

THE LESS-RACIST-THAN-MYSELF EFFECT:  
EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL  
COMPARISON INFORMATION ON  
PERCEPTIONS OF RACISM

By

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**ABSTRACT:** It is well established that people evaluate themselves more favorably than they evaluate the average person. For example, people report they have higher IQs, are better drivers, and are more qualified for jobs relative to the average person. This biased social comparison is known as the Better-Than-Average effect. Even more interesting, this positivity bias even works when the comparison other has responses that are identical to the individual's own response, an effect known as the Better-Than-Myself effect. The present research extends the BTME to the area of prejudice, to investigate the judgment process that occurs when people are asked to estimate their own prejudices and see if people tend to deny their own racist behaviors. In Study 1, participants indicated they were less racist than a comparison other, even when that comparison other engaged in identical behaviors as that of the participant, thereby demonstrating a "less-racist-than myself" effect. The present research of Study 2 extended the findings of Study 1, and sought to investigate the role of consensus comparison feedback, that was hypothesized to significantly weaken the Less-Racist-Than-Myself effect when social consensus was low. Contrary to the hypotheses, neither the consensus manipulation nor other moderating variables were found to impact the self enhancement bias. These results provide insight into situations where people engage in seemingly racist behavior but deny that they are racist. According to the present work, this denial does not seem to stem from the fact that such perpetrators define racism differently than their audience, or are affected by whether or not their peers are in agreement with their behaviors. Instead, such perpetrators appear to suffer from a positivity blind spot that allows them to see racism in others, but not in themselves, regardless of consensus. Results and implications are discussed in terms of how the present research was the first to incorporate the study of prejudice in these self-enhancement effects, and the difficulty of debiasing such effects.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In 2010, comedian/actor Michael Richards was performing standup at a comedy club when he was interrupted by a heckler and proceeded to call the audience member a number of racial slurs. This incident was caught on tape, brought to the media, and Richards received much criticism over his behavior that night. In response to the criticism, Richards released a public apology stating, “I am not a racist, that’s what’s so insane about this.” (“Kramer’ Apologizes, Says He’s Not Racist,” 2010). Clearly Michael Richards and the audience disagree about whether his behavior was racist or not. But what could be the reason for this discrepancy? It could be that Michael Richards has a different definition of racism than the observers and therefore Richards would judge anyone who engages in this behavior as non-racist. Or it could be that Richards has the same definition of racism as his observers but he is unable or unwilling to see racism in himself.

The example demonstrates how attitudes and behaviors are impacted by social comparisons and consensus feedback. The (re)evaluation of one’s own attitudes and behaviors are influenced by whether or not one’s attitudes and behaviors are endorsed by others. The purpose of the present research is to tease apart the differences in how prejudiced attitudes and behaviors are defined through the investigation of social comparisons and consensus information, and examine how those effects impact an individual’s evaluation of her own reported prejudice.

#### **Biases in Making Social Comparisons**



Evaluations of the self are said to be drawn from making comparisons of one's own attitudes and behaviors to other people's (Festinger, 1954; Gilbert, Giesler, & Morris, 1995). In order for an individual to know how intelligent she is, she must compare her intelligence with that of others around her. However, such social comparisons are not always objective. People often bias their social comparisons in ways that make them look better (i.e., self-enhancement; Sedikides & Strube, 1995). Self enhancement behaviors stem from a propensity to frame one's own traits, attitudes and behaviors more positively than negatively when comparing the self relative to others. For example, perceptions of one's own academic success are enhanced when judgments are made relative to the perceived success of others, but is not enhanced when the judgments of others' success are made relative to the self (Detweiler-Bedell, Detweiler-Bedell, & Salovey, 2006). Positive and negatively framed self-other comparisons are also said to bias memories and perceptions of others (White, Coppola, & Multunas, 2008). Furthermore, when attributes are positively framed, individuals demonstrate self-enhancement behaviors, and perceive others as in agreement with their self-enhanced judgments (i.e., false-consensus effect; Tabachnik, Crocker, & Alloy, 1983). These self-enhancement biases often emerge when evaluations of the self are made in comparison to the general, or "average," person or population.

### **The Better-Than-Average Effect**

One form of self-enhanced social comparison that has been widely studied is the better-than-average effect (Alicke, 1985). The better-than-average effect (BTAE) refers to the tendency for people to evaluate themselves more favorably than they evaluate the "average other." For example, people tend to report that they have higher IQs, are more accurate in self-assessments, predict they are better sources of judgment and perception, all relative to the average person (Dunning, Heath, & Suls, 2004). In addition to individual comparisons, the BTAE findings have been generalized to apply to social comparisons made at a group level, and a number of studies

established that individuals evaluate in-group members more positively than out-group members (Goetz, Ehret, Jullien, & Hall, 2006; Hoyt, Price, & Emrick, 2010; Klar & Giladi, 1997).

Furthermore, a number of factors are known to influence people's tendency to engage in the BTAE, including personality traits and situational effects (Alicke, 1985; Detweiler-Bedell, Detweiler-Bedell, & Salovey, 2006; Williams & Gilovich, 2012). For example, people high in subjective well-being are more likely to engage in the BTAE than those low in well-being (Goetz, et. al, 2006). And people who compare their own behavior to that of a concrete other (e.g., a specified stranger; Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, Vredenburg, 1995) is weaker, although still evident, compared to those who compare to an abstract other (e.g, the average person; Johnson, 2009). Finally, people are more likely to demonstrate the BTAE when evaluating qualities that are "important" compared to those that are rated as "unimportant" (Brown, 2012).

