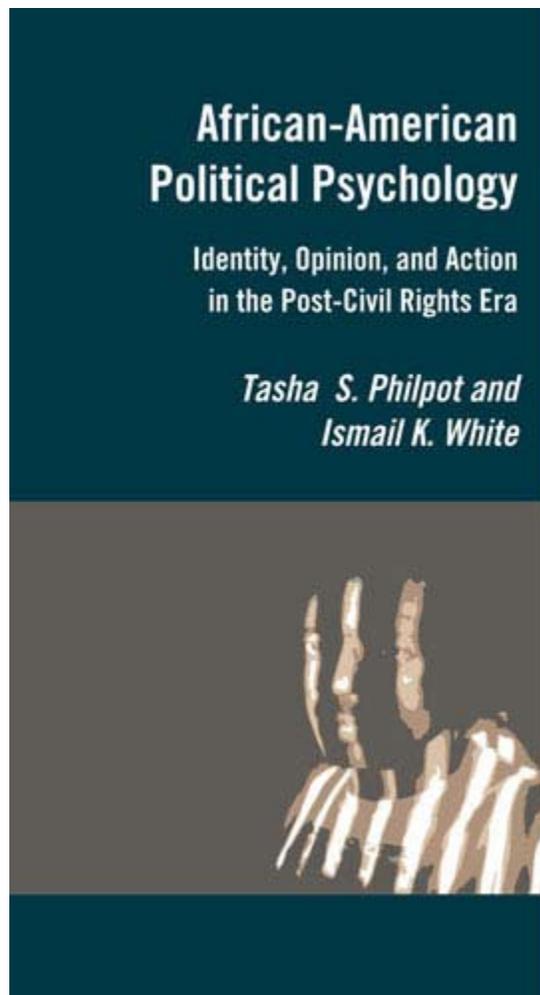


**Beliefs in Black and White:
How Race Influences Americans' Perceptions of Themselves, Their Racial Group, and
Their National Group**

Roy J. Eidelson
Eidelson Consulting

Mikhail Lyubansky
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign



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Over the past century, African Americans have made significant progress on a broad range of fronts, including life expectancy, employment and income, education, and political representation (e.g., Sears et al. 2000; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1999). Moreover, the rapidly growing multicultural movement (e.g., Fowers and Richardson, 1996) has signaled a new *zeitgeist* in terms of racial and ethnic relations. For arguably the first time in U.S. history, there is widespread recognition that none of the nation's many racial and ethnic groups are inherently or culturally superior to any other (National Opinion Research Center, 2002a). Furthermore, the multicultural movement has successfully transplanted into the mainstream the previously radical notion that cultural diversity ought to be not merely tolerated but rather encouraged and celebrated.

Nevertheless, multiculturalism has hardly been a panacea. Despite the mainstreaming of egalitarian ideology, Blacks¹ continue to lag behind Whites on most important measures associated with life quality in the United States. For example, a significantly lower percentage of Blacks (48%) than Whites (72%) own their own home (U.S. Census Bureau 2002a), and similar discrepancies are evident in health insurance coverage (Bennefield 2002), education (U.S. Census Bureau 2003), job income (U.S. Census Bureau 2002b), and job satisfaction (Riley 2000;

¹ We use "Black" and "African American" interchangeably throughout the article to refer to a socially constructed racial group or identity and recognize that this group, like all other racial groups in the United States, is ethnically heterogeneous.

Tuch and Martin 1991). The cause of this pervasive inequality cannot be reduced to a single factor. However, it seems self-evident that racial inequality will persist until racism and race-based discrimination are fully eliminated (see Glick and Fiske 2001, for a recent theoretical formulation of modern prejudice) and Whites no longer derive benefits from their racial status (e.g., McIntosh 1998).

Not surprisingly, Black and White Americans continue to have vastly different perceptions regarding the realities of racial inequality. For example, according to national surveys conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), 66% of Blacks but only 34% of Whites thought that racial inequality in jobs, income, and housing was primarily the result of discrimination (Schuman et al. 1997). Without doubt, the different life experiences of the two sides of the color line contribute heavily to this discrepancy. However, it is also significant that Whites tend to locate racism in color-consciousness (and therefore see “color-blindness” as the solution)², whereas Blacks are more likely to see racism as a system of power and privilege and to consider the affirmation of racial difference (i.e., racial identity) as a core element of their historical and present experience (Hughes and Tuch 2000; Omi and Wynant 1994).

² Interestingly, while those subscribing to the color-blind approach may be well intentioned, there is growing evidence that even individuals who explicitly disavow prejudice may unconsciously hold negative attitudes and stereotypes about members of an out-group (for a review, see Greenwald and Banaji 1995). Not surprisingly, there is also considerable evidence that a color-blind approach actually leads to a perpetuation of group inequalities (for a review, see Brewer and Brown 1998).

