



Essentialist beliefs about race in early childhood

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Background & Research Questions

Children as young as 4-years-old view race as heritable and stable¹, but it is unclear whether they view it as predictive of behavioral and psychological traits, a *causal essentialist* view of race.

Essentialist beliefs about race vary by culture², and seem to require ample input to emerge.

Essentialist beliefs are thought to underlie prejudicial attitudes³, and are associated with greater prejudice towards minorities in White⁴ and Black⁵ adults.

Do children have causal essentialist beliefs about race?

What environmental input shapes these beliefs?

What are the implications of these beliefs on intergroup attitudes in children?

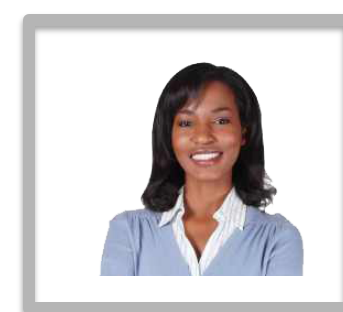
Methods & Results

5 and 6-year olds $N = 204$ (White: $n = 123$; Black: $n = 81$)



Switched at birth task¹

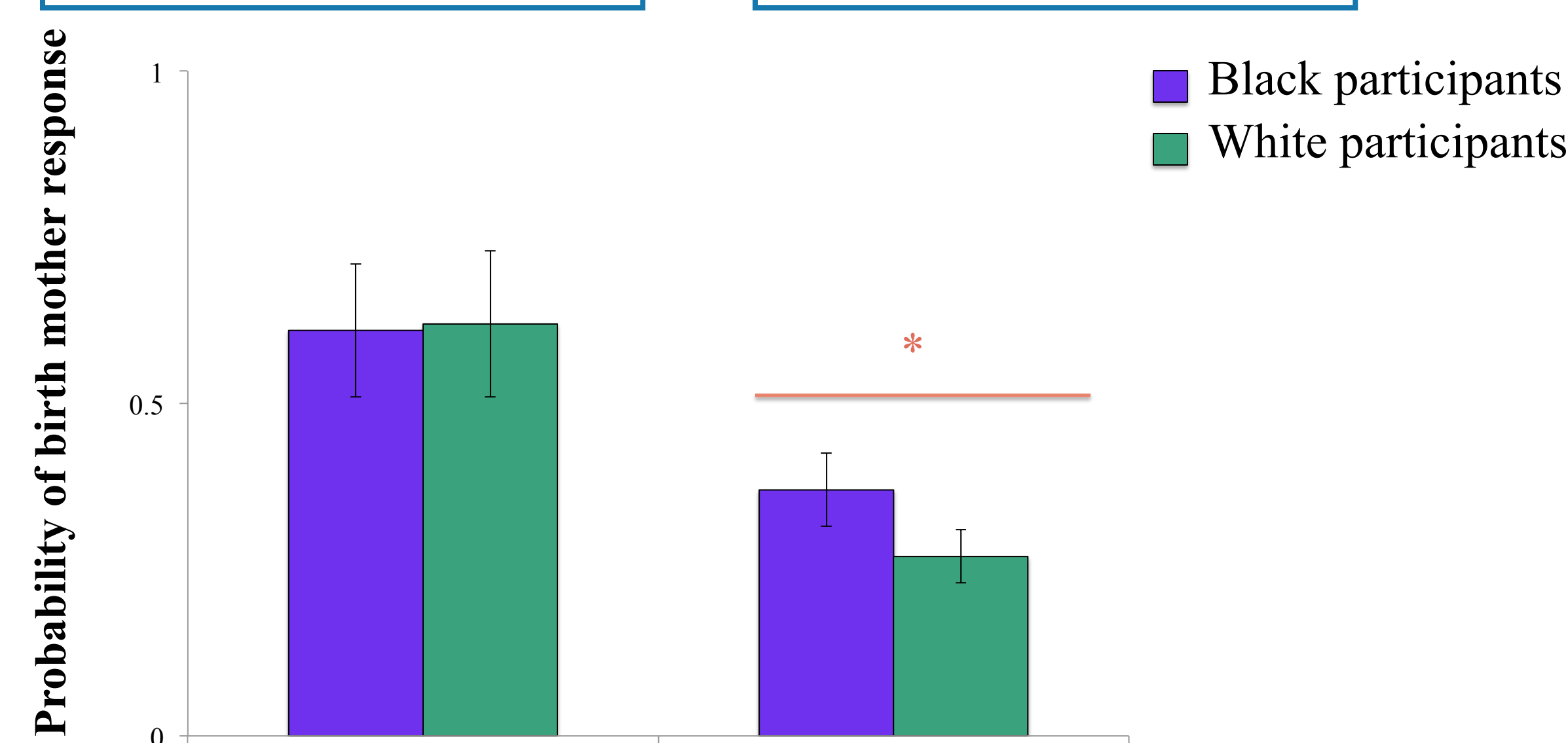
A baby was born to this mom, but was raised by this mom (or vice versa)



Think about this baby when it's grown up...

What will it **look** like?

What will it **be** like?