In understanding why the BTAE occurs, researchers are divided between cognitive and motivational explanations. Cognitive models claim the processes underlying comparative judgments between people (aggregate or individualized) are not unlike comparisons of other objects, such as food (Giladi & Klar, 2002). Conversely, motivational models argue the BTAE occurs due to a desire to preserve or enhance self worth (Alicke & Seikides, 2009; Brown, 2012; Guenther & Alicke, 2010). The fact that the BTAE occurs more frequently among people high in well-being, and in regards to important qualities, gives credence to this motivational account.

### **The Better-Than-Myself Effect**

While people generally rate themselves more favorably in comparison to an abstract concept, like the aggregate "average" person, research has also found that people still rate themselves more favorably in comparison to a concrete individual (Alicke, et. al., 1995; Brown, 2012). Interestingly, this occurs even when the comparison individual has trait or behavioral ratings are actually made by the participants themselves (Alicke, Vredenburg, Hiatt, & Govorun,

2001; Guenther & Alicke, 2010). This tendency for people to perceive they are better than another who is identical to them is known as the better-than-myself effect (BTME). For example, in a series of studies conducted by Alicke and colleagues (2001), individuals first rated themselves on a variety of personality traits (e.g., cooperative, aggressive, honest). Then sometime later, the participants were presented with personality ratings for the “average” person, but in fact these ratings were the same one’s provided earlier by the participant. Thus, this average person was essentially identical to the participant. Despite this, participants still rated themselves as better than this average person. This BTME was also found when individuals compared themselves to another concrete individual, and not just the abstract concept of the “average” person (Alicke, et. al., 2001). The BTME represents an interesting extension of the well-established better-than- average effect yet it has not received as much empirical attention as its predecessor. Furthermore, the BTME has only been examined within the context of personality ratings. However, I believe the principles of the BTME can help explain why people may be unwilling to label their own behavior as racist. The present work was designed to test this intriguing possibility.

### **Present Research**

When people like Michael Richards commit a questionably prejudiced act and then deny they are prejudice, two potential explanations are possible. On the one hand, these individuals may just hold a different definition of prejudice than their observers. On the other hand, these people may hold the same definition, but because of self-enhancement reasons may be reluctant to perceive themselves are prejudiced. If the latter explanation is correct, it suggests that such denial of prejudice would not occur if they were to observe someone else committing the same act (thereby falling prey to the BTME). The present studies relied on the BTME to examine whether people’s reluctance to perceive themselves as prejudiced is responsible for such divergent views of prejudiced behavior.

The purpose of Study 1 was to determine if the BTME (Alicke et al., 2001) extends to the domain of prejudice. This study examined if people are more likely to consider their own behaviors and attitudes as prejudiced when these responses are supposedly committed by someone else. We refer to this overall pattern of underestimating one's own racist attitudes and behaviors in comparison to another person with identical responses as the "less-racist-than-myself" effect. Study 1 also examined whether the BTME is more or less likely to occur in regards to racist behaviors compared to other undesirable but non-racist behaviors (i.e., dishonest and disgusting behaviors).

## CHAPTER II

### STUDY 1

#### **Method**

##### **Participants and design**

A total of 98 students (62 female, 37 male; 67% Caucasian) from a Midwestern university participated in this study for course credit (mean age = 19.82 years).

##### **Procedure and materials**

We used a modified version of the procedure created by Alicke and colleagues (2001). We also wanted to directly compare people's self-perceptions of their prejudice with self-perceptions of other undesirable qualities so the list of behaviors also included actions that were potentially dishonest (e.g., "Have you ever lied to get out of a gathering with friends or family?"), and disgusting acts (e.g., "Have you ever worn the same underwear two days in a row?"). For each item, participants indicated if they had ever engaged in the behavior by selecting either "yes" or "no." Participants were then asked to rate how racist, dishonest, and disgusting they were compared to the average peer (e.g., Compared to the average fellow college student, how *racist/dishonest/disgusting* are you?).

The second phase of the study took place months later during an in-lab session. Participants were asked to review another student's pre-screener responses. Unbeknownst to the

participant, this “other” person had the exact same ratings that the participant provided on the pre-screener. Thus, all participants were exposed to their own ratings under the guise that these were someone else’s ratings. For example, if a participant had indicated in the pre-screener that she had “avoided an interaction with someone because they spoke with a thick foreign accent,” had “worn the same underwear two days in a row,” but had never “lied to get out of a gathering with friends or family,” she was later shown these exact same behaviors under the guise that it was reported by another student.

