I Don't See Race (or Conflict): Strategic Descriptions of Ambiguous Negative Intergroup Contexts

Francine Karmali[*]

University of Toronto

Kerry Kawakami

York University

Elysia Vaccarino

York University

Amanda Williams

University of Bristol

Curtis Phills

University of North Florida

Justin P. Friesen

University of Winnipeg

Despite current societal trends to encourage diversity, individuals often avoid acknowledging race, and we suggest also conflict, because of concerns about appearing prejudiced. The present research investigated the use of racial color and conflict blind strategies in an ambiguous negative intergroup context. In three studies, we assessed whether people acknowledged race and conflict using a novel

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ambiguous context task. Study 1 demonstrated that when describing an intergroup interaction with a photograph of Black and White males bumping into one another, only 27% of participants used racial labels and approximately half (53%) mentioned conflict. In Study 2, when participants described two White males in the same situation, significantly fewer participants mentioned conflict compared to when the photograph depicted a Black and White male actor, but rates of mentioning race were not different. Finally, in Study 3, when participants were instructed to use race when describing the actors, they mentioned conflict significantly less than when they were free to avoid racial labels. These latter results suggest that although racial color blindness may be used to appear unbiased, when this strategy is unavailable, people may resort to not referencing intergroup negativity. Together these findings indicate that racial color and conflict blindness may work in conjunction as compensatory strategies to appearing nonprejudiced.

"Never trust anyone who says they do not see color. This means to them, you are invisible."
(Waheed, 2013, pp. 139).

In North America, there are strong norms against expressing prejudice and discrimination (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002; Plant & Devine, 1998, 2009). As a result, most people, whether prejudiced or not, are highly motivated to avoid behaviors or responses that suggest differential treatment of members of groups other than their own (Plant & Devine, 1998, 2009). One strategy to avoid appearing prejudice is strategic racial color blindness—ignoring race altogether. Specifically, people may assume that if they do not mention race, other people will believe it could not have affected their behavior and thus they cannot be racist (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008b; Neville, Awad, Brooks, Flores, & Bluemel, 2013; Sommers, Apfelbaum, Dukes, Toosi, & Wang, 2006). Indeed, many people spontaneously choose a *racial color blind* strategy under the assumption that it reduces perceptions that they are prejudiced (Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; Apfelbaum, Pauker, Ambady, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Purna, & Ariely, 2006). By avoiding statements about the race of others and abstaining from acknowledging race in an intergroup context, they believe that people will see them as not biased.

Although there may be good reason to think that racial color blindness should be society's ultimate goal (e.g., "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character." Martin Luther King Jr., Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2012, p. 215), research suggests that racial color blindness may not be an effective means of promoting equality (Apfelbaum et al., 2008b; Apfelbaum, Pauker, Sommers, & Ambady, 2010; Neville et al., 2013; Norton et al., 2006). For example, Nalo Hopkinson (2012), author of "Correcting the Balance," explains that:

There are a lot of readers who pride themselves on not paying attention to the identities of their favorite writers. Some of them think this means they're not prejudiced ... How many books by writers of color do you think you'll find on their bookshelves? I'd lay odds that if there are any at all, they will be far outnumbered by the books by white authors. Not necessarily because those readers are deliberately choosing mostly white/male authors. They don't have to. The status quo does it for them. (p. 82)

As Hopkinson writes, to be unbiased, we may first need to pay attention to race.

Although experimental research on the in-the-moment use of racial color blind strategies has focused primarily on neutral or innocuous contexts (e.g., *Guess Who* game, Apfelbaum et al., 2008b), in many real-world instances, claims of racial color blindness occur after racial conflict or misunderstanding (Scotti, 2017). Therefore, the current research extended prior research by investigating racial color blindness in an ambiguous negative intergroup situation with the potential for intergroup tension. Moreover, we suggest that when an intergroup situation is ambiguously negative, people have the unique opportunity to adopt a secondary strategy for appearing nonprejudiced: *racial conflict blindness*—avoiding mentioning intergroup conflict. Therefore, a further goal of this research was to initially explore these dual strategies and how they work in conjunction. In particular, we examined how suppressing the use of strategic color racial blindness can impact descriptions of intergroup conflict.

To this end, we first review past research on the strategic use of racial color blindness to appear nonprejudiced. Next, we discuss racial biases in ambiguous negative situations and how both avoiding acknowledging race and mentioning conflict in these contexts may interact. Three experiments are then presented in which a new paradigm is introduced to investigate the extent to which non-Black participants use racial labels and mention conflict when describing an interracial interaction and how the suppression of racial color blind strategies impacts racial conflict blindness. Finally, we discuss the potential implications of racial color and conflict blind strategies for diversity goals and race relations.

Strategic Racial Color Blindness

As a strategy to appear unbiased, people may avoid explicitly acknowledging race (Apfelbaum et al., 2012; Bonilla-Silva, 2002; Fein & Spencer, 1997; Kunda & Spencer, 2003; Sinclair & Kunda, 1999). Indeed, research suggests that inducing concerns about being prejudiced can motivate greater endorsement of racial color blindness. For example, in an experiment by Goff, Jackson, Nicholas, and Di Leone (2013), participants completed a measure of racial prejudice, then were randomly assigned to receive false feedback that they were either high or low in negative attitudes toward Blacks. Results revealed that participants who were given high prejudice feedback scored higher on a subsequent strategic racial

color blindness scale than those who were given low prejudiced feedback. That is, those who were given reason to be concerned about being perceived as prejudiced, more strongly endorsed statements such as "Seeing people in terms of race is a significant hindrance to racial harmony." These findings suggest that racial color blindness may be at least partially motivated by a desire to appear unbiased.

Even in contexts where experimenters have examined actual spontaneous behavior, people still employ racial color blind strategies. For example, in a series of studies by Apfelbaum et al. (2008b), participants were presented with a modified *Guess Who Game.* To win this game, participants must identify a target person from an array of people using the fewest questions possible. The game, however, was rigged so that referencing race (e.g., "Is the person Black?") was functional because doing so eliminated a large proportion of nonrelevant targets, thereby helping participants identify the target more efficiently. The results indicated that although 68% to 93% of White participants asked about race when their partner was White, 58% to 67% asked about race when their partner was Black.

Notably, in a study using the same paradigm with children (Apfelbaum et al., 2008a), 10 and 11 year olds used significantly fewer race-related labels than 8 and 9 year olds. These specific age differences are meaningful because at approximately 10 years of age, children typically internalize norms regarding prejudice and have the capacity to self-regulate. The authors suggested that one reason older children were more likely to avoid the use of race is because they wanted to escape the negative social consequences associated with appearing biased. Although a large literature has provided evidence that children attend to race from an early age, research has also demonstrated that racial color blindness increases as children learn social norms and are better able to regulate their behavior according to social expectations (Aboud, 2003; Anzures, Quinn, Pascalis, Slater, & Lee, 2010; for reviews see Kawakami, Friesen, & Vingilis-Jaremko, 2018; Kawakami, Hugenberg, & Dunham, 2019).

