

White Identity and Selective Exposure to Information About Racism

by

Koji J. Takahashi

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Allison Earl, Chair
Assistant Professor Nicholas P. Camp
Professor David Dunning
Assistant Professor Hakeem J. Jefferson, Stanford University
Associate Professor Muniba Saleem, University of California, Santa Barbara
Professor Denise Sekaquaptewa

Koji Takahashi

[kjtake@umich.edu](mailto:kjtaka@umich.edu)

ORCID iD: [0000-0003-4081-5522](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4081-5522)

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DEDICATION

To my family, both granted and chosen, for all they do to inspire me.

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ABSTRACT

White Americans dramatically underestimate the severity of racism and racial inequality, which limits motivation to address them. Exposure to high quality information about systemic racism is known to reduce misperceptions of racism. However, information about racism will do little if its intended audience avoids it, which past research suggests they may be inclined to if they find it threatening. In seven studies ($n = 2,056$), this dissertation presents evidence that White Americans avoid information about racism because it threatens their racial identity—even when it affirms their racial and political attitudes. Compared to participants of color, White participants avoided race-relevant information (Study 1) or information implicating Whiteness in racism (Study 2). These racial differences in information selection were shaped in part by identity-based motivations and not just attitudinal ones. Attitude and identity cues simultaneously affected how threatening White participants expected racial-political information to be (Studies 3A and 3B) and what information they selected (Studies 4 - 6). However, I found no evidence that experimentally heightening identity threats made White Americans any more avoidant of information implicating Whiteness in racism. Instead, identity-based motivations for selective exposure interacted with racial and political attitudes in complex ways. Together, this work highlights the necessity of considering both attitudes and identity to understand the nature of White Americans' motivated resistance to information about racism and racial inequality.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Misperceptions and Information about Racial Inequality

Racial inequalities are stark and pervasive, with White Americans enjoying advantages across crucial domains due to both historical and contemporary racism. White Americans have far greater wealth and home ownership (Bhutta et al., 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), live in wealthier and less environmentally hazardous neighborhoods (Reardon, Fox, & Townsend, 2015; Locke et al., 2021; Nigra, 2020), attend more well-resourced schools (EdBuild, 2019), are favored for hiring and promotion (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Nunley et al., 2015; Yu, 2020), fare better in the criminal legal system (Clair, 2020; Kovera, 2019; Voigt et al., 2017), are more economically mobile (Chetty, Hendren, Jones, & Porter, 2020), and have better health and health care access (Artiga & Orgera, 2019; Williams & Collins, 2016; Hammonds & Reverby, 2019). Although the evidence is abundantly clear about the severity and persistence of racial inequalities, public perceptions are not.

Despite a growing body of evidence about racial inequalities, people—particularly White people—vastly underestimate how much racism and inequality exists (Kraus et al., 2017; Kraus et al., 2019; Onyeador et al., 2020; Norton & Sommers, 2011). Research on perceptions of wealth, for example, finds that Americans dramatically underestimated the size of Black-White wealth gap, with comparable underestimations of the Latinx-White wealth gap and a much

smaller underestimation of the Asian-White wealth gap (Kraus et al., 2019). In other studies, high-income White Americans were particularly likely to underestimate these racial wealth inequalities (Kraus et al., 2017). Compared to Black Americans, White Americans also tend to perceive far less anti-Black racism (Norton & Sommers, 2011; Carter & Murphy, 2015; Weitzer & Tuch, 2002), particularly when asked about institutional or systemic racism (Nelson, Adams, & Salter, 2013; Bonam et al., 2019; Strickhouser, Zell, & Harris, 2019). Similarly, White Americans believe that the United States has made far more progress in achieving racial equity, both compared to Black Americans and to objective benchmarks of racial progress (DeBell, 2017; Eibach & Ehrlinger, 2006; Kraus et al., 2017). These misperceptions are not without consequence, as perceiving less racial discrimination or more racial progress predicts decreased support for policies intended to address inequalities, such as affirmative action (Valentino & Brader, 2011; DeBell, 2017; Carter & Murphy, 2015; Matsueda & Drakulich, 2009; Rucker, Duker, & Richeson, 2019).

Although there are likely multiple reasons that perceptions of racial inequality are polarized across racial lines, a prominent hypothesis is that White Americans are not as informed about historical and contemporary racism (e.g., Nelson et al., 2013). Compared to people of color, whose direct experiences with racism inform their perceptions of societal racism (e.g., Weitzer & Tuch, 2002; Hausmann et al., 2010; D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993), White people may depend more heavily on external information to shape their perceptions of racial inequalities. In fact, there is evidence that differences in knowledge about historical racism partially explains racial differences in perceptions of contemporary racism (Nelson et al., 2013; Bonam et al., 2019; see also Strickhouser et al., 2019). Furthermore, newer research suggests that exposing White people to high-quality information about racism can reduce their tendency to

underestimate racial inequality (Onyeador et al., 2020; Fang & White, 2020; Bonam et al., 2019). Although some precaution needs to be taken when framing information about inequality (see Hetey & Eberhardt, 2018; Lowery et al., 2012; Dietze & Craig, 2020), it generally seems to be the case that it is important for how White people understand racism and inequality. If this is the case, then White Americans' exposure to such information may be a critical lever for understanding and addressing racially polarized beliefs about racism. However, decades of research have demonstrated that people are not passive consumers of information, and instead actively select information in biased ways (Festinger, 1957; Hart et al., 2009; Stroud, 2010).

In fact, a major challenge for efforts to inform or persuade is that people actively seek information that justifies their existing attitudes or behaviors while avoiding information that challenges them—a biased pattern known as *selective exposure* (Festinger, 1957; Hart et al., 2009). Selective exposure is a known problem for communication about a variety of important issues, such as health and public policy (Earl & Nisson, 2015; Zúñiga, Correa, & Valenzuela, 2012; Stroud, 2010). Similar phenomena have recently been demonstrated for information about inequality. For instance, recent research on selective attention demonstrates that those with strong egalitarian attitudes (e.g., low social dominance orientation) are more likely to notice and attend to cues about social inequalities (Waldfogel et al., 2021). Similarly, the vast majority of psychological research on selective exposure and attention focuses on attitudes as the driving force (Frey, 1986; Smith, Fabrigar, & Norris, 2008). A large body of evidence demonstrates that people are motivated to defend attitudes and beliefs to which they have already committed, and an effective way to do so is to select information that validates preexisting attitudes and to avoid information that challenges them (Festinger, 1957; Hart et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2008).

