How Race Affects Simply Having versus Actually Choosing: Cross-Race Political Discussion Partners

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1. Introduction

The political discussion and deliberation literature focuses on exposure to difference as an important criterion for democratically valuable political talk (e.g., Huckfeldt et al. 2004; Mutz 2006; Schmitt-Beck/Lup 2013). Exposure to difference in political talk (or the lack thereof) also has been a key variable in recent studies of political polarization (Amsalem et al. 2022; Hutchens et al. 2019; Song/Boomgaarden 2017) and the use of social media platforms such as Facebook (Heatherly et al. 2017; Kubin/von Sikorski 2021). The criteria for "difference" on which the vast majority of these studies have centered are party identification, political ideology, candidate choice, or general political opinions (Eveland/Hively 2009; Huckfeldt et al. 2004; Klofstad et al. 2013). Conspicuously absent in much of the work on exposure to political difference is the criterion of race (for an exception see Eveland/Appiah 2021). This is surprising given decades of research in the U.S. that has highlighted the segregation of Whites from Blacks in various forms of social relationships (see Smith et al. 2014), and the fact that race is a relevant factor for many political topics, including but not limited to immigration, affirmative action, health care, crime, drugs, and police treatment of minorities.

Some U.S. studies of exposure to political difference in discussion networks have incorporated exposure to racial difference, but only as one component of a larger measure of "network heterogeneity" that combines it with many other political and demographic factors (e.g., Brundidge 2010; Kim et al. 2013; Scheufele et al. 2004). As recently argued (Hutchens et al. 2018), such embedding means those studies have been unable to speak directly and independently to the implications of exposure to racial difference, which may be correlated with but also may operate differently from other forms of exposure to politically-relevant difference. Furthermore, the implications of various forms of difference may be interdependent and yet asymmetrical. When a White Republican encounters a Black person,

odds are that person is simultaneously encountering racial and partisan difference since few Blacks identify as Republicans. By contrast, if a White Democrat interacts with a Black person, they are likely to share partisanship even though they are encountering difference based on race. In short, these two aspects of political talk – across racial lines and across partisan lines – may relate to one another in complex ways given that partisanship is not equally distributed across races.

Only a few studies have focused specifically upon political talk about and across race (e.g., Appiah et al. 2022; Eveland/Appiah 2021; Mendelberg/ Oleske 2000; Walsh 2007), and even fewer have focused on political talk by ethnic and racial minorities (for one exception, see Carlson et al. 2020). Recent evidence suggests that political talk across racial lines is considerably less frequent than political talk across partisan lines among Whites, but the reverse is true among Blacks (Eveland/Appiah 2021). Unfortunately, absent atypically large data sets or designs with Black oversamples, few studies have sufficient statistical power to fully understand the nature of political networks and selection among Blacks, so our understanding of Black political networks and Blacks' preference regarding interracial interaction about politics is limited (Carlson et al. 2020).

Following a similar approach to other recent work on partisan-based selection (e.g., Shafranek 2021), the present study seeks to isolate the choice dimensions of selecting a cross-race discussion partner. What if the opportunity presented itself to have a political discussion with a cross-race discussion partner who, although different with regards to race, shared a variety of other relevant political or social characteristics? Would more cross-race political interaction be possible if such an environment existed? If so, this may suggest that people are willing to have cross-race political conversations, and so these relatively rare interactions may be driven more by a person's access to various types of difference than their willingness to choose a discussion partner of a different race. This notion is supported by recent evidence that, when given a choice, Whites are willing – in fact more so than Blacks – to select news information about racial outgroups (Appiah et al. 2013) and find it easier to listen to others in cross-race political interactions (Eveland et al. 2020). Additionally, desire for cross-race political discussions may be expanding given that recent findings suggest Blacks and Whites have a growing interest in seeking out information about one another via the media (Appiah 2018) and have more racial outgroup members in their political conversation networks than traditional methods seem to suggest (Eveland et al. 2018). This begs the question, what factors impact

an individual's decision to select a political discussion partner of a different race?

To begin to answer these questions, we report results from a quasi-experimental study, using a large U.S. national sample with a Black oversample. In addition to reporting on their existing cross-race political interactions, respondents were led to believe that as part of the study they would be engaging in an online political conversation with one other person – a stranger. This is a form of political talk that is largely neglected but can be important for democracy (see Schmitt-Beck/Schnaudt 2023). We offered photos of eight individuals as options, counterbalanced by race, gender, and (as best we could) partisanship.[1] This allowed respondents to express their preference to talk with some individuals and not others. We find that Blacks are more likely to have cross-race discussants in their real-world networks, but Whites are more likely to be willing to and even prefer to have cross-race discussants, at least in this online experimental setting.

2. Propinquity and Homophily in Cross-Race Interactions

Research in sociology on cross-race friendships among children and adolescents, and cross-race confidants among adults, consistently finds that U.S. Blacks and Whites interact in largely separate worlds (e.g., Echols/ Graham 2013; Hofstra et al. 2017; Quillian/Campbell 2003; Wimmer/Lewis 2010), with "the vast majority of ties within race" (Smith et al. 2014: 440). This coincides with findings that cross-race political discussions are relatively rare, at least compared to those that cross party lines (Eveland et al. 2018), the latter of which is the focus of most political communication research.

There are multiple potential reasons for observed similarity – regardless of the characteristic in question – in social and political interaction. As Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995) point out in the context of talk across lines of political difference (148-149):

> Members of political majorities and members of political minorities
> choose discussion partners subject to dramatically different sets of op-

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1 The images were initially identified through online searches and came from a variety of public websites. Fifty photos were pilot tested with undergraduates which allowed us to identify photos varying in race and gender for which respondents collectively agreed with the researchers' a priori partisan assessment (Kleinman/Eveland, 2014). More detail is provided in the Method section.

portunities and constraints, but a focus on individual control ignores these environmental contingencies. Second, a failure to isolate choice from supply in the formation of a politically agreeable discussion network results in a failure to examine the contribution of each and, perhaps more important, a failure to examine the manner in which choice responds to supply in the flow of political information.

It would be useful to expand upon these ideas while considering cross-race political talk. First, "propinquity" – essentially, the availability of people with a given characteristic in the accessible environment – can affect exposure to difference. If you do not live near, work or go to school with, have friends who are friends with, or otherwise encounter people from a different race, finding people of a different race with whom to talk about politics will be exceedingly difficult. The flip side of the coin is that if people with a particular characteristic are plentiful in your environment, it will be far easier to select among them to find an ideal – that is, otherwise appealing aside from that one characteristic – partner for political discussion.

