

Measuring Benevolent Racism: Scale Development and Initial Validation

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Abstract

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Racism has existed in the United States since the country's founding, although it has taken different forms over time. Psychological research on racism has reflected and captured these changes, with new theories and measures in response to historical events. For example, when Jim Crow laws were prevalent, many Americans expressed Hostile Racism, or overt racial prejudice. Following the Civil Rights era, Symbolic and Modern Racism emerged, which are indirect or covert expressions of racism. Over the past several years, racism in the U.S. has continued to shift. Specifically, the racial reckoning period of 2020 (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Stop Asian Hate) led many Americans to reconsider their own biases and attempt to be less racist. At the same time, negative views of POC persist. Thus, to capture how uniquely American racism manifests today, we developed a measure of Benevolent Racism, which is defined as seemingly positive attitudes regarding People of Color (POC) that mask underlying beliefs about POC that maintain the status quo. We developed a 30 item measure of Benevolent Racism that assessed beliefs such as the view that White people must protect communities of color, it is acceptable to

expect POC to overcome any barrier that they encounter, the country needs POC to fill lower status jobs, POC of color serve as a source of entertainment or emotional comfort to other racial groups, and it is risky to push to racial equity if society is not ready for it. We administered our measure and other established measures of racism and support for hierarchy (e.g., Modern Racism, System Justification, Social Dominance Orientation) to undergraduates at a public university ($N = 445$) to test 1) whether the Benevolent Racism measure captured variation in attitudes and 2) whether the Benevolent Racism measure was distinct from existing measures 3) whether the factor structure of our Benevolent Racism measure matched our theoretical grouping of subscales. Means for the samples were roughly at the midpoint of the 7-point scale (Sample Mean = 3.48), and there was variation in participants' responses ($SD = 0.63$, Min = 1.60, Max = 5.00). In addition, the Benevolent Racism measure had only small correlations with established measures of racism and support for hierarchy ($r_s < .20$), indicating that Benevolent Racism captured a related but distinct construct. Further, our exploratory factor analysis suggested that the future iterations of the scale may require a more parsimonious factor structure and a reduced number of items. Accordingly, future research will build on the initial validation of the Benevolent Racism measure, aiming to confirm factor structure and item clarity. Subsequently, future work will examine how Benevolent Racism is related to willingness to live amongst, employ, befriend, or otherwise engage with POC. It may be the case that people with high levels of Benevolent Racism are willing or even eager to do this as long as their interactions uphold a racial hierarchy. In addition, future research could examine the effects of Benevolent Racism on POC.

Introduction

Together systemic and interpersonal racism has proven to be a chronic symptom of White supremacy (Kendi, 2016). As a result, the psychological, physical and economic suffering of People of Color (POC) has spanned generations (Harriot, 2023). However, racism has taken different forms over time. Over the past several years, racism in the U.S. has continued to shift. Specifically, the racial reckoning period of 2020 (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Stop Asian Hate) led many Americans to reconsider their own biases and attempt to be less racist. At the same time, negative views of POC persist. In this paper, develop a measure to examine the psychological construct, Benevolent Racism, that captures persistent forms of racism more completely than existing measures in psychology.

The Need for a Benevolent Racism Scale

Throughout American history, racism has taken different forms that reflect sociopolitical shifts. For example, following the Reconstruction era, the majority of Southern White people harbored racist beliefs of White people's biological superiority over Black people, along with a sociopolitical motivation to assert dominance over Black people (Du Bois, 1935; Harriot, 2023). Because of this, overt anti-Black racism known as Jim Crow racism was legally sanctioned. Accordingly, Jim Crow racism led to Jim Crow laws which made racial segregation and disenfranchisement of Black Americans legal (Harriot, 2023).

Following the sociopolitical advancements of the Civil Rights Era (e.g., Civil Rights Act of 1964) the manifestation of racism evolved to more subtle approaches. Accordingly, the psychological theories of symbolic and modern racism emerged. Psychologists posited that as a result of sociopolitical progress that Black people made following the civil rights movement,

expressions of racism were no longer solely influenced by White people's belief in White supremacy. Instead, psychologists theorized that White Americans' expressions of interpersonal racism was influenced by their feelings of resentment towards Black Americans sociopolitical progress as a result of the civil rights movement (McConohay, 1986; Sears, 1988). To capture this new form of racism, the field developed new measures such as the Modern Racism Scale (McConohay, 1986) and Symbolic Racism Scale (Henry & Sears, 2002).

While the measures of modern racism and symbolic racism accurately capture the peculiarities of racism post the civil rights movement, technological advances, historical events and dynamic social norms regarding racism continue to influence the evolution of racism, therefore requiring a new construct to capture its manifestation. For example, because policing in the U.S. derives from slave patrols, police brutality has always existed. However, as a result of cell phones with recording capabilities, Americans have uniquely witnessed just how often Black and other POC are executed by the hands of police, since the 2010's (Mapping Police Violence). Further, police led killing of innocent Black and Brown people was greatly magnified in 2020 when George Floyd was wrongfully murdered by police on camera. This event, along with recent murders of Breonna Taylor by the hands of active police as well as Arnaud Arberry by the hands of a retired police officer and his son, sparked nationwide discussions on systemic and interpersonal racism (ACLU, n.d; Biscontin, 2023; MPR, n.d). For many, this period marked an additional shift of social norms, albeit temporary, regarding racism. For example, many corporations were denouncing racism, endorsing the Black Lives Matter and Stop Asian Hate movement, and dedicating funding of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs to attempt to make up for historical racial inequities in media, fashion, and other business industries (Douglas,

2026 ; Purpose Brand, 2026). Not only this, contrary to prior norms regarding politics in the workplace, many work places and academic spaces were encouraging “doing the work” of unpacking White privilege, White fragility, and color blind racism (Cullen, 2021; Price, 2020; GW Law, 2020). Essentially, this “racial reckoning” period created a new incentivization system whereas White people genuinely wanted to be perceived as egalitarian; however, the motivation to be perceived as egalitarian did not guarantee lasting equitable outcomes for POC (The White House, 2025).

Existing theories in the field such as symbolic and modern racism suggest that White people are motivated to appear egalitarian, but their behavior does not back that up. These theories suggest that this misalignment between motivation and behavior stems from the erroneous belief that POC have already received "enough" institutional support (McConohay, 1986 ; Sears,1988). However, these rationales do not quite capture this current phenomena of racism. Instead, we believe the contradiction between some White people’s motivations to appear egalitarian and the pro-egalitarian behaviors or lack thereof is instead due to a benevolent form of racism, which is when a person or group such as White Americans genuinely want to be perceived as egalitarian, so long as it does not disturb the racial hierarchy. Thus, unlike a person who possesses modern racist or symbolic racist beliefs, a person who is benevolently racist would not deny the existence of racism nor intentionally make a decision that prevents racial equity out of resentment; instead a benevolently racist person is engaging in behaviors that they believe will address racism up until the point that it threatens themselves or the racial hierarchy, which they fail to realize is inextricably linked. In fact, they may behave in superficially positive ways or support actions that seem, on the surface, to be dismantling or addressing racism.

However, these actions continue to uphold racism by centering White people and their needs or keeping people of color in low status positions.

Benevolent racism may explain why the racial reckoning period of 2020 failed to materially shift the racial hierarchy. For example, during the racial reckoning period in 2020, White Americans and corporations recognized the atrocities that African Americans endured as a result of slavery and racial capitalism, in some cases even going as far as taking public stances against Anti-Blackness, showing allyship in encouraging equitable pay for Black people in the workplace, and showing up to Black Lives Matter protest (Levine-Rasky & Ghaffar - Siddiqui, 2021; Melaku et al., 2020). However, African Americans have yet to receive reparations. Likewise, despite the increases in land acknowledgements, Native American tribes such as the San Carlos Apache Tribe remain in legal battles against the United States government to protect their sacred land from mining. Similarly, Latine and Black immigrants are disproportionately being targeted and deported by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); and Asian, African and Middle Eastern international students are facing extreme barriers in their academic pursuits in America (Aqsa et al., 2025; Business & Human Rights Centre, 2019; Guerrero, 2025; NAACP, 2019; Ong et al., 2026). Thus, while it is clear that there is a process that is causing the disconnect between white people's motivations and the social outcomes, racism today does not appear to be a result of resentment, instead it appears to be a result of benevolent racism.

