

The moderating role of collective narcissism in White Americans' psychological defensiveness to the history of racism

Group Processes & Intergroup Relations

1–22

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DOI: 10.1177/13684302261418031

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Abstract

Since teaching about past racism in the United States often necessitates deliberations over White Americans' ingroup transgressions, it can elicit historical defensiveness. We tested this hypothesis across three experiments (N s = 109, 263, and 601) and further investigated if this effect was moderated by White collective narcissism. White American participants were randomly assigned to an ingroup transgression (presented with the history of racism) or an ingroup nontransgression (presented with the history of general events) condition. Across all experiments, (a) facing ingroup transgressions increased perceived ingroup responsibility among participants with low collective narcissism but not among those with high collective narcissism, and (b) among participants facing ingroup transgressions only, strong collective narcissism was consistently associated with less perceived ingroup responsibility. This research highlights the potential dangers of collective narcissism in erasing the history of racism.

Keywords

critical race theory, education, political psychology, politics, racial identity, social justice, Whiteness

Paper received 7 May 2024; revised version accepted 9 January 2026.

Across the United States (US), there is a strong political and legislative movement to restrict and/or ban education about racism, including the history of racism and critical race theory (CRT), a legal framework that centers racism in laws, policies, and institutions to understand social inequities in the US (Crenshaw, 2011). At least 44 states have proposed or signed into law bills restricting and/or banning education about racism (Schwartz, 2025). For example, in 2023, the Florida Department of Education blocked

a proposed College Board Advanced Placement course in African American Studies for high school students (Mazzei & Hartocollis, 2023).

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By ignoring and erasing the history of racism in the US, these bills and laws may have the detrimental consequences of maintaining and exacerbating systemic racial inequities (Ray & Gibbons, 2024). Given this pressing social issue, there is a strong need for social psychological research to examine the contexts and motivational processes underlying the opposition to antiracism education.

Supporters of the aforementioned political and legislative movement tend to be White Americans who believe that antiracism education, including lessons about the history of racism in the US, unfairly villainizes White people (C. Adams, 2021; Safarpour et al., 2021). Because the U.S. history of racism provides an account of White Americans' past ingroup transgressions against Black people, such as slavery and racial segregation, White Americans can perceive it as a group-image threat and, thus, react negatively (Knowles et al., 2014; Shuman et al., 2024). Extant research also indicates that individuals with high collective narcissism are more likely to engage in defensive responses to group-image threats in general, and to reminders of ingroup transgressions in particular (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013; Kazarovytska & Imhoff, 2022). We contribute to the literature by testing the role of ingroup transgression in the context of the history of racism in the antiracism education backlash. Furthermore, the current research experimentally tests the hypothesis that ethnic-racial collective narcissism moderates White Americans' defensive responses to facing ingroup transgressions related to the history of racism in the US.

Historical Defensiveness and Ingroup Transgressions Related to the History of Racism

According to one leading perspective on historical defensiveness, individuals are motivated to react defensively to the history of their ingroup's transgressions because it threatens the positive image of their group (Bilewicz, 2016). Historical

defensiveness is the result of individuals' desire to view themselves as belonging to a social group that has behaved morally and justly throughout history (Bilewicz, 2016). When an ingroup's integrity is questioned by past transgressions, its members may engage in a wide range of historical defensive responses to bolster and maintain the positive image of their group. Defensive responses include, but are not limited to, historical denial (i.e., denying that ingroup transgressions occurred) and ingroup responsibility denial (i.e., denying that the ingroup was responsible for past transgressions; for a review, see Bilewicz, 2016).

For White Americans, learning about the history of racism in the US can threaten their ingroup image as it highlights past ingroup racist transgressions against Black people. As a result, we posit that they may be motivated to engage in defensive responses towards the history of racism in the US and its teaching. Indeed, national polls demonstrate that a majority of White Americans (54.0%) think that paying attention to the history of racism in the US is "not good for society" (Pew Research Center, 2021). Also, among ethnic-racial groups in the US, White Americans are the only group that mostly opposes the teaching of the legacy of past racism (i.e., how past racism impacts today's American society) and CRT in public schools (Safarpour et al., 2021). Altogether, these data from public opinion polls suggest that White Americans may be motivated to react defensively when faced with the history of racism by opposing antiracism education. Despite both the importance of teaching about the history of racism and the current widespread backlash against antiracism education across the US, to our knowledge, only three published psychology papers have experimentally investigated the effects of exposure to the history of racism among White Americans (Bonam et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2007; Salter & Adams, 2016).

Hughes et al. (2007, Study 1) randomly assigned White American child participants (ages 6–11) to receive history lessons with or without explicit information about racism over 6 consecutive school days. Children in the

history-of-racism condition learned about six famous African Americans who experienced racial discrimination by White people, while children in the no-history-of-racism condition learned about the same African Americans without the discrimination information. The authors found that White American children in the history-of-racism condition expressed less prejudice against Black people than those in the no-history-of-racism condition. However, exposure to historical racism also elicited defensive responses—White American children believed that the history of racism lesson was unfair in their portrayal of White people.

In another study, Bonam et al. (2019, Study 2) found that exposing White American adult participants to historical racism (the federal government's past role in housing discrimination) versus no historical racism (pig intelligence) increased their belief that the government intentionally created "Black ghettos." However, among White Americans who strongly identified with their racial group, exposure to historical racism increased their denial of present-day individual and systemic racism.

Finally, Salter and Adams (2016, Study 1) found in a field study that the history of racism in visual displays that commemorated Black History Month (BHM) was less commonly depicted in White-majority high schools relative to Black-majority high schools. Then, in a separate study, Salter and Adams (2016, Study 3) found that exposing the BHM displays from Black-majority schools (vs. BHM displays from White-majority schools or no exposure) increased White and non-White college student participants' awareness of present-day racism in the US, which, in turn, increased their support for antiracism policies (e.g., slavery reparation policy). However, Salter and Adams (2016, Study 2) also found that White American college student participants expressed less positive emotions, more negative emotions, and less preference for the BHM displays in Black-majority schools than for those in White-majority schools. Moreover, strong White identification was strongly associated with negative affect about, and less preference for, the

BHM displays in Black-majority schools than for those in White-majority schools (Salter & Adams, 2016, Study 2).

Altogether, the above findings paint a nuanced picture of how exposing White Americans to the history of racism in the US can yield some positive outcomes but also elicit historical defensiveness. On the one hand, exposure to the history of racism reduces prejudice towards Black people, denial of present-day racism, and negative attitudes towards antiracism policies (Bonam et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2007; Salter & Adams, 2016). Moreover, some of these effects are especially strong among White Americans with a weak White identification (Bonam et al., 2019; Salter & Adams, 2016). On the other hand, White Americans find the educational content of racism history unfavorable, uncomfortable, and unfair in their portrayal of White people (Bonam et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2007; Salter & Adams, 2016), suggesting that facing ingroup transgressions elicits defensive responses. Moreover, some of these effects are especially strong among White Americans with a strong White identification (Bonam et al., 2019; Salter & Adams, 2016).

Historical denial, ingroup responsibility denial, and opposition to teaching about racism. The current research contributes to the above work by experimentally investigating the effects of facing ingroup transgressions in the context of the history of racism in the US on three defensive responses: White American adults' historical denial, ingroup responsibility denial, and opposition to education about racism. As stated above, these responses belong to a cadre of historical defensive behaviors in which individuals engage to maintain and bolster the positive image of their ingroup after being confronted with historical events perceived as ingroup transgressions (Bilewicz, 2016; Leach et al., 2013).