Several factors drive propinquity. The first is simple *base rates* of given characteristics – or, people with those characteristics – in the population. Quillian and Campbell (2013) point out that aggregate cross-race friendships will be maximized when the racial groups are of equal size. It is harder to interact, all else equal, with people who have rare characteristics than with people who have common characteristics. This is particularly consequential when we consider interactions between Blacks and Whites. Blacks are a small minority of the U.S. population, and Whites remain a majority.[2] As Blau (1977) argues, this uneven distribution discourages aggregate exposure to difference, but operates more strongly for Whites than Blacks because Blacks on average have more access to Whites than Whites do to Blacks given Whites' wider availability in the population. Thus, *we expect that, when considering existing political discussion network structures that in part reflect the effects of propinquity, Whites will be less likely to have cross-race discussants than Blacks.*

Propinquity also is driven by uneven *spatial distributions* of a given characteristic, regardless of its overall size in a larger population. As Smith and colleagues (2014: 435) note, "demographic sorting along residential, oc-

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2 In 2022, it was estimated that 13.6 percent of the U.S. population identifies as solely Black (vs. multi-racial) vs. 75.8 percent identifying as solely White (vs. multi-racial), according to the U.S. Census. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST04 5222.

cupational, and associational lines creates strong barriers to out-group ties and will affect the rate of homophily in a population." Considerable evidence exists that racial segregation remains a significant factor in the U.S. (Charles 2003; Enos 2017). Not only is there segregation across neighborhoods within a given city, but Blacks are proportionately over-represented in urban areas and under-represented in rural areas (with some exceptions in the South as a legacy of slavery). All of these factors amplify the general U.S. population disparity between Blacks and Whites, and thus decrease the odds of cross-race interactions overall.

Note that such structural features of the environment can affect exposure to difference absent any preference or desire of a given individual to avoid difference or seek out similarity. Although some use the term "homophily" to describe the simple state of similarity (in friendships, discussion, etc.), others have argued that this term should be reserved for the process of seeking out or choosing similarity, and to contrast it with propinquity or availability as a process. Wimmer and Lewis (2010: 595), for instance, note that "distinguishing the effects of availability from homophily has now become mainstream research practice," although Kossinets and Watts (2009) caution that "in the absence of dynamic data, structure-versus-agency debates can be difficult to adjudicate." (438) This is a particular problem in the study of political discussion networks, which typically employs cross-sectional national survey methods that cannot easily distinguish propinquity from homophily (or other "choice") mechanisms. This is especially true of the common name generator approaches to tapping discussion networks, as these methods tend to capture political talk among those structurally closest to respondents, and so those who are also most likely to be similar on a variety of dimensions.

An added challenge exists when characteristics of interest are not randomly distributed (at whatever rate) in the population, but instead their appearance is correlated with the presence of other traits. If those other, correlated traits could also be a characteristic on which people would seek homophily, it can be a challenge to distinguish the target characteristic of the homophily-seeking actions. And, "through such correlations between various attributes (termed 'parameter consolidation' by Blau), different types of homophilies can reinforce each other and produce a cumulative, more marked ingroup preference within each category." (Wimmer/Lewis 2010, 592; see also Blau 1977)

In the U.S., Blacks and Whites differ significantly not only in their political viewpoints (Pew Research Center 2016), but even in their perceptions

of the broader social reality (Gilberstadt 2020). Moreover, changes in the orientations of the two major parties in the U.S. since the 1960s have led the vast majority of Blacks to eschew the Republican party in favor of the Democratic party or political independence (Pew Research Center 2018). Therefore, whereas Whites are roughly evenly distributed across the two major political parties, Blacks are concentrated in the Democratic party. This is a prime example of the notion of parameter consolidation. Seeking homophily on partisanship – a topic the political communication literature has focused upon – is likely to amplify any tendency toward seeking homophily on race, and similarly seeking homophily on race is likely to amplify tendencies toward seeking homophily on partisanship, at least among Blacks.

This pairing of race and partisanship also brings us back to the concept of propinquity and a rarely considered dilemma for those interested in studying exposure to difference in political discussion networks (although see Hutchens et al. 2018). Whites can engage across partisan lines of difference while quite easily maintaining racial similarity, but the vast majority of Blacks must also cross racial lines in order to talk with someone from a different political party because there are very few Black Republicans (Eveland/Appiah 2021). More relevant to our current question, however, in order to cross racial lines (White) Republicans will also typically have to cross partisan lines. Therefore, the problem of finding a "suitable" – otherwise appealing due to similarity on other criteria such as partisanship – cross-race alter for White Republicans is compounded by the rarity of Blacks who share their partisan identification. Thus, *we would expect that, given propinquity mechanisms and a preference for partisan homophily, White Republicans will have a lower likelihood of cross-race political discussion partners in their existing political discussion networks than White Democrats.* However, it is not clear whether the same prediction would apply when the option of talking to a same-party but cross-race political discussant was presented to them.

Based on analysis of Facebook data from students at a particular university, Wimmer and Lewis (2010) demonstrated that "racial homophily (and most of the other attribute-based preferences mentioned above) are dwarfed by the consequences of propinquity mechanisms" (627). Others have highlighted a similarly important role for propinquity in cross-race relationships in the U.S. and beyond (e.g., Echols/Graham 2013; Hofstra et al. 2017). Smith and colleagues (2014) found that demographic changes (i.e., increased population diversity, and therefore increased propinquity)

between 1985 and 2004 in the U.S. led to a modest overall increase in exposure to racial difference in confidant discussion networks – that is, those defined by "important matters" name generators. But there was no evidence in that study of a reduction in homophily over time relative to chance contact. These findings lead us to conclude that both propinquity and homophily (or choice) play important roles in the creation of cross-race political interactions.

Constraints on cross-race political discussion – availability, and the amplification of racial difference with partisan difference in some cases due to parameter consolidation – cannot be easily solved in the real world, and we expect that they play an important role in the amount of cross-race political talk that occurs (or does not occur) in the larger population. But we focus here on an important question: What role does choice play in the population figures of cross-race discussion we have described? Goodreau and colleagues (2009: 122) argue that "experimental data are required to observe the preferences that guide friendship choice; there, preferences may be revealed by design." Shafranek (2021) reported significant effects of both race and partisanship in undergraduate students' roommate preferences when those and other traits were randomized to allow independence in an experimental design. Given this, our study was designed to mitigate issues of propinquity in the formation of political discussion networks so that we could examine the factors that drive choice of same- or opposite-race discussion partners. If we could largely put aside the propinquity constraints on cross-race political talk, would more people engage in cross-race political talk? And, what factors might influence the decision to choose a cross-race political discussant if one could find a suitable individual who shared other relevant traits such as sex and partisanship, while still varying on race?

