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A Social Identity Threat To Merit: The Effects Of Similar Experience On Empathic Concern

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Abstract

Past research indicates that having a similar life experience as another person leads to greater empathic concern towards that person. Two studies empirically investigated if similar experiences of race-based social identity threat can increase the empathic concern of White Americans toward African Americans. Study 1 revealed that White Americans randomly assigned to think about White privilege and then randomly assigned to read a passage about an African American whose accomplishments are attributed to Affirmative Action policies (versus an African American whose accomplishments are attributed to his hard work and merit) felt greater empathic concern toward the African American described in the passage. This effect was significantly mediated by stereotype threat feelings and moderated by group identity.

Study 2 revealed that White Americans randomly assigned to think about how others think they have benefited from White privilege and then randomly assigned to read a passage about an African American whose accomplishments are attributed to Affirmative Action policies (versus an African American whose accomplishments are attributed to his hard work and merit) felt greater empathic concern toward the African American described in the passage only when mediated by stereotype threat feelings or stereotype threat cognitions. This mediated effect was moderated by merit identity.

This suggests that White American participants do not see the literal similarities between the scenarios of race based social identity threat to merit but can see the similarities in internal feelings and cognitions that both experiences create. Collectively, these studies suggest a novel consideration of social identity and understanding of intergroup processes.
Dedication

This is dedicated to my mother, Letricia McCleary and brother, Omari McCleary who never let me lose my power; my power to give things meaning and value, and my power to take it away. Thank you family, for keeping me grounded in who I am and not letting me get lost in who I think I should be.
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Introduction

The fact that White people are better off is not a privilege; it’s earned.

Horowitz & John Perazzo, *Black Skin Privilege and the American Dream*

My main problem with Affirmative Action is that it has come to mean that the only reason you got the job or were admitted to this or that school was because you were Black and not because you were qualified or good enough to get in on your own merits.

Lena Williams, *It’s the little things: Everyday interactions that anger, annoy, and divide the races*

For decades, the racial gap in success has been a topic of concern in social, academic, and economic settings (Reskin, 1998; Appel, Gray, & Loy, 2004; McIntosh, 1988; Darity, 2005). Affirmative Action is a policy aimed at closing these gaps by giving consideration to membership in underrepresented groups in decisions about who will gain admittance to educational institutions and who will be hired and promoted. However, an abundance of research has shown that Affirmative Action has negative effects on African Americans’ self-conceptions and the evaluations that others make of them (Heilman, Simon, & Repper, 1987; Heilman, Block & Lucas, 1992). A chief unintended consequence of Affirmative Action is that African Americans are perceived as receiving special treatment. Affirmative Action is perceived as circumventing a merit system in which people receive the rewards they deserve (Kravitz, 1995; Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Nacoste, 1985; Nosworthy, Lea, & Lindsay, 1995; Veilleux & Tougas, 1989). Consequently, African Americans are thought to advance unfairly over more deserving majority group members.
An analogous experience for White Americans is the concept of White privilege. White privilege poses a threat to Whites’ self-regard because privilege represents an illegitimate alternative to personal merit as an explanation for success (Kelley, 1987). Because the notion of White privilege attributes the success of White people at least in part to their status in a racially stratified society rather than solely to their merit, it threatens White people’s identities as meritocratic people (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Branscombe, Schmitt & Schiffhauer, 2007).

In the United States there is a strong belief that the social structure is a meritocracy in which everybody has a chance to achieve success. Consequently, the intimation that individuals achieved what they did because of privilege or preferential treatment can threaten core beliefs about their social value and identity. Thus, regardless of whether a person’s success is attributed to special treatment (as in the case of Affirmative Action) or privilege (as in the case of White privilege), the attribution of success to membership in a favored group threatens the person’s social identity of being meritorious. In this way, Whites who contemplate White privilege share an experience that African Americans have when Affirmative Action is credited with their success.

A large body of research has demonstrated that life experiences similar to that of another person increases empathy toward the other person and promotes greater understanding (Hodges, Kiel, Adam, Kramer, Veach, & Villanueva, 2010; Batson, Sympson, Hindman, Decruz, Todd, Weeks,... & Burns, 1996; Eklund, Andersson-Straberg, Teresia, & Hansen, 2009). This research suggests that White Americans who experience race-based social identity threat to merit may be able to better understand and empathize with the plight of African Americans who endure similar experiences of race-
based social identity threat when their achievements are attributed to special treatment. In the current study, I empirically investigated whether similar experiences of race-based social identity threat can increase empathic concerns in Whites towards African Americans.

**Social Identity Threat**

A social identity is the portion of an individual’s self-concept derived from perceived membership in a social category or social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identities can be achieved (e.g., being a CEO) or ascribed (e.g., being African-American), as well as valued (e.g., being a doctor) or devalued (e.g., being overweight). For purposes of this paper I focus on an ascribed social identity - race. Race is one of the most salient social categories, especially for minority group members such as African Americans (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories. African Americans have a devalued identity and are negatively stereotyped as unintelligent, incompetent, and lazy (Bergsieker, Leslie, Constantine, & Fiske 2012; Devine & Elliot, 1995). African Americans are aware that outgroup members devalue their identity. This awareness makes African Americans vulnerable to experiencing race-based social identity threat.

Race-based social identity threat is a situationally triggered psychological state in which an individual is concerned that he or she has been or will be devalued, discriminated against, rejected, or negatively stereotyped because of his or her race (Steele, 1997; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). In seminal research, Steele & Aaronson (1995) gave African American and White college students a 30-minute test composed of 30 items from the verbal Graduate Record Examination. In the stereotype threat condition, the test was
described as a diagnostic of intellectual ability. In the non-threat condition, the test was described as a laboratory problem solving task that was non-diagnostic of ability. Results revealed that African Americans who believed the test was diagnostic of intellectual ability (threat condition) did significantly worse than White American participants in the same condition. However, African Americans who believed that the test was non-diagnostic of ability performed similarly to White Americans. The researchers assumed that the source of threat in these situations stems from the African American participants’ anxiety about confirming the stereotype that African Americans are unintelligent.

According to Schmader & Johns (2003), working memory, a limited-capacity executive process that coordinates cognition and controls behavior, is needed to allocate attention in the service of task performance. Social identity threat reduces attention regulation during complex tasks because it puts an individual in a state of stress-induced arousal which is taxing to working memory. In addition, when social identity is threatened, coping mechanisms such as suppression are employed to actively regulate negative thoughts and feelings, but this processes also uses working memory resources. Social identity threat also elicits vigilance to performance cues, internal states, and social feedback in order to disambiguate the uncertainty aroused by the threat (Schmader, Johns & Forbes, 2008). This process of monitoring performance for self-relevant information also draws on working memory. Because all three processes; stress, coping, and vigilance, draw on the same limited resource, individuals under social identity threat experience a decrement in performance because insufficient working memory remains to concentrate on task performance.
During the years since Steele and Aronson (1995) first demonstrated that social identity threat can impair performance on intellectual tasks, there has been extensive evidence that other stigmatized groups (e.g., women, Latinos) experience identity threat when working on tasks in situations in which their membership in a stigmatized group is made salient and/or the task is perceived as one in which their group does worse than others. Specifically, negative group stereotypes have been shown to decrease the performance of women on math tests (e.g., Schmader, 2002; Spencer, Steele & Quinn, 1999), children from low socioeconomic backgrounds on academic tests (Croizet & Claire, 1998), and the elderly on memory tasks (Levy, 2003).

Although race-based social identity threat commonly occurs for minority group members, it can also be experienced by traditionally non-stigmatized majority group members (Frantz, Cuddy, Burnett, Ray, & Hart, 2004; Leyens, Désert, Croizet, & Darcis, 2000; Aronson, Lustina, Good, Keough, Steele & Brown, 1999). Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley (1999) had African American and White students complete a “standardized” test of athletic performance that was based on the game of golf. Some participants were told that the athletic performance test was a measure of natural athletic ability while the others were told that the test was a measure of sports intelligence. The researchers reasoned that framing the test as a measure of sports intelligence would make White participants feel that they were being evaluated on the basis of a positive characterization (intelligence) linked to their racial identity. In contrast, framing the test as a measure of natural athletic ability would make them feel they were being evaluated on the basis of a negative characteristic, the supposed inferiority of Whites to Blacks in athleticism. Consequently, they would become concerned about confirming the negative stereotype of White inferiority in sports
and perform more poorly than if the stereotype was not made salient. Results revealed that framing the sports performance task as diagnostic of natural athletic ability caused a significant decrease in the performance of White participants on the golf task compared to when the test was framed as diagnostic of sports intelligence or when race was simply primed and the test was described in non-stereotypic terms.

There also are studies showing that White men perform worse on math tests when the Asian stereotype of being superior in math is salient (Aronson et al., 1999). When White participants were told, “In math, it seems to be the case that Asians outperform Whites”, White participants solved fewer items on the math portion of the Graduate Record Examination than participants who did not hear any mention of Asian-White ability differences.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that both historically stigmatized minority members (African Americans) and non-stigmatized majority members (White Americans) can experience race-based social identity threat (Aronson, et al., 1999).

**American Social Identity and Belief in Meritocracy**

The majority of research on race-based social identity threat has examined threats to performance on academic or intellectual tasks (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Spencer et al., 1999; Levy, 1996; Schmader & Johns, 2003). However, another important aspect of American culture and identity is merit. Americans abide by a cultural perspective in which social rewards, success, and status are assumed to reflect individual hard work and worthiness (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003). This cultural value is a central component of the American Dream which promotes the belief that anyone can get ahead if he or she works hard enough and is talented enough (McCoy & Major, 2007). Although endorsement of this belief in meritocracy varies among
individuals, it is so widely held that it has been termed America’s dominant ideology (Kluegel & Smith, 1986).

People base their identities in part on the belief that their social stature and accomplishments are deserved because they are meritorious. For majority group members, belief in meritocracy legitimizes the social hierarchy and the dominant role their group has within the hierarchy (Sidanius, Levin & Pratto, 1996). System justification theory holds that people are motivated to justify and rationalize the way things are. Consequently, existing social, economic, and political arrangements tend to be perceived as fair and legitimate (Jost & Hunyday, 2005). Suggesting that the dominant group’s position is not a function of merit reduces the group’s esteem and increases feelings of guilt about its position (Chow, Lowery, & Knowles, 2008; Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005; Swim & Miller, 1999). For minority group members, meritocracy represents a belief in upward mobility (Wiley, Deaux, & Hagelskamp, 2012). Minority group members embrace meritocratic values in hopes of improving their status as individuals. When minority group members are accused of unearned advantages, this suggests that their new position in society is undeserved. Thus, for both majority group and minority group members the implication that group members get more than they deserve functions as a social identity threat.

**Affirmative Action as a Threat to the Merit-Related Social Identity**

A common situation in which African Americans experience race-based social identity threat to merit is when their achievements are attributed to Affirmative Action. Although Affirmative Action is aimed at redressing current and past inequities, Affirmative Action can act as an identity threat for African Americans because many people believe
that Affirmative Action gives benefits and rewards to minorities that they do not merit (Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003).

High achieving African Americans whose success is attributed to Affirmative Action face the danger of being perceived as less meritorious than their White peers. For example, in a field study conducted by Heilman and colleagues (1992), White men rated African American men and women as less competent, having poor interpersonal skills, and less likely to advance in their career when the African American hires were associated with Affirmative Action programs. In another study, male and female managers recommended smaller salary increases for women hired under Affirmative Action policies than for men and women not associated with Affirmative Action (Heilman, Block, & Stathatos, 1997).

