another, our dyadic relationship can bloom into friendship, and with increased knowledge and sustained investment in one another, our prejudices are more likely to decrease. How do we get there, when norms and expectations in interracial interactions often limit voluntary self-disclosure? If self-disclosure is solicited from the other, will the two people in our scenario be likely to like and see one another as prospective friends?

Positive Intergroup Interactions

Research has investigated factors, including contextual and individual difference variables, that contribute to more conflictual or more harmonious interactions (Shelton & Richeson, 2006). Classic research on the contact hypothesis, for example, has shown that a cooperative context where parties are treated as equals and where a common goal is worked toward produces beneficial effects (Allport, 1954). Other work has shown that more intimate contact (with greater self-disclosure) leads to greater friendship potential, a well-documented mediator of prejudice reduction that is associated with positive outgroup attitudes (Ensari & Miller, 2002; Bohmert & DeMaris, 2015).

Personal, individuated contact can serve as one link in the prejudice reduction chain by allowing people to decategorize outgroup members (Pettigrew 1998, 2021). This initial contact is preceded and influenced by participants' experiences and characteristics and by facilitating situational factors and may be proceeded by repeated contact. Therefore, to extend the application of prejudice reduction beyond single outgroup members; maximally reduce negative stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination; and promote generalized recategorization of outgroup members, making a friend is an important first step.

Work on cultural cognition suggests an important goal people have in deriving their attitudes from their important groups: maintaining social connections (Kahan et al., 2010). Friendships can fulfill basic human need for attachment and belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 2000) and positively impact cognitive and academic outcomes (Wentzel et al., 2018), happiness and wellbeing, and physical health (Cohen, 2004; Cohen & Wills, 1985). People may derive attitudes from their important social groups not because they assume those groups are correct but because disagreeing with their groups risks loss of social support (Brady & Van Bavel, 2025). Dyadic intergroup contact can lead to repeated friendship contact that produces positive evaluations of outgroup members, transforming a perceived "them" into an inclusive "we" (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Decategorizing and recategorizing outgroup members, then, might serve to mitigate prejudices learned from one's social groups.

Positive intergroup contact serves to enhance knowledge about the outgroup, decrease intergroup contact anxiety, and increase empathy and perspective-taking

(Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). In a study by Kteily and colleagues (2019) of White Americans' attitudes toward and experiences with Black Americans, positive contact was associated with lower levels of intergroup hostility, even controlling for individual difference variables such as social dominance orientation, ethnic identification, and right-wing authoritarianism. Additionally, advantaged group members' positive contact with disadvantaged group members is predictive of collective action intentions. For advantaged group members, positive contact experiences are more predictive of this support than are negative contact experiences (Reimer et al., 2017). Selvanathan and colleagues (2018) revealed a mechanism of support for collective action in their findings: White Americans' positive contact with Black Americans predicted greater support for collective action by promoting empathy with them and anger over injustice. Positive contact, then, can be understood to not only increase knowledge of one another but to encourage outgroup identification and empathy. Such psychological processes as increasing empathy with and relevance and humanizing of the outgroup are potentially particularly valuable components of positive contact in fostering investment in the outgroup (Tropp & Barlow, 2018).

Positive intergroup contact is evidently a valuable tool for reduction of prejudice and negative stereotyping, but mere occasional interactions are inherently limited in these functions. However, positive intergroup contact is associated with greater openness to future intergroup interaction (Emerson et al., 2002) and is an important element of friendship potential, which in turn plays an important role in outgroup evaluations. Intergroup friendships are associated with positive outgroup attitudes (Bohmert &

DeMaris, 2015) and can effectively reduce bias because the interactions are continued, long-term, and favorable (Davies et al., 2011). Closeness to an outgroup other predicts identification with the outgroup, and being primed with that friendship not only leads to positive contact expectations for interactions with the outgroup but also to actual reduced stress in interactions with other, novel outgroup members (Page-Gould, 2009; Page-Gould et al., 2010).

Negative Intergroup Interactions

However, we also know that interracial interactions can be fraught, and people often respond anxiously to intergroup interactions. Short-term interactions with outgroup strangers can increase bias, anxiety, and avoidance behaviors (Trawalter et al., 2009; Plant & Devine, 2003; Dovidio et al., 2002; Stephan & Stephan, 1985, 1989) and social identity threat (Shelton et al., 2006) and thus deteriorate the interactions (West, 2011). When interacting with outgroup others, fear of negative consequences can result in physiological distress (Blascovich et al., 2001; Mendes et al., 2002), more negative outgroup attitudes (Deegan et al., 2015), and poorer interactions toward intergroup partners (Butz et al., 2014).

White individuals avoid interracial interactions (Johnson et al., 2009), and a cycle of intergroup avoidance and anxiety continues: Isolation from the outgroup increases intergroup anxiety, fear of rejection, and fear of acting in a prejudiced manner or of being perceived as prejudiced, which in turn encourages isolation. Interracial contact avoidance poses a barrier to friendship development, but failure to initiate interracial contact is not unique to one racial group. People fear rejection and negative impressions

and assume disinterest from other-race partners (Shelton & Richeson, 2005). Shelton and Richeson found attributional bias in interracial interaction initiation: Both Whites and Blacks attribute their own failure to initiate interracial contact to rejection concerns related to their race and attribute outgroup members' failure to initial interracial contact to lack of interest. When considering contacts as likely to result in friendship or not, people adjust their interactions with others (Lydon et al., 1997). Consequently, although people excuse their own lack of intergroup contact initiation, they perceive outgroup members as disinterested in friendship with them or their group, which can result in rejection concerns and initial rejection of their outgroup partner that precludes friendship (Shapiro et al., 2010).

Interracial anxiety can be depleting (Shelton & Richeson, 2006; Zabel et al., 2015) and drain self-regulatory resources (e.g., Stroop color task; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005). Wegner's (1994) theory of ironic effects holds that people struggle to suppress prejudice when under pressure to not be prejudiced. Shelton (2003) showed that Whites who interacted with a Black partner had heightened anxiety and reduced enjoyment of the interaction when they were instructed not to be prejudiced during the interaction. When under cognitive load, people default to automatic attitudes. Therefore, we can conceptualize these depletion effects as promoting automatic attitudes and hindering thoughtful, anti-biased responses.