While historical denial and ingroup responsibility denial have not been experimentally investigated in the context of White Americans facing ingroup transgressions against Black people in the US, they have been examined in other

intergroup relation contexts (Bilali et al., 2019; Čehajić & Brown, 2010; Čehajić-Clancy et al., 2011; Yelland & Stone, 1996). For example, Bilali et al. (2019) found that, after reading about the US' historical involvement in and support for the 1954 coup d'état in Guatemala, strongly identified American nationalists were more likely to deny the US' responsibility in the Guatemalan civil war than weakly identified American nationalists. Also, Yelland and Stone (1996) found that American college students who endorsed right-wing authoritarianism and ethnocentrism were more likely to deny the historical fact that the Holocaust happened. While these correlational findings provide important insights into the identity and personality variables associated with historical denial and ingroup responsibility denial, it remains unclear whether being exposed to past ingroup transgression directly impacts these outcomes. In addition, given the importance of education on the history of racism in understanding and addressing present-day racial biases (Bonam et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2007), it is crucial to examine whether White Americans who are faced with ingroup transgressions in the context of the history of racism exhibit the negative and harmful defensive responses of historical denial and ingroup responsibility denial.

Despite the pervasive opposition to teaching about racism across the US, little social psychological research on this third defensive response exists in the literature. Targeting the opposition to teaching CRT specifically, Richmond et al. (2024) found that White Americans who opposed teaching this theory were more likely to have an inaccurate understanding of it, deny the existence of racism, believe that CRT harms Whites, and perceive that discussions on race and racism are divisive. The current backlash against antiracism education includes opposition to teaching not only CRT but also any educational content about race and racism. For example, in January 2025, U.S. President Donald J. Trump signed a presidential executive order titled "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K–12 Schooling," to limit the teaching about race and racism, claiming that such education content

was "radical indoctrination" (The White House, 2025). The current research seeks to investigate attitudes to antiracism education, including opposition to teaching CRT and the history of racism more generally. Altogether, the current research fills a gap in the literature by investigating three historical defensive outcomes for White Americans—ingroup historical responsibility denial, historical facts denial, and opposition to teaching about the history of racism—when they are faced with their group's racial transgressions.

Moderating Role of Collective Narcissism in Historical Defensiveness to Ingroup Transgressions

Although being confronted with past ingroup transgressions should elicit historical defensiveness, this effect may depend on individual differences in collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala, Cichočka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013; Kazarovytska & Imhoff, 2022). Collective narcissism is defined as "an emotional investment in an unrealistic belief about the unparalleled greatness of an ingroup" (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009, p. 1074). High collective narcissism is linked to high ingroup identification in part because of their shared perceived ingroup positivity (Golec de Zavala, Cichočka, & Bilewicz, 2013). However, collective narcissism involves the need for validation of ingroup positivity, authority, and supremacy from (and over) others, which are not necessarily tethered to a person's global ingroup identification (Golec de Zavala, Cichočka, & Bilewicz, 2013). Indeed, when examining the independent roles of ingroup identification and collective narcissism in outgroup attitudes, strong ingroup identification is associated with positive attitudes toward outgroups, whereas high collective narcissism is associated with negative attitudes toward outgroups (Golec de Zavala, Cichočka, & Bilewicz, 2013). Moreover, collective narcissism is consistently associated with intergroup hostility, retaliatory intergroup aggression, and support for terrorist violence and extremism (Golec de Zavala, Cichočka, & Bilewicz, 2013;

Golec de Zavala & Lantos, 2020; Golec de Zavala et al., 2016).

Most relevant to the present research, correlational data suggest that individuals with high collective narcissism are motivated to maintain their group's image and status and, thus, react defensively to ingroup transgressions (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013; Kazarovytska & Imhoff, 2022). For example, high national collective narcissism among Germans is associated with demand for historical closure (the desire to deny the relevance and importance of discussions on a historical event) regarding the Holocaust (above and beyond the role of general ingroup identification; Kazarovytska & Imhoff, 2022). In Poland, strong national collective narcissism is associated with historical instrumentalism—the belief that history should be shaped into narratives to serve the group's current needs, rather than pursued as an objective search for truth—and with anger towards historians who expose the nation's negative history (Klar & Bilewicz, 2017; Wójcik & Lewicka, 2022). Also, in the US and almost three dozen other countries, high national collective narcissism is associated with strong support for emphasizing ingroup achievements and the tendency to exaggerate one's country's contribution (Główczewski et al., 2022; Putnam et al., 2018; Zaromb et al., 2018). Finally, in the US, high national collective narcissism is related to intolerance of criticism towards, and unwavering support for, the US even when it commits wrongdoings (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013); and among White individuals, ethnic-racial collective narcissism is associated with denying present-day racism (Cichocka et al., 2022; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; West et al., 2022), including in the context of immigration restrictions (Cichocka et al., 2022).

In terms of experimental evidence, West et al. (2022, Studies 1 and 2) found across two studies with samples of White American men that those with high ethnic-racial collective narcissism defined a list of racist discriminatory behaviors more narrowly when the perpetrators were White versus Black. Furthermore, Americans' collective

narcissism is associated with retaliatory intergroup hostility—namely, intentions and willingness to confront, oppose, hurt, offend, injure, intimidate, and humiliate people from other countries—when the image of the US is criticized (a threat) versus praised (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013, Studies 1 and 2). This research suggests that the relation between high collective narcissism and defensive responses emerges only when White Americans face past ingroup transgressions.

In light of the above literature review, it stands to reason that the defensive responses of White Americans with high collective narcissism when faced with ingroup transgressions in the context of the history of racism in the US should extend to denying ingroup responsibility for past racism, denying past racism, and opposing education about the history of racism and CRT. By comparison, White Americans with low collective narcissism should be less likely to engage in these historical defensive responses when they are faced with ingroup transgressions.

Overview of the Present Research

Here, we present three experiments that manipulate exposure to historical ingroup transgressions and test whether collective narcissism moderates its effect on perceived historical facts, acknowledged ingroup responsibility, and opposition to the teaching of the history of racism. Our two main hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Facing past ingroup transgressions in the context of the history of racism in the US will lead White American participants to (a) perceive historical events as less factual, (b) acknowledge less ingroup responsibility, and (c) express greater opposition to the teaching of the history of racism.

Hypothesis 2: Collective narcissism will moderate the effect of exposure to past ingroup transgressions in the context of the history of racism on (a) perceived historical facts, (b) perceived ingroup responsibility, and

(c) opposition to the teaching of the history of racism. Particularly, we predict that these defensive responses will be stronger among individuals with high ethnic-racial collective narcissism but weaker among individuals with low ethnic-racial collective narcissism.

Experiment 1

The main goals of Experiment 1 were to provide initial tests of Hypotheses 1 and 2.

Method

The method and a priori hypotheses of Experiment 1 were preregistered at the Open Science Framework (OSF; <https://osf.io/w8cv7>).¹

Participants and design. Experiment 1 adopted a one-factor, two-level (ingroup transgression vs. ingroup nontransgression), between-subjects design. Using G*Power 3 (Faul et al., 2009), an a priori power analysis that set the effect size at $f = 0.25$ (medium), alpha at .05, power at 80%, numerator df at 1, and number of groups at two yielded a minimum sample size of 128.¹ We recruited a total of 144 participants on Amazon Mechanical Turk and compensated them \$1.80 each for completing the study. Participants who failed the attention check ($n = 17$) or did not identify as White ($n = 18$)² were excluded from data analyses, yielding a final sample size of $N = 109$ ($M_{\text{age}} = 36.63$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 6.13$, 60.06% men).