3. Individual-level Factors Producing Homophily

Recall that homophily is a desire for similarity above and beyond what is produced by availability in the form of propinquity. Although there may be a general tendency toward seeking racial homophily, it is also likely that there are individual differences in seeking it out. For instance, tendencies toward racial homophily – above and beyond propinquity – may actually vary by race.

Rogers and Bhowmik (1970: 531) argue that "Given that members of a dyad cannot be homophilous on all variables, they should be homophilous on as many as are relevant to the situation." Clearly for a political discussion, political preferences are relevant to the situation, and this is why most prior research has focused on those as criteria for homophily. However, race may also be an important, and independent, homophily criterion. According to distinctiveness theory, racial identity is often central to the concept of self among Blacks because, as a numeric minority, race is a key characteristic that makes them stand out (see McGuire et al. 1978; Phinney 1992). This suggests that for Blacks race would be a salient characteristic for selection, regardless of topic of discussion – but perhaps particularly for political discussions given the racial divides in U.S. politics. By contrast, historically most Whites do not necessarily think of themselves as distinctly part of a specific ethnic group and have weak ethnic identity (Phinney 1992), although this may be changing. This should lead Whites to be less likely to use race for discussant selection purposes than Blacks.

Wimmer and Lewis (2010) found that Whites had the lowest level, and Blacks the highest level, of racial homophily in their Facebook networks once propinquity was controlled. This finding is consistent with research on core networks by Smith and colleagues (2014). Wimmer and Lewis (2010: 622) "speculate that those ethnic or racial categories that were or are associated with high levels of discrimination are those that seem to have developed a high degree of internal solidarity, as expressed in high degrees of homophily." Trawalter and Richeson (2008: 1215) also reason that "racial minorities' concerns about being the target of prejudice may trigger anxiety." In an effort to avoid potential racism and therefore to preserve their dignity, self-respect, and psychological well-being, Blacks may try to avoid political talk with Whites when possible.

Quillian and Campbell (2013) offer an additional explanation that relates propinquity to homophily. They suggest that in order to maintain at least some same-race discussants – something that all groups may strive to do – selection must be more actively engaged in among numeric (and thus racial) minorities than majorities due to propinquity decreasing the chance of same-race alters among minority members.[3] This could explain the findings of greater racial selectivity or homophily (once accounting for

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3 It is important to note that in highly racially segregated areas, for instance those with high concentrations of ethnic or racial minorities, finding same race discussants would be a simple matter. The key is defining the boundaries of the population about which

propinquity or chance) among Blacks. But, the flip side of this argument would be that members of the majority (Whites in the larger population) must put forth more active effort to select for heterophily to counteract propinquity and produce a network with at least some exposure to racial difference. Therefore, we expect that, *when propinquity is removed as a factor by design, Blacks will exhibit lower preferences for cross-race political discussion partners than will Whites.*

4. Method

During the summer of 2015, U.S. adult participants were recruited from an online panel by the company Qualtrics. Qualtrics utilizes an invitation-only panel recruitment method to obtain quota-based samples. In addition to the general sample, we had Qualtrics add a Black oversample to be in a better position to estimate the political discussant choices of Blacks. After the oversample was included, we removed multi-racial respondents – that is, those who did not report being either exclusively Black or White. This left us with a total sample size of 798, with an average age of 48.1 (*SD* = 16.1), ranging from 18 to 87 years old. The sample was divided roughly equally by race (56 percent White, 44 percent Black) and sex (50 percent male, 50 percent female). Partisanship was biased toward Democrats (62 percent) compared to Republicans (32 percent) or "neither" (6 percent), based largely on the atypically (but intentionally) large number of Blacks in our sample.[4]

Participants completed a 20-minute online survey. Upon reaching the survey page participants were told (emphasis added):

> This study involves two components. First, you will complete a question-naire that will ask you about with whom and how often you talk about various subjects, which includes being asked to judge and evaluate a series of photographs of potential discussion partners in the second part of the study. *After you upload a photo of yourself to symbolize you to your discussion partner, the second part of the study will be to engage in a ten-minute online discussion.*

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inferences of majority and minority status are drawn. For many people, the community of residence may not coincide with the location of schools, shopping or work.

4 In rough equivalence to U.S. population figures, in our study Whites were 46 percent Democrat and 49 percent Republican, whereas Blacks were 83 percent Democrat and only 10 percent Republican.

This italicized component described above was not actually part of the study, but rather was a deception necessary to lead respondents to believe that their survey responses regarding willingness to talk politics with a stranger would be expected to have real world implications and thus lead to more accurate and honest responses.

At the start of the survey, participants were presented with eight photographs in a 4 (column) x 2 (row) matrix.[5] Six of these eight photographs were selected from a larger pool of photos employed in a pilot study (see Kleinman/Eveland 2014); the remaining two were based on a new, smaller set curated by the researchers to represent Black Republicans. Specifically, an implied[6] White female Democrat (WFD), a Black female Democrat (BFD), a White female Republican (WFR), a Black female Republican (BFR), a White male Democrat (WMD), a Black male Democrat (BMD), a White male Republican (WMR), and a Black male Republican (BMR) were included.[7] *This distribution of photographs was designed to induce orthogonality relative to sex, race, and partisanship, which in the real world are correlated as described in the notion of parameter consolidation. It was also meant to equalize the availability of alters with a wide variety of characteristics to account for propinquity.* Had we relied on "typical" traits, selection on the basis of female sex would also imply selection on Democratic partisanship. The same would be true for selection on the basis of Black race. For instance, in the real world, random selection of eight individuals would produce only one Black person, and that person would very likely be a Democrat, requiring any choice to talk to a Black person also requiring discussion with a Democrat. In the present design, we sacrificed typicality across photographs in order to roughly balance the presence of sex, race, and partisanship "cues" across photographs. This permitted respondents to maintain similarity in the sex and (implied) partisanship of their discussants while simultaneously choosing a discussant of a different race – something not always possible in the real world.

To be clear, we do not know for sure the partisanship or identities of the individuals in these photographs, as they were procured anonymously from

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5 Verbal descriptions of each photograph are presented in the notes of Appendix Table 1.
6 Based on "artifacts" such as clothing (business suit vs. tie-died shirt, uniforms), hair styles, photograph settings (office vs. farm field, presence of American flag) and other even more subjective characteristics that align with partisan stereotypes in the U.S.
7 The WFR photo was not rated for partisanship in the pilot study due to a programming error. In that pilot test a majority (significantly different from chance in all but one case – the BMD) perceived these photos as we had intended in terms of partisanship.

