Compositions in Black and White: Determinants of Interaction in Interracial Dyads

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The initial, unstructured interactions of 40 interracial (black–white) dyads were studied in a design in which three factors were systematically varied. These factors were (a) the disposition of the white dyad members to either seek out or shun (i.e., approach vs. avoid) interaction with blacks, (b) the race (black vs. white) of the experimenter, and (c) the gender composition (male–male vs. female–female) of the dyads. The results revealed that within dyads, the white dyad members displayed more interactional involvement (i.e., more talking, smiling, and gazing) than their black partners but at the same time appeared to experience the interactions as more stressful and uncomfortable. Additional findings qualified these results by revealing that (a) whites predisposed to avoid interaction with blacks looked and smiled at their partners less than those predisposed to initiate interaction; (b) both the black and white members of these “avoidance” dyads reported heightened feelings of anxiety and concern about their interactions; but (c) the moderating influences of the whites’ approach–avoidance dispositions on interaction behavior were essentially limited to conditions in which the experimenter was black and the white subject was therefore a “solo minority.” The author suggests that the black–white partner effects may be attributable to the differing amounts of crossrace contact typically experienced by blacks and whites. He interprets the black–white experimenter effects in terms of Taylor’s (1981) hypothesis that stereotypes and related dispositions are activated in social contexts in which group membership is made salient.

Stephan (in press) concluded a recent review of the literature on intergroup relations by noting that “the ecological validity of much of the work in this area is low and it remains to be determined when [the phenomena of interest] operate in everyday social interactions.” This conclusion may apply with even greater force to the more specific literature on black–white relations in the U.S. and Canada. Not only are there relatively few studies in this literature in which the actual social interactions of whites and blacks are examined, but there appear to be none in which a range of behavioral and self-report measures is used to assess various aspects of the spontaneous, unstructured interactions between blacks and whites. The present study helped to fill this gap in the literature by providing some detailed, exploratory data about the feelings and behaviors of blacks and whites in initial, unstructured dyadic interactions.

As Stephan (in press) noted, in some of the studies of black-white relationships (e.g., Weitz, 1972), researchers have created “simulated interaction” situations in which “there was no actual contact between blacks and whites” (p. 96). Studies of this type may be quite vulnerable to Stephan’s criticism of low ecological validity. There are a few studies in which the verbal or nonverbal behaviors of blacks and whites in direct interaction with each other have been examined, but in most of these studies, only spatial or visual behaviors were assessed. With regard to spatial behavior, whites have been found to approach blacks less closely than they approach other whites (Willis, 1966; see also Dennis & Powell, 1972) and to maintain greater seating distance from...
black confederates than from white ones (Hendricks & Bootzin, 1976; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974).

With regard to visual behavior, studies by Fugjta, Wexley, and Hillery (1974) and by LaFrance & Mayo (1976) indicate that blacks maintain less visual interaction with whites than vice versa, especially while listening when the other is talking. Although there is some disagreement about the origin and meaning of this difference, there is general agreement that it is often responsible for problems in the crossrace interactions of blacks and whites. Blacks tend to consider it rude, confrontational, or disrespectful to maintain eye contact with a person who is speaking, whereas whites tend to consider it evasive, inattentive, or disrespectful not to do so. A common outcome of this clash of cultural expectations is that black and white participants both experience their visual interaction as somewhat awkward and uncomfortable (for reviews, see Henley, 1977, p. 159; LaFrance & Mayo, 1978, p. 188).

One of the most interesting and behaviorally detailed studies of black-white interaction to date is the first of two experiments by Word et al. (1974). They found that naive white interviewers displayed strikingly different patterns of behavior toward black versus white job applicants (all applicants were, in fact, confederates of the experimenters). Specifically, they sat farther away from the black applicants, made more speech errors, and terminated the interview significantly sooner. Word et al. hypothesized that these interviewer behaviors could mediate a self-fulfilling prophecy process by which the black applicants would wind up making a poor impression, and this hypothesis was tested in their second experiment. In this experiment, white confederate-interviewers displayed patterns of behavior toward white subject-applicants that approximated those displayed toward either the black or the white applicants in Experiment 1. The results indicated that subjects treated like the blacks of Experiment 1 were judged by "blind" raters to have been more nervous and to have performed less adequately than subjects treated like the whites.