Independent variable

Ingroup transgression. All participants were informed that we were “developing a new assessment of knowledge about U.S. history,” and that their task was first to “complete several questions about U.S. history” to the best of their knowledge, and second, to indicate their “beliefs about these historical events.” All participants were presented with five multiple-choice questions on U.S. history. In the ingroup transgression condition, participants were presented with facts about the history of racism (slavery, segregation, slave patrols, KKK, and racial lynching; racism condition: $n = 50$). In the ingroup nontransgression condition, par-

ticipants were presented with facts about history unrelated to racism (national anthem, Independence Day, purchase of Alaska, U.S. Constitution, and U.S. flag; ingroup nontransgression condition: $n = 59$). Following each response, participants were all given the correct answer and additional information about it.³ A sample question in the ingroup transgression condition was, “Which state first authorized ‘slave patrols’ in the 1700s?” followed by four options: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina (the correct response). After indicating their response, they read,

In the 1700s, South Carolina developed the nation’s first slave patrols. Slave patrols were White men who assisted the wealthy White landowners in recovering and punishing Black slaves, who essentially were considered property. Slave patrols continued until the end of the Civil War and were replaced by militia-style groups that were empowered to control and deny access to equal rights to freed slaves.

A sample question in the ingroup nontransgression condition was, “Which U.S. President signed the treaty to purchase Alaska?” followed by four options: Abraham Lincoln, Ronald Reagan, Ulysses S. Grant, and Andrew Johnson (the correct response). After indicating their response, they read,

On March 30, 1867, the United States reached an agreement to purchase Alaska for a price of \$7.2 million. The purchase of Alaska in 1867 is considered Andrew Johnson’s most important foreign policy action. The idea and implementation are credited to Secretary of State William.

After reading each question, the correct answer, and the additional information, all participants completed a two-item manipulation check measure in which they reported the degree to which they perceived each of the events as a transgression (“This event/action inflicted harms on others,” “This event/action was morally wrong”)

Table 1. Zero-order correlations among dependent and moderator variables: Experiment 1.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Perceived historical facts	5.85	0.87	-		
2. Perceived ingroup responsibility	5.69	0.94	.56*	-	
3. Opposition to teaching history	2.55	1.09	-.37*	-.44*	-
4. Collective narcissism	4.23	1.56	-.10	.01	-.33*

Note. *N* = 109.

**p* ≤ .001.

on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Higher mean scores indicate greater perceived transgressions ($\alpha = .98$).

Dependent variables

Perceived historical facts. Participants reported the degree to which they believed each of the historical events was a fact on a single item (“This is a historical fact”) using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Higher mean scores indicate stronger perceived historical facts ($\alpha = .98$).

Perceived ingroup responsibility. Participants reported the degree to which they perceived the ingroup as responsible for each of the historical events on two items (“One or more members of my ethnic group were responsible for this event,” “One or more members of my ethnic-racial group did this intentionally”) using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Higher mean scores indicate stronger perceived ingroup responsibility ($\alpha = .99$).

Opposition to teaching history. Participants reported whether American students should learn about all the historical events presented in their respective condition (i.e., either the history of racism events in the ingroup transgression condition or the history of nonracism events in the ingroup nontransgression condition) in elementary school, middle school, high school, and college, respectively, on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Responses were reverse-scored, and higher mean scores indicate greater opposition to teaching history ($\alpha = .68$).⁴

Moderator variable

Collective narcissism. Participants responded to nine items of the Collective Narcissism Scale (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009; e.g., “I will never be satisfied until my ethnic-racial group gets the recognition it deserves”) on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Higher mean scores indicate higher collective narcissism ($\alpha = .94$).

Demographics. Participants completed a demographics questionnaire that included gender, age, and education level. Gender and education level were categorical, and age (in years) was continuous.

Procedure. All participants were randomly assigned to either the ingroup transgression or the ingroup nontransgression condition. Within each condition, participants reported their perceived historical facts and perceived ingroup responsibility for each historical event presented. Next, after all historical events were presented in their respective condition, participants indicated their opposition to teaching those events. Finally, participants completed the measure of collective narcissism followed by the demographic questionnaire.

Results

Table 1 lists all zero-order correlations among all dependent and moderator variables.

Manipulation check. Before testing the main hypotheses, we tested the effectiveness of the ingroup transgression manipulation. In support of our

Table 2. Regression analyses predicting perceived historical facts, perceived ingroup responsibility, and opposition to teaching history: Experiment 1.

	Perceived historical facts				Perceived ingroup responsibility				Opposition to teaching history			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Ingroup transgression	1.46	0.48	3.00	.003	2.01	0.52	3.88	< .001	0.25	0.57	-3.96	< .001
Collective narcissism	0.13	0.08	1.57	.120	0.25	0.08	3.02	.003	0.50	0.09	-5.48	< .001
Ingroup Transgression x Collective Narcissism	-0.34	0.11	-3.12	.002	-0.43	0.12	-3.70	< .001	0.46	0.13	3.63	< .001
Model summaries	$R^2 = .10,$ $F(3, 105) = 3.67,$ $p = .015$				$R^2 = .13,$ $F(3, 105) = 5.04,$ $p = .003$				$R^2 = .22,$ $F(3, 105) = 10.10,$ $p < .001$			

Note. $N = 109$. Ingroup transgression coding: 1 = ingroup transgression condition, 0 = ingroup nontransgression condition.

manipulation, an independent samples *t* test confirmed that participants perceived the historical racism events in the ingroup transgression condition ($M = 5.67$, $SD = 1.28$) as more wrong and harmful than the historical nonracism events in the ingroup nontransgression condition ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.74$), $t(105.01) = 3.49$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.65$.

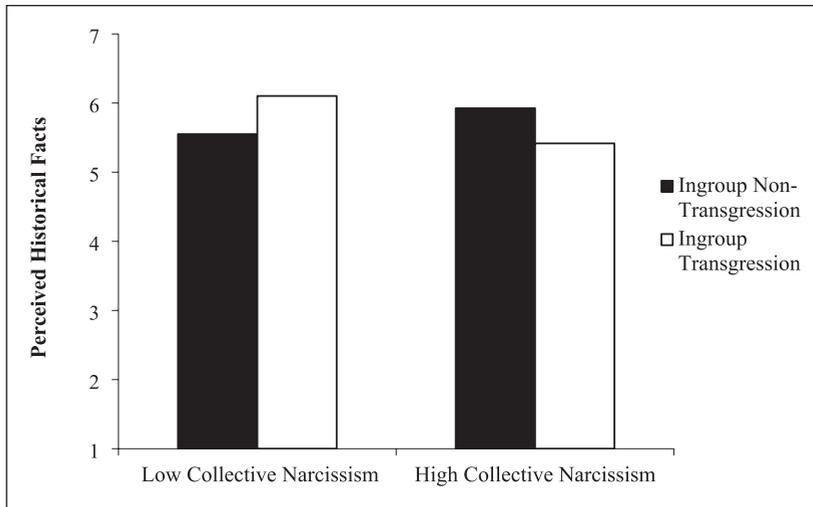
Analytic plan. Across all three experiments, we first ran a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test Hypotheses 1a–1c: the main effect of ingroup transgression in the context of the history of racism (1 = ingroup transgression condition, 0 = ingroup nontransgression condition) on perceived historical facts, perceived ingroup responsibility, and opposition to teaching history. Second, to test Hypotheses 2a–2c about the moderating role of collective narcissism, we used Hayes's (2018) PROCESS macro (Model 1) for moderation with 10,000 bootstraps. We conducted three moderation models for each of the three dependent variables to evaluate conditional effects at 1 *SD* above (high collective narcissism) and 1 *SD* below (low collective narcissism) the mean, as well as the relations between collective narcissism and each of the dependent variables (e.g., the relation between collective narcissism and perceived historical facts) within each condition.

