When Compassion Leads to Paternalism:
How Empathy Can Create Perceptions of Incompetence

Thesis

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Abstract

Conventional wisdom and psychological research suggest that empathy is one of the most effective ways to promote intergroup relations. We suggest, however, that certain types of empathy may in fact backfire and undermine intergroup relations. Specifically, in the present research we examined whether empathy focused only on a racial minority group target’s disadvantages and struggles – what we refer to as *paternalistic empathy* – would lead majority group members to form more negative impressions of the target. In addition, we examined whether *respectful empathy*, or empathy that focuses on the target’s strengths in addition to their disadvantages, would lead to more positive impressions of the target. In Study 1, White participants who engaged in paternalistic empathy for a Black target showed more pity for the target and perceived him as less competent (vs. a respectful empathy condition and a control condition). Participants who engaged in respectful empathy for the target perceived him as more competent (vs. the control condition). Study 2 addresses alternative explanations associated with the results of Study 1. Lastly, Study 3 was a two-part study that examined the effects of paternalistic empathy on White’s behaviors toward a Black job candidate in an interview task, and how White’s behaviors might in turn affect a job candidate’s interview performance. In Study 3a we found that participants who engaged in paternalistic empathy asked the Black job candidate more non-diagnostic and fewer competence-eliciting interview
questions. In Study 3b, we found a trend such that the interview questions asked by participants in the paternalistic empathy condition in Study 3a tended to elicit worse interview answers from a new sample of undergraduate students. The discussion focuses on the implications of these findings for strategies to reduce prejudice and improve intergroup relations.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

“‘First of all,’ he said, ‘if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.’”
— Atticus Finch (in Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird, 1960)

As illustrated in this piece of advice from Harper Lee’s classic novel To Kill a Mockingbird, empathy is widely regarded as a virtue and as perhaps one of the most effective means though which we can come to understand people who are different from us. Conventional wisdom and psychological research alike suggest that empathy can lead to positive outcomes in a wide variety of domains, perhaps most prominent of which is intergroup relations (For a review, see Batson & Ahmad, 2009). But is empathy a source of unmitigated virtue in intergroup contexts? Without denying the value of empathy in many instances, we suggest that under certain circumstances empathy may in fact backfire and ultimately hinder rather than help efforts to achieve intergroup harmony.

At first glance, it may be hard to imagine how attempting to empathize with someone – that is, to understand and share that person’s emotions – could be harmful. But consider as an example a schoolteacher who is attempting to empathize with a struggling student; the student’s grades are lower than she would like, but she also knows that this student comes from a low-income family and that he has a stressful home life.
One way that this teacher could empathize with the student would be to think about how difficult the student’s plight must be – about how she might feel if she were faced with such hardship. Feeling sorry for the student, the teacher might ease up her standards for him, assigning easier problem sets or calling on him fewer times in class. Although this strategy may lead the teacher to feel sympathy for the student, and perhaps even to like the student more, it does not allow the teacher to appreciate his unique strengths. By lowering the teacher’s expectations for the student, this form of empathy could ultimately prevent him from fulfilling his full academic potential.

Alternatively, the teacher could empathize with the student by imagining all of the strengths and strategies that he has learned from his experiences of struggle and hardship, and thinking about how she might feel if she were to use these strengths in situations of adversity. With a newfound understanding of the student and his strengths, the teacher may choose to provide support and encouragement that would allow the student to improve without lowering her standards for him. Although the differences between these two examples of empathy may seem subtle, they could lead to very different outcomes for both the teacher and the student. Following from these possibilities, in the present research we suggest that whether empathy is helpful or harmful in intergroup relations will depend on with which aspects of another person’s experiences are empathized.

Empathy and Intergroup Relations

Colloquially, empathy is defined as the process of understanding and experiencing the emotions of another person. Throughout the research literature empathy
has been defined in a number of different ways, but it is generally understood to involve “feeling what another person feels because of something that happens to them” (Wondra & Ellsworth, 2015). Although the term empathy is often used synonymously with the term perspective-taking, the latter is typically thought to be a primarily cognitive process that consists of “seeing the world through another person’s perspective” (Gilin, Maddux, Carpenter, & Galinsky, 2013). Regardless of this distinction, the two constructs are tightly coupled and some research suggests that engaging in one often leads to the other (Batson et al., 1997; See also Vorauer, 2013). Thus, in the present research we define empathy as a broad construct that involves both feeling another’s emotions and seeing the world from their perspective.

Irrespective of how it is defined, there is a large amount of evidence suggesting that empathy can improve intergroup relations (Dovidio et al., 2010). Indeed, empathy has been shown to lead to more positive attitudes towards members of stigmatized groups, including people with AIDS, homeless people, and even convicted murders, with some effects persisting up to two weeks (Batson et al., 1997). Other research has shown that empathy can reduce explicit and implicit prejudice (Dovidio et al., 2004; Shih, Stotzer, & Gutiérrez, 2013; Shih, Wang, Trahan Bucher, & Stotzer, 2009; Vescio, Sechrist, & Paolucci, 2003), curtail tendencies to deny intergroup discrimination (Todd, Bodenhausen, Richeson, & Galinsky, 2011), and encourage people to help out-group members in need (Shih et al., 2009).

Yet the effects of empathy in intergroup relations have not been uniformly positive in nature. Although a number of studies have found positive effects on White’s
overall attitudes toward Blacks (as noted above), these same studies found null effects on
White’s endorsement of stereotypes about Blacks (Dovidio et al., 2004; Vescio et al.,
2003). Some studies, moreover, have shown that empathy can have *harmful* effects in
intergroup contexts. For instance, in face-to-face interactions, attempting to empathize
with an out-group interaction partner can lead people to be more concerned about how
they are evaluated by the out-group and, among more prejudiced individuals, to derogate
their interaction partner (Vorauer & Sasaki, 2009). Negative effects of empathy have
also been documented among non-disabled college students taking the perspective of
individuals with disabilities (Silverman, Gwinn, & Van Boven, 2015) and among
conservatives taking the perspective of Gay men (Mooijman & Stern, 2016).

What factors might determine whether empathy is helpful or harmful? To answer
this question, we propose an important distinction between two forms of empathy. The
first we refer to as *paternalistic empathy*, which is characterized by singular focus on
someone’s struggles, weaknesses, and disadvantages. We suggest that this form of
empathy will cause people to see others as victims deserving of pity, rather than as
competent individuals deserving of respect. In contrast to paternalistic empathy,
*respectful empathy* is characterized by a focus on someone’s strengths and resilience in
the face of their disadvantages and struggles. We suggest that this type of empathy will
lead to increased appreciation of other’s competencies, and ultimately increased respect
for others. Note that we are not attempting to comprehensively characterize empathy, but
rather to make an important distinction in the forms that empathy can take.
To further illustrate the difference between these two forms of empathy and to provide an example of how these differences might occur in the real world, consider an important historical example. During the 20th century, the Canadian government enacted a policy to help First Nations people assimilate and adapt to Canadian culture. A central feature of this policy was the creation of residential schools (i.e. mandatory boarding schools) in which First Nations children were taught norms of Christian and Canadian Culture. This example represents the essence of paternalistic empathy and its negative outcomes: First Nations people were seen as so disadvantaged, so low in competence, that the Canadian government took over responsibility for raising and educating their children. Residential schools carried many devastating psychological and physical consequences for First Nations children, including severe feelings of alienation from their family and culture, emotional and physical abuse, and in some cases, even death. We do not mean to suggest that paternalistic empathy is entirely to blame for these tragedies, but rather that it is one potential contributor to the general lack of respect with which the Canadian government approached First Nations people during this time.

In contrast, with respectful empathy, the Canadian government would have recognized First Nation peoples’ strengths (e.g. strong sense of community, cultural emphasis on valuing children) in addition to the disadvantages they face. With a sense of respect for First Nations people and their culture, the government may have chosen to provide them with support and material resources to raise and educate their own children, allowing self-governance of these important human rights. Although the distinction between the two forms of empathy may seem subtle, we suggest that these subtle
differences may have important consequences for intergroup relations, as the example of First Nations and residential schools illustrates.

