

Automatically activated racial attitudes as predictors of the success of interracial roommate relationships [☆]

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Abstract

Study 1 indicated that roommate relationships involving randomly paired interracial freshmen were characterized by less extensive joint activity and were more likely to dissolve than those involving randomly paired White freshmen. Study 2 explored whether the automatically activated racial attitudes of White freshmen who had been randomly assigned to share rooms with Black freshmen would predict the stability and duration of the roommate relationships. The racial attitudes of the White freshmen were measured unobtrusively via a priming procedure at the beginning of the fall semester. White students' automatically activated racial attitudes, but not their motivation to control prejudiced reactions, predicted the longevity of the relationships. Theoretical and methodological implications are discussed.

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Over the last few decades, the field of social psychology has made considerable progress in understanding racial prejudice. One of the major principles to emerge is that race-related judgments and behaviors involve a complex interplay of automatic and more motivated, deliberative processes. Research by Devine and her colleagues has demonstrated that some people are disturbed by the experience of automatically activated negativity in response to African-Americans and are motivated to control their prejudiced reactions (Devine, 1989; Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991; Monteith, 1993; Plant & Devine, 1998). Similarly, the aversive racism perspective has

pointed to the importance of salient situational norms that can promote egalitarian behavior even in the face of anti-Black sentiment (see Dovidio and Gaertner, 2004, for a recent review).

The MODE model (*Motivation and Opportunity as Determinants*) provides a general perspective on the multiple processes by which attitudes influence behavior and, as such, specifies how automatic and controlled processes might jointly influence race-related behavior (Fazio, 1990; Fazio & Towles-Schwen, 1999). According to this model, attitudes that are automatically activated when an individual encounters an attitude object influence construals of the object in the immediate situation and, ultimately, behavior—unless the person is *both* motivated to counter the influence of the attitude *and* has the opportunity to do so. In such cases, the influence of the person's automatically activated attitude may be attenuated.

The development of an unobtrusive procedure for assessing participants' automatically activated racial attitudes (Fazio, Jackson, Dunton, & Williams, 1995), as well as an individual difference measure of motivation to control prejudiced reactions (Dunton & Fazio, 1997), has

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made it possible to test the MODE model in the domain of race. The attitude assessment procedure, which is based on priming, requires participants to judge quickly the evaluative connotation of an adjective that appears immediately after the presentation of a Black or a White face. Participants' response latencies are recorded for each trial, and the effect size of the prime (Black or White face) \times adjective (positive or negative) interaction is then calculated. This effect size provides an index of participants' automatically activated attitudes toward Black persons. Relatively faster responding to negative adjectives, compared to positive ones, when they are preceded by Black faces than by White faces is indicative of a negative racial attitude. Attitude estimates based on this priming procedure correlated with participants' judgments of Blacks' responsibility for the riots that followed the Rodney King verdict and participants' friendliness during an interaction with a Black experimenter (Fazio et al., 1995; see Fazio & Olson, 2003, for additional related findings).

However, motivation to control prejudiced reactions, as assessed by the MCPR scale (Dunton & Fazio, 1997), has sometimes been shown to moderate the effect of automatically activated racial attitudes on judgments and behavior. For example, participants characterized by automatically activated negativity toward Blacks expressed more negative attitudes on a self-report scale of racial prejudice (Fazio et al., 1995), reported more negative feelings about the "typical Black male undergraduate" (Dunton & Fazio, 1997), anticipated more discomfort interacting with Blacks in various situations (Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2003), and reported more negative first-impressions of Black targets (Olson & Fazio, 2004) only if they were also relatively unmotivated to control their prejudiced reactions. More motivated participants reported more favorable judgments, even if their automatically activated attitudes were negative.

The present research was prompted by our desire to investigate these same variables in the context of real-life relationships. The past work in which motivation has moderated the effects of racial attitudes has been conducted in laboratory contexts in which the opportunity to deliberate has been relatively high. The race-related judgments that constituted the dependent measures neither were requested in contexts in which individuals' resources were taxed, nor concerned targets with whom the participants had interacted extensively. In real-life dyadic interactions, especially those involving longer-term interactions, opportunity is much lower. One cannot constantly be vigilant about prejudicial reactions; other pressing concerns or depleted resources are likely to interfere with attempts to remain unbiased.

