

Redface and Blackface: Differences in Acceptability of Racialized Representations



Julisa Lopez¹, Arianne Eason², Stephanie Fryberg¹

¹University of Michigan, ²University of California, Berkeley



Introduction

Recently, there have been several high-profile instances of individuals being called out and sanctioned for the use of racialized representations (i.e., representations that reflect stereotypical, caricaturizations of racial groups, such as blackface and redface). Notably, the incidents which led to the fiercest backlash were instances of blackface. From 2014 to 2019, 104,097 news article titles included the term “blackface”, while only 614 news article titles include the term “redface”. This is especially concerning given the voracity at which Native people protest the continued use of redface every sport season. The current research sheds light on why blackface is understood as unacceptable, while similar racialized representations, such as redface, are given far less attention and incur less social disapproval.

RQ1: Are there differences in how acceptable people perceive redface and blackface?

RQ2: Do differences in perceptions about Natives and Blacks predict differential acceptability?

Methods

Participants

Study	N	Population	Stimuli	Within/Between
1a	84	College students (50% women)	Photos	Within
1b	124	College students (49% women)	Photos	Within
2	150	White Americans (55% women)	Photos	Between
3	733	White Americans (48% women)	Photos	Between
4	900	White Americans (53% women)	Vignettes	Within

Stimuli



“Brad is a part of the town’s annual historic parade and chose to dress up as a historical **Native** American figure. Brad wore a costume and painted their body and face with **red** paint to look the part.”

“Anne is a part of the town’s annual historic parade and chose to dress up as a historical **African** American figure. Anne wore a costume and painted their body and face with **black** paint to look the part.”

Items

Acceptability¹ (4 item scale; $\alpha > .812$, Pilot Study 1a – Study 4)

- “It is acceptable for this person to dress like this”
- “Observers will react negatively towards this person for dressing this way”
- “This way of dressing is a positive representation of Native/African American culture”
- “There are negative consequences for Native/African Americans when people dress like this”

Denial of Racism^{2,3} (10 item scale, $\alpha > .909$, Studies 2-4)

“Racism towards African/Native Americans is a thing of the past”

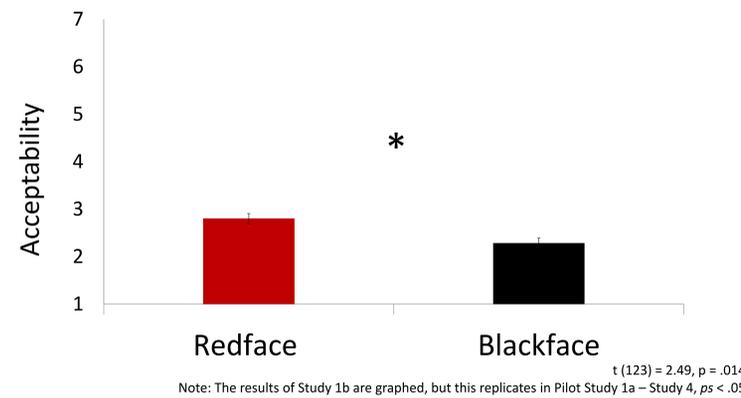
Invisibility⁴ (6 item scale, $\alpha > .759$, Studies 3-4)

“There are hardly any Native/African American people left in U.S. society”

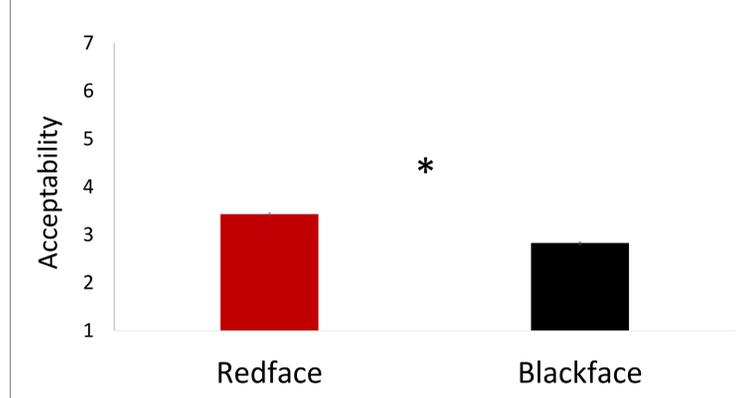
*All measures rated on a 7-point scale from 1 Strongly Disagree to 7 Strongly Agree

Results

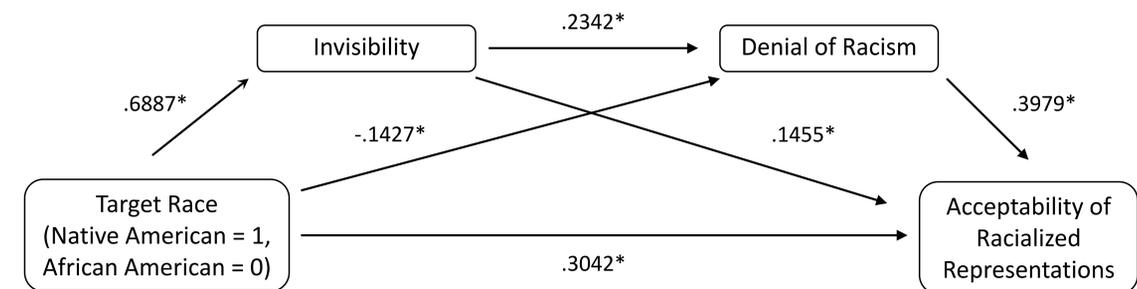
Redface is more acceptable than Blackface
(Pilot Study 1b, Photos)



Redface is more acceptable than Blackface
(Study 4, Vignettes)



Differences in perceptions of invisibility and denial of racism predicts differential acceptability
(Study 3, Photos)



Discussion

- Results suggest that the use of racialized representations continues to exist because society is ill informed and unaware of the lived experiences of people of color
- To the extent that people overlook racism faced by Native Americans they may also fail to recognize the negative consequences of such imagery, thus deeming redface acceptable.
- When a group is rendered invisible, acts of racism, like redface seem acceptable and less harmful because the groups is considered insignificant and irrelevant in contemporary times.
- To eliminate racialized representations; society need a more accurate understanding of the role racism plays in the lives of people of color face and society must disrupt the narrative of Native Americans as frozen in the past
- To test this, future research should experimentally manipulate invisibility and denial of racism

¹Adapted from Goff et. al. (2008). ²Neville et al. (2000). ³RMazzocco, Cooper & Flint (2011). ⁴Reclaiming Native Truths (2018)

1
Viewed photos or scenarios of redface and/or blackface

2
Rated acceptability of redface and/or blackface

3
Reported beliefs about NAs and AAs