



Confronting Racism: When, Why, and How?

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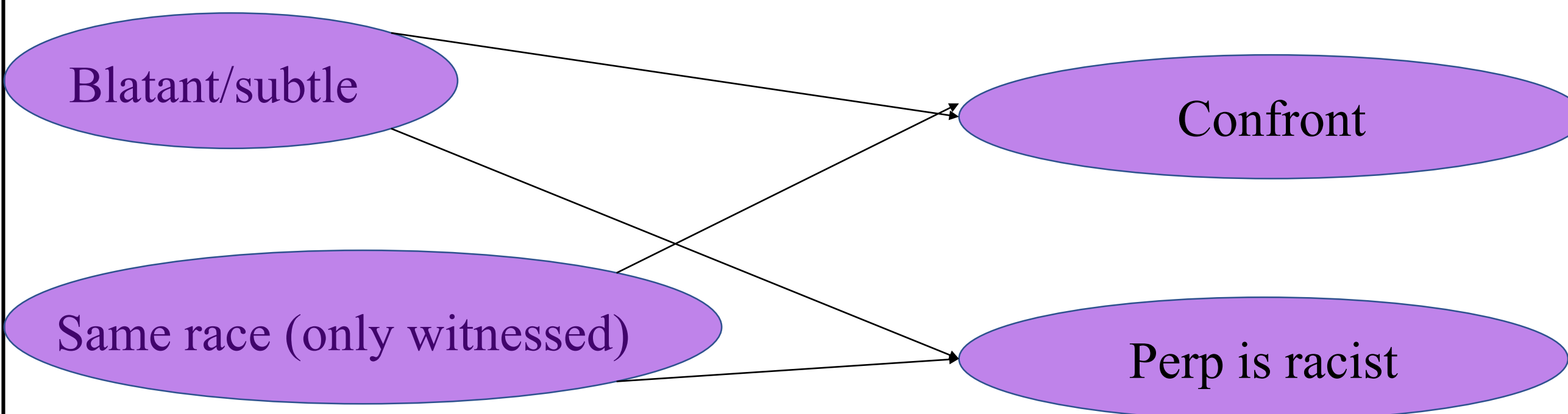
Background

- Racism can be described as blatant when an incident is obvious, and overt and subtle when there is more nuance or ambiguity (Pettigrew & Meertens, 1995).
- Subtle racism is harder to detect than blatant racism, even for targets of prejudice (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008). This ambiguity leads stigmatized individuals to internally question the situation rather than being confrontational.
- Confrontation most likely occurs when an incident is more blatant since it is immediately detectable and hurtful (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008). Additionally, witnesses of racism that share racial identity with the target are likely to be discouraged from confronting due to the difficulty of identifying an appropriate response or action (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008).
- According to Swim et al. (2003), clear intent generally predicts when both an action and individual are perceived as unfair. Fairness theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001) presents the conditions that are needed in attribution of injustice. Based on these studies we wanted to better understand people's racist perceptions.
- This study is focused on when and why people confront perpetrators of racist incidents and the circumstances involved in perceptions of individuals as racists.

Hypotheses

- Incidents that are more blatant racism will result in a greater probability that the target will confront the perpetrator.
→ And the perpetrator is more likely to be seen as racist
- Witnesses that are the same race as targets are less likely to confront the perpetrator
→ But more likely to perceive the perpetrator as racist

Working Model:



Methods

Participants

- Participants: 143 UMD students (63.6% women, 36.4% men; Black 35.0%, Asian 27.3%, White 26.6%, Hispanic 5.6%, Other 5.6%; $M_{age} = 20.70$)

Procedure

- Participants were asked to voluntarily describe a recent event where they witnessed or experienced racism. They were asked to include what was said/done, where they were, and the reactions of the people who were involved.

Methods cont.