Importantly, the present experiments introduced a novel ambiguous context task (ACT) in which participants were instructed to describe the people and events in a photograph depicting Black and White males who, depending on interpretation, may be bumping into each other in a crowded stairwell (see Figure 1). In this way, the ACT depicts an ambiguous negative intergroup situation and was created to advance racial color blind research in numerous ways. First, past work has often focused on contexts in which using racial labels was functional to the primary goal (e.g., succeeding in the *Guess Who* game). For example, in one study, racial color blindness was examined during interactions in which participants were instructed to discuss race (Goff, Jackson, Nichols, & Di Leone, 2013). However, as is the case in many real-life scenarios, the direct relevance of race in the ACT is limited. Although race is one way to distinguish between actors on the ACT, many other ways are also available (e.g., color of shirt). The ACT therefore provides a more
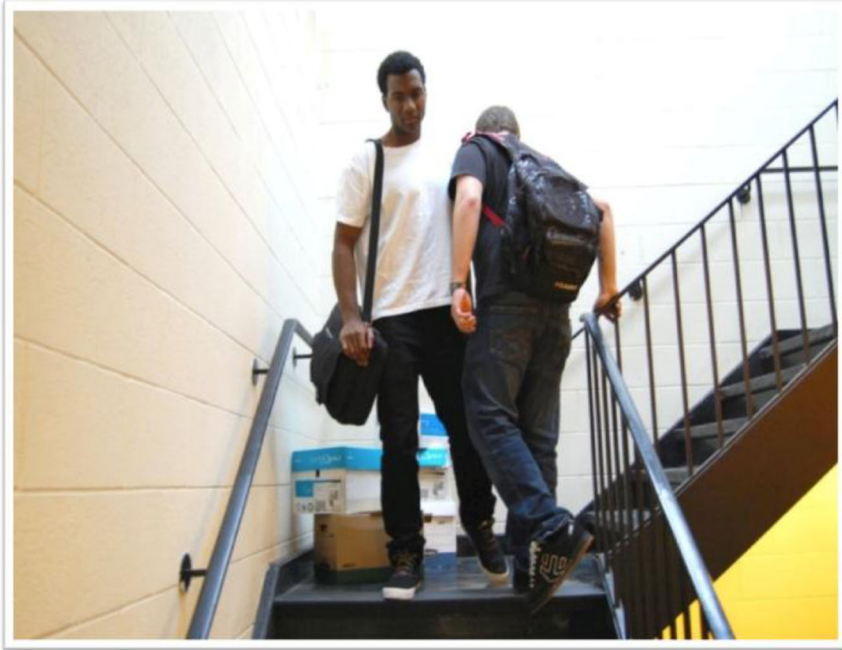
Fig. 1. Cross-race ambiguous context task (ACT). [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

naturalistic task that can provide information on the spontaneous use of strategic use of racial color blindness when racial labels do not objectively facilitate the task at hand.

Second, in real-world situations, claims like "I don't see race" often occur in response to circumstances marked by intergroup conflict or disagreement (Scotti, 2017). Because the use of racial color blindness allows people to believe that they have reduced the chance that others will perceive them as racist (Apfelbaum et al., 2008b; Goff et al., 2013; Neville et al., 2013; Somers et al., 2006), such strategies may be particularly common in contentious situations. However, strategic racial color blindness has typically been studied in neutral or positive contexts, such as the *Guess Who* game. Therefore, it is useful to investigate the prevalence of racial color blindness in a potentially negative context such as in the ACT because in these types of intergroup contexts non-Black participants may be particularly motivated to adopt a racial color blind strategy to appear nonprejudiced (Apfelbaum et al., 2008b). Indeed, when a negative component was added to the Guess Who task by describing it as the "FBI's Ten Most Wanted," the use of race decreased significantly because of potential accusations

of racial profiling (Norton et al., 2006). Given that the ACT provides an ambiguous negative context in which race does not objectively facilitate the completion of the task, we expected that few participants would acknowledge race in their descriptions.

Notably, the concept of strategic racial color blindness has been defined and studied in various ways. For instance, some researchers have conceptualized racial color blindness as an ideology and created an individual difference scale to measure the extent to which people endorse racial color blindness or the practice of ignoring racial differences and inequality (e.g., Frankenberg, 1993; Goff et al., 2013; Neville, Lilly, Duran, Lee, & Browne, 2000). This research has revealed that greater endorsement of a racial color blind ideology is related to negative outcomes, such as the denial, minimizations, or distortion of racial discrimination experienced by non-White minorities and of racial privileges experienced by the White majority (Neville et al., 2013).

Other researchers have operationalized racial color blindness by the extent to which people use racial labels in an intergroup context. This operationalization of racial color blindness is common in social psychological studies (Apfelbaum et al., 2008b; Norton et al., 2006; Pauker, Apfelbaum, & Spitzer, 2015). Rather than focusing on beliefs, this type of research examines the use of racial labels such as Black or White, for example, when playing the *Guess Who* game (Apfelbaum et al., 2008b; Norton et al., 2006). In accordance with this latter research, the focus of the current studies was on spontaneous racial color blind behaviors in an ambiguous negative intergroup context rather than on investigating beliefs about racial color blindness. In particular, we operationalized racial color blindness as the frequency with which participants acknowledge race when completing the ACT.

One important distinction between the conceptualization of racial color blindness as a belief system and spontaneous racial color blind behaviors is their relationship with prejudice. In particular, racial color blind ideology has been shown to be positively related to prejudice and evidence suggests racial color blind beliefs may represent a modern form of prejudice (Neville et al., 2013). Specifically, people who agree with statements such as "Everyone who works hard, no matter what race they are, has an equal chance to become rich" and "Talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension" tend to also score high on measures of explicit prejudice (Neville et al., 2000). Research examining spontaneous in-the-moment use of race, however, find no such relationship with prejudice, suggesting that irrespective of racial attitudes, people are motivated to avoid behaviors that might be construed as racist. As expected, rather than prejudice, previous work has revealed that avoiding the use of racial labels is related to higher scores on scales measuring motivations to appear unprejudiced (Apfelbaum et al., 2008b).

Racial Biases in Ambiguous Intergroup Contexts

Despite efforts to act in ways that imply that they "do not see race," past research in person perception demonstrates people form impressions of others quickly and effortlessly, often using category information regarding race early in this process (Amodio, Bartholow, & Ito, 2014; Cañadas, Rodríguez-Bailón, Milliken, & Lupiáñez, 2013; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Ito & Urland, 2003). People are also highly accurate (99%) in categorizing images of Black and White targets (Friesen et al., 2019), although to appear nonprejudiced, they tend to underestimate this ability (Norton et al., 2006). Importantly, the impact of categorization processes on person judgments can lead to negative evaluations, stereotypic construals, and discriminatory behavior (Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002; Kawakami, Amodio, & Hugenberg, 2017; Kawakami, Dovidio, Moll, Hermsen, & Russin, 2000; Nosek, 2007) and these biases may be especially likely to "leak out" in ambiguous negative intergroup situations.

In particular, numerous studies indicate that social categorization processes are likely to bias the perception of others in negative interactions, such as when there is a disagreement (Kunda, Davies, Adams, & Spencer, 2002) or a potential shove or poke (Duncan, 1976; Lawrence, 1991; Sagar & Schofield, 1980). In an experiment by McGlothlin, Killen, and Edmonds (2005), for example, children were presented with a drawing that depicted one child sitting on the ground in front of a playground swing, whereas another child stood behind the swing. Importantly, it was ambiguous as to whether the child on the ground fell from the swing and the child behind was helping or whether the child on the ground was pushed by the child behind the swing. When participants were asked whether the two children in the drawing were friends, they were more likely to report a friendship when the child behind the swing (i.e., the potential perpetrator) was White compared to Black. Because of stereotypes of Blacks as aggressive (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, Davis, & 2004), racial categorization can lead others to interpret potentially negative intergroup situations as more contentious.

Moreover, a large literature demonstrates that in more ambiguous contexts, racial biases thrive (Devine, 1989; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Son Hing, Chung-Yan, Hamilton, & Zanna, 2008). For example, when qualifications by minority group members are ambiguous or when behavior is not clearly positive or negative, Blacks may be evaluated more negatively. Dovidio and Gaertner (2000), for instance, demonstrated that when hiring a job candidate for a campus position, there was no discrimination when the candidate was clearly qualified or unqualified. However, when qualifications were less obvious, Black compared to White candidates with the same credentials were recommended less often. Similar findings were demonstrated with regard to college admissions (Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002). When applicants had mixed credentials (e.g., strong high school grades but modest standardized scores), Black compared to White students were rated

lower. According to aversive racism theory (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), one reason bias may occur in ambiguous situations is because a lack of clarity allows people to deny that their negative responses to Blacks are related to racist motives. In particular, this theory proposes that if behaviors and contexts are ambiguous and our evaluations and actions can be explained in ways that do not implicate negative racial attitudes, intergroup bias such as those described above will leak out.

