Google is Free: Moral Evaluations of Intergroup Curiosity

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# Abstract

Two experiments investigated how evaluations of intergroup curiosity differed depending on whether people placed responsibility for their learning on themselves or on outgroup members. In Study 1, participants ($n$=340; 51% White-American, 49% Black-American) evaluated White actors who were curious about Black culture and placed responsibility on outgroup members to teach versus on themselves to learn. Both Black and White participants rated the latter actors as more moral, and perceptions of effort mediated this effect. A follow-up pre-registered study ($n$=513; 75% White-American) asked whether perceptions of greater effort *cause* greater perceptions of moral goodness. Replicating Study 1, participants rated actors as more moral when they placed responsibility on themselves versus others. Participants also rated actors as more moral when they exerted high versus low effort. These results clarify when and why participants view curiosity as morally good and help to strengthen bridges between work on curiosity, moral cognition, and intergroup relations.

Keywords: curiosity; intergroup relations; morality; social cognition

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Recent movements such as Black Lives Matter have highlighted the prevalence of systematic racial inequality in the United States and increased calls for social justice (Leach & Allen, 2017; Rogers et al., 2021). One important outcome of this movement has been an increase in dominant group members' desire to learn more about outgroup members. For example, after police officers killed George Floyd, many White Americans turned to their Black neighbors and colleagues with questions (Johns, 2020; Pham, 2020; Wilson, 2020).

Curiosity—the desire to possess information that one does not currently have (Kidd & Hayden, 2015; Lowenstein, 1994)—and behaviors associated with curiosity, such as experimentation to remedy scientific ignorance, often elicit favorable evaluations (Davoodi & Lombrozo, 2022; Funk & Kennedy, 2019). Indeed, adults often cultivate curiosity in children (e.g., by encouraging children's question-asking and exploration; Callanan et al., 2020; Crowley et al., 2001; Sobel et al., 2021). However, positive evaluations of curiosity may depend on how people satisfy their desire to know more than they currently know. For instance, a father may welcome his daughter's curiosity about disability if she asks him to take her to the library so that she can learn more about this topic. He may respond quite differently if she sees a person in a wheelchair while playing at the park and stages an impromptu interview with them—in part, perhaps, out of a sense that educating someone they do not know places an inappropriate burden on people who use wheelchairs. And he may respond differently still if his daughter teases a peer who uses a wheelchair and then approaches that person with curiosity about what it is like to be teased in this way, especially if this conversation does not include an apology or an attempt to mend the daughter's transgression.

Similarly, adults' responses to their peers' curiosity may depend on how peers try to obtain information that they do not currently have. Adults may conduct scientific research, read books, sign up for classes, or take other steps to satisfy their own curiosity (including searching the Internet for the information about which they are curious, as in the phrase "Google is free"). In performing such behaviors, people are placing the onus of responsibility on themselves to learn. In contrast, when White individuals reach out to Black strangers and acquaintances with requests for education, they are placing the onus of responsibility on minoritized group members to teach. If those requests for education are specifically about race-related topics, they also create a situation where minoritized individuals face requests to educate members of a group that has harmed their group about information relevant to those harms. The current studies tested whether moral evaluations of intergroup curiosity differ depending on where curious individuals from a dominant group place the onus of responsibility for remedying their ignorance.

**Moral Evaluations of Curiosity**

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argued that the best life is centered around contemplation and understanding—in other words, that seeking greater understanding is virtuous. Laypeople, too, value curiosity (Dubey et al., 2022; Liquin & Lombrozo, 2020) and generally evaluate individuals who engage in scientific questioning positively (e.g., Jirout & Klahr, 2012; Legare, 2014; Schulz & Bonawitz, 2007; Wootton, 2016). Similarly, recent empirical evidence suggests that both adults (White et al., under review) and 5- to 8-year-olds (Mosley et al., under review) perceive actors who are curious about religion and science as more virtuous than actors who do not display curiosity. Thus, past literature suggests that perceivers tend to evaluate expressions of curiosity positively.

However, this past work focused on areas where curious individuals placed the onus of responsibility on themselves to learn information that they currently lacked. For instance, scientists elicit favorable evaluations when they conduct research to satisfy their curiosity (Davoodi & Lombrozo, 2022; Funk & Kennedy, 2019), and laypeople garner positive moral judgments from their peers when they put in effort to obtain information about science and religion that they previously lacked (White et al., under review). In everyday life, people instead sometimes place the onus of responsibility on *others* to teach them information about which they are curious. For instance, people may ask their friends for information or reach out to former acquaintances whom they believe are well-positioned to address their questions.

The issue of whom to hold responsible for particular acts, especially acts that harm others, has been central to philosophy and moral psychology (e.g., Cushman et al., 2012; Gantman et al., 2020; Greene & Cohen, 2004; Hume, 1740/2012; Sartre, 1943/1956; Strawson, 1994; Young & Phillips, 2011). This focus may stem in part from the fact that the answer to this question is associated with many other moral judgments, such as how severely to punish transgressors (Buckholz et al., 2008; Cushman, 2015; Shultz et al., 1986) and how best to consider information about transgressors' intentions (Parkinson & Byrne, 2017; Phillips & Shaw, 2015; Plaks et al., 2009). However, most empirical research focusing on this topic has asked how people allocate moral responsibility for transgressions. For instance, findings have shown that people assign greater responsibility to agents who accept ownership of an act than to those who do not (Woolfolk et al., 2006) and perceive agents who decide to commit a wrongdoing as more responsible than agents who implement those decisions (Gantman et al., 2020). Building on this foundation, the current work probed the consequences of accepting responsibility for one's own learning versus thrusting that responsibility on bystanders.

