

Do You Really Understand? Achieving Accuracy in Interracial Relationships

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Accurately perceiving whether interaction partners feel understood is important for developing intimate relationships and maintaining smooth interpersonal exchanges. During interracial interactions, when are Whites and racial minorities likely to accurately perceive how understood cross-race partners feel? We propose that participant race, desire to affiliate, and racial salience moderate accuracy in interracial interactions. Examination of cross-race roommates (Study 1) and interracial interactions with strangers (Study 2) revealed that when race is salient, Whites higher in desire to affiliate with racial minorities failed to accurately perceive the extent to which racial minority partners felt understood. Thus, although the desire to affiliate may appear beneficial, it may interfere with Whites' ability to accurately perceive how understood racial minorities feel. By contrast, racial minorities higher in desire to affiliate with Whites accurately perceived how understood White partners felt. Furthermore, participants' overestimation of how well they understood partners correlated negatively with partners' reports of relationship quality. Collectively, these findings indicate that racial salience and desire to affiliate moderate accurate perceptions of cross-race partners—even in the context of sustained interracial relationships—yielding divergent outcomes for Whites and racial minorities.

Keywords: accuracy, understanding, interracial interactions, roommates

At times, people may fail to accurately perceive whether their interaction partners feel understood. They may overestimate how well they understand partners when partners in fact feel misunderstood, or they may perceive a lack of understanding even when partners feel well understood. Accurate perceptions of understanding are important because feeling understood facilitates intimacy in close relationships (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998; Reis & Shaver, 1988; Shelton, Trail, West, & Bergsieker, 2010). When people fail to accurately gauge how partners think and feel, they may provide too much or too little support, both of which are

associated with decreased relationship satisfaction (Brock & Lawrence, 2009). Although much work has focused on accuracy of perceptions in romantic relationships (for a meta-analysis, see Fletcher & Kerr, 2010), relatively less attention has been paid to accuracy in interracial contexts. The present work examines accurate perceptions of understanding in the context of interracial interactions and relationships, investigating when Whites and racial minorities may accurately versus inaccurately perceive one another.

Inaccurate perceptions of understanding could be especially problematic in interracial interactions, which are already quite fragile. Interracial interactions tend to be more negative than same-race interactions (Toosi, Babbitt, Ambady, & Sommers, 2012) and are associated with lower levels of feeling understood (Seder & Oishi, 2009; Shelton, Douglass, Garcia, Yip, & Trail, 2014). Polling data reveal widespread perceptions of interracial misunderstanding, with many White and racial minority respondents agreeing that "people of other races can't really understand the way my race sees things" (Survey of American Political Culture, 1996) and denying that "Whites and Blacks really understand each other" (KRC Communications Research, 1992). Because negative interracial experiences can readily generalize to attitudes toward outgroup members as a whole (Tropp, 2003), inaccurate perceptions of how understood partners feel may cause partners to anticipate decreased understanding in future interracial encounters. Given the importance of feeling understood for interracial interactions and relationships, the present research examines the factors that facilitate or impede accurate perceptions of how understood cross-race partners feel.

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Consistent with prior research on accuracy in person perception (e.g., Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Funder, 2012; Ickes, 1997; West & Kenny, 2011), we define accuracy as the extent to which a perceiver's judgment corresponds to a "truth benchmark." One of the most common benchmarks is partners' own judgments about the self—such as partners' own ratings of how understood they feel—and accuracy is defined as the extent to which perceivers' judgments about the partner converge with the partner's judgments about the self. Thus, accuracy (or "tracking accuracy;" Fletcher & Kerr, 2010) typically represents a positive correlation between these two sets of judgments. The present research defines accuracy as the extent to which perceivers' judgments of how well they understand their partner correlate with partners' judgments of how well they feel that the perceiver understands them. Accuracy, then, reflects a positive correlation between perceivers' and partners' judgments of how well the perceiver understands the partner.

Although research has identified numerous factors that impede interracial interactions (for a review, see Toosi et al., 2012), including perceptions and metaperceptions (Vorauer, 2006), relatively little work has assessed the accuracy of such perceptions. As an exception, one recent study tested whether participants in same-race and cross-race roommate relationships could accurately track their roommate's relationship interest over 6 weeks (West, Dovidio, & Pearson, 2014). When participants saw their roommate as very anxious, accuracy in gauging their roommate's relationship interest was low for both cross-race and same-race dyads. When participants saw their roommate as less anxious, however, Whites (but not minorities) in interracial roommate relationships accurately perceived their roommate's level of relationship interest. Our work also examines accuracy in an interracial context but uses a different judgment criterion: how understood partners feel. We examine both roommate relationships and interactions with strangers to test whether patterns of accuracy converge across relationship types, and we investigate additional moderators of accuracy.

The goals of the present research are twofold: First, we investigate when Whites and racial minorities are likely to accurately perceive how understood outgroup partners feel. We propose that the desire to affiliate with partners, participant race, and racial salience will moderate accuracy. Seeking to affiliate with outgroup partners may seem beneficial, but when race is highly salient this desire may interfere with Whites' ability to accurately perceive how understood partners feel. Second, we explore the relational outcomes associated with accuracy. Consistent with prior research on the benefits of accurate partner perceptions in interpersonal relationships (e.g., Lemay & Neal, 2014; Neff & Karney, 2002; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994), we predict that inaccurately perceiving how understood partners feel will be associated with negative relationship quality. Collectively, our research extends and integrates research on intergroup relations, person perception, and close relationships by examining accuracy in interracial relationships and interactions.

Achieving Accuracy

When are Whites and racial minorities likely to accurately perceive how understood partners feel? In contexts when race is highly salient, we predict that Whites' desire to affiliate with racial minorities will thwart accuracy, whereas racial minorities' desire to affiliate with Whites will facilitate accuracy. Thus, we propose

that participant race, participants' desire to affiliate with their partner, and racial salience will interact to shape accurate perceptions of how understood partners feel.

Desire to Affiliate

Generally, people higher in desire to affiliate with partners are more likely to accurately perceive the partner's thoughts and feelings. When people have a strong desire to like and be liked by others, they tend to exhibit other-focused, attention-giving behaviors (Jones & Pittman, 1982), such as nodding, making eye contact, paying attention, and letting the other person speak more (Godfrey, Jones, & Lord, 1986). Greater interest in the other person, as evidenced by gaze, smiling, and partner attractiveness, is correlated with empathic accuracy—namely, the extent to which people can accurately infer the other person's thoughts and feelings (Ickes, 1997). In addition, the desire to affiliate with others can enhance accurate detection of social cues. People higher in the need to belong in interpersonal relationships are more likely to attend to and accurately identify vocal tones, facial emotions, and a target person's thoughts and feelings (Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004). At first blush, then, greater desire to affiliate with partners seems likely to enhance perceivers' ability to accurately gauge partners' internal states, due to increased other-focus and sensitivity to cues that signal partners' thoughts and feelings. Research on intergroup relations, however, suggests that this desire may impede accuracy for Whites in interracial interactions.

Inaccuracy may arise when Whites in interracial interactions seek to affiliate with partners in service of self-image goals rather than truly compassionate goals (Crocker & Canevello, 2012). Whites tend to experience high affiliative motivation in interracial interactions, desiring to be liked by racial minorities to a greater extent than racial minorities want to be liked by Whites (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010). This desire to affiliate is theorized to stem in part from evaluative concerns associated with racial stereotypes. Specifically, many Whites recognize that others view them as prejudiced, unfair, and close-minded (Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998). In a pilot study (from the same student population as the current studies), open-ended descriptions of Whites' impression management concerns confirmed that in cross-race interactions, concerns about appearing *racist* or *biased* were mentioned more frequently than the other 32 coded concerns (e.g., appearing *elitist*, *arrogant*, *domineering*, *ignorant*), all $p < .03$; these prejudice concerns were more prevalent in cross- than same-race interactions, $t(35, \text{equal variances not assumed}) = 6.25, p < .001$. Although some may be more concerned about appearing prejudiced than others (Dunton & Fazio, 1997; Plant & Devine, 1998), such evaluative concerns are particularly heightened in cross-race interactions.

Whites' evaluative concerns about appearing nonprejudiced are likely to thwart accuracy for several reasons. First, impression management requires effort and depletes self-regulatory resources that could be devoted to trying to understand partners (Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005). Heightening Whites' evaluative concerns by telling them not to appear prejudiced (Trawalter & Richeson, 2006) or telling them that they may be racially biased (Richeson & Trawalter, 2005) prior to an interracial interaction causes Whites to perform worse on the Stroop (1935) color-naming task, a measure of cognitive resource depletion. Whites

also tend to exhibit overly positive responses toward Black partners, a self-presentational “overcorrection” bias that consumes cognitive resources (Mendes & Koslov, 2013). Whites who desire to affiliate with racial minorities may try especially hard to maintain a nonprejudiced self-image, using cognitive resources that could be deployed to understand racial minorities’ thoughts and feelings.