Yet, investigations concerning longer-term interracial interactions are rare, and those that have been conducted have tended to focus not on the consequences of attitudes for the relationship, but on the effects of the relationship on racial attitudes. The latter have been inspired by the contact hypothesis, which has had a long, but troubled history

in the field (see Brewer and Brown, 1998; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2000, for reviews). However, this literature suggests that the formation of friendships is an important and critical contributor to any positive attitude change that emerges from intergroup contact. Moreover, recent research that has pursued the same strategy we followed in the current work—namely, to take advantage of the random pairing of roommates in college dorms—has observed benefits of interracial roommate relationships on self-reports of affect toward Blacks and symbolic racism (Van Laar, Levin, Sinclair, & Sidanius, 2005). But, how likely are such interracial relationships to become close friendships, and how do racial attitudes and/or motivations to control prejudiced reactions contribute to their success?

The present research focused on incoming White freshmen who had been randomly assigned to share a room with an African-American freshman. Freshmen often do not know many people when they arrive on campus and are motivated to form friendships. Sharing a room provides a unique opportunity to spend intimate, unstructured time with someone in a similar situation. Furthermore, random assignment of roommates provided the basis for a natural field experiment, as some White freshmen would be assigned to a share a room with a Black freshman, and others to a White.

We began with the presumption that race would complicate the development of a close roommate relationship. Indeed, the only prior study, to our knowledge, concerning the development of interracial roommate relationships supports this presumption. Phelps et al. (1998) found that Whites randomly assigned to an African-American roommate perceived lower compatibility with their roommates than did those randomly paired with a White roommate. However, the inferences that can be drawn from this study are limited in that the dependent measure involved only a brief inventory of perceived roommate compatibility. The first purpose of the present research, then, was to assess the success of interracial roommate relationships by collecting, not only self-reports of relationship quality, but also information about more specific behaviors, such as the frequency of engaging in various activities with the roommate, and, most importantly, objective data regarding the stability and longevity of the relationships.¹ We expected that randomly assigned interracial roommate dyads would report less satisfaction with their relationships, spend less time together, and be more likely to dissolve their relationships than their same-race White dyad counterparts.

The purpose of the second study was then to examine whether White participants' automatically activated racial attitudes at the beginning of the semester could predict the success of the interracial relationships.

¹ It should be noted that, at the time and location where the research was conducted, vacant dorm rooms were readily available. Hence, students could change rooms with relative ease.

Study 1

Method

Participants

We recruited White freshmen students who had been randomly assigned by the university to live with freshmen African-American students in dorm rooms designed for two. With the assistance of the university housing office, we identified 87 such students, all of whom were sharing a room with their assigned roommate approximately $2\frac{1}{2}$ weeks into the semester. Of the 79 contacted successfully, 58 participated in exchange for payment.

A comparable set of 57 White freshmen students who had been randomly paired with other freshmen White students was also identified. Students randomly selected from the campus student directory were screened for eligibility (a freshman who had been randomly paired to share a room with another freshman) through a brief telephone interview before being invited to participate. We did not inquire about race during the initial screening, but we did verify that they identified themselves and their roommates as “White” after all other data had been collected.

It was important to make sure that participants were unaware of true focus of the study. Hence, participants were recruited under the guise that the experimenters were interested in exploring factors that might affect freshmen’s satisfaction with college life (e.g., freshmen’s academic and personality characteristics, as well as characteristics of participants’ social lives). Of course, since participants’ living arrangements could conceivably play an important part in determining their overall satisfaction with college life, asking them about their relationships with their roommates matched the alleged purpose of the study.