Preferential selection implies that a work-irrelevant characteristic had special weight in the decision process, whereas merit-based selection implies that skill and ability were the critical deciding points. Consequently, those selected on the basis of merit feel they have earned their positions and their sense of competence is affirmed. In contrast, there is evidence that those selected on the basis of Affirmative Action may feel that they did not fully earn their positions, and this denies them affirmation of their competence (Heilman et al., 1987; Niemann & Dovidio, 2005). For this reason, beneficiaries of Affirmative Action may be vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy in filling the position in which they are placed (Heilman et al., 1987; Steele, 1997). In a correlational study, Taylor (1994) found Black male employees working at companies with Affirmative Action programs in place had lower levels of job excitement than did those working at companies without such policies. Heilman and colleagues (1987) found women who thought they were hired because of Affirmative Action devalued their leadership performance and took less
credit for successful outcomes relative to those who thought they were hired based on merit. Thus, Affirmative Action may be a threat to African Americans’ self-conceptions as meritorious people.

**White privilege as a Threat to Merit-Related Social Identity**

A situation in which race-based social identity threat to merit may be triggered for White Americans is one in which White privilege is salient. White privilege refers to the unearned advantages of being White in a racially stratified society. It is the product of institutional power that is largely unacknowledged by most Whites (Neville, Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001). These unearned privileges afford Whites a disproportionate share of economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Lewis, 2003; Lipsitz, 1998; McIntosh, 1988; Rains, 1998). Because the concept of White privilege represents an illegitimate alternative to personal merit as an explanation for success, it can pose a threat to Whites’ self-regard (Kelley, 1987). The concept of White privilege threatens system justifying ideologies as well as social dominance orientation. Because it attributes the success of White people at least in part to their status in a racially stratified society rather than solely to their merit, it threatens White people’s identities as meritocratic people by raising concerns of being judged through the negative stereotypical lens of being undeserving.

**Differences between Affirmative Action and White privilege in Threatening Social Identity**

Thus far I have argued that the beneficiaries of White privilege and Affirmative Action grapple with similar perceptions of preferential treatment. This poses a threat to their identity as meritorious people, which triggers negative emotional and cognitive
responses and protective defense mechanisms to cope with these responses. However, there are some differences between these experiences that warrant consideration.

One important difference between Affirmative Action and White privilege is that Affirmative Action is a formal government/institutional/organizational policy that has been adjudicated by courts, including the Supreme Court (Brest & Oshige, 1995). In contrast, White privilege is a concept unrecognized by many people, perhaps especially by those who benefit most (McIntosh, 1988). Therefore, it may be hard to deny Affirmative Action and easier to argue against the existence of White privilege.

Another important difference is that Whites and minority group members differ in how strongly they identify with their group. Group identification is typically conceptualized as how important the group is to self-definition (centrality) and how strong feelings of attachment are to the group are (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). An abundance of research has shown that race/ethnic identity is less important to the self-concepts of White students than it is for ethnic minority students (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990; McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978). In fact, race/ethnicity is an important component of the self-concepts of the majority of minority group members, whereas Whites tend to be more divergent in how important being White is to their self-concepts (Powell et al., 2005; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For example, Phinney & Alipuria (1990) found that almost two-thirds of minority group students rated ethnic identity as quite or very important, in contrast to less than a quarter of White students.

An implication of this difference is that crediting achievements of African Americans to Affirmative Action should threaten the social identity of being a meritorious person for most African Americans, whereas a similar threat to identity arising from White
privilege may only occur among Whites who highly group identify with Whites (Branscombe et al., 2007). Whites who do not strongly group identify with Whites may understand that there is White privilege, but may not feel that they personally have benefitted because being White is not an important component of their self-concept. In contrast, White Americans who are strongly group identified may see their success as tightly linked to those of the in-group. In other words, race-based social identity threat may be moderated by group identification. Thus, I hypothesized that thoughts about the unmerited benefits gained from a privileged group membership may threaten the social identity of White Americans who strongly group identify with Whites.

Individuals may also differ in how strongly they identify as being a meritorious person. For some, an identity of merit may be a very important part of self-concept while others may not prioritize this aspect of self-identity. In other words, race-based identity threat based on White privilege may also be moderated by their identity of merit. Thus, I hypothesized that thoughts about the unmerited benefits gained from a privileged group membership will threaten the social identity of White Americans who have a strong identity of merit.

**Similar Experiences Lead to Empathic Congruency**

A major goal of this dissertation is to explore some consequences of White privilege identity threat on Whites’ empathy toward an African American who experiences an Affirmative Action identity threat. I proposed that Whites who experience White privileged-based social identity threat may perceive that an African American who experiences Affirmative Action-based social identity threat as having a similar experience to their own.
Understanding what other people think and feel requires imagining how one would think or feel in that situation (Nickerson, 1999). Situational cues remind people of times in the past when they experienced something similar (Hoffman, 2000). These memories evoke emotional responses which are likely to match those of someone who is having a similar experience. In this way, people’s own experiences act as an anchor for judgment about other people's experiences. Kohut (1984) argued that through “vicarious introspection” into our own experiences, we can understand what it is like for someone else in a situation similar to one we have been in before. This does not suggest that our experiences could ever be exactly the same as another’s; only that our previous similar experiences allow us to approximate what it might be like for the other (MacIsaac, 1997).

Research shows that people who have similar experiences are able to understand and empathize with the same feelings as another person when they imagine being in that person's situation (Hume, 1957). Empathy can include emotional matching and the vicarious experiencing of a range of emotions consistent with those of others (see Davis, 1983 for an in-depth review). Although empathy is multidimensional, (Hodge et al., 2009), much of the research has focused specifically on empathic concern. Empathic concern is experiencing “other oriented” feelings. These feelings include emotions such as compassion, sympathy, being moved, and warm.

A number of studies indicate that having experiences similar to those of others increases empathic concern. For example, Barnett, Tetreault, & Masbad (1987) found that women who were victims of rape perceived themselves as more similar to and were more empathic toward an actress who described an experience with rape than to an actress who described a different difficult situation. Batson and colleagues (1997, Experiment 2)
investigated the effect of having a similar experience on girls’ emotional response to a girl who had severe acne or been rejected by a romantic partner. Consistent with the results of Barnett et al., (1987), reports of empathic concern were higher for girls who had prior experience with acne or being rejected by a romantic partner than those who did not have prior experience. Hodges and colleagues (2010) further confirmed these results among pregnant women. Women who were expecting their first child and women who had recently given birth to their first child watched videotapes of new-mothers. Results revealed that women who had just given birth expressed greater empathic concern and reported greater understanding of the new mother than women who had not yet given birth.

This research suggests that a White person undergoing race-based social identity threat may feel more similar to and have greater empathic concern for another person who is also going through an experience of race-based social identity threat. Thus an experience of White privilege threat to meritorious identity may make White Americans more empathic towards a Black American experiencing Affirmative Action threat to his or her meritorious identity.

**Consequences of Empathic Concern**

Davis (1983) and other researchers describe empathy as the phenomenon that connects two otherwise isolated individuals to each other (Hakansson & Montgomery, 2003). It is therefore not surprising that empathic concern has a strong positive relationship to attitude change and helping (Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978).

For example, Clore & Jeffrey (1972) found that assuming the role of a person with a mobility disability by traveling around campus in a wheelchair for an hour significantly improved attitudes toward people who are disabled immediately following the experience.
Moreover, the improvement in attitude change was still significant when measured four months later. Another example is research inspired by Jane Elliot, an elementary school teacher, who made an effort to help White children understand what it is like for African Americans’ who experience racial discrimination. During a 3-hour simulation game, blue-eyed or brown-eyed children were made to feel inferior by their remarks and examples (Byrnes & Kiger, 1990). They found that the experience of discrimination based on eye color increased empathy of White American teachers and students toward African Americans, which was associated with greater willingness to act in nondiscriminatory ways. In other words, similar experiences of discrimination based on physical features enabled non-stigmatized White teachers and students to empathize with stigmatized African Americans.

This study is particularly important because it shows that people, even school children, can relate an experience of discrimination based on one attribute (eye color) to discrimination based on another attribute (race). This suggests that although the special treatment associated with White privilege and Affirmative Action are not identical, White people may be able to relate their experience of White-privilege based identity threat to the identity threat experienced by African Americans who supposedly get special treatment because of their race.

One barrier that might prevent Whites experiencing White privilege- identity threat, from perceiving a similar experience to African Americans experiencing Affirmative Action threat is the tendency for people to compare themselves to others who are similar on attributes that are important to self-concept (Sanders, Gastorf, & Mullen, 1979). For example, Major & Konar (1984) found that women had significantly lower career entry
and career peak salary expectations than males because their comparison standard was
another woman who was also underpaid. Miller (1984) showed some attributes such as
race and gender are so central to people’s identity that they are always relevant dimensions
for comparison even when they are unrelated to performance. This research suggests that
White Americans experiencing identity threat to merit may not be able to see African
Americans experiencing identity threat to merit as a comparison standard, and thus may
fail to understand how similar their experiences are.

Although some attributes may “always be salient” for social comparison, the
studies conducted by Byrnes & Kiger (1990) and Clore & Jeffrey (1972) indicate that non-
stigmatized people are able to put themselves in the perspective of stigmatized people. The
fact that these experiences resulted in prejudice reduction suggest that people are able to
compare their experiences of those who are dissimilar even in identity-defining ways.

Empathy has also been linked to altruism and other forms of helping behavior (e.g.,
found that participants who were instructed to imagine how a person in need felt (vs.
instructed to just observe a person in need), had more empathic concern toward the person
in need and were more likely to help the person in need. Thus, in the current study I
investigated if White Americans who experience race-based identity threat to merit will be
more likely to help an African American facing a similar experience of race-based identity
threat or an African American who experiences some stressor unrelated to merit attribution.

The Current Research

The primary purpose of the current research was to investigate whether similar
experiences of race-based social-identity threat to merit will increase empathic concerns
for stigmatized minority members in non-stigmatized majority members. Specifically, I
investigated whether White privilege will act as a social identity threat for White Americans and as result (1) increase empathic concern and (2) increase empathic behavior toward an African American whose success was attributed only to Affirmative Action. To my knowledge, the current research is the first to investigate whether White people who experience race-based social identity threat based on privilege become more empathic toward an African American who experiences a similar social identity threat based on assumptions about Affirmative Action. Furthermore, this is the first study to examine threats to personal merit as a process of increasing empathic concern for and empathic behavior toward minority members in majority members. Lastly, these studies also examined whether this effect would be stronger for people who are highly identified as White or being a meritorious person.

**Study 1**

This study examined whether White Americans who experience race-based social identity threat to merit have greater empathic concern for an African American who also experiences race-based social identity threat to merit. I hypothesized that White Americans who are assigned to think about the benefits gained from a privileged group membership may feel greater empathic concern for an African American whose success is attributed to Affirmative Action. I also hypothesized that this effect may be stronger for White Americans who strongly identify as White or strongly identify as being a meritorious person.

**Method**

**Participants**

Two hundred and sixty participants were recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk for an online experiment that had the ostensible purpose of piloting a new interview
process for a consulting company. Twenty-four participants did not identify as White/Caucasian and were excluded from the study, leaving a total of 236 (96 male, 140 female) participants. Participants ages ranged from 18 years-70 years (\(M_{\text{age}} = 35.51\ SD = 10.58\)) and on average had earned a 4- year college degree. Approximately 76% of participants were employed, earning an average income of $50,000 to $59,999. On a 7-point Likert scale of political views (1= liberal, 7 = conservative), on average participants rated themselves a 3, indicating relatively liberal political views. All participants were compensated $1 for their participation.

**Design**

This was a 2 (White-privilege identity threat or internet control) x 2 (Affirmative Action identity threat or credential control) between subjects design.

**Procedures and Measures**

Participants were told they were participating in a study that was piloting a new interview process for hiring employees for a small consulting company. The first competency they were instructed to complete was a cultural competency activity. The purpose of this activity was described as, “an examination of how well people express themselves in writing about current issues facing society.” For this competency activity, participants were randomly assigned to the White privilege identity threat condition or the internet control condition.

