

Whites Confronting Racism: What Confrontations Are Most Appreciated by Blacks?

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## Abstract

Previous work in social psychology has defined effective confrontations as ones that reduce prejudice. While prejudice reduction is an important outcome, this approach has resulted in a large body of research focusing mostly on the perspectives of the majority group members, ironically ignoring the targets' perspectives. To understand how target group members perceive confrontations, we conducted studies in two phases. In Phase 1, we documented when and how Whites confront racial bias; specifically, what they would say in response to a prejudiced remark. We found that low-prejudiced Whites who felt anger and moral outrage (vs. sympathy, empathy, or guilt) in response to a racist comment were more likely to confront. In Phase 2, we explored Blacks' reactions to those confrontations; specifically, we asked them to evaluate a sample of confrontations from Phase 1. We found that Black participants appreciated almost all confrontations, especially those that were direct, targeted the action (but not the person), and connected instances of interpersonal prejudice to systemic racism. This work has important implications for promoting White allies and reducing prejudiced behavior.

### Whites Confronting Racism: What Confrontations Are Most Appreciated by Blacks?

*“We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.” – Martin Luther King Jr.*

Confronting racial prejudice is important. Left unchallenged, prejudiced behavior contributes to a hostile racial climate and signals to the perpetrator and bystanders that prejudice and discrimination are acceptable and, in time, normal (Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, & Vaughn, 1994; Nelson, Dunn, & Paradies, 2011; Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Hill, 2005). And yet, many non-target witnesses do not confront prejudice when they see it (Dickter & Newton, 2013; Hyers, 2007; Kawakami, Dunn, Karmali, & Dovidio, 2009). In the present work, we document when and how Whites confront racial prejudice, and explore Blacks’ reactions to those confrontations. To foreshadow, we find that Whites who experience strong emotional reactions to prejudiced remarks—specifically, anger and moral outrage toward the perpetrator—are most likely to confront prejudiced remarks. And, Black observers appreciate nearly all of these confrontations, particularly those that are direct, label the action (but not the person) as prejudiced, and connect instances of interpersonal prejudice to systemic racism.

This work is important because, to date, most research on confronting prejudice has focused on the perpetrators. It has examined how confrontations change perpetrators’ emotions and attitudes, and sometimes behavior. It has shown that confrontations can induce guilt and, as a result, reduce prejudiced behavior (Chaney & Sanchez, 2017; Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006). While this work is unarguably important, changing perpetrators’ emotions, attitudes, and behavior is not the only reason to confront prejudice. Another and, we

would argue, equally important reason to confront prejudice is to repair the harm done by the prejudiced remark. The present work, thus, extends previous work by asking two novel questions: (1) what are Whites able and willing to say in response to prejudiced remarks? And importantly, (2) which responses are most appreciated by Black observers? Which responses repair the harm done by the prejudiced remark? This work is, then, the first to our knowledge to provide clear prescriptions on how to confront racial prejudice in order to repair the harm of prejudiced remarks in the eyes of people of color. It also provides further insights into the psychological antecedents and consequences of confronting.

### **Why Do Whites Not Confront? And Why Should They?**

Many White Americans endorse egalitarian norms and yet, many do not confront prejudice if and when they see it (Dickter & Newton, 2013; Hyers, 2007; Kawakami et al., 2009). That is, in part, because confronting prejudice is difficult. According to the Confronting Prejudiced Responses (CPR) model, for instance, confronting prejudice requires at least 5 steps: (1) identifying a situation as prejudiced, (2) determining whether it is urgent to respond to the situation, (3) taking responsibility to respond, (4) choosing a strategy, and (5) confronting the perpetrator (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008). Failing at any of the steps will result in no confrontation.

Notably, all of these steps are likely to be (or feel) challenging for White people. First, Whites are less likely to identify a situation as prejudiced, especially if it is subtle (Carter & Murphy, 2015; Salvatore & Shelton, 2007). In fact, their majority-group status may prevent them from recognizing bias, to maintain the status quo (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Second, Whites are likely to underestimate the harm of a prejudiced comment and the urgency it requires. If the target of prejudice is absent (e.g., when a racist comment is made in the presence of only White

