



Reports

Selectively friending: Racial stereotypicality and social rejection

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ABSTRACT

Three studies show that people whose physical features are seen as more (versus less) racially stereotypical are more vulnerable to social rejection and exclusion from those outside their group. In Study 1, which used an online social networking site, Blacks perceived as more physically stereotypical were found to have fewer non-Black friends, compared to less-stereotypical Blacks. In Study 2, which used an experimental paradigm, requests for friendship made to non-Blacks by more-stereotypical Blacks were more likely to be rejected than those made by less-stereotypical Blacks. Finally, in a college dormitory, people judged to have more (vs. less) racially stereotypical physical features were found to interact less often with outgroup members. This work substantiates a growing body of research demonstrating that people who are perceived as more physically stereotypical of their racial group are particularly vulnerable to discriminatory treatment by outgroup members across a variety of life domains.

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Introduction

A visible stigma, such as membership in a racial minority group, can have significant negative consequences for a person's life outcomes, well-being, and daily interactions with others, as shown by an abundance of research over many decades (e.g., Allport, 1954; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986). Recent scholarship, however, has added to the complexity of this approach by demonstrating that negative outcomes are experienced to unequal degrees by members of the same minority group. Specifically, racial minorities who are perceived as more physically stereotypical or prototypical of their group are more vulnerable to negative outcomes, compared to less-stereotypical minorities. In other words, visible minorities face feature-based as well as category-based discrimination (Maddox, 2004). In the case of Blacks, stereotypical features include a darker skin tone and broader nose and lips (Blair, Judd, Sadler, & Jenkins, 2002; Brooks & Gwinn, 2010); for Hispanics, they include a darker skin tone and more indigenous-appearing features (Uhlmann, Dasgupta, Elgueta, Greenwald, & Swanson, 2002). White stereotypicality appears to involve lighter skin, lighter hair and eyes, and a thinner nose (Ma & Correll, 2011; Ronquillo et al., 2007); for Asians, darker hair, smaller eyes, and larger cheeks (Mok, 1998; Wilkins, Chan, & Kaiser, 2011).

Individuals perceived as more (versus less) stereotypical of their ethnic or racial group are the recipients of more negative affect or bias (Ito, Willadsen-Jensen, Kaye, & Park, 2011; Livingston & Brewer, 2002; Ronquillo et al., 2007; Uhlmann et al., 2002) and are viewed in more stereotypical trait terms (Blair, 2006; Blair, Chapleau, & Judd, 2005; Blair, Judd, & Fallman, 2004; Blair, et al., 2002; Maddox & Gray, 2002). Stereotypes linking Blacks and crime are particularly problematic; Blacks perceived as more stereotypical are more likely to be judged violent or criminal (Dixon & Maddox, 2005; Kahn & Davies, 2010), even by police officers (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, & Davies, 2004). They also are more likely to receive long prison sentences – and even the death penalty (Blair, Judd, & Chapleau, 2004; Eberhardt, Davies, Purdie-Vaughns, & Johnson, 2006). Indeed, sociologists have suggested that the difference in life outcomes (such as economic or educational attainment) between Blacks perceived as more versus less stereotypical is at least as large as that between Blacks and Whites (Hill, 2000; Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Keith & Herring, 1991).

However, despite this recent growth of research exploring the consequences for minorities of within-group phenotypic variability, little is known about the role that this phenomenon plays in everyday social interactions. That is, what are the experiences of individuals perceived as more versus less physically stereotypical in interacting with those outside their group? In the present studies, we investigate the role of racial stereotypicality in social acceptance and rejection, looking at social decision making in real-life communities.

Research on friendship and social interaction across racial group lines demonstrates that both majority-group and minority-group members anticipate interracial interactions with significant anxiety

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and distress (Richeson & Shelton, 2007). Majority-group members typically fear that they will be viewed as prejudiced, and also (incorrectly) assume a lack of interest in friendship on the part of their minority-group interaction partners, who meanwhile fear they will be the targets of racial prejudice (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008; Plant, 2004; Shelton & Richeson, 2005). As a result of these anxious expectations, relatively cold non-verbal behaviors are mutually expressed, with the consequence being poorer relational outcomes relative to comparable same-race interactions (Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2006).