Together these theories and findings suggest that in the present research, when participants are instructed to describe an ambiguous negative event, they may be more likely to mention conflict if the photograph depicts an intergroup interaction with a Black and White actor than if the scene depicts two White actors (Duncan, 1976; Lawrence, 1991; McGlothlin et al., 2005; Sagar & Schofield, 1980). Importantly, this may especially be the case if participants do not acknowledge race because such strategic racial color blindness allows people to believe that others cannot construe them as racist. That is, if participants do not appear to notice race, then they may assume that describing an interracial situation as conflictual would likely not be attributed to prejudice and they may, therefore, feel more free to mention negativity. If they are forced to use racial labels, however, participants may avoid mentioning conflict as a secondary strategy to appear nonprejudiced (Mann & Kawakami, 2012; Moskowitz, & Li, 2011). Therefore, we suggest that racial color and conflict blindness may work in conjunction.

Strategic Racial Conflict Blindness

In contrast to situations that are positive or neutral, such as in the *Guess Who* game (Apfelbaum et al., 2008b; Norton et al., 2006), when situations are potentially negative, we assert that people have access to a secondary strategy to appear nonprejudiced, *racial conflict blindness*. Similar to racial color blindness, we define racial conflict blindness as not mentioning conflict in a potentially negative intergroup situation as a strategy for appearing not biased. Because people may believe that mentioning intergroup friction can signal prejudice, people may strategically not acknowledge tension or conflict between White and Black actors. Indeed, theorizing and research suggests that people may avoid describing intergroup negativity when such actions may be perceived as prejudiced by observers (Lawrence, 1991).

For example, people may not be as willing to report negative ratings or stereotypic construals when their audience is Black because the chances of them being perceived as prejudiced may increase. Lawrence (1991), for instance, found that when monitored by a White experimenter and presented with an ambiguous scene, White students described behavior by a Black actor as more negative than the same behavior by a White actor. However, when monitored by a Black experimenter, these students described behavior by a Black actor as more positive

than behavior by a White actor. Presumably, because negative ratings of behavior by a Black actor could be construed as prejudiced by a Black experimenter, participants reduced their negative ratings of ambiguous behaviors to avoid appearing biased. In accordance with aversive racism theory, these results suggest that if responses to a behavior or event have the potential to be seen as prejudiced (e.g., reporting discord between races), then people will modify their initial biased tendencies (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Perry, Murphy, & Dovidio, 2015).

A further goal of the present research was to investigate whether instructing participants to use racial labels when describing the ACT would decrease the extent to which they would acknowledge negativity. Specifically, by preventing participants from using racial color blind strategies to avoid appearing prejudiced, thereby taking away their plausible deniability that their perceptions were not influenced by race, we expected that participants would be less likely to reference the bump and any conflict. In short, by acknowledging race, participants' ability to claim that their perceptions were not influenced by race would be reduced, and therefore they would limit the extent to which their description of the events could be perceived as biased by avoiding any mention of conflict. That is, when unable to demonstrate that they were not prejudiced through strategic racial color blindness, strategic racial conflict blindness would occur.

Overview of Studies

In the current research, we expected that in an ambiguous negative context in which racial labels do not objectively facilitate the task, such as in the cross-race ACT, few non-Black participants would acknowledge race (i.e., they would use a racial color blind strategy). In accordance with aversive racism theory (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), however, given the ambiguity of the situation and that many participants are expected to avoid mentioning race, participants may feel that mentioning conflict would not imply that they are prejudiced. Participants may therefore mention conflict. We also expected that in Study 2, when presented with a cross-race photograph compared to a photograph with two White actors, there would be no difference in the extent to which people would mention race. Both in the cross-race ACT and the same-race ACT, we expected few participants to acknowledge race. Notably, although we expected that participants in the cross-race condition would act in racially color blind ways, as evidence that they do see color, we expected that they would show racial biases in their construal of the event. In particular, we predicted that more participants would mention conflict when describing a photograph with a Black and White actor compared to a photograph with two White actors. Because of the ambiguity of the context and their expected use of strategic racial color blindness, we predicted that participants would not be motivated to mask perceptions of conflict since

they would assume that acknowledging conflict in this context would not imply that they were biased. Finally, we expected that in Study 3 when participants were explicitly instructed to *use* race when describing a cross-race ACT and, therefore, would be unable to demonstrate that they were not prejudiced, they would downplay the negativity in the situation. In particular, we expected that in the *use* race condition, participants would act in racially conflict blind ways by mentioning conflict less than in a standard instructions condition in which they were able to avoid using racial labels.

Study 1

In Study 1, a novel paradigm was used to explore strategic racial color and conflict blindness. Specifically, non-Black participants completed the ACT, which required them to describe the people and events in a photograph depicting an ambiguous negative event. Given the novelty of the ACT, the primary goal of this experiment was to establish baseline expectations related to the frequency of racial color blind and conflict blind strategies with this task. We therefore focused on a cross-race situation in which the photograph depicted a Black and White male bumping into each other in a crowded stairwell. Given prior research examining racial color blindness and negativity (Norton et al., 2006), we expected that many participants would avoid using racial labels. Furthermore, because strategic racial color blindness may allow participants to believe that they will not be deemed a racist (Apfelbaum et al., 2008b; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Goff et al., 2013; Neville et al., 2013; Norton et al., 2006), we expected more participants would mention conflict.

Method

Participants.   Fifty-five non-Black undergraduate students took part in the experiment for course credit. The data from four students were excluded because they failed to follow instructions, resulting in 51 (22 female, 29 males) undergraduates (*M* age = 20 years).[1] A power analysis using G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) based on estimates of effect sizes typical in social and personality psychology (*r* = .21, Fraley & Vazire, 2014; Funder et al., 2014) indicated that 50 participants would be required to reach 80% power. Although much smaller sample sizes have typically been recommended for chi-square tests (Wilson VanVoorhis, & Morgan, 2007), in

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[1]In Study 1, we were not able to provide the ethnic/racial makeup of the participants. Although we used the university's participant prescreening survey to select only non-Black undergraduates to participate in this experiment, we did not collect information related to participants' ethnicity in our study and we no longer have access to the prescreening data.

keeping with our power analysis and conventional recommendations (Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2013), we aimed to stop recruiting at the end of the day that we reached 50 participants.

Procedure.   Upon arrival, participants were seated in private cubicles in front of a computer and asked to complete the ACT. They were informed that they would see an image on the monitor and that their task was to "describe the people in the photograph in one sentence and what you think they are doing in a second sentence." In a practice trial, included to minimize the relevance of race as a variable of interest, participants were first presented with a photograph that depicted two White males conversing in an outside setting. Participants were instructed to provide their responses aloud into a microphone for four seconds. Following the practice image, participants were presented with the critical cross-race photograph depicting a Black and a White male actor bumping into each other as they passed in a stairwell full of boxes, see Figure 1. After completion of the study, participants were debriefed.[2]

Results and Discussion

Before conducting the primary analyses, a research assistant transcribed all responses to the photograph verbatim and three independent coders content analyzed these descriptions. Coders were trained during a session in which they learned our definitions of racial color blindness (i.e., use of racial label) and racial conflict blindness (i.e., describes the bump or any other form of conflict) and were given explicit instructions for rating participants' descriptions. Specifically, coders rated (1) whether the race of the actors was mentioned (yes, no), Cohen's $\kappa = 1.00$, and the specific terms used, and (2) whether conflict was referenced (yes, no), Cohen's $\kappa = .95$. For conflict, when a description acknowledged the bump or referenced any form of disagreement or discord between the actors (e.g., "... looks like there's a confrontation and something might be about to go down ...") coders were instructed to rate the response as yes. If there was no reference to the bump or any conflict, coders were instructed to rate the response as no. The reported Cohen's κs are means of the kappa coefficients produced from each coder pair

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[2]After finishing the ACT but before debriefing, participants completed measures of implicit and explicit racial attitudes to explore the relationship between prejudice and the use of racial color blind and conflict blind strategies. Specifically, participants were presented with a Modern Racism Scale (MRS, McConahay, 1986) and an Implicit Association Test related to attitudes toward Blacks and Whites (IAT, Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). These exploratory analyses indicated that the use of race was not associated with MRS scores ($r = -.13$, $p = .38$) or IAT scores ($r = -.22$, $p = .13$). While mentioning conflict was marginally associated with MRS scores ($r = .28$, $p = .05$), such that greater explicit prejudice was associated with a greater tendency to mention conflict, it was not related to IAT scores ($r = .05$, $p = .73$).