When actors take responsibility for their own learning, they signal a desire to do the work of acquiring information that they currently lack. In other words, they accept ownership of their ignorance and demonstrate a willingness to put in effort to remedy it. Because people evaluate effort positively (Celniker et al., in press; Furnham, 1990; Inzlicht et al., 2018), demonstrating a willingness to work hard to remedy an undesirable characteristic (ignorance) may elicit favorable moral evaluations. In contrast, actors who place responsibility on others to teach them are laying the burden of their own ignorance on other people. Rather than doing the work necessary to gain the knowledge they desire, such actors instead require additional work of the targets of their curiosity. Although they are demonstrating curiosity, they are also showing that they are not willing to work hard to seek out information for themselves and may therefore elicit relatively negative moral judgments. The current work asked whether Black and White participants evaluate curiosity about race-related topics more positively when curious individuals place the onus of responsibility on themselves to learn, versus on others to teach.

**Curiosity in an Intergroup Context**

As discussed above, questions of responsibility have often been the purview of moral psychology and philosophy (e.g., Cushman et al., 2012; Gantman et al., 2020; Greene & Cohen, 2004; Hume, 1740/2012; Sartre, 1943/1956; Strawson, 1994; Young & Phillips, 2011). Much of this work has asked about responsibility on an individual level, probing questions such as how much responsibility to assign to one individual who harmed another. However, many morally relevant behaviors occur in intergroup contexts (Mosley & Heiphetz, 2021). The current work used intergroup curiosity as an example domain in which to test moral judgments of people who place the onus of responsibility to satisfy their curiosity on themselves versus others.

We selected the context of intergroup relations for three main reasons. First, this is a particularly meaningful domain in which to study the outcomes of making others responsible for remedying one's ignorance. In many areas of life, people view ignorance as undesirable; for instance, adults may face mockery if they are ignorant of current events and encounter negative professional consequences if they lack the knowledge relevant to their careers. However, in some cases, people may view ignorance as beneficial (Gigerenzer & Garcia-Retamero, 2017). For instance, a college student may avoid going through her roommate's closet in the days before her birthday because she wants to feel surprised when she receives the birthday gift her roommate is storing there. In addition to situations of pleasant surprise, ignorance can also protect people from information they do not want to have. For instance, a wife whose husband comes home in the middle of the night may avoid asking questions because she does not want to know.

Intergroup curiosity presents a special case of sought-out ignorance because ignorance structures intergroup interactions—particularly interracial interactions—in a way that is not evident in many other contexts. Moving beyond interpersonal examples of desired ignorance, such as wanting to be surprised or to avoid confirmation of marital fears, ignorance can also reinforce group-based oppression (Mueller, 2020). James Baldwin describes white innocence as not *wanting* to understand racism and choosing instead to shield oneself from understanding; in his view, "[i]t is the innocence which constitutes the crime" (1962/2021, p. 5). Relatedly, Charles Mills (1997) points to epistemologies of white ignorance as a sustaining facet of white supremacy, arguing that people could come to know the realities of racism but often choose not to. In such a context, satisfying White people's racial curiosity can be difficult for anyone; if the ignorance that created the curiosity is motivated, people may respond poorly when others seek to educate them, even if they initially requested that education. Asking Black people to satisfy this

curiosity can create particular moral difficulties by making members of a group that has been harmed in interracial contexts responsible for remedying a situation that has maintained the dominant group's ability to inflict that harm. Thus, intergroup curiosity is a particularly important area in which to investigate moral judgments of people who seek to remedy their ignorance by placing the onus of responsibility on others to teach them versus by adopting responsibility for their own learning.

Second, investigating moral judgments of intergroup curiosity allowed us to extend moral psychology's current focus on the interpersonal level of analysis by probing people's moral judgments when group membership is relevant, as it is in many everyday interactions (e.g., Bonam et al., 2016; Jarvis & Okonofua, 2020; Marshburn & Campos, 2022; Perry et al., 2019; Rogers et al., 2012; Spruill & Lewis, in press). This approach also contributes to scholarship on intergroup relations, as many judgments in this area are morally relevant. For instance, prior work on intergroup bias has asked participants to evaluate the rightness or wrongness of outgroup members' behaviors (Heiphetz et al., 2015; Killen et al., 2002), probed morally relevant emotions (e.g., empathy toward out-group members or guilt about the actions of one's own group; Harth et al., 2008; Hudson et al., 2019), and measured pro-social and anti-social behaviors toward people on the basis of group membership (Goff & Rau, 2020; Kraus & Keltner, 2013; Over, 2018). However, this scholarship has largely not drawn from the moral psychology literature to inform its theorizing. The present research integrates approaches from moral psychology and intergroup relations to better understand how people make moral judgments in intergroup contexts.

Third, national conversations have recently focused on dominant group members' propensity to request that minoritized individuals to teach them about racism (Johns, 2020;

Pham, 2020; Wilson, 2020). Therefore, studying curiosity in this context can speak to

individuals' lived experiences, clarify the consequences of dominant group members' actions, and

bring scientific evidence to bear on ongoing public dialogues.

