



The Role of Stigma in Understanding Ethnicity Differences in Authoritarianism

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Ethnic minorities often have shown higher mean levels of authoritarianism compared to Whites. However, no theoretical mechanism has been directly tested to explain these ethnicity differences. Using the stigma literature as a framework, two studies are presented that test a novel explanation for this difference, rooted in the devaluing that accompanies being a member of a stigmatized group in society. The results show that, in Study 1, ethnic minorities reported higher levels of authoritarianism in ways that could not be explained by traditional explanations of authoritarianism, including lower income, lower education, or lack of cognitive complexity. However, in Study 2, when participants were given the opportunity to affirm their sense of worth, ethnic minorities did not differ in their mean levels of authoritarianism compared to Whites. These findings are discussed in the context of understanding ethnic minority endorsement of authoritarianism in terms of self-regulatory processes that may be related to their stigmatized condition in society.

KEY WORDS: authoritarianism, ethnicity, stigma compensation theory, prejudice

Research on the demographic correlates of ethnicity has shown that ethnic minorities in the United States have higher levels of authoritarianism compared to Whites (e.g., Austin, Hale, & Ramsey, 1987; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; MacKinnon & Centers, 1956; Nation & LeUnes, 1983; Ramirez, 1967; Smith & Prothro, 1957; Varela et al., 2004). The present research is designed to provide an explanation for these ethnicity differences. The objective is to show that ethnic minority endorsement of authoritarianism is not a function of lack of sophistication or cognitive simplicity, as some theoretical perspectives would predict, but is a function of self-regulatory processes that accompany being a member of a stigmatized group.

Evidence for Ethnicity Differences in Authoritarian Attitudes

Studies that have examined authoritarian attitudes across ethnic groups in the United States have found differences in mean levels between Whites and ethnic minorities.¹ For example, in one study of nearly 8000 high school students in the San Francisco bay area, Black and Latino children reported coming from homes whose parents endorsed greater levels of authoritarian parenting compared to their White counterparts (Dornbusch et al., 1987). Other studies have confirmed these results from the perspective of the parents: Mexican mothers report using more authoritarian parenting practices compared to Whites (Rodriguez & Olswang, 2003), and in one sample of representative adults in California, Blacks endorsed more than Whites the idea that “children should obey every order their parents give without question, even if they think the parents are wrong” (Noel & Pinkney, 1964, p. 619).

Other studies on more generalized authoritarian attitudes, given by the California F scale and the Rokeach dogmatism scale, have shown similar ethnicity differences.² In one representative sample in Los Angeles in the early 1950s, both Mexican and Black groups were composed of a significantly higher proportion of authoritarians, based on a measure similar to the F scale, compared to Whites (MacKinnon & Centers, 1956). Three studies using the California F scale measure of authoritarianism among college participants showed that Mexican-American students (Ramirez, 1967), Black freshmen (Smith & Prothro, 1957), and Black senior football players (Nation & LeUnes, 1983) expressed higher levels of authoritarianism than their White counterparts. Another relatively more recent sample of laid-off police officers in Detroit showed that Blacks scored higher than Whites on the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale (Austin, Hale, & Ramsey, 1987).

Taken together, these results show that ethnic minorities in the United States seem to endorse authoritarian attitudes more strongly than Whites. Despite consistent findings at the empirical level, however, the studies that reveal ethnicity differences have made little progress at the level of interpretation, offering either scant theoretical explanation or a grab-bag of speculations. Occasionally, socio-economic class differences (i.e., lack of education among ethnic minorities) have been invoked as a reason for these ethnicity differences (Noel & Pinkney, 1964). For the most part, however, ethnicity differences in authoritarianism lack explanation.

¹ The term “ethnic minorities” in this paper includes African Americans and Latinos, who are the focus here given their history of longstanding and continuing discrimination in the United States (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and given the body of evidence presented here that shows consistent results across these different ethnic groups.

² Curiously, later studies of authoritarianism using the Right-Wing Authoritarianism measure (RWA; Altemeyer, 1981) rarely were conducted targeting ethnic minority samples (Altemeyer, 1996, p. 17), and consequently the reporting of ethnicity differences is generally absent in later authoritarianism research.

Different Explanations Concerning Ethnicity Differences in Authoritarian Attitudes

Different theoretical perspectives could provide explanations for the endorsement of authoritarianism among ethnic minorities. One common perspective views authoritarianism as a by-product of factors that accompany lower status, such as lack of resources and limited education. An alternative perspective, tested in the present research, views the endorsement as serving a psychological, self-protective function.

