

Revisiting the Influence of 'White' and 'European American' Labels on Attitudes Toward Multiculturalism and Ethnic Minorities

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Abstract. Research has suggested that priming whites to self-identify as European American rather than as White might result in more support for multiculturalism and lower ethnic prejudice. However, these effects were not detected in a survey experiment conducted with a weighted nationally-representative sample. Results indicate the importance of replicating research with samples that are more representative of the population of interest and the importance in reporting all studies that have been conducted.

Keywords: race; ethnicity; multiculturalism; survey experiment; file drawer problem

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Ethnic bias is a perennial concern in multiethnic societies, and one of the more important goals of social science is to identify mechanisms that can reduce or eliminate ethnic bias. In a recent article, Morrison and Chung (2011) suggested a simple mechanism to reduce ethnic bias, reporting experimental evidence that, compared to whites prompted to mark their race/ethnicity as "White," whites prompted to mark their race/ethnicity as "European American" reported a higher mean level of support for multiculturalism (Studies 1 and 2) and a lower mean level of prejudice (Study 2). Morrison and Chung (2011, p. 166) proposed an explanation for why priming whites to self-identify as European American instead of as white could produce such results:

...we propose that labeling oneself as "White" (relative to "European American"), which connotes an absence of a "real" ethnic identity, will decrease nonminorities' feelings of closeness to ethnic minorities. This should in turn lead nonminorities to be less supportive of multiculturalism, an ideology that promotes the recognition of diverse (primarily minority) identities. Moreover, given that resistance to multiculturalism is often associated with prejudice against minorities, self-identifying as White may ultimately render nonminorities less tolerant of other groups. [citations omitted]

Marking one's ethnicity in a survey is a remarkably simple method by which to reduce white prejudice and increase white support for multiculturalism. However, psychology and psychiatry journals publish a large number of positive results (91.5% by the estimate in Fanelli, 2010), and some publications reporting multiple studies report more positive results than would be expected by chance (Francis, 2012b, Francis, 2012c). Such non-random reporting of results can produce published results that fail to replicate or at least effect size estimates that fail to replicate.

Inferences from Morrison and Chung (2011) were based on final samples of 129 persons from across the United States who had registered to receive notification of invitations to participate in social experiments (Study 1) and 111 college students (Study 2). The study reported below reflects an attempt that was made to test the hypothesis presented in Morrison and Chung (2011) with a larger and/or more representative sample drawn from a national population. The study was fielded in 2009 through TESS, the Time-Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences program, based on a proposal from the first author of Morrison and Chung (2011); however, results from this nationally-representative sample were not reported in Morrison and Chung (2011).

Method

Documentation available at the TESS webpage for the Morrison 2009 study indicated that respondents were members of a nationally-representative Knowledge Networks online panel recruited with probability-based sampling, in which respondents were provided

equipment for internet access if necessary.¹ The Final Response Rate Report for the study indicated that, between the field start date of August 6 and the field end date of August 19, 633 respondents completed the survey of 902 respondents fielded, for a 70% completion rate.²

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of three groups: respondents in the European American prime group were asked to identify their race/ethnicity as European American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian American or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, or Other; respondents in the White prime group were asked to identify their race/ethnicity from the same list but with European American replaced with White; and respondents in the control group were not asked to identify their race/ethnicity.

The sample had 455 non-Hispanic white respondents, 70 non-Hispanic black respondents, 19 non-Hispanic other race respondents, 65 Hispanic respondents, and 24 non-Hispanic multiple race respondents. The European American, White, and control groups respectively had 153, 147, and 155 non-Hispanic white respondents and 55, 60, and 63 ethnic minority respondents. For comparison, Morrison and Chung (2011) reported 77 white respondents and 52 nonwhite respondents across the White and European American conditions in their Study 1, and reported 111 white respondents across the White, European American, and control conditions in their Study 2. The TESS sample is thus larger and/or more representative of the population of interest than the studies described in Morrison and Chung (2011). For the TESS study, comparison of samples of 147 cases would have 0.80 power to detect a 0.33 standardized difference in means with a two-tailed alpha of 0.05.

Respondents in the TESS study were given fourteen items regarding ethnic minorities or whites, divided into four sections. Refusals and nonresponses were coded as missing data. Respondents were excluded in a particular analysis only if the respondent did not provide enough substantive responses to have a score on the relevant dependent variable scale described below.

