

# Navigating successful confrontations: What should I say and how should I say it?

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Confronting others' stereotypes and prejudices can seem daunting. Just what should you say, and how should you say it? Is it your place to speak up? Will your confrontation come with costs, such as people not liking you, or perhaps backfire so that the perpetrator spews even more offensive remarks? These concerns can have a silencing effect on would-be confronters (e.g., Shelton & Stewart, 2004), creating guilty feelings for failing to confront (Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Hill, 2006), and leaving stereotypes and prejudice unchecked.

However, as the research reviewed in this chapter will underscore, people can rely on certain strategies to help them to speak up, to decrease negative reactions from perpetrators, and to successfully reduce people's biases. We illustrate these strategies using a driving metaphor. Just as drivers benefit from drivers training before getting behind the wheel, would-be confronters can benefit from experiences that prepare them for the "confrontation roadway." Also, just as people pack their car for a trip, would-be confronters can ready themselves for confrontation with certain psychological mindsets and tools. Then, when a confrontable moment is encountered, they will be ready to "hop in the car" and begin their confrontation journey. Although confronters are interested in bias reduction as their ultimate destination, they may wish to make a "pit stop," even if it involves going a bit out of

their way, to preserve positive interpersonal impressions. We review strategies that people can use to increase the likelihood that others will think positively of them even after confrontation. However, in some cases, would-be confronters will care little about others' impressions; they will skip the pit stop and go directly on to confront, with the ultimate goal of reducing others' biases. Many variables influence whether and why confrontations are more or less effective, and we address these variables as well. By organizing the research literature in this way, our intention is to provide a helpful roadmap for navigating interpersonal confrontations.

## Drivers training

If people are caught off guard or unprepared to confront, they will be unlikely to challenge others' biased behavior. Thus to prepare people to hop on the confrontation roadway, some initial training may prove beneficial. This training can cultivate the ability to detect bias that should be confronted. In addition, training can provide experiences that teach people some basic skills related to standing up and confronting bias.

Bias, especially when manifested subtly, may go undetected if people lack the experiences and knowledge to recognize it. Imagine a job interview involving a female candidate and two interviewers. Toward the end of the interview, one of the interviewers—thinking he is being friendly—asks the applicant whether she has any kids. Many people would not regard this question as biased. However, would a male applicant be asked about kids? If the female applicant answers affirmatively, might the interviewers end up making conscious or unconscious inferences relevant to evaluating her for the job? Laden with stereotypic visions of the woman at home caring for her children, perhaps the interviewers will feel less than confident that the applicant will be 100% committed to the job. But imagine that immediately after the question about kids is asked, the second interviewer interjects to say “Well, whether she has kids isn't relevant to this interview or the job, so let's move on with another topic.” The second interviewer likely knew to perform a confront-and-redirect maneuver because she recognized the potentially biasing effects of the question. In other words, this interviewer likely was “bias literate,” in that she was aware and knowledgeable about the effects of bias (especially unconscious bias) on people's cognitions, judgments, and behaviors.

Bias literacy is the cornerstone of successful training workshops in work contexts that teach people to be aware of their own and others' biases (e.g., Carnes et al., 2012). It can also be fostered in classrooms contexts through the use of empirically validated instructional content and methods (Morris & Ashburn-Nardo, 2010). Although interventions designed to increase bias literacy are receiving increasing research attention, many diversity training programs (e.g., in companies) have been implemented without attention to the theoretical and empirical literature that might inform their potential effectiveness. In fact, the outcomes of such programs are often not even assessed (Paluck, 2006), and some programs may actually

backfire (Pendry, Driscoll, & Field, 2007). Thus would-be confronters who want to increase their bias literacy can partake in opportunities that are theoretically and empirically grounded.

Recent research has explored avenues for making empirically validated bias literacy training highly accessible and impactful. For instance, Pietri et al. (2017) developed two sets of theoretically grounded videos that anyone might view (e.g., on YouTube) and tested multiple outcomes related to bias literacy, including measures related to confrontation. A *narrative* set of videos immersed participants in stories in which actors illustrated gender bias in action. An *expert interview* set of videos involved discussion of the same instances of bias but through an interview with a psychology professor. Finally, a control set of videos presented documentaries that made no mention of gender bias. The results indicated that both the narrative and expert interview videos increased participants' awareness of gender bias and their knowledge about gender inequity, relative to the control condition. Both sets of experimental videos also led to greater reported self-efficacy in the ability to detect gender bias, and greater recognition of the presence of gender bias across various situations. Compared to the narrative and control conditions, participants who viewed the expert interview videos also reported greater responsibility for confronting gender bias and greater intentions to do so, and they were more likely to engage in public action to point out gender bias. Hopefully future studies will extend this promising research by preparing and empirically examining media content that addresses other types of biases as well.

Would-be confronters can also benefit from training that builds skills for engaging in confrontation. Many studies indicate that people think they would confront bias upon encountering it, but in fact they are unlikely to do so (Brinkman, Garcia, & Rickard, 2011; Kawakami, Karmali, & Vaccarino, 2019; Swim & Hyers, 1999; Woodzicka & LaFrance, 2001). This gap may be partially explained by a lack of practice behind the wheel. Behavior modeling training, such as role-playing (Plous, 2000), may be useful. For instance, researchers had students complete a classroom exercise that involved role-playing how they would respond to prejudiced statements. Students' ability to effectively respond to prejudiced comments in their everyday lives was assessed both before and after the exercise, and the results showed significant improvement following this practice (Lawson, McDonough, & Bodle, 2010).