people), or the present target fails to protest, Whites might perceive the comment as harmless or not harmful enough to require confrontation (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008). Third, Whites might think it is not their place to confront, especially if potential confronters such as members of the target group (Crosby, Monin, & Richardson, 2008) or someone with higher authority (Ashburn-Nardo, Blanchar, Petersson, Morris, & Goodwin, 2014) are present. Fourth, many Whites may simply not know how to confront (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2014, 2008). They may lack practice and may not have a script for how to confront. Finally, even those who identify a situation as prejudiced, recognize the urgency of the situation, take responsibility, and know, in theory, what they might say, often fail to act (Kawakami et al., 2009). Confrontations are, after all, costly. Studies have shown that confronting prejudice comes with social costs; those who confront (vs. not) are often disliked by those they confront (Czopp et al., 2006). Studies also suggest that confronting prejudice is cognitively costly; many find confronting prejudice effortful and do not wish to “waste their energy” on confronting prejudice (Hyers, 2007). Moreover, the benefits of confronting prejudice can be unclear. In one study, for example, many participants reported that one of the main reasons they did not confront racism is that their response would not make any difference (Dickter & Newton, 2013). For these reasons, even when Whites think the perpetrators’ comments or actions are prejudiced and do not agree with them, they are unlikely to confront prejudice.

Despite the challenges, it is important for Whites to confront in response to witnessing racial prejudice and discrimination. First of all, in most situations, they are the only individuals who can even attempt to confront, as the majority of the prejudiced remarks are performed by acquainted others in private settings (Dickter & Newton, 2013). Second, research suggests that Whites are more “effective” in confronting prejudice than racial minorities. When racial

minorities confront prejudice directed at them or their group, their claims are more likely to be devalued (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Kaiser & Miller, 2001). On the other hand, Whites' confrontations are not perceived to stem from self-interest, which in turn increases persuasiveness of the message (Gulker, Mark, & Monteith, 2013; Rasinski & Czopp, 2010). Moreover, targets and target group members who confront prejudice often bear much more negative interpersonal and social consequences than non-target group members who confront prejudice (Czopp et al., 2006). Therefore, egalitarian-minded Whites, or White "allies," are often considered to be better positioned to confront than targets of racial prejudice. Lastly, the onus of confronting prejudice should arguably be on White people, who benefit from past and present forms of racism, and not people of color who are the target of prejudice.

### **If Whites Were to Confront, What *Should* They Say?**

Most research on confronting prejudice has focused on the perpetrators; specifically, on how confrontations affect the emotions and attitudes of perpetrators and, in turn, how confrontations can reduce prejudiced behavior. In other words, this research has taken the long view and set its aim at reducing discrimination among perpetrators. This work has shown that confrontations can reduce prejudiced behavior if and when they induce self-directed negative affects such as guilt and self-criticism (Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink, & Elliot, 1991), as opposed to other-directed negative affects such as anger toward the confronter or the target (Czopp et al., 2006). This work thus implies that an effective confrontation is one that is unlikely to elicit reactance among the perpetrators, while minimizing backlash against the confronter or the target. Work has also shown that confrontations affect the perpetrators' attitudes toward the person who confronted them; not surprisingly, people feel less positive about someone who confronts them vs. not (Czopp et al., 2006; Shelton & Stewart, 2004). This work implies that, if one's

relationship to the perpetrator is important, an effective confrontation is one that does not undermine the relationship too much, at least not in the long-term.

Finally, another important outcome for confrontation is the reduction in prejudice expressions among the perpetrators. Research has shown that after being confronted, perpetrators expressed lower levels of prejudiced attitudes (Czopp et al., 2006), reduced use of stereotypic language (Chaney & Sanchez, 2017), and increased egalitarian behavior (Mallett & Wagner, 2011).

Consistent with these works, research has shown that “cold” confrontations may be best. Czopp and colleagues (2006) defined hot vs. cold confrontations, with the former being hostile, accusatory, and labeling and the latter being calm and non-labeling. Even though both hot, or high-threat, and cold, or low-threat, confrontations significantly reduced the confronted individuals’ subsequent use of racial stereotypes, the authors concluded that the cold confrontation was a better one as it invoked less negative emotions toward the confronter. In other words, the cold confrontation was more effective in maintaining an interpersonal goal than the hot confrontation, whereas both cold and hot confrontations were equally effective in reducing prejudice expressions. Similarly, in Hyers (2010), hostile and assertive confrontation styles were tested by comparing hostile assertive, non-hostile assertive, and non-assertive confrontations. Target’s confrontation styles did not have an effect on perpetrators’ and bystanders’ prejudice expressions, such that while confrontation itself reduced prejudice expressions, specific styles did not have an impact. However, confronters who were using a hostile style were perceived as least polite, most overreacting, and least likable by bystanders and perpetrators. Overall, the author concluded that non-hostile but assertive confrontations are most effective and least costly.

