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**Explicit and Implicit Perceptions of Non-Whiteness and  
Interracial Interaction Reluctance in the United States**

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**Abstract**

The study examines how explicit and implicit perceptions of people of color are related to interracial interaction reluctance in the United States. A total of 169 college students completed a self-administered survey. The present analysis focuses on responses of 82 White (Caucasian) and 37 African American participants. Thirty-one of the 119 participants also took the 'Black and White' Implicit Association Test (IAT, Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) in which they were asked to make prompt associations between White/Black persons and descriptive words within short time limits. Explicit perceptions of non-Whiteness were measured in three dimensions: distinctness, inferiority, and incompatibility. The results indicated that implicit, automatic preferences for Blacks among African American participants were positively associated with their reluctance to interact with Whites, whereas the association between White participants' preferences for Whites and interracial interaction reluctance failed to reach statistical significance. As for explicit perception measures, regression results showed that perceived non-White distinctness and incompatibility were significant predictors for interracial interaction reluctance among Whites, whereas perceived non-White inferiority and incompatibility were positive indicators of the reluctance among Blacks.

In the 1970s, Henri Tajfel and John Turner made an undisputed contribution to our understanding of inter-group prejudice through social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The theory contends that given even the slenderest of criteria such as nationality or skin color, we naturally split people into two groups: an "in-group" and an "out-group." Based, in part, on the desire to think highly of ourselves, we tend to think more highly of people in the in-group than those in the out-group---a belief anchored only in perceived group identity. The disparity hypothesis (Bahk, Woesti, & Cushing, 2003) suggests that the greater the perceived disparity towards out-group members, the lower the inclination to get involved in inter-group interactions with them. It is possible that in an effort to corroborate the in-groupness among those who share certain perceptions of prestigious social identity, people may distance themselves as much as possible from those who they think seem unlikely to belong to their in-group. Notably, this distancing behavior that has been manifested, and researched, more conspicuously in residential, educational, and recreational settings is often based on skin color, or race----a notion that has already begun to be discarded by intellectuals as a false conceptualization that misleads individuals in their perception of others (Adelman & Gocker, 2007; Montagu, 1942; Zack, 1993).

The contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) proposes that under right conditions, contact between members of different groups will reduce prejudice between the groups and increase positive and tolerant inter-group attitudes. Although there have been contradictory findings on specific conditions in which contact enhances inter-group understanding (see for review, Pettigrew, 1998), the contact hypothesis has continuously gained popularity among social and behavioral researchers, mainly because of its simplicity and its underlying ideological implications (Connolly, 2000). In most research on the contact hypothesis, however, inter-group contact has been studied as an antecedent condition for generating various social effects such as ameliorating inter-group relations. The present study deals with inter-group contact as an outcome variable. In particular, the study focuses on how inter-group perceptions of disparity increase or decrease inter-group contact. Avoidance or reduction in inter-group contact can result from an individual's reluctance to interact with out-group members, categorized based on perceived social identity. More specifically, the present investigation is intended to examine how perceptions of non-Whiteness are related to interracial interaction reluctance among Whites and non-Whites in the United States.

### **Interracial Interaction Reluctance**

While the construct communication apprehension is now commonly regarded as a trait (McCroskey and Beatty, 1998), McCroskey and Richmond (1998) acknowledge that the willingness-to-communicate (WTC) scale may be subject to possible cultural variations. Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) argued that due to relatively higher levels of novelty, uncertainty, unfamiliarity, and dissimilarity, the contexts of interethnic and intercultural communication would likely engender anxiety among some individuals involved. Later, Toale and McCroskey (2001) reported that ethnocentrism (negatively judging another culture by the standards of one's own culture) is positively related to interethnic communication apprehension. That is, the higher the level of ethnocentrism, the higher the level of interethnic communication apprehension. In another series of studies, Bahk and Jandt (2003a, 2004) have shown that Whites and non-Whites have

different perceptions of social identity based on skin color of themselves and others and that these perceptions are to some extent associated with interracial communication anxiety. For example, it was empirically demonstrated that non-White individuals tend to have a higher awareness of skin color than do Whites and that among some non-Whites the perception of Whiteness is positively related to the level of interracial interaction anxiety (Bahk & Jandt, 2003a, 2004).