My study was not intended as a specific follow-up to any of the black-white interaction studies just described; however, because of the paradigm used, I expected it to yield data that would bear on many of the issues explored in the earlier research. The unstructured dyadic interaction paradigm that I used in the study has proven to be well suited to the task of studying the influence of various factors on behavior and perceptions occurring in the initial interaction of strangers (Ickes & Barnes, 1977, 1978; Ickes, Patterson, Rajecki, & Tanford, 1982; Ickes, Schermer, & Steeno, 1979; Ickes & Turner, 1983; LaFrance & Ickes, 1981; Rajecki, Ickes, & Tanford, 1981). Among other advantages, the paradigm (a) permits the unobtrusive measurement of spontaneous, unstructured interaction behavior that is relatively uncontaminated by task demands or other traditional sources of bias, and (b) yields a wide range of behavioral and self-report measures that can be analyzed at both the between-dyads and within-dyads levels of analysis. For detailed reviews and discussions of the paradigm, see Ickes (1982, 1983).

Because the original impetus for the study was the scarcity of research on interracial interactions as they spontaneously occur, I decided to study only interracial (i.e., black-white) interactions. In this decision I acknowledged a trade-off between (a) being able to examine certain between-dyad effects that could only be tested in designs including both intra- and interracial dyads (e.g., the tendency of whites to sit farther away from blacks than from other whites), and (b) having a sufficiently large sample of interracial dyads to permit strong statistical tests of within-dyad differences in the interaction behavior of the black versus white members (e.g., the tendency of whites to display higher levels of looking than their black interaction partners).

Given this initial decision, I further decided to systematically vary three elements as "between-dyads" independent or counterbalance variables. The first variable, the measured disposition of the white dyad members to initiate or avoid interaction with blacks, was included as a behaviorally oriented disposition that may be more closely tied to past and future behaviors than are prejudiced or stereotyped attitudes and beliefs. Given the evidence of an interracial self-fulfilling prophecy in Word et al.'s (1974) research, it was expected that the whites' approach-avoidance dispositions would affect their own interaction behavior in a relatively strong and direct way, but would
affect their black partners' behavior in a somewhat weaker, more indirect manner.

Inclusion of the second between-dyads variable—the sex composition (male–male vs. female–female) of the dyads—was based partly on counterbalance considerations and partly on a desire to answer the question of whether the sex composition differences observed in my previous studies of intraracial (white–white) interactions (Ickes, 1981; Ickes & Barnes, 1977; 1978; Ickes et al., 1979) would emerge in these interracial (black–white) interactions as well. It is possible, for example, that the race variable might be so salient and overwhelming in its impact that effects due to gender composition might be overridden or attenuated.

The third between-dyads variable, the race (black vs. white) of the experimenter, was originally intended as a simple counterbalance feature. Because of the fairly minimal contact the experimenter had with the subjects before their interaction took place, I did not expect this variable to influence the results. As the results indicate, however, this variable may have had important implications for the type of social context in which these interracial interactions took place.¹

Method

Pretesting and Subject Selection

The subjects were 42 male and 42 female introductory psychology undergraduates at the University of Missouri at St. Louis. They were drawn from a population of over 500 students whose attitudes toward initiating or avoiding crossrace social contacts had been assessed during a departmental pretesting at the beginning of the semester. Embedded in the attitude survey that subjects completed at this time were two items by which I could measure subjects' dispositions to initiate or avoid interracial social contacts. The items were, respectively, "Because of my feelings about the relationship between blacks and whites, I actively initiate social contacts with individuals who are not of my race," and "Because of my feelings about the relationship between blacks and whites, I tend to avoid individuals who are not of my race."

Subjects responded to these items by circling a number on a scale ranging from 0 (not at all true of me) to 10 (very true of me). Subjects who circled a point above the midpoint of the first scale and below the midpoint on the second were classified as "approachers," whereas those who circled a point below the midpoint on the first scale and above the midpoint on the second were classified as "avoiders." Originally, the intent was to classify both the black and the white subjects on the basis of their responses to these measures. However, because virtually no blacks scored as "avoiders" (only 3 out of over 70 tested), it was infeasible to systematically vary the approach–avoidance disposition of blacks in the research design. Accordingly, only the white subjects were preselected on the basis of this variable, and they were randomly assigned black interaction partners of the same sex to create the appropriate dyadic pairings.

Potential subjects were contacted by telephone and scheduled to participate in the study in same-sex (male–male, female–female) dyads. The subjects were not informed at this stage that another subject would be participating in the study with them.

Design

As in previous studies in this series (e.g., Ickes & Barnes, 1978; Ickes et al., 1982; Ickes & Turner, 1983; Rajeecki et al., 1981), behavior was examined at two levels of analysis. On one level, using subjects within dyads as the units of analysis, it was of interest how behavior might vary as a function of the race (black vs. white) of the subjects within these interracial dyads. On another level, using dyads as the units of analysis, it was of interest how behavior might vary as a function of (a) the disposition of the white dyad members to seek out or shun (i.e., approach vs. avoid) interaction with blacks, (b) the race (black vs. white) of the experimenter, and (c) the sex composition (male–male vs. female–female) of the dyads. Thus the design of the study was a three-between-one-within factorial that varied the white subjects' approach–avoidance tendency, the race of the experimenter, and sex composition as the three between-dyads factors, and varied the race of the subjects within dyads as the single within-dyads factor.

