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Perceiving a Danger Within: Black Americans Associate Black Men With Physical Threat

David S. March[1]

Abstract

Recent work suggests that good/bad out-group favoritism of Blacks for Whites may reflect positive associations with White rather than negative associations with Black. The Dual Implicit Process Model suggests that Blacks may come to associate their own group with threat, even absent a concurrent Black-negative association. This work tests this idea among Black Americans. Three studies tested this possibility using mouse-tracking (Study 1) and evaluative priming tasks (Studies 2 and 3) to assess how quickly participants make judgments involving Black versus White male faces and names. All studies found that that Black Americans hold automatic Black-threat associations absent automatic Black-negative associations. This supports the Dual Implicit Process Model's threat versus negativity distinction within the realm of anti-Black bias and supplements recent work by showing that the presence of out-group favoritism on one dimension (i.e., threat) can occur even in the absence of out-group favoritism on a seemingly related dimension (i.e., negativity).

Keywords

bias, prejudice, threat, Black Americans, negativity

The Dual Implicit Process Model (DIPM) details how the automatic processing of threat is initial to and takes priority over the automatic processing of negativity (March et al., 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2022). Consequent of this distinction, automatic associations with threat are unique from automatic associations with negativity. My recent research applying the DIPM perspective to intergroup processes shows that White Americans automatically associate Black men with physical threat distinct from and more strongly than negativity (March et al., 2021). In that work, no evidence implied a simultaneous general automatic Black-negative association. The threat versus negativity distinction of the DIPM also suggests that Black Americans—as members of a group stereotyped as dangerous—may hold a Black-threat association distinct from, primary to, or perhaps absent a Black-negative association (March et al., 2018a). Yet it remains unknown whether the DIPM distinction holds for Black Americans. That is, will Black Americans show evidence of the Black-threat association and, if so, will it be distinct from a Black-negative association? Examining this question not only has implications for the scope of the DIPM as it applies to inter- and intra-group processes, but also for gaining a better understanding of the nature of a disadvantaged group's automatically activated associations with their in-group.

Although advantaged groups typically show an automatic in-group bias, research has shown that historically disadvantaged groups can sometimes show associations that favor the out-group (Jost et al., 2004; Nosek et al., 2007). For example, on measures of automatic valence associations (i.e., a good/bad implicit association test [IAT]), members of marginalized groups tend to favor the out-group. Specifically, elderly people favor the young, people with disability favor people without disability, and people with obesity favor people with normal weight (Nosek et al., 2007). In addition, most germane to this work, Black Americans tend to favor Whites. Theorists have suggested that these trends reflect the justification or internalization of negative in-group stereotypes (David et al., 2019; Jost et al., 2004). That is, members of disadvantaged groups favor advantaged groups to justify the status quo and may come to hold negative in-group stereotypes. Yet recent research suggests that liking another group does not necessarily imply commensurately disliking one's own (Calanchini et al., 2022). Dissociating the IAT associations between Black versus White and positive versus negative showed that out-group IAT favoritism among Blacks is driven more by

[1]Florida State University, USA

Corresponding Author:
David S. March, Department of Psychology, Florida State University, 1107 West Call Street, Tallahassee, FL 32306, USA.
Email: march@psy.fsu.edu

positive associations with Whites than by negative associations with Blacks. In other words, Blacks may hold a White-positive association without holding an equally strong Black-negative association. This research builds on this emerging discourse by directly testing whether Black Americans automatically associate Black with negativity.

The DIPM, however, suggests that focusing on good/bad associations may fail to capture the specific content of stereotypes. One implication of the DIPM tenet that threat-associations are primary to negative associations is that Black Americans can hold a Black-threat association *even in the absence* of a Black-negative association. In the United States, media often prominently feature Black individuals as dangerous (Oliver, 2003; Welch, 2007), and there are widespread cultural stereotypes linking Black to danger-related concepts (e.g., violence, aggression, criminality; Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Devine & Elliot, 1995; Krueger, 1996). Black Americans are exposed to the same cultural stereotypes as are White Americans; hence, they too may evidence a Black-threat association. Indirect evidence that Black Americans associate Black with danger comes from the "shooter" task (Correll et al., 2002; Kahn & Davies, 2011). Both Black and White Americans are (a) faster to "shoot" armed Black than armed White men and (b) slower to "not-shoot" unarmed Black than unarmed White men. However, it is not clear whether anti-Black shooter bias is driven by an association linking Black men to threat, negativity, or both. The shooter task is a sequential priming task where the prime (i.e., Black or White person) and target (i.e., gun or neutral object) are presented simultaneously (Cameron et al., 2012), but processed successively (i.e., person then object; Correll et al., 2015). Because Black Americans are stereotyped both in terms of threat and negativity (e.g., dangerous, lazy; Devine & Elliot, 1995), and guns are also evaluated as threatening and negative (March et al., 2017), anti-Black shooter bias may reflect Black-threat or Black-negative associations (March et al., 2020). Accordingly, it remains unclear whether Black Americans associate Blacks with threat, negativity, both, or neither. The current research overcomes this limitation to directly test whether Black Americans hold an automatically activated Black-threat association.

