

# Perceptions of Confronters of Racist Remarks Towards Interracial Couples: The Effects of Confronter Race, Assertiveness, Explicit Bias, and Participant Race

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Previous research demonstrates that confronting prejudicial comments reduces bias towards minority groups and that perceptions of those who confront prejudicial comments differ as a function of factors such as confronter race. The current study extends on previous research examining how participants' race, confronters' race, assertiveness, and racial bias affect the perceptions of individuals who confront prejudice towards interracial couples on Twitter. Black and White participants throughout the United States (N=154) viewed a Twitter post from a Black-White interracial couple followed by a racist comment and a confronting comment varying by confronter race and assertiveness. Results indicated that confronters were perceived more positively when using a low assertive than a high assertive approach and were rated more negatively by Black compared to White participants. Additionally, those with more explicit biases towards the outgroup perceived the confronter more negatively. This work can inform interventions focused on increased confronting and highlights the importance of allyship.

*Keywords:* confronting, explicit bias, prejudice, perception, interracial couple

Plusieurs recherches ont démontré que confronter des commentaires racistes peut réduire les préjugés portés à l'égard de groupes minoritaires et que l'ethnicité des individus qui confrontent influence la façon dont ceux-ci sont perçus par les autres. Cette étude a examiné comment l'ethnicité des observateurs, l'ethnicité des individus confrontant les commentaires, l'intensité du commentaire confrontant et les biais raciaux peuvent influencer notre perception de personnes confrontant des commentaires racistes. 154 participants noirs et blancs vivant aux États-Unis ont lu deux commentaires (un raciste et un confrontant) sur la publication Twitter d'un couple interracial. Les résultats indiquent que les protagonistes confrontant le message raciste étaient évalués plus positivement quand leur commentaire avait une faible intensité, plus négativement par les observateurs noirs et par les observateurs ayant plus de préjugés explicites envers les ethnicités différentes de la leur. Ces résultats justifient les interventions axées sur la confrontation des commentaires racistes et l'importance des alliés.

*Mots-clés :* confrontation, biais explicite, préjudice, perception, couple interracial

Racism and denial of racism have increased significantly, causing people of color and members of other minority groups to feel unsafe, which shows there is more work to do in order to reduce discrimination (Dougherty, 2017). This increase in racism has increased on social media, with more conversations and comments dealing with race, particularly during Donald Trump's presidency (Ott, 2016; Shear, 2020). Most conversations regarding race on social media occur after large news events concerning intergroup relationships (i.e., cases of

police brutality) and mainly deal with references to Black and White people (Anderson, 2016). The conversations sometimes encompass prejudicial language which can have detrimental effects on the targeted groups and further prevent positive intergroup relationships.

These detrimental effects can be reduced, and future prejudicial acts can be avoided through confronting the individuals who make these prejudicial comments. Confronting prejudicial remarks requires an individual, the confronter, to deliberately express disapproval of the prejudice (Kaiser & Miller, 2004). Previous research indicates that confronting prejudice can increase guilt in the commenter which in turn causes the prejudiced commenter to engage in self-criticism of their prejudicial behavior (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). Perpetrators who are confronted are less likely to

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make prejudicial statements in the future (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Mallett & Wagner, 2011) and their use of stereotypes is reduced (Chaney & Sanchez, 2018). Confronting has also been shown to encourage egalitarian norms in bystanders (Czopp et al., 2006). Together, these findings illustrate the importance of the confrontation of prejudicial remarks as it can evoke social change, creating and fostering egalitarian social norms, thoughts, and behaviors. As confronting instances of prejudice can have consequences for the confronter (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Dickter et al., 2012; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010; Zou & Dickter, 2013), research also needs to investigate the perceptions of those who confront.

### Perceptions of confronters

There are several factors that can affect how individuals who confront prejudicial comments are perceived. Previous research indicates that the race of the confronter can contribute to the perception others have toward the confronter (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Dickter et al., 2012; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010; Zou & Dickter, 2013). Most of the research concerning the perceptions of confronters of prejudice examines Blacks as the target group and Whites as the non-target group. These studies have been consistent in indicating that the confronters who identify as the majority, non-target group, are perceived more positively than those who identify as the minority, target group (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010; Zou & Dickter, 2013). In fact, individuals who confront prejudicial comments towards an ingroup member, a person who shares their racial identity, tend to be looked down upon for confronting these injustices. For example, Black confronters are negatively perceived as complainers and as hypersensitive when speaking out against prejudicial comments (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010). Even further, confrontation style in the form of assertiveness, the firmness of communication used in responses, has been studied alongside confronter race. Rasinski and Czopp (2010) demonstrated that members of the Black community who confronted prejudicial comments were perceived more negatively in comparison to Whites regardless of the assertiveness of their remark. Majority group confronters often do not suffer from the same negative judgments as minority group confronters. Dickter and colleagues (2012) showed that White confronters were liked more when they confronted a highly offensive comment than when they did not, regardless of the confrontation style used. Since negative perceptions of confronters tend to result in a lack of agreement with minority confronters and an overall less effective confrontation among minority confronters in comparison to majority confronters (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010), more

research needs to be conducted. Furthermore, there needs to be more research examining the confrontation of comments made about targets of different minority groups.