Expecting intergroup interactions to go poorly, both majority- and minority-group members tend to avoid them; it is therefore not surprising that racial homophily persists in a variety of social contexts (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Here, we hypothesize that these trends will be exacerbated as a function of physical stereotypicality. That is, we expect that people perceived to have a more-stereotypical appearance will experience more social rejection from outgroup members than will those judged to be less stereotypical.

This hypothesis is tested in three studies exploring real social communities. In Study 1, we investigated the network size of Blacks who use an online social networking site, hypothesizing that Blacks perceived as more stereotypical would have fewer non-Black friends than would less-stereotypical Blacks. This idea was further explored in Study 2 using an experimental paradigm; we hypothesized that Blacks' overtures of friendship to non-Blacks within a city-based online community would be met with more rejection when the Black initiator was more versus less stereotypical. Finally, in Study 3 we examined the strength of social ties among residents of a college dormitory, hypothesizing that individuals perceived as more stereotypical would have fewer interactions with outgroup members.

Study 1

In Study 1, we explored the relationship between perceived physical stereotypicality and friendship network size. Black Americans' photographs on Facebook, the social networking website, were coded for physical stereotypicality, and their number of friends was recorded. We predicted that more-stereotypical Blacks would have fewer non-Black Facebook friends, compared to those lower in stereotypicality. (We did not make a prediction about the relationship between physical stereotypicality and numbers of Black friends.)

Method

Participants

The participant sample comprised Black men and women who maintained personal profile pages on Facebook. To help ensure that participants would be likely to identify as Black, participant selection was limited to men and women with first names shown to occur significantly more frequently among Black than non-Black Americans (Fryer & Levitt, 2004): Darnell, DeAndre, Deshawn, Jamal, Malik, Marquis, Trevon, Tyrone, and Willie (men); and Aaliyah, Ashanti, Deja, Diamond, Ebony, Jada, Jazmin, Precious, Raven, Shanice, and Tiara (women). All participants who had one of these names, whose profile picture included a recognizable face image, and who appeared Black were added to the sample until we had an initial sample of 200. Ten participants were then excluded because their profile indicated that they lived outside the United States. This yielded a final sample of 190 (85 men and 105 women).

Coding of independent and dependent variables

Three judges rated each participant's main profile photo on Black physical stereotypicality, using a scale that ranged from 1 (definitely not stereotypical) to 4 (definitely stereotypical). Judges had access only

to photos during coding, and were blind to hypotheses. Inter-judge reliability was sufficiently high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$), so stereotypicality ratings were averaged across judges. This stereotypicality index served as the independent variable.

Next, a fourth judge visited each profile page and recorded how many Black and non-Black friends the person had (based on the friend's profile photo). These two indices (number of non-Black friends and number of Black friends) served as the dependent variables.

Coding of potential mediators

In addition, for exploratory purposes, participants' racial category memberships also were coded. Specifically, two judges indicated whether they thought the person in the photo was Black (or not)⁴, and rated their confidence in this categorization as high, medium, or low, therefore yielding a continuous scale that ranged from 1 (highly confident that the person is not Black) to 6 (highly confident that the person is Black). Further, two additional judges indicated whether they thought the person in the photo was Asian, Latino, or White (i.e., a group other than Black, abbreviated here as ALW) or not ALW, and rated their confidence in this categorization as high, medium, or low, therefore yielding a continuous scale that ranged from 1 (highly confident that the person is not Asian, Latino, or White) to 6 (highly confident that the person is ALW). Inter-judge reliability was sufficiently high, so ratings were averaged across judges to create a Black category confidence index ($\alpha = .90$) and an ALW category confidence index ($\alpha = .78$). These indices were highly but not perfectly correlated ($r = -.62$).

Results

Four participants' total friend counts were more than two standard deviations above the sample mean (> 1876 friends). These participants were excluded from analysis⁵ as unrepresentative of typical Facebook users.