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an online search engine. Instead, visual cues conveyed via dress and other contextual cues were sometimes used to counteract basic demographic cues in the photographs. This would permit, for instance, a Black male to be perceived as a Republican without using a blatant caption stating the person was a Republican.

All photos were of equal size, with the placement of photographs within the matrix randomized. Respondents were given the following instructions:

> The individuals below will be participating in today's study of ONE-ON-ONE online discussion about politics. We want to know which of the following individuals you would be willing to talk to about politics today. Please check the box to the left of each individual *with whom you would be willing to have a discussion.*

Roughly one-third of respondents selected only a single discussant, and 17.3 percent selected all eight ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 2.57$). Immediately following these choices, a new screen was presented that said:

> Among those individuals with whom you agreed to talk about politics, with which person would you most want to have your online discussion? Please click the picture of the ONE individual with whom you most want to have your discussion with…

Responses to these questions were used to construct three of our four key dependent variables. Based on the respondent's self-reported race (limited to Whites and Blacks), we first determined whether a respondent selected *any opposite-race discussant* (out of four opposite-race options) as someone they would be willing to talk to about politics, coded one if yes (66 percent), and otherwise zero. Next, we counted the *number of opposite-race discussants*, which could range from zero to four ($M = 1.51$, $SD = 1.48$). Finally, we assessed if respondents had *preferred an opposite-race discussant*, coded 1 if the preferred discussant was of a different race than the respondent (37 percent).

We view these related, but somewhat different, outcome measures as a sort of continuum of choice. Selecting at least one opposite race discussion partner among four choices is the first step across the threshold of having a cross-race discussion partner; it suggests an openness to racial difference, but that is all. The number (potentially more than one) reflects the next step in the continuum, as it necessarily increases the likelihood (in the present case) of encountering difference. Finally, actually preferring an op-

posite-race discussion partner *over* all of the available same-race discussion partners is the final step in the continuum.

Appendix Table 1 presents the partisanship perceptions from respondents in *this* study, divided by respondent race. Overall, our goal of presenting two opposite-race apparent co-partisans to respondents among the eight photos was a success. To evaluate this in the aggregate (since our outcome measures are aggregate rather than photo-specific, and based only on opposite-race photos), for Black respondents we counted the number out of four White photos they perceived as matching their own partisanship. For White respondents, we counted the number out of four Black photos they perceived as matching their own partisanship. On average, respondents perceived 1.90 (SD = 1.19) opposite-race co-partisans, which is very close to our study design goal of 2.00 out of four (i.e., providing half same- and half opposite-partisanship discussants among the opposite race).

However, as Appendix Table 1 reveals in detail on a photo-by-photo basis, there were some inconsistencies in respondent perceptions of photos relative to our intentions. It was particularly difficult for Black respondents to perceive a (middle-aged) White male – even one dressed in a tie-dyed shirt and bike helmet – as a Democrat (only 50.6 percent did). And, it was hard for White respondents to perceive a Black woman – even one dressed in military garb in front of an American flag – as a Republican (only 50.7 percent did). On the other hand, agreement with our intended communication of partisanship for both Blacks and Whites was 64 percent when averaged across the four opposite-race photos they evaluated. This is within the range of accuracy of interpersonal network members across a number of studies analyzed by Eveland and colleagues (2019).

Nonetheless, there was some racial imbalance in perceptions, such that Blacks perceived on average fewer opposite-race co-partisans (M = 1.56, SD = 1.18) than did Whites (M = 2.15, SD = 1.13). These values are significantly different from one another, and from our target goal of the value 2.00 (all p < .01). On the other hand, 85 percent of respondents perceived *at least* one co-partisan among the opposite-race photos (78 percent Black respondents and 91 percent White respondents), so most respondents had the ability to choose (or prefer) at least one opposite-race discussant with whom they perceived partisan agreement. Nonetheless, the racial disparities in the number of perceived co-partisans, opposite-race photos could affect our test of respondent race as a predictor because Whites on average perceived a greater number of co-partisan options. Therefore, we added the number of perceived opposite-race co-partisans among the photos as a control

variable in each of the models testing the effects of respondent race in selecting photos as discussants.

We also measured a number of political variables relevant to discussant selection. First, and to some degree associated with the concept of propinquity, Wimmer and Lewis (2010; see also Goodreau et al. 2009) argue that research on homophily must first take into account "the degree of sociality, which can be measured using the size of the personal networks." (591) More social individuals – in the present case, defined as those who have larger political discussion networks – are also likely to have greater exposure to racial (Echols/Graham 2013) and political difference, at least in terms of the presence of difference if not the proportion of difference (e.g., Eveland et al. 2018; Mutz 2006). Interestingly, there is some evidence that Blacks have smaller overall social or political networks than Whites (Carlson et al. 2020; Eveland/Appiah 2021; Wimmer/Lewis 2010), and so at minimum network size should be controlled for so that it does not confound racial differences in exposure to cross-race discussants. The respondent's overall *political network size* ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 10.81$) was measured by asking:

> Next, we'd like to ask you a series of questions about your political conversations. When we say political conversations, we mean talk online (email, discussion forums, social media), via phone, or face-to-face about elections, politicians and candidates, and the performance of local, state, and national government. To begin, how many different people did you talk about politics with during the past month?

For analysis, because of the high skewness in this variable, we followed common practice and adjusted the measure (e.g., see Gil de Zúñiga/Valenzuela 2011), in this case by using the square root of network size ($M = 1.76$, $SD = 1.30$).

Building on the work of Jürgen Habermas, Rojas (2008) identifies "understanding" and "strategy" orientations toward conversation. He notes that "someone who talks about politics with an orientation toward reaching understanding – that is, taking into account the point of view of others in conversation and trying to integrate them into a common definition of situations – will grasp the complexity of social issues … and finally will see the potential to work with others…" (Rojas 2008: 459) Eveland and colleagues (Eveland et al. 2020) have empirically connected this concept to the idea of "listening" in the context of race and political talk. Rojas' second dimension, a strategic orientation (which focuses on persuasion and argumentation) might lead individuals to avoid cross-race discussants because

it would likely lead to more contentious interactions. Here we employed a modified version of Rojas' (2008) conversation orientation measure to tap *understanding orientation* with four items (M = 3.82, SD = 0.64; α = .72) and *strategic orientation* with three items (M = 2.99, SD = 0.89, α = .62).