Three Levels of Identity

One potentially fruitful avenue for illuminating the underpinnings of this apparent perceptual divide between the races is to incorporate psychological approaches that recognize the *multiple* identities through which Blacks and Whites filter their experiences. Of particular value may be the critical distinction made by social identity theorists (e.g., Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986) between personal identity and social identity. Personal identity refers to the individual's sense of self derived from his or her personal characteristics and interpersonal relationships. At this level, each African American or White American is viewed as a distinct individual, without consideration for characteristics that members of the same group might hold in common.

In contrast to personal identity, social identity refers to an individual's sense of self derived from his or her membership in one or more groups. Most people have multiple social identities, reflecting their identification with more than one group (e.g., Roccas and Brewer 2002). In this chapter, we are interested in two specific social identities: one based on racial group and the other based on national group identification. The former quite clearly represents the primary separation between Blacks and Whites and the predominant focus of much research on race relations. On the other hand, the latter represents an important shared or "superordinate" identity for Blacks and Whites—as Americans.

An individual's racial and national identities can vary in the extent to which they are comfortably aligned or, alternatively, in conflict. In this regard, for African Americans the concept of "double consciousness" is long-standing, and it refers in part to the challenges posed by the need to negotiate their Black and American identities in a social context that sometime pits one against the other (Du Bois 1903; Lyubansky and Eidelson 2005). Less attention has been

given to a possible parallel dilemma for White Americans because they are generally less likely to see themselves in racial terms and therefore to be relatively unaware of their own racial socialization and privilege (McIntosh 1998). However, recent work investigating the rise of “White nationalism” in the United States (e.g., Swain 2002) suggests that race is already an important distinct source of identity for some members of the majority group. Perhaps more importantly, Winant’s (1997) analysis of the “new politicization of whiteness” suggests that white identity may be becoming increasingly more salient for all whites, even as the identity itself has become confused and contradictory, holding both the legacy of white supremacy and the multicultural ideal of recognizing and valuing difference.

In this chapter, we were interested in examining the extent to which each of these three separate levels of identity—personal identity, racial group identity, and national group identity—contribute to perceptual differences in the ways that Blacks and Whites understand the world. This question is of much more than mere academic interest. A better understanding of where the divergences and convergences in perceptions lie may help to determine how best to bridge and repair the racial divide.

Five Belief Domains

As targets for our three-level exploration of Black-White differences in perception, we selected the five key belief domains that Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) have identified as spanning the personal and group contexts because they are simultaneously fundamental to the daily and existential pursuits of individuals and pivotal to the central concerns and shared narratives of groups. These five domains revolve around issues of *vulnerability*, *injustice*, *distrust*, *superiority*, and *helplessness*. Each belief has been described in detail elsewhere

(Eidelson and Eidelson 2003), so here we offer only a brief description of its particular relevance for Blacks and Whites in the United States today.

The vulnerability belief, whether applied to one's personal world or to the circumstances of one's group, is characterized by the conviction that the world is a dangerous and risky place, where safety and security are difficult to obtain and catastrophic loss lurks on the horizon (e.g., Beck, Emery, and Greenberg 1985). Vulnerability-related concerns have been a centerpiece of the post-9/11 environment in the United States, finding expression in heightened perceptions of both personal and national threat (e.g., Eidelson and Plummer 2005; Huddy et al. 2002). At the same time, threat perceptions continue to play a key role in the context of racial group competition between Blacks and Whites (e.g., Bobo and Hutchings 1996). From a different vulnerability perspective, worries about assimilation and the loss of group distinctiveness (e.g., Brewer 1991) also appear as important features of the contemporary African American narrative.

The injustice belief is based on the individual's perceptions of being personally victimized and mistreated by others or the view that ingroup members receive undeserved, substandard, and unjust outcomes, perhaps due to a biased or rigged system created by a more powerful outgroup (e.g., Horowitz 1985). This injustice mindset is also frequently linked to a historical perspective that emphasizes past episodes or periods of abuse and exploitation at the hands of others, which certainly characterizes the history of slavery in the United States. Experiences and perceptions of mistreatment persist for many African Americans, particularly in relation to discrimination in key areas such as housing (e.g., Massey and Denton 1993). At the same time, grievances are common among Whites who object to policies such as affirmative action designed to promote racial equality (e.g., Bobo and Kluegel 1993).