In an ambitious field experiment, Paluck (2011) collaborated with the Anti-Defamation League's "A World of Difference Institute Peer Training Program" to examine the effects of training some students ("peer trainers") to intervene when they saw biased behavior or speech among classmates. Relative to a control group that received no training, the peer trainers were more likely to detect biased teasing in their school. They were also more likely to be named by other students as people who would likely stand up for, or confront on behalf of, a fellow student who was being teased or insulted. Thus peer trainers clearly put their training into action in the schools. In addition, Paluck found that peer trainers' nondiscriminatory behavior spread to close others in their social networks.

As this section has illustrated, people can prepare for confrontation both by acquiring knowledge that helps them to recognize bias and by receiving training that helps them to take a stand against bias. Although we have emphasized more formalized avenues for receiving training (i.e., researcher-led trainings), would-be confronters likely can achieve a good deal of preparation through individual efforts (e.g., paying attention to discussions of bias online or in the media).

## What to pack for the trip

Confronters will benefit by “packing appropriately” for their trip, or being mentally prepared to begin their confrontation journey. Keeping in mind that stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination can be reduced, rather than being fixed, is undoubtedly crucial (Rattan & Dweck, 2010; see Rattan, 2019). People will not attempt confrontation if they believe their efforts will be futile because others are unwilling or unable to change (e.g., “It won’t do any good anyhow”). Similarly, an optimistic outlook and keeping one’s egalitarian goals in mind increase the likelihood of confrontation (Kaiser & Miller, 2004; Wellman, Czopp, & Geers, 2010; see also Stewart, Latu, Branscombe, & Denney, 2010).

Targets of bias and allies can also prepare for confrontations by thinking about general tactics they can use to begin their confrontations, rather than hesitating and losing out on opportunities (Martinez, Hebl, Smith, & Sabat, 2017). As one participant noted, “Sometimes I’ve been in a conversation where it’s like, ‘Oh, this is a good opportunity,’ [then it’s like] ‘What? Shoot! I blew it. I should have said something in here.’ What are the right words, that’s kind of where I am now” (as quoted in Martinez et al., 2017, p. 75). To ready oneself for possible confrontations, people can pack an easily accessible bag of general tactics. Some tactics that are commonly employed include the use of questions (e.g., “Did you really just call her ‘doll’?!”), demonstrating an alternative to a biased response (e.g., “I think that the Black actor should play the doctor role”), directly challenging (“It’s not just Asians that are smart. Race has nothing to do with intelligence”), or surprised exclamation (e.g., “Really?! I can’t believe you would say that!”) (Swim & Hyers, 1999). Would-be confronters can give these tactics some thought, along with others (e.g., appealing to fairness, egalitarianism, or traditions, e.g., “Saying things like that really isn’t the American way,” Citron, Chein, & Harding, 1950). Note that, as Swim, Gervais, Pearson, and Stangor (2009) argue, the persuasion literature has much to offer for understanding what types of confrontational messages are likely to be effective. For example, Swim et al. (2009) point out that confrontations that are timid or vague are unlikely to be attended to, which the classic message-learning approach suggests is necessary for persuasion. Likewise, confrontations that present weak arguments or qualifying statements are unlikely to be comprehended as challenges to prejudicial behavior. In sum, a little forethought about possible confrontation tactics may help people to overcome the speechlessness that is frequently experienced during confrontable moments.

Thus far, we have suggested that would-be confronters can do things to prepare themselves for confrontation, including “drivers training” (e.g., preparing oneself to be able to detect bias) and “packing certain things for the trip” (e.g., being mentally prepared not to let confrontable moments slip by). We now consider what happens when would-be confronters have actually encountered a situation that presents an opportunity for confrontation. In keeping with our analogy, the confronter is now in the car and on the confrontation highway, moving toward the destination of reduced biased responding. There are both hazards and a possible pit stop along the way. The hazards involve conditions or factors that could negatively affect the confronter’s likelihood of being able to reduce bias. The pit stop involves preserving positive impressions. If confronters are concerned about preserving positive impressions of themselves, they will need to stop and consider whether they can use one of more strategies, which we address in the next section.

## **Pit stop: Preserving positive impressions**

Although the ultimate goal of confrontation is to reduce bias, confronters often want and sometimes desperately desire to preserve others’ positive impressions of them along the way (e.g., Shelton & Stewart, 2004). For instance, would-be confronters probably want to be liked when confronting acquaintances, friends, and family members, and people undoubtedly do not want their confrontations to reduce others’ respect or beliefs about their competency when confronting coworkers (see Czopp, 2019; Mallett & Melchiori, 2019). Considerable research has revealed that the content and qualities of confrontations have important implications for the extent to which positive impressions are preserved.

### ***What to avoid: Hostility, aggressiveness, threat, and extremity***

Researchers have compared the effects of hostile or aggressive confrontations to calmer or less aggressive confrontations. Such research is important, because confronters may experience a host of emotionally charged reactions to witnessing others’ bias (e.g., irritation, anger, disgust), which may lead them to confront in hostile or aggressive ways. Although confronters may think that such confrontations will make their point best, studies indicate that confronters will be evaluated more positively if they take a deep breath and inhibit the impulse to “gun the gas” when confronting.

In one study (Hyers, 2010), small groups of participants were asked to consider a variety of “ethical dilemmas.” One dilemma concerned what a guy should do when he found out that his roommate of one month was gay. A confederate in the group referred to this as a “fag problem,” and another confederate confronted by first identifying himself as gay, and then noting that he previously had a straight roommate. The confederate then confronted with hostility (“I don’t see why it is such a damn problem. Anyone who has a problem with it should get over it”),

without hostility ("I don't see why it is such a problem. We got along just fine. I can think of a lot worse things your roommate could be besides gay. A good roommate is hard to find . . ."), or did not confront ("I don't know what to say about that"). Subsequently, the confronter was rated as less polite and more sensitive when the confrontation was hostile, compared to when it was nonhostile or when no confrontation occurred.

