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How lay theories of prejudice shape prejudice confrontations: Examining beliefs about prejudice prevalence, origins, and controllability

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Abstract

The formative framework in prejudice confrontations research has focused on the utility of confrontations to activate one's self-regulation strategies to interrupt unintentional prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping. As this framework remains dominant in the literature, little research has examined everyday people's theories about prejudice that diverge from this framework and accounted for these theories in investigating confrontation rates and outcomes. In this paper, we review key lay theories of prejudice and discuss the ways in which they may influence prejudice confrontations. First, we summarize lay theories regarding the prevalence, origins, and controllability of prejudice. Next, we consider how lay theories of prejudice may factor into the circumstances under which people confront prejudice, goals that people may hold when confronting, and outcomes of confronting for confronters and perpetrators. Throughout, we highlight fundamental research questions and hypotheses that integrate lay theories of prejudice and prejudice confrontations. We propose that better understanding lay theories of prejudice and how they influence prejudice confrontations may help to advance translational and theoretical research in social psychology.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Prejudice confrontations, verbal challenges directed at a person who commits an act of discrimination, may be uniquely well suited for helping people become aware of and self-regulate their biased thoughts and behavior (e.g.,

Ashburn-Nardo et al., 2008; Chaney & Sanchez, 2018; Monteith et al., 2002). The literature on prejudice confrontations is deeply reliant on seminal research that compared prejudice reduction to the "breaking of a bad habit" (Devine, 1989). From this perspective, people who are committed to egalitarian values, and those who are not, are equally aware of stereotypes (i.e., generalized beliefs about social groups) because they are learned. In turn, stereotype-based (prejudiced) beliefs are automatically activated and applied to members of the targeted group unless people are motivated to "break the prejudice habit" by engaging in self-regulation (Devine et al., 2005; Devine et al., 2012, p. 1268; Monteith & Mark, 2005; Monteith et al., 2010). Interpersonal discrimination occurs when such prejudiced beliefs or attitudes influence behavior (Morgan et al., 2013).

Building on this framework, research has demonstrated that prejudice confrontations make people aware of their prejudices by highlighting their biases (indicated by use of, e.g., stereotype-based inference, discrimination against a female applicant, discriminatory comments; e.g., Czopp et al., 2006; Parker et al., 2018), and confronted perpetrators report feeling guilty in response (Chaney & Sanchez, 2018; Czopp et al., 2006). Guilt is considered a critical ingredient for acknowledgment of wrongdoing, acceptance of responsibility, and a desire to improve (Fisher & Exline, 2010; Hall & Fincham, 2005; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014). As a negative affective state, people are motivated to alleviate their sense of guilt. Following a prejudice confrontation, perpetrators' guilt is associated with decreased stereotype activation, less self-reported prejudice, and greater compensatory behavior (Chaney & Sanchez, 2018; Chaney et al., 2021; Czopp et al., 2006; Mallet & Wagner, 2011). As such, prejudice confrontations have been identified as a promising strategy for reducing prejudice, and research has suggested other benefits of prejudice confrontations (e.g., promoting egalitarian norms and well-being; Chaney et al., 2015).

While this model of stereotyping and prejudice has been explored extensively (Devine et al., 2005; Monteith, 1993; Monteith et al., 2002; Plant & Devine, 2009), less research has explored whether everyday people think of and understand prejudice as a widely learned habit that requires self-regulation. Investigating how lay people think about and understand prejudice affords the opportunity to integrate person-based factors into our understanding of prejudice, including how it is perceived and how people respond once prejudice is recognized (Hodson & Dhont, 2015). That is, research in social psychology has not yet fully investigated the role of *lay theories of prejudice prevalence, origins, and controllability* including how lay theories of prejudice may impact prejudice confrontation rates and outcomes for perpetrators and confronters. Such investigations have the potential to enrich our understanding of the beliefs that underlie prejudice confrontations and, in turn, inform evidence-based strategies for prejudice-reduction via confrontations. In this review, we first present research on lay theories of prejudice, including their content and impact on intergroup relationships, before outlining how these lay theories might shape prejudice confrontations.[1] While there are numerous other lay theories of relevance to prejudice confrontations, we focus on lay theories of prejudice prevalence, origins, and controllability because these are three critical assertions of the self-regulation model of prejudice: prejudice is learned, prejudice can be regulated, and prejudice is widespread.

