

Poster

TITLE

Perspective-taking and Guilt during Interpersonal Confrontation against Prejudice

SHORTENED TITLE

Perspective-taking and Guilt during Confrontation

ABSTRACT

Prior research has established that most people act defensively and/or hostilely when they are confronted about their own prejudice. We found that individuals acted prosocially towards their confronter, regardless of perceived race, when they felt guilty for a prejudiced comment they had previously made.

PRESS PARAGRAPH

Although confronting prejudice is necessary to reduce its occurrence, most people respond with hostility when they are told that they have exhibited prejudiced behavior or made a prejudiced comment. Therefore, we want to identify ways to remedy this, with perspective-taking as a potential route that will help the confronted individual understand the effect of their comment/behavior upon the minority group or individual. We examined how guilt may mediate the relationship between perspective-taking and prosocial behavior, among other variables of interest. We also discuss the implications of our results and identify potential avenues for future research on perspective-taking during confrontation.

WORD COUNT

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The literature examining the human capacity to take another's perspective and its relationship with social dysfunction is diverse, from antisocial populations who struggle to recognize facial affect, to conduct-disordered children who struggle with perspective-taking (Anastassiou-Hadjicharalambous & Warden, 2008; Marsh & Blair, 2008). These populations demonstrate that an inability to perspective-take has a negative effect on social functioning. One of the ways that perspective-taking supports sociality is through guilt induction, which in turn elicits negative feelings towards oneself (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). In this way, the guilty individual can anticipate future misdeeds and will try to avoid them, effectively defending themselves from social isolation (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). One of the methods guilty individuals use to alleviate their negative self-evaluation involves prosocial behavior, where they attempt to mend their relationships (Estrada-I-Iollenbeck, & Heatherton, 1997).

Based upon these premises, guilt may serve as a vital link to help us confront potential moral transgressions without risking relationship dissolution. For example, if we witness others make a prejudiced comment, this may motivate us to confront the offender and help them recognize that their comment could have been construed negatively. Czopp and Monteith (2003) have shown that individuals who are confronted about a racially-biased comment tend to feel more guilt and want to rectify their wrongdoing by apologizing more than individuals who are alleged to have made a sexist comment. Although these confrontations have been shown to reduce the occurrence of prejudiced comments by making perpetrators aware of their own prejudice (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris, & Goodwin, 2008), many individuals who think about confronting prejudice fear that they may inflict damage upon their relationship with the offender by causing conflict. On the other hand, ignoring the problem bears significant consequences. Prejudice imposes major psychological and physiological harm to the target of discrimination (Allison, 1998; Aronson,

Quinn, & Spencer, 1998; Marsh & Blair, 2008). Prior research examining perspective-taking provides hope for a solution to the intrapersonal conflict that people face when they want to speak up against prejudice but simultaneously want to preserve their relationship with an individual who makes a prejudiced comment. In the current paper, we seek to expand our understanding of how to confront prejudice by examining whether guilt mediates the relationship between perspective-taking and prosocial behavior and partner evaluations after an individual is confronted about a racially biased comment. In this way, perspective-taking may help people feel more confident that confronting prejudice will not only reduce racially biased comments, but will also allow them to maintain their relationship with the confronted individual.

Literature Review

Although discrimination against stigmatized groups is a daily occurrence across numerous settings (Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999), people rarely confront the prejudiced comments/behaviors (Swim & Hyers, 1999; Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001). However, confrontations are crucial in reducing the occurrence of prejudiced comments because the perpetrators are more likely to perceive themselves negatively and modify their behavior, as shown by Czopp, Monteith, and Mark (2006). One of the major forces inhibiting most people who yearn to confront prejudice is the social cost typically associated with said confrontation, since they anticipate that they will be perceived as an instigator and experience backlash for standing up against prejudice (Kaiser & Miller, 2004). In this way, the decision to confront prejudice is a difficult choice to make, especially when one must interact with the perpetrator on a regular basis, as in some business settings. If someone has the proper tools to confront prejudice without retaliation, they would be more likely to initiate the confrontation. In our research, we explore the

efficacy of empathy, specifically perspective-taking and guilt induction, in increasing prosocial behavior and positive evaluations following a race-based confrontation.

