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Failure to warn: How student race affects warnings of potential academic difficulty ☆

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Abstract

In two studies, we document "failure to warn"—a reduced likelihood of warning Black students against potential academic difficulty compared to White students. In both studies, participants placed in the role of academic advisors saw a highly challenging academic course plan, attributed to either a Black or a White student, and gave Black students less warning about the potential negative consequences of taking on the proposed plan. Study 1 ($N = 172$) demonstrates this effect using undergraduate peer academic advisors, and Study 2 ($N = 58$) provides evidence that this effect is moderated by Internal Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998), suggesting that this effect is driven by the fear that discouraging an ambitious Black student might reflect prejudice. This well-intentioned concern can have the ironic consequence of leading the recipients of this advice into academic difficulties.
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Introduction

Imagine a well-intentioned White professor giving advice to a Black freshman proposing an academic course load vastly exceeding what is expected of the average student. Knowing that the student runs the risk of being in over his head, a reasonable advisor would take it upon herself to warn the student that he has bitten off more than he could chew, and that he should consider revising his course load. But the professor may worry that her assessment of

the list's appropriateness was affected by the race of the student, and may be eager to demonstrate her lack of racial bias. So she says nothing about the difficulty of the courses, giving the student no warning that this course load might be too much. The meeting ends with the advisor feeling relieved that she did not do anything racist, while the student is left to fend for himself with a course load that is overly strenuous.

The present research explores this tension between giving helpful advice and the fear that this advice may reflect prejudice when the recipient is a minority. This paper therefore links academic advice to the growing literature on people's concern with being prejudiced, and suggests that members of minority groups may not receive appropriate warning when their trajectory appears misguided to others. Failure to warn, we propose, is especially pernicious and invisible when it takes the form of approving nods, or worse, silence, where alarm and concern would be warranted. It is equivalent to approving someone's proposal to climb Mount Everest in sandals with a friendly pat on the back. This phenomenon goes beyond academic advice, and

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beyond Black–White relations. Concerns about prejudice may prevent a White supervisor from telling a Latino programmer he has underestimated how long a software project will take to complete, or may prevent a male colleague from telling a female assistant professor she is working on intractable problems unlikely to yield tenure. In these examples, we propose that it would be easier for an advisor to caution a majority group member against the difficulties he is setting himself up for than it would be when the recipient of warning is a member of a minority group. This differential treatment, which we demonstrate in this paper, is what we term failure to warn.

Norms against prejudice

The source of failure to warn is a concern with avoiding being prejudiced. The expression of explicit racial prejudice has declined dramatically in recent decades (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1991; Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), reflecting either a true change in racial attitudes, or a move toward more covert forms of racial prejudice (Banaji & Greenwald, 1994; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1991; Monteith, Voils, & Ashburn-Nardo, 2001). In either case, the tide of social norms has changed such that racism is considered unacceptable in the majority of social contexts in contemporary America. Indeed, prejudice against racists has come to be seen as more acceptable than prejudice against drunk drivers and negligent parents (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002). Because of the amount of negativity associated with being a racist, majority group members in interracial interactions may go to great lengths to avoid this label.

Theoretical interest in these concerns led to the development two validated, widely-used scales, Dunton and Fazio's (1997) Motivation to Control Prejudice Scale and Plant and Devine's (1998) Internal and External Motivations to Respond Without Prejudice Scale. The latter scale separates concern with *being* prejudiced against Black individuals (Internal Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice) from concern with *appearing* prejudiced against Black individuals (External Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice). The two subscales are fairly orthogonal to one another, and yield relatively high scores in college populations—participants seem concerned with prejudice as a violation both of their personal values and of social norms (Plant & Devine, 1998).

Certainly, "zero tolerance" norms against racism are a positive thing—individuals, for the most part, recognize that their judgments of the capabilities of another person should not be biased by the color of that person's skin. However, these changing norms can also have ironic effects; they are sometimes so strong that people feel compelled to "bend over backwards" (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1981, p. 209) to demonstrate their lack of bias, and overcorrect their response to minority group members beyond how they would react to a majority group member (e.g., Dutton, 1971). We argue that these efforts, in some cases, come at the expense of the ability to respond honestly (see also Norton, Vandello, & Darley, 2004).