Although attitudes are a potent driver of selective exposure, other research points to similar kinds of avoidance on the basis of social identity. In intergroup contexts, for example, discomfort and concerns about being seen as a stereotypically racist White person leads many White people to avoid discussing or thinking about racism (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008; Norton et al., 2006; Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008). These kinds of avoidant behaviors in intergroup interactions happen even—or perhaps especially—for White people with strong egalitarian attitudes (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). Even so, it is unclear from existing research whether racial identity may similarly lead White people to avoid information about racism. This is complicated by the fact that information highlighting racial inequality can threaten White identity (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008) even if it may affirm attitudes and beliefs about racial inequality (e.g., Hughey, 2012). This means that many White people could have conflicting motivations for selecting information about racism and racial inequality. Facilitating selection of this information would then require overcoming two sources of resistance: prior attitudes and social identity. Given the impact that information about racism can have on perceptions of racial inequality, it is important to understand whether and why White people may be motivated to avoid it.

Overview

This dissertation will investigate how White Americans select information about racism and racial inequality, laying the theoretical groundwork for a broader understanding how attitudes and identity come together to shape information processing. The remainder of this chapter will explicate the functions of attitudes and social identities to understand how White racial identity—above and beyond relevant racial and political attitudes—may motivate selective exposure. I will first review research on the role of attitudes in selective exposure. I will then

dive into theoretical accounts of social identity and social identity threats to understand how extant research on identity and information selection has been framed. I will then discuss why it is challenging, but necessary to consider attitudes and identity together while investigating selection of race-relevant information. Finally, I will describe the burgeoning research on White racial identity and argue that Whiteness is a critically important context for investigating attitude-identity conflicts and their behavioral consequences, particularly for information selection behavior.

Selective Exposure and the Role of Attitudes

Defining attitudes and their functions. To accomplish the broader goal of understanding how attitudes may align or conflict with identity-based motivations to shape selective exposure, it is helpful to consider what it is about attitudes people are motivated to defend. Although entire books can and have been written about what an attitude is and how it is structured, it can be broadly and simply defined as evaluations of any person, object, or idea people (i.e., the attitude object; Albarracín et al., 2019). People may like or dislike apples or they may support or oppose gun control.

These evaluations may be useful for many reasons, and an important theoretical approach to understanding attitudes and attitude change is to consider the function that a specific attitude may serve for a given person (Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956; Katz, 1960; Shavitt, 1989). For example, Daniel Katz's (1960) classification posits that attitudes can function to attain goals or positive outcomes (adjustment/instrumental function), to protect the self from threat (ego-defense function), to express core values (value-expressive function), and/or to provide understanding or clarity (knowledge function). For example, an attitude about a person (e.g., a negative attitude about a new coworker) may serve a knowledge function if it helps people know

what to expect and how to interpret any ambiguous behaviors (e.g., a strangely worded email). People should be motivated to maintain an attitude that primarily serves a knowledge function insofar as it continues to provide a consistent understanding of the attitude object; otherwise, the attitude may change (Katz, 1960). In this way, the function that an attitude serves can help us understand why people are motivated to protect it.

Knowing what function an attitude serves is useful for understanding whether and why it might motivate information selection. Research suggests that people tend to prefer persuasive messages framed to match the underlying function for an attitude (Petty, Wheeler, & Bizer, 2000; Shavitt, 1990). Two kinds of attitudes that are perhaps most relevant to selective exposure are those that serve an ego-defense function and those that serve a value-expression function (e.g., Katz, 1960; Frey & Stahlberg, 1986; Hart et al., 2019). Attitudes serving an ego-defense function, sometimes called the self-esteem function, are those that people form and maintain to protect the self from threat (Katz, 1960; Shavitt, 1989). These may be attitudes that derogate something unflattering to the self (e.g., negative attitudes about an instructor who gave a student a poor grade) or attitudes that bolster something associated with the self (e.g., positive attitudes about a group one belongs to; Katz, 1960; Frey & Stahlberg, 1986; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Because attitudes serving the ego-defense functions are closely linked to the self, people generally tend to be more motivated to protect them against threatening information (Katz, 1960, Frey & Stahlberg, 1986; Hart et al., 2009).

Attitudes serving a value-expressive function are those that reflect or showcase a person's core values (Katz, 1960), although this function has also been described more broadly as signaling any important aspect of the self (Shavitt, 1989). Value-expressive attitudes can function to manage social relationships by signaling to others who you are, what your values are,

or what groups you belong to (e.g., attitudes about taxation signaling a broader political value system; Katz, 1960; Hart et al., 2019). People may be more motivated select information that affirms value-expressive attitudes both because they are linked to core values people are motivated to defend and also because selecting attitude-consistent information is an opportunity to signal values and group membership to others (Frey & Stahlberg, 1986; Hart et al., 2019)

Conceptualizing selective exposure. Although selective exposure has been defined in different ways, the most prominent conceptualizations center attitudes and people's motivations to defend them (Frey, 1986; Smith et al., 2008). At the broadest level, selective exposure is sometimes defined as any tendency to choose some information over others, regardless of what may lead people to do so (e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). However, the conceptualization that has shaped much of the literature since its inception is that selective exposure is information selection that is specifically motivated to protect existing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors from information that would challenge them (Festinger, 1957; Smith et al., 2008; Hart et al., 2009). Although people select information to confirm relatively unimportant attitudes, like preferences for vacation destinations (e.g., Jonas, Graupmann, & Frey, 2006), selective exposure is more extreme for attitudes and behaviors relevant to core values, to which people are more committed and less willing to adjust (Hart et al., 2009; Brannon, Tagler, & Eagly, 2007).

