

Stop mocking Starbucks's 'Race Together.' It could actually lead to useful conversations about race.

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The Washington Post:

Starbucks recently launched a campaign called “Race Together,” in which baristas invite customers to engage in conversations about race by writing “race together” on their coffee cups. The idea has been mocked and critiqued as naive, insensitive and perhaps even abusive to its baristas.

Don't be so quick to dismiss it. I've been teaching and conducting research on the complex and, often complicated, dynamics of race-related dialogues and interracial interactions for more than 20 years. Encouraging people to talk about race and racism more often can actually improve our willingness and ability to do so.

Talking about race-related issues, especially with members of different racial groups, makes people uncomfortable, anxious, and even taxes their cognitive resources. Indeed, more than a decade of research reveals that individuals, both white and non-white, often exit these types of interracial dialogues feeling mentally exhausted. In a 2003 study in *Psychological Science*, my colleagues and I found that when white college students interacted for 5 to 7 minutes with a black college student, they subsequently underperformed on cognitive tasks that required “inhibitory-control” — the cognition that underlies our ability to engage in self-control, stay focused on important tasks and goals and exercising willpower. When these students interacted with other white students, we didn't see any decline in cognitive ability.

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