



Autonomy striving and antiracism: A twofold view of autonomy reveals distinct pathways to outgroup attitudes vs. action

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Abstract

Most people disagree with racism, yet very few stand up to actively address or confront it. This is problematic because such *antiracism* is essential to overturn structures of racial injustice. Relative to research promoting positive intergroup attitudes, little is known about the antecedents of antiracism. We use recent advances in the asserted (i.e., proactive) versus assisted (i.e., affiliative) nature of autonomy to identify the motivational predictors of both positive attitudes and antiracist actions. In study 1 ($n=431$), we found that assisted autonomy was a stronger predictor of warm outgroup feelings (e.g., allophilia, admiration), and that this effect was mediated by empathy. Conversely, only asserted autonomy linked to confrontation of racism and willingness to take action on behalf of racialized groups. In study 2 ($n=290$), we assessed antiracist intentions before and after presentation of an antiracist message. Asserted (but not assisted) autonomy predicted an increase in antiracism after message exposure. Results suggest that asserted versus assisted autonomy striving have divergent links to outgroup feelings and behavior. We highlight the separate motivational pathways toward two important but functionally distinct outgroup outcomes and discuss how human autonomy can mobilize antiracist efforts.

Introduction

Although egalitarians express positive attitudes toward outgroups and align themselves with values of diversity, equity, and inclusion, most fail to summon their egalitarian beliefs into antiracist action (Kawakami et al., 2019; LaCosse et al., 2023). For instance, people lack insight into how they would respond to acts of racism; although they predict they would be very upset and believe they would rebuke the racist, in reality they show almost no emotional distress and respond instead with apathy (Kawakami et al., 2009). Indeed, most nonracists openly tolerate blatant racism from others and in society (Hunt et al., 2021). Unlike passive nonracism—which typically entails endorsement of egalitarianism and even positive attitudes toward racialized groups—*antiracism* involves self-realization, mobilization, effort, and skill to confront racially oppressive systems (DiAngelo, 2022). To address racial injustice and overturn widespread white racial supremacy, the pursuit of antiracism—rather than the

reduction of racism or pursuit of intergroup harmony—is needed (Kendi, 2023; Singh, 2019). Unfortunately, the social psychological study of antiracism among the racially advantaged is lacking. Indeed, while the motivational predictors of nonracism are well-established (Legault et al., 2007; Plant & Devine, 1998), the way that motivation shapes antiracist intentions and behavior is unknown. In the current research, we use recent advances regarding the asserted (i.e., proactive) versus assisted (i.e., affiliative) nature of autonomy (Legault et al., 2017; Laporte et al., 2021a; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020) to uncover the unique motivational antecedents of not only positive outgroup feelings, but antiracist intention and behavior.

Beyond racism reduction and toward antiracism promotion

Social psychologists have studied racism consistently for 70 years, focusing mainly on the promotion of positive intergroup contact (Allport, 1954; Tajfel, 1969; Paluck & Green, 2009; Pettigrew, 1998). While important for reducing conflict and tension, the promotion of harmonious and warm intergroup relations does not necessarily translate into racial justice. This is partly because the goals of prejudice reduction and social change are often opposed. Prejudice reduction

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interventions are intended to nurture positive affect such as empathy and trust, and to diminish the tendency to make “us versus them” categorizations. Conversely, collective-action interventions encourage members of disadvantaged groups to form a strong sense of ingroup solidarity to better identify injustice and take action against the established hierarchy (Wright & Lubensky, 2013). Thus, not only do intergroup warmth and harmony often occur alongside social inequality, but they can also mask it—by fostering a desire to maintain positive relations and reducing the need to disrupt the status quo (Dixon et al., 2010; Wright & Lubensky, 2013).

Although collective action is well studied among disadvantaged groups, the tendency for advantaged group members to challenge their own privilege and act on behalf of minoritized groups is not well-understood. Indeed, antiracist behavior appears to be rather difficult to predict (Hunt et al., 2021; Kawakami et al., 2009). Outside psychological research, antiracist educators have long suggested that the mere disapproval of racism is insufficient, and that explicit antiracist motivation and action are needed to address widespread racial injustice (Collins, 1986; Kehoe, 1994; Dei, 2000). Racial discrimination remains pervasive despite that most people agree it is unacceptable. Black Americans are still killed by police at twice the rate their white counterparts are (Tate et al., 2020), earn 31% less annual income (Lang & Spitzer, 2020), and are subjected to significantly more harassment and aggression (Roberts & Rizzo, 2021). And recently, scholars have noted upticks in white supremacy; Horowitz, 2019).

Thus, to overturn systemic racism, antiracist efforts among the racial majority are essential. Whereas being *non-racist* means taking up an egalitarian posture and endorsing egalitarian beliefs, becoming *antiracist* involves acknowledging one’s extensive racial privilege (DiAngelo, 2022; Singh, 2019), recognizing that racism is embedded in white culture (Kendi, 2023), and actively working to amend it (e.g., by confronting racism; by engaging in collective action on behalf of disadvantaged groups; van Zomeren, 2013). Thus, antiracism pushes beyond nonracism, and even beyond positive affect toward minoritized groups, to mobilize proactive counteraction of all forms of racism—at individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels (Pieterse et al., 2016). Recent evidence suggests that nonracism and antiracism are not only conceptually but empirically distinct (LaCosse et al., 2023). They also exert distinct effects on related behaviors. While nonracist stances and warm feelings are important in creating intergroup cohesion and peace, they do not necessarily translate to social change (Dixon et al., 2010), and unlike the palliative effect of positive intergroup affect, antiracism predicts support for diversity tax initiatives, as well as the tendency to hold police accountable for shooting unarmed Black men (LaCosse et

al., 2023). Given that antiracist behavior appears to be germane in mobilizing individuals to confront and dismantle racial bias and prejudice, it becomes important to examine the motivational forces that give rise to it.

The role of autonomy in outgroup attitudes

Self-Determination Theory is an important lens with which to understand nonprejudiced and nonracist motivations. Legault and colleagues demonstrated that motivation to be nonprejudiced can range in the extent to which it is autonomous (Legault et al., 2007). Whereas *autonomous* motivation refers to self-direction and volition in belief and action, *control* denotes feelings of constraint and pressure from external forces. Individuals who are autonomously motivated to be nonracist place personal importance on egalitarianism and see themselves as open-minded and accepting of social differences. In contrast, those with a controlled motivation toward the regulation of prejudice are concerned about appearing prejudiced (Plant & Devine, 1998) and feel socially pressured to behave in line with the expectation to be nonprejudiced. It therefore may not be surprising that those who believe nonprejudice is important and meaningful show more egalitarianism (Legault et al., 2007), less racial stereotyping (Legault, Green-Demers, & Eadie, 2009), and more positive outgroup affect than those who are more externally motivated (Legault & Green-Demers, 2012).