This desire to protect attitudes from threatening information is often referred to as a *defense motive* (Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989; Hart et al., 2009). Although there are other motivations for selecting information, such as to have accurate information (*accuracy motive*) or to maintain favorable impression in the eyes of others (*impression motive*), it is the defense motive that has come to define selective exposure (Hart et al., 2009). Different motivations can become active under different conditions. Accuracy motives are stronger when there is a greater

practical need to arrive at correct conclusions (Kruglanski & Freund, 1983), impression motives are stronger when information selection is public rather than private (Hart et al., 2019), and defense motives are stronger when information is more relevant to a person's core values (Hart et al., 2009; Johnson & Eagly, 1989). Accuracy and impression motives are certainly important, but a large body of evidence suggests that people generally have a baseline tendency to defend their existing attitudes (Hart et al., 2009). This most commonly manifests as a preference for attitude-consistent information (e.g., Hart et al., 2009), but can also be a preference for weak attitude-inconsistent information, which bolsters existing attitudes by providing an opportunity to refute attitude-inconsistent information (Lowin, 1967; Smith et al., 2008). In this way, selective exposure is better described by the motivations that drive it (i.e., the selectivity) than by the information that is selected (i.e., the exposure).

The prevailing explanation for how attitudes ultimately guide information selection comes from cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957; Frey, 1986). Information that is inconsistent with prior attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors to which people have already committed themselves should arouse cognitive dissonance, a state of discomfort that comes with holding incompatible cognitions (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance is experienced as negative affect, which is ultimately what people are motivated to avoid (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959; Harmon-Jones, 2020; Takahashi & Earl, 2020). For selective exposure, this means people can avoid experiencing negative affect by avoiding the attitude-inconsistent information that might cause it (Jonas et al., 2006; Frey, 1986; Zillman, 2000).

However, people do not only avoid information to avert negative affect, but also select information to attain or maintain positive affect (Frey, 1986; Garrett, 2009; Jonas et al., 2006; Wegner, Petty, & Smith, 1995; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Takahashi & Earl, 2020). More

generally, there is abundant evidence that people consider what emotional reactions they may have to information when deciding whether to select and attend to it (Zillman, 2000; Earl & Albarracín, 2007; Earl, Nisson, & Albarracín, 2015; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Jonas et al., 2006; Wegener, Petty, & Smith, 1995; Gainsburg & Earl, 2018; Takahashi & Earl, 2020). Complicating matters, people can be drawn to or repelled by the same kind of information for different reasons. With political information, for instance, one study found that selective exposure could be characterized more as an avoidance of attitude-inconsistent information for Republicans, but more as an approach towards attitude-consistent information for Democrats and Independents (Garrett & Stroud, 2014). In health contexts, people may agree with information (positive attitude) and expect it to be informative and useful (high accuracy), but nonetheless avoid because of the negative emotions it may evoke, such as fear and anxiety (Earl & Albarracín, 2007; Sweeney et al., 2010; Earl et al., 2015). In sum, the attitudinal content of information can either attract or repel people while other features of the information simultaneously do the same.

Social Identity and Selective Exposure

Defining social identity. Another psychological force that powerfully influences cognition, affect, and behavior is social identity. Social identity generally refers to a person's membership in social groups that meaningfully helps them understand themselves and their relation to others (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Much of our social scientific understanding of social identity stems from Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and its extension, Self-Categorization Theory (SCT; Turner et al., 1987). In this tradition, an individual belongs to many social groups, but some create more salient boundaries for psychologically meaningful group comparisons, whether chronically or situationally; these

salient social identities have more impact in shaping people's self-image (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Social identity is shaped by both the negative and positive evaluations tied to a salient social category, and the esteem attached to a social identity affects the self-esteem of individual members of that group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). A central tenet of Social Identity Theory is that people are motivated to maintain a positive self-image, and as a result are motivated to maintain a positive group image. Social identities are also defined distinctly from personal identity, which also shape self-esteem but through evaluations of individual rather than group characteristics (Turner et al., 1987).

Social identities are given meaning not only by the importance group members place on their social identity, but also by the value granted to it through social consensus (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Major & O'Brien, 2005). The effects of social identity on behavior thus depends on multiple factors: how salient the identity is, how central it is to a person's self-concept, how highly (or poorly) regarded that group is by others, and how highly regarded that identity is for those who hold it (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Sellers et al., 1997). Research on social identification often operationalizes it by measuring how central a social identity is to a person's self-image (i.e., identity centrality). This work frequently finds that when an identity is more central, people perceive more social identity threats (cues that challenge the status, image, or social standing of a social group and its members) and react more strongly to them (Sellers & Shelton, 2003; Branscombe, Schmitt, & Schiffauer, 2007; Schmader, 2002; Major, Blodorn & Blascovich, 2018; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015).

However, the effects of social identity are not dependent solely on centrality, but also on the social group's position in society. An important part of social identity is how it is collectively

represented in society, which may impact well-being and shape behaviors of a group even when its members do not endorse that representation (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Perhaps the clearest illustration of this comes from research on negative stereotypes, which leads to stress and defensive behavior among those stereotyped, even when they do not personally believe or endorse those stereotypes (Major & O'Brien, 2005; Steele, 1997). This way of thinking about social identity has shaped much of the research on racial identity and information processing, although a number of important questions remain open.

Social identity, persuasion, and selective exposure. A major function of social identity is to help people make sense of the social world and their place in it. Accordingly, social identity can shape information selection either by changing how relevant information seems, how useful it is for managing impressions, and how threatening it is to the self.

Much of the research on the effects of social identity on information processing focuses on how social identity cues can signal the relevance or value of information (e.g., Fleming & Petty, 2000; Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2006; Greenaway et al., 2015). In the realm of media preferences, a number of studies suggest that racial and ethnic minorities (whose racial identities are generally more salient) prefer media featuring same-race others, presumably because a shared social identity signals potential relevance of the content (Schieferdecker & Wessler, 2017; Knobloch-Westerwick, Appiah, & Alter, 2008). The social identity of a source can also be a cue for the quality of information. Research with arbitrary groups finds that people perceive information about a group task as being higher quality when it comes from an ingroup member (Greenaway et al., 2015). This is perhaps one reason people are often more persuaded by information coming from an ingroup member (Mackie, Worth, & Asuncion, 1990; Durantini et al., 2006; Fleming & Petty, 2000).