Race: $\chi^2(1) = 1.45, p = .228$
Property type: $\chi^2(1) = 50.42, p < .001$
Race x property type: $\chi^2(1) = 2.02, p = .156$

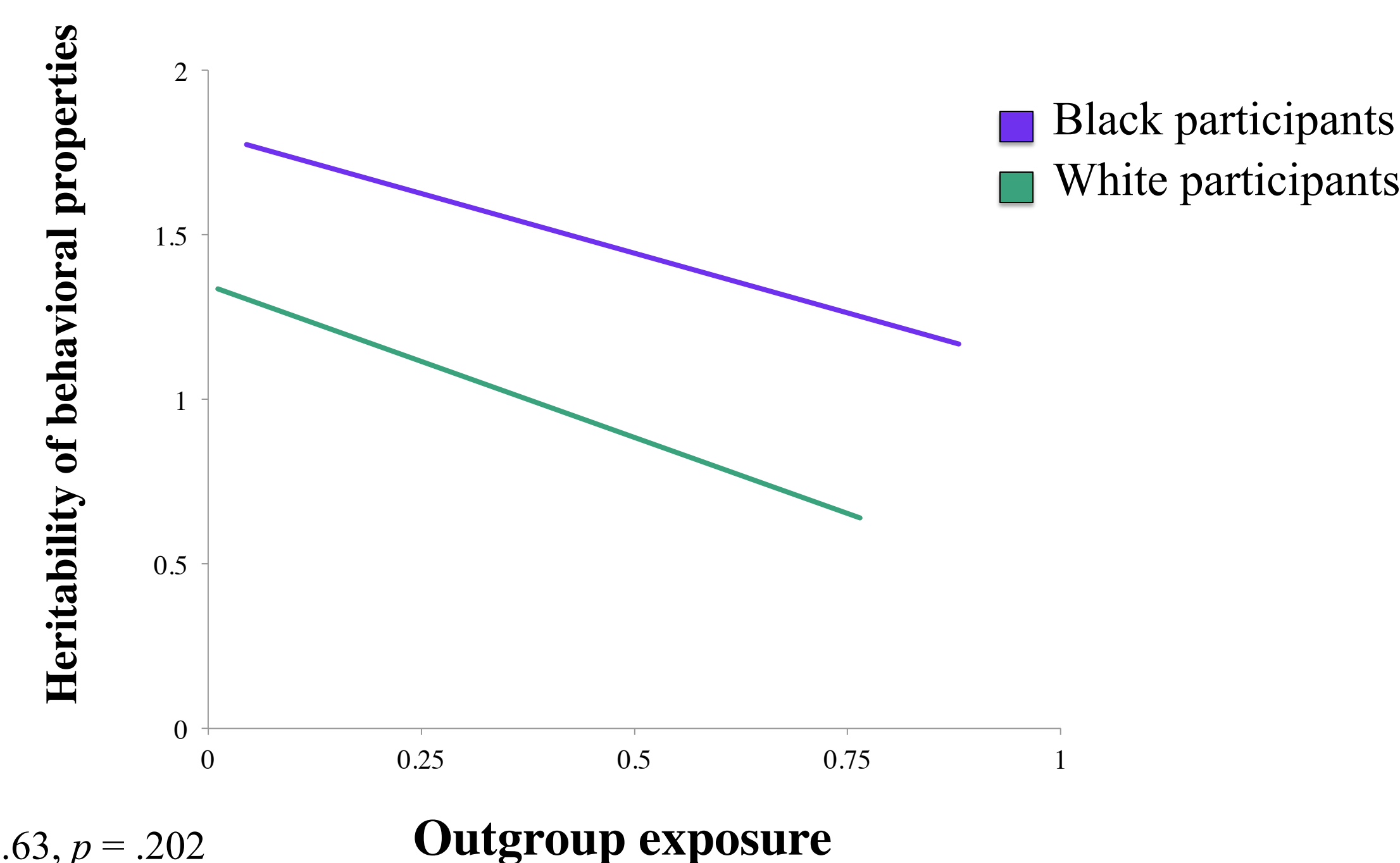
5- and 6-year-olds view skin color as heritable, but have much weaker causal essentialist beliefs about race

At this age, Black children express slightly greater racial essentialism than White children

Exposure to a racial outgroup

Used child's current residential zipcode to determine percentage of current neighborhood identified as a racial outgroup member on the 2010 census

For White children: % that self-identified as Black/African American
For Black children: % that self-identified as White



