Experiencing past racial discrimination from the target's perspective:
The role of narrative voice in promoting intergroup understanding

BACKGROUND

❖ People have different reactions to their group's past wrongdoings.

- Prosocial: improved intergroup attitude (Wohl, Branscombe, & Klar, 2006).

- Defensive: feel own group's past wrongdoings as far away in time (Peetz et al., 2010).

  - Subjective distancing is more prominent for those who feel defensive about the blame for their group's past wrongdoings than those who do not feel defensive.

❖ Narrative Voice

- First-person narrative voice, compared to third-person, leads the reader to share the protagonist's attitudes, beliefs, and goals (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). This first-person narrative voice effect applies when the reader shares group membership with the protagonist or when the protagonist's different group membership is revealed later in the story.

- When the story is about own group's past wrongdoings against the protagonist's group, the reader's level of defensiveness matters in accepting the protagonist's perspective.

  - Historical perpetrator group members who do not feel defensive about the blame from their group's past wrongdoings saw more present-day discrimination, like victimized group members would, when they read the story in the victim's first-person narrative voice than in third-person narrative voice (Rha, Libby, & Kaufman, 2012).
  - However, there seemed to be no sign of first-person voice effect among perpetrator group members who were defensive.

❖ When would victim's first-person narrative voice about past wrongdoings also influence defensive perpetrator group members?

- Reading a story about the own group's past wrongdoings in the victim's first-person voice may be threatening to readers who defensively feel their group is unjustly blamed, thus, leading to defensive reactions of perceiving less present-day racism.

- However, when the threat posed by the story about own group's past wrongdoings in first-person voice is mitigated, defensive perpetrator group members may become more open to understand the victim's perspective. In other words, mitigating threat of the first-person story may lead both defensive and non-defensive readers to perceive greater present-day discrimination.

THE PRESENT STUDY

❖ Defensive or non-defensive White participants read threatening or less threatening information about school desegregation. They then read a real historical incident about prejudice after school desegregation in either first- or third-person narrative voice and filled out a questionnaire.

❖ **Predictions**
- When the story is in first-person narrative voice, non-defensive Whites would see more present-day racism than defensive Whites when the story is threatening but _not when its threat is mitigated_.
- When the story is in third-person narrative voice, non-defensive Whites would see more present-day racism than defensive Whites regardless of the threat of the story.

METHOD

❖ 185 White participants

❖ Read either threatening or non-threatening background information about school desegregation.
❖ Measured defensiveness (modified from Peetz et al., 2010).
❖ Read a real historical incident of a Black student's experience on the first day of school after school desegregation in 1950's in either first- or third-person narrative voice.

1st person narrative voice	3rd person narrative voice
I sat in the back of the station wagon, the deputies in front. As we neared the school, the sun was crashing over the entrance of Central High School. The chilled air bit the whites of those glaring eyes surrounding the station wagon. Every face that I looked into, as the car crawled, glistened. The din: "Two, four, six, eight, we don't wanna integrate," split the morning. Arms flailed the air with homemade signs. Bodies hunched. I sat in the back of the station wagon, my back pressed against the hot leather seat. A tomato splashed against the window on my left. I didn't flinch.	_He sat in the back of the station wagon, the deputies in front. As they neared the school, the sun was crashing over the entrance of Central High School. The chilled air bit the whites of those glaring eyes surrounding the station wagon. Every face that he looked into, as the car crawled, glistened. The din: "Two, four, six, eight, we don't wanna integrate," split the morning. Arms flailed the air with homemade signs. Bodies hunched. He sat in the back of the station wagon, his back pressed against the hot leather seat. A tomato splashed against the window on his left. He didn't flinch._

❖ Dependent Measure
- "To what extent do you think racism is a problem for Blacks in the US today?"
  - 5-point scale: Not at all, A little bit, Moderately, Very Much, Extremely