Another reason people may select information is to signal their social identity and avoid unfavorable associations. For example, people are more likely to avoid stigmatizing information, like information about HIV, when in public vs. private settings (Earl et al., 2015). People consider how their information selection decisions affect the ideas, topics, or attitudes they become associated with, and are careful to manage these impressions (Hart et al., 2019). People are especially concerned about selecting information they may be judged for in the presence of people who share a valued social identity. For example, one study found that Black patients in the waiting room of a sexual health clinic were less likely to look at an HIV informational video when there were other Black patients who were also not paying attention (Lewis et al., 2020). Attention did not decline for Black patients in the presence of White patients, Black patients in the presence of other Black patients who *were* paying attention to the video, or for White patients in the presence of Black or White patients. This suggests people prefer to avoid information if paying attention to it may alienate them from those who share a salient and valued social identity (Lewis et al., 2020).

Even selection of attitude-consistent information can serve similar functions, as the attitudes people defend can signal their relation to valued social groups (Katz, 1960; Shavitt, 1989; Smith & Hogg, 2008, Hart et al., 2019). Attitudes can either signal what groups a person belongs to (e.g., abortion attitudes signaling political affiliations) or how similar a person is to prototypical members of their group (e.g., attitudes about troops signaling more prototypical American identity; Smith, Terry, & Hogg, 2006; Hogg & Smith, 2007; Smith & Hogg, 2008; Shavitt, 1989). In other words, attitudes and identity may sometimes impact information selection in similar ways.

Along these lines, people also select information to defend their identities from threatening content and avoid the negative affect that may come with it. There is evidence that people select and feel better after reading information that is positive about their ingroup (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). People also prefer to avoid information that threatens their identity (Earl et al., 2015; Derricks & Earl, 2019; Lewis et al., 2020). Past research finds that members of stigmatized groups are inclined to avoid information that makes them feel stereotyped or judged on the basis of their identity (Abram & Giles, 2007; Derricks & Earl, 2019). Identity threats can prompt avoidance even when people may otherwise value the information, as is often the case for important health information (Earl et al., 2016). As with attitude-relevant information, the selection of identity-relevant information can be understood as an effort to regulate affect by defending against threats to important aspects of the self (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015).

Racial identity and selective exposure. In the domain of race, existing research generally finds that racial identity affects information selection for racial and ethnic minorities, but not for White people. One study found that Black participants were more likely to click on and read articles from a news site explicitly targeting Black audiences compared to those subtly targeting White audiences; White participants, however, showed no preference for racially targeted content (Appiah, 2004). Similar research has found that Black participants selected and spent more time reading news stories if they featured Black characters rather than White characters, but White participants again showed no preference based on these peripheral race cues (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2008; Appiah et al., 2013; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015).

This asymmetric effect of racial identity for racial and ethnic minorities and White people has also been found in health contexts. For source effects, one meta-analysis of condom use

interventions found that ingroup sources produced greater behavior change for both White and Black people, although significantly less so for White people (Durantini et al., 2006). For impression management concerns, another field experiment in a sexual health clinic found that for Black patients and not White patients, having other same-race patients pay attention to HIV information increased their own attention (Lewis et al., 2020).

One proposed explanation for this is that White identity is less salient for White people, making race a less meaningful cue for the relevance of information (Appiah et al., 2013). However, a growing body of research demonstrates that White racial identity can be activated in ways that influence a variety of relevant behaviors and may produce the necessary conditions for selective exposure under defense motives.

White Identity and White Identity Threats

Although Whiteness was long considered to be an “invisible” identity, a wealth of research suggests that White identity is salient for many White people and can motivate a variety of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that favor the ingroup (Jardina, 2019; McDermott & Samson, 2005; Lowery et al., 2006; Knowles, Lowery, Chow, & Unzueta, 2014; Branscombe et al. 2007; Morrison, Plaut, & Ybarra, 2010; Jefferson & Takahashi, 2021). A prominent example of this comes from research on White Americans’ reactions to demographic shifts, whereby White people are made aware that they will no longer be the majority of the U.S. population in the near future (Craig & Richeson, 2014a). White people, particularly those who strongly identify with their race, perceive these demographic shifts as a threat to their status in society; these status threats in turn lead to increased prejudice against racial minorities, support for anti-immigration policies, opposition to political correctness, endorsement of conservative ideology, and support for and intentions to vote for Trump (Major, Blodorn, & Blascovich, 2018; Craig & Richeson,

2017; Craig & Richeson, 2014a; Craig & Richeson, 2014b). In this way, threats to White identity lead White people to form defensive attitudes that function to protect their group image and maintain existing social hierarchies (Wilkins & Kaiser, 2014; Wilkins et al., 2016; Wellman, Liu, & Wilkins, 2016). Although a notable and prominent example, status threats are not the only kind of White identity threat with these effects.

Systemic inequality and identity threat. One way that White identity is frequently threatened is through its association with racism and privilege (Goff et al., 2008; Adams, Tormala, & O'Brien, 2006; Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007; Knowles et al., 2014; Jefferson & Takahashi, 2021). White people are increasingly aware that their racial group is associated with racial injustices, making these identity threats something White people regularly have to contend with (Jefferson & Takahashi, 2021; Knowles et al., 2014). In one study on White people's perceptions of group stereotypes, White participants were asked to list five characteristics, traits, or behaviors they thought others perceived were typical of White people. The two most common individual characteristics listed were "racist" and "privileged," with almost two-thirds of the sample listing at least one association related to either bias and bigotry or unearned racial advantage (Jefferson & Takahashi, 2021). Other research suggests that White people are more threatened by the idea of systemic racism, which implicates the entire group, and less by interpersonal racism perpetrated by individual White people, which can be more easily explained away as isolated incidents (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008; Nelson et al., 2013).

A large body of evidence finds that the association between White identity and racial injustice is threatening in ways that lead to a variety of defensive behaviors with different implications. A common reaction to these threats is to deny or downplay White racism and privilege (Adams et al., 2006; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008; Phillips & Lowery, 2015; Knowles &

Lowery, 2012; Knowles et al., 2014). For example, when White participants in one study were reminded of their racial privilege, they were much more likely to describe their own life as marked by hardship in order to downplay their racial privilege (Phillips & Lowery, 2015). Reminders of White privilege and racism can also lead people to support egalitarian policies (Lowery, Chow, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2012). This may be more likely when White people feel collective guilt for racism or if making concessions on egalitarian policies would appease broader discontent about existing racial hierarchies (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003; Chudy, Piston, & Shipper, 2019; Chow, Lowery, & Hogan, 2013). However, denying racial inequalities or distancing oneself from Whiteness is likely to be a more efficient strategy for assuaging White identity threat, making it a more likely strategy than an increased commitment to egalitarian principles (Knowles et al., 2014). In any case, the research described demonstrates that White people react defensively when reminded of racial injustices favoring or perpetrated by White people. However, White people may also prefer to avoid these reminders altogether.