2 | LAY THEORIES OF PREJUDICE

Lay theories are non-experts' beliefs about the nature of a phenomenon (Anderson & Lindsay, 1998) and are often endorsed to control one's environment or make sense of social interactions (Heider, 1958; Petty & Wegener, 1998; Plaks et al., 2005). Research on lay theories of prejudice has been diverse, exploring beliefs about the origins of prejudice in others (e.g., Apfelbaum et al., 2017), beliefs about traits of prototypical perpetrators (e.g., Sommers & Norton, 2006), beliefs about the monolithic nature of prejudices (e.g., Chaney et al., 2016, 2021; Sanchez et al., 2017), and beliefs about the malleability of prejudice in others (e.g., Neel & Shapiro, 2012; Rattan & Dweck, 2010, 2018). While such research often starts by identifying and understanding the content of such lay theories (e.g., Hodson & Esses, 2005), further examinations demonstrate how such lay theories shape attitudes, cognition, and behavior (e.g., Apfelbaum et al., 2017; Carr et al., 2012).

The integration of research on prejudice confrontations and lay theories of prejudices has been limited. Past research integrating these areas has found that believing that prejudice is malleable is associated with greater likelihood of confronting prejudice in others (Rattan & Dweck, 2010). Relatedly, research has found that people who believe prejudice is malleable reported greater belonging and workplace satisfaction after a perpetrator is confronted because such a belief creates a more positive outlook (Rattan & Dweck, 2018; see also Rattan, 2019). These findings demonstrate how lay beliefs about prejudice might promote confrontation rates (i.e., believing prejudice levels can change promotes greater confrontation likelihood) and shape the outcomes of prejudice confrontations (i.e., believing prejudice is malleable resulted in more positive outlooks after confrontations). As lay theories of prejudice influence confrontation rates and outcomes, we propose a more thorough examination of the ways lay theories of prejudice shape prejudice confrontations is needed. While social psychological research on prejudice confrontations relies on scientific theories of prejudice as a widely learned automatic habit that can be regulated (i.e., prejudice is prevalent, originates from learning, but can be controlled), this may not match lay theories of prejudice. Below, we review literature on three key lay theories of prejudice and highlight implications for prejudice confrontations (Table 1 highlights key lay theory research and confrontation hypotheses). Lastly, we consider how the current theoretical framework of stereotyping and prejudice may limit scientific inquiry and translational application of research on prejudice confrontations.

2.1 | Lay theories of prejudice definitions & prevalence

The self-regulation model of prejudice suggests that prejudice, defined broadly as negative attitudes (Monteith, 1993), stereotyping (Monteith & Mark, 2005), or other behavioral manifestations of bias (Devine et al., 2005), is widespread. What do lay people believe constitutes prejudice? Research on attributions to discrimination suggests that White Americans largely attribute negative treatment of marginalized people to discrimination only when there is evidence of harm *and* intention (Simon et al., 2019). In contrast, members of marginalized groups appear to attend primarily to harm (Simon et al., 2019). Further, research has found that White Americans tend to focus on blatant cues of racism (e.g., statements regarding inferiority), whereas Black Americans attend to both blatant and more ambiguous cues of racism (e.g., discomfort interacting; Dovidio et al., 1997; McConnel & Leibold, 2001). As such, it is unlikely for White Americans to indicate that seemingly benevolent behavior or attitudes constitute discrimination or prejudice, despite their inclusion in social psychological definitions of prejudice. For example, statements endorsing positive stereotypes that Black Americans are skilled athletes are less likely to be rated as discriminatory by high-status, relative to marginalized, groups (Czopp, 2008). Such findings have contributed to theoretical models examining individual and contextual factors that may contribute to White Americans' more restrictive definition of what constitutes interpersonal prejudice compared to Black Americans' definitions (for review, see Carter & Murphy, 2015), and offer important insights into lay theories of prejudice definitions—a fundamental component of understanding lay theories of prejudice prevalence, origins, and controllability.