Stereotype Content Model and Paternalism

The distinction between these two types of empathy is derived from Fiske and colleagues’ stereotype content model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Stereotype content model provides a framework that maps perceptions of social groups along two dimensions: warmth and competence. Some social groups – such as welfare recipients, poor people, and members of marginalized racial groups - are stereotyped as low in both competence and warmth, and tend to elicit feelings of contempt, anger, and resentment (Fiske et al., 2002). Other groups are the targets of mixed stereotypes. For instance, groups that are viewed as high on warmth but low on competence – including the elderly, people with disabilities, and women - tend to elicit feelings of sympathy and pity but not respect; that is, paternalism (Fiske et al., 2002).

The term “paternalism” refers to a manner of interacting with others that resembles the way a father might interact with his children (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Paternalism, n.d.). Inherent in this definition, is the relegation of the target of paternalism to a position of lower status relative to the actor, much like the relationship between a child and a father. Thus, even when paternalistic behaviors are well intentioned, they could have negative consequences to the extent that they place targets into a position of relative disadvantage.

Such paternalistic prejudices are especially prominent in the domain of gender stereotyping. Although gender prejudice can often take the form of unambiguous
antipathy (i.e. hostile sexism) it can also take a more paternalistic form (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Specifically, research has shown that people can hold *benevolent sexist* attitudes, characterized by positive or warm feelings toward women, but also by a lack of respect for their competence. Past research suggests that benevolent sexism is related to a variety of negative consequences for gender relations including endorsement of gender stereotypes (Glick & Fiske, 1996), sexual harassment behaviors (Fiske & Glick, 1995; Pryor, Giedd, & Williams, 1995), and the tendency to derogate victims of sexual assault (Abrams, Tendayi, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Viki & Abrams, 2002). Thus, despite the ostensibly positive tone of benevolent sexism, the consequences of these beliefs for women are far from positive.

Drawing from research on stereotype content model and benevolent sexism, we propose that empathy will have different consequences for intergroup relations depending on whether it creates feelings of *paternalism* vs. *respect* for the target. Because paternalistic empathy focuses *only* on the target’s experiences of struggle and disadvantage, the target may come to be *defined* by their struggles and disadvantages in the eyes of the perceiver. Or, in other words, they come to be seen primarily as a victim. In contrast, because respectful empathy involves focusing on a target’s strengths in addition to the disadvantages they face, it should allow the perceiver to see the out-group target as a competent, autonomous individual who is *not* defined by their disadvantages. In line with this reasoning, we hypothesize that engaging in paternalistic empathy should lead majority group members to pity racial minority targets, and to perceive them as relatively less competent. In contrast, we hypothesize that respectful empathy will
prevent feelings of pity for targets, and instead lead majority group members to view them as relatively *more* competent.

The Present Research

We test these hypotheses in a series of two online studies and one laboratory study. Study 1 is an online study that examines how engaging in paternalistic vs. respectful empathy affects White participants’ feelings of pity for a Black target, as well as their perceptions of the target’s competence. Study 2 replicates and extends Study 1 by addressing potential alternative explanations associated with the findings. Specifically, Study 2 examined whether differences in the extent to which the targets in each condition seem to have a growth-seeking orientation (Dykman, 1998) could account for the differences in observed in Study 1. Last, Study 3 is a two-part study in which we first examine how engaging in the two types of empathy for one Black students might affect Whites’ behaviors toward a second Black student in an interview task and, with a separate sample, how their behaviors could in turn undermine a job candidate’s interview performance.
Chapter 2: Study 1

Study 1 was an initial test of whether engaging in the two types of empathy (i.e. paternalistic and respectful) might have different consequences for White’s impressions of a Black student. We first asked White participants to empathize with a target with either paternalistic or respectful empathy, and then examined the extent to which they pitied the Black target, as well as their perceptions of the target’s competence. We predicted that engaging in paternalistic empathy would lead Whites to pity a Black target more and to perceive him as less competent. In contrast, we predicted that participants in the respectful empathy would show no such increase in pity for the target, and instead perceive the target as more competent.

Method

Participants

One hundred seventy-six White M-Turk workers (71 women, \(M_{\text{age}} = 33.6\) years, SD = 12.19) participated in a study on the “Development of Reading Materials” in exchange for 50 cents.

Procedure

Participants completed all materials and procedures online. They were told that the researchers were pilot testing reading and writing materials, and that they would read and write about a randomly chosen topic. Participants were then assigned to one of two
experimental conditions (i.e. a paternalistic empathy condition or a respectful empathy condition), or a control condition, described in detail below. After the empathy manipulation, participants completed the dependent measures, which were framed as an impression formation task in which they were asked to rate the protagonist described in the empathy manipulation.

**Empathy Manipulation**

Participants in all three conditions were asked to complete a perspective-taking writing activity, which served as our manipulation of empathy. Specifically, they were instructed to write a summary of a day in the life of Tyrone Williams, who was ostensibly a Black college student. Consistent with past research (Batson et al., 1997), they were instructed to “try to feel the full impact of his experiences, and how he feels as a result.” Participants in the paternalistic empathy condition were further instructed to “try to imagine how much more difficult his experiences are than the typical student, and the kind of help he might need in such situations”; whereas participants in the respectful empathy condition were instructed to “try to imagine how much stronger he will become from these difficult experiences, and what he could teach you about dealing with challenging situations.” Participants in the control condition received no such further instructions.

All participants were then asked to write one sentence about how they might feel if they were Tyrone in five different scenarios. In the paternalistic empathy condition, these scenarios focused on the struggles and disadvantages that Tyrone faces. In the respectful empathy condition, the scenarios focused on Tyrone’s strengths in the face of
the disadvantages that he faces. For instance, one scenario in the paternalistic condition asked participants to write about how Tyrone might feel when he “meets with his English professor to talk about his term paper, and how he might worry that the professor might judge his abilities in the light of negative stereotypes about Black people”; whereas in the respectful condition they were asked to write about how he might feel when he “meets with his English professor to talk about his term paper, and what strategies he uses to get the most out of the feedback despite the professor’s potential doubts about his ability.”

The control condition included scenarios that were identical to those in the experimental conditions, but without the focus on disadvantages or strengths. For instance, the analogous control scenario was: “meets with his English professor to talk about his term paper.”

Dependent Measures

The primary dependent measure consisted of participants’ perceptions of the extent to which the target possessed traits related to pity and competence. Each trait was rated on a five-point scale (1 = not at all to 5 = extremely). Two composites were formed by averaging participants’ ratings of the traits related to pity (victim, incapable, in need of help, weak, needs support; α = .82), and those related to competence (empowered, strong, intelligent, determined, able to help others, has a lot to offer; α = .84).

Results

Analysis Plan

Our analysis plan and predictions for Study 1 were pre-registered on the Open Science Framework (“Open Science Framework,” n.d.). Our first prediction was that
participants in the paternalistic empathy condition would show increased pity for the target as compared to both the control condition and the respectful empathy condition. Our second prediction was that participants in the paternalistic empathy condition would perceive the target as less competent (vs. control), whereas participants in the respectful empathy condition would perceive the target as more competent (vs. control). We tested these predictions using planned comparisons with two-tailed tests.

\textit{Pity}

As predicted, we found that empathy condition significantly affected ratings of pity (See Figure 1), $F(2, 171) = 9.52, p < .001$. Participants in the paternalistic condition reported more pity for the target ($M = 2.61, SD = 0.80$) than those in both the control condition ($M = 1.94, SD = 0.70$), $t(171) = 4.11, p < .001, d = 0.89$), and the respectful condition ($M = 2.05, SD = 0.69$), $t(171) = 4.95, p < .001, d = 0.75$.

\textit{Competence}

Empathy condition also influenced participants’ ratings of the target’s competence, $F(2, 171) = 9.52, p < .001$. Participants in the paternalistic empathy condition ($M = 3.66, SD = 0.78$) rated the target as less competent than did those in the control condition ($M = 3.92, SD = 0.59$), $t(171) = -2.13, p = .04, d = .38$, whereas participants in the respectful empathy condition ($M = 4.18, SD = 0.55$) rated the target as more competent than did those in the control condition, $t(171) = -2.24, p = .03, d = 0.46$.