**Manipulation of White privilege threat to merit.** These conditions were modeled after those used by Branscombe et al., (2007). Participants assigned to the White privilege condition read:
**White privilege** is a term that refers to privileges or unearned advantages that Whites have, that are not commonly experienced by non-white people under the same social, political, or economic circumstances.

According to sociologist, Peggy McIntosh, Whites in Western societies enjoy advantages that non-whites do not experience, as "an invisible package of unearned assets". For example, empirical research has shown that:

- Whites are 78% more likely to be accepted to the same university as equally qualified people of color.
- In customer-related jobs, White job applicants are 28% more likely to receive a positive response or a callback compared to otherwise identical African American job applicants.
- Despite advances in medicine over the past three decades, breast cancer survival among White women is 92%, while breast cancer survival among African American women is 79%.
- Among high-income borrowers, Whites are three times as likely as African Americans to pay lower prices for mortgages- 10.5 % compared to 32.1% of African Americans.

Given these facts:

‘In the next three minutes, we would like you to think about and consider the ways that you have received unearned privileges because you are White/Caucasian. Write down as many different ways as you can think of that you have received unearned benefits because of your race.’

Participants assigned to the Internet Control condition read:

The internet has revolutionized the way we live, learn, communicate and the way we do our business. Today, most of use can’t and won’t imagine our lives without it and we take the existence of the Internet for granted. The internet has completely transformed the way people live their lives. Research has shown that

- An estimated 2.4 billion people go online each day
- 600 million websites are online
- A poll of U.S adults found that users across all age groups spend an average of 4.7 hours per day on social media
- 500 million tweets are sent every day.

Given these facts:

‘In the next three minutes, we would like you to think about and consider the ways in which the internet has changed your life. Write down as many different ways as you can think of that the internet has changed the way you live.’

The instructions in both conditions were accompanied by a text box in which participants typed their responses. Participants were allotted three minutes to type their response before they could advance to the rest of the experiment.
Following this manipulation, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they experienced stereotype threat feelings. Stereotype threat feelings were assessed with five adjectives; threatened, defensiveness, distress, guilt, and anger (α = .84) (Appendix B). Participants indicated on 5-point scales ranging from 1 (does not describe my feeling) to 5 (clearly describes my feelings) how much they were experiencing each emotion as a result of the competence activity they had just completed. Scores were averaged across the five items to compute the measure of stereotype threat feelings. Higher scores reflected greater threat feelings. Participants also indicated the extent to which they experienced stereotype threat cognitions (Appendix C). Stereotype threat cognitions were measured using the Revised Stereotype Vulnerability Scale (Woodcock, Hernandez, Estrada, & Schultz, 2012). This scale has four items; “Some people believe you have not earned what you have because you are White”, “If you are better than average, people assume it is because of the unearned benefits of being White”, “If you are hired for a job, people will assume that it is because you are White not because of your merit”, “You face unfair evaluation of your merit because you are White.” Participants indicated their level of agreement with each item that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). High scores on each scale reflected stronger agreement with the given statement. Scores were averaged across the four items to compute the overall stereotype threat cognitions for each participant (α = .90).

Participants then completed the last competence activity, which was labeled as emotional competence. Emotional competence was described as, “an examination of interactions and emotional responses between employees in the corporate world.”
Participants were then randomly assigned to the Affirmative Action identity threat condition or the credentials control condition.

**Manipulation of Affirmative Action threat to merit.** Participants assigned to the Affirmative Action condition read:

One morning at a large business company, the executive board scheduled a meeting to announce the promotion of one supervisor to a senior management position. At this meeting the CEO stated, “The promotional decision was difficult, given that all candidates were qualified, with impressive leadership skills and excellent track records as supervisors. However, we found Andre was best fit for the job.”

As Andre (an African American) reached his hand out to give the CEO a handshake of appreciation, Andre overheard a fellow employee whisper, “You know the company is behind in meeting its Affirmative Action goals. Being Black really gave Andre an edge up.” As those employees patted Andre on the back and quietly returned back to their respective offices, Andre began to feel angry about his promotion, and wondered whether the CEO really saw his work ethic or just the color of his skin.

Participants assigned to the credentials control condition read:

One morning at a large business company, the executive board scheduled a meeting to announce the promotion of one supervisor to a senior management position. At this meeting the CEO stated, “The promotional decision was difficult, given that all candidates were qualified, with impressive leadership skills and excellent track records as supervisors. However, we found Andre was best fit for the job.”

As Andre (an African American) reached his hand out to give the CEO a handshake of appreciation, Andre overheard a fellow employee whisper, “You know the company made a great decision. Being so experienced really gave Andre an edge up.” As those employees patted Andre on the back and quietly returned back to their respective offices, Andre began to feel even more excited about his promotion, and wondered whether the CEO valued his work ethic or years of experience more.

Following this manipulation, participants completed a single item about their perceptions of whether they had an experience similar to the one they had just read about which asked, “To what extent do you feel you have recently experienced a similar experience as Andre?” Participants indicated their level of agreement with this item that ranged from 1 (definitely not) to 7 (definitely yes).
Next, participants completed a measure of empathic response (Batson, 1991) to the African American described in the scenario. This measure consists of 24 emotion adjectives. Participants were asked to indicate on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (none at all) to 7 (extremely) how much they were experiencing each emotion as a result of reading the employee’s experience. The dependent variable derived from this measure was an index of empathic concern that was assessed with six of the 24 adjectives; *sympathetic, softhearted, warm, compassionate, tender, and moved* \((\alpha = .82)\) (see Appendix D). Scores were averaged across the six items to compute the measure of empathic concern. Higher scores on each scale reflected greater empathic concern.

Consistent with the cover story, participants then completed measures that examined “different attitudes, opinions, and beliefs that were imperative to work ethics, work identity, and employee interactions.” These measures included ingroup identity, merit identity, trait level empathy, feeling thermometer, and demographics. Group identity was measured using an adapted version of the Revised Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity Centrality Scale (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997) (Appendix E). Participants’ identification with the White race was assessed across eight items; “Overall, being White has very little to do with how I feel about myself (R)” , “In general being White is an important part of my self-image”, “Being White is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am (R)” , “Being White is an important reflection of who I am”, “My destiny is tied to the destiny of other White people” , “I have a strong sense of belonging to White people”, “I have a strong attachment to other White people” , “Being White is not a major factor in my social relationships (R).” Participants indicated their level of agreement with each item that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly
agree). Items were reverse coded when necessary such that high scores on each scale reflected higher agreement with each item. Scores were averaged across the eight items to compute the overall measure of ingroup identity for each participant ($\alpha = .85$).

Merit identity was measured using the Importance to Identity subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) (Appendix F). Participants first read, “Meritorious is an adjective that describes an individuals’ identity as a person whose social rewards, success, and status are earned (or based on merit) and reflect hard work.” Participant’s identification with being a meritorious person was assessed across four items; “Being meritorious is an important reflection of who I am”, “In general being meritorious is an important part of myself-image”, “Being meritorious is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am (R)”, “Overall, being meritorious has very little to do with how I feel about myself (R).” Participants indicated their level of agreement with each item that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Items were reverse coded when necessary such that high scores on each scale reflected higher agreement with each item. Scores were averaged across the four items to compute the overall measure of merit identity for each participant ($\alpha = .83$).

Trait level empathic concern was measured using the Empathic Concern subscale of the Empathy Scale (Davis, 1983) (Appendix G). Participant’s individual difference level of empathic concern was assessed across seven items; “When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them”, “When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them (R)”, “I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me”, “I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person”, “Sometimes I don't feel sorry for other people when they are having
problems (R), “Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal (R), “I am often quite touched by things that I see happen.” Participants indicated their level of agreement with each item that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Items were reverse coded when necessary such that high scores on each scale reflected higher agreement with each item. Scores were averaged across the seven items to compute the individual differences in empathy for each participant (α = .88).

Overall feelings towards African Americans were measured using a feeling thermometer. The feeling thermometer is widely used and well-validated explicit measure of prejudice (Lavrakas, 2008). It is a single item anchor-based visual analogue scale from 0 to 100 where 0 represents feeling very cold toward African Americans and 100 indicates feeling very warm.

Finally participants completed demographic measures including age, gender, level of education, employment status, annual salary, and political orientation. They then were debriefed and compensated.

**Study 1 Results**

Correlations, means and standard deviation of all measures are in Table 1.

**Manipulation Check**

A two-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the impact of the White privilege manipulation and the Affirmative Action manipulation on stereotype threat feelings. The main effect of White privilege was significant, \( F(1,232) = 19.50, p < .001, \eta^2 = .08 \). Participants who thought about the ways they benefited from White privilege felt more threatened (\( M = 1.84, SE = .07 \)) than those who were asked to think about the ways they benefitted from the internet (\( M = 1.40, SE = \))
The main effect of Affirmative Action was not significant, $F(1,232) = .55, p = .46, \eta^2 = .00$. Participants who read about the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action ($M = 1.66, SE = .07$) experienced similar stereotype threat feelings as the participants who read about the African American whose success was not attributed to Affirmative Action ($M = 1.58, SE = .07$). The interaction of the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation was also not significant, $F(1,232) = .50, p = .48, \eta^2 = .00$. These results indicate that the White privilege manipulation achieved its objective of increasing feelings of stereotype threat among Whites who contemplated their group-based privilege.

A two-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of the White privilege manipulation and the Affirmative Action manipulation on stereotype threat cognitions. Although participants who thought about the ways they benefited from White privilege experienced more stereotype threat cognitions ($M = 3.16, SE = .15$) than those who were asked to think about the ways they benefitted from the internet ($M = 2.91, SE = .15$), the main effect of the White privilege manipulation was not significant, $F(1,232) = 1.45, p = .23, \eta^2 = .01$. The main effect of Affirmative Action, $F(1,232) = .02, p = .90, \eta^2 = .00$ was also not significant. Participants in the Affirmative Action condition ($M = 3.05, SE = .15$) experienced similar stereotype threat cognitions as the participants in the credentials control condition ($M = 3.02, SE = .15$). The interaction of the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation was also not significant, $F(1,232) = 1.71, p = .19, \eta^2 = .01$.

Main analysis

Effects of White privilege and Affirmative Action manipulations
Trait level empathy, sex, and the feeling thermometer prejudice measure were used as covariates in all the analyses described in the remainder of this study. I conducted moderation analysis using Hayes’ PROCESS macro model 1 (Hayes, 2013) to examine whether there was an interaction between the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation on empathic concern (see Figure 1). The White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation were dummy coded such that 0 indicated their respective control conditions.

The overall regression model was significant, $R^2 = .10$, $F(6, 229) = 2.24$, $p < .001$. The predicted 2-way interaction between the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation also was significant, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(1, 229) = 5.23$, $p = .02$ (see Table 2).

Simple slopes were calculated to examine the effects of the White privilege manipulation at each level of the Affirmative Action manipulation (see Figure 2). Results revealed a significant positive slope for the effect of the White privilege manipulation for participants in the Affirmative Action threat condition, $t(229) = .60$, $p = .01$, which indicated that those who read about an African American whose promotion was attributed to Affirmative Action felt greater empathic concern in the White privilege condition than in the internet control condition. In contrast, the slope was not significant for participants in the credentials control condition, $t(229) = -.15$, $p = .54$, which indicated the White privilege manipulation did not increase feelings of empathic concern for the African American whose success was attributed to merit.

The rationale for hypothesizing that participants who wrote about White privilege would be more empathic to the African American whose success was attributed to
Affirmative Action was that participants would perceive a shared experience of a race-based social identity threat to merit with the employee whose meritorious identity had been threatened by an Affirmative Action explanation for his success. Thus, I repeated the above analysis using the same predictors with perceived similarity of experience as the outcome.

The overall regression model was significant, $R^2 = .12, F(6, 229) = 5.33, p < .001$. However, as shown in Table 2, the predicted 2-way interaction between the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation was not significant.