We hypothesized that Blacks judged to be more physically stereotypical would have fewer non-Black (outgroup) friends than would less-stereotypical Blacks. We also looked at Black (ingroup) friends for comparison. Following the methods of Judd, McClelland, and Smith (1996) for within-subjects moderated regression, we first regressed the stereotypicality index on the difference between the number of Black and non-Black friends each participant had. This term was significant, $\beta = .29, p < .005$, indicating that friend race moderated the effect of stereotypicality on numbers of friends. Follow-up analyses revealed that, as predicted, Black stereotypicality was negatively associated with numbers of non-Black friends, $\beta = -.32, p < .005$. Moreover, Black stereotypicality was positively and marginally associated with numbers of Black friends, $\beta = .17, p = .051$.

We also explored the Black and ALW category confidence ratings as potential mediators of the relationship between stereotypicality and number of non-Black friends, to gain further insight into this relationship. Not surprisingly, Black stereotypicality was positively related to Black category confidence, $\beta = .53, p < .005$, and negatively related to ALW category confidence, $\beta = -.53, p < .005$. Analyses using bootstrapping methods (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007) showed that when Black category confidence was tested as a potential mediator, the 95% confidence interval ($-29.49, 14.32$) included 0, indicating no mediation. However, when ALW category confidence was tested as a potential mediator, the 95% confidence interval

⁴ Three participants were rated by both judges as unlikely to be Black. Excluding these participants did not affect significance levels of the reported analyses. They were retained in order to include the full range of the Black category confidence index in the subsequent mediation analyses.

⁵ Excluding these participants did not affect significance levels.

($-72.45, -7.03$) did not include 0, indicating mediation. However, this mediation was only partial, as the relationship between stereotypicality and number of non-Black friends remained significant after controlling for the two category confidence indices, $\beta = -.17, p = .03$. In other words, non-Blacks may be more accepting of less-stereotypical (relative to more-stereotypical) Black Americans not because they perceive them as not actually belonging to the Black category, as indicated by the lack of mediation of the Black category confidence index, but rather because they perceive less-stereotypical Blacks as potentially belonging to another racial category (Asian, Latino, or White) along with the Black category.

Discussion

These results provide preliminary evidence that physical stereotypicality is linked to weaker social connections outside one's own racial group. Further, the mediation analyses suggest that this may occur in part because less-stereotypical (but not more-stereotypical) individuals may be seen by others as potentially also belonging to the ingroup.

Our central hypothesis is that people perceived as more stereotypical experience greater social rejection from outgroup members, leading to smaller numbers of friends. However, other explanations for the correlational finding in Study 1 are possible; for instance, more-stereotypical Black Americans may choose to maintain fewer outgroup friendships than those lower in perceived stereotypicality. Hence, the goals of Study 2 were to test (using an experimental design) the hypothesis that more-stereotypical Blacks are vulnerable to greater social rejection by outgroup members.

Study 2

In Study 2, Black and non-Black participants were invited to respond to friendship requests from Black men and women whose appearance varied in stereotypicality.

Method

Participants

The participant sample comprised individuals in a large U.S. city who maintain Facebook pages. To obtain the sample, we visited the city-specific Facebook page and recorded URLs for the first 1400 individuals (randomly generated out of the entire set) who had a photo with a recognizable face image and a range of friends that was ± 1 SD from the city network mean (range: 51–541 friends). This latter criterion ensured participants who were fairly typical in terms of their tendency to accept/reject friend requests. Six profile pages could not be found when friend requests were sent; hence, the final sample size was 1394. The sample was 56% male and 71% White, 14% Asian, 8% Latino, and 7% Black. Gender was determined from self-identification on profiles; race was coded from profile photos.

Materials

We first obtained photos of a Black man and Black woman who were perceived as moderately stereotypical (Davies, 2012). Next, each photo was altered using Adobe Photoshop, with modifications of the skin color, nose width, and lip fullness, to generate a less-stereotypical version and a more-stereotypical version of the male and female targets. (The original, moderately stereotypical photos were not used as stimuli.) Pretesting confirmed that the two photos modified to appear more stereotypical were perceived as significantly more stereotypical than the two photos modified to appear less stereotypical (Davies, 2012).

Fictitious Facebook profile pages were then created using these four photos. Male targets were named "Michael Davis"; female targets were named "Jennifer Davis." These names were chosen because they are very common among young-adult Americans (Social Security Administration, 2011) and could easily describe either a White or Black American. Each profile page included a name, photo, and city of residence (same as the participants'), and a short blurb: "I'm new to Facebook. Working on putting up my info!"