Of the three between-dyads variables, the variation of the second (race of experimenter) was somewhat less than optimal owing to practical constraints. Because of two important limitations on resources for the study (i.e., the availability of only one black research assistant and the fact that the relative scarcity of black subject-volunteers limited the number of dyads per cell to five), I used only two experimenters, one black and one white (both male).² They were given extensive training with the same experimental script in order to make the form and content of their interaction with subjects as similar as possible. This training, combined with the fact that the experimenters had only minimal contact with the subjects before their

¹ It is probably apparent that expectations concerning the results of the study tended to be a bit loose and unformulated. Although this is entirely consistent with the inductive, exploratory nature of the research, it admittedly frustrates the desire to present a list of explicit and formally stated hypotheses at the end of one's introduction.

² The difficulty of conducting research of this type should not be underestimated. Even in what the author considered a relatively optimal environment for studying black–white interactions (i.e., the University of Missouri at St. Louis, where blacks constitute about 15% of the student body), the pool of available subjects (after eliminating dropouts, nonvolunteers, no-shows, etc.) was barely adequate to run a minimum of five dyads in each of this study's eight conditions.
interracial interaction took place (and no contact at all during the interaction itself), should have helped to ensure that race was the most salient variable that systematically distinguished the two experimenters.

Subjects were assigned randomly, within the constraints imposed by their race, sex, and the whites' approach-avoidance disposition, to the eight between-dyads conditions. After compensation was made for two dyads lost because of suspicion that their interactions were either observed or videotaped, there were five dyads in each of the eight conditions.

Setting and Equipment

The observation room used as a setting for the study was furnished to look like a storage area that recently had been converted into a waiting room. (For schematic diagrams of the room arrangement, see Ickes & Turner, 1983.) As in earlier studies in this series (e.g., Ickes & Barnes, 1977, 1978; Ickes et al., 1982, 1979; Ickes & Turner, 1983), a video camera and videotape recorder were concealed behind boxes stacked on tables in a corner of the room across from a couch and coffee table.

Procedure

During the telephone solicitation, a research assistant (who feigned naivete of what the study was about) instructed the subjects to report to specific waiting areas within the psychology building. These areas were physically isolated from each other but were on the same floor as the observation room just described. At the beginning of each session and before meeting each pair of subjects, the experimenter activated the videotape equipment in the observation room and checked to ensure that it was well concealed and operating properly. He then collected the two subjects from their respective waiting areas. (Throughout the course of the study, the experimenters were kept blind with respect to the white subjects' approach-avoidance disposition, but obviously they could not be kept blind to the subjects' race and sex.)

The experimenter led the subjects into the observation room and asked them to leave their belongings by the door and take a seat on the couch. He explained that the first part of the study involved filling out copies of a questionnaire, but that he had just run out of these and would have to obtain some more. Stating that he would return "in a minute or two," the experimenter left the room to secure some fresh copies of the questionnaire, closing the door behind him. He then consulted a digital watch to time the 5-min interval in which the subjects were covertly audi-taped and videotaped.

At the end of this period, the experimenter returned, announced that the study was half over, and queried the subjects for possible suspicion of the videotaping before proceeding further. Following this test for suspicion, the experimenter conducted a partial debriefing in which he explained that the first part of the study had been designed to examine "the actual behavior of two strangers during their initial interaction." He showed the subjects how the videotape of their interaction had been made, assured them that any data taken from the tape would be used for statistical purposes only, and asked them to sign a release form giving their consent for the tapes to be used in this way. (All subjects agreed to sign the release.)

The experimenter then explained that the second part of the study involved assessment of the subjects' perceptions of the interaction in which they had just engaged. Accordingly, each subject was asked to fill out a posttest questionnaire designed to elicit perceptions of self and other's behavior during the interaction period. Before they completed the questionnaires, the subjects were seated in opposite corners of the room, facing away from each other, and were explicitly assured that their responses would not be seen by the other subject. The experimenter waited outside in the hall while the subjects completed the questionnaires, and he collected the forms as subjects left the room. Each subject was then debriefed more fully, was requested not to discuss the study with potential future subjects, and was then released.

