**Revisiting the Influence of 'White' and 'European American' Labels**

**on Attitudes Toward Multiculturalism and Ethnic Minorities**

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Research based on convenience samples has suggested that priming whites to self-identify as European American rather than as White might increase support for multiculturalism and reduce ethnic prejudice. However, these effects were not detected in a study conducted with a weighted nationally-representative sample: results suggest at most a small effect of racial and ethnic self-identification primes on white attitudes toward multiculturalism and ethnic minorities. Results indicate the importance of replicating research with samples that are more representative of the population of interest.

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

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**Introduction**

Morrison and Chung (2011) reported 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). Final samples for Study 1 and 2 were respectively 129 persons who had registered to receive notification of invitations to participate in social experiments and 111 college students. Below, results are reported from a similar study based on a proposal from the first author of Morrison and Chung (2011) and fielded through TESS, the Time-Sharing Experiments for the Social Sciences program (NSF Grant 0818839, Jeremy Freese and Penny Visser, Principal Investigators).

Morrison and Chung (2011: 166) provided an explanation for their hypotheses regarding the attitudinal effect of priming whites (i.e., nonminorities) to self-identify as White or European American:

...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].

**Material and methods**

Documentation in the TESS files 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. The Final Response Rate Report provided by Knowledge Networks for the study indicated that, between the field start date of Aug 6, 2009, and the field end date of Aug 19, 2009, 633 respondents completed the survey of the 902 respondents fielded, for a 70% completion rate.

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 white respondents and 55, 60, and 63 nonwhite respondents.

Respondents were shown 15 items regarding ethnic minorities, divided into four sections. Refusals were coded as missing data.

Support for multiculturalism. The first section asked respondents to "[p]lease indicate your agreement with each of the following statements about relations between ethnic groups in the United States"; responses were coded on a seven-point scale. Items were: "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 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 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.

Support for pro-ethnic policies. The second section asked respondents to "[p]lease answer the following questions about your attitudes toward social policies in the United States"; responses were coded on a seven-point scale. Items were: "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 a "support for pro-ethnic policies" scale created from these 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 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 pro-ethnic policies.

Resentment of ethnic minorities. The third section asked respondents to "[p]lease mark the response that most accurately represents your views"; responses were coded on a seven-point scale. Items were: "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 items, with items standardized before summing and a scale value created only for respondents with a substantive response for at least three items. 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 dataset retrieved from the TESS website contained these variables: an item indicating the experimental group that a respondent was assigned to, the fifteen items regarding ethnic minorities described above, an item indicating whether item 14 was shown before or after item 15, 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, 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.

Respondents were excluded in a particular analysis reported below only if the respondent did not provide enough substantive responses to have a score on the relevant dependent variable scales, as described above.

**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 items 14 and 15, with 1 indicating that item 15 appeared first and 0 indicating that item 14 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.

[Figure 1 about here]

Results presented in Figure 1 indicate that, for whites and for nonwhites, the European American prime and white prime had little effect, compared to the control or to each other, on support for multiculturalism, support for pro-ethnic policies, resentment of ethnic minorities, and closeness to whites. Table 1 presents 95% confidence intervals that estimate differences between means for paired comparisons of the experimental groups for the dependent variables; these confidence intervals were drawn from weighted regressions.

[Table 1 about here]

Interpretation of confidence intervals can be conducted as such: 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 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 (Cumming and Finch, 2005: 174-175). Dependent variables were standardized so that their mean and standard deviation were respectively 0 and 1, so confidence intervals for 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: 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 nonwhites included medium and large plausible effect sizes, but this might be due only to small sample sizes inflating the width of the confidence intervals.

**Discussion**

Results from a survey experiment conducted with a sample weighted to represent national population demographics provided little evidence that priming whites and nonwhites to think in terms of European American ethnicity instead of White race had an effect on perceptions of multiculturalism or ethnic minorities; these results should be combined with results from convenience samples presented in Morrison and Chung (2011) to produce a more generalized inference about the influence of race/ethnic primes on perceptions of multiculturalism or ethnic minorities.

Regarding the conduct of research, results presented here indicate the value of replicating research originally conducted with college students and other convenience 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, 2012).

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**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 Closeness to Whites were calculated controlling for the order of items 14 and 15.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Table 1**  **95% Confidence Intervals for**  **Mean Differences between Experimental Groups** | | |
| **Comparison** | **Whites** | **Nonwhites** |
|  | | |
| **Support for multiculturalism** | | |
| European American prime, compared to White prime | [-0.29, 0.21] | [-0.34, 0.54] |
| European American prime, compared to Control | [-0.16, 0.37] | [-0.33, 0.73] |
| White prime, compared to Control | [-0.14, 0.43] | [-0.40, 0.61] |
|  | | |
| **Support for pro-ethnic policies** | | |
| European American prime, compared to White prime | [-0.21, 0.28] | [-0.70, 0.27] |
| European American prime, compared to Control | [-0.23, 0.29] | [-0.49, 0.46] |
| White prime, compared to Control | [-0.26, 0.25] | [-0.31, 0.70] |
|  | | |
| **Resentment of ethnic minorities** | | |
| European American prime, compared to White prime | [-0.36, 0.16] | [-0.49, 0.30] |
| European American prime, compared to Control | [-0.22, 0.32] | [-0.53, 0.27] |
| White prime, compared to Control | [-0.13, 0.42] | [-0.44, 0.38] |
|  | | |
| **Closeness to whites** | | |
| European American prime, compared to White prime | [-0.35, 0.37] | [-0.53, 0.40] |
| European American prime, compared to Control | [-0.48, 0.28] | [-0.81, 0.17] |
| White prime, compared to Control | [-0.44, 0.22] | [-0.86, 0.35] |