Procedure

Each participant was sent a single friend request⁶ on Facebook from one of the four target profiles, randomly determined. We then recorded whether the friendship request was accepted. Requests were recorded as rejected if no response was received within several weeks.

Results and discussion

Overall, 15% of participants (213 out of 1394) accepted the requests. This low rate is likely attributable to the fact that the targets were unknown to participants, requesting friendship and access to personal information, with only a (large) hometown in common. Nonetheless, we anticipated that some targets – specifically those with a more racially stereotypical appearance – would be rejected more than others, particularly by outgroup members.

Request acceptance was therefore analyzed by means of a 2 (target stereotypicality: high vs. low) \times 2 (participant race: Black vs. non-Black) logistic regression. There was a main effect for participant race, such that the Black targets were more likely to be accepted as friends by Black than non-Black participants, $\beta = -.75, p < .01$. (See Table 1.) The overall main effect of target stereotypicality was not significant, $\beta = -.12, p = .12$. However, as predicted, there was a significant target stereotypicality \times participant race interaction, $\beta = -.60, p = .02$. Consistent with hypotheses, non-Black participants were significantly less likely to accept a more-stereotypical vs. less-stereotypical Black target as their friend, $\beta = -.16, p = .04$. Among Black participants, however, the likelihood of friend acceptance was in fact marginally higher for more-stereotypical versus less-stereotypical targets, $\beta = .44, p = .08$.

Follow-up analyses examined how long participants took before accepting friend requests. Non-Black participants who accepted friend requests took significantly longer to accept requests from the more-stereotypical vs. less-stereotypical Black target, $F(1, 189) = 9.66, p < .005, \eta^2 = .05$. There was no difference in the number of days Black participants took to accept friend requests from less-stereotypical and more-stereotypical targets, $F(1, 25) < 1$, and the target stereotypicality \times participant race interaction was not significant, $F(1, 212) < 1$, both *ns*.

In summary, an overture of friendship from a Black person to a non-Black person was less likely to be accepted when the friendship requester looked more (vs. less) stereotypically Black. Further, even among those requests that were accepted, more time passed before acceptance when the requester looked more (vs. less) stereotypically Black. As previously noted, past research has noted the anxiety Blacks experience in initial social interactions with non-Blacks (Richeson & Shelton, 2007; Shelton, Richeson, & Vorauer, 2006), based on fears of rejection and stigmatization. The present research suggests that such fears may not be unfounded. Further, Blacks perceived as more (versus less) racially stereotypical are even more likely to experience this rejection. Had the more-stereotypical targets created for this

⁶ In a "friend" request, a sender requests that he or she be added to the recipient's Facebook-based social network, which may allow the sender greater access to personal information (such as photos of the recipient). The recipient may accept, deny, or ignore the request.

Table 1
Acceptance of friend requests, Study 2.

		High stereotypicality condition	Low stereotypicality condition	Total
Non-Black participants	# (%) who accepted friend requests*	81 (12%)	107 (16%)	188 (14%)
	n	649	654	1303
	Days to accept friend request (<i>M</i>)**	3.08	2.24	2.60
Black participants	# (%) who accepted friend requests†	17 (35%)	8 (19%)	25 (27%)
	n	48	43	91
	Days to accept friend request (<i>M</i>)	2.09	2.00	2.06
Total	# (%) who accepted friend requests	98 (14%)	115 (16%)	213 (15%)
	n	697	697	1394
	Days to accept friend request (<i>M</i>)**	2.91	2.22	2.53

Note: Significance levels reflect a comparison between the high- and low-stereotypicality conditions. † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

study been real people, their experience of reaching out to initiate a new friendship across race lines would likely have been met with an outright rejection or, at best, a disheartening period of hesitancy (as suggested by the longer times to accept requests). More-stereotypical Blacks may regularly experience what amounts to a double dose of social rejection in daily interactions with outgroup members – one for their membership in the Black racial group, and another for a physical appearance seen as “extra Black.”

Combined with the first study, Study 2 provides additional evidence that racial stereotypicality leads to greater social rejection from outgroup members. Further, the experimental design used in the present study allows for confirmation of a causal path – that greater racial stereotypicality can directly cause increased rejection from outgroup members.