The distrust belief focuses on the presumed hostility and malicious intent of other individuals or other groups. In reference to the personal world, this mindset may range from a predisposition toward suspicion and anticipated deceit to, in the extreme, outright paranoia. At the group level, the conviction that outsiders harbor malevolent designs toward the ingroup is sufficiently widespread that “dishonest” and “untrustworthy” are considered to be central elements in the universal stereotype of outgroups (Campbell 1967; LeVine and Campbell 1972). In the U.S., heightened suspicion of non-Americans has characterized the immediate post-9/11 environment, while interpersonal distrust between Blacks and Whites represents a long-standing feature of race relations in this country. Similarly, many African Americans also view mainstream institutions with suspicion, including law enforcement and the judicial system (Schuman et al. 1997).

The superiority belief revolves around the conviction that the individual or the ingroup is morally superior, chosen, entitled, or destined for greatness—and the corresponding view that others are contemptible, immoral, and inferior (e.g., LeVine and Campbell 1972). This belief has been used to explain, legitimize, and ruthlessly enforce ingroup status advantages (e.g., Sidanius 1993), often via political entrepreneurs’ selective recounting of the ingroup’s history and embellished narratives of accomplishments (e.g., Brown 1997). For the United States, the 9/11 terrorist attacks brought to the fore a national narrative describing a battle of “good versus evil” (e.g., Eidelson and Plummer 2005). At the racial level, this belief domain was central to the historical institution of slavery, built in part upon assumptions of White superiority and Black inferiority. More recent decades have witnessed movements by both races to elevate and protect their unique cultures. “Black is beautiful” emerged as a slogan to promote pride in African Americans and to overcome still-prevalent negative stereotypes, even as many “non-prejudiced”

whites continue to endorse the belief that poverty and other forms of racial inequity exist in large part due to Blacks' cultural inferiority (Kluegel 1990).

Finally, the helplessness belief (e.g., Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale 1978; Buchanan and Seligman 1995) refers to the conviction that the individual or the ingroup is unable to favorably influence or control events and outcomes. This belief plays a prominent role in different types of group mobilization. Since an effective social movement is inherently risky and depends upon the promise of some reasonable likelihood of success (e.g., Brewer and Brown 1998; Gamson 1992; Homer-Dixon 1999), organized political mobilization is severely hampered—while extremist activity may be simultaneously facilitated—when group members perceive their ingroup as helpless to improve circumstances by working within the system. The nation's retaliatory military action in Afghanistan in response to the 9/11 attacks was viewed in part as a demonstration that the United States was not and would never be a helpless target (e.g., Eidelson and Plummer 2005). At the same time, helplessness may indeed be salient at the racial level for many Blacks, given that efforts to achieve racial equality have faced significant obstacles, particularly in regard to education and income (U.S. Census Bureau 2002b; 2003), as well as in the criminal justice system (Wagner 2005).

The Current Study

In the exploratory study reported here we surveyed Black and White Americans to determine whether their beliefs in these five domains converged or diverged at each of the three different levels of identity. We posed four inter-related research questions:

1. *Personal Identity: Do Blacks and Whites differ in the extent to which they see their own individual lives as characterized by personal vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority, and*

helplessness? We expected that group differences based on personal identity, if any, would be smaller than those based on racial group identity. In particular, differences might be muted if Black and White respondents evaluated their circumstances primarily in comparison to their own fellow ingroup members, as suggested by research on social comparison and the person-group discrepancy effect (e.g., Festinger 1954; Postmes et al. 1999).

2. *Racial Group Identity: Do Blacks and Whites differ in the degree to which they hold these five beliefs about their respective racial groups?* Here we expected significant race group differences because beliefs about vulnerability, injustice, distrust, and helplessness all capture important components of the Black experience as a disadvantaged minority in the United States. In the case of superiority, it also seemed likely that Blacks would express greater racial pride, both in light of their presumed stronger racial identity and the greater stigma associated with Whites expressing beliefs about racial group superiority.

3. *National Group Identity: Do Blacks and Whites differ in how strongly they hold these five beliefs in regard to their national group identity as Americans?* We expected that group differences based on national group identity, if any, would be smaller than those based on racial group identity, precisely because this identity is shared by both racial groups. At the same time, to the extent that beliefs about one's racial group influence beliefs about one's national group, some differences between Blacks and Whites might indeed appear.

4. *Are beliefs in these five domains linked to other important individual difference variables?* We recognized that beliefs at all three identity levels might be related to other individual characteristics for one or both racial groups (e.g., see National Opinion Research Center 2002b; 2002c). Therefore, we also examined the significance of age, gender, level of

formal education, family income, political orientation, religiosity and strength of group identification in relation to the five belief domains.