Table 1. Frequency of Mentioning Race and Conflict in the ACT

	Mention Race		Mention Conflict	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Study 1				
Cross-race actors				
Standard instructions	14 (27%)	37 (73%)	27 (53%)	24 (47%)
($N = 51$)				
Study 2				
Cross-race actors				
Standard instructions	18 (21%)	69 (79%)	47 (54%)	40 (46%)
($N = 87$)				
Two White actors				
Standard instructions	13 (16%)	67 (84%)	26 (33%)	54 (67%)
($N = 80$)				
Study 3				
Cross-race actors				
Standard instructions	20 (20%)	82 (80%)	44 (45%)	54 (55%)
($N = 98$)				
Cross-race actors				
Use race instructions	99 (100%)	0 (0%)	19 (19%)	80 (81%)
($N = 99$)				

(Light, 1971). Discrepancies between the three coders in their ratings related to race or conflict were resolved by using the rating that was the same for two of the three coders (Bartholomew, Henderson, & Marcia, 2000).

Rates of mentioning race and the racial labels used. The first primary analysis examined the proportion of participants who acknowledged race (0 = yes, 1 = no) in their description of the photograph. As predicted, a chi-square goodness of fit test revealed that the proportions of participants who mentioned and did not mention race were different than would be expected by chance, X^2 ($N = 51$, 1) = 10.37, $p = .001$. Specifically, only 27% of participants mentioned race, whereas 73% used no racial terms when describing the actors (see Table 1). In examining the specific racial labels used in the ACT descriptions, the results indicated that when describing the White actor, 11 participants (79%) who acknowledged race used the term, "White," and 3 participants (21%) used the term, "Caucasian." When describing the Black actor, 10 participants (71%) who acknowledged race used the term, "Black," 2 participants (14%) used the term, "African American/Canadian," and 2 participants (14%) used another term (i.e., "darker skinned" and "African").

Table 2. Frequency of Specific Strategies in the ACT

	Only Mention Race	Only Mention Conflict	Mention Race and Conflict	Not Mention Race or Conflict
Study 1				
Cross-race actors				
Standard instructions ($N = 51$)	14%	39%	14%	33%
Study 2				
Cross-race actors				
Standard instructions ($N = 87$)	8%	41%	13%	38%
Two White actors				
Standard instructions ($N = 80$)	8%	25%	8%	59%
Study 3				
Cross-race actors				
Standard instructions ($N = 98$)	12%	37%	9%	43%
Cross-race actors				
Use race instructions ($N = 99$)	81%	/	19%	/

Rates of mentioning conflict. A second chi-square goodness of fit test demonstrated that the proportions of participants who mentioned and did not mention conflict were not significantly different than what would be expected by chance, X^2 ($N = 51$, 1) $= .18$, $p = .67$. In particular, when describing the ambiguous negative intergroup interaction, approximately half (53%) of the participants mentioned some conflict and approximately half (47%) did not mention conflict (see Table 1). Table 2 displays the frequencies of participants who only mentioned race, only mentioned conflict, mentioned both race and conflict, or did not mention race or conflict when describing the photograph. Notably, from a total of 51 participants, only 7 (14%) mentioned both race and conflict. Examples of descriptions of the photograph are presented in Table 3.

In summary, the initial results related to the ACT revealed that while only 27% of participants acknowledged the race of the actors, approximately half (53%) of the participants mentioned conflict when describing an ambiguous negative intergroup interaction. Notably, rates of racial color blindness in the current study are relatively high compared to previous research examining racial color blind behavior in more innocuous contexts in which the use of race is functional (e.g., *Guess Who* game, 58–67% mention race, Apfelbaum et al., 2008b). These results

Table 3. Examples of Descriptions using Specific Strategies in Cross-Race, Standard Instruction Conditions in the ACT

Only Mention Race	Study 1	"Two people in this picture - one Black guy, one White guy and they're just going up the stairs and there's nothing else to it."
	Study 2	"I see two males. One looks Africa-American and the other one looks like he is White, and they look like they are university students and it seems like one is trying to go upstairs and one is trying to go down the stairs. And they are just passing each other by."
	Study 3	"Um, two males walking up the stairs, getting ready for class. One may be African-American and the other Caucasian."
Only Mention Conflict	Study 1	"Looks like two people crossing paths on a stairwell and one is about to bump into another and they don't really seem to be doing it intentionally, but it may lead to an exchange of glances, or a small confrontation."
	Study 2	"These people seem like really nice. They are just like walking on the stairs and at some place they can hit each other not on purpose."
	Study 3	"Ok. I see two students that are walking up in a stairway. As well, they are bumping into each other."
Mention Race and Conflict	Study 1	"Two young people, one White, the other Black. Looks like they're bumping into each other going up and down the stairs."
	Study 2	"So, there is a Black male going down the stairs and White man going up the stairs. I think that they just bumped into each other while going up the stairs because it's a narrow staircase."
	Study 3	"Ok, good. K, looks like the Black male is stopping the White male from climbing up the stairs."
Not Mention Race or Conflict	Study 1	"Two school kids. They are walking up and down the stairs - one going up, one coming down."
	Study 2	"I see a pair of students on the staircase. Looks like they are moving into school or residence and they are moving their bags and boxes to their rooms."
	Study 3	"Ok so one person is walking up the stairs in a black t-shirt while the other person is walking down the stairs in a white t-shirt."

support expectations that people may be especially likely to use racial color blind strategies in potentially negative intergroup situations.
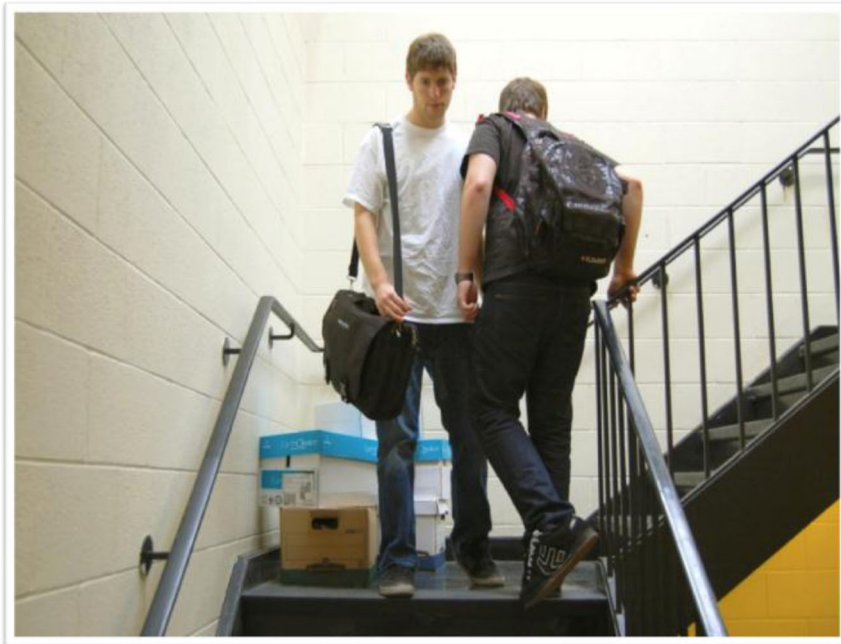
Study 2

The primary goal of Study 2 was to replicate our initial findings from Study 1 and to compare responses in the cross-race situation to a similar photograph that depicted two White actors. We included White actors in this same-race condition because we assumed, based on past studies, that race would be less salient for non-Black participants in this context and so the inclusion of this situation would be a strong test of our hypotheses. In particular, research suggests that in North America for non-Blacks, White is considered the default and therefore a photograph with two White actors would not draw the same attention to race as it does for other racial categories or an intergroup photograph (Hegarty, 2017; Zarate & Sanders, 1999; Zarate & Eliot, 1990). Specifically, we expected that few participants would mention race in the cross-race ACT, thereby demonstrating strategic racial color blindness, and in the same-race ACT, because race is not salient. For mentioning conflict, alternatively, because the use of racial color blindness allows participants to not feel pressure to further demonstrate that they are not prejudiced, we predicted that participants would not control biased interpretations of ambiguous negativity. Therefore, we expected that conflict would be mentioned more in the cross-race compared to the same-race ACT.