\textit{Discussion}

These findings provide preliminary evidence that the two types of empathy (paternalistic vs. respectful) have important differences in their effects on White’s
perceptions of racial minorities. Participants who engaged in paternalistic empathy, that is, by focusing on the target’s disadvantages and struggles, pitied Tyrone Williams more and perceived him as less competent. In contrast, participants who engaged in respectful empathy, or empathy focused on the target’s strengths and resilience in the face of their struggles, showed no such increase in pity for Tyrone, but importantly perceived him as more competent.

One potential alternative explanation of Study 1 is that the respectful empathy condition may have elicited more empathy than the paternalistic condition, leading to more positive perceptions of the target. To rule out this possibility, we conducted a separate study that was identical to Study 2, but with two manipulation check items (i.e. “How much do you think you were you able to understand Tyrone's experiences?”; “How much do you think you were you able to feel the emotions that Tyrone felt?”). We found no differences in empathy across the two experimental conditions, which is inconsistent with this alternative account. 1

A second alternative explanation associated with these findings is that, because of the way that the scenarios in the respectful empathy condition were written, the target may have seemed to be more growth-seeking (Dykman, 1998) in the respectful condition than in the two other conditions. A growth seeking orientation is characterized by appraising challenges or struggles as opportunities to learn and grow. Although the scenarios in the respectful empathy condition do not explicitly mention the target’s

1 Participants in the control condition showed more empathy than those in the two experimental conditions. This is likely because, unlike the two experimental conditions, the control did not mention issues that Black students face. Thus, it may have been easier for White participants to empathize with the target’s experiences in the control.
appraisals of the challenges he faces, they refer to strategies that the target uses to manage the challenges and difficulties he faces. It is possible that participants made an inference about the target’s growth-seeking orientation based on the target’s actions in these scenarios. We therefore attempted to rule out this alternative explanation in Study 2.
Chapter 3: Study 2

Study 1 provided an initial test of our hypotheses regarding the differences between paternalistic and respectful empathy on White’s perceptions of a Black target. Study 2 tested these hypotheses in a more controlled manner. Specifically, we made slight changes to the respectful empathy condition to rule out the potential alternative explanation noted above.

Method

Participants

Four hundred and forty-seven White M-Turk workers (59.5% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 39.68$, years, $SD = 13.58$) participated in the study in exchange for 50 cents.

Procedure

The cover story, materials, and procedure were identical to Study 2 except for a number of minor changes to the respectful empathy condition. Participants then completed the same dependent measures used in Study 1.

Empathy Manipulation

The control condition and the paternalistic empathy condition were identical to those used in Study 1. The respectful condition, however, was slightly different. Specifically, here the scenarios focused on how the target might overcome or cope with challenges that he faces; there was no mention of the skills or strategies that he uses to do
so. For instance, one scenario was “Meets with his English professor to talk about his term paper, and how he might worry that the professor might judge his abilities in light of negative stereotypes about Black people, but how he might overcome these worries.” Thus, the scenarios were identical to those used in the paternalistic condition, but with additional content that encouraged the participants to think about how the target mitigated his struggles.

**Dependent Measures**

As in Study 1, participants completed an impression formation task that assessed their perceptions of the target related to pity $\alpha = 0.76$ and competence $\alpha = 0.71$.

**Results**

**Pity**

Once again, we found that empathy condition significantly affected ratings of pity, $F(2, 444) = 13.34, p < .001$. Participants in the paternalistic condition reported more pity for the target ($M = 2.42, SD = 0.74$) than did those in the control condition ($M = 2.01, SD = 0.74$), $t(444) = -4.98, p < .001, d = .55$). In contrast with Study 1, however, participants in the respectful condition ($M = 2.32, SD = 0.66$) did not significantly differ from those in the paternalistic condition, $t(444) = 1.21, p = .22, d = .13$.

**Competence**

Empathy condition also influenced participants’ ratings of the target’s competence, $F(2,444) = 5.15, p = 0.006$. Participants in the paternalistic empathy condition ($M = 3.73, SD = 0.74$) rated the target as less competent than did participants in the control condition ($M = 3.98, SD = 0.59$), $t(444) = 3.16, p = .002, d = .37$, and the
respectful empathy condition \((M = 3.89, SD = 0.71), t(444) = 2.00, p = 0.046, d = .22\). Participants in the respectful empathy condition, however, did not perceive the target as more competent than did those in the control condition, \(t(444) = -1.14, p = .26, d = .14\).

**Discussion**

Study 2 provides additional evidence that paternalistic empathy can be harmful. Indeed, replicating the results of Study 1, participants who engaged in paternalistic empathy for the Black student subsequently pitied him more and perceived him as less competent than did participants in the control condition and the respectful empathy condition.

The findings regarding respectful empathy are less clear. In contrast to Study 1, participants who engaged in respectful empathy showed an increase in pity for the target similar to those who engaged in paternalistic empathy. In addition, they perceived the target as no more competent than did participants in the control condition. They did, however, perceive the target as more competent relative to participants in the paternalistic condition. Thus, although respectful empathy did not prevent feelings of pity for the target, as it did in Study 1, it does appear to have prevented the reduction in perceived competence that was observed among participants in the paternalistic empathy condition.

Why did the effects of respectful empathy here differ from those observed in Study 1? One important difference between the respectful empathy conditions across the two studies was that in Study 1, the scenarios mentioned specific strengths that the target possessed, whereas in Study 2, they simply asked participants to think of strengths that the target *might* possess. It is possible that just asking participants to think about ways
that Tyrone Williams might cope with or manage disadvantage in the abstract sense did not allow them to fully elaborate on the strengths that he would actually use in those situations. To fully mitigate the harmful effects of paternalistic empathy, it may be necessary to highlight specific strengths that the target possesses.

Together, Studies 1& 2 support our hypotheses regarding the harmful effects of paternalistic empathy on White’s perceptions of a minority group target. One limitation of Studies 1 & 2, however, is that the dependent measures were limited to participants’ self-reported perceptions of a hypothetical target. Do the effects of the two types of empathy extend to participants’ actual behaviors toward a real Black student? We tested this question in Study 3.
Chapter 4: Study 3

Study 3 was a two-part study in which we first examined how the two types of empathy affect White’s behaviors toward a different Black student in a job interview, and how these behaviors might in turn affect a potential job candidate’s interview performance. To do so, we modeled our studies after two classic paradigms: one from Snyder and Swann, 1978 (Study 3a), and one from Word, Zanna, and Cooper, 1974 (Study 3b). ²

In Study 3a, White undergraduates first engaged in one of the two types of empathy for a Black student or completed a control empathy task. Then, in an ostensible job interview, they selected questions for a second Black student (i.e., a confederate who was ostensibly a candidate for a job in the psychology department) that varied in the extent which they elicited competence and in their diagnosticity. Previous research suggests that people are biased toward seeking information that confirms their existing hypotheses about a social interaction partner (Snyder & Swann, 1978). For instance, people who are asked to determine whether someone is an extrovert will tend to ask questions that tend to elicit extroverted answers, such as “what do you do to liven things up at parties?” rather than questions that tend to elicit introverted responses, such as

² Study 3a was previously reported as part of a University of Waterloo dissertation by Crystal Tse. The present thesis reports a reanalysis of the data, as well as a new follow-up to this study (Study 3b). The methods and some of the previously reported results are included in this thesis because they provide necessary context and information for the new analyses and Study 3b.
“what do you dislike about loud parties?” People also show a preference for questions that are diagnostic of their hypotheses that is, questions that will be most likely to prove their hypothesis right or wrong (Bassok & Trope, 1984; Trope & Bassok, 1982, 1983).