### **Limitations of the Literature**

All the studies summarized above approached confrontation outcomes from the perspectives of the non-target majority group—often Whites—and defined effective confrontations as ones that discourage prejudiced behaviors while minimizing backlash from the perpetrators. This dominant approach ironically leaves out perhaps the most affected individuals, namely, the targets of prejudice. Rarely does research consider the immediate and longer-term effects of confrontation on the targets of prejudice, other than how costly it is to those who confront. Research has not directly asked people of color about their perceptions of White people confronting racism (cf., Chu, 2017). A “cold” confrontation that is deemed effective in the eyes of Whites might not be effective in the eyes of people of color.

While the benefits of reducing non-target group’s prejudice expressions are unequivocal, we lack the understanding of targets’ perspectives. As a result, we know little about how non-target confrontation repairs the harm done onto the targets of prejudice, if at all possible. Repairing the harm done by the prejudice remark might be harder than we think. When Black participants imagined having a White (vs. Black) colleague confront racist comments directed at them, they reported lower self-esteem and sense of empowerment, partly due to their suspicion about Whites’ motivations for confronting prejudice (Chu, 2017).

### **Current Work**

In the present work, therefore, we try to fill in the gaps in literature by shifting our focus to the targets of prejudice. Specifically, in our work, we focus on confrontation of racial bias by White majority-group members and how Black Americans perceive these confrontations, rather than the other way around as it is typical in research on this topic. With respect to White confrontation, we know little about *who* confront prejudice, *when* they confront prejudice, and



*how* they do it. Moreover, we also know little about Black perceptions; that is, *how* they will evaluate them and *what* will be appreciated. To fill these gaps, we conducted studies in two phases. In Phase 1, we generated a variety of hypothetical scenarios and documented how White participants confront comments they deemed prejudiced. Whites' racial prejudice and pro-social emotions were measured in order to explore who confront and when. Using the confrontation responses White participants from Phase 1 provided, in Phase 2, we measured Black participants' perspectives of those confrontations. What type of confrontations do targets like and appreciate? What are the ingredients for effective confrontation from targets' perspectives?

### Phase 1

The purpose of Phase 2 was two-fold: (1) to understand when and how White people confront racial prejudice; specifically, what they are able and willing to say when confronting prejudice; and (2) to generate confrontations to be used as stimuli in Phase 2.

### Method

**Participants.** We collected two samples: one from a University participant pool ( $n = 126$ ) and one from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk;  $n = 195$ ). All participants were self-identified mono-racial White. Participants were 60% women, and the average age was 29.65 ( $SD = 11.95$ ).

**Procedure and materials.** Participants read randomly selected hypothetical scenarios. College students read a total of 8 scenarios, and MTurk workers read 5 scenarios so they could complete the study in 20 minutes. Participants were instructed to imagine, as best as they could, that they were in those situations. Each scenario contained a White speaker who says a comment prejudiced against Black people. After reading each scenario, participants answered how they would feel and would do in that situation. When they finished reading all scenarios, participants

completed a few measures of anti-Black prejudice and a demographic questionnaire. Finally, participants were thanked, debriefed, and compensated with either course credit or a predetermined amount of money.

***Hypothetical scenarios.*** To provide White participants with opportunities to confront prejudice, we took the format of Plous' (2000) role playing exercises to generate hypothetical situations in which a White person says an anti-Black comment. The scenarios detail who the speaker is (e.g., Your college dorm roommate), the setting in which the comment is said (e.g., Comment was made during a late-night private conversation about a Black student in your class.), and the comment (e.g., "She thinks she's smart, but she wouldn't have gotten into this university if it weren't for Affirmative Action."). The prejudiced comments were created to reflect real-world prejudice, the kind of racial bias White Americans might hear in their day-to-day life. We varied the scenarios in terms of the offensiveness of the comment (ranging from positive stereotypes to overt racism), participants' relationship to the speaker (family, friend, neighbor, colleague, and stranger), and power dynamics (higher status (e.g., Dad, boss), equal status (e.g., roommate, colleague), and lower status (e.g., younger brother). Some comments were adapted from Plous (2000), some were from other studies (e.g., Czopp & Monteith, 2006), and some were written by the researchers, reflecting what we had witnessed in our daily lives either in person or online. We generated a total of 11 scenarios (See Appendix).