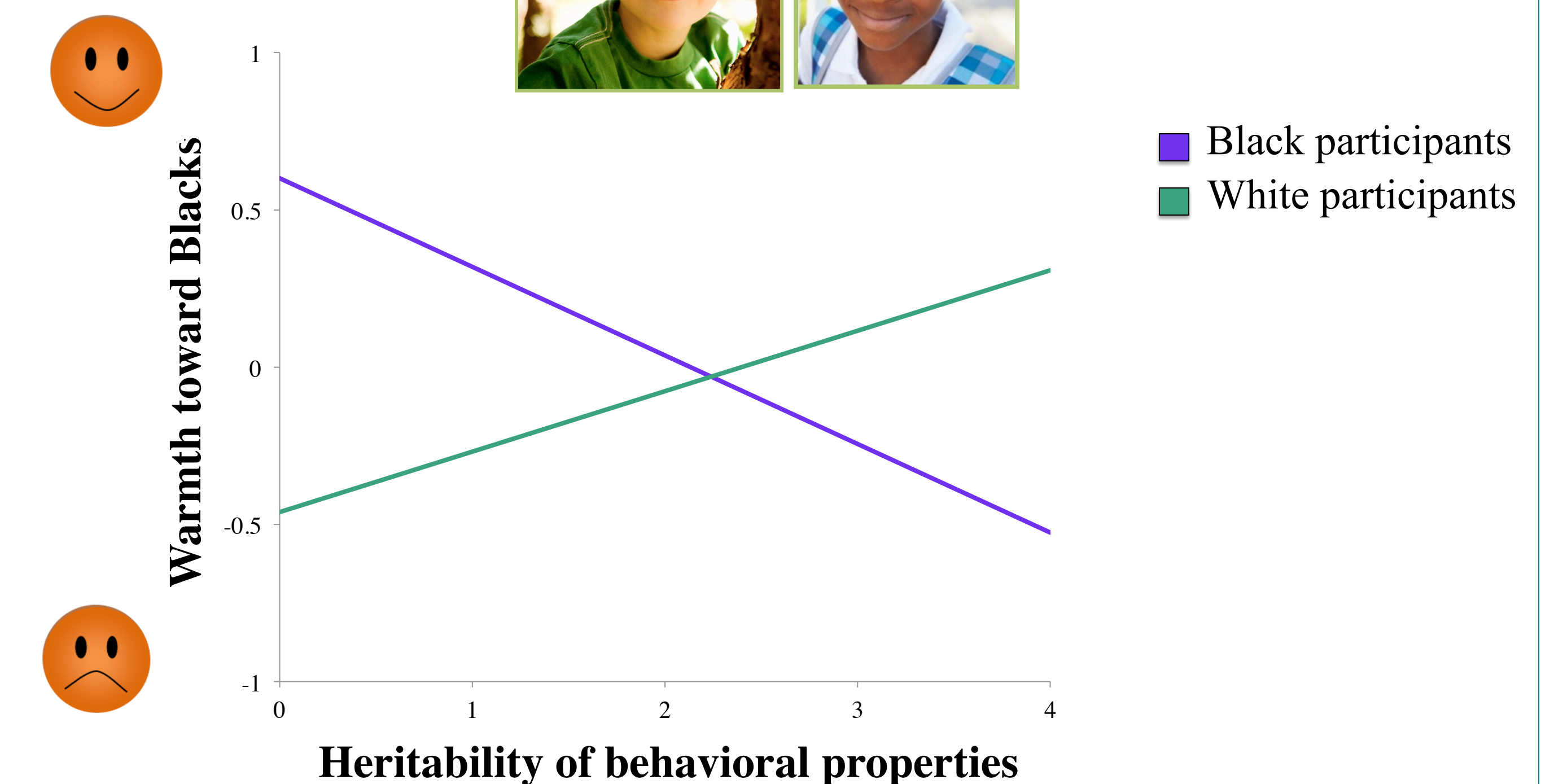
Race: $\chi^2(1) = 1.63, p = .202$
Outgroup: $\chi^2(1) = 3.98, p = .046$
Race x outgroup: $\chi^2(1) = .190, p = .663$

Greater exposure to racial outgroup associated with weaker racial essentialism for White and Black children

There was no effect of outgroup exposure on children's beliefs about heritability of skin color

Feelings thermometer task⁶

Children were asked how much they did or did not like a kid.
Asked for 3 White and 3 Black children, with ratings averaged across each group separately



Race: $\chi^2(1) = 8.28, p = .004$
Essentialism: $\chi^2(1) = .202, p = .653$
Race x essentialism: $\chi^2(1) = 5.67, p = .017$

Racial essentialism associated with negative attitudes toward Blacks among Black, but not White, children

There was no effect on attitudes toward Whites, and no effect of children's beliefs about heritability of skin color

References & Acknowledgements

1. Hirschfeld, L.A. (1995). Do children have a theory of race? *Cognition*, 54, 209-252. 2. Rhodes, M. & Gelman, S.A. (2009). A developmental examination of the conceptual structure of animal, artifact, and human social categories across two cultural contexts. *Cognitive Psychology*, 59, 244-274. 3. Allport, G. W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. 4. Williams, M. J. & Eberhardt, J. L. (2008). Biological conceptions of race and the motivation to cross racial boundaries. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94, 1033-1047. 5. Mandalaywala, T.M., Amodio, D.A., & Rhodes, M. (in press). Essentialism promotes racial prejudice by increasing endorsement of social hierarchies. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. 6. Amodio, D.A. & Devine, P.G. (2006). Stereotyping and evaluation in implicit race bias: Evidence for independent constructs and unique effects on behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91, 652-661.

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