

The Effect of White Minority Status on the Self Concept

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Abstract

Recent demographic projections estimate that the United States will become a so-called “minority-majority” nation by the year 2045. Although increases in minority demographic representation may appear to signal a positive shift away from minority marginalization, such changes may prompt a White backlash and an increased identification of White individuals with White identity. In this study, I manipulated exposure to projections that describe a future minority majority United States demography and measured changes in White individuals’ self concepts. To do this, I measured a pre-manipulation score of White individuals’ endorsements of trait words, which were coded as relevant or irrelevant to White identity, as self-descriptive with a five-point Likert Scale and a post-manipulation score of White individuals’ endorsements of the same trait words as self descriptive with a me/ not me task. The results indicate that, overall, White participants in the minority condition tended to endorse White-ingroup words to a higher degree as a result of the manipulation. This effect was driven primarily by traits which were related to dominance. Secondary results failed to indicate that the manipulation resulted in lessened support for affirmative action policies. These results indicate support for the notion that group status threat results in changes in the self concept to be more consistent with ingroup identity.

General Introduction

In the current American economic, social, demographic, and political landscape, there has been a large amount of contention regarding the status of racial and ethnic minorities. Economically, individuals of several racial and ethnic minority groups continue to earn significantly less than individuals of the White racial majority (Kochhar & Cillufo, 2018). Socially, there is a widespread pattern of micro-level biases that work to the disadvantage of ethnic minority groups; for example, the presence of Afrocentric features tends to increase the likelihood of incarceration (Blair et al., 2004). However, racial and ethnic minority groups are increasing in demographic size and, by the year 2045, ethnic minorities are predicted to become a numerical majority in the United States (Frey, 2018). The rise in ethnic and racial minority demographic representation may facilitate decreased prejudice against these groups based on contact theory's contention that increased social contact may reduce bias (Aberson et al., 2004). However, it may also lead to a conservative backlash due to Whites' perceptions of group status threat (Craig and Richeson 2014a), which may, in turn, lead to Whites' increased identification with the White ingroup (Outten et al., 2012). This study aims to extend the current research on White backlash against rising minority demographic representation into the domain of the self concept.

The self concept has been conceptualized as a dynamic, multi-faceted cognitive representation of the self (Markus and Wurf, 1987). Based on self-categorization theory, which describes identification with an ingroup as a depersonalization of personal identity, resulting in a self-concept of oneself as an interchangeable exemplar of social categories (Hogg and Turner, 1987), we may predict that the suggested increased ingroup identification associated with group status threat would change one's self concept to be more consistent with the ingroup.

Additionally, because past work has shown that ingroup identification and outgroup discrimination are aroused by categorization into a minority group (Leonardelli and Brewer, 2001), we may predict that conveying a future “minority-majority” demography to Whites will result in a self concept that is more hostile in nature.

Based on these predictions, I hypothesize that conveying a future minority-majority demography to Whites will lead to greater identification with White ingroup (H1). More specifically, I hypothesize that this manipulation will result in a self concept that is more dominant (H1A), stereotypically White (H1B), and categorically White (H1C). Additionally, I hypothesize that this manipulation will result in decreased support for social welfare policies (H2).

Background

In the contemporary American social, economic, demographic, and political landscape, there are many reasons for both pessimism and optimism regarding the future of disadvantaged minority groups. By a “minority group”, I refer to “a culturally, ethnically, or racially distinct group that coexists with but is subordinate to a more dominant group” (Britannica).

There are obvious concerns regarding the future of ethnic and racial minority groups in the United States. In the United States, there is an intersection between socio-economic class and ethnicity, such that, on average, each Black and Hispanic person earned 65% as much money as each White person did in 2016 (Kochhar & Cillufo, 2018). Alongside and in tandem with this pattern is a widespread pattern of micro-level biases against minority groups (Greenwald et al., 1998) which advances economic interests of Whites through several processes including, for example, excluding ethnic minority candidates from high- paying jobs (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004) and increasing incarceration rates for individuals with Afrocentric features

(Blair et al., 2004). Economically, although the disparity between Black and White Americans has decreased since 1970, the disparity between Hispanic and White Americans has increased, with each Hispanic person earning an average of 74 cents on the White dollar in 1970, compared to 65 cents in the white dollar in 2016 (Kochhar and Cillufo, 2018). Additionally, American Republicans are becoming increasingly conservative, with rises in conservative ideological conformity and overall polarization: in 2014, 92% of Republicans were more conservative than the median Democrat, contrasting the 1994 figure of 64% (Pew Research Center, 2014). Broadly, conservative ideology significantly correlates with symbolic racism and racial policy preferences (Sears et al., 1997) and therefore the observed conservative shift may further marginalize racial and ethnic minority groups. Therefore, it is imperative for social scientists to better understand the mechanisms that drive conservative shifts in order to effectively develop measures to counteract such shifts.