Procedure

All students participated in a single session at the end of the semester. Participants were first asked to provide some demographic and academic information about themselves; these data were collected primarily to support the cover story. The quality of participants’ relationships with their roommates was assessed using a variety of measures. Participants were asked whether or not they were still sharing a room with the roommates who had been assigned to them at the beginning of the semester, to estimate the amount of time they spent with their roommates outside of their room, and to indicate the frequency with which they performed a variety of activities with their roommates (e.g., run errands, eat out, study, watch tv or videos). They also reported their satisfaction with their roommates on a 3-item scale adapted from Murray and Holmes’s (1997) research on close relationships. The items asked participants to indicate their agreement with the following statements: “I am extremely happy with my roommate,” “I have a very strong relationship with my roommate,” and “My relationship with my roommate is very rewarding.” Participants also provided information concerning the

extent to which they and their roommates were involved in each other’s friendship networks. After providing the initials of the two individuals with whom they and the roommate each spent the most time (other than each other), participants indicated the frequency with which they interacted with their roommate and with each of the roommate’s two friends, as well as the frequency with which the roommate interacted with their (i.e., the participants’) two friends. Because participants might have a different roommate at the time of the laboratory session than when the semester began, the instructions specified that, in such a case, the questions referred to the original roommate.

Results and discussion

To test whether White participants who had been assigned randomly to Black roommates had poorer relationships than White participants who had been randomly assigned to other White roommates, variables concerning the quality of the roommate relationship were compared as a function of the roommate’s race. The interracial pairs appeared to experience poorer quality relationships than their same-race White counterparts (see Table 1 for means and *t* values). White participants in the interracial pairs were much less satisfied with their roommates and reported spending less time together outside the room, less frequent joint activity, and less cross-network interaction. These four variables correlated substantially with one another, ranging from .49 (time outside room with cross-network interaction) to .79 (satisfaction with joint activity). Indeed, a single factor emerged from a principal components analysis of these interrelated variables. The factor score

Table 1

Study 1: Means for relationship measures as a function of the roommate’s race

Variable	White	Black	<i>t</i> (113)
Satisfaction with relationship ^a	5.18	3.07	4.31
Time together outside room per day (hours)	1.74	0.17	4.82
Frequency of engaging in various joint activities ^b	3.12	1.56	5.86
Cross-network interaction ^c	2.69	1.97	4.51
Relationship assessment factor score ^d	.49	-.48	5.93

^a Average response across three items on 10-point scale (0 = *not at all* to 9 = *very*).

^b Average response across eleven activities on 9-point scale (0 = *Never*, 1 = *Once or twice this semester*, 2 = *Once or twice per month*, 3 = *Three times per month*, 4 = *Once per week*, 5 = *Two or three times each week*, 6 = *Four or five times per week*, 7 = *Six or seven times per week*, 8 = *More than once per day*).

^c Average response regarding extent of interaction between members of five dyads: participant with roommate, participant with each of two people with whom roommate spends most time, and roommate with each of two people with whom participant spends most time. Responses made on 5-point scale (0 = *Don’t know each other*, 1 = *Have met, but interact rarely or never*, 2 = *Know each other, but interact only occasionally*, 3 = *Know each other and interact frequently*, 4 = *Know each other and interact daily*).

^d Based on the single component extracted from a principal components analysis of the above variables; the component accounted for 73% of the variance.

provides a convenient composite measure of the participants' self-reports regarding their roommate relationships (hereafter referred to as the "relationship assessment" variable). The scores differed significantly as a function of the roommate's race.

The most striking evidence of the difficulties faced by the interracial dyads, however, comes from a very simple variable—the sheer likelihood of the relationship remaining intact. We know that the randomly paired students were living together at the beginning of the semester. However, by the end of the semester, a number of these relationships had simply dissolved. More specifically, whereas only 5 of the 57 same-race White pairs "broke up" before the end of the semester, 16 of the 58 interracial pairs did so; Fisher's exact $p = .01$.