***Emotional reactions.*** Upon reading each scenario, participants rated their immediate emotions (guilt, sympathy for target, empathy toward target, anger toward speaker, and moral outrage) on a 7-point scale (1=Not at all, 7=Very much). We chose these five emotions based on the work by Thomas, McGarty, and Mavor (2009), which provides a framework for understanding how different prosocial emotions can play a role in addressing social inequality.

**CPR model measures.** Participants then answered questions corresponding with Ashburn-Nardo et al.'s (2008) 5 steps of CPR model: (a) Do you think this comment is prejudice? If participants said no, then they were given the next scenario. If yes, then they answered the following questions: (b) Does the comment require an immediate response; that is, is responding to this comment urgent? (c) Would you feel responsible for responding? (d) Would you respond? Those who answered yes to question d were shown the next question, (e) What would you do and/or say? If no, they were shown the following question, (f) Why would you not respond? Participants' responses to question e are considered as confrontations. Note that we switched the order of the CPR model, such that step 5 (confronting prejudice) comes before step 4 (deciding how to confront). Because we use hypothetical scenarios, we cannot measure whether people will truly take action or not. Instead, we first asked people's intent or willingness to confront, and then specific content of the confrontation later.

**Prejudice measures.** In addition, White participants also answered three individual differences measures on prejudice: Internal and External Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice Scales (IMS/EMS; Plant & Devine, 1998), a Social Distance Scale (e.g. I would be willing to marry an African American.; 1=Not at all, 7=Very much), and an item that measures explicit racial preference (1=I strongly prefer Black people to White people, 4=I like White people and Black people equally, 7=I strongly prefer White people to Black people; Axt, 2017).

## **Results**

**Scenarios.** The hypothetical scenarios and comments, on average, were perceived to be prejudiced ( $M = .70$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ; 0=Not prejudiced, 1=Prejudiced). Comments varied in terms of how prejudiced they were perceived to be, ranging from 33.71% (Scenario 4) to 92.21%

(Scenario 8). Willingness to confront also varied by scenario, ranging from 18.68% (Scenario 8) to 79.06% (Scenario 9). Percentages of full responses by scenario are summarized in *Table 1*.

**Confrontations.** Participants generated 900 confrontations total. With an exception of a few behavioral responses (“I would immediately report it to HR.”), most of them were verbal confrontations (“I am going to HR with your comment.”).

**Primary analysis.** We were most interested in *when* White people who identify prejudice decides to confront. Out of many factors, our primary interest was how the type of emotions predicted participants’ responses. Therefore, we performed a series of mixed-effects logistic regressions predicting CPR model responses (i.e., whether participants said they thought a comment was prejudiced, it was urgent to respond, they felt responsible, and they would respond) from all five pro-social emotions (i.e., guilt, sympathy, empathy, anger, and moral outrage), with subjects, who are nested within samples, and scenarios as random effects.

The results revealed that holding every other emotion constant, sympathy for the target, anger toward the speaker, and moral outrage were significant predictors of whether one thought a comment was prejudiced or not, but guilt and empathy toward the target were not significant. Specifically, participants who were sympathetic toward the target of prejudice were more likely to think the comment was prejudiced ( $b = .20, SE = 0.07, p = .005$ ), and so did those who felt anger toward the speaker ( $b = .45, SE = 0.08, p < .001$ ) and moral outrage ( $b = .33, SE = 0.08, p < .001$ ). Of those who identified a comment as prejudiced, however, only anger and moral outrage were consistent predictors of the rest of the CPR model outcomes. Specifically, the more one reported anger toward the speaker, the more likely that they think that responding to the comment was urgent ( $b = .36, SE = 0.09, p < .001$ ), feel responsible for responding to the comment ( $b = .38, SE = 0.08, p < .001$ ), and most importantly, report willingness to confront ( $b$

= .35,  $SE = 0.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This means that with one unit (i.e., one point on a 7-point Likert scale) increase in anger, participants who thought a comment was prejudiced were 41% more likely to say they would confront the speaker.

**Racial prejudice.** *Who confronts prejudice?* Consistent with hypotheses, those who were less prejudiced were more likely to identify prejudice from hypothetical scenarios, to think addressing the comments was urgent, to feel responsible for responding to the comments, and to report they would respond to the comments. Specifically, of those who identified prejudice, people with higher IMS scores were more likely to confront ( $B = .33$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The more someone explicitly prefers Whites over Blacks, the less likely they would confront ( $B = -.27$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p = .001$ ), and the more willing someone was to marry an African American, the more likely they said they would confront ( $B = .31$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Interestingly, EMS was linked with *reduced* confrontation. The more someone was motivated to act without prejudice due to concerns about appearing prejudiced, the less likely they would confront prejudice ( $B = -.18$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ,  $p = .031$ ), and this was true when controlling for their internal motivations.