Support for multiculturalism. The first section asked respondents to indicate agreement on a seven-point scale with the following three statements: "We must appreciate the unique characteristics of different ethnic groups in order to have a cooperative society" (5 refusals); "Learning about the ways that different ethnic groups resolve conflict will help us develop a more harmonious society" (5 refusals); and "When interacting with a member of an ethnic group that is different from your own, it is very important to take into account the history and cultural traditions of that person's ethnic group" (2 refusals). Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) was 0.84 for a "support for multiculturalism" scale created from these

¹ See the Morrison 2009 study TESS webpage for documentation that provides more detail on the Knowledge Networks methodology:

<http://www.tessexperiments.org/data/morrison714.html>.

² TESS contracts for a certain number of respondents with the survey firm, Knowledge Networks. Knowledge Networks solicits respondents in mass emails that often produce a sample larger than the contracted number. The stopping rule is thus to stop collecting data when the contracted number of respondents has been met with a particular mass email.

three items, with items standardized before summing and a scale value created only for respondents with a substantive response for at least two items. The scale had one missing case, and this missing case was an ethnic minority from the control condition. The scale was standardized so that its mean and standard deviation were respectively 0 and 1, with values coded so that higher scale values indicate stronger support for multiculturalism.

Opposition to pro-ethnic policies. The second section asked respondents to indicate responses on a seven-point scale to the following three items: "In general, do you favor or oppose school districts offering bilingual education for non-English-speaking students?" (2 refusals); "In your view, should immigration be increased, kept at its present level, or decreased?" (6 refusals); and "Do you generally favor or oppose affirmative action programs for ethnic minorities?" (8 refusals). Cronbach's alpha was 0.70 for an "opposition to pro-ethnic policies" scale created from these three items, with items standardized before summing and a scale value created only for respondents with a substantive response for at least two items. The scale had two missing cases: an ethnic minority case from the control condition, and an ethnic minority case from the White prime condition. The scale was standardized so that its mean and standard deviation were respectively 0 and 1, with values coded so that higher scale values indicate stronger opposition to pro-ethnic policies.

Resentment of ethnic minorities. The third section asked respondents to indicate agreement on a seven-point scale with the following six statements: "Over the past few years, ethnic minorities have gotten more economically than they deserve" (2 refusals); "Over the past few years, the government and news media have shown more respect for ethnic minorities than they deserve" (4 refusals); "It is easy to understand the anger of ethnic minorities in America" (1 refusal); "Discrimination against ethnic minorities is no longer a problem in the United States" (6 refusals); "Ethnic minorities are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights" (6 refusals); and "Ethnic minorities should not push themselves where they are not wanted" (3 refusals). Cronbach's alpha was 0.85 for a "resentment of ethnic minorities" scale created from these six items, with items standardized before summing and a scale value created only for respondents with a substantive response to at least three items. The scale had one missing case, and this missing case was an ethnic minority from the control condition. The scale was standardized so that its mean and standard deviation were respectively 0 and 1, with values coded so that higher scale values indicate higher levels of resentment of ethnic minorities.

Closeness to whites. The fourth section had two items that displayed six pairs of circles that overlapped a little (coded 1) to very much (coded 6); respondents were asked to "[p]lease indicate the number of the picture below that best represents your relationship to [ethnic minorities / non-minorities (i.e., Whites/European Americans)]." The order of these items was randomized. Responses to the two items correlated at 0.45. To create a "closeness to whites" scale, responses to the item for ethnic minorities were subtracted from responses to the item for nonminorities, to indicate degree of relative closeness to whites; this item was then standardized so that its mean and standard deviation were respectively 0 and 1, with values coded so that higher scale values indicate higher levels of closeness to whites relative to ethnic minorities. The "closeness to ethnic minorities" item had 22 refusals, and the "closeness to whites" item had 21 refusals; the scale had 27 missing cases: 6 whites and

3 ethnic minorities from the European American prime condition, 7 whites and 3 ethnic minorities from the White prime condition, and 6 whites and 2 ethnic minorities from the control condition.