The first perspective is rooted in the economic and educational factors associated with being a member of a lower status group, focusing on how the by-products of a lack of financial resources and education may influence greater endorsement of authoritarianism. Members of ethnic minorities generally are less educated and have less access to financial resources compared to Whites (see, e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This deficit could lead to an attraction to authoritarianism, a link that was first considered in research on “working class authoritarianism” (Lipset, 1959), which suggested that the relationship between low status and authoritarianism could be explained by greater economic insecurity (akin to a kind of frustration-aggression) and lack of social and political sophistication among members of the working classes.

Subsequent treatments of the phenomenon endorsed this hypothesis by suggesting that working class authoritarianism may be explained by a narrow world view (Gabennesch, 1972) or lack of exposure to multiple perspectives (Kelman & Barclay, 1963) that would otherwise be avoided with a good education. Consistent with this perspective, research has shown a connection between authoritarianism and less political knowledge, as well as less interest in gaining political knowledge (Peterson, Duncan, & Pang, 2002). One recent review of the literature has shown that certain cognitive and motivational factors, including intolerance of ambiguity, attributional simplicity, lack of openness to experience, etc., are related to authoritarian attitudes (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Despite this circumstantial evidence, however, it remains empirically untested whether these factors explain specifically ethnicity differences in authoritarianism.

The second theoretical perspective, newly forwarded here, also links the greater endorsement of authoritarianism among ethnic minorities to their lower social status, but not due to by-products accompanying their lower status such as lack of sophistication or a narrow world view. Instead, this perspective focuses on psychological processes that accompany being a stigmatized person in society. In brief, ethnic minorities are far more likely than Whites to experience prejudice and discrimination as part of their daily lives, a condition that can lead to a state of psychological self-defensiveness against future threats. This psychological defensiveness may lead members of stigmatized groups such as ethnic minorities to adopt attitudes that provide a psychological sense of security, including authoritarian attitudes.

The Socially Devalued State of the Stigmatized

The literature on stigma has examined extensively the relationship between being a stigmatized person in society and the various consequences of that stigmatization on basic psychological processes and motivations. To begin, there is an assumption that those who are stigmatized face long-term threats to the self based on prejudice, an assumption maintained by some of the earliest stigma theorists (e.g., Goffman, 1963) and shared by stigma researchers today (Crocker & Major, 1989; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002). Ethnic minorities have lower social value (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006), “negative social value” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 32), or carry a social stigma that is “inextricably linked to the value placed on varying social identities” (Dovidio, Major, & Crocker, 2000, p. 3). Indeed, the term “devalued” often is used to describe stigmatized groups in society such as ethnic minorities (Major & O’Brien, 2005; Miller & Kaiser, 2001). Furthermore, the disproportionate negative association with ethnic minorities shown by the body of research on the implicit association test (IAT) reveals the negative group-based associations that permeate a culture (Banaji, 2001; Karpinski & Hilton, 2001), and information about which groups are oppressed, devalued, or “badly off” in a society (Uhlmann, Brescoll, & Paluck, 2006).

This devalued sense of worth is social. It is tied to one’s value within one’s broader society, or one’s “relational value” (Leary, 2007). Indeed, the very process of stigmatization and the experience of prejudice and discrimination has been defined in part by this devalued relational status: “The central feature of stigmatization may involve not merely a tainted identity but also low relational value,” and “The targets of discrimination are people whose relational value is perceived to be low” (Leary, 2010, p. 877). This devalued relational value is threatening to one’s sense of belonging, a core psychological need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; see also Fiske, 2010).

One’s sense of social worth as it is described here is not the same thing as one’s self-esteem. The two constructs are related, but they are theoretically distinguishable such that a sense of social worth is not a person’s personal opinion of their social worth but their sense of their worth to society *as held by others* in that society. Conversely, self-esteem involves people’s own perception of their personal worth and efficacy, and how generally positive they feel toward themselves as reflected by explicit (Rosenberg, 1965) and implicit (Greenwald & Farnham, 2000) measures. Self-esteem may be related to social worth insofar as perceptions of social exclusion and inclusion (which are a function of one’s social worth) can lower and raise one’s self-esteem (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Yet self-esteem can be intentionally controlled or artificially inflated as a self-presentational strategy, and in the face of cognitively appraised threats self-esteem may be maintained in both its explicit (Crocker, Voelkl, Testa, & Major, 1991) and implicit (Rudman, Dohn, & Fairchild, 2007) forms. These findings are consistent with data showing that ethnic minorities such as African Americans have as high

or even higher self-esteem compared to their White counterparts despite their devalued condition in society (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989).