### Bias Towards Interracial Couples

Interracial couples are an understudied group yet are often the target of prejudicial remarks. Since the 1960s, interracial marriage among newlyweds has increased by 14%, especially among Whites and Blacks (Livingston & Brown, 2017). Research has revealed that perceivers hold consistent negative perceptions and discrimination towards interracial couples (Chuang et al., 2020; Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Herman & Campbell, 2012; Murty & Roebuck, 2015; Skinner & Hudac, 2017; Skinner & Rae, 2018). For example, in the U.S., pairings between African Americans and Caucasians are seen as disgusting and unacceptable by some people (Fu & Heaton, 2008). Murty and Roebuck (2015) demonstrated that even though Black students approve of interracial dating, they do not necessarily approve of interracial marriage. Similarly, Skinner and Hudac (2017) conducted a study to assess the overall bias individuals have towards interracial couples in relation to disgust through using neural response measures and source localization. They demonstrated that disgust leads to dehumanization, and many people have dehumanized interracial couples to the point of processing them similar to the processing of non-human animals. Additionally, Skinner and Rae (2018) found that people have negative explicit (i.e., deliberate and conscious attitudes) as well as implicit (i.e., hidden and unconscious) biases towards Black-White interracial couples. Importantly, it was noted that there is a difference in the bias exhibited based on the intersectionality between race and gender. That is, Black women demonstrated a higher amount of bias due to feeling that there is a lack of eligible Black men in the marriage market, and Blacks overall had shown more bias towards interracial marriage in comparison to Whites (Crowder & Tolnay, 2000). Research examining the effects of confronting prejudice against interracial couples has not yet been conducted. However, since confronting can help reduce racism, discrimination, and stereotyping towards target groups (Czopp et al., 2006), research investigating the perceptions of individuals who confront racism against this group may inform of ways to reduce these biases.

### Present study

The goal of the present study is to examine the perceptions of individuals who confronted racist comments made about a Black-White interracial couple and to examine whether these perceptions varied as a function of race of the confronter, race of

the perceiver, and the assertiveness of the confrontation. We chose to examine confrontations on social media, which has seen a significant amount of discussion concerning race. For example, Anderson (2016) found that between January of 2015 and March of 2016, there were 2.1 million Twitter posts per day concerning race. There is also a large number of racist comments on social media, particularly since the 2016 Presidential election when Donald Trump took the presidency (Dougherty, 2017; Ott, 2016; Sharma & Brooker, 2016; Shear, 2020) and especially in the United States, in comparison to other countries. Indeed, Laub (2019) indicated that 67% of U.S. participants agreed that they should be allowed to make offensive comments towards minority groups on public platforms. Therefore, discovering ways to combat the expression of racist content on social media is important because of the lack of research concerning the best ways to address prejudice on social media (Cisneros & Nakayama, 2015). This study may illuminate the factors that affect perceptions of White people, thus informing how majority, non-target individuals can effectively use their privilege as allies in confronting discrimination and prejudice towards target groups. This study may also extend beyond social media to inform interventions and trainings regarding discriminatory comments in the workplace, academia, and other institutions.

In the current study, adult participants from the United States viewed Twitter posts that contained a racist comment followed by a confronting comment by another person. The race (White) and gender (male) of the racist commenter was kept constant, a decision made because past work indicates that White males are the most common perpetrators of racist comments (Dickter & Newton, 2013). Additionally, gender of the confronter was held constant with a woman always confronting since women are more likely to confront than men (Rasinski & Czopp, 2010); this also limited the potential influence of gender dynamics related to power in confronting behavior. Participants then rated the perceiver on both positive and negative traits. As an extension of previous research, we asked participants if they found the confronter friendly or racist (Rasinski & Czopp, 2010). Further, we asked about perceptions of respect as an extension of the literature since this allowed us to test the participants' judgement of the confronters' character and principles (Dickter et al., 2012). Lastly, we examined if participants found the confronter to be hypersensitive since confronters, specifically minorities, have been viewed as complainers and overtly sensitive (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010; Xie, 2019). The four dependent variables—friendly, racist, respect, and sensitive—were chosen to measure perceptions consistent with

these previous studies.

We hypothesized that perceptions of the confronter would be affected by several factors. First, we investigated whether the race of the confronter affected perceptions. To test this, confronter race was manipulated with the race being either Black or White. Consistent with previous work, we expected that White confronters would be perceived more positively than Black confronters (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Dickter et al., 2012; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010).

Second, we examined whether the assertiveness of the comment would affect perceptions of the confronter. Some previous research demonstrated that using a high assertive approach when confronting racism can cause individuals to have more negative perceptions of the confronter (Czopp et al., 2006), while other work indicated that a confronter was perceived more positively when the racist comment was highly offensive regardless of assertiveness (Dickter et al., 2012). Based on the Dickter et al. (2012) findings, we hypothesized that assertiveness would not have a significant effect on perceptions of the confronter.

