

Backlash following a confrontation: The impact of relationship, essentialism, and trust

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Confronting bias can reduce prejudice (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006).

- But people are unlikely to confront because they fear backlash (Kawakami, et al., 2009; Swim & Hyers, 1999), such as being disliked by the person who is confronted (i.e., the confrontee).
- The literature to date has not tested the effect of confrontation in the context of existing **relationships**. Feeling close to the confronter may reduce backlash by the confrontee.

Understanding some characteristics and social categories as fixed, identity-determining essences (Gelman, 2003) is called **essentialism**.

- Essentialist beliefs can lead to viewing others as inalterable, possessing attributes that are informative of their true nature.
- Essentialist beliefs often predict stereotype endorsement and bias (Bastian & Haslam, 2005).

Trust is an essential element of human interaction (Rotter, 1971).

- Trust is the expectation of benevolence in another's motives and intentions and the prediction that others will act in one's best interest.

This research tests how much the confrontee's relationship with their confronter affects their level of trust, feelings of being essentialized, and subsequent backlash.

- **Hypothesis:** Trust and essentialism mediate the association between one's relationship with the confronter and backlash.

437 White participants (301 women, 132 men, 3 nonbinary, 1 another gender; age range: 18-84, $M_{age}=18.94$, $SD=1.23$) were recruited from LUC and JMU psychology participant pools.

- Participants imagined being confronted for making a racist comment or a being rude by their friend or a stranger.

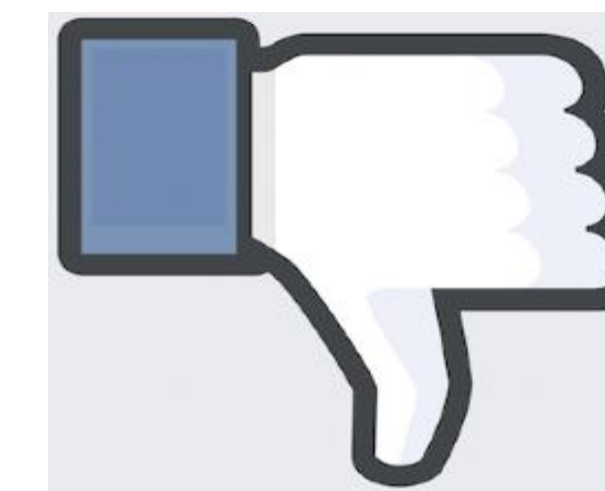
The participants imagined visiting a restaurant in an unfamiliar part of town and admitting to the waiter that they felt unsafe in the neighborhood, to which either a friend or a White stranger at the next table responded, **"I'm not gonna lie, that wasn't cool. Just because this neighborhood has a lot of Black people doesn't mean it's dangerous. That comment makes you seem like a racist, you know?"** OR **"I'm not gonna lie, you're talking way too loudly. The waiter is standing right next to you, there is no reason to yell. Talking so loudly makes you seem like an inconsiderate person, you know?"**