But why should general autonomy link to nonracism? Although research on the role of motivation to regulate prejudice is plentiful, relatively little attention has been paid to how general autonomy or autonomous functioning drives egalitarian belief and positive outgroup regard. Evidence suggests that those who hold more autonomous or intrinsic goals (i.e., for personal growth, meaningful relationships, and community contribution) demonstrate more egalitarianism and less racial prejudice than those with extrinsic goals (e.g., for wealth and prestige; Duriez et al., 2007). It is likely that psychological need satisfaction helps to explain the connection. Past research has shown that autonomous functioning is uniquely important to wellbeing (Kukita et al., 2022), because it serves basic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which in turn foster virtuousness (Deci & Ryan, 2008), the integration and resolution of ego-threats and defenses (Hodgins & Knee, 2002), and eudaimonia—or the experience of living a life that is reflective, agentic, and *exemplary* (Ryan et al., 2008). Because autonomy links to *goodness*, including prosocial and benevolent concern (Gagne, 2003; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010), as well as community contribution and personal improvement (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser, 2009), it makes sense that it should facilitate egalitarian and nonracist

attitudes. Moreover, because those higher in autonomy are more likely to behave in ways that align with their interests and values—which tend to reflect both personal development and prosocial concern—they are likely to resist social prejudices. Because racism tends to stem from feelings of threat or fear, it may be more difficult to integrate than more positive or even neutral attitudes—much akin to the difficulty people have in harmonizing harm or violence with the self; rather, harm and violence tend to reflect more compartmentalized thoughts and behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In this way, autonomy should be negatively associated with racism. In contrast, intrinsic values like egalitarianism and prosocial concern should be consonant with autonomous and integrated functioning (Hodgins & Knee, 2002; Legault et al., 2009), as such pursuits likely serve eudaimonic wellbeing and need satisfaction. What is not yet clear is the way autonomy links to action and resistance in the face of racial injustice. In this research, we ask about the links between autonomy and outgroup attitudes as well as social action on behalf of outgroups.

The asserted and assisted components of autonomy: A two-dimensional perspective

Recently, scholars have begun to emphasize the different ways to strive for autonomy. Legault and colleagues posited two distinct trait-based approaches to autonomy satisfaction—one that is contextually “assisted” and one that is individually “asserted” (Legault et al., 2017). Assisted—also referred to as collaborative—autonomy satisfaction refers to the experience of ease and harmony in self-determination and self-expression usually resulting from a consistently autonomy-supportive environment. When autonomy-satisfying conditions are conferred by a supportive social environment, individuals need not spend a great deal of effort in seeking autonomy. Social contexts that furnish individuals with support and opportunity promote self-integration and self-determination in an efficient fashion (Deci & Ryan, 2013). Someone with an assisted autonomy orientation might characteristically lean on close others for autonomy support or frequently feel nurtured by others during their agentic pursuits. This ‘leaning into’ autonomy support, in turn, heightens perceptions of autonomy satisfying social interactions (Legault et al., 2017; Levine et al., 2021a; Levine et al., 2021). This interdependence centers on the essential connection between autonomy support and autonomy satisfaction. In other words, those high in assisted autonomy tend to perceive close others as a source of autonomy satisfaction. Accordingly, research shows that assisted autonomy promotes cooperation and the capacity to perceive autonomy support from others (Levine et al., 2021a,

b). Thus, because of the interpersonal focus of assisted autonomy, it should promote empathy and thus positive regard for others (e.g., Legault et al., 2017).

In contrast, assertive—or proactive—autonomy seeking is the personal assertion and search for autonomy. Individuals high in asserted autonomy create autonomy-satisfying conditions in a more effortful way (Legault et al., 2017). They may do so by affirming their own interests and looking for opportunities to self-express or behave in self-determined ways. Although both asserted and assisted forms of autonomy striving equally reflect self-congruence and connect to needs and wellbeing, asserted autonomy is more active or resilient in nature. Indeed, it has been shown to stem from more challenging social experiences where recruitment of self-awareness and self-assertion may be more adaptive, for instance, when coping successfully with controlling parents or employers (Legault et al., 2017), or when reclaiming autonomy after it is thwarted (Radel et al., 2011). Interestingly, while assisted autonomy is more strongly linked to positive interpersonal relationships, asserted autonomy is more robustly connected to the psychological integration (i.e., healthy processing) of difficult life experiences (Legault et al., 2017). Thus, one way to differentiate assertive and assisted forms of autonomy striving is along a continuum of effort—where assisted autonomy is characterized by ease and harmony in self-determination, while asserted autonomy reflects energy and effort.

Building on this two-dimensional view of autonomy striving, and in line with SDT’s assumption that human beings are inherently proactive in nature, recent research has shown that individuals actively contribute to their own need-satisfaction by “crafting” autonomy, competence, and relatedness experiences (Laporte et al., 2021). Importantly, *need crafting* varies between individuals, but also changes within the same individuals over time, and contributes to psychological wellbeing (Laporte et al., 2021; Laporte, Soenens, Flamant, Laporte et al., 2021a, b). Unlike assisted autonomy, assertive autonomy crafting relates to active self-exploration and a negotiating rather than agreeable interpersonal style (Legault et al., 2017)—suggesting it might promote a more emphatic pursuit of identity and values.

Thus, both assisted and asserted autonomy are core aspects of self-determination, and fundamental to self-integration, vitality, and growth. In the current research, we examine their distinctiveness in predicting passive positive affect versus active antiracist behavioral tendencies. We surmise that assisted autonomy should promote positive intergroup affect—due to its affiliative and cooperative nature focusing on relationship preservation and prosocial concern. However, because antiracism and social justice action require disruption and confrontation of unjust systems (Pietrse et al., 2016), assisted autonomy is not likely a sufficient

predictor; rather, assertive autonomy—which reflects tenacity in self-determination and self-expression (Legault et al., 2017)—should be a more powerful antecedent.

The present studies

In study 1, we examine the roles of assisted vs. asserted autonomy in emotional and behavioral outgroup phenomena—including the affective outcomes of allophilia (outgroup affinity), outgroup warmth, and outgroup admiration, and the action-focused outcomes associated with antiracism. Because of its complexity, we assess antiracism in different ways and at different levels, including interpersonal antiracism (i.e., the confrontation of racism between individuals), awareness of institutional antiracism, and social justice seeking behavior. Although these different outgroup measures are all positive and altruistic in nature, they elicit different consequences for outgroup behavior and social change (Dixon et al., 2010).

Thus, we expected that the two forms of autonomy would be socially important for different reasons. In particular, we hypothesized that, due to the affiliative and relationship-promoting nature of assisted autonomy (Legault et al., 2017; Levine et al., 2021a, b), it would be more strongly associated with positive outgroup affect (allophilia, outgroup warmth, and outgroup admiration). We also expected that, due to the relational aspects of assisted autonomy, its link to positive outgroup attitudes would be mediated by empathy specifically (rather than other possible mediators).