After reviewing the target other’s responses, participants responded to several questions that asked to evaluate how racist, dishonest, and disgusting they and this target were. Specifically, participants were asked to compare this target to the average student (e.g., “Compared to the average fellow college student, how *racist/dishonest/disgusting* is this person?”), and compare themselves to the average student (e.g., “Compared to the average fellow college student, how *racist/dishonest/disgusting* are you?”). Ratings were made using a 9 point scale ranging from -4 (much less *racist/dishonest/disgusting* than average) to 4 (much more *racist/dishonest/disgusting* than average). After completing the task, participants were debriefed and the true intentions of the study were revealed. Ten participants expressed suspicion that the target other’s responses were in fact their own and were therefore removed from the analyses. Removing these participants from the analyses did not impact the overall results.

## Results

A series of paired sample t-tests were conducted to compare participants’ ratings of the target to ratings of themselves for racist, dishonest, and disgusting evaluations. For all three domains, there was a significant difference between target-ratings and self-ratings. As expected, participants rated the target as more racist ( $M = -.97$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ) than themselves ( $M = -1.53$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ),  $t(87) = 3.45$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $d = 0.74$ . Participants also rated the target as more dishonest ( $M =$

-.91,  $SD = 1.59$ ) than themselves ( $M = -1.48$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ),  $t(87) = 3.20$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $d = 0.69$ , and more disgusting ( $M = -1.01$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ) than themselves ( $M = -1.59$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ),  $t(87) = 3.12$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $d = 0.67$ . Thus, across all three domains, participants demonstrated a better-than-myself effect.

One possible explanation for these results is that participants' definition of what constitutes a prejudiced act changed from the time of the pre-screener to the time of the in-lab study. To test for this possibility, we compared participants' self-ratings of racism during the pre-screener to their self-ratings during the in-lab session. As expected, there was no significant difference between these two racist evaluations,  $t(80) = -1.52$ ,  $p = .13$ . Thus, participants' tendency to rate another as more racist than themselves even though this "other" person was in fact themselves is not due to a change in definitions of prejudice over time. This provides strong evidence that the "less-racist-than-myself" pattern detected in this study was driven by participants' reluctance to perceive racism in their own attitudes and behaviors.

## **Discussion**

Study 1 demonstrated that the BTME can be extended to the domain of racism. In this study, people showed a "less-racist-than-myself" pattern whereby they perceived themselves as less racist than ostensibly different individual, even when that other individual committed the same questionable behaviors as themselves. This result suggests that people who deny they are racist likely do so not out of a difference in definition of what it means to commit a racist act, but rather out of a self-enhancing tendency to deny racism in themselves.

## CHAPTER III

### STUDY 2

The purpose of Study 2 is to further explore the dynamics of social comparisons and investigate the conditions that may weaken or strengthen the “less-racist-than-myself” effect. When it comes to social comparisons, people have a tendency to believe that others share their opinions, beliefs and values; a cognitive bias commonly known as a false consensus effect (Alicke & Largo, 1995). Research has found that false consensus effects emerge when people compare perceptions of the self to how others perceive them (Sechrist & Stangor, 2001; Tabachnik, Crocker, & Alloy, 1983). Furthermore, people generally overestimate the extent that others agree with them (Pedersen, Griffiths, & Watt, 2008). For example, in examining people’s estimations for how other in-group members view the out-group, people high in prejudiced are more likely to overestimate the extent that other in-group members share their prejudiced views (Watt & Larkin, 2010).

False consensus not only influences our evaluations of others, it also affects our attitudes and behaviors toward others. When people are providing consensus information that indicates their prejudicial beliefs and behaviors are uncommon, they often engage in a reevaluation and adjustment such that they become less prejudiced (Klein & Goethals, 2002; Stangor, Sechrist, & Jost, 2001). For example, participants who received consensus information citing their fellow peers held favorable attitudes toward obese people were less likely to endorse obese stereotypes



whereas those who received consensus information citing more negative attitudes were more likely to endorse obese stereotypes (Puhl, Schwartz, & Brownell, 2005). Similarly, participants who were told the majority of their peers held favorable attitudes toward African Americans were more willing to help an African American in need (Sechrist & Milford, 2007). Because consensus feedback is effective in changing people's attitudes and behavior in comparison to others, it is of particular interest to the present study to investigate the impact of consensus information on the "less-racist-than-myself" effect.

In the current experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions that present them with "high" or "low" consensus information regarding their reported prejudicial behaviors. Thus, those in the high consensus condition were told that the majority of their peers engaged in the same questionably prejudicial behaviors as they do; whereas those in the low consensus condition were told the majority does not engage in those behaviors. It is hypothesized that participants in the high consensus condition will not evaluate their behaviors as significantly less racist than the comparison other, thereby decreasing the "less-racist-than-myself" effect. This pattern is expected because receiving high consensus information serves as endorsement justification for holding these potentially prejudiced attitudes and behaviors and therefore these participants will be less likely to deny their level of prejudice compared to their peers. Conversely, participants in the low consensus condition are expected to evaluate their behaviors as significantly less racist than the comparison other; thereby replicating the less-racist effect demonstrated in Study 1. This pattern is expected because receiving low consensus information does not provide a justification for their potentially prejudiced attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, these participants are expected to be more likely to deny their own prejudice and thus claim they are less racist than the comparison other.