Second, Whites’ concerns of being nonprejudiced may hinder accuracy by causing Whites to become self-focused (Vorauer, 2006), scrutinizing their own thoughts and behaviors for signs of prejudice, and consequently diverting their attention away from racial minority partners (Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001). Instructing White participants to adopt a self-focused (vs. other-focused) mindset prior to an interracial interaction caused White participants and their partners to become more cognitively depleted and caused racial minority partners to communicate less verbal and nonverbal information about themselves (Sasaki & Vorauer, 2010), hindering accurate detection of their inner states. Taken together, reduced cognitive resources and an egocentric attentional focus may prevent Whites who desire to affiliate with racial minorities from accurately perceiving their partner in interracial interactions.

Racial Salience

Concerns about appearing prejudiced, although commonly experienced by Whites, may not always be activated. Discussing racial issues or considering partners’ race-related experiences may increase racial salience. In such contexts, Whites’ desire to affiliate is more likely to reflect self-image concerns of not appearing prejudiced, preventing them from accurately perceiving partners. Indeed, talking about racial topics (high racial salience) rather than nonracial topics (low racial salience) can cause Whites to experience stereotype threat (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008; Steele & Aronson, 1995), or a sense of threat that may occur when one feels at risk of confirming a negative stereotype about one’s group. Anticipating a conversation about race led Whites to physically distance themselves from hypothetical Black interaction partners, with greater distance associated with increased activation of the stereotype of Whites as racist (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008). Whites generally prefer not to talk about race with Black partners (Johnson, Olson, & Fazio, 2009) and in situations where they must discuss racial issues, they experience greater anxiety than Blacks do (Trawalter & Richeson, 2008). Similarly, seeing partners as members of their racial group (high racial salience) instead of as individuals (low racial salience) may activate Whites’ metaperception of being prejudiced (Frey & Tropp, 2006). Thus, situations in which race is highly salient may particularly cause Whites to be self-focused and limit their ability to accurately perceive racial minorities.

Racial salience may also influence accuracy by eliciting a greater sense of “otherness” in cross-race interactions and increasing perceptions of group boundaries. Decreasing the salience of race or group boundaries by focusing on commonalities between selves and outgroup members facilitates treating former outgroup members as belonging to a common ingroup (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Interracial roommate pairs who strongly perceive commonalities between their racial groups early in the semester are more likely to sustain their friendship 6 weeks later, whereas those with

low perceptions of commonalities experience declines in friendship quality (West, Pearson, Dovidio, Shelton, & Trail, 2009). Decreased racial salience over time (Kunda, Davies, Adams, & Spencer, 2002) and subsequent reductions of race-related concerns may explain why Whites with more interracial contact experiences feel less anxious in novel interracial interactions (Blascovich, Mendes, Hunter, Lickel, & Kowai-Bell, 2001) and in repeated interactions with the same racial minority partner (Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton, & Tropp, 2008) or roommate (Shook & Fazio, 2008). When race becomes less salient, Whites appear more able to move past their evaluative concerns and enjoy more positive relationships with racial minorities. In situations when race is more salient, however, even in sustained relationships Whites may find it difficult to enjoy the interaction and accurately gauge the other person’s thoughts and feelings.

Although racial salience is likely to render Whites’ desire to affiliate to be more self-focused, we predict that it will not negatively impact racial minorities’ desire to affiliate. Minorities do not experience similar self-image threats when talking about race and in fact, can find it to be less stressful than talking about nonracial topics (Trawalter & Richeson, 2008). Thus, racial salience seems less likely to interfere with minorities’ accurate perception of White partners. By default, racial minorities tend to seek respect over liking from Whites (Bergsieker et al., 2010), in part reflecting a self-focused attempt to disconfirm stereotypes of incompetence; racial minorities’ desire to affiliate with Whites, in contrast, may reflect a shift to increased other-focus, stemming from genuine interest in the partner. Thus, racial minorities higher in desire to affiliate with Whites are likely to experience the positive effects of affiliation on accuracy, paying more attention to partners (Godfrey et al., 1986) and accurately perceiving cues that signal partner’s internal states (Pickett et al., 2004). To summarize, we predict that in interracial interactions racial minorities—but not Whites—who desire to affiliate with partners will be more likely to accurately perceive how understood partners feel.

We believe that accurately perceiving outgroup members’ racial experiences can be beneficial for interracial interactions because it can be a unique opportunity to learn about outgroups and develop intimacy across racial divides. Racial minorities in particular may find it more meaningful when Whites understand their racial experiences rather than their general, nonracial experiences because of their frequent assumption that Whites cannot understand what it is like to be a racial minority. In opinion polls, minority respondents perceive interracial misunderstanding more often than Whites: Minorities were at least 50% more likely than Whites to agree that outgroup members “don’t understand the way my race sees things” (Survey of American Political Culture, 1996) and 50% less likely to agree that Whites and Blacks “really understand each other” (KRC Communications Research, 1992). For these reasons the present research investigates the role of racial salience on accurately perceiving how understood partners feel.

Thus far, we have focused on the factors that moderate accurate perceptions of how understood partners feel in interracial interactions. Do similar processes occur in same-race interactions? We predict that in same-race interactions, desire to affiliate and racial salience will not moderate accuracy. In fact, people may not be as concerned about accuracy because they assume partners are (racially) similar to the self. When people perceive similarities between themselves and others, they are more likely to project

attributes about the self onto others (Ames, 2004); similarly, projection occurs more strongly when people make judgments about ingroups rather than outgroups (Robbins & Krueger, 2005). Thus, in the present research, people may project how understood they feel onto their perceptions of how understood their partner feels. For instance, Whites' judgments of a White roommate's relationship interest primarily reflect projection (or "assumed similarity") rather than accuracy (West et al., 2014). In same-race interactions, then, we may be particularly likely to find projection rather than accuracy.

Relational Correlates of Accuracy

How might accuracy correlate with indices of relationship quality? Much—though not all—evidence suggests that accuracy is associated with positive relationship quality. Perceiving romantic partners as partners view themselves is associated with marital satisfaction and intimacy (Luo & Snider, 2009; Neff & Karney, 2002; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Empathic accuracy is associated with provision of skillful social support, accommodating behavior, and couple well-being (Kilpatrick, Bissonnette, & Rusult, 2002; Verhofstadt, Buysse, Ickes, Davis, & Devoldre, 2008). Initial acquaintanceships also appear to benefit from accurate perceptions. Accurately perceiving a classmate's personality is correlated with liking and more future interactions with that person (Human, Sandstrom, Biesanz, & Dunn, 2013), and in unstructured dyadic interactions people with higher empathic accuracy tend to smile and look at their partner more (Ickes et al., 1990), which may enhance interactions for both partners. To our knowledge, no studies have linked accuracy for feelings of understanding to relationship outcomes, but some have examined understanding in the context of responsiveness (e.g., "How much did he or she seem to understand your feelings regarding your problem?"). Accurate perceptions of romantic partners' responsiveness during an interaction predicts perceivers' personal and interpersonal well-being (e.g., self-efficacy, valuing the partner) immediately following the interaction and even 6 months later (Lemay & Neal, 2014). By contrast, others have found that perceptions of relationship quality are unrelated to accurate partner perceptions in close relationships (Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009), and that empathic accuracy for a partner's relationship-threatening thoughts and feelings is associated with declines in subjective closeness (Simpson, Oriña, & Ickes, 2003).

We predict that in interracial interactions, inaccurately perceiving how understood partners feel will be associated with negative relationship quality. Because interracial interactions tend to be characterized by lower levels of feeling understood (Seder & Oishi, 2009; Shelton et al., 2014), we predict that inaccurately perceiving how understood cross-race partners feel will be associated with relationship decrements. Moreover, we predict that accuracy will correlate with relationship quality over and above mean levels of mutual understanding. Believing that one understands the partner and feeling understood by a perceiver are both related to dyadic adjustment, intimacy, and trust (Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009), yet we predict that—controlling for dyadic levels of these types of understanding—discrepancies between these judgments (i.e., inaccuracy) will still be associated with lower relationship quality.

Our measure of inaccuracy also allows us to investigate whether (a) failure to accurately perceive how understood partners feel or (b) the directionality of failure—namely, whether perceivers overestimate¹ or underestimate their understanding of their partner—is correlated with negative relationship quality. On the one hand, both overestimation and underestimation could harm relationships by virtue of being inaccurate (e.g., Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). On the other hand, overestimation of understanding may be particularly detrimental. Because feeling understood matters for intimacy, perceivers should be vigilant to cues signaling that interaction partners and close others feel misunderstood, rather than assuming high levels of understanding. Once they detect these cues, they can provide adequate levels of care, support, and validation to restore felt understanding. Conversely, if people mistakenly overestimate how well they understand others, they may fail to realize when they need to take steps to make sure the other person feels well understood. Overestimators may also come across as presumptuous and insensitive, causing others to view them unfavorably. Thus, overestimating how well one understands someone may especially harm relationship quality.

Overview of Studies

The present research tests two primary questions. First, when do Whites and racial minorities accurately perceive how understood partners feel in interracial relationships and interactions? We predict that when racial salience is high, higher desire to affiliate will be associated with accurate perceptions of cross-race partners for racial minorities, but not Whites. Thus, participant race, participants' desire to affiliate, and racial salience are likely to moderate accuracy. Second, is inaccuracy associated with lower relationship quality? We predict that failing to accurately perceive how understood partners feel will correlate with negative relationship quality, such as less closeness, less favorable partner impressions, and less relationship satisfaction.