Current Work

This work takes a novel approach to test whether Black Americans hold a Black-threat and/or a Black-negative association. Three studies methodologically differentiate threat from negativity and exposes Black participants to Black and White targets to assess the strength of Black- versus White-threat and Black- versus White-negative associations. Study 1 uses mouse-tracking to assess how quickly Black participants begin to categorize whether Black versus White male-faces are dangerous or negative. Study 2 uses evaluative priming to test whether Black participants more quickly categorize threatening or negative words as "dangerous" versus "negative" when primed by Black versus White male-names. Study 3 uses evaluative priming to test how quickly Black participants categorize (in one block) negative and neutral words as "negative" versus "not-negative" and (in another block) threatening and neutral words as "dangerous" versus "not-dangerous" when primed by Black versus White male-names.

All code, data, and material are available at https://osf.io/5f4cj/.

Study 1

Study 1 employed mouse-tracking to assess the relative associations between Black versus White males with threat versus negativity. Black participants saw Black and White male-faces expressing anger or sadness and chose from two labels: the target label accurately described the face (in this case, a Dangerous label for angry faces, and a Negative label for sad faces) and a distractor label that did not describe the face. If Black Americans more strongly associate threat versus negativity with Black than White, they will more quickly begin moving the mouse to Dangerous (but not Negative) for Black versus White faces.

Participants

In this and all subsequent studies, participants were self-identified Black individuals at a large southeastern American university (whose student population is approximately 10% Black). The sample size of all studies reflects the number of Black participants capable of being obtained within the semester in which that study's data were collected. The final sample size for each study is comparable to previous work using the current methods (i.e., March et al., 2021).

Method

Mouse-tracking records the X- and Y coordinates of the mouse on the computer screen as participants move the cursor to categorize a stimulus based on the target and distractor labels. Mouse-tracking indexes the influence of these two competing alternatives during the decision-making process (Freeman, 2018). Participants (N = 103; 40 men, 60 women, three unidentified) sat in a room equipped with single monitor and computer. Participants were told that we were looking to identify face images that are easily classified as dangerous or negative. Participants were told that dangerous faces look scary, angry, and threatening, whereas negative faces look gloomy, sad, and unhappy. They were further told that each trial would begin with the presentation of a start-button and response labels located at the top right and left corners (i.e., dangerous and negative). After they clicked the "start" button, a single face appeared in the center of the screen, and their task was to click on the label that correctly identifies the

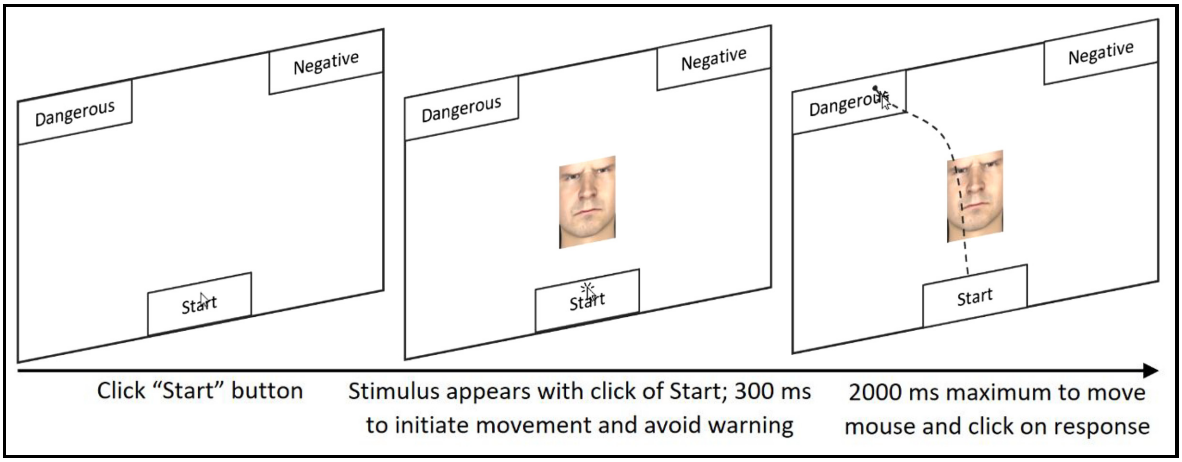

Figure 1. Trial Time Course.