Tests of hypotheses. The MANOVA indicated a nonsignificant multivariate effect of ingroup

transgression on the three dependent variables, $F(3, 105) = 0.36$, $p = .780$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$; thus, the main effects are no longer discussed. Next, we present the moderation test by dependent variable (see Table 2 for a summary).

Perceived historical facts. Collective narcissism significantly moderated the effect of ingroup transgression on perceived historical facts, $F(1, 105) = 9.73$, $p = .002$, $\Delta R^2 = .08$. As per Figure 1, among participants with high collective narcissism, historical events were perceived as less factual in the ingroup transgression condition ($M_{\text{est}} = 5.44$) than in the ingroup nontransgression condition ($M_{\text{est}} = 5.94$), $b = -0.50$, $p = .041$, 95% CI [-0.98, -0.02]. By comparison, among participants with low collective narcissism, historical events were perceived as more factual in the ingroup transgression condition ($M_{\text{est}} = 6.12$) than in the ingroup nontransgression condition ($M_{\text{est}} = 5.56$), $b = 0.55$, $p = .021$, 95% CI [0.09, 1.03]. Also, in the ingroup transgression condition, high collective narcissism was associated with perceiving historical events as less factual, $b = -0.22$, $p = .005$, 95% CI [-0.36, -0.07]. However, in the ingroup nontransgression condition, collective narcissism was not associated with perceived historical facts, $b = 0.12$, $p = .120$.

Perceived ingroup responsibility. Collective narcissism significantly moderated the effect of ingroup

Figure 1. Effect of ingroup transgression and collective narcissism on perceived historical facts: Experiment 1.

transgression on perceived ingroup responsibility, $F(1, 105) = 13.66, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .11$. As per Figure 2, among participants with low collective narcissism, perceived ingroup responsibility was higher in the ingroup transgression condition ($M_{\text{est}} = 5.97$) than in the ingroup nontransgression condition ($M_{\text{est}} = 5.09$), $b = 0.87, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.37, 1.37]$. The effect of ingroup transgression was not significant among participants with high collective narcissism, $b = -0.46, p = .076, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.97, 0.05]$. However, high collective narcissism was associated with less perceived ingroup responsibility in the ingroup transgression condition, $b = -0.17, p = .031, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.33, -0.02]$. By comparison, in the ingroup nontransgression condition, high collective narcissism was associated with higher perceived ingroup responsibility, $b = 0.25, p = .003, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.09, 0.42]$.

Opposition to teaching history. Collective narcissism moderated the effect of ingroup transgression on the opposition to teaching history, $F(1, 105) = 13.14, p < .001, \Delta R^2 = .10$. As per Figure 3, among participants with low collective narcissism, there was less opposition to teaching historical racism events in the ingroup transgression condition ($M_{\text{est}} = 2.58$) relative to teaching

historical nonracism events in the ingroup nontransgression condition ($M_{\text{est}} = 3.83$), $b = -1.25, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.89, -0.61]$. The effect of ingroup transgression was not significant among participants with high collective narcissism, $b = 0.35, p = .196, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.18, 0.89]$. Also, in the ingroup nontransgression condition, high collective narcissism was associated with less opposition to teaching historical nonracism events, $b = -0.50, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.68, -0.32]$. By comparison, in the ingroup transgression condition, collective narcissism was not associated with opposition to teaching about racism, $b = -0.04, p = .638, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.21, 0.13]$.

Summary. While there were no main effects of facing past ingroup transgressions on defensive responses (Hypothesis 1), individual differences in collective narcissism emerged as a moderator (Hypothesis 2). When White American participants faced ingroup transgressions in the context of the history of racism, high collective narcissism was associated with perceiving historical racism events as less factual and with perceiving less ingroup responsibility for historical racism events. By comparison, among White American participants who were presented with

Figure 2. Effect of ingroup transgression and collective narcissism on perceived ingroup responsibility: Experiment 1.

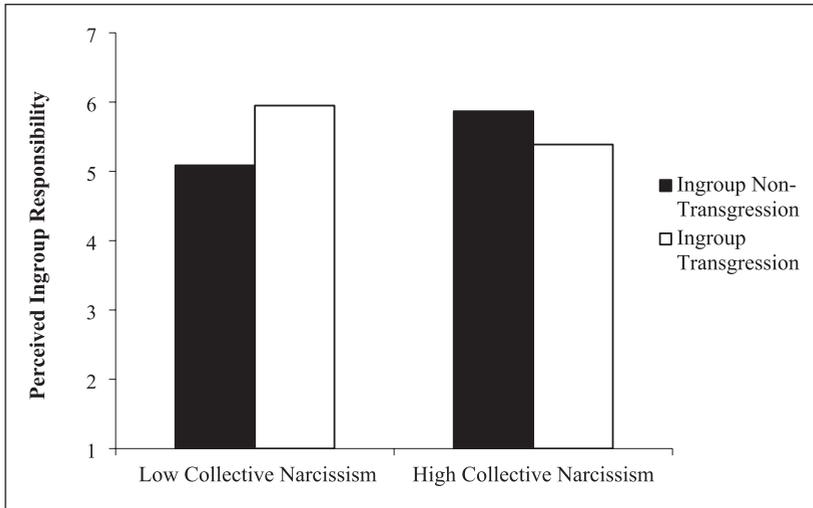
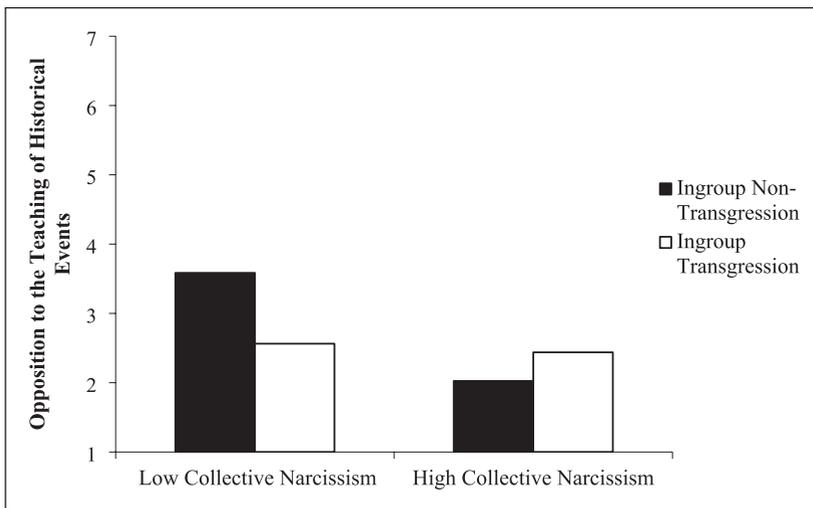


Figure 3. Effect of ingroup transgression and collective narcissism on opposition to teaching history: Experiment 1.



ingroup nontransgressions, high collective narcissism was associated with greater perceived ingroup responsibility and less opposition to the teaching of historical nonracism events. These findings are consistent with existing research showing that the relation between

collective narcissism and defensive responses emerges particularly when an individual's ingroup image is threatened (e.g., when the outgroup criticizes ingroup traits and actions) versus when it is not (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013).