According to Davis (1983), there are four dimensions of empathy, which are divided into affective and cognitive components. Perspective-taking, which falls under the category of cognitive empathy, is most likely to induce prosocial behavior from targets. Perspective-taking is best defined as “the tendency to spontaneously adopt the psychological point of view of others” (Davis, 1983, p. 113). When an individual is directed to take a target’s perspective after they have committed a transgression against the target, they will feel guilty for their actions after realizing their negative impact upon the target, and will attempt to amend the situation through prosocial behavior. Research suggests that guilt and perspective-taking both increase one’s prosocial behavior after conflict, enhancing relationship outcomes (e.g. Howell, Turowski, & Buro, 2012; Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Tangney, 1991; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 2007). Guilt involves “condemnation of [one’s own] behavior” (Tangney & Dearing, 2002, p. 24), and is positively linked to one’s tendency to perspective-take and to enhanced perspective-taking ability (Leith & Baumeister, 1998). When an individual’s transgression is labeled as a situational occurrence and they are directed to take the target’s perspective, they are motivated by their heightened guilt to amend their wrongdoing because they better understand the effects of their actions upon the target (Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Stuewig, Tangney, Heigel, Harty, & Mccloskey, 2010; Tangney, 1991; Tangney & Dearing, 2002).

Although there is evidence suggesting that perspective-taking and guilt are useful in eliciting prosocial behavior, prior research has not examined if perspective-taking leads to more positive outcomes following bias-related confrontations. In addition, prior research has not addressed whether guilt mediates the relationship between perspective-taking and prosocial

behavior when an individual is confronted about their racially biased behavior. In the current study, we hypothesize that participants who are induced to perspective-take will experience heightened levels of guilt, and, as a result, will be more likely to act prosocially towards a confederate that has confronted them about a prejudiced comment and view that confederate positively, with an increased desire to work with the confederate again.

Method

Participants

The entirety of the study was conducted online, where subjects were collected through Cint, an online participant recruitment platform. Since we confronted subjects about prejudiced comments towards African American individuals, we did not include African American subjects in the participant pool. Participants received a survey link through which the entire study was conducted. After data cleaning and participant exclusion based on certain criteria (explained in the Results section), our final sample consisted of 80 participants (38 female, age $M = 47.04$, age $SD = 14.22$). The majority of participants identified as Caucasian/White (86.3%), while 6.3% identified as Asian, 5% identified as Hispanic/Latino, and the rest identified as either American Indian/Alaska Native or Other (1.3% for each category).

Procedure

Participants first received an informed consent document. We used a cover story in the initial description of the study, since the procedures involved some deception. After providing consent, participants completed a filler item measuring attitudes about online communication to sustain the cover story (Ledbetter, 2009) and then were notified that they would be connected to a random partner. The researcher instructed the partners to tell each other about themselves (e.g. what is your name, what state are you originally from, what do you like to do in your free time,

etc.). The participants were primed to believe that their partner was African American because she was named Aisha, a distinctively African American name which has been effective in previous studies to prime perceptions of race (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004).

The participants then partook in a task that has been shown to induce perspective-taking (Epley et al., 2004). In this task, participants were randomly assigned to conditions: one in which they were instructed to perspective-take and a control condition that did not include explicit instructions for participants to take their partners' perspective. Afterwards, the participants completed the Picture-word Association Task with their partner, which was intended to induce participant responses that could be interpreted as prejudiced (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006). The participants were then told that they would receive feedback from their partner, which is when the confederate confronted the subject about their responses.

After the confrontation, the participants were redirected to a series of surveys that asked them to evaluate their partner and their current affective state (Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Within the PANAS scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), we examined the guilt subscale by averaging participants' responses to items asking whether they felt "regretful," "blameworthy," and "guilty", which was used as the mediator in all of the analyses for this paper (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.91). Afterwards, the participants took part in a cooperation task that mimicked the Prisoner's Dilemma task where people are faced with a conflict between promoting their own interests against those of the entire group (Rapoport & Chammah, 1965). Next, participants completed demographic questions and were asked to guess the race of their partner, which was used as a manipulation check during analyses to assess whether participants identified the confederate as African American. Participants completed the

study by answering an open-ended question regarding their suspicions about the purpose of the study. All participants were then thoroughly debriefed.