The predicted effect was also considered to be moderated by other relevant individual differences such as external and internal motivations to control prejudice, life satisfaction, trait

self-esteem, public self-consciousness, and self-monitoring. It is predicted that the moderating effect of consensus would be stronger for people high in external and internal motivations to control prejudice, life satisfaction, trait self-esteem, public self-consciousness, and self-monitoring.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHOD

#### **Participants and design**

74 students (45 female, 29 male, 50% Caucasian; mean age 19.88 years) from a Midwestern university participated in this study in return for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions: high consensus or low consensus.

#### **Procedure and materials**

The procedure of this study was similar to that of Study 1, with an added experimental manipulation and additional individual difference measures that took place during the in-lab session. Like before, participants were first included in a pre-screener phase at the start of the semester where they indicated whether they have engaged in potentially racist behaviors. To hide the true purpose of this study, the racist behaviors were embedded within a larger list of non-relevant behaviors. Weeks later in the semester, participants volunteered for the study and were brought into the lab for phase 2. During this second phase, participants were exposed to their own ratings under the guise that these were another student's ratings, and then randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (consensus or non-consensus). After participants completed all measures, they were debriefed and probed for suspicion. During the debriefing, participants were informed of the true purpose of the study.

**Consensus manipulation.** Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions: high consensus (N = 34) and low consensus (N = 36). The information

presented to participants was as follows: “Based on extensive research at the present university, the percentage of fellow students who also engaged in these behaviors listed on the previous questionnaire is 81% (*high consensus*)/19% (*low consensus*).” This manipulation was taken directly from Sechrist and Stangor (2001).

**Trait comparisons.** Participants rated how racist the target other was as well as themselves (e.g., “Compared to the average university student, how racist are you?”). To conceal the purpose of the study, participants rated the target and themselves on a number of non-relevant traits (e.g., cooperative, aggressive, sophisticated, intelligent, polite, etc.; taken directly from Alicke, et. al., 2001). These ratings all occurred on a 9 point scale ranging from -4 (much less *racist* than average) to 4 (much more *racist* than average).

### **Potential moderators**

***Motivation to control prejudice.*** Developed by Plant and Devine (1998), the motivation to control prejudice scale is a measure of one’s external *and* internal motivations to control prejudice. Differentiating external and internal motivations allows the researcher to separate and identify an individual’s personal beliefs (internal motivator) from societal standards external to the self (external motivator) that would influence one’s judgments. In its original form, the internal and external motivation to control prejudice scale was an evaluation of one’s views towards Black people; however, modified versions of the internal motivation to respond without prejudice (IMS) and the external motivation to respond without prejudice (EMS) scales were used in this study. The scale was modified by replacing the word “Black” with references to those who generally belonged to other ethnic groups. For example, sample items from the EMS subscale was, “Because of today’s PC (politically correct) standards I try to appear nonprejudiced toward people of other ethnicities.” A sample item from the IMS subscale was “I am personally motivated by my beliefs to be nonprejudiced toward people of other ethnicities.” The IMS

consists of 5 items ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and the EMS consists of 5 items ( $\alpha = .74$ ). Responses were made using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) rating scale.

***Life satisfaction.*** Satisfaction with life was measured using the satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985) which assesses “global life satisfaction” (71). A sample item from the SWLS is “In most ways my life is close to my ideal.” The SWLS is a five-item measure ( $\alpha = .82$ ). Responses were made on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) rating scale.

***Trait self-esteem.*** Global trait self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) which consists of ten items ( $\alpha = .84$ ). Example items from this scale include “I feel that I have a number of good qualities” and “I feel I do not have much to be proud of” (reverse-coded). Responses were made on a 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*) rating scale.

***Self-consciousness.*** Self-consciousness was assessed using the self-consciousness scale (SCS; Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss, 1975). The SCS is comprised of three subscales: private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness and social anxiety. Private self-consciousness refers to an individual’s attention on their internal thoughts and feelings (e.g., “I am always trying to figure myself out”). Public self-consciousness refers to an individual’s attention to others’ perceptions of his or her thoughts and behaviors (e.g., “I am concerned about my style of doing things”). Social anxiety refers to one’s discomfort in social situations (e.g., “I get embarrassed very easily”). The private subscale consists of 10 items ( $\alpha = .74$ ), the public subscale consists of 7 items ( $\alpha = .70$ ) and the anxiety subscale consists of 6 items ( $\alpha = .82$ ). Responses were made using a 0 (*extremely uncharacteristic*) to 5 (*extremely characteristic*) rating scale.

***Self monitoring.*** Self-monitoring refers to the extent people consciously manage their public self in social situations (Snyder, 1974). Individual differences in this tendency was

assessed using the self-monitoring scale (SM; Snyder, 1974) which consists 25 true/false items ( $\alpha = .56$ ). A sample item from the SM scale is “At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt or to do or say things that others will like.”

## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS

Four participants expressed suspicion that the comparison “other” was in fact his or herself and so were removed from the following analyses. These pages are where you type in the title of your chapter and add the body (text, images, etc.) of your thesis.