image. Mouse movement was forced to begin as soon as participants clicked the start-button and they experienced a warning if they began moving too slowly (i.e., >300 ms) or took too long to enter a response (i.e., >2,000 ms; see Figure 1). Participants first undertook 10 practice trials where they identified food as "vegetable" or "fruit" and were provided correct/incorrect feedback, and then completed a 40-trial block categorizing dangerous and negative faces with no feedback provided. The left-right position of the labels changed halfway through the block (with an instruction screen detailing the switch). The block contained the same number of Black and White faces of both expressions. The order of the left-right starting position of labels was randomized. See supplemental materials for all stimuli.

MouseTracker (www.mousetracker.org) software recorded on each trial the X- and Y-coordinates at each 20 ms interval. Data were remapped to equate the right/left position of responses. Data were then exported to SAS software for analyses. Following the criteria from March et al. (2021), trials were excluded (a) where no data was recorded due to participants exceeding the 2,000 ms limit (125, 0.75%), (b) in which participants clicked the distractor label (i.e., incorrect responses; 399, 2.38%), (c) in which participants began moving too slowly (>300 ms of clicking start; 802, 4.79%), or (d) that ended abnormally fast (<600 ms; 681, 4.06%). This yielded 14,747 trials from 103 participants.

The hypothesis focused on how quickly participants began correctly categorizing each stimulus for each target label and whether the time of initiating correct categorization (TICC) varied as a function of race. The TICC reflects how early in the decision process participants begin to move toward the selected response (March & Gaertner, 2021). Earlier TICCs reflect stronger automatic associations between the stimulus and the target- versus distractor labels. What follows is only a brief overview of the method for calculating the TICC (full details can be found in March & Gaertner, 2021). To create more stable mouse-trajectory estimates, I averaged the X-Y coordinate at each time point of each target for each race for each participant. For the average trajectories, I then calculated the difference of Euclidean distances to the target and distractor labels, respectively, at every time point. This difference score produces a sigmoid curve rising over time (see Figure 2). The

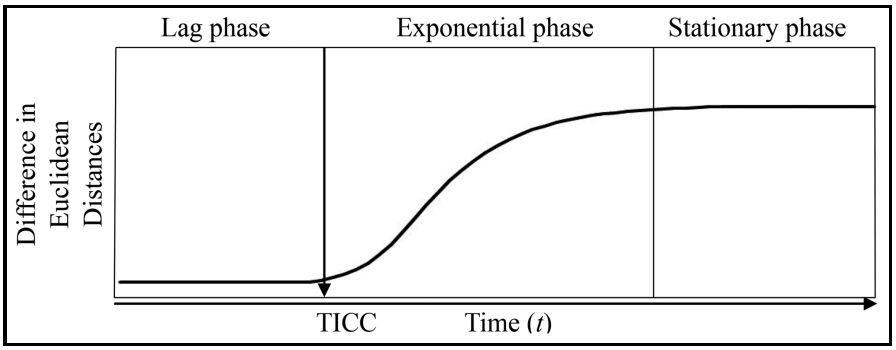

Figure 2. Sigmoid for Difference in Euclidean Distances Over Time.
Note. TICC = time of initiating correct categorization.

initial horizontal line reflects vertical mouse movement equally close to both target and distractor labels. The exponential phase occurs with movement closer to the target relative to the distractor label. The line asymptotes as movement ends at the target label. The TICC reflects the time that participants began moving closer to the target relative to the distractor label.

Two nonlinear models that can estimate TICC are the Baranyi and Gompertz models (Baty, Delignette-Muller, 2004). I used Proc NLIN in SAS to fit the Baranyi and Gompertz models to the time by Euclidean-distance difference values to each target for each race for each participant. Each model evidenced exceptional fit with an average pseudo-R^2_{Gompertz} of .9399 and pseudo-R^2_{Baranyi} of .9441. As in previous work (March et al., 2021), to yield a more stable estimate, I averaged each participant's Gompertz and Baranyi TICC estimates for each of the targets by race pairings. See Figure 3 for raw mouse paths and Euclidean-distance differences over time.

Results

I entered TICC estimates into a 2 (*Target*: dangerous vs. negative) × 2 (*Race*: Black vs. White) multivariate repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). Three participants were missing a single or more TICC estimates due to non-convergence or missing trajectories, yielding 100 Black participants for analyses.