Another study (Martinez et al., 2017) examined liking of a confronter (e.g., "Would you want to be friends?" and "Would you get along?") as a function of confrontation hostility. Full-time employees watched a video depicting a work situation in which someone made a prejudicial remark about a gay person and then was confronted in either a hostile or nonhostile manner. The researchers found that the hostile confrontation ("Well, I'm gay and I don't see why it's such a damn problem. You should really try to think about gay people in a way that is less prejudiced. You sound like some sort of homophobic asshole to me, you know what I mean?") was associated with lower interpersonal liking than a nonhostile confrontation (i.e., the same confrontation without "damn" and "asshole").

Researchers have also examined the effects of an aggressive confrontation that included physical violence on interpersonal evaluations. Specifically, Becker and Barreto (2014) had participants read a scenario in which a perpetrator made a variety of blatantly sexist comments before being confronted by a woman in an aggressive manner, including a slap across the perpetrator's face. Other participants read the same scenario, but the woman confronted nonaggressively or did not confront the sexist remarks. The researchers' "positive impression" measure included ratings of various types of interpersonal traits (e.g., friendly, whiner, competent). Even though the perpetrator's comments were flagrant and highly offensive, the aggressive confronter was evaluated unfavorably relative to a control condition, whereas evaluations of the nonaggressive confronter were similar to evaluations in the control condition.

These lines of research clearly indicate that people should avoid hostile and aggressive confrontations to minimize negative evaluations from others. However, in these and other studies (Dickter, Kittel, & Gyurovski, 2012; Saunders & Senn, 2009), the participants observed a confrontation or read a scenario involving confrontation but were not confronted themselves. Designing believable laboratory situations in which participants actually generate biased responses that can be confronted is very challenging, which no doubt contributes to their scarcity. However, such research is critical to understanding how people react when they are actually confronted.

Czopp, Monteith, and Mark (2006) designed such a paradigm to investigate reactions to receiving a threatening or nonthreatening confrontation. White participants completed a task with a partner (a confederate) via instant messaging in which they were presented with a series of photos of people, and each photo was accompanied by a brief description. The partners were informed that they were to take turns providing fitting responses for each photo-description pair. For instance, a picture of a White man accompanied by "You can find this person in the theater" might elicit the response "actor" or "movie fan." Embedded among twenty trials were three

critical trials that always corresponded with the participant's turn, which were designed to elicit stereotypic responses. For example, a photo of a Black person paired with "This person relies on the government for money" elicited responses like "welfare recipient." Afterward, the confederate sent a message to the participant that either served as a threatening confrontation ("... you should really try to think about Blacks in other ways that are less prejudiced. It just seems that you sound like some kind of racist to me. You know what I mean?") or that appealed to fairness and equality ("... maybe it would be good to think about Blacks in other ways that are a little more fair? It just seems that a lot of times Blacks don't get equal treatment in our society. You know what I mean?"). Later in the study, participants reported how much they liked their partner. As expected, liking was lower when the confrontation was threatening relative to nonthreatening. In a second study using the same paradigm, Czopp et al. found that even a nonthreatening confrontation elicited more negative evaluations of the confronter than when no confrontation had occurred. Finally, a third study showed that a nonthreatening confrontation about racial bias resulted in more negative evaluations than a race-unrelated confrontation, and this race-unrelated confrontation elicited more negative evaluations compared to when participants were not confronted. Altogether, these results suggest that confronters will take a hit on liking even if they confront in nonthreatening ways, and especially if they confront in threatening ways.

Czopp et al. (2006) characterized the confrontation that called participants "some kind of racist" as threatening because they reasoned that most people favor a nonracist self-image and are threatened when this image is impugned. Other research suggests that confronters should even stay away from labeling responses as discriminatory (e.g., "That's racist/sexist!") if they want to preserve others' liking of them (Woodzicka, Mallett, Hendricks, & Pruitt, 2015). Thus confronters will want to stay focused on the egregious behavior or utterance ("That joke isn't funny; it's not fair to gay people") to maximize liking.

The extremity of confrontations is another element to consider. In Schultz and Maddox's (2013) research, White participants heard a speech given by a Black or White student (confederate) that confronted racial bias on campus. When the speech made relatively extreme claims of bias (i.e., stronger, more assertive, and more pointed language), participants evaluated the student as less likeable than when the speech included milder claims of bias. Evaluations in the milder claim condition, in turn, reflected lower liking than evaluations in the control condition (i.e., race-unrelated speech). Although the race of the person who gave the speech did not predict liking, race did affect certain impressions. In particular, the Black confronter was evaluated as more of a complainer, hypersensitive, and argumentative if the speech made extreme rather than mild claims. In contrast, extremity had little impact on negative impressions of the White confronter.

In sum, the literature provides a clear answer to the question of whether people can express their negative feelings or perhaps even outrage during confrontation and not risk interpersonal consequences: they cannot. Thus people should be psychologically prepared to avoid Hostility, Aggressiveness, Threat, and Extremity (which conveniently, spells out H.A.T.E.) if they are concerned about preserving

positive impressions. For instance, people might avoid H.A.T.E. by reappraising the confrontation as an opportunity to reduce bias (rather than focusing on the negative feelings elicited by bias), or actively inhibiting the expression of negative emotion, regardless of what one is actually feeling (e.g., see the process model of emotion regulation; Gross, 2002).