## Discussion

Phase 1 results revealed a number of new insights. First, results showed that many Whites can and do identify prejudiced comments as such and many say they would confront. Of course, from previous work, we know this does not mean that they would necessarily do so in real life. Still, it is informative to see what kinds of confrontations participants were able to generate. At least for those who wish to be allies, these hypothetical, deliberate confrontations likely represent what they wish they would say in that situation. Second, Phase 1 revealed important individual differences. Whites low in prejudice (high-IMS, low social distance, and low explicit racial preference) were more willing to confront prejudice than their high-prejudiced counterparts

when they imagined hearing racially prejudiced comments. Those who were externally motivated to act without prejudice were less willing to confront prejudice compared to those with low external motivation, even when their levels of internal motivation were comparable. High-EMS participants might be reluctant to confront prejudice because confronting prejudice would require talking about race and racism, which can be especially daunting for high-EMS individuals. It provides an opportunity to say the “wrong” thing and appear prejudiced. Future work will need to further examine this.

Third, the present work homed in on the emotional antecedents to confronting or, at the very least, intending to confront. Results showed that participants who felt anger and moral outrage were more willing to confront. This result is consistent with the previous finding that non-targets who confronted (vs. who did not confront) racial prejudice reported having been more angered by prejudice (Dickter & Newton, 2013). Our current finding complements this finding by showing that anger and moral outrage uniquely predict confronting (or wanting to confront), above and beyond guilt, empathy, and sympathy. We think this is quite interesting given the tight focus on anger with respect to confronting and guilt and sympathy with respect to being confronted. Moreover, guilt, empathy, and sympathy were not associated with Whites’ willingness to confront, though being sympathetic helped them recognize bias more easily.

## Phase 2

The purpose of Phase 2 was to explore what confrontations by Whites (generated in Phase 1) Blacks most appreciate.

## Method

**Participants.** We collected 4 samples, one from a University participant pool ( $n = 29$ ) and three from MTurk ( $n = 139$ ). All participants were self-identified mono-racial

Black/African-American. Participants were 65% women, and their average age was 33.19 ( $SD = 11.58$ ).

**Procedure and materials.** Participants read 5 randomly selected scenarios out of 10 scenarios.<sup>1</sup> For each scenario, Black participants were asked whether they thought the comment was prejudiced. Afterward, they received information that many White participants in a previous study read the same scenario, thought the comment was prejudiced, and reported that they would respond to the speaker if they were in that situation. Black participants then read 5 responses White participants in Study 1 had provided. In other words, Black participants read 25 White confrontations total, five per scenario. These responses were preselected by the author using a random number generator in R. Different samples read different confrontations, but within a sample, those who read the same scenario read the same set of 5 confrontations.

After reading each comment, Black participants rated the comment in terms of how good it was, how much they appreciated it, how effective it would be in changing the speaker's attitudes, how effective it would be in changing the speaker's understanding of social norms, and how effective it would be in changing the speaker's future behavior. All items were rated on 7-point Likert scales (1=Not at all, 7=Very much).

Finally, participants answered a demographic questionnaire, were debriefed, and were compensated with either credit toward the participant pool (Sample 1) or a small amount of money (Sample 2, Sample 3, and Sample 4).

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<sup>1</sup> Upon analyzing the results for Phase 1, we decided to exclude one scenario (Scenario 8) in Phase 2 due to White participants' lack of willingness to confront, thereby leaving 10 scenarios total. Scenario 8 described a situation in which participants overheard the speaker's (a stranger) private conversations at a restaurant, without target's presence. Even though the comment was perceived to be most problematic out of all comments, few people said they would confront.

**Text analysis.** In addition to Black participants' ratings, White confrontations were text-analyzed using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker, Booth, & Francis, 2007).

**Content coding.** In addition, one coder—the author—coded White confrontations based on their content. We developed a coding scheme to cover a range of categories that were not fully reflected in LIWC. Nine categories were created: whether the confrontation targeted the action vs. the person (“that’s a stupid thing to say,” vs. “you’re stupid to say that”; each is a separate category), whether it labeled the action vs. the person (“what you said is racist,” vs. “you’re racist”; each is a separate category), whether it was “rational” or fact-based (“that’s not true”), whether the respondent was hedging (“I think that’s kind of racist”), whether the respondent acknowledged racism beyond the individual level (“it’s structural”), the degree to which the respondent was being polite or civil (1=Not at all, 2=Somewhat, 3=Very), and the directness in which the respondent conveyed disapproval (1=Not at all direct, 2=Somewhat direct, 3=Very direct).