One's sense of social worth is also separable from collective self-esteem, which captures individuals' attitudes and feelings about the groups to which they belong (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990). Plausibly, an individual's appraisal of their group's worth also can be personally controlled or manipulated like their self-esteem can: An African American may feel great about African Americans, but that assessment is separable from how the broader society views African Americans.³

Managing the Effects of Chronic Stigmatization

Such long-term threats to one's sense of social worth or value need to be managed in some fashion, and research shows that those who are members of ethnic minorities may be more vigilant to varying degrees about threats to the self. For example, ethnic minorities show higher levels of rejection sensitivity compared to higher-status Whites (Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002) and may have chronically higher levels of belonging uncertainty compared to higher-status Whites (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Other research shows that the stigmatized may show a greater preference for psychologically protective constructs such as respect even when it incurs a financial loss or prevention of financial gain (Davis & Henry, 2009). These studies show how ethnic minorities may be especially attracted to psychological beliefs and attitudes that entail a kind of psychological vigilance or protective quality. Theoretically, then, any attitude or behavior that could serve a psychologically protective function could be a candidate as a self-regulatory strategy to be used by stigmatized members of society.

Authoritarian attitudes may serve such a function. The earliest perspectives on authoritarianism couched its function as a tool for managing internalized threats (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) or as providing a "fixed anchorage point" for people to help stabilize their ego when it has compromised integrity (Allport, [1954] 1979, p. 403). Later, more refined analyses clarified the function of authoritarianism, conceptualizing it as a belief system that is useful for its psychologically protective function in the face of social, normative threats, such as anything that might invoke deviance from current political or social practices (Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Stenner, 2005). Authoritarianism also has been conceptualized broadly as a strategy for dealing with the stresses of reality when other

³ The closest measures that would approximate one's sense of social worth are the public collective self-esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) and the public regard subscale of the multidimensional model of racial identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997), both of which capture perceptions of others' evaluations of one's group. However, although a measure such as public collective self-esteem may capture one's sense of social worth as can be determined by messages that are clearly about one's group, it might not capture the full range of experiences of negative messages received by a person, which include subtle negative communications that are not so consciously perceived as tied to group membership but which form an everyday part of the stigmatized experience (e.g., nasty glares, curt remarks, paternalistic treatment).

stress management strategies fail (Oesterreich, 2005). Although these different studies examine authoritarian attitudes across a range of types of threats, be they internalized threats to one's ego integrity or externalized threats to social norms, what these perspectives share is that authoritarianism provides a kind of psychological defensiveness or security in the face of these threats. This psychologically defensive function of authoritarianism is the critical point for purposes here.

For members of ethnic minorities who chronically face threats due to their stigmatized condition in society, then, authoritarianism may provide a kind of psychological defensive or security function. This specific type of threat, of being marginalized and socially devalued based on one's social group membership, to this point has not been considered by authoritarian researchers. Yet it is a threat that could be addressed by the psychological defensiveness that authoritarian attitudes offer.

Although there is no current evidence to point to the role of psychological defensiveness in explaining ethnic differences in authoritarianism, some existing evidence is consistent with this hypothesis. One study examining several hundred families in the United States and Mexico showed that Mexican-American parents were more likely to endorse authoritarian child-raising practices compared to their White counterparts, consistent with previous findings, but they were also more likely to endorse authoritarian practices compared to Mexican parents living in Mexico (Varela et al., 2004). These patterns emerged despite the fact that the Mexican Americans in the study were as educated as and better paid than their Mexican counterparts living in Mexico; clearly, the education and income alternative explanations cannot be applied here. However, because Mexicans are more likely to endure prejudices and psychological threats to the self when living in the United States compared to Mexico, according to the theory presented here one would expect such a greater endorsement of authoritarianism among Mexicans living in the United States compared to those living in Mexico.

In sum, the psychologically protective function of authoritarian attitudes assumes that ethnicity differences in authoritarianism are not caused by a lack of education or lack of financial resources that would limit the world view and cognitive complexity of ethnic minorities. While this perspective does not deny the influence that a lack of education or narrow world view could have on determining authoritarian attitudes more generally, it does suggest that such processes probably do not explain the relationship between ethnicity and authoritarianism as found throughout the literature.

The Present Studies

The present studies are designed to examine ethnicity differences in authoritarianism and the mechanisms that drive them. Two studies are presented to test the following hypotheses, respectively:

H1: Ethnicity differences on authoritarian beliefs will not be explained by economic resources, education, and need for cognition, each of which nevertheless is expected to independently predict authoritarian attitudes.

H2: Ethnicity differences on authoritarian beliefs will disappear in the presence of an affirmation of one's worth, which would remove any psychologically defensive need to endorse authoritarian attitudes for ethnic minorities.

Study 1

The first study was a survey of a nationally representative sample of American adults concerning their attitudes toward a range of political and social issues. Only those variables of theoretical interest here were selected for analysis.