We also asked respondents, "Have you had any discussions about politics with any [Black/White] people in the past month?" with Whites being asked about Blacks, and Blacks being asked about Whites. We used these questions to calculate a summary measure of the respondent (regardless of race) *having an opposite-race alter* in his/her political discussion network (39 percent did), which is a dependent variable in some of our analyses and an independent variable in others.

Finally, political interest may decrease the likelihood of selecting a cross-race discussant. Although political interest and political network size are positively correlated (Eveland et al. 2013), individuals who are more interested are more likely to make the effort to engage in politically-oriented selectivity (Iyengar/Kahn 2009; Shafranek 2021). And, politically-interested individuals may better realize the likely political conflicts that could come with cross-race political discussion. Of course, it is also possible that political interest could drive a desire to have a larger political network generally and be exposed to political difference (Schmitt-Beck/Schnaudt 2023); this could translate to some openness to racial difference. *Political interest* (in "government and politics") was measured on a scale from 1 to 3 (M = 2.45, SD = 0.59).

Our plan for analysis is as follows. Our first set of expectations (and analyses) relate to existing political discussion networks for which propinquity is in operation. We expect that Blacks will be more likely to have exposure to racial difference in their networks than Whites. We also expect that network size and understanding orientations will be positively related to exposure to racial difference, whereas political interest and strategic orientations will be negatively related to exposure to racial difference. When we move next to the choice of discussion partners based on the eight photos, we expect the same results except that Blacks would be less likely than Whites to select cross-race discussants.

5. Results

5.1 Existing Network Exposure to Cross-Race Discussants (Propinquity in Operation)

An initial bivariate analysis demonstrated that, as expected based on the impact of propinquity in social network formation, Whites (31.6 percent) were significantly less likely (χ^2 = 22.536, *df* = 1, *p* < .05) to have an opposite race discussant in their real-world political discussion network than were Blacks (48.1 percent). Table 1 reveals that this finding was robust to a series of additional control variables. Moreover, older respondents and women also were less likely to have opposite-race political discussants than younger and male respondents. Education and political interest, however, were unrelated to having a cross-race political discussant. As expected, those with larger political discussion networks and higher levels of understanding orientation also were more likely to have cross-race discussants in their real-world political discussion networks.

Table 1:   Logit Model Predicting Having an Opposite-Race Discussant (Actual Network)

	Exp(B)	B	SE
Intercept	0.15*	-1.91	0.78
Race (White)	0.39*	-0.94	0.18
Age	0.97*	-0.03	0.01
Education	1.09	0.09	0.10
Sex (female)	0.53*	-0.64	0.18
Political interest	1.12	0.11	0.17
$\sqrt{\text{Political network size}}$	3.08*	1.12	0.12
Understanding orientation	1.35*	0.30	0.15
Strategic orientation	0.98	-0.02	0.10
N = 797			

* = p < .05, two-tailed   # = p < .10, two-tailed

5.2 Selection of Discussant for Purported Discussion Study (Propinquity Controlled by Design)

Table 2 presents the results of the logit model predicting the presence of at least one opposite-race alter among the choices of acceptable political discussion partners.[8] The model reveals, first of all, that the basic control of total number of acceptable alters is a significant predictor. The more acceptable alters a respondent selects overall, the more likely s/he is to consider at least one opposite-race alter to be acceptable. The conceptually-equivalent general tendency in the real-world network – political network size – was also a significant positive predictor of choosing at least one opposite-race alter in the study. It is also true that the more opposite-race co-partisans the respondent perceives, the more likely s/he is to consider at least one of them an acceptable discussant. The only other significant predictor was race; Whites were more likely than Blacks to consider at least one opposite-race alter as acceptable.

Table 2: Logit Model Predicting Having Any Opposite-Race Alter (Potential Network)

	Exp(B)	B	SE
Intercept	0.13*	-2.03	0.93
# of "yes" answers	3.37*	1.22	0.11
Perceived # of co-partisans	1.21*	0.19	0.09
Race (White)	5.92*	1.78	0.25
Age	1.00	0.00	0.01
Education	0.81#	-0.21	0.12
Sex (female)	0.75	-0.28	0.22
Political interest	0.85	-0.17	0.20
$\sqrt{\text{Political network size}}$	1.32*	0.28	0.12
Has opposite-race discussant	1.15	0.14	0.26
Understanding orientation	0.71#	-0.34	0.19
Strategic orientation	1.18	0.16	0.13

N = 748

* = p < .05, two-tailed   # = p < .10, two-tailed

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8 Appendix Figures 1 and 2 present descriptive statistics on the selection of each particular photo by respondent race.

Table 3 examines the predictors of the number of opposite-race alters considered acceptable by respondents, using a negative binomial generalized linear model. Here again, the structural control – this time the number of same-race alters considered acceptable discussants – was a significant positive predictor of the number of opposite-race alters considered acceptable.[9] And, the perceived number of opposite-race co-partisans also positively predicted the number of opposite race alters chosen. Even after these controls, once again Whites were willing to talk to a larger number of opposite-race discussants than Blacks. The estimated marginal means after all controls were applied reveal that Whites averaged 1.60 acceptable opposite-race discussants whereas Blacks averaged 0.83 acceptable opposite-race discussants.

Table 3: Negative Binomial GLM Predicting Number of Opposite-Race Alters (Potential Network)

	Exp(B)	B	SE
Intercept	0.28*	-1.28	0.45
# of same-race alters	1.46*	0.38	0.04
Perceived # of co-partisans	1.12*	0.12	0.04
Race (White)	1.93*	0.66	0.11
Age	1.00	0.00	0.00
Education	0.97	-0.03	0.05
Sex (female)	1.00	0.00	0.10
Political interest	1.08	0.08	0.10
$\sqrt{\text{Political network size}}$	1.08	0.07	0.04
Has opposite-race discussant	1.15	0.14	0.12
Understanding orientation	0.99	-0.01	0.09
Strategic orientation	0.99	-0.01	0.06

N = 748

* = p < .05, two-tailed   # = p < .10, two-tailed

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9 The in-study controls (i.e., total number of alters selected, number of same-race alters selected, and number of opposite-race alters selected) shift from analysis to analysis as the dependent variables shift in order to maintain a similar logic of structural availability as the conceptual control.