Although there are systemic issues regarding socio-economic ethnic and racial inequality, there are also reasons to be optimistic that this will change. Firstly, America is becoming more ethnically and racially diverse. Based on Census data from 2018, the United States is projected to become minority White by the year 2045 (Frey, 2018). This may decrease ethnically patterned socio-economic inequality through increases in both democratic representation of minority interests and chances of close relationships between Whites and individuals of racial and ethnic minority status. Increasing close relationships may be a benefit because past work has shown that the frequency of close inter-racial relationships negatively correlates with bias against minority groups (Aberson et al., 2004). Secondly, there have been proactive efforts from government institutions, social psychologists, and ethical activist groups to mitigate bias and its effects on tangible outcomes. For example, in response to endemic racial disparities in the criminal justice

systems, state and Federal governments passed laws designed to ensure sentencing neutrality and, in contemporary judicial decisions, “it would be misleading to conclude that there is a consistent and widespread pattern of direct discrimination... in sentencing decisions” (Spohn, 2000, p.474). Additionally, economic inequality between African Americans and White Americans has marginally decreased, with each African American earning an average of 59 cents on the White dollar in 1970, compared to 65 cents on the White dollar in 2016 (Kochhar & Cillufo, 2018).

Unfortunately, these positive changes may provoke backlash. Demographic changes which increase the proportion of Americans who are non-White may in part contribute to conservative shifts through its effect on group status threat. Group threat theory proposes that increases in the size of an outgroup result in a perception of threat on the part of an ingroup (Blumer, 1958). This theory has found experimental support. Craig and Richeson (2014a) found that exposing White Americans to information that conveys a future minority-majority U.S. demography results in increased endorsement of conservative ideology. To do this, Craig and Richeson exposed White individuals of varying political identification (studies 2 and 3) to U.S. Census Bureau projections of the U.S. demographic makeup in the year 2042, which informed readers that the U.S. will, by that time, be a “majority-minority” nation. They found that this manipulation resulted in an overall policy support shift towards conservatism, regardless of the race relevance of the policies (study 2). Importantly, their data analysis supported the idea that the relationship between information exposure and increased conservatism was mediated by group status threat, which may mean that group status threat is the mechanism by which exposure to information about demographic changes results in heightened conservatism. Wetts and Willer (2018) conceptually replicated Craig and Richeson (2014a) and found that exposure

to minority- majority projections results in lessened support for social welfare policy among Whites.

Problematically, group status threat also drives outgroup hostility. Craig and Richeson (2014b) found that exposure to minority- majority projections increases racial bias among Whites. Craig and Richeson (2014b) may also suggest that increases in racial bias may be one mechanism by which support for social welfare policies is lessened due to exposure to information conveying changes in ethnic demographic representations. This finding is consistent with theoretical explanations from Blumer's (1958) group threat theory's conceptualization of prejudice as arising, in part, from fear that a socially subordinate race possesses intentions that conflict with the prerogative of the socially dominant race.

Group status threat may also increase ingroup identification. A number of studies have found that, for minority group individuals, threats to the ingroup lead to increases in identification with the ingroup (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2011; Jetten et al., 2001). This pattern extends to members of ethnic majority groups. Outten et al. (2012) found that exposure to minority-majority projections leads to heightened ethnic ingroup identification as well as anger and fear towards minority groups among Whites. In their study they also measured perceptions of intergroup threat and determined that perceptions of intergroup threat mediate the relationship between exposure to demographic information and ingroup identification.

From the analysis of relevant literature, we are able to ascertain several potential causes of attitudes and behaviors among Whites that promote or maintain race- and ethnicity-based disparities. Perceptions of demographic changes result in group status threat, which in turn results in increased conservatism, outgroup hostility, and increased ethnic ingroup

identification. However, more work needs to be done to extend this causal process into the domain of the self concept.

The primary argument of this paper is that, on the individual level for Whites, viewing projections of a future minority majority enhances their identification with the White ingroup because it enhances the distinctiveness of the White racial category, which in turn provides a motivation for individual Whites to more strongly identify with the White racial group. This increased identification occurs simultaneously with changes in the self concept to be more consistent with the White identity and therefore results in increased hostility towards outgroups.

Optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991) explains that identification with social groups is motivated by opposing needs for differentiation from outgroups and assimilation with ingroups. Therefore, decreasing the size of ingroups would increase the distinctiveness of such groups, which as been contextualized in past work as an explanation for why individuals in minority groups identify more strongly with their ingroups and exhibit greater intergroup discrimination (Leonardelli & Brewer, 2001). This explanation implies that, for ethnic and racial minority groups, such groups provide more optimal distinctiveness than ethnic and racial majority groups because the distinctiveness of an ingroup is relative to the size of outgroups. Additionally, the psychological utility of groups has been, in past work, theoretically based in part on the value of the group, which in turn is based on the degree of optimal distinctiveness of the group as well as the power and merit of the group (Correll and Park, 2005). In tandem with increased distinctiveness, smaller group size may also result in perceived group status threat based on understandings from Brewer and Silver (2000), who explain that, while minority status may satisfy distinctiveness needs, this increased distinctiveness competes with the disadvantages of decreased group power and status that often accompanies minority status.

Therefore, the most optimal group is one which both optimally satisfies distinctiveness and assimilation needs and also provides a sense of status. In the context of identification, self categorization theory provides us with the greatest thoroughness in explaining the different factors that lead to identification. (Turner et al., 1994). *Perceiver readiness* refers to an individual's tendency to identify with the ingroup, which is based on objective constraints and motivations. An objective constraint would be an individual's similarity to other members of a particular group, while a motivation to identify with a group would be based on, for example, the psychological utility of a group. The dependence of motivation on psychological utility of groups was an explanation provided by Correll and Park (2005) for why individuals identified with ingroups on the basis of the perceived value of the group.

In the event of a White individual's perception of a group status threat which increases the perceived distinctiveness of the group, such as what would occur for Whites exposed to minority-majority projections, we can predict that, because of the increased identification with the group due to enhanced distinctiveness, White individuals would identify more strongly with the White category and therefore depend on that category to a higher degree for esteem and a sense of status and power. This would, in turn, lead to increased motivation to maintain a high sense of relative group status, which may result in outgroup hostility. This prediction maps well onto experimental data from Leonardelli and Brewer (2001), which found that ingroup identification and discrimination are spontaneously aroused by categorization into a minority group.

Based on the conclusion that group status threat due to minority- majority projections results in increased racial ingroup identification and outgroup discrimination, self categorization theory would predict that this increased identification would result in changes in the self concept

to be more consistent with the ingroup. Self-categorization theory describes identification with an ingroup as a depersonalization of personal identity, resulting in a self-concept of oneself as an interchangeable exemplar of social categories (Hogg and Turner, 1987). Put a different way, according to the theory, one's self concept is a context dependent cognitive representation, which responds to salient social identity. Evidence for this claim comes from Onorato and Turner (2004), which found that, when a higher-order social identity was made salient, the effect of personal self-schemas on information processing was eliminated. Of importance in the context of this paper, Sim et al. (2014) found that, when ingroups were made salient, participants increased their endorsement of group relevant traits in a me/ not me task and this effect was particularly pronounced for groups of high psychological utility.

In application to the current study, increased perceptions of ingroup distinctiveness for a current majority group would lead to an increase in the psychological utility of the group, which would in turn increase the degree to which participants' self concepts become more consistent with the ingroup because of the motivational factors of identification. Additionally, the group status threat would direct individuals who are now more strongly identified with the White ingroup to be more motivated to maintain the relatively high-status threat of the ingroup, which would increase the hostility of the self-concept. Despite the logical continuation of group status threat into changes in the self-concept, no studies to my knowledge have measured the effect of group status threat on the self-concept. The present study aims to fill this hole in the literature.

To fill the aforementioned gap in the literature, we plan to expose White participants to projections of a minority- majority demography and measure resulting changes in the self-concept. Additionally, as a secondary purpose, we hope to verify that this manipulation results in increased outgroup hostility by measuring support for racially equalizing policies after

manipulating group status threat. Based on the theoretical underpinnings of the self concept and group identification, I propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Group status threat will result in a self-concept consistent with ingroup identity.

H1A: Group status threat will result in a self concept which is more dominant.

H1B: Group status threat will result in a self concept which is more stereotypic of the ingroup.

H1C: Group status threat will result in a self concept which is more categorically relevant to the ingroup.

H2: Group status threat will result in decreased support for affirmative action policies.