## Results

**Evaluations.** On average, Black participants thought Whites' confrontations were good ( $M = 5.07$ ,  $SD = 1.82$ ) and appreciated them ( $M = 5.11$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ). Importantly, even the “worst” confrontation (i.e., the response that was least liked by Black participants) was significantly greater than 1 (i.e., not at all liked) ( $M = 2.30$ ;  $t(22) = 4.38$ ,  $p < .001$ ), meaning that people still thought it was good to some extent. Similarly, even the least appreciated confrontation was on average rated at 2.44, greater than 1, not at all appreciated ( $t(22) = 4.68$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Because *good* and *appreciate* variables are highly correlated ( $r = .88$ ) and not



significantly different from each other ( $t(167) = -1.25, p = .215$ ), only *appreciate* variable was used as a dependent variable in subsequent analyses.

**Whites' emotions.** Whites' emotions at the time of confrontation did predict Black participants' level of appreciation. Specifically, Black participants preferred confrontations associated with sympathy for target ( $b = .09, SE = 0.04, p = .009$ ), anger toward speaker ( $b = .14, SE = 0.04, p = .001$ ), and moral outrage ( $b = .10, SE = 0.04, p = .009$ ).

**Whites' racial prejudice.** Among the prejudice measures, only Whites' IMS scores were a significant predictor of Blacks' level of appreciation. Black participants most appreciated confrontations by Whites higher on IMS ( $B = .18, SE = 0.03, p < .001$ ).

**Content coding.** Content coding results showed Black participants most appreciated confrontations that were direct ( $b = .62, SE = 0.08, p < .001$ ), targeted the action ( $b = .60, SE = 0.14, p < .001$ ), and labeled the action ( $b = .53, SE = 0.17, p = .004$ ). Interestingly, Black participants' evaluations were not affected by whether or not confrontations targeted or labeled the person ( $b = .10, SE = 0.25, p = .700$  and  $b = .45, SE = 0.49, p = .366$ , respectively). Finally, Black participants most appreciated confrontations that acknowledged racism beyond the individual level ( $b = .44, SE = 0.26, p = .096$ ), although it is underpowered, as not many confrontations acknowledged racism beyond the individual level. Future work will need to further examine this.

**Text analysis.** While the coding results shed light on *how* to confront prejudice, LIWC analysis gave insight into specifically *what* to say. First of all, Black participants preferred confrontations that did not make use of question marks ( $B = -.11, SE = 0.03, p = .001$ ). This suggests that a statement is better appreciated than a question. Though asking questions (such as, "Why do you think that way?") might help the perpetrator realize their own bias, and feel more

comfortable for the confronter, it does not convey disapproval directly. This result, therefore, is consistent with the content coding finding that being direct was associated with better ratings. Second, Black participants preferred confrontations that did not use modal verbs (would, should, must, etc.) ( $B = -.23, SE = 0.03, p < .001$ ). Third, Black participants preferred confrontations that did not use “I” pronouns ( $B = -.26, SE = 0.03, p < .001$ ). These two categories could perhaps mean that confrontations should focus on the action or a broader issue, rather than the person (either the perpetrator or the person who confronts).

If question marks, modal verbs, and I pronouns are what one should not say, what should they say then? Black participants appreciated confrontations that made use of conjunctions ( $B = .14, SE = 0.04, p < .001$ ), prepositions ( $B = .08, SE = 0.04, p = .025$ ), and words greater than 6 letters ( $B = .14, SE = 0.04, p < .001$ ). According to the developer of LIWC, these words reflect cognitive complexity (Tausczik & Pennebaker, 2010). How could a confrontation be cognitively complex? We think and have some initial evidence that cognitive complexity is associated, in part, with confrontations that acknowledge racism beyond the individual prejudice, such as confrontations that mention systemic issues; we combined conjunctions, prepositions, and words longer than six letters to create a cognitive complexity index and found that those who mentioned systemic issues used more cognitively complex language ( $t(148) = 2.40, p = .018$ ).

Although Whites’ self-reported emotions at the time of confronting predicted Black participants’ ratings of their confrontations, whether the text contained emotion-related words did not. Affective words, negative emotion words, and positive emotion words were all not related to the ratings (all  $ps > .10$ ).