Methods

Data were analyzed from the 2004 American National Election Studies (ANES) survey. Eligible participants were all United States citizens of voting age living in the contiguous 48 states. Participants were randomly selected using multistage area probability sampling for participation in face-to-face interviews. This sampling method was designed to maximize the probability of a sample representative of the American population. For more information about the sampling procedures used in the 2000–2004 NES, see National Election Studies (2006). The total number of participants interviewed was 1,212. All interviews were conducted in English.

Participants

The present analyses focus on comparing White participants, representing the higher status ethnic group in the United States, with Black and Latino participants, representing lower status ethnic groups in the United States. Of the total participants, 876 identified as White, 81 Latino (Hispanic), and 180 Black, resulting in a final sample size of $N = 1,137$ (including 517 men, 591 women, and 29 who did not indicate their sex). The age of participants ranged from 18 to 90, with an average age of 47.1 ($SD = 17.0$).

Measures

Minority Status. Participant minority status was split into two groups, Whites (the dominant group in American society) and those who identified as Black or Hispanic.⁴ The following analyses, then, were conducted comparing the 876 Whites to the 261 ethnic minorities.

⁴ The Black and Latino data are combined in both Studies 1 and 2 because the patterns do not change when examining these ethnic groups separately in their comparison to Whites.

Authoritarianism. The measure of authoritarianism used here was that which focuses on child-rearing values, or the kind of values one finds most important to teach children (Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Stenner, 2005). The advantage of such measures over other conceptualizations of authoritarianism such as the right-wing authoritarianism scale (RWA; Altemeyer, 1996) is that they remove the politics and conservatism that may taint scales such as RWA, which is important given that conservatism is theoretically separable from authoritarianism (Feldman, 2003; Stenner, 2005). The measures used here contrast values associated with autonomy (e.g., “curiosity,” “self-reliance,” “independence”) with conformity (e.g., “good manners,” “obedience,” “respect for elders”) and more directly tap into core features of authoritarianism that are especially sensitive to social threats.

For the measure of authoritarianism available in the 2004 ANES, the interviewer read four pairs of “desirable qualities,” and participants were asked to choose which one was more important for a child to have. The pairs included “independence or respect for elders,” “curiosity or good manners,” “obedience or self-reliance,” and “being considerate or well-behaved.” Participants scored a “5” if they chose the more authoritarian of the options (“respect for elders,” “good manners,” “obedience,” and “well-behaved”), and a “1” if they chose the alternative. Participants were given a “3” if they said “both were important.” The items were averaged into a scale, Cronbach’s alpha = .61.⁵

Potential Mechanisms to Explain Ethnicity Differences. Three measures were included to test the potential mechanisms behind the hypothesized differences between Whites and ethnic minorities on the authoritarianism scales, all based on different by-products of being lower in status in society: lack of income, lack of education, and cognitive simplicity. The first measure captured participants’ income, measured on a 23-point scale with 1 = “\$2,999 or less” through 23 = “\$120,000 and over,” with varying ranges in between. The average income of the sample was in the \$22,000–\$24,999 range. The second measure captured the participants’ education on a 7-point scale where 1 = 8 grades or less with no diploma or equivalency, to 7 = an advanced degree beyond a bachelor’s in college. The average education of the sample was a high school diploma. A third measure captured the participants’ cognitive complexity (cf. need for cognition, Cacioppo & Petty, 1982) with two items. The first asked how much they “like to have responsibility for handling situations that require a lot of thinking,” with responses coded on a 5-point scale anchored at 1 = “dislike it a lot” and 5 = “like it a lot.” The second question was a dichotomous measure that asked the participant whether they preferred to answer simple problems or complex problems. The items correlated fairly strongly ($r = .54, p < .001$) and so were converted into z scores and combined into a scale.

⁵ This reliability is not very high; however, it is consistent with the reliabilities reported in other studies using the same or similar scales (e.g., Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Stenner, 2005).

Covariates

Additionally, a variety of covariates were added to control for other potential influencers of authoritarian attitudes. These covariates included sex, age, party identification (ranging from 0 = strong Democrat to 6 = strong Republican), conservatism (ranging from 1 = extremely liberal to 7 = extremely conservative), whether or not the participant's parents were both born in the United States, and the length of time spent at the current place of residence.

Results and Discussion

The first set of analyses considered correlations between the different predictor variables and the measure of authoritarian attitudes. Each of the measures expected to have a relationship with authoritarian attitudes showed a statistically significant relationship to authoritarianism in the expected direction (see Table 1). Ethnic minorities were more likely to endorse authoritarian child-rearing practices, as well as those with lower incomes, less education, and less cognitive complexity.