In the domain of academic advice, the strength of the anti-racist norms on university campuses leads us to predict that advisors would be reluctant to appear discouraging toward minority students. In particular, advisors telling minority students that their proposed academic or career plans are overly ambitious may fear that they reached that conclusion based on a negative, stereotype-based assessment of the students and their racial or ethnic group. Individuals providing advice may bend over backwards to avoid possible characterization as a racist, even at the risk of providing advice of poor quality.

Academic feedback and advice

In the domain of academic feedback, Harber (1998) found that college students gave significantly more positive evaluations of the content of low-quality essays when they believed that the essay writer was Black rather than White. Academic advice has obvious parallels with academic feedback, and when these interactions occur across racial lines, teachers and advisors may similarly worry that a negative response could cast them as racially biased. However, two crucial differences make it important to study advice in its own right. First, in the typical feedback situation, a concrete piece of work (an essay) is being discussed, whereas advice is primarily about plans and aspirations. Having a work sample can constrain the impact of race: Harber (1998) found that race did not bias assessments of an essay's grammar and mechanics, presumably because there is less ambiguity in these domains for participants to work around. In advice, there may be little concrete evidence to constrain the advisor, so one might expect that the effect of race would be stronger. However, it is also possible that having a sample of the student's work is what liberated participants in feedback paradigms to act out their concerns, convinced that they were reacting to the text before them (Darley & Gross, 1983; Norton et al., 2004; Yzerbyt, Schadron, Leyens, & Rocher, 1994), whereas advisers without the cover of an actual work sample might feel uncomfortable acting out of concern for race, and may in fact show little positive bias in their advice to African Americans. Given these conflicting predictions, it seems important to go beyond prior feedback paradigms and to use a procedure specifically designed to investigate the distinct case of academic advice.

A second important distinction between feedback and advice is how they differ in their consequences, because of the differing expectations being communicated. Feedback that is overly positive (such as saying a poor piece of work is acceptable) conveys low expectations to minority students, potentially resulting in academic disengagement (see Cohen & Steele, 2002), whereas approving a student's plan to take on an unreasonable load does the opposite—sending the message that the advisor holds high expectations for the student. Thus, even if the end product of these differential treatments might be the same (frustration and disengagement), the two pathways are quite distinct theoretically

in terms of the expectations signaled; whereas overly positive feedback may lead to distrust in the institution, overly positive advice may be a recipe for self-doubt as students encounter repeated failure. In addition, academic advice has greater direct impact than feedback on academic and vocational choices with long-term consequences. For these reasons, academic advice seems worthy of study in its own right.

The present studies

In two studies, we investigated how racial group membership affects the quality of academic advice a student receives. We focused on the situation where an advisor would have to warn a student that his proposed plan is too ambitious, and predicted that White students would receive more warning than Black students. Study 1 demonstrates this failure-to-warn phenomenon with students specifically trained as peer academic advisors. Study 2 replicates this effect and shows that this phenomenon is moderated by concerns with being prejudiced using Plant and Devine's (1998) Internal Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice (IMS) scale.

Study 1

Study 1 was an initial test of the hypothesis that advisors would be inhibited from warning a member of a minority group (in this case, a Black student) that his or her proposed academic plan was too challenging and likely to result in difficulty. Participants (who were actual peer academic advisors who had applied, been chosen, and been trained to advise a diverse group of incoming students) saw a highly challenging academic plan attributed to a Black or White student, and were asked to offer advice. This particular population was chosen because it was likely to take the advice task seriously, and would have a reasonable understanding of the consequences of taking overly ambitious course loads early in one's academic career.

Method

Participants

One hundred and ninety-seven peer academic advisors participated in this study in exchange for snacks. We eliminated from our analysis 11 African American or partially African American participants, as well as 9 participants who did not provide their race. In addition, 5 participants who failed to complete the main dependent variables were eliminated. The final sample consisted of 172 participants—107 women; 74 Whites, 66 Asians, 9 Latinos, 12 individuals of mixed race, 3 Native Americans, and 8 individuals who indicated "other" (such as Indian, Arab, etc.).