      For these reasons, we probed moral evaluations of White actors who sought to satisfy

their curiosity by asking Black people they did not know well or by seeking to learn the answers

to their questions themselves. When dominant group members place the onus of responsibility on

minoritized group members to teach, intergroup curiosity may elicit negative evaluations. This

expression of curiosity implies that historically disadvantaged groups should serve dominant

group members by providing them with knowledge, which can reinforce systems of inequality

and racial dominance by obscuring and devaluing the intellectual labor of minoritized

individuals. This psychological entitlement to "insider" knowledge signifies a system of racial

privilege that exploits the resources (e.g., effort, time, energy) of minoritized groups to benefit

dominant groups (Adams et al., 2008; Branscombe, et al., 2007; Powell et al., 2005). Further,

intergroup curiosity that places demands on minoritized individuals to explain their culture can

reinforce Whiteness as the prototypical "norm" in mainstream society (Devos & Banaji, 2005;

Feagin, 2009; Mekawi & Todd, 2021; Salter & Adams, 2016) while leaving minoritized

individuals as "the effect to be explained" (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001; Verkuyten, 2011). Indeed,

seemingly innocuous questioning can exert a harmful psychological impact on the emotional

well-being of minoritized individuals (Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Sue, 2017).

      In contrast, intergroup curiosity may elicit relatively positive evaluations when dominant

group members place the onus of responsibility on themselves to learn. People may view the

desire to learn about outgroups as a valuable step toward reducing intergroup tension by making

a conscious effort to understand people who differ from the self (Page-Gould et al., 2008). In

addition, putting in effort to acquire new information may suggest that a person is industrious, hard-working, and disciplined in their search for knowledge—personal traits that people generally perceive positively and associate with good moral character (Furnham, 1990). When determining an object's value and quality, people rely in part on the amount of effort and labor expended to produce the result (Inzlicht et al., 2018; Kruger et al., 2004). They also view individuals who put in effort as more cooperative, dedicated, and trustworthy than those who do not (Celniker et al., in press). Furthermore, in past work on moral evaluations of curiosity, participants perceived curious, versus non-curious, actors as putting in more effort and consequently having better moral character (White et al, under review). Thus, we hypothesized that participants in the current work would evaluate intergroup curiosity more positively when curious individuals placed the onus of responsibility on themselves to learn rather than on outgroup members to teach.

**Overview of Current Research**

Two experiments examined the hypothesis that actors who exhibited group-based curiosity would elicit more positive moral evaluations when they placed the onus of responsibility on themselves to learn rather than on outgroup members to teach. In addition to probing this main effect, we asked *why* moral evaluations might differ depending on onus of responsibility. Specifically, we asked whether perceptions of effort mediated (Study 1) and caused (Study 2) different moral evaluations of dominant group members who tried to satisfy their curiosity by taking the initiative to learn on their own versus asking minoritized group members to teach them the information they lacked. Together, these studies clarify how individuals evaluate curiosity in an intergroup context, shed light on a mechanism (perceptions

of effort) underlying these moral evaluations, and highlight the consequences of trying to satisfy one's curiosity by putting in one's own effort versus relying on the effort of others.

## Study 1

Study 1 provided an initial test of whether participants judged White actors who placed the onus of responsibility on others to teach more harshly than those who placed the onus of responsibility on themselves to learn. To do so, we told participants about actors who displayed curiosity about an outgroup and either took responsibility for their own learning (e.g., searching for information themselves by reading books or watching video tutorials) or placed responsibility on outgroup members to teach (e.g., asking questions of their Black neighbor or a Black cashier). To test a potential mechanism underlying the hypothesized effect—i.e., to determine whether participants perceived actors who placed the onus of responsibility on others to teach as working less hard than actors who placed the onus of responsibility on themselves to learn—we also asked participants how much effort each actor exerted. Finally, we tested both Black and White participants. White Americans are particularly likely to endorse the view that people must work hard in order to be moral (Cokley et al., 2007) and to view people's position in life as stemming from their own effort (Salter et al., 2018). Therefore, we asked whether the link between perceptions that someone worked hard and perceptions of that person as morally good would be especially strong for White Americans. Testing both Black and White participants also allowed us to contribute to the diversity of psychological science, which has relied on predominantly White samples to date (Guthrie, 2003; Roberts et al., 2020).

### Method

Here and in Study 2, we report all manipulations, measures, participant exclusions, and sample size determinations. In both studies, similar patterns as those reported in the main text

emerged when analyzing responses from everyone who completed the dependent measures. Materials, anonymized data, analysis syntax, and codebooks for both studies can be accessed at https://osf.io/um9xv/?view_only=1fcd5285aa4b42bf85097e8b2966ccff. Study 1 was not pre-registered. For Study 2, we pre-registered the study design, planned sample size, exclusion criteria, and planned analyses at https://aspredicted.org/6WG_CJR. Below, we report all pre-registered analyses and mark any deviations from our pre-registered analytic plan. All materials and procedures for both studies were approved by the authors' university IRB.