Data and Methodology

Surveys were completed in April 2002 by prospective jurors waiting possible empanelling at a municipal courthouse in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. On four occasions over the course of a month, volunteers were recruited in a large courthouse waiting room and were invited to anonymously fill out a 20-minute survey for which each respondent received a candy bar as a token of appreciation for his or her participation. Approximately one-half of those present each day agreed to participate. Only those respondents who identified their racial/ethnic group as “African American/Black” or “Caucasian/White” and their national group as “American” were included in the data analyses (15 respondents did not meet these criteria; another 16 were excluded because they did not complete the survey). This resulted in an overall sample size of 216, comprising of 100 self-identified Black Americans³ and 116 self-identified White Americans.⁴

³ This subsample of Black Americans was used in a previously published study about Black double consciousness (Lyubansky and Eidelson 2005).

⁴ Of the Black participants, 29% were male and 71% were female; for the White sample, 47% were male and 53% were female. The average ages of the Black and White samples were 40.53 years ($SD = 12.49$) and 39.71 years ($SD = 12.38$) respectively. The distribution on highest educational level attained for the Black participants was 18% graduate work, 17% college degree, 35% some college, 29% high school, and 1% no formal education; for the White sample these percentages were 24% graduate work, 24% college degree, 26% some college, and 26%

The Individual-Group Belief Inventory (IGBI; Eidelson 2002; 2009) was used to measure respondents' personal beliefs about their personal worlds, their racial group, and their national group in regard to issues of vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority, and helplessness. The complete IGBI is designed to measure each of these five belief domains at three levels of analysis: (1) beliefs about the personal world (e.g., "Other people are often unfair to me"), (2) beliefs about the ingroup (e.g., "I believe other groups are often unfair to my group"), and (3) perceptions of the ingroup's collective worldviews (e.g., "My group believes that other groups are often unfair to it"). At each level, each belief is measured by three-items endorsed on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (5). The respondent's score for each belief scale is the arithmetic sum of the three items measuring that belief.

In this study we did not include the third level items (i.e., perceptions of collective worldviews). In addition to the personal world items, we included two versions of the personal beliefs about the ingroup items (one set for the racial group and one set for the national group). Sample items from each three-item IGBI scale measuring respondent beliefs about the personal world are "My safety and security are uncertain" [Vulnerability], "Other people criticize me more than they should" [Injustice], "Other people will try to deceive me if given the chance" [Distrust], "I am superior to other people in many ways" [Superiority], and "I have very little control over my future" [Helplessness]. Parallel IGBI items measuring beliefs about the racial high school. Family income distribution for the Black sample was 27% less than \$30,000, 52% between \$30,000-\$75,000, and 21% greater than \$75,000; the corresponding percentages for the White sample was 15% less than \$30,000, 48% between \$30,000-\$75,000, and 37% greater than \$75,000.

group and the national group are “I believe my (racial/ethnic or national) group’s safety and security are uncertain” [Vulnerability], “I believe my (racial/ethnic or national) group is criticized by other groups more than it should be” [Injustice], “I believe that other groups will try to deceive my (racial/ethnic or national) group if given the chance” [Distrust], “I believe that my (racial/ethnic or national) group is superior to other groups in many ways” [Superiority], and “I believe that my (racial/ethnic or national) group has very little control over its future” [Helplessness].

Group identification was measured using six items (with five-point Likert-type scales ranging from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*) adapted from Brown et al. (1986). For the racial group identification scale these items read: “I identify with other members of my racial/ethnic group,” “My racial/ethnic group is important to my identity,” “I think of myself as a member of my racial/ethnic group,” “I feel close to other members of my racial/ethnic group,” “When someone criticizes my racial/ethnic group, it feels like a personal insult,” and “When I talk about members of my racial/ethnic group, I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they.’” For the national group identification scale, the phrase “racial/ethnic group” was replaced by “national group” in each item.

The administered questionnaire also included a series of demographic questions. Single-item questions asked the respondents about their age, gender, level of formal education (on a six-point scale from “no formal education” to “graduate work/advanced degree”), family income (on an eight-point scale from “less than \$10,000” to “\$100,000 or more”), level of religiosity (on a seven-point scale ranging from “Not at all religious” to “Very religious”), and their political orientation (on a seven-point scale ranging from “Liberal” to “Conservative”).

The survey measures used in this study were structured into four sections in the following way. In the first section the respondents answered the 15 IGBI items that measure beliefs about the personal world. For the second section, the respondents first identified their racial group and indicated their level of identification with that group. They then completed 15 IGBI items measuring their beliefs about this racial group. The third section of the survey paralleled the second section but instead focused the participants on their American national group (in contrast to their racial group). The final section of the survey instrument included the demographic questions.

