Ingroup Bias in the Application of Historical Information to Blame Judgments

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Background

Research Question
Do people exhibit racial bias when applying historical information to blame decisions of transgressors?

Blame
- …to hold responsible; to find fault with
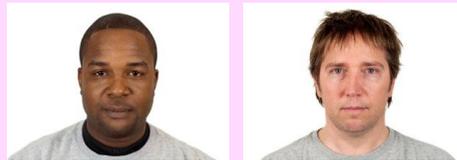- Associated with spiteful punishment (Gill & Cerce, 2017; Gill & Ungson, 2018)

Historicist narratives
(Gill & Cerce, 2017)
- A storied account of how a moral transgressor "became that way"
- Narratives reduced **blame**, but not perceived intentionality
- Evidence that White participants **do not** reduce blame for Black transgressors, even when historicist narrative is present (Gill & Pizzuto, under review)

- The **current study attempts to replicate these findings** – and examine potential biases among Black participants
  - Will Black participants also ignore history information for Black transgressors?
  - OR will Black participants ignore history information for White transgressors?

Method

Participants were asked to read vignettes describing an intentional moral transgression (physical assault) committed by either a Black [or White] man named Tyrone [Brad] Winters

Independent Variables:
- Participant Race: Black vs. White
- Transgressor Race: Black vs. White *(between-subjects)*
- Societal -Level Historicism
  - 6-item scale measuring extent to which American racial inequality is due to past history of segregation, injustice
  - (Included as moderator – no significant effects)
- History Condition *(between-subjects)*
  1. Just Act: transgression only
  2. History: transgression + historicist narrative
     "his father started to physically abuse him… Winters learned that violence was a way to keep somebody in line."

Dependent Variable: Blame
(1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*)
1. I blame Winters for his criminal behavior.
2. I feel moral anger or disapproval toward Winters.
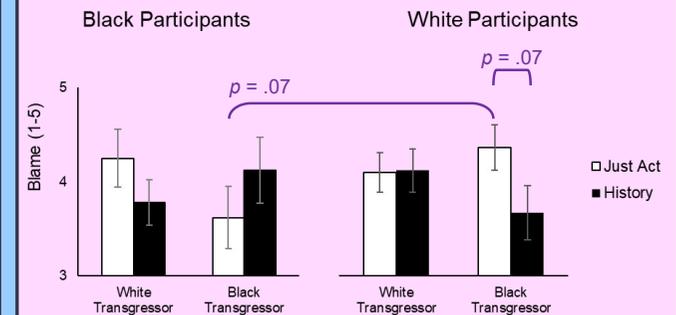3. I have strong feelings of dislike for Winters.

Results

(Albright undergraduates, *N* = 87)

Analysis: **Three-Way ANOVA**
Participant Race * Transgressor Race * History Condition

Results: **Significant three-way interaction**
$F(1, 78) = 4.76$, $p = .03$

Main Findings
- White P's blamed Black transgressors LESS when exposed to historicist narratives ($p = .07$), but were unaffected by history when blaming White transgressors, suggesting **outgroup favoritism** among White P's when narratives are present
- White P's were more blaming than Black P's when judging a **Black transgressor without history information** ($p = .07$) – in the absence of historicist narratives, White P's seemed to exhibit outgroup derogation.

Conclusions & Future Directions

- White P's were more forgiving of Black (but not White) transgressors when history was present
- However, White P's were more blaming of Black (but not White) transgressors when no history was present

Future Directions
- Appears as if Black P's become more blaming of Black transgressors when history was present?
- How would gender of transgressor affect blame and application of history information?
- Future analyses will further examine the role of Societal-Level Historicism on blame, as well as outcomes of compassion, free will, punishment, etc.
- Future studies should attempt to recruit a larger sample size