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Paying for Positive Group Esteem: How Inequity Frames Affect Whites' Responses to Redistributive Policies

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This article finds that, when faced with racial inequity framed as White advantage, Whites' desire to think well of their racial group increases their support for policies perceived to harm Whites. Across 4 studies, the article provides evidence that (a) relative to minority disadvantage, White advantage increases Whites' support for policies perceived to reduce their group's economic opportunities, but does not increase support for policies perceived to increase minority opportunities; and (b) the effect of White advantage on Whites' esteem for their ingroup drives the effect of inequity frame on support for policies perceived to reduce Whites' opportunities.

Keywords: social inequality, White advantage, affirmative action, group-esteem

At the beginning of the 21st century, the United States is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Yet the United States tolerates the highest rate of poverty in the “developed” world (Smeeding, Rainwater, & Burtless, 2002), and differences in financial privilege can literally mean the difference between life and death (Feagin & McKinney, 2003; Shapiro, 2004). Moreover, the concentration of poverty among ethnic minorities and the hereditary nature of wealth (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995) belie claims that these inequalities are equitable (e.g., Sowell, 1994).

Despite Americans' deeply ingrained support for equity (Hochschild, 1981, 1995), rather than support the elimination of biases by redistributing societal resources, those at the top of the social hierarchy—for example, Whites—frequently elect to maintain the status quo, and hence, their favored position (Bobo, 1999; Durheim & Dixon, 2004; Jackman, 1994; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Knowles, Lowery, Hogan, & Chow, 2009; Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, & Krysan, 1997; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Tuch & Hughes, 1996). Given this general reluctance to support remedies that result in decreasing the group's position, we ask: Under what circumstances might Whites be willing to incur costs to their group in order to remedy social inequity?

In this article, we suggest that the mere perception of inequity is insufficient to counteract Whites' opposition to policies they perceive to harm their group. Rather, to motivate action, inequity must be of a particular form, namely, White advantage. We posit that perceived racial advantage undermines Whites' esteem for their group, which motivates them to support policies that reduce their group's economic advantage. In contrast, we do not expect the belief that minorities are disadvantaged to threaten Whites' esteem for their group (cf. Chow, Lowery, & Knowles, 2008), and thus should not increase Whites' support for policies perceived to harm Whites.

The Self-Relevance of Inequity

Although some might object to redistributive policies such as affirmative action because they perceive the policies to violate closely held principles (e.g., equal treatment; Bobocel, Son Hing, Davey, Stanley, & Zanna, 1998), research strongly suggests that the desire for group dominance fuels much of the opposition to these policies (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Federico & Sidanius, 2002a, 2002b; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kluegel & Smith, 1983; Lowery et al., 2006; Sears & Funk, 1990). Perspectives such as social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), and realistic group conflict theory (Sherif, 1966) suggest that the desire for dominance motivates individuals to protect their group's interests by either gaining advantage over or by maximizing status differentials with respect to outgroups.

At first blush, these theories, and the empirical work that supports them, appear to weigh against the possibility that individuals will support policies that reduce their group's economic advantages. However, some theorists argue that in addition to the desire to maximize the ingroup's economic fortunes, individuals are motivated to think highly of their group (Brown, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). We suggest that this need to think highly of one's

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group can conflict with material group interest; what makes people feel best about their group might not promise the best economic outcomes. If racial advantage undermines group esteem, and policies that reduce the group's economic outcomes mitigate this loss of esteem, the desire to think highly of the group might counteract the desire for positive economic outcomes, and therefore increase support for policies that harm the group.

Consistent with the possibility that perceived racial advantage can undermine group esteem, research suggests that individuals think less well of their group if they believe the differences between their group and subordinate groups are illegitimate (Branscombe, 1998; Chow et al., 2008; Hornsey, Spears, Cremers, & Hogg, 2003; Johnson, Terry, & Louis, 2005; Leach, Iyer, & Pedersen, 2006; Leach, Snider, & Iyer, 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Importantly, we argue that the belief that inequality is illegitimate is necessary, but not sufficient, to undermine dominant-group members' esteem for their group; individuals must also believe that the inequity challenges the legitimacy of *their* group's standing.

Although inequity necessarily involves disadvantage and advantage, we suggest that individuals distinguish between inequity described as subordinate disadvantage and inequity described as dominant advantage. Support for this claim comes from evidence that Whites' sense of self is more strongly tied to inequity framed in terms of White advantage than minority disadvantage. For example, the more Whites perceive their group to be privileged, the more collective racial guilt they experience, but the belief that Blacks face racial discrimination does not affect Whites' experience of guilt (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005; Swim & Miller, 1999). Also, when Whites are motivated to protect their self-esteem, they deny the existence of White privilege, but not anti-Black discrimination (Adams, Tomala, & O'Brien, 2006; Branscombe, Schmitt, & Schiffhauer, 2007; Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007). Similarly, among Whites who value equity, exposure to evidence of unearned White advantage results in less esteem for the ingroup than exposure to evidence of undeserved minority disadvantage (Chow et al., 2008). Thus, it appears that Whites distinguish between White advantage and minority disadvantage, and White advantage poses a greater threat to their esteem for the group.

Ingroup Dominance and Responses to Redistributive Policies

If unearned advantage threatens Whites' esteem for their group, then Whites should attempt to alleviate this threat. Although Whites might be able to attenuate this threat through purely intrapsychic means—for instance, by denying the existence of privilege (Lowery et al., 2007; Unzueta & Lowery, 2010) or distancing themselves from the group (Chow et al., 2008; Powell et al., 2005)—they might also take steps to reduce their group's advantage.

The idea that acknowledging inequity increases support for resource redistribution is not new. Indeed, a large body of research suggests that the perception of social inequity increases support for policies designed to reduce it (Bobo & Kluegel, 1993; Bobocel et al., 1998; Iyer et al., 2003; Murrell, Dietz-Uhler, Dovidio, Gaertner, & Drout, 1994; Tuch & Hughes, 1996). However, we predict that to successfully alleviate the esteem threat associated with

unearned advantage, a policy needs to redistribute resources in a particular way: by reducing the opportunities available to the advantaged ingroup.

If individuals distinguish between ingroup advantage and outgroup disadvantage, then they might also distinguish between a policy that reduces outgroup disadvantage and a policy that reduces ingroup advantage. Although helping disadvantaged minorities might reduce differences in relative social standing, as well as alleviate guilt (Iyer et al., 2003), it might fail to protect Whites' esteem for the ingroup from the threat of unearned advantage. This leads to the somewhat surprising prediction that exposure to evidence of unearned racial advantage will increase Whites' support for a policy perceived to reduce Whites' opportunities, but will not affect their support for the same policy if it is perceived to help minorities.

Importantly, we do not assume that the desire to hold the group in high esteem eliminates a desire to maximize the group's economic fortunes. Material group interests should continue to press against support for a policy perceived to harm the group. Thus, although we predict that perceptions of ingroup advantage will increase support for a policy perceived to harm the group, it is less clear whether this support will surpass support for a policy perceived as less threatening to the group's economic position (i.e., a policy that helps minorities). That is, we predict that Whites will increase their support for an ingroup-harming policy when they perceive their group to be advantaged, compared with when they perceive minorities to be disadvantaged, but we do not predict that their levels of support for group-harming policies will necessarily exceed their support for policies they perceive as less harmful to their group.

We conducted four studies to test these predictions.

Overview of Studies

In Studies 1 and 2, we tested the hypothesis that evidence of White advantage, compared with minority disadvantage, increases Whites' support for a policy perceived to harm Whites, but does not affect their support for the same policy when they perceive it to benefit Blacks. In Study 3, we provide direct evidence that group esteem mediates the effect of inequity frame on Whites' attitudes toward a policy perceived to reduce White outcomes. In Study 4, we provide further evidence that the effect of inequity frame on Whites' policy attitudes is driven by esteem needs. Specifically, we demonstrate that when self-affirmation satisfies esteem needs, evidence of White advantage does not increase Whites' support for policies perceived to harm their group.