As an application of earlier conceptualizations of communication avoidance such as "reticence" (Phillips, 1968), "unwillingness to communicate" (Burgoon, 1976), and "willingness to communicate" (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987) to inter-group contexts, the present study introduces the construct of "intergroup interaction reluctance," defined as "inclination not to interact with members of an out-group." The study focuses on examining the relationship between inter-group perceptions and inter-group interaction reluctance. In particular, drawing upon the disparity hypothesis (Bahk, Woesti, & Cushing, 2003), we predict that the level of perceived disparity is positively associated with interaction reluctance between Whites and non-Whites in U.S. society.

Prior studies using the measures of interracial perceptions and attitudes have mostly relied on explicit, self-report responses. In the field of psychology, however, there have been persistent attempts to measure inter-group attitudes in implicit ways. Psychologist Anthony Greenwald and his colleagues, for example, developed what they call the Implicit Association Test (IAT) to measure people's implicit attitudes towards various socially identifiable groups, typically based on such characteristics as race, sex, and age (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998).

### **Implicit Racial Attitudes**

Greenwald, McGhee, and Schwartz (1998) define explicit attitudes and beliefs as those that are directly expressed or publicly stated, such as self-report questionnaires. Implicit attitudes and beliefs, on the other hand, refer to attitudes that are hidden from public view and even from conscious awareness or conscious control (Greenwald and Banaji, 1995). Explicit and implicit attitudes may not be the same. One explanation is that a person may be unwilling to accurately report some attitudes. A second explanation for explicit-implicit disagreement is that a person may be unable to accurately report an attitude. These two explanations are similar to the Johari window: hiding something from others and something being hidden from the person himself/herself. Implicit and explicit attitude measures should agree when people are both aware of and willing to report their associations.

Skin color was one of the first topics investigated by the developers of the IAT. Users see faces of Blacks and Whites and words that have either a good or bad connotation. Faces were used under the assumption that faces do not require the knowledge of a language to make a judgment. Categorization is made using the "E" or "I" key on the keyboard. The test is divided into congruent and non-congruent portions. For example, in the stereotype congruent portion a common key is used for "White and Good" or "Black and Bad" and in the stereotype non-congruent portion a common key is used for "White and Bad" or "Black and Good." Generally, researchers using the IAT find that it is easier for subjects of one group to pair images of their group with pleasant words—and easier to pair the opposite group with unpleasant imagery. It is argued that this reveals underlying biases. Past research has found that White Americans on average have positive IAT scores on the IAT-Race task, even when they are totally

unprejudiced in their overt attitudes and behavior. Racial prejudice as indexed by the IAT would likely be associated with interracial interaction reluctance. Although not empirically evidenced, the racism literature has persistently discoursed on practices of segregation and separation in social activities and gatherings between White and non-White groups in U.S. society. As Toale and McCroskey (2001) suggested, individuals negatively judging members of another group by the standards of one's own group are likely to exhibit higher levels of inter-group interaction reluctance. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated for empirical testing:

H1: Implicit racial preferences for Whites are positively related to interracial interaction reluctance.

### **Explicit Perceptions of Non-Whiteness**

Bahk and Jandt (2003a, 2004) developed an instrument, called "Being White in America Scale" (BWAS), to measure people's perceptions of White racial dominance in the U.S. The instrument deals with whether Whites are perceived to be more dominant, superior, and privileged than non-Whites in U.S. society. The present study, however, focuses on the perceptions of non-Whiteness as influencing the level of interracial interaction reluctance among both Whites and non-Whites. Of particular concern is the relationship between the perception of non-White racial disparity and the level of interracial interaction reluctance. Perceived racial (non-White) disparity is regarded as consisting of three dimensions: distinctness, inferiority, and incompatibility (Bahk & Jandt, 2003b).

### **Perceived Non-White Distinctness**

Perceived racial distinctness refers to the extent to which one perceives his/her own racial group to be dissimilar to his/her interactant's racial group in values, beliefs, and life styles (Bahk & Jandt, 2003b). Perceived non-White distinctness represents the extent to which one perceives non-Whites to be dissimilar to Whites. It is possible that different individuals perceive different levels of non-White distinctness. The context of interracial communication is likely to be characterized by high levels of novelty, uncertainty, and unfamiliarity and, as a result, generate anxiety or uneasiness among some individuals (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). This can be more so when an individual considers one racial group (e.g., non-Whites) to be much different from another (e.g., Whites). Perceiving others to belong to an out-group, can create an impression that they have different values, beliefs, and behavioral styles. The perception of racial distinctness can cause individuals to experience unfamiliarity and uncertainty and to exhibit anxiety or uneasiness in interracial interactions (Gudykunst, 1985; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984). Thus, the following hypothesis is tested empirically:

H2: Explicit perceptions of non-White distinctness are positively associated with interracial interaction reluctance.