Results

To explore potential differences between the Black and White respondents in the strengths of their beliefs (Research Questions 1 through 3), a series of tests (one for each belief domain) were conducted at each of the three levels of analysis. Two variations of these analysis sets were conducted. In one approach, the between-group differences were assessed while using age, gender, education, family income, religiosity, political orientation, strength of racial group identification, and strength of national group identification as covariates. In the other approach, the Black-White differences were measured without controlling for these individual difference variables. For each IGBI belief scale, the magnitude of the difference between the two samples was comparable for both approaches. Therefore, for simplicity the *t*-test results from the second approach (i.e., without covariates) are presented here. Table 1 displays these unadjusted means and standard deviations. Following these exploratory tests of mean group differences, to answer Research Question 4 separate analyses were conducted to determine whether any of the demographic or other individual differences measures were related to the belief scales, either

across both samples or differentially in one group versus the other (using standard z -tests for comparing correlations in independent samples).

[Table 1 About Here]

Research Question 1: Do Blacks and Whites Differ in Their Beliefs about Their Personal Worlds?

At the level of the respondents' personal beliefs about their personal worlds (distinct from their social group identities), the only significant difference was in the distrust domain where Blacks on average scored higher than their White counterparts [$t(214) = 2.38, p = .018$]. That is, in their personal lives, the Black respondents considered a distrustful posture toward others to be more appropriate than did the White respondents. None of the other domains revealed significant differences: vulnerability [$t(214) = 1.55, p = .122$], injustice [$t(214) = 1.18, p = .239$], superiority [$t(214) = -0.47, p = .638$], and helplessness [$t(214) = -0.90, p = .367$].

Research Question 2: Do Blacks and Whites Differ in Their Beliefs about Their Different Racial Groups?

As hypothesized, in sharp contrast to the similarities in the personal world beliefs of Blacks and Whites, there were large differences between the two samples in beliefs about their respective racial groups. Blacks scored significantly higher than Whites in all five domains: vulnerability [$t(214) = 7.71, p < .001$], injustice [$t(214) = 10.37, p < .001$], distrust [$t(214) = 8.58, p < .001$], superiority [$t(214) = 6.21, p < .001$], and helplessness [$t(214) = 4.84, p < .001$]. A follow-up analysis was conducted for each belief domain in which the Black-White difference in racial group beliefs was tested controlling for the respondents' parallel personal world beliefs. For each domain the magnitude of the difference between samples was not substantially changed.

Research Question 3: Do Blacks and Whites Differ in Their Beliefs about Their Shared National Group?

At the national group level the White and Black respondents revealed more similarities than differences in their beliefs. Helplessness was the only belief domain on which the two groups differed significantly, with Blacks scoring higher than Whites [$t(214) = 2.98, p = .003$]. There were no significant racial group differences on beliefs about national group vulnerability [$t(214) = 0.63, p = .532$], injustice [$t(214) = -0.71, p = .477$], distrust [$t(214) = 1.21, p = .229$], or superiority [$t(214) = -0.72, p = .475$]. As with racial group beliefs, the magnitudes of these differences between samples in beliefs about their American national group were not substantially changed when the parallel personal world beliefs were controlled for.

Research Question 4: How Are Individual Difference Variables Linked to Beliefs for Blacks and Whites?

For both Blacks and Whites there were significant and largely comparable relationships between strength of identification with a group (racial or national) and strength of beliefs about that group. This was especially true in regard to the American national group, where convictions about vulnerability, injustice, distrust, and superiority (but not helplessness) were all significantly correlated with stronger national group identification: r s of .32 ($p = .001$), .44 ($p < .001$), .22 ($p = .025$), and .38 ($p < .001$) respectively for the Black sample and r s of .48 ($p < .001$), .55 ($p < .001$), .51 ($p < .001$), and .54 ($p < .001$) respectively for the White sample. The pattern was similar but substantially weaker for strength of racial group identification and beliefs about the racial group: in the Black sample, r s of .22 ($p = .031$), .23 ($p = .025$), .17 ($p = .093$), and .28 ($p = .004$) for vulnerability, injustice, distrust, and superiority respectively, and in the

White sample parallel r s of .14 ($p = .122$), .19 ($p = .045$), .10 ($p = .306$), and .32 ($p < .001$) (again helplessness was uncorrelated in both samples).

Level of formal education was the demographic variable with the most pervasive pattern of relationships with the respondents' beliefs and it produced consistent differences between the Black and White samples. For the White sample, education was in general significantly negatively correlated with strength of beliefs at the personal world, racial group, and national group levels; in contrast, education tended to be uncorrelated with belief strength in the Black sample at all three levels. At the personal world level, the more educated Whites felt less vulnerable ($r = -.33, p < .001$), less mistreated ($r = -.32, p < .001$), less distrustful ($r = -.29, p = .001$), and less helpless ($r = -.43, p < .001$) than their less educated White counterparts. The exception was superiority, where more educated Whites scored higher on personal superiority than less educated Whites ($r = .25, p = .007$).