Study 1

Study 1 provided an initial test of the hypothesis that unearned White advantage is associated with an increased willingness among Whites to harm their racial group, but not associated with a willingness to help disadvantaged minorities. We measured White participants' perceptions of White privilege, perceptions of a policy's effect on Blacks and Whites, and support for the policy.

Research on Whites' perceptions of racial privilege has found a positive relationship between perceptions of privilege and feelings of racial guilt. In general, the more Whites perceive their group to benefit unfairly from their racial group membership, the more guilt

they feel about their group's status (Leach et al., 2002; Lowery et al., 2006). Evidence also suggests that racial guilt increases support for policies designed to help ethnic minorities (Branscombe, Doosje, & McGarty, 2002; Iyer et al., 2003; Swim & Miller, 1999). Because we are focused on policies that harm Whites, we do not expect the effect of White privilege to be driven by guilt. However, we included a measure of White racial guilt to test this alternative.

Method

Participants. A total of 40 White participants (25 women, 15 men) ranging in age from 19 to 78 years ($M = 38.85$, $SD = 15.19$) visited a website containing study materials. Participants were recruited from an e-mail list, maintained by a private Californian university, of individuals interested in receiving online survey announcements. As payment, each participant received a \$5 gift certificate from an online retailer.

Procedure. Participants were e-mailed a link to the study website. After linking to the site, they were told that the online session would consist of a survey of social attitudes and attitude change. Participants first completed measures of perceived White privilege and White guilt. They were then shown a description of a hiring policy and asked to rate how they thought the policy would affect Whites, how they thought the policy would affect Blacks, and their attitudes toward the policy.

Materials and measured variables.

White privilege. In order to measure participants' belief that Whites benefit from unearned advantage, Swim and Miller's (1999) five-item White Privilege Scale was administered. Sample items include "Being a White person grants unearned privileges in today's society" and "I do not feel that White people have any benefits or privileges due to their race" (reverse scored; 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .90$).

White guilt. Participants' level of White guilt was measured using a five-item scale developed by Swim and Miller (1999). Sample items include "I feel guilty about benefits and privileges that I receive because of the color of my skin" and "I do not feel guilty about social inequality between White and Black Americans" (reverse scored). Higher scores indicated greater feelings of racial guilt (1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*; $\alpha = .82$).

Perceived effects of policy. All participants were given the following description of a hiring policy: "A 'tie-breaker' policy in which a minority applicant is selected over a White applicant when the two applicants are *equally* qualified." After reading this policy description, participants were asked to rate how they thought the

policy would affect Whites and Blacks. Perceived effect on Whites was assessed with the following item: "How much do you expect this policy to affect Whites?" (1 = *Greatly harm*, 4 = *no effect*, 7 = *Greatly help*). Perceived effect on Blacks was measured with a similar item: "How much do you expect this policy to affect Blacks?" (1 = *Greatly harm*, 4 = *no effect*, 7 = *Greatly help*). These items were subsequently reverse scored, such that higher scores reflected greater perceptions of harm.

Policy attitude. Attitudes toward the policy were measured by asking, "Compared to having *no affirmative action policy at all*, how much would you support the policy just described?" (1 = *Prefer no policy*, 7 = *Strongly support this policy*).

Results

Participant gender did not moderate any reported effects in this study or any of the subsequent studies, and is therefore omitted from the analyses that follow.

Using the midpoint of the perceived effect scales as a reference value, one-sample *t* tests revealed that, overall, participants expected the policy to harm Whites ($M = 5.68$, $SD = 1.31$), $t(39) = 8.10$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.81$, and to help minorities ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.67$), $t(39) = 3.88$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.72$. Moreover, the perceived effects on Whites and Blacks were negatively correlated ($r = -.51$, $p < .001$).

Perceived effect on Whites. We first sought to test the hypothesis that perceived racial privilege would reduce Whites' support for a policy perceived to harm Whites (see Table 1). In accordance with procedures articulated by Aiken and West (1991), we regressed policy attitudes on anticipated White outcome, White privilege, and their interaction. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Lowery et al., 2006), we observed a significant effect of White outcome, such that the more participants expected the policy to harm Whites, the more they opposed the policy ($B = -.45$, $SE B = .20$, $\beta = -.39$), $t(36) = 2.25$, $p < .05$. White privilege did not predict policy attitudes ($B = .12$, $SE B = .17$, $\beta = .11$, $t < 1$, $p = .49$). However, as hypothesized, there was a significant interaction between White privilege and anticipated harm to Whites ($B = .41$, $SE B = .14$, $\beta = .52$), $t(36) = 3.03$, $p < .005$.

In order to visualize this interaction, we probed it at one standard deviation above and below the mean of the expected outcome for Whites (Aiken & West, 1991; see Figure 1). Consistent with our predictions, these analyses revealed that among participants who perceived the policy to greatly harm Whites, perceptions of White privilege were associated with more support for the policy ($B = .66$, $SE B = .22$, $\beta = .59$), $t(36) = 3.03$, $p < .005$. In contrast, among participants who perceived the policy to do rela-

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Variables in Study 1

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. White privilege	4.24	1.37	—				
2. White guilt	3.06	1.20	.27 [†]	—			
3. Perceived effect on Whites	5.67	1.31	-.13	-.40*	—		
4. Perceived effect on Blacks	2.98	1.67	-.13	.25	-.51**	—	
5. Policy support	5.50	1.52	.21	.20	-.14	-.04	—

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

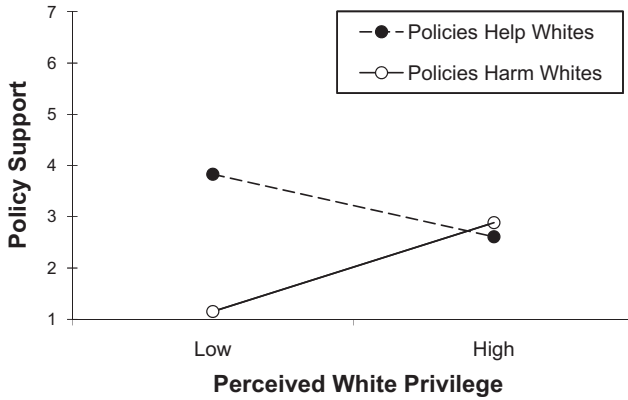


Figure 1. Policy support as a function of perceived White privilege and a policy's perceived effect on Whites (Study 1).

tively little harm to Whites, perceptions of White privilege did not predict support for the policy ($B = -.42$, $SE B = .27$, $\beta = -.38$), $t(36) = 1.59$, $p = .12$.

Another way to visualize the interaction involves probing it at one standard deviation above and below the mean of White privilege. Consistent with existing evidence that economic group interest affects Whites' policy attitudes, simple slope analyses revealed that among participants who perceived relatively low levels of White privilege, the more they expected the policy to harm Whites, the less they supported the policy ($B = -1.01$, $SE B = .34$, $\beta = -.87$), $t(36) = 3.00$, $p = .005$. However, among participants who perceived relatively high levels of White privilege, the belief that the policy harmed Whites did not diminish support for the policy ($B = .12$, $SE B = .19$, $\beta = .10$, $t < 1$, $p = .54$).