Dependent Measures

To ensure the comparability of the present data with those obtained in previous studies in this series, the same categories of dependent measures were obtained. The first set of measures assessed basic aspects of interactional involvement and were coded from the videotapes by two independent judges (one black, one white) who were blind with respect to the white subjects' approach-avoidance tendency. Included in this set were measures of a number of "static" behaviors that either occurred only once or did not vary much over time: who sat first, who talked first, interpersonal distance (shoulder-to-shoulder), the degree of body orientation each subject maintained with respect to the other, and the openness of each subject's body posture. The interrater reliability coefficients for these five measures were all greater than .90, based on the entire sample.

Also included in the first set of measures were some temporally variable or "dynamic" behaviors that were recorded from the video by means of pushbutton hand panels connected to a specially designed array of clocks and counters. These behaviors included the total frequency and duration of verbalizations, directed gazes, mutual gazes, expressive gestures, and facial expressions of positive affect, namely, smiles and laughter. (For the operational criteria used to define these behaviors, see Ickes & Turner, 1983.) The interrater reliabilities for the total frequency and duration of the five dynamic behaviors ranged from .85 to .94.

3 In this partial debriefing, subjects were told only about the general purpose of the research ("to study the initial interactions of strangers") and the scientific necessity of the videotaping procedure in achieving this purpose. They were told nothing about any of the independent variables at this point in order to avoid biasing their subsequent responses on the posttest questionnaire.

4 Subjects run in the paradigm were always made aware at this point that no invasion of their privacy had occurred. Because the videotape equipment was activated before they entered the room, and because there were no external monitors or outputs in use during the observation period, no one but the subjects themselves knew what events transpired that were recorded on the tape. This means that if one or both subjects exercised the right to have the tape erased immediately, instead of releasing it for use as data, the content of the interaction would remain their own private concern.
.79 to .95 for total frequency (M of rs = .89), and from .76 to .97 for total duration (M of rs = .86), based on a subsample of 20 subjects (10 dyads).

A second set of dependent measures was based on the subjects' responses to the items on the posttest questionnaire. These items included measures of various feelings and behavior occurring during the 5-min interaction for which subjects were required to rate both themselves and their partners. Following these items was the measure of interpersonal attraction used in the studies by Ickes and Barnes (1978), Ickes et al. (1982, 1979), and Ickes and Turner (1983). This measure was composed of the sum of the dyad members' ratings of each other on 18 bipolar adjective dimensions (exciting-dull, sincere-insincere, friendly-unfriendly, etc.). Because no significant effects emerged in the data for the attraction measure, it will not be discussed further.

**Results**

Given the large and somewhat diverse set of findings that emerged from the study, it was necessary to determine the most meaningful way to organize and present them. In the following organization, the within-dyad main effects (i.e., black-white partner effects) are presented first, and then the qualifying main and interaction effects imposed by the three between-dyads variables are presented. Data supporting the predictive validity of the approach-avoidance measure are reported in the sections describing the influence of this variable.

**Black–White Partner Effects**

**Behavioral differences.** Analyses of the static behavior data revealed no differences in the behaviors of black and white interaction partners. However, analyses of the dynamic behavior data revealed that the white subjects talked and smiled more often than their black partners, and looked at them more often and for longer periods of time (Table 1).

**Self-report differences.** Consistent with the behavioral differences, the white subjects were perceived—both by themselves and by their black partners—as having displayed more involvement in the interactions (Table 2, top part). Specifically, they were perceived as having been more directive, assertive, and accommodative during the interactions than were their black partners. In addition, relative to the black subjects, the white subjects perceived both dyad members to have (a) influenced each other more, (b) used each other's behavior more as a guide, and (c) experienced the interactions as more uncomfortable, awkward, forced, and strained (Table 2, bottom part). Viewed collectively, these findings suggest that the white subjects not only were more involved in the interactions than their black partners but also were more likely to experience the interactions as somewhat difficult and burdensome.

**Approach–Avoidance Effects**

The interpretation of the behavioral and self-report data just reported is qualified by several main and interaction effects involving the disposition of the white subjects to initiate or avoid interaction with blacks.

**Behavioral differences.** Differences in the white subjects' dispositions to initiate or avoid interaction with blacks were reflected in corresponding differences in the levels of nonverbal involvement displayed in the two respective dyad types. Dyad members looked at each other more often in dyads whose white members were disposed to initiate interaction with blacks than in dyads whose white members were disposed to avoid interaction with blacks (see Table 3). This effect in the directed gaze data resulted in similar trends for the frequency and duration of mutual gazes. In addition, a significant interaction in the positive affect data revealed that approach-disposed whites smiled at their partners more than twice as long as avoidance-disposed whites, whereas the duration of smiling did not differ for the blacks across these dyad types.