White identity and avoidance of race. There is abundant evidence that many White people prefer not to think or talk about race, with some evidence that threats to White identity specifically may be a driving force. Notably, many White people prefer to avoid discussing or acknowledging race in order to avoid appearing biased, although this preference actually leads to greater bias and appears as such to people of color (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008; Apfelbaum, Norton, & Sommers, 2012; Richeson & Nussbaum, 2004; Vorauer, Gagnon, & Sasaki, 2009). The threat of association with racism also leads many White people to avoid situations in which their racial biases may be revealed, making them less inclined to have intergroup conversations, especially about race (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Goff et al., 2008).

These kinds of avoidance are not limited to White people with any particular set of racial or political attitudes. Racially anti-egalitarian White people are often motivated to divert attention from race in order to protect existing racial hierarchies (e.g., Knowles, Lowery, Hogan, & Chow, 2009) and racially egalitarian White people are motivated to do so to protect their egalitarian self-image from potential evidence of their own biases (e.g., Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). In this way, maintaining ignorance of racism and privilege is a flexible and effective strategy for protecting against different kinds of identity threat. By maintaining racial ignorance, White people may satisfice their ego-defense motives without exerting much cognitive effort, sacrificing the material and psychological comforts of privilege, or betraying any egalitarian beliefs and attitudes they may hold (Phillips & Lowery, 2018; Mueller, 2020).

So, despite a lack of evidence that White people select information based on certain kinds of identity cues (e.g., Appiah et al., 2013), there is ample reason to believe that White people may indeed avoid information about racism and inequality because of the identity threats they frequently evoke.

A Test Case for Attitudinal and Identity-Based Selective Exposure

A deeper investigation of the effects of White racial identity on selective exposure may provide many practical and theoretical insights. Conventional selective exposure research would predict that White people seek information that affirms their attitudes and beliefs, meaning that White egalitarians would seek information that affirms the existence and severity of racial inequality, and White antiegalitarians would avoid such information. This would certainly be consistent with decades of research on selective exposure (Hart et al., 2009), as there is no reason to expect that egalitarian attitudes are exempt from defense motives. However, information highlighting racism and racial inequality should be threatening to White racial identity, which

should motivate avoidance for similar reasons. If identity threats reduce the affective value of attitude-consistent information, then the presence of identity threatening cues should make people less likely to seek it out than they otherwise may have been. This may be akin to the kinds of avoidance often observed in health messaging research, where people are known to avoid information they may otherwise agree with because it makes people feel bad in other ways (e.g., Earl & Albarracín, 2007; Sweeney et al., 2010). In fact, these kinds of conflicting motivations may be present for much of the information people encounter in their day-to-day lives, which frequently implicate multiple attitudes and identities. This is certainly the case for information about race, which is increasingly bound up in partisan politics in complex ways (e.g., McLeod, 2021).

It may be especially important then to create a theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding information processing for attitude- and identity-relevant content. Currently, the evidence described in this chapter would lead to different predictions from conventional selective exposure research focusing on attitudes alone. When attitude-consistent information can threaten other aspects of the self, the nature of the decision changes. If race-relevance dampens the affective value of attitude-consistent information, then people may choose to affirm their attitudes in a race-irrelevant domain. This may be particularly true for White egalitarians, for whom information that denies inequality may be comforting to their racial identity (e.g., Knowles et al., 2014), but threatening to their attitudes. Complicating matters further, research on intergroup interactions suggests that egalitarian attitudes for White people make them *more* avoidant of racial dialogue because it presents opportunities to tarnish their egalitarian self-image (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). If private information selection decisions were to operate the same way, White egalitarians might be *less* likely to select information highlighting racism and

inequality. In any case, it is currently unclear how people will select information when their attitudes and racial identity are in direct conflict (information affirms one and threatens the other), as existing research shows mixed findings (see Wojcieszak, 2019; Dvir-Gvirsman, 2019; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2008).

The remaining chapters will explore these questions, building theoretical, methodological, and empirical foundations for understanding the effect of White racial identity on selective exposure to racial and political information.

Chapter 2 will focus primarily on how White participants and participants of color select information that is either indirectly threatening to White people (information about racism without explicit mentions of Whiteness) and directly threatening (explicit mentions of Whiteness). This chapter will also present preliminary evidence that White racial identity motivates avoidance of information about racial inequality even when it is attitude-consistent.

Chapter 3 will more precisely test the competing effects of White identity threats and political attitudes on information processing. This chapter will provide direct evidence of how attitudes and identity independently and jointly shape information selection motives, subsequently demonstrating that these common motives explain actual information selection.

Chapter 4 will further investigate the role of identity threat by testing the effect of experimentally heightened White identity threats on information selection. Two kinds of identity threats (status threat and public regard threat) will be investigated, and their complex and unclear effects discussed. The evidence in this chapter will point to important unanswered questions about the nature of White identity threats and our psychological understanding of them.

Finally, Chapter 5 will summarize the evidence presented in Chapters 2-4 and explicate the broader practical and theoretical implications for our understanding of attitudes, of identity, and of selective exposure.

CHAPTER 2

Racial Identity and Selection of Race-Relevant Information

The first step is to assess whether White people are indeed less inclined to select information that highlights racial inequality and whether such preferences may be explained by their attitudes, their racial identification, or both. On one hand, the majority of evidence to date suggests White people's information selection is unaffected by their racial identity, which is most often operationalized as a source characteristic or peripheral relevance cue (e.g., Appiah et al., 2013; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2008). On the other, there is evidence that White people are threatened by this information (e.g., Unzueta & Lowery, 2008; Phillips & Lowery, 2015) and that they often manage racial identity threats by not discussing or thinking about race (Shelton, Richeson, & Vorauer, 2006; Goff et al., 2008; Apfelbaum et al., 2008). It may be the case that White people prefer to avoid information that threatens White identity, even if past research concludes they do not select information based on its relevance to White identity (e.g., Appiah et al., 2013).