#### **Primary analysis**

A 2 (target: self vs. other rating)  $\times$  2 (consensus: high vs. low) mixed model analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to assess the impact of the consensus manipulation on participants’ self vs. other racist evaluations. Consistent with Study 1, there was a main effect for target,  $F(1,68) = 5.13, p = .03$ . As indicative of the less-racist-than-myself effect, participants rated themselves as significantly less racist ( $M = -1.89$ ) than the comparison other ( $M = -1.51$ ). Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no main effect of consensus,  $F(1,68) = 1.53, p = .22$ . Moreover, there was no significant interaction between target and consensus,  $F(1, 68) = .277, p = .60$ , suggesting there was no difference in the self-other evaluations between the two consensus groups. Simple main effects tests were conducted and pair-wise differences were not found to be significant between the two consensus conditions ( $p = .37$ ). To examine if the individual difference measures modified the effect, a series of hierarchical regressions were conducted treating internal and external motivations to control prejudice, trait self esteem, self-monitoring, public self consciousness, private self consciousness, and social anxiety as potential moderators. To make the analyses more interpretable, a difference

score between the self and other racist evaluations was computed then regressed onto a dummy code for the consensus condition (0 = low; 1 = high), the moderator, and the multiplicative cross-product of the moderator with consensus condition. To assess main effects, the consensus and moderator variable entered into the first block of the hierarchical regression and the cross-product was added in the second block of the equation.

The results of the regression analyses are displayed in Tables 1-7. None of the potential moderators had a significant main effect or an interaction with consensus.



## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to investigate if consensus debiases the less-racist-than-myself effect that I established in Study 1. Specifically, it was predicted that participants who received high consensus information suggesting that those around them also engage in racist behaviors would be less likely to demonstrate the less-racist-than-myself effect compared to participants receiving low consensus information. However, the results failed to support this prediction. Furthermore, none of the moderation analyses were significant. This indicates that people high and low in motivation to control prejudice, satisfaction with life, self-esteem, self-consciousness and self-monitoring are equally likely to engage in the less-racist-than-myself effect. Taken together, these results indicate that the less-racist-than-myself is more robust and wide-ranging than initially thought.

#### **Limitations and Future Research**

Several limitations were present in the current study. Although past research suggests that consensus manipulations lead to changes in evaluations of beliefs and behaviors, it is possible that the consensus manipulation used in this study was not strong enough to produce a significant change. The consensus information provided in Study 2 (see Appendix) could have been misleading to participants, or not provided enough relevant information to participants. This consensus manipulation should have been pre-tested prior to conducting Study 2 to ensure that participants understood the provided information and

were aware of its implications. Likewise, the consensus information provided could have been perfectly understood by the participants (Sechrist & Milford, 2007); however, the information could have not been personally relevant enough for participants to consider the information when making the trait evaluations for themselves or the target. Future research should retest the validity of the consensus information provided as well as test variations of the consensus information that would potentially have a greater impact on participants' racist evaluations.

Another potential limitation to this study was that the prejudiced attitudes and behavior evaluation measures were made vague enough that they applied to all ethnic minorities. Additional measures for prejudice (i.e., feeling thermometers) should be included to assess participants' attitudes toward minorities belonging to specific ethnic groups, to see if there are any differences if the ethnic group is specified. Prior work shows that the more specific an assessment is, the more likely it will predict behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1974), so the effects present in the present studies might be stronger if more specific ethnic groups were targeted in the measures.

However, it may be that the less-racist-than-myself effect is just too robust to be debiased by a simple in-lab manipulation. This effect is theorized to stem from the larger motivation of self-enhancement and because self-enhancement is so fundamental, it may be difficult to make the less-racist-than-myself disappear. Instead, future studies should explore potential variables that would strengthen, rather than eliminate, the less-racist-than-myself effect. For example, prior research shows that self-enhancement effects become stronger after a threat to self-esteem (Boney McCoy, Gibbons, & Gerrard, 1999). Future research could examine if the same thing occurs to the less-racist-than-myself

effect. Similarly, prior research shows people are more self-enhancing toward in-group rather than out-group members (Crocker, & Luhtanen, 1990). This suggests that the less-racist-than-myself effect may become stronger when participants think they are evaluating responses from an out-group member rather than in-group member. Future research could examine if the less-racist-than-myself effect becomes stronger when OSU students think they are evaluating an OU versus OSU student.

Finally, another variable that may increase the less-racist-than-myself effect may be social pressure to avoid acting prejudiced. Using a manipulation by Payne, Burkley and Stokes (2008), participants could be warned to avoid acting prejudiced or not. The assumption would be that increased social pressure to act non-prejudiced or “politically correct” would only strengthen the less-racist-than-myself effect demonstrated in the present studies. Future research should explore this possibility.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

Previous studies on the better-than-average and better-than-myself effects have not investigated evaluations of prejudiced attitudes and behaviors. The present area of research is the first to incorporate the study of prejudice in these self-enhancement effects. The findings of the present research provide further insight into how people evaluate others’ attitudes and behavior while denying the identical attitudes and behaviors in themselves. The emergence of the less-racist-than-myself effect reveals that people do not have different definitions of what prejudice is, and that people consistently disconnect their own behaviors from others which makes them blind to their own prejudices.