Perceived effect on Blacks. To test the hypothesis that Whites would not increase their support for a policy that is expected to help Blacks in response to perceptions of White privilege, we regressed policy attitudes on anticipated Black outcome, White privilege, and their interaction. The perceived effect on Blacks did not affect policy attitudes ($B = .01$, $SE B = .15$, $\beta = .01$, $t < 1$, $p = .96$). White privilege was not significantly associated with support for the policy ($B = .24$, $SE B = .18$, $\beta = .22$), $t(36) = 1.34$, $p = .19$. Importantly, and as predicted, we did not observe a significant interaction between anticipated Black outcome and White privilege ($B = .05$, $SE B = .10$, $\beta = .08$, $t < 1$, $p = .62$). In other words, increased perceptions of White privilege were not associated with a greater desire to support a policy perceived to help Blacks.

Additional analyses. Because perceptions of the policy's effect on Whites and Blacks were correlated, we also conducted a regression in which both effects were included in order to determine whether the White Privilege \times Perceived Effect on Whites interaction would remain significant while controlling for the effects of the White Privilege \times Perceived Effect on Blacks interaction. The results of this analysis indicated that the White Privilege \times Perceived Effect on Whites interaction remained significant ($B = .41$, $SE B = .16$, $\beta = .52$), $t(34) = 2.64$, $p < .05$, and that the White Privilege \times Perceived Effect on Blacks interaction remained nonsignificant ($B = .02$, $SE B = .12$, $\beta = .03$, $t < 1$, $p = .87$).

We next examined the possibility that the effect of the White Privilege \times Perceived Effect on Whites interaction on policy attitudes was mediated by White guilt. Thus, we regressed White guilt on White privilege, perceived effect on Whites, and their interaction. Suggesting against mediation, the White Privilege \times Perceived Effect on Whites interaction did not significantly predict White guilt ($B = .12$, $SE B = .11$, $\beta = .20$), $t(36) = 1.13$, $p = .27$. This, in turn, implies that the effect of the White Privilege \times Perceived Effect on Whites interaction on policy attitudes was not conveyed through participants' self-reported racial guilt. White privilege was also unrelated to White guilt ($B = .17$, $SE B = .13$, $\beta = .19$, $t < 1$, $p = .21$). Only the perceived effect on Whites significantly predicted White guilt; the more participants perceived the policy to hurt Whites, the less White guilt they reported ($B = -.43$, $SE B = .16$, $\beta = -.47$), $t(36) = 2.73$, $p = .01$.

It is also possible that White guilt could increase support for policies perceived to harm the group. To test this possibility, we regressed policy attitudes on White guilt, perceived effect on Whites, and their interaction. The White Guilt \times Perceived Effect on Whites interaction did not significantly predict policy attitudes ($B = .22$, $SE B = .22$, $\beta = .17$), $t(36) = 1.03$, $p = .31$, suggesting that feelings of White guilt do not lead to a willingness to accept ingroup harm.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 support the hypothesis that perceptions of White privilege are associated with more support for a policy perceived to harm the White ingroup. Specifically, the more Whites thought that their group benefited from White privilege, the more they supported a policy they perceived to harm Whites. Also consistent with predictions, White privilege did not affect attitudes toward the same policy when the policy was perceived to help Blacks. Interpreted another way, when Whites believe that their group benefits from racial advantage, the belief that a policy harms their group does not result in greater opposition to the policy. These results suggest that responses to White advantage are tied specifically to a reduction in Whites' opportunities and not to a reduction of inequity in general. This study also failed to find evidence that the effect of privilege on a policy perceived to harm Whites is driven by racial guilt.

Although the results of Study 1 support our hypotheses, all the variables were measured. To test the hypothesis that perceptions of White advantage (but not minority disadvantage) cause an increase in support for policies perceived to harm Whites (but not policies perceived to help minorities), in Study 2 we manipulated whether inequity was framed as White advantage or Black disadvantage, and whether a policy decreased White outcomes or increased Black outcomes.

Study 2

In Study 2, we manipulated whether inequity was framed as White advantage, Black disadvantage, or was presented without an explicit frame. In addition, we manipulated the outcome of the policy designed to redress the inequity by telling participants that the policy either increased Black or decreased White representation in the target company's workforce. We predicted that Whites would support a policy perceived to decrease White representation

more after exposure to evidence of White advantage than Black disadvantage or inequity presented without a specific frame. We also predicted that perceived White advantage would not increase Whites' support for a policy perceived to help Blacks.

Method

Participants. A total of 136 White participants (106 women, 29 men, one gender not reported) ranging in age from 18 to 66 years ($M = 32.58$, $SD = 8.77$) visited a website containing study materials. Participants were recruited from an e-mail list, maintained by a private Californian university, of individuals interested in receiving online survey announcements. As payment, each participant received a \$5 gift certificate from an online retailer.

Procedure. Study 2 consisted of a questionnaire containing a description of a fictitious company and its affirmative action policy. After reading about the inequity that prompted the policy, and about the policy's effect on the racial make-up of the company's workforce, participants rated how much they would support the policy.

Materials and manipulations.

Company description. All participants were presented with the following description of a fictitious consulting firm: "Strathmore International is a consulting firm operating in the Midwestern United States. It specializes in facilitation of export financing, tourism development, and environmental management."

Inequity frame. Immediately following the company description, participants were administered the inequity frame manipulation. In the *Black disadvantage* condition, participants read that, "Several years ago, an internal audit found that Strathmore's recruiting policies unfairly disadvantaged Blacks." In the *White advantage* condition, participants read the same sentence, except "disadvantaged Blacks" was replaced with "advantaged Whites." Finally, in the control condition, the sentence describing the inequity was omitted.¹

Policy description. Next, participants were told about a new recruitment policy at Strathmore. In the Black disadvantage and White advantage conditions, participants read the following description of the policy:

To correct for this unintentional bias, Strathmore adopted an affirmative action policy designed to increase the number of minority applicants. This policy, however, did not consider minority group status in the final selection decision. Due to the relatively small number of members of other ethnic groups in the region, the policy only affected Whites and Blacks.

The control condition omitted the portion of the policy description that read, "To correct for this unintentional bias."

Outcome frame. Following the policy description, participants were administered the outcome frame manipulation. In the *Black rise* condition, participants read that, "Prior to the adoption of the policy, 5.3% of Strathmore's employees were Black. In the years since the adoption of the affirmative action policy, the percentage of Black employees has risen to 13.2%." In contrast, in the *White fall* condition, participants read that, "Prior to the adoption of the affirmative action policy, 90.2% of Strathmore's employees were White. In the years since the adoption of the affirmative action policy, the percentage of White employees has fallen to 82.3%." Importantly, because the policy was said to only affect

Black and White employees, the magnitude of the effect on both White and Black employees was the same in both conditions.

Policy attitude. After reading about Strathmore's affirmative action policy, participants completed the following policy attitude item: "To what extent would you oppose/support this policy if it were actually implemented?" (1 = *strongly oppose*, 7 = *strongly support*).

Results

Policy attitude within each combination of inequity and outcome frame condition are shown in Figure 2.

We expected that participants who were told that Whites were advantaged would report greater support for the policy perceived to harm Whites than participants who were told that Blacks were disadvantaged. In addition, we expected that participants told that Whites were advantaged would not report greater support for a policy perceived to benefit Blacks than participants told that Blacks were disadvantaged. In order to evaluate these predictions, we conducted a 3 (inequity frame: White advantage, Black disadvantage, control) \times 2 (outcome frame: Black rise, White fall) between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) on participants' support for the policy. As predicted, there was a significant interaction between inequity frame and outcome frame, $F(2, 130) = 3.60$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .05$.