Method

Participants and design.   Although 170 undergraduates initially participated in Study 2, three students who identified as Black were removed, leaving 167 (107 females, 60 males) non-Black (39% South Asian [e.g., India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka], 23% East Asian [e.g., China, Philippines, Taiwan], 18% Middle Eastern [e.g., Iran, Palestine, Egypt], 15% White [e.g., Ireland, Italy, Russia], 5% Latinx [e.g., Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia], 1% Other) students (M age $=$ 20 years) who took part in this experiment for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to either an ACT depicting a cross-race interaction ($N = 87$) or an ACT depicting two White males ($N = 80$). Using the racial color blind effect size from Norton et al. (2006, $r = .31$), a power analysis for logistic regressions in G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007, 2009) indicated that 111 participants would be required to reach 80% power. To ensure adequate power and to account for potentially smaller effects, however, we aimed to stop recruiting at the end of the day that we reached 150 participants.[3]

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[3]A sensitivity analysis indicated that our achieved sample ($N = 167$) had 80% power to detect a one-tailed difference of .19 in the proportion of participants who were conflict blind across ACT

Fig. 2. Same-race ambiguous context task (ACT). [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlineli-brary.com]

Procedure.   The procedure was similar to Study 1 with three modifications. The initial practice trial and the time limit for responding to the ACT were removed. Furthermore, a condition in which two White actors were depicted in the ACT was added. Specifically, upon arrival participants were seated in private cubicles in front of a computer. In the cross-race ACT condition, participants were presented with the same photograph depicting a Black and White male bumping into each other in a crowded stairwell. In the same-race ACT condition, participants were presented with a photograph that depicted two White males bumping into each other in a crowded stairwell (see Figure 2). In both conditions, participants were presented with the same instructions used in Study 1. After completion of the study, all participants were debriefed.[4]

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conditions. For example, if the conflict blind rate in the interracial photo condition remained the same (47%), we had 80% power to detect a conflict blind rate of 66% or greater in the white-white photo condition.

[4]As in the previous experiment, Study 2 explored the relationship between implicit and explicit prejudice and the use of racial color blind and conflict blind strategies. Specifically, after finishing the

Results and Discussion

Before conducting the primary analyses, a research assistant transcribed all responses on the ACT verbatim and the same three independent coders from Study 1 content analyzed the descriptions using the same procedure. Specifically, the coders indicated whether the race of the actors was mentioned (yes/no, Cohen's $\kappa = .92$), what labels were used, and whether conflict was described (yes/no, Cohen's $\kappa = .85$).

Effect of ACT condition on mentioning race and the racial labels used.   We expected no difference in rates of mentioning racial labels between cross-race and same-race ACT conditions. To test the effect of ACT condition (cross-race actors = 0, two White actors = 1) on acknowledging race (yes = 0, no = 1), a logistic regression analysis was conducted. As predicted, participants did not differ in the extent to which they referenced race when describing a cross-race interaction and an interaction between two White men, B (1, $N = 167$) = 0.30, $W = 0.54$, $p = .46$, $Exp(B) = 1.34$, 95% CI [0.61, 3.00]. In both conditions, few participants acknowledged race. Specifically, replicating Study 1, when describing the actors in an ambiguous negative cross-race interaction, the proportions of participants who mentioned and did not mention race were different than would be expected by chance, X^2 ($N = 87$, 1) = 29.90, $p < .001$. Only 21% of participants referenced race, whereas 79% did not use racial terms. As expected, when describing the same situation with two White actors, a similar pattern was found. The proportions of participants who mentioned and did not mention race were different than would be expected by chance, X^2 ($N = 80$, 1) = 36.45, $p < .001$. In particular, only 16% of participants referenced race, whereas 84% did not use racial terms (see Table 1).

In examining the specific racial labels used in the ACT in only the cross-race condition, the results indicated that when describing the White actor, 13 participants (72%) who acknowledged race used the term, "White," and 3 participants (17%) used the term, "Caucasian." When describing the Black actor, 10 participants (56%) who acknowledged race used the term, "Black," 4 participants

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ACT but before debriefing, participants completed the Attitudes Toward Blacks Scale (ATB, Brigham, 1993) and the same IAT (Greenwald et al., 1998) used in Study 1. Exploratory analyses indicated that both when the ACT depicted a cross-race interaction and an interaction between two White men, acknowledging race or conflict was not related to the ATB scores ($r = -.08$, $p = .31$; $r = .07$, $p = .35$) or the IAT scores ($r = -.08$, $p = .29$; $r = -.13$, $p = .11$). When examining responses in only the cross-race condition, mentioning race or conflict was not correlated with ATB scores ($r = .02$, $p = .82$; $r = .02$, $p = .84$) or IAT scores ($r = .03$, $p = .82$; $r = -.17$, $p = .15$). When examining responses in only the condition depicting two White men, however, mentioning race was negatively associated with ATB scores, such that greater explicit prejudice was associated with a greater tendency to mention race ($r = -.24$, $p = .03$), but not IAT scores ($r = -.21$, $p = .08$). Mentioning conflict was not associated with ATB or IAT scores ($r = .08$, $p = .47$; $r = -.13$, $p = .28$).

(22%) used the term, "African American/Canadian," and 3 participants (18%) used another term (i.e., "Colored" or "dark skin" or "different races").

Effect of ACT condition on mentioning conflict. In contrast, we expected greater rates of mentioning conflict in the cross-race compared to the same-race ACT condition. A logistic regression analysis that tested the effect of ACT condition (cross-race actors = 0, two White actors = 1) on mentioning conflict (yes = 0, no = 1) was significant, B (1, $N = 167$) = 0.89, $W = 7.71$, $p = .005$, *Exp(B)* = 2.44, 95% CI [1.30, 4.58]. Notably, this analysis revealed that participants were 2.44 times more likely to mention conflict in describing a scenario when a Black and White man were interacting compared to when two White men were interacting. Replicating Study 1, the proportions of participants describing an ambiguous negative context in a cross-race situation who mentioned and did not mention conflict were not significantly different than would be expected by chance, X^2 ($N = 87$, 1) = 0.56, $p = .45$. Specifically, approximately half (54%) of the participants mentioned some conflict and approximately half (46%) did not mention conflict. When both actors were White, however, the proportions of participants who mentioned and did not mention conflict were different than would be expected by chance, X^2 ($N = 80$, 1) = 9.80, $p = .002$. Only 33% of participants mentioned conflict, whereas 67% did not mention conflict (see Table 1). Table 2 displays the frequencies of participants who only mentioned race, only mentioned conflict, mentioned both race and conflict, or did not mention race or conflict when describing the photograph. Notably, in the condition with cross-race actors, from a total of 87 participants, only 11 students (13%) mentioned both race and conflict. In the condition with two White actors, from a total of 80 participants, only 6 students (8%) mentioned both race and conflict.

In summary, the results from Study 2 closely replicated the results of the initial study when describing an ambiguous negative context with a Black and a White actor. In particular, few participants acknowledged race and approximately half mentioned conflict. Alternatively, when describing the same context with two White actors, few participants referenced race or conflict. Notably, rates of mentioning race did not differ between conditions, providing further support for strategic racial color blindness on the cross-race ACT. Importantly, in accordance with previous results and theorizing related to the description of ambiguous behavior as more negative and contentious in an intergroup context (Duncan, 1976; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Perry et al., 2015; Sagar & Schofield, 1980), non-Black participants were more likely to describe conflict when describing an interaction between a Black and White male than when describing an interaction between two White males.