Third, we examined whether participant race would affect perceptions of the confronter. Previous research indicates that individuals are more likely to confront when the prejudicial remark is made towards their own group rather than an outgroup, a person who does not share the same racial identity (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). However, no research has examined the confrontation of comments made about interracial couples in which one of the targets is an outgroup member and the other is an ingroup member. There is some research showing that Black individuals have negative feelings towards Black-White interracial couples (Chuang et al., 2020; Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Skinner & Rae, 2018), but it is unclear whether attitudes towards interracial couples will predict confronting behavior. Since the present study focuses on interracial couples, with partners of both racial groups, and there is no prior research examining perceptions of those who confront prejudice towards interracial couples, predictions were not made concerning participant race.

The fourth goal of the present study was to examine whether those with more prejudice would have more negative perceptions of the confronter. Although there is a lack of research on whether this relationship occurs when the target group is an interracial couple, Rasinski and Czopp (2010) demonstrated that high-prejudiced participants perceived people confronting racist comments about one racial group more negatively than low-prejudiced participants. Therefore, we hypothesized that participants with more negative explicit attitudes

towards the outgroup and interracial couples would have more negative perceptions of the confronter.

Finally, on an exploratory basis, we sought to examine how confronter race, assertiveness, and participant race would interact with each other to influence the perception of the confronter. There is a gap in the literature indicating how these three variables interact with each other. Overall, it is important to study these interactions to examine which identities are perceived more positively than others which in turn can help inform the literature on confronting prejudice.

## Methods

### Participants

There was a total of 188 participants who completed the study through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Participants had to fulfill the following requirements: task approval rating greater than or equal to 99%, reside in the United States, and have had at least 100 completed tasks approved by other MTurk requesters. Thirty-four participants were removed due to participants failing manipulation ( $n = 32$ ) checks or identifying as biracial ( $n = 2$ ), as the focus of this study was monoracial populations. Age was coded as such: 1 = 18-24, 2 = 25-34, 3 = 35-44, 4 = 45-54, 5 = 55-64, 6 = 65, and older. Most of the participants were between the ages of 18-24 (61.7%) and 25-34 (20.1%) ( $M = 2.43$ ,  $SE = 0.76$ ); 16 participants did not state their age. The gender composition was 103 males (66.9%), 50 females (32.5%), and 1 transgender female (0.6%). The racial composition was 88 Whites (57.1%) and 66 Blacks (42.9%), and 56.5% of participants have had previous experience in interracial relationships.

### Materials and Procedures

The study had a 2 (Participant Race: White, Black) x 2 (Confronter Race: White, Black) x 2 (Confrontation Assertiveness: low, high) between-subjects factorial design. Participants were told that they would be answering a survey about their opinions. They then moved on to give informed consent and answered some demographic questions. Next, they read a Twitter post of an interracial couple. The last names of the interracial couple (Anderson), racist commenter (Smith), and confronters (Black-Jones, White-Clark) used in the Twitter post were chosen using common last names in the US (Mongabay, n.d.). The first names of the racist commenter (Connor) and confronters (Black-Ebony, White-Holly) were taken from a site that displayed the most common White and Black female names in the US (ABC News, 2015). The entire image provided included the original post made by the interracial

couple, the racist comment, and the confronting comment (Appendices A-D). The original post and racist comment, including race of the commenter, were consistent among all conditions and appeared as such:

Original Post: "We just want to take the time to say thank you to all of those who have been supporting our cause over the years. We appreciate all of your love, support, and dedication that you have had towards making the world a better place. You mean so much to us and we will forever be grateful for the impact you have helped the Anderson family have. We love you! #thankyou #goals".

Racist Comment: "What do you have against dating your own race? I know your parents are disappointed in you, we already have affirmative action, we don't have to marry them too."

The race (White/Black) of the confronter and the assertiveness (low/high) of the confronting comments were manipulated while the gender (female) of the confronter remained constant. The low assertive comment stated: "Honestly we should just be nicer to each other. I think they are a beautiful couple and have done alot for their community #peace". The high assertive comment stated: "I ABSOLUTELY HATE PEOPLE LIKE YOU! You don't have to be with a person of color but don't DEMEAN those who are. Im sick of people attacking interracial couples!"

A pilot test was conducted in order to choose the best high assertive, low assertive, racist, and original comments out of multiple options generated by research assistants. The racial composition of participants in the pilot test was as follows: Non-Hispanic, Whites (33.33%), Black (52.38%), Hispanic (4.76%), Asian (4.76%), and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (4.76%). Response choices for credibility, assertiveness, and racist ranged from 1=*extremely incredible (unbelievable)*, *inoffensive*, *unassertive* to 7=*extremely credible (believable)*, *offensive*, *assertive*. The original post was judged as highly credible ( $M = 5.86$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ) while the racist comment was judged as highly offensive ( $M = 6.33$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ) and credible ( $M = 5.10$ ,  $SD = 2.07$ ). The high assertive comment was high in both assertiveness ( $M = 6.71$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ) and credibility ( $M = 6.00$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ). In contrast, the lowest assertive comment was low in assertiveness ( $M = 4.00$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ) and high in credibility ( $M = 5.90$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ).