Closer examination of the interaction revealed that when participants were told the policy decreased White representation, inequity frame had a significant effect on their attitudes toward the policy. Specifically, when told that the policy decreased White representation, participants exposed to evidence of White advantage reported greater support for the policy ($M = 4.92$, $SD = 0.94$) than participants in both the control ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.50$), $t(130) = 2.82$, $p < .01$, and Black disadvantage conditions ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.62$), $t(130) = 2.32$, $p < .05$. Support did not differ between the control and Black disadvantage conditions ($t < 1$). In contrast, when told the policy increased Black representation, White advantage did not result in greater support ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.64$) compared either with the Black disadvantage condition ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.86$), $t(130) = 1.31$, $p = .19$, or the control condition ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.49$; $t < 1$). In addition, policy attitudes did not differ between the Black disadvantage and control conditions, $t(130) = 1.34$, $p = .18$.²

¹ Data from participants in the control condition were collected in a separate data collection session. There was no difference in participant age between data collection sessions, $t(133) = 1.11$, $p = .27$. Although there were a greater proportion of men to women in the control condition, $\chi^2(1, N = 135) = 5.71$, $p < .05$, gender did not moderate the effect of inequity frames on policy attitudes in either data set ($ps > .55$). The two-way interaction between inequity frame and policy outcome frame remained significant when the control condition was omitted, $F(1, 70) = 4.29$, $p < .05$, as did all relevant simple main effects.

² We also compared participants' levels of support for ingroup-harming and outgroup-helping policies across inequity frame conditions. Participants reported significantly less policy support when told that White representation decreased than when told Black representation increased in both the control, $t(130) = 2.14$, $p < .05$, and Black disadvantage conditions, $t(130) = 2.50$, $p < .05$. In contrast, participants in the White advantage condition reported the same degree of support for the policy across outcome frame conditions, $t(130) = 1.16$, $p = .25$.

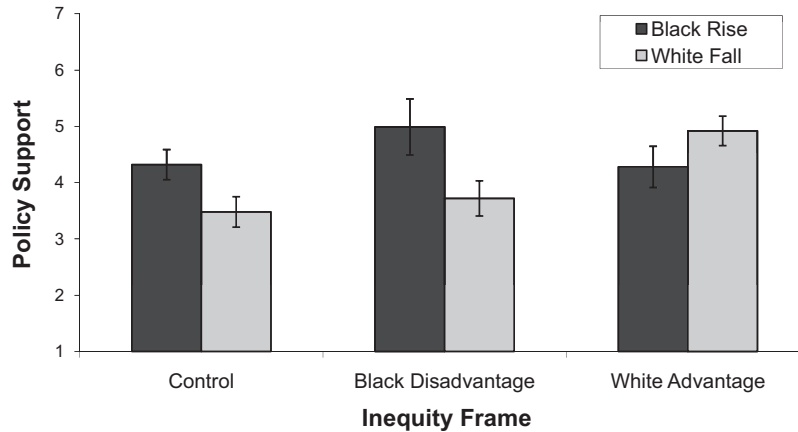


Figure 2. Policy support as a function of inequity frame and outcome frame (Study 2).

There was not a main effect of inequity frame on policy support, $F(2, 130) = 2.40, p = .10$. However, there was a marginally significant main effect of outcome frame, such that participants tended to support the policy less when told White representation decreased ($M = 3.84, SD = 1.54$) than when told that Black representation increased ($M = 4.45, SD = 1.62$), $F(1, 130) = 3.03, p = .08$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$.³

Discussion

Replicating Study 1, we found that exposure to evidence of White advantage increased Whites' support for a policy that harmed their group more than exposure to inequity framed in terms of Black disadvantage, or inequity presented without an explicit frame. In contrast, attitudes toward a policy perceived to help Blacks was not affected by the way the inequity was framed. Consistent with our hypothesis that the desire to hold the group in high esteem works against, but does not necessarily eliminate economic group interest, evidence of White advantage does not cause Whites to support a policy perceived to hurt their group significantly more than a policy perceived to help minorities. However, it is worth repeating that White advantage eliminates the gap in support between a policy perceived to hurt Whites and a policy perceived to do the group less harm.

Inequity frames and esteem for the ingroup. To this point, we have provided evidence that inequity framed as White advantage increases Whites' support for policies perceived to reduce Whites' outcomes. Although Study 1 suggests that guilt does not mediate this process, we have not provided direct support for our hypothesis that Whites' esteem for the ingroup drives the effect. Studies 3 and 4 were designed to test this proposed mechanism.

In contrast to the fictional company that provided the context in Study 2, Studies 3 and 4 focused on real racial inequalities in the United States. In addition, to provide evidence that the effect of inequity frames holds when the situation is zero-sum, we expanded the description of inequality and policy effects to include racial minorities in general, rather than Blacks in particular.

Study 3

Study 3 was designed to replicate the interactive effect of inequity frame and outcome frame on Whites' attitudes toward a

policy said to reduce White outcomes, and to demonstrate that this effect is mediated by Whites' esteem for their racial group.

Method

Participants. A total of 88 White participants (60 women, 28 men) with ages ranging from 19 to 61 years ($M = 36.26, SD = 10.71$) visited a website containing study materials. Participants were recruited from an e-mail list, maintained by a private Californian university, of individuals interested in receiving online survey announcements. As payment, each participant received a \$5 gift certificate from an online retailer.

Procedure. Study 3 was presented as a survey of social attitudes. Participants first read a description about recent economic research that described racial inequality as either Minority disadvantage or White advantage. After reading the description, participants completed a measure of collective self-esteem. They then read a description about research that described the effects of a redistributive policy as either helping minorities or harming Whites. They then provided their attitudes toward the policy.

Materials, manipulations, and measured variables. All participants were told that, prior to beginning the study, they should consider the results of contemporary research on social issues.

Inequity frame. The description of the research described racial inequality framed as either White advantage or Minority disadvantage. Participants in the *White advantage* condition read:

Prior research has led most social scientists to agree that, even today, Whites in America continue to enjoy undeserved advantages that minorities do not, particularly in the realm of employment. Below are some ways in which Whites are advantaged, compiled from economic research.

- Relative to equally qualified minorities, being White increases the chance of being hired for a prestigious position.
- Whites receive higher salaries than equally qualified minorities.

³ It is possible that the described aim of the policy to increase the representation of minorities caused individuals to perceive the control condition as similar to the disadvantage condition. Therefore, comparisons between the control and disadvantage conditions should be interpreted with caution.

Participants in the minority disadvantage condition read:

Prior research has led most social scientists to agree that, even today, minorities in America continue to suffer from undeserved disadvantages that Whites do not, particularly in the realm of employment. Below are some ways in which minorities are disadvantaged, compiled from economic research.

- Relative to equally qualified Whites, being a minority decreases the chance of being hired for a prestigious position.
- Minorities receive lower salaries than equally qualified Whites.

Perceived magnitude of inequity. To measure participants' perceptions of the magnitude of inequity, they were asked to indicate their agreement with the statement, "Differences in status between ethnic groups are the result of injustice" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Esteem for the ingroup. After reading the description of racial inequality and indicating its magnitude, participants were asked to complete a measure of group esteem. Participants' esteem for their racial group was measured using the Private Regard subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem scale (CSE; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The Private Regard items measure how much Whites value their racial group: "I often regret that I belong to my racial/ethnic group" (reverse scored); "In general, I'm glad to be a member of my racial/ethnic group"; "Overall, I often feel that my racial/ethnic group is not worthwhile"; (reverse scored), and "I feel good about the race/ethnicity I belong to" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*, $\alpha = .61$).

Policy description. Following the esteem measure, participants read about the effects of policies designed to remedy racial inequality. All participants read, "In order to reduce the discrepancy between Whites and minorities, the U.S. government has implemented a number of policies, often known as affirmative action policies."

Outcome frame. Next, participants were administered the outcome frame manipulation. In the *Minority help* condition, participants read that, "Research has shown that implementation of these policies has resulted in greater economic opportunities for minorities." In contrast, in the *White harm* condition, participants read that, "Research has shown that implementation of these policies has resulted in fewer economic opportunities for Whites."