Measures/Materials

Perspective-taking task. In the experimental condition, the participants were presented four scenarios, which incorporated messages that could be perceived as sarcastic depending upon one's background knowledge about the scenario. In this way, background knowledge about the scenario informed how the message would be interpreted (sarcastic or non-sarcastic). After receiving background knowledge about the scenario (positive or negative event), the participants judged whether their partner would be able to determine the valence of the ambiguous message. The participants were told that their partner had not been informed of the background knowledge about the scenario, which forced the participant to acknowledge that they have a different perspective than their partner. We incorporated a strategy for inducing perspective-taking from Leith and Baumeister (1998), instructing participants to "become the other person in the situation," and telling them to say "I am (my partner's name)" out loud three or four times. The participants were asked to type a response from the perspective of their partner, using the word "I" to reinforce the idea that they must place themselves in the cognitive realm of their partner. Participants randomly assigned to the control condition followed the same procedures as those in the experimental condition, only they were asked to take their own perspective.

The picture-word association task. In the picture-word association task, participants were shown a series of pictures of both White and Black individuals with descriptions below them, and were asked to write a one-word inference about the individual pictured based upon the information provided (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006). The participant and the confederate alternated responses, but the participant always responded before the confederate. The task included three

pictures of African Americans with associated descriptions that tend to elicit responses from participants that can be perceived as prejudiced (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006). The subjects' responses to these critical questions were then used as the basis for the interpersonal confrontation.

Cooperation task. The participants were told to imagine that they had been given four chips, and their partner was also given four chips. Each chip was worth 5 cents if they kept it for themselves, but was worth 10 cents to their partner if they chose to give it away. They decided how many chips to give to their partner, where higher cooperation is positively related to the number of chips given.

Results

The subjects who failed to make any prejudiced comments were eliminated from the study after they were identified ($N=4$), for they would not have understood why they were being confronted in the first place. We also eliminated participants whose written responses to either the Picture-word association task or the Perspective-taking task could not be interpreted in a meaningful way ($N=14$).

In order to analyze the data based upon our predicted mediation model, we used regression analysis in Process (Hayes, 2013), where the control condition was dummy coded as 0, while the perspective-taking condition was dummy coded as 1. The analyses suggested that condition did not significantly predict guilt, $b = 0.02$, $t = 0.09$, $p = 0.93$, and that guilt did not significantly predict number of coins given, $b = 0.09$, $t = 0.78$, $p = 0.44$. These results do not support the predicted mediation model. The indirect effect was tested using a bootstrap estimation approach with 1000 samples (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). These results indicated the indirect coefficient was not significant, $b = 0.002$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = 0.93$. Based upon these results, our hypotheses were not supported for prosocial behavior as the dependent variable (See Figure 5). We also tested for the

effects of condition and guilt on perceptions of partner competence, perceptions of partner warmth, and desire to work with one's partner again. None of these mediation models were significant (see Figures 6, 7, and 8). Interestingly, we found that guilt was positively related to both perceptions of partner competence ($b = 0.22, t = 2.32, p = 0.02$), and the desire to work with one's partner again ($b = 0.37, t = 3.38, p = 0.001$).

We conducted exploratory analyses to further comprehend potential mechanisms behind our findings. One major concern in analyzing our participant responses arose upon realizing that some participants failed the manipulation check ($N=33$), meaning they did not perceive that their partner was Black, despite prior work validating the use of the name Aisha for this purpose (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). As the perceived race of the confronter likely affects reactions to being confronted (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006), we decided to test whether participants who believed that a non-African American individual was confronting them about their prejudiced comment would respond differently than participants who perceived that they were being confronted by an African American partner. Further, we were interested in understanding whether feelings of guilt might affect the relationship between perceived race of confronter and outcomes. Using multiple regression analysis, we determined whether the manipulation check for race and guilt would interact to predict number of coins given to one's partner. We regressed the number of coins given on guilt, manipulation check for race, and a product term representing the interaction between manipulation check for race and guilt. In terms of main effects, neither perceived race of the confronter ($b = -0.34, t = -1.32, p = 0.19$), nor guilt ($b = 0.09, t = 0.77, p = 0.45$) significantly predicted the number of coins given to the confronter. However, the interaction was found to be significant, $b = 0.51, t = 2.18, p = 0.03$. We then tested the conditional effects of perceived race of confronter at high and low levels of guilt (one standard deviation above and below the mean). The

effect of perceived confronter race on guilt was not significant for participants with high levels of guilt post-confrontation, $b = 0.23$, $t = 0.63$, $p = 0.53$, but it was significant for participants who felt low levels of guilt, $b = -0.91$, $t = -2.53$, $p < 0.05$. Specifically, when participants perceived that their partner was Black and felt low levels of guilt, they gave fewer coins relative to those who thought the confederate was another race (e.g., Asian, White). See Figure 1 for the nature of this interaction. We also conducted three separate regression analyses with perceived race of confronter, guilt, and the interaction term on perceptions of partner competence, warmth, and desire to work with one's partner again. None of these interactions were significant (see Figures 2, 3, and 4).