As is to be expected, the relationship assessment variable correlated with relationship status (coded 0 and 1 for dissolved and intact relationships, respectively) at the end of the semester, $r = .38$, $p < .001$. The significant relation between roommate race (coded 0 and 1 for White and Black, respectively) and relationship status, $r = -.24$, $p < .01$, was reduced to a negligible level by controlling for the assessment variable, $r = -.07$. A mediational analysis and a Sobel test indicated the reduction to be statistically significant, $z = 2.93$, $p < .005$. Thus, the White members of the interracial dyads reported relatively less satisfaction and involvement with their roommates than was true of the White–White dyads, and this in turn was associated with a greater likelihood of relationship dissolution.

Study 2

Study 1 established that interracial roommate pairs often have less successful, less enduring relationships. Given that approximately 28% of the interracial relationships dissolved, we were especially interested in whether we could predict the eventual longevity of interracial roommate relationships from knowledge of the White partner's automatically activated racial attitudes at an early point in the semester. Study 2 examined this possibility.

As previously discussed, White students' automatically activated racial attitudes might affect their willingness to interact with their Black roommates and, hence, the extent to which the roommates get involved with one another and develop a positive relationship. In addition, White participants with more negative automatically activated racial attitudes might "leak" negativity, even though they may be generally motivated to control prejudiced reactions. According to the MODE model, the influence of such participants' automatically activated attitudes is likely to be apparent when the opportunity to control prejudiced reactions is relatively low (Fazio & Towles-Schwen, 1999). Unlike many situations in the laboratory, where participants are likely to interact for only short periods of time, roommates have extended and repeated interactions over periods of months. During this time, participants would

sometimes be tired, stressed, distracted, or otherwise have low opportunity to control prejudiced reactions. Thus, it is likely that someone who has a negative automatically activated racial attitude would exhibit behavioral consequences of that attitude—the expression of negativity and/or the avoidance of interaction—despite any goals to behave in a nonprejudiced manner.

Method

Participants

Eighty-four White freshmen who had been randomly assigned to share a double room with African-American freshmen were identified as before. Of the 80 successfully contacted, 58 agreed to participate in two laboratory sessions, one at the beginning and one at the end of the fall semester. They received their choice of either payment or course credit (when relevant). One person was excluded from the analyses because he made an excessive number of errors on the task intended to measure his automatically activated attitude. An additional person failed to complete the Motivation to Control Prejudiced Reactions survey and, hence, was treated as a missing case on analyses involving this scale. A third was the only participant who failed to return for the second session, but information obtained from the university office regarding his housing situation permitted his inclusion in analyses of relationship duration.

First session

Participants' automatically activated racial attitudes were measured via the priming procedure developed by Fazio et al. (1995). To fit with the cover story, the various tasks involved in the procedure were presented as separate tests of various cognitive abilities potentially related to success in college (e.g., speed of processing word meaning, memory recognition of unfamiliar faces, the ability to perform multiple tasks simultaneously, etc.).

The priming procedure consisted of five distinct phases. The first provided baseline data. On each trial, a row of asterisks appeared as a warning signal and was followed by an adjective with a clear evaluative connotation. Participants were asked to indicate its meaning ("good" vs. "bad") as quickly and as accurately as possible by pressing one of two buttons. In phase two, participants were presented with a series of faces that they were to remember for a later, phase three, recognition test. The fourth phase involved the task of interest. Participants were told that if responding to word meaning was truly an automatic skill, they should be able to perform the adjective connotation task just as efficiently as they did earlier, even if doing a second task simultaneously. They were told that faces would appear in place of the asterisks, and their secondary task was to study these faces for a later recognition test while judging the valence of the adjective. During this phase, 48 photographs (head shots of Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic male and female undergraduates) were each

presented four times, twice followed by positive adjectives and twice by negative adjectives. Each of the 16 Black faces was paired with a same-sex White face, in that the pairs were followed by the same four adjectives. The trials involving these pairs ultimately provided the data for the estimate of automatically activated racial attitude. In the fifth phase, participants were presented with the expected recognition task involving the faces they had seen, solely to maintain the cover story.

After the priming task, participants responded to questions about their demographics, family, and educational background, as well as a variety of social and political opinion items. These were intended as filler questions to bolster the cover story. The MCPR scale (Dunton & Fazio, 1997) was embedded within this lengthy questionnaire.²

Second session

Participants returned for a second session approximately 15 weeks after the fall semester began.³ At this time, participants' relationships with their roommates were assessed using a variety of measures, as in the first study. At the end of the year, data were obtained from the university housing office to verify whether the participants were still living with their roommates, and if not, the precise date the living arrangements had changed.