In addition, only among participants with low ethnic-racial collective narcissism did facing ingroup transgressions in the context of the history of racism increase perceptions of the historical events as factual, increase perceptions of their ingroup as responsible for the historical events, and decrease opposition to teaching history. These findings are consistent with existing research on how facing ingroup transgressions in the context of the history of racism reduces defensive responses among White individuals who weakly identify with their ethnic-racial group (Bonam et al., 2019; Salter & Adams, 2016). It is possible that since White Americans with low (vs. high) collective narcissism are less concerned about their ingroup's image, they are less threatened by the history of racism in the US and, thus, less likely to react defensively to it and more likely to support its teaching.

Experiment 2

The first goal of Experiment 2 was to provide a test of replication of Experiment 1's findings but with a larger sample of White participants. The second goal was to have all participants (as opposed to only participants in the ingroup transgression condition in Experiment 1) complete the measure of opposition to education about the US' history of racism. Using the same measure across our ingroup transgression and nontransgression conditions allowed us to provide a consistent test of the hypothesis that high collective narcissism moderates the effect of exposure to ingroup transgression on opposition to the teaching of racism (Hypothesis 2c).

Method

The method and a priori hypotheses of Experiment 2 were preregistered at the OSF (<https://osf.io/qrydb>).⁵

Participants and design. Experiment 2 adopted a one-factor, two-level (ingroup transgression vs. ingroup nontransgression), between-subjects

design. Using G*Power 3 (Faul et al., 2009), an a priori power analysis that set the effect size at $f^2(V) = 0.05$, alpha at .05, power at 80%, and number of groups at two yielded a minimum sample size of 250. To account for an attrition rate of 12%, we recruited a total of 280 participants on Prolific and compensated them \$2.00 each for completing the study. Participants who failed the attention check ($n = 8$) or did not identify as White ($n = 7$) were excluded from data analyses, yielding a final sample size of $N = 263$ ($M_{\text{age}} = 44.33$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 15.20$, 49.80% women).

Independent and dependent variables

Ingroup transgression, perceived historical facts, perceived ingroup responsibility, and collective narcissism. We used Experiment 1's manipulation of ingroup transgression, including its manipulation check ($\alpha = .94$), and administered its measures of perceived historical facts ($\alpha = .97$), perceived ingroup responsibility ($\alpha = .99$), and collective narcissism ($\alpha = .93$).

Opposition to teaching about racism. As opposed to Experiment 1's procedure and measure, all participants in Experiment 2, regardless of their randomly assigned condition, reported their opposition to teaching about racism in the US. Participants responded to two items ("Racism in society and its institutions should be allowed to be taught in ..." and "Critical race theory should be allowed to be taught in ...") for each education level (elementary, middle, high school, and college) on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Responses were reverse-scored, and higher mean scores indicate greater opposition ($\alpha = .96$).

Procedure. Experiment 1's procedure was followed, except that participants in Experiment 2 completed the revised measure of opposition to teaching about racism described above. Also, participants reported their ethnicity-race and nationality and completed a measure of collective narcissism before the ingroup transgression manipulation rather than at the end of the study.

Table 3. Zero-order correlations among dependent and moderator variables: Experiment 2.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Perceived historical facts	5.97	0.95	-		
2. Perceived ingroup responsibility	5.91	1.30	.28**	-	
3. Opposition to teaching about racism	3.85	2.06	-.04	-.12*	-
4. Collective narcissism	2.82	1.33	-.05	-.20**	.47**

Note. *N* = 263.

* $p \leq .050$. ** $p \leq .001$.

Results

We followed the same analytical plans reported in Experiment 1. Table 3 lists all zero-order correlations among all dependent and moderator variables.

Manipulation check. Similar to Experiment 1, historical racism events in the ingroup transgression condition ($M = 6.47$, $SD = 0.81$) were perceived as more wrong and harmful than the nonracism historical events in the ingroup nontransgression condition ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(236.78) = 35.92$, $p < .001$, $d = 4.44$.

Tests of hypotheses. The MANOVA indicated a significant multivariate effect of ingroup transgression, $F(3, 259) = 4.16$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Participants in the ingroup transgression condition ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 1.06$) reported perceiving the historical events as less factual than participants in the ingroup nontransgression condition ($M = 6.10$, $SD = 0.80$), $F(1, 261) = 5.05$, $p = .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. There were no significant main effects on perceived ingroup responsibility and opposition to teaching about racism. Next, we present the moderation test by dependent variable (see Table 4 for a summary).

Perceived historical facts. Unlike in Experiment 1, collective narcissism did not moderate the effect of ingroup transgression on perceived historical facts, $b = -0.10$, $p = .275$, 95% CI $[-0.27, 0.08]$.

Perceived ingroup responsibility. As per Figure 4 and similar to Experiment 1's findings, collective

narcissism significantly moderated the effect of ingroup transgression on perceived ingroup responsibility, $F(1, 259) = 4.70$, $p = .031$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$. Among individuals with low collective narcissism, perceived ingroup responsibility was higher in the ingroup transgression condition ($M_{\text{est}} = 6.57$) than in the ingroup nontransgression condition ($M_{\text{est}} = 5.89$), $b = 0.68$, $p = .004$, 95% CI $[0.22, 1.13]$. Among participants with high collective narcissism, perceived ingroup responsibility was relatively high across both ingroup transgression and ingroup nontransgression conditions, $b = -0.03$, $p = .900$, 95% CI $[-0.46, 0.40]$. In addition, in the ingroup transgression condition, high collective narcissism was associated with less perceived ingroup responsibility, $b = -0.35$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.52, -0.17]$. By comparison, in the ingroup nontransgression condition, collective narcissism was not associated with perceived ingroup responsibility, $b = -0.09$, $p = .245$, 95% CI $[-0.24, 0.06]$.

Opposition to teaching about racism. Collective narcissism did not emerge as a significant moderator since the Ingroup Transgression \times Collective Narcissism interaction was not significant, $b = 0.13$, $p = .459$, 95% CI $[-0.21, 0.47]$.

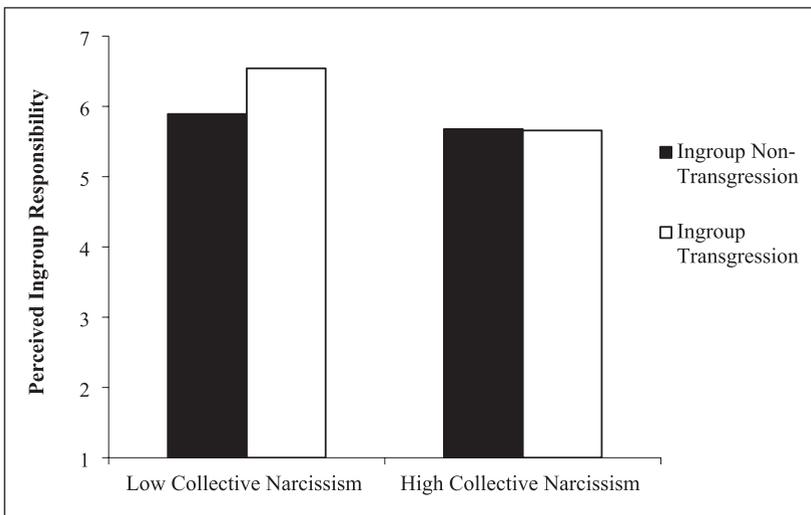
Summary. In Experiment 2, we replicated Experiment 1's findings that high collective narcissism was associated with less perceived ingroup responsibility only when White American participants were exposed to ingroup transgressions in the context of the history of racism. Also consistent with Experiment 1, the effect of ingroup

Table 4. Regression analyses predicting perceived historical facts, perceived ingroup responsibility, and opposition to teaching about racism: Experiment 2.