This latter finding is in accordance with decades of research demonstrating racial biases in perceptions of intergroup interactions. To our knowledge, however, this is the first demonstration that race impacts perceptions of *conflict*. Although

past work has focused on other types of biases, such as evaluations of the actors, their qualifications, and intentions (Duncan, 1976; Hodson et al., 2002; Hodson, Hooper, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2005; Lawrence, 1991; McGlothlin et al., 2005; Sagar & Schofield, 1980; Vorauer, 2005), our findings demonstrate that an intergroup context can impact perceived contention between actors. Furthermore, we propose that these biased perceptions of conflict are more likely to leak out because after strategic racial color blindness participants no longer worry about appearing prejudiced. In the final study, we test this assumption by manipulating the use of racial labels and examining its impact on the extent to which participants mention conflict.

Study 3

The primary aim of the next experiment was to initially investigate how acknowledging race impacts the extent to which people mention conflict on the ACT. In particular, we explored whether blocking one means of representing oneself as unbiased (e.g., not acknowledging race) would increase the use of other means of fulfilling this goal (e.g., not acknowledging conflict). To test this hypothesis, we examined whether preventing participants from using racial color blind strategies would decrease the extent to which they would mention conflict in an ambiguous negative interracial context. Specifically, all participants were presented with a cross-race ACT, but only half received the standard instructions. The other half received modified instructions to include race in their descriptions of the cross-race ACT. We expected that when participants were instructed to use race, and therefore would not be able to demonstrate that they were not biased with this strategy, they would minimize reporting conflict compared to the standard instructions condition where participants were free to act in racially color blind ways and establish themselves as nonprejudiced.

Method

Participants and design. Although 204 undergraduates initially participated in Study 3, seven students who identified as Black were removed, leaving 197 (133 females, 64 males) non-Black [34% White (e.g., Croatia, Italy, Russia), 27% South Asian (e.g., India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), 21% East Asian (e.g., China, Philippines, Taiwan), 14% Middle Eastern (e.g., Iran, Palestine, Iraq), 3% Other/Mixed, and 2% Latinx (e.g., Mexico)] students (M age $= 20$ years) who took part in this experiment for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to either a condition with the standard instructions in the ACT ($N = 98$) or to a condition in which they were instructed to use race in the ACT ($N = 99$). Because the effect size related to the impact of acknowledging race on referencing conflict is unknown, as in Study 2, we used the racial color blind effect size from Norton et al. (2006),

$r = .31$) in a power analysis for logistic regressions in G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2007, 2009). These analyses indicated that 111 participants would be required to reach 80% power. To ensure adequate power and to account for potentially smaller effects, however, we aimed to stop recruiting at the end of the day that we reached 200 participants.[5]

Procedure. The procedure was similar to the cross-race condition in Study 1 with two modifications. Specifically, a condition directing participants to use race in the ACT was added and the ACT general instructions were modified. Although in the initial experiments, participants were asked to describe the people and events in the photograph, in Study 3, the instructions were limited to a description of the people. This change allowed us to examine people's spontaneous tendencies to avoid mentioning conflict when not prompted to do so. By removing instructions to describe what was happening, our design allowed for a more stringent test of spontaneous racial conflict blind responses in an ambiguous negative intergroup interaction. Given past research on the reporting of biased perceptions in intergroup contexts (Duncan, 1976; Lawrence, 1991; McGlothlin et al., 2005; Sagar & Schofield, 1980), we nonetheless expected even with these alternative instructions, participants in the standard ACT instructions condition would mention conflict to a similar extent as in Studies 1 and 2. More importantly, we expected that fewer participants in the use race instruction conditions would mention conflict.

Upon arrival, participants in the standard ACT instructions condition were seated in a private cubicle in front of a computer and presented with a cross-race photograph. They were told "In one sentence, describe the people in the photograph." aloud into a microphone while the experimenter remained in the room. In the use race ACT instructions condition, participants were presented with the same image but were told "In one sentence, describe the people in the photograph, including the race and sex of each person." aloud into a microphone while the experimenter remained in the room. After completing the study, participants were debriefed.[6]

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[5]A sensitivity analysis indicated that our achieved sample ($N = 197$) had 80% power to detect a one-tailed difference of .18 in the proportion of participants who were conflict blind across conditions. For example, if the conflict blind rate in the standard instructions condition remained the same as Study 2 (.46), then we had 80% power to detect a conflict blind rate of 64% in the use race condition.

[6]Because a measure of explicit but not implicit attitudes was weakly associated with mentioning conflict (but not race) in Study 1, and neither were associated with racial color or conflict blindness in Study 2, to further explore this relationship, we only included a measure of explicit prejudice, the ATB (Brigham, 1993), in Study 3 after the ACT. In accordance with the findings in Study 2, in the standard ACT instructions condition, mentioning race or conflict was not associated with ATB scores ($r = -.07$, $p = .45$; $r = -.12, p = .25$). Although in the use race ACT instructions condition, correlations between

Results and Discussion

As in the previous experiments, a research assistant transcribed all responses verbatim and the same three independent coders from Study 1 content analyzed the descriptions with the same procedure. Specifically, the coders indicated whether the race of the actors was mentioned (yes/no, Cohen's $\kappa = .99$), what racial labels were used, and whether any conflict between the actors was referenced (yes/no, Cohen's $\kappa = .90$).

Mentioning race and racial labels used in the standard ACT instructions condition. As expected, and replicating the previous studies, the proportions of participants who mentioned and did not mention race in the standard ACT instructions condition were different than would be expected by chance, X^2 ($N = 98, 1) = 34.33, p < .001$. Specifically, only 20% of participants mentioned race, whereas 80% used no racial terms. As instructed, however, all participants (100%) in the use race ACT instructions condition included this characteristic in their descriptions. Because there was no variance in the use of race in the latter condition, a logistic regression examining the use of racial color blind strategies across conditions was not possible.

In examining the rates of racial labels used in each instruction condition separately, the results indicated that in the standard ACT instructions condition when describing the White actor, 14 participants (70%) who acknowledged race used the term, "White," and 4 participants (20%) used the term, "Caucasian." When describing the Black actor, 14 participants (70%) used the term, "Black," 4 participants (20%) used the term, "African American/Canadian," and 2 participants (10%) used another term (i.e., "dark skin" or "different races"). In the Use Race ACT instructions condition when describing the White actor, 72 participants (73%) used the term, "White," 22 participants (22%) used the term, "Caucasian," 2 participants (2%) used the term, "North American or Canadian," and 2 participants (2%) used another term (i.e., "White skin" or "White-skinned"). When describing the Black actor, 73 participants (74%) used the term, "Black," 26 participants (26%) used the term, "African American/Canadian," and 9 participants (9%) used another term (i.e., "African," "African descent," "dark," "dark skin," "South American or African descent," or "different races").

Effect of ACT instructions condition on mentioning conflict. In our primary analysis, we expected rates of mentioning conflict to be greater in the standard

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mentioning race and the ATB scores could not be calculated because all participants mentioned race, mentioning conflict was not related to ATB scores in this condition ($r = -.10, p = .33$).

compared to the use race instructions ACT condition. A logistic regression testing the effect of ACT instructions (standard = 0, use race = 1) on referencing conflict (yes = 0, no = 1) was significant, B (1, N = 197) = 1.23, W = 14.29, p > .001, $Exp(B)$ = 3.43, 95% CI [1.81, 6.50]. As predicted, participants in the standard ACT instructions condition were 3.43 times more likely than those in the use race ACT instructions condition to mention conflict. In accordance with results in the previous experiments, in the standard ACT instructions condition, the proportions of participants who mentioned and did not mention conflict were not significantly different than would be expected by chance, X^2 (N = 98, 1) = 1.02, p = .31. In particular, when describing the ambiguous negative intergroup interaction, approximately half of participants (45%) mentioned conflict and approximately half (55%) did not mention conflict. However, when participants ability to act in racially color blind ways was suppressed because of instructions to use racial labels, the proportions of participants who mentioned and did not mention conflict were different than would be expected by chance, X^2 (N = 99, 1) = 37.59, p < .001. Specifically, only 19% of participants mentioned conflict whereas 81% mentioned no conflict. Table 2 provides the frequencies of participants who only mentioned race, only mentioned conflict, mentioned both race and conflict or did not mention race or conflict when describing the photograph. Notably, in the standard ACT instructions condition, from a total of 98 participants, only 9 students (9%) mentioned both race and conflict. In the use race ACT instructions condition, from a total of 99 participants, 19 students (19%) mentioned both race and conflict.