Defining Benevolent Racism

Some other scholars in psychology and in related fields such as sociology have theorized about Benevolent Racism and offered definitions of the construct. For example, Espositio and Romano (2016) defined Benevolent racism as "Forms of post-civil rights racisms, whereby racial

inequity is dodged, defended, or justified behind a facade of color-blindness and racial neutrality” (Esposito & Romano, 2016). Similarly, within the field, Ramasubramanian & Oliver (2007) define benevolent racism as seemingly positive feelings that stem from perceptions of out-groups as being inferior, incompetent, and passive. Benevolent prejudice manifests as “feelings of sympathy, pity, sadness, amusement, and guilt toward out-groups”

(Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2007). To support this theory, Ramasubramanian & Oliver examined the role of media literacy by exposing White participants to either a media literacy video or a control video, following up with either a negative stereotypical news story or a counter-stereotypical study about Asian-Indians and African Americans, revealing that hostile prejudice is more likely to be expressed toward African-Americans and benevolent prejudice is more likely to be expressed toward Asian-Indians (Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2007).

Moreover, Ramasubramanian and Oliver’s conceptualizations of Benevolent Racism are similar to the related construct of aversive racism (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004), which, too, is a subtle form of racism in which people desire to be egalitarian but hold unconscious racist beliefs and therefore are captured by measuring people’s explicit and implicit racism. This work has provided some preliminary definitions of Benevolent racism and identified the combination of implicit and explicit associations that might underlie it. Here, we build on it by developing a scale that measures a wider set of beliefs that Benevolent Racists are likely to hold.

As mentioned above, we define Benevolent Racism as seemingly positive attitudes regarding People of Color (POC) that mask underlying beliefs about POC that maintain the status quo. That is to say that a person who demonstrates Benevolent Racism is willing to engage positively (e.g. live amongst, employ, make friends) with POC as long as it upholds or fails to threaten their belief in the American racial hierarchy, which effectively positions White people

firmly at the top, Black people firmly at the bottom, and other groups of color fluidly in between (Kendi, X. I., 2016; Wilderson III, B. F., 2020). Importantly, Benevolent Racism is not unidimensional, as its expression may vary by context. Because of this, the proposed Benevolent Racism scale can be thought of by subcategories and in turn subscales. Below we review five proposed components of Benevolent Racism.

Normalization of Adversity

One component of Benevolent Racism is the normalization of POC experiencing adversity. This may involve suggesting that experiences of adversity increase POC's work ethic, praising POC for succeeding in the face of adversity without acknowledging racism's toll, or expecting POC to be relentlessly strong. One well-studied example of this is the stereotype of the "strong Black woman," which is the idea that Black women are naturally strong, resilient, self-contained, and self-sacrificing (Donovan & West, 2014; Thomas et al., 2022). There are other examples as well. American news coverage often praises POC for persisting in the face of racism. For instance, news coverage of baseball player Hank Aaron praised him because he "refused to be intimidated by racist hate mail or threats during his pursuit of Babe Ruth's home run record" (Associated Press, 2024). Similarly, Asian American students have been praised for attending school at higher rates than other racial groups during the COVID-19 pandemic even though they were met with racism that included taunts from peers and assignments that included stereotypical portrayals (Marcelo, 2021).

It is true that systemic racism has led to disproportionate adversity for POC. For example, due to redlining, the historical practice of systematically denying POC, especially Black people, loans for homes and businesses, POC are more likely to experience suppressed social

advancement (e.g economic, education), which research suggest increases the likelihood of premature mortality, hyperincarceration, barriers to higher educational attainment and housing (Edgede et al., 2023). Therefore, as currently constructed, the socioeconomic systems in America makes it extremely difficult for POC to live a life void of adversity. However, we argue that the problem arises when people *normalize* racialized adversity without fully acknowledging or lessening its toll on POC.

Low Status Roles

Another core component of Benevolent Racism is the persisting racist belief that POC are meant to serve lower status roles in American Society. In many ways, this is a longstanding racist belief in American society. For example, in efforts to justify the enslavement and raping of Africans, and genocide of Native Americans, both groups were stereotyped as “savages” who were intellectually and spiritually incapable of governig themselves, yet physically “gifted” enough for enslavement (Harriot,M., 2023; Katz, L. W., 1986). Even after the legalized cessation of transatlantic chattel slavery, the psuedo-science industry of eugenics, which was an ideological belief of White superiority, and selective breeding to reify a society rid of people of color, poor people and disabled people remained, resulting in the coerced sterilization of Black, Latina, and Native women, as they were all deemed as socio-economic burdens to society, albeit this belief stemming from white supremacist beliefs of eugenics (Farber, 2008; Simpson, 2005; Jones et al., 2018). We argue that today, these beliefs not only persist, but are even attached to benevolent causes. For example, many Americans support immigration because they think that immigrants, who are disproportionately Latine, fill jobs that Americans do not want (Krogstad et al., 2020). As one roofing company owner put it, “It’s really hard to find any reliable local labor that works as hard as [immigrants] do. I’ve tried” (Ferguson, 2025). Indubitably, this racist belief

is a byproduct of POC systemically being placed into low status and exploitative positions, due to discrimination in both educational and vocational sectors (Krogstad et al., 2020; Lu & Leicht, 2025; Pager et al., 2009). However, racism comes from believing that they belong in this low status position in society.

POC and Their Culture as entertainment & catharsis

A third component of Benevolent Racism is when POC and their culture are utilized as a source of entertainment and or catharsis for White people and other non-White cultural outsiders. That is, since its inception, American society has constructed and maintained a racial hierarchy that positions White people firmly at the top, Black and Indigenous people firmly at the bottom, and other groups of color such as East Asian, South Asian, and Latino people fluidly in between White, Black and Indigenous people (Kendi., 2016; Wilderson III, 2020). A fundamental component of the American Racial hierarchy is the belief that racial categorization begets the exploitation of POC, particularly to the benefit of White people and their entertainment and or cathartic interest. In fact, this form of benevolent racism is prevalent in today's society. For example, in hip-hop, which historically has been a predominantly Black space, it is common for artists to illustrate their social experiences ranging from ones grounded in sociopolitical hardship and ones grounded in privileged experiences. However, the artists who tend to garner the most attraction from White audiences (Pierre, 2022; Rojas, 2023) are Drill Rappers, who utilize a pseudo-realism approach of detailing gun violence, loss, and complex traumas, as a result of living in red-lined environments. In fact, this process is so prevalent that there has been an emergence of multiple White people who are entirely disconnected from these environments, who have developed a media following , specifically due to their content that investigates,

mythologizes, pathologizes and further incite conflict between drill rappers (e.g., Adam 22, Adin Ross, DJ Vlad, Traplore Ross).

The exploitation of POC and their culture for entertainment and or cathartic reasonings is consistent with other theories that show White people using POC to serve their own needs. For example, Bell's theory of interest convergence posits that policies promising the advancement of Black Americans are enacted only to the extent that they advance White Americans' interest (Bell, 1992). Similarly according to Starck et al. (2024), instrumental rationales of diversity serve the psychological interest of White Americans and Organizations due to the fact that the rationales are focused on the benefits White Americans and organizations often receive as a result (e.g., "Graduate cohorts with more racial diversity produce better research.") instead of being focused on the moral implications of increasing diversity. Likewise, we believe that rationales regarding diversity that are centered on instrumentalism opposed to moral rationales indeed maintain the racial hierarchy and the status quo. However, the Benevolent Racism Entertainment Catharsis (BREC) construct diverges in regards to the motivations behind the exploitative instrumentalism of POC's cultures. Unlike the theories of Instrumental racism and interest convergence that theorizes that policies promising the advancement of Black Americans are enacted only to the extent that they advance White Americans interest (Bell, 1992; Starck, 2024), which therein implies a conscious motivation to further the advancement of the White interest. We posit that perpetrators of BREC are instead consciously motivated to appear egalitarian, despite possessing racist beliefs. Therefore, an individual who exhibits BREC beliefs, will not necessarily advance the racial hierarchy, instead it will be maintained.