**Analyses of moderating effects of group identification and merit identity.**

I conducted moderated moderation analyses using Hayes’ PROCESS macro model 3 (Hayes, 2013). This involved adding either group identification or merit identity as an additional moderator in the 2(White privilege manipulation) x 2(Affirmative Action manipulation) design (see Figure 3).

For group identity, the overall regression model was significant, $R^2 = .12, F(10, 225) = 3.16, p < .001$. The predicted 3-way interaction between the White privilege manipulation, Affirmative Action manipulation, and group identity was significant, $\Delta R^2 = .01, F(1, 225) = 3.78, p = .05$ (see Table 3). Simple slopes were calculated to decompose the interaction (see Figure 4). The effects of the White privilege threat manipulation were estimated for the Affirmative Action and credentials control conditions for participants who were high (+1 SD), medium (mean value), or low (-1SD) in group identity. As the bottom and middle panels of Figure 4 show, the slopes for the effects for the White privilege manipulation on empathic concern toward the African American were significant for participants high in group identity, $t(225) = 2.89, p < .001$, and average in group identity, $t(225) = .69, p = .04$, in the Affirmative Action condition, but White privilege had
did not significantly affect empathic concern in the credentials control condition for participants who were high, \( t(225) = -0.66, p = .51 \) or average \( t(225) = -1.33, p = .18 \) in group identity. In other words, participants who thought about the ways they benefited from White privilege and read about an African American whose promotion was attributed to Affirmative Action felt greater empathic concern if they were moderately to strongly White-identified. In contrast, the slopes for the effects of the White privilege manipulation were not significant for participants low in group identity (top panel of figure 4) in either the Affirmative Action condition, \( t(225) = .52, p = .60 \), or the credentials control condition, \( t(225) = .44, p = .66 \).

I repeated the moderation analysis substituting merit identity as the additional moderator. Overall the model was significant, \( R^2 = .11, F(10, 225) = 2.67, p < .001 \). However, as shown in Table 3, the predicted 3-way interaction between the White privilege manipulation, Affirmative Action manipulation, and merit identity was not significant.

**Analyses of mediators of the relationship between experimental conditions with outcome variables**

Mediation analyses were conducted using Hayes’ (2013) model 4 to examine whether perceived similar experience mediated the relationship between the experimental manipulations and empathic concern. Contrast coding was used so that the White privilege/Affirmative Action condition was compared to the other conditions collectively. Results revealed that the overall mediation model was not significant, \( R^2 = .02, F(4, 231) = 1.25, p = .29 \). Experimental condition did not predict similar experience, \( B = -.24, SE = .25, 95\% CI[-.73, .25] \), nor did similar experience predict empathic concern, \( B = .07, SE = .05, 95\% CI[-.03, .17] \). Thus, although the direct effect between experimental condition
and empathic concern remains significant, $B = .52, SE = .19, 95\% \text{ CI}[.14, .90]$, the indirect effect of condition on empathic concern through similar experience was not significant, $B = -.02, SE = .02, 95\% \text{ CI}[-.11, .01]$.

Another mediation analysis using the same contrast coding was conducted to examine whether stereotype threat feelings mediated the effect of the experimental manipulations on empathic concern. Results revealed that the overall mediation model was significant, $R^2 = .06, F(4, 231) = 3.91, p < .001$. Stereotype threat feelings significantly mediated the relationship between experimental condition and empathic concern, $B = .11, SE = .06, 95\% \text{ CI} [.02, .27]$. Those who were assigned to the White privilege threat and Affirmative Action threat condition felt more threat than participants in the other three conditions, which was associated with greater empathic concern for the African American (see Figure 5).

I hypothesized that perceptions of similar experience to the African American in the Affirmative Action vignette would result from the feelings evoked by thinking about White privilege. Thus, I examined whether stereotype threat feelings mediate the effect of the White privilege/Affirmative Action condition on perceived similar experience.

The overall mediation model was significant, $R^2 = .06, F(4, 231) = 3.91, p < .001$. Results revealed that stereotype threat feelings significantly mediated the relationship between this condition (versus the other conditions) and perceived similar experience, $B = .24, SE = .25, 95\% \text{ CI} [.09, .55]$. Those who were assigned to the White privilege threat and Affirmative Action vignette felt more threatened and thus were more likely to perceive similarity with the African American who also experienced race-based social identity threat (i.e., his accomplishments were credited to Affirmative Action; see Figure 6). Although
threatened feelings resulting from the experimental manipulations were positively related
to perceived similar experience, the direct path between experimental condition and
perceived similarity was negative. As illustrated in Figure 6, participants in the White
privilege threat/Affirmative Action condition perceived themselves as having a less similar
experience to the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action.
However, the indirect paths indicate that to the extent that the manipulation evoked threat,
participants perceived more similarity with the African American whose promotion was
attributed to Affirmative Action.

This chain of events requires testing a serial mediation model, which I did using
Hayes macro model 6. I tested the pathways from experimental condition (White
privilege/Affirmative Action condition versus all other conditions) on empathic concern
by way of the effects of experimental condition on stereotype threat feelings, the
association of threat feelings with perceived similar experience, and the association of
perceived similar experience and empathic concern. Results revealed the overall model
was significant, \( R^2 = 0.06, F(4, 231) = 3.91, p < 0.001 \). However, the indirect effect between
condition and empathic concern through stereotype threat feelings and similar experience
was not significant, \( B = 0.01, SE = 0.01, 95\% \text{ CI}[-0.01, 0.04] \).

Since group identification was a significant moderator of the relationship between
experimental conditions and empathic concern, I conducted a moderated mediation model
using Hayes’ model 7 to examine whether group identification moderated the indirect
effect of condition on empathic concern through stereotype threat feelings. Results
revealed the overall model was significant, \( R^2 = 0.07, F(6, 229) = 2.68, p = 0.02 \). However,
as shown in Figure 7, the moderated indirect path was not significant, $B = .04$, $SE = .10$, 95% CI[-.16, .24].

**Study 1 Discussion**

A major finding of Study 1 is that White Americans who thought about the benefits gained from a privileged group membership felt greater empathic concern for an African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action. Consistent with my hypotheses about why this would occur, White Americans in the White privilege threat condition experienced more stereotype threat feelings (but not stereotype threat cognitions) than the White Americans who were in the internet control condition. Group identification moderated this relationship such that participants who were average or high in White group identification were more empathic toward the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action if they had previously thought about White privilege. These results largely confirm my major hypotheses.

I hypothesized that participants in the White privilege condition would feel more empathic concern toward the African American whose success is attributed to Affirmative Action because both individuals have had a similar experience of race-based social identity threat to merit. However, results revealed that participants in the White privilege condition did not perceive themselves as having had experiences similar to the African American in the Affirmative Action condition. Moreover, perceptions of similar experience were not a significant mediator of the effects of experimental conditions on empathic concern. Instead, stereotype threat feelings emerged as the mediator. Those who felt threatened by thinking about White privilege felt more empathic concern for the African American in the Affirmative Action condition relative to the control conditions.
One explanation for these findings is that people can recognize similarity in emotional experiences more easily than they can discern the underlying structural similarity between experiences that have different surface features. That is, the surface details of benefitting from White privilege and benefitting from Affirmative Action differ in many ways, but share an underlying characteristic - denial of one’s merit. It is likely that most White Americans have never experienced their success being attributed to Affirmative Action. Thus, when the African American’s promotion was attributed to Affirmative Action, White participants who believe they have never benefitted from such a program cannot see how they have experienced a similar threat. This may explain why ratings of perceptions of similar experience were below the scale mid-point ($M = 2.32$, see Table 1). It also may explain why those who read the Affirmative Action scenario thought that their experiences were less similar to the African American’s than those who read the credentials control scenario.

Results also revealed that participants who received the White privilege condition (versus internet control condition) felt more threatened, and feelings of threat were associated with perceiving greater similarity between the African Americans’ and their own experiences. In other words, even though Whites likely have not experienced their success being attributed to Affirmative Action, they may have been able to understand how threatening this would feel to an African American. This may explain why threatened feelings were related to perceived similar experience. It is not possible to test this explanation with the data from Study 1 because there was no measure of how participants thought the African American was feeling. For this reason, in Study 2 participants rated
both their own stereotype threat feelings and the extent to which they perceived the African American described in the vignette was experiencing stereotype threat feelings.

Another possible reason why participants in the White privilege condition did not perceive their experience as similar to the African American in the Affirmative Action condition is that the White privilege manipulation instructed participants to think about how they think they have benefited, whereas the threat to the African American in the Affirmative Action condition was how other people thought he unfairly benefited. This inconsistency was addressed in Study 2 by altering the White privilege manipulation so that participants were instructed to think about how other people think they benefited from White privilege.

This reasoning may also explain the differences in findings for stereotype threat feelings and stereotype threat cognitions. While stereotype threat feelings and stereotype threat cognitions were significantly correlated, the White privilege manipulation did not significantly affect stereotype threat cognitions. The stereotype threat feelings measure asked how the participants themselves felt, whereas the stereotype threat cognition measure asked about what other people think. This may also explain the difference in the role that threat emotions and threat cognitions played in participants’ empathic concern toward the African American.

As hypothesized, group identity did moderate the effects of the White privilege manipulation and the Affirmative Action manipulation on empathic concern. Those who were in the White privilege threat/Affirmative Action threat manipulation and were moderate to highly group identified felt greater empathic concern for the African American. This supports my hypothesis that White Americans who are strongly group
identified may see their success as tightly linked to those of the in-group, which should make the White privilege manipulation more threatening. However, group identification did not moderate the mediating effect of stereotype threat feelings on the relationship between experimental condition and empathic concern. This suggests that the mechanism by which group identification moderates the effects of contemplation of White privilege on empathic concern for the African American in the Affirmative Action scenario operates in some way that does not involve stereotype threat emotions.

Merit identity did not moderate the relationship of experimental condition on empathic concern for the African American. In general participants indicated that merit was important to their self-concept ($M = 5.38, SD = 1.17$) and was more central to self-concept than was White group identification ($M = 3.21, SD = 1.22$). Despite the importance of a meritorious identity to the self-concept, an identity of merit did not moderate the effects of the White privilege threat manipulation and the Affirmative Action threat manipulation. It is possible that overall, the identity of merit is important to most people and consequently makes most people vulnerable to social identity threat to merit.

**Study 2 Purpose and Hypotheses**

Study 2 investigated whether the findings of Study 1 were replicable, and whether effects of thinking about White privilege extend beyond empathic concern to willingness to help an African American facing a race-based threat to merit identity. In Study 1, participants in the White privilege threat condition were asked to list the ways that they thought they have received unearned benefits because of their race. In Study 2, participants in the White privilege condition listed the ways in which *others* think they have received unearned benefits because of their race. I did this to increase the similarity between the
experience of the participants in the White privilege condition and that of the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action.

I hypothesized that White Americans assigned to think about how others believe they have benefited from a privileged group membership would feel greater stereotype threat feelings and stereotype threat cognitions. Similar to Study 1, I hypothesized that White Americans assigned to think about how others believe they have benefited from a privileged group membership would feel greater empathic concern for an African American whose success is attributed to Affirmative Action. I hypothesized that increased empathic concern would lead to more willingness to help a different African American facing an incident of race-based social identity threat. I hypothesized that all of these effects would be moderated by group identification. Based on the results of Study 1, I also hypothesized that the similarity between participants’ stereotype threat feelings and their perceptions of how the African American was feeling would mediate the relationship between thinking about White privilege and empathic concern for the African American facing an Affirmative Action threat to merit identity. To test this participants rated their own feelings of threat and their perception of how threatened the African American was feeling.