Although most research has focused on understanding the effects of confrontation on liking, another important interpersonal outcome to consider is respect. As Mallett and Melchiori (2019) explain, especially for confronters with stigmatized identities, the goal to be respected may be more important than the goal to be liked (see also Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010). When this is the case, targets of bias may confront bias assertively and with the goal of being respected, particularly when this goal outweighs the goal to be liked (Mallett & Melchiori, 2014).

### ***What to approach: Priming fairness and positive self-images, and engaging in interaction***

Other than approaching the opposite of what should be avoided, what can confronters say and do to maximize liking and positive interpersonal outcomes? Most people want to think of themselves as fair and egalitarian (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986; Monteith & Walters, 1998). Thus to the extent that confrontations appeal to principles of fairness and egalitarianism, people who are confronted may be less likely to lash out following confrontation (Czopp et al., 2006).

Confronters may want to ask questions that prime the confrontee's egalitarian self-image. For instance, Stone, Whitehead, Schmader, and Focella (2011) had highly prejudiced participants read online material supposedly composed by an Arab-American target. The target first asked participants to consider how someone had treated them fairly that week and how they had treated someone else fairly, or the target posed a question that did not prime a self-image related to fairness. Then the target described the "skepticism and hatred" that Arab-Americans endure on a daily basis (a confrontation, albeit not of a specific response that participants had generated) and asked participants to consider what it would be like to deal with this skepticism and hatred on a daily basis. Participants subsequently expressed greater interest in meeting the target if they had been primed to think of themselves as fair, compared to participants who were primed to think of a nonaffirming attribute. In another study, Stone et al. found that even when a fairness-unrelated but affirming self-image (i.e., creative) was primed prior to the Arab-American target's confrontation, participants' interest in meeting the target was boosted. Although this affirmation strategy may not be possible to use in unexpected situations that call for immediate responses (e.g., a brief conversation with a stranger), oftentimes confronters can plan out confrontations to address previously biased remark or behaviors (e.g., with friends or relatives). A way to jumpstart these conversations may be to mention something that primes a positive aspect of the confrontee's self-image, which then may reduce negative reactions to the confrontation.



However, a caveat is in order. If individuals are led to believe that they are *not prone* to intergroup bias before they are confronted, research suggests they will view the confronter as less competent and will be less desirous of future contact, compared to when the confrontee's nonbiased credentials have not been established (Simon & O'Brien, 2015). Thus confronters should not attempt to soften reactions to confrontations by first assuring others that they are unbiased (e.g., "I know you don't have a prejudiced bone in your body, but don't you think what you just said was racially biased?").

A final important factor to consider is whether confronters expect to have continued contact with confrontation recipients beyond the confrontation context. None of the experimental confrontation research reviewed thus far involved a confrontation between two people having a face-to-face ongoing interaction. To be sure, learning how people react to confrontations occurring without interactions is relevant to many real-world situations. However, do such findings generalize to actual interactions?

We are aware of only one set of experiments that has met the methodological challenge of staging actual one-on-one interactions in which participants were confronted by another person, and then more interaction occurred. This research revealed some surprising and important findings concerning the interpersonal outcomes under such circumstances. Specifically, Mallett and Wagner (2011) argued that people who are confronted in person about their biases do not want to be seen as bigots, and so they compensate after being confronted (e.g., smile, try to present themselves favorably), with *positive* consequences for interpersonal outcomes. Male participants were induced to use gender-biased language (referring to a nurse as "she") during an interaction with a female confederate who then pointed out the sexist language ("I noticed you said *she* when referring to the nurse. Are you assuming the nurse is female? That's kind of sexist, don't you think?"). Then the pair interacted again, and afterward the participant and the confederate reported their liking of each other. As predicted, the male participants engaged in compensatory behavior after being confronted, relative to a gender-neutral confrontation condition. In turn, this compensatory behavior facilitated mutual liking between the confronter and confrontee. Future research capitalizing on this paradigm can investigate whether the findings hold for other types of bias or confronters. Perhaps males who are confronted about sexism by females are particularly motivated to compensate, whereas different findings would emerge for race-based confrontation. On the other hand, perhaps compensatory efforts would be even greater in the case of racism because people are more sensitive to accusations of racism (cf. Mallett & Wagner, 2011). Another interesting avenue will be to examine whether compensatory efforts are even stronger when confrontations occur within preexisting relationships (e.g., romantic partners, close friends).

In sum, confronters can use various strategies to decrease the likelihood of negative interpersonal outcomes immediately following the confrontation. Do the findings also apply to longer-term interpersonal outcomes? This question has not been empirically addressed. Perhaps people's bruised egos result in negative

interpersonal outcomes in the moment, but once people have time to cool down and reflect, they may come to appreciate what was said and recognize it as an opportunity for growth.

## **Ultimate destination: Reducing biased responding**

The road to examining whether confrontations reduce biased responding is less well traveled by researchers than the road that leads to interpersonal outcomes. This is probably because going the extra mile to examine whether confronted people's biased responses are reduced in the future is methodological challenging. However, studies that have been conducted indicate that confrontations do curb subsequent bias. For instance, in Mallett and Wagner's (2011) research described above, the participants were also asked to "pilot test a task for future research" at the conclusion of the study. This task involved quickly finding errors in sentences. Men who were confronted for making a sexist comment earlier were more likely to identify language as sexist than men who were not confronted, suggesting a reduction in the use of sexist language.