Participants then answered five questions as manipulation checks to the mock Twitter posts to ensure participants remembered the race of the commenter and confronter. The following questions

were included: *What was the name of the couple from the original Twitter post?*, *What was the race pairing of the couple from the original Twitter post?*, *What was the name and race of the first commenter?*, *What was the name and race of the second commenter?*. Participants were included if they correctly identified the racial pairing of the interracial couple and the race of the racist commenter and the confronter.

Next, participants completed a series of questionnaires assessing their perceptions of the confronter in the social media posts using Likert scales. Participants rated the confronter using 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*. They assessed the dependent variables friendly and respect to assess positive perceptions of the confronter and used the terms racist and sensitive to assess negative perceptions of the confronter.

Participants next completed the *Attitude Towards Blacks* scale (ATB; Brigham, 1993) if they identified as White. The ATB is a 20-item questionnaire which assesses prejudice towards Blacks using concise sentences (e.g., *I would rather not have blacks live in the same apartment building I live in.*) on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). This was only administered to the White participants within the sample since the questions asked participants to rate their feelings in relation to Black individuals. Reliability analysis was conducted among the sample ( $\alpha = .51$ ). Scores were standardized (higher scores indicate more positive attitudes).

Participants completed the *Attitude Towards Whites* scale (ATW; Brigham, 1993) if they identified as Black. The ATW is a 20-item questionnaire assessing prejudice towards Whites using concise sentences (e.g., *Most Whites can't be trusted to deal honestly with Blacks*) on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). This was only administered to the Black participants within the sample since the questions asked participants to rate their feelings in relation to White individuals. Reliability analysis was conducted among the sample ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Scores were standardized (higher scores indicate more positive attitudes).

Finally, participants completed a scale used to assess explicit attitudes of interracial couples (Skinner & Rae, 2018). This 3-item scale examines the explicit attitudes participants have towards Black-White interracial couples. The first question asked: *Which statement best describes your feelings about same race (both partners are White or both partners Black) and interracial (one partner is White and the other is Black) couples?* Participants responded on a 7-point scale (1 = *I strongly prefer same-race couples to interracial couples* to 7 = *I strongly prefer interracial*

*couples to same-race couples*). The last two items assessed feelings towards same-race couples in comparison to interracial couples (i.e., *How warm or cold do you feel towards Black-White interracial couples?*) using 11-point scales (1 = *extremely warm* to 11 = *extremely cold*). These scales were previously utilized to examine explicit attitudes towards members of different social groups. Reliability analysis was conducted among the sample ( $\alpha = .80$ ). They were standardized with high scores indicating preference for interracial couples, since the item with high scores that indicated preference for same-race couples was reverse coded. For demographic purposes, we also used the single item (*Have you ever had a romantic or sexual encounter with someone outside your racial or ethnic group?*) to indicate the proportion of the sample with previous experience in interracial relationships.

## Results

### Data Reduction and Overview of Analyses

Only data from participants who identified as monoracial and passed the manipulation checks ( $N = 154$ ) were included in the analyses; this required knowing the racial composition of the interracial couple in the original Twitter post and the races of both confronters (White or Black). The data examining perceptions of the confronter were analyzed using 2 (Participant Race: White, Black)  $\times$  2 (Confronter Race: White, Black)  $\times$  2 (Confrontation Assertiveness: low, high) analyses of variance (ANOVA) with the first three factors as between-subjects variables and the average explicit attitudes toward interracial couples (Skinner & Rae, 2018) as within-subjects variables. Each dependent measure was tested individually with the ANOVA. The independent variables were coded as such: participant race (1 = White, 2 = Black), confronter race (1 = White, 2 = Black), and assertiveness (1 = Low, 2 = High). The ATB and ATW, attitudes towards the outgroup, were standardized to provide correlational analyses for both Black and White participants. Significant main effects, interactions, and correlations are reported below.

### Perceptions of the Confronter

**Friendly.** There was a main effect of assertiveness,  $F(1, 152) = 6.03, p = .015, \eta_p^2 = .041$ , such that high assertive confronters ( $M = 5.03, SE = .17$ ) were perceived as less friendly than low assertive confronters ( $M = 5.69, SE = .17$ ). This main effect was qualified by a significant confronter race  $\times$  assertiveness interaction,  $F(1, 152) = 4.29, p = .040, \eta_p^2 = .029$ , as seen in Table 1. This interaction was broken down by assertiveness. For the White confronters there was no effect of assertiveness. For the Black confronters, those who were higher in assertiveness ( $M = 4.90, SE = .25$ ) were perceived as

less friendly than those lower in assertiveness ( $M = 5.86, SE = .21$ ). As seen in Table 1, there was a significant participant race x assertiveness interaction,  $F(1, 152) = 6.44, p = .012, \eta_p^2 = .043$ . This interaction was broken down by assertiveness. For the Black participants there was no effect of assertiveness. For the White participants, they perceived the high assertive confronter ( $M = 4.65, SE = .22$ ) as less friendly than the low assertive confronter ( $M = 5.73, SE = .22$ ).