Further, some theories on cultural appropriation are also consistent with our proposed theory of BREC. According to research in the field on cultural appropriation, cultural exchanges

become harmful when there is a power imbalance that leads to the exploitation of a marginalized culture (Mosley & Biernat, 2020). However, some findings suggest that the appropriations intent (positive vs negative) mediates how harmful their act of appropriation is. Whereas our theory of BREC posits that whether harm is perceived by the actor or observer, POC are harmed based on how the benevolently racist act maintains the racial hierarchy (Eposito & Romano, 2016; Mosley & Biernat, 2024).

White People as Benefactors

A fourth component of Benevolent Racism is the belief that POC need White people's help to obtain success and equity in America. According to our theory of Benevolent Racism, we posit that this belief stems from the acknowledgement that POC experience systemic barriers in regards to their success and well being, although erroneously believing people of color's cultural values and decision making is the primary contributor to their lack of success in overcoming systemic issues. As a result, the American sociopolitical model of "undoing racism" tends to center White Americans and organizations as the agents of change, opposed to empowering POC to seek self determination, which ultimately stifles meaningful progress for POC. In fact, previous research has shown that status based perceptions can influence how individuals received help. For instance, individuals who are perceived as low status, are viewed as less capable and in turn were given dependency oriented help opposed to autonomy oriented help (Nadler & Chernyak-Hai, 2013).

Likewise, when non-stigmatized people focus on members of stigmatized groups difficulties opposed to challenges, they view stigmatized group members as less competent and more helpless (Reeves et al., 2021). A common example of this in media is White Saviorism

narratives, such as those like American influencer Mr. Beast who has generated hundreds of millions of views on videos where he has “built 100 wells, built schools, adopted an orphanage rescuing child slaves” (African children) as a means of “helping” opposed to assisting in a way that leads to their self determination. Now, assuming Mr Beast's intent is genuinely to assist children throughout Cameroon, Uganda, Ghana, then one would say it is a benevolent intent. However, the method of doing so does not lead to their self-determination. Instead, the prescribed solution does not sustainably empower Cameroonians, Ugandans, and Ghanians, nor does it threaten the power structures that create their scenario. Instead, Mr Beast receives praise and tax breaks. Accordingly, we suggest that examples like this are common throughout life and media due to the fact that individuals who possess BRBP beliefs are motivated to appear egalitarian as long as it does not disrupt the current racial hierarchy.

Limiting of opportunities

Lastly, the final component of Benevolent Racism are beliefs that limit opportunities for POC (BRLO) in effort to avoid negative outcomes. For example, people who hold this belief might oppose nominating a candidate of color for political office because they fear that other people might not vote for the candidate and their party will lose (Hassal et al., 2024). Another example would be encouraging students of color (but not white students) to avoid “risky” creative or academic fields and instead encouraging them to build “practical” job skills. These examples may appear on the surface to support people of color, but they actually limit their opportunities. Again, individuals who endorse Benevolent Racism are motivated to present egalitarianism as long as it maintains the American racial hierarchy. Consequently, they may be more concerned with behaving in a way that appears egalitarian, without critically behaving in a

way that disrupts the oppressive status quo, which in turn maintains the current racial standing and racial disparities.

Unfortunately, a common example of BRLO tends to happen in a context in which POC are aiming to accomplish goals that are contrary to their group stereotype. For example, research suggests that students are more likely to graduate college if their high school teachers believe they will; however teachers have less faith that Black students will successfully complete college, resulting in self-fulfilling prophecies that place Black students at a disadvantage (Gershenson et al., 2016). Further, although this study does not clearly indicate that teachers are vocally discouraging Black students from attempting to achieve challenging goals, research in the field examining underrepresentation in politics, suggest that people discriminate against Black political candidates, due to their doubt of their ability to succeed as candidates due to their race. Thus, while these two scenarios are in differing arenas, we believe the core motivation of these behaviors is not only more common, it is also consistent with our benevolent racism limiting opportunities sub scale.

Current Research

The current research explores whether Benevolent Racism exists in the real world, by examining if the Benevolent Racism Composite scale captures variations in responses, as well as if it is distinct from other related constructs in the field. First, we developed items that assessed all five components of the construct of Benevolent Racism as we had defined it. Next, we administered our new Benevolent Racism scale and other established measures of racism and support for hierarchy (e.g., Modern Racism, System Justification, Social Dominance Orientation) to a sample of undergraduates. We examined the descriptive statistics of our scale to ensure that responses were distributed across the full range of the scale and, thus, that the scale would have

enough variance to predict behaviors or other outcomes in future research. We also examined the correlation of our new scale with the related measures of racism and support for hierarchy. Here, we wanted to see if our newly developed scale was correlated in the expected direction with established measures (convergent validity) but also to ensure that the correlations were modest (thus confirming that our scale was needed and not redundant with existing measures; discriminant validity).

Scale Development

First, we developed the scale. Drawing on examples from history, sociology, politics, contemporary examples in the media, and personal experience, we (the two authors) generated 1) a list of components (i.e., subscales) of Benevolent Racism that should be assessed by the scale and 2) 5-7 items to include in each subscale. The full list of items is presented in Table 3.

Methods

Participants

We recruited 444 undergraduate students from the University of Washington subject pool; however, some participants did not complete all measures. Of those participants who completed demographic questionnaires 63 were cis-men, 244 were cis-women, 13 were gender non-conforming, 1 was a trans man, 3 were trans women, and 3 identified as other. Similarly, 16 were Black, 165 were White, 83 were East Asian, 61 were South Asian, 40 were Latine, 3 were Native American, 1 was a Pacific Islander, 8 was MENA, 60 identified as multi-racial, 9 identified as “other”.

Procedure

Participants completed the benevolent racism scale along with 4 additional related racism scales such as social dominance orientation, modern racism, system justification and pro diversity beliefs. Accordingly, our results are organized to describe item characteristics such as the mean, standard deviation, range and Spearman's correlation coefficient for our subscales and finally the composite scale.

Measures

Benevolent Racism Participants rated their agreement with the 30 items from our new Benevolent Racism Scale (see Table 3) on a scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*). Higher scores indicate more Benevolent Racist attitudes.

Social Dominance Orientation was assessed with the Social Dominance Orientation 7 Scale (Ho et al., 2015), which asked participants to rate how much they agreed with 16 items (e.g., ‘An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom.’) on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate more social dominance attitudes.

Pro Diversity Beliefs was assessed with the Pro Diversity Beliefs Scale (Kauff et al., 2018), which asked participants to rate how much they agreed with 5 items (e.g., ‘An ethnically diverse society can overcome future challenges better than a society that is not ethnically diverse.’) on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate more pro diversity beliefs.

System Justification was assessed with the System Justification Scale (Jost et al., 2004), which asked participants to rate how much they agreed with 8 items (e.g., ‘In general, the

American political system operates as it should.’) on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate higher justification for the system.

Modern Racism was assessed with the Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, 1986), which asked participants to rate how much they agreed with 8 items (‘Blacks should not push themselves where they’re not wanted.’) on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores indicate higher modern racist attitudes.