In testing whether White identity threats motivate information selection, it is important to consider attitudes that may be simultaneously activated by identity threatening information. Classic selective exposure research would suggest that people should select information that affirms their attitudes, meaning that White people with strong egalitarian attitudes may have

countervailing motivations to select information that highlights and opposes racism. However, research on intergroup interactions finds that egalitarian White people may actually be *more* avoidant of discussions about race and racism because they value their egalitarian self-image and are more averse to anything that may threaten it (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). Another way of thinking about this is that White egalitarians may experience more dissonance between their self-image (“I am not racist”) and information that evokes inequalities their group is implicated in (“White people perpetrate and benefit from racism”). Given that greater dissonance is what ultimately explains selective exposure (e.g., Festinger, 1957; Frey, 1986; Smith et al., 2008), it is possible that more egalitarian White people may avoid information about inequality, even if it is consistent with their attitudes. For people of color, however, information highlighting racism should not evoke a conflict between attitudes and identity, so they should be inclined to select information about racism in a way that is wholly consistent with their attitudes. The two studies presented in this chapter provide preliminary tests of the effects of racial identity and egalitarian attitudes on selective exposure to information about racism and inequality

Study 1: Motivated Avoidance of Information about Race

Study 1 tested selection of race-relevant information among White participants and participants of color. This was a preliminary study originally intended to pretest procedures for a separate line of research but included a selective exposure task to explore the effects of racial identity on selection of race-relevant information. These data are thus an initial proof of concept for studying White Americans’ selective exposure to race-relevant information.

Although information highlighting racism threatens White identity (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008; Nelson et al., 2013), White people vary in terms of how they prefer to cope with it, with some opting to protect the self by actively denying racism and others by avoiding the topic

altogether (Knowles et al., 2014; Shelton et al., 2006; Apfelbaum et al., 2008). To account for the different information selection strategies White participants may prefer, this study included three kinds of information: information that highlights racism, deflects from racism, or does not discuss race. This gave participants two options for avoiding information highlighting racism, one that may affirm antiegalitarian attitudes (denying racism) and one that may more simply help people avoid thinking about race altogether (race-irrelevant). The option to select irrelevant information also makes the selection decisions more closely reflect the options people may have when selecting information outside of the lab (e.g., Wojcieszac, 2019).

Another goal of this study was to explore the role of both attitude and identity processes in shaping information selection. To do so, this study included measures of both racial egalitarian attitudes and racial identification. To the extent that information selection is shaped by attitudes, we would expect those with more egalitarian attitudes to select more information highlighting racism irrespective of their own racial identity. Because identity threats have more pronounced effects when an identity is more central to someone's self-concept (e.g., Major et al., 2018), greater identification should make White participants (and not participants of color) more inclined to avoid information about racism.

Methods

Participants and procedure. 148 introductory psychology students completed the study in exchange for course credit in the fall semester of 2018. 81 were White, 34 were Asian, 12 were Black, 6 were Multiracial, 4 were Middle Eastern, 4 were Latinx, 1 listed "Other," and 6 did not respond and were removed from the analyses. Because there was insufficient power for more granular comparisons, we coded participants either as White (81) or as people of color (61; see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1

Participant Demographics across Studies

Study	1	2	3A	3B	4	5	6	
<i>n</i>	148	171	207	201	321	503	505	
Party ID	Democrat	75 (50.7%)	73 (42.7%)	101 (48.8%)	92 (45.8%)	147 (45.8%),	242 (48.1%)	229 (45.3%)
	Republican	26 (17.6%)	38 (22.2%)	104 (50.2%)	86 (42.8%)	146 (45.5%),	228 (45.3%)	228 (45.1%)
	Independent/ other	46 (31.1%)	40 (23.4%)	2 (1.0%)	23 (11.4%)	28 (8.7%)	32 (6.4%)	48 (9.5%)
Gender	Female	79 (53.4%)	83 (48.5%)	128 (61.8%)	110 (54.7%)	181 (56.4%),	281 (55.9%)	306 (60.8%)
	Male	62 (41.9%)	87 (50.9%)	79 (38.2%)	90 (44.8%)	137 (42.4%),	217 (43.1%)	192 (38.2%)
	Transgender/ nonbinary	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.0%)	5 (1.6%)	7 (1.4%)	6 (1.2%)
Age	Range	18 - 21	18 - 65	18 - 83	20 - 81	18 - 78	18 - 84	18 - 76
	Mean	18.8	35.5	45.7	41.5	39.9	43.3	40.5%
Education	Less than high school	2 (1.4%)	27 (15.8%)	5 (2.4%)	2 (1.0%)	2 (0.6%)	1 (0.2%)	1 (0.2%)
	High school/ GED	19 (12.8%)	27 (15.8%)	51 (24.6%)	25 (12.4%)	30 (9.3%)	43 (8.5%)	52 (10.3%)
	Some college	29 (19.6%)	23 (13.5%)	59 (28.5%)	55 (27.4%)	72 (22.4%)	99 (19.7%)	104 (20.7%)
	2-year college degree	4 (2.7%)	17 (9.9%)	29 (14.0%)	27 (13.4%)	45 (14.0%)	62 (12.3%)	51 (10.1%)
	4-year college degree	27 (18.2%)	68 (39.8%)	42 (20.3%)	65 (32.3%)	125 (38.9%)	191 (38.0%)	189 (37.6%)
	Master's degree	30 (20.3%)	28 (16.4%)	19 (9.2%)	25 (12.4%)	36 (11.2%)	87 (17.3%)	91 (18.1%)
	Doctoral or prof. degree	30 (20.3%)	2 (1.2%)	2 (1.2%)	1 (0.5%)	11 (3.4%)	18 (3.6%)	17 (3.4%)
	Median	4-year degree	4-year degree	Some college	2-year degree	4-year degree	4-year degree	4-year degree
Income	Median	\$160,000 - \$179,999	\$40,000- \$59,999	\$40,000 - \$59,999	\$40,000 - \$59,999	\$60,000 - \$79,999	\$60,000 - \$79,999	\$60,000 - \$79,999

Note. Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding error or missing responses. Study 1 used a college student sample, so income and education level reflect their parents' income and highest education level.