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## TABLES

Table 1

External Motivation to Control Prejudice  $\times$  Consensus (high and low) on  
Self-other difference scores

		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>	Constant	-.23	.87		-.27	.79
	External Motive	-.06	.18	-.04	-.30	.76
	Consensus	.29	.37	.09	.78	.44
<b>Model 2</b>	Constant	.29	1.28		.23	.82
	External Motive	-.17	.27	-.12	-.63	.53
	Consensus	-.66	1.70	-.23	-.39	.69
	EM $\times$ Consensus	.21	.36	.34	.57	.57

Table 2

Internal Motivation to Control Prejudice  $\times$  Consensus (high and low) on  
Self-other difference scores

		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>	Constant	1.03	.92		1.12	.27
	Internal Motive	.37	.36	-.13	1.03	.31
	Consensus	-.29	.17	-.21	-1.7	.09
<b>Model 2</b>	Constant	.83	1.34		.62	.54
	Internal Motive	.77	1.87	.27	.41	.68
	Consensus	-.25	.25	-.18	-.99	.32
	IM $\times$ Consensus	-.07	.34	-.15	-.22	.83

Table 3

Life Satisfaction  $\times$  Consensus (high and low) on  
Self-other difference scores

		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>	Constant	.47	.24		1.99	.05
	Life Satisfaction	.009	.03	.03	.28	.78
	Consensus	-.18	.34	-.06	-.53	.60
<b>Model 2</b>	Constant	.48	.24		1.99	.05
	Life Satisfaction	.04	.05	.16	.78	.44
	Consensus	-.18	.34	-.07	-.53	.60
	LS $\times$ Consensus	-.05	.07	-.15	-.76	.45

Table 4

Self Esteem  $\times$  Consensus (high and low) on  
Self-other difference scores

		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>	Constant	.50	.24		2.12	.04
	Self Esteem	.04	.04	.13	1.05	.30
	Consensus	-.21	.34	-.08	-.63	.53
<b>Model 2</b>	Constant	.50	.24		2.07	.04
	Self Esteem	.04	.06	.11	.65	.52
	Consensus	-.21	.34	-.08	-.61	.54
	SE $\times$ Consensus	-.004	.03	-.03	-.15	.88

Table 5

Private Self-Consciousness  $\times$  Consensus (high and low) on  
Self-other difference scores

		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>	Constant	.47	.24		1.98	.05
	Private Self	-.02	.03	-.08	-.66	.51
	Consensus	-.17	.34	-.06	-.50	.62
<b>Model 2</b>	Constant	.47	.24		1.99	.05
	Private Self	.001	.04	.003	.02	.99
	Consensus	-.17	.34	-.06	-.51	.62
	PS $\times$ Consensus	-.04	.06	-.11	-.60	.55

Table 6

Public Self-Consciousness  $\times$  Consensus (high and low) on  
Self-other difference scores

		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>	Constant	.47	.24		1.98	.05
	Public Self	-.006	.04	-.02	-.15	.88
	Consensus	-.18	.34	-.06	-.52	.61
<b>Model 2</b>	Constant	.47	.24		1.98	.05
	Public Self	.003	.05	.008	.05	.96
	Consensus	-.18	.34	-.06	-.51	.61
	PS $\times$ Consensus	-.02	.08	-.04	-.26	.80

Table 7

Social Anxiety  $\times$  Consensus (high and low) on  
Self-other difference scores

		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>	Constant	.47	.24		1.98	.05
	Social Anxiety	-.03	.03	-.11	-.8	.38
	Consensus	-.17	.34	-.06	-.49	.63
<b>Model 2</b>	Constant	.47	.24		1.98	.05
	Social Anxiety	-.01	.04	-.04	-.23	.82
	Consensus	-.17	.34	-.06	-.49	.63
	SA $\times$ Consensus	-.03	.06	-.04	-.53	.60

Table 8

Social Monitoring  $\times$  Consensus (high and low) on  
Self-other difference scores

		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Model 1</b>	Constant	.47	.24		1.99	.05
	Social Monitor	.008	.05	-.02	-.17	.87
	Consensus	-.18	.34	-.06	-.52	.60
<b>Model 2</b>	Constant	.47	.24		1.98	.05
	Social Monitor	-.03	.07	-.07	-.38	.70
	Consensus	-.18	.34	-.06	-.52	.61
	SM $\times$ Consensus	.06	.09	.12	.65	.52

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### **Pre-screener Items:**

#### **RACIST BEHAVIOR ITEMS**

*Have you ever: (response = Yes or No)*

- Discouraged a friend/family member from dating someone of another race?
- Avoided an interaction with someone because they spoke with a thick foreign accent?
- Told a joke about Black people?
- Told a joke about Asians?
- Laughed at another person's joke about Black people?
- Laughed at another person's joke about Asian people?
- Failed to speak up when someone else tells a racist joke?
- Told an international student to go back to their own country?
- Sought out an Asian student for help in your math or science class?
- Thought there are too many international students on campus?
- Used the N word to refer to Blacks?
- Used the term "Towel Heads" to refer to Muslims?
- Avoided interacting with a Muslim person out of fear?
- Felt anxious when interacting with racial minorities?
- Denied someone membership in your organization (e.g., sorority, fraternity, study group) because they were of a different race?
- Assumed someone was a criminal because they were Black? Supported displaying the confederate flag?
- Used a racial slur in conversation?
- Avoided sitting next to someone of another race while in a waiting room?
- Belonged to a group that promoted racial bigotry?
- Secretly thought that Blacks are inferior but didn't publically say so? Believed that races differ in terms of intelligence?
- Felt uncomfortable around Blacks?
- Agreed with stereotypes about racial minorities?