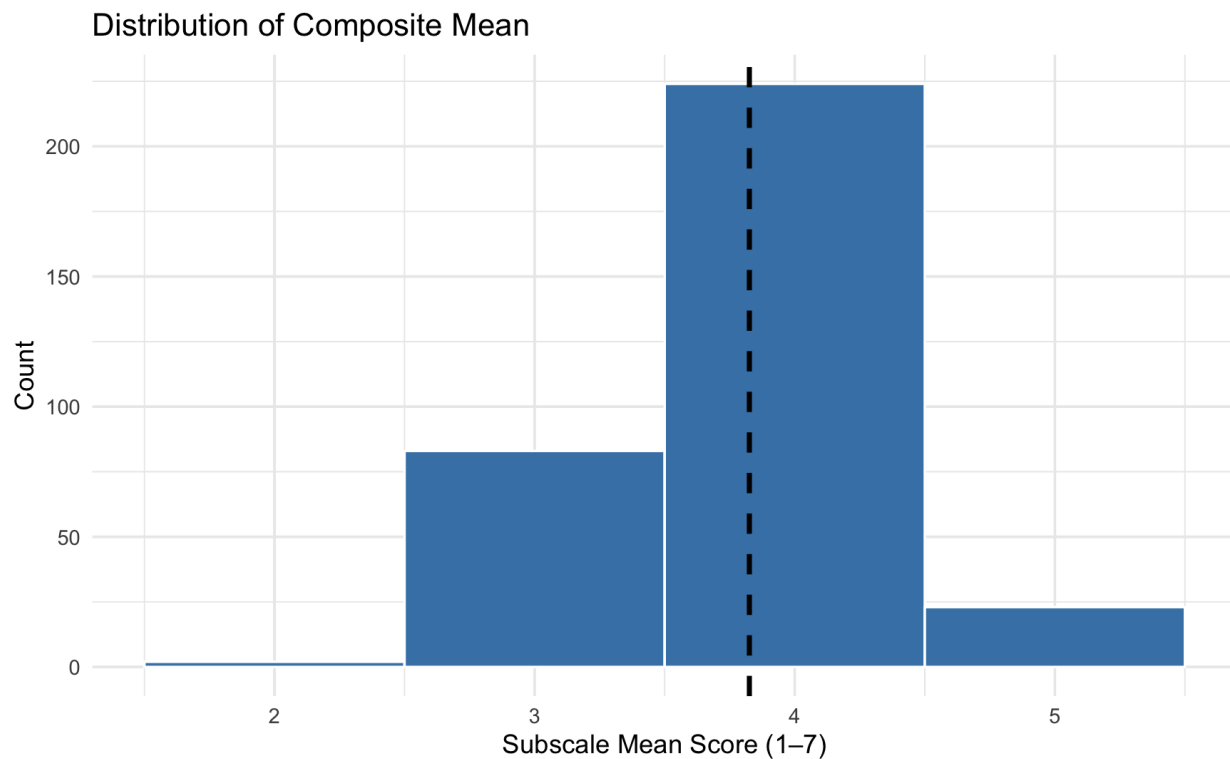
Results

We conducted a series of three analyses. First, we examined the descriptive statistics and distributions of the composite scale, along with the subscales. Second, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis to determine if our theoretical model statistically matches the latent factor structure in our scale. Lastly, we ran an exploratory two-sample t-test to examine how White people compare to People of Color (POC) on the Benevolent Racism measure.

Descriptive Statistics and Distributions

Does the benevolent racism composite subscale capture variation in response to the scale?

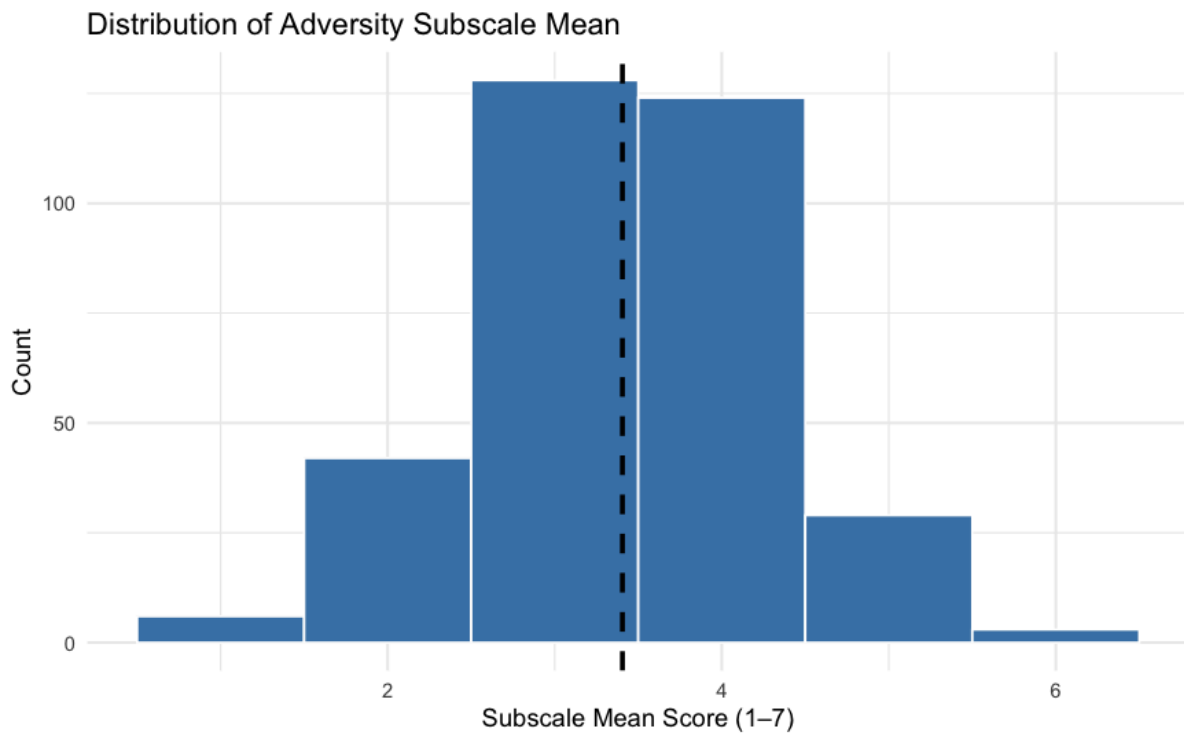
Figure 1



The composite benevolent racism scale ($M = 3.83$ $SD = 0.52$), had a mean close to the middle of the scale, and participant responses ranged from 2.00 – 5.23 . See Figure 1 for the distribution of the results.

Does the Benevolent Racism Normalization of Adversity subscale capture variation in response to the scale?