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Table 4: Logit Model Predicting Preference for an Opposite-Race Alter (Potential Network)

	Exp(B)	B	SE
Intercept	0.17*	-1.76	0.79
# of opposite-race alters	1.55*	0.44	0.06
Perceived # of co-partisans	1.15#	0.14	0.08
Race (White)	7.08*	1.96	0.21
Age	1.00	0.00	0.01
Education	0.83#	-0.19	0.10
Sex (female)	0.60*	-0.51	0.19
Political interest	0.71#	-0.34	0.17
$\sqrt{\text{Political network size}}$	1.15#	0.14	0.08
Has opposite-race discussant	0.97	-0.03	0.21
Understanding orientation	1.13	0.12	0.16
Strategic orientation	0.99	-0.01	0.11

N = 748

* = p < .05, two-tailed   # = p < .10, two-tailed

Table 4 presents the predictors of preferring an opposite-race discussion partner using a logit regression model. This model largely replicates the prior two. The structural control – the number of opposite-race alters chosen (the dependent variable of the model in Table 3), was a significant positive predictor. The more opposite-race alters a respondent was open to talking politics with, the more likely s/he was to prefer an opposite-race alter as the top discussant choice. The perceived number of opposite-race co-partisans was at best weakly related (*p* < .10) to preferring an opposite race discussant. In this model, females were less likely to prefer an opposite-race alter than males, and those with less political interest, less education, and larger political network sizes were more likely (at *p* < .10) to prefer an opposite-race alter. However, race was the most powerful predictor in this outcome, with Whites more likely than Blacks to prefer an opposite-race alter as a political discussant over a same-race alter. Interestingly, supplementary analyses demonstrate that there is no difference between White Democrats and White Republicans on any of the outcomes above, either

on having Black discussants in the real world or being willing to, selecting more, or preferring a Black discussant in the study context.[10]

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better understand the factors that influence the likelihood of cross-race political discussion. Little work has considered talk about politics across racial divides, despite the heavy emphasis in the literature on cross-party political talk, the strong correlation between race and political viewpoints and perceptions, and the related evidence that Blacks and Whites are limited in other types of cross-race interactions such as friendships. Our study employed a Black oversample so that we had sufficient power to estimate and compare Black and White networks and choices. The study was designed to permit a disentanglement of structural (propinquity) and choice (homophily) factors in having cross-race political discussants. As a baseline, we also examined data on actual exposure to a cross-race political discussant in the presence of propinquity mechanisms.

Our results largely comport with expectations derived mostly from the literature on homophily in networks. As expected, based on the propinquity mechanism that drives much of network construction, self-reports of having a cross-race discussant within their *political discussion networks* revealed that Whites are considerably less likely to talk politics with a Black person than Blacks are to talk politics with a White person. Due to their proportions in the population, Blacks encounter more Whites than Whites encounter Blacks, and this availability alone should increase the likelihood that Blacks have White political discussion partners. Also as expected, respondents who had larger political discussion networks and those who subscribed to an "understanding" orientation toward political discussion (akin to a tendency to be a good listener) were more likely to have cross-race discussants. But, counter to our expectations, White Republicans were no less likely to have real world Black discussants than were White Democrats, despite the fact that White Republicans would have far less in common politically with most Blacks than would White Democrats. This perhaps surprising finding is actually consistent with recent national survey data (Eveland/Appiah 2021).

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10 Contact the first author for details of these analyses.

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Moving on to respondent indications of willingness and preference for particular purported discussants as part of the study, we see that once propinquity is controlled by design (as well as using a perceptual measure of available number of opposite-race co-partisans), some findings shift considerably while others remain the same. Under the guise of having a brief online political discussion, study participants were given the opportunity to select possible discussion partners from a number of photos featuring equal numbers of Blacks and Whites, and males and females, with each pairing (e.g., two Black males, two White females) possessing visual cues suggestive of variation in partisanship. Whites were significantly more likely to indicate willingness to talk to at least one cross-race discussant, express a willingness to talk with a significantly larger number of cross-race discussants, and were significantly more likely to prefer a cross-race over same-race discussant than were Blacks. Although various measures of network size continued to show up as significant predictors of selecting a cross-race discussant in many models, respondent race was a strong predictor across the three dependent measures in the discussant selection part of the study. Yet again, additional analyses suggested that White partisanship played no role in willingness or preference to talk to a Black person about politics.

Our key findings hold despite accounting for propinquity by design – by offering respondents multiple and equal cross-race opportunities combined with variation in and rough balance of partisanship – and controlling for perceptions of propinquity to account for inconsistencies in partisan perceptions by our respondents. Figure 1 provides some tangible context for the racial differences across the three dichotomous outcomes and allows us to think about homophily relative to what could reflect random choice through actual heterophily.

In our sample about half of Blacks have at least one White political discussant in their network, and three-quarters are willing to talk to at least one of the four White options we provided, although only 13 percent of Blacks ultimately preferred one of those White discussants over one of the four Black discussants. Thus, among Blacks, the choice findings suggest homophily to one degree or another. By comparison, only about a quarter of Whites have a Black political discussant in their network. However, nearly all (94 percent) were willing to talk to at least one of the four Black discussants we offered, and roughly half actually preferred one of the four Black discussants to any of the White discussant options. The latter two findings, although optimistic from the perspective of seeing value in exposure to difference, still seem closer to random choice rather than heterophily.

For instance, with 52 percent of Whites preferring a Black discussant when they could choose between four Whites and four Blacks, amounts to the result of a coin toss rather than any strong tendency toward heterophily. But the absence of homophily in the presence of choice is encouraging.

Figure 1: Estimated marginal means of having and choosing opposite-race political discussants.
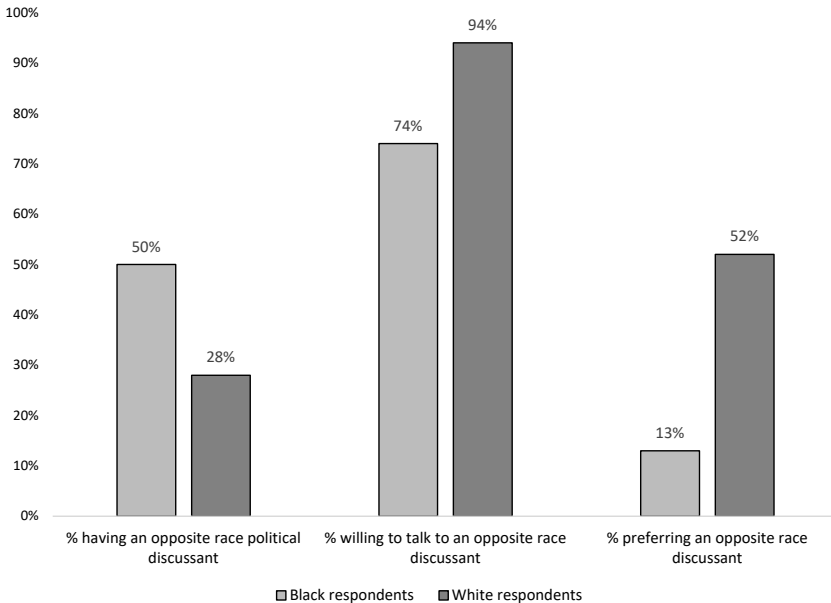
Note: Values are derived from the analyses reported in Tables 1, 2, and 4. Differences between Blacks and Whites are statistically significant in all cases.