In contrast, we surmised that assisted autonomy would not be sufficient for predicting social action on behalf of minoritized groups. Rather, the relationship-maintaining aspects of assisted autonomy might attenuate intentions to disrupt the status quo, and instead more assertive and proactive aspects of autonomy are likely needed for action that challenges systems of injustice. Because antiracism requires action and effort rather than positive feelings (Dixon et al., 2010), we predicted that asserted (but not assisted) autonomy would be related to antiracism and social justice seeking behavior.

In study 2, we follow up on the role of asserted autonomy in predicting antiracist intent. We do so by measuring changes in antiracism after reading an antiracism message and call to action. We theorized that the collaborative and relational embeddedness of assisted autonomy might assuage a direct plea to challenge the status quo. Rather, we predicted that those with an asserted autonomy orientation would be more mobilized to perform acts of antiracism after exposure to an antiracist message. Thus, we expected asserted autonomy to predict an increase in antiracism from

pre- to post-message, whereas we did not expect the same for assisted autonomy.

Study 1 method

Participants and procedure

We recruited participants online from Prolific Academic ($n=431$) and compensated them \$5.00 for a survey of about 15–20 minutes' duration. Participants were 51% women, 46% men, and the remainder were nonbinary or did not report their gender. We intentionally sampled Non-Black participants because several of our measures targeted attitudes and antiracism in support of Black people in particular. Most participants were white (94%). Participants' mean age was 37.05 years ($SD=11.64$). A third of the sample was college educated (32%) and 28% had obtained a master's degree. The survey assessed both asserted and assisted forms of autonomy, as well as warm outgroup attitudes and justice-related intentions and behaviors. We also assessed key traits as potential mediators of the link between autonomy and intergroup outcomes—expecting that assisted autonomy would link to trait empathy, which would in turn link to positive attitudes toward outgroup members.

Asserted and assisted autonomy

Legault and colleagues (2017) developed the definitions for *assertive* and *assisted* autonomy striving along with a two-factor scale. Asserted autonomy refers to the active seeking out of autonomy-satisfying experiences, whereas assisted autonomy refers to the tendency to see close others as sources of autonomy satisfaction (Legault et al., 2017). Assisted autonomy striving was measured with 4 items (i.e., “I feel like my social groups (e.g. friends, family) allow me the chance to express myself and my feelings”; “My interests are supported by the people (e.g. my friends and family) in my life”; “I feel supported by my social environment” and “I feel like I get the chance to be my true self”; $\alpha=0.88$). Assertive—or proactive—autonomy was also measured with 4 items (e.g., “I look for every opportunity to express my ideas and opinions”; “I fight for opportunities to be who I really am”; “I always search for ways to express who I am”; and “I work to overcome the obstacles that prevent me from expressing my interests and desires”; $\alpha=0.86$). All items were measured on a Likert Scale from 1 (disagree completely) to 6 (agree completely). The scale shows sound psychometric properties and the two types of autonomy predict distinct interaction styles (Legault et al., 2017).

Measures of outgroup attitudes

Allophilia

In contrast to xenophobia, *allophilia* denotes positive affect and openness toward outgroups. We used Pittinsky and colleagues' (2011a) allophilia scale, which measures the degree to which individuals like and feel connected to Black people. Participants rated their agreement with items such as "I respect Black people" and "I feel a sense of belonging with Black people" (10 items; $\alpha=0.91$) on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). The scale demonstrates validity as a single construct measure and predicts variability in intergroup behavior beyond that predicted by stereotypes and prejudice (Pittinsky, Rosenthal, & Montoya, Pittinsky et al., 2011b). Items were measured on a Likert scale from 1 (disagree completely) to 6 (agree completely).

Outgroup warmth

Feelings towards Black, Arabic, Latine, and Jewish people were measured using feeling thermometers (Alwin, 1997; Nelson, 2008). Participants rated their feelings towards these outgroups on a scale from 0 to 100, where 50 indicates a neutral feeling towards the outgroup. Attitudes toward the four outgroups were combined to create a single indicator of outgroup warmth ($\alpha=0.93$).

Outgroup admiration

Admiration towards outgroups was measured with three items (e.g. "As a non-Black person, I feel admiration toward Black individuals"). All three items were measured on a Likert scale from 1 (disagree completely) to 6 (agree completely). Reliability was very good ($\alpha=0.88$).

Measures of outgroup action and intentions

Social justice behaviors and behavioral intentions

We used 4 Items from the behavioral dimensions of the Social Justice Scale (Torres-Harding et al., 2012) based on the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991). These items reflected *perceived behavioral control* in promoting social justice (2 items; e.g. "If I choose to do so, I am capable of influencing others to promote fairness and equality") and *behavioral intentions* to engage (2 items; e.g. "I intend to talk with others about social power inequalities, social injustices, and the impact of social forces on health and well-being"). In contrast to social justice beliefs and attitudes, social justice behaviors involve taking action to promote egalitarianism and challenge unfairness and oppression

(Torres-Harding et al., 2012). All 4 items were measured on a Likert scale from 1 (disagree completely) to 6 (agree completely) and showed good reliability ($\alpha=0.85$).

Antiracism

The Anti-Racism Behavioral Inventory (Pieterse et al., 2016) was used to assess antiracism. It has been validated both as a unitary measure and as containing three subscales—including (1) wanting to repair racism at the interpersonal level and individual attempts at combating racism (9 items; e.g., "When I hear people telling racist jokes and using negative racial stereotypes, I usually confront them"; $\alpha=0.90$); (2) awareness of structural racism (7 items; e.g., "I feel guilty and ashamed when I think of the history of racism and slavery in the US"; $\alpha=0.94$); and (3) the desire to combat institutional racism or to address and expose systemic racism (5 items; e.g., "I give money to organizations working against racism and discrimination"; $\alpha=0.89$). All 21 items were measured on a Likert scale from 1 (disagree completely) to 6 (agree completely). The ARBI shows good psychometric properties and has demonstrated inverse associations with symbolic racism and color-blind racial attitudes (Pieterse et al., 2016).

Frequency of confronting racism

The frequency with which individuals actively confront racism was measured using 6 items on a Likert scale from 1 (never) to 6 (every time; e.g. "When you have observed racism directed toward another person, how often have you confronted the racist person?"; $\alpha=0.72$). We created this measure for the purpose of the current study to ascertain not just whether respondents endorse antiracist action, but how often they engage in it.

Mediator measures

We expected that assisted autonomy would relate to positive outgroup affect through empathy, due to the critical link between autonomy and altruism, and because it is likely that empathy is a pathway toward positive outgroup regard. We also tested for alternative mediators—including perspective-taking and intellectual humility. These were used to verify whether assisted autonomy links to positive outgroup attitudes through empathy specifically, rather than other known predictors of nonprejudice (Shih et al., 2009; Legault et al., 2022).

Empathy and perspective taking

The empathic concern subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980) was used to measure trait-based interpersonal empathy. The seven items (e.g. “I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me”) were measured on a Likert scale from 1 (does not describe me well) to 6 (describes me very well), and showed good reliability ($\alpha=0.83$).