**Self-report differences.** Relative to the
### Table 2

**Self-Report Differences: Black Versus White Interaction Partners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent measures</th>
<th>Race of dyad member</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>F(1, 32)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effects for person being rated</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directed interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>4.85*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeared assertive</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>4.64*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried to accommodate other</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>10.66***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effects for person providing the ratings</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried to influence other</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6.09**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used other's behavior as guide</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>4.45*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived interaction as comfortable</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.43**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived interaction as awkward, forced, and strained</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>4.52*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Means in the top part of the table refer to the dyad member who is being rated, and represent the average of the ratings by both dyad members of the black versus the white member's feelings or behavior. Means in the bottom part refer to the dyad member who is doing the rating, and represent the average of the ratings by the black versus the white dyad members of their own and their partners' feelings or behavior.

* • p < .05. ** p < .02. *** p < .005.

### Table 3

**Behavioral Differences: Approach Versus Avoidance Dyads**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent measures</th>
<th>Approach dyads</th>
<th>Avoidance dyads</th>
<th>F(1, 32)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directed gazes (frequency)</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>6.71**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual gazes (frequency)</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>3.42*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual gazes (duration)*</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>3.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive affect (duration)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black dyad members</td>
<td>15.41</td>
<td>13.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White dyad members</td>
<td>24.74</td>
<td>10.98</td>
<td>7.06***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Measures of duration are in seconds.

b Two-way interaction F. Means not sharing a common subscript differ at p < .05 or better by the appropriate two-tailed t test for correlated or independent samples.

* • p < .08. ** p < .015. 

In addition to these main-effect differences, a number of interaction effects qualified the conclusion suggested by the data in Table 2, namely, that the white dyad members were generally more involved than their black partners in these interracial interactions. In exception to the general trend, the black and white members perceived each other as being equally directive and about equally likely to compensate for each other's lack of responsiveness in dyads whose white members were disposed to avoid interaction with blacks. Moreover, the black members of these dyads were perceived as having felt a greater need to communicate than did their white partners (Table 4, last three rows).
Table 4

Self-Report Differences: Approach Versus Avoidance Dyads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent measures</th>
<th>Approach dyads</th>
<th>Avoidance dyads</th>
<th>F(1, 32)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tried to avoid offending other</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>8.76***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt nervous or self-conscious</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.46*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was influenced by other's behavior</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>3.78*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directed interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black dyad members</td>
<td>6.3,</td>
<td>7.1,</td>
<td>6.46***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White dyad members</td>
<td>8.4,</td>
<td>7.0,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt a need to communicate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black dyad members</td>
<td>8.0,</td>
<td>9.5,</td>
<td>6.78***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White dyad members</td>
<td>8.8,</td>
<td>8.6,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensated for other's lack of responsiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black dyad members</td>
<td>5.4,</td>
<td>7.5,</td>
<td>4.82***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White dyad members</td>
<td>7.7,</td>
<td>6.6,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two-way interaction Fs. The means for the first two interactions refer to the dyad member who is being rated by both self and partner; the means for the third interaction refer to the dyad member who is doing the rating of both self and partner. Within each interaction, means not sharing a common subscript differ at p < .05 or better by the appropriate two-tailed t test for correlated or independent samples.

*p < .075. ** p < .05. *** p < .02. **** p < .01.

Black–White Experimenter Effects

A number of effects due to the experimenter variable further qualified some of these results. These effects may prove to be among the most interesting of all the findings, although their value, like that of the findings previously described, should be regarded as primarily heuristic in exploratory research such as this.

Behavioral differences. A significant interaction in the directed gaze data revealed that the effect of the white subjects' approach–avoidance disposition on the number of times dyad members looked at each other occurred only in those dyads run by the black experimenter. Similar differences were apparent in the data for the frequency and duration of mutual gazes, in which significant differences between the approach and the avoidance dyads again occurred only when the experimenter was black (Table 5, first three rows). Finally, a three-way interaction in the verbalization data offered still more evidence that the white subjects' approach–avoidance dispositions had

Table 5

Behavioral Differences: Interactions Involving the Experimenter Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent measures</th>
<th>Black experimenter</th>
<th>White experimenter</th>
<th>F(1, 32)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directed gazes (freq.)</td>
<td>26.5,</td>
<td>12.6,</td>
<td>17.9,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutal gazes (freq.)</td>
<td>19.3,</td>
<td>8.5,</td>
<td>15.2,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual gazes (dur.)</td>
<td>37.7,</td>
<td>16.5,</td>
<td>25.4,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbalizations (dur.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black dyad members</td>
<td>85.7,</td>
<td>81.7,</td>
<td>83.9,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White dyad members</td>
<td>112.6,</td>
<td>59.3,</td>
<td>79.4,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. freq. = frequency; dur. = duration.