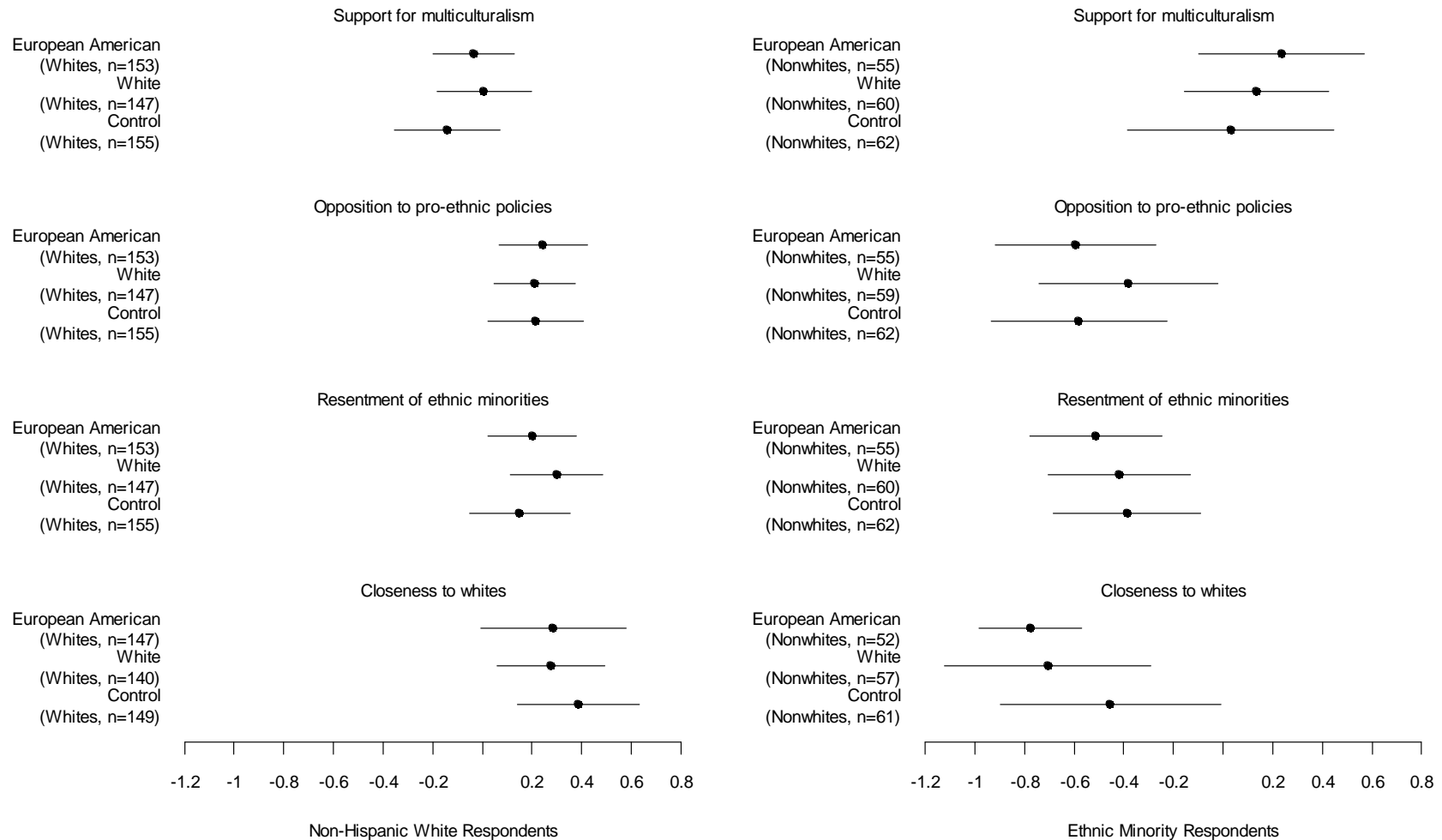
The dataset retrieved from the TESS website contained these variables: an item indicating the experimental group that a respondent was assigned to, the fourteen items regarding ethnic minorities described above, an item indicating the order for the closeness items, items regarding survey implementation (case id, interview start time, interview finish time, and interview duration), a post-stratification weight variable, and demographic variables measuring age, education, race/ethnicity, gender, household characteristics (head, size, type, income), marital status, MSA status, geographic region, home ownership status, state of residence, presence of household members (children or adults of particular ages), current employment status, household internet access, political partisanship, ideology, religious denomination, and frequency of attendance at religious services.

Results

Figure 1 displays point estimates and 95% confidence intervals for the mean value of each dependent variable, disaggregated by condition and racial categories, based on weighted regressions in Stata 11. Regressions for the "closeness to whites" scale included a dichotomous control for the order in which a respondent received the closeness items, with 0 indicating that the "closeness to ethnic minorities" item appeared first. No other control variable was included in this regression or in any other regression used to determine point estimates and 95% confidence intervals.