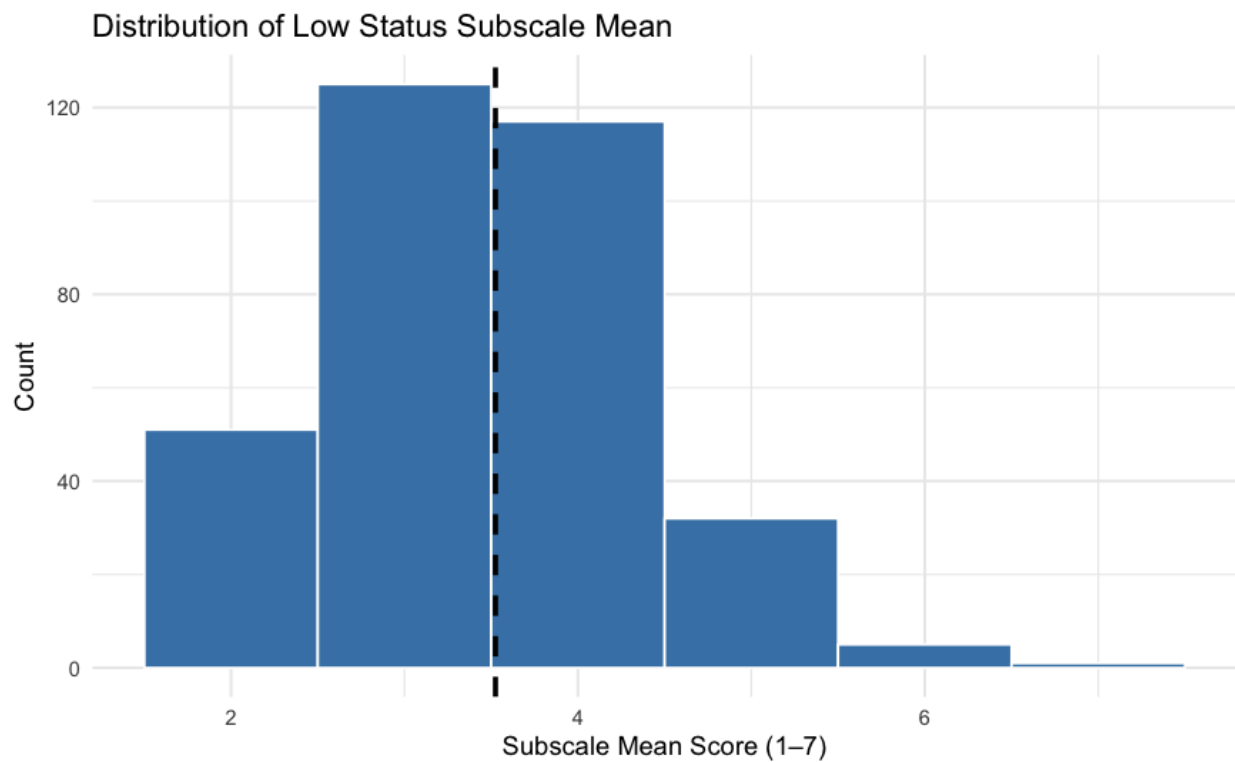
Figure 2



Likewise, the Adversity subscale ($M = 3.41$ $SD = 0.88$) had a mean close to the middle of the scale, and participant responses ranged from 1.00 – 5.86. See Figure 2 for the distribution of results.

Does the Benevolent Racism Low Status subscale capture variation in response to the scale?

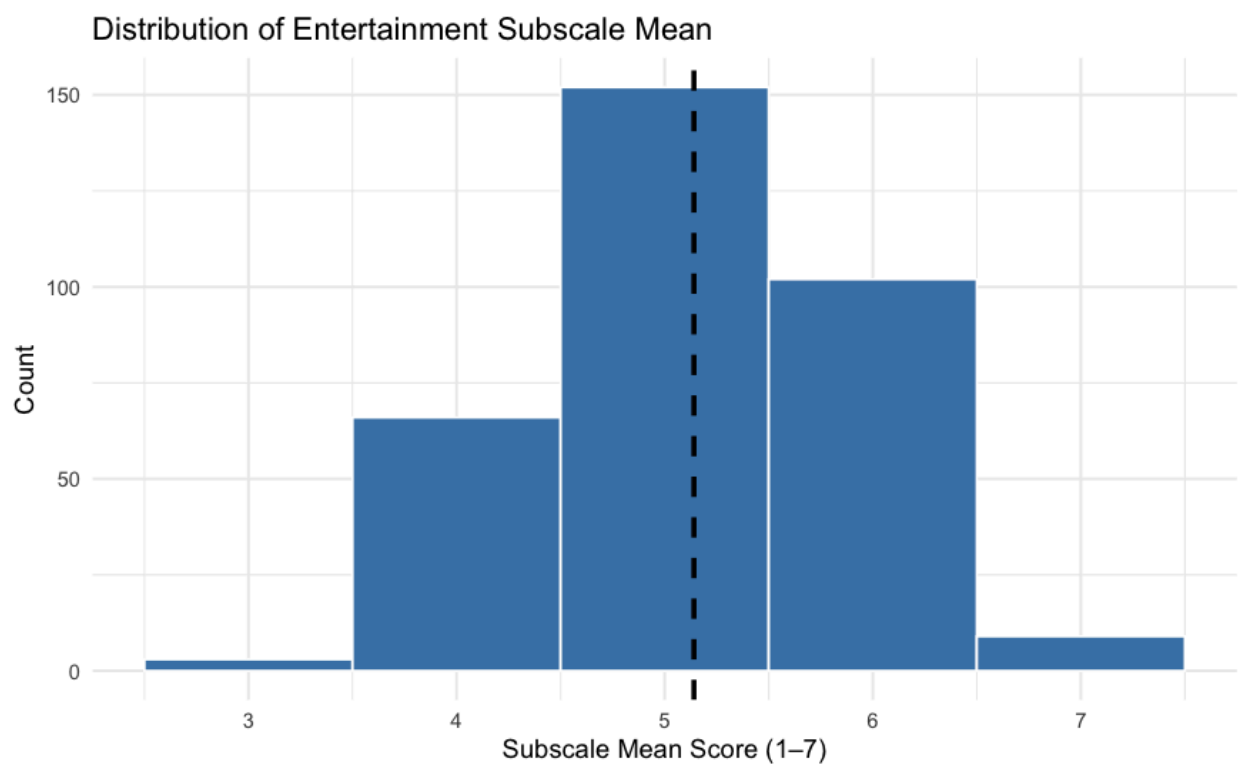
Figure 3



Additionally, the low status subscale ($M = 3.52$ $SD = 0.89$) had a mean close to the middle of the scale, and participant responses ranged from 1.67 – 7.00. See Figure 3 for the distribution of results.

Does the Benevolent Racism Entertainment & Catharsis subscale capture variation in response to the scale?

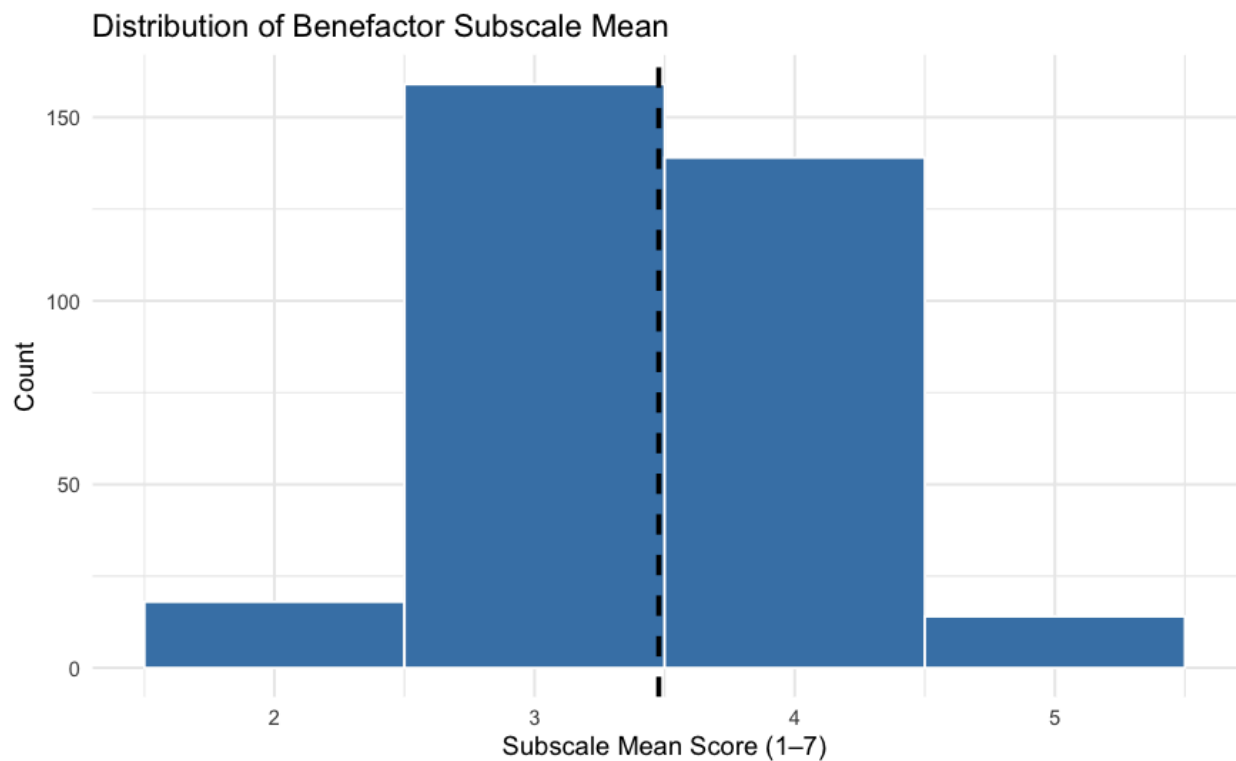
Figure 4



Similarly, the entertainment subscale ($M = 5.14$ $SD = 0.75$) demonstrated moderate variation as participant responses ranged from 3.00 – 7.00. See Figure 4 for the distribution of the results.