Other research has shown that such cognitive depletion effects depend on what is being talked about: depletion only occurs when the topics being discussed are more vs. less intimate (Zabel et al., 2015). When interacting with a Black relative to a White

partner, White interaction partners tend to prefer neutral (neither positive nor negative), low intimacy, and low controversy topics (Zabel et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2009). Such content preferences are likely to have implications for the outcomes of intergroup interactions, as low intimacy topics tend to preclude friendship development.

Intergroup Interaction Content

Intuitively, it seems obvious that what people talk about in an interaction can have significant consequences. A discussion of superficial, non-intimate topics, for example, probably reduces the likelihood of friendship development. However, the content of intergroup contact is understudied. Very little work has investigated the topics of conversation discussed by interaction partners (Olson et al., 2018; MacInnis & Page-Gould, 2015). Determining how interaction content is interpreted by the involved groups is essential in creating effective intervention recommendations. A negative intergroup interaction that lacks positivity increases the perceptual salience of an interaction partner's outgroup membership and can also increase negative perceptions of their group over time (Paolini et al., 2010). By contrast, positive intergroup interactions can lead to improved intergroup attitudes (Paolini et al., 2006) and reduced intergroup bias (Berger et al., 2015; Vezzali et al., 2015; Walker & Crogan, 1998), and expressing positive outgroup representations can create positive downstream behavioral consequences (Sheeran et al., 1999; Byrka et al., 2019). With outgroup friendship formation, these downstream attitudes and behaviors could more broadly allow for positive perceptions of and interactions with other outgroup members.

In the context of intergroup interactions, friendship potential is an "essential" condition of generalizing the effects of intergroup contact and reducing negative stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (Pettigrew, 1998). Intimate contact (with greater self-disclosure) leads to greater friendship potential, a well-documented mediator of prejudice reduction (Ensari & Miller, 2002). Positive impressions and liking are important in forming friendships. Because people generally like others who ask about us and who self-disclose (Collins & Miller, 1994), interaction partners might increase liking of a partner who broaches intimate topics, perhaps regardless of partner race. Ensari and Miller (2002) found that self-disclosure to an outgroup partner led to increased partner liking. Whether partner liking generalizes to improved outgroup attitudes in a short-term interaction is unlikely, particularly when outgroup membership is not made salient. However, having a positive interaction with an individuated different race partner might result in increased friendship potential that later produces generalizing effects.

Although increased disclosure of higher intimacy topics encourages friendship, social norms guide interactions and can lead to intimacy avoidance. Sanctions (e.g., conversational awkwardness, social avoidance) result from inappropriately calibrating intimate self-disclosure to social norms (Brehm, 1966; Leary, 1995). To avoid such sanctions and ensure revealing the proper degree of self-disclosing information, individuals must consider the expected intimacy levels of their interactions. Generally, people estimate their conversation partner's level of responsiveness to revealing intimate information and accordingly adapt their own disclosure in their interactions (Reis &

Shaver, 1988). Because these intimacy norms are important in any interaction, intimacy might be especially important to interracial interactions.

When self-disclosures are perceived as norm violations, they might result in sanctions. The surprise of breaking expectancy norms might lead to anxiety, aversion, and decreased partner liking, likely precluding friendship formation. Whether high intimacy initial contact between interracial interaction partners is viewed as inappropriate is yet to be determined. Additionally, such expectancy norms might vary by participant race. For example, majority group members tend to interact less frequently with minority group members than minority group members interact with majority group members (Trawalter & Richeson, 2008), so we might see that White Americans react negatively to Black partners who seek higher intimacy in an initial conversation.

The present paper proposes that because two groups (Black and White Americans) with potentially differing norms and expectations are involved, we should investigate the effects of interracial interaction upon both groups. Because of time and budgetary constraints, two studies were conducted, one per participant race. These studies investigate participants' impressions of their interaction partners, warmth towards various social groups (including of Black people and White people), surprise at the level of conversation intimacy, perceptions of their partner's level of interest, potential for friendship with their partner, and ratings of their own emotional state.

SECTION 2: OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

Self-disclosure in interracial interactions can foster friendship and reduce prejudice. However, it is unclear how individuals respond when self-disclosure is solicited from a different-raced interaction partner. Such solicitations may communicate interest and liking (thus fostering positive impressions), or they may violate social norms discouraging intimacy in interracial interactions (thus fostering negative impressions). We tested these competing hypotheses among Black Americans and White Americans, who were led to believe they were about to engage in an interaction with either a Black or White partner who either invited self-disclosure or did not based on the topics they asked the participant to discuss.

Study 1 (Black American participants) method and results will be presented, then Study 2 (White American participants) method and results, followed by a combined discussion and exploratory analyses of dependent variables.

Study 1: Black American Participants

Method

Participants

Participants were 176 self-identified Black/African American, adult, English-speaking residents of the United States. Participants were included who identified as multi-racial, as long as Black/African American was part of their racial identity. We recruited participants online using Amazon's MTurk program and filtered through CloudResearch, which vets participants by allowing participation only from those who provide consistent answers across various studies. Participants were paid $2.00, awarded

as credit to their MTurk worker accounts, for their participation in the approximately 20-minute experiment, which is within the typical range but above average for payment in MTurk studies of this duration (Hara et al., 2018).

Exclusion Criteria

Time to study completion is not a normal distribution but instead tends to be positively skewed, so a standard deviation approach would not be appropriate for a lower end cutoff. Thus, participants were removed for taking less than 5 minutes or more than 3 SD above the mean time to complete the study. 22 participants were excluded from analyses due to brief or long study completion time, failing to identify Black as a racial identity, or failing to pass 3 attention check items, including properly identifying the race of their interaction partner. The final sample was 154 participants.

Materials

High and Low Intimacy Questions

High Intimacy questions ("*Describe your relationship with your parents*."; "*What is your favorite romantic gesture*?"; and "*What is the hardest part about making new friends for you*?") or Low Intimacy questions ("*If you could be a comic strip character, who would it be?*"; "*Where are you from originally? Where are your parents from?*"; and "*Do you have any pets?*") were presented (see Appendix 1). These conversation topics were generated from past research that examined Black Americans' and White Americans' perceptions of the intimacy (among other dimensions) of various conversation topics (Olson et al., 2018; see also Johnson et al., 2009). High intimacy topics were, based on this earlier research, seen as higher in intimacy than the low

intimacy topics in both Black and White samples. The items selected for High and Low Intimacy conditions were also relatively moderate in valence and controversy.