Policy attitudes. After reading about the effects of affirmative action policies, participants were asked, "Based on the information given above, how much do you support affirmative action policies?" (1 = *strongly oppose*, 7 = *strongly support*).

Results

Preliminary analyses. To test the possibility that the inequity framing manipulation also affected the perceived magnitude of inequity, we conducted an independent samples *t* test on participants' perceptions of the magnitude of inequity across inequity frame conditions. These analyses indicated that participants did not perceive a significant difference in injustice across inequity frame conditions, White advantage ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.58$), Black disadvantage ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.81$), $t(86) = 0.40$, $p = .69$.

Policy attitudes. We hypothesized that framing inequity as White advantage would increase Whites' support for policies perceived to harm Whites, but would have no effect on policies

perceived to help minorities. In order to evaluate these predictions, we conducted a 2 (inequity frame: White advantage, Minority disadvantage) \times 2 (outcome frame: Minority help, White harm) between-subjects ANOVA on participants' support for the policy. There was not a main effect of inequity frame, $F(1, 84) = 2.14$, $p = .15$, nor of outcome frame, $F(1, 84) = 0.05$, $p = .83$, on participants' policy attitudes. Importantly, as predicted and replicating the previous studies, there was a significant interaction between inequity frame and outcome frame, $F(1, 84) = 5.92$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .07$ (see Figure 3).

Closer examination of the interaction revealed that, as predicted and replicating Studies 1 and 2, when the policies were said to harm Whites, participants exposed to evidence of White advantage reported more support for the policy ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.70$) than participants exposed to evidence of Minority disadvantage ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.54$), $t(84) = 2.85$, $p = .005$. In contrast, inequity frame did not affect support for a policy said to help minorities (White advantage, $M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.37$; Minority disadvantage, $M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.95$), $t(84) = 0.67$, $p = .51$.

Esteem for the ingroup. We hypothesized that participants' esteem for their group would be lower after exposure to evidence of White advantage than after exposure to evidence of minority disadvantage. To test this hypothesis, we conducted an independent samples *t* test on participants' esteem for their racial group across inequity frame conditions. The analysis revealed that Whites had lower levels of esteem for the group in the White advantage condition ($M = 1.06$, $SD = 0.88$) than in the Minority disadvantage condition ($M = 1.47$, $SD = 0.87$), $t(86) = 2.20$, $p < .05$.

Furthermore, we hypothesized that lower levels of esteem for the ingroup would be associated with more support for a policy perceived to harm Whites, but esteem for the ingroup would not be associated with attitudes toward a policy perceived to help ethnic minorities. Statistically, this entails a CSE \times Outcome Frame interaction on policy attitudes. To test this hypothesis, we mean-centered CSE, effects-coded the outcome frame manipulation (1 = *White harm*, -1 = *Minority help*), and computed an interaction term by multiplying the two variables (Aiken & West, 1991). We then regressed policy attitude on CSE, outcome frame, and their interaction term. There was not a main effect of outcome frame on support for the policy ($B = .10$, $SE B = .17$, $\beta = .06$, $t < 1$, $p = .57$). However, there was a significant main effect of CSE on

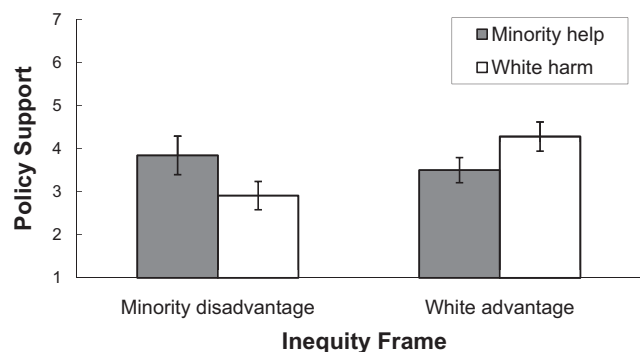


Figure 3. Policy support as a function of inequity frame and outcome frame (Study 3).

policy attitude ($B = -.44$, $SE B = .20$, $\beta = -.23$), $t(84) = 2.26$, $p < .05$, such that the higher participants' levels of CSE, the less they supported the policy. This main effect was qualified by the predicted CSE \times Outcome Frame interaction ($B = -.68$, $SE B = .20$, $\beta = -.35$), $t(84) = 3.50$, $p < .005$ (see Figure 4).

To interpret the interaction, we probed it across outcome frame conditions. These analyses indicated that the lower participants' levels of esteem for the group, the more they supported the policy said to harm Whites ($B = -1.12$, $SE B = .27$, $\beta = -.59$), $t(84) = 4.16$, $p < .001$. In contrast, there was no relationship between esteem for the group and support for the policy when it was said to help minorities ($B = .24$, $SE B = .28$, $\beta = .13$, $t < 1$, $p = .40$).

Analyses that probed the interaction at high (+1 *SD*) and low (-1 *SD*) levels of group esteem indicated that participants with low esteem for the group supported policies that harmed Whites significantly more than policies that helped minorities ($B = .51$, $SE B = .25$, $\beta = .30$), $t(84) = 2.04$, $p < .05$. In contrast, participants who had high esteem for the group supported policies that harmed Whites significantly less than policies that helped minorities ($B = -.71$, $SE B = .24$, $\beta = -.42$), $t(84) = 2.93$, $p < .005$.

Mediational analyses. We predicted that the effect of inequity frame on policy attitudes would be mediated by CSE when participants were told that the policy harmed Whites, but not when they were told that the policy helped minorities. Importantly, we also hypothesized that policies perceived to help minorities are not perceived to alleviate the esteem threat associated with White advantage, and thus CSE should not mediate any association between White advantage and support for policies perceived to help minorities. We conducted a moderated mediation model to test this hypothesis (cf. Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005; Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007).

To establish moderated mediation, four conditions must be met: (a) The independent variable (inequity frame) must significantly predict the proposed mediator (CSE); (b) CSE and the moderator (outcome frame) must interact to predict the dependent variable (policy attitudes); (c) inequity frame and outcome frame must interact to predict policy attitudes; and (d) the interaction between CSE and outcome frame must account for the effect of the interaction between inequity frame and outcome frame on policy attitudes. As described above, the first three conditions were met: The

inequity frame manipulation had a significant effect on CSE, there was a significant CSE \times Outcome Frame interaction on policy attitudes, and there was a significant Inequity Frame \times Outcome Frame interaction on policy attitudes.

To test the fourth condition, we regressed policy attitudes on inequity frame, outcome frame, and their interaction term, controlling for the effect of CSE and the CSE \times Outcome Frame interaction term. This analysis revealed that the significant interactive effect of inequity frame and outcome frame on policy attitudes dropped to nonsignificance ($B = -.22$, $SE B = .18$, $\beta = -.19$), $t(82) = 1.21$, $p = .23$, whereas the CSE \times Outcome Frame interaction remained significant ($B = -.61$, $SE B = .21$, $\beta = -.31$), $t(82) = 2.87$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 5). To further interpret these findings, we examined the conditional indirect effects at the two levels of the outcome frame manipulation: White harm ($z = 1.86$, $p = .06$) and Minority help ($z = .73$, $p = .47$). These effects were consistent with the hypothesis that CSE mediated the effect of inequity frame on policy attitudes among participants who were told that the policy harmed Whites, but not among participants who were told that the policy helped minorities.

Discussion

Study 3 replicated the results of Studies 1 and 2. Specifically, inequity framed as White advantage resulted in more support for a policy said to harm Whites than inequity framed as minority disadvantage. In addition, Study 3 provides support for the hypothesis that shifts in Whites' esteem for their group drives the effect of inequity frame on their attitudes toward policies perceived to harm Whites. Exposure to inequity framed as White advantage lowers esteem for Whites compared with exposure to inequity framed as minority disadvantage. This shift in esteem for their group, in turn, increases Whites' support for policies said to harm Whites. Remarkably, this study provides evidence that this effect holds even when participants could realistically expect the policies described to harm themselves or people close to them.