We test our research questions across two studies. Study 1 examines accurately perceiving how understood partners feel among same-race and cross-race roommate pairs over 10 days. Study 2 uses a structured laboratory paradigm to assess accuracy between previously unacquainted White and Black participants. Examining our research questions across different relationship types and methodologies allows us to test the generalizability and robustness of our effects. Despite the difficulties of accurately perceiving others' internal states, we assert that accuracy matters because it can benefit both long-term and newly established interracial relationships.

Study 1: Accuracy in Roommate Relationships

This study tests whether Whites' and racial minorities' desire to affiliate with same-race or cross-race roommates moderates accurate perceptions of how understood roommates feel when race is

¹ We acknowledge that perceivers' overestimation of how well they understand their partner could also reflect the partner's underestimation of how understood they feel; similarly, perceivers' underestimation could just as well reflect partners' overestimation. Our analyses (and the literature on accuracy more generally; e.g., West & Kenny, 2011) use partners' judgments as the "truth benchmark," so we emphasize perceivers' variations from partners' judgments when labeling our effects.

salient. We investigated the role of racial salience by measuring participants' racial understanding (the extent to which participants understand being a member of the roommate's racial group) in addition to their general understanding (the extent to which participants understand the roommate's character). We predicted that when race is salient, higher desire to affiliate with cross-race roommates would be associated with accurately perceiving roommates for racial minorities, but not Whites. Specifically, racial minorities higher in desire to affiliate with Whites would be more likely to accurately perceive how understood Whites feel, whereas Whites higher in desire to affiliate with racial minorities would be less likely to be accurate. We did not predict a similar interaction for general understanding (low racial salience).

Method

Participants. A total of 234 undergraduates in 117 same-sex roommate pairs ($M_{age} = 19.3$, $SD_{age} = 1.1$) participated in the Princeton Roommate and College Experiences (PRACE) study for \$100. The sample included 59 same-race pairs (19 Asian/Asian, 10 Black/Black, and 30 White/White) and 58 cross-race pairs (33 White/Asian and 25 White/Black). An eleventh Black/Black dyad was dropped after one dyad member withdrew from the study. This sample size was based on participant and funding availability. Data collection occurred in two waves spaced 1 week apart.

Procedure. We recruited students at the beginning of the academic year to participate in a study about campus experiences and relationships. Participants attended an orientation session with their roommate to complete prediary measures (e.g., demographics, initial roommate closeness) and receive information on how to complete the nightly diary entries.² Each evening for the next 10 days, participants were e-mailed a personalized Web link for that day's diary, followed by an automated reminder at 8 a.m. if they had not already submitted their diary. The average number of diaries submitted was 9.6 (mode and median = 10; range = 4–10), and 91% of participants submitted at least nine complete diaries. After completing an exit survey, participants were debriefed and paid.

Measures. Given limited space in the daily online questionnaires, one- to two-item measures assessed all constructs of interest to ensure high completion rates, a methodology used in previous research (e.g., Molden & Finkel, 2010). Items were rated on 1 (*not at all or strongly disagree*) to 7 (*extremely or strongly agree*) scales, unless otherwise noted, and were averaged into composites. We personalized items by inserting the roommate's first name for all items referencing the roommate. Reported reliabilities were computed across participants and days.³ Participants completed the following daily measures.⁴

Desire to affiliate. Two items ($\alpha = .86$) reflecting the goal to be liked (Bergsieker et al., 2010) assessed desire to affiliate with one's roommate: "Today it was important for my roommate to see me as kind" and "Today, it was important for my roommate to see me as open-minded." Ratings from two independent samples drawn from the same student population confirmed that the goal to be liked is strongly associated with the desire to affiliate with an interaction partner.⁵

Understanding. Participants indicated how much they racially understood their roommate ("Today I understood what it is like to be a member of my roommate's racial group") and felt

racially understood by their roommate ("Today my roommate understood what it is like to be a member of my racial group"). Participants also reported their general understanding of their roommate ("I was an excellent judge of my roommate's character today") and how much they felt generally understood by their roommate ("My roommate was an excellent judge of my character today").

Relational outcomes. We assessed several different daily outcomes regarding the roommate relationship, including closeness ("I felt close to my roommate today"), relationship satisfaction ("Today I felt satisfied with our relationship") and trust ("I felt I could rely on my roommate today" and "I felt I could trust my roommate today"; $\alpha = .85$). Participants indicated on a 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very much*) scale how much negative affect (sad/depressed, anxious/nervous, rejected/lonely, self-conscious/awkward; $\alpha = .70$) and positive affect (happy/cheerful, relaxed/calm, cared for/appreciated; $\alpha = .74$) they felt that day while interacting with their roommate.

Initial closeness. To control for preexisting differences in relationship quality (e.g., between self-selected vs. university-assigned roommate pairs), initial closeness to one's roommate was assessed with two items ($\alpha = .91$): "I feel close to my roommate" and "Relative to all your other friendships, how close are you to your roommate?"

Results

Of the 2,251 diaries submitted, we excluded from analysis six because participants quit before reaching the understanding measures and 301 (13%) because participants reported spending no time ("0 min") with their roommate that day and were thus not asked about the dynamics of their roommate interactions. Of the remaining 1,944 diaries, all 1,762 in which both members of a

² An ineffective experimental closeness manipulation was dropped from analyses. This 15-min intervention with intimacy-building versus control tasks failed to influence roommates' closeness on the postintervention manipulation check and our dependent measures of interest.

³ Computing reliabilities within each day then averaging across days yielded almost identical estimates, all discrepancies $< .02$.

⁴ In addition, participants daily completed items on relationship attitudes, authenticity, university belonging, conflict, disclosure, dominance, self-promotion, self-efficacy, future living preferences, intergroup meta-perceptions, prejudice attributions, and physical health. Participants completed additional unrelated pre- and postmeasures, as well as brief measures for interactions lasting at least 10 min or containing an interpersonal conflict; these data are not analyzed here.

⁵ In a lab study of same- and cross-race interactions (Bergsieker & Shelton, 2007), participants' responses to "How much did you care whether you were seen as kind?" correlated positively, $r(88) = .62$, $p < .001$, with measures of affiliation ($\alpha = .79$) taken from the Circumplex Scales of Interpersonal Values (CSIV; Locke, 2000). Participants rated importance that "I got along with my partner," "I felt connected to my partner," "My partner did not reject me," and "My partner thought I was a nice person." In a separate study where White participants engaged in a simulated interracial interaction (Holoiien & Shelton, 2014), participants' responses to "It was important for my partner to see me as a good person" correlated positively, $r(61) = .56$, $p < .001$, with ratings of how much did participants wanted "to get along with" and "have a smooth interaction with" their study partner. In each study, adding the items assessing desire to be liked increased the overall reliability of the desire-to-affiliate composite.

roommate pair had completed the dependent measures on that day were retained for dyadic analysis.

Data analytic plan. We examined data using dyadic analysis (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006) via the PROC MIXED procedure in SAS. To test participants' accuracy in perceiving how understood their roommate feels, we used the truth and bias (T&B) model developed by West and Kenny (2011), a multilevel model specifically designed to identify the extent of accuracy and bias in dyadic perceptions (e.g., Rauers, Blanke, & Riediger, 2013; West et al., 2014). In this model, *accuracy* is a correlation between roommates' reports of feeling understood (the predictor) and participants' reports of how well they understood their roommate (the outcome). Accuracy occurs when a positive correlation between these two variables reach statistical significance. These analyses also test for *projection* (assumed similarity)—the extent to which participants' own reports of feeling understood predict their perception of how well they understood their roommate. Thus, unlike a model testing this relationship in reverse (i.e., with roommate's reports of feeling understood as the outcome), the T&B approach is preferable because it tests accuracy while controlling for projection effects (e.g., thinking you understand your roommate simply because you feel understood).

Our model included the predictors participants' and roommates' reports of feeling understood; the moderators dyad race ($-1 =$ cross race, $1 =$ same race), participant race ($-1 =$ minority, $1 =$ White), and participant and roommate desire to affiliate; and all requisite interaction terms. The dependent variable was participants' reports of how well they understood their roommate. Black and Asian participants were combined into the racial minority category after initial analyses revealed no consistent differences between these groups. Gender and initial closeness were entered as covariates. Consistent with the T&B model, the dependent variable and continuous predictors were grand-mean centered on the truth criterion (i.e., roommates' reports of feeling understood). Negative affect exhibited extreme positive skew (>3), so we Winsorized outliers to be within 2.5 standard deviations of the mean. Table 1 reports means and standard deviations, and Table 2 reports correlations.

Mean variation by participant and dyad race. Our primary research questions involve correlational processes (i.e., accuracy and projection) unfolding in cross- versus same-race roommate relationships, not mean differences. Nevertheless, Table 1 provides means (unadjusted) and standard deviations of each measure for White and minority participants in same- and cross-race dyads. Tests of group-based differences—controlling for gender and initial closeness—revealed that compared to minority participants, White participants reported feeling more racially understood by their roommate, generally understood by their roommate, and satisfaction, as well as less negative affect. Participants in same-race dyads reported racially understanding their roommates more and feeling more racially understood than participants in cross-race dyads.