Similarly, in regard to beliefs about one's racial group, education was uncorrelated with belief strength in the Black sample but in the White sample it was significantly negatively linked to vulnerability ($r = -.29, p = .002$), injustice ($r = -.39, p < .001$), distrust ($r = -.25, p = .007$), and helplessness ($r = -.36, p < .001$); beliefs about racial group superiority were unrelated to education in both groups. The same pattern emerged for beliefs about the American national group, with more education (for Whites only) associated with less vulnerability ($r = -.24, p = .001$), less injustice ($r = -.32, p = .001$), less distrust ($r = -.24, p = .010$), and less helplessness ($r = -.34, p < .001$), with superiority again not significant.

Individual differences in religiosity had divergent relationships with some beliefs in the Black and White samples. This was most apparent in the vulnerability domain. Blacks who were more religious described themselves (i.e., at the personal world level) and their racial and

national groups as *less* vulnerable, while more religious Whites tended to see themselves and their groups as *more* at risk. The correlations were significantly different between the two samples at all three levels: for the personal world, *rs* of -.25 and .10 for Blacks and Whites respectively ($z = 2.58, p = .010$); for beliefs about their racial group, *rs* of -.28 and .19 respectively ($z = 3.49, p < .001$); and for beliefs about their shared American national group, *rs* of -.09 and .19 respectively ($z = 2.06, p = .040$). The same general pattern was also found in regard to three other beliefs about the racial group: for injustice, *rs* of -.21 and .07 for Blacks and Whites respectively ($z = 2.08, p = .038$); for distrust, *rs* of -.20 and .08 respectively ($z = 2.00, p = .046$); and for helplessness, *rs* of -.24 and .11 respectively ($z = 2.57, p = .010$).

Political orientation as reflected in liberal versus conservative leanings also proved to be differentially linked to certain beliefs for Blacks and Whites. For Blacks, beliefs about racial group vulnerability ($r = .23, p = .023$) and injustice ($r = .23, p = .020$) were significantly stronger among the more liberal respondents, whereas these two beliefs tended to be associated with greater conservatism (non-significant *rs* of .07 and .09 respectively) among the White respondents ($z = 2.15, p = .032$ and $z = 2.36, p = .018$ respectively). At the national group level of analysis, White conservatives held stronger beliefs than White liberals about group vulnerability ($r = .24, p = .011$) and distrust ($r = .28, p = .002$); for Blacks the corresponding correlations (*rs* of -.12 and -.01 respectively) were non-significant but in the opposite direction ($z = 2.57, p = .010$ and $z = 2.14, p = .032$ respectively). For both groups conservatives tended to hold stronger beliefs about national group injustice (i.e., mistreatment at the hands of other groups) than did liberals: for Whites, $r = .37, p < .001$; for Blacks, $r = .19, p = .057$.

Overall, age proved to be a relatively unimportant variable in regard to its relationships with the respondents' beliefs. However, there was a tendency for younger participants in both

samples to view themselves as personally superior, although this correlation was significant only in the White sample ($r = -.24, p = .009$) but not in the Black sample ($r = -.14, p = .166$). In addition, there was a significant difference between Blacks and Whites ($z = 3.38, p < .001$) in the relationship between age and beliefs about racial group vulnerability. For Blacks, these two variables were negatively correlated ($r = -.18, p = .067$) whereas for Whites they were positively associated ($r = .27, p = .003$). That is, younger Blacks and older Whites were the respondents who tended to see their respective racial groups as in jeopardy.

Discussion

In this chapter, we were interested in examining similarities and differences in the beliefs of Black and White Americans from the perspectives of their personal identities, their racial group identities, and their national group identities. We focused on the five belief domains—vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority, and helplessness—that Eidelson and Eidelson (2003) have identified as spanning the realms of personal and group experience, and as bearing directly on issues of distress and conflict.

When these five beliefs were compared at the level of personal identity, distinct from any explicit focus on group membership, the Black and White samples were quite similar in almost all domains. Distrust was the only one of the five domains in which a significant difference emerged, with Blacks reporting greater interpersonal suspicion than Whites. This difference is consistent with other studies of trust (e.g., Shavers-Hornaday et al. 1997) as well as with a post-9/11 national phone survey, which found that 46% of Whites but only 15% of Blacks believed that “people are trustworthy” (National Opinion Research Center 2002b).

In regard to beliefs about one's racial group (i.e., through the explicit lens of one's racial group identity), we expected and found very large differences between Blacks and Whites, with the former reporting stronger beliefs across all five domains. Beliefs about collective vulnerability, injustice, distrust, and helplessness all reflect important challenges facing a group. It therefore is not surprising that the Black respondents held beliefs more consonant with seeing their racial group in a tenuous and potentially adversarial position than did their White counterparts. It is interesting that the largest discrepancy between the racial groups was found in the injustice domain, which perhaps best characterizes the centuries-old contrast between Black and White experiences in America. The stronger race-group superiority beliefs reported by the Black sample in comparison to the White sample may reflect two complementary factors — the commonplace salience of “racial pride” within minority communities that have struggled to embrace their difference, and the probable discomfort of many White Americans with the explicitly racist ideology associated with claims of White supremacy.