**Participants**. We determined sample size based on an a priori power analysis using G*Power software. As we were unsure as to what effect size to expect, we assumed a medium effect size ($f$=.15) with other standard parameters ($\alpha$=.05, 80% power) and estimated a desired sample size of 353 participants. We used Prolific.com to recruit a total of 406 adults living in the United States, over-recruiting from our target sample size because we expected that we would need to exclude data from some respondents. We used a pre-screening survey to recruit Black and White participants and excluded one respondent for not identifying as either Black or White during the demographics portion of the study, two respondents for identifying as both Black and White, and twelve respondents for failing to correctly answer an attention check question that asked them to recall any of the scenarios they had read throughout the study. Fifty-one people began the study but did not proceed far enough to be assigned to condition. Thus, the final analysis included 340 participants who ranged from 18 to 79 years old ($m$=36.25 years, $sd$=14.63 years). Participants self-identified their race as White (51%) or Black (49%) and their gender as female (50%) or male (50%).

**Design and procedures**. This study adopted a 2 (Participant Race: White vs. Black) x 2 (Onus of Responsibility: Other vs. Self) between-subjects design. Participants learned that the

purpose of the study was to "understand how people think about different scenarios." Each story described a different White actor who was curious about one of five topics (how to organize a Black Lives Matter protest, how to best serve Black students in an intercity classroom, how to pastor a predominantly Black church, how to do Black hairstyles, whether it was acceptable to dress as a character of a different race for Halloween) and did not know anything about this topic. Participants viewed vignettes in a randomized order, and the full text of all vignettes used in both studies is available in the supplemental materials. We randomized the order of vignettes. Female participants read about female actors, and male participants read about male actors.

We randomly assigned participants to complete one of two conditions. In the self-responsibility condition (*n*=170), participants read about characters who engaged in behaviors that placed the onus of responsibility to acquire outgroup knowledge on themselves (e.g., reading books, attending seminars, watching video tutorials). In the other-responsibility condition (*n*=170), participants read about characters who engaged in behaviors that placed the onus of responsibility to teach on outgroup members (e.g., asking Black strangers to answer their questions). We adapted scenarios from previous research manipulating curiosity (Mosley et al, under review; White et al., under review).

After reading each scenario, participants indicated their perceptions of effort using three counterbalanced items: (1) "[Actor] is a hard worker," (2) "[Actor] has a strong work ethic," and (3) "[Actor] puts in the effort to achieve [her/his] goals" (1–*Strongly Disagree*; 4–*Neither Agree nor Disagree*; 7–*Strongly Agree*). Reliabilities (αs) ranged from .90 - .94 for each actor. For analyses below, we averaged three items across the five scenarios of each condition.

Participants then indicated their moral judgments using three counterbalanced items: (1) "How would you evaluate this person's moral character?" (1–*Very Immoral Character*; 4–

*Neither Immoral nor Moral Character*; 7–*Very Moral Character*); (2) "How ethical or unethical

is this person?" (1–*Very Unethical*; 4–*Neither Unethical nor Ethical*; 7–*Very Ethical*); (3) "How

would you evaluate this person overall?" (1–*Very Immoral*; 4–*Neither Immoral nor Moral*; 7–

*Very Moral*). Reliabilities (αs) ranged from .93 - .95 for each actor. For analyses below, we

averaged three items across the five scenarios of each condition.[1]

**Results**

To determine how Black and White participants perceived individuals who placed the

onus of responsibility on other people to teach versus on themselves to learn, we analyzed moral

judgments using a 2 (Participant Race: White vs. Black) x 2 (Onus of Responsibility: Other vs.

Self) between-subjects ANOVA. This analysis revealed a main effect of Onus of Responsibility,

$F(1, 336)=31.81$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.09$: on average, participants evaluated actors who placed the onus

of responsibility on themselves ($m=5.49$, $sd=.82$) as more moral than those who placed the onus

of responsibility on others ($m=4.93$, $sd=.98$). No other main effects or interactions reached

significance, $ps\geq.163$.

To probe participants' judgments regarding the degree to which actors worked hard, we

analyzed perceptions of effort using a 2 (Participant Race: White vs. Black) x 2 (Onus of

Responsibility: Other vs. Self) between-subjects ANOVA. Again, we observed a main effect of

Onus of Responsibility, $F(1, 336)=55.36$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.14$: on average, participants reported that

actors who placed the onus of responsibility on themselves ($m=5.32$, $sd=0.84$) exerted more

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[1] As an exploratory measure, we also included a measure of colorblind ideology in which participants indicated their agreement with items such as "We must stop obsessing so much about race and ethnicity in order to have a cooperative society" (1–*Strongly Disagree*; 4–*Neither Agree nor Disagree*; 7–*Strongly Agree*). White participants ($m=5.30$, $sd=.92$) endorsed these ideologies more than did Black participants ($m=5.01$, $sd=1.01$), independent-samples $t(320.81)=2.64$, $p=.009$, Cohen's $d=0.29$. However, we did not find that endorsement of colorblind ideologies mediated the relation between where actors placed the onus of responsibility and participants' moral evaluations of those actors for the sample overall (indirect effect: -0.01, $p=.264$, 95% CI: [-0.04, 0.01]), for Black participants only (indirect effect: -0.02, $p=0.371$, 95% CI: [-0.06, 0.02]), or for White participants only (indirect effect: -0.01, $p=.481$, 95% CI: [-0.04, 0.02]).

effort than actors who placed the onus of responsibility on others (*m*=4.54, *sd*=1.07). No other

main effects or interactions reached significance, *p*s≥.320.