Figure 5

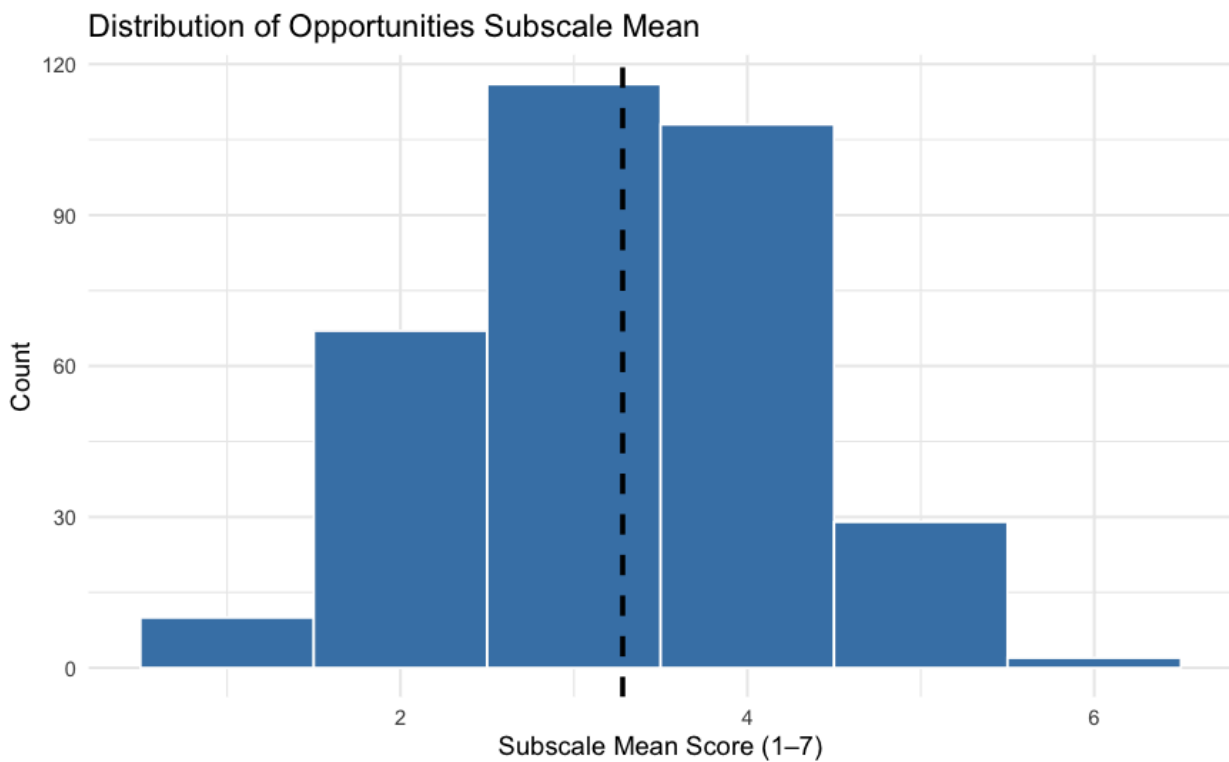
Does the benevolent racism White people as benefactors subscale capture variation in response to the scale?



The benefactor subscale ($M = 3.48$ $SD = 0.63$) had a mean close to the middle of the scale, and participant responses ranged from 1.60 – 5.00. See Figure 5 for the distribution of results.

Figure 6

Does the Benevolent Racism Limiting of Opportunities subscale capture variation in response to the scale?



Likewise, the limiting of opportunities subscale ($M = 3.28$ $SD = 0.94$) had a mean close to the middle of the scale, and participant responses ranged from 1.00 – 6.20. See figure 6 for the distribution of results.

Table 1

Does the benevolent racism scale demonstrate convergent and discriminant validity?

	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	5
1	Benevolent Racism Composite Scale	3.83	0.52				
2	Modern Racism Scale	2.24	0.93	.12* [.01, .22]			
3	Pro Diversity Beliefs Scale	6.13	0.94	.10 [-.00, .21]	-.63** [-.69, -.56]		
4	Social Dominance Orientation	1.86	0.85	.18** [.07, .28]	.71** [.65, .76]	-.66** [-.72, -.60]	
5	System Justification Scale	2.68	0.96	.06 [-.05, .17]	.64** [.57, .701]	.44** [-.53, -.35]	*.55 [.47, .62]

Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the composite benevolent racism scale, sub-scales and additional racism measures (e.g. MR, SDO, PDB, SJ) are presented in Table 1. Further, interrelations among the benevolent racism scale and additional racism measures demonstrated small correlations (.06-18). Modern Racism assesses subtle forms of racism and racial resentment towards people of color and Social Dominance Orientation assesses support for a hierarchy, so we would expect both Modern Racism and Social Dominance Orientation to have small positive correlations with Benevolent Racism and its subscales. As reported in Table 1, Modern racism had small positive correlations with the Adversity, Low Status and Entertainment & Catharsis Benevolent Racism subscales. However, Modern Racism was negatively correlated with the Limiting of Opportunities Benevolent Racism subscale. Similarly, Social Dominance Orientation did have small positive correlations, with the Adversity, Low Status, Entertainment & Catharsis Benevolent Racism subscales and SDO was negatively correlated with the Limiting of Opportunities subscale.

Additionally, System Justification measures the extent to which people believe the existing sociopolitical system is fair, even when those systems produce inequality. Therefore, we would expect for there to be a mix of small positive correlations with Benevolent Racism and low to no correlation with its subscales. As reported in Table 1, System Justification did have small positive correlation with the Adversity subscale. Expectedly, System Justification was negatively correlated with the Limiting of Opportunities subscale and showed insignificant positive correlations with Low Status Roles and Benevolent Racism Entertainment & Catharsis subscales.

Finally, the Pro Diversity Beliefs scale measures how much one values racial diversity. Therefore, we would expect for there to be small positive correlations with Benevolent Racism

and its subscales, as well as negative correlations with some subscales. As reported in Table 1, Pro Diversity Beliefs did have moderate positive correlations with the Limiting of Opportunities subscale. However, the Pro Diversity Beliefs scale was negatively correlated with the Adversity subscale and showed insignificant positive correlations with the Low Status Roles and Entertainment & Catharsis subscales. Thus, our interrelations support discriminant validity with our scale.

Table 2

Do the latent factor groupings observed in our variables align with our theoretical groupings?