The TICC estimate indicated a Race × Expression interaction, $F(1, 99) = 5.26$, $p = .0239$. For the dangerous label, participants more quickly began categorizing Black ($M = 461$ ms) than White faces ($M = 510$ ms), $F(1, 99) =$

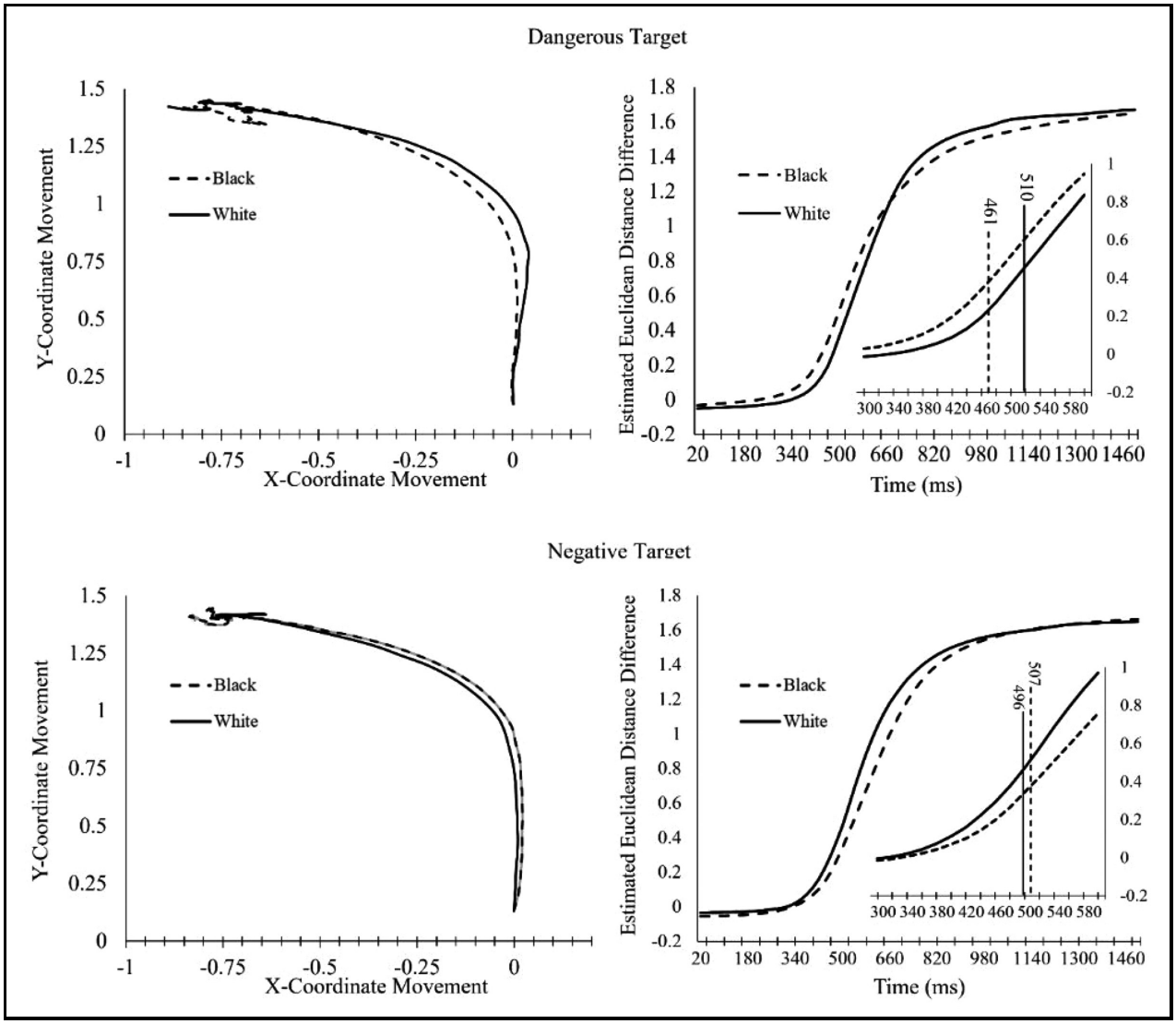

Figure 3. Raw Mouse Paths (Left Panel) and Euclidean-Distance Differences with a TICC Focus (Right Panel).
Note. TICC = time of initiating correct categorization.

6.08, $p = .0154$, $d_z = 0.23$. For the negative label, the onset of categorization was nonsignificantly slower for Black ($M = 507$) than White faces ($M = 496$ ms), $F(1, 99) = 0.59$, $p = .4438$, $d_z = 0.10$ (see Figure 4). This implies that threat versus negativity was more strongly associated with Black- versus White men.