Results

Duration of the relationship

Of the original 58 dyads, only 41 were still roommates at the end of the Fall semester; 16 dyads had dissolved their relationships. After the academic year ended, the university housing office provided the last date the participants officially shared a room with their roommates. The number who had "split up" increased from 16 at the end of the first semester to 33 by the end of the year. Thus, only 25 of the original 58 pairs, or 43.1%, remained intact on the last day of the academic year. The number of days the roommates were together ranged from 24 to 252 days, $M = 162$, $SD = 87$. These data provide a very useful continuous measure of the success of the relationship and represent the outcome measure of major interest.

² The usual MCPR factor scores were computed on the basis of a principal components analysis with varimax rotation. The analysis included not only the present study's participants, but also 574 introductory psychology students who participated in a mass survey that same semester, thus basing the factor scores on a larger sample. The analysis revealed the same two factors, *concern with acting prejudiced* and *restraint to avoid dispute*, that had been apparent in the earlier research (Dunton & Fazio, 1997).

³ Although not central to the study, 30 White introductory psychology students, all of whom had been randomly paired to share a dorm room with another White freshman, also were recruited at this point in the semester. Data from this comparison sample generally replicated the main findings from Study 1, including the rates of relationship dissolution. Only one of these 30 dyads was no longer sharing a room at the end of the fall semester—a significantly lower dissolution rate than was observed for the interracial dyads.

White participants' automatically activated racial attitudes, as estimated by the priming procedure administered during the first session (see Fazio et al., 1995, for details regarding the calculation of the attitude scores), predicted the longevity of the relationship, $r(55) = .30$, $p < .03$.⁴ Neither the *concern with acting prejudiced* factor, $r(54) = .09$, nor the *restraint to avoid dispute* factor, $r(54) = .03$, of the MCPR scale correlated significantly with relationship duration. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis involving the factor scores and the attitude estimates revealed no indications of any interactions among these variables in predicting relationship duration.⁵ Thus, the relation between attitudes and relationship longevity was not itself moderated by either motivational factor.

Self-report measures of the relationship

As in Study 1, the four self-report measures of satisfaction and involvement with the roommate intercorrelated substantially. Hence, we again focused on factor scores based on the single factor (accounting for 69% of the variance) extracted from a principal components analysis. This relationship assessment variable correlated significantly with the duration of the relationship, $r(54) = .45$, $p < .001$.

However, a hierarchical regression analysis predicting relationship assessment from attitudes, concern, restraint, and the interaction terms did not reveal the main effect of attitude that had been observed for relationship longevity. Instead, an interaction between attitudes and restraint emerged, $t(48) = 2.03$, $p < .05$, which is displayed in Fig. 1. When restraint was relatively low, more positive attitudes were associated with more favorable reports regarding the relationship. At one standard deviation below the mean restraint score, this simple effect approached statistical significance, $b = 1.51$, $t(48) = 1.60$, $p < .12$. As restraint increased, the relation was attenuated and even began to reverse, although not significantly so at a value one standard deviation above the mean, $b = -0.92$, $t(48) = 1.17$, $p < .25$. Moreover, the form of the interaction suggests that, when assessing their roommate relationships, higher restraint individuals may have been correcting for negativity (in the interest of not appearing prejudiced) and for positivity (presumably in the interest of not appearing to exaggerate the quality of their relationships). This is the same pattern that has been observed in previous research concerning the interactive effects of automatically activated racial attitudes and restraint to avoid dispute on race-related judgments. Olson and Fazio (2004) reviewed such findings and offered a conceptual analysis of the underlying process as overcorrection

⁴ Among the 33 cases in which the dyad dissolved, the correlation between automatically activated racial attitudes and relationship duration was $.37$, $p < .03$. In 22 of these cases, the White student re-located; the correlation among these was $.49$, $p = .02$.