Following from this research, we were interested in both confirmatory and diagnostic testing strategies. In the context of a job interview, the most diagnostic questions will be those that pertain to a candidate’s competencies and skills that relate to the job in question. In an interracial interview, however, the interviewer is likely to begin with the hypothesis that the Black job candidate is not very competent, and thus not very suitable for the job (Fiske et al., 2002). As such, we examined the questions participants chose to ask the job candidate both in terms of whether they would elicit competence, and whether they would be diagnostic of their competence. We predicted that participants who engaged in paternalistic empathy for the first Black student would ask more non-diagnostic questions, more incompetence-eliciting questions, and fewer competence-eliciting questions to the second Black student.

Importantly, the effects of people’s hypothesis testing strategies in social interactions can extend beyond their own behaviors toward the person with whom they are interacting. Indeed, previous research has shown that such behaviors can create self-fulfilling prophecies – that is, they can influence the other person’s behaviors in ways that confirm the hypothesis being tested. For instance, in a classic demonstration of this effect, White interviewers treated a Black confederate worse than a White confederate in an ostensible job interview (Word et al., 1974). Then, in a second study when White undergraduates were treated like the Black confederate in Study 1, they showed worse
interview performance. Study 3b attempts to emulate this approach. Undergraduate students were asked to answer random subsets of the interview questions used in Study 3a as if they were participating in an actual interview. We then obtained ratings of these answers, and used these ratings to determine the overall quality of responses elicited by each interview question. We predicted that participants who engaged in paternalistic empathy in Study 3a would choose to ask interview questions that elicited worse responses from participants in Study 3b.

Study 3a Method

Participants

Seventy-seven White undergraduates (37 women, \(M_{\text{age}} = 19.3\) years, \(SD = 2.57\)) at the University of Waterloo participated in the study in exchange for partial course credit. Participants first completed a version of the Modern Racism Scale (MRS) adapted for Canadians (\(M = 5.02, SD = 0.67, \alpha = .78\); Bobocel, Son Hing, Davey, Stanley, & Zanna, 1998) as part of a mass-testing survey conducted at the beginning of the semester. We then recruited those who scored in the top third of the scale to participate in the study.\(^3\)

Procedure

Participants were told that they were completing separate studies, the first of which was on how people process and remember scientific and social information, and the second of which was on interview practices.

\(^3\) We limited our sample to students who scored high on MRS because we wanted to ensure that participants would hold negative expectations about the Black job candidate’s competence, and we reasoned that people who were higher on prejudice would be more likely to see the job candidate as less competent.
During the first ostensible study, participants completed a modified version of the empathy manipulation used in Studies 1 and 2. As in the first two studies, they were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: a paternalistic empathy condition, a respectful empathy condition, and a control condition. After the empathy manipulation, participants completed the same dependent measures used in Studies 1 & 2.

Upon completion of the first ostensible study, participants were taken to a different room to complete the second ostensible study, which consisted of the interview task. During this task, participants asked a Black job candidate, who was in fact a confederate, interview questions from a pre-selected list. Participants then completed a series of self-report questionnaires regarding their perceptions of the job candidate and the interview. Finally, participants were debriefed, probed for suspicion, and thanked for their time.

**Empathy Manipulation and Self-report Measures**

The materials and procedures in the ostensible first study were identical to Study 1, except for a few notable differences. First, before the perspective-taking task, participants completed an article task. In the paternalistic empathy condition and the respectful empathy condition, this topic of the article was stereotype threat. Specifically, this article first explained the concept of stereotype threat and how it can affect members of negatively stereotyped groups, and then provided real world examples of stereotype threat. Participants in the control condition read a neutral article about plants.

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4 This study uses an empathy manipulation that was used in initial pilot studies that are not reported in this thesis. We chose to use the earlier version of the manipulation because the effect size was slightly larger, and we therefore reasoned it would be more likely to affect participants’ behaviors toward a different Black target.
Participants in the two experimental conditions then completed an empathy task that was the same as the one used in Studies 1 & 2, but with a different target. In this study, the target was Kwaku Asante, “a student who has just immigrated from Ghana to Canada.” In the control condition, the empathy task included a White target named John Williams, and asked participants to imagine neutral scenarios such as “takes his dog for a walk in the park.” Participants then completed the same measures of pity ($\alpha = .86$) and competence ($\alpha = .70$) used in the first two studies.

*Interview Task*

Participants were told that the second study – the interview task – was being conducted by a second group of researchers who were interested in examining different types of interview practices. The experimenter explained that the researchers had partnered with the university’s Psychology Department to conduct interviews of upper-year psychology students who had recently been hired by the department as undergraduate teaching assistants. Participants were told that these students had volunteered to help with the study by taking the role of the job candidate and being interviewed by participants in the study. To support the cover story, there was a schedule with dates and times for interviews of other job candidates on the desk in the study room. All participants then met and interviewed Delroy Jones (i.e. the confederate), who was ostensibly a third-year psychology student from Barbados, over MSN messenger.

Participants were instructed to select and ask eight interview questions from a list of thirty-two preselected questions that varied in the extent to which they would likely elicit competence from the candidate and the extent to which they would be diagnostic of
the candidate’s competence. A confederate who was blind to condition and to the study’s hypotheses answered each of the participant’s questions with scripted answers. Although participants were instructed to ask only questions from the list, some participants did not follow these instructions and instead asked their own questions. In such cases, the confederate improvised in their responses, but tried to answer in a manner that would be consistent with the candidate’s background and experiences. After the confederate had answered eight questions, they notified the experimenter to end the interview. Participants were then instructed to select four additional questions that they would have liked to ask the candidate if there was more time, thus they were asked to select a total of 12 questions. Finally, participants completed self-report questionnaires measuring their attitudes about the job candidate and the interview.5

*Interview Question Coding*

The interview questions were categorized by diagnosticity prior to data analysis based on whether they were directly relevant to the job in question. For example, “What traits and experience do you have that applies to this position?” was considered a diagnostic question, whereas “What is your favorite book?” was considered a non-diagnostic question.

The diagnostic questions were further categorized based on whether they would elicit competence or incompetence – that is, whether they had the potential to disconfirm or confirm the participant’s hypothesis about the Black job candidate (Fiske et al., 2002; Snyder & Swann, 1978). Examples of incompetence-eliciting questions include “What is

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5 These self-report measures are included in the appendices. Because they were included on an exploratory basis and are not a central focus of this thesis, they will not be discussed further.
your greatest weakness?” and “What do people most often criticize about you.”

Examples of competence-eliciting questions include “What is your greatest strength?”
and “What traits and experience do you have that applies to this position?”

Study 3a Results

Pity and Competence

As predicted, we found a significant effect of empathy condition on pity for the target, $F(2, 74) = 30.58, p < .001$. Participants in the paternalistic empathy condition reported marginally more pity for the target ($M = 2.95, SD = 0.80$) than participants in the respectful empathy condition ($M = 2.54$ paternalistic, $SD = 0.61$), $p = .08$, and significantly more than those in the control condition ($M = 1.55, SD = 0.56$), $p < .001$.

There was also a marginally significant effect of empathy condition on perceptions of the target’s competence, $F(2, 74) = 2.61, p = .08$. Participants in the paternalistic condition ($M = 3.31, SD = 0.60$) perceived the target as marginally less competent than did participants in the respectful condition ($M = 3.67, SD = 0.57$), $p = .07$. Neither of the two empathy conditions differed from the control condition ($M = 3.54, SD = 0.50$).

Interview Questions

Our predictions regarding the interview questions focused on how diagnostic they were (Trope & Bassok, 1982), and the extent to which they elicited competence, that is, the extent to which they might confirm expectations about Black individuals as being less competent,(Fiske et al., 2002; Snyder & Swann, 1978). The majority of participants ($n = 53$) followed instructions and asked 12 interview questions. However, some ($n = 14$)
asked more than 12 questions, and some (n = 7) asked fewer than 12 questions.° Participants who did not conduct the online interview because of technical difficulties, and those who asked fewer than 9 questions were excluded from analyses reported below.°

We analyzed number of competence-eliciting, incompetence-eliciting, and non-diagnostic questions participants chose to ask within subjects by condition. There was a significant question type by condition interaction, $F(2,70) = 3.47, p = 0.01$. Consistent with our predictions, empathy condition significantly affected the number of non-diagnostic questions asked, $F(2, 70) = 3.49, p = .036$. Participants in the paternalistic empathy condition asked marginally more non-diagnostic questions ($M = 3.61, SD = 1.83$) than participants in the respectful empathy condition ($M = 2.56, SD = 1.69$), $p = 0.099$, and significantly more non-diagnostic questions than participants in the control condition ($M = 2.42, SD = 1.50$), $p = 0.042$.°

Empathy condition also had a significant effect on the number of competence-eliciting questions asked, $F(2,70) = 3.99, p = .023$. Participants in the paternalistic empathy condition asked fewer competence-eliciting questions ($M = 6.52, SD = 1.56$) than participants in the control condition ($M = 7.88, SD = 1.81$), $p = 0.017$. The

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6 Although the experimenter attempted to end the interview after 8 questions had been asked, some participants continued to ask questions after the confederate notified the experimenter. Additionally, some participants chose more than 4 additional questions after the interview questions. Lastly, some participants chose to end the interview before they had asked 8 questions.