Materials pre-testing

Prior to the experiment, we normed several combinations of classes that would be available to incoming fresh-men. Forty-three participants rated the difficulty of six different course lists using a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all difficult*) to 7 (*extremely difficult*). Mean difficulty ratings ranged from 2.80 to 5.75, and we chose the list that had been rated as the most difficult ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 1.48$). The extreme difficulty of the proposed list came both from the number of classes (19 academic units when the suggested number of academic units is 15) and the widespread reputations of the specific courses for difficulty (calculus, chemistry, computer science, and a required reading and writing-intensive humanities survey course).

Design

Participants were randomly assigned to give advice either to a Black or a White student. A cover page on the questionnaire kept the experimenters blind to condition, and interaction between participants and the experimenters was minimal.

Procedure

Participants were addressed as a group by a Black, female experimenter (accompanied by a White, female experimenter) at the end of their peer academic advisor training. They were told they would engage in a study of academic choices and academic advice, and were asked to complete a 5-min questionnaire. After signing a consent form, participants read: "Imagine you have the following information about one of your advisees, and you need to advise this student on his/her fall quarter study list. Please read over the information provided and do your best to be as helpful as possible." They then saw a form filled out by hand by a hypothetical student. Race of the student being advised was manipulated through the student's name and dormitory ("Jamaal Jackson" residing in the African American theme house or "James Jensen" residing in a predominantly White dormitory). Except for this manipulation, information about the student was identical—he reported that he wanted to pursue a career in medicine, that his favorite subjects were history and biology, and that his least favorite subject was math. This information was provided both to justify the courses chosen (calculus and chemistry are required courses for pre-medical students) and to help rule out the possibility that the student was unusually well prepared to take all of these difficult courses at the same time (thus his dislike of math). Participants then saw the student's proposed course plan, and provided advice to the student on the seven scales listed in Table 2.

Results

Because the seven-dependent variables were designed to assess various aspects of the concept of warning, and correlated moderately with one another[1] (see Table 1), data were

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[1] *Confidence in the advice provided* was the only variable that did not correlate significantly with all other variables. The overall MANOVA was significant both with confidence included and excluded, and we include confidence in the MANOVA presented here.

Table 1
Two-tailed correlations of dependent variables, Study 1

	Advice	Help	Time left	Approve	Second op.	Confident	Difficulty
Advice	1	.40**	−.42**	−.46**	.39**	.15*	.33**
Help		1	−.36**	−.58**	.52**	.18*	.51**
Time left			1	.44**	−.28**	−.12	−.32**
Approve				1	−.45**	−.15**	−.45**
Second op.					1	.18*	.35**
Confident						1	.09
Difficulty							1

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Advice Provided to Black and White Students, Study 2 ($N = 172$)

	White Student		Black Student		F (1, 170)	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
What advice would you give this student? (1 = list is much too easy; 5 = list is much too hard)	4.08	.43	3.93	.47	5.22	.02
How likely is the student to need help such as tutoring? (1 = not at all; 5 = absolutely)	3.64	.86	3.20	.94	10.22	.002
How much time will the student have left for other activities? (1 = no time at all; 5 = a great deal of time)	1.9	.62	2.07	.49	4.7	.03
How difficult is this study list? (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely)	4.29	.63	4.05	.69	5.51	.02
If you had to decide, would you approve the list or insist on changes? (1 = refuse to sign; 5 = approve as is)	2.82	.88	3.15	.96	5.33	.02
How likely are you to suggest that the student get a second opinion? (1 = not at all; 5 = absolutely)	4.08	.93	3.64	1.1	7.87	.006
How confident are you in your assessment of this list? (1 = not at all; 5 = extremely)	3.82	.72	3.90	.54	<1	NS

analyzed using a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA; see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2000). We found no significant main effects of participant race or gender, nor did these variables interact with the independent variable of interest. The only significant effect was the main effect of student race (Wilks' $\Lambda = .1$, $F(7, 164) = 2.35$, $p < .05$).