### **Perceived Non-White Inferiority**

Bahk and Jandt (2003b) define perceived racial inferiority as the extent to which an individual considers his/her own racial group to be lower in social status and less privileged than the group in comparison. Perceiving one's own racial group to be either superior or inferior to another group can influence his/her interaction with members of the target group. Toale and McCroskey (2001) suggest that individuals' ethnocentric attitudes towards racial/ethnic out-groups (i.e., tendencies to perceive racial/ethnic out-groups to be inferior) are positively related to interracial/interethnic communication

anxiety. It is expected that interracial interaction reluctance can also be observed among non-Whites who perceive themselves to be inferior to Whites in U.S. society. Jackson, Shin, and Wilson (2000) argue that through acknowledging the superiority and privilege of Whites in U.S. society, people who identify themselves as "non-Whites" come to internalize their status as inferior. Non-White individuals who absorb such ideology may believe that their White interaction partners regard them as inferior, unprivileged, and subordinate. It is possible that non-Whites' self-identification as belonging to an inferior racial group causes them some levels of reluctance to interact with Whites. Those who identify themselves as the targets of constant judgments by the superior/dominant group's rules and norms may find themselves in anxious positions when they encounter members of the superior group. Hence, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H3: Explicit perceptions of non-White inferiority are positively associated with interracial interaction reluctance.

#### **Perceived Non-White Incompatibility**

Perceived racial incompatibility represents the extent to which an individual regards his/her own racial group and the group in comparison as not agreeable or congenial to each other and considers it difficult or useless to make efforts to learn about, and adapt to, the target group (Bahk & Jandt, 2003b). The level of interracial interaction reluctance is also likely to be related to the extent to which individuals, either White or non-White, perceive non-Whites to be incompatible with Whites. It is possible that different individuals might exhibit different levels of perceived racial incompatibility. No matter what levels of racial distinctness and inferiority---the two other dimensions of racial disparity---they perceive, some individuals might find it more or less difficult than others to learn about, adapt to, and get along with members of a racial out-group. That is, the perceptions of interracial incompatibility are also likely to produce reluctance to interact with members of a racial out-group. The following hypothesis is also added:

H4: Explicit perceptions of non-White incompatibility are positively associated with interracial interaction reluctance.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

A total of 169 students enrolled at a mid-size West Coast university completed a self-administered survey. Thirty-one of them also took the "Black-White" Implicit Association Test (IAT). Since the Race IAT used in the present study related only to White and African Americans, responses of other racial groups (i.e., Asian, Hispanic, and Native Americans) were excluded from the analysis. The mean age of the participants (82 White and 37 African Americans) was 24.9 yr. ( $SD = 7.3$ ). Of them, 41 were men and 78 women. There were no significant differences ( $p > .05$ ) in the composition of gender and age between White and African Americans.

#### **Instruments**

The questionnaire used in this study contains scales and question items that measure: 1) the perception of non-Whiteness in terms of distinctness, inferiority, and incompatibility, 2) the reluctance to interact with non-Whites (for White participants) or with Whites (for non-White participants), 3) the anxiety experienced during interactions with Whites (for non-Whites) or with non-Whites (for Whites), and 4) the perception of Whiteness. Participants also indicated their demographic characteristics such as sex, age, and race.

### **Perceived Non-White Distinctness**

Perceived non-White disparity consisting of three dimensions (distinctness, inferiority, and incompatibility) was measured by the BNWAS (Being Non-White in America Scale)---a 16-item Likert-type scale. The BNWAS has three sections covering the three dimensions of non-White disparity perception respectively. The first section containing seven items measures the level of *perceived non-White distinctness*---the first dimension of the construct *perceived non-White disparity*. The 7-item Likert-type instrument has statements that relate to perceived dissimilarities between Whites and non-Whites in various aspects (e.g., life philosophies/worldviews, life values and styles, and interpersonal dealings/relationships). Participants indicated their agreement or disagreement with each of the statements on a 5-point scale anchored by 'strongly disagree' (1) and 'strongly agree' (5). The instrument includes such statements as "Non-White people are different from Whites in many ways," "Non-Whites have different life values than do Whites," and "Non-Whites tend to deal with their problems differently than do Whites." A Cronbach internal reliability of the scale was  $\alpha = .81$ .