Racial understanding. When predicting participants' reports of how well they racially understood their roommate, analyses revealed a main effect of projection, $b = 0.52$, $t(1,384) = 22.02$, $p = <.001$, but not accuracy, $b = 0.03$, $t(1384) = 1.21$, $p = .228$ (see Table 3). That is, participants' own feelings of being understood—not their roommates' feelings of being understood—predicted participants' reports of how well they understood their

roommate. Next, we test whether dyad race, participant race, and desire to affiliate moderated accuracy and projection of racial understanding.

Accuracy. Consistent with our hypotheses, accuracy was moderated significantly by dyad race, participant race, and participant desire to affiliate, $b = 0.03$, $t(1,587) = 2.16$, $p = .031$ (see Table 3).⁶ Tests of simple interactions revealed that accuracy was moderated by participant race and participant desire to affiliate for cross-race dyads, $b = -0.05$, $t(1,610) = -3.07$, $p = .002$ (see Figure 1), but not same-race dyads, $b = 0.00$, $t(1,549) = 0.11$, $p = .913$. In cross-race dyads, participant race moderated accuracy significantly for participants higher (i.e., $1 SD$ above the mean) in desire to affiliate, $b = -0.10$, $t(1,529) = -2.51$, $p = .012$, and marginally for participants lower (i.e., $1 SD$ below the mean) in desire to affiliate, $b = 0.07$, $t(1,414) = 1.66$, $p = .097$.

Consistent with our prediction that desire to affiliate would help minorities yet hinder Whites from accurately perceiving how racially understood roommates feel, we found that desire to affiliate showed opposite effects for minority and White participants in cross-race dyads. Minority participants higher in desire to affiliate with White roommates achieved accuracy, $b = 0.19$, $t(1,551) = 3.42$, $p = .001$. By contrast—and as predicted—White participants higher in desire to affiliate with minority roommates were not accurate, $b = 0.00$, $t(1,600) = -0.06$, $p = .949$. We also probed the marginal ($p = .097$) simple effect for participants lower in desire to affiliate in cross-race dyads: Minority participants lower in desire to affiliate with White roommates were not accurate, $b = 0.04$, $t(1,394) = 0.60$, $p = .552$, but Whites lower in desire to affiliate with minority roommates achieved accuracy, $b = 0.18$, $t(1,556) = 3.04$, $p = .002$. In summary, relative to minorities, Whites were marginally more accurate when low in desire to affiliate but significantly less accurate when high in desire to affiliate. As hypothesized, higher desire to affiliate with cross-race roommates predicted accuracy for racial minority participants but not White participants (see Figure 1).

Projection. Although our primary interest is in accuracy, the T&B model simultaneously tests for projection, an egocentric bias in which participants' reports of feeling understood predict their reports of how well they understand their roommate. We therefore briefly summarize our exploratory analyses of projection effects for racial understanding.

Projection was moderated significantly by dyad race, participant race, and participant desire to affiliate, $b = -0.03$, $t(1,539) = -2.47$, $p = .014$. Tests of simple interactions revealed that projection was moderated by participant race and participant desire to affiliate for cross-race dyads, $b = 0.04$, $t(1,541) = 2.72$, $p = .007$, but not same race dyads, $b = -0.02$, $t(1,507) = -0.90$, $p = .368$. Within cross-race dyads, participant desire to affiliate significantly moderated projection for White participants, $b = 0.05$, $t(1,587) = 2.01$, $p = .044$, but only marginally for minority participants, $b = -0.04$, $t(1,608) = -1.82$, $p = .069$. Analysis of simple effects confirmed that in cross-race dyads, minority and White participants at both lower and higher levels of desire to affiliate showed robust projection, all $bs \geq .30$, $ps < .001$, al-

⁶ We obtained similar findings omitting initial closeness as a covariate, $b = 0.03$, $t(1,588) = 2.17$, $p = .030$, or covarying for whether roommates were self-selected versus university-assigned, $b = 0.03$, $t(1,587) = 2.17$, $p = .030$. Simple effects tests using these approaches also parallel those reported.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations by Participant and Dyad Race for Daily Measures and Initial Closeness (Study 1)

Measure	Total	M (SD) by participant race and dyad race				Group difference t-tests		
		Minority/ cross race	Minority/ same race	White/ cross race	White/ same race	P race	Dyad race	P race × Dyad race
1. Desire to affiliate	4.76 (1.62)	4.93 (1.41)	4.44 (1.79)	4.98 (1.58)	4.70 (1.62)	0.19	-1.81 [†]	1.12
2. Perceived racial understanding	4.68 (2.02)	3.54 (1.82)	5.70 (1.35)	3.20 (1.60)	6.04 (1.48)	0.12	11.77***	2.15*
3. Felt racial understanding	4.77 (1.85)	3.36 (1.62)	5.62 (1.31)	3.86 (1.60)	5.99 (1.36)	2.42*	10.99***	-0.09
4. Perceived general understanding	4.72 (1.37)	4.54 (1.39)	4.50 (1.28)	4.81 (1.34)	4.98 (1.41)	2.22*	-1.16	1.49
5. Felt general understanding	4.80 (1.26)	4.60 (1.25)	4.63 (1.28)	4.86 (1.17)	5.05 (1.27)	2.28*	-0.42	0.97
6. Closeness	4.70 (1.56)	4.48 (1.66)	4.52 (1.52)	4.73 (1.46)	5.01 (1.52)	1.88 [†]	-0.68	1.99*
7. Satisfaction	5.47 (1.37)	5.40 (1.43)	5.16 (1.37)	5.48 (1.38)	5.77 (1.24)	2.48*	-0.80	2.69**
8. Trust	5.40 (1.25)	5.37 (1.26)	5.16 (1.22)	5.48 (1.23)	5.55 (1.24)	0.76	-1.78 [†]	1.94
9. Positive affect	3.60 (0.84)	3.49 (0.89)	3.52 (0.82)	3.67 (0.86)	3.70 (0.80)	1.79 [†]	-0.66	0.43
10. Negative affect	1.13 (0.27)	1.17 (0.32)	1.16 (0.30)	1.10 (0.23)	1.08 (0.23)	-2.45*	0.46	-0.69
11. Initial closeness	5.22 (1.42)	4.66 (1.45)	5.51 (1.32)	5.12 (1.34)	5.55 (1.39)	0.97	2.92**	-1.04

Note. P = participant. "Perceived" understanding refers to participants' reports of how well they understand their roommates and "felt" understanding refers to how well understood participants themselves report feeling. Tests of group differences were estimated in a multilevel dyadic longitudinal model that controlled for gender and initial closeness (except when initial closeness was the outcome measure).

[†]p < .10. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

though Whites higher in desire to affiliate showed stronger projection, $b = 0.45$, $t(1,167) = 8.12$, $p < .001$, than Whites lower in desire to affiliate, $b = 0.30$, $t(1,623) = 4.77$, $p < .001$. These exploratory results suggest that Whites may project their own feelings of being racially understood onto minority roommates more so when they are high (vs. low) in desire to affiliate with their roommate.

General understanding. Given our prediction that racial salience moderates accuracy, we predicted that accuracy for general (nonracial) understanding would not show the same pattern of results observed for racial understanding. As expected, accuracy was not significantly moderated by dyad race, participant race, and participant desire to affiliate, $b = -0.02$, $t(1,470) = -1.10$, $p = .270$ (see Table 3). Notably, accuracy was moderated by participant desire to affiliate, $b = 0.04$, $t(1,471) = 2.59$, $p = .010$. Participants lower in desire to affiliate did not exhibit accuracy, $b = -0.02$, $t(1,257) = -0.49$, $p = .627$, whereas participants higher in desire to affiliate did achieve accuracy, $b = 0.10$,

$t(1,505) = 3.03$, $p = .003$. These results parallel prior findings that in general, desire to affiliate boosts accuracy.

Relational correlates of accuracy. Next, we examined whether inaccurate perceptions of how racially understood participants feel is associated with negative relationship quality. To capture *inaccurate racial understanding* in a single variable, we used the social comparison model recommended by Kenny, Kashy, and Cook (2006) to compute a difference score: We took roommates' reports of how well they racially understood the participant and subtracted from it participants' reports of feeling racially understood. A score of zero indicates accuracy. Positive values indicate that roommates overestimated how well they racially understood participants and negative values indicate that roommates underestimated. We also created an *average racial understanding* score by averaging roommates' reports of how well they racially understood the participant and participants' reports of

Table 2

Pairwise Estimates of Bivariate Correlations for Daily Measures and Initial Closeness (Study 1)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Desire to affiliate	.19	-.10	-.07	.14	.07	.14	.09	.09	.08	.08	.01
2. Perceived racial understanding	.03	.53	.53	.16	.14	.16	.14	.11	.07	-.03	.18
3. Felt racial understanding	.01	.82	.50	.16	.16	.18	.15	.11	.11	-.05	.19
4. Perceived general understanding	.25	.20	.22	.25	.23	.29	.21	.24	.20	-.05	.23
5. Felt general understanding	.25	.23	.30	.63	.20	.30	.21	.22	.21	.01	.19
6. Closeness	.25	.15	.22	.61	.61	.40	.32	.33	.27	-.04	.23
7. Satisfaction	.20	.15	.18	.50	.52	.67	.29	.27	.25	-.06	.17
8. Trust	.23	.14	.18	.62	.65	.65	.63	.29	.27	-.03	.18
9. Positive affect	.24	.12	.17	.42	.47	.55	.47	.55	.29	-.07	.08
10. Negative affect	.02	-.07	-.07	-.08	-.09	-.09	-.15	-.14	-.24	.02	.05
11. Initial closeness	-.01	.17	.21	.37	.36	.43	.26	.34	.22	-.05	.55

Note. "Perceived" understanding refers to participants' reports of how well they understand their roommates and "felt" understanding refers to how well understood participants report feeling. With $N = 1,762$ cases for all correlations, if $|r| > .05$, $p < .05$. (Alternately, using $N = 117$ dyads as a very conservative control for nonindependence, if $|r| > .19$, $p < .05$.) Intrapersonal correlations, pairwise estimates of intraclass correlations (shown in bold), and interpersonal correlations are respectively reported below, on, and above the diagonal. Computing correlations separately for each day and then averaging across days produced almost identical results (within $\pm .02$ points of the raw correlations).