The seven-item perspective taking subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980) was used to measure trait-based perspective taking (e.g. “I try to look at everybody’s side of a disagreement before I make a decision”; $\alpha=0.80$). Thus, where empathy refers to care and concern for others, perspective taking involves the tendency to consider others’ perspective. Empathy (e.g., Ensari et al., 2012) and perspective taking (e.g., Adida et al., 2018) have been shown to be important predictors of nonprejudice, and so their role in mediating effects of autonomy was assessed.

Intellectual humility

Intellectual humility refers to the meta-cognitive ability to recognize the limitations of one’s beliefs and knowledge (Porter et al., 2022). People who score higher in intellectual humility are more likely to display tolerance of opposing political and religious views and show less hostility toward members of opposing groups (Hook et al., 2017; Stanley et al., 2020). Humility has also been shown to protect against racism and sexism (Legault et al., 2020). The six-item Intellectual Humility Scale (Leary et al., 2017) assessed acceptance of personal fallibility and limitation (e.g., “I question my own opinions, positions, and viewpoints because they could be wrong”; $\alpha=0.86$).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for measured variables (Study 1)

	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
<i>Autonomy Measures</i>				
Asserted Autonomy	4.18	1.07	−0.47	−0.13
Assisted Autonomy	4.56	1.02	−0.90	0.81
<i>Attitude Measures</i>				
Allophilia	4.68	0.87	−0.83	0.86
Warmth	71.64	21.4	−0.42	−0.58
Admiration	4.77	1.08	−1.21	1.32
<i>Behavioral Measures</i>				
Social Justice Behavior	4.32	1.12	−0.70	0.04
Antiracism	3.63	1.13	−0.50	−0.47
Confrontation	3.65	0.95	−0.10	0.02
<i>Mediation Measures</i>				
Empathy	4.60	0.85	−0.38	0.23
Intellectual Humility	4.79	0.76	−0.60	0.87
Perspective Taking	4.33	0.79	0.03	0.15

Note. All variable scales range from 1 to 6 except “warmth” thermometer, which ranges from 0 to 100

Study 1 results & discussion

Preliminary analyses

Data and code are available at https://osf.io/68erv/?view_only=ae9c53e18f9d4a0bb7091bb3b7d78c1a. Missing values were less than 2% for each variable and left as missing at random. Data did not deviate significantly from univariate normality, as shown in Table 1. Agreement with variable items was moderately strong.

Correlations between variables are presented in Table 2. Asserted and assisted autonomy were moderately associated with one another and with general autonomy. In general, asserted autonomy was somewhat more strongly related to behavioral indicators of action in support of outgroups, whereas assisted autonomy was somewhat more strongly associated with positive attitudes toward outgroups and pro-social traits of empathy, humility, and perspective-taking.

Table 2 Correlations between study 1 variables

	Assisted	Allophilia	Admiration	Warmth	SJB	Antiracism	Confront	Empathy	Humility	Pers. taking
Asserted	0.43***	0.23***	0.16**	−0.02	0.54***	0.41***	0.32***	0.17***	0.11*	0.16**
Assisted		0.29***	0.20***	0.16**	0.39***	0.22***	0.17**	0.31***	0.16**	0.24***
Allophilia			0.70***	0.50***	0.48***	0.46***	0.38***	0.33***	0.26***	0.28***
Admiration				0.48***	0.40***	0.56***	0.34***	0.45***	0.34***	0.22***
Warmth					0.17**	0.17**	0.20***	0.39***	0.26***	0.20***
SJB						0.65***	0.44***	0.39***	0.30***	0.35***
Antiracism							0.56***	0.30***	0.17***	0.14***
Confront								0.26***	0.08	0.20***
Empathy									0.33***	0.42***
Humility										0.57***

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

Table 3 Multiple regression models: role of asserted and assisted autonomy in antiracist attitudes and behavior

Attitude Outcomes				Action Outcomes			
	β	t	p		β	t	p
DV: Allophilia				DV: Social Justice Behavior			
<i>Predictors</i>				<i>Predictors</i>			
Asserted Autonomy	0.14	2.63	0.01	Asserted Autonomy	0.46	10.12	<0.001
Assisted Autonomy	0.23	4.36	<0.001	Assisted Autonomy	0.18	4.04	0.001
DV: Outgroup Admiration				DV: Antiracism			
Asserted Autonomy	0.10	1.96	0.051	Asserted Autonomy	0.39	7.87	<0.001
Assisted Autonomy	0.16	2.90	0.004	Assisted Autonomy	0.06	1.09	0.28
DV: Warmth				DV: Confrontation			
Asserted Autonomy	-0.09	-1.59	0.11	Asserted Autonomy	0.30	5.72	<0.001
Assisted Autonomy	.16	3.74	<0.001	Assisted Autonomy	0.05	<1	0.32

Significant coefficients are in bold

Main analyses

To understand the unique roles of asserted and assisted autonomy striving in intergroup outcomes, we conducted analyses in two phases. First, a series of multiple regressions assessed the extent to which each form of autonomy predicted each outcome. Secondly, we examined the mediating roles of empathy, humility, and perspective-taking in explaining the link between autonomy type on one hand, and each outcome on the other. We anticipated that empathy would help to explain the role of assisted autonomy on intergroup affect, given the relational focus of affiliative autonomy processes. Mediation analyses were examined using PROCESS to assess direct and indirect effects of each autonomy type (Hayes, 2017).

Multiple regression analyses: Unique effects of asserted and assisted autonomy

All antiracist outcomes were regressed onto the predictors of assisted and asserted autonomy¹. As displayed in Table 3, results show that assisted autonomy was significantly predictive of all three attitude measures of allophilia, admiration, and warmth. Asserted autonomy also linked allophilia, although to a lesser extent. Asserted autonomy was not related to outgroup admiration or warmth. Rather, asserted autonomy was uniquely and robustly connected to all three indicators of antiracist action—including social justice behaviors, antiracist intentions, and frequency of confronting interpersonal racism. In contrast, assisted autonomy did

not predict either antiracism or confrontation frequency. It was related to social justice behavior, however—although the effect was three times weaker than that of asserted autonomy.

Overall, this pattern of results suggests that assisted autonomy links more strongly and consistently with positive attitudes toward outgroups, whereas asserted autonomy links more strongly and consistently with taking action to support outgroups.