Of greater theoretical interest here, however, were the tests of whether the variables known to be related to authoritarianism could significantly mediate the relationship between ethnicity and authoritarianism. Five models were tested: one for each theoretical mechanism, including income, education, and cognitive complexity; one for the full model including all three mechanisms; and one for the full model including the covariates. Despite their independent power in predicting authoritarianism, neither income, education, nor cognitive complexity significantly reduced the influence of ethnicity on authoritarian attitudes (see Table 2). In the full model all predictors showed a statistically significant relationship with authoritarian attitudes, with the exception of income, but still did not reduce the ethnicity effect. Finally, when the covariates were included in the complete model, the pattern of results did not change, with the exception of income, which again became statistically significant. Some of the covariates also were independent predictors of authoritarianism: greater conservatism ($\beta = .19$, $t = 4.4$, $p < .001$),

Table 1. Study 1: Correlation Matrix

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Authoritarianism	–				
2. Ethnicity	–.23***	–			
3. Income	–.19***	.08**	–		
4. Education	–.35***	.11***	.44***	–	
5. Cognitive Complexity	–.24***	–.03	.28***	.34***	–

Note. *N* ranges from 971 to 1101. Higher values on the variables indicate more authoritarian attitudes, White, higher income, educated, and higher in cognitive complexity. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Study 1: Different Models Testing the Mechanisms Behind the Ethnicity-Authoritarianism Relationship

	Model 1: Income	Model 2: Education	Model 3: Cognitive Complexity	Full Model	Full Model With Controls
Ethnicity	-.24***	-.21***	-.26***	-.22***	-.22***
Income	-.16***	–	–	-.01	-.09*
Education	–	-.32***	–	-.25***	-.18***
Cognitive Complexity	–	–	-.25***	-.17***	-.15***
Adj. R^2	.088	.160	.122	.181	.223

Note. *** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$. The controls in the rightmost column include participant sex, age, conservatism, strength of political party identification, foreign born status of the participant's parents, and length of residency in the participant's community.

stronger Republican identification ($\beta = .09$, $t = 2.1$, $p = .035$), and older age (marginally, $\beta = .07$, $t = 1.7$, $p = .08$) were each related to increased endorsement of authoritarianism. Sex, parental foreign born status, and length of residency in the community were not independently related to authoritarianism.

In summing the results of theoretical interest, all variables were significant predictors of authoritarian attitudes, confirming previous theories concerning the effects of low income, education, and cognitive simplicity on these attitudes. However, each operated independently of the relationship between ethnicity and authoritarian attitudes, suggesting that other processes likely drive ethnic minority endorsement of authoritarianism. Study 2 was designed to explore one proposed mechanism, that of the psychologically protective function that authoritarian attitudes provide.

Study 2

Study 1 provided data supporting previous findings that ethnic minorities will endorse higher levels of authoritarian beliefs compared to their White counterparts and provided evidence that showed this endorsement could not be explained by deficiencies in financial resources, education, or cognitive complexity. An alternative explanation derived from the stigma literature suggests that instead such differences may be due to the psychologically protective function that authoritarian attitudes may serve for ethnic minorities. However, this proposition could not be tested in Study 1.

If authoritarianism serves a psychologically protective function for ethnic minorities, then allowing ethnic minority participants the opportunity to protect their psychological self before responding to the measures of authoritarianism may reduce the need to endorse authoritarian attitudes. In the spirit of using experimental methodology to examine psychological mechanisms (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005), Study 2 used an affirmation induction that allowed participants to reflect on their worth. It is known that various types of affirmations can relax or

release the need for psychological defensiveness in reaction to threats of various kinds (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; see also Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006), and a worth affirmation was selected specifically to target the threatened social worth that accompanies being a stigmatized person in society (Henry, 2009). This induction, however, was not expected to have an effect on Whites, who are more socially valued as a function of their higher status in society.

Methods

Participants

Participants were DePaul University students who were recruited from several sections of introductory psychology courses and who received course credit for their participation. As with Study 1, the sample included Whites (representing the higher status ethnic group) and Blacks and Latinos (representing the lower status ethnic group). Three participants were excluded for reporting being under adult age (under 18). The final sample totaled 273 participants, including 216 White, 37 Latino, 16 Black participants, and 4 participants who checked “other” and indicated a Latino or Black identity in a subsequent open-ended question (e.g., Mexican American).⁶ Sex was broken down into 85 men, 184 women; 4 did not indicate their sex. The median age was 19.

Procedure and Measures

All measures, including the experimental manipulation, were administered in an online survey format and appeared within a larger survey that contained measures unrelated to the current study.