For example, such discrepant definitions of prejudice between racial and ethnic groups may partially account for discrepancies in prejudice prevalence estimates (i.e., 85% of Black Americans perceived racism against Black Americans as widespread in the United States, while only 66% of Hispanic Americans, and 56% of White Americans believed anti-Black racism was widespread in the United States in 2016 [Jones, 2016]). Yet, when a single definition is provided, White, Black, and Latino Americans' estimates of anti-Black racism in the United States are relatively accurate (Cipollina et al., 2022). Specifically, estimates of what percentage of White men view Black Lives Matter (BLM) unfavorably compared to the percentage of a nationally representative sample of White men who indicated that they view BLM unfavorably (50.85%) were quite accurate, as estimates ranged from underestimating the "true" value by only 3.25%–7.45% (estimates range from 43.4% to 47.6% of White Americans; Cipollina et al., 2022). Notably, self-reports of prejudice are subject to social desirability bias, potentially leading to underreporting of bias

TABLE 1 Summary of lay theories of prejudice and implications for prejudice confrontations

	Description	Implications for prejudice confrontations
Prejudice origins & intentionality		
Ignorance	• Prejudice stems from ignorance (Hodson & Esses, 2005; Sommers & Norton, 2006)	• Perpetrators viewed as less accountable and deserving of less punishment (Daumeyer et al., 2019)
	• Implies prejudice is unintentional (Apfelbaum et al., 2017)	• Educational prejudice confrontation styles may be employed to reduce ignorance (Chaney et al., in press)
Malice	• Prejudice stems from malice (Hodson & Esses, 2005; Miglietta et al., 2014; Sommers & Norton, 2006)	• Perpetrators viewed as more accountable and deserving of more punishment (Daumeyer et al., 2019)
	• Suggests prejudice is intentional (Apfelbaum et al., 2017)	• May evoke an empathy or argumentative prejudice confrontation style (Chaney et al., in press)
Learned	• Prejudice is learned (Devine, 1989; Hodson & Esses, 2005), for example, from parents	• Perpetrators may be viewed as capable of self-regulating biases (e.g., Devine, 1989; Monteith, 1993)
Prejudice controllability		
Oneself versus others	• One's own prejudices perceived to be outside of one's control, whereas others' prejudices perceived to be within their control (Cusimano & Goodwin, 2020)	• Confronters may view perpetrators' prejudice as controllable, whereas perpetrators may view their own prejudice as uncontrollable
Malleable versus fixed	• Prejudice is malleable and capable of changing or is fixed and cannot be changed (Carr et al., 2012; Neel & Shapiro, 2012)	• May have stronger intentions to confront if view prejudice as malleable (Rattan & Dweck, 2010)
		• Perpetrators may have more interest in learning to reduce their prejudice (Neel & Shapiro, 2012) and be less defensive to prejudice confrontations (Vitriol et al., 2021) if they view prejudice as malleable
Prejudice Prevalence		
Widespread versus rare	• Marginalized groups view prejudice as more widespread than high-status groups (Jones, 2016)	• If viewed as widespread, may be less likely to confront, or report fewer benefits to confronting (see Chaney et al., 2015) OR if view as rare, may be more likely to confront due to egalitarian norms
	• Marginalized groups view racism as an individual and structural issue, whereas high-status groups primarily view racism as an individual issue (Carter & Murphy, 2015)	• May be less defensive to confrontations if they believe prejudice is widespread (Vitriol et al., 2021)
	• Marginalized groups consider ambiguous and blatant acts as racism, whereas high-status groups focus on blatant acts (Dovidio et al., 1997; McConnell & Leibold, 2001)	
	• Myths of racial progress indicate underestimations of inequality (Kraus et al., 2019)	

(Krysan, 1998); this may mean that the "true" percentage of White men who view BLM unfavorably is higher, making lay estimates of prejudice prevalence less accurate.