Prejudice

A feeling thermometer was used to measure outgroup prejudice. This measure asks participants to rate on a 0 (cold) to 100 (warm) scale their feelings toward a variety of groups. The present version focused on feelings toward Black and White people, but a number of filler groups (e.g., *athletes, scientists, Muslims*) were included to obscure our interest in race (see Appendix 3).

Partner Interest

Participants responded to 2 questions regarding participant perception of partner interest ("*How interested does your partner seem in becoming your friend*?" and "*How interested does your partner seem in revealing information about him/herself to you?*") on a 1 (not very much) to 7 (very much) Likert-type scale (see Appendix 4).

Self Interest in Friendship

Participants responded to 3 questions regarding participant interest in friendship with their partner ("*How interested are you in getting to know your interaction partner?*," "*How much would you have preferred not to have had the interaction with your partner?*," and "*I am not interested in becoming friends with my partner*") on a 1 (not very much) to 7 (very much) Likert-type scale (see Appendix 4; Shelton et al., 2009).

Surprise

Participants responded to questions regarding their expectancies about the topics their partner selected ("*How surprised are you at your partner's question choices?*" and

"*To what extent would you expect your partner to ask these questions?*" (reverse-scored) on a 1 (not very much) to 7 (very much) Likert-type scale (see Appendix 4).

State Anxiety

Participants responded to negative self affect items (*Anxious, Nervous, Tense, Worried, Concerned, Apprehensive, Uncertain, Distressed, Bored, Awkward*) on a 1 (not very much) to 7 (very much) Likert-type scale (see Appendix 4).

Procedure

The study was hosted through Qualtrics. Participants registered for the study titled "Partner Impressions" and were told that they would be interacting with a partner and asked about their general reactions about their partner. After agreeing to participate in the study, participants were assigned to one of four conditions: Interacting with a Black or White partner who asks High or Low Intimacy questions. Participants were led to believe that they had been paired with a partner who had been assigned to the condition of choosing topics from a list for the participant to discuss in an "online chat." They were then informed of the researchers' interest in how their partner's choice of questions affects the interaction and impressions the participant and partner form of one another. Participants were then told that they would be paired with a partner and basic demographics would be shared before the chat; they then answered demographic questions, and a profile was made of their first name, age, gender, race, and location.

After a loading screen apparently connecting the participant to their partner, participants were shown a profile of their partner, Michael, a 24-year-old ["Black" or "White" appeared for the profile's race] man from Atlanta, Georgia, along with a photo

showing the face of either a Black or White man (procured from Google images in the public domain and matched on attractiveness). Participants were shown a list of 6 potential questions, from which their partner ostensibly chose 3: either from the High Intimacy or Low Intimacy set (see Appendix 1 for the order of question presentation).

Participants were then given an opportunity to prepare for the chat with their partner by making notes of what they would say. After completing their notes, participants were instructed to complete a series of questions (our dependent variables, presented in random order, along with attention and manipulation checks) before continuing. In line with research on impression formation in social psychology (Ford & Stangor, 1992) the impression formation task asked participants to report their positive (*warm, honest, intelligent, trustworthy, competent, sincere*) and negative (*anxious, judgmental, avoidant, prejudiced*) impressions of their interaction partner (see Appendix 2).

For exploratory purposes, additional dependent variables included group Feeling Thermometer evaluations (see Appendix 3), questions on Surprise, Perceived Partner Interest, Self Interest (see Appendix 4), and Anxiety (see Appendix 5). Participants were then debriefed and given their compensation via Amazon's MTurk.

Results

Positive trait ratings were highly correlated ($\alpha = .88$) and were averaged to create a Positive Impressions index. Negative trait ratings ($\alpha = .83$) were also averaged to create a Negative Impressions index. Studies 1 and 2 were combined for analyses on the remaining dependent variables and will be discussed in the section proceeding Study 2.

Black participants revealed a partner race by topic effect for negative impressions, $F(1, 151) = 5.291$, $p = .023$, but not positive impressions, $F(1, 151) = .814$, $p = .368$. Black participants formed more negative impressions of White partners ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.06$) than of Black partners ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 1.06$) who posed low intimacy questions, $t(83) = 3.214$, $p = .002$. There was no difference by partner race (White partner $M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.86$; Black partner $M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.08$) in negative impressions of partner who posed high intimacy questions, $t(68) = -.092$, $p = .927$, and no difference by partner race (White partner $M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.12$; Black partner $M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.07$) in positive impressions of partner who posed low intimacy questions, $t(83) = -.943$, $p = .348$. Black participants formed less positive impressions of White partners ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.12$) than of Black partners ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 0.92$) who posed high intimacy questions, $t(68) = -2.180$, $p = .033$ (see **Figures 1** and **2**, p. 16). **Table 1** (p. 17) presents these findings in parallel with those of the White participants.

To summarize, Black participants formed more negative impressions of their White partners than of their Black partners who posed low intimacy questions and showed no difference by partner race in positive impressions. Black participants formed less positive impressions of their White partners than of their Black partners who posed high intimacy questions and showed no difference by partner race in negative impressions.