If esteem needs drive the effect of inequity frames on attitudes toward a policy perceived to harm the ingroup, it should also be possible to manipulate this effect by protecting esteem. In Study 4, we attempt to eliminate the effect of White advantage on attitudes toward policies perceived to harm Whites by giving participants the opportunity to buffer themselves against esteem threats.

Study 4

In Study 4, we examined attitudes toward affirmative action as a function of a self-affirmation manipulation, a manipulation of inequity frame, and the perceived effect of affirmative action on Whites and minorities. We predicted a replication of Studies 1 through 3 among those not affirmed, such that participants will be more supportive of a policy that is perceived to harm Whites when they are exposed to evidence of White advantage than when exposed to evidence of minority disadvantage. However, we expected self-affirmation to eliminate the effect of inequity frame on Whites' support for policies perceived to harm their group.

Method

Participants. A total of 155 White participants (93 women, 62 men) ranging in age from 20 to 66 years ($M = 34.63$, $SD =$

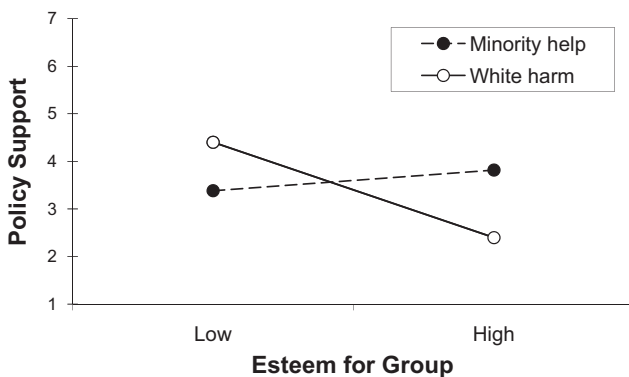


Figure 4. Policy support as a function of collective self-esteem and outcome frame (Study 3).

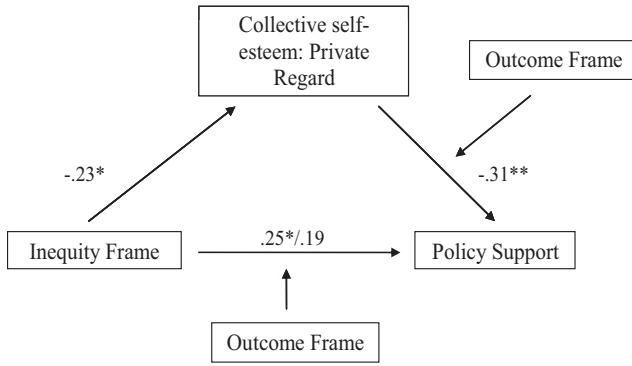


Figure 5. Mediation of inequity frame on policy support by collective self-esteem among participants in the White fall condition (Study 3). Standardized coefficients shown. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

10.78) visited a website containing study materials. Participants were recruited from an e-mail list, maintained by a private Californian university, of individuals interested in receiving online survey announcements. As payment, each participant received a \$5 gift certificate from an online retailer.

Procedure. Participants were e-mailed a link to the study website. After linking to the site, participants were told that the online session would consist of two unrelated studies. The first study was described as an investigation of how individuals convey information about themselves and others. The second study was described as a survey of social attitudes and attitude change. Participants first completed a self-affirmation task, wherein they ranked a list of values and either did or did not write about the importance of their top-ranked value (cf. Cohen, Aronson, & Steele, 2000). After completing the study on “communication,” participants completed a study on social attitudes. They first read a description about recent economic research that described racial inequality in the United States as either White advantage or Minority disadvantage. After reading the description, participants were asked to indicate how they thought affirmative action policies affected Whites, affected minorities, and how much they supported affirmative action policies.

Materials, manipulations, and measured variables.

Affirmation. All participants were told that the first study was designed to investigate how people convey information about themselves and others. They were then asked to rank a list of 11 traits and values in order of their personal importance. The list included items such as creativity, physical attractiveness, and relations with friends and family (Cohen et al., 2000). Then, participants were asked to write a short essay about the traits and values they had ranked. Participants in the *affirmation* condition

wrote a brief essay explaining why their top-ranked value was important to them and describing a time in their lives when the value had been meaningful to them. Participants in the *control* condition wrote a brief essay describing why their ninth ranked value would be important to the average person.

After completing the “first study” (which included the affirmation manipulation), participants were told that the next study would investigate their social attitudes. All participants were told that, prior to beginning the study, they should consider the results of contemporary research on social issues.

Inequity frame. The manipulation of inequity frame was identical to that used in Study 3.

Perceived magnitude of inequity. After reading about the research on social inequality, participants were given the same item measuring magnitude of inequity used in Study 3.

Perceived effect on Whites and minorities. After reading about the research on social inequality and indicating their perceptions of the magnitude of inequity, participants reported how they thought Whites and minorities had been affected by affirmative action policies. Specifically, participants were asked, “How do you think affirmative action policies have affected Whites?” and “How do you think affirmative action policies have affected minorities?” (1 = *Extremely negatively*, 7 = *Extremely positively*). These items were subsequently reverse scored, such that higher scores reflect greater harm.

Policy attitude. Participants were then asked, “How much do you support affirmative action policies?” (1 = *Strongly oppose*, 7 = *Strongly support*).

Results

Preliminary analyses. Means, standard deviations, and correlations for all measured variables are reported in Table 2.

Using the midpoint of the perceived effect scales as a reference value, one-sample *t* tests revealed that, overall, participants perceived affirmative action policies to harm Whites, $t(154) = 6.37, p < .001, d = 0.42$, and to help minorities, $t(154) = 11.00, p < .001, d = 2.41$. There was not a significant relationship between perceived effect on Whites and perceived effect on minorities.

We also tested the possibility that our affirmation and inequity frame manipulations affected participants’ perceptions of the effect of affirmative action policies on Whites and minorities. To test this possibility, we first conducted a 2 (affirmation: affirmed, control) × 2 (inequity frame: minority disadvantage, White advantage) ANOVA on the perceived effect of affirmative action policies on Whites. Neither main effect nor the interaction were significant ($F_s < 1$). We conducted the same analyses on perceived effect on minorities and found the same result; none of the effects were significant ($F_s < 1$).

In addition, to test the possibility that the manipulation of affirmation and inequity frame affected the perceived magnitude of inequity,

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Variables in Study 4

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Perceived effect of policies on Whites	4.63	1.22	—		
2. Perceived effect of policies on minorities	2.92	1.22	.08	—	
3. Policy support	4.00	1.77	-.57**	-.22**	—

** $p < .001$.

we conducted the same analyses on perceptions of inequity magnitude. None of the effects were significant ($F_s < 1$).

Main analyses.

Perceived effect on Whites. Our overarching hypothesis is that White advantage, compared with minority disadvantage, increases Whites' support of policies perceived to harm Whites, but has no effect on policies perceived to help minorities and that these effects are driven by the group esteem threat posed by White advantage. When individuals have not been affirmed, we expected to replicate the results of Studies 1 through 3. However, when individuals are affirmed, the threat associated with White advantage should be attenuated or eliminated, which should result in continued opposition to a policy perceived to harm the ingroup. This amounts to a predicted three-way interaction among affirmation, inequity frame, and perceived effect of policy on Whites on participants' policy attitudes.