Table 1  
*Perception of the Confronter- Friendliness*

	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Confronter Race	1	.00	.997	.000
Assertiveness	1	6.03	.015*	.041
Participant Race	1	2.64	.106	.018
Explicit Attitudes Towards Interracial Couples	1	1.62	.205	.011
Confronter Race * Assertiveness	1	4.29	.040*	.029
Confronter Race * Participant Race	1	.76	.385	.005
Assertiveness * Participant Race	1	6.44	.012*	.043
Confronter Race * Assertiveness * Participant Race	1	2.32	.130	.016
Total	152			

Note. \* $p < .05$ .

Figure 1  
*Confronters' Ratings Based on Friendliness*

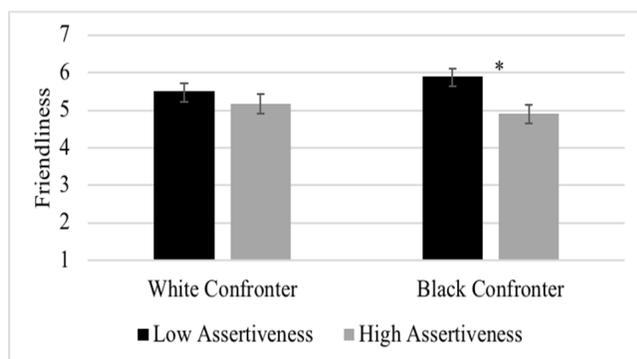
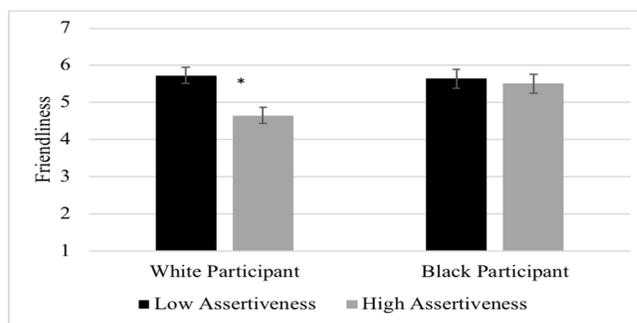


Figure 2  
*White Participants' Ratings of Friendliness*



**Respect.** There were no main effects for respect. There was a significant correlation between attitudes towards the outgroup and respect for the confronter,  $r = .23, p < .01$ , such that participants who had less prejudice respected the confronter more.

**Racist.** As seen in Table 2, there was a main effect of assertiveness,  $F(1, 152) = 4.73, p = .031, \eta_p^2 = .032$ . High assertive confronters ( $M = 3.09, SE = .24$ ) were rated as more racist than the low assertive confronters ( $M = 2.54, SE = .23$ ). There was also a main effect of participant race,  $F(1, 152) = 23.79, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .143$ . Black participants ( $M = 3.56, SE = .24$ ) rated the confronter as more racist than the White

Table 2  
*Perception of the Confronter- Racist*

	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Confronter Race	1	1.66	.200	.012
Assertiveness	1	4.73	.031*	.032
Participant Race	1	23.79	.000* **	.143
Explicit Atti- tudes Towards Interracial Couples	1	2.36	.126	.016
Confronter Race * Asser- tiveness	1	1.72	.192	.012
Confronter Race * Partici- pant Race	1	1.35	.247	.009
Assertiveness * Participant Race	1	.20	.654	.001
Confronter Race * Asser- tiveness * Partic- ipant Race	1	.03	.875	.000
Total	152			

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

participants ( $M= 2.25, SE= .21$ ). Lastly, there was a significant correlation between attitudes towards the outgroup and perceiving the confronter as racist,  $r = -.45, p < .001$ . Participants who had more prejudice rated the confronter as more racist.

**Sensitive.** As seen in Table 3, there was a main effect of participant race,  $F(1, 152) = 5.14, p = .025, \eta_p^2 = .035$ , such that Black participants ( $M = 4.92, SE = .21$ ) rated the confronter as more sensitive than the White participants ( $M = 4.35, SE = .18$ ). Lastly, there was a significant correlation between attitudes towards the outgroup and perceiving the confronter as sensitive,  $r = -.31, p = .001$ . Participants who were more prejudiced rated the confronter as more sensitive.

Table 3  
*Perception of the Confronter- Sensitive*

	df	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Confronter Race	1	1.10	.297	.008
Assertiveness	1	.01	.921	.000
Participant Race	1	5.14	.025*	.035
Explicit Attitudes Towards Interracial Couples	1	1.14	.288	.008
Confronter Race * Assertiveness	1	.147	.702	.001
Confronter Race * Participant Race	1	.08	.784	.001
Assertiveness * Participant Race	1	1.45	.231	.010
Confronter Race * Assertiveness * Participant Race	1	.052	.819	.000
Total	152			

Note. \* $p < .05$ .