Study 1 was originally designed to pilot test identity threat manipulations for another project, with the selective exposure task and relevant measures added at the end as a preliminary test of the questions relevant to the current research. This manipulation, which involved having participants comment on a message board about race-related issues, ultimately failed and had no impact on manipulation checks or any variables of interest for the current analyses (see Appendix A for details on the manipulation). After answering demographic questions and completing the manipulation, participants completed a measure of racial identity centrality, the selective exposure task, and then racial attitude measures.

Materials and measures of interest. Participants were presented with 12 article titles and asked to select four to read excerpts of. Four of these article titles made no reference to race or racism (race-irrelevant), which included nonpartisan content as well as liberal and conservative content. Four articles highlighted racism or racial inequality (highlighting racism), which included general information about racism and information about having racial biases or privileges. Finally, four dismissed identity politics or deflected White racial advantage (deflecting racism), reflecting a variety of defensive reactions to the threat of being implicated in racism or privilege, such as highlighting one's own disadvantages (e.g., Phillips & Lowery, 2015) or defending free speech (White & Crandall, 2017; see Table 2.2).

To measure egalitarian racial attitudes, I used a version of the Social Dominance Orientation scale worded specifically for racial groups (Ho et al., 2015). This measures preference for racial group-based dominance and anti-egalitarianism (e.g., "Racial equality should not be our primary goal," scale of 1 (strongly oppose) to 7 (strongly support), $M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.03$, $\alpha = .83$). I also measured racial identity centrality with items adapted from the centrality subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale Multidimensional Inventory of Black

Identity (Sellers et al., 1998). I adapted these items to pipe in whatever race or ethnicity participants reported in the demographic questionnaire, so all items were specific to participants' own racial identity. This measure included eight items about how important racial identity is for participants' self-concept (e.g., "Overall, being [race/ethnicity] is an important part of my self-image," scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), $M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.18$). Because I adapted this measure by having each participant's racial or ethnic identity piped in, I conducted an EFA with parallel analysis to determine factor structure, which suggested a one-factor model that was also reliable ($\alpha = .89$).

Table 2.2

Study 1 Article Titles

Race content	Article Title
Highlighting inequality	Together but Unequal: How Racism Transformed Desegregation
	The Racial Wealth Gap: Addressing America's Most Pressing Epidemic
	How to Stop the Racist in You
	How to Be an Advocate if You Are a Person with Privilege
Deflecting inequality	How America's Identity Politics Went from Inclusion to Division
	Learning from the Other Achievement Gap: Understanding Growing Achievement Gap between Asian-American and White Students
	In Defense of Free Speech
Race-irrelevant	Psychology's Racism-Measuring Tool Isn't up to the Job
	College Admissions Are Getting Less Predictable
	How Would Corporate Tax Reform Benefit Workers?
	When Will Climate Change Make Earth Too Hot for Humans
	Burning for Some Learning: Knowing the Symptoms of Gonorrhea

Analysis plan. I used logistic multilevel models to test the probability that an article would be selected depending on its content (highlighting racism, deflecting racism, race-

irrelevant) and the race of participants. Article content was coded with dummy codes centered around .5 with the race-irrelevant information serving as the reference group, participant race was coded using a dummy code centered around .5 (White = .5, POC = -.5), and all continuous moderators were mean-centered. Simple effects were estimated at one standard deviation above and below the mean on a continuous moderator. For moderators skewed enough so that one standard deviation extrapolates beyond the scale, simple effects were estimated at the 20th and 80th percentile of the moderator.

All models specified random intercepts for participant and individual article titles. Initial models included all random slopes but failed to converge, so the final models did not include these. However, interpretations of the fixed effects were the same for these simplified models. Analyses were conducted in R using the lme4 package (Bates et al., 2015). For descriptive purposes, I also estimated probabilities based on model coefficients. Because there were three article types in equal numbers, a probability of 33.3% is equivalent to random chance.

Results

Information selection

White participants and participants of color differed in their preferences for race-relevant information. Looking at the probabilities, participants of color selected more information highlighting racism than either of the other two categories (highlighting racism = 40.8%, deflecting racism = 27.4%, race-irrelevant = 28.7%). White participants selected each type of information at roughly equal rates, although race-irrelevant information was nominally the most preferred (highlighting racism = 33.5%, deflecting racism = 26.4%, race-irrelevant = 37.7%; see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3

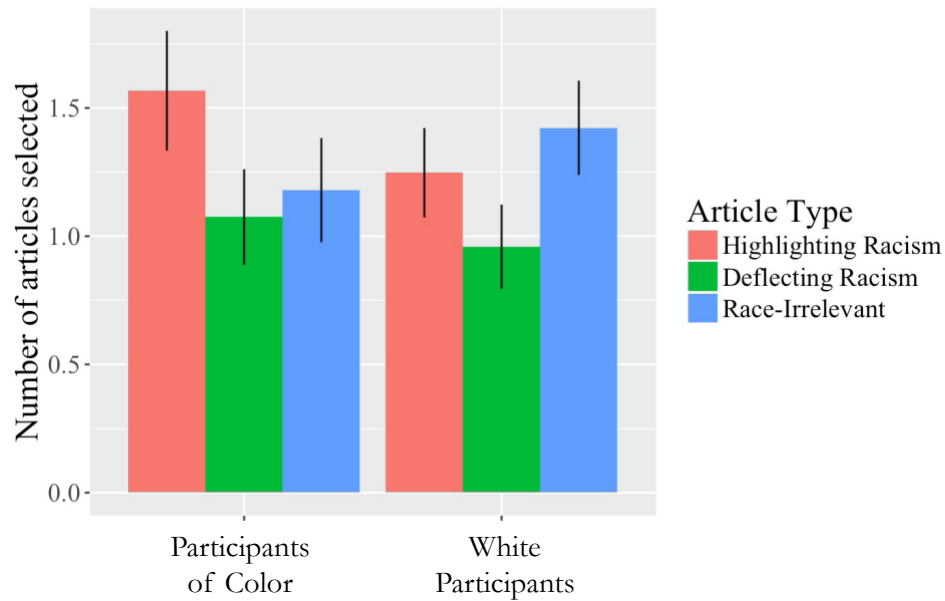
Probability of Selecting an Article by Race, Article Type, SDO, and Identity Centrality