### **Perceived Non-White Inferiority**

The second dimension *perceived non-White inferiority* was indexed by the next 5 items of the BNWAS. The items measure the extent to which a person perceives non-White people to be underprivileged, disadvantaged, and less powerful, compared to Whites in U.S. society. The scale contains statements such as "In the U.S. society, non-White people are less privileged than Whites," "Non-Whites are disadvantaged economically in the U.S.," and "Non-Whites are less powerful in the U.S." The items were scored such that the higher the values, the greater the level of perceived inferiority of non-Whites compared to Whites in the U.S. society. An internal reliability of the scale was  $\alpha = .74$ .

### **Perceived Racial Incompatibility**

*Perceived racial incompatibility* as the third dimension of perceived racial disparity was measured by 4 items. The scale contains statements that relate to whether respondents believe that Whites and non-Whites are incompatible, i.e., hard to mingle and get along with each other. For example, the scale includes items such as "There are incompatible differences between non-Whites and Whites," "Non-Whites and Whites do not mingle well," and "It is important to establish good relations between non-Whites and Whites" (R, scores reversed). The items were scored such that the higher the values, the greater the level of perceived incompatibility between non-Whites and Whites. An internal reliability of the scale was  $\alpha = .72$ .

### **Interracial Interaction Reluctance**

Interracial interaction reluctance was measured by the Interracial Interaction Reluctance Scale (IRIRS)---an 11-item Likert-type scale. The scale used in the present study consists of 11 statements that relate to reluctance that Whites and non-Whites have in their interaction with each other. The measure contains such items as "I do not like situations in which I have to interact with non-Whites [Whites]," "I feel more comfortable in interactions with Whites [non-Whites] than with non-Whites [Whites]," and "I have more fun at parties with Whites [non-Whites]." An inter-item reliability of this scale was  $\alpha = .84$ .

### Perceptions of White Racial Dominance

The questionnaire also contains such scales as BWAS (Being White in American Scale) and IRCAS (Interracial Communication Anxiety Scale) that have been used in Bahk and Jandt's prior studies (Bahk & Jandt, 2003a; 2004). The BWAS ("Being White in America" Scale) is used to measure the extent to which each respondent perceives White people, currently the majority group of U.S. society, to be distinct, superior, privileged, dominant, and unsociable, compared to other racial groups in the United States. The BWAS is a Likert-type measure in which subjects indicate their agreement or disagreement with each of the 25 statements on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5) (Bahk & Jandt, 2004). For example, the scale includes statements such as "White people have privilege in the United States," "The politics in the United States are dominated by Whites," "White people are regarded as superior to people of other racial groups in the United States," and "Whites tend to choose to interact with Whites rather than non-Whites in social situations." A reliability of this scale was  $\alpha = .92$ .

### Interracial Communication Anxiety

The level of communication anxiety experienced in interaction with White people was also measured by using the IRCAS (Interracial Communication Anxiety Scale), adapted from Booth-Butterfield and Gould's (1986) CAI (Communication Anxiety Inventory) (Bahk & Jandt, 2003a). The CAI is a 41-item self-report scale, similar to McCroskey's PRCA-24 (McCroskey, 1982), that relates to three contexts (dyadic, small group, and public speaking) and consists of two forms: Form Trait (21 items) and Form State (20 items). For Form Trait of the CAI, four ordinal response options were used: "almost never," "sometimes," "often," and "almost always." For Form State, they used a 4-point response format from "not at all" to "very much so." The IRCAS is a 5-point Likert-type scale consisting of 15 items adopted from both forms of the CAI and transformed to relate only to the context of interracial interaction. Respondents indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with each of the 20 statements by marking an appropriate number on a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The measure contains such items as "I often become nervous when I speak with non-White [White for non-White participants] people in the United States," "I often feel distressed after interacting with non-White [White] people," and "My body often feels tense and stiff when I speak with non-White [White] people." An inter-item reliability of this scale was  $\alpha = .92$ .