When we turn to beliefs about the American national group (i.e., through the explicit lens of one's national group identity), Blacks and Whites seemingly put aside their contrasting beliefs about their respective racial groups and tended to see their shared American group in much the same way. Helplessness was the only domain in which the two groups differed significantly, with Blacks seeing the national group as more helpless than Whites; this difference is also consistent with national public opinion surveys (National Opinion Research Center 2002b; 2002c).

It is important to consider the implications of the similarities and differences we found between the beliefs of Blacks and Whites at the personal, racial group, and national group levels of analysis. The similar personal identity beliefs stand in sharp contrast to the divergence in the

respondents' beliefs about their respective racial groups. One possible explanation for why Blacks and Whites tended to see their personal worlds in comparable ways involves the nature of social comparison processes. Assessments of personal experiences—such as mistreatment by others—are typically made within the boundaries of one's ingroup (e.g., Festinger 1954; Buckingham and Alicke 2002). Thus, Blacks may use other Blacks as their standard of comparison while Whites use other Whites as their benchmark—leading to similar averages in belief strengths between the two groups. In contrast, when assessing the experiences of one's racial group, the standard of comparison becomes the other racial group, which in the case of Blacks and Whites would naturally lead to assessments that differ substantially from each other. This use of different standards of comparison is also consistent with the literature on the person-group discrepancy effect (e.g., Kessler, Mummendey, and Leisse 2000; Postmes et al. 1999), which has also shown, for example, that respondents tend to identify discrimination as a greater problem for their group than for themselves personally (e.g., Crosby 1984; Moghaddam, Stolkin, and Hutcheson 1997).

However, an additional plausible explanation for our findings is that the contrasting similarities and differences in beliefs between Blacks and Whites about their personal worlds and racial groups respectively reflect the differing pace of progressive changes in individual versus structural racism in the United States. As noted earlier, there has been a significant moral shift within the White community regarding the acceptability of racism. However, most Whites (in contrast to most Blacks) still define racism as an individualistic phenomenon, characterized by color consciousness and prejudicial thoughts or behavior on the part of one person towards another (Bonilla-Silva 2003). In this regard, much of the progress that has taken place in race relations has occurred on the personal level (e.g., a reduction in personal attacks, racial slurs, and

openly disrespectful behavior), while progress at the structural level (e.g., in the areas of employment, education, and criminal justice) has been both slower and more tenuous. But it is also important to note that it is unclear whether Blacks and Whites would expect members of the other racial group to report similar personal level beliefs (as reported in our study) and whether they would accept these assessments as reasonable and reliable. As one example, discovering that members of the other racial group see themselves as equally vulnerable at the personal level could serve as either a source of positive connection between groups or, to the contrary, as evidence of the outgroup's alienating and invalidating world-view.

In this context, the convergence of beliefs at the national group level is also noteworthy. To a large extent it appears that divergent beliefs about racial group circumstances did not find expression in different beliefs about the American national group for the Black and White respondents. That is, this superordinate identity as Americans produced highly consensual views across the racial divide in regard to the nation's current circumstances (with the previously noted exception of the helplessness domain). This consensus may, in part, be attributed to the greater sense of national unity produced by the 9/11 terrorist attacks seven months prior to the collection of our data. For example, it is clear that, at least for a few months, concerns regarding national security were atypically prominent and salient for most Americans (Black and White). The events of 9/11, therefore, are an important part of the context for our study and should be viewed as such—rather than as a source of “noise” or “nuisance.” Examining national group beliefs in the context of conflict is informative and, in at least some ways, more relevant to understanding group relations than when national security is unthreatened and national identity is not particularly salient.

The similarities and differences between the two samples in their beliefs as reported through the lenses of their personal, racial group, and national group identities were not meaningfully changed by statistically controlling for a broad range of individual difference variables—strength of group identification (racial and national), age, gender, education, family income, religiosity, and political orientation. This indicates that the large differences between the two samples in racial group beliefs in all likelihood reflect truly divergent experiences and perceptions that emerge from being Black versus White in America today. From the set we considered, level of formal education proved to be the variable most consistently linked to individual differences in the belief strengths of the respondents. At all three levels of identity, the same difference appeared in the way that education was related to beliefs for Blacks versus Whites. For the Black respondents education was uncorrelated with the strength of their beliefs at the personal, racial group, and national group levels. In sharp contrast, for the White respondents greater education was significantly correlated with weaker beliefs about vulnerability, injustice, distrust, and helplessness across all three levels.