Yet, despite such seemingly accurate estimates of the prevalence of interpersonal prejudice, examination of estimates of structural prejudice suggests a widespread belief that racial inequality in the United States is rapidly being eradicated (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Eibach & Keegan, 2006; see also Pinkney, 1986) evidenced, in part, by widely inaccurate estimates in the Black-White racial wealth gap (Kraus et al., 2019). Such beliefs about current racial economic equality are robust to change by information about the persistence of modern racial disparities (Onyeador et al., 2020). Demonstrations of such "myths of racial equality" (Richeson, 2020) and beliefs that the United States is "post-racial" (Bonilla-Silva, 2015) suggest a larger narrative of racial progress that focuses on interpersonal, rather than structural, discrimination in lay definitions of prejudice (see also Carter & Murphy, 2015). Together, these findings demonstrate that lay individuals, especially White Americans, do not necessarily view racial prejudice as widespread and generally believe that the U.S. has progressed towards racial equality more rapidly than indicated by data. In contrast, Black Americans view prejudice to be widespread, perhaps in part due to endorsing a broader definition of what constitutes prejudice.

2.1.1 | Implications for prejudice confrontations

As research on lay theories of prejudice prevalence has primarily demonstrated differences between White and Black Americans' *definitions* of prejudice (Carter & Murphy, 2015), it is perhaps unsurprising that research on prejudice confrontations has often focused on differences between privileged and marginalized group confronters and observers. For example, research has found that Black and Asian Americans report being less likely to confront statements that endorse positive than negative stereotypes about their racial group, in part because they (accurately) believe privileged groups view positive stereotypes as less offensive than negative stereotypes (Alt et al., 2019). Yet, as positive stereotypes are seen as less harmful, participants responded more favorably after being confronted for using positive, relative to negative, stereotypes about women (Burns & Granz, 2021).

Importantly, another key difference in how prejudice is defined by lay people is prejudice as interpersonal versus structural. While past research has argued that White Americans may be less attuned to structural and historical discrimination than Black Americans (e.g., Adams et al., 2006), White Americans indicate greater intention to confront structural, relative to interpersonal, discrimination, due in part to perceiving greater harm from structural discrimination (Brown et al., 2021). Nevertheless, research on prejudice confrontations primarily focuses on intended confrontations to hypothetical scenarios (e.g., Brown et al., 2021) or examines outcomes of confronting stereotype use (e.g., Chaney & Sanchez, 2018), rather than confrontations of more blatant acts of discrimination. A more complete examination is needed of lay definitions of prejudice with implications for when prejudice is confronted and its outcomes.

Related to lay definitions of prejudice, lay theories of prejudice prevalence may shape prejudice confrontation rates. For example, if someone holds a lay theory that prejudice is rare, they may be more likely to confront prejudice because of a stronger perceived norm of egalitarianism. Research suggests this is the case: men were more supportive of women confronters when sexism was framed as rare compared to widespread (Kahn et al., 2016). Thus, strengthened norms of egalitarianism may function to increase rates of confrontation (Kawakami et al., 2019), which may, in turn, bolster egalitarian norms (i.e., confrontations signal prejudice is not acceptable; Mallett & Monteith, 2019; Wellman et al., 2009).

Yet, when perpetrators are informed that (implicit) bias is widespread, a normal function of human cognition, and controllable, they demonstrated less defensiveness and greater bias awareness even 6 months after being confronted for demonstrating implicit bias (Vitriol & Moskowitz, 2021). However, believing prejudice is widespread, and therefore normal, may mitigate White Americans' perceptions of the harm caused by prejudice and their responsibility for mitigating prejudice (for discussion, see Chaney et al., 2022). Importantly, greater awareness of the harm and pervasiveness of sexism reduces sexism endorsement (Becker & Swim, 2012), suggesting the importance of acknowledging

the harm of prejudice. Thus, further integration of lay theories of prejudice prevalence and lay definitions of what constitutes prejudice (subtle vs. blatant; positive vs. negative stereotype-based inferences; interpersonal vs. structural) offers avenues for future research on prejudice confrontations.