*a Measures of duration are in seconds.

*b Two-way interaction Fs. Means not sharing a common subscript differ at p < .05 or better by a two-tailed t test for independent samples.

*c Three-way interaction F. Means not sharing a common subscript differ at p < .05 or better by the appropriate two-tailed t test for correlated or independent samples.

*p < .09. ** p < .03. *** p < .015.
INTERACTION IN INTERRACIAL DYADS

Table 6
Self-Report Differences: Interactions Involving the Experimenter Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent measures</th>
<th>Black experimenter</th>
<th>White experimenter</th>
<th>F(1, 32)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was influenced by other's behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black dyad members</td>
<td>7.6ₜ</td>
<td>7.6ᵧ</td>
<td>5.79***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White dyad members</td>
<td>8.8ᵧ</td>
<td>7.3ᵧ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried to avoid offending other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach dyads</td>
<td>5.7ₜ</td>
<td>8.4ᵧ</td>
<td>4.40**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance dyads</td>
<td>10.3ᵧ</td>
<td>9.2ᵧ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Two-way interaction Fs. Means not sharing a common subscript differ at p < .05 or better by the appropriate two-tailed t test for correlated or independent samples.  
  * p < .05. ** p < .025.

their greatest impact on interracial interaction when the experimenter was black (Table 5, last two rows). In dyads with a black experimenter, approach-whites talked nearly twice as long as avoidance-whites did; however, in dyads with a white experimenter, the order of the corresponding means was actually reversed.

**Self-report differences.** Interactions found in the self-report data indicated that the experimenters’ race was indeed a salient variable. The first of these interactions, represented in the top half of Table 6, revealed that white dyad members were perceived (both by themselves and their partners), as having been strongly influenced by their black partner’s behavior only when the experimenter was also black. A second interaction, represented in the bottom half of Table 6, further indicated that the approach–avoidance variable influenced dyad members’ concern about offending each other only when the experimenter was black. Together these findings suggest that the interracial aspect of the interaction was particularly salient for the white subjects when the experimenter, like their partners, was black. This heightened salience of the interracial variable may have activated the white subjects’ interracial stereotypes and dispositions, thus causing these dispositions to affect their interaction behavior (cf. Taylor, 1981; Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978).

**Sex Composition Effects**

In contrast to previous studies in this series (Ickes & Barnes, 1977; Ickes et al., 1979) in which several sex composition main effects evidenced differences in the behavior of male–female versus female–female dyads, only one such difference was found in the present study. Subjects in the male–male dyads were found to display a more open body posture than those in the female–female dyads (Ms = 1.00 and .48, respectively), F(1, 32) = 18.0, p < .0001. This finding replicates effects obtained in the two previous studies cited, and Henley (1977) and LaFrance and Mayo (1978) have proposed that it may be the result of differences between the sexes in status, personal space, or both. The failure to replicate other sex composition main effects obtained in previous studies (e.g., those revealing more mutual gazes, more smiling, and increased body orientation toward the other in female–female dyads than in male–male dyads) may be due partly to the smaller number of dyads in the present study (40 vs. 60). However, it may also be due partly to the unique presence of the interracial variable, an aspect of the interactions that appeared so compelling that it tended to override all but the strongest influences of sex composition.

**Discussion**

The large and rather diverse set of findings obtained in this study may be summarized in terms of three internally consistent patterns of results. These three patterns are discussed in turn, with each discussion building to some extent on the ones preceding it.

**Pattern 1: Black–White Partner Effects**

The first pattern of results, which characterizes behavior and subjective perceptions at
the within-dyads level, reveals that the white dyad members talked, looked, and smiled more than their black partners, and were correspondingly perceived as having been more involved, assertive, directive, influential, and accommodating during the interaction. However, the greater investment of the white subjects at the interpersonal level appeared to take its toll at the personal or subjective level in that the white subjects were more likely (a) to perceive the interactions as uncomfortable, awkward, forced, and strained, and (b) to emphasize the importance of monitoring the other person's behavior during the interaction.

Viewed collectively, these results suggest that the white subjects, either because of or in anticipation of the perceived difficulty and awkwardness of these initial interracial interactions, felt a particular responsibility and concern for making the interactions work. This concern not only increased their behavioral involvement in these interracial interactions but also caused them to experience the interactions as uncomfortable and stressful, suggesting a somewhat novel (but perhaps no less ironic) twist to the meaning of the phrase, "white man's burden."