Discussion

Previous research has suggested that there is a link between perspective-taking, a form of empathy, and guilt in their ability to elicit prosocial behavior (e.g. Howell, Turowski, & Buro, 2012; Leith & Baumeister, 1998; Tangney, 1991; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 2007). However, these variables have not been examined within the context of confrontation against prejudice. In the current study, we attempted to examine the relationship between perspective-taking and prosocial behavior and partner evaluations using guilt as a mediator during interpersonal confrontation concerning a prejudiced comment. We predicted that participants who took the perspective of the confederate would be more likely to act prosocially towards their partner after being confronted for a prejudiced comment, and that guilt would serve as the crucial link between these variables. Our results did not support our hypotheses. The perspective-taking task did not affect behavior or attitudes toward the confronter and the relationship was not mediated by guilt. We found that guilt was positively related to perceptions of partner competence and a desire to work with one's partner again, which supports the

literature showing the social benefits of guilt (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). These findings are important in structuring positive interactions between people from different backgrounds, since confronters who understand how to induce guilt will be more likely to maintain their relationship with the transgressor.

Exploratory analyses suggest that perceived race of the confronter influenced prosocial behavior when the participants felt low levels of guilt. Specifically, those who felt low levels of guilt and thought their partner was African American gave fewer coins to their partner. In comparison, participants who felt high levels of guilt presented a similar number of coins to confronters, regardless of their race. Specifically, Black confronters were at a disadvantage (in terms of their partner's prosocial behavior) when the confronted participant did not feel any guilt, but were treated the same as non-Black confronters when the participant felt guilty. These results indicate that participants who did not feel guilty about making a prejudiced comment cooperated less with a Black confronter compared to a non-Black confronter, but participants who felt high levels of guilt cooperated equally with confronters, regardless of their race. Based upon these findings, we propose that guilt may serve as a buffer against negative consequences when Black individuals confront prejudice. This finding is crucial when considering the literature that suggests how much prejudice negatively affects African Americans, both physically and psychologically (Allison, 1998; Aronson, Quinn, & Spencer, 1998; Marsh & Blair, 2008), since it provides an opportunity for African American individuals to defend themselves against the harmful effects of prejudice. In this way, African Americans will be able to feel empowered and gain a sense of closure post-confrontation by confronting the perpetrator in a way that induces guilt (Haslett & Lipman, 1997; Hyers, 2007). The ability to actively confront prejudice on one's own is crucial for African Americans, who face discrimination on a

regular basis (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, Fitzgerald, & Bylsma, 2003). Therefore, these findings should be explored further to understand why guilt serves as a means of inducing prosocial behavior for confronters of all races, which will help us capitalize on guilt during confrontation against prejudice. We also examined whether this interaction predicted perceptions of partner competence, warmth, and desire to work with one's partner again, with non-significant results. This suggests that feelings of guilt and perceived race of partner affect prosocial behavior (e.g. number of coins given) in a different way than they affect perceptions of partner characteristics and one's desire to work with their partner again. The mechanisms underlying these findings are outside of the scope of the current study, so we encourage future research to explore this interesting phenomenon.

There were some potential limitations in the study worth mentioning. Specifically, it is possible that the perspective-taking task we used did not actually induce perspective-taking in our participants. A potential barrier to perspective-taking is the egocentric bias that observers are likely to adopt. When a target is perceived as dissimilar to oneself, the observer primarily uses stored information to assess the perspective of the target. Since the participant was not familiar with their partner, it is possible that this obstructed their ability to perspective-take (Epley & Caruso, 2009). Future studies should consider this possibility by modifying this task to increase perceived partner familiarity and/or similarity. It is also possible that participants struggled to take their partner's perspective because the study was conducted online, which may have made the entire interaction feel artificial.