When decomposing the interaction within levels of race, participants more quickly began categorizing faces as Dangerous than Negative when the face was Black, $F(1, 99) = 7.90$, $p = .0060$, $d_z = 0.29$, and nonsignificantly slower when the face was White, $F(1, 99) = 0.58$, $p = .4489$, $d_z = 0.08$. That participants (a) more quickly began categorizing Black than White faces as Dangerous angry, but (b) not Black than White faces as Negative implies that Black (than White) faces are more strongly associated with threat than negativity.

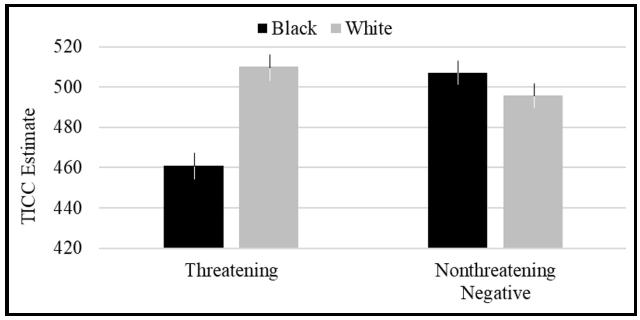

Figure 4. Mean TICC: Error Bar Calculated Within-Participants ± 1 SEM.
Source. O'Brien & Cousineau (2014)..
Note. TICC = time of initiating correct categorization. SEM = standard error of the mean.

Discussion

Study 1 results suggest that, among Black Americans, Black versus White men are more strongly automatically associated with threat than negativity. In contrast, neither Black nor White men are more strongly automatically associated with negativity.

Study 2

Study 2 used an evaluative priming task to test the relative strengths of the Black versus White, threat versus negative associations by assessing how quickly Black Americans categorize negative or threatening words when preceded by Black or White names. Whereas Study 1 required participants to categorize faces, the stimuli in Study 2 were not faces nor used emotion referents. If Black Americans more strongly automatically associate Black men with threat versus negativity, participants should more quickly categorize threatening than negative words as dangerous when preceded by Black than White names.

Method

Study 2 used 12 first names rated as either being typical of White men (Brad, Connor Ethan, Jack, Jake, and Scott) or Black men (Darnell, DeAndre, DeShawn, Jamal, Tyrone, and Trevon) as primes. Study 2 also used 12 negatively valanced words that reflect either nonthreatening negativity (awful, disliked, displeasing, inferior, lousy, and undesirable) or physical threat (aggressive, harmful, murderous, threatening, unsafe, and violent) as targets (March et al., 2021). Data were collected with Inquisit Web (https://www.millisecond.com). Participants ($N = 168$; 37 men, 129 women, two unidentified) were told that each trial would present two words. The first word would be a name and the second word would be a target and their task was to categorize (by pressing the "A" or "L" key, respectively) as accurately and quickly as possible if the target was dangerous or negative. Participants first completed 24 practice trials that only presented target words and provided correct/incorrect feedback before completing a single block of 144 prime-target trials where no feedback was provided. Each prime-target trial began with a string of asterisks presented for 400 ms that was replaced by a 400-ms name that in turn was replaced by a 400-ms target word. Trials ended as participants indicated whether the target word was Negative or Dangerous. The order in which the prime and target words were presented was randomized.

The dependent measure was response time to correctly categorize each target. Similar to March et al. (2021), I excluded trials (a) of one target ("unsafe") that had error rates greater than 20% (the a priori cutoff from both that and this work; $n = 2{,}016$, 8.3%), (b) where participants entered incorrect responses, ($n = 2{,}306$, 9.5%), (c) with slow reaction times greater than three interquartile ranges above the third quantile (Tukey, 1977; $n = 605$, 2.5%), and (d) from 24 participants with no more than 70% of their maximum data remaining. These a priori exclusion criteria yielded 144 participants (32 men, 110 women, two unidentified) and 17,339 responses.

Results

Research utilizing priming tasks often tries to equate the length (i.e., number of letters) of primes and targets (e.g., De Houwer et al., 2002; Kiefer et al., 2015). In this work, White names were, on average, shorter than Black names (Ms = 4.67 vs. 6.33 letters). Negative words were around the same length as threat words (Ms = vs. 8.00 vs. 8.33 letters). Therefore, as in previous work utilizing these primes (March et al., 2021), I first tested whether response time was affected by the length of the prime names or target words (i.e., number of letters in each). I regressed the natural logged reaction times on name- and target-length, respectively, and estimated random effects of the intercept, name- and target-length, and their covariances, with a

random intercept for each target. Response times were influenced by the length of prime names, $F(1, 143) = 4.89$, $p = .0286$, such that reaction time increased by approximately 3.2 ms for each additional letter of a name. The length of target words was unrelated to response times, $F(1, 143) = 0.62$, $p = .4309$. Therefore, to unconfound the length and race of the prime-name, I control for name-length in all the following analyses.[1]