Race had a significant impact on all but one of the dependent variables (see Table 2). The Black student was significantly less likely to be told that the list was too difficult, that he would need help such as tutoring, and was told he would have more time left for non-academic activities if he pursued the course plan. Participants reported being significantly more willing to endorse the course plan in its current form when it was submitted by a Black student than when it was submitted by a White student, and were also significantly less likely to suggest that a Black student seek out a second opinion before pursuing the list. Finally, participants rated the list as significantly less difficult when it was attributed to a Black student than when it was attributed to a White student. Student race did not have a significant effect on participants' confidence in their judgments.

Discussion

Actual peer advisors were less likely to convey warning to a Black student than to a White student about the difficulty of a proposed course plan. They were less likely to caution students explicitly (as seen in the "advice" variable), were unrealistic in their depiction of the results that could be expected from following such a plan (evidenced

by the difference in the rated likelihood of needing help and having time for other activities), and rated the plan as less difficult when it was attributed to a Black student. In addition, these trained peer advisors were more willing to allow Black students to make their academic decisions based only on their own opinions (as seen in their willingness to endorse the plan as-is and their reduced likelihood of suggesting that the student seek a second opinion). Although one might have expected that decreased confidence in their assessment could have tempered the advisor's apparent endorsement of the plan, this did not occur—participants seemed to be equally confident in the warning they gave White students and the lack of warning they gave Black students. Based on these data, it seems likely that a Black student would be more likely than a White student to undertake an unreasonable course plan if he or she relied on the feedback from these trained peer advisors.

Study 2

Study 1 documents a systematic difference in the academic advice given to Black and White students. We believe this difference arises from a fear on the part of participants that discouraging Black students may cast them as potential racists. Study 2 was designed to test this explanation more directly by measuring participants' internal and external motivations to respond without prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998), and how these concerns relate to the amount of warning given to Black and White students.

In addition, Study 2 was designed to rule out alternative interpretations of Study 1. First, it is possible that, when looking at an ambitious course plan proposed by a Black male, participants may be thinking: "Given the educational and social inequalities that continue to exist in our society and disproportionately affect Black males, if this student has attained admission to this university and mapped out this challenging course plan, perhaps he can do what he says he can." We attempted to rule out this possibility in the present study, as well as in Study 1, by providing some information about the student meant to convey that he was "average" for this population of students, and, in particular, had no special abilities in quantitative areas that would lead him to succeed in calculus, chemistry, and computer science courses concurrently. In addition, in the present study we measured participants' assessments of the student in terms of his academic capabilities and ability to overcome obstacles. These questions were designed to determine if a Black student with an ambitious course plan is seen as more likely to achieve his goals than a White student proposing the same plan. A second alternative explanation for the findings in Study 1 is that, rather than fearing being racist, participants are actually acting on their racial antipathy by encouraging a Black student to pursue a course of study likely to result in failure. The inclusion of the IMS enables us to test this interpretation directly, as it would predict that the race difference should be greatest for individuals low in IMS (a measure shown to be highly correlated—negatively—with measures of racism, see Plant & Devine, 1998), whereas we predicted the opposite. Finally, Study 2 examined whether our observed effect was specific to the manner in which we chose to convey race (through racially stereotypical names), or more generalizable: we now conveyed student race through the use of a photograph of a Black or White male.

Method

Participants

In exchange of course credit, 66 undergraduate students at a large, private West coast university completed two (ostensibly) separate questionnaires. One individual who declined to state race and six individuals who identified themselves as African American were removed from the sample. The sample consisted of 58 individuals—38 women; 29 Whites, 10 Latinos, 8 Asian Americans, 3 International students, 2 Native Americans, and 6 individuals of mixed race.

Materials

At Time 1, participants completed Plant and Devine's (1998) IMS/EMS scale. The materials for Time 2 were based on those used in Study 1, with several changes. First, the instructions to participants read as follows "Imagine that the student below has just received acceptance to [your university]. He or she has already begun thinking about courses for next fall, and has come up with the list below.