In accordance with procedures articulated by Aiken and West (1991), we first mean-centered both the perceived effect on Whites and perceived effect on minorities variables. We also effects-coded the affirmation manipulation (1 = affirmed, -1 = control) and inequity frame (1 = White advantage, -1 = minority disadvantage). We then multiplied the recoded affirmation, inequity frame, and perceived effect of policies (for both Whites and minorities) variables to create interaction terms. To test our first hypothesis, we regressed policy attitudes on the affirmation, inequity frame, and perceived effect on Whites variables, and all of their interaction terms (see Table 3 for regression results). Only two effects were significant: (a) perceived effect on Whites and (b) the predicted three-way interaction.

If Whites are more likely to support policies they perceive to harm their group when their esteem for the group is threatened by perceptions of White advantage, the interactive effect of inequity frame and perceived effect on Whites on policy attitudes should only hold among participants who were not affirmed. To test this hypothesis, we conducted the Inequity Frame \times Perceived Effect on Whites interaction across the two levels of affirmation (Aiken & West, 1991). The interaction was significant among participants in the control condition ($B = -.37, SE B = .14, \beta = -.26, t(147) = 0.26, p < .05$ (see Figure 6a). In contrast, consistent with our predictions, participants in the affirmed condition did not differ in their support for policies across inequity frames ($B = .02, SE B = .10, \beta = .18, t(147) = 0.16, p = .87$). That is, among affirmed participants, evidence of White advantage, compared with minority disadvantage, did not increase support for a policy perceived to harm Whites (see Figure 6b).

To visualize the interaction among participants in the control condition, we probed the interaction at high (+1 SD) and low (-1 SD)

Table 3
Support for a Policy as a Function of Affirmation Condition, Inequity Frame, and Perceived Effect of Policies on Whites in Study 4

Variable	β	$t(154)$
Affirmation condition	-.03	0.42
Inequity frame	-.04	0.67
Perceived effect of policies on Whites	-.55	8.28**
Affirmation \times Frame	-.09	1.35
Affirmation \times Perceived Effect	-.07	0.98
Frame \times Perceived Effect	.12	1.83 [†]
Affirmation \times Frame \times Perceived Effect	-.14	2.04*

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

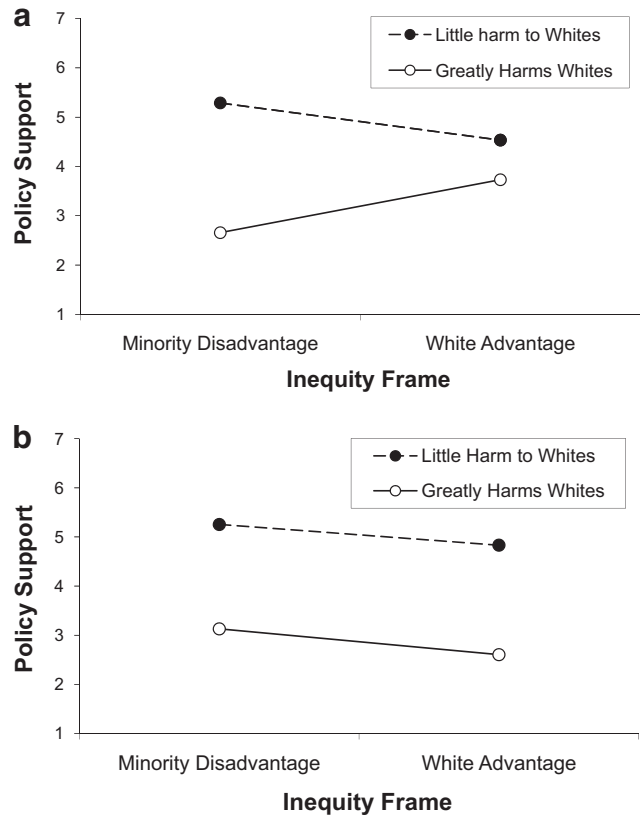


Figure 6. Control condition participants' policy support as a function of inequity frame and a policy's perceived effect on Whites (Study 4) (top panel). Affirmed participants' policy support as a function of inequity frame and a policy's perceived effect on Whites (Study 4) (bottom panel).

levels of perceived harm to Whites. Replicating the results of Studies 1 through 3, among participants who perceived policies to greatly harm Whites, support was greater in the White advantage condition than in the Minority disadvantage condition ($B = .53, SE B = .23, \beta = .30, t(147) = 2.29, p < .05$). In contrast, among participants who perceived the policy to do relatively little harm, there was no difference in support across inequity frame ($B = -.38, SE B = .25, \beta = -.38, t(147) = 1.50, p = .14$).

Perceived effect on minorities. We predicted that inequity framed as White advantage would not increase Whites' support for policies perceived to help minorities. Thus, we did not expect policy attitudes to be predicted by a three-way interaction among

⁴ We also examined the Affirmation \times Perceived Effect of the policy for Whites across inequity frame conditions. The interaction was significant in the White advantage condition ($B = .29, SE B = .14, \beta = .20, t(147) = 2.13, p < .05$, but not in the Minority disadvantage condition ($B = .10, SE B = .14, \beta = .07, t < 1, p = .45$). Among participants in the White advantage condition, participants who perceived policies to greatly harm Whites were more opposed to the policies when they had an opportunity to self-affirm than when they did not ($B = -.56, SE B = .24, \beta = -.32, t(147) = 2.35, p < .05$). However, participants who perceived policies to do relatively little harm to Whites did not differ in their opposition across affirmation conditions ($B = .15, SE B = .23, \beta = .08, t < 1, p = .52$).

affirmation, inequity frame, and perceived effect on minorities. To test this possibility, we reran the above analyses, replacing perceived effect on Whites with perceived effect on minorities. As predicted, there was not a significant Affirmation × Inequity Frame × Perceived Effect on Minorities interaction on policy attitudes (see Table 4 for regression results).

Interestingly, there was a significant Affirmation × Perceived Effect on Minorities interaction on policy attitudes ($B = .29$, $SE B = .11$, $\beta = .21$), $t(147) = 2.70$, $p < .01$. To visualize it, we probed the interaction at the different levels of the affirmation manipulation. These analyses revealed that among participants who were not affirmed, the more the policies were perceived to benefit minorities, the more participants supported the policies ($B = -.57$, $SE B = .14$, $\beta = -.41$), $t(147) = 4.11$, $p < .001$. In contrast, when affirmed, the belief that the policy benefited minorities was not associated with greater support for the policy ($B = .002$, $SE B = .13$, $\beta = .002$), $t(147) = 0.01$, $p = .99$.

Discussion

Study 4 replicated the finding that perceptions of White advantage increase Whites’ support for policies perceived to harm Whites, but does not affect their attitudes toward the same policies when the policies are perceived to help minorities. Study 4 also provides further evidence that this effect is driven by esteem threat; the effect of inequity frame on participants’ attitudes toward policies perceived to harm Whites is eliminated when they were given the opportunity to self-affirm.

General Discussion

Our central thesis is that Whites who believe that they benefit from inequity increase their support for policies perceived to reduce their groups’ economic opportunities. We argue that perceptions of White advantage threaten Whites’ esteem for their group, which in turn increases their support for policies perceived to reduce their group’s advantages. We also hypothesized that the ability to distinguish between the fortunes of advantaged and disadvantaged groups means that outgroup disadvantage does not pose a threat to dominant-group members’ esteem for their ingroup, and therefore does not affect attitudes toward policies perceived to harm the ingroup. All of the reported studies support the idea that inequity framed as White advantage increases Whites’ support for policies perceived to harm their own group, but does

not affect their attitudes toward the same policies when they are perceived to help minorities.