I regressed the natural-logged reaction times on a 2 (*Prime*: Black vs. White) × 2 (*Target*: threatening vs. negative) factorial with random effects of the intercept, target, Prime × Target interaction, their covariances, and a random intercept for each target-stimuli. Outside the delaying influence of name-length, $F(1, 17038) = 7.42$, $p = .0065$, and indicating a stronger association between Black than White and threat than negativity, was a White versus Black × Threatening versus Negative interaction, $F(1, 17038) = 7.30$, $p = .0069$, $d_0 = -0.15$ (see Figure 5). Threatening targets were categorized more quickly after Black versus White names, $F(1, 17038) = 8.82$, $p = .0030$, $d_0 = -0.15$, ($M_{Black} = 608$ ms vs. $M_{White} = 619$ ms). Participants were nonsignificantly slower to categorize Negative targets after White than Black names, $F(1, 17038) = 0.0021$, $p = .9631$, $d_0 = 0.07$, ($M_{Black} = 655$ ms vs. $M_{White} = 656$ ms).

When decomposing the interaction within levels of race, threatening (vs. negative) targets were categorized more quickly when primed by Black names, $F(1, 143) = 7.21$, $p = .0081$, $d_0 = -0.66$, and by White names, $F(1, 143) = 4.26$, $p = .0408$, $d_0 = -0.50$. In sum, Black participants more quickly categorized threatening words when preceded by Black than White names. The categorization of negative words was not differentially primed by Black or White names. This implies that Black Americans more strongly associate Black than White men with threat than with negativity.

Discussion

Similar to Study 1, Study 2 results suggest that, among Black Americans, Black versus White men are more strongly automatically associated with threat than negativity. Again, neither Black nor White men are more strongly automatically associated with negativity.

Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 found distinct and stronger Black versus White, threat versus negative associations. Yet it remains unclear whether Black Americans hold separate Black-threat *and* Black-negative associations (i.e., in isolation vs. relative to each other). Study 3 assesses the strength of the Black-versus White-threat as *distinct* from-negative association by assessing latency to evaluate whether (in one block) negative and neutral words were "negative" versus "not-negative" and whether (in another block) threatening and neutral words were "dangerous" versus "not-dangerous" when primed by White versus Black male-names. If Black Americans automatically associate Black men with threat *and* negativity, participants will more quickly categorize threatening versus nonthreatening and negative versus not-negative words as dangerous and negative, respectively, when preceded by Black versus White names.

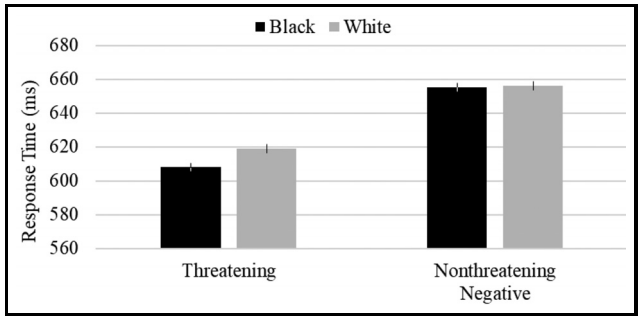

Figure 5. Mean RT: Error Bars Calculated From Clustered Multilevel Data ± 1 SEM.
Source. Gelman & Hill (2006).
Note. RT = response time; SEM = standard error of the mean..

Method

Study 3 used the same Threat and Negative target words and Black and White names used in Study 2 in addition to several words previously piloted to be neutral (general, indifferent, normal, neutral, regular, or undefined). Data were collected with Inquisit Web. Participants ($N = 106$; 25 men, 79 women, two unidentified) were told that each trial would present two words. The first word would be a name and the second word would be a target. They were told that their task is to categorize (by pressing the "A" or "L" key, respectively) as accurately and quickly as possible whether the target was (in one block) "dangerous" or "not-dangerous" and (in another block) "negative" or "not-negative." Participants first practiced 24 trials that provided correct/incorrect feedback involving only the target words from that block, and then completed 144 prime-target trials in one block where no feedback was provided. They then completed 24 trials that provided correct/incorrect feedback involving only the target words from the second block and another 144 prime-target trials in the other block where no feedback was provided. Each of the 288 prime-target trials began with a 400 ms string of asterisks that was replaced by a 400 ms prime that was replaced by a 400 ms target and ended when participants categorized the target as (in one block) "dangerous" or "not-dangerous" and (in another block) "negative" or "not-negative." The order of prime and target words were random within blocks, and the block order was random across participants.