7 These participants did not follow the instructions to ask four additional questions after the interview. The results remain qualitatively the same when these participants are included.

8 Multiple comparisons were analyzed with Tukey Post Hoc tests.
paternalistic empathy condition, however, did not significantly differ from the respectful empathy condition, \( p = 0.40 \).

The effect of empathy condition on the number of *incompetence-eliciting* questions was non-significant, \( F(2,70) = 1.50, p = 0.23 \).

**Discussion**

The results of Study 3a suggest that the harmful effects of paternalistic empathy extend beyond Whites’ impressions of racial minorities to their actual behaviors toward them. Indeed, participants who engaged in paternalistic empathy for one Black student not only had less favorable impressions of that student (as indicated by increased pity and reduced perceptions of his competence), but they also subsequently chose to ask the second Black student fewer competence-eliciting and more non-diagnostic interview questions. Such behaviors could have important consequences for a job candidates’ interview performance because they give the candidate fewer opportunities to discuss his job-relevant skills and competencies and reduce the likelihood that he will be able to disprove any negative expectations the interviewer has of him because of his racial group. In this way, paternalistic empathy could lead to a *self-fulfilling prophecy*, in which the types of questions the interviewer asks elicit answers from the candidate that confirm the interviewer’s initial impression of the candidate. The job candidate in Study 3a, however, was a confederate who answered the questions with scripted answers, so we did not have the opportunity to test this possibility empirically. To provide such a test, in Study 3b, we conducted a follow-up study that was modeled after Study 2 of Word et al.,
In this study, we examined how a separate sample of undergraduates performed on the interview questions used in Study 3a.

**Study 3b Method**

The aim of Study 3b was to examine whether the behavioral effects of paternalistic empathy could lead to negative outcomes for a target. To do so, we asked undergraduate students to answer the questions from Study 3a as if they were participating in a real interview. We then asked a separate sample of participants to rate how competent the response was and how diagnostic the response was of the candidate’s suitability for the job. We created average competence and diagnosticity scores for each question, and then used these scores to estimate how an actual job candidate would have performed if they were answering the questions that participants chose to ask the confederate in Study 3a. We predicted that the questions asked by participants in the paternalistic condition in 3a would tend to elicit answers that were on average less competent and less diagnostic, relative to the questions asked by participants in the control condition and the respectful condition.

**Participants**

In the first part of the Study 3b, in which we collected answers to the interview questions from 3a, 92 undergraduate students at a Canadian university (70% female, \( M_{age} = 21.15, SD = 2.4 \)) participated in the study in exchange for partial course credit. In the second part, in which we collected ratings of these answers, 163 Mechanical Turk workers (45% female, \( M_{age} = 36 \) years, \( SD = 12.41 \)) participated in exchange for $1.25.

**Procedure**

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Part 1. Participants were told that they were participating in a study on how people respond to different types of job interview questions. They were presented with the job description used in Study 3a and asked to imagine that they were an upper-year psychology student who was interviewing for the position. They were then asked to answer five interview questions from Study 3a as if they were participating in a real interview. If they did not have the relevant expertise, background, or experience for an undergraduate teaching assistant position, they were asked to answer to the best of their ability. We aimed to collect 6-7 responses per question; in one case, we collected as few as five responses, and in some cases as many as eight.

Part 2. Participants in part 2 were given the same cover story as participants in part 1: that the purpose of the study was to examine how people respond to different types of job interview questions. They were given the job description used in Study 3a and in Part 1, and were asked to imagine that they were in charge of selecting a student to fill the job. They were then presented with 10 randomly selected responses collected from students in part 1, along with the question to which the response corresponded. For instance, one example of a question and answer pair that participants were presented with was: “Question: What do people most often criticize about you? Answer: I am told that I take on many tasks at once and spread myself too thin because of this. I have since learned in the past to only take on what I can handle at one time and give it my full efforts and interest.” Participants were asked to rate each answer based on how competent the candidate seemed, and how diagnostic it would be of the candidate’s suitability for the job.
Measures

Competence. Competence was measured with the following two items: “Based on this answer, how competent does this candidate seem?” and “Based on this answer, how good at the job do you think this candidate would be?” Ratings were given on a five-point scale (1 = Not at all to 5 = Extremely). We computed average competence scores for each question by averaging across ratings on both competence items for all responses to that question.

Diagnosticity. Diagnosticity was measured with the following two items: “How much does this answer tell you about how good of a candidate they are for the job?” and “If you had to decide whether to hire this candidate based on just this one answer, how confident would you be in your decision?” Ratings were given on a five-point scale (1 = Not at all to 5 = Extremely). As above, we computed diagnosticity scores for each question by averaging across ratings on both diagnosticity items for all the relevant responses.

Study 3b Results

Competence

Overall, empathy condition did not significantly affect competence ratings, $F(2,70) = 2.143, p = 0.13$. The questions asked by participants in the paternalistic empathy condition did, however, elicit marginally less competent responses ($M = 3.14, SD = 0.13$) as compared to the questions asked by participants in the respectful empathy condition ($M = 3.20, SD = 0.10$), $t(70) = -1.77, p = .08$, and those asked by participants in the control condition ($M = 3.20, SD = 0.11$), $t(70) = -1.84, p = 0.07$. 
Diagnosticity

The effect of empathy condition on ratings of diagnosticity was also non-significant, $F(2,70) = 2.02, p = 0.14$. However, the questions asked by participants in the paternalistic empathy condition ($M = 2.90, SD = 0.16$) elicited responses that were marginally lower in diagnosticity relative to those asked by participants in the control ($M = 2.97, SD = 0.12$), $t(70) = -1.85, p = 0.07$. The paternalistic empathy condition did not significantly differ from the respectful empathy condition, $t(70) = -1.63, p = 0.11$.

Discussion

The results of Study 3b provide tentative evidence that the harmful effects of paternalistic empathy may not be limited to White perceivers’ own behaviors toward racial minority targets; they may in turn lead the target to behave in ways that confirm the perceiver’s initial impression of the target. Participants who engaged in paternalistic empathy for a Black student in Study 3a asked interview questions that tended to elicit answers that were rated as less competent and diagnostic of the candidate’s skills and qualifications in Study 3b. It is important to note, however, that the effects observed in Study 3b were relatively weak, and until they can be replicated, remain an interesting hypothesis that has not been fully supported. Nevertheless, taken together, the results of Study 3a&b provide preliminary evidence that paternalistic empathy might have downstream consequences for racial minorities.
Chapter 5: General Discussion

Empathy has traditionally been thought of as an effective strategy to improve intergroup relations – both in past research and in society more broadly. Yet the present research suggests that when Whites engage in paternalistic empathy – that is, when they attempt to empathize exclusively with racial minorities’ experiences of disadvantages and struggles – empathy will backfire. Indeed, the three studies reported here suggest that paternalistic empathy can undermine White’s perceptions of and behaviors toward racial minorities. The present studies also provide preliminary evidence that empathy focused on strengths *in addition* to disadvantages – what we refer to as respectful empathy – can improve White’s perceptions of racial minorities.