Minority Status. As with Study 1, participants’ ethnic status was split into groups, White and ethnic minority, the latter composed of those indicating a Black or Latino identity (see Footnote 4). This breakdown resulted in 216 Whites and 57 ethnic minorities.

Authoritarianism. This study used the same measure of authoritarianism from Study 1, with two changes. First, the items were scaled in a more continuous, semantic differential format, using a 7-point scale where a “7” indicated the more authoritarian quality (e.g., “obedience”) and a “1” indicated the less authoritarian option (e.g., “self-reliance”). Second, the “being considerate or well-behaved” item was changed to “assertive versus well-behaved” to provide a clearer separation between the authoritarian and nonauthoritarian option. The items were then averaged into a scale, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .60$ (see Footnote 5).

Experimental Affirmation Induction. Before receiving the authoritarianism measure, however, participants were randomly assigned to a between-subjects

⁶ The open-ended question was reserved only for those who selected “other.”

experimental condition through an automated process that was integrated into the online administration system.⁷ The experimental induction allowed participants to affirm their worth, versus a control condition.⁸ Similar affirmation manipulations have been shown in a number of studies to relax psychological defensiveness and increase self-regulatory resources (for reviews, see Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Sherman & Hartson, 2011). In the “worth” condition, participants followed these instructions:

Try to recall a situation where something happened that made you feel really important and valuable. This may be because of something that you did or said, or something someone else did or said to you. Please take as much time as you need to remember a situation like this. Try to recall yourself in that position. Try to imagine exactly what happened. Take as much time as you need. When you have the situation clearly in mind, we need you to briefly describe the situation you are thinking of, and more importantly, explain why it made you feel important or valuable.

Participants provided open-ended descriptions.⁹ In the control condition, instead of writing about a personal experience that made them feel valuable, participants provided definitions for neutral words, including “flat,” “chair,” “neutral,” and “bird.”

Covariates. As with Study 1, a number of demographic and attitude covariates were included to control for other potential influences on authoritarian attitudes. These covariates included participant sex, age, year in school, parental income (ranging from 1 = less than \$20,000 to 12 = greater than \$200,000), conservatism (ranging from 1 = strong liberal to 7 = strong conservative), political party identification (ranging from 1 = strong Democrat to 7 = strong Republican), a 10-item trait

⁷ The randomization process involved the full sample of participants. The final numbers in the worth versus control condition, however, were not exact: $N = 147$ for the worth condition, $N = 126$ for the control condition. Several tests were run to determine if the participants may have differed in key demographic variables across these conditions. The results showed that participants did not differ between conditions on almost all covariates, including ethnicity, age, parental income, year in school, conservatism, and strength of political party identification (all $t < 1.2$). However, there was a difference across conditions on sex, with a greater proportion of men randomly assigned to the worth manipulation ($t(263) = 1.98, p = .049$). To help manage this discrepancy, the sex variable was included as a covariate in all analyses (along with the other demographic variables), but its inclusion did not change the pattern of results, nor did it independently predict authoritarian attitudes.

⁸ This study was developed within the context of stigma compensation theory (also referred to as low-status compensation theory; Henry, 2009), which focuses on the stigmatized defending their psychological sense of social worth. However, theoretically any type of affirmation could also work provided it serves a similar function of relaxing one’s psychological defensiveness (Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006; Sherman & Cohen, 2006).

⁹ Although participants were not asked specifically to recall an incident of social worth (i.e., the wording did not specify “social”), without exception the narratives involved incidents of social worth, such as being chosen as a leader of a group, winning some public award, etc.

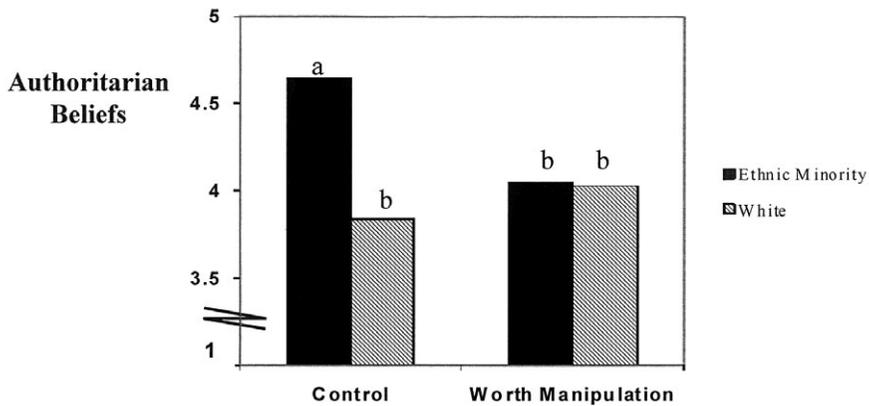


Figure 1. Study 2: Interaction Between Participant Ethnicity and Worth Manipulation Predicting Authoritarian Attitudes, Including Control Variables (see text). Different letters indicate statistically significant means based on 95% confidence intervals.

self-esteem scale (Cronbach's alpha = .94; Rosenberg, 1965), and a 20-item state self-esteem scale (Cronbach's alpha = .92; Heatherton & Polivy, 1991).