Meditating roles of empathy, perspective-taking, and humility

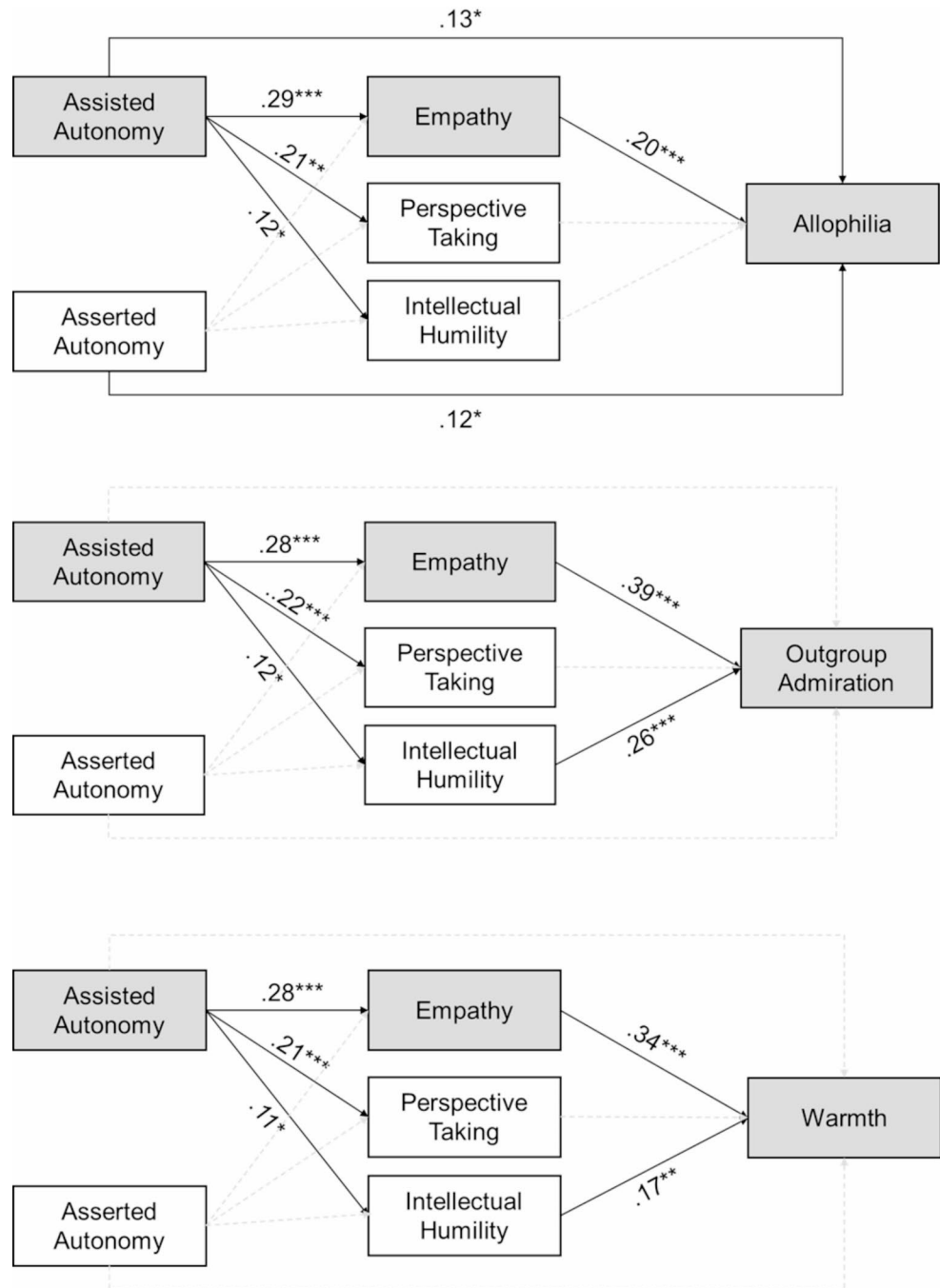
Because of the affiliative and prosocial effects of both assisted autonomy (Legault et al., 2017; Levine et al., 2021a, b) and empathy, we surmised that empathy would mediate the link between assisted autonomy and attitude outcomes. We also included additional competing mediators to verify the unique importance of empathy in the link between assisted autonomy and attitudes. To disentangle these effects, we used SPSS PROCESS to test the direct and indirect effects of the two kinds of autonomy on each affective and behavioral outcome, through the mediators of empathy, perspective-taking, and humility. Figures 1 and 2 depict these results.

Intergroup attitude outcomes. For all models presented in Fig. 1, assisted autonomy was positively related to the prosocial mediators of empathy [B=0.24, SE=0.04, 95% CI [0.16, 0.33], t(391)=5.57, p<.0001], perspective-taking [B=0.16, SE=0.04, 95% CI [0.08, 0.25], t(391)=3.93, p=.0001], and humility [B=0.09, SE=0.04, 95% CI [0.01, 0.17], t(391)=2.20, p=.03]. In contrast, asserted autonomy was *not* related to any of the prosocial mediators.

For the *allophilia model*, assisted autonomy remained directly related to allophilia after controlling for the effects of the mediators (B=0.11, SE=0.04, 95% CI [0.02, 0.20], t(388)=2.53, p=.01). Mirroring the regression analysis, asserted autonomy was also directly related to allophilia

¹ We also ran the same set of analyses including a general, more traditional measure of autonomous functioning, in order to complement the current results, by revealing what assisted and assertive components predict over and above well-established measures of general autonomous functioning. We also wanted to show that these assisted and asserted components contribute to the prediction of important outcomes not captured by the measurement of general autonomy. The pattern of results was almost identical to those presented in Table 3. See “Supplemental Analyses Including General Autonomy”.

Fig. 1 Direct and Indirect Effects of Autonomy Type on Intergroup Attitudes. Path coefficients are standardized for interpretability. Grayed boxes reflect significant indirect effects. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$