Method

Participants

Three hundred and fifty five (154 male, 201 female) participants were recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk for the ostensible purpose of piloting a new interview process for a consulting company. Participants ages ranged from 20 years-72 years ($M_{age}=36.72$ $SD=11.35$) and on average had earned a 2-year college degree or higher. Approximately 89% of participants were employed, earning an average income of $50,000
to $59,999. On a 7-point Likert scale of political views (1 = liberal, 7 = conservative), on average participants rated themselves a 3, indicating relatively liberal political views. All participants were compensated $1.40 for their participation.

**Design**

Study 2 was a 2 (White-privilege identity threat or internet control) x 2 (Affirmative Action identity threat or credential control) design with an additional within-subjects factor which involved asking participants how likely they were to help an African American who faced a race-based social identity threat and how likely they were to help an African American facing another type of stressor.

**Procedures and Measures**

Study 2 was conducted as an online experiment. Participants were told they were participating in a study that was piloting a new interview process for hiring employees for a small consulting company. The interview process involved testing people for three competencies. The first competency they were instructed to complete was the same cultural competency activity in Study 1. Participants were instructed to complete, “an examination of how well people express themselves in writing about current issues facing society.” During this competency, participants were randomly assigned to the White privilege identity threat condition or the internet control condition.

The prompts of the **Manipulation of White privilege threat** to merit differed from Study 1 in that participants were instructed to think about how other people think they have benefitted from White privilege. The instructions read, “In the next three minutes, we would like you to think about and consider the ways that others think you have received unearned privileges because you are White/Caucasian. Write down as many different ways
as you can think of that others think you have received unearned benefits because of your race.’ Participants assigned to the **Internet Control condition** read the same prompts and instructions as Study 1. Following this manipulation, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they experienced stereotype threat feelings (α = .84) and stereotype threat cognitions (α = .92) on the same measures used in Study 1.

Participants next completed the same emotional competence test used in Study 1 in which they were randomly assigned to the Affirmative Action identity threat condition or the credentials control condition. Following this manipulation, participants rated the extent to which they have had a similar experience to the African American in the vignette and completed the same emotional response questionnaire used in Study 1. The main dependent variable was empathic concern that was derived from the emotional response measure with the same six adjectives as Study 1; *sympathetic, softhearted, warm, compassionate, tender, and moved* (α = .86). Participants also rated the extent to which the African American in the vignette was experiencing stereotype threat feelings on adaptations of the same questions about their own feelings of stereotype threat (α = .85).

Participants were next prompted to complete the fourth competency of “Employee Responsibility.” In this competency, there were two short passages describing an African American who needed assistance because he experienced a raced-based threat to his merit or because he experienced a stressor unrelated to race. Participants were asked how likely they would help an African American facing a race-based threat and one facing a race-irrelevant stressor. Participants read both of the vignettes below in counterbalanced order.

**Race-based social identity threat:**

A large tech company just hired a group of new employees to fulfill the exceeding demand of the tech industry. Over a week, all new hirers were trained by current employees so that
they may become better acclimated to the company environment. As one supervisor began to review the policy of tech manufacturing he stated, “This process is complex so everyone please pay attention.” He then looked at Jerome, a new African American hire and stated, “You may have been hired for this job because you are African American, but let us see if you can actually keep it.”

**Other Type of Stressful event:**

Darius, an African American employee at a large investment firm, was given the task of presenting the company’s current financial profits to the Advisory Board. As Darius was setting up, it became apparent that he left the presentation at home. Darius immediately left to go retrieve the presentation, however with the travel to and from his home, Darius was very late to the start of the meeting. When the Advisory Board heard of the news, they immediately became angry that their morning will now be delayed.

After reading each vignette, participants indicated how likely they were to help the African American with a single item; “How likely are you to help the African American described?” Participants indicated their level of agreement on a 1 (extremely unlikely) to 7 (extremely likely) scale. High scores reflected stronger agreement likelihood of helping (Appendix H).

Participants then answered questions about whether they would advocate for the target and offer him social support. The advocacy questions for the race based social identity threat vignette were, “How likely are you to speak to the supervisor who said the comment to advocate for Jerome” and “How likely are you to speak to the hiring manager to advocate for Jerome” (α = .86). For the other stressful event vignette, the advocacy questions were, “How likely are you to speak to the manager who gave Darius the task and advocate for him” and “How likely are you to speak to the advisory board that is waiting for Darius and advocate for him” (α = .91). The questions about providing social support for the target were, “How likely are you to privately speak to (Jerome or Darius) and let him know that you are here for support”, and “How likely are you to send an email to (Jerome or Darius) to express your sympathy for his situation” (α = .57 Affirmative Action
vignette and $\alpha = .71$ stressful event vignette). Both the advocacy and social support scales used a 1-7 Likert scale with endpoints labeled extremely unlikely and extremely likely (Appendix H). Scores were averaged across the two items for each scale to compute an advocacy and social support score for each participant for each of the two vignettes.

Consistent with the cover story, participants then completed measures that examined “different attitudes, opinions, and beliefs that were imperative to work ethic, work identity, and employee interactions.” These measures included ingroup identity, merit identity, trait level empathy, and demographics. *Group identity* was measured using Branscombe et al., (2007) measure of White identity instead of the group identity measure used in Study 1 (Appendix I). This measure includes five items; “I am comfortable being White,” “Being White just feels natural to me,” “I believe that White people have a lot to be proud of,” “I feel good about being White,” “I am not embarrassed to admit that I am White.” Participants indicated their level of agreement with each item that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Scores were averaged across the five items to compute the overall measure of ingroup identity for each participant ($\alpha = .90$). Measures of merit identity ($\alpha = .84$), trait level empathy ($\alpha = .91$), feeling thermometer, and demographics were the same as Study 1. Finally, participants were debriefed and compensated.

**Study 2 Results**

Correlations, means and standard deviation of all measures are in Table 4.

**Manipulation Check.**

A two-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of the White privilege manipulation and the Affirmative Action manipulation on stereotype threat
feelings. The main effect of White privilege was significant, $F(1,351) = 22.90, p < .001, \eta^2 = .06$. Participants who thought about the ways they benefited from White privilege felt more threatened ($M = 1.82, SE = .06$) than those who were asked to think about the ways they benefitted from the internet ($M = 1.42, SE = .06$). The main effect of Affirmative Action was not significant, $F(1,351) = .01, p = .93, \eta^2 = .00$. Participants who read about the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action ($M = 1.62, SE = .06$) experienced similar stereotype threat feelings as the participants who read about the African American whose success was not attributed to Affirmative Action ($M = 1.62, SE = .06$). The interaction of the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation was also not significant, $F(1,351) = .04, p = .83, \eta^2 = .00$.

The same analysis was conducted to explore the impact of the White privilege manipulation and the Affirmative Action manipulation on the perceived stereotype threat feelings of the African American in the Affirmative Action or credentials vignette. The main effect of White privilege was not significant, $F(1,351) = .15, p = .70, \eta^2 = .00$. Participants who thought about the ways they benefited from White privilege perceived the African American described in the vignette as having similar stereotype threat feelings ($M = 2.07, SE = .06$) as those who were asked to think about the ways they benefitted from the internet ($M = 2.04, SE = .06$). The main effect of Affirmative Action was significant, $F(1,351) = 154.17, p < .001, \eta^2 = .31$. Participants who read about the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action ($M = 2.57, SE = .06$) perceived that African American experienced more stereotype threat feelings than participants who read about the African American whose success was not attributed to Affirmative Action ($M = 1.55, SE = .06$). The interaction of the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action
manipulation was not significant, $F(1,351) = .78, p = .38, \eta^2 = .00$). In other words, thinking about White privilege did not affect how threatening participants thought it was for the employee to experience an Affirmative Action threat to his merit.

As a second measure of perceptions of similarity, I took the absolute difference between personal stereotype threat feelings and the perceived stereotype threat feelings of the African American in the vignette. If thinking about White privilege creates greater perceived similarity in feelings with an African American undergoing an Affirmative Action threat to merit, there should be a significant interaction between the White privilege and Affirmative Action manipulations such that the absolute difference in participants’ threat feelings and perceptions of the target’s feelings should be smallest in the White privilege/Affirmative Action condition. Contrary to this prediction, a two-way between groups ANOVA indicated that the interaction of the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation was not significant, $F(1,351) = 1.14, p = .29, \eta^2 = .00$. The absolute difference in participants’ threat feelings and perceptions of the target’s feelings was smallest when participants received the internet control and credentials control condition ($M = .50, SD = .73$), and when participants received the White privilege manipulation and the credential control condition, ($M = .58, SD = .63$). The absolute difference in participants’ threat feelings and perceptions of the target’s feelings was largest when participants received the internet control and Affirmative Action manipulation ($M = 1.20, SD = .74$), and when participants received the White privilege and Affirmative Action manipulation, ($M = 1.11, SD = .87$). The main effect of White privilege also was not significant, $F(1,351) = 0.00, p = .98, \eta^2 = .00$. The absence of a main effect for White privilege indicates that the difference between participants’ feelings of threat and
perceived feelings of the African American were unaffected by thinking about White privilege \( (M = .85, SE = .06) \), and thinking about the ways one has benefitted from the internet \( (M = .85, SE = .06) \). The main effect of Affirmative Action was significant, \( F(1,351) = 60.35, p < .001, \eta^2 = .15 \). The significant main effect for the Affirmative Action manipulation indicates that there was a larger difference between self and target feelings when the participants read about the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action \( (M = 1.17, SE = .06) \) versus the participants who read about the African American whose success was not attributed to Affirmative Action \( (M = .54, SE = .06) \).

A 2 x 2 ANOVA also was conducted to explore the impact of the White privilege manipulation and the Affirmative Action manipulation on participants’ stereotype threat cognitions. The main effect of White privilege was significant, \( F(1,351) = 17.71, p < .001, \eta^2 = .05 \). Participants who thought about the ways they benefitted from White privilege experienced more stereotype threat cognitions \( (M = 3.52, SE = .12) \) than those who were asked to think about the ways they benefitted from the internet \( (M = 2.79, SE = .12) \). The main effect of Affirmative Action was not significant, \( F(1,351) = 2.21, p = .14, \eta^2 = .01 \). Participants who read about the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action \( (M = 3.28, SE = .12) \) experienced similar stereotype threat cognitions as the participants who read about the African American whose success was not attributed to Affirmative Action \( (M = 3.03, SE = .12) \). The interaction of the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation was also not significant, \( F(1,351) = 2.41, p = .12, \eta^2 = .01 \).

**Main analysis**

**Effects of White privilege and Affirmative Action manipulations.**
Trait level empathy, sex, and the feeling thermometer prejudice measure were used as covariates in all the analyses described in the remainder of this study. I conducted moderation analysis using Hayes’ PROCESS macro model 1 (Hayes, 2013) to examine whether there was an interaction between the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation on empathic concern (see Figure 1). The White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation were dummy coded such that 0 indicated their respective control conditions.

The overall regression model was significant, $R^2 = .15$, $F(6, 348) = 10.41$, $p < .001$. However as shown in Table 5, the predicted 2-way interaction between the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation was not significant.

I repeated the moderation analysis using the same predictors with perceived similarity of experience as the outcome to examine if participants who wrote about White privilege would perceive a shared experience of race-based social identity threat to merit with the employee whose meritorious identity had been threatened through Affirmative Action. The overall regression model was significant, $R^2 = .11$, $F(6, 348) = 7.35$, $p < .001$. As shown in Table 5, participants perceived themselves as having less similar experiences with the African American in the Affirmative Action condition than in the credentials control condition. Moreover, the predicted 2-way interaction between the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation was not significant.

**Analyses of mediators of the relationship between experimental conditions with outcome variables**

Mediation analyses were conducted using Hayes’ (2013) macro model 4 categorical procedures to examine whether perceived similar experience mediated the relationship.
between the experimental manipulations and empathic concern. Contrast coding was used so that the White privilege/Affirmative Action condition was compared to the other conditions collectively. The overall mediation model was significant, \(R^2 = .03, F(4, 350) = 2.86, p = .02\). The indirect effect of condition on empathic concern through similar experience was significant, \(B = -.14, SE = .05, 95\% \text{ CI}[-.25, -.05]\) (see Figure 8). Participants in the Privilege/Affirmative Action condition who perceived greater similarity with the African American had more empathic concern for him.