Measures

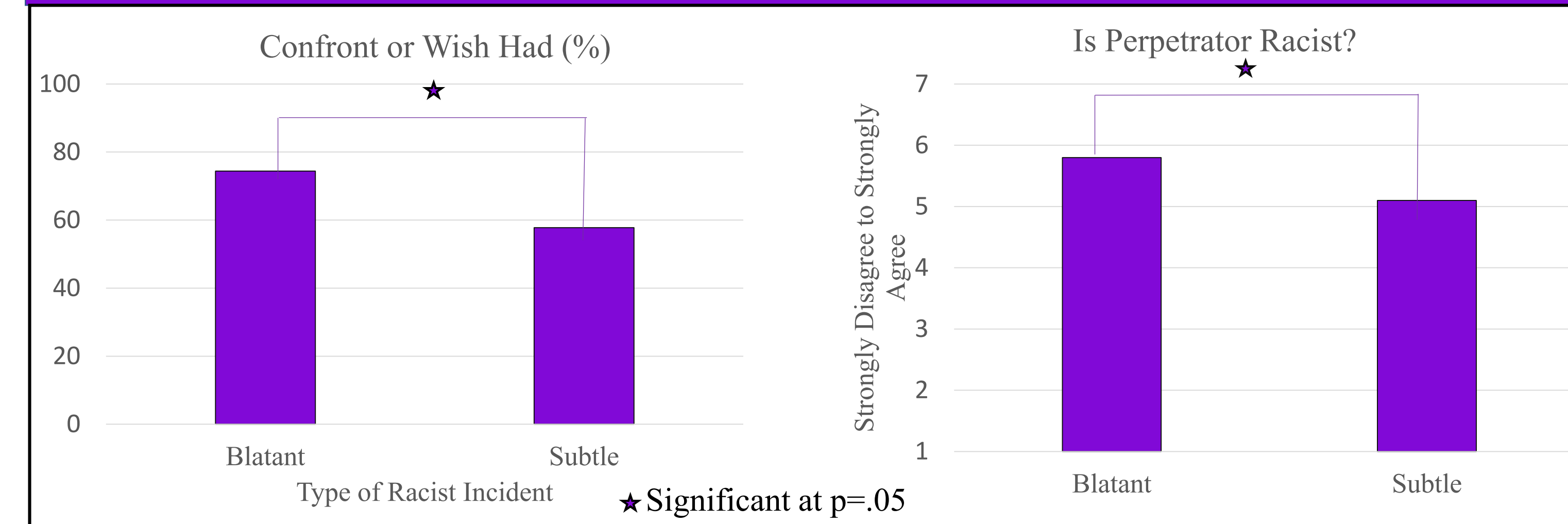
- The survey asked if the event was witnessed or personally experienced (0= experienced, 1= witnessed)
- If they confronted the individual or wished they had (0= no, 1= yes)
- How likely they were to label the perpetrator as racist (Scale from 1 → 7, 1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree)
- They were also asked demographic questions (gender, race/ethnicity)
- Independent coders rated the responses based on the following characteristics: Blatant ($\alpha = .90$), Subtle ($\alpha = .88$), and the race of the target/victim in the incident ($Kappa = .67$)
- The blatant and subtle variables were highly correlated and merged to make one variable (type of racism). Higher values indicated more blatant racism.
- We created a variable (Witness – same race) to indicate when the witness and target/victim were the same race (0= no, 1= yes).

Results

- 40.5% of incidents were experienced by participants and 59.5% were witnessed.
- 67% of participants confronted or wished they had confronted the perpetrator.
- 47% of participants perceived the perpetrator as racist (agree/somewhat agree).
- The similarity between the race of the target and the witness did not predict confrontation or willingness to confront perpetrators (odds ratio = .56, $p = .29$, ns) nor labeling those individuals as racist ($b = .65$, $p = .10$, ns).
- More blatant incidents of racism were associated with higher rates of confrontation (odds ratio = 1.24, $p = .04$) and increased labeling of those individuals as racist ($b = .23$, $p < .01$).

Type of Incident	Witnessed		Experienced
	85 (59.5%)		58 (40.5%)
	Witnessed - Same Race as Target	Witnessed - Different Race as Target	
	22 (33.8%)	43 (66.2%)	
Reaction	Did not Confront		Confronted
	102 (71.3%)		41 (28.7%)
	Did not Wish Had Confronted	Wish Had Confronted	
	47 (46.1%)	55 (53.9%)	
	Perpetrator not Racist (Strongly Disagree/ Disagree)	Perpetrator Might be Racist (Somewhat Disagree/ Neutral/ Somewhat Agree)	Perpetrator is Racist (Agree/ Strongly Agree)
	6 (4.2%)	61 (43.0%)	75 (52.8%)

Figures



Discussion

- Our findings on blatant racism support fairness theory (Nicklin et al., 2011) because there was an increased likelihood of willingness to confront, actual confrontation, and racist perceptions of the perpetrator following blatantly racist and clearly harmful incidents.
- Unexpectedly, our same race variable did not have a significant correlation with confrontation, nor racist perception of the perpetrator. This might be a result of a smaller portion of our sample that could be analyzed for this measure compared to that of the others (witness same race = 22, confront/wish had = 96, perpetrator is racist = 75).
- This study presents some of the difficulties related to addressing subtle racism since individuals' intentions are often unknown. Furthermore, targets and witnesses of racism are less likely to directly confront perpetrators because confrontation, especially labeling someone as a racist, can result in hostile reactions.
- Unfortunately, the majority of participants did not confront perpetrators. This finding is more pronounced for instances of subtle racism.

Future Directions

- Investigate when people confront instances of subtle racism because they may be more psychologically damaging in the long term (Hebl et al., 2002).
- Develop a better understanding of how individuals physiologically react to racism through hearing or reading about racist incidents.
- Conceptualize when and why certain incidents are considered racist in contrast with the circumstances that result in labeling an individual as a racist.
- Differentiate between incidents that are considered racist and individuals who are considered racist because there is more inhibition for the latter regard.

References

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