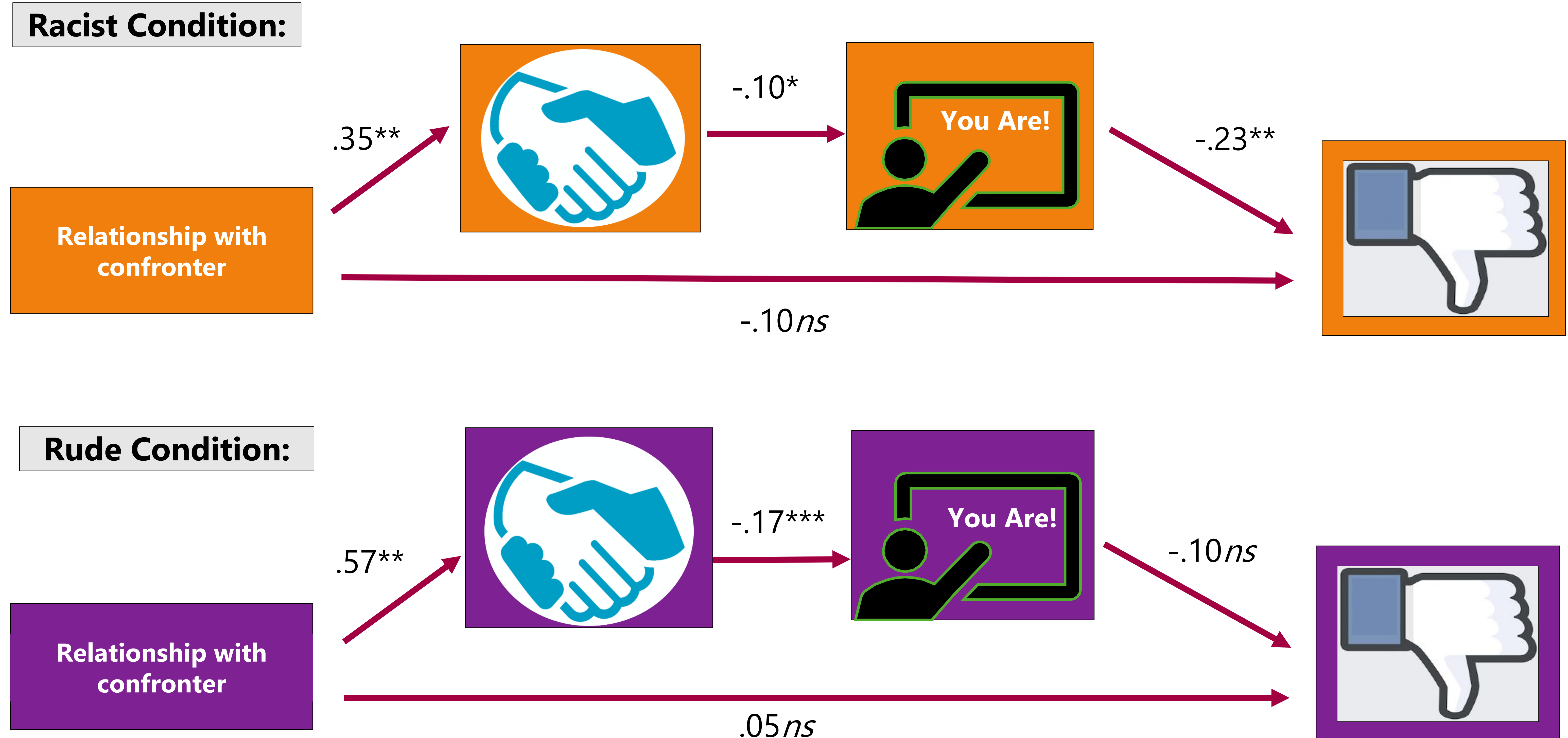
Essentialism 13 items; $\alpha=.66$; [1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree*]
Higher scores = More feelings of being essentialized by the confronter;
"The other person would say that 'you are either a certain type of person or you are not'."



Trust 8 items; $\alpha=.85$; [1 *not at all* to 7 *very much*] & 7 items; $\alpha=.85$; [1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree*]
Higher scores = more feelings of trust toward the confronter
"During the interaction with [the other person], I believe [they] acted benevolently."
"I believe [the other person] has high integrity."



Backlash 7 items; $\alpha=.93$; [1 *absolutely not* to 7 *absolutely*]
Higher scores = Less backlash against the confronter;
"The person who replied to my comment is likeable."



PROCESS Model 6

Relationship coded as: 0 = Stranger, 1 = Friend

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$; ns : not significant

In support of the hypothesis, for confrontations of racism (versus confrontations of rudeness), the combination of trusting the confronter and feeling less essentialized by them decreases backlash for confronters who are friends (versus strangers).

Future research could explore results with other variables in the dataset such as emotional reactions (NegSelf/NegOther). Additionally, future research can expand on the types of relationships examined.