As I described in the analysis of experimental conditions on perceived similar experience, participants in the Affirmative Action condition perceived their experiences as less similar to the African Americans than did those in the credentials control condition, regardless of whether they had or had not previously thought about White privilege. This suggests that the White privilege/Affirmative Action contrast with the other three conditions may have produced a significant mediation effect only because of the effects of the Affirmative Action manipulation on perceived similarity to the African American. For this reason, I conducted a separate mediation analyses in which I looked at the mediated effects for each independent variable separately.

Results showed that when White privilege alone was the predictor, the mediated path was not significant, primarily because the White privilege manipulation had no effects on perceived similar experience (as you described in preceding analyses.)

In a model in which the Affirmative Action manipulation was the only predictor, the overall mediation model was significant, \(R^2 = .11, F(4, 350) = 10.64, p < .001\). The Affirmative Action manipulation was negatively related to perceptions of similar experience, \(B = -1.15, SE = .18, 95\% \text{ CI}[-1.51, -0.79]\) and similar experience significantly
predicted empathic concern, $B = .22$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [.14, .30]. Thus, the indirect effect of the Affirmative Action was significant, $B = .26$, $SE = .06$, 95% CI [-.40, -.15]. Note however that since participants in the Affirmative Action condition perceived less similarity in experience relative to participants in the credentials control condition, this mediated path implies that participants’ inability to discern the similarity between their experiences and those of an African American facing a race-based threat to merit identity depresses empathic concern for the plight of those whose accomplishments are attributed to Affirmative Action. In other words, the mediated path showed that those who perceived higher levels of similarity in experience with the African American had more empathic concern for him, but learning that he faced an Affirmative Action threat to merit reduced the amount of similarity in experience they perceived.

Mediation models also examined whether stereotype threat feelings and cognitions mediated the effect of the experimental manipulations (White privilege/Affirmative Action versus all other conditions) on empathic concern. The overall mediation models for stereotype feelings, $R^2 = .09$, $F(4, 350) = 9.03$, $p < .001$, and stereotype threat cognitions, $R^2 = .07$, $F(4, 350) = 6.30$, $p < .001$ were significant. Results revealed that stereotype threat feelings, $B = .11$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [.04,.21], and stereotype threat cognitions, $B = .07$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI [.01,.16], significantly mediated the relationship between experimental condition and empathic concern. Those who were assigned to the White privilege threat and Affirmative Action threat condition experienced greater stereotype feelings and cognitions than participants in the other three conditions, which was associated with greater empathic concern for the African American described in the Affirmative Action vignette (see Figure 9a and 9b). As the non-significant direct effect in the figures show, the White
privilege threat/ Affirmative Action threat leads to empathic concern only when mediated by stereotype threat feelings and cognitions.

I hypothesized that perceptions of similar experience to the African American in the Affirmative Action vignette would result from the feelings and cognitions evoked by thinking about White privilege. Thus, I examined whether stereotype threat feelings and stereotype threat cognitions mediate the effect of the White privilege/Affirmative Action condition on perceived similar experience.

The overall mediation models for stereotype feelings, $R^2 = .09, F(4, 350) = 9.03, p < .001$, and stereotype threat cognitions, $R^2 = .07, F(4, 350) = 6.30, p < .001$ were significant. Results revealed that stereotype threat feelings, $B = .16, SE = .07, 95\% CI[.05, .30]$, and stereotype threat cognitions, $B = .13, SE = .06, 95\% CI[.03, .26]$ significantly mediated the relationship between the White privilege/Affirmative Action condition (versus the other conditions) and similar experience (see Figure 10a and 10b). As shown in Figure 10a and 10b, the direct effect of experimental condition on perceptions of similar experience is negative, suggesting that participants who were assigned to the White privilege threat and Affirmative Action vignette were less likely to perceive a similar experience with the African American described. However the indirect effect shows that those who were assigned to the White privilege threat and Affirmative Action vignette experienced more stereotype threat feelings and cognitions which led to greater perceptions of a similar experience with the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action.

Collectively, these results suggest that participants who received the White privilege threat experienced more stereotype threat feelings and cognitions, which led to
increased perceptions of similar experience with the African American who was under Affirmative Action threat, which then led to increased empathic concern for that African American. This chain of events requires testing a serial mediation model, which I did using Hayes macro model 6. In one analysis, I tested the pathways from experimental condition (White privilege/Affirmative Action condition versus all other conditions) to stereotype threat feelings, the path from feelings to perceived similar experience, and the path from perceived similar experience to empathic concern. In another analysis I replaced stereotype threat feelings with stereotype threat cognitions.

The overall mediation models for stereotype feelings, $R^2 = .09$, $F(4, 350) = 9.03$, $p < .001$, and stereotype cognitions, $R^2 = .07$, $F(4, 350) = 6.30$, $p < .001$ were significant. Results revealed that stereotype threat feelings and similar experience, $B = .03$, $SE = .01$, 95% CI[.01, .06], and stereotype threat cognitions and similar experience, $B = .03$, $SE = .01$, 95% CI[.01, .06] significantly mediated the relationship between the White privilege/Affirmative Action condition (versus the other conditions) and empathic concern (see Figure 11a and 11b). Those who were assigned to the White privilege threat and Affirmative Action vignette experienced more stereotype threat feelings and cognitions, which led to greater perceptions of a similar experience with the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action, which ultimately led to increased empathic concern.

**Analyses of moderating effects of group identification and merit identity.**

I conducted a moderated mediation model using Hayes macro model 7 (Hayes, 2013) to examine whether group identification or merit identity moderated the indirect effect of experimental conditions on empathic concern through stereotype threat feelings.
or stereotype threat cognitions. Group identification and merit identity were mean centered prior to analysis. In these analysis condition was coded to contrast the White privilege/Affirmative Action condition with the other three conditions.

For group identity, the overall regression models for stereotype feelings, $R^2 = .11$, $F(6, 348) = 7.46, p < .001$, and stereotype threat cognitions, $R^2 = .07$, $F(6, 348) = 4.57, p < .001$ were significant. However, the predicted indirect paths through stereotype threat feelings, $B = .11, SE = .08, 95\% \text{CI}[-.06, .27]$, and though stereotype threat cognitions, $B = -.01, SE = .18, 95\% \text{CI}[-.36, .34]$ as moderated by group identification were not significant.

For merit identity, the overall regression models for stereotype feelings, $R^2 = .12$, $F(6, 348) = 7.67, p < .001$, and stereotype threat cognitions, $R^2 = .08$, $F(6, 348) = 5.24, p < .001$ were significant. Moreover, as shown in Figure 12, the moderated indirect paths for stereotype threat feelings, $B = .18, SE = .07, 95\% \text{CI}[-.05, .31]$, and stereotype threat cognitions, $B = .33, SE = .14, 95\% \text{CI}[-.06, .61]$ were significant.

Conditional effects for the merit identity moderated indirect paths indicated that the path going from condition to stereotype threat feelings, from feelings to perceived similar experience, and from perceived similar experience to empathic concern was significant only for participants who were average, $B = .08, SE = .04, 95\% \text{CI}[-.02, .19]$ to high, $B = .16, SE = .06, 95\% \text{CI}[-.07, .32]$ in merit identity, and was not significant for those low in merit identity, $B = .00, SE = .05, 95\% \text{CI}[-.09, .09]$. Likewise, this same serial pathway was significant with stereotype threat cognitions replacing stereotype threat feelings for participants who were average, $B = .06, SE = .03, 95\% \text{CI}[-.01, .15]$ to high, $B = .12, SE = .06, 95\% \text{CI}[-.03, .26]$ in merit identity, but not for participants who were low in merit identity.
identity, $B = .00$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI[-.05, .08]. In sum, for both stereotype threat feelings and cognitions, the sequential mediated path involving the effect of threat response to experimental condition as a predictor of empathic concern occurred only for participants who were average to high in merit identity.

**Helping Analyses.**

Two two-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of the White privilege manipulation and the Affirmative Action manipulation on helping the African American facing Affirmative Action threat and helping the African American facing a stressful situation. As shown in Table 6, for both scenarios, neither the main effects nor the interaction between the White privilege manipulation and the Affirmative Action manipulation were significant.

Mediation analyses were conducted to examine if stereotype threat feelings and stereotype threat cognitions mediated the relationship between experimental condition and helping the African American facing Affirmative Action threat and helping the African American facing a stressful situation. As shown in Figure 13, stereotype threat feelings and stereotype cognitions did not significantly mediate the relationship between experimental condition and helping the African American facing a stressful situation that was unrelated to Affirmative Action. However, as shown in Figure 14, stereotype threat feelings significantly mediated the path between experimental condition and helping the African American facing Affirmative Action threat, $B = -.05$, $SE = .03$, 95% CI[-.13, -.01], whereas this mediated pathway was not significant when stereotype threat cognitions were the mediator, $B = .01$, $SE = .02$, 95% CI[-.04, .07]. However, as can be seen in Figure 14a, the path from stereotype threat feelings to helping the African American facing an Affirmative
Action threat was negative. Participants who were asked to think about the ways others think they have benefitted from White privilege and then read about an African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action felt more stereotype threat feelings, but these feelings depressed helping for an African American target who faced a different Affirmative Action threat.

I conducted a serial mediation analysis to examine if both stereotype threat feelings and perceptions of similar experience mediated the path between experimental condition and helping the African American facing Affirmative Action threat. The overall regression model, \( R^2 = .09, F(4, 350) = 9.03, p < .001 \), was significant. As shown in Figure 15, the serial mediation was not significant, \( B = .00, SE = .01, 95\% CI[-01, .01] \). Specifically, perceptions of similar experience did not predict helping for the African American whose ability was questioned because he was an Affirmative Action hire or the African American who faced another stressor.

I conducted moderated mediation analysis to examine whether group identity or merit identity moderated the mediated effect of stereotype threat feelings between experimental condition and helping the African American facing Affirmative Action threat.

For group identity, the overall regression model, \( R^2 = .34, F(6, 348) = 7.46, p < .001 \), was significant. However the moderated indirect path for stereotype threat feelings, \( B = .11, SE = .08, 95\% CI[-.06, .27] \) was not significant. For merit identity, the overall regression model, \( R^2 = .12, F(6, 348) = 7.67, p < .001 \), was significant. Moreover, as shown in Figure 16, the moderated indirect path for stereotype threat feelings, \( B = .18, SE = .07, 95\% CI[.05, .31] \) was significant.
Conditional effects for the merit identity moderated indirect paths indicated that the path going from condition to stereotype threat feelings to helping the African American facing Affirmative Action threat was significant only for participants who were high, $B = -.09, SE = .06, 95\% CI[-.24, -.01]$ in merit identity. It was not significant for those low, $B = .00, SE = .03, 95\% CI[.06, .05]$, or average, $B = -.04, SE = .03, 95\% CI[-.15, .00]$, in merit identity.

**Study 2 Discussion**

White Americans in the White privilege threat condition experienced more stereotype threat feelings than the White Americans who were in the control condition. Complementary to these findings, White Americans in the Affirmative Action threat condition perceived the African American described in the vignette as experiencing more stereotype threat feelings than those who were in the credentials control. Interestingly, White Americans in the White privilege threat condition also experienced more stereotype threat cognitions than the White Americans who were in the control condition. This suggests that thoughts about how others think participants have benefitted from White privilege, evokes both affective and cognitive threat responses.