Other research has indicated that confrontations can curb future biased responding even when they are interpersonally costly. Specifically, recall Czopp et al.'s (2006) research described previously, which examined participants' liking of an instant messaging partner who confronted them about their stereotypic responses to photo-description task. As noted, the confronter was especially disliked when the confrontation was threatening. Would a threatening confrontation be less effective at curbing subsequent bias than a nonthreatening confrontation? Czopp et al. investigated this by administering another photo-description task after the instant messaging tasks had been completed and no further interaction was to occur between the participant and the confronter. Participants completed a paper-and-pencil set of photo-description items, with the understanding that their responses would be not linked to them as a person and were completely confidential. Three new items that allowed for stereotypic descriptions were included among fillers. Across three experiments, Czopp et al. found that confronted participants generated fewer stereotypic responses than participants who were not confronted. Furthermore, bias was reduced to a similar extent following threatening and nonthreatening confrontations, and regardless of how much participants reported disliking the person who confronted them, or how irritated and annoyed they were about the confrontation. These findings indicate that if confronters want to reduce bias but are not concerned about preserving positive impressions, even a threatening confrontation will do.

In Czopp et al.'s (2006) research, the variable that mediated the effect of confrontation on subsequent biased responding was how much negative self-directed affect participants felt after the confrontation (e.g., self-critical, guilty). Thus even if confrontations elicit negative feelings toward the confronter, they can simultaneously trigger negative feelings toward the self for having responded in a biased way, and this negative self-directed affect promotes reduced bias. The crucial role

of negative self-directed effect on bias reduction is consistent with much research showing that this form of affect sets in motion a variety of self-regulatory processes that help people to detect, control, and inhibit their biased responses (for reviews, see Monteith & Mark, 2005; Monteith, Lybarger, & Woodcock, 2009). Other confrontation research has similarly demonstrated the important role of negative self-directed affect for bias reduction and, impressively, in the context of longitudinal studies.

Specifically, Chaney and Sanchez (2017, Study 1) used Czopp et al.'s photo-description paradigm in a task that White participants completed out loud in the presence of the experimenter. Afterward, the experimenter confronted participants in an assertive, but not particularly threatening, manner ("I thought some of your answers seemed a little offensive. The Black guy wandering the streets could be a lost tourist. People shouldn't use stereotypes, you know?"). After reporting their feelings and completing various filler tasks, participants were dismissed. One week later, they were contacted via email to complete another photo-description task with novel critical trials, this time remotely (online) and confidentially. Participants also completed a rumination measure by reporting how much they had thought about the experiment (and thus the confrontation) over the past week. The results indicated that confrontation heightened negative self-directed affect, which in turn increased rumination, which in turn produced enduring reduced stereotyping.

In a second study, the researchers measured a different indicator of self-regulation, rather than reduced stereotyping. According to the Self-Regulation of Prejudice model (Monteith, 1993; Monteith, Ashburn-Nardo, Voils, & Czopp, 2002) behavioral inhibition (i.e., a very brief pause of ongoing responding) is critical to interrupting ongoing behavior so that stereotypical and prejudiced responses can be inhibited. Furthermore, because the ability to engage in behavioral inhibition is learned through previous experiences in which one felt guilty about their stereotypic or prejudiced responses, a confrontation experience should facilitate subsequent behavioral inhibition to stereotypic information. Based on this reasoning, Chaney and Sanchez (2017, Study 2) measured behavioral inhibition to stereotypic sentences a week after the confrontation. They found that relative to control participants, confronted participants experienced greater negative self-directed affect, which was related to greater rumination over the experiment. Rumination, in turn, was associated with greater behavioral inhibition (i.e., longer reaction times) when stereotypic sentences were presented in the context of a word probe task. These results indicate that confrontation can prompt the self-regulation of bias and its reduction even across a week's time and may generalize across contexts and tasks.

Other research has investigated the effect of varying the motivational foci in the confrontational message on reducing subsequent stereotyping. A large body of research indicates that people can be more or less motivated to avoid biased responding based on their degree of internal motivation (i.e., one's personal, egalitarian, and internalized standards for responding) and external motivation (i.e., pressures from others or social norms) (Plant & Devine, 1998). Rather than focusing on individual differences in motivation, Burns and Monteith (in press) investigated whether confrontations framed in terms of internal versus external reasons for

responding without bias would be differentially effective at reducing subsequent bias. White participants completed the photo-description task previously described, their performance was supposedly assessed through a computer program, and then they saw feedback. Confronted participants read that their responses reflected stereotyping, and examples were provided of how their responses were stereotypic (e.g., "You may have assumed that a Black man paired with 'this person can be found behind bars' is a criminal rather than being a bartender"). Then participants in the internal motivational framing condition read,

*Such racial biases are unfortunate among people who strive for social justice. You can choose to think about Blacks in more open-minded ways. If you choose to avoid racial stereotyping, you will be able to benefit more from positive interactions with diverse people and contribute to an egalitarian society. You will also be contributing to a free, fair, and peaceful society.*

In contrast, participants in an external framing condition read

*Such racial biases are unacceptable among people who strive for political and social correctness. They violate societal norms to not be racist. People are not going to like you, they may not hire you, and they may prevent you from joining their organizations if you continue to think about Blacks in stereotypical ways. You really should not rely on stereotypes of Blacks if you want to fit in with today's anti-racism norms.*

The results indicated that confronted participants later stereotyped less on a new photo-description task, relative to a no confrontation condition, regardless of which framing was used. Another experiment replicated the stereotype reduction effect with both motivational framings reducing stereotyping, and it also showed that a confrontation that simply pointed out biased responses but provided no motivation framing did not reduce bias relative to no confrontation. These findings indicate that the inclusion of motivation framing, whether it provides internal or external reasons to avoid bias, was necessary for bias reduction. Although the confrontations used by Burns and Monteith (in press) were somewhat lengthy, other studies that we have already reviewed have demonstrated bias reduction with more concise motivational framing (e.g., "maybe it would be good to think about Blacks in other ways that are a little more fair") can be successful. However, note that Burns and Monteith also found that the external framing was evaluated as significantly more hostile than the internal framing, so such framing is likely to lead to more negative interpersonal consequences than an internal framing.