2.2 | Lay theories of prejudice origins & intentionality

Divergent definitions of what constitutes prejudice and its' prevalence may result in divergent beliefs about where prejudice originates. Yet, little research has examined the theories lay people hold regarding the origins of prejudice. In a sample of 104 Canadian undergraduates, the most strongly supported lay theories of prejudices' origin were a belief that ethnic prejudice is due to ignorance (42.0%) or is learned from parents (32.7%). Others, however, believed that prejudice was a product of negative intergroup experiences (26.9%), or a product of human nature, including groups looking out for themselves and real differences between groups (percentages not reported; Hodson & Esses, 2005). Similar research with Italian high-schoolers found comparable lay theories of prejudice origins (Miglietta et al., 2014). In a separate line of research, United States participants were asked what White racists tend to be like (Sommers & Norton, 2006). The most supported traits included ignorant, close-minded, fearful of change, and hateful. Together, this research suggests lay people primarily view prejudice as either learned from parents (i.e., learned), due to a lack of awareness or knowledge (i.e., ignorance), or a product of hateful beliefs stemming from negative intergroup experiences or competition (i.e., malice).

Believing that prejudice comes from ignorance suggests a view that prejudice is unintentional, whereas believing that prejudice stems from malice suggests a view that prejudice is intentional. Research on the perceived intentionality of racial discrimination among United States participants found that discrimination that was presented as unintentional was rated as stemming more from ignorance, while discrimination that was presented as intentional was rated as stemming from malice (Apfelbaum et al., 2017).[2] Further, research exploring lay understandings of implicit (automatic, often without awareness) and explicit biases (intentional, with awareness, see Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995) offers insights into the implications of believing that prejudice is intentional or unintentional. This research has found that attributing prejudice to implicit biases is associated with perceiving perpetrators as less accountable and deserving of less punishment compared to attributing prejudice to explicit bias (Daumeyer et al., 2019). Indeed, one of the most basic inferences people make is perceived intentionality of an act (Malle & Holbrook, 2012) and perceived intentionality can shape how one responds, including moral judgements of harm and responsibility (Ames & Fiske, 2013, 2015; Malle, 2004; Weiner, 1995). Thus, lay theories of the origins of prejudice appear to relate to attributions about the intentionality of prejudice, which in turn influence judgements about perpetrators.

Notably, the perceived motives for prejudice expression may vary depending on lay beliefs about the origin of prejudice. While viewing prejudice as stemming from ignorance suggests there is no motivation, malice-based prejudice may be seen as stemming from various motives, ranging from efforts to legitimize the current social system (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius et al., 1992), a fear of change (Craig & Richeson, 2014; Outten et al., 2012), or an effort to lift the ingroup or derogate the outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Yet, it is unlikely lay individuals believe that all prejudices stem from only one place; rather, it is likely they view certain expressions of prejudice (e.g., blatant vs. subtle) as having different origins. Thus, a careful consideration of lay theories of prejudices' origins has implications for not only what is recognized as prejudice and the moral judgements assigned to recognized acts of discrimination, but also the implications for how perpetrators and targets understand the motivations and consequences of espoused, witnessed, or experienced prejudice.

2.2.1 | Implications for prejudice confrontations

We propose competing hypotheses for how lay theories of prejudices' origins may shape confrontation rates. On the one hand, believing prejudice is learned or due to ignorance suggests that being taught to recognize prejudice, including through a prejudice confrontation, would be likely to decrease prejudice, thus promoting confrontation rates due to a greater perceived likelihood of reducing prejudice (for discussion of cost-benefit analyses in confrontation decisions, see Good et al., 2012; Shelton & Stewart, 2004). On the other hand, believing that prejudice stems from malice may make the prejudice itself appear more threatening, thus increasing rates of prejudice confrontations due to a greater perceived necessity of intervention (for discussion of Confronting Prejudice Responses model, see Ashburn-Nardo & Abdul Karim, 2019). Indeed, believing that prejudice stems from malice (e.g., "Prejudice comes from intent to hurt others") was associated with increased prejudice attributions (e.g., believing prejudice caused a White employee to reject a Black applicant; Santascoy, 2019). Empirical research is therefore needed to better understand how lay theories of prejudice origins shape prejudice confrontation likelihood.