⁵ Neither factor score related to the racial attitudes measure (both r 's $< .10$), just as has been observed in past research. Hence, the regression coefficient predicting relationship duration from racial attitudes remained statistically reliable even after controlling for concern and restraint, $t(52) = 2.25$, $p < .03$.

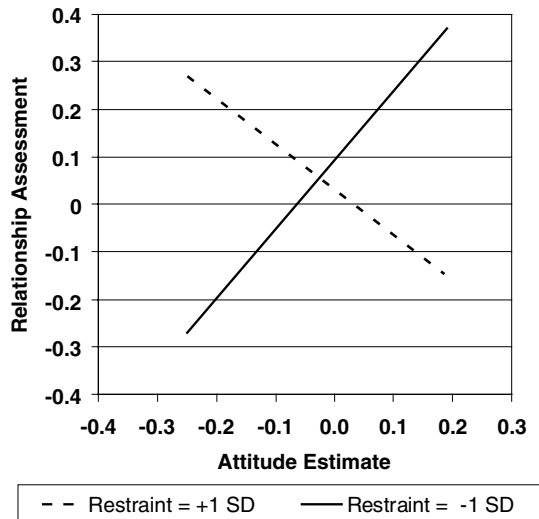


Fig. 1. Regression lines predicting the relationship assessment scores from automatically activated attitudes at one standard deviation above and below the mean restraint to avoid dispute score. More positive scores reflect more self-reported involvement with and satisfaction with the roommate.

for the influence of automatically activated racial attitudes when striving toward a judgmental goal of neutral impartiality with respect to race. As they emphasized, restraint has a bi-directional quality; individuals with both positive and negative attitudes have reason to be concerned that a race-related judgment may evoke dispute.

Relation between relationship assessment and duration

The above finding implies that the relation between relationship assessment and the behavioral outcome measure may itself depend on the level of restraint to avoid dispute. An additional hierarchical regression provided support for this reasoning. The two motivation factors and the relationship assessment variable, along with their interactions, were examined as predictors of relationship duration. Just as indicated by the correlation reported earlier, a strong main effect of the relationship assessment variable was observed, $t(51) = 3.56, p < .001$. However, this effect was moderated by the restraint variable, $t(48) = 1.88, p < .07$, such that the relation between the subjective assessment and the outcome measure of days together grew weaker as restraint increased (simple slopes: $b = 26.23, t(48) = 1.92, p = .06$, and $b = 69.03, t(48) = 3.70, p < .001$, for values one standard deviation above and below the mean, respectively).

The differential patterns observed when predicting relationship assessment versus duration resulted in unique effects of attitudes, $t(50) = 2.67, p = .01$, and relationship assessment, $t(50) = 3.81, p < .001$, when both were entered as predictors, along with concern and restraint, of relationship duration.

Discussion

The study's most interesting finding concerned the relation between the White participants' automatically

activated racial attitudes and the objective measure of the quality of their interracial roommate relationships—the relationship's longevity. Relationships were less stable when participants had more negative attitudes. The relationships dissolved at an earlier point in the year. Moreover, the relation between attitudes and relationship duration was not moderated by either type of motivation to control prejudiced reactions. In other words, White participants who had negative automatically activated racial attitudes but desired to prevent them from influencing their actions were no more successful in developing enduring relationships with their Black roommates than were those who were less motivated.

Past research has found that individuals sometimes correct for the influence of their automatically activated attitudes on various race-related judgments if characterized by a motivation to do so (e.g., Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Fazio & Dunton, 1997; Olson & Fazio, 2004; Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2003). Such motivated individuals offer judgments that differ from those of their less motivated counterparts. A similar pattern was observed in the present study for participants' subjective assessments of their involvement with and satisfaction with their roommates. The relation between attitudes and relationship assessment was moderated by restraint to avoid dispute. The lower the restraint, the more positive the relation.