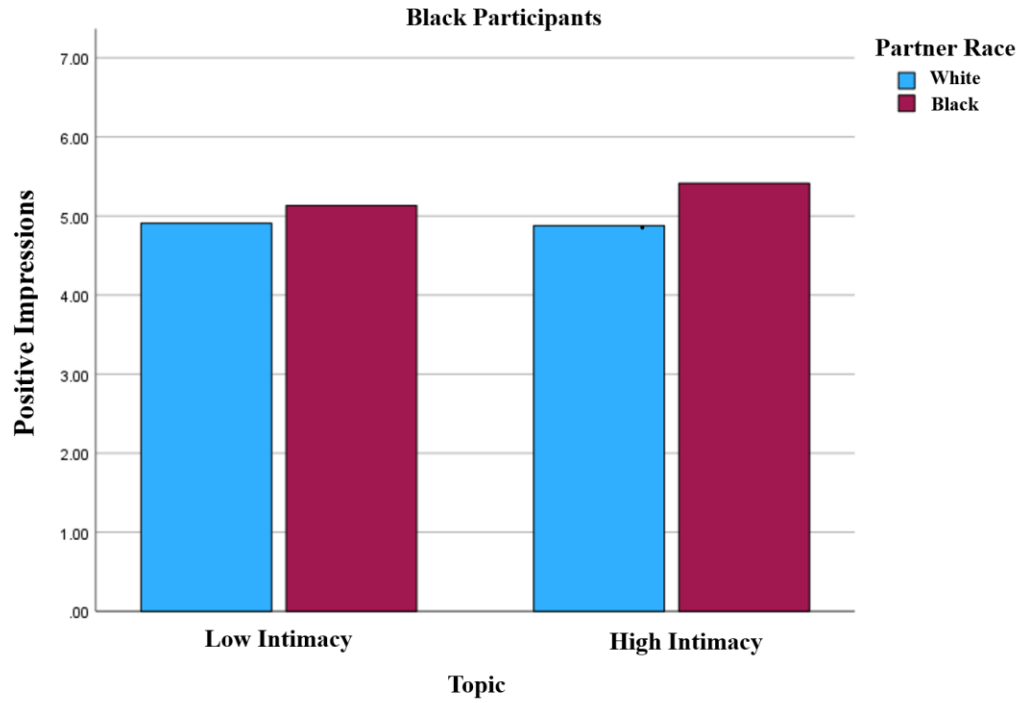


Figure 1: *Black Participants' Positive Impressions by Partner Race*

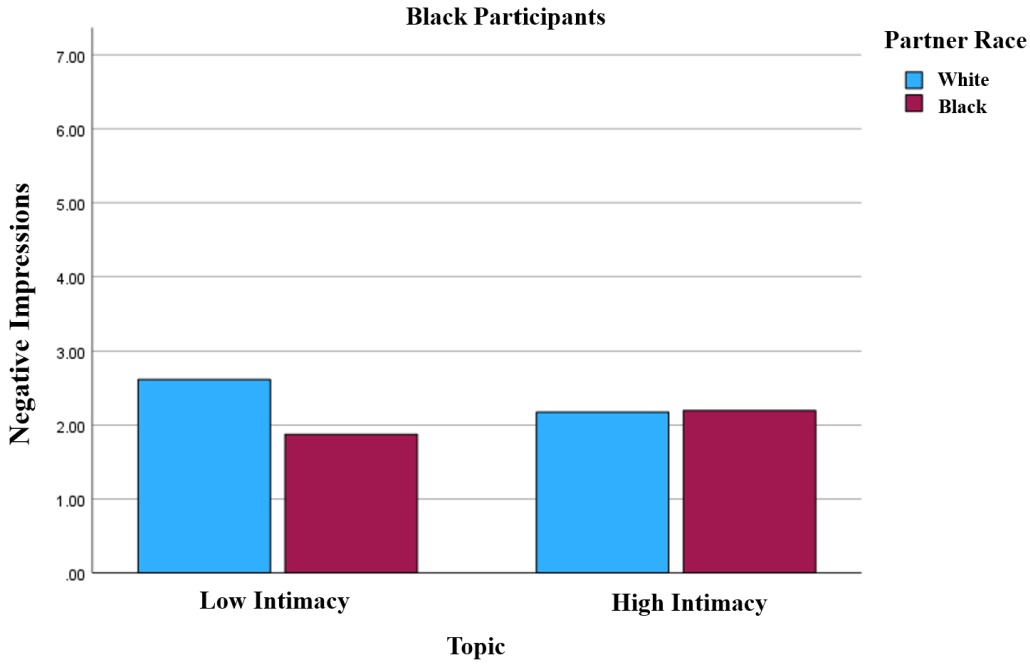


Figure 2: *Black Participants' Negative Impressions by Partner Race*

Table 1: *Intimacy Penalties*

Black Participants	**White Participants**
More negative impression of White partners than Black partners who posed low intimacy questions	Less negative impression of Black partners than White partners who posed low intimacy questions (marginal)
No difference by partner race in positive impression of partner who posed low intimacy questions	More positive impressions of Black partner than White partner who posed low intimacy questions
No difference by partner race in negative impression of partner who posed high intimacy questions	No difference by partner race in negative impression of partner who posed high intimacy questions
Less positive impressions of White partners than Black partners who posed high intimacy questions	No difference by partner race in positive impression of partner who posed high intimacy questions

The remaining dependent variables (our exploratory analyses) will be discussed in the section proceeding Study 2; data from our Black American and White American samples were combined for these analyses because the study designs are the same and the only significant effects of these exploratory analyses involved participant race.

Study 2: White American Participants

Method

Participants

Participants were 181 self-identified White American, adult, English-speaking residents of the United States (who identified no minoritized racial identities) and were recruited and paid in the same manner as Study 1. As minoritized identities often overshadow majority identities in social perception and intergroup interactions, analyses focused only on White participants who did not report any minoritized racial identities.

Exclusion Criteria

Participants were excluded if they reported racial identities other than White. Otherwise, exclusion criteria were identical to Study 1. On these criteria, 10 participants were excluded from analyses. The final sample was 171 participants.

Materials and Procedure

Materials and procedure were identical to those in study 1.

Results

As in Study 1, positive trait ratings were highly correlated ($\alpha = .77$) and were averaged to create a positive impressions index, and negative Trait Ratings ($\alpha = .94$) were averaged to create a negative impressions index. Analyses revealed a Partner Race by Topic interaction for negative impressions, $F(1, 167) = 3.95$, $p = .049$, and positive impressions, $F(1, 167) = 6.74$, $p = .010$. Each impression type was further investigated with independent samples *t* tests. White participants formed a marginally less negative impression of Black partners ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.93$) than of White partners ($M = 2.30$, *SD*

= 1.04) who posed low intimacy questions, $t(87) = 1.703$, $p = .092$. There was no difference by partner race (Black partner $M = 2.24$, $SD = 0.94$; White partner $M = 2.02$, $SD = 0.87$) in negative impression of partner who posed high intimacy questions, $t(80) = -1.106$, $p = .272$. White participants formed more positive impressions of Black partners ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 0.86$) than White partners ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.01$) who posed low intimacy questions, $t(87) = -4.152$, $p < .001$. There was no difference by race in positive impression of partner (Black partner $M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.13$; White partner $M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.16$) who posed high intimacy questions, $t(80) = .020$, $p = .984$ (see **Figures 3** and **4**, p. 20). **Table 1** (p. 17) presents these findings in parallel with those of the Black participants.