Please imagine that this student shared his or her proposed courses with you during admit weekend, and do your best to answer the questions below." Participants then saw the proposed class list of a student. Rather than indicating race through a name, in this study both students were named "Michael Edwards," but the information sheet included a small photograph. As in Study 1, the student proposed taking four very difficult classes totaling 19 academic units (out of a maximum of 20).

Participants were then asked several questions about how this particular student compared to other students, including how academically capable, ambitious, realistic, and capable of overcoming obstacles he was compared to other students at the university. Finally, participants completed a subset of the "advice" scales used in Study 1, i.e., what they would tell the student, how likely the student would be to need help, how much time the student would have left for other activities, how likely the participant would be to suggest the student get a second opinion, how difficult the list was, and how confident the participant was in their assessment.

Procedure

Both phases of the study took place during mass testing in which participants came to the laboratory at a designated time to complete an hour-long packet of questionnaires. The two questionnaire sessions occurred between 9 and 19 days apart. At each session, participants completed at least 20 different questionnaires, the order of which was randomized.

Results

Student assessment

To rule out the possibility that the Black student was seen as more gifted, *t*-tests were conducted on the assessments of how capable, ambitious, realistic, and capable of overcoming obstacles the student was. There were no significant differences in how the student was assessed when he was portrayed as Black compared to White (see Table 3).

Main analyses

Dependent variables were again moderately correlated (see Table 4), and data were analyzed using a Multivariate Analysis of Variance. There were no significant main effects of participant race or gender, nor did these variables interact with the independent variable of interest. Replicating Study 1, the only significant MANOVA was the main effect of student race, Wilks' $\Lambda = .78$, $F(6, 51) = 2.42$, $p < .05$.

However, a MANOVA did not enable us to test our focal interest, the moderating role of IMS (a continuous variable), requiring regression instead. We created an average of all six variables, with greater scores indicating more warning to the student, and predicted this aggregate in a linear regression with race of student (recoded into 1 for White and −1 for Black), IMS, EMS (both standardized), and the two products of the standardized Plant and

Table 3
Assessments of Black and White Students, Study 2 ($N = 58$)

	White Student		Black Student		t(56)	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Academically Capable	63.67	12.17	64.48	14.29	−.23	.81
Ambitious In His/Her Academic Plans	78.33	11.17	76.90	13.91	.44	.66
Realistic In His/Her Academic Plans	47.00	15.57	52.07	18.78	−1.13	.26
Capable Of Overcoming Obstacles	58.00	12.42	61.07	11.33	−.98	.33

Table 4
Two-tailed correlations of dependent variables, Study 2

	Advice	Help	Time left	Second op.	Confident	Difficulty
Advice	1	.46**	−.48**	.44**	.18	.38**
Help		1	−.36**	.39**	.17	.31**
Time left			1	−.41**	−.36**	−.52**
Second op.				1	.33*	.36**
Confident					1	.03
Difficulty						1

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Devine subscales with race of student. The only significant predictor in this regression was the product term capturing the predicted interaction between IMS and race of student, $b = .17$, $t(52) = 2.18$, $p < .05$ (see Table 5). To interpret this interaction, we tested simple effects by applying the techniques described by Jaccard, Wan, and Turrisi (1990). For simplicity we used the coefficients obtained in the regression equation without the EMS components, also yielding a significant term for the predicted interaction, $b = .16$, $t(54) = 2.25$, $p < .05$. This analysis revealed that the effect of student race was a significant predictor when IMS was 1 SD above the mean, $b = .22$, $t(54) = 2.2$, $p < .05$, but that it was neither significant at the mean, $b = .06$, $t(54) < 1$, nor at 1 SD below the mean, $b = -.11$, $t(54) = -1.1$, $p = .26$.