The finding that even an external motivational framing can reduce bias is consistent with prior research showing that social norms and external forces prompt people to regulate expressions of bias (Blanchard, Crandall, Brigham, & Vaughn, 1994; Monteith, Deneen, & Tooman, 1996). However, the finding may seem to conflict with other research showing that an antiprejudice persuasive message in a brochure that had an internal focus reduced participants' prejudiced attitudes, whereas an externally focused message backfired and increased prejudiced attitudes

(Legault, Gutsell, & Inzlicht, 2011). The different results may be due to the fact that participants in Legault et al.'s (2011) research were not confronted about biased responses they had actually generated; rather, participants were encouraged to adopt nonprejudiced attitudes through a persuasive brochure. In contrast, the Burns and Monteith's (in press) research indicates that when participants are confronted about specific responses that they generated, either an internal or external motivational framing reduces similar responses in the future.

A final point to keep in mind is that confronters should strive to be assertive if they wish to reduce subsequent bias. Assertive (but nonhostile) confrontations are best for catching people's attention and motivating them to stop their biased behavior. People may believe that rolling one's eyes, ignoring a biased statement, or changing the subject is confrontational enough, yet these nonassertive behaviors may not even be noticed by offenders and may do little to stop bias in its tracks. Research shows that people shy away from assertive confrontations if their desire to be liked and accepted outweighs their desire to be respected (Mallett & Melchiori, 2014; see Mallett & Melchiori, 2019). Would-be confronters are well-aware of the interpersonal conflict that can ensue from confrontations, even if their confronting behavior gives them a sense of satisfaction (Hyers, 2007) and allows them to escape the uncomfortable rumination that may follow failures to confront (Shelton et al., 2006). Therefore, to increase the likelihood of assertive confrontation, people can bring to mind ways in which they are accepted and experience belonging outside of the confrontation situation (Mallett & Melchiori, 2014).

In sum, confrontations appear to lead to self-regulation and reduced expressions of bias, even if they negatively affect interpersonal outcomes, both immediately and across time. Confronters should keep in mind the importance of being assertive and including a motivational framing focusing on either internal or external reasons for reducing bias. However, more research is needed to examine possible limits on the bias-reducing effects of confrontation, as only a handful relevant of studies have been conducted, and most used the photo-description task for staging the confrontation.

## **Road hazards**

There are two qualifications that place limits on the conclusions we have reached thus far. One might think of these as hazards that may, in fact, stop the confronter from being able to preserve positive impressions or encourage bias reduction. These qualifications concern who does the confronting, and what type of bias is being confronted.

### ***Who does the confronting?***

Researchers repeatedly find that people who claim that they, or other members of their group, have experienced discrimination are perceived as hypersensitive,

irritating, and complainers (Kaiser & Miller, 2001, 2003). This is the case even when discrimination has undeniably occurred (Kaiser & Miller, 2001). The same phenomenon occurs when confronters are target group members (e.g., Black people who confront racism toward Blacks). In an early demonstration of this, participants imagined themselves in scenarios involving confrontations made by either a target or nontarget group member in relation to either sexism or racism. The results indicated that participants evaluated the target group confronter as more unreasonable and as overreacting compared to the nontarget confronter (Czopp & Monteith, 2003). Other subsequent studies involving either scenario methods or participants observing what they believed were real confrontations have routinely found that targets are more likely to be viewed as troublemakers and complainers than nontargets (Eliezer & Major, 2012; Gulker, Mark, & Monteith, 2013; Rasinski, Geers, & Czopp, 2013; Schultz and Maddox, 2013; for a review, see Drury & Kaiser, 2014).

Moreover, target group confronters appear to be less effective at promoting the self-regulation of bias than nontarget confronters (Gulker et al., 2013). Why would this be the case? Two possibilities have been entertained. First, nontargets may not be viewed as having a vested interest in confrontation so that when they do confront, people are surprised (Gervais & Hillard, 2014) and give the confrontation more serious attention. Second, the tendency to regard target confronters as complainers may undermine their effectiveness. Gulker et al. (2013) tested these alternative accounts by first having White participants complete a task that supposedly measured their unconscious biases toward Blacks, after which participants received feedback indicating racial bias. Then participants learned that the unconscious bias task was developed by either a target group member (a Black researcher) or a nontarget group member (a White researcher). Participants then read an article supposedly written by this researcher that discussed how such biases can have important everyday implications for discriminatory behaviors and urged readers to reduce their biases. Afterward, participants indicated their acceptance of the researcher's arguments (e.g., "To what extent do you think the article pertains to your own behavior and reactions?", "To what extent do you think you need to watch yourself in the future so that you won't be biased by stereotypes?"). They also evaluated the confronter and reported the extent to which the researcher's arguments were surprising and inconsistent with their expectations. Gulker et al. found that participants showed greater acceptance of the confrontation with a White than Black confronter, perceived the Black confronter as more of a complainer, and reported that the confrontation by the Black confronter was less surprising/more consistent with their expectations. Most importantly, the effect of target group membership on acceptance of the confrontation was mediated by complainer perceptions and not by the participants' surprise or expectations. Thus perceptions of targets confronters as complainers may undermine confrontation effectiveness. Whether the use of certain confrontation strategies can eliminate this target group complainer effect is an important issue for future research.