Methods

Measures

Trait endorsement pre-measure

Participants took part in a task involving a 5-point Likert scale indicating their endorsement of 60 specific traits as self descriptive. These traits were largely taken from Sim et al. (2014) with some alterations. Critically, we both identified traits from Sim's original list and added traits that we considered potential indicators of defensive or ingroup-oriented responding: 4 White-identity traits (i.e. "Anglo Saxon"), 10 white stereotypical traits (i.e. "Privileged"), and 10 dominance traits (i.e. "Hostile"). We will refer to these traits as ingroup-oriented items and contrast them with "control" items that do not particularly invoke the ingroup. The full list of traits is presented in the appendix.

Me/ not me task

The traits presented during the me/ not me task were the same as the traits presented in the trait endorsement pre-measure. Participants took part in a me/ not me task, adapted from Markus (1977) and Onorato & Turner (2004) that asks participants to indicate, with a timed response limited to 3 seconds or less, to click the left arrow key if the presented trait is characteristic of them and the right arrow key if the trait is not characteristic of them. Each trait was presented three times to the participant. This measure has a time limit so as to reduce the effect that explicit elaboration has on endorsements of traits as either self-descriptive or not.

Affirmative action support measure

Prior to the affirmative action support measure, participants were instructed that they were to rate their agreement with diversity goal-oriented policies. The term “affirmative action” was omitted from the instructions entirely to reduce preconceived associations with the term “affirmative action”. Participants indicated on a 5-point Likert Scale how much they agree with 8 different types of Affirmative Action policies, which were adapted from Aberson (2007). Each specific policy is followed by a description of that policy (i.e. “hiring nonqualified: hiring of employees who are not qualified, in order to meet diversity goals”).

Participants and overview of procedure

Participants

237 introductory psychology students at the University of Colorado Boulder completed the study in return for extra credit. However, four of the participants exited the program prior to filling out demographic questions. Additionally, because we were interested in students whose ethnic racial identity is White, 63 non-White participants were excluded from the final data analysis, making a final sample of 170 ($n = 170$). 100% of these participants were White and the

participants were between the ages of 18 and 53 ($M = 19.53$, $SD = 2.78$). 38 of these participants were male, 131 were female, and two were non-binary.

Overview of procedures

All online materials in this procedure were presented using Psychopy and Qualtrics software. Upon arriving at a Zoom meeting room, participants were verbally instructed to read all written materials carefully and avoid environmental distractions. After receiving a link for a consent form through Qualtrics and consenting to participate, participants were directed to Pavlovia and performed the trait-rating task, indicating the degree to which 60 traits were self-descriptive on a 5-point Likert scale. They then read an article about demographics in the United States. The article they read depended on the condition that they were randomly assigned to. These conditions and the information contained within each article are taken from Craig & Richeson (2014 B) and rely on data by the US Census Bureau and summaries from CNN. The experimental, “White-minority” condition presented a short article and pie chart to participants that indicated that, in the year 2042, Whites will be a numerical minority in the United States. In the control, “White-majority” condition, participants read a similar article that detailed current racial United States makeup, in which Whites are still the majority, and a corresponding pie chart. The condition manipulation was followed by a me/not-me (MNM) task, which included 3 repetitions of the same 60 traits presented in the first measure. The MNM task was then followed by a presentation of 8 different affirmative action policies, for which participants were asked to indicate, on a 5-point Likert scale, the degree to which they agree with each policy. Participants were then redirected back to Qualtrics to fill out demographic information. Participants were then debriefed, thanked, and asked to leave. All data were analyzed using R studio.

Design

This experiment was a 2 (condition: White minority vs. White majority) x 2 (word type: control vs. ingroup-oriented) mixed design, with the former factor varying between participants, and the latter factor varying within participants.

Results

The MNM task presented a series of words to the participant, who was asked to classify each as either self-descriptive or not self-descriptive. Each of the sixty words, including both control and ingroup-oriented words, appeared three times during the task. Additionally, each participant had rated each word during the premeasure, so we have an explicit measure of the degree to which each word is judged as self-descriptive.

I analyzed these data using a logistic multilevel model. This model predicts the likelihood of choosing “me” on any given trial of the MNM task. We predicted this likelihood as a function of the premeasure trait rating because people who indicate that a particular word is highly self-descriptive in the premeasure are intuitively more likely to choose “me” on the MNM task for that word. Over and above this relationship, however, we wanted to test the idea that participants in the minority condition are more likely than participants in the majority condition to endorse ingroup-oriented words as self-descriptive. To test this, our model included a code for word type (0 = control words, 1 = ingroup-oriented words), a code for condition (.5 = majority condition, -.5 = minority condition), and their interaction. The model also allowed for random intercepts and random slopes for the premeasure for each participant and random intercepts for each trait in the MNM task.