Study 3

Study 3 tested the effects of perceived racial stereotypicality on friendships within a face-to-face community. Here, residents of a college dormitory documented their relationships with each other, and this information was examined as a function of the perceived stereotypicality of residents' physical appearance. We hypothesized that dorm residents would report interacting less with fellow residents who were more (vs. less) stereotypical of a racial outgroup. Members of all racial groups were included in the study.

Method

Participants

The sample comprised all 330 residents of a university dormitory. At this university, most students live on campus, and first-year students are randomly assigned to dormitories, helping to limit the role of self-selection biases in the sample. Further, interaction among dormitory residents is high (e.g., frequent dorm-based events), as is identification with dorm membership (e.g., frequent inter-dorm competitions).

Demographic information, based on self-identification, was obtained independently from school administrators, along with students' identification photos. Half of the participants (49%) were male; 55% self-identified as White, 26% as Asian, 12% as Latino, and 7% as Black.

The study was announced during common mealtimes, and a survey was placed in each student's mailbox. The response rate was

56% (184 people). Students who participated were entered into a lottery, and four winners each received a \$250 gift certificate.

Materials and procedure

Participants completed the survey privately and returned it to a centrally located collection box. The survey asked participants to indicate, using a 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very frequently*) scale, how much they interact with each of their 329 fellow dorm residents. The survey included fellow residents' names, but not their pictures.

Ratings made of each dorm resident (rather than ratings made by each participant), indicating how much other participants said they interacted with him/her, were used as the dependent variables. Specifically, an ingroup interaction index was created by averaging interaction ratings made of each dorm resident by respondents who shared his/her racial group (White, Black, Asian, or Latino), and an outgroup interaction index was created by averaging interaction ratings made of each dorm resident by respondents who did not share his/her racial group.

Racial stereotypicality index

To obtain information about physical stereotypicality, we coded each participant's college-identification photo. The photos had been taken using a standardized format at the beginning of each participant's first year. Eight photos were unavailable, leaving a total sample size of 322.

Three judges rated the racial stereotypicality of each photograph, using a 7-point scale. Because reliability was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .78$), ratings were averaged across judges.

Inter-judge reliability was comparable for ratings of the four racial groups (range = .77–.85), indicating that judges were able to determine stereotypicality with a similar level of agreement across the four groups. Nonetheless, to ensure that subsequent analyses would be driven by within-group variability in physical stereotypicality (rather than any between-group variability in scale usage), each participant's stereotypicality rating was z-scored around the mean and standard deviation for his or her racial group before being compiled into a single index. This racial stereotypicality index constitutes the primary independent variable.

Results and discussion

Overall, the ingroup interaction index was significantly larger than the outgroup interaction index for both Whites, $F(1, 178) = 144.48$, $p < .005$, and non-Whites, $F(1, 146) = 69.21$, $p < .005$. This indicates that participants who were dorm residents' ingroup members said they interacted with the residents more often than did participants who were residents' outgroup members, confirming previously observed patterns of racial homophily (e.g., McPherson et al., 2001).

To test our prediction that residents' perceived physical stereotypicality would predict their exclusion by outgroup members, the outgroup interaction index was regressed on racial stereotypicality. This analysis was significant, $\beta = -.12$, $p = .03$, consistent with predictions. In other words, the more stereotypical that residents appeared based on their photograph, the less often fellow residents outside their own racial group said that they interacted with them.

A follow-up analysis in which participant racial group (White versus non-White) and the product of racial group and stereotypicality were entered as additional terms revealed that stereotypicality did not interact with participant racial group in predicting outgroup interaction, $\beta = .01$, *ns*. Thus, the strength of the relationship between being perceived as having more stereotypical physical features and interacting less with outgroup members was comparable for White ($\beta = -.11$) and non-White ($\beta = -.13$) participants. (Sample sizes

within individual non-White groups were too small to allow separate analyses for each group.)

In contrast, there was no relationship between racial stereotypicality and the ingroup interaction index, $\beta = -.04$, *ns*, indicating that participants' relationships with those in their group were not tied to the stereotypicality of their physical appearance.