Table 3
Predictors of Actor's Perceived Understanding (Study 1)

Effect	Racial		General	
	b	t	b	t
Intercept	4.60	58.76***	3.74	22.61***
Closeness	-0.03	-0.73	0.18	5.92***
Gender	-0.04	-0.60	-0.01	-0.19
Race (A)	-0.07	-1.01	0.09	2.22*
Dyad race	0.69	9.23***	0.00	-0.09
Race (A)*dyad race	0.23	3.39***	0.06	1.46
Felt understanding (A)	0.52	22.02***	0.46	18.76***
Felt understanding (P)	0.03	1.21	0.04	1.75†
Affiliation (A)	0.03	1.14	0.08	3.94***
Affiliation (P)	0.01	0.47	0.04	1.73†
Felt understanding (A)*affiliation (A)	0.02	1.36	0.00	0.16
Felt understanding (A)*affiliation (P)	0.01	0.46	-0.03	-2.30*
Felt understanding (P)*affiliation (A)	-0.01	-0.40	0.04	2.59*
Felt understanding (P)*affiliation (P)	-0.02	-1.68†	0.02	1.50
Race (A)*felt understanding (A)	-0.03	-1.49	0.01	0.29
Race (A)*felt understanding (P)	-0.03	-1.20	0.01	0.53
Race (A)*affiliation (A)	0.02	0.91	0.03	1.40
Race (A)*affiliation (P)	-0.02	-0.79	-0.01	-0.47
Dyad race*felt understanding (A)	0.10	4.32***	-0.04	-1.82†
Dyad race*felt understanding (P)	-0.07	-3.11**	0.03	1.39
Dyad race*affiliation (A)	-0.07	-2.47*	0.00	0.11
Dyad race*affiliation (P)	0.05	1.87†	0.00	-0.17
Race (A)*dyad race*felt understanding (A)	0.01	0.33	-0.01	-0.62
Race (A)*dyad race*felt understanding (P)	-0.01	-0.63	0.02	1.02
Race (A)*dyad race*affiliation (A)	0.01	0.46	-0.02	-1.18
Race (A)*dyad race*affiliation (P)	0.06	2.08*	0.01	0.57
Race (A)*felt understanding (A)*affiliation (A)	0.01	1.11	0.03	2.19*
Race (A)*felt understanding (A)*affiliation (P)	0.01	0.41	0.01	0.54
Race (A)*felt understanding (P)*affiliation (A)	-0.03	-2.00*	-0.02	-1.34
Race (A)*felt understanding (P)*affiliation (P)	-0.03	-2.57*	-0.02	-1.86†
Dyad race*felt understanding (A)*affiliation (A)	0.01	1.03	0.04	3.40***
Dyad race*felt understanding (A)*affiliation (P)	-0.02	-1.48	-0.02	-1.60
Dyad race*felt understanding (P)*affiliation (A)	0.00	-0.05	-0.03	-2.00*
Dyad race*felt understanding (P)*affiliation (P)	0.00	-0.25	-0.04	-2.70**
Race (A)*dyad race*felt understanding (A)*affiliation (A)	-0.03	-2.47*	-0.04	-2.92**
Race (A)*dyad race*felt understanding (A)*affiliation (P)	-0.01	-0.66	0.00	0.21
Race (A)*dyad race*felt understanding (P)*affiliation (A)	0.03	2.16*	-0.02	-1.10
Race (A)*dyad race*felt understanding (P)*affiliation (P)	0.01	0.93	0.01	1.02

Note. "(A)" and "(P)" refer to actor (participant) vs. partner (roommate) variables. "Perceived" understanding refers to participants' reports of how well they understand their roommate and "felt" understanding refers to how well understood participants report feeling. The interaction of interest is italicized.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

feeling racially understood. This variable captures the main effect of overall dyadic racial understanding.

These analyses test (a) whether inaccurate racial understanding was associated with negative relationship quality controlling for average racial understanding, and (b) whether the directionality of inaccuracy—either roommates' overestimation or underestimation of racial understanding—was particularly associated with negative relationship quality. To address the first question, we tested for quadratic effects of inaccuracy. A significant negative quadratic effect would indicate that inaccuracy per se—regardless of whether roommates overestimated or underestimated—was associated with lower relationship quality. To address the second question, we tested the linear effects of inaccurate and average racial understanding. In addition, we included gender and initial roommate closeness prior to the study as covariates and entered participant race and dyad race as moderators on an exploratory basis.

Analyses revealed that quadratic effects of inaccurate racial understanding were not significantly associated with any of the relational outcomes we measured, all $ps > .142$. Also, inaccuracy did not consistently interact with participant race or dyad race, so these predictors were dropped from analyses. We found significant linear effects of both average and inaccurate racial understanding (see Table 4). Average racial understanding was positively associated with closeness, relationship satisfaction, trust, and positive affect, all $ps < .001$. Inaccurate racial understanding also reached significance, such that the more roommates overestimated how well they racially understood participants, the less participants felt satisfied with their relationship, trusted the roommate, and experienced positive (as opposed to negative) affect in their interactions with their roommate, all $ps < .05$. Roommates' overestimation was also associated with participants feeling marginally less close to their roommate, $p = .071$. Thus, although average racial understanding was generally correlated with positive relationship qual-

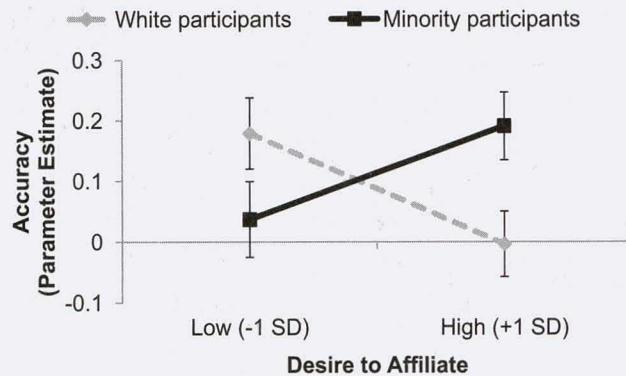


Figure 1. Accuracy in perceptions of racial understanding by participant race and participant desire to affiliate in cross-race roommate pairs (Study 1). Estimated accuracy parameters are unstandardized regression coefficients (i.e., slopes) of roommates' reports of feeling racially understood predicting participants' reports of racially understanding their roommates. Error bars indicate ± 1 SE. Positive values indicate greater accuracy.

ity, overestimation of racial understanding was associated with negative relationship quality.

Although we were primarily interested in testing whether inaccurate perceptions of racial understanding were associated with relationship quality, we conducted similar analyses to test whether inaccurate perceptions of *general* understanding yielded similar correlations. Feeling understood is beneficial for both same- and cross-race relationships (Shelton et al., 2010), and as such we expect inaccurate perceptions of general understanding to be associated with negative outcomes as well. Consistent with findings for racial understanding, average general understanding was positively associated with closeness, relationship satisfaction, trust, and positive affect, all $p < .001$. Inaccurate general understanding yielded significance, such that the more roommates overestimate how well they generally understood participants, the less participants felt close to their roommate, felt satisfied with their relationship, trusted the roommate, and experienced positive affect, all $p < .001$.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 support our hypothesis that in interracial dyads, greater desire to affiliate is associated with *more* accuracy for racial minorities and *less* accuracy for Whites as they attempt

to gauge how racially understood their roommate feels. These findings point to the unfortunate possibility that, relative to Whites who are less interested in affiliating with their roommate, Whites who particularly value connecting with cross-race roommates may be more at risk for negative roommate relationships by virtue of failing to accurately perceive their roommate's race-related thoughts and feelings. No such pattern emerged for general understanding, suggesting that racial salience matters for cross-race accuracy in perceptions of feeling understood.

We also found evidence that people think that they understand their roommate when they themselves feel understood. Similar projection effects have been documented in close relationships, where people project feelings of their own care and supportiveness for a partner onto their perceptions of their partner's care and support (e.g., Lemay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007). These patterns are correlational, so we cannot make strong claims about whether participants who initially felt understood consequently thought they understood their roommate or vice versa. Nevertheless, both intrapersonal (e.g., how well the self feels understood) and interpersonal (e.g., how well one's roommate feels understood) factors shape judgments of how well one understands another person.