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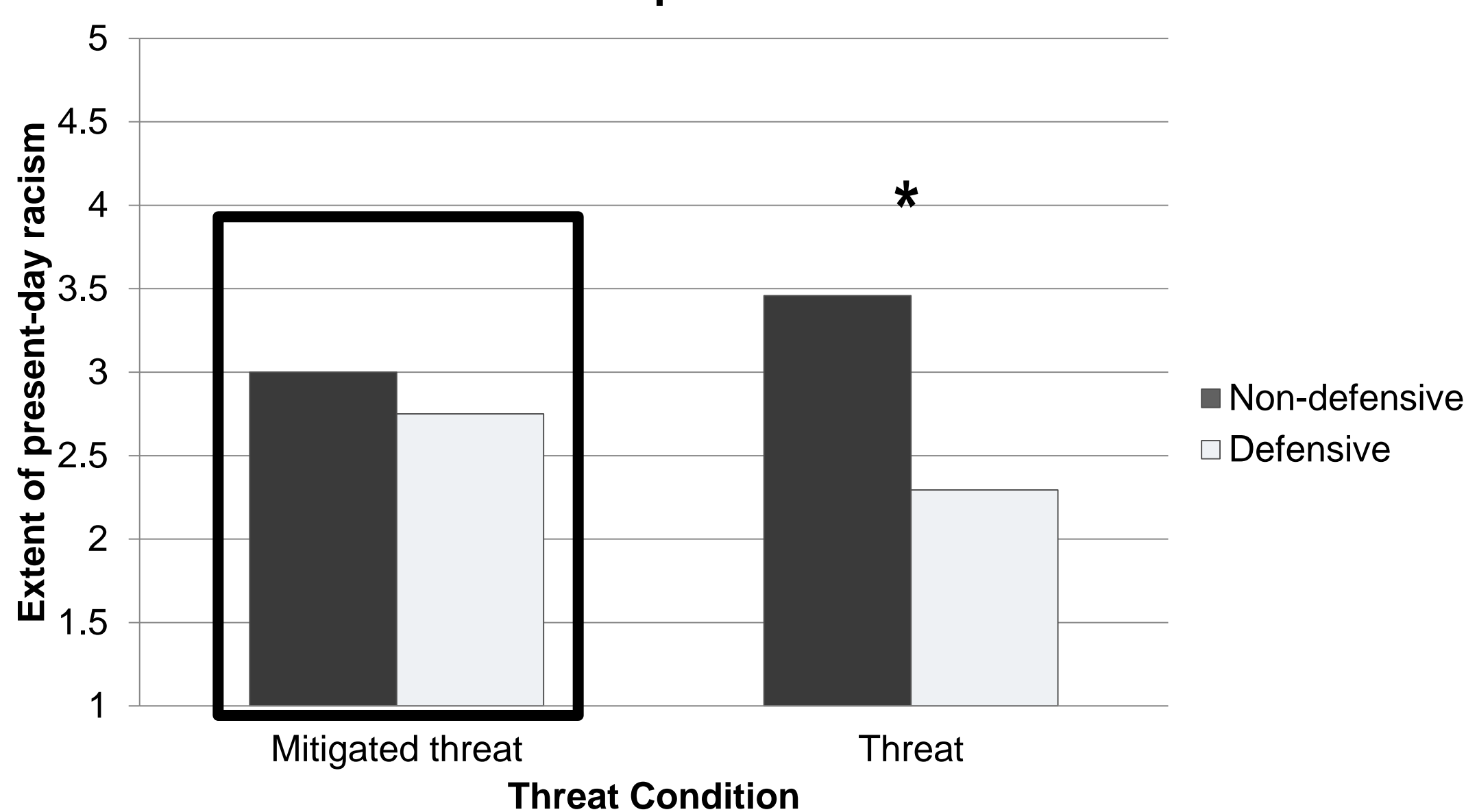## Department of Psychology, The Ohio State University