Studies 1 and 2 examined the consequences of paternalistic and respectful empathy on Whites’ perceptions of a Black student. In Study 1, Whites who engaged in paternalistic empathy for the student pitied him more and saw him as less competent than did participants in the control condition and the respectful condition. In contrast, Whites who engaged in respectful empathy perceived the target as more competent relative to those in the control condition. In Study 2, we replicated and extended these findings by ruling out differences in perceptions of the target’s growth-seeking orientation as a potential alternative explanation for our results. In this study, we found that once again paternalistic empathy caused Whites to pity a Black target more and to perceive him as
less competent. In Study 3, we examined the behavioral consequences of paternalistic empathy, both for the people who are engaging in empathy and for those who are the targets of empathy. Using a classic research paradigm (Snyder & Swann, 1978), we found that White undergraduates who engaged in paternalistic empathy for one Black student subsequently chose to ask a second Black student fewer competence-eliciting questions and more non-diagnostic questions in an ostensible job interview (Study 3a). We then examined whether the types of questions that participants chose to ask could in turn affect a job candidate’s interview performance (Study 3b). To do so, we asked a new group of undergraduate students to answer the interview questions as if they were a participating in a real job interview; we then obtained ratings of the quality of their answers. We found that participants who engaged in paternalistic empathy in Study 3a tended to elicit worse interview answers from the new sample of undergraduates in Study 3b, although these effects were not strong or large and their reliability needs to be assessed.

We consistently found evidence that paternalistic empathy is harmful, however, the effects of respectful empathy were not quite so clear. Study 1 found that respectful empathy led participants to perceive the Black student as more competent relative to the control condition. But in Study 2, the changes that we made to the respectful empathy condition to rule out potential alternative explanations seemed to dampen the effect. Indeed, although participants who engaged in respectful empathy did not show the same decrement in perceptions of the student’s competence that was observed among participants in the paternalistic condition, they did not significantly differ from those in
the paternalistic condition with regards to pity for the student. Moreover, in Study 3, respectful empathy did not significantly differ from the control condition for any of our dependent variables. What might have caused these inconsistencies? First, in Study 1, the respectful empathy condition pointed to specific strengths that the target might use to manage his difficulties – such as his ability to teach other students about working well in groups – whereas in Study 2, participants were simply asked to think about how he might cope with disadvantages. It is possible that White participants left to their own imagination were unable to think of ways that a Black student might positively cope with race-based disadvantage. It is also possible that coping with disadvantage is not construed as a strength in the same way that something like teaching others might be. In Study 3, we suspect that the null effects may be a result of insufficient statistical power. In any case, although the present research provides strong evidence for the harmful effects of paternalistic empathy, it is clear that additional research is needed to clarify the conditions under which empathy can be beneficial in these situations.

There are several remaining questions regarding when and how paternalistic empathy produces negative effects. First, it is important to note that the studies reported here did not cross our manipulation of focus on disadvantages vs. strengths with a manipulation of empathy. As such, we do not know whether empathy contributes to the harmful effects of paternalistic empathy or if simply focusing on a target’s disadvantages and struggles from a third person perspective would be sufficient. Another outstanding question concerns the role of the target’s race. Would engaging in paternalistic empathy for any target, regardless of their group membership, create negative perceptions of that
target? In the studies reported here we focused exclusively on the effects of paternalistic empathy for a Black target. Thus, the question of whether the effects would hold when the target is a member of a different stigmatized group or a member of a high-status group remains unknown. Answering these questions will be an important task for future research.

The goal of Study 3b was to examine whether paternalistic empathy might create a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which initial perceptions of incompetence created by paternalistic empathy would ultimately elicit incompetent behaviors from the target. The evidence supporting this possibility, however, was relatively weak and should therefore be treated with some degree of caution. Specifically, the effects of empathy condition on interview response performance in Study 3b reached only marginal statistical significance, though they were in the predicted direction. It is possible that these weak effects were due to insufficient statistical power. Another possibility concerns the nature of the targets included in Study 3a. Recall that the interview task included a different Black target than the target with whom participants empathized. This design may have led to a relatively weak effect of the manipulation on the behavioral outcomes. Nevertheless, Study 3 tentatively suggests that paternalistic empathy could lead to negative downstream consequences for racial minorities; future studies should attempt to replicate it with a larger sample size and a stronger experimental manipulation.

Taken together these three studies provide an important contribution to the small but growing body of research showing negative effects of empathy as a prejudice reduction strategy (Vorauer, Martens, & Sasaki, 2009; Vorauer & Sasaki, 2009, 2012).
This work goes beyond previous research by showing that effects of empathy in intergroup relations depend in part on with which aspects of the target’s experiences are empathized. If the focus is only on the target’s struggles and disadvantages, empathy will likely be harmful; if the focus is on strengths that allow the target to overcome their disadvantages, empathy could prove beneficial. This research may shed light on the seemingly contradictory findings throughout the literature on empathy and intergroup relations, with some studies findings positive effects (For a review, see Batson & Ahmad, 2009) and others finding neutral or even harmful effects (Mooijman & Stern, 2016; Silverman et al., 2015). These inconsistencies could be explained by differences across studies in the focus of the manipulations of empathy.

This research also has important practical implications. Reducing bias and improving intergroup harmony has become an increasingly important issue in today’s society, and there has been a push for strategies to increase diversity and reduce racial bias across many different types of organizations. Given the widespread belief that empathy improves intergroup relations, it would not be surprising if at least some of these efforts have focused on fostering empathy for racial minorities. Yet, this work suggests that if such interventions encourage people to empathize exclusively with the societal disadvantages many racial minorities face, they may only serve to exacerbate intergroup bias and conflict. With a relatively subtle shift, however, such efforts could produce their intended effects. Indeed, by incorporating respectful empathy into these programs, organizations may create more harmonious environments for majority and minority group members alike.
Conclusion

I began this thesis with a popular quotation from Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960). In this quotation, the beloved character Atticus Finch tells his daughter Scout that she will better understand someone if she sees the world from his point of view – if she “climbs into his skin and walks around in it.” This quote illustrates the widespread belief in our society that empathy is a source of unmitigated virtue, particularly in contexts in which we must interact with people who are different from us. Yet this thesis suggests that empathy is not a panacea for improving intergroup harmony. Indeed, if we attempt to climb into out-group members’ skin, but only walk around in it as they are experiencing struggle and hardship, we may hinder rather than enhance our understanding of them, and ultimately widen rather than narrow existing racial divides.
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Appendix A: Empathy Manipulation Writing Prompts (Studies 1-3)

**Paternalistic condition (Studies 1-3):**

Now we'll like you to write a brief summary about the life of Tyrone Williams, a student in his second year of college.

Imagine a day in the life of this individual as if you were that person, looking at the world through his eyes and walking through the world in his shoes.

**Please write 1 sentence for each scenario:** As you do so try to feel the full impact of Tyrone’s experiences and how he feels as a result. Try to imagine how much more difficult his experiences are than the typical student, and the kind of help he might need in such situations.

Goes to a political science lecture, and he is the only Black student in the class.

Meets with his English professor to talk about his term paper, and how he might worry that the professor might judge his abilities in light of negative stereotypes about Black people.

Meets with a few other students to work on a group project for his biology class, and how he might worry that his classmates are judging his abilities based on negative stereotypes about Black people.

Writes a difficult midterm test while under extra pressure to prove that the negative stereotype about Black people's abilities isn’t true, and what kinds of extra help he might need to overcome this pressure.

Gives a presentation in history class, and how stressful or challenging the situation can be for him.

**Respectful empathy condition (Studies 1 & 3):**

Now we'll like you to write a brief summary about the life of Tyrone Williams, a student in his second year of college.
Imagine a day in the life of this individual as if you were that person, looking at the world through his eyes and walking through the world in his shoes.

**Please write 1 sentence for each scenario:** As you do so try to feel the full impact of Tyrone’s experiences and how he feels as a result. Try to imagine how much stronger he will become from these difficult experiences, and what he could teach you about dealing with challenging situations.

Goes to a political science lecture, and he is the only Black student in the class.

Meets with his English professor to talk about his term paper, and what strategies he uses to get the most out of the feedback despite the professor’s potential doubts about his ability.