In the standard ACT instructions condition, the present results closely replicated the findings of Studies 1 and 2 when describing a photograph depicting an ambiguous negative intergroup situation. In particular, under these circumstances, few participants mentioned race when describing the actors in the photograph. Despite differences in instructions and the deletion of a statement asking participants about the events in the photograph, as in the earlier experiments, approximately half of participants mentioned conflict. However, when participants' ability to act in racially color blind ways was prevented in the use race ACT instructions condition, the number of participants who referenced conflict was drastically reduced. In other words, when racial color blind strategies were blocked, participants were much more likely to act conflict blind. These initial results suggest that although avoiding racial labels is a common strategy used to appear nonprejudiced, not mentioning conflict in an intergroup context may also be employed for this purpose when necessary. To our knowledge, these results are the first to suggest that people may employ multiple and flexible strategies to not appear biased in compensatory ways.

General Discussion

In today's society, people are motivated to not appear prejudiced (Apfelbaum et al., 2008a; Crandall et al., 2002; Dovidio et al., 2002; Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2010). The present research aimed to broaden our understanding of strategies that people use to achieve this goal. In particular, the current experiments extended past work on strategic color blindness by investigating the avoidance of racial labels and referencing conflict in an ambiguous negative intergroup context. Notably, we found relatively high rates of strategic color blindness compared to experiment focusing on neutral or positive contexts, such as the *Guess Who* game (Apfelbaum et al., 2008b; Norton et al., 2006). Moreover, the current work extends the intergroup literature by focusing on the influence of race on perceptions of conflict. While past work has demonstrated that racial categorization can impact evaluations of actors and perceptions of their behavior and intentions (Duncan, 1976; Lawrence, 1991; McGlothlin et al., 2005; Sagar & Schofield, 1980), our research indicates that the same ambiguous negative situation may be perceived as more conflictual when it involves a Black and White actor compared to two White actors. These findings contribute to a growing list of race-based biases (Kawakami, 2014; Kawakami et al., 2017).

In accordance with our predictions related to the prevalence of strategic racial color blindness in an ambiguous negative intergroup context, across three studies we found that few non-Black participants used racial labels in a cross-race ACT. Notably, this percentage was similar across experiments (20%–27%) and did not differ from an ACT in which two White males were interacting (16%) in Study 2. The results related to mentioning conflict were also consistent across studies in the standard cross-race ACT conditions. In particular, approximately half of participants mentioned conflict in an ambiguous negative intergroup context (45%–54%), which was significantly more than when two White males were interacting (33%) in Study 2. Importantly, when participants were instructed to use racial labels when describing a cross-race interaction in Study 3, they were significantly less likely (19%) to mention conflict.

Taken together, these results provide initial evidence that people may employ flexible and compensatory strategies to appear nonprejudiced. In particular, they suggest that when describing an ambiguous negative interracial interaction, most non-Black people do not use racial labels. However, when this tactic is thwarted, they avoid referencing conflict. In short, while spontaneous color blindness may in general be the primary strategy, at least in our samples, when this strategy is no longer viable, people resorted to conflict blindness as a secondary strategy to appear nonprejudiced. In this study, it is notable that few participants (9%–14%) used both racial labels and described conflict in completing the cross-race ACT. Despite a general tendency to perceive ambiguous negative situations in

a contentious way, non-Black participants may be amenable to acknowledging either race or conflict, but they were not eager to mention both simultaneously.

Notably, unlike racial color blind ideology (Neville et al., 21013), in the present research, neither racial color or conflict blind responses on the cross-race ACT were significantly related to explicit or implicit prejudice (see footnotes 2, 4, and 6). This is consistent with past work examining spontaneous racial color blind behavior (Apfelbaum et al., 2008b) and suggests that whether they are high or low in prejudice, most people are motivated to be viewed as nonprejudiced and use racial color blindness, conflict blindness, or both to achieve this goal. Thus, although ideological color blind beliefs that race and racism are not important are related to greater levels of prejudice (Neville et al., 2000), the extent to which people *spontaneously* avoid mentioning race in an intergroup context, tells us little about their level of prejudice. Instead, these responses should be theoretically related to participants' level of motivations to present themselves as nonprejudiced. Indeed, previous work examining in-the-moment racial color blind behavior using the *Guess Who* paradigm has demonstrated that avoiding race is positively related to motivations to avoid appearing prejudiced (Apfelbaum et al., 2008b), and future work should examine whether this relationship also holds for responses on the cross-race ACT.

The present findings raise the questions of when, and in which contexts, it is acceptable to mention race and to describe a potentially negative interracial situation. The avoidance of using racial labels when describing minorities and not mentioning negativity when discussing cross-race contexts suggests that people may believe that there is something inherently negative about being a racial minority or with interracial discord and disagreements. Further research is needed to investigate whether acknowledging another person's race or referencing a negative interaction is experienced negatively by minority and majority group members.

Future research may also productively investigate how the valence of a particular interracial situation (i.e., positive, neutral, or negative) together with the ambiguity of the event might affect tendencies to describe the situation more objectively (i.e., using racial labels and accurately describing the event). Perhaps within a positive interracial context, people would be more open to utilizing racial labels or perhaps when the event was less ambiguous, and was clearly positive or negative, people would not show bias when describing the valence of an event. More likely, however, is that racial biases may be more evident in ambiguous negative rather than positive situations (Lawrence, 1991). One limitation in the current work is that the perceived valance of the interaction depicted on the ACT was not directly measured. It is therefore recommended that future research collect perceptions of the ACT, specifically testing the extent to which the interaction is perceived as ambiguous and its perceived valance.

Another limitation of the present research is our reliance on non-Black undergraduates as participants. This focus limits our ability to generalize the present

results to more diverse populations. We therefore encourage researchers to extend the current findings to other samples and in particular, to Black participants. Indeed, research suggests that, albeit for different reasons, some Black people endorse a racial color blind ideology (Neville, Coleman, Falconer, & Holms, 2005; Neville et al., 2013). However, as with non-Blacks, racial color blind ideologies when held by Blacks can have negative downstream consequences, such as the internalization of racial discrimination (Neville, Coleman, Falconer, & Holmes, 2005). It is, therefore, important to investigate whether Black participants are also motivated to avoid racial labels when describing ambiguous negative intergroup contexts and whether racial color blind tendencies influence the rate of mentioning conflict. If Black participants' motivations for ignoring race diverge from non-Black participants, racial color and conflict blind strategies may work in very different ways.

Future research should also investigate responses to ambiguous negative situations involving two Black actors along with images of two White actors in a same-race ACT. In the current experiments, we were interested in testing racial color blindness by comparing the use of racial labels when an interaction was interracial, and thus race was salient, to when race was assumed to not be salient for non-Black participants, for example when the ACT depicted two White actors (Hegarty, 2017; Zarate & Sanders, 1999; Zarate & Eliot, 1990). It is important, however, to explore whether non-Black participants do not mention race in a same-race context with two Black actors and if not, whether the reason for avoiding race is because race is not salient, because they believe that using race is unfair to Blacks (Goff et al., 2013), or because they are trying to create the appearance that minorities do not differ from the White majority and that they are not prejudiced (Neville et al., 2013). It would also be important to investigate and compare how Black participants would respond to an intergroup interaction compared to two White actors interacting and two Black actors interacting. Future work, therefore, should examine when race is salient in ambiguous negative contexts, for whom, and when people are motivated to avoid acknowledging race.