### Implicit Racial Perceptions

Implicit perceptions of non-Whites were measured by using the race version of the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). The IAT is a measure of automatic, i.e., relatively uncontrolled, associations between social groups, based on gender, age, race, etc., and commonly stereotyped attributes. The Web IAT program uses Java Applet and CGI (Common Gateway Interface) technology to, once downloaded, present stimuli and measure responses through the respondent's computer (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). The Race IAT uses labels (e.g., "Black" and "White") and morphed faces of African Americans and European (White) Americans and concepts of positive (e.g., joy, love, peace, wonderful, glorious, and happy) and negative (e.g., failure, agony, evil, awful, terrible, and nasty) attributes. The "Black-White" IAT used in the present study first asks participants to match, as quickly as possible, each of

exemplar faces of African and European Americans appearing on their computer screen in a mixed order with its appropriate category label (i.e., "African American" or "European American"). Participants are then asked to sort various positive and negative attributes into two categories: "Good" and "Bad." The "e" key is pressed for images or words described by the left concept(s) and the "i" key for images or words described by the right concept(s). In the next section, a mixed set of faces and attribute words are presented for classification while one racial category and one attribute category are assigned to the same key, i.e., "European American" and "Good" on the left and "African American" and "Bad" on the right. Finally, the combinations of words are switched, i.e., "African American" and "Good" on the left and "European American" and "Bad" on the right. For the purpose of statistical analysis, responses of the participants were coded into one of three levels: 1) preferences for Blacks, 2) no preferences for either Blacks or Whites, and 3) preferences for Whites. The responses were scored such that higher values indicate greater preferences for Whites over Blacks, and vice versa.

### Results

Table 1 presents the IAT data for White and Black participants. The results show that a majority of White participants (77.3%) revealed their implicit preferences for Whites over Blacks, whereas the responses of Black participants were distributed more evenly across the three levels (i.e., 22.2% for White preferences, 44.4% for no preferences, and 33.3% for Black preferences),  $\chi^2 = 8.17$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .05$ . Explicit perceptions of non-Whiteness were measured by using the BNWAS.

**Table 1 - Implicit Association Responses by Whites and Blacks**

Implicit Association (IA) Responses	<u>Whites</u>		<u>Blacks</u>	
	N	%	N	%
Automatic Preferences for Whites	17	77.3	2	22.2
No Automatic Preferences	3	13.6	4	44.4
Automatic Preferences for Blacks	2	9.1	3	33.3
Total	22	100.0	9	100.0

Chi Square = 8.17,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .05$ .

**Table 2 - Factor Loadings on Three Dimensions of Perceived Non-White Disparity<sup>a</sup>**

Dimension Loading	Items	Factor
Non-White Distinctness (Alpha = .81)	1. Non-Whites tend to deal with their problems differently than do Whites.	.83
	2. Non-White people are different from Whites in many ways.	.76
	3. Non-Whites have different life values than do Whites.	.75
	4. Non-White people tend to have different inborn characteristics than do Whites.	.65
	5. Non-Whites and Whites have similar views about reality. (R) <sup>b</sup>	.63
	6. Non-Whites' life styles are similar to those of Whites. (R)	.56
	7. Differences between non-Whites and Whites are negligible (= not much). (R)	.55
	(Cumulative Percent of Variance = 46.6)	
Non-White Inferiority (Alpha = .74)	1. In the U.S. society, non-White people are less privileged than Whites.	.81
	2. Non-Whites are disadvantaged economically in the U.S.	.79
	3. Non-Whites are less powerful in the U.S.	.72
	4. I would like to see more non-Whites play important roles in our society. (R)	.61
	5. Non-Whites create less social problems than do Whites in the U.S. (R)	.51

(Cumulative Percent of Variance = 48.8)

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Non-White Incompatibility (Alpha = .72)	1. There are incompatible differences between non-Whites and Whites.	.79
	2. I find it difficult to learn about cultures of non-Whites.	.76
	3. Non-Whites and Whites do not mingle well.	.74
	4. It is important to establish good relations between non-Whites and Whites. (R)	.65

(Cumulative Percent of Variance = 54.1)

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<sup>a</sup>Principal component analysis. <sup>b</sup>Scores were reversed.  $N = 117$ .

The scale consists of three parts, each representing one of the three dimensions of perceived non-White disparity (i.e., distinctness, inferiority, and incompatibility). Table 2 presents factor loadings for items on each dimension, based on principle component analysis. Overall, the results of factor analysis indicate the unidimensionality of each of the three dimensions of perceived racial disparity.

To compare the scores of White and Black participants on the Likert-type measures, independent-samples t-tests were conducted. The results of the t-tests are reported in Table 3.