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RESULTS

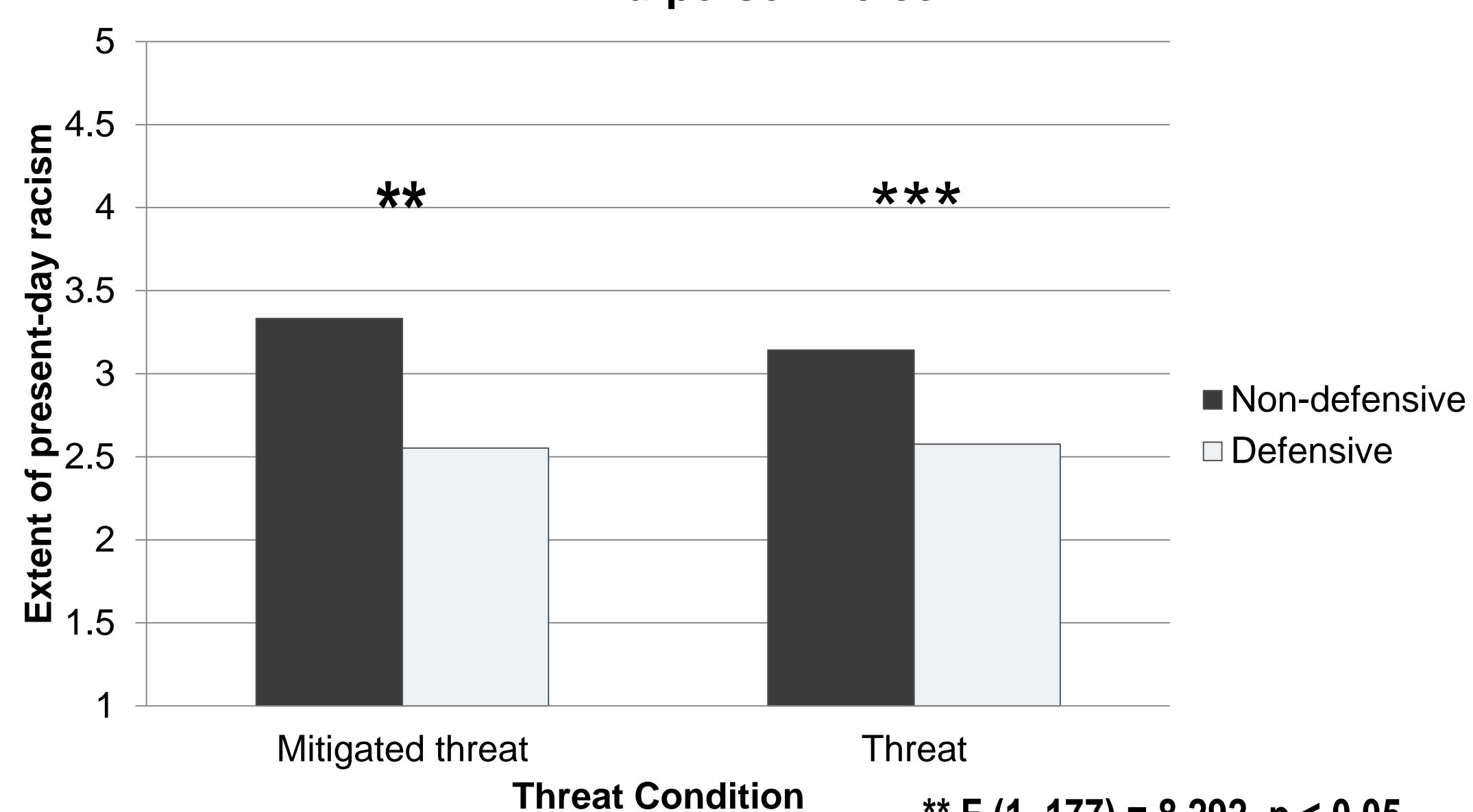### To what extent do you think racism is a problem for Blacks in the US today?

First-person Voice

* F (1, 177) = 16.484, p < 0.01

Third-person Voice

** F (1, 177) = 8.292, p < 0.05
*** F (1, 177) = 4.547, p < 0.05

3-way: F (1, 177) = 4.361, p < 0.05

There was a significant three-way interaction in a 2 (First or third-person narrative voice) x 2 (Defensive or non-defensive) x 2 (Threatening or non-threatening) ANOVA, F (1, 77) = 4.361, p < .05.

- When participants read the story in first-person narrative voice, there was a two-way interaction between defensiveness and threat, F (1, 177) = 13.455, p < 0.01. For those who read the story in first-person voice, the difference between defensive and non-defensive participants was present when the story was threatening, F (1, 177) = 16.484, p < 0.01, but not when the threat of the story was mitigated , F (1, 177) = 0.941, ns.
- Viewed differently, when participants in first-person narrative voice condition are not defensive about their group's past wrongdoings, they saw more present-day racism when the story was threatening than when the story was not with marginal significance, F (1, 177) = 2.947, p < 0.1. When participants in first-person narrative voice condition are defensive, however, the effect was reversed. That is, they saw less present-day racism when the story was threatening than when it was not with marginal significance, F (1, 177) = 2.687, p = 0.1.

DISCUSSION

- ❖ When the story about school desegregation in first-person narrative voice was threatening, compared to less threatening, the White readers' defensiveness was more predictive of their judgment of present-day racism.
  - Non-defensive Whites, compared to defensive Whites, who read threatening background information about their group's past wrongdoings against Blacks before reading the first-person story about school desegregation saw more present-day racism.
  - When threat of the first-person story was mitigated, there was no difference in perception of present-day racism between defensive and non-defensive Whites.
- ❖ Non-defensive Whites, compared to defensive Whites, who read the story about school desegregation in third-person narrative voice saw more present-day racism regardless of threat the story posed.

- ❖ These results suggest that when a first-person narrative about own group's past wrongdoings is threatening, readers become more or less susceptible to understand victim's perspective depending on the level of defensiveness on the issue. However, when the threat of the first-person narrative is mitigated, readers' level of defensiveness matters less.
- ❖ Thus, our results provide preliminary evidence that victim's first-person narrative voice about past wrongdoings can lead defensive perpetrator group members to become more open to understand victim's perspective when threat of the narrative is mitigated.

REFERENCES

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