Furthermore, roommates' overestimation of how well they racially understood participants was associated with worse relationship quality for participants. Though correlational, these findings suggest that when people overestimate how well they understand someone relative to how understood the individual feels, they can unwittingly endanger the quality of their relationship.

Study 2: Accuracy in Interracial Interactions

Next, we examined when newly acquainted White and Black participants in a laboratory paradigm accurately perceive how understood their interaction partner feels. This study tests whether the motivational and situational dynamics observed for accurate understanding with cross-race roommates replicate even in brief encounters with cross-race strangers. We made several procedural modifications to extend the previous study. First, we experimentally manipulated whether dyads discussed racial (vs. nonracial) topics with one another instead of asking about racial (vs. general) understanding. This design tests whether desire to affiliate influences accurate perceptions of how understood interaction partners feel when race is high (vs. low) in salience. Second, we modified our measurement of participants' desire to affiliate to more directly measure participants' desire to interpersonally connect with the other person. Whereas the items used in Study 1 assumed that

Table 4
Effects of Average and Inaccurate Racial Understanding on Relationship Quality (Study 1)

	Average understanding			Inaccuracy		
	b	SE	t	b	SE	t
Closeness	0.21	0.03	6.00***	-0.03	0.02	-1.81†
Satisfaction	0.15	0.03	4.68***	-0.04	0.02	-2.18*
Trust	0.14	0.03	5.05***	-0.06	0.02	-3.89***
Positive affect	0.07	0.02	3.71***	-0.05	0.01	-4.53***
Negative affect	-0.01	0.01	-1.10	0.01	0.01	1.98*

Note. These analyses control for the effects of gender and initial closeness prior to the study. The rows contain our dependent measures and the columns contain our predictors.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

wanting to be seen by someone as kind and open-minded reflect a desire to affiliate with that person, this revised measure used face-valid wording unrelated to racial stereotypes (e.g., Whites as close-minded).

Consistent with Study 1, we predicted that when discussing racial topics with a cross-race partner, desire to affiliate would have opposite implications for accuracy among Black versus White participants. We predicted that higher desire to affiliate would be associated with more accuracy for Blacks and less accuracy for Whites as they attempt to gauge how understood their partner feels.

Method

Participants. A total of 77 Black/White same-sex undergraduate dyads participated in the study for course credit or \$12. This sample size was based on participant availability; data collection stopped at the end of the academic year.⁷ We dropped three dyads for knowing their partner “quite a bit” prior to the study, one for experimenter error, and one where a participant arrived very late, leaving a sample of 72 dyads for analysis (54 female, $M_{age} = 19.2$ years, $SD_{age} = 1.2$).

Procedure. Participants arrived at the laboratory and were seated facing one another at a table. The experimenter introduced the participants and explained that during this study, they would get to know each other and talk about their college experiences. They would complete two discussions together then answer questions on the computer separately.⁸

In the first interaction, participants spent 5 min discussing five “small talk” questions adapted from Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, and Bator (1997; e.g., “What did you do this past summer?”). The experimenter then returned to set up the second interaction by having White participants select a topic to discuss from a set of nine facedown cards and Black participants select the first speaker by drawing a name from a lottery. Both drawings were rigged to yield the racial discrimination (high racial salience) or peer relationships (low racial salience) topic and the Black participant as the first speaker. Next, participants completed preliminary questions on the computer in separate rooms. During this time, Black participants also read the topic card and brainstormed what they wanted to say. Next, participants spent 8 min discussing negative experiences with racial discrimination or peer relationships. Last, participants completed final questions on the computer.

Measures. Participants completed the following measures after interacting with their partner (see Appendix for items).⁹ Items were rated on 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*) scales and were averaged to form composites. We personalized the items by inserting the interaction partner’s first name whenever items referenced the partner. Participants reported their desire to affiliate ($\alpha = .89$; e.g., “How much did you want to get along with your partner?”), how well they understood their partner ($\alpha = .89$; e.g., “How well did you ‘get’ how your partner felt?”), how well they felt understood by their partner ($\alpha = .93$; e.g., “How much did you think your partner ‘gets’ how you feel?”), and felt caring ($\alpha = .77$; e.g., “How much genuine concern did you feel from your partner?”). Both positive affect (e.g., enthusiastic, excited; $\alpha = .86$) and negative affect (e.g., upset, distressed; $\alpha = .84$) during the interaction were assessed with 10 items each from the Positive and Negative Affective

Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Positive partner impressions were assessed with seven items (e.g., pleasant, warm; $\alpha = .90$).

Results

Data analytic plan. We conducted dyadic analysis via the MIXED procedure in SPSS, which can yield fractional degrees of freedom (Kenny et al., 2006). The covariance matrix used heterogeneous compound symmetry for Whites and Blacks because dyad members are distinguishable by participant race. As in Study 1, we used the T&B model to test accuracy (significantly positive correlations between partners’ reports of feeling understood and participants’ reports of how well they understood their partner) and projection (correlation between participants’ reports of feeling understood and participants’ reports of how well they understood their partner). Our model included participants’ and partners’ reports of feeling understood as predictors; participant race ($-1 = \text{Black}, 1 = \text{White}$), topic ($-1 = \text{nonracial}, 1 = \text{racial}$), and participant and partner desire to affiliate as moderators; and all requisite interaction terms. The dependent variable was participants’ reports of how well they understood their partner. Dyad gender was entered as a covariate. Consistent with the T&B model, the dependent variable and continuous predictors were grand-mean centered on the truth criterion (i.e., partners’ reports of feeling understood). Outliers were Winsorized to be within 2.5 standard deviations of the mean. Table 5 reports means and standard deviations of measures and Table 6 reports correlations.

Mean variation by participant race and topic. Although our primary research questions involve correlational processes (i.e., accuracy and projection) and not mean differences, Table 5 provides means and standard deviations of each measure for White and Black participants in the racial and nonracial topic conditions. Controlling for gender, White participants experienced higher desire to affiliate and felt more understood than Black participants (who tended to feel especially misunderstood in the racial topics condition). Dyads in the nonracial topic condition reported understanding partners better than dyads in the racial topic condition.

Understanding. As in Study 1, a significant main effect of projection, $b = 0.69$, $t(90.8) = 7.30$, $p < .001$, but not accuracy, $b = 0.08$, $t(82.3) = 0.86$, $p = .395$, emerged (see Table 7). Participants’ reports of how well they understood their partner was predicted by participants’—but not their partner’s—reports of feeling understood. Next, we examine whether topic, participant race, and desire to affiliate moderated accuracy and projection.

Accuracy. Consistent with our hypotheses, accuracy was moderated by topic, participant race, and participant desire to affiliate,

⁷ A post-hoc power analysis of our highest order interaction revealed that Study 2 was adequately powered. G*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) gave power estimates ranging from .85 to .92, depending on whether we used the raw sample size ($N = 144$), the sample size corrected for non-independence ($N = 141$), or the sample size that reproduces the adjusted df used in our original analyses ($N = 120$).

⁸ An ineffective experimental affiliation manipulation was dropped from analyses. We attempted to prime high vs. low levels of desire to affiliate, but this intervention did not influence affiliation on the manipulation check or moderate any reported effects.

⁹ Participants completed additional measures (i.e., discussion quality, social support, social desirability, social anxiety, race centrality, intergroup meta-perceptions, prejudice concerns, colorblindness), but our analyses focused on measures present in Study 1 to enable replication.

Table 5
Means and Standard Deviations by Participant Race and Topic (Study 2)

Measure	M (SD) by participant race and topic					Group difference <i>t</i> tests		
	Total	Minority/nonracial	Minority/racial	White/nonracial	White/racial	P race	Topic	P race × Topic
1. Desire to affiliate	5.80 (0.95)	5.57 (0.94)	5.73 (1.06)	5.83 (0.79)	6.10 (0.97)	2.06*	1.45	0.38
2. Perceived understanding	4.63 (1.23)	5.08 (1.25)	4.27 (1.45)	5.00 (0.97)	4.18 (0.94)	-0.46	-3.94***	0.01
3. Felt understanding	4.33 (1.28)	4.64 (1.29)	3.61 (1.57)	4.47 (0.97)	4.63 (0.95)	2.37*	-1.61	3.28**
4. Caring	5.20 (1.07)	5.27 (1.02)	5.34 (1.27)	4.95 (0.96)	5.24 (1.02)	-1.31	0.90	0.68
5. Positive affect	2.38 (0.77)	2.25 (0.93)	2.53 (0.74)	2.32 (0.79)	2.43 (0.61)	-0.10	1.89†	-0.71
6. Negative affect	1.30 (0.41)	1.26 (0.33)	1.30 (0.45)	1.21 (0.36)	1.43 (0.48)	0.64	1.70†	1.30
7. Positive partner impression	5.21 (1.07)	5.14 (1.19)	5.21 (1.15)	5.01 (1.01)	5.50 (0.88)	0.47	1.18	1.22

Note. P = participant. "Perceived" understanding refers to participants' reports of how well they understand their partners and "felt" understanding refers to how well understood participants report feeling.