**Table 3 - T-Tests on Score Differences in Explicit Perceptions of Non-White Disparity and Interracial Interaction Reluctance**

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Variables	Whites	Blacks	t
Perceived Non-White Distinctness (BNWAS-A)	2.91 <sup>a</sup> (.66) <sup>b</sup>	3.47 (.77)	-4.05***
Perceived Non-White Inferiority (BNWAS-B)	3.08 (.74)	3.66 (.70)	-3.93***
Perceived Non-White Incompatibility (BNWAS-C)	.28 (.46)	1.43 (.40)	n.s.
Perceived Whiteness (BWAS)	3.07 (.64)	3.71 (.61)	-4.91***

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Interracial Interaction Reluctance (IRIRS)	1.96 (.73)	2.29 (.62)	-2.38*
Interracial Communication Anxiety (IRCAS)	1.45 (.52)	1.42 (.64)	n.s.

<sup>a</sup>Mean. <sup>b</sup>Standard Deviation. \*p < .05. \*\*\*p < .001. Two-tailed.

Black participants scored significantly higher in perceived non-White distinctness ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) and perceived non-White inferiority ( $M = 3.66$ ,  $SD = .70$ ) than did White counterparts ( $M = 2.91$ ,  $SD = .66$ ;  $t_{114} = -4.05$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = .74$ ;  $t_{112} = -3.93$ ,  $p < .001$  respectively). The results indicate that Black participants are more likely than Whites to perceive that non-Whites are distinct and inferior. There was no significant difference between the two groups in perceived non-White incompatibility. As for interracial interaction reluctance, Blacks ( $M = 2.29$ ,  $SD = .62$ ) scored higher than did Whites ( $M = 1.96$ ,  $SD = .73$ ),  $t_{115} = -2.38$ ,  $p < .05$ . That is, the results showed that Blacks were more reluctant to interact with Whites than Whites were with non-Whites including Blacks. Also, consistent with prior findings, Blacks ( $M = 3.71$ ,  $SD = .61$ ) scored higher in the perception of White racial dominance as indexed by the BWAS than did Whites ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = .64$ ),  $t_{115} = -4.91$ ,  $p < .001$ . Finally, in interracial communication anxiety as measured by the IRCAS, no significant difference was found between Black and White participants.

Table 4 presents zero-order correlations between variables for White and Black participants. It is noted that the BWAS scores (i.e., perceptions of White racial dominance) are positively correlated with perceived non-White distinctness ( $r = .47$ ,  $p < .001$ ), inferiority ( $r = .67$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and incompatibility ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ) among Whites and with perceived non-White

**Table 4 - Correlations between Variables for Whites and Blacks**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	(Blacks) <sup>1</sup>						
1. Interracial Interaction Reluctance (IRIRS) <sup>a</sup>	---	-.74*	.28*	.20	.39*	.36*	-.14
2. Implicit White Preference <sup>b</sup> (IAT)	.16	---	-.62*	.11	-.43	-.28	.07

3. Perceived Non-White Distinctness (BNWAS-A) <sup>a</sup>	.33**	.20	---	.36*	.17	.51**	.16
4. Perceived Non-White Inferiority (BNWAS-B) <sup>a</sup>	-.13	-.28	.14	---	-.15	.68***	.05
5. Perceived Non-White Incompatibility (BNWAS-C) <sup>a</sup>	.48***	.35	.39***	-.11	---	-.04	.08
6. Perceived Whiteness (BWAS)	.19*	.23	.47***	.67***	.37***	---	-.03
7. Interracial Communication Anxiety (IRCAS) (Whites) <sup>2</sup>	.73***	-.03	.34**	.03	.27**	.25*	---

Note. The numbers above the diagonal are correlation coefficients for African American participants and the numbers below the diagonal are the coefficients for White American participants. <sup>1</sup> $n = 37$  (Number for the IAT = 9). <sup>2</sup> $n = 82$  (Number for the IAT = 22). <sup>a</sup>Based on a 5-point scale. <sup>b</sup>Based on a 3-point scale; the higher the number, the greater the automatic preferences for Whites and the less the preferences for Blacks, and vice versa.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ . One-tailed.

distinctness ( $r = .51$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and inferiority ( $r = .68$ ,  $p < .001$ ) among Blacks. Interracial communication anxiety, on the other hand, as indexed by the IRCAS is also highly correlated with interracial interaction reluctance among Whites ( $r = .73$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but not among Blacks.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between implicit racial (White) preferences and interracial interaction reluctance. The results show that implicit White preference is not significantly associated with interracial interaction reluctance ( $r = .16$ ,  $p > .05$ ) among White participants, whereas among Blacks the two variables are significantly correlated ( $r = -.74$ ,  $p < .05$ ). That is, Black participants who indicated low preferences for Whites tended to show more reluctance to interact with Whites. Hence, the present data provide partial support for Hypothesis 1.