	Perceived historical facts				Perceived ingroup responsibility				Opposition to teaching about racism			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Ingroup transgression	0.01	0.28	0.05	.964	1.03	0.37	2.79	.006	-0.51	0.53	-0.95	.344
Collective narcissism	0.01	0.06	0.05	.959	-0.09	0.08	-1.17	.245	0.68	0.11	6.12	< .001
Ingroup Transgression × Collective Narcissism	-0.10	0.09	-1.09	.275	-0.26	0.12	-2.17	.031	0.13	0.17	0.74	.459
Model summaries	$R^2 = .03,$ $F(3, 259) = 2.33,$ $p = .075$				$R^2 = .07,$ $F(3, 259) = 6.66,$ $p < .001$				$R^2 = .23,$ $F(3, 259) = 25.43,$ $p < .001$			

Note. *N* = 263. Ingroup transgression coding: 1 = ingroup transgression condition, 0 = ingroup nontransgression condition.

Figure 4. Effect of ingroup transgression and collective narcissism on perceived ingroup responsibility: Experiment 2.



transgressions on increasing perceived ingroup responsibility only emerged among participants with low ethnic-racial collective narcissism. These findings suggest that White Americans with low collective narcissism are less defensive to ingroup transgressions, particularly, less likely to deny their ingroup’s responsibility in past racism (vs. nonracism) history.

We did not replicate Experiment 1’s moderating role of collective narcissism in the effect of ingroup transgression on perceived historical

facts. Instead, participants, regardless of their levels of collective narcissism, perceived past racism events as less factual in the ingroup transgression condition relative to participants in ingroup nontransgression condition.

Experiment 3

In Experiment 3, we sought to increase the rigor of our hypotheses by addressing three limitations of the first two experiments. First, because the

measure of perceived historical facts only included a single item and the measure of ingroup responsibility only included two items, they might have been susceptible to validity and reliability issues (Hoepfner et al., 2011). We addressed this in Experiment 3 by administering measures with three items. Second, and as discussed in the introduction, ethnic-racial collective narcissism and White ingroup identification are related, and White ingroup identification moderates the effect of exposure to historical racism on White Americans' perceptions of racism education content as favorable and fair (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Bilewicz, 2013; Salter & Adams, 2016). Therefore, we sought to demonstrate that any support for Hypothesis 2 (i.e., the moderating effects of collective narcissism) emerged above and beyond the role of White ingroup identification. Experiment 3 administered a measure of White ingroup identification and included it as a covariate in all moderation analyses. Finally, the procedure of Experiments 1 and 2 was inconsistent—the collective narcissism measure was administered either after or before the experimental manipulation of ingroup transgression, respectively. This inconsistency may have contributed to some of the uneven results between the two experiments. Experiment 2 measured collective narcissism before the experimental manipulation to prevent any effects (e.g., statistical noise) of ingroup transgression on collective narcissism, so we adopted this approach in Experiment 3.

Method

The method and a priori hypotheses of Experiment 3 were preregistered at the OSF (<https://osf.io/74sbe>).

Participants and design. Similar to the previous two experiments, Experiment 3 adopted a one-factor, two-level (ingroup transgression vs. ingroup nontransgression), between-subjects design. Using G*Power 3 (Faul et al., 2009), an a priori power analysis that selected “Linear multiple regression: Fixed model, R^2 increase” and set the

effect size at $f^2 = 0.02$, alpha at .05, power at 80%, number of tested predictors at three, and the total number of predictors at four yielded a minimum sample size of 550. To account for attrition, we recruited a total of 616 participants on Prolific and compensated them \$2.00 each for completing the study. Participants who did not identify exclusively as White ($n = 15$) were excluded from data analyses, yielding a final sample size of $N = 601$ ($M_{\text{age}} = 42.89$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.80$; 50.10% women).

Independent and dependent variables

Ingroup transgression, collective narcissism, and opposition to teaching about racism. We used the same manipulation of ingroup transgression from Experiments 1 and 2, including its manipulation check ($r = .96$, $p < .001$), and administered its measures of collective narcissism ($\alpha = .92$) and opposition to teaching about racism ($\alpha = .94$).

Perceived historical facts. In addition to the single item from Experiments 1 and 2, we included two reverse-scored items (“This event never happened” and “This information is a hoax or false”). Higher mean scores indicate greater perceived historical facts ($\alpha = .86$).

Perceived ingroup responsibility. In addition to the two items from Experiments 1 and 2, we included a third item (“One or more members of my ethnic-racial group committed this event”). Higher mean scores indicate greater perceived ingroup responsibility ($\alpha = .98$).

Ethnic-racial ingroup identification. Participants responded to four items from Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Private Subscale (e.g., “In general, I'm glad to be a member of my ethnic-racial group”) on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). Higher mean scores indicate stronger ethnic-racial ingroup identification ($\alpha = .80$).

Procedure. Experiment 2's procedure was followed, except that participants completed the

Table 5. Zero-order correlations among dependent and moderator variables: Experiment 3.

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived historical facts	6.01	1.08	-			
2. Perceived ingroup responsibility	5.66	1.25	.31**	-		
3. Opposition to teaching about racism	3.28	1.71	.02	-.11*	-	
4. Collective narcissism	3.15	1.40	-.40**	-.30**	.01	-
5. Ingroup identification	5.30	1.26	.22**	-.01	.37**	.15**

Note. *N* = 601.
 p* ≤ .050. *p* ≤ .001.

longer measures of perceived historical facts and perceived ingroup responsibility described above.

Results

Table 5 lists all zero-order correlations among all dependent and moderator variables.

Manipulation check. Similar to Experiments 1 and 2, historical racism events in the ingroup transgression condition (*M* = 6.24, *SD* = 0.91) were perceived as more wrong and harmful than the nonracism historical events in the ingroup non-transgression condition (*M* = 2.54, *SD* = 1.25), *t*(549.02) = 41.34, *p* < .001, *d* = 3.37.

Tests of hypotheses. The MANOVA indicated a significant multivariate effect of ingroup transgression, *F*(3, 597) = 8.81, *p* < .001, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Participants in the ingroup transgression condition reported stronger perceived ingroup responsibility (*M* = 5.88, *SD* = 1.18) than participants in the ingroup nontransgression condition (*M* = 5.43, *SD* = 1.28), *F*(1, 599) = 19.52, *p* < .001, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Also, participants in the ingroup transgression condition expressed less opposition to the teaching about racism (*M* = 3.13, *SD* = 1.64) than participants in the ingroup nontransgression condition (*M* = 3.44, *SD* = 1.76), *F*(1, 599) = 4.85, *p* = .028, $\eta_p^2 = .01$ (no significant main effect on perceived historical facts). Although these main effects are inconsistent with our main hypothesis regarding defensive responses to the history of racism, they are in line with existing research on the positive effects of learning about

the history of racism (e.g., less denial of present-day racism and more positive attitudes towards antiracism policies; Bonam et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2007; Salter & Adams, 2016). Furthermore, as reported next and consistent with our Hypothesis 2b, the main effect on perceived ingroup responsibility was subsumed under the moderating effect of collective narcissism (see Table 6 for a summary).