**Discussion**

The goal of the present study was to examine whether perceptions of individuals who confronted a racist comment about a Black-White interracial couple on Twitter would vary based on the race of the confronter, the race of the perceiver, the assertiveness of the confrontation, and prejudice towards the outgroup and/or Black-White interracial couples. The first hypothesis was not supported as there was no main effect of confronter race. This is inconsistent with previous research demonstrating that minority confronters in general are viewed more negatively than majority confronters (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Dickter et al., 2012; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010; Zou & Dickter, 2013). However, confronter race did affect perceptions when the assertiveness of the

confrontation was considered, as discussed below. We speculate that confronter race may have yielded differences in perceptions if the confronter had been identified as a male; that is, Black men may have been perceived in a way that is consistent with negative stereotypes about their intersectional identity. In addition, whereas previous research focused on perceptions of a racist comment made towards an individual, the lack of significant effects of confronter race may have been because our research focused on a comment that was made about two individuals, one individual being an ingroup member and one being an outgroup member. Future research should take an intersectional approach to better understand this dynamic and investigate whether perceptions of confrontations to comments about interracial couples differ than comments about individuals.

Second, we found that assertiveness affected how the confronter was perceived. This finding is counter to our hypothesis, as other work has shown that confronters are favored regardless of the level of assertiveness (Dickter et al., 2012). Although our findings are inconsistent with this previous work, they are consistent with some research demonstrating that using a high assertive approach when confronting racism can cause individuals to have more negative perceptions of the confronter (Czopp et al., 2006). We speculate that the high assertive confronter was perceived as more racist due to the specific comment we chose to use in the current study. This comment was similar to that used in a study by Czopp et al. (2006), which used the phrase "...hate people like you." Future research should further investigate whether the specific language in the confrontation can negatively impact perceptions of the confronter.

Our results showed that Black participants viewed the confronter more negatively than White participants. That is, Black participants rated the confronter as more racist and sensitive than White participants. Within the Black participant sample only 15% of the men had ever been in a romantic relationship with a White person while only 7.8% of the women had a prior relationship with a White person. The increased negative perceptions of the confronter may be attributed to the lack of experience in a Black-White romantic relationship and upset feelings towards the decrease of eligible Black partners as romantic prospects (Chuang et al., 2020; Skinner & Rae, 2018). This in turn may be affected by the individual’s prejudice towards Whites in addition to the history of the marginalization of Black communities by White people and the high prevalence of negative race-related events (i.e., police brutality, hate speech). As previous research has not tested whether there is a difference in perceptions of confronters as a function of racial identity, future

research should seek to replicate this finding and investigate potential mediators of this relationship. One factor that may have affected participants' ratings of the confronter was their individual level of prejudice.

The hypothesis stating that those with more prejudice towards the outgroup would perceive the confronter more negatively was supported. Participants with higher levels of racial prejudice towards their respective outgroup member perceived the confronter as more racist and more sensitive while those with less prejudice perceived the confronter as more respectable. In contrast, the hypothesis concerning explicit attitudes towards Black-White interracial couples was not supported. Explicit attitudes towards interracial couples did not play a significant role in perceptions of the confronter in comparison to examining prejudice towards the outgroup member. Therefore, our findings suggest that improving perceptions of those who confront discrimination towards interracial couples begins at the level of prejudice the individual has toward the outgroup. One way to improve attitudes may be through efforts to increase exposure to positive, counterstereotypical outgroup exemplars (Gonzales et al., 2017; Plant et al., 2009). This could foster better intergroup relationships which in turn could decrease prejudice towards interracial couples.

Lastly, our findings indicated that Black confronters who used a higher assertive approach were viewed as less friendly than Black confronters with a low assertive approach. The finding suggests that Black confronters are perceived more negatively regarding friendliness when they use a high assertive confrontation style while there was no effect seen in White confronters concerning friendliness. This suggests that using a highly assertive confrontation was possibly considered to be more direct and less polite when the confronter was a person of color; however, the assertiveness of the confrontation did not affect how the White confronter was perceived. These findings showcase how minority groups can be unfairly perceived as acting in a way that is consistent with negative racial stereotypes (e.g., angry Black woman) but that majority groups are not judged in this way. In addition, these results are consistent with previous work showing that minority group members are perceived more negatively than majority group members when they confront prejudice (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010; Zou & Dickter, 2013). Therefore, it is important that majority group individuals act as allies by confronting others when racist remarks are made. In addition, high assertive confronters were also perceived as less friendly in comparison to low assertive confronters by

White participants. This effect was not found in Black participants indicating that White individuals may be paying more attention to the confrontation style. White individuals may not see the value of the confrontation when its highly assertive such that they may prefer a more passive or potentially color-blind approach to confronting prejudice. Previous research has found that White individuals who possessed more color-blind ideology perceived the confronter more negatively (Zou & Dickter, 2013). Therefore, it is important to inform majority groups on the benefits of confronting to encourage positive perceptions of confronters regardless of assertiveness. Together, these findings demonstrated that assertiveness plays a dominant role in perceptions of confronters. This can be attributed to Twitter serving as a platform where users can make comments while their race can remain ambiguous, but when race of the user is evident, we can see how individuals' own biases are reflected in the perceptions of the confronter.