Finally, we tested whether perceptions of effort mediated the relation between onus of

responsibility and moral judgments. To do so, we conducted a mediation analysis using 5,000

bootstrapped samples (Hayes, 2013). Onus of responsibility served as the predictor variable,

perceptions of effort served as the mediator, and moral judgments served as the dependent

measure. Figure 1 depicts these results, which revealed a significant indirect effect. Participants

reported that actors who placed the onus of responsibility on others to teach put in less effort

than actors who placed the onus of responsibility on themselves to learn. In turn, the more

participants perceived that actors put in effort, the more favorable were their moral evaluations

of those actors. That is, perceptions of effort appeared to underlie the relation between onus of

responsibility and moral judgments.[2]

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[2] Because the relation between where actors placed responsibility and participants' evaluations of those actors did not vary as a function of participant race (i.e., the omnibus ANOVA did not reveal a main effect of Participant Race or an Onus of Responsibility x Participant Race interaction), we collapsed across participant race for the mediation analysis. However, we also observed significant indirect effects when conducting this analysis among only Black participants (indirect effect: -0.42, *p*<.001, 95% CI: [-0.62, -0.21]) and only White participants (indirect effect: -0.57, *p*<.001, 95% CI: [-0.74, -0.41]).
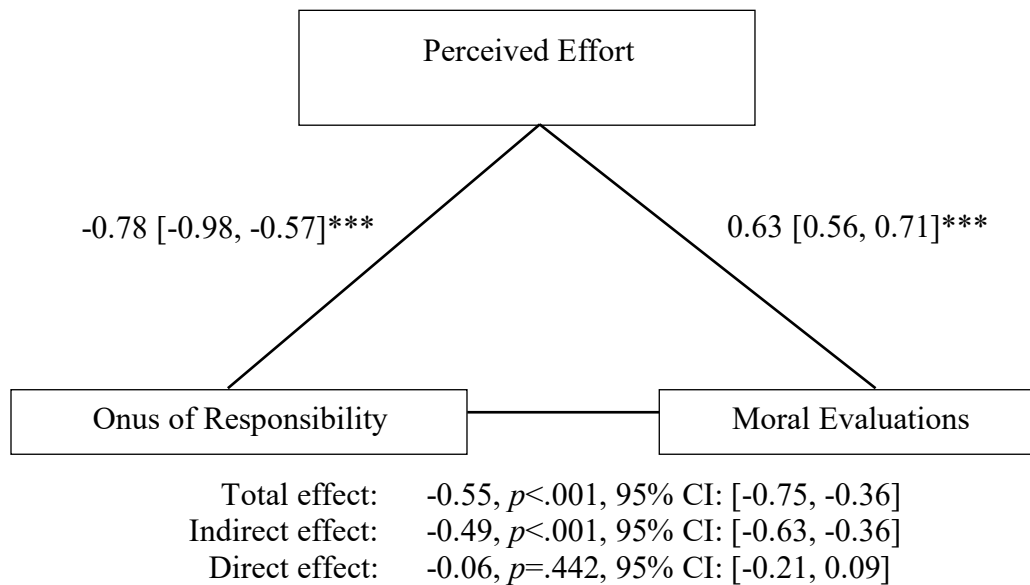
Figure 1. Model in which perceptions of effort mediate the relation between onus of

responsibility and moral judgments, Study 1. *** $p \leq .001$

**Study 2**

In Study 1, participants judged curious White actors who placed the onus of

responsibility on others to teach as less moral than actors who placed the onus of responsibility

on themselves to learn, an effect mediated by perceptions of effort. Because mediation analyses

use a correlational approach, the design of Study 1 allowed us to measure naturally occurring

variation in perceptions of effort but did not allow for causal conclusions. Therefore, Study 2

manipulated perceptions of effort to better assess its causal impact on moral judgments, while

also investigating whether the main effect from Study 1 (harsher moral evaluations of actors who

placed the onus of responsibility on others versus on themselves) would replicate in a new

sample.

**Method**

**Participants.** We determined sample size based on an a priori power analysis using G*Power software. Assuming a medium effect size ($f$=.15), α=.05, and 80% power for a 2 x 2 between-subjects analysis, we estimated a desired sample size of 351 participants. Because Study 1 did not reveal significant differences between Black and White participants, we recruited participants without regard to their race and planned for our main analyses to collapse across this variable. However, we also planned (and pre-registered) analyses focusing only on White participants because the actors in all vignettes were White and this analysis allowed us to ensure that all participants were reading about in-group actors. We expected that 75% percent of sample would identify as White; therefore, we aimed for a total sample size of 468 participants. Finally, we oversampled slightly in the anticipation of needing to exclude data from some respondents and tested a total of 519 participants. From this pool, we excluded responses from four participants who failed to correctly answer an attention check question asking them to recall any of the vignettes they had read throughout the study and two additional respondents with duplicate IP addresses (we retained data from the first testing session only for each of these respondents).

The remaining 513 participants whose responses were included in analyses ranged from 18 to 82 years old ($m$=38.16 years, $sd$=13.16 years). Participants self-identified their race/ethnicity as White (75%), Black (8%), Hispanic or Latino/a (8%), Asian (6%), Native American (<1%), Pacific Islander (<1%), Arab-American (<1%), "mixed ethnicity" (2%), or "other" (<1%). Participants also self-identified their gender as female (50%) or male (50%).