Item Number	Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
br_1	Communities of color need to be protected by those in positions of privilege.	0.4		
br_2	Communities of color need economic investment from White people to thrive.		0.373	
br_3_reverse_code	People of Color should have more say than White people in decisions that affect their communities.*	-0.48	0.308	

br_4	One of the most important things that White people can do for racial equity is to teach People of Color new skills.		0.6	
br_5_reverse_code	All else being equal, People of Color benefit more from living in neighborhoods with people who share their racial/ethnic background than in predominantly White neighborhoods.*	-0.309		
br_6	People of Color benefit more from attending Predominantly White institutions than attending Historically Black and Brown institutions.*		0.439	
br_7	People of Color can be counted on to have a quality of resilience that few White	0.808		

	people possess.			
br_8	No matter the barrier, you can always count on People of Color to overcome it.	0.528		
br_9	A silver lining to racism is that it makes people of color stronger.		0.472	
br_10	People of color can almost always find a way to get really hard things done.	0.548		
br_11	People of Color can be relied on to work harder than White people.	0.723		
br-12	People of Color need fewer resources to overcome challenges than White people do.		0.359	
br_13	People of Color are naturally better than White people at service jobs.		0.663	
br_14	People of Color are naturally better than White people at jobs that require	0.32	0.652	

	physical labor.			
br_15	People of Color are more willing than White people to work in service jobs.	0.431	0.433	
br_16	People of Color are more willing than White people to work jobs that require a lot of physical labor.	0.458	0.434	
br_17	People of Color play a vital role in our economy as consumers.	NO LOADING	NO LOADING	NO LOADING
br_18_reverse_code	People of Color play a vital role in our community as taxpayers *	NO LOADING	NO LOADING	NO LOADING
br_19	I find spiritual or religious practices from other cultures more meaningful than those from my own culture.	NO LOADING	NO LOADING	NO LOADING
br_20	I find that the wisdom of other cultures or races helps me see my own life more clearly.			0.399

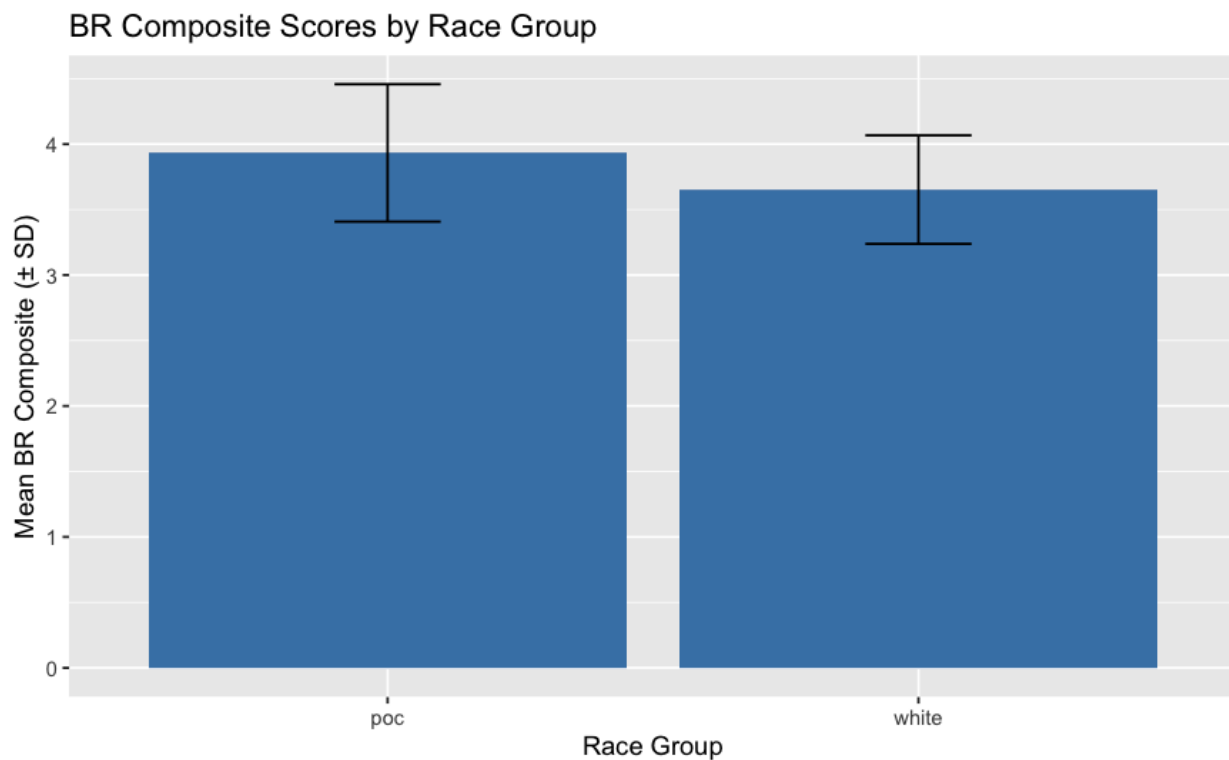
br_21	I feel like People of Color often show more empathy and kindness than White people I know.	0.722		
br_22	I like to try food from other countries because it exposes me to cultures that I wouldn't otherwise know about.			0.913
br_23	I like to try food from different cultures because it broadens my horizons.			0.898
br_24	Traveling is one of the best ways to connect with people from different backgrounds.			0.361
br_25	I'm drawn to art or music from other cultures because of the emotions it evokes, even if I don't know much about the culture.	0.335		0.371

br_26	People of Color place a higher value on money than on academic success.		0.618	
br_27	For many students of color, focusing on practical job skills is more important than pursuing academic or artistic ambitions.		0.515	
br_28	Running a candidate of color can be risky in districts where voters may not be receptive.	NO LOADING	NO LOADING	NO LOADING
br_29	Sometimes promoting a person of color into a leadership role too soon can create tension in the workplace.		0.4	
br_30	Pushing too quickly for racial change in an organization can alienate people who aren't ready for it.	-0.327	0.604	

As reflected in Table 3, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using maximum likelihood extraction with oblimin rotation was conducted specifying a three-factor solution. Before administering the EFA, we hypothesized that our Benevolent Racism subscale would be composed of 5 subscales. However, based on the results, the EFA instead suggests that our scale may be composed of 3 subscales. Furthermore, our EFA also suggests the removal of some items that may need to be modified based on their crossloading. (e.g., br_25) ; or removed based on them failing to meet the loading cutoff of $< .30$ (e.g., br_28).

Figure 7

Do White people score higher on the Benevolent Racism measure than People of color?



An independent sample t-test was conducted to examine White people differ from People of Color in levels of Benevolent Racism. Interestingly, results show that People of Color ($M = 3.93$, $sd = 0.52$) significantly report higher levels of Benevolent Racism in comparison to White people ($M = 3.65$, $sd = 0.41$).

Discussion

We developed a novel measure of Benevolent Racism. When we administered the new scale to a large sample of undergraduates, our results suggested that benevolent racism is a distinct form of racism in the real world. While most people tend to be positioned near the midpoint, there is enough variation in benevolent racist attitudes that the scale can capture beliefs and behaviors that lead to disparate social outcomes for people of color.

Interestingly, the Limiting Opportunities subscale did not correlate with Social Dominance Orientation and Modern racism in the expected direction. Regarding the former, one explanation is that the veneer of equity that is captured by the questions in the Benevolent Racism question is enough to distinguish it from more traditional forms of prejudice that have no interest in appearing egalitarian, instead endorsing inequity. However, regarding Modern Racism, what may explain the negative relationship between the scales is the rationales in the phrasing of the questions. Specifically, Modern Racism denies that racism exists, which therefore may naturally lead to disparate outcomes for POC. However, in the Limiting of Opportunities subscales, racism is acknowledged, which influences behaviors that will maintain or lead to disparate outcomes.

Furthermore, both of our exploratory analyses revealed unexpected findings. First, the exploratory factor analysis revealed a three-factor structure that partially departed from the

original theoretical model, suggesting that although the items indeed grouped into conceptually meaningful dimensions, a considerable number of items loaded onto unexpected factors, indicating the need for the refinement of latent constructs. Lastly, our exploratory t-test revealed that POC reported higher levels of Benevolent Racism than White people. Although unexpected, this finding may reflect limited racial heterogeneity within the POC sample. Given that the sample was predominantly composed of White and East Asian participants, collapsing diverse racial groups into a single category may have obscured meaningful variability in benevolently racist attitudes.