### **Limitations**

Even though the current study can contribute to the literature on the confrontation of prejudice, there were several limitations. One is that this study has a large age range. Even though this increases generalizability due to having a diverse sample, most users of social media are typically younger and middle-aged adults with fewer elderly users. Future research may examine whether a younger sample or a sample with greater social media use yields different results. Additionally, future research should address our limitation of restricting the race and gender of the commenter, confronters, and interracial couple, as these particular identities may have made the results in this study unique to our study.

Another limitation of the current work is that the use of single adjectives (e.g., friendly) to assess one's perception of the confronter may have limited the ecological validity. Although some research suggests that single-item and multiple-item Likert-type measures of constructs do not differ in validity (Gardner et al., 1998), future research should use multiple items to assess perceptions of the confronter. Future studies should also include questions concerning actions the participants would have taken on Twitter (i.e., liking/retweeting the comment) to capture a more real-world experience.

### **Directions for Future Studies**

Future studies should assess perceptions of confronters who identify as multiracial and use participants who identify as multiracial. Previous research has indicated even though multiracial individuals tend to favor interracial couples, there is a

possibility that multiracial individuals who self-identify as Black and not biracial/multiracial may have increased bias towards interracial couples (Skinner & Rae, 2018). There is a lack of research concerning this bias, but it is important to examine multiracial individuals' perceptions of confronters and whether this may be influenced by their own biases, based on their self-identified race.

Additionally, future research should take an intersectional approach to examine if there is a difference in the perceptions of Black male and White female marriages and Black female and White male marriages. Most previous research indicates that there is a preference for Black female and White male marriages due to Black women's feelings of competition for available Black men (Chuang et al., 2020; Skinner & Rae, 2018). This would also allow for examining the intersectionality of race and gender with perceptions of the confronter. Research has shown that White women have more biases towards interracial marriage than White men (Herman & Campbell, 2012) and this relationship is the same for Black women and Black men (Chuang et al., 2020; Crowder & Tolnay, 2000; Skinner & Rae, 2018). Also, future research should take an intersectional approach when examining the confronter and commenter to better understand the dynamic of confronting when the race and/or gender of the racist commenter and confronting commenters is different. Due to different gender and racial stereotypes, it would be important to examine if findings are consistent when there are different gender/race combinations.

Additionally, perceptions of confronters of dual minority interracial couples should be examined to better understand if these results are generalizable to couples that do not encompass a majority race partner. Overall, there is a lack of research examining the racism experienced by dual minority couples in addition to no prior research on perceptions of confronters with racism towards these couples.

### Conclusions

The current study has implications for the confrontation of racist comments on social media. Our results suggest that confrontation style plays a dominant role in how confronters are perceived showcasing there may be negative consequences when confronting racist comments. Results also indicate that majority, non-target allies should confront prejudicial remarks since they are not held to these unfair standards and consequences in comparison to minority, target groups. Future research should continue to examine how confronters are being perceived on social media and how this is different based on who confronts and how they choose to

confront the situation. Research should also find ways to increase confrontations of -prejudice, especially by majority allies, which can help decrease discrimination to both outgroup members and interracial couples on social media. Confronting racism on social media can encourage more nonprejudiced social norms where racist remarks are less tolerated and can uplift targets of prejudice and make them feel welcome on these social media networks. Confrontation can also help Whites identify instances of racism on social media; as Whites are generally perceived positively for confronting, we encourage White allies to use their privilege to confront prejudice on social media outlets.

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**Appendix A**  
**Twitter Post - Race (White)/Assertiveness (Low) Condition**

**Tweet**

 **Mr. & Mrs. Anderson** @TheAndersons

We just want to take the time to say thank you to all of those who have been supporting our cause over the years. We appreciate all of your love, support, and dedication that you have had towards making the world a better place. You mean so much to us and we will forever be grateful for the impact you have helped the Anderson family have. We love you!  
#thankyou #goals

2:54 PM • 6/12/20 • [Twitter for iPhone](#)

**20.5K** Retweets    **32.1K** Likes

 **Connor Smith** @Connor\_Smith • 4d

Replying to [@TheAnderson](#)

What do you have against dating your own race? I know your parents are disappointed in you, we already have affirmative action, we don't have to marry them too.