To summarize, White participants formed more positive and marginally less negative impressions of their Black partners than White partners who posed low intimacy questions. White participants showed no difference by partner race in negative or positive impressions of partner who posed high intimacy questions. The remaining dependent variables (our exploratory analyses) will be discussed in the proceeding section.

Studies 1 and 2: Exploratory Analyses

Data from Studies 1 and 2 were combined to evaluate additional dependent variables beyond impressions: Prejudice, Partner Interest, Self Interest, Surprise, and State Anxiety (see Appendices 2-4).

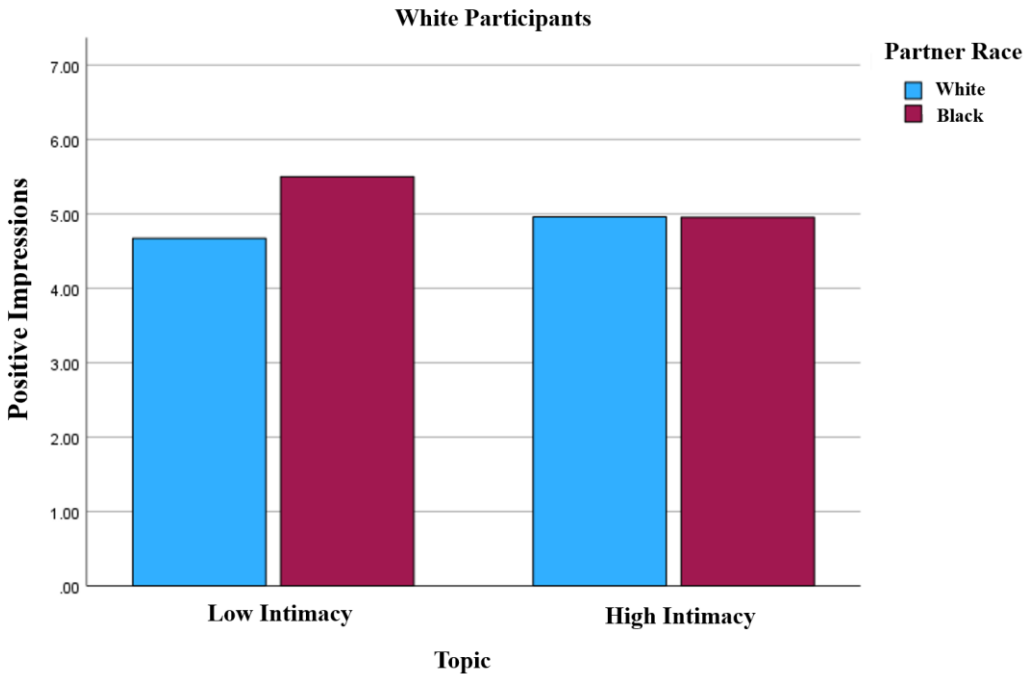


Figure 3: *White Participants' Positive Impressions by Partner Race*

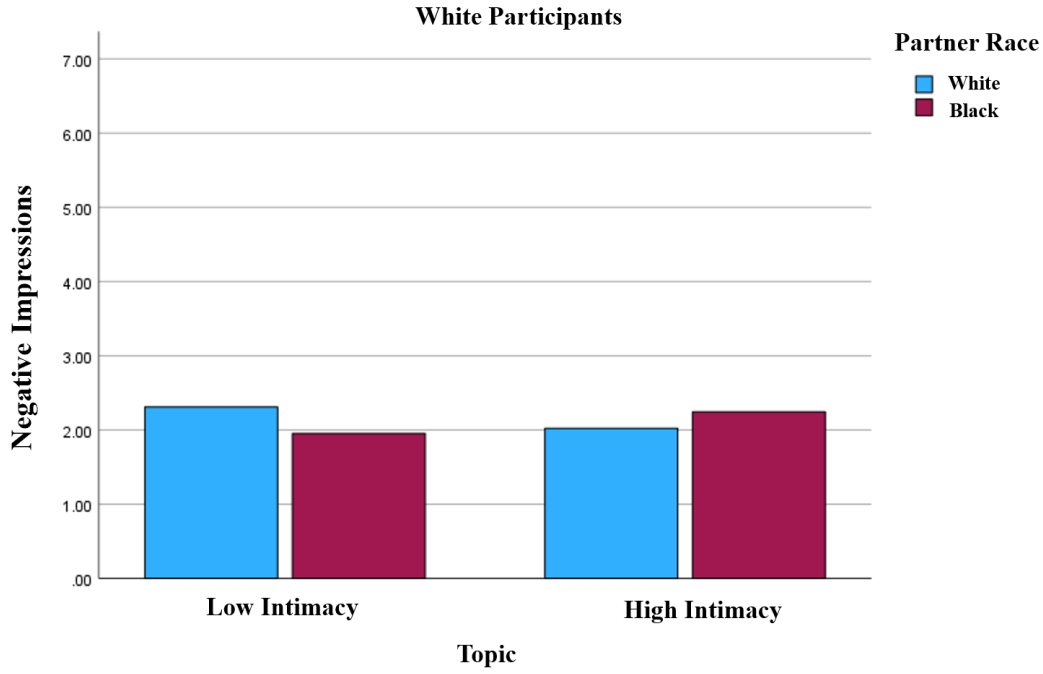


Figure 4: *White Participants' Negative Impressions by Partner Race*

Hypotheses and Results

Prejudice

Although we were mainly interested in the immediate impressions that participants formed of their partners depending on race and topic intimacy, we were also curious as to whether any positive or negative impressions might generalize to the racial group of the interaction partner. We expected to see a higher, "warmer," rating of the partner's racial group correlate with more positive impressions of the partner and a lower, "colder," rating of the partner's racial group correlate with more negative impressions of the partner.

The feeling thermometer was used to calculate a Black – White difference score (Black participants) or a White – Black difference score (White participants), creating an index of Prejudice. There was a main effect of participant race on outgroup prejudice, $F(1, 323) = 47.59$, $p < .001$, such that Black participants preferred Blacks to Whites (thermometer difference score $M = 18.47$, $SD = 25.91$), $t(151) = 8.79$, $p < .001$, but White participants did not show a group preference ($M = .97$, $SD = 19.24$), $t < 1$. No other effects were significant.