Just as people's lay theories influence confrontation likelihood, they may influence prejudice confrontation styles. For example, beliefs that prejudice comes from ignorance or is unintentional may be more likely to elicit an educational confrontation style than a belief that prejudice stems from malice, which might be more likely to elicit an angry confrontation style (Chaney & Sanchez, in press) that is more interpersonally costly (Monteith et al., 2019). Indeed, when people perceive hostile intent in actions, they react punitively and aggressively (Dodge, 2006; Dodge et al., 2015; Li et al., 2016; Yeager et al., 2013). Importantly, past research has found that evidence-based, educational confrontations are perceived to be effective at reducing prejudice in perpetrators (Chaney & Sanchez, in press). This belief appears to be accurate, as evidence-based confrontation styles do elicit greater guilt, and in turn, are more effective at reducing perpetrator bias than simply pointing out prejudice (Parker et al., 2018). Thus, a belief of prejudice as ignorance based may facilitate a more effective prejudice confrontation style. Finally, perpetrators' beliefs of prejudice origins may influence affective responses to being confronted. For example, after learning that one demonstrated implicit bias, the predominant affective state is defensiveness (Howell et al., 2017) which likely mitigates feelings of guilt. Together, these findings suggest that lay theories of prejudice origins and intentionality are likely integral in shaping prejudice confrontations.

2.3 | Lay theories of prejudice controllability

A distinct but related question about prejudice origins and intentionality is, *Can prejudice be controlled and modified?* The self-regulation model of prejudice reduction views stereotype application as an automatic habit that can be controlled. This presents prejudice as at times unintentional (automatic) but ultimately controllable. Interestingly, research on lay theories of voluntary control of beliefs found that people generally view themselves as having less voluntary control over their own beliefs than other people have over their beliefs (Cusimano & Goodwin, 2020). This difference is due to people spontaneously thinking about supporting evidence for their beliefs, which in turn leads them to perceive their beliefs to be outside of their control. Such findings are in line with attribution theories which propose greater attribution to external factors for one's own negative behavior, and greater attribution to internal factors for other's negative behavior (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). From this perspective, people may view others' biases as more controllable than their own biases. Given view's that one's own beliefs are less controllable, people may perceive efforts to self-regulate their biases as challenging.

When considering research on lay theories of prejudice controllability, we can again look to research on lay theories of implicit bias. When biases were defined as conscious but automatic (and therefore difficult to control) compared to when no definition was provided, participants' views of the perpetrator's moral responsibility did not significantly differ and were moderately high (Cameron et al., 2010). Conversely, biases defined as unconscious were subject to diminished perceived moral responsibility (Cameron et al., 2010). As moral responsibility typically increases

when the action is under one's control (Ames & Fiske, 2013), these findings suggest a lay belief that prejudice (at least in others) is controllable, even if controlling such prejudice is difficult.

Notably, the self-regulation model of prejudice reduction argues that over time, frequent self-regulation may change automatic responses, making non-prejudiced responses more automatic (Devine, 1989; Monteith, 1993). Thus, inherent in questions about lay theories of prejudice controllability is a similar question of lay theories of prejudice malleability: beliefs about whether people can change their level of prejudice. A large literature has explored lay theories of malleability related to personality (Schneider, 1973) and intelligence (Dweck, 2012) and found that people can view such characteristics as more malleable or more fixed (Howe & Dweck, 2016; Lee et al., 2019). Research specifically on prejudice malleability beliefs (e.g., "People have a certain amount of prejudice, and they can't really change") has found that lay theories of prejudice malleability are predictors of intergroup relationships and prejudice related behaviors.[3] For example, believing that prejudice is fixed is associated with less interest in interracial interactions and learning about prejudice (Carr et al., 2012). Moreover, when White Americans engaged in interracial interactions, a belief that prejudice is fixed was associated with more performance-oriented strategies (e.g., overcompensating), while a belief that prejudice is malleable was associated with learning-oriented strategies (e.g., trying to learn why an interaction was challenging; Neel & Shapiro, 2012).