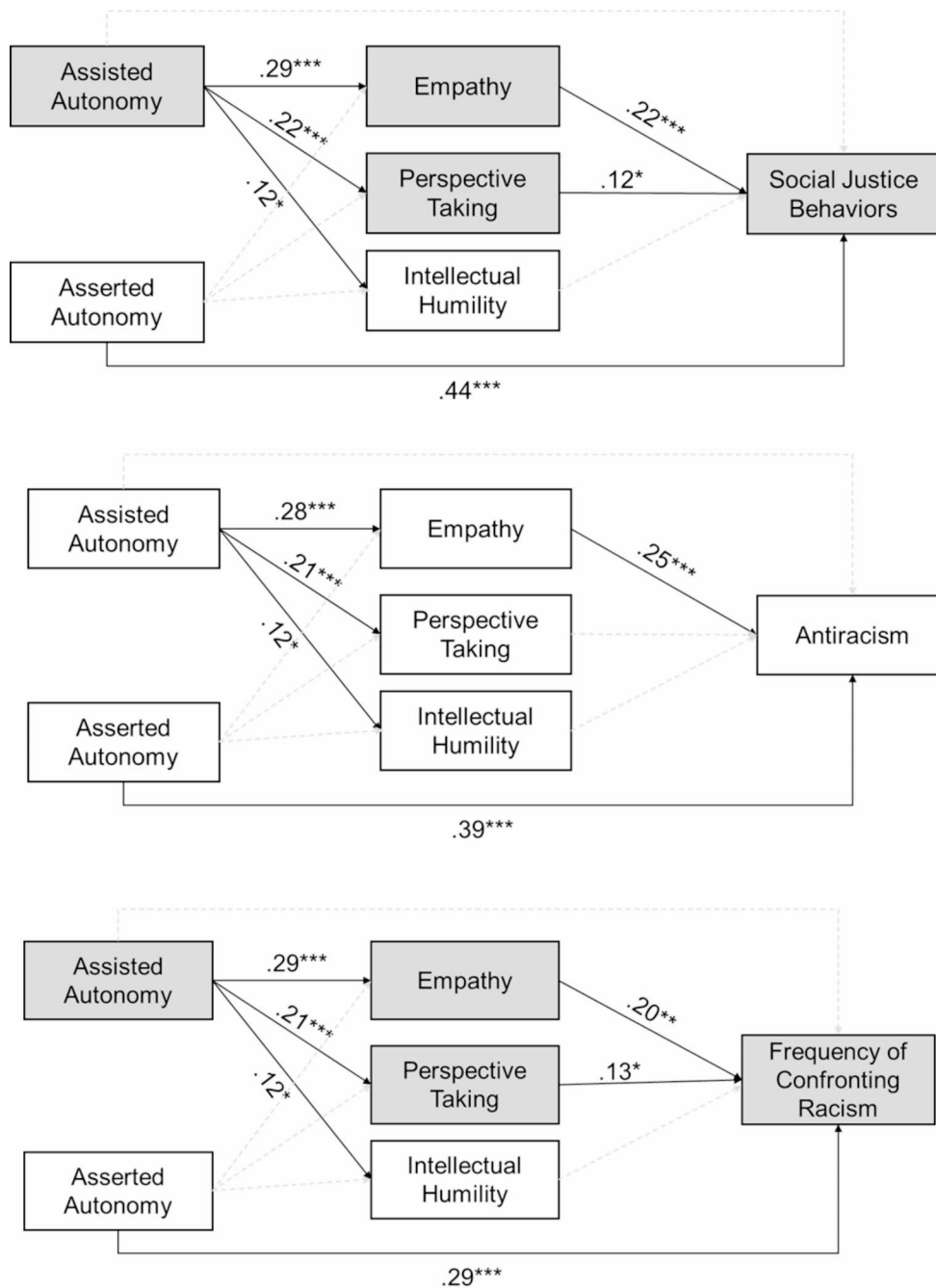
($B = 0.10$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.18], $t(388) = 2.43$, $p = .02$). Of the mediators, only empathy was uniquely linked to allophilia ($B = 0.21$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.32], $t(388) = 3.92$, $p = .0001$). In terms of mediating effects, assisted autonomy had a significant indirect effect on allophilia through empathy, $B = 0.05$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.10]. There were no other mediators.

For the *outgroup admiration model*, the mediators of empathy and humility were each uniquely related to admiration ($B = 0.50$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.37, 0.62], $t(390) = 7.80$, $p < .0001$ for empathy and $B = 0.36$, $SE = 0.08$, 95% CI [0.22,

$0.52]$, $t(390) = 4.79$, $p < .0001$ for humility). There were no direct connections between the two kinds of autonomy and admiration after controlling for the mediators; however, assisted (but not asserted) autonomy was indirectly related to admiration through empathy, $B = 0.11$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.18]. There were no other mediators.

For the outcome of *outgroup warmth*, empathy and humility were each uniquely related to warmth ($B = 8.59$, $SE = 1.30$, 95% CI [6.03, 11.14], $t(392) = 6.61$, $p < .0001$ for empathy and $B = 4.81$, $SE = 1.55$, 95% CI [1.76, 7.85], $t(392) = 3.10$, $p = .002$ for humility). Only empathy mediated the effect of

Fig. 2 Direct and Indirect Effects of Autonomy Type on Action in Support of Outgroup. Path coefficients are standardized for interpretability. Grayed boxes reflect significant indirect effects. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$



assisted autonomy on outgroup warmth, $B = 2.00$, $SE = 0.61$, 95% CI [0.94, 3.32].

Action in support of outgroups. As shown in Fig. 2, asserted autonomy was directly related to all behavioral outcomes—i.e., social justice behavior ($B = 0.46$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.37, 0.54], $t(400) = 10.29$, $p < .0001$), antiracist intentions ($B = 0.42$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI [0.31, 0.52], $t(391) = 7.97$, $p < .0001$) and frequency of confronting racism ($B = 0.26$, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.35], $t(394) = 5.68$, $p < .0001$). In contrast, assisted autonomy did not directly predict any of the behavioral outcomes. Once again,

assisted (but not asserted) autonomy linked to the prosocial mediators.

For the *social justice behaviors model*, empathy and perspective-taking were uniquely related to social justice behavior ($B = 0.28$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.39], $t(400) = 4.88$, $p < .0001$ for empathy and $B = 0.16$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.30], $t(400) = 2.38$, $p = .02$ for perspective-taking). In addition, these two variables revealed indirect effects—that is, although assisted autonomy was not related to social justice behavior directly, it did show an indirect effect on social justice through both empathy ($B = 0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI

[0.03, 0.12]) and perspective-taking ($B=0.02$, $SE=0.01$, 95% CI [0.001, 0.06]).

For the *antiracism model*, although empathy was uniquely related to antiracism ($B=0.34$, $SE=0.07$, 95% CI [0.21, 0.47], $t(391)=5.08$, $p<.0001$), this did not mediate the effect of assisted or asserted autonomy.

Finally, for the *frequency of confronting racism model*, empathy and perspective-taking were uniquely related to the frequency of confronting racism ($B=0.22$, $SE=0.06$, 95% CI [0.11, 0.34], $t(394)=3.86$, $p=.001$ for empathy and $B=0.16$, $SE=0.07$, 95% CI [0.02, 0.30], $t(394)=2.26$, $p=.02$ for perspective-taking). As in the social justice model, empathy and perspective-taking served as mediators between assisted autonomy and frequency of confronting racism ($B=0.05$, $SE=0.02$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.12] for the indirect effect through empathy and $B=0.03$, $SE=0.01$, 95% CI [0.004, 0.06] for the indirect effect through perspective-taking).

In sum, results of study 1 suggest that assisted autonomy predicts positive outgroup attitudes through empathy specifically—rather than through perspective taking or humility. Indeed, empathy mediated the link between assisted autonomy and three measures of attitudes. Asserted autonomy, in contrast, was not associated with prosocial traits, nor with outgroup warmth or admiration, which illustrates its relative individualism. Interestingly, it did predict allophilia directly.

Unlike assisted autonomy, asserted autonomy played an important direct role in all action-focused outcomes. Interestingly, although assisted autonomy was not related to social action on its own, these two variables were indirectly connected. Specifically, assisted autonomy was related to empathy and perspective taking, and in turn, empathy and perspective-taking were related to social justice behavior and frequency of confronting racism. These indirect effects shed light on the manner in which with assisted autonomy might contribute to antiracist efforts—through empathy and perspective taking. In contrast, asserted autonomy appears to be conducive to antiracist efforts in a more direct way.