If these effects have generality—that is, if whites typically work harder at and experience more social stress in their interactions with blacks than vice versa—an understanding of this phenomenon may provide important insights into the interactional bases of interracial tension. There are at least two possible explanations for these black-white differences in public behavior and private emotional state. The first explanation, suggested by Cox (personal communication, June 1983), is that blacks (and other minority group members) who have been led to expect that interactions with whites will typically be more punishing than rewarding may have acquired patterns of social behavior that enable them to minimize their stress and interactional involvement in these encounters. An example of such an acquired behavior might be the reduced eye contact displayed by black subjects in the present study as well as in previous ones (e.g., Fugita et al., 1974; LaFrance & Mayo, 1976).

A theoretically compatible alternative explanation is that minority group members typically experience far more interracial contacts than majority group members and thus have far more opportunities to learn to handle such encounters in a relatively nonanxious, nonstressed way. According to this account, many whites, particularly those disposed to avoid social contact with blacks, may construct their social lives in ways that result in their living little, if any, direct contact with blacks. In contrast, blacks, almost by virtue of their minority status, must learn to deal with whites early on because of the relatively frequent contacts they have with whites throughout their life. Consequently, blacks may be more likely than whites to learn how to handle crossracial interactions with some degree of comfort. On the other hand, whites (particularly those disposed to avoid interaction with blacks) may be more likely to initiate self-fulfilling prophecies in which their own lack of experience with blacks produces an anxiety and behavioral awkwardness that virtually guarantees a difficult interaction with any blacks they encounter, and thus spuriously confirms their original avoidance disposition or prejudice (cf. Rose, 1981; Word et al., 1974).

Pattern 2: Approach–Avoidance Effects

The pattern of within-dyad results just discussed was qualified somewhat by the white subjects' dispositions to initiate or avoid interaction with blacks. A second pattern of results, which characterizes behavior and subjective perceptions at the between-dyads level, indicates that white subjects who were disposed to avoid interaction with blacks looked and smiled at their partners less than did whites who were disposed to initiate interaction. The data further suggest that the black dyad members had a tendency to reciprocate the amount of gazing they received from their white partners, so that the influence of the whites' approach–avoidance dispositions on this behavior was evident at the dyadic level (i.e., in the blacks' behavior as well as the whites').

At the level of the dyad members' subjective perceptions, the influence of these dispositions was also apparent in the form of greater reported anxiety and concern about the interactions in the avoidance-disposition dyads than in the approach-disposition dyads. This anxiety took the form of increased self-consciousness, a greater concern not to offend the other, and a greater tendency to report being influenced by the other's behavior. In addition, the black members of the avoidance dyads
appeared to compensate somewhat for their white partner's avoidance-disposed behavior by becoming more directive and feeling a greater need to communicate and to compensate for their partners' lack of responsiveness.

All of these effects would appear to be relatively straightforward consequences of the behavioral expression of the white subjects' approach-avoidance dispositions. Because of the constraints of the situation, whites who were predisposed to avoid interaction with blacks could not avoid waiting with black partners during the 5-min observation period. They could, however, attempt to maintain social distance during this interval by displaying low levels of interactional involvement in such nonverbal behaviors as looking and smiling. It is not clear whether the anxiety and concern reported by both the black and white members of these avoidance dyads was either a cause or a consequence of the low level of nonverbal involvement, or whether both sets of effects were simply parallel outcomes of the whites' expectations that interaction with their black partners would be difficult and potentially unpleasant. It appears, however, that the awkwardness of these interactions was sufficiently apparent to the black dyad members to motivate them to try to compensate for their white partners' avoidance behavior. Given the high face validity of the approach-avoidance attitude items, the internal consistency of these Pattern 2 effects may come as no surprise.

Pattern 3: Black–White Experimenter Effects

The third pattern of results, which also characterizes behavior and subjective perceptions at the between-dyads level, qualifies the results still further in terms of the social context or "social environment" (Taylor, 1981) in which these interracial interactions occurred. The data indicate that the influence of the whites' approach–avoidance dispositions on dyadic behavior was limited primarily to a social environment in which blacks (i.e., the experimenter and the other subject) were in the majority and the white subject was in the minority. In this social context, the salience of the interracial variable due to the white subjects' minority (i.e., solo) status may have activated their interracial stereotypes and social-contact schemas in the same way that a similar contextual salience manipulation activated observers' stereotypes and schemas in studies by Taylor and her colleagues (Taylor, 1981; Taylor et al., 1978; see also McArthur, 1980; McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978; McGuire, McGuire & Winton, 1979; Tversky & Gati, 1978; Wilder, 1978; Wilder & Thompson, 1980).