**Design and procedures**. This study adopted a 2 (Onus of Responsibility: Other vs. Self) x 2 (Effort: High vs. Low) between-subjects ANOVA. As in Study 1, participants only evaluated descriptions of White actors. This study proceeded similarly to Study 1 except that the vignettes

included a manipulation of effort. For instance, in the high-effort condition in which actors

placed the onus of responsibility on themselves to learn (*n*=128), one vignette read as follows:

> Charlotte is a White American activist. She is inspired by recent events of
> racial injustice is curious how to organize a Black Lives Matter
> demonstration. She does not know anything about this topic. In order to
> learn more, she reads a series of books published by Black authors on how
> to be an ally to Black activists. Charlotte is not able to receive a
> satisfactory answer; therefore, she seeks out more information by reading
> additional books, and spends a lot of time trying to understand the
> question.

In the high-effort condition in which actors placed the onus of responsibility on others

(*n*=127), participants read that Charlotte "sends a message on social media to Deja, a Black

American classmate she knew from high school, with a request that Deja tell her more. Charlotte

is not able to receive a satisfactory answer; therefore, she seeks out more information by asking

additional Black people she knows and spends a lot of time trying to understand the question." In

the low-effort conditions (*n*s=129 in both the self-responsibility and other-responsibility

conditions), the last sentence of both versions of the vignette read as follows: "Charlotte spends a

little bit of time seeking a satisfactory answer, and does not seek out any other sources of

information to help her answer the question."

After reading each vignette, participants indicated their agreement with a single-item

manipulation check of perceptions of effort: "[Actor] puts in the effort required to succeed"

(1=*Strongly Disagree*, 4=*Neither Agree nor Disagree*, 7=*Strongly Agree*). Afterwards,

participants completed the same measure of moral judgment as Study 1. Reliabilities (αs) ranged

from .91 - .96 for each actor.

**Results**

To determine whether we successfully manipulated perceptions of effort, we used an

independent-samples *t*-test to probe whether participants perceived that actors exerted more

effort in the high effort condition (*m*=5.84, *sd*=1.05) than in the low effort condition (*m*=3.71,

*sd*=1.33). These two conditions significantly differed from each other (*t*(487.09)=20.08, *p*<.001,

Cohen's *d*=1.77), demonstrating that our manipulation was successful.

To address our main question of interest—the extent to which onus of responsibility and

perceptions of effort shaped moral judgments of curious individuals—we analyzed participants'

moral evaluations using a 2 (Onus of Responsibility: Other vs. Self) x 2 (Effort: High vs. Low)

between-subjects ANOVA (Figure 2). Replicating Study 1, we observed a main effect of Onus of

Responsibility, $F$ (1, 509)=17.94, *p*<.001, $\eta_P^2$=.03: on average, participants evaluated actors who

placed the onus of responsibility on themselves (*m*=5.40, *sd*=1.02) as more moral than those who

placed the onus of responsibility on others (*m*=5.04, *sd*=1.03). We also observed a main effect of

Effort, $F$ (1, 509)=72.89, *p*<.001, $\eta_P^2$=.13: on average, participants evaluated actors who exerted

high effort (*m*=5.58, *sd*=.99) as more moral than actors who exerted low effort (*m*=4.86, *sd*=.95).

The Onus of Responsibility x Effort interaction did not reach significance, *p*=.999.[3]



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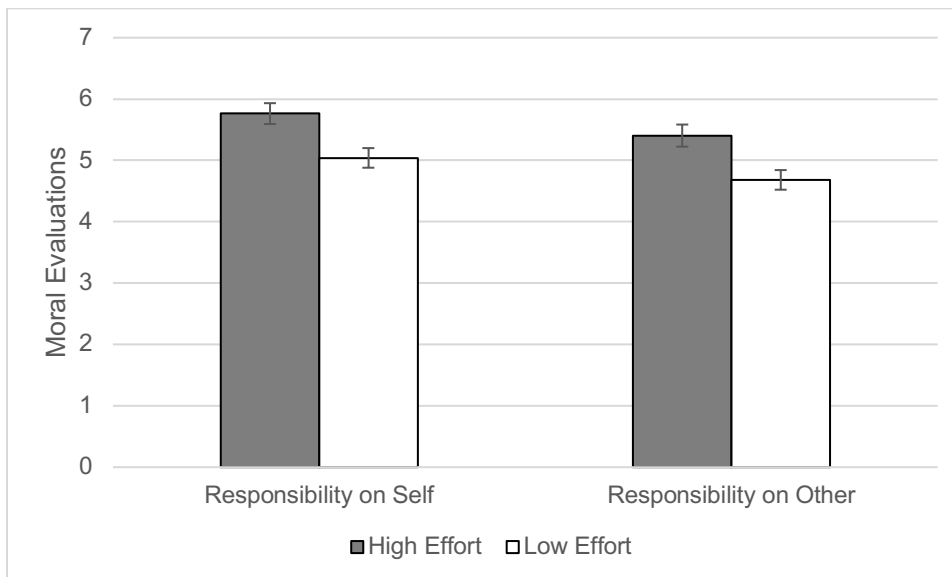
[3] Similar patterns emerged among White participants only. Like in the full sample, we observed a main effect of Onus of Responsibility, $F$ (1, 384)=14.36, *p*<.001, $\eta_P^2$=.13, and a main effect of Effort, $F$ (1, 384) = 55.60, *p*<.001, $\eta_P^2$=.13. The Onus of Responsibility x Effort interaction did not reach significance, *p*=.323.