The dependent measure was the reaction time to correctly categorize as (in one block) "negative" the negative targets and "not-negative" the neutral target words, and to

correctly categorize as (in the other block) as "dangerous" the threatening target words and as "not-dangerous" the neutral targets words. As in Study 2, I exclude trials (a) of one target ("unsafe") that had error rates greater than 20% (the a priori cutoff from both that and this study; n = 1,269, 4.13%), (b) where participants entered incorrect responses, (n = 2,781, 9.04%), (c) with slow reaction times greater than three interquartile ranges above the third quantile (n = 668, 2.27%), and (d) from 12 participants with no more than 70% of their maximum data remaining. These a priori exclusion criteria yielded 98 participants (23 men, 72 women, two unidentified) and 26,040 responses.

Results

Similar to Study 2, name-length is controlled in all the following analyses. I regressed the natural-logged reaction times on a 2 (*Prime*: White vs. Black) × 2 (*Target*: threatening vs. not-threatening *or* negative vs. not-negative) factorial with random effects of the intercept, target, Prime × Target, their covariances, and a random intercept for each target-stimuli.[2]

Threatening Versus Not-Threatening. Outside of the delaying effect of name-length, $F(1, 11731) = 9.22$, $p = .0024$, and implying a stronger Black than White association with threat, was the Black versus White × Threatening versus Not-Threatening interaction, $F(1, 11731) = 12.13$, $p = .0005$, $d_0 = -0.21$ (see Figure 6). Threatening targets were categorized more quickly after Black versus White names, $F(1, 11731) = 10.88$, $p = .0010$, $d_0 = -0.18$, (M_{Black} = 573 ms vs. M_{White} = 585 ms). Participants were nonsignificantly slower to categorize not-threatening targets after Black than White names, $F(1, 11731) = 0.26$, $p = .6097$, $d_0 = 0.03$, (M_{Black} = 621 ms vs. M_{White} = 618 ms).

When decomposing the interaction within levels of race, participants more quickly categorized threatening (vs. not-threatening) targets when primed by Black names, $F(1, 97) = 10.37$, $p = .0017$, $d_0 = -0.60$, and by White names, $F(1, 97) = 4.38$, $p = .0389$, $d_0 = -0.39$. These results imply that Black Americans more strongly associate Black than White men with threat.

Negative Versus Not-Negative. Outside of the delaying effect of name-length, $F(1, 12351) = 4.15$, $p = .0416$, and implying no difference in the Black than White association with Negativity, was a lack of Black versus White × Negative versus Not-Negative interaction, $F(1, 12351) = 2.08$, $p = .1491$, $d_0 = -0.09$ ($M_{\text{Black negative}}$ = 639 ms vs. $M_{\text{White negative}}$ = 639 ms; $M_{\text{Black not-negative}}$ = 649 ms vs. $M_{\text{White not-negative}}$ = 642 ms). These results indicate that Black Americans do not differentially associate Black than White men with nonthreatening-negativity.

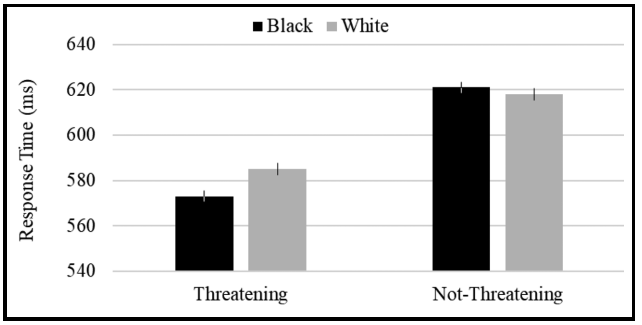

Figure 6. Mean RT. Error Bars Calculated From Clustered Multilevel Data ± 1 SEM.
Source. Gelman & Hill (2006).
Note. RT = response time; SEM = standard error of the mean.

Discussion

Similar to Study 1 and Study 2, Study 3 suggests that Black Americans more strongly associate Black than White with threat. Similar to Study 1 and Study 2, neither Black nor White was more strongly associated with negativity. This again implies that Black Americans have stronger associations between Black than White men and threat but not with general negativity.

General Discussion

Recent work has shown that good/bad out-group favoritism of Blacks for Whites may reflect positive associations with White more than negative associations with Black. The DIPM suggests that Black Americans may come to associate their own group with threat, *even absent* a concurrent Black-negative association. By separately operationalizing threat versus negativity within measures, all current studies found that that Black Americans hold automatic Black-threat associations, perhaps absent concurrent automatic Black-negative associations. This supports the DIPM's threat versus negativity distinction within the realm of anti-Black bias and supplements recent work by showing that the presence of out-group favoritism on one dimension (i.e., threat) can occur even in the absence of out-group favoritism on a seemingly related but more general dimension (i.e., negativity). These results advance our understanding of the extent to which Black Americans associate their in-group with threat and/or negativity.