Thus, the influence of attitudes on relationship longevity was not moderated by restraint, whereas the relations between attitudes and relationship assessment and between relationship assessment and relationship duration were moderated by restraint. The three variables were differentially related as a function of restraint. For participants low in restraint, relationship assessment and duration shared a common dependence on automatically activated racial attitudes, as assessed at an earlier point in time. The more positive their attitudes, the more the White participants interacted with and were satisfied with their African-American roommates and the longer the relationship remained intact. For those individuals characterized by higher restraint to avoid dispute, relationship longevity was a direct function of attitudes, but subjective assessments of the relationship were not. The latter were obscured by the motivational goal of wishing to be neutral or impartial with respect to race (see Olson & Fazio, 2004). Participants with more negative attitudes and higher restraint to avoid dispute reported a seemingly exaggerated sense of rapport with their roommates, and participants with more positive attitudes and higher restraint reported lesser involvement. These assessments were more disparate from the more objective outcome measure of days spent sharing the room than was true for the lower restraint participants.

These findings are very compatible with the MODE model and its emphasis upon motivation *and* opportunity as necessary factors for countering the downstream consequences of automatically activated attitudes. Questions that require subjective appraisals of the quality of the relationship or re-constructions of past interaction

frequency—at least under conditions of administration that involve neither time pressure nor cognitive load—allow for the opportunity to engage in motivated deliberation. For example, participants with negative attitudes but higher in restraint may have been relatively motivated to search for episodic memories of specific activities they had performed with their roommates. That, along with the mere desire to believe that the relationship was progressing well, may have fostered reports of greater rapport and involvement. Analogously, higher restraint individuals with positive attitudes may have been concerned about appearing to exaggerate the quality of their interracial relationship. Hence, they may have been satisfied with identifying only a few specific joint activities and may have tempered their stated enthusiasm for the relationship. Such motivational tendencies would have resulted in less calibrated assessments of the relationship—ones that proved less predictive of longevity.

Although focused on a null finding, we believe that the lack of moderating effects of motivation on the relation between attitudes and relationship duration is noteworthy. Extended interactions with another will include situations in which the opportunity to pursue motivational goals is relatively low. Roommate relationships require interactions not just when the roommates are rested, calm, and thoughtful, but also when they are tired, aroused, preoccupied, or just plain irritable. These conditions diminish opportunity for individuals to monitor and control their behavior. Moreover, the very acts of monitoring and striving for a smooth interracial interaction are known to be resource-depleting and, hence, may have negative consequences for an ensuing interaction (Richeson & Shelton, 2003). In such “low opportunity” moments, the likelihood of attitudinally-influenced decisions to avoid interaction and/or expressions of negativity may increase among those with negative attitudes. Over the long term, such interaction patterns may foster the desire of one or both partners to dissolve the roommate relationship. Thus, the null finding forces consideration of the possibility that motivation to control prejudiced reactions may be of limited effectiveness in an important, natural setting. In many instances, being sufficiently motivated to control prejudiced reactions may be enough to behave in an egalitarian manner. In others, such as in a close interracial relationship, a positive attitude may be necessary.

In addition to the advance offered by the findings’ support for the MODE model, the research also provides a methodological advance. The correlation between the priming measure and relationship longevity represents the most dramatic evidence to date regarding its predictive validity and, hence, bolsters our confidence in the priming procedure as an implicit measure of racial attitude (see Fazio and Olson, 2003, for a general review).

The present findings certainly indicate that additional longitudinal research on the effects of automatically activated racial attitudes on interracial relationships would be beneficial. In particular, a more detailed examination

of the specific consequences associated with automatically activated attitudes is necessary. For example, future research might consider more closely the extent to which interracial dyads fail to engage jointly in activities, and the extent to which the White dyad member “leaks” negativity. Experience sampling techniques might provide a means of collecting data intermittently throughout the semester so as to obtain a more complete understanding of the relationship dynamics. Finally, it should be noted that the present research focused on White students’ attitudes. Although this does not undermine the validity of the current findings (if anything, it highlights their importance), any relationship involves a dynamic process between individuals. Parallel research from the perspective of the African-American partners would be valuable. If at all possible, simultaneously studying both roommates has the potential to provide important insights.

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