Speculatively, this pattern suggests that the beliefs of Blacks and Whites may emerge in different ways and may be susceptible to differing influences. For Whites, education seems to moderate how they see themselves and their racial and national groups (e.g., as in jeopardy, as mistreated, etc.); the more educated hold less extreme mindsets than their less educated counterparts. But why not the same pattern for the Black respondents? Perhaps because for many Blacks these key beliefs emerge more directly from their actual experiences as a disadvantaged minority, and/or because education for many Blacks does not as substantially alter the reality they face. Also, due to the slower pace of structural race-related changes in the United States, Blacks may not perceive the relationship between education and opportunity to be particularly

strong, creating more suspicion and less susceptibility to the messages propounded by higher education. At the same time, the absence of a relationship between education and beliefs in the Black sample raises the question of what other variables, unmeasured in our study, might be linked to individual differences in beliefs among Blacks (and perhaps among Whites as well).

Limitations of our study should be highlighted, beginning with the general caveat that much of our analysis was exploratory in nature. This was a conscious decision, based on the view that raising questions, even speculatively, could facilitate further research. That said, without additional studies including more broadly representative samples, our findings must be viewed tentatively. Our samples were not large, and while we believe that the participants were reasonably representative of those who both met the legal requirements and accepted the summons to report for jury duty in Philadelphia, these selection criteria alone demonstrate that the respondents were not necessarily representative of the broader populations of Blacks and Whites throughout the United States, including other geographical regions and especially non-urban settings. The under-representation of Black men (29%) relative to Black women (71%) is particularly evident. However, since our statistical analyses failed to yield any significant effects linked to gender, the impact of this particular sample bias is likely minimal.

Also noteworthy are the substantial inter-correlations among the IGBI belief domain measures. We considered combining several of these measures into broader composite scales, but we felt that the constructs of interest (i.e., vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority, and helplessness) were theoretically distinct in regard to our focus and we therefore deemed it preferable to examine each belief separately. Moreover, confirmatory factor analyses using the IGBI in prior research with a U.S. sample documented that a five-factor model produced a better fit to the data than did alternative models with fewer factors (Eidelson 2002). Methodologically,

it should also be noted that the IGBI items were presented to all participants in the same order (i.e., without any counterbalancing). This represents a potential confound, but the first author has tested for IGBI order effects in another study and found no significant differences in the relative strength of beliefs linked to whether personal-world or group-level items are presented first (Eidelson 2005).

In conclusion, we focused on the beliefs of Black and White Americans in the five domains of vulnerability, injustice, distrust, superiority, and helplessness because of their salience as triggers or constraints on interpersonal and intergroup conflict and distress (Eidelson and Eidelson 2003). The present study revealed relatively small group differences in beliefs at the personal and national group levels, combined with quite large differences in beliefs at the racial group level. What picture do these findings paint of race relations and racial equality in this country today? No simple answer emerges. The large differences between Blacks and Whites at the racial group belief level make it clear that there is still much work to be done to narrow the gap between these two groups, at least in the way they perceive their racial group circumstances. The lack of comparable discrepancies at the personal world level is in some ways encouraging but, at the same time, may also represent a potential source of inertia in addressing the larger societal divides. Our findings may be indicative of relative progress in race relations at the personal level and a welcome reminder that the efforts of countless individuals to fight racism in the United States are not in vain. They may also suggest that the efforts to create structural changes in this arena remain both important and achievable. That is, these findings may reflect a historical trajectory that takes into consideration where we are as well as where we have been.

Table 1
 Personal, Racial-Level, and National-Level IGBI Measures by Racial Group

	Blacks		Whites	
	M	SD	M	SD
PERSONAL WORLD				
Vulnerability	8.81	2.61	8.27	2.44
Injustice	7.30	2.58	6.92	2.11
Distrust	8.29	2.57	7.53	2.10
Superiority	7.49	2.45	7.64	2.17
Helplessness	5.56	1.98	5.80	1.95
RACIAL GROUP				
Vulnerability	10.42	2.59	7.72	2.56
Injustice	11.72	2.39	8.13	2.66
Distrust	9.48	2.29	6.89	2.14
Superiority	8.92	2.49	6.82	2.48
Helplessness	8.01	2.82	6.31	2.35
NATIONAL GROUP				
Vulnerability	11.11	2.61	10.89	2.59
Injustice	9.46	2.89	9.74	2.90
Distrust	10.18	2.57	9.76	2.55
Superiority	9.35	2.84	9.63	2.88
Helplessness	7.30	2.50	6.38	2.04

Note: N = 100 for Blacks and 116 for Whites.

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