Not surprisingly, the results indicate that the trait scale premeasure robustly predicts results on the MNM task. If participants indicate that a word is self self-descriptive on the trait

scale premeasure, they are significantly more likely to choose “me” on the MNM task ($z = 22.07$, $p < .001$, $OR = 4.57$). The main effect of word type was not significant ($z = .24$, $p = .81$, $OR = 1.07$) nor was the main effect of condition on overall word endorsement ($z = .74$, $p = .46$, $OR = 1.09$). Most critically for our hypothesis, the results indicate that the interaction between condition and word type is significant ($z = 2.72$, $p = .007$, $OR = 1.23$) such that the tendency for participants to endorse ingroup-oriented words more than control words was more pronounced in the minority condition than in the majority condition. In neither condition was the simple slope of word type significant, but within the majority condition participants showed a slight tendency to avoid endorsement of these words ($z = -.59$, $p = .56$, $OR = .84$; see model dum.min in appendix) and within the minority condition participants showed a very slight tendency to endorse them ($z = .12$, $p = .91$, $OR = 1.03$; see model dum.maj in appendix). Based on the results, the probability of choosing “me” for control words based on the average overall score value of 3.22 in the majority condition was 74.4%, the probability of choosing “me” for ingroup words based on the score value of 3.22 in the majority condition was 71.0%, the probability of choosing “me” for control words based on the average score value in the minority condition was 76.0%, and the probability of choosing “me” for ingroup words based on the average score value in the minority condition was 76.6% (see figure 1).

Next, we aimed to elucidate the interaction between condition and word type by examining different kinds of ingroup-oriented traits: dominance, White stereotype, and White category relevant words. To note, in all of the following models, we controlled for the premeasure ratings, and in every case, there was a strong relationship between premeasure and the tendency to endorse the word as self-relevant, which are available in the appendix. Here, I

will focus on the conceptually significant effects, which focus on the interaction between word type and condition, which is always assessed over and above the effect of the premeasure.

To determine whether or not the likelihood of choosing “me” on the MNM task in response to dominance-related words is contingent on condition, we re-ran the logistic multilevel model (see model dominance in appendix) but substituted a code for dominance (0=control, 1=dominance) for the original word-type predictor. As hypothesized (H1A), the results indicate that the interaction between condition and dominance relatedness of words is significant ($z = 2.417, p = 0.016, OR = 1.22$) such that the tendency for participants to endorse dominance relevant words more than control words was more pronounced in the minority condition than in the majority condition

To determine whether or not the likelihood of choosing “me” on the MNM task in response to words that are coded as White stereotypical was contingent on condition, we ran another logistic multilevel model (see model stereotype in appendix) substituting a code for stereotypicality (0=control, 1=stereotypic). The results were not significant ($z = 1.384, p = .17, OR = 1.15$). These results failed to confirm the hypothesis that group status threat results in a self-concept more consistent with White stereotypes (H1B), but the direction of the effects was consistent with our prediction.

Finally, to determine whether or not the likelihood of choosing “me” on the MNM task in response to words that are coded as White category relevant was contingent on condition, we re-ran the logistic multilevel model (see model category in appendix) substituting a code for White category (0=control, 1=White). The results were not significant ($z = 1.61, p = .11, OR = 1.30$). These results failed to confirm the hypothesis that group status threat results in a self-concept

more consistent with White category relevant words (H1C), but again, the pattern was consistent with our prediction.