* $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

$b = -0.26$, $t(83.2) = -2.54$, $p = .013$ (see Table 7). Tests of simple interactions revealed that accuracy was moderated by participant race and participant desire to affiliate when dyads discussed the racial topic, $b = -0.36$, $t(72.6) = -2.40$, $p = .019$, but not the nonracial topic, $b = 0.16$, $t(93.5) = 1.16$, $p = .250$. For dyads discussing the racial topic, participant race moderated accuracy for participants higher in desire to affiliate, $b = -0.52$, $t(67.5) = -2.59$, $p = .012$, but not for participants lower in desire to affiliate, $b = 0.16$, $t(80.0) = 0.81$, $p = .422$. As predicted, desire to affiliate yielded different patterns for Blacks' and Whites' accuracy when race was salient. Black participants higher in desire to affiliate with White partners accurately perceived how understood White partners felt, $b = 0.78$, $t(54.0) = 2.03$, $p = .047$. By contrast, White participants higher in desire to affiliate with Black partners achieved marginally negative accuracy, such that there was a negative relationship between partners' reports of feeling understood and participants' reports of how well they understood their partner, $b = -0.26$, $t(54.0) = -1.87$, $p = .067$. To summarize, consistent with predictions, Black participants higher in desire to affiliate with White partners were more likely to achieve accuracy whereas Whites showed the opposite pattern (see Figure 2): White participants higher in desire to affiliate actually achieved marginally negative accuracy (i.e., negative correlation) between themselves and Black partners.

Projection. We also tested for projection, or whether participants' reports of how well they understood their partner correlated with participants' reports of feeling understood themselves. Projection

was not significantly moderated by topic, participant race, and participant desire to affiliate, $b = 0.01$, $t(92.0) = 0.14$, $p = .890$. Although we found a significant main effect of projection, $b = 0.69$, $t(90.8) = 7.30$, $p < .001$, it was not moderated by the same racial and motivational factors that influenced accuracy.

Relational correlates of accuracy. As with Study 1, we entered both the linear and quadratic effects of *inaccurate understanding* (partners' reports of how well they understood the participant minus participants' reports of feeling understood) as well as the linear effect of *average understanding* (main effect of overall dyadic understanding) as predictors of relationship quality. We entered gender as a covariate and included participant race and topic as exploratory moderators.

Analyses revealed that quadratic effects of inaccurate understanding were not significantly associated with any of the relationship quality measures, all $p > .171$. Also, inaccuracy did not consistently interact with participant race or topic. Thus, these predictors were dropped from analyses. We did, however, find significant linear effects of average and inaccurate understanding (see Table 8). Average understanding was positively associated with felt caring and positive partner impressions, all $p < .001$, and marginally associated with less negative affect, $p = .063$. Inaccurate understanding also showed significant associations, as hypothesized: The more partners overestimated how well they understood the participant, the less participants felt cared for, experienced positive affect, and had positive impressions about their partner, all $p < .001$. Consistent with our

Table 6
Pairwise Estimates of Bivariate Correlations for Measures (Study 2)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Desire to affiliate	.04	.11	.12	.18	-.05	-.03	.03
2. Perceived understanding	.30	.19	.23	.09	-.20	-.16	-.01
3. Felt understanding	.49	.67	.14	.16	-.11	-.19	-.03
4. Caring	.62	.43	.57	.16	-.11	-.11	.02
5. Positive affect	.32	.16	.25	.30	.03	.01	-.09
6. Negative affect	-.06	-.16	-.09	-.08	.14	.05	-.24
7. Positive partner impressions	.60	.32	.50	.53	.28	-.07	.02

Note. "Perceived" understanding refers to participants' reports of how well they understand their partners and "felt" understanding refers to how well understood participants report feeling. With $N = 144$ cases for all correlations, if $|r| > .16$, $p < .05$. (Alternately, using $N = 72$ dyads as a very conservative control for nonindependence, if $|r| > .24$, $p < .05$.) Intrapersonal correlations, pairwise estimates of intraclass correlations (shown in bold), and interpersonal correlations are respectively reported below, on, and above the diagonal.

Table 7
Predictors of Actor's Perceived Understanding (Study 2)

Fixed effect	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>t</i>
Intercept	-0.20	0.29	-0.70
Gender	0.32	0.16	2.03*
Race (A)	-0.36	0.13	-2.67*
Felt understanding (A)	0.69	0.09	7.30***
Felt understanding (P)	0.08	0.10	0.86
Affiliation (A)	-0.14	0.12	-1.11
Affiliation (P)	-0.10	0.12	-0.83
Topic	-0.20	0.11	-1.87†
Race (A)*felt understanding (A)	0.04	0.09	0.49
Race (A)*felt understanding (P)	-0.03	0.10	-0.26
Race (A)*affiliation (A)	-0.14	0.13	-1.06
Race (A)*affiliation (P)	0.10	0.13	0.74
Race (A)*topic	-0.10	0.13	-0.75
Felt understanding (A)*topic	0.09	0.09	0.96
Felt understanding (P)*topic	0.04	0.10	0.36
Affiliation (A)*topic	-0.28	0.12	-2.32*
Affiliation (P)*topic	-0.04	0.12	-0.36
Felt understanding (A)*affiliation (A)	-0.07	0.10	-0.68
Felt understanding (A)*affiliation (P)	0.06	0.10	0.55
Felt understanding (P)*affiliation (A)	-0.02	0.11	-0.20
Felt understanding (P)*affiliation (P)	0.06	0.11	0.55
Race (A)*felt understanding (A)*topic	-0.03	0.09	-0.32
Race (A)*felt understanding (P)*topic	-0.16	0.10	-1.64
Race (A)*affiliation (A)*topic	0.16	0.13	1.21
Race (A)*affiliation (P)*topic	0.09	0.13	0.70
Race (A)*felt understanding (A)*affiliation (A)	0.10	0.10	0.95
Race (A)*felt understanding (A)*affiliation (P)	0.14	0.10	1.39
Race (A)*felt understanding (P)*affiliation (A)	-0.10	0.10	-0.95
Race (A)*felt understanding (P)*affiliation (P)	0.07	0.11	0.65
Felt understanding (A)*affiliation (A)*topic	-0.13	0.10	-1.25
Felt understanding (A)*affiliation (P)*topic	-0.03	0.10	-0.28
Felt understanding (P)*affiliation (A)*topic	0.17	0.11	1.57
Felt understanding (P)*affiliation (P)*topic	-0.10	0.11	-0.98
Race (A)*felt understanding (A)*affiliation (A)*topic	0.01	0.10	0.14
Race (A)*felt understanding (A)*affiliation (P)*topic	0.11	0.10	1.11
Race (A)*felt understanding (P)*affiliation (A)*topic	-0.26	0.10	-2.54*
Race (A)*felt understanding (P)*affiliation (P)*topic	-0.07	0.11	-0.70

Note. "(A)" and "(P)" refer to actor (participant) vs. partner variables. "Perceived" understanding refers to participants' reports of how well they understand their partner and "felt" understanding refers to how well understood participants report feeling. The interaction of interest is italicized.

* $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

predictions and the previous study, partners' overestimation of how well they understood the participant was associated with lower relationship quality for participants.

Discussion

These results supported our predictions. When race was salient, Black participants higher in desire to affiliate with White partners accurately perceived how understood White partners felt. By contrast, White participants higher in desire to affiliate with Black partners not only failed to achieve accuracy, but actually trended toward *negative accuracy*, such that White participants' reports of how well they understood their Black partner negatively corresponded with Black partners' reports of feeling understood. Collectively, these findings suggest that desire to affiliate may help racial minorities accurately perceive how well Whites feel understood but hinder Whites from accurately perceiving racial minorities, at least in contexts in which race is salient.

We also found that partners' overestimation of how well they understood participants (relative to how understood participants felt) was associated with worse relationship quality. Specifically, participants felt less cared for, experienced less positive affect, and viewed partners more negatively. These findings parallel results from Study 1, in which roommates' overestimation of how well they racially understood participants was associated with participants experiencing less positive affect and holding more negative views of their roommate relationship (i.e., less trust, closeness, satisfaction). In both studies, participant race did not moderate these correlations, suggesting that people generally respond negatively when perceivers overestimate how well they understand them. These findings demonstrate the complex nature of understanding in interpersonal relationships: People should try to convey understanding to others to develop intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988), yet presuming too much understanding can backfire and potentially undermine relationship quality.

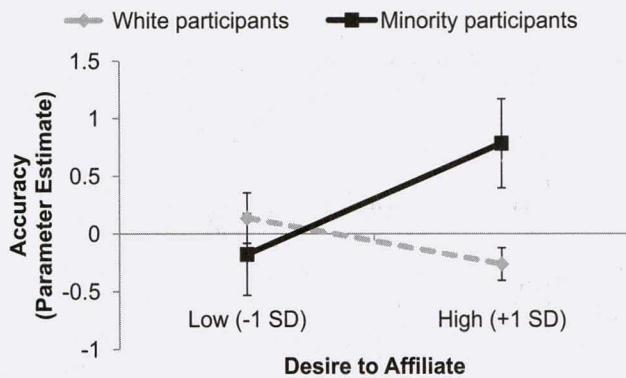


Figure 2. Accuracy in perceptions of understanding by participant race and participant desire to affiliate while discussing a racial topic (Study 2). Estimated accuracy parameters are unstandardized regression coefficients (i.e., slopes) of partners' reports of feeling understood predicting participants' reports of understanding their partners. Error bars indicate ± 1 SE. Positive values indicate greater accuracy and negative values indicate negative accuracy (an inverse relationship between dyad members' perceptions).