Study 2

Study 1 showed that assisted and asserted autonomy relate differently to outgroup attitudes versus actions and improves understanding of the way in which different aspects of autonomy may be useful in promoting not just outgroup attitudes but antiracist mobilization efforts. Antiracist calls to action have increased exponentially since the murder of George Floyd in 2020 and the resulting racial reckoning throughout the United States and Canada (Chamberlin, 2021). Indeed, antiracist messaging abounds—whether on social media or on lawn signage throughout neighborhoods (Chamberlin, 2021). Although antiracist messaging is ubiquitous, little

is known about its effectiveness in promoting its antiracist objectives (Kachanoff et al., 2022), or whether autonomous motivation might influence the degree to which antiracist messages resonate or inspire recipients. Given the unique connection between asserted autonomy and antiracist intentions, study 2 sought to ascertain whether asserted autonomy would predict initiative in response to an antiracist message.

Study 2 method

Participants, procedure, & measures Participants were recruited from Prolific Academic and compensated \$4.00 for a 10-minute study. Although all participants were invited and compensated, black participants were excluded ($n=11$) from the analysis because messages were aimed at promoting black antiracism. The final sample included 290 participants with a mean age of 26.56 years ($SD=13.52$). Most were white (86%) while 4% were Latine and 3% were biracial. Most (65%) had completed some college and 46% were women while 52% were men. Upon recruitment to “consider a media message”, all participants first completed an adapted state measure of antiracist intent and then all were invited to “consider a media message addressing racism toward Black Americans”, worded as follows:

Black Americans are subjected to widespread discrimination and racism at school, at work, in the justice system, and in almost every aspect of life. At work, for instance, Black Americans are paid 17% less than White Americans are, and are less likely to receive equal credit for their contributions (Karver & Paulson, 2021). As individuals, we are each responsible for identifying this inequality around us, and we have a duty to stand against it. We can do this by fighting for equality and justice, and confronting racism when we observe it.

We designed this message to target antiracism by acknowledging racial inequity and the need to stand up for racial justice rather than to simply “be nonprejudiced”. After message exposure, state antiracism was assessed again. In both pre- and post-message measurement, we used an adapted version of the Antiracism Behavioral Inventory used in study 1 (Pieterse et al., 2016) to capture state-level perceptions of antiracist intentions for the future (e.g., “In the future, I intend to talk with others about social injustices and the impact of social forces on health and well-being”). This state ARBI showed strong reliability both pre-message (3 items; $\alpha=0.88$) and post-message (3 items; $\alpha=0.94$).

Table 4 Descriptive statistics and correlations for measured variables (Study 2)

	Assisted Autonomy	Asserted Autonomy	Antiracism (Pre-Message)	Antiracism (Post-Message)	Antira- cism Δ (Post- Pre)
Descriptive Statistic					
Mean	4.59	3.93	4.30	4.32	0.03
SD	0.94	0.94	1.31	1.46	0.72
Skewness	-0.78	-0.21	-0.79	-0.73	0.06
Kurtosis	0.38	0.09	0.17	-0.34	0.32
Correlations					
Assisted Autonomy		0.40***	0.21***	0.22***	0.06
Asserted Autonomy			0.31***	0.36***	0.16**
Antiracism (Pre-Message)				0.87***	-0.05
Antiracism (Post-Message)					0.45***

p*<.05; *p*<.01; ****p*<.001.

Table 5 Multiple regression models: asserted autonomy predicts increase in antiracism after message exposure

	Antiracist Intent in the Moment					
	<i>β</i>	B	SE for B	t	<i>p</i>	95% CI for B
DV: Antiracism Pre-Message						
<i>Predictors</i>						
Asserted Autonomy	0.28	0.39	0.09	4.52	<0.001	0.22, 0.56
Assisted Autonomy	0.10	0.14	0.09	2.56	0.097	-0.03, 0.31
DV: Antiracism Post-Message						
Asserted Autonomy	0.34	0.53	0.10	5.55	<0.001	0.34, 0.72
Assisted Autonomy	0.08	0.13	0.10	1.38	0.17	-0.06, 0.32
DV: Increase in Antiracism from Pre- to Post-Message						
Asserted Autonomy	0.18	0.14	0.05	2.75	0.006	0.04, 0.24
Assisted Autonomy	-0.02	-0.01	0.05	-1.60	0.112	-0.11, 0.08

Study 2 results

Preliminary results

Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 4. Variables were moderately to strongly endorsed by participants and normally distributed. Asserted and assisted autonomy were moderately correlated with one another and moderately correlated with antiracism before and after message exposure.

Main results

As shown in Table 5, a series of three multiple regression analyses was performed to illustrate the role of asserted relative to assisted autonomy in predicting an increase in antiracist intentions as a function of antiracist message exposure. In line with findings from study 1, asserted autonomy was significantly and positively related to antiracist intent before message exposure—however, assisted autonomy was not. The same pattern emerged for post-message antiracism. Importantly, however, asserted autonomy, but not assisted autonomy, predicted an increase in antiracist intentions

from pre- to post-message. In other words, after accounting for baseline antiracism, only asserted autonomy was related a rise in antiracism. For those with a primarily assisted autonomy orientation, there was no increase in antiracism after reading an antiracist message.

General discussion

Taken together, this pair of studies suggests that individual differences in the nature of autonomy striving demonstrate different links to intergroup outcomes. In general, those with an assisted and relational autonomy style tend to hold warmer outgroup attitudes based on empathy. This is not to say that asserted autonomy is unrelated to positive outgroup attitudes (it was, for some measures), but that assisted autonomy is a somewhat stronger and more consistent predictor. Conversely, assertive autonomy is more strongly related to antiracist behavioral intentions and racial justice seeking. Study 2 extends the findings from study 1 regarding the active nature of autonomy by showing that assertive but not assisted autonomy predicts an increase in antiracist motivational intentions after reading an antiracist message.

Contributions to SDT and antiracist action research

Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of autonomous functioning by underscoring that autonomy can work in different ways, which may tie to divergent benefits. Few (if any) studies have shown that different facets of autonomy have truly separable consequences. We show here that autonomous functioning shaped by social support is more strongly linked to empathy and outgroup warmth, whereas autonomy that is more proactive is helpful in the pursuit of social justice. As proposed by Legault and colleagues (2017), there appear to be individual differences in the experience of autonomy, which link to important social outcomes. Although novel and in need further study, this finding has potentially important implications for self-determination theory because it expands and refines the measurement of autonomy to more accurately predict a variety of criteria. For instance, because asserted autonomy predicted antiracism better than did assisted autonomy, this suggests it is important to capture the asserted nature of autonomy when trying to understand variability in antiracist intent. This could be extended to other outcomes where strong personal resolve and active self-determination are critical, including the pursuit of social, economic, and climate justice, or other forms of civil protest. Such pursuits require not only initiative and sustained motivation, but also willingness to engage in confrontation. Measures of collaborative or assisted autonomy are less likely to explain such forceful or provocative social behaviors. Instead, assisted autonomy is more useful in the promotion of prosocial and other-focused care and concern. Although past SDT research has shown consistently that autonomous functioning links to important social behaviors, by delineating between the assertive and assisted dimensions of autonomy, it will be better positioned to explain *how* and *why* this is the case.