Other research suggests that negative reactions to target group confronters are especially likely when confrontees strongly endorse meritocracy (Schultz and Maddox, 2013) or value a colorblind approach to race relations (Zou & Dickter,

2013). Also, the less women identify with women as a group, the more negative their evaluations of women who confront sexism (Kaiser, Hagiwara, Malahy, & Wilkins, 2009). Finally, a few studies have found that a target confronter was just as effective as a nontarget confronter (see Czopp et al., 2006, Study 2; Gervais & Hillard, 2014; Martinez et al., 2017). Future research is needed to determine whether these exceptions can be systematically explained or are chance failures to replicate.

Research is also needed to go beyond the simple distinction between targets and nontargets. People have a variety of identities that intersect in ways that may affect the course and outcomes of confrontations (cf. Drury & Kaiser, 2014; Remedios & Akhtar, 2019). For instance, a woman who identifies as lesbian and confronts racism may be just as likely to be pegged as a complainer as a Black person who confronts racism because of her dual subordinate identity (see Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Additional research concerning intersectionality identities and confrontation is critical for gaining a more complete understanding of what identities lead to especially effective confrontations.

### ***Different isms, different reactions?***

A number of studies have found that confrontations of sexism fall flat. Many people appear to be unconcerned about sexism, especially subtler (but no less consequential) forms, and they react to sexism confrontations with amusement, trivialization, and general disregard (Czopp & Monteith, 2003; Gulker et al., 2013). People also dislike confronters of sexism more than confronters of racism, and they find racist jokes and statements more offensive and confrontation-worthy than sexist jokes and statements (Woodzicka, Mallett, Hendricks, & Pruitt, 2015). One study examined people's comments to a popular press report of research demonstrating discriminatory treatment of women (Moss-Racusin, Molenda, & Cramer, 2015). The results revealed more than twice the number of negative compared to positive comments to the article, with readers denying the empirical evidence, justifying gender bias, or criticizing the researchers who had initially found evidence of gender discrimination.

Why are gender bias confrontations often unsuccessful? Beliefs about women are typically positive (Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1991), as evidenced by the "women are wonderful" effect (i.e., greater liking for women than men, Eagly & Mladinic, 1989). The view of women as warm and likeable can be linked to their role as caregivers (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), and can encourage benevolent, but patronizing and restrictive, sexist attitudes (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Such reactions to women may lead people to believe that they could not possibly be sexist and to be rather unmotivated to respond without bias (Klonis, Plant, & Devine, 2005). These reactions can also contribute to weak societal norms opposing sexism (Fiske & Stevens, 1993). Consequently, people appear to require an understanding of the harm and pervasiveness of sexism to adopt less sexist attitudes (Becker & Swim, 2012; but see Kahn, Barreto, Kaiser, & Rego, 2016).

With this backdrop in mind, Parker, Monteith, Moss-Racusin, and Van Camp (2018) reasoned that confrontations of sexism should be effective to the extent that they present clear, conclusive evidence of a confrontee's own gender bias and its negative consequence. Across four experiments with variations on the confrontation context, Parker et al. found that people who evaluated women for a job position and then were informed that their evaluations were gender biased had encouraging confrontation reactions, but only if their confrontation was *evidence-based*. More specifically, when participants (male and female alike) were shown concrete evidence that their evaluations were gender-biased and the negative consequences of this bias were underscored, they reported heightened negative self-directed affect, which in turn prompted greater concern about expressing and regulating their gender bias in the future. Indeed, these affective and regulatory outcomes to an evidence-based confrontation of sexism were as strong as in a parallel condition that concerned racism (Experiment 3). However, little reaction was observed when participants were simply confronted by a statement that their evaluations were gender-biased but with no evidence.

Considering this research helps to explain why sexism confrontations occasionally have been found to curb subsequent sexist biases. For instance, in Mallett and Wagner's (2011) research (described previously), the confronter specifically pointed out how participants' language was sexist, thus providing "evidence" of bias. In Burns and Monteith's (in press, Experiment 2), participants confronted about their reliance on gender stereotypes were just as likely to reduce later stereotyping as participants confronted about their reliance on racial stereotypes, and this research likewise used a confrontation that provided evidence of bias. In a similar vein, when male participants initially completed a task that provided evidence of their proneness to sexism, they subsequently evaluated a female confronter more positively compared to participants who had been presented with nonsexist credentials (Simon & O'Brien, 2015).

Although some confrontational contexts may be well-suited to the evidence-based approach, concrete evidence of bias may be unavailable in many situations (e.g., saying "I'll bet you wouldn't say that employee lacks leadership skills if the employee was male" does not suffice as evidence of bias). However, evidence-based confrontations can be used with positive effects in other contexts, including diversity training interventions. The use of experiential learning activities that reveal people's own biases and their negative consequences can increase people's recognition of their biases and motivate intentions to regulate in the future (Moss-Racusin et al., 2014; Shields, Zawadzki, & Johnson, 2011; Cundiff, Zawadzki, Danube, & Shields, 2014).

An evidence-based approach that underscores negative consequences may also be important for confrontations involving stereotypes that are positive (i.e., subjectively favorable beliefs, such as "Blacks are athletic"). People often believe their positive stereotyping is flattering and complimentary, and they remain unaware of the substantial costs of positive stereotyping (Czopp, 2010; Czopp, Kay, & Cheryan, 2015; Siy & Cheryan, 2013, 2016). Thus confrontations of positive stereotypes may be effective at motivating bias reduction only if people are presented with evidence of their harmful effects.



In sum, the use of evidence-based confrontations may get one back on the road to favorable confrontation outcomes. Unfortunately, most confrontation research has concerned sexism and racism toward Blacks, and we know little about whether there are particular obstacles that should be considered for confrontations of other intergroup biases. Future research is clearly needed that goes beyond the two *isms* that have received most research attention to date.