Finally, participants were instructed to perspective-take several minutes before they were confronted about their prejudiced comments. In this way, the effects of perspective-taking may have attenuated by the time that the participants were confronted. On a similar note, we did not

examine how inducing perspective-taking during the confrontation would have effects upon the transgressor's prosocial behavior. In our study, we wanted to examine if simply taking the confronter's perspective would exert effects upon the transgressor's prosocial behavior. It is possible that trying to take the target's perspective during a confrontation might elicit guilt and in turn, prosocial behavior. Since our study did not attempt to induce perspective-taking during the confrontation, it would be useful for future studies to include perspective-taking as an intrinsic part of the confrontation.

In conducting this study, we were striving towards improving intergroup interactions by showing individuals specific strategies to confront prejudice while maintaining a relationship with the target of the confrontation. Our exploratory analyses of the moderation of manipulation check for race upon the relationship between guilt and prosocial behavior presents promise for confronters of all races to partake in the fight to reduce prejudice, as long as they are able to effectively elicit high levels of guilt in a transgressor during confrontation. This proposition is supported by our findings that suggest inducing guilt during a confrontation against prejudice can also improve perceptions of the confronter and increase the transgressor's willingness to interact with the confronter again. In this way, guilt will enhance our ability to avoid relationship dissolution when confronting prejudice. Although our initial hypotheses were not supported, we urge other researchers to probe this question further and find other ways of inducing perspective-taking. Honing effective confrontation strategies is essential in a diverse society where transcultural interaction is probable, and potentially necessary in some contexts.

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Table 1
Correlation matrix with all study variables of interest

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--------------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-----|
| 1. Condition | --- | | | | | | |
| 2. Number of coins given | -0.137 | --- | | | | | |
| 3. Desire to work with partner again | 0.073 | 0.193 | --- | | | | |
| 4. Manipulation check of race | 0.004** | -0.148 | -0.126 | --- | | | |
| 5. Guilt | 0.010* | 0.086 | 0.359 | 0.039* | --- | | |
| 6. Partner warmth | 0.122 | 0.087 | 0.421 | -0.306 | 0.131 | --- | |
| 7. Partner competence | 0.055 | 0.142 | 0.346 | -0.257 | 0.256 | 0.772 | --- |

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

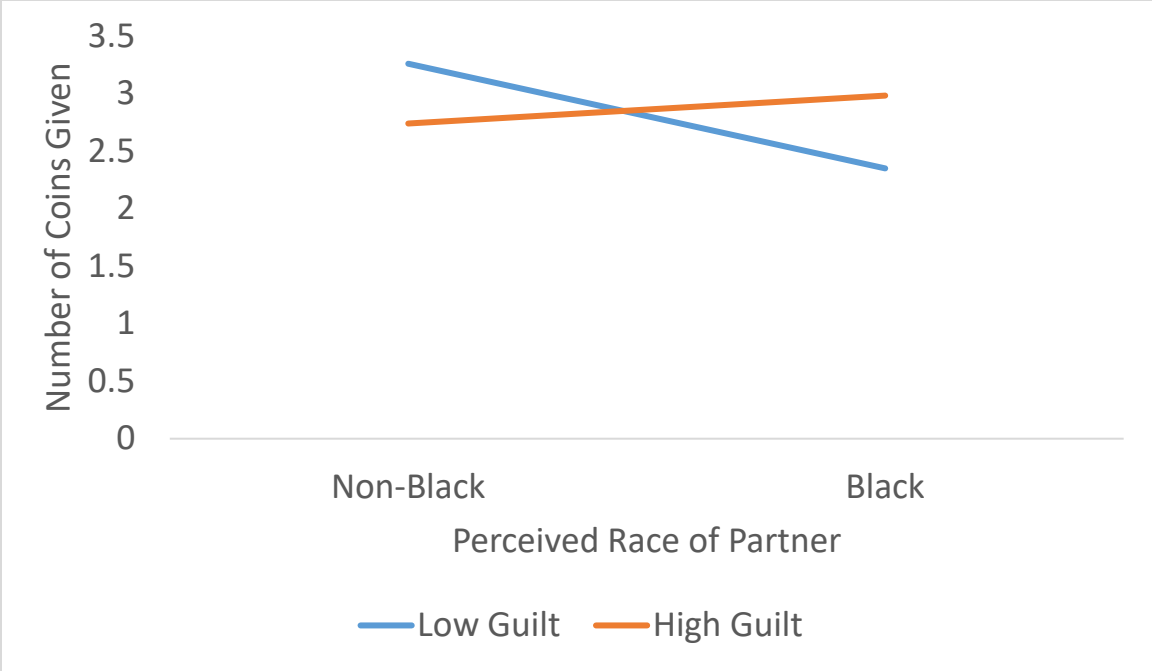


Figure 1. The interaction between perceived race of partner and guilt predicting number of coins given to partner.