Partner Interest

We anticipated that participants would perceive greater partner interest when partners posed higher intimacy questions. This effect might vary as a function of partner race.

Questions regarding participant perceptions of their partner's interest in friendship and disclosure were moderately correlated ($r = .49$, $p < .001$ for Black participants; $r =$

.58, $p < .001$ for White participants) and were averaged to create a Partner Interest index for analyses; analogous results were obtained when items were analyzed separately. There was a main effect of partner race; $t(324) = 3.17$, $p < .001$, such that all participants assumed greater interest from Black ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.24$) vs. White ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.30$) partners. No other effects were significant.

Self Interest in Friendship

An expectancy violation perspective would imply that participants will rate partners as having lower friendship potential in an interaction with a racial outgroup partner who poses more intimate relative to less intimate questions. An alternative hypothesis predicts a main effect of intimacy condition, such that that participants will perceive their partners as having greater friendship potential after interacting with a partner who poses higher intimacy questions.

Questions regarding participant interest in friendship with their partner were highly correlated ($\alpha = .78$ for Black participants; $\alpha = .88$ for White participants) and were averaged to create a Self Interest index. There was a main effect of partner race, $F(1, 326) = 6.51$, $p = .011$, moderated by participant race. Among Black participants, there was no difference in Self Interest between their Black ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.66$) and White ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.57$) partners, $t < 1$. However, White participants showed higher Self Interest in their Black ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.44$) than their White ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.53$) partners, $t(169) = -4.02$, $p < .001$ (see **Table 2**, p. 24).

Surprise

Given norms against intimate interactions with outgroup members, we expect participants to indicate more surprise at a racial outgroup partner posing high intimacy questions than a racial ingroup partner posing high intimacy questions.

Participants responded to questions regarding topic expectancies. Despite differing correlations between the samples (r = .15, p = .06 for Black participants; r = .46, p < .001 for White participants), these items were combined to create a Surprise index for analyses; analogous results were obtained when items were analyzed separately. There was a participant race by topic intimacy interaction, $F(1, 326) = 16.09$, $p < .001$. Black participants did not differ in surprise between low (M = 3.49, SD = 1.40) and high (M = 3.54, SD = 1.47) intimacy, $t < 1$. White participants were more surprised by high (M = 3.98, SD = 1.53) than low (M = 2.70, SD = 0.94) intimacy, $t(169) = 6.61$, $p < .001$ (see **Table 3**, p. 24).

State Anxiety

An expectancy violation perspective would imply that participants will have higher anxiety in an interaction with a different-race partner who poses more intimate relative to less intimate questions. An alternative hypothesis predicts a main effect of intimacy condition, such that that participants will have lower anxiety after interacting with a partner who poses higher intimacy questions.

Negative self affect items were highly correlated (α = .91 for Black participants; α = .94 for White participants) and were averaged to create a State Anxiety index. There were no effects of independent variables on State Anxiety.

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics for Self Interest in Friendship with Partner by Partner Race*

Participant Race	Black Partner		White Partner	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Black	4.28	1.66	4.26	1.57
White	4.73	1.44	3.81	1.53

Table 3: *Descriptive Statistics for Surprise at Topic Choices by Partner Race*

Participant Race	Low Intimacy		High Intimacy	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Black	3.49	1.40	3.54	1.47
White	2.70	0.94	3.98	1.53

SECTION 3: GENERAL DISCUSSION

Positive interracial interactions are particularly beneficial and can overshadow negative contact experiences (Reimer et al., 2017) and improve intergroup attitudes (Davies et al., 2011; Kteily et al., 2019). They lead more broadly to positive perceptions of and interactions with other outgroup members (Page-Gould et al., 2010), increased knowledge of and decreased anxiety toward the outgroup (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008) and increased empathy and perspective-taking (Tropp & Barlow, 2018).

Exposure to outgroup others is sometimes associated with positive outcomes such as greater openness to future intergroup interactions (Emerson et al., 2002). However, although contact is an important component of prejudice reduction (Allport, 1954), the manner in which that contact occurs determines its outcome. When initial interactions go poorly, they not only produce negative outcomes but also preclude friendship, which could have served as a pathway to prejudice reduction and positive intergroup interactions (Pettigrew 1998, 2021). When partners in an interracial interaction form favorable impressions of one another, repeated contact that leads to friendship could become more likely. We know that intimate self-disclosure is an important component of friendship formation, fostering liking (Collins & Miller, 1994) and intergroup friendship (Ensari & Miller, 2002). However, when people perceive a partner as disinterested, they reject their partner in advance (Shapiro et al., 2010). We wondered whether a racial outgroup partner soliciting self-disclosure would reduce the conversation anxiety-avoidance cycle and spark a positive interaction that ultimately leads to positive downstream consequences.

With this logic, we explored intimacy as a dimension of conversation content, and although self-disclosure is an important component of friendship, we had competing predictions of whether solicited self-disclosure would result in favorable impressions of a racial outgroup partner: On the one hand, people like others who ask about them and who self-disclose, and they might form more favorable impressions of partners who pose more intimate questions, regardless of partner race; on the other hand, social norms guide our interactions, and people might form less favorable impressions of racial outgroup partners who broach intimacy.

A main focus of our impressions results is when penalties for broaching intimate topics do and do not occur. Considering the results in these terms, Black participants penalized White partners more than Black partners for posing questions low in intimacy, forming more negative impressions of their White relative to Black partners who failed to broach intimate topics. Although Black participants formed less positive impressions of their White partners relative to their Black partners who asked questions higher in intimacy, this difference could be conceptualized as a bonus for Black partners who posed intimate questions rather than as a penalty for White partners for doing so.

White participants showed a preference for Black partners over White partners who posed questions low in intimacy, rewarding low intimacy with relatively higher positive (and marginally, lower negative) impressions of Black partners. Additionally, White participants did not penalize Black partners for broaching intimate topics, showing no partner race preference in either positive or negative impressions for high intimacy topics. White participants' lack of impression distinction between partner race along

high intimacy questions might be due to differing norms and expectations around intimacy in conversations. Previous research (Olson et al., 2018; Zabel et al., 2015) has shown that Black Americans are more comfortable with and enjoy more intimate conversations on average than do White Americans. Framing the findings in terms of interracial intimacy penalties, Black participants did not penalize White partners for asking high intimacy questions. Black people's more frequent exposure to White people could have contributed to the intimacy penalty that White partners incurred for posing low intimacy questions. White partners posing lower intimacy questions could violate expectancies and indicate anxiety or prejudice and a lack of interest in Black participants. White partners asking more intimate questions, on the other hand, could serve as an indicator of their low prejudice of humanization of Black participants.