Although our data cannot answer the "why" question, there are a number of theoretical explanations that can help interpret these findings. First, in the U.S. Blacks live in a "real" world in which they are numeric minorities. Unlike Whites, the social structure effectively forces Blacks to experience racial difference on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, half of our Black respondents reported already having at least one White political discussion partner in their real-world network. But being pushed into cross-race discussions is not the same as preferring them or seeking them out. Nonetheless, most Blacks in our study were willing to talk politics with at least one of the White options provided.

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Being a numeric minority also increases the salience of race (McGuire et al. 1978), making it more likely that Blacks would engage in race-based selection processes – even in news articles (Appiah et al. 2013) – than Whites, for whom race is less salient. Moreover, Blacks have suffered – initially from slavery, and since that time from prejudice, racism, and discrimination – at the hands of the White majority. This past personal exposure and knowledge of historical exposure may lead Blacks to be more likely to assess new conversation experiences with White discussion partners as potentially threatening and harmful – especially if conversations may verge into race-related topics. It is likely that Blacks do not want to experience the emotional pain, and the shifting of blame Whites are likely to direct at them during racially sensitive conversations. Blacks still experience what have been termed "racial micro-aggressions" on a regular basis. Micro-aggressions are often subtle digs that occur during interactions that cumulatively take a toll on Blacks via stress and psychological affliction, and cause them to be particularly sensitive to further attacks, a phenomenon labeled ethnocultural allodynia (Comas-Díaz/Jacobsen 2001). In an effort to avoid potential racism, preserve their dignity, self-respect, and psychological well-being, Blacks may avoid sensitive interactions such as political discussions with Whites when they can. Indeed, after our data collection Reni Eddo-Lodge (2017) published the book *Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race*, and her sentiment has been repeated in other public commentary since then. This desire to avoid cross-race interactions may be true even if Blacks perceive shared co-partisanship because they may still believe co-partisan Whites may not be sensitive or open with race-related aspects of political conversations.

Rather than wonder why so few Blacks preferred to talk about politics with an opposite-race alter, we instead can ask why roughly half of Whites did. This may be a reflection of simple random selection; a coin toss as the driver of selection in our choice study would have produced this finding. But, if one assumes homophily would otherwise be in operation in discussant selection, there may have been forces driving homophily down among Whites. One possibility is that Whites may have seen this study as a "safe" opportunity to talk to someone who was racially different from them, something that they may not have many other opportunities to do. Dys-Steenbergen, Wright, and Aron (2016) refer to the concept of self-expansion, which may be what is driving some of Whites' willingness to have a Black discussion partner. A largely anonymous, brief, and online discussion with a stranger of a different race might have been viewed as a rare

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chance to talk to and learn without fear of lasting relational repercussions if things went poorly.

Our findings also fit in with the concept of cultural voyeurism (Appiah 2018), which notes that recent changes may have increased the interest in and desire for understanding and interaction across racial boundaries. Events in the U.S. since we gathered our data reveal a potentially growing openness among at least some Whites to listen to, engage, and support Blacks in the political domain. Some polling suggests significant changes in recent years (Cohn/Quealy 2020) that our data may have captured early on. Whites might be more cautious and less likely to have a political conversation with a Black neighbor, co-worker, or family member, for fear that what they said would be offensive and harm a long-standing relationship beyond repair. But, if a random stranger in an online space was hurt by something the White person said, they may see this as having little real import.

These explanations are both race-specific, and race-centric. Other research has suggested that greater homophily-seeking tendencies may be less a function of particular characteristics of racial subgroups than of the structural position of those groups relative to overall population size. Any group in a relatively small numerical minority may engage in greater effort to seek out interactions and friendships with others like them because, absent that effort, they might experience too many "difference" interactions by chance alone. One study, for instance, found that when White students were a small minority in their schools, they actually demonstrated greater homophily seeking than did Blacks when Blacks were in a similarly-sized minority (Goodreau et al. 2009). When their group was roughly half the student population, however, Whites and Blacks had roughly equal tendencies toward selecting same race friends. Given these competing theoretical accounts, and the limitations of our data, future research may need to pay closer attention to the particular social contexts in which Blacks and Whites live – their neighborhoods, jobs, and associations – to fully account for their preferences for same- or cross-race political discussants.

Another question that arises relates to the lack of partisan differentiation, among Whites, in both actual exposure and willingness to be exposed to Blacks in the context of political conversation. If there is no partisan difference in cross-race exposure, why are White Democrat and Republican viewpoints on race and racial progress so different (e.g., Pew Research Center 2019)? Wouldn't intergroup contact theory (Allport 1954) suggest this exposure would in some way equalize racial viewpoints across the political parties? We suspect the answer here is partly related to the nature

of actual interactions that take place compared to their simple presence. Do the interactions meet the expectations of contact theory, particularly with regards to being around common goals and intergroup cooperation? Given the prevalence of Black Democrats (compared to Black Republicans) in the real world, we suspect the requisite characteristics of interactions would be more likely among White Democrats than White Republicans, suggesting that only those White Democrats would accrue the positive outcomes predicted by intergroup contact theory. This would of course align with more pro-Black racial attitudes among Democrats than Republicans.

7. Limitations and Future Directions

Despite this study's strengths, there are also a number of weaknesses. A key weakness is that, like other studies with similar goals in studying social selection choices (e.g., Huber/Malhotra 2017; Shafranek 2021), we did not employ a probability sample, nor one formally representative of the U.S. adult public. Given the intentional over-representation of Blacks in our study, it is possible that some predictors of exposure to racial difference (e.g., network size, sex) may be different from a general population survey if the influence of those predictors varies by race. On the other hand, part of this non-representativeness was also a strength. Had we not incorporated a Black oversample, we (like many others) would have had insufficient statistical precision to compare Blacks and Whites and to describe the political discussion networks of Blacks. Nonetheless, a better approach would have been to add a Black oversample to a representative national survey. In a recent representative national sample with an additional Black oversample (Eveland/Appiah 2021), we also found that those with larger discussion networks and Blacks were more likely to have opposite-race discussants in their political discussant networks, whereas partisanship was not a significant predictor. This offers some confidence that the findings of the present study, because of our sample, are not particularly anomalous regarding the predictors of having an opposite-race discussant in one's political discussion network.