Only dated people of your own race?  
Only had friends of your own race?  
Failed to speak up when someone else was racist?  
Felt irritated because Blacks still talk about slavery even though it happened a long time ago?  
Assumed someone was an illegal immigrant because of their skin color?

***Would you ever...(response = Yes or No)***

Marry someone of another race?  
Marry someone of another religion?  
Discourage your child from playing with Blacks?  
Discourage your child from marrying someone who is Black?  
Favor a White worker over a racial minority when making a hiring decision?  
Not vote for a political candidate because of their race?

**CONTROL ITEMS**

***Have you ever: (response = Yes or No)***

Eaten food that had fallen on the floor when nobody was looking?  
Drank milk straight out of the carton?  
Littered in a public place?  
Worn the same clothes two days in a row?  
Gone three days without showering?  
Gone a week without brushing your teeth?  
Worn the same underwear two days in a row?  
Picked your nose in public?  
Put chewed gum on the bottom of a chair or table?  
Gossiped about someone behind their back?  
Pretended to be sick to get out of work?  
Lied to get out of a gathering with friends or family?  
Lied to someone in order to avoid hurting their feelings?  
Downloaded or streamed music, movies or TV shows in violation of copyright laws?  
Have you ever parked illegally in a handicapped spot?  
Have you ever lied to get out of a speeding ticket?

Compared to the average OSU student, how racist are you?  
Compared to the average OSU student, how dishonest are you?  
Compared to the average OSU student, how disgusting are you?

Internal and external motivation to control prejudice scale (Plant & Devine, 1998).

1. Because of today's PC (politically correct) standards I try to appear nonprejudiced toward people of other ethnicities.
2. Being nonprejudiced toward people of other ethnicities is important to my self-concept.
3. I attempt to act in nonprejudiced ways toward people of other ethnicities because it is personally important to me.
4. I attempt to appear nonprejudiced toward people of other ethnicities in order to avoid disapproval from others.
5. According to my personal values, using stereotypes about people of other ethnicities is OK.
6. I try to hide any negative thoughts about people of other ethnicities in order to avoid negative reactions from others.
7. I am personally motivated by my beliefs to be nonprejudiced toward people of other ethnicities.

8. If I acted prejudiced toward people of other ethnicities, I would be concerned that others would be angry with me.
9. I try to act nonprejudiced toward people of other ethnicities because of pressure from others.
10. Because of my personal values, I believe that using stereotypes about people of other ethnicities is wrong.

## Appendix B

### **In-Lab Items:**

Instructions:

The purpose of this study is to examine how people form impressions of others based on minimal information. In this study, you will read some information presented by another OSU student and asked to form an impression of the person.

On the next page is a survey completed by another OSU student at the beginning of this semester. In this survey, the student was given a list of behaviors and asked to indicate if they had ever engaged in each behavior. We ask that you read this student's responses and then answer questions based on your impression of this student.

Please note that it is important you read everything carefully, because you will be asked questions later about what you have read.

### **Responses provided by student 127**

**Question: Have you ever...**

1. Avoided an interaction with someone because they spoke with a thick foreign accent?

**Student's Response: No.**

2. Told a joke about Black people?

**Student's Response: No.**

3. Told a joke about Asians?

**Student's Response: No.**

4. Failed to speak up when someone else tells a racist joke?

**Student's Response: Yes.**

5. Thought there are too many international students on campus?

**Student's Response: No.**

6. Used a racial slur in conversation?

**Student's Response: No.**

7. Felt uncomfortable around Blacks?

**Student's Response: Yes.**

8. Agreed with stereotypes about racial minorities?

**Student's Response: No.**

9. Felt irritated because Blacks still talk about slavery even though it happened a long time ago?

**Student's Response: Yes.**

10. Used the N word to refer to blacks?

**Student's Response: Yes.**

11. Worn the same underwear two days in a row?

**Student's Response: No.**

12. Picked your nose in public?

**Student's Response: No.**

13. Put chewed gum on the bottom of a chair or table?

**Student's Response: No.**

14. Pretended to be sick to get out of work?

**Student's Response: No.**

15. Lied to get out of a gathering with friends or family?

**Student's Response: No.**

16. Downloaded or streamed music, movies, or TV shows in violation of copyrights?  
**Student's Response: No.**



## Appendix C

### Consensus manipulation:

#### *(High consensus)*

Based on extensive research at Oklahoma State University, the percentage of OSU students who also engaged in these behaviors listed on the previous questionnaire is 81%.

#### *(Low consensus)*

Based on extensive research at Oklahoma State University, the percentage of OSU students who also engaged in these behaviors listed on the previous questionnaire is 19%.

## Appendix D

Instructions: This first set of questions asks you to rate this student on a series of traits:

1. How cooperative is this student?
2. How aggressive is this student?
3. How racist is this student?
4. How sophisticated is this student?
5. How intelligent is this student?
6. How disgusting is this student?
7. How polite is this student?
8. How dishonest is this student?
9. Compared to the average OSU student, how cooperative is this person?
10. Compared to the average OSU student, how aggressive is this student?
11. Compared to the average OSU student, how racist is this person?
12. Compared to the average OSU student, how sophisticated is this person?
13. Compared to the average OSU student, how intelligent is this person?
14. Compared to the average OSU student, how disgusting is this person?
15. Compared to the average OSU student, how polite is this person?
16. Compared to the average OSU student, how dishonest is this person?