Thus, even among a community of adults with a great deal in common (age, educational ambitions, and dorm membership), race-based physical appearance played a meaningful role in predicting social acceptance. Here, we found that this phenomenon was of comparable size among Whites and non-Whites. It may be that the mechanisms that lead more-stereotypical individuals to experience more outgroup rejection are similar for Whites and non-Whites, possibly because physical stereotypicality exacerbates individuals' reservations about outgroup members. That is, encountering a person who looks more prototypical of the outgroup may heighten a person's anxieties about cross-group interactions, whereas encountering a person who looks less prototypical may lessen these anxieties. This may occur even for non-Whites encountering more-stereotypical Whites, even though White physical appearance has not historically been stigmatized. We view this as an intriguing initial foray into the role that physical stereotypicality plays for Whites and worthy of further research.

Nonetheless, the consequences of outgroup exclusion are likely to be more drastic for minority- than majority-group members. First, exclusion by outgroup members results in more exclusion (in an absolute sense) for those in a numerical minority group than those in a majority group, simply because the size of the outgroup is larger for minority- than majority-group members. Second, historically stigmatized minorities (Blacks, Asians, and Latinos) likely enter this selective, academically intense environment with greater anxieties (relative to majority-group members) about the degree to which they will be accepted socially; research shows that a sense of belonging and social acceptance in academic domains is critical for the success of minority-group members (more than majority-group members; [Walton & Cohen, 2011](#)).

These results may be somewhat surprising in light of the fact that college dormitories are famously liberal environments ([Feldman & Newcomb, 1969](#)), and this university is one that, like most, publicly embraces the values of diversity, multiculturalism, and social engagement with people of different backgrounds. Yet as past research shows, liberal attitudes or low prejudice levels are insufficient for reducing – and may even exacerbate – anxieties in interracial interactions ([Shelton, Richeson, & Bergsieker, 2009](#); [Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005](#); [Vorauer, 2005, 2008](#); [Vorauer & Turpie, 2004](#)). In higher-education environments, this may be especially true for students who had had minimal contact with outgroup members before coming to college ([Plant & Devine, 2003](#)). Such an environment may create a “perfect storm” for anxiety and miscommunication between majority- and minority-group members. The present studies suggest that this may be particularly true the more that people appear physically prototypical of their group.

General Discussion

These findings are consistent with a growing body of research confirming that race-based discrimination occurs not only between categories but also within categories, such that people whose appearance is more strongly prototypical of their group are subject to additional stereotyping (e.g., [Blair, et al., 2002](#)), discrimination (e.g., [Eberhardt, et al., 2006](#)), and, in the present results, social rejection and exclusion. This phenomenon is all the more problematic given that stereotypicality-based bias appears to be less consciously accessible and more difficult to control than category-based bias ([Blair, Judd, & Fallman, 2004](#); [Sczesny & Kuhnen, 2004](#)).

These studies were the first to explore the phenomenon of stereotypicality bias within the context of social acceptance and rejection. Analysis of two different social communities, the online social networking site Facebook (Studies 1–2) and a college dormitory (Study 3), revealed that being perceived as more physically stereotypical was associated with having a smaller group of outgroup friends and fewer outgroup social interactions. Further, the experimental paradigm used in Study 2 revealed that even direct overtures of friendship initiated by minorities are more likely to be rejected by outgroup members if the initiator looks more stereotypical of his/her racial group. Thus, an idea central to social psychological thinking about interpersonal attraction, that we like those who like us, or who wish to be our friends (e.g., [Kenny & La Voie, 1982](#)), may apply less to those who bear the stigma of racially stereotypical physical features.

Research in other areas has repeatedly demonstrated the negative consequences of day-to-day experiences of exclusion for minorities. For example, discrimination experiences predict poorer cardiovascular health among both Black Americans ([Clark, 2000](#)) and Asian Americans ([Gee, Spencer, Chen, & Takeuchi, 2007](#)). In the employment domain, racial minorities' reduced access to valuable social networks hurts their prospects for hiring and promotion ([Petersen, Saporta, & Seidel, 2000](#); [Seidel, Polzer, & Stewart, 2000](#)). Across the board, social rejection not only feels painful but also can undermine intellectual performance, impulse control, self-esteem, and physical health ([DeWall & Bushman, 2011](#)). Based on the present findings, we would suggest that these consequences of social rejection would be worsened for those perceived as more stereotypical of their racial group.