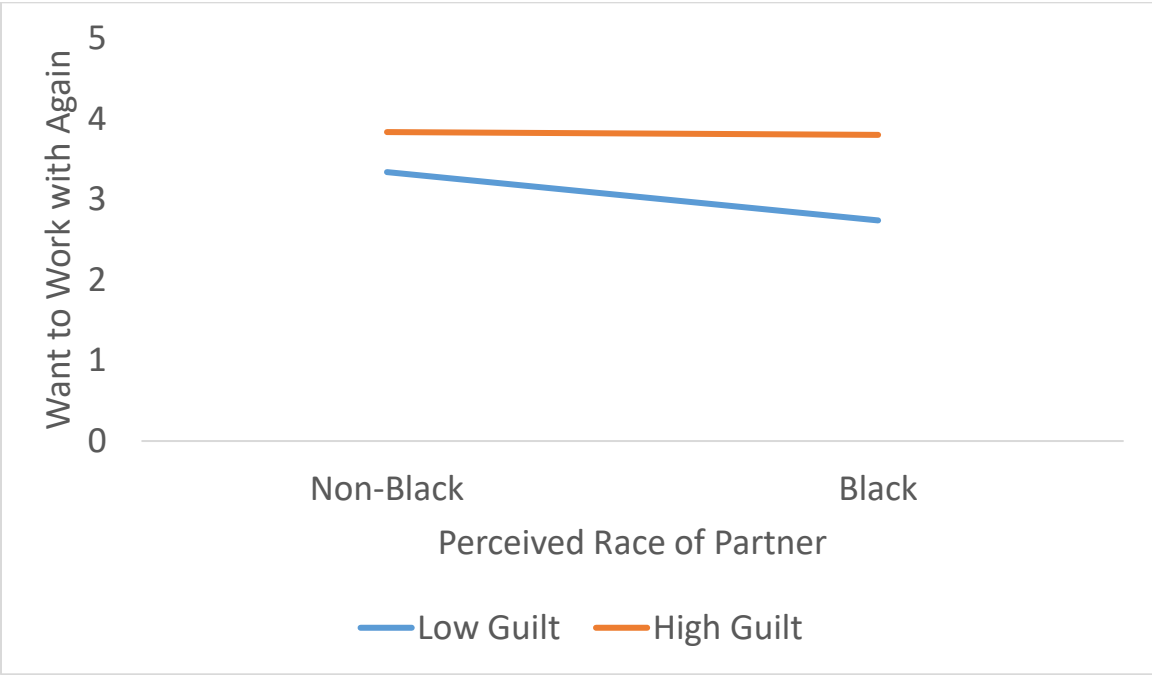


Figure 2. Non-significant moderation of perceived race of partner and guilt upon desire to work with partner again.