The next three hypotheses predicted positive relationships between explicit measures of perceived non-Whiteness and interracial interaction reluctance. To test these hypotheses, stepwise regression analysis was conducted. The three dimensions of perceived non-Whiteness (i.e., distinctness, inferiority, and incompatibility) were selectively entered into the equation in the order of the magnitude of their contribution to the equation. Table 5 summarizes the results of stepwise regression analysis for Whites and for Blacks.

**Table 5 - Summary of Stepwise Regression for Dimensions of Perceived Non-White Disparity Predicting Interracial Interaction Reluctance among Whites and Blacks**

Group	Step	Variables	Beta	t
Whites	1	Perceived Non-White Incompatibility	.47	4.58***
		Adjusted $R^2 = .21$ ; $F$ Change = 20.96***		
	2	Perceived Non-White Incompatibility	.39	3.59***
		Perceived Non-White Distinctness	.19	1.69*
		Adjusted $R^2 = .23$ ; $F$ Change = 2.85*		
Blacks	1	Perceived Non-White Incompatibility	.39	2.45*
		Adjusted $R^2 = .13$ ; $F$ Change = 6.02*		
	2	Perceived Non-White Incompatibility	.44	2.82**
		Perceived Non-White Inferiority	.31	1.97*
		Adjusted $R^2 = .20$ ; $F$ Change = 3.89*		

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Hypothesis 2 predicted that perceived non-White distinctness would be positively related to interracial interaction reluctance. The results of regression analysis show that perceived non-White distinctness is a significant predictor for interracial interaction reluctance in the White group ( $\beta = .19$ ), but not in the Black group. That is, among White participants, the higher the level of perceived non-White distinctness, the higher the level of interracial interaction reluctance towards non-Whites. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is partially supported by the present data.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that perceived non-White inferiority would be positively associated with interracial interaction reluctance. The results indicate that perceived non-White inferiority is a significant indicator of interracial interaction reluctance in the Black group ( $\beta = .31$ ), but not in the White group. That is, among Black participants, the higher the level of perceived non-White inferiority, the higher the level of interracial interaction reluctance towards Whites. The current data provide partial support for Hypothesis 3.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 predicted a positive association between perceived non-White incompatibility and interracial interaction reluctance. The results of regression analysis reveal that perceived non-White incompatibility is a strong predictor for interracial interaction reluctance in both White ( $\beta = .39$ ) and Black groups ( $\beta = .44$ ). That is, whether they are White or Black, the higher the level of perceived non-White incompatibility, the higher the level of interracial interaction reluctance. Hence, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

### Discussion

Although conspicuous efforts have been made to legally protect "natural rights" of historically under-privileged racial groups, covert forms of racial separation and segregation still exist especially in the realms of individual liberty in U.S. society (Coates, 2008). The findings of the present study provide interesting implications for our understanding of interracial interactions and relations in the United States. The categorization of people into groups based on skin color has a long history of social construction (Jandt & Tanno, 2001). Categorization by skin color goes beyond an immediate classification of people into "in-group" and "out-group." It must be understood in terms of an accumulated history of associated beliefs of superiority and inferiority. The present investigation, using both implicit and explicit measures of racial perceptions, explored the role of this internalized, historical prejudice/bias in engendering interracial interaction reluctance. In particular, the Implicit Association Test (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) used in this study was intended to index such racial bias through scanning automatic and uncontrolled reactions to the stimuli. It was hypothesized that perceptions of non-Whites as being distinct, inferior, and incompatible would be positively associated with interracial interaction reluctance among both Whites and Blacks.

