



Figure 3. Racial discounting moderates the relationship between racial progress condition and signature size (Study 2).

Note. ***Slope is significant at the 0.001 level (two-tailed). Endpoints are graphed at 1 *SD* above and below the mean of the discounting measure.

Discussion

Study 2 tested whether racial progress is threatening to Whites, and whether attributions to racial discrimination buffer Whites' self-worth from the threat of racial progress. We replicated the Study 1 pattern: Whites exhibited lower implicit self-worth when considering high, but not low, racial progress. Importantly, this effect arose using a more conservative manipulation of racial progress in which all participants were primed to consider increasing numbers of racial minorities at their university.

Priming participants to perceive high racial progress did not make them more likely to perceive discrimination: perhaps because they were compared to a low racial progress condition as opposed to a pure control (as in Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014). Our null finding might have also been a result of a greater tendency for participants to agree that Whites (in general) experience racial bias than to report that they *personally* experienced bias (Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990). Furthermore, personally claiming racial bias is associated with negative interpersonal consequences (e.g., Kaiser & Miller, 2001; Wilkins, Wellman, & Kaiser, 2013). Essentially, participants might have been reluctant to claim racial bias.

Importantly, Whites in the high racial progress condition who made greater racial attributions

experienced greater increases in implicit self-worth. The implicit self-worth of participants in the low racial progress condition was unrelated to discrimination attributions. After having the opportunity to make attributions for their loss, the self-worth of Whites in the high racial progress condition returned to baseline levels, but it remained low for those in the low racial progress condition. This suggests that attributing a negative outcome to racial discrimination is self-protective for Whites primed with a significant amount of racial progress.

General Discussion

Two studies examined Whites' reactions to perceiving racial progress: operationalized as increasing numbers of high-status racial minorities in the US and greater numbers of students of color at participants' university. White participants responded to racial progress by exhibiting evidence of threat: lower implicit self-worth relative to baseline. This reaction is consistent with our argument that racial progress threatens the status hierarchy and thus, Whites—who traditionally occupy dominant positions in society. These experiments are the first to demonstrate that Whites' implicit self-esteem suffers when they consider racial minorities' social advancement.

Participants primed with high racial progress experienced greater self-worth protection to the

extent to which they attributed their loss to race relative to the self. This is consistent with theorizing on race attributions and self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989), and evidence that Whites experience a boost in perceived competence when they perceive bias against their group (Unzueta et al., 2008). We found that self-worth was restored to baseline levels for White participants in the high racial progress condition. This suggests that when experiencing threat due to racial progress, Whites might be motivated to perceive racial bias because the more they do, the better they feel about themselves.

Limitations and Future Research

While we refer to signature size as implicit self-esteem (to be consistent with terms used by previous researchers; e.g., Rudman et al., 2007), it is an indirect measure, and thus it may assess explicit self-esteem, implicit self-esteem, or a combination of both (Karpinski & Steinberg, 2006). Therefore, we cannot say with certainty *what* aspect of the self we assess. However, given the consistency between fluctuations in signature size and the self-esteem IAT (Rudman et al., 2007), we are confident in referencing implicit self-esteem.

Additionally, based on previous research on *implicit self-esteem compensation* (ISEC) (Rudman et al., 2007), some might expect participants to respond to threat with an *increase*, rather than decrease, in signature size. It remains unclear which circumstances elicit traditional threat responses (like those observed in the present studies) versus ISEC (Rudman et al., 2007). Further research is needed to delineate the limits of ISEC versus other threat effects.

Implications

In the US egalitarian ideals are widely espoused, and yet this research demonstrates that Whites implicitly feel worse about themselves when they consider greater progress toward achieving racial equality. Because Whites feel better about themselves to the extent to which they make discrimination attributions, it suggests that they may be

motivated to perceive greater discrimination against their group. This provides one potential explanation for Whites' increasing perceptions of anti-White bias (Norton & Sommers, 2011).

Our work raises the important question of whether racial progress can be framed in a non-threatening way for high-status groups. While self-affirmation (Steele, 1988) will likely reduce threat, other strategies that are easier to implement on a large scale are needed. Perhaps racial progress framed as evidence of commitment to equality rather than as progress toward equality (Eibach & Purdie-Vaughns, 2011) would be less threatening.

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Notes

1. We also included measures of status legitimizing belief (SLB) endorsement (Levin, Sidanius, Rabinowitz, & Federico, 1998) in Studies 1 and 2. We tested whether threat response would be particularly apparent for strong SLB endorsers given their particular support for existing status arrangements. We did not find a significant interaction between time, condition, and SLB endorsement for either Study 1, $F(2, 55) = 1.62, p = .21, \eta_p^2 = .06$, or Study 2, $F(2, 130) = 0.79, p = .46, \eta_p^2 = .01$.
2. A pilot test confirmed that the graphing task successfully manipulated perceptions of racial progress (assessed by agreement with three items: e.g., "How much progress toward racial equality has occurred since the 1960s?" $\alpha = .88$). Whites in the *high racial progress* condition ($M = 4.61, SD = 1.34$) perceived greater racial progress than those in the *low racial progress* condition ($M = 3.93, SD = 1.18$), $t(62) = 2.16, p = .04, d = .54$.
3. We also tested whether SLBs would moderate the racial progress effect on racial discounting. There were no significant main effects in Step 1 ($ps > .48$), and no significant interaction in Step 2, $t(69) = -.10, p = .92$. This suggests that neither condition nor SLBs affected the extent to which individuals attributed personal outcomes to discrimination.

4. As expected, there were no significant main effects or interactions for analyses examining attributions to sex or competitor deservingness.

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