Together, these findings suggest that beliefs about the controllability of prejudice may differ when considering one's own versus another person's prejudices and that such lay beliefs have important implications for moral judgements and intergroup interactions. Notably, social identities likely influence endorsement of lay theories. e.g., high-status groups may be more likely than marginalized groups to view prejudice as uncontrollable as such beliefs remove responsibility from prototypical perpetrators (e.g., Daumeyer et al., 2019). Further, akin to lay theories of prejudice origins, lay theories of controllability, may also differ following instances of subtle versus blatant discrimination. Indeed, beliefs about the origin and controllability of prejudice may be related (e.g., Apfelbaum et al., 2017), though we again note the importance of considering further situational factors, including lay theories about prejudice in oneself versus others.

2.3.1 | Implications for prejudice confrontations

Integrating these lay theories of prejudice controllability and malleability will provide further insights into understanding when and how people choose to confront prejudice. For example, past research has found that believing that prejudice is malleable is associated with greater intent to confront prejudicial comments (Rattan & Dweck, 2010). Similarly, women often cite believing that confrontations would not be effective at reducing sexist speech as a reason to not confront prejudice (Brinkman et al., 2011). Thus, believing that people are in control of their levels or expressions of prejudice may be associated with greater likelihood of confronting prejudice. However, confrontations can serve purposes beyond prejudice reduction, such as acting as a coping strategy (Chaney et al., 2015) or promoting norms of egalitarianism more broadly (Czopp et al., 2006; Wellman et al., 2009), suggesting even when people endorse a belief that prejudice is fixed, they may confront for other reasons. e.g., they may cope by using a confrontation style that focuses on one's own experiences with prejudice (e.g., empathy style; Chaney & Sanchez, in press), or use an aggressive confrontation to signal a broader norm (e.g., aggressive confrontations increased perceived offensiveness of act relative to passive confrontations; Meyers et al., 2020).

Further, believing that prejudice is controllable via self-regulation and learning, yet increasing efforts to maintain ignorance among privileged social groups persist (e.g., US state laws banning public schools from teaching about structural racism; Adams et al., 2021; Alfonseca, 2021), may leave people feeling frustrated, demeaned, and hopeless. In such a case, people may confront prejudice out of frustration but with few expected benefits of doing so. Indeed, while humor is a coping strategy to reduce stress (Overholser, 1992), people who confronted prejudice using humor did not expect it to reduce bias in the perpetrator (Chaney & Sanchez, in press), suggesting a motive beyond bias reduction. We note, however, that believing that prejudice is uncontrollable or inevitable could similarly negatively

impact prejudice confrontation rates and anticipated benefits for members of marginalized groups due to perceptions that they will always face prejudice. Thus, lay theories of prejudice may shape not only when confrontations occur, but also how they occur. Such a lens requires further examination of the motivations to confront prejudice outside of perpetrator prejudice reduction (e.g., Mallett & Melchiori, 2019)—the motivation inherently centered by the self-regulation model of prejudice reduction.

Lastly, lay theories of prejudice controllability impact how perpetrators respond to bias feedback. People who endorsed a lay theory of prejudice as controllable (i.e., those who feel efficacious at self-regulating their bias) were less defensive to the implicit bias feedback they received (Vitriol et al., 2021). Believing that one can change their prejudice levels is likely integral in promoting prejudice reduction via effortful self-regulation. Thus, lay theories about prejudice controllability impact when confrontations occur, how they occur, and the impacts for perpetrators and confronters.

3 | EXPLORING PREJUDICE CONFRONTATIONS FROM A DIFFERENT THEORETICAL LENS

While a predominant and well supported theory in social psychology, believing that stereotyping is an automatic habit may downplay the ways in which stereotypes are at times motivated inferences that aim to maintain current systems of oppression. For example, stereotypes may be used to reinforce and legitimize White Americans' positions of power and status by denigrating Black Americans (e.g., Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). While much contemporary research has viewed bias as unintentional and inconsistent with people's non-prejudiced intentions (Devine, 1989; Dovidio, Gaertner, et al., 2002; Dovidio, Kawakami, & Gaertner, 2002), motivation to express prejudice intentionally continues to exist (Forscher et al., 2015).