A second limitation is our inability to ensure that all of our eight photographs were equivalent on the myriad factors that might affect people choosing them as political discussion partners. Perceptual accuracy can vary due to individual differences across perceivers (see Eveland/Hutchens

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2013), and it would seem exceedingly difficult to identify photographs (of real people) who would vary on the three key traits here (race, partisanship, and gender) while at the same time not varying on multiple other perceptual factors that might influence discussant choice.[11] The only way to vary race, gender, and (presumed) partisan affiliation in a study such as this based on photographs would have been to digitally alter the same photographs to imply difference in race (by changing features such as skin tone and possibly hair), sex (perhaps by changing hair or facial features), and partisanship (by altering clothing or other artifacts). Nonetheless, this would also have required a switch to a between-subjects design since such subtle alterations of the same photographs to capture racial, sex, and partisan variation would be obvious if those photographs were shown together in a setting in which subjects had to choose among them.

Although text-based descriptions used in prior research on roommate or dating partner selection produce cleaner stimuli without these problems (Huber/Malhotra 2017; Shafranek 2021), and we have gained valuable insights from such studies, they are less generalizable to real world face-to-face interactions with strangers as studied by others (e.g., Schmitt-Beck/ Schnaudt 2023). In such settings most people do not wear their partisanship and political viewpoints explicitly on their sleeves, and real-world perceptions of partisanship or candidate preference are not always particularly accurate, even among those already part of an individual's social network (Eveland et al. 2019). In the spirit of triangulation of methods, all of which have drawbacks and limitations, we chose a different route. That is, we sought greater realism by having respondents "perceive" the partisanship of the alters because this is what – in most real-world stranger interaction settings – people must do. People are not explicitly told the gender and race of someone; rather, they "see" it in social media profile pictures, or in face-to-face interactions at a bus stop or a social gathering. And, prior research (e.g., Rule/Ambady 2010) has shown that people infer partisanship (rightly or wrongly) based on things like gender, age, or other visual charac-

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11   Indeed, our study provides evidence (see Appendix Table 1) that Blacks and Whites differed significantly in their partisan perceptions of seven of eight identical photographs. On the other hand, significant racial differences in perceptions of friendliness (2 of 8), open-mindedness (3 of 8), intelligence (1 of 8), and morality (1 of 8) of those same photographs were far less common. Moreover, all photos averaged above the midpoint for all of the traits other than partisanship among both Blacks and Whites with only one exception: the WMR, who averaged below the midpoint for both Blacks and Whites on the trait of open-mindedness (see Appendix Table 2).

teristics. We "see" these things before we decide to talk to someone, and use them as criteria to decide whether or not to talk to them. Rather than potentially highlight the salience of the explicitly communicated traits as we might have done in a study using stimuli other than photographs, in our approach partisanship (and race, and gender) was entirely implicit prior to the supposed "selection" of political discussion partners. That is, we did not signal to respondents what factors they should or should not consider; they could use whatever was available to them implicitly (which could go far beyond race, gender, and partisanship), or even choose randomly. Designs using text-based descriptions have different (and complimentary) advantages and disadvantages. Of course, additional research employing alternative strategies can help to ensure that the particular photos, and our particular design in this study, did not produce atypical results.

A third limitation is possible social desirability bias in responding, either across the board or specifically among the White respondents. Several factors are likely to mitigate this, however. First, online surveys such as the sort we used are less likely than other survey administration modes to produce socially desirable responses (Kreuter et al. 2008) because (a) there is no interaction with another human to signal disapproval, even subtly, and (b) the survey was anonymous. Moreover, balancing race, gender, and (roughly) partisanship among the potential discussants in a repeated measures design permitted respondents to choose as many or as few discussants as they would like. And, since we did not signal with any explicit textual references that certain categories of people were salient for selection (as might have happened if we had explicitly provided textual references to race, gender, and partisanship for respondents to use in making their selection), such social desirability should be reduced. We also employed a deception that suggested that reports of discussant preference would have real world implications – respondents would have a conversation with one of the people they considered acceptable discussants – which would add a real cost to providing an untrue but socially desirable response. Finally, if White respondents offered socially desirable responses to the potential discussant questions, it would stand to reason that they also would have engaged in the same socially desirable behavior in reporting whether or not they had real world cross-race discussion partners (i.e., the classic "sure, I have a Black friend"). This is particularly true given that they would know there was no cost to lying about their real-world network since we could not confirm this report. But, the findings of racial difference were opposite for real world and study-based discussion, with Blacks more likely to have

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opposite race discussants than Whites but Whites more likely to prefer an opposite race discussant than Blacks. All of these suggest that our findings are at least not entirely the result of socially desirable responding among Whites.

A fourth limitation is the relatively limited political controls that we employed. Although we accounted for political network size and interest, other political variables may be related to race and the willingness to engage in what might be seen as "dangerous" political discussions. For instance, research (e.g., Merolla et al. 2013) suggests that Blacks have lower internal political efficacy than Whites, and such efficacy (or the political knowledge that underpins it) may bolster one's willingness to talk politics (although not necessarily other topics) across racial lines. Future research should expand these sorts of controls, and also consider them as possible mediators.

A final limitation of this study is that we cannot be sure if the results hold in the current U.S. political climate or in non-U.S. settings. Our data were gathered in 2015, at a time of heightened racial salience in the U.S., as the nascent "Black Lives Matter" movement was drawing attention to racism and heightening inter-racial conflict. Since then, the campaign, election, and presidency of Donald Trump continued to stoke racial animus. Today, there is a former Black Democratic Senator serving as Vice President and a Black U.S. Senator running for the Republican nomination for president. On the other hand, the racial diversity in the coalition supporting protests (Scott 2020) following the death of yet another Black man – George Floyd – at the hands of the police in spring 2020, and increasing congruency between perceptions of many White and Black Americans about matters of race (Cohn/Quealy 2020), may have shifted the dynamics reported here. And of course, our study does not address other racial or ethnic differences; future research should examine other comparisons such as White non-Hispanic vs. Hispanic interactions, where the partisan diversity among Hispanics is much greater than among Black Americans.

Moreover, we should consider the implications of these findings for other countries that do not have the historical and modern racial dynamics present in the U.S. Might our findings apply as well in Western Europe with regard to recent or longer-standing immigrants from Africa or the Middle East? Could these findings apply with regard to religious background of Christians vs. Jews or Muslims? How might these comparisons play out in multi-party settings rather than the two-party U.S. system? Only additional research in many different contexts can demonstrate if our findings hold,

are amplified, or even reversed in different social milieus or in other national or political contexts.

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