Results and Discussion

The data were analyzed using a 2 (White versus ethnic minority) \times 2 (worth manipulation versus control) between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) in predicting authoritarian attitudes and included all covariates listed above. The results revealed a statistically significant interaction, $F(1, 250) = 5.36$, $MSE = 1.22$, $p = .021$, which is graphed in Figure 1. As expected, in the control condition the ethnic minority participants had higher scores on authoritarianism ($M = 4.65$, $SE = .22$) compared to their White counterparts ($M = 3.84$, $SE = .12$), as given by a post-hoc analysis of the simple slopes (including controls), $t = 2.68$, $p = .008$. However, in the condition where participants were allowed the opportunity to affirm their worth, there was no difference on authoritarianism between the ethnic minority participants ($M = 4.05$, $SE = .22$) and their White counterparts ($M = 4.03$, $SE = .11$), $t < 1.0$, $p = .79$. Based on 95% confidence intervals, the means for the White and ethnic minority participants in the worth manipulation condition did not differ from the Whites in the control condition. All three means, however, were significantly different from the ethnic minority participants in the control condition. These results are consistent with the theoretical claim that authoritarianism serves an important psychologically protective function for ethnic minorities.

Before continuing to the general discussion it is important to note a potential issue in interpreting the manipulation of worth. It is possible that rather than

establishing a sense of social worth for individuals in this condition, the manipulation instead invoked an increase in positive mood, which might have then decreased authoritarian attitudes. There are mixed results in the literature concerning the relationship between mood and authoritarianism, with some studies showing no effect (e.g., Nagoshi, Terrell, & Nagoshi, 2007; Peterson & Plamondon, 2009), but one study showing a relationship (albeit not a casual one; Van Hiel & Kossowska, 2006). Nevertheless, it is important to consider whether the manipulation induced a good mood rather than an affirmation of worth.

There are empirical and theoretical reasons for ruling out mood as the explanation of these effects. First, if mood alone was responsible for the effects, a worth induction should make a person feel good regardless of their ethnicity. There is no theory to suggest that mood should operate differently depending on a person's ethnicity. More specifically, if the worth induction is simply making people feel good, and if a good mood is associated with lower authoritarianism, we should expect a good-mood induction to decrease authoritarianism for both ethnic minorities and for Whites. However, the effect of the manipulation occurs only for ethnic minorities. One cannot invoke a floor effect for Whites, because their mean response on authoritarianism hovers around the midpoint of the scale ($M = 3.92$, midpoint = 4.0) with a fairly narrow standard deviation ($SD = 1.14$).

Second, the past literature on affirmations (of which the worth manipulation is a type; see Footnote 8) has demonstrated more broadly that mood probably is not an important processes involved in affirmations (Cohen, Aronson, & Steele, 2000; Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Sherman, Nelson, & Steele, 2000). Affirmations instead tap cognitive, self-regulatory processes that help individuals tackle threats in their environment, as has been evidenced in reviews of a growing number of studies examining the mechanisms behind affirmations (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Sherman & Hartson, 2011). The relevance to the present theoretical perspective concerning a sense of social worth is clearest in the following quote by leading researchers on affirmations: "When self-affirmed, individuals feel as though the task of proving their worth, both to themselves and to others, is 'settled.' As a consequence, they can focus on other salient demands in the situation beyond ego protection" (Sherman & Cohen, 2006, p. 189). This body of research seems to confirm that self-regulatory processes, rather than mood, is triggered by affirmations.

Thus, for both empirical and theoretical reasons, it seems the most parsimonious explanation for the observed results is that the participants were affected by exactly what was measured in the study: an induced sense of worth that impacts ethnic minorities differently from Whites. Presumably the mechanism at work was the freeing of self-regulatory resources for ethnic minorities, who have their self-regulatory resources taxed based on chronic threats due to stigma. Fully unpacking these cognitive elements underlying the differential effectiveness of the worth manipulation, while important, goes beyond the purpose here of establishing that something about a sense of worth is influencing the differential

endorsement of authoritarianism by ethnic minorities, and that something about financial problems, lack of education, or cognitive simplicity is not.