## **Discussion**

Phase 2 revealed what confrontations by Whites are most appreciated by Black observers. Results suggest that Whites should speak up whenever they hear a prejudiced remark. Confronting prejudice not only helps discourage White perpetrators' future biased behavior, it could also repair some of the harm, as our study showed that Blacks appreciated almost all confrontations.

Our research also revealed whose confrontations are most appreciated by Black observers. Confrontations driven by internal motivations (as indicated by Whites' high IMS scores) are most appreciated by Blacks. Moreover, confrontations driven by sympathy, anger, and moral outrage (vs. guilt and empathy) are better appreciated. It is heartening to see that the emotions that were most predictive of confrontations—anger and moral outrage—also produced confrontations that were most appreciated. We could have imagined a situation where Whites confront when they feel anger and outrage but those confrontations are not as appreciated by Black observers (as, say, confrontations driven by sympathy or empathy). But that was not the case.

Content coding and text analysis results suggest that Black people indeed view confrontation of racial bias somewhat differently than the majority group. Participants in Plous' (2000) role-playing exercises recommended that confronters use questions, say how they feel, and stay away from labeling. On the other hand, Black participants in our study appreciated confrontations that did not use questions, that did not talk about the confronter's feelings or thoughts, and that labeled the comment as prejudiced.

### **Future Directions**

In the present research, we examined two important questions: (1) what are Whites able and willing to say in response to prejudiced remarks? And importantly, (2) which responses are

most appreciated by Black observers? These two questions are important for practical reasons, of course, but also theoretical ones.

With regards to the first question, we find that Whites can and do identify prejudice, even when it is subtle, and that many do know what to say in response to prejudiced behavior. Moreover, Whites who are internally—but not externally—motivated to respond without prejudice are most likely to confront prejudice (or at least intend to). In addition, Whites who experience anger and moral outrage (as opposed to empathy or guilt) are most likely to confront prejudice. Taken together, these findings provide important hints about how to promote and build White allyship. Although building intergroup empathy might be an important goal for any number of reasons, promoting moral outrage might be more important for encouraging Whites to confront racism. Future work will thus need to develop and test interventions to increase Whites' internal motivations to confront prejudice and moral outrage. These interventions will also provide useful tests for the causal relationship between these individual differences and confronting prejudice.

With regards to the second question, we propose that the immediate impact of Whites' confrontations for people of color is another and overlooked consideration. We agree that an effective confrontation is one that is likely to reduce the perpetrators' prejudice and prejudiced behavior in the long-term. However, an effective confrontation is also one that is likely to repair some of the harm done by the prejudiced comment or behavior. And, unfortunately, what might be effective in the eyes of White perpetrators (e.g., “cold” confrontations; “Why did you say that?”) might not be as effective in the eyes of a Black observer (e.g., a direct confrontation that targets and labels the behavior, and acknowledges systemic racism; “What you said is racist. This country was built on the systemic oppression of Black people. Beliefs that further this

oppression is unacceptable.”). One of our future directions, then, is to design and test interventions to encourage White allies to confront prejudice and in ways that are most appreciated by Black peers. In our future intervention studies, we are planning to give White participants a script for what to say and an opportunity to confront actual bias, which is a prejudiced online comment, rather than hypothetical scenarios. We will then bring them to the lab, in which they will witness a White confederate’s prejudiced remark toward a Black confederate.

Our test of this intervention will be important for a number of reasons. From an applied perspective, it will tell us whether we can increase and improve White allies’ confrontations. From a theoretical perspective, it will tell us whether we have identified the correct features of appreciated confrontations and will replicate the current findings in a real-life situation, not a hypothetical one. This is supremely important given previous work showing that many people think they will confront prejudice when they see it but do not do so in reality (Kawakami et al., 2009; Swim & Hyers, 1999; Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001).

This intervention will also give us the opportunity to further examine what confrontations people of color—targets of prejudice and discrimination—appreciate. In this future work, it will be important to consider individual differences among Black observers. It could be, for example, that Black individuals who are suspicious of confronter’s motives might perceive Whites’ confrontations less positively than those who are not suspicious. Studies have shown that individuals high in suspicion of Whites’ motives perceived interracial interactions very differently than those low in suspicion. One study, for example, found that positive feedback from Whites was associated with increased stress and threat and decreased self-esteem among racial minorities who were suspicious about Whites’ motives (Major et al., 2016).