Studies 3 and 4 support the idea that esteem threat plays a role in Whites’ responses to the way inequity is described. Study 3 provides direct evidence that exposure to inequity framed as White advantage, as compared with minority disadvantage, reduces Whites’ esteem for their racial group. Study 3 also provides evidence that this change in esteem drives the observed effect of inequity frame on Whites’ support for policies perceived to reduce their group’s advantages. Study 4 provided further evidence that the effect of White advantage on Whites’ support for a policy perceived to harm their group is driven by esteem needs; the increase in support for ingroup-harming policies in response to White advantage is eliminated when Whites are given the opportunity to self-affirm.

Justice Motives

The findings reported here suggest that the concern for group esteem can motivate the redistribution of resources independent of a desire to reduce relative differences between groups (cf. Bell, 1980). Although the perceived magnitude of inequity between groups was the same across inequity frames, Whites who perceived their group to be advantaged did not increase their support for a policy that helped minorities, even though such a policy might reduce the inequity between groups. Instead of a desire for justice, a desire to hold the ingroup in high esteem motivated Whites to increase their support for policies perceived to harm their group. This suggests that the willingness to redistribute resources more equitably is not necessarily evidence of the operation of a justice motive.

However, it is also possible that the distinction between inequity framed as advantage and disadvantage affects the operation of the justice motive. It might be that what constitutes a just response to inequity depends on the way inequity is framed. If individuals distinguish between one group’s advantage and another’s disadvantage, it is possible to perceive actions that clearly reduce inequity as unjust or ineffective if the actions operate on the wrong group (Lowery, Chow, & Randall-Crosby, 2009). For example, if inequity is framed as disadvantage, actions that decrease inequity by harming a dominant group may be perceived as unjust. This possibility is consistent with the finding that perceptions of minority group disadvantage do not affect attitudes toward policies that reduce inequity by harming Whites. However, it is often the case that helping one group really does hurt another group, and vice versa. Therefore, to the extent that dominant group advantages are tied to subordinate-group disadvantages, the reluctance to “harm” advantaged groups is the same as a reluctance to help disadvantaged groups. Moreover, the role played by individuals’ esteem for the ingroup suggest that the desire to match inequity frame to particular policy solutions is not the whole story.

The idea that individuals differentiate between remedies that reduce the dominant group’s position and those that increase the subordinate group’s position is important because much of the research on intergroup behavior has focused on dominant group members’ desire to engage in compensatory behavior toward the subordinate group. For example, recent research on collective emotions has found that the greater self-relevance of ingroup advantage leads to higher levels of existential guilt (Iyer et al.,

Table 4
Support for a Policy as a Function of Affirmation Condition, Inequity Frame, and Perceived Effect of Policies on Minorities in Study 4

Variable	β	$t(154)$
Affirmation condition	.02	0.30
Inequity frame	-.05	0.62
Perceived effect of policies on minorities	-.20	2.48*
Affirmation × Frame	-.09	1.08
Affirmation × Perceived Effect	.21	2.59*
Frame × Perceived Effect	.10	1.28
Affirmation × Frame × Perceived Effect	.07	.86

* $p < .05$.

2003; Leach et al., 2006; Miron, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2006; Powell et al., 2005) and collective anger (Leach et al., 2006) than outgroup disadvantage, which is associated with feelings of sympathy (Harth, Kessler, & Leach, 2008; Iyer et al., 2003). These emotional responses have been linked to shifts in dominant group members' willingness to engage in compensatory actions toward the subordinate group, but this research has not, to our knowledge, looked specifically at how emotions might influence dominant group members' willingness to incur reductions to their group position. Thus, we believe that the distinction between ingroup harm and outgroup help may be an interesting avenue for future research in intergroup behavior.

The Experience of Group Position

The results presented in this article provide evidence that Whites' perceptions of inequity are influenced by the way inequity is framed, resulting in different experiences of inequity. Specifically, inequity framed as ingroup advantage is experienced as more threatening than inequity framed as outgroup disadvantage. From our perspective, the need to protect the self from threats associated with the ingroup's standing should be affected by the way in which inequity is framed. Similarly, the ability to derive positive esteem from the relative status of one's group should depend on the manner in which inequity is framed. For example, assuming the status differential is legitimate, individuals derive more esteem from a status differential described as the ingroup's advantage than the same differential described as the outgroup's disadvantage (Chow et al., 2008; Harth et al., 2008). This might help explain why individuals sometimes favor the ingroup but eschew the opportunity to hurt outgroups (Brewer, 1979, 1999; Gaertner et al., 1997; Lowery et al., 2006; Mummendey & Otten, 1998; Raden, 2003).

Although the focus of the present article was on the experience and responses of dominant group members to inequity, future research might also consider the effects of inequity frames on subordinate groups. For example, it is possible that inequity framed as disadvantage poses a greater threat to subordinate group members' sense of self than inequity framed as advantage, because disadvantage highlights the inequity of the subordinate group's position. Consistent with this possibility, research suggests that members of subordinate groups, who commonly disengage their sense of self from domains in which their group typically performs poorly (Crocker & Major, 1989; Major, Spencer, Schmader, Wolfe, & Crocker, 1998; Schmader, Major, & Gramzow, 2001), actually engage if group differences are framed in terms of dominant group advantage rather than subordinate group disadvantage (Lowery & Wout, 2010). This shift from disengagement to engagement as a function of shifting the inequity frame from subordinate group disadvantage to dominant group advantage suggests that many responses to both dominant- and subordinate group status might be moderated by the way group differences are framed.

Motivated representations of inequity. Our research suggests that dominant group members stand to gain in two ways when inequity is framed as outgroup disadvantage, rather than the dominant group's advantage. First, unfair outgroup disadvantage is less threatening to ingroup esteem than is unfair ingroup advantage. Inequity framed as outgroup disadvantage does not challenge dominant group members' esteem for the group and allows them to reap the psychological benefits of their group's dominant position.

Thus, when the opportunity to represent inequity arises, the motivation to maintain positive esteem for the group might push members of the dominant group to frame inequity in terms of subordinate group disadvantage (cf. Lowery et al., 2007).

Second, the desire to maximize access to material resources might also push dominant groups to perceive inequity as outgroup disadvantage. In our studies, Whites were more willing to give up resources when they perceived the group to be advantaged than when they perceived the outgroup to be disadvantaged. In other words, dominant groups might expect to retain more resources when inequity is framed as outgroup disadvantage (cf. Lowery et al., 2009). Thus, dominant group members' material interests might be best served, at least in the short term, by adopting a disadvantage frame. Ironically, subordinate group members might have the same preference, believing that their ability to gain access to resources might be greater if inequity is described as their disadvantage.

Conclusion

How can individuals that espouse the ideal of equity tolerate egregious inequity? One possibility is that individuals simply refuse to acknowledge the existence of inequity (Knowles & Lowery, in press). However, these studies suggest another possibility; even if individuals acknowledge the existence of inequity, they still might not support policies that reduce it. More specifically, the existence of inequity framed as outgroup disadvantage is not enough to elicit dominant group members' support for redistributive policies when the policies harm their group. Yet, the general discourse about inequity is framed precisely in this way; social commentary typically focuses on subordinate group members' undeserved disadvantages rather than dominant group members' unearned advantages (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Lowery & Wout, 2010; McIntosh, 2004; Miller, Taylor, & Buck, 1991; Powell et al., 2005). This focus on the disadvantages faced by subordinate group members might allow members of dominant groups to acknowledge the existence of inequity without questioning the legitimacy of their group's dominant standing.

The present research suggests that how inequities are discussed influences individuals' preferences for remedying inequity. Limiting the discussion to the fact that subordinate group members suffer from undeserved disadvantages shields dominant group members from the psychological costs and material burdens that come with acknowledging the concurrent possibility of undeserved dominant group advantages. To have a truly comprehensive conversation about inequity requires that dominant group members be willing to consider the possibility not only that subordinate group members suffer from their disadvantaged status but also that dominant group members benefit from their advantaged status.

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