To be clear, the presence of an in-group directed Black-threat association does not suggest that the association is accurate or that Black Americans, believe, endorse, or are responsible for maintaining this association. Nor does it suggest that Black Americans can not also hold a coexisting but weaker White-threat association. Instead, a stronger Black- versus White-threat association may be one consequence of the pernicious presence and influence of the

Black-threat stereotype in the US. This work suggests that cultural stereotypes linking Black Americans to danger-related concepts such as violence, aggression, and criminality not only lead to a Black-threat association among out-group but also in-group members.

The Consequences of Threat-Based Anti-Black Bias

Finding a unique Black-threat association implies that, even among Black Americans, Black men may evoke an automatic threat-process and rapid threat-responses aimed at self-defense. The threat versus negativity distinction speaks both to the source of the stereotype and to types of outcomes that are likely to result from unique threat-relevant sources of anti-Black bias. As threat and negative associations evoke functionally unique outcomes (i.e., judgments, behaviors), responses to groups associated with physical threat will likely differ from responses to groups associated only with negativity. March et al. (2021) argue that delineating whether groups are associated with threat, negativity, both, or neither may offer insight into why particular groups disproportionally experience certain forms of discrimination that need not always come from out-group members (e.g., Goff et al., 2016; March & Graham, 2015; Paoline et al., 2018; Wright & Headley, 2020). Specifically, "dislike" and "danger" are unique evaluations that drive distinct biases (e.g., Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Schaller & Neuberg, 2012). The presence of an automatic Black-threat association, not just among Whites, but also Blacks, may speak both to the kind and frequency of responses a Black-threat associations is likely to evoke.

Focusing on the Black-threat association may provide insight into perhaps why, for example, Black Americans experience greater police use of force than do other races (Goff et al., 2016). Instead of revealing implicit disdain or dislike, such occurrences may indicate threat responses that result through the activation of threat associations. Individuals raised in the same society likely integrate some of the same associations, regardless of whether the stereotype regards their in-group. Considering bias from all angles may help elucidate why, for example, disproportionate police use of force encounters are not limited to White officers (Goff et al., 2016; Paoline et al., 2018; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018; Wright & Headley, 2020). Although one might expect Black individuals to be especially motivated to control the effects of activated bias on downstream outcomes (i.e., by applying control to automatic processes; Devine et al., 2002), threat evoking stimuli are preferentially processed and likely to activate associations that influence outcomes with relatively little opportunity to intervene (March et al., 2018a).

To be clear, initiation and reaction times in the mouse-tracking and evaluative priming tasks used here assess the relative *strength of associations* between Black versus White with threat and/or negativity; faster initiation and reaction times imply a stronger association. This is not the same as measuring a threat *response*. A threat response involves physiological and behavioral reactions geared toward self-preservation. A threat-association is a necessary prior to a threat response. The purpose of these current work is to assess whether Black Americans associate Black men with threat. As a threat-association is a precursor to a threat-response, the activation of a Black-threat association may begin the process of evoking automatic outcomes aimed at self-defense.

Shooter bias is only one manifestation of the ways in which the DIPM argues that threat-associations may guide automatic outcomes. Other domains may be explaining outcomes using negativity which could be explained by threat. Many prejudiced outcomes likely involve functionally distinct threat and valence characteristics, such as, for example, jury decisions, hiring decisions, and school discipline (Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). Recognizing the presence of a unique Black-threat association, even among the in-group, has implications for informing broader theories of social processes that span into the many manifestations of threat-driven responses that serve to disadvantage Black Americans. As a result, increased understanding of bias in the United States can be gained by considering threat-based anti-Black bias the result of a societal-level issue that affects not only Whites, but also other ethnic groups, perhaps even other Black Americans. In doing so, the underlying source of the harmful consequences of such bias is identified as the result of a systemic societal problem and can begin to be addressed at that level.

Conclusion

This work explored whether Black, similar to White, Americans more strongly associate Black than White men with threat. All data clearly indicate that Black Americans' automatic evaluation of Black versus White men is one of physical threat. In addition, Black Americans did not differentially associate Black versus White men with negativity. This supports the DIPM supposition that threat-stereotyped groups can maintain an in-group-threat association even absent an in-group-negative association.

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ORCID iD

David S. March https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9874-7967

Supplemental Material

The supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

Notes

1. Analyses without name-length covariate can be found in the supplemental materials.
2. Analyses without name-length covariate can be found in the supplemental materials.

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Author Biography

David March is an assistant professor at Florida State University. His research focuses on highlighting the unique role of threat processing within broader aspects of social cognition.

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