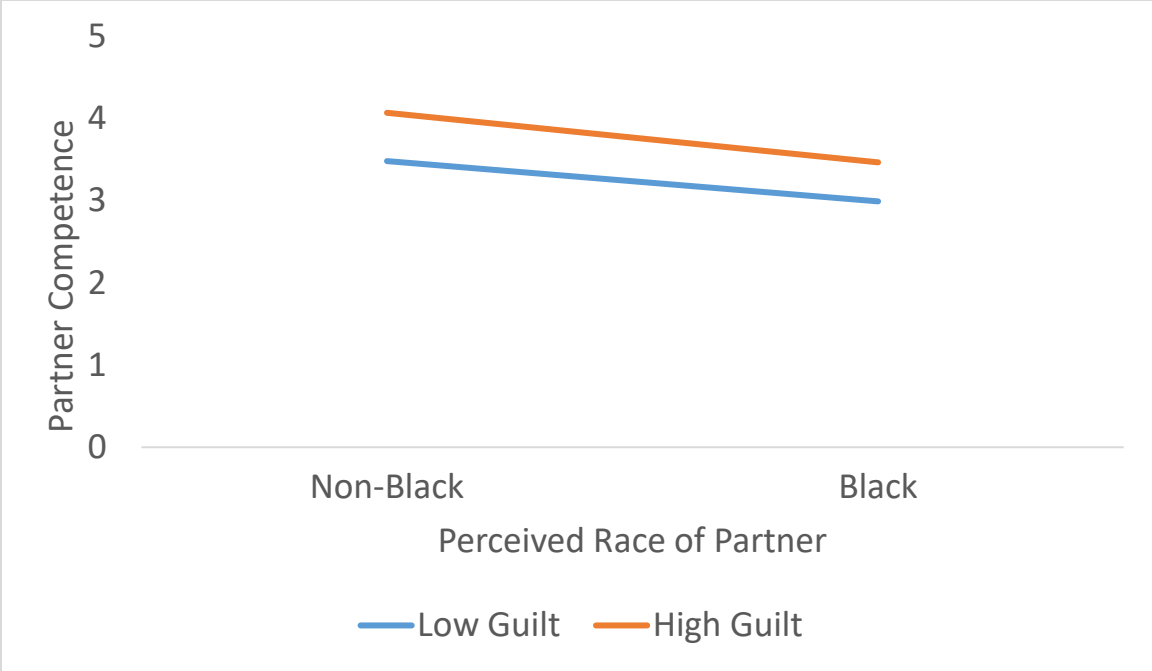


Figure 3. Non-significant moderation of perceived race of partner and guilt upon perceptions of partner competence.

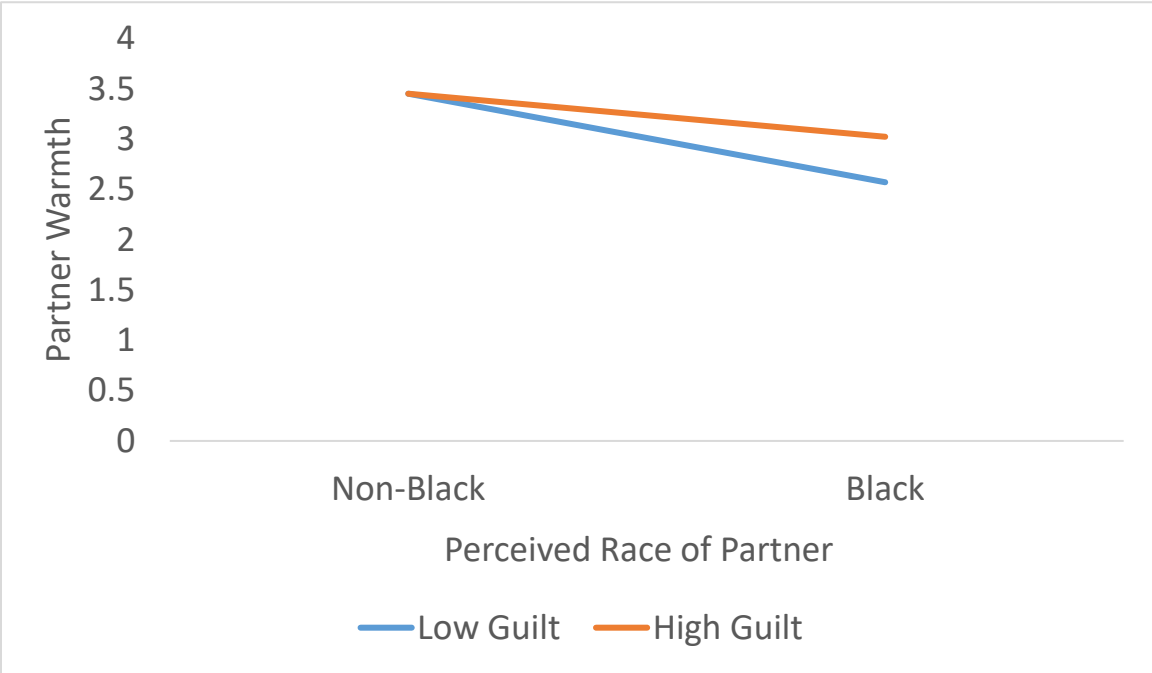


Figure 4. Non-significant moderation of perceived race of partner and guilt upon perceptions of partner warmth.