Meets with a few other students to work on a group project for his biology class, and what he could teach them about working well together even when they have concerns about everyone working hard on the project.

Writes a difficult midterm test, and what strategies he has learned to use to reduce any anxiety he feels when taking this test.

Gives a presentation in history class, and what he could teach other students about concerns about how others will perceive them in front of the class.

**Respectful empathy condition (Study 2)**

Now we'll like you to write a brief summary about the life of Tyrone Williams, a student in his second year of college.

Imagine a day in the life of this individual as if you were that person, looking at the world through his eyes and walking through the world in his shoes.

**Please write 1 sentence for each scenario:** As you do so try to feel the full impact of Tyrone’s experiences and how he feels as a result. Try to imagine how much stronger he will become from these difficult experiences, and what he could teach you about dealing with challenging situations.

Goes to a political science lecture, and he is the only Black student in the class.

Meets with his English professor to talk about his term paper, and how he might worry that the professor might judge his abilities in light of negative stereotypes about Black people, but how he might overcome these worries.
Meets with a few other students to work on a group project for his biology class, and how he might worry that his classmates are judging his abilities based on negative stereotypes about Black people, but how he might handle these worries.

Takes a difficult midterm test while under extra pressure to prove that the negative stereotype about Black people's abilities isn’t true, and how he might cope with this extra pressure.

Gives a presentation in history class, and how stressful or challenging the situation can be for him, but how he might overcome his stress.

**Control condition (Studies 1 and 2):**

Now we'll like you to write a brief summary about the life of Tyrone Williams, a student in his second year of college.

Imagine a day in the life of this individual as if you were that person, looking at the world through his eyes and walking through the world in his shoes.

Please write 1 sentence for each scenario: As you do so try to feel the full impact of Tyrone’s experiences and how he feels as a result.

Goes to a political science lecture.

Meets with his English professor to talk about his term paper.

Meets with a few other students to work on a group project for his biology class.

Writes a difficult midterm test.

Gives a presentation in history class.

**Control condition (Study 3):**

Now we'll like you to write a brief summary about the life of John Williams, a student in his second year of college.

Imagine a day in the life of this individual as if you were that person, looking at the world through his eyes and walking through the world in his shoes.

Please write 1 sentence for each scenario: As you do so try to feel the full impact of John’s experiences and how he feels as a result.
Wakes up and eats breakfast before class.

Takes a nap.

Takes his dog for a walk in the park.

Goes to the grocery store.

Watches a movie with his friends.
Appendix B: Article Task (Study 3)

Stereotype Threat Article used in the Experimental Conditions

Please read the following article taken from Claude Steele's book, *Whistling Vivaldi: How stereotypes affect us and what we can do*. You will complete a short writing activity afterwards.

Consider the following thought experiment:

Imagine that you arrived late to your family reunion.

Thinking that everyone else has already eaten, you head to the buffet table and load your plate with food.

But as you leave the buffet table, you notice a group of people who haven’t eaten a bite yet. They look at the few remains on the food table and then at your plate filled with food. You try to explain, but your effort is lost in the noise of the crowd and the music. You hear them say as they go by, “Those Smiths are so selfish.”

Based on this “misunderstanding” you might fear that your immediate family is going to be judged by the stereotype that they are selfish. Every time you do something that could be interpreted in light of that negative stereotype—such as volunteering to dry the dishes instead of wash, deciding how much to tip the pizza man—you are at risk of confirming their stereotype that your family is selfish.

Such suspicion, and the unfair interpretation of your behavior, can make you feel uncomfortable. It could distract you and interfere with your interactions with other people. This experience is related to the experience of a threat from a negative stereotype – researchers call this “Stereotype threat”.

But imagine how stereotype threat could get even worse. Suppose that the negative view of you had nothing to do with your own behavior but came from what people thought the group that you belong to, such as your race. Suppose that more people than just your relatives knew about this negative view - say everyone in society knew. Suppose that the negative views reflected not your table manners, but very important abilities that are important to getting ahead, for example, your intelligence in general. And, suppose that
the new view applied to you in exactly those situations that were most critical to your success in school and in society – when you take a test, when you do a lab project.

Stereotype threat describes the experience of being at risk of being judged through the lens of a negative stereotype. Everyone has different identities that have stereotypes attached to them – an older person might be judged by the stereotype that she is forgetful, a White man might be judged by the stereotype that white men can’t dance, a person with glasses might be judged by the nerd stereotype.

To see this in your own life, think of the important settings in your life: Your school, your workplace, your family. Imagine a situation in which your identity does matter in the situation, that it affects how you see things, whom you identify with, how you react emotionally to events in the setting, and how you perform. Here is an example (a true story of a friend of the writer):

A college student named Geoff was one of the only two whites in an African American political science class composed of mostly black and other minority students. He worried about fitting in because he was White, and he was concerned that he could be judged because of it - that if he said anything that revealed an ignorance of African American experience, or a confusion about how to think about it, then he could well be seen as racially insensitive. However, if he said nothing in class, then he could escape the suspicion of his fellow students. His condition made him feel his racial identity, his whiteness, in that time and place something he hadn’t thought much about before.

Here is an example relevant to engineering (also a friend of the writer):

An engineering student named Maria wanted to do well in her program for the same reasons that everyone does – to get a good job, to meet her personal standards, to make her parents proud. But as a Hispanic woman, she spends every day being outnumbered by men in her engineering classes. Being a Hispanic woman puts her at risk of confirming the stereotype that women and Hispanics are not good at math and other quantitative skills. In addition to all the reasons she wants to do well in her courses, she has to deal with this extra pressure to perform well and to not conform to this stereotype.

Neutral Article used in the control condition
How Some Plants Spread Their Seeds: Ready, Set, Catapult

ScienceDaily (Nov. 4, 2010) — Catapults are often associated with a medieval means of destruction, but for some plants, they are an effective way to launch new life. Dispersing seeds greater distances by catapulting can provide advantages, including the establishment of populations in new environments and escape from certain threats. In new work published in the recent October issue of American Journal of Botany, Dr. Ellerby, students, and postdoctoral researcher Shannon Gerry at Wellesley College measured the mechanics involved in catapulting seeds for the plant species, Cardamine parviflora.

"While plants are generally thought of as still organisms, many of them are capable of spectacularly rapid movements," stated Ellerby. For Cardamine parviflora, organs within the plant rapidly coil outward catapulting the seeds away from it. The entire coiling and launching process is completed in around 5 milliseconds -- faster than the blink of an eye. This incredible speed and high energy storage present a challenge for the researchers for videotaping the process. "These seed pod catapults are on a hair trigger," said Ellerby. "Successfully positioning them in front of our high-speed camera without them exploding requires an incredibly steady hand."

Seed launching has evolved in a number of groups. Researchers can understand the evolution of this mechanism by comparing the processes of seed dispersal of fruits and seeds between plants using this launching method and those that do not.

Seed dispersal has been studied extensively in the model plant Arabidopsis thaliana, a close relation to Cardamine parviflora. Arabidopsis thaliana does not disperse its seeds via catapulting. Instead, the seeds are dropped to the ground. Despite these differences in seed dispersal processes, the plant parts of Cardamine parviflora and Arabidopsis thaliana are similar. One difference is that there is a second layer of plant material in Cardamine parviflora that is absent in Arabidopsis thaliana. This additional layer likely plays a role in the launching.

"Ultimately it will be important to analyze the structures at a tissue and cellular level to determine precisely how they store such impressive amounts of energy," Ellerby said. "This could inform the design of human-engineered structures for absorbing or storing elastic energy."
Appendix C: Impression Formation Task (Studies 1-3)

We are interested in your general impression of the individual you just wrote about. Please rate the extent to which you think [target name] possesses the following traits.

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Victim  
Empowered  
Uncertain  
Strong  
Intelligent  
Incapable  
Determined  
In need of help  
Weak  
Able to help others  
Needs support  
Has a lot to offer
Appendix D: Interview Task Materials (Study 3)

Job position description

You will be learning about an undergraduate teaching assistant position for second year psychology courses at the University of Waterloo.