Study 2 revealed that thinking about how others believed the participant has benefitted from a privileged group membership did not directly lead White Americans to have greater empathic concern for an African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action. I hypothesized that participants in the White privilege condition would feel more empathic concern toward the African American whose success is attributed to Affirmative Action because both individuals have had a similar experience of race-based social identity threat to merit. However, results revealed that the White privilege
manipulation did not lead participants to perceive that the African American in the Affirmative Action scenario had an experience that was similar to their own. Interestingly, the Affirmative Action manipulation did affect perceptions of similar experience, such that participants in the Affirmative Action threat condition perceived less of a similar experience with the African American in the vignette than did those who received the credential control condition.

Similar experience mediated the relationship between the White privilege/Affirmative Action condition and empathic concern, but the effect was opposite of my predictions. Participants who thought about how others think they have benefitted from White privilege and read about an African American whose promotion was attributed to Affirmative Action were less likely to perceive a similar experience, while perceived similar experience was associated with increased empathic concern. One interpretation of this finding is that White privilege had the undesirable effect of diminishing the perception of similarity which was necessary to promote empathic concern. However, additional mediation analyses revealed that this finding is likely to have occurred because the Affirmative Action manipulation negatively affected perceptions of similar experience, whereas the White privilege manipulation did not affect perceived similarity. In other words, Whites generally perceive relatively little in common with the experiences of an African American facing an Affirmative Action threat to his merit identity, regardless of whether they have been thinking about White privilege or not. As shown in Table 2, overall perceptions of similar experience were low (M = 1.80). This supports the notion that White Americans may have never experienced their success be attributed to Affirmative Action and thus do not see the similar experience.
This explanation is also consistent with the findings for stereotype threat feelings. White Americans who were asked to think about the ways others think they have benefitted from White privilege and read about an African Americans’ promotion being attributed to Affirmative Action experienced more feelings of stereotype threat, which led to increased empathic concern.

This suggests that similar feelings arising from stereotype threat in the scenarios of race based social identity threat to merit in the White privilege manipulation and the perceived feelings of stereotype threat the African American faced in the Affirmative Action manipulation led to increased empathic concern.

In addition to stereotype threat feelings, stereotype threat cognitions also mediated the effect between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action condition and empathic concern in the predicted direction. Moreover, both stereotype threat feelings and stereotype threat cognitions positively mediated the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action condition and perceptions of similar experience. This finding is further evidence that suggests that participants did not perceive a similarity in literal experiences, but rather perceive the similarity in the internal experiences of emotion and cognition. This also suggests that when participants think about how others think they have benefitted from White privilege and then read about an African American whose promotion is attributed to Affirmative Action, there are multiple processes that lead to increased empathic concern. As the results showed, participants in the White privilege threat/Affirmative Action experienced increased cognitions and feelings of identity threat which may lead to increased perceptions of similar experience, which in turn leads to increased empathic concern.
Interestingly, an identity of merit ($M = 5.10, SD = 1.36$) and group identity ($M = 6.73, SD = 1.13$) were both relatively central to the self-concepts of participants. Identity of merit was a significant moderator of the mediating effects of stereotype threat feelings on White privilege threat/ Affirmative Action threat on empathic concern. Participants with average to high identities of merit felt increased stereotype threat feelings in the White privilege/Affirmative Action condition, which in turn led to increased feelings of empathic concern for the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action. This suggests that thinking about how others believe you have benefitted from White privilege may be a more threatening attack on merit identity than thinking about how you think you have benefitted, as participants in Study 1 did. This finding also supports my theoretical argument that an identity of merit is important to most Americans and that accusations of White privilege are a threat to this identity. It is not clear why stereotype threat cognitions did not function in a similar way.

Group identity did not moderate the mediating effects of stereotype threat feelings and stereotype threat cognitions on White privilege threat/ Affirmative Action threat on empathic concern. As previously stated I used a different measure of group identity for Study 2. Although both measures are intended to measure group identity, the items of the measure used in Study 2 focuses more on feelings aspects of group identity, while the measure used in Study 1 focuses on the group esteem and attachment aspects of group identity. To test this hypothesis, I conducted principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation for the items included in the group identification measures. The items used in Study 2 were, “I am comfortable being White,” “Being White just feels natural to me”, “I believe that White people have a lot to be proud of ”,“I feel good about being
White”, “I am not embarrassed to admit that I am White.” The items for the Study 1 group identification measure were “Overall, being White has very little to do with how I feel about myself (R)”, “In general being White is an important part of my self-image” ,“Being White is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am (R)” , “Being White is an important reflection of who I am”, “My destiny is tied to the destiny of other White people” , “I have a strong sense of belonging to White people”, “I have a strong attachment to other White people”, “Being White is not a major factor in my social relationships (R).”

Study 2 results revealed a one component solution which accounted for 71.32% of the variance. Study 1 results revealed a two-component factor structure which accounted for 64.45% of the variance. These results support the idea that the measure of group identification in Study 2 may be tapping into one construct focused on how people feel about being White, while the measure of group identification in Study 1 may be tapping into two constructs, one focusing on the centrality of being White to personal identity and the other focusing on attachment to ingroup members. This may also explain the differences in group identification moderation findings from Study 1 and Study 2.

Although empathic concern was positively correlated with helping for the African American experiencing race-based identity threat and helping for the African American experiencing a stressful event, the White privilege manipulation and Affirmative Action manipulation did not directly predict helping for a second African American who faced an Affirmative Action threat or other stressor in a different employment-related scenario. Stereotype threat feelings produced an indirect (mediated) effect between experimental condition and helping the African American facing Affirmative Action threat, but not in the predicted direction. Increased feelings of stereotype threat from the experimental
conditions led to a decreased likelihood to help the African American facing Affirmative Action threat. It is possible that because participants who were asked to think about how others think they have benefited from White privilege felt increased stereotype threat, they were too consumed by their own emotional state to help another. Although they felt more empathic concern with the African American facing an Affirmative Action threat in the first vignette either this did not generalize to empathic concern for an African American facing a different Affirmative Action threat or empathic concern did not translate to actual behavior.

Finally merit identity significantly moderated the mediated path of stereotype threat feelings between experimental condition and helping the African American facing Affirmative Action threat. However, this finding was opposite of the hypothesized direction. Participants who were high in an identity of merit and thought about the ways others think they have benefitted from White privilege were less likely to feel stereotype threat, which made them less likely to help the African American facing Affirmative Action threat.

**Overall Discussion**

Across two studies, the current research provides preliminary evidence that similar experiences of race-based social-identity threat to merit will increase empathic concerns for stigmatized minority members in non-stigmatized majority members. Consistently across both studies, White Americans who endured a race based social identity threat to merit through White privilege felt more threatened, which in turn led to increased empathic concern for an African American who endured a race based social identity threat to merit through Affirmative Action.
In Study 1, in which participants thought about the ways they thought they have benefitted from White privilege, participants experienced more stereotype threat feelings, but not stereotype threat cognitions. However, in Study 2, in which participants thought about the ways they thought others think they have benefitted from White privilege, participants experienced both more stereotype threat feelings and cognitions. According to Lazarus (1991), cognition and emotion function in a bidirectional relationship. Emotions are generated when people recognize that a behavior can cause them to gain or lose something that is relevant to their goals and well-being. Recognition is a cognitive process. In Study 1, participants were instructed to think about themselves, and therefore only experienced a threat to their identity of merit from one person, themselves. However in Study 2, participants were asked to think about the threats others pose to their identity of merit. Thus, this may have affected both emotions and cognitions because thinking about how others view oneself is inherently a cognitive process.

In both studies, the White privilege and Affirmative Action manipulation did not directly predict perceptions of similar experience with an African American experiencing an Affirmative Action threat to his merit identity. However, both manipulations predicted feelings of threat (Study 1 and Study 2) and cognitions of threat (Study 2), which did predict perceptions of similar experience. These findings suggest that in instances of race-based social identity threat, White Americans may not see the similarity in the literal experience of African Americans. White men will never experience their success attributed to Affirmative Action and White women may not realize they are beneficiaries of Affirmative Action policies (Angyal, 2016). Although both White privilege and attributions of success to Affirmative Action are situations of race-based social identity
threat, White Americans do not see the literal similarities. Instead, White American participants may relate to the internal feelings and cognitions that both experiences create. As a result, White Americans feel more empathic concern toward African Americans. This is supported by the significant negative direct effect of the Affirmative Action manipulation on perceptions of similar experience. In both Study 1 and Study 2, participants who received the Affirmative Action manipulation were less likely to see a similar experience than participants in the credentials control condition.

In Study 1, the White privilege/Affirmative Action condition produced greater empathic concern than the other conditions did, an effect that was mediated by stereotype threat cognitions. In Study 2, both stereotype threat feelings and stereotype threat cognitions significantly mediated the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action threat and empathic concern. Moreover, there was a significant serial mediation such that stereotype threat feelings and perceptions of similar experience, and stereotype threat cognitions and perceptions of similar experience mediated the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action threat and empathic concern in the hypothesized direction. This suggests that reminding people about White privilege increases empathic concern by increasing stereotype threat feelings (Study 1 and Study 2) and stereotype threat cognitions (Study 2), and that the effects these increases have on empathic concern are partly attributable to the effects of threatened feelings and cognitions on the perception that an African American facing an Affirmative Action threat is having an experience similar the one participants’ in White privilege condition had.

In Study 2, although stereotype threat feelings and cognitions led to greater empathic concern for one African American experiencing a race-based threat to merit
identity, there was no corresponding increase helping another African American facing a different race-based threat to his merit identity. Moreover, the threatened feelings participants in the White privilege /Affirmative Action condition experienced led to decreased likelihood to help the African American facing a race-based threat to his merit identity. According to the negative state relief model (Batson, Batson, Griffitt, Barrientos, Brandt, Sprengelmeyer, & Bayly, 1989), individuals who empathize with someone’s suffering experience emotional distress, which is a negative affective state that motivates people to take some kind of action. The action they take may be to help the person in need of help, but there are other actions, such as escaping from the situation that also can reduce personal distress. In addition, while empathic concern is an other-oriented emotion, personal distress is an inner-oriented emotion that creates a concern for one’s own welfare and comfort over the welfare and comfort of a suffering person (Batson & Coke, 1981). Consequently, although participants in the White privilege/Affirmative Action threat conditions felt empathic concern for the African American, they also were distressed for themselves. Helping an African American experiencing race-based social identity threat helps the African American, but may not reduce the negative emotional state because it does not change how others believe one has benefitted from White privilege. This might explain why the personal distress participants experience was not effective in motivating them to help the African American facing and Affirmative Action threat.

In Study 1, but not in Study 2, group identity was a significant moderator of the effects of experimental condition on empathic concern. Participants in the White privilege manipulation who had moderate to high ingroup identity were more likely to express empathic concern for the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative
Action. In neither study did group identification moderate the mediating role that stereotype threat feelings played in producing the effects of experimental condition on empathic concern. This suggests that the moderating effect of group identification on empathic concern does not occur because only high or moderately group identified experience threat feelings and cognitions. The finding that group identification has a moderating effect in Study 1 but not in Study 2 may be the result of the different measures of group identification I used in the two studies. As shown in the factor analysis, the measure of group identification used in Study 1 covered multiple concepts of group identity, while the group identification measure used for Study 2 focused on one central aspect of group identity.

In Study 2 (but not Study 1), merit identity was a significant moderator to the mediated effect of stereotype threat feelings on experimental condition and empathic concern. Participants in the White privilege condition who were average to high in merit identity felt increased stereotype threat feelings, which led to increased empathic concern for the African American whose success was attributed to Affirmative Action. An identity of merit was important to participants’ self-concept in both Studies 1 and 2. Since the measure of merit identity was the same in both studies, there is no readily apparent explanation for why the findings of the two studies differ.