In addition to broadening our understanding of the role of autonomy in social attitudes versus action, this research also works to address the problem of widespread apathy in the face of racial inequality. It is well-established that most goodhearted egalitarians remain silent and complacent to the prejudice that surrounds them (Kawakami et al., 2009; Hunt et al., 2021). This inertia applies to all forms of bigotry. In a study of heterosexual individuals' responses to confronting a homophobic slur, Crosby and Wilson (2015) exposed participants to actual and imagined scenarios of a research confederate using a homophobic slur. Although half of the participants in the imagined scenario reported they would confront the confederate, none of the participants who actually witnessed the slur confronted it. This attitude-behavior gap is so pervasive in human behavior it is practically a rule (Ajzen et al., 2018; Park & Lin, 2020; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Our findings here suggest that asserted autonomous

functioning may in fact serve as a bridge between what people believe and what they actually do. Given that antiracism among white Americans is relatively rare and evades clear prediction (Hunt et al., 2021; Kachanoff et al., 2022), the finding that it may stem from active self-determination is valuable.

By this logic, future research would be prudent to better understand the specific antecedents of asserted autonomy. Although it is a central component of self-determination, it has also been associated with resilience to situational need threat (Radel et al., 2011) and early life challenges, including adaptive responding to an authoritarian parent (Legault et al., 2017). While in need of more robust study, current research on assertive autonomy suggests that autonomy has a resilience component, which implies that individuals may act to up-regulate or reassert it when threatened. Further exploration of the developmental and contextual predictors of asserted autonomy could help in understanding and fostering social activism. Although chronic and severe need thwarting undoubtedly leads to defensive processing and threat-driven responses, including prejudice (Hodgins & Klee, 2002; Legault et al., 2007), it is possible that assertive autonomy could modulate typical connections between need disruption and certain outcomes like prejudice. The implication here is that personal resilience or resolve is needed to fight racism or engage in other forms of social action.

Resolving tensions between positive attitudes and positive change

We highlight the motivational pathways toward two important but functionally distinct outgroup outcomes. It may be that both compassion for targets of racism and mobilization against racism are useful in the search for social justice—albeit for different reasons. Although some researchers argue that harmony and justice are incompatible because intergroup cohesion often eclipses and attenuates the more important issues of justice and equity (e.g., Dixon et al., 2010), others suggest they are different pathways toward the same end (e.g., Gonzalez et al., 2015). For instance, conflict and disruption may initially serve as a necessary catalyst of redistributive justice when social inequality is pervasive, but the proliferation of empathy and positive regard between groups may prove necessary for the long-term sustainability of diversity. Indeed, the cultivation of positive feelings is important for ally development because positive dispositions toward outgroups can promote the desire to learn from them, as well as to focus on shared benefits and support. Strategies that promote outgroup allyship are thought to be effective because they increase openness to outgroup experiences (Gonzalez et al., 2015).

Accordingly, although we found that there was no direct link between assisted autonomy and behavior, assisted autonomy was connected to antiracism and frequency of confronting racism indirectly through empathy. This suggests that the relationship between assisted autonomy and antiracist behavior may not be straightforward, but does emerge when considering how empathy relates to both variables. Thus, allyship based in collaborative autonomy is likely shaped primarily by empathy and compassion for those at the receiving end of oppressive hierarchies. In contrast, the direct links between asserted autonomy and behavior were resistant to empathy. This suggests that antiracism efforts based in asserted autonomy might be driven by moral imperatives, ethical values, and self-identity, rather than other-focused care and concern. Indeed, it is likely that these two faces of autonomy reflect complementary pursuits of self-determination—one that is interpersonally embedded and one that is intrapersonally created.

Implications for intervention

While the affective and behavioral pathways toward egalitarian society may be predicted by different motivations, it is also true that prejudice interventions might have different goals. Our work here suggests that these goals should be better defined in order to select motivational supports that enhance them. Based on our findings and related research (e.g., Dixon et al., 2010), positive intergroup affect and regard is critical in promoting intergroup harmony and unity. Thus, when the need for harmony is a priority, then positive affect, which is predicted by assisted autonomy, will be most important. In contrast, if the goal is to make change and address injustice, a focus on cohesion and mutual liking may be ineffective. In fact, the powerful need (and social norm) to get along with others could be a reason why egalitarians fail to confront racism in their interactions (Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008; Hunt et al., 2021). If collaborative strategies are sometimes ill-advised, then what is the alternative? The quandary here is that white Americans tend to resist antiracism messages—preferring positivity narratives rather than critical race narratives that target whiteness (Kachanoff et al., 2022). In order to better understand how to support white Americans in confronting their own privilege and working to equalize it, future work will need to unveil why and how asserted autonomy connects to antiracism (in addition to measuring specific and objective forms of antiracist action). Unfortunately, we failed to test mediators that could explain why asserted autonomy links to antiracism. But two possible explanations come to mind. The first is that assertive autonomy, while not prosocial per se, may be strongly driven by personal ethics or morals. It

would follow that interventions focused on personal rather than purely prosocial imperatives could be useful in promoting antiracist action. Another explanation might be that assertive autonomy is associated with greater competence or self-efficacy in carrying out antiracist action. For many egalitarians, failures to confront racism stem from a lack of confidence rather than a lack of concern. Indeed, it requires skill, practice, and determination to learn how to effectively assume a contrary social position and challenge the status quo (DiAngelo, 2022). Interventions focused on learning and improving antiracist assertion are worthy of future study.

Conclusion

Prejudice, discrimination, and racial violence disproportionately threaten the lives of Black Americans and other people of color in the United States and beyond (Kilgo et al., 2019; Ross et al., 2021). The solution to this disparity centers on antiracism—the unraveling of systemic racism, rejection of racial supremacy, and movement toward racial justice. Yet, while prejudice reduction research is vast, there has been very little focus on understanding what motivational forces promote antiracism. Moreover, engagement in antiracism among the racial majority remains uncommon. In this research, we show that assertive autonomy uniquely predicts antiracism—beyond the role of typical prosocial traits like empathy, perspective taking, and humility. By expanding the conceptualization of autonomous functioning into assisted and assertive facets, we show how SDT can be useful in understanding and explaining social attitudes as well as social action.

Data availability The data and code for this study are publicly accessible at https://osf.io/68erv/?view_only=ae9c53e18f9d4a0bb7091bb3b7d78c1a.

Declarations

Ethical approval This study was approved by the ethical review board at the authors' institution.

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