General Discussion

Two studies investigated when Whites and racial minorities are likely to accurately perceive how well understood cross-race roommates and interaction partners feel. Our findings extend prior research on affiliation by examining the conditions under which people may not be able to accurately gauge how well they understand partners despite wanting to connect with them. Across both studies, when race was salient, racial minorities higher in desire to affiliate with Whites were more likely to be accurate, yet Whites higher in desire to affiliate with racial minorities failed to be accurate. During interpersonal interactions others' internal states may not be readily apparent and require effort to detect. Whites higher in desire to affiliate with racial minorities may have limited cognitive resources to expend on effortful detection of racial minorities' beliefs (Mendes & Koslov, 2013), preventing Whites from accurately detecting or interpreting racial minorities' thoughts and feelings.

Both studies showed that these patterns were more likely to occur in contexts where race is salient, such as thinking about what it is like to be a member of a cross-race roommate's racial group or talking about negative race-related experiences. Interestingly, similar patterns emerged for cross-race roommates and strangers,

suggesting that accurately gauging how understood partners feel may prove challenging even in the context of sustained relationships when racial boundaries are salient.

In addition to desire to affiliate, we found that racial salience moderated accurate perceptions of how understood partners feel. We operationalized racial salience by having participants think about how well they racially (vs. generally) understood their roommate (Study 1) and by having participants discuss negative racial (vs. nonracial) personal experiences (Study 2). One implication of our work is that interracial interactions need not always be negative, insofar as increasing or decreasing racial salience can critically affect the extent to which people can achieve accuracy in these interactions.

Participants experienced negative outcomes, such as feeling less satisfied with the relationship or experiencing less positive affect, when others inaccurately perceived how understood they felt. Although correlational, our findings suggest relational deficits arising when perceivers overestimate (vs. underestimate) their understanding of partners. Additional research should examine the factors that lead people to overestimate or underestimate how well they understand interaction partners. Future work should also examine how Whites attempt to convey their understanding and whether their overtures are successful. Excessive claims of understanding may be particularly detrimental in part because Blacks in fact prefer for Whites to convey limited understanding by saying that they don't understand Blacks' racial issues rather than claiming that they understand (Hollien, Libby, & Shelton, 2014). Investigating these questions may illuminate the complexities of accurately perceiving others as well as its interpersonal consequences.

Our work also contributes to the growing literature on how good intentions may backfire in intergroup contexts (e.g., Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009; Siy & Cheryan, 2013). Although Whites' desire to affiliate with racial minorities may seem benign, it is associated with decreased accuracy in perceiving what racial minorities are thinking and feeling. This finding may initially come across as disheartening for Whites in interracial interactions, but our intention is not to discourage Whites from affiliating with racial minorities. Instead, Whites may want to examine whether they want to affiliate with racial minorities due to evaluative concerns and impression management (self-image goals) or due to concerns about racial minorities' well-being and care (compassionate goals; Crocker & Canevello, 2012). In longitudinal studies of roommate relationships (Canevello & Crocker, 2010), compassionate goals increased responsiveness toward roommates, which roommates perceived and incorporated into their judgments of relationship quality. Similarly, insofar

Table 8
Effects of Average and Inaccurate Understanding on Relationship Quality (Study 2)

	Average understanding			Inaccuracy		
	b	SE	t	b	SE	t
Caring	0.45	0.08	5.98***	-0.26	0.05	-5.68***
Positive affect	0.02	0.06	0.25	-0.17	0.04	-4.60***
Negative affect	-0.06	0.03	-1.88†	-0.01	0.02	-0.60
Positive partner impression	0.35	0.08	4.43***	-0.28	0.05	-5.89***

Note. These analyses control for the effects of gender. The rows contain our dependent measures and the columns contain our predictors.

† $p < .10$. *** $p < .001$.

as Whites' desire to affiliate with racial minorities stems from compassionate goals rather than self-image goals, Whites may more accurately perceive racial minorities' thoughts and feelings.

The present findings also highlight the importance of examining both Whites and racial minorities as active agents during interracial interactions. This relational approach (Shelton & Richeson, 2006) allows us to demonstrate that similar psychological motivations are associated with different outcomes in terms of Whites' and racial minorities' accuracy, such that when race is salient desire to affiliate hinders accuracy for Whites yet facilitates accuracy for racial minorities. Studying Whites and racial minorities as both perceivers and partners enables us to more accurately capture the complex and highly interdependent nature of interracial interactions and demonstrates that Whites and racial minorities may physically be present in the same interaction while experiencing very different psychological outcomes.

Future Directions

Additional research should explore the conditions under which desire to affiliate may facilitate accuracy for Whites and thwart accuracy for racial minorities when race is salient. Findings from Study 1 suggest that desire to affiliate can yield accurate perceptions when race is less salient. Perhaps reducing Whites' concerns with appearing prejudiced (Trawalter & Richeson, 2006), encouraging Whites to learn about their partners (Neel & Shapiro, 2012), or credentialing Whites as nonprejudiced individuals (Monin & Miller, 2001) would allow Whites who desire to affiliate with minorities to become less self-focused and more other-focused, leading to more accurate perceptions of partners. There may be instances when racial minorities who desire to affiliate with Whites may be less likely to accurately gauge how well they understand Whites, particularly if accurately reading Whites' thoughts may reveal information that is threatening to their relationship (e.g., Simpson, Oriña, & Ickes, 2003). Discovering that a White friend or peer holds racially hostile views may negatively impact perceptions of relationship quality, so racial minorities may sometimes be motivated to inaccurately perceive Whites' racial attitudes. Future work should explore alternate conditions under which both Whites and racial minorities accurately (or inaccurately) perceive others.

Although our work investigates accuracy by primarily focusing on perceiver characteristics, such as participant race and desire to affiliate, partner (or target) characteristics can also influence accuracy. Some people are more emotionally expressive than others, enabling perceivers to more accurately read their inner states (Zaki, Bolger, & Ochsner, 2008). One factor that affects expressiveness is social status, with higher status associated with greater expressiveness (Human & Biesanz, 2013). For example, lower-class Whites are less expressive than upper-class counterparts in dyadic interactions, although they express themselves more naturally when interacting with similar others (Garcia, Hallahan, & Rosenthal, 2007). Whites and racial minorities are generally seen as differing in social status, and future work could test whether making such differences salient would influence targets' expressivity and perceivers' accuracy.

In addition to exploring partners' characteristics, future work could examine whether biases in partners' judgments could hinder accuracy. Although the present work (in addition to others) defines accuracy as the extent to which perceivers' judgments of their understanding correspond to the extent to which partners feel understood, partners' ratings may not necessarily reflect objective truth. For example,

partners may be biased to feel less understood by cross-race perceivers than same-race perceivers, even if perceivers were to behave or speak in the exact same way. Additional research may want to examine the ways in which biases in partners' judgments, in addition to variations in perceivers' judgments, contribute to accuracy. Notably, although partners' characteristics or biases could potentially inhibit accurate understanding, the present work identifies several conditions in which people indeed achieve accuracy.

Conclusion

In summary, the present research seeks to understand when Whites and racial minorities accurately perceive one another in roommate relationships and brief interactions. Although increased contact with outgroup members is one of the most effective means of improving negative intergroup attitudes (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and is associated with greater empathy, perspective-taking, and outgroup knowledge (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008)—all of which should facilitate accuracy in theory—we find that even in sustained interracial relationships people may not accurately perceive one another. Investigating the factors that facilitate or impede accurate perceptions of partners is an important step in discovering the ways in which people can enjoy close and meaningful relationships across racial boundaries.

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Appendix
Study 2 Measures

Desire to Affiliate

How much did you want to get along with your partner?
 How much did you want to have a smooth interaction with your partner?
 How much did you like your partner?

Perceived Understanding

How well did you understand your partner?
 How well could you relate to your partner?
 How well did you feel what your partner felt?
 How well did you know what your partner was going through?
 How well did you empathize with your partner?
 How well did you "get" how your partner felt?
 How well did you know what it's like to be in your partner's shoes?

Felt Understanding

How much did you feel understood by your partner?
 How much did you think your partner related to your feelings?
 How much did you think your partner felt what you feel?
 How much did you feel your partner knew what you're going through?
 How much empathy did you feel from your partner?
 How much did you think your partner "gets" how you feel?
 How much did you feel your partner knows what it's like to be in your shoes?

Felt Caring

How supported did you feel by your partner?
 How much genuine concern did you feel from your partner?
 How unsupported did you feel by your partner? [reverse scored]

Positive Partner Impressions

Based on your interactions with your partner overall, how pleasant did he or she seem?
 Based on your interactions with your partner overall, how warm did he or she seem?
 Based on your interactions with your partner overall, how likable did he or she seem?
 Based on your interactions with your partner overall, how natural did he or she seem?
 Based on your interactions with your partner overall, how confident did he or she seem?
 Based on your interactions with your partner overall, how attractive did he or she seem?
 Based on your interactions with your partner overall, how intelligent did he or she seem?

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