Results presented in Figure 1 indicate that, for non-Hispanic whites, the European American prime had little effect compared to the White prime, for any of the four dependent variables. Table 1 reports point estimates, p-values, and 95% confidence intervals for estimates of the difference between mean responses for the dependent variables in the European American prime condition compared to the White prime condition, for weighted and unweighted regressions, for non-Hispanic white respondents and for ethnic minority respondents.

Figure 1



Note: The figure indicates weighted point estimates and 95% confidence intervals for the mean of indicated variables, with dependent variables standardized so that their mean and standard deviation were respectively 0 and 1, and with values coded so that higher scale values indicate higher levels of the indicated dependent variable; means and confidence intervals for the Closeness to Whites item were calculated controlling for the order of the closeness items in the survey.

Table 1						
Results for Mean Differences comparing the European American prime to the White prime						
	Non-Hispanic Whites			Ethnic Minorities		
Weighted Results						
Support for multiculturalism	-0.04	p=0.737	[-0.29, 0.21]	0.10	p=0.658	[-0.34, 0.54]
Opposition to pro-ethnic policies	0.03	p=0.780	[-0.21, 0.28]	-0.21	p=0.388	[-0.70, 0.27]
Resentment of ethnic minorities	-0.10	p=0.451	[-0.36, 0.16]	-0.09	p=0.637	[-0.49, 0.30]
Closeness to whites	0.01	p=0.961	[-0.35, 0.37]	-0.07	p=0.773	[-0.53, 0.40]
Unweighted Results						
Support for multiculturalism	-0.04	p=0.699	[-0.25, 0.17]	0.16	p=0.400	[-0.22, 0.54]
Opposition to pro-ethnic policies	0.04	p=0.670	[-0.16, 0.26]	-0.25	p=0.185	[-0.61, 0.12]
Resentment of ethnic minorities	-0.01	p=0.913	[-0.22, 0.20]	-0.23	p=0.182	[-0.57, 0.11]
Closeness to whites	-0.13	p=0.399	[-0.43, 0.17]	-0.01	p=0.960	[-0.49, 0.47]

Note: Values indicate the coefficient, p-value, and 95% confidence interval from a linear regression predicting the indicated dependent variable, with the mean in the White prime condition subtracted from the mean in the European American prime condition. Values for the Closeness to Whites item were calculated controlling for the order of the closeness items in the survey. Dependent variables are on a standardized scale with respective means and standard deviations of 0 and 1, with values coded so that higher scale values indicate higher levels of the indicated dependent variable.

Interpretation of confidence intervals can be conducted as follows: were the experiment repeated indefinitely, 95 of every 100 confidence intervals would include the true population mean; thus, the [-0.29, 0.21] 95% confidence interval for the effect of the European American prime on non-Hispanic white support for multiculturalism compared to the White prime indicates that it is unlikely that the true population mean falls outside the [-0.29, 0.21] interval (for a discussion of the interpretation of confidence intervals, see Cumming & Finch, 2005: 174-175). Dependent variables were standardized so that their mean and standard deviation were respectively 0 and 1, so confidence intervals for non-Hispanic whites suggest that the effect of the European American prime with regard to support for multiculturalism and prejudice is likely medium to small, given that Cohen (1988, p. 285-287) proposed default effect sizes of 0.20 for small, 0.50 for medium, and 0.80 for large. However, 95% confidence intervals for ethnic minorities included medium and large plausible effect sizes, but this might reflect only small sample sizes inflating the width of the confidence intervals.

Discussion

The theory outlined in Morrison and Chung (2011) is that whites thinking in terms of a White identity will have more negative feelings toward ethnic minorities than whites thinking in terms of a European American identity, given that a White identity can be thought of as the absence of an ethnic identity. However, results from a survey experiment conducted with a sample weighted to represent national population demographics provided little evidence that perceptions of multiculturalism or ethnic minorities were affected by a simple prime of marking a European American ethnicity instead of White race in a survey; these results should be combined with results from samples presented in Morrison and Chung (2011) to produce a more complete inference about the influence of a European American ethnicity prime on white perceptions of multiculturalism or ethnic minorities. The prime in these experiments – marking one's ethnicity as White or European American – is relatively weak, so it is possible that a stronger prime might produce clearer evidence of an effect of whites thinking in terms of a European American identity.

Regarding the conduct of research, results presented here indicate the value of replicating research originally conducted with college students and other samples; moreover, given that these results were not reported in Morrison and Chung (2011) or in a subsequent publication, these results also illustrate the value of public access to data as a method by which to reduce the file drawer problem (Rosenthal, 1979) and publication bias (Francis, 2012a).

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