What would prejudice confrontation research look like if researchers considered that prejudice is at times intentional and stems from malice? Such a starting point would require de-centering guilt and defensiveness given that perpetrators are acting and behaving as they intend. Instead, the field might consider when (or if) confrontations could evoke empathy or tolerance (Abbott & Cameron, 2014; Miklikowska, 2018; Verkuyten et al., 2020) and if such empathy would lead to prejudice reduction in perpetrators. Indeed, empathy is a primary mechanism identified for prejudice reduction in the literature on positive intergroup contact as a prejudice reduction strategy (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Vezzali et al., 2017). Such a focus would also need to consider pathways that would evoke empathy versus schadenfreude, the experience of pleasure at others' misfortunes (Cikara & Fiske, 2013; Leach et al., 2003). Empathy-aimed prejudice confrontation styles have been identified (Chaney & Sanchez, in press), but limited research has considered the utility of this style. Importantly, this re-consideration would require the field to consider more deeply how prejudice is defined by both researchers and lay people, acknowledging that mechanisms towards attitude and behavioral change likely differ significantly between prejudice defined as automatically activated stereotype versus explicit dehumanization (and the increments in-between).

Broadly, we propose that research on prejudice confrontations that integrates lay theories of prejudice will provide opportunities for theoretical advancements that will increase the translational value of research findings. That is, by de-coupling from the self-regulation model of prejudice, research on prejudice confrontations may begin to more richly explore the intricacies of when and how prejudice confrontations occur, including a recognition of the reciprocal effect of lay theories of prejudice and efforts to combat prejudice. Finally, we believe it is critical for the field to more carefully consider the ways scientific theories of prejudice are shaped by, and in turn shape, how everyday people think about and understand prejudice in themselves and others (Hopkins et al., 1997). Such considerations need to include an awareness of the racial diversity of researchers and the way research findings are shared with the public (e.g., Roberts et al., 2020).

4 | CONCLUSION

Research that incorporates lay theories of prejudice into the study of prejudice confrontations constitutes an under-explored area of study that may progress our understanding of perpetrators' and confronters' attitudes and behaviors. In contrast with the prominent theoretical approach that conceptualized prejudice as a "bad habit" (Devine, 1989), lay theories about the origins of prejudice may each result in unique views of prejudice. Whereas believing that prejudice is learned or due to ignorance (Hodson & Esses, 2005) may lead to the view that prejudice is unintentional, believing that prejudice originates in malice (Apfelbaum et al., 2017) may lead to the view that prejudice is intentional. Relatedly, people hold lay theories that prejudice is a fixed or malleable characteristic (Carr et al., 2012) and rare (Bonilla-Silva, 2017) or widespread (Cipollina et al., 2022). These lay theories may impact the frequency and style of prejudice confrontations, as well as the degree to which confrontations result in positive outcomes for perpetrators and confronters. Many gaps remain in the literature that considers prejudice confrontations through the lens of lay theories of prejudice, and we hope that our review galvanizes researchers to investigate these topics.

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ENDNOTES

[1] While lay people generally view prejudices towards different groups as co-occurring (Chaney et al., 2019), the majority of the reviewed literature on lay theories of prejudice focuses on anti-Black racism. Thus, the present review primarily considers the role of lay theories of anti-Black racism when referring to lay theories of prejudice. Future research should explore lay theories of sexism, heterosexism, and other prejudices.

[2] People generally viewed racial discrimination as somewhat intentional (*Ms* range: 4.22–4.99 across 6 MTurk samples; scale from 1 to 7 with higher values indicating intentional; Apfelbaum et al., 2017; Grunberg, 2016).

[3] Carr et al. (2012) found that prejudice was viewed to be neither highly malleable nor highly fixed (*N* = 40 White Americans; *M* = 3.01, *SD* = 0.89 on a scale from one to six with six indicating highly fixed). While others have examined lay theories of the malleability of racial bias (Neel & Shapiro, 2012; Rattan & Dweck, 2010), the measure was mean centered with little information provided about raw means of support.

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