A major tenet of Taylor's (1981) categorization approach is that "the process of stereotyping has a contextual basis" such that "any factor that makes an individual's membership in a social group especially salient would engage the stereotype of the group" (p. 110). Assuming "that individuals will be relatively distinctive as a function of the number of members of their category in the environment," it follows that "a black man will be more distinctive when he is in an otherwise white environment and less so when he is in a black environment, because in the first case he is the only one in his category and in the latter case, he shares category membership with others" (p. 89). Contextual distinctiveness of this type is assumed to enhance the salience of the individual's "category" (i.e., group membership), and thereby engage whatever stereotypes or schemas are associated with the category. In essence, Taylor's argument is one that "posits relative distinctiveness as a determinant of degree of stereotyping" (p. 95).

An ingenious series of experiments by Taylor and her colleagues (Taylor, Fiske, Close, Anderson, & Ruderman, 1977; Taylor et al., 1978) provide substantial evidence that a person's relative distinctiveness within a social context does indeed affect the degree to which the category-based stereotypes and schemas of outside observers are invoked. By logical extension, however, Taylor's (1981) stereotyping hypothesis should hold for the individuals who have become distinctive within the social context being studied as well as for outside observers of these individuals. For example, the black person who becomes more distinctive by moving into an otherwise white environment should find his or her own stereotypes and schemas about whites becoming more salient, just as the white person who becomes more distinctive within an otherwise black environment should find his or her stereotypes and schemas about blacks becoming more salient. This extension of Taylor's (1981) reasoning therefore suggests that individuals hav-
ing the status of a solo minority member within a group context may be particularly likely to engage and, circumstances permitting, to act on their stereotypes and schemas regarding the other group members.

A slightly different alternative explanation is that distinctiveness within a social context increases the self-focus of the solo minority member (cf. Duval, 1976; Duval & Wicklund, 1972, chaps. 2, 4, & 9), thereby increasing the salience and influence on his or her behavior of situationally relevant dispositions such as the approach–avoidance tendency (e.g., Carver, 1975; Gibbons, 1978; Pryor, Gibbons, Wicklund, Fazio, & Hood, 1977; Scheier, 1976; Scheier, Carver, & Gibbons, 1981). These two explanations may, in fact, be complementary, and may diverge mainly in their emphasis on different aspects of the same underlying process. Their interest lies in the fact that they extend Taylor’s (1981) “stereotyping hypothesis” by suggesting that individuals’ stereotypes and prejudices may be activated by the individuals’ own distinctiveness within social contexts as well as by the distinctiveness of others (for a possible empirical precedent, see the study by Higgins and Petty reported in Higgins & King, 1981). This extension, if substantiated, would have obvious theoretical and practical importance (e.g., in studies of prejudice in racially balanced vs. unbalanced classrooms or neighborhoods).

It is important to remember, however, that the Pattern 3 findings, like those of the other two patterns reviewed earlier, cannot yet be regarded as definitive. Instead, their value in this exploratory study is to provide some important heuristic leads for future research on the interactions of blacks and whites. Given (a) the strength of the effects revealed in this study, (b) the convergence in all three patterns of results of both the behavioral and the self-report measures, and (c) the probable external validity of these spontaneous, unstructured interaction data, the present findings should provide a good inductive basis for subsequent theory and research.

Conclusions

On the basis of the various findings reviewed here, a number of methodological and substantive conclusions may be drawn. From a methodological perspective, one may conclude that (a) studies of the behavior and perceptions occurring in spontaneous, ongoing dyadic interactions can be particularly informative about the dynamics of interracial relationships, and (b) measures of the tendency to initiate or avoid interaction with members of a different racial or ethnic category can provide a useful alternative to more traditional measures that assess prejudice or stereotyping.

From a substantive perspective, one may at least tentatively conclude that in the context of initial, same-sex, interracial dyads, (a) race (black vs. white) is an important variable influencing behavior and perceptions at the within-dyad level; (b) when interracial contacts between blacks and whites are situationally mandated, whites are likely to display more interactional involvement than their black partners, but at the same time may experience greater social stress; (c) individual dispositions of whites to initiate or avoid interaction with blacks appear to moderate these effects; but (d) these dispositional influences may be clearly manifested in interaction behavior only when the interracial nature of the interaction is made salient by virtue of the white subjects’ distinctiveness within the social context. An overriding conclusion suggested by all of these conclusions is that economic and historical factors notwithstanding, important sources of interracial tension can be traced directly to the concrete interaction experiences of interracial dyads.

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References


INTERACTION IN Interracial Dyads


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