Perceived historical facts. Similar to Experiment 2, collective narcissism did not moderate the effect of ingroup transgression on perceived historical facts, *b* = 0.10, *p* = .095, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.21].

Perceived ingroup responsibility. As per Figure 5 and similar to findings from both Experiments 1 and 2, collective narcissism significantly moderated the effect of ingroup transgression on perceived ingroup responsibility, *F*(1, 597) = 4.83, *p* = .028, $\Delta R^2 = .01$.

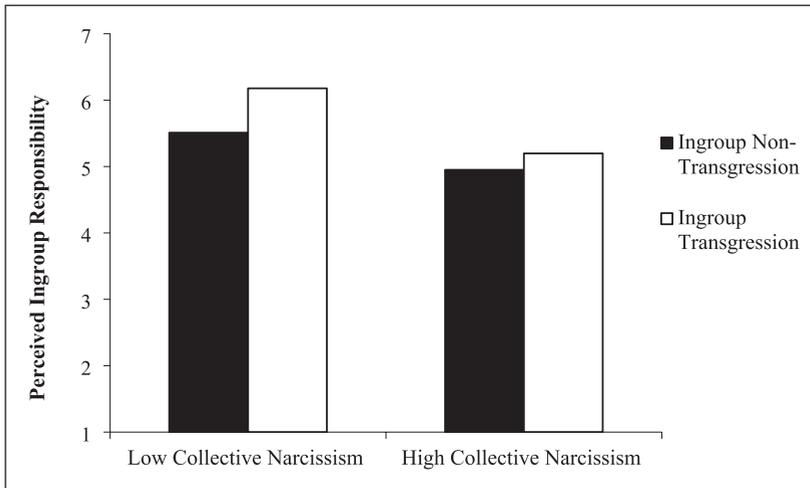
Among participants with low collective narcissism, perceived ingroup responsibility was higher in the ingroup transgression condition (*M*_{est} = 6.41) than in the ingroup nontransgression condition (*M*_{est} = 5.72), *b* = 0.69, *p* < .001, 95% CI [0.41, 0.96]. Among participants with high collective narcissism, perceived ingroup responsibility was similar across both the ingroup transgression (*M*_{est} = 5.12) and ingroup nontransgression conditions (*M*_{est} = 5.36), *b* = 0.24, *p* = .086, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.52].

In addition, in the ingroup transgression condition, high collective narcissism was associated with less perceived ingroup responsibility, *b* = -0.34,

Table 6. Regression analyses predicting perceived historical facts, perceived ingroup responsibility, and opposition to teaching about racism: Experiment 3.

	Perceived historical facts				Perceived ingroup responsibility				Opposition to teaching about racism			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Ingroup transgression	0.26	0.19	1.39	.164	0.93	0.23	3.97	.001	-0.63	0.32	-1.97	.049
Collective narcissism	-0.30	0.03	-7.54	< .001	-0.20	0.05	-4.11	< .001	-0.11	0.07	-1.66	.098
Ingroup Transgression × Collective Narcissism	-0.09	0.06	-1.62	.106	-0.15	0.07	-2.18	.030	0.11	0.09	1.17	.246
Ingroup identity	0.25	0.03	7.97	< .001	0.04	0.04	1.03	.305	0.51	0.05	9.81	< .001
Model summaries	$R^2 = .24$, $F(4, 596) = 47.85$, $p < .001$				$R^2 = .13$, $F(4, 596) = 22.38$, $p < .001$				$R^2 = .15$, $F(4, 596) = 25.72$, $p < .001$			

Note. $N = 601$. Ingroup transgression coding: 1 = ingroup transgression condition, 0 = ingroup nontransgression condition.

Figure 5. Effect of ingroup transgression and collective narcissism on perceived ingroup responsibility: Experiment 3.

$p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.44, -0.25]. This relation emerged in the ingroup nontransgression condition as well, $b = -0.19$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-0.29, 0.10], but it was significantly weaker, $b = -0.15$, $p = .030$, 95% CI [-0.28, -0.01].

Opposition to teaching about racism. Similar to Experiment 2, the Ingroup Transgression × Col-

lective Narcissism interaction was not significant, $b = 0.10$, $p = .243$, 95% CI [-0.07, 0.29].

Summary. In Experiment 3, we replicated findings from Experiments 1 and 2 that the effect of ingroup transgressions on perceived ingroup responsibility only emerged among participants with low ethnic-racial collective narcissism. Also

consistent with Experiment 1, the association between strong collective narcissism and less perceived ingroup responsibility was stronger when White American participants were exposed to ingroup transgressions in the context of the history of racism (relative to being exposed to ingroup nontransgressions). These findings suggest that White Americans with low collective narcissism are less defensive to ingroup transgressions, particularly, they are more likely to accept their ingroup's responsibility for past racist events. Furthermore, these effects emerged even after controlling for ethnic-racial ingroup identification, suggesting that the role of collective narcissism is psychologically distinct from that of ingroup identification.

Similar to Experiment 2, we did not replicate Experiment 1's moderating role of collective narcissism in the effect of ingroup transgression on perceived historical facts in Experiment 3.

General Discussion

The current research investigated White Americans' responses to ingroup transgressions in the context of the history of racism, including historical denial, ingroup responsibility denial, and opposition to teaching about racism in the US. Furthermore, we tested whether these defensive responses were moderated by White Americans' ethnic-racial collective narcissism.

Across three experiments, we consistently found that collective narcissism moderated the effect of exposure to ingroup transgressions on perceived ingroup responsibility, even after controlling for ingroup identification (in Experiment 3). Also across all experiments, high collective narcissism was associated with less perceived ingroup responsibility only when participants were exposed to past racism. Moreover, participants with low collective narcissism perceived more ingroup responsibility in the ingroup transgression condition than in the nontransgression condition. Also, among participants with high collective narcissism, there were no differences in the perception of ingroup responsibility between the two conditions. While we found consistent

findings regarding the moderating role of collective narcissism in the effect of exposure to ingroup transgressions on perceived ingroup responsibility across all three studies, the main effect of exposure to ingroup transgression on the outcome yielded mixed findings. Exposure to ingroup transgression did not affect perceived ingroup responsibility in Experiments 1 and 2, but it increased it in Experiment 3.

Regarding the outcome of perceived historical facts, we also found mixed findings. Exposure to ingroup transgression did not affect opposition to the teaching of the history of racism in Experiments 1 and 2, but it reduced it in Experiment 3. Collective narcissism significantly moderated the effect of exposure to past ingroup transgression in Experiment 1—exposure to ingroup transgressions marginally reduced perceived historical facts among participants with high collective narcissism and significantly increased perceived historical facts among participants with low collective narcissism. In addition, high collective narcissism was associated with less perceived historical facts only when participants were faced with ingroup transgressions, but no such relation emerged among participants in the ingroup nontransgression condition. However, in Experiments 2 and 3, collective narcissism did not emerge as a significant moderator of the effect of exposure to ingroup transgressions on perceived historical facts. Regarding attitudes towards history education, in Experiment 1, we measured White American participants' opposition to the teaching of the historical events presented in their respective conditions. Exposure to ingroup transgression did not affect opposition to the teaching of history in Experiment 1. When participants were exposed to past racism events, collective narcissism was also not associated with opposition to the teaching of these events. However, when participants were exposed to past nonracism events, high collective narcissism was associated with less opposition to the teaching of these events. This relation may have emerged because nonracism historical events (the national anthem, Independence Day,

purchase of Alaska, U.S. Constitution, and the U.S. flag) can be perceived as positive; thus, participants with high collective narcissism likely supported their teaching to maintain and perhaps bolster their White American status. Previous research also suggests that U.S. individuals favor historical content that glorifies the U.S. past over historical content that exposes historical injustices in the immigration context (Mukherjee et al., 2015).