As noted in past research ([Kaiser & Wilkins, 2010](#)), it is likely that multiple mechanisms are at play in the greater social exclusion experienced by those perceived as more racially stereotypical. The correlational approach used in Studies 1 and 3 does not exclude the role of personal choice, such that more-stereotypical individuals may choose to associate with outgroup members less often (relative to less-stereotypical individuals). However, the experimental paradigm used in Study 2 suggests that more-stereotypical individuals are also more likely to be directly rejected by those outside their group, even when they explicitly initiate a relationship. Confirmation of this causal path renders it unlikely that personal choice fully accounts for the results of the other two studies. Further, recent work demonstrates that although more-stereotypical minorities do identify with their ingroup more strongly than do less-stereotypical minorities, this tendency is minimally related or unrelated to the desire for interaction with outgroup members ([Wilkins, Kaiser, & Rieck, 2010](#)). In other words, majority group members appear to assume – incorrectly – that more-stereotypical minorities are less interested in friendship with them. Based on these findings, we suggest that the role played by personal choice in the reduced social interactions between more-stereotypical group members and those outside their group is minimal, and, if present at all, may reflect a coping mechanism against further exclusion ([Kaiser & Wilkins, 2010](#); [Maddox & Chase, 2004](#)) rather than the ultimate cause of stereotypicality-based differences in social communities.

Instead, we speculate that the many factors that continue to stand in the way of close friendships across racial lines are exacerbated when one's interaction partner is more (vs. less) physically stereotypical of his or her group. To the perceiver, a more-stereotypical outgroup member may be seen as even more different from the self than a less-stereotypical outgroup member, who may even be seen as possibly belonging to an ingroup as well (as suggested by the mediation analyses from Study 1). These patterns are likely to be maintained over time given that people appear to be largely unaware of discriminating based on physical stereotypicality ([Blair, Judd, & Fallman, 2004](#); [Sczesny & Kuhnen, 2004](#)). As a result, individuals seeking to maintain an image of themselves as non-prejudiced may do so by maintaining friendships with less-stereotypical outgroup members, without

realizing that their outgroup friends are not necessarily representative of the group as a whole.

It was notable in these results that Black stereotypicality was marginally positively correlated with numbers of Black (ingroup) friends in Study 1, and in Study 2, Black participants were marginally more likely to accept friend requests from more-stereotypical (vs. less-stereotypical) Black targets. In Study 3, on the other hand, which included all racial groups, there were no relationships between stereotypicality and ingroup interaction. One possibility for this discrepancy may be the greater amount of stigma experienced by Black Americans than by other racial groups, which may increase Blacks' empathy for the inherent risk that an ingroup member faces (particularly one with a more-stereotypical appearance) in making an overture of friendship. Although it is certainly true that stereotypicality-based discrimination has historically occurred within the African-American community as well as outside of it (Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1993), it is possible that different norms apply to the domain of social interaction, in which one person reaches out to another with a (literal) request for acceptance and inclusion. We see this as an interesting area for future research.

One distressing implication of the present findings is the role they may play in perpetuating cycles of intergroup avoidance and segregation. Research shows that one of the strongest predictors of seeking out or positively anticipating a cross-race social interaction is having had such interactions in the past that have gone well (Levin, van Laar, & Sidanius, 2003; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, Alegre, & Siy, 2010; Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008; Wout, Murphy, & Steele, 2010). Yet in general, people tend to avoid interracial interactions, in part due to false assumptions that outgroup members are uninterested in friendship with them (Shelton & Richeson, 2005; Wilkins, et al., 2010; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008). Combined with the present results, these findings suggest a lamentable, self-perpetuating cycle based on pluralistic ignorance – exacerbated by the perception of stereotypical physical appearance – such that individuals from different racial groups assume a desire for racial homophily in the other and thus reinforce such homophily via mutual passive disregard.

In summary, the results presented here demonstrate that people whose physical features are viewed as more stereotypical of their group are particularly vulnerable to exclusion from meaningful social connections with others outside their group. Future research should incorporate the role of physical stereotypicality in producing the anxiety and animosity between groups that provides such a fertile climate for interpersonal segregation across racial lines.

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