We conducted the same analyses on our main advice variable (and the first advice variable encountered by participants): "If this student asked your opinion of this list, you would most likely tell the student …" which was followed by five response choices, ranging from "This list is much too easy for you" to "This list is much too hard for you." As above, the 5-predictor model only yielded a significant coefficient for the predicted interaction between IMS and race of student, $b = .17$, $t(52) = 2.38$, $p < .05$, though with this variable we also observed a marginal main effect, $b = .12$, $t(52) = 1.92$, $p = .06$ (see Table 6). Simple-

Table 5
Regression predicting mean of advice variables as a function of student race, IMS, and EMS

	b	t(52)	p
Constant	3.71	55.21	.000
Race of student	.05	.81	.42
IMS	−.06	−.83	.41
EMS	.02	.24	.81
IMS × student race	.17	2.18	.03
EMS × student race	.02	.32	.75

Table 6
Regression predicting anticipated difficulty for student as a function of student race, IMS, and EMS

	b	t(52)	p
Constant	3.79	59.67	.000
Race of student	.12	1.92	.06
IMS	−.05	−.68	.50
EMS	.05	.81	.43
IMS × student race	.17	2.38	.02
EMS × student race	.05	−.73	.47

effect analyses on the 3-predictor model, which also yielded the significant interaction, $b = .19$, $t(54) = 2.75$, $p < .01$, as well as a significant main effect of student race, $b = .13$, $t(54) = 2.05$, $p < .05$, help clarify this interaction (see Fig. 1): The effect of student race was significant at 1 SD above the mean of IMS, $b = .32$, $t(54) = 3.4$, $p < .005$, and at the mean of IMS, $b = .13$, $t(54) = 2.1$, $p < .05$, but not 1 SD below the mean, $b = -.06$, $t(54) < 1$.

Discussion

Study 2 replicates the basic "failure to warn" effect, and shows that it is driven by fear of being prejudiced against Blacks, with the interaction of IMS and student race being the only significant predictor of both the mean of the advice variables and of the first measure of direct advice given to
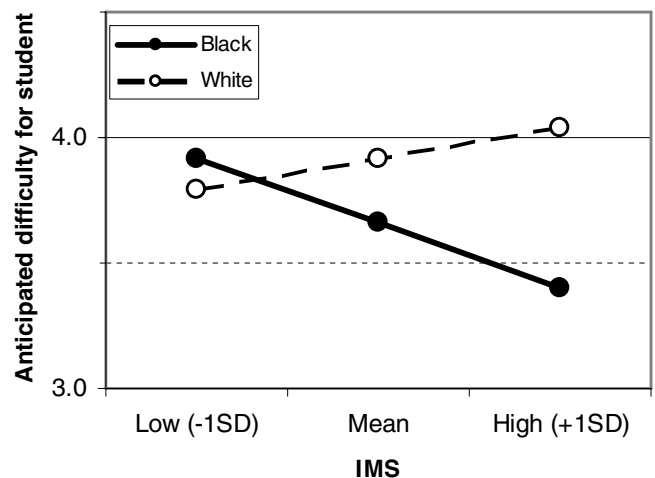

Fig. 1. Predicted values by race of target and level of IMS (at the mean, and +/−1 SD) for the expected difficulty expressed to the student in the obtained 3-predictor regression model, Study 2. [3 is the midpoint of this scale ("This list is appropriate for you as it is"), and higher values denote greater expected difficulty for the student].

the student. Simple-effect analyses further revealed that ironically, participants highly internally motivated not to discriminate were the ones who treated Whites and Blacks differently, whereas less concerned participants showed more evenhandedness. This also rules out that Blacks were intentionally set up for failure, because this interpretation would predict that the people low in IMS should show the effect, while the finding that Black students were not rated as more capable helps rule out the possibility that Blacks proposing this course list are simply seen differently from Whites proposing the same course list.

General discussion

In two studies, we found evidence that individuals may be less willing to provide warning about the potential difficulties of challenging courses to Black students than to White students. When an exceptionally challenging academic plan was attributed to a Black student, trained peer academic advisors (in Study 1) were less realistic in their assessments of the study list across a variety of measures, including their assessments of the list's difficulty and appropriateness for the student, the likely consequences of committing to the proposed classes, the need for a second opinion, and their own likelihood of approving the list. Given these responses, a minority student receiving this advice and acting on it would be likely to enroll in the proposed courses with little idea of the difficulties that lie ahead.