In Experiments 2 and 3, all participants completed the measure of opposition to the teaching of racism and critical race theory. Exposure to ingroup transgression did not affect opposition to the teaching of the history of racism in Experiment 2, but it reduced it in Experiment 3. Across both experiments, collective narcissism did not moderate the effect of ingroup transgression exposure on opposition to education on racism. Instead, high collective narcissism was associated with strong opposition to the teaching of racism among all participants in Experiment 2, but this relation did not emerge in Experiment 3. Overall, mixed findings emerged across the three experiments regarding Hypothesis 1 that exposure to ingroup transgression would lead White American participants to generally exhibit defensive responses. Exposure to ingroup transgression increased perceived ingroup responsibility and reduced opposition to the teaching of the history of racism only in Experiment 3, and it reduced perceived historical facts only in Experiment 2. These mixed findings on the main effects of learning about the history of racism, coupled with the findings regarding the moderating role of collective narcissism, highlight the nuanced interplay between historical narratives and narcissistic group identity in shaping defensive responses (for a review, see the introduction).

Regarding Hypothesis 2 on the moderating role of collective narcissism, as previously mentioned, we consistently found across all three experiments that exposure to past ingroup transgressions in the context of the history of racism increased perceived ingroup responsibility for historical events only among White American participants with low collective narcissism, but

not among those with high collective narcissism. This finding highlights the role of collective narcissism as a psychological roadblock buffering the effect of racism history exposure on acknowledgement of ingroup responsibility. While learning about the history of racism is beneficial for intergroup outcomes, its benefits may only be observed among low collective narcissists because they are less susceptible to group image threats. Among high collective narcissists, the chronic need to maintain their group image appears to prevent them from acknowledging their ingroup's responsibility.

The present data contribute to the literature on the role of collective narcissism in responses to ingroup image threats (Golec de Zavala, Cichocka, & Iskra-Golec, 2013), specifically when the source of threat is past ingroup transgressions (Kazarovytska & Imhoff, 2022). The current research highlights when and for whom exposure to education about the U.S. history of racism elicits or reduces defensive responses. Our findings generally underscore the dangers of ethnic-racial collective narcissism to antiracism education. Historical defensiveness in the context of past racism in the US may contribute to maintaining and perhaps exacerbating racial inequities and inequalities.

Limitations and Future Directions

The current experiments are not without limitations. First, in Experiments 2 and 3, the measure of teaching opposition included a measurement item specifically about opposing the teaching of CRT, but it is possible that some of our participants were not aware of CRT or did not understand it. According to a Reuters national poll, only 5% of Americans have accurate knowledge of CRT, while 33.0% embrace falsehoods about it, such as that CRT posits that “white people are inherently bad or evil” or that “discriminating against white people is the only way to achieve equality” (Kahn, 2021). Additionally, White Americans who oppose the teaching of CRT tend to have an inaccurate understanding of it, deny the existence of present-day anti-Black racism, believe

that CRT harms Whites, and perceive that discussions about race are divisive (Richmond et al., 2024). In the current research, we found that opposition to teaching about racism and opposition to teaching about CRT were strongly correlated, suggesting that opposition to the teaching of CRT, regardless of its accurate knowledge, is deeply intertwined with opposition to general anti-racism education.

The second limitation is that the procedures regarding the order of the collective narcissism measure were different between Experiment 1 versus Experiments 2 and 3. Participants in Experiment 1 completed the measure of collective narcissism (in addition to their nationality and ethnicity-race) after the history of racism manipulation and dependent variable measures, while participants in Experiments 2 and 3 completed these procedures beforehand. This order difference might have played a role in some of the inconsistent findings regarding perceived historical facts between the two experiments. Although collective narcissism is conceptualized as a “trait” (Golec de Zavala et al., 2009), completing its measure before the experimental manipulation may have primed and activated motives, such as bolstering group-image concern, that explain the disparate results. Given the pervasiveness of collective narcissism and its growing research, future research should investigate the possibility that collective narcissism can chronically versus temporarily activate group-based motives.

Finally, the U.S. history of racism together with the tenets of CRT expose how systemic racism is embedded in the US and its legal system (Crenshaw, 2011). As a result, in addition to being a source of threat to (some) White Americans’ positive ingroup image, antiracism education can also threaten the belief that the U.S. sociopolitical system is legitimate, fair, and just, even when learning about systemic racism increases understanding of systemic racism and support for anti-racist policies (G. Adams et al., 2008). One way to further understand this issue is for future research to investigate the role of system justification, which is the motivation to justify and protect the current social and political system (Jost, 2019), in opposition to antiracism education. It is possible

that motivations rooted in system justification beliefs can drive backlash against antiracism education among White Americans as well as among other ethnic-racial groups in the US.

Conclusion and Implications

The current research is the first to draw attention to the role of collective narcissism as a psychological barrier to learning about the racist history of the US and supporting antiracism education. Our findings suggest that antiracism education elicits historical defensiveness among White Americans, especially those who are ethnic-racial collective narcissists. At the time of writing this empirical paper, a total of 246 federal, state, and local government entities across the US have introduced 805 legal and policy measures (e.g., bills, resolutions, executive orders, opinion letters, statements, and more) that restrict and/or ban antiracism education, of which, 335 have been adopted (Alexander et al., 2023). These policies can further exacerbate racial inequities and injustices in the US through maintaining and promoting ignorance of the U.S. history of racism (Bonam et al., 2019; Hughes et al., 2007). Thus, it is critical for legislators, educators, historians, and racial justice activists to persist in their efforts to protect and promote antiracism education.

Authors’ Note

The authors thank the Rutgers Implicit Social Cognition (RISC) Lab for their thoughtful comments on an earlier version of this manuscript.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The studies were funded by the Institute for the Study of Global Racial Justice, Rutgers University.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. In Experiment 1, Hypothesis 2 about the moderating role of collective narcissism was preregistered in the “Other” section of the preregistration. The preregistered a priori power analysis was powered to test a main effect of ingroup transgression.
2. Although the study was advertised for White-identified individuals only, 18 participants identified as non-White after being asked to “truthfully” report their ethnic-racial identity in the demographic questionnaires with no effect on their compensation.
3. The Supplemental Material lists all independent variable materials as well as the analyses of the assessment of historical knowledge prior to receiving the correct answer for Experiments 1, 2, and 3.
4. The Supplemental Material reports analyses at each education level—elementary school, middle school, high school, and college—for Experiments 1, 2, and 3. Findings were mostly consistent across education levels.
5. As in Experiment 1, Experiment 2’s hypothesis on the moderating role of collective narcissism was preregistered in the “Other” section of the preregistration. The preregistered a priori power analysis was powered to test a main effect of ingroup transgression. Beyond the current Hypotheses 1 and 2, additional preregistered hypotheses targeted memory recall and collective guilt outcome variables. Interested readers can find analyses with these dependent variables in the Supplemental Material.

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