The current findings have important implications for initiatives aimed at achieving equity. For example, if affirmative action policies require people to explicitly acknowledge race, it may inadvertently trigger alternative strategies that are perceived to be related to not appearing biased. In the present research, when people were obliged to use racial labels, they compensated by avoiding mentioning conflict. In other contexts, when people are required to take minority group status into account in decision making hiring processes, they may attempt to demonstrate that they are nonprejudiced in other ways (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). Thus acknowledging race could potentially have positive downstream consequences. However, if referencing race is perceived to be a nonprejudiced action, as may be the case with regard to affirmative action recommendations, then using racial labels may actually backfire and result in less egalitarian behavior in other

domains. Just as initial positive behavior toward racial minorities may lead to moral credentialing and subsequently more biased judgements (Monin & Miller, 2001), if using racial labels is perceived to be a demonstration that the actor is not prejudiced, then more rather than fewer negative racial responses may ensue (Mann & Kawakami, 2012). A potentially fruitful avenue for future research is to investigate when the use and avoidance of racial labels is deemed to be related to nonprejudiced versus biased behaviors.

While the present research has focused on the suppression of racial color blindness on the use of other strategies such as mentioning conflict to appear nonprejudiced, previous research has investigated the adverse effects of racial color blindness. Downstream consequences of such strategies include impaired communication and negative nonverbal behavior. For example, not acknowledging race is related to appearing less friendly and making less eye contact with other-race partners (Apfelbaum et al., 2008b; Norton et al., 2006). Research has also demonstrated that racial color blindness can lead to a decreased likelihood that discrimination will be recognized and reported (Apfelbaum et al., 2010). This link between racial color blind behavior and subsequent prejudice is troubling since this process may mask bias and reinforce false notions of a post-racial society. In short, a racial color blind approach to managing diversity may obscure the ability of interaction partners to accurately perceive and define prejudice.

More generally, research indicates that acting in unprejudiced ways is challenging and that managing the goal to appear unbiased can sometimes undermine interaction quality. For example, goals that emphasized avoiding appearing prejudiced, compared to strategies that emphasized approaching interracial interactions, led to less positive outcomes (Plant, Devine, & Peruche, 2010). Goals to avoid appearing prejudice also showed more depletion of self-regulation resources (Trawalter & Richeson, 2006) and were found to be more related to an external rather than internal motivation to be nonprejudiced (Plant et al., 2010). Thus, racial color blind and conflict blind strategies may ironically result in more negative interracial interactions.

Notably in Study 2, although only a few participants in the cross-race condition acknowledged race in their descriptions of the actors, they did reference conflict more when describing an interaction between a Black and White male than between two White males. These findings indicate that they did see race and that it did influence their perceptions of events. This focus on appearing nonprejudiced, rather than being nonprejudiced, and its potential association with external goals rather than internal goals, suggests that the needs of the perceiver rather than the target may be at the forefront of this process. While racial color blind strategies may ostensibly be used to foster the same treatment of all, the ultimate goal in employing these tactics may be more related to self-presentation concerns and masking bias rather than preventing it. Notably, recent research has demonstrated that attempts to appear nonprejudiced, such as avoiding negativity, may not

be well-received by racial minority group members (Major et al., 2016). In fact, Black participants who were suspicious of White interaction partners' motives reacted negatively to positive evaluations and found the feedback of Whites to be disingenuous.

Although celebrating diversity may be valued in society, the present findings suggest that people may often choose the alternative route of acting in racially color blind ways (Apfelbaum et al., 2010; Rattan & Ambady, 2013). While the latter strategy may obscure racial differences in an effort to fulfill the goal to appear nonprejudiced, the former strategy recognizes that acknowledging and supporting racial differences can have positive outcomes. For example, within an organizational context, research has shown that diverse groups are more innovative and that simply interacting with individuals from different groups prompts people to work harder and be better prepared in anticipation of alternative viewpoints (Galinsky et al., 2015).

Even though acknowledging diversity may be a starting point, it is important that inequities that are often associated with such differences are also taken into account (Bell & Hartmann, 2007). Notably, when participants in the current research were obliged to reference race, they were less likely to mention interracial conflict. To truly celebrate and appreciate differences, however, a full understanding and appreciation of the basis behind such differences is critical. That means the concurrent acknowledgement of both racial differences and potential or actual negativity is important. In short, we believe that people should be encouraged to think about race *and* racial conflict. Furthermore, we recommend that future work on racial color blind interventions consider racial conflict blindness and its role as a secondary strategy to appear nonprejudiced.

Social policies should therefore seek to extend the use of diversity language to include racial labels and differences, even when these themes may be uncomfortable. The current research suggests that diversity is often not acknowledged and when it is, conflict is not reported. By masking such negative intergroup observations, however, people's ability to understand, appraise, and address a situation effectively is limited and negative intergroup situations that could be addressed may instead be ignored. A broad range of research has demonstrated that interethnic and interracial interactions are prone to misinterpretations and misunderstandings (Dovidio et al., 2002; Friesen et al., 2019; Holoien, Bergsieker, Shelton, & Alegre, 2015; Shelton, Douglass, Garcia, Yip, & Trail, 2014; Vorauer, 2005; Weisbuch & Ambady, 2008). To promote group differences without recognizing the persistent inequalities underlying such differences, does not paint a full picture of the meaning of diversity. In the current research, when people avoid mentioning conflict when acknowledging race, it may obscure the grounds for interracial differences. Such attempts to omit negative information, may therefore not effectively foster prejudice reduction. An appreciation of racial diversity that is not bound to a positive context has the potential to address inequalities and

intergroup conflict head on and represent a more genuine and fruitful approach to managing diversity that maximizes its benefits for all parties involved.

In summary, the current research highlights the pervasiveness of racial color blind and conflict blind strategies to appear nonprejudiced when describing an ambiguous negative interracial interaction. While avoiding the use of racial labels may not be related to malignant intentions, it may work to reinforce hierarchical relations between groups, obscure unfair treatment, and undermine motivations to confront bias (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2015; Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008). In contrast to celebrating diversity and acknowledging potential differences related to racial categories, racial color blind strategies ignore group differences and their importance to its members. Valuing diversity in all contexts, rather than selectively acknowledging race or intergroup conflict, is our recommendation for improving intergroup relations.

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FRANCINE KARMALI is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Toronto. She received her Ph.D. in social psychology from York University. Her research focuses on intergroup cognitive processes and behavior. Francine uses a variety of methods to investigate the precursors and consequences of social categorization based on race and gender. She has also published research on behavioral, affective, physiological, and cognitive responses to expressions of outgroup bias. Francine is currently exploring the interactive effects of race and nonverbal cues on person perception and judgements, as well as the boundaries and consequences of strategic color blind behavior.

KERRY KAWAKAMI is a professor of psychology at York University. Her Ph.D. in social psychology is from the University of Toronto. Her research interests include face perception, social categorization, prejudice, and stereotyping. A primary aim of this work is to explore strategies to reduce implicit intergroup biases

using a variety of social cognitive methodologies. Her research has been supported by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Canadian Foundation for Innovation Fund (CFI), and the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). She has received the Premiers Research Excellence Award and the Gordon Allport Intergroup Relations Prize in 2000 and 2018 from Division 9 of the American Psychological Association.

ELYSIA VACCARINO is a Ph.D. candidate in social psychology at York University. She is interested in stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Currently, Elysia is exploring expectations and perceptions related to people who confront discrimination and contextual factors that influence these perceptions. Elysia also investigates the impact of color blind strategies on intergroup relations.

AMANDA WILLIAMS is a lecturer in psychology at the University of Bristol. She received her PhD in social psychology from York University. Amanda uses a multi-discipline and multi-method approach to advance our theoretical understanding of the automatic components that underlie social cognition, gaining a richer understanding of when and how prejudicial and stereotypical beliefs develop and how these beliefs influence behavior toward others.

CURTIS PHILLS is an assistant professor of psychology at the University of North Florida. His PhD in social psychology is from York University. His program of research is primarily driven by three questions: (1) What types of biases (including prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination) are present in our society? (2) How are these biases related to one another? and (3) How can we reduce them? He is also interested in how biases develop and their impact on people beyond discrimination.

JUSTIN FRIESEN is an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Winnipeg. His PhD in social psychology is from the University of Waterloo. Justin investigates the psychological motivations, such as needs for control, system justification, and trust, that affect social inequality, stereotyping, and ideology. His recent research has focused on how visual attention relates to intergroup bias and gender inequality. His research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada (SSHRC).