In Study 2, we replicated this effect, and found that it was moderated by Internal Motivation to Respond Without Prejudice (Plant & Devine, 1998). That is, participants seem concerned about how their behavior toward the Black student reflects on their own potentially racist thoughts or behaviors. This moderation helps rule out several alternative interpretations of the basic finding, such as that Blacks were being set up for failure intentionally.

Diversity of participant population

The effects documented in this paper were observed among participants who were not only White but also Asian, Latino, Native American, and multi-racial. We excluded participants who identified primarily as African American, and yet in both studies Whites made up at most half the sample. Our first motivation for including a diverse set of participants was that it reflects the actual diversity of our student body, and, in particular, the actual diversity of peer advisors, but it is worth discussing the judiciousness of retaining an ethnically diverse sample in a study involving racism. Although many studies of reactions to Black individuals focus exclusively on White participants, we know of no compelling evidence suggesting that members of other groups are unaware of the negative stereotypes associated with Black students in academic contexts, or unworried about displaying racism toward Blacks. Nosek, Banaji, and Greenwald (2002) find that Hispanic and Asian partici-

pants "show pro-White bias at levels comparable to White respondents" on Implicit Association (IAT) tasks (p. 110). In our Study 2, there is substantial between-group overlap in the distributions of IMS and substantial within-group variation for both Whites and Non-Whites (White $M = 7.77$, $SD = .99$, Non-White $M = 7.33$, $SD = 1.31$, $t(57) = -1.45$, $p = .15$). Rather than using racial group membership as a proxy for concerns with racism, we measured concerns with racism directly, using Plant and Devine's (1998) scales, which showed us that the effect was motivated by internal concerns (IMS). The effect was not moderated by whether participants were White or not (a binary variable that compared Whites to Non-Whites to obtain reasonable cell sizes), nor was the three-way interaction among IMS, being white, and the manipulation close to significance. Finally, the moderating effect of IMS did not disappear when the "being white" variable was included as a main effect and as a moderator in the corresponding product terms. Non-Black minority group members, like Whites, vary widely in their responses to the IMS/ EMS scales (which are specifically about Blacks), and their level of concern with personal racism towards Blacks seems more important in predicting the impact of student race on their advice than whether they are White or not.

Consequences of the failure to warn

If minority students, as we have documented, receive biased feedback, they may be more be likely to take on more than any student can reasonably handle, which may lead to academic difficulties and eventually help contribute to the racial achievement gap. Further, if a minority student is not told to expect difficulty when taking on challenging course plans, he or she may then search for the source of academic difficulties elsewhere when faced with them. Without more information on the consequences of the courses themselves, a student may attribute any experienced difficulty to his or her own failings in ability, preparation, and motivation, rather than the difficulty of the situation, and may revise his or her aspirations accordingly.

Equalizing advice

An important direction for future research is to understand how the failure to warn may be reduced or eliminated. Although we do not advocate discouraging talented students from pursuing challenging plans, anyone undertaking such a plan should have a realistic idea of the difficulties that might arise. Because of the importance of realistic advice, developing methods for easing inter-group advising interactions seems to be a fruitful area for future inquiry. These methods may take the form of specific interaction strategies designed to put the advisor's concerns at ease, with the establishment of moral credentials (Monin & Miller, 2001), or the strategies used by successful mentors giving critical feedback to Black students (Cohen, Steele, & Ross, 1999). In addition, broader changes may create

greater comfort and honesty in these interactions. Greater inter-group contact may help reduce some of the anxieties of interracial interaction, at both the explicit (Lopez, 2004; Stephan & Stephan, 1985) and physiological (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, & Lickel, 2000) levels.

Final thoughts

We have focused on academic interactions, given that the learning involves giving and receiving advice on a regular basis, and that the stakes of providing good advice are substantial. However, academic contexts are not the only ones in which fears of being prejudiced may interfere with smooth and honest interactions. In many professional and educational settings, it may simply be easier to allow individuals to take on more than they should than to risk violating personal standards for racism. Although the desire to avoid racism is laudable, the unfortunate and ironic end result is differential treatment based on race. This differential treatment is important because, at all levels of professional achievement, receiving advice on the most realistic approach to a goal may be as important as receiving encouragement to set ambitious goals in the first place.

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