### **Final Remarks**

In an open letter to his fellow clergymen, Martin Luther King Jr. (1963) challenged White moderates to speak out about injustice and oppression. In what were radical words for many White Americans at the time, he suggested that silence is complicit. Many White Americans today hold egalitarian, non-racist views. And yet, many White Americans today fail to confront prejudice if and when they see it. For some, at least, they fail to confront prejudice because they do not know what to say. The present work suggests that those who are motivated to be truly unprejudiced and who feel anger and outrage at the thought of prejudice are most likely to confront, not to stand by in silence. Moreover, their confrontations are deeply appreciated by Black observers. The present work also suggests that Black observers, on average, appreciate all confrontations and especially those that are direct, those that target and label the action (not the person), and those that connect acts of individual prejudice to systemic racism. As such, the present work contributes to an emerging body of work promoting a better White allyship.

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Table 1

*Percentage of Responses by Scenario (Phase 1)*

Scenario	Prejudiced	Urgent	Responsible	Confront
1 ( <i>n</i> = 194)	72.2	35.1	42.3	49.5
2 ( <i>n</i> = 155)	45.2	32.9	38.1	35.5
3 ( <i>n</i> = 192)	82.3	60.4	61.5	68.2
4 ( <i>n</i> = 178)	33.7	24.7	25.3	28.7
5 ( <i>n</i> = 185)	38.9	27.6	29.7	28.7
6 ( <i>n</i> = 174)	90.2	66.7	56.3	44.3
7 ( <i>n</i> = 175)	74.9	46.3	42.3	48.6
8 ( <i>n</i> = 182)	91.2	34.6	25.3	18.7
9 ( <i>n</i> = 191)	90.1	74.4	74.4	79.1
10 ( <i>n</i> = 175)	82.9	64.6	55.4	57.1
11 ( <i>n</i> = 182)	65.4	21.4	29.7	36.8

*Note.* Those who did not perceive a comment as prejudiced did not receive the rest of the questions (urgent, responsible, or confront).

## Appendix

### Scenario 1

Speaker: Your friend

Background: You and your friend were watching an NBA game at your place. The comment was made during a conversation about why there were so many Black professional athletes.

Comment: “Black people are such good athletes by nature. They are wasting their opportunity by not getting involved in sports.”

### Scenario 2

Speaker: Your dad

Background: Comment was made during a family dinner. The conversation was about the violence at the ‘Unite the Right’ rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Comment: “There was violence on both sides. Black Lives Matter protestors were just as violent as the alt-right protestors.”

### Scenario 3

Speaker: Your college dorm roommate

Background: Comment was made during a late-night private conversation about a Black student in your class.

Comment: “She thinks she’s smart, but she wouldn’t have gotten into this university if it weren’t for Affirmative Action.”

**Scenario 4**

Speaker: Your younger brother

Background: Your brother was singing along to a hip-hop song.

Comment: “Who dat n\*\*\*a thinkin' that he frontin' on man, man?”

**Scenario 5**

Speaker: Your middle-aged aunt

Background: Comment was made while watching news about a police shooting of a Black man.

Comment: “It has nothing to do with race. He should have complied to the officer.”

**Scenario 6**

Speaker: Your boss

Background: You were in a meeting when your boss brought up a mistake your colleague, who is Black, had made. Only White employees were present at the meeting.

Comment: “The only reason we hired him was so we could get the tax credit.”

**Scenario 7**

Speaker: A White male in his mid-twenties

Background: Comment was made at a party and intended to be funny.

Comment: “Do you know why Black people are so tall? Because their knee grows!”

**Scenario 8**

Speaker: A middle-aged diner next to your table

Background: You were dining in a restaurant when you overheard a conversation from a table next to yours. Although the comment was intended to be private, it was loud enough that you could hear it.

Comment: “It just doesn’t feel right to me to see a Black person and a White person holding hands and kissing.”

### **Scenario 9**

Speaker: Your coworker

Background: Comment was made about a lack of racial diversity in your workplace.

Comment: “It is a scientifically proven fact that out of all races, Black people have the lowest IQ.”

### **Scenario 10**

Speaker: White middle-aged female customer at a retail store

Background: Comment was made targeting a Black family at the cash register. The customer in line behind you got frustrated that the family was taking so long to check out because of the number of coupons they were processing.

Comment: “Why don’t you work hard instead of looking for free coupons!”

### **Scenario 11**

Speaker: A choir member at your church

Background: Comment was made about how Black people had musical talents.

Comment: “I wish I was Black so I could sing better!”