The results of the Race IAT indicate that most White participants showed implicit preferences for Whites over Blacks in the tasks of attributing positive and negative characteristics to target individuals. This suggests that Whites do perceive African Americans in a stereotyped and prejudicial way, echoing the long-held claim by academicians and social commentators discoursing on White racism in US society (Allen, 1994; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Fredrickson, 1999; Juan, 2002; Kovel, 1970; Wellman, 1977). Interestingly, however, the responses of Black participants were rather evenly spread over the three levels (Preference for Whites, No Preference, and Preference for Blacks), not particularly favoring African Americans over White Americans. In fact, this is similar to the IAT researchers' earlier finding that although Whites showed preferences for Whites over Blacks, Blacks did not have preferences for Blacks themselves, but indicated even weak preferences for Whites on the implicit measure (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002). It is plausible, as Nosek et al. (2002) suggest, that stereotypical evaluations of social groups, often imposed culturally through various communication channels including the mass media, can permeate into

the minds of individual members of the society, even among those who belong to the group evaluated unfavorably. However, it must be noted that Black participants who did exhibit implicit preferences for Blacks over Whites also showed greater levels of reluctance to interact with Whites ( $r = -.74$ ). In other words, Blacks who tended to implicitly associate Whites with negative attributes were more reluctant to interact with Whites. Among White participants, the IAT scores (i.e., preferences for Whites over Blacks) were positively correlated with the level of interracial interaction reluctance ( $r = .16$ ), but this association failed to reach statistical significance ( $p > .05$ ).

On the other hand, explicit measures of racial perceptions also produced some significant findings in relation to interracial interaction reluctance. Perceptions of non-Whiteness were regarded as consisting of three dimensions: distinctness, inferiority, and incompatibility (Bahk & Jandt, 2003a). The results of stepwise regression analysis showed that among White participants the perceptions of non-White distinctness and incompatibility were significant predictors, as hypothesized, for interracial interaction reluctance, whereas the role of the inferiority dimension in predicting the dependent measure was not significant. That is, White participants who perceived non-Whites to be distinct and incompatible tended to be more reluctant to interact with non-Whites than otherwise. As for Black participants, the inferiority and incompatibility dimensions were significant predictors of reluctance to interact with Whites, whereas the contribution of the distinctness dimension failed to reach statistical significance in predicting the reluctance. The results suggest that one major reason for avoiding interactions with members of another racial group is because people believe that the target group and their own group are incompatible, i.e., unlikely to mingle well with each other. Further, perceived inferiority of non-Whites also affects the level of interracial interaction reluctance among Blacks, but not among Whites. That is, in deciding whether to interact with members of another racial group, Whites do not seem to regard as important whether they perceive non-Whites to be inferior or not, whereas for Blacks it does appear to matter significantly.

It is important to note that the findings of the present study, particularly the results of the IAT, need to be interpreted with caution and tentativeness, considering the smallness of the samples. The study used the IAT as an implicit measure and the BNWAS as an explicit measure of non-Whiteness perception. Explicit measures of racial perceptions require extensive caution to ensure that the responses of respondents are sincere and accurate, because such self-report instruments are often susceptible to an evaluation apprehension bias that can make the respondents more concerned with presenting his/her positive self-image than with providing honest answers (Adair & Schachter, 1972). The IAT was intended to reveal automatically and uncontrollably the participant's racial bias often hidden from public view and even from conscious awareness. The explicit instruments employed in this study were expected to supplement the implicit instrument by covering certain aspects of racial perceptions beyond what the implicit measure can detect. For example, the IAT used in the present study focused on associating White and Black faces with a set of attributes such as love, peace, evil, wonderful, terrible, glorious, nasty, happy, and awful, whereas the BNWAS considered three dimensions of non-White perception (i.e., distinctness, inferiority, and incompatibility), each with multiple descriptive statements.

The practice of racial classification and perception can only be justified by the racial consciousness it creates (Webster, 1992). Socio-historical emphasis on racial categorization has permeated so deeply into our lives that the prevalent, culturally imposed racial ideology continues to exert its influence on both our conscious and unconscious realms of person perception. Kurzban, Tooby, and Cosmides (2001) contend that categorizing individuals based on skin color is not inevitable. They suggest that racial perceptions are maintained through being linked to persistent systems of social alliance. Their experiment demonstrated that when introduced to a new social environment in which coalition memberships are construed on an alternative cue rather than race, their subjects were less likely to categorize others by race. For example, people were more likely to confuse two players on the same team, regardless of race, than two players of the same race on opposite teams. This finding is supported by Gaertner, Dovidio, and Bachman's (1996) earlier study. Gaertner et al. (1996), using laboratory and field experiments, showed that interracial bias could be reduced by transforming people's cognitive representations of the memberships from two groups to one more inclusive social entity. What these studies suggest is that racial judgments are not inevitable, i.e., correctable. Nonetheless, as long as practices of racial categorization persist in our society, research on racial perceptions/attitudes and their effects on interracial interactions and relations would continue to have significance in producing informative reports that contribute to our understanding of *racial realities*.

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