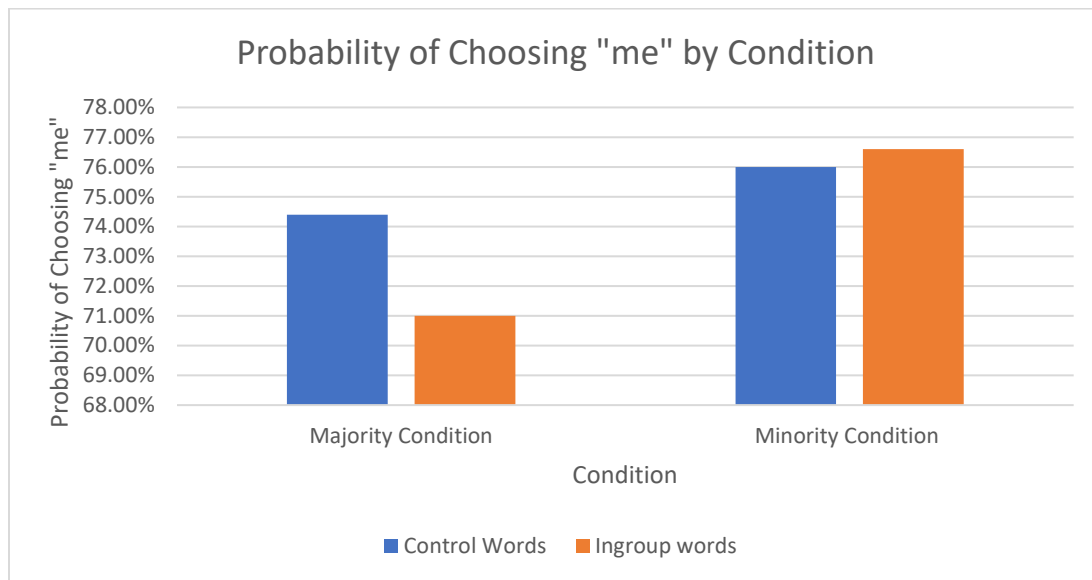


Figure 1: graph of the probability of choosing “me” in the mnm task by condition (White majority or White minority condition) by word type (ingroup words or control words) with the score value set to the average score value of 3.22. There was a significant interaction effect such that participants were more likely to endorse ingroup words in the minority condition than in the majority condition.

Affirmative Action Support

We analyzed endorsement of the affirmative action support policies as a function of condition and we also did this in a multilevel model that allowed for random intercepts for both participant and item (there were eight affirmative action items). There was no support for the hypothesis that the manipulation resulted in lessened support for affirmative action policies ($t(168) = -.76, p = .45$). Although the effect was in the predicted direction, the difference was not significant (see model AA in the appendix).

Discussion

This study explored whether White group status threat results in changes in the self-concept to be more dominant, stereotypically White, and categorically White and whether White

group status threat results in decreased support for affirmative action policies. Regarding the self-concept, analyses revealed a significant effect of group status threat on the self-concept regarding traits that reflect dominance, White stereotypicality, and the White category, which largely supports our primary hypothesis. Upon further analysis, it was revealed that group status threat had a significant effect on the self-concept for traits that are related to dominance, but weaker and non-significant effects on traits that are related to the White stereotype and the White category. These results upheld hypothesis 1A, failed to uphold hypothesis 1B, and failed to uphold hypothesis 1C. Regarding support for affirmative action policies, analyses revealed no significant effects of condition nor interactions of condition with policy type on support for affirmative action. These results failed to confirm hypothesis two.

Regarding the MNM task predictions, there was broad support for hypothesis one. However, further analyses revealed that this may have been primarily driven from the effect of condition on participants' likelihood of endorsing dominance relevant words in the task. These results failed to directly uphold the prediction that perceived optimal distinctiveness is maximized under the condition of a future minority-majority demography because increased identification, outright, as measured by endorsement of White category and stereotype relevant words, was not shown to significantly increase controlling for the premeasure in the manipulation condition. There was a near-significant effect of White- category relevance on the effect of condition on the post-manipulation measure; therefore, future replications of this work ought to use higher sample sizes. Additionally, these results can be explained by the notion that a exposure to information conveying a future minority-majority demography resulted in a sense of group status threat and that the degree to which this threat was felt was contingent on the degree to which the self-concept reflects a White identity, which in turn increased the hostility of the

self-concept of members of the White social category because increased in-group identification connects group outcomes more strongly to individual outcomes (Fiske, 2005).

A future direction in this work may be to increase the political variability of the sample. Because the participants were Boulder undergraduates, there may have been a relatively small degree in variability of the political ideology of the sample pool, which may have resulted in a pool of individuals who do not rely on the White identity as a primary source of psychological utility. Therefore, future work ought to increase the ideological variability of the sample. Another future direction may be to analyze reaction times in the MNM as well as to attempt a mediational analysis of identity shifts on support for social equalizing policies.

Failure to find a significant effect of condition on support for affirmative action policies fails to conceptually replicate prior work by Craig and Richeson (2014b) which showed that racial bias increases due to the manipulation of projections of a future minority- majority demographic makeup. These results also failed to conceptually replicate prior work by Wetts and Willer (2018), which found that the same manipulation decreased support for social equalizing policies among Whites. Future replications of this study ought to therefore use separate measures for support for affirmative action.

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