Overall, Study 1 and Study 2 provide preliminary evidence that similar experiences of race-based social identity threat to merit may foster greater empathic concern in majority members toward minority members. Both studies demonstrate that when White Americans think about White privilege they feel greater empathic concern for an African American whose success is attributed to Affirmative Action. Although I hypothesized that
perceptions of similar experience would mediate this finding. Study 1 offered no support for this, and the evidence found in Study 2 is contrary to the hypothesized direction. Interestingly, across both studies stereotype threat feelings, and in Study 2, stereotype threat cognitions were significant mediators between the White privilege/ Affirmative Action manipulation and (1) empathic concern and (2) perceptions of similar experience. This suggests that the White American participants’ may not have been able to perceive the similarity in the literal experiences of race-based social identity threat to merit, however they were able to perceive the similarity in feelings and cognitions that are a consequence of race-based social identity threat to merit.

Contrary to my hypothesis, the increased feelings and cognitions of stereotype threat that resulted from the race-based social identity threat to merit of White Americans did not lead to an increased likelihood of helping an African American facing race-based social identity threat to merit. Instead, Study 2 showed participants’ distress was related to reduced likelihood to help an African American facing race-based social identity threat to merit as a function of Affirmative Action. Although previous research and the current research has shown that empathic concern is significantly correlated with pro-social behaviors (e.g., helping), the motivations as to why someone may help are not as straightforward. While I hypothesized that empathic concern may evoke an altruistic motivation to help the targeted individual, the current results support the theoretical framework that empathic concern may evoke an egoistic motivation to relieve themselves from the negative emotional state empathic concern can create.

The current studies highlight an overlooked identity that is essential to all Americans; an identity of merit. Both White Americans and African Americans share an
identity of merit in which they conceptualize themselves as hardworking and earning their achievements and success. Research has shown that creating a common identity between majority and minority group members fosters positive intergroup contact (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009; Insko & Robinson, 1967). Otten & Moskowitz (2000) found that people experience more positive emotions toward other ingroup members than toward outgroup members. White Americans might be encouraged to recategorize themselves and African Americans as members of one ingroup of meritorious people. This should lead to increases in positive feelings toward African Americans.

Another prominent mechanism to reducing racial intergroup differences is I-sharing. I-sharing occurs when two individuals share an identical subjective experience with another person (Pinel, Long, Landau, Alexander, & Pyszczynski, 2006; Pinel & Long, 2012). In other words, it feels as though someone who simultaneously has the same reaction as you must share your view of the world – undoubtedly, a positive social experience. Although the participants in the current studies did not I-share per se, helping White Americans to recognize that a White privilege threat to merit identity is similar to an Affirmative Action threat to merit identity may increase the likelihood that they will perceive a shared emotional experience. In the present studies they did not do so, and in fact perceived the African American facing the Affirmative Action threat as having an experience that is dissimilar to their own.

The current studies also contribute to the growing literature that identifies White privilege as a mechanism to bias reduction. Stewart, Latu, Branscombe, Phillips, & Denney (2012) found that White American college students who thought about the unearned advantages of being White were more likely to act to reduce racial inequality on campus,
and overall held more positive attitudes toward African Americans. The current studies add to the current literature dedicated to the positive effects of White privilege as the first to use White privilege as a mechanism of similarity to African Americans, and empathic concern as the outcome.

Limitations

It is important to mention some limitations of the present set of studies. First, I used an online participant pool rather than an undergraduate participant pool. This was a strategic choice to recruit a more representative sample of America than the educated, relatively affluent, and predominantly liberal undergraduate population of the University of Vermont.

The current study also used self-report measures. In the majority of the aforementioned research, empathic concern has been assessed with self-report indexes and experimental manipulations. Thus the current studies also used these methods of measure and manipulation in order to compare the current results with past research. Although some self-report indexes and experimental manipulations are influenced by social desirability, ratings of empathic concern in Study 1 and Study 2 were low (see Table 1 and Table 4) suggesting participants did not inflate their responses. It is possible that ratings of empathic concern may have been low due to the use of vignettes. Vignettes may have needed to be a little more robust. Future research may want to employ additional measures of empathic concern by studying facial gestures and vocal indices of empathy-related responding (Zhou, Valiente, & Eisenberg, 2003).
Lastly, all vignettes designed for the study used male names. Eisenberg and Lennon (1983) found that in general, women empathize more than men when empathic concern is measured by self-report scales. Participant sex was used a covariate in all main analyses to control for this potential confound. Future research should explore whether gender of the person experiencing Affirmative Action threat to merit matters.

**Future Directions**

Looking forward, I see a number of interesting and potentially important directions for future research. The present research investigated majority members empathizing with minority members. However will minority members show empathic concern to majority members who undergo a similar experience of race-based social identity threat to merit? In other words, in the current studies, I used a White population because I was focused on majority perceptions. But future research should investigate minority perceptions using an African American population. Would African American participants’ who think about how others believe they have benefitted from Affirmative Action feel more empathic concern for a White American whose success was attributed to White privilege? It would also be interesting to investigate White perceptions in relation to other minority identities such as Latin American or Asian American.

In conclusion, White Americans may never fully understand the pervasive discrimination African Americans face in social settings, but they may be able to understand the feelings of threat that these situations evoke. The present studies provided empirical evidence that race based social identity threat has some potential to help White Americans empathize with the emotional experiences of Black Americans who experience race-based threats to their social identities.
Table 1. Study 1 Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

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Table 2. Study 1 Effects of White privilege Threat Manipulation and Affirmative Action Manipulation on Empathic Concern and Perceptions of Similar Experience

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Table 3. Study 1 Effects of White privilege Threat Manipulation/ Affirmative Action Manipulation and Identification on Empathic Concern
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Table 4. Study 2 Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

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Table 5. Study 2 Effects of White privilege Threat Manipulation and Affirmative Action Manipulation on Empathic Concern and Perceptions of Similar Experience

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<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White privilege</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAxAA</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling Thermometer</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trait level Empathy</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Hypothesized moderation model
Figure 2. Study 1 Effect of White Privilege and Affirmative Action Manipulation on Empathic Concern
Figure 3. Hypothesized moderated moderation analysis
Figure 4. Study 1 Moderating Effect of White privilege threat/Affirmative Action threat and Group Identification on Empathic Concern
Figure 5. Study 1 Mediating Effect of Stereotype Threat Feelings on the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action Threat on Empathic Concern. ** $p < .001$ *$p < .05$
Figure 6. Study 1 Mediating Effect of Stereotype Threat Feelings on the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action Threat on Perceptions of Similar Experience. . ** $p < .001$ *$p \leq .05$
Figure 7. Study 1 test of moderated mediation. ** $p < .001$ * $p \leq .05$
Figure 8. Study 2 Mediating Effect of Perceptions of Similar Experience on the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action Threat on Empathic Concern. ** $p < .001$ *$p \leq .05$
Figure 9. Study 2 Mediating Effect of Stereotype Threat Feelings and Cognitions on the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action threat on Empathic Concern. ** p < .001 * p ≤ .05
Figure 10. Study 2 Mediating Effect of Stereotype Threat Feelings and Cognitions on the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action threat on Perceptions of Similar Experience. ** $p < .001$ * $p \leq .05$
Figure 11. Study 2 Mediating Effect of Stereotype Threat Feelings/Cognitions and Perceptions of Similar Experience on the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action threat on Empathic Concern. ** $p < .001$ *$p \leq .05$
Figure 12. Study 2 Moderating Effect of Merit Identity on the Mediating Effect of Stereotype Threat Feelings/Cognitions on the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action Threat on Empathic Concern
Figure 13. Study 2 Mediating Effect of Stereotype Threat Feelings and Cognitions on the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action threat on Helping Stressful Situation
Figure 14. Study 2 Mediating Effect of Stereotype Threat Feelings and Cognitions on the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action threat on Helping Race-based Social Identity Threat
Figure 15. Study 2 Mediating Effect of Stereotype Threat Feelings and Perceptions of Similar Experience on the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action threat on Helping Race-based Social Identity Threat
Figure 16. Study 2 Moderating Effect of Merit Identity on the Mediating Effect of Stereotype Threat Feelings on the relationship between White privilege threat/Affirmative Action Threat on Helping Race-based Social Identity Threat
References


Appendix A

Study 1

H1: White Americans who are assigned to think about the benefits gained from a privileged group membership may feel greater empathic concern for an African American whose success is attributed to Affirmative Action.

H2: Perceived similar experience will mediate the relationship between the experimental manipulations and empathic concern.

H3: This effect may be moderated by White Americans who strongly identify as White or strongly identify as being a meritorious person.

Study 2:

H1: White Americans assigned to think about how others believe they have benefited from a privileged group membership would feel greater empathic concern for an African American whose success is attributed to Affirmative Action.

H2: Increased empathic concern would lead to more willingness to help a different African American facing an incident of race-based social identity threat.

H3: The similarity between participants’ stereotype threat feelings and their perceptions of how the African American was feeling would mediate the relationship between thinking about White privilege and empathic concern for the African American facing an Affirmative Action threat to merit identity.

H4: This effect may be moderated by White Americans who strongly identify as White
Appendix B

Stereotype Threat Feelings

1 (does not describe my feeling) to 5 (clearly describes my feelings)

Threatened
Defensiveness
Distress
Guilt
Anger
Appendix C
Revised Stereotype Vulnerability Scale
Woodcock, Hernandez, Estrada, & Schultz (2012)
1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

1. Some people believe you have not earned what you have because you are White
2. If you are better than average, people assume it is because of the unearned benefits of being White
3. If you are hired for a job, people will assume that it is because you are White not because of your merit
4. You face unfair evaluation of your merit because you are White
Appendix D
Batson (1991)

1 (none at all) to 7 (extremely)

Emotions

Alarmed
Grieved
Sympathetic
Determined
Softhearted
Troubled
Warm
Pleased
Distressed
Low-spirited
Perturbed
Compassionate
Upset
Disturbed
Tender
Worried
Moved
Anxious
Feeling low
Intrigued
Heavy-hearted
Relaxed
Happy
Sad
Appendix E

Revised Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity Centrality Scale

Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith (1997)

1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

1. Overall, being White has very little to do with how I feel about myself (R)
2. In general being White is an important part of my self-image
3. Being White is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am (R)
4. Being White is an important reflection of who I am
5. My destiny is tied to the destiny of other White people
6. I have a strong sense of belonging to White people
7. I have a strong attachment to other White people
8. Being White is not a major factor in my social relationships (R)
Appendix F
Importance to Identity subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale
Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992
1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

“Meritorious is an adjective that describes an individuals’ identity as a person whose social rewards, success, and status are earned (or based on merit) and reflect hard work.”

1. Being meritorious is an important reflection of who I am
2. In general being meritorious is an important part of myself-image
3. Being meritorious is unimportant to my sense of what kind of person I am (R)
4. Overall, being meritorious has very little to do with how I feel about myself (R)
Appendix G
Empathic Concern subscale of the Empathy Scale
Davis, 1983
1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

1. When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective toward them
2. When I see someone being treated unfairly, I sometimes don't feel very much pity for them (R)
3. I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me
4. I would describe myself as a pretty soft-hearted person
5. Sometimes I don't feel sorry for other people when they are having problems (R)
6. Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal (R)
7. I am often quite touched by things that I see happen
Appendix H

1 (extremely unlikely) to 7 (extremely likely)

How likely are you to help the African American described?

**Advocacy:**
How likely are you to speak to the supervisor who said the comment to advocate for Jerome?
How likely are you to speak to the hiring manager to advocate for Jerome?
How likely are you to speak to the manager who gave Darius the task and advocate for him?
How likely are you to speak to the advisory board that is waiting for Darius and advocate for him?

**Social Support:**
How likely are you to privately speak to (Jerome or Darius) and let him know that you are here for support?
How likely are you to send an email to (Jerome or Darius) to express your sympathy for his situation?
Appendix I
White Identity
Branscombe, Schmitt & Schiffhauer (2007)
1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree)

1. I am comfortable being White
2. Being White just feels natural to me
3. I believe that White people have a lot to be proud of
4. I feel good about being White
5. I am not embarrassed to admit that I am White