*Figure 2*. Effects of Onus of Responsibility and Effort on moral evaluations of curious individuals, Study 2. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

## General Discussion

Two experiments probed people's evaluations of intergroup curiosity—an actor's desire to acquire information about outgroup members that the actor does not currently have. Although people generally view curiosity and its associated behaviors (e.g., exploration, question-asking) as virtuous (Davoodi & Lombrozo, 2022; Jirout & Klahr, 2012; Legare, 2014; Mosley et al., under review; White et al., under review), the current work suggested an important boundary condition. Namely, participants reported more positive evaluations of curious actors when they placed the onus of responsibility on themselves to learn rather than when they placed responsibility on others to teach, an effect driven by participants' perceptions that actors in the former group exerted more effort than those in the latter group.

### Theoretical and Translational Implications

These results extend prior work by clarifying when and why people evaluate curiosity favorably. Specifically, people may value curiosity when actors exert effort to obtain information that they do not currently have, such as by conducting scientific experiments or taking classes on the topic of interest (Davoodi & Lombrozo, 2022; Funk & Kennedy, 2019; White et al., under review). In contrast, intergroup contexts sometimes place value on ignorance, as when White people choose not to learn about racial inequality (Baldwin, 1962/2021; Mills, 1997; Mueller, 2020). Further, in these contexts, dominant group members sometimes ask minoritized individuals to put in effort to ensure that the dominant group members have particular pieces of information (e.g., Johns, 2020; Pham, 2020; Wilson, 2020). Investigating moral evaluations in this context revealed that participants viewed curiosity as more virtuous when actors put in effort

themselves to remedy their ignorance rather than placing the responsibility of teaching on others.

In addition to extending work on curiosity, investigating moral evaluations of intergroup curiosity integrates moral psychology and scholarship on intergroup relations. These areas of inquiry are conceptually related: if one conceives of intergroup bias as immoral, then work on (im)morality should inform understanding of intergroup relations and vice versa. Additionally, people often make moral judgments in intergroup contexts (e.g., Leath et al., 2021; Roberts et al., 2016; Wilkins et al., 2022; Yudkin et al., 2016), yet work on intergroup relations rarely draws its theories from moral psychology and work on morality rarely considers group membership as an important variable of interest (for notable exceptions, see Goldring & Heiphetz, 2020; Leach et al., 2015; Rutland et al., 2010). By integrating frameworks from both areas, the current work adds a nuanced perspective to scientific understanding of when and why people view curiosity as virtuous. An approach drawing only from moral psychology may have concluded that people evaluate curiosity positively in general, as prior work focusing on morality without an intergroup lens has found positive evaluations of curiosity and its associated behaviors (Davoodi & Lombrozo, 2022; Funk & Kennedy, 2019; Jirout & Klahr, 2012; Legare, 2014; Mosley et al, under review; White et al., under review). Meanwhile, an approach drawing only from scholarship on intergroup relations may not have asked about perceptions of virtue at all. An intergroup approach may also not have focused on responsibility, which has largely been the focus of scholarship on morality (e.g., Cushman et al., 2012; Gantman et al., 2020; Greene & Cohen, 2004; Hume, 1740/2012; Sartre, 1943/1956; Strawson, 1994; Young & Phillips, 2011). In incorporating frameworks from both fields, the current work adds nuance to scientific understanding of the extent to which people perceive expressions of curiosity as morally good and the situations that are especially likely to facilitate this perception.

Alongside these theoretical contributions, the present results shed light on a somewhat common experience for minoritized people in the United States (Johns, 2020; Pham, 2020; Wilson, 2020)—namely, being asked to interrupt their daily activities in order to educate White people about race. To date, psychology has recruited largely White samples and focused largely on White people's experiences of navigating their social world (Guthrie, 2003; Roberts et al., 2020). In the current work, both Black and White participants viewed White actors as less moral when they placed the onus of responsibility for satisfying their curiosity on others rather than on themselves. This finding adds to prior writings—many found outside of psychology—highlighting the negative consequences that White people's curiosity can hold for minoritized individuals (e.g., Blanchard et al., 2009; Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Washington, 2006).

Finally, the present results hold translational implications for White individuals who have well-intentioned curiosity about outgroup members by suggesting that they may wish to put in significant effort themselves to obtain the information they lack. A failure to do so may lead others to perceive them as immoral, an outcome that many people seek to avoid (Batson et al., 1997; Prentice et al., 2019; Shaw et al., 2014). Even if only for self-interested reasons—i.e., the desire to seem like a morally good person—people may find it beneficial to expend their own effort to learn about outgroups.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

The current work offers important insight into how people morally evaluate intergroup curiosity. In doing so, the present research extends work on intergroup relations, morality, and curiosity; builds stronger bridges between these areas of study, which have remained largely separate to date; and holds translational implications for navigating a desire to learn about

outgroup members. However, like all research, the current work is limited in ways that future work can address.