High and low intimacy questions were selected from past research (Olson et al., 2018), and given that Black Americans and White Americans rated the topics as relatively higher or lower in intimacy – and due to norms against intimate interactions with outgroup members – our high intimacy questions were anticipated to be surprising to participants in our studies. However, only White participants were more surprised by high relative to low intimacy questions. A possible explanation of these findings is that our predictions were based on oversimplified norms, and these norms likely vary by race due to differential exposure to racial outgroup members. White participants likely had less exposure to and interactions with Black partners than Black participants had with White partners (Trawalter & Richeson, 2008), leading to White participants' greater surprise at their Black partners broaching intimacy. Conversely, Black participants'

probable more frequent racial outgroup experience could have led them to expect intimacy from an initial conversation with a White partner.

White participants showed greater friendship interest in their Black relative to White partners, regardless of topic intimacy, while Black participants showed no partner race distinction. The norms we focused on in our expectations of friendship potential might be second to other conventions. Black participants and White participants both perceived greater interest from Black relative to White partners. Rather than expectancies of low intimacy interracial interactions guiding friendship potential, it could be that White participants, having relatively fewer interactions with Black partners, perceived greater interest from their Black partners than White partners for engaging with them and asking them questions, regardless of the degree of intimacy of those questions. White participants might have responded to this perceived interest from their partner with feelings that it was likely that the conversation could result in friendship, thus avoiding the loop of rejecting their partner due to fear of being rejected (Shapiro et al., 2010). Considering our interracial intimacy penalty discussion, not only did White participants not penalize Black partners relative to White partners in friendship potential, they viewed greater friendship potential from their Black partners. This effect appears encouraging for interracial interactions; however, we cannot fail to consider that social desirability might have been at play in White participants' responses on this dimension. On the other hand, Black participants showed no distinction in friendship interest by partner race. Following the discussion above, Black Americans' greater exposure to White partners and greater conversation enjoyment might have led to this null result for our Black

participants. Considering our interracial intimacy penalty discussion, this lack of friendship potential penalty for White partners is a reassuring result.

In terms of Black Americans' and White Americans' impressions of one another for soliciting greater self-disclosure, we have learned a complex story. But these studies grant us greater understanding of a conversation tool that people can use to develop positive interracial contact experiences. Additionally, although a single interaction with a member a racial outgroup did not generalize in our prejudice measure to feelings toward their group, a positive encounter with an individuated racial outgroup member can lead to continued contact, which might then result in an increased likelihood of friendship that ultimately produces generalizing effects. The interaction in the present studies was merely an anticipated one and ended as a result of the experimental design. However, over a slightly longer period of time in a single interaction, initial interracial anxiety reduces (Davies et al., 2011). Considering natural settings of conversations, where they can continue beyond the end point of these studies: If a conversation is perceived positively and is continued rather than ended by the partners, it could promote friendship potential and future interactions. When those initial interactions go well, perhaps the next interaction becomes more likely – and more likely to be positively perceived.

Limitations and Future Directions

A common critique of pseudo-interaction studies is the lack of *real* contact. However, real contact is rife with potential confounding variables and merely switches what is the priority in the trade-off between internal and external validity. Additionally, a substantial body of work has evidenced that imagined positive intergroup contact is

sufficient to reduce outgroup prejudice (Miles & Crisp, 2014). Still, a pressing question is whether *expecting* an interaction constitutes "imagined contact" and can be similarly substituted for an interaction. Future work should explore whether and the degree to which expectation of an interaction differs from imagined contact or similar interaction substitutes evidenced to have prejudice reduction effects (e.g., parasocial relationships; Paluck, 2009; Tukachinsky et al., 2015). If anticipation of an interaction is insufficient to attain comparable effect sizes to these alternative options, future studies should be conducted to replicate and explore the present studies' findings with real or imagined contact.

Although high intimacy questions required greater disclosure than low intimacy questions, the manipulation may have been too slight. Future research could explore intimacy with less subtlety, such that participants could more clearly detect the intimacy level of the questions their partner chose versus that of the alternative question options presented.

Participants in this study set, regardless of gender, interacted with a Black or White man. However, norms surrounding the degree of self-disclosure and solicited intimacy could vary by race and gender. Future studies could expand this work by adding Black and White women as partners, either with a large participant pool that explores the intersectional impact of race and gender, or with gender matching participants to their partners.

Concluding Remarks

The present studies responded to a literature gap in the content of interracial interactions by exploring partner-solicited self-disclosure, and their results presented a complex story. Our findings suggest that White and Black Americans form differential impressions of interracial vs. same-race partners who do or do not solicit intimacy. Black participants penalized White partners for posing low intimacy questions, and White participants penalized Black partners for broaching intimacy. Future research could explore the norms and expectations that guide these racial differences to provide a clearer picture of how to foster positive interaction outcomes and encourage future contact and friendship.