 20     7     35    

 **Holly Clark** @Holly\_Clark • 4d

Replying to [@TheAndersons](#) and [@Connor\\_Smith](#)

Honestly we should just be nicer to each other. I think they are a beautiful couple and have done alot for their community #peace

 22     9     40    

Appendix B  
Twitter Post - Race (White)/Assertiveness (High) Condition

The image is a screenshot of a Twitter interface. At the top, there is a back arrow and the word "Tweet". The main tweet is from "Mr. & Mrs. Anderson" (@TheAndersons), posted at 2:54 PM on 6/12/20 via Twitter for iPhone. The tweet text reads: "We just want to take the time to say thank you to all of those who have been supporting our cause over the years. We appreciate all of your love, support, and dedication that you have had towards making the world a better place. You mean so much to us and we will forever be grateful for the impact you have helped the Anderson family have. We love you! #thankyou #goals". Below the tweet, it shows 20.5K Retweets and 32.1K Likes. There are four icons for replying, retweeting, liking, and sharing. Below the main tweet, there are two replies. The first reply is from "Connor Smith" (@Connor\_Smith), posted 4 days ago, replying to @TheAndersons. The text of the reply is: "What do you have against dating your own race? I know your parents are disappointed in you, we already have affirmative action, we don't have to marry them too." This reply has 20 replies, 7 retweets, and 35 likes. The second reply is from "Holly Clark" (@Holly\_Clark), also posted 4 days ago, replying to @TheAndersons and @Connor\_Smith. The text of the reply is: "I ABSOLUTELY HATE PEOPLE LIKE YOU! You don't have to be with a person of color but don't DEMEAN those who are. Im sick of people attacking interracial couples!" This reply has 22 replies, 9 retweets, and 40 likes.

**Mr. & Mrs. Anderson** @TheAndersons

We just want to take the time to say thank you to all of those who have been supporting our cause over the years. We appreciate all of your love, support, and dedication that you have had towards making the world a better place. You mean so much to us and we will forever be grateful for the impact you have helped the Anderson family have. We love you!  
#thankyou #goals

2:54 PM • 6/12/20 • [Twitter for iPhone](#)

**20.5K** Retweets    **32.1K** Likes

**Connor Smith** @Connor\_Smith • 4d  
Replying to [@TheAndersons](#)

What do you have against dating your own race? I know your parents are disappointed in you, we already have affirmative action, we don't have to marry them too.

20    7    35

**Holly Clark** @Holly\_Clark • 4d  
Replying to [@TheAndersons](#) and [@Connor\\_Smith](#)

I ABSOLUTELY HATE PEOPLE LIKE YOU! You don't have to be with a person of color but don't DEMEAN those who are. Im sick of people attacking interracial couples!

22    9    40

Appendix C  
Twitter Post - Race (Black)/Assertiveness (Low) Condition

The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter thread on a dark background. At the top, there is a back arrow and the word "Tweet". The first tweet is from "Mr. & Mrs. Anderson" (@TheAndersons), posted at 2:54 PM on 6/12/20 via Twitter for iPhone. The tweet text reads: "We just want to take the time to say thank you to all of those who have been supporting our cause over the years. We appreciate all of your love, support, and dedication that you have had towards making the world a better place. You mean so much to us and we will forever be grateful for the impact you have helped the Anderson family have. We love you! #thankyou #goals". Below the tweet, it shows 20.5K Retweets and 32.1K Likes. The interaction bar includes icons for replies, retweets, likes, and share. Below this is a reply from "Connor Smith" (@Connor\_Smith) posted 4 days ago, replying to @TheAndersons. His text says: "What do you have against dating your own race? I know your parents are disappointed in you, we already have affirmative action, we don't have to marry them too." His tweet shows 20 replies, 7 retweets, and 35 likes. Below Connor's tweet is another reply from "Ebony Jones" (@Ebony\_Jones) posted 4 days ago, replying to @TheAndersons and @Connor\_Smith. Her text says: "Honestly we should just be nicer to each other. I think they are a beautiful couple and have done alot for their community #peace". Her tweet shows 22 replies, 9 retweets, and 40 likes. The interaction bar for her tweet also includes icons for replies, retweets, likes, and share.

Appendix D  
Twitter Post - Race (Black)/Assertiveness (High) Condition

**Tweet**

 **Mr. & Mrs. Anderson** @TheAndersons

We just want to take the time to say thank you to all of those who have been supporting our cause over the years. We appreciate all of your love, support, and dedication that you have had towards making the world a better place. You mean so much to us and we will forever be grateful for the impact you have helped the Anderson family have. We love you!  
#thankyou #goals

2:54 PM • 6/12/20 • [Twitter for iPhone](#)

**20.5K** Retweets    **32.1K** Likes

 **Connor Smith** @Connor\_Smith • 4d  
Replying to [@TheAndersons](#)

What do you have against dating your own race? I know your parents are disappointed in you, we already have affirmative action, we don't have to marry them too.

 20     7     35    

 **Ebony Jones** @Ebony\_Jones • 4d  
Replying to [@TheAndersons](#) and [@Connor\\_Smith](#)

I ABSOLUTELY HATE PEOPLE LIKE YOU! You don't have to be with a person of color but don't DEMEAN those who are. Im sick of people attacking interracial couples!

 22     9     40    