Teaching assistant position details:
- Grade assignments, essays, and tests, and compute and record results
- Help the instructor prepare lesson materials
- Hold regular office hours to assist and mentor students

List of Interview Questions

Incompetence-eliciting
- What do people most often criticize about you?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- Tell me about the most challenging course you took.
- Tell me about the worst grade you received.
- Tell me about a time where you didn’t meet your boss’ or supervisor’s expectations.

Competence-eliciting
- What psychology courses have you taken?
- What is your overall grade in psychology?
- How comfortable are you in answering students’ questions about material in second year psychology courses?
- Why did you choose to major in psychology?
- What is your greatest strength?
- What makes you think you can succeed in this job?
- How do you plan to handle a part-time job in addition to school?
- Why did you decide to apply for this position?
- How will this teaching assistant position help in your career plans?
- What traits and experience do you have that applies to this position?
- What are your career goals?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

**Non-diagnostic**

- What are your hobbies?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- What is your favourite movie?
- What is your favourite book?
- What is your favourite colour?
- What would be your ideal vacation?
- What was your exchange experience like?
- What is your biggest pet peeve?
- If you could be an animal, what would you be, and why?
- Tell me about your family.
- Where do you live in Waterloo? Do you have roommates?
- If you were a kitchen appliance, what would you be, and why?
- What’s your favourite place to hang out in Waterloo?
- What’s your favourite food?
- What do you value most?

**Confederate Script and Scripted Answers to Interview Questions**

**Instructions for Confederate**

Wait until participant says hi and introduces themselves. Then type:

Hi!
My name is Delroy Jones.
I originally came from Bridgetown. It’s a city in Barbados.
I’m a third year student (in 3A) in the Honours Psychology program here at Waterloo.
I’m also thinking of doing a minor in international studies ever since I did an exchange program in Germany for 8 months in my second year.
After 8 questions are asked, do not respond. Tell the experimenter to stop the chat session. When she types in “Thanks Delroy, the interview is over. Thanks for helping us out!”, please type:

No problem! Talk soon.

Scripted Interview Questions and Answers

1. What courses have you taken?
   I’ve taken Psych101, and most of the second year courses like social psych, developmental psych, psychopathology, physiological psych, basic research methods, and cognitive processes. I’ve also taken a few third year courses, like interpersonal relations, language development, research in social psych seminar and an advanced data analysis course.

2. What is your overall grade in psychology?
   About 70%
   I didn’t do as well in my first and second year courses.
   But I did a lot better in my third year courses.

3. How comfortable are you in answering students’ questions about material in second year psychology courses?
   I’m very confident in helping students with material from second year courses. I’ve taken most of them and also a few third year courses. Our understanding and how well we do in upper year courses depends on how well we understood the basic material in the second year courses and I have a pretty good grasp of the major theories and concepts.

4. Why did you choose to major in psychology?
   I was debating between majoring in the more physical sciences, like biology and going into psych.
   But psychology interested me more because it is relevant to people’s everyday lives.
   I like how we can use theories in psychology to understand real world problems.

5. What is your greatest strength?
   I’m a very reliable person. When people ask me to do things, I get them done.
   I have a part time job at Zehrs and I’m a volunteer research assistant too so I’ve become an expert at balancing the things I need to do.

6. What makes you think you can succeed in this job?
Right now I’m volunteering as a research assistant at one of the psych labs in the department. It’s a really valuable position to have as an undergrad. I’ve learned how to work with other research assistants and with participants, how to work independently, and how to time manage when the professor wants lots of different things done. So things like data entry and coding and running experiments. I have a lot more experience working in psychology and how the department works compared to other students who don’t have RA positions.

7. How do you plan to handle a part-time job in addition to school? I’ve been working part time as a cashier at Zehrs for the past 2 years and I’m also a volunteer research assistant in the department so I know how to balance work, school and my volunteer commitments. I use an agenda and I plan out everything I do that day. I keep to-do list every week so I make sure that I get the most important things done.

8. Why did you decide to apply for this position? I thought it would be a great way to get more experience in the field of psychology on the research side of things which I’m doing right now as a research assistant. Also more experience on the teaching side of things.

9. How will this teaching assistant position help in your career plans? This position would really help in my career plans especially if I apply to do research in graduate school. Graduate students usually get teaching assistantships, and so this would give me a chance to see what it would be like. It would give me more exposure to the field of psychology and how it works, and give me experience teaching students about psychology.

10. What traits and experience do you have that applies to this position? I’m a very conscientious and organized person. Since this position requires that the person be able to balance different kinds of tasks like marking assignments, offering office hours and helping the professor prepare lesson plans. I think I would be able to do a great job. I’m also a research assistant in one of the labs here in the department.

11. What are your career goals? I’m still exploring my options since I’m still in third year. I might apply to do research in grad school after my undergrad is done. I’m really not sure yet.

12. What do people most often criticize about you?
I guess I tend to take on too much work or commitments when I don’t really have the time for it. I say yes to events I get invited to, and sometimes I don’t end up going because I’m too busy.

13. Tell me about the most challenging course you took.
   That was a first year biology course.
   The expectations were very different from the ones in high school so I had to study a lot more and spend more time reviewing and going to my prof’s office hours.

14. Tell me about the worst grade you received so far.
   I got 60% in chemistry in my first year because I thought I might major in biology but it was really difficult for me.
   I just wasn’t interested in the subject and all the lab sessions took up a lot of my time.

15. What is your greatest weakness?
   I guess I sometimes procrastinate.
   Time pressure motivates me, and I usually get things done on time that way.

16. Tell me about a time where you didn’t meet your boss’ or supervisor’s expectations.
   I’m working at Zehrs now as a cashier. When I started that job I had also just moved to Waterloo and started school at the same time.
   It was difficult adjusting to the new environment and balancing school and work. I made a few errors on the till, and also had to miss a few shifts.
   I’ve been a lot better since then though. The whole balancing process got easier and I haven’t had to miss a shift or made any serious mistakes since then.

17. What are your hobbies?
   I like to go rockclimbing and bike mostly.

18. What do you do in your spare time?
   I mainly go biking or rockclimbing, or hiking if I have time to go out further away from Toronto. I read and write too.

19. What is your favourite movie?
   That’s a hard one.
   I would say Pulp Fiction. I really like Quentin Tarantino movies.

20. What is your favourite book?
   I would say In the Skin of a Lion.
   A friend recommended it to me and I really enjoyed the writing.

21. What is your favourite colour?
   I’ll say blue.

22. What would be your ideal vacation?
   Anywhere where I can be active and explore. I don’t really like vacations where you lounge around and do nothing.
I would love to do hiking trails, or try mountain biking.

23. What do you value most?
   The relationships I have with my friends and family.
   I really value having a support network especially when school or work can become really busy and challenging.

24. What was your exchange experience like?
   It was probably one of the best experiences I’ve had since I started school.
   It was really challenging getting over the language barrier, but I had really great mentors and teachers.
   I got the chance to travel around Europe too, which was great.
   I also made lots of friends that I still keep in touch with.

25. What is your biggest pet peeve?
   When people are inconsiderate of others.

26. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
   I will have graduated by then.
   I don’t have definite plans for after I finish my undergrad, but I am thinking about doing research in graduate school.
   I’m not sure yet.

27. If you could be an animal, what would you be, and why?
   Let me think about that.
   I think I would be a leopard. I’m a pretty physically active person so I think that animal matches me the most.

28. Tell me about your family.
   I have one older sister that’s 2 years older than me. She’s working now.
   I also have one younger brother who’s 3 years younger than me. They live with my parents.

29. Where do you live Waterloo? Do you have roommates?
   I live really close to school, at University and Phillip.
   It’s really convenient!
   I live in an apartment, and I have 2 roommates.

30. If you were a kitchen appliance, what would you be, and why?
   Let me think about that.
   I think I would be a fridge, because I like to eat!

31. What’s your favourite place to hang out in Waterloo?
   At school, I like hanging out with my friends at the SLC.
   We get together and talk and do work on our laptops.
   Outside school, it would have to be Waterloo park.
   I like biking there and seeing the animals.

32. What’s your favourite food?
   Pizza, for sure!