Instructions:

Sometimes our own traits can influence how we rate others, so for the next task, we would like you to rate yourself on these same qualities:

17. Compared to this student, how cooperative are you?
18. Compared to this student, how aggressive are you?
19. Compared to this student, how racist are you?
20. Compared to this student, how sophisticated are you?
21. Compared to this student, how intelligent are you?
22. Compared to this student, how disgusting are you?
23. Compared to this student, how polite are you?
24. Compared to this student, how dishonest are you?
25. Compared to the average OSU student, how cooperative are you?
26. Compared to the average OSU student, how aggressive are you?
27. Compared to the average OSU student, how racist are you?
28. Compared to the average OSU student, how sophisticated are you?
29. Compared to the average OSU student, how intelligent are you?
30. Compared to the average OSU student, how disgusting are you?
31. Compared to the average OSU student, how polite are you?
32. Compared to the average OSU student, how dishonest is are you?
33. What was the percentage of OSU students that engaged in the behaviors listed on the previous questionnaire?

\_\_\_\_\_ %

## Appendix E

### Satisfaction With Life Scale

34. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
35. The conditions of my life are excellent.
36. I am satisfied with my life.
37. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
38. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

### Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

39. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
40. At times, I think I am no good at all.
41. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
42. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
43. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
44. I certainly feel useless at times.
45. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
46. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
47. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
48. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

### Self-Consciousness Scale

1. I am always trying to figure myself out.
2. I'm concerned about my style of doing things.
3. Generally, I'm not very aware of myself.
4. It takes me time to overcome my shyness in new situations.
5. I reflect about myself a lot.
6. I'm concerned about the way I present myself.
7. I'm often the subject of my own fantasies.
8. I have trouble working when someone is watching me.
9. I never scrutinize myself.
10. I get embarrassed very easily.
11. I'm self-conscious about the way I look.
12. I don't find it hard to talk to strangers.
13. I'm generally attentive to my inner feelings.
14. I usually worry about making a good impression.
15. I'm constantly examining my motives.
16. One of the last things I do before I leave my house is look in the mirror.
17. I sometimes have the feeling that I'm off somewhere watching myself.
18. I feel anxious when I speak in front of a group.
19. I'm concerned about what other people think of me.
20. I'm alert to changes in my mood.
21. I'm usually aware of my appearance.
22. I'm aware of the way my mind works when I work through a problem.
23. Large groups make me nervous.

### Self-Monitoring Scale

1. I find it hard to imitate the behavior of other people.
2. My behavior is usually an expression of my true inner feelings, attitudes and beliefs.
3. At parties and social gatherings, I do not attempt to do or say things that others will like.

4. I can only argue for ideas which I already believe.
5. I can make impromptu speeches even on topics about which I have almost no information.
6. I guess I put on a show to impress or entertain people.
7. When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I look to the behavior of others for cues.
8. I would probably make a good actor.
9. I rarely need the advice of my friends to choose movies, books or music.
10. I sometimes appear to others to be experiencing deeper emotions than I actually am.
11. I laugh more when I watch a comedy with others than when alone.
12. In a group of people I am rarely the center of attention.
13. In different situations and with different people, I often act like very different persons.
14. I am not particularly good at making other people like me.
15. Even if I am not enjoying myself, I often pretend to be having a good time.
16. I'm not always the person I appear to be.
17. I would not change my opinions (or the way I do things) in order to please someone else or win their favor.
18. I have considered being an entertainer.
19. In order to get along and be liked, I tend to be what people expect me to be rather than anything else.
20. I have never been good at games like charades or improvisational acting.
21. I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations.
22. At a party, I let others keep the jokes and stories going.
23. I feel a bit awkward in company and do not show up quite so well as I should.
24. I can look anyone in the eye and tell a lie with a straight face (if for a right end).
25. I may deceive people by being friendly when I really dislike them. Appendix L

## Appendix F

### Demographics

#### 1. ID Code:

To protect your identity, we will create a personalized ID and use this number, instead of your name, to link your data. To create this ID code, we need you to provide the following information:

What are your initials (the first letter of your first and last name)? \_\_ \_\_

What is your birthday date (Month, Day, Year)? \_\_ \_\_ - \_\_ \_\_ - \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_

*For example, if your birthday was Jan 12, 1980, you would put 01-12-1980.*

#### 2. Age \_\_\_\_\_

#### 3. Year in college:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Freshman
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sophomore
- \_\_\_\_\_ Junior
- \_\_\_\_\_ Senior
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other

#### 4. Race (check as many as necessary)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian
- \_\_\_\_\_ African American
- \_\_\_\_\_ Latino/Hispanic
- \_\_\_\_\_ Asian American
- \_\_\_\_\_ Native American
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other, Please Specify: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 5. Gender

- \_\_\_\_\_ Male
- \_\_\_\_\_ Female

#### 6. Before we tell you the purpose of this study, we would like to get your opinion. What do you think this study was about?

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## VITA

Angela C. Bell

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

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