General Discussion

Past research has identified that ethnic minorities are more likely to endorse authoritarian attitudes, but no explanation for this effect has ever been tested. The main question here is, does the endorsement of authoritarianism among ethnic minorities serve a particular psychological function, or is it merely the by-product of other factors that accompany being an ethnic minority? Over the years, several by-products known to be associated with ethnic minorities, including lower incomes and less education, have been identified as independent determinants of authoritarian attitudes. However, Study 1 showed that, despite having their unique effects in predicting authoritarian attitudes, none of these variables was able to explain the relationship between ethnicity and authoritarianism.

Study 2 tested the more psychologically functional aspect of authoritarianism, that it serves a protective function especially useful for ethnic minorities as a defense against chronic psychological threats to their sense of worth coming from their stigmatized condition in society. When given the opportunity to affirm their sense of worth, ethnic minorities performed no differently from Whites.

This research helps to provide an explanation for the body of research that has shown that ethnic minorities have higher levels of authoritarianism compared to Whites. However, the explanation appears to be rooted not in classic predictors of authoritarianism such as lack of education and resources (which presumably hinder access to multiple perspectives and a broader worldview), or cognitive simplicity. Rather, the explanation may lie in the psychologically protective function of authoritarian attitudes.

Theoretical and Political Implications

From a theoretical perspective, these results suggest that while authoritarianism may be driven by economic insecurity, a lack of education, and a lack of interest in complex thinking (as evidenced by the independent effects of these variables in predicting authoritarian attitudes in Study 1), there may be something also about the condition of stigmatization that may be influencing why some people may endorse authoritarianism. But this raises an additional question concerning those who have low income or low education: These individuals, too, are stigmatized members of society compared to their wealthy, more educated counterparts. While it is possible that low income may result in authoritarian endorsement because of realistic economic insecurities that exist independently of threats to one's social worth, low-income individuals might also endorse authoritarianism because of the psychological defensiveness that emerges from being a stigmatized

member of society. Similarly, those with less education may endorse authoritarian attitudes because of not having their mind opened and exposed to other perspectives, but they, too, might be influenced by psychological defensiveness that accompanies the stigma of being uneducated. Consequently, while the present theoretical perspective was designed to understand the experience of ethnic minorities, it could also raise questions about “working class authoritarianism” (Lipset, 1959) more broadly in a way that has not been addressed or empirically tested to date. There may be utility in exploring this empirical question of the influence of economic insecurity versus psychological defensiveness in determining authoritarianism among the working class.

Another implication of this line of research concerns questions about the relationship between authoritarian attitudes and negative prejudice against ethnic minorities (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996; Whitley, 1999). The present set of studies replicated past research that ethnic minorities are more likely to endorse authoritarian attitudes compared to Whites. Why should such attitudes be endorsed by a population that otherwise would be harmed by them in the broader society? There are at least a few explanations for these seemingly irrational patterns of results. First, at least in the present set of studies, the measure of authoritarianism used was free of politically charged items often used in studies of authoritarianism. As mentioned earlier, this measure of authoritarianism is particularly well suited to the present research because it maintains its function as a protector against psychological threats while removing any confounding political content (Feldman, 2003; Stenner, 2005). Nevertheless, several of the studies mentioned in the introduction reported greater endorsement of authoritarianism in ethnic minorities compared to Whites even when using the F scale of authoritarianism, which does contain some political content. However, even in those circumstances, personal psychological defensiveness may trump group interests (see, e.g., Jost & Hunyady, 2002). Indeed, the phenomenon of endorsing attitudes and behaviors that may be harmful to stigmatized groups by members of those groups is more common than might be imagined, as has been well-documented by the theory of system justification (Jost, 2001; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004).

This set of studies is not without its limitations, foremost in that different hypotheses are ruled out or supported but across different studies. Ideally, all competing hypotheses would be tested in a single study. With that point noted, importantly in Study 2 with the student sample, even when controlling for parental income and with education level kept constant (all student participants shared the same level of education), ethnicity differences still emerged on authoritarianism in the control condition, replicating that part of the ANES data in Study 1. These studies represent a start for empirically testing the mechanisms behind the endorsement of authoritarianism among ethnic minorities, an endeavor which heretofore has received little attention beyond simply demonstrating that ethnic differences exist.

In conclusion, if the stigmatized condition that ethnic minorities face leaves them in a position of psychological defensiveness, as has been proposed in the literature, then we would expect to see the adoption of strategies designed to ensure that the self is protected against further psychological threats. Adopting attitudes that serve a psychologically protective function, including authoritarian attitudes, may be one such strategy. These results help bring perspective to a belief system that has otherwise been associated with negative social consequences such as prejudice and other antisocial attitudes: For members of stigmatized groups, authoritarian attitudes may not serve the same function that it may for those who are not stigmatized.

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