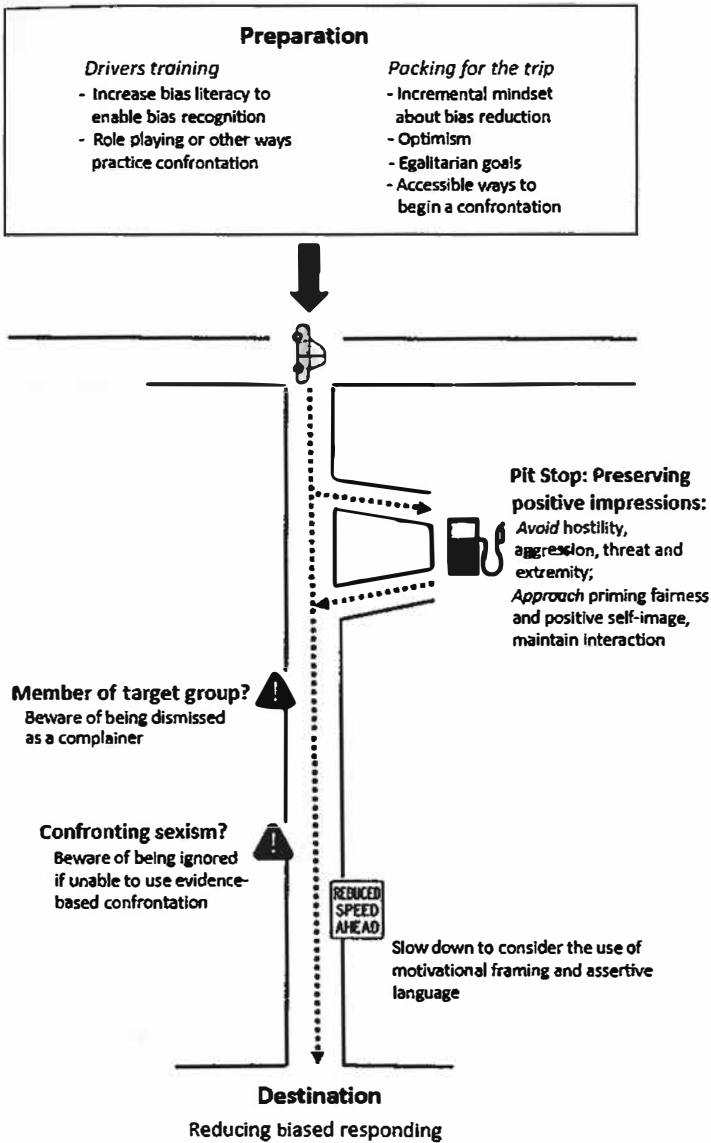
## Applications

The content of this chapter is directly applicable to individual efforts to reduce others' bias through confrontation. We intentionally included many examples of language that can (or should not) be used during confrontations. Moreover, by doing some preparation before confrontations and following certain strategies during confrontations (while avoiding others), people can be better assured that they will achieve their desired outcomes. Fig. 11.1 provides an illustrative summary of how the content of this chapter can be applied to individual efforts to curb bias with confrontation.

Although we have described preserving positive impressions as a pit stop that confronters can choose to make early in the confrontation journey, it is also possible that impressions might be managed after confrontations occur. For example, suppose a confronter lurches into a rather hostile confrontation in the heat of the moment after someone makes a group-based derogatory remark. The confronter may decide to circle back and use tactics to repair the damage. Perhaps affirming a positive characteristic of confrontee may help to repair the damage, or apologizing for the extremity of the confrontation and restating it in a more measured way will be useful. This brings up an important issue, which is that confrontations often occur in the context of *dialogs* between people, rather than as the one-shot messages that have been used in many experiments. Additional research is needed to study situations in which confrontations occur as part of ongoing dialog and to determine whether certain strategies might help to repair damaged impressions.

Beyond individual use, the empirical evidence summarized in this chapter can be used by organizations, companies, and institutions to facilitate their members' or employees' understanding of how to prepare for and best confront bias in their environments. Beyond providing valuable information and suggestions, these organizations will also be establishing social norms that favor speaking up against biases. Some organizations already have website material urging people to speak out about bias and providing suggestions for doing so; unfortunately, these suggestions often are not empirically based and their efficacy may be highly questionable. Finally, we believe this chapter can provide the foundation for planning workshops about confrontation, the effects of which could be fruitfully studied in field research (as in Paluck, 2011).

However, we caution that applications must be updated as more empirical evidence becomes available. Confrontation research is still quite nascent, and future



**Figure 11.1** Illustration of factors that can enhance or reduce the likelihood of positive outcomes of confrontations.

research will no doubt discover important new insights. For instance, although extant research shows that target confronters (e.g., Black people confronting racism) are prone to being viewed as complainers and dismissed (e.g., Eliezer & Major, 2012; Gulker et al., 2013), future research may reveal conditions under which targets are very effective confronters.

In conclusion, there are many ways in which the research reviewed in this chapter can be put to good use through applications. Indeed, we believe that confrontation research and its application are critical to combatting not only blatant but also subtle forms of bias. Subtle biases often seem harmless (“So what if I laughed at that joke?”) and may go unnoticed (“Really, did I refer to the writer as ‘he’?”) in the absence of confrontation, despite having discriminatory implications. Furthermore, as perceptions of norms against expressions of bias are prone to flux and sometimes weaken (see Crandall, Miller, & White, 2018), teaching people to navigate confrontations successfully is critical to establishing and maintaining egalitarian normative climates. Although confrontations are vital to reducing bias, they may seem daunting, as would-be confronters may wonder what to say and how to say it. The work addressed in this chapter can prepare would-be confronters for the “confrontation roadway” so that, upon encountering a confrontable moment, they will be ready to “hop in the car” and proceed to their bias reduction destination.

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