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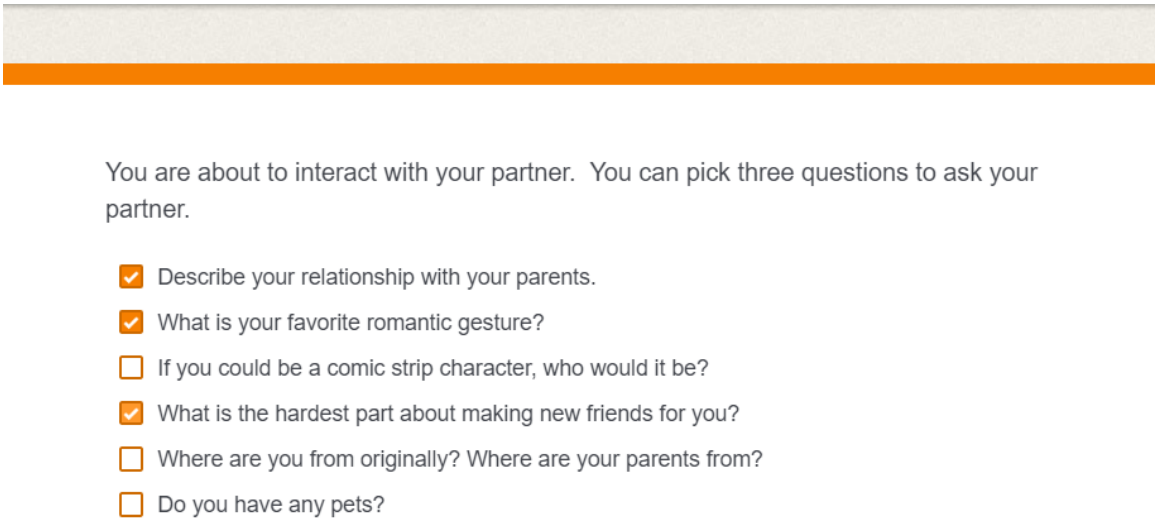
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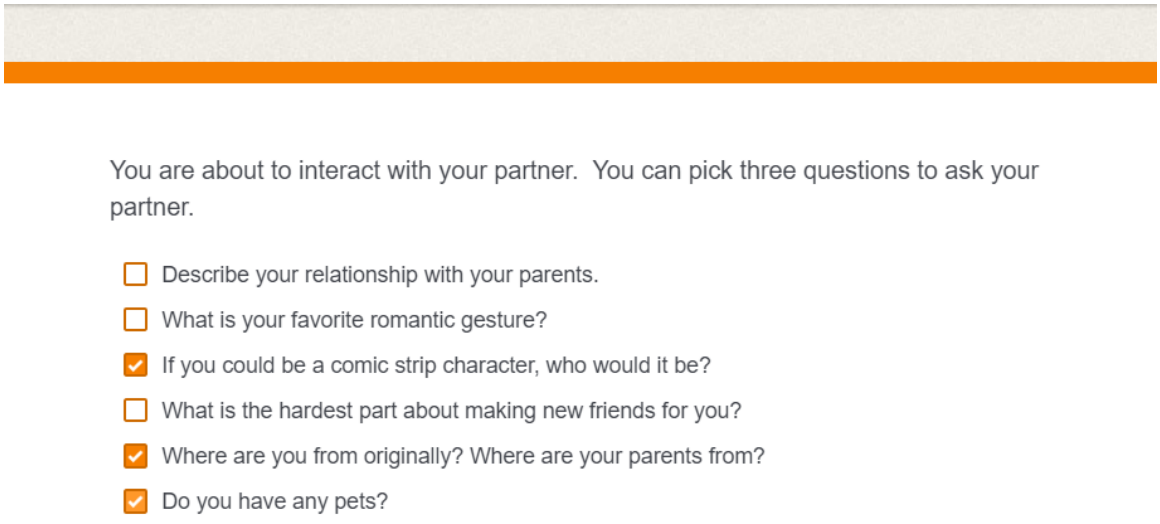
Appendix 1: *High vs. Low Intimacy Questions*

"Your partner was provided the following 6 topics. They were then asked to pick 3 out of the 6 to ask you about. Below you will see all 6 topics and your partner's choices. Please spend some time reviewing the topics and your partner's choices."

High Intimacy



Low Intimacy



Appendix 2: *Partner Impressions*

"Research shows that people are generally very good at "reading" other people based on very little information. So, even though you don't know much about your interaction partner so far, we are interested in your first impressions of him/her. Even though you might not be sure, please provide your best estimate about how much the traits below describe your interaction partner."

[Warm, Honest, Intelligent, Trustworthy, Competent, Sincere: +]
[Anxious, Judgmental, Avoidant, Prejudiced: –]

	Not very much			**Somewhat**			**Very much**
Warm	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Anxious	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Honest	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Judgmental	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Intelligent	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Trustworthy	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Avoidant	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Competent	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Sincere	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
Prejudiced	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**

Appendix 3: *Groups Feeling Thermometer*

"Before we continue, we'd like to get a sense of how coldly or warmly you feel about different social groups. **Assign a value of 0 (extremely negative) to 100 (extremely positive) to each group below**. For example, if you have a negative attitude towards typical members of the group, you would assign a value between 0 and 50, depending on how unfavorable your evaluation is. On the other hand, if you have a positive attitude towards members of the group, you would assign a value between 50 and 100, depending on how favorable your evaluation is. Please use the slider to assign a number to each group."

[*0 – 100 Slider scale, Extremely Negative to Extremely Positive*]

- Nurses
- Women
- Athletes
- White people
- Gay Men
- Scientists
- Black people
- Engineers
- Homeless People
- Muslims
- College Professors
- Paramedics
- Hispanics
- Lawyers
- Right-Wing Conservatives
- Lesbians
- Please move the slider to "73" for this item [*attention check*]

Appendix 4: *Surprise, Perceived Partner Interest, Self Interest*

"Research shows that people are generally very good at "reading" other people based on very little information. So, even though you know don't know much about your interaction partner so far, we are interested in your first impressions of him/her. Even though you might not be sure, please answer these questions about your interaction partner:"

	Not very much			**Some what**			**Very much**
How surprised are you at your partner's question choices?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
To what extent would you expect your partner to ask these questions?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
How interested does your partner seem in becoming your friend?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
How interested does your partner seem in revealing information about him/herself to you?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
How interested are you in getting to know your interaction partner?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
This question is designed just to make sure everyone is paying attention. Please select "Very Much" for this question.	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
How much would you prefer NOT to have the interaction with your partner?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**
How interested are you in becoming friends with your partner?	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**

Appendix 5: *State Anxiety*

"Now we want to ask you about YOUR thoughts and feelings. Please rate how much you are feeling the following emotions right now using the scale below:"

[*1 (not very much) to 7 (very much) Likert-type scale*]

- Anxious
- Nervous
- Please answer "very much" [*attention check*]
- Tense
- Worried
- Concerned
- Apprehensive
- Uncertain
- Distressed
- Bored
- Awkward

VITA

Laura Gill was born and raised in Tennessee. After completing high school, she attended the University of Tennessee, where she completed a Bachelor of Arts with majors in Psychology, Sociology (concentrating in Criminology and Criminal Justice), and Interdisciplinary Studies (concentrating in Africana Studies). She chose to again attend the University of Tennessee to pursue a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Experimental Psychology with Dr. Michael Olson as her advisor. Broadly, her research focuses on automatic attitudes, evaluative conditioning, and mechanisms of prejudice reduction.