Overall, our findings are consistent with previous literature that suggests, foremost, benevolent forms of racism exist as a distinct form of racism in American society, which derives from post-Civil Rights politics (Esposito & Romano, 2016). Secondly, benevolent racism is a manifestation of unconscious racist biases prevailing despite individuals' motivations to appear egalitarian.(Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004). Further, our work expounds on the earlier theories of benevolent racism, specifically in the various ways in which these may manifest. For example, in the Ramasubramanian & Oliver (2007) study, they tested which forms of prejudice (Benevolent & Hostile) are more likely to be expressed towards African Americans and Asian Indians (2007), whereas we structured our scale to measure beliefs about all People of Color. Furthermore, our scale measures benevolent racist beliefs across various social contexts (e.g., cognitions. Therefore, while our work is not the first to mention Benevolent Racism, our work is the first to establish a comprehensive Benevolent Racism measure.

Limitations and Future Directions

Unfortunately, our study had a few notable limitations that we do plan to address in future iterations of our study. Foremost, our sample only included participants in the United States. While Benevolent Racism is particularly relevant to the United States at this moment, Benevolent Racism is a function of White supremacy and therefore may have the potential to show up in other parts of the world, especially in parts with histories of Western Colonialism / Enslavement and or histories of occupation by neighboring entities (e.g., The Americas, Africa, Asia, Oceania). In fact, a real-world example of how benevolent racism may currently manifest in other parts of the world is tourism. Tourism, historically, has been framed as a benevolent source of revenue for host economies, while also providing opportunities for tourists to engage with “othered” cultures and landscapes. However, in recent years, many local residents and activists have highlighted the ways in which tourism perpetuates historical exploitation of local culture, land, and labor (Bourlin, 2021; Ecology Project International, n.d.; Grant, 2025; Hall, 2024). Despite these critiques, scholars, tourism industries and in some cases, tourists themselves justify the practice by emphasizing its role in supporting economic development in host communities (Bourlin, 2021; Coscia et al., 2016; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2026). Future research can therefore include a wider geographical sample of participants.

Further, our study utilized a SONA student sample, Since the SONA pool solely recruits students taking psychology classes, it limits the range of participants we can recruit, potentially impacting the diversity of perspectives, particularly among White participants that may be obtained via larger online platforms such as Qualtrics or Cloud Researcher. For example, research suggests that college students tend to be more liberal than the general population (UCLA, 2017). Liberalism is politically associated with anti racist beliefs (Perry et al., 2021) and lower levels of modern racism (Oxendine, 2015; Perry et al., 2021). However, a silver lining of

this limitation is that despite our participant sample being made up of more liberal participants, we were still able to capture meaningful variation in our measure responses. Therefore, we suspect our measure may detect more robust variation with samples more representative of the U.S. Likewise, A limitation of the present study is the restricted racial heterogeneity within the POC sample. Given that the sample was predominantly White and East Asian, aggregating participants into a single POC category may limit the generalizability and interpretability of group comparisons, Thus future iterations of this study should incorporate a more diverse sample of POC.

Another limitation is the findings of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Originally, our theory proposed a five-structure measure; the EFA currently supports a three-factor solution. Consequently, we have yet to yield definitive confirmation of our factor structure. Therefore, future research should employ iterative scale refinement, along with a confirmatory factor analysis, to validate the proposed Benevolent Racism Measure.

Additionally, a limitation in our study is the length of our Benevolent Racism measure. For brainstorming and establishing the construct, we felt it was necessary to capture as many relevant real-world examples as possible. However, research in the field suggests long measures may lead to less accurate results. However, a silver lining is that the initial EFA indicated potential problematic items that should be removed based on their tendency to cross-load or based on their weak loading values (e.g., $< .30$). Therefore, future research should undergo iterative scale refinement to attempt to shorten the measure respectively.

Lastly, our final limitation is that our study did not assess the correlation between benevolent racism and benevolent sexism despite literature in sociology, Black feminism, and

critical race theory supporting the notion that sexism, much like hostile racism, is an extension of White supremacy. Because both theories underscore the use of seemingly positive rhetoric and behaviors that reinforce their respective hierarchies (Glick & Fiske, 2001), we hypothesize that individuals who are high in benevolent racism may also be high in benevolent sexism. However, as it currently stands, neither our study nor the field has explored whether this dynamic persists between benevolent racism and benevolent sexism. Therefore, there is a critical need to examine if and how Benevolent Racism relates to Benevolent Sexism. Thus, future research should explore the relationship between the two constructs.

Implications

As our paper details, benevolent racism is a unique construct that is measurable, which yields theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, our findings provide further evidence that benevolence and racism are not diametrically opposed, therefore providing further support for related studies in the field that refer to benevolent forms of racism as a catalyst of oppression of people of color. Practically, our findings allow for more testable questions in the field. Prior to the development of our scale, researchers had to use related measures or refer to aspects of benevolent racism more broadly (e.g. positive stereotypes), which may have made it difficult to confidently capture this phenomenon that many people of color were experiencing, yet unable to fully detail in social psychological literature. To this point; and of most importance, having a measurable construct for benevolent racism adds to the language that people of color within and outside of academia may use to interpret and explain their life experiences, in efforts of furthering the construction of an anti-racist society. Thus, these findings emerge at a critical juncture of time, marked by the Trump Administration's intentional efforts to distort the people's understanding of what constitutes racism; along with the demonization of anti-racist thinking

and policies for the purpose of furthering White-supremacist rhetoric and policies by way of both explicit and covert actions.

Conclusion

Our study provides evidence that benevolent racism uniquely exists in the real world. Of equal importance, benevolent racism is a social ailment that cannot simply be addressed within academia. Not only this, but those who are most affected should have a leading perspective in detailing how it manifests in the real world. Therefore, resources must be allocated to allow for more bottom up research, and barrier free practices to ensure our anti-racist theories are being used to deconstruct all forms of racism.

Appendix

Table 3

Benevolent Racism Questionnaire

White People as Benefactors

1. Communities of color need to be protected by those in positions of privilege.
2. Communities of color need economic investment from White people to thrive.
3. People of Color should have more say than White people in decisions that affect their communities.*
4. One of the most important things that White people can do for racial equity is to teach People of Color new skills.
5. All else being equal, People of Color benefit more from living in neighborhoods with people who share their racial/ethnic background than in predominantly White neighborhoods.*
6. People of Color benefit more from attending Predominantly White institutions than attending Historically Black and Brown institutions.

Normalization of adversity

7. People of Color can be counted on to have a quality of resilience that few White people possess.
8. No matter the barrier, you can always count on People of Color to overcome it.
9. A silver lining to racism is that it makes people of color stronger.
10. People of color can almost always find a way to get really hard things done.
11. People of Color can be relied on to work harder than White people.
12. People of Color need fewer resources to overcome challenges than White people do.

Serve a lower status role in society that White people won't/don't fill

13. People of Color are naturally better than White people at service jobs.
14. People of Color are naturally better than White people at jobs that require physical labor.
15. People of Color are more willing than White people to work in service jobs.
16. People of Color are more willing than White people to work jobs that require a lot of physical labor.
17. People of Color play a vital role in our economy as consumers.
18. People of Color play a vital role in our community as taxpayers *

POC's Culture as Entertainment & Catharsis

19. I find spiritual or religious practices from other cultures more meaningful than those from my own culture.
20. I find that the wisdom of other cultures or races helps me see my own life more clearly.
21. I feel like People of Color often show more empathy and kindness than White people I know.
22. I like to try food from other countries because it exposes me to cultures that I wouldn't otherwise know about.
23. I like to try food from different cultures because it broadens my horizons.
24. Traveling is one of the best ways to connect with people from different backgrounds.
25. I'm drawn to art or music from other cultures because of the emotions it evokes, even if I don't know much about the culture.

Limiting of Opportunities

26. People of Color place a higher value on money than on academic success.
27. For many students of color, focusing on practical job skills is more important than pursuing academic or artistic ambitions.
28. Running a candidate of color can be risky in districts where voters may not be receptive.
29. Sometimes promoting a person of color into a leadership role too soon can create tension in the workplace.
30. Pushing too quickly for racial change in an organization can alienate people who aren't ready for it.

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