First, the vignettes in the current work contrasted actors who sought information from people they did not know well and actors who sought the answers to their questions for themselves. We structured our stimuli in this way in part to reflect the social phenomenon of White people asking Black people they do not know well to inform them about race-related topics. In so doing, we designed research that could speak to people's everyday experiences. Using these stimuli, we observed that participants perceived actors who asked strangers or acquaintances to answer their questions as exerting less effort than actors who sought to satisfy their curiosity in other ways, and that perceptions of effort were associated with moral judgments. We further observed that manipulating perceptions of effort shaped moral judgment, providing stronger evidence for claims regarding the role of perceived effort in moral judgments. However, many social phenomena are multicausal, and it is unlikely that perceived effort was the only possible variable shaping moral evaluations. For instance, people who seek information from strangers and acquaintances may appear to be entitled, incompetent and unable to discover answers on their own, or acting in bad faith. Future work can test what factors, in addition to perceptions of effort, might inform participants' moral judgments of intergroup curiosity.

Second, future work can also investigate possible shifts in participants' moral judgments based on whom the actor is questioning and the context in which the questioning occurs. For example, a White student may enroll in an African American Studies course and ask questions of her Black instructor. In this case, the student has taken responsibility for her own learning by enrolling in the class, and the instructor has signed up for a paying job whose responsibilities include answering student questions. Thus, observers may perceive this student as more moral

than someone who asks the same questions of a Black stranger who does not have an obligation to educate others. As another example, a White person who holds racially biased views may question a known white supremacist about Black culture. In this case, the goal of asking a question may not be to learn new information *per se*; rather, the questioner may be seeking to reinforce her own beliefs, connect with someone whom she presumes shares similar beliefs, or strengthen her racial identity through comradery with someone who espouses a particular racial ideology. Like the questioners in our vignettes, this person may elicit negative moral judgments (at least from people who do not share her views), but potentially for a different reason: not because she is exerting insufficient effort, but because she is not sufficiently curious. That is, in cases where people's questions signal something other than a desire to obtain new information, observers may not respond in the same way as they would to someone they perceived to be genuinely curious. In this example, observers may render negative moral judgments because they perceive the actor's questions to indicate racism or close-mindedness rather than a true desire to learn.

Of course, there are many situations in which people ask questions of others, many of which exist outside the intergroup context. For instance, a person may be curious about what it is like to experience violence and ask about the experiences of someone who has had this experience. Moral evaluations of these questions may differ depending on the context in which they occur. Consider an instance where a person grows up poor because her father consistently gambles with the household's income and refuses to listen when his family tries to tell him the damage he is causing. This person later grows up and has a daughter of her own. Her daughter may become curious about what it was like to grow up in poverty and ask her mother questions about this topic. These questions would likely elicit a different moral evaluation than if the father

asked the same questions, especially if he was simply seeking to satisfy his own curiosity rather than acknowledging the role he played in the poverty his daughter had to endure and seeking to mend their relationship going forward. Future work can test whether the results observed in the present work generalize to interpersonal situations where one person has maintained ignorance at the expense of another and then attempts to place the burden of responsibility on the second person to satisfy their curiosity.

Third, as discussed above, the present research diversifies psychological science by testing Black and White participants' perceptions of curious actors in Study 1. However, in the vignettes to which participants responded, all curious actors were White. We made this decision because dominant group members typically possess less knowledge about minoritized group members than vice versa (Baldwin, 1962/2021; Bonam e al., 2019; Nelson et al., 2013; Salter et al., 2018), and because, as discussed above, dominant group members can be particularly motivated to maintain epistemologies of ignorance surrounding racial injustice (Knowles et al., 2014; Mills, 1997; Mosley et al., under review). Therefore, it appears especially important to understand when White individuals—who have the most institutional power to dismantle systems of inequality (Knowles et al., 2014)—learn positive ways to express intergroup curiosity. Future work can build on these results by investigating perceptions of minoritized group members who are curious about other minoritized groups (e.g., Black actors who are curious about Japanese Harajuku culture) or about the dominant culture (e.g., Black actors who are curious about White culture). Additionally, the present work focused on consequences of intergroup curiosity for White actors. We made this decision to build on a rich tradition in moral psychology of asking how actors' own behaviors shape the degree to which other people perceive them as moral (e.g., Cushman et al., 2012; Gantman et al., 2020; Heiphetz et al., 2015; Phillips &

Shaw, 2015). Furthermore, this approach allowed the current work to provide insight into how individuals can best express their curiosity if they want to be perceived as good people. However, people's behaviors also have consequences for others. For instance, requests to satisfy others' curiosity can be stressful, particularly if they occur frequently or come from high-power individuals, such as one's supervisor at work. In an employment context, repeated questioning about one's culture can also take time away from performing job-related responsibilities and potentially result in worse performance. Future work can investigate outcomes for minoritized group members who encounter requests—or sometimes demands—to satisfy the curiosity of dominant group members.

## Conclusions

What happens when dominant group members try to learn about minoritized groups? With the best of intentions, they may seek out members of the minoritized group to satisfy their curiosity. The current work indicates that such an approach may result in moral condemnation, suggesting that curiosity does not always elicit positive moral evaluations. Rather, people may view curiosity more positively when it is clear that the curious person is putting in effort to remedy their own ignorance rather than treating minoritized group members like on-call teachers. To elicit judgments of virtue, curiosity on its own is insufficient, and taking responsibility for one's own learning is key.

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