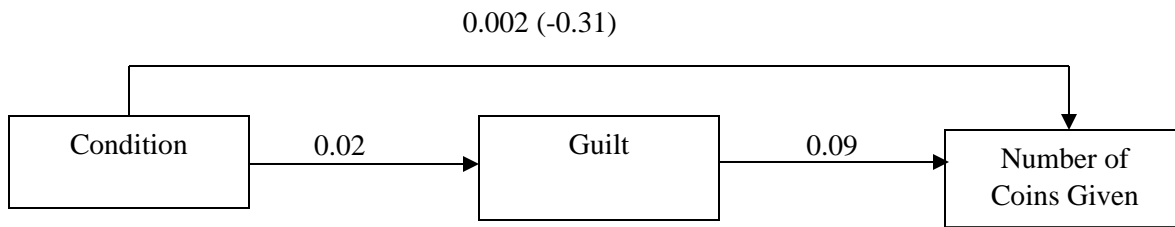


Figure 5. Mediating effect of guilt upon number of coins given.

* $p < 0.05$. * $p < .01$.

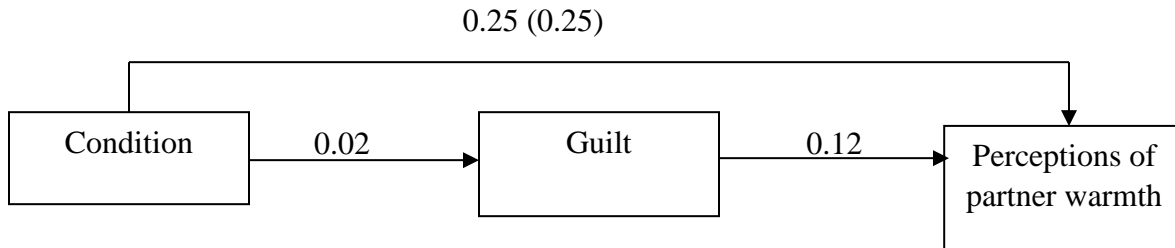


Figure 6. Mediating effect of guilt upon perceptions of partner warmth.

* $p < 0.05$. * $p < .01$.

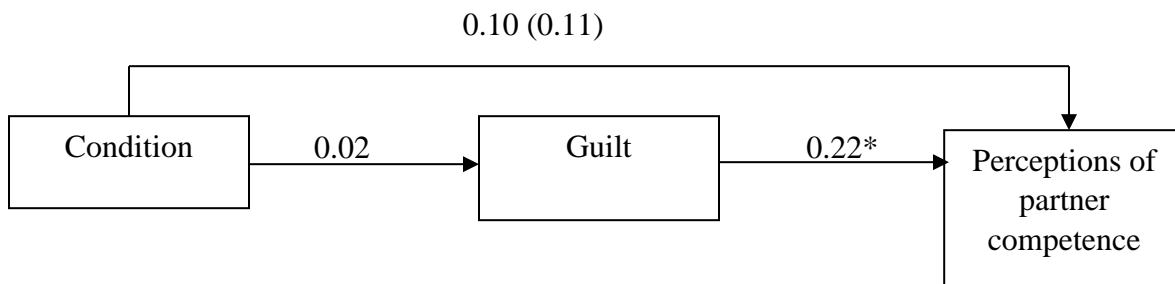


Figure 7. Mediating effect of guilt upon perceptions of partner competence.

* $p < 0.05$. * $p < .01$.

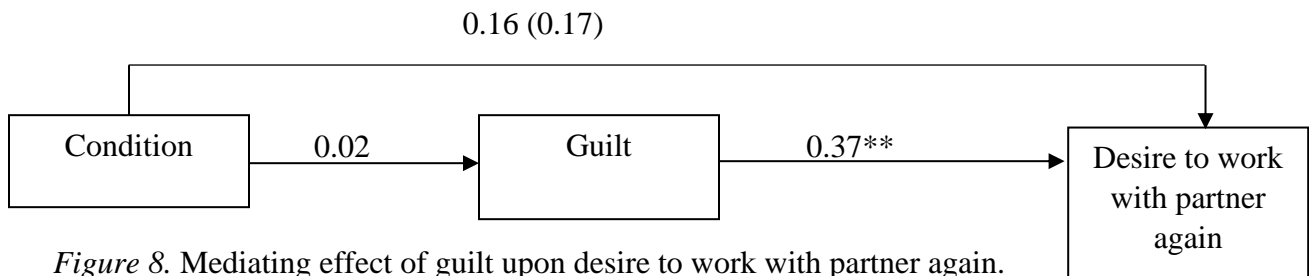


Figure 8. Mediating effect of guilt upon desire to work with partner again.

* $p < 0.05$. * $p < .01$.