	White Participants					Participants of Color				
	Overall	Low SDO	High SDO	Low ID	High ID	Overall	Low SDO	High SDO	Low ID	High ID
Highlighting racism	33.5%	35.3%	32.0%	34.8%	27.0%	40.8%	47.0%	35.3%	26.0%	42.8%
Deflecting racism	26.4%	22.2%	29.8%	25.1%	32.7%	27.4%	26.8%	27.2%	25.5%	27.7%
Race-irrelevant	37.7%	40.5%	35.4%	37.6%	38.3%	28.7%	23.4%	34.2%	49.3%	25.9%

Results confirmed that the selection of information highlighting racism (vs. race-irrelevant) differed significantly by race ($B_{logit} = -0.72$, $SE = 0.26$, $z = -2.82$, $p = .005$, $OR = 0.49$; see Figure 2.1). The direction of the interaction suggests that the relative preference for information highlighting racism (compared to race-irrelevant information) was significantly greater for participants of color (40.8% to 28.7%) than for White participants, who selected more race-irrelevant information (33.5% to 37.7%); however, neither of these simple effects were significant (White: $B_{logit} = -0.19$, $SE = 0.41$, $z = -0.46$, $p = .647$, $OR = 0.83$; participants of color: $B_{logit} = 0.54$, $SE = 0.42$, $z = 1.29$, $p = .197$, $OR = 1.72$). There was also a marginally significant interaction between race and selection of information deflecting racism (vs. race-irrelevant info), with White participants again being slightly (although not significantly) more inclined to select race-irrelevant information ($B_{logit} = -0.46$, $SE = 0.27$, $z = -1.73$, $p = .083$, $OR = 0.63$). Overall, White participants and participants of color had significantly different preferences for information, with White participants slightly preferring race-irrelevant information and participants of color preferring information highlighting racism.

Figure 2.1

Number of Articles Selected by Participant Race and Article Type



Note. For presentation purposes, these results are plotted as the average number of each article type selected, although analyses tested the probability that a given article title would be selected.

Moderating role of (anti)egalitarian attitudes and identity centrality

Racial egalitarianism and identity centrality each moderated the results. First, egalitarian attitudes affected information selection as expected for participants of color, but not for White participants. Results showed that information selection patterns changed significantly depending on egalitarian attitudes (three-way interaction with info highlighting racism: $B_{logit} = 0.58$, $SE = 0.25$, $z = -2.30$, $p = .021$; three-way with info deflecting racism: $B_{logit} = 0.60$, $SE = 0.26$, $z = -2.33$, $p = .020$). Analysis of the simple slopes revealed this was driven by the more egalitarian participants (i.e., low SDO), who showed even greater racial differences in preferences for information highlighting racism (race x highlighting racism at 20th percentile SDO: $B_{logit} = -1.29$, $SE = 0.36$, $z = -3.52$, $p < .001$, OR = .27) and deflecting racism (race x deflecting racism at 20th percentile SDO: $B_{logit} = -1.05$, $SE = 0.38$, $z = -2.74$, $p = .006$, odds ratio = .34). Specifically, egalitarian participants of color showed an even greater preference for information highlighting

racism than race-irrelevant information (47.0% to 23.4%), while the opposite was true for egalitarian White participants (35.3% to 40.5%). It was also the case that egalitarian White participants were slightly less inclined to select information deflecting racism (22.2%) than participants of color (26.8%).

In sum, having more egalitarian attitudes lead to greater selection of information highlighting racism for participants of color, which would be wholly consistent with their attitudes. This was not the case for White participants, who did select less information deflecting racism, but ultimately preferred race-irrelevant information most.

Racial identity centrality also moderated racial differences in information selection. The racial difference in selection of information highlighting racism was also moderated by racial identity centrality (three-way interaction: $B_{logit} = -0.92$, $SE = 0.31$, $z = -2.95$, $p = .003$, $OR = 0.40$). This was due to more exaggerated racial differences in information selection among those high in racial identity centrality (two-way interaction at 80th percentile identity centrality: $B_{logit} = -1.23$, $SE = 0.46$, $z = -2.65$, $p = .008$, $OR = 0.29$) rather than low (at 20th percentile: $B_{logit} = 0.89$, $SE = 0.57$, $z = 1.58$, $p = .113$, $OR = 2.45$). Highly identified participants of color again preferred information highlighting inequality to race-irrelevant information (42.8% to 25.9%), while highly identified White people again showed the opposite pattern (27.0% to 38.3%).

Discussion

Consistent with evidence that the topic of racial inequality is threatening for many White people (Phillips & Lowery, 2015; Goff et al., 2008), Study 1 found that White participants generally preferred to avoid race-relevant information, whether it highlighted or deflected racism, while participants of color generally preferred information highlighting racism. These patterns became clearer among those with more racially egalitarian attitudes. Although

participants of color with strong egalitarian attitudes sought more information about racial inequality, this was not true for White participants. How White participants selected information was not entirely consistent with their egalitarian attitudes, but it was consistent with their identity-based motives. White participants' relative preference for race-irrelevant information over information highlighting inequality was even more extreme when their racial identity was highly central. This provides some initial evidence that these information preferences are at least partly explained by identity-based motivations, which are stronger for people whose identity is more central to the self.

In sum, racial egalitarian attitudes matter, but do not drive information selection among White people as much as a purely attitudinal account might suggest. Instead, identity-based motivations interfere to shift selection away from race-relevant content. One limitation of this study, however, is that it focused primarily on the identity content of the information with the attitudinal content left to vary freely. It provides a preliminary test of the core questions but provides limited information on selection based on attitudinal content. Subsequent studies strengthen inferences about attitudinal and identity threats by more systematically varying the attitudinal content and reproducing selection effects with information that more directly references White identity.

Study 2: Motivated Avoidance of White Identity Threatening Information

The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate Study 1, but with more direct tests of identity threat effects on information selection. More of the article titles directly referenced White identity, with more of the information highlighting racism specifically threatening White identity and information deflecting from racism specifically affirming White identity. Article titles were also separately rated to ensure they were indeed perceived as being threatening or affirming to

White identity. To simplify the design and focus on identity threat, Study 2 also focused on information that was either favorable or unfavorable to White people, with no race-irrelevant information.

Study 2 also aimed to account for the role political ideology may play in shaping information selection. Because information highlighting racism is generally more liberal, and because people who identify more strongly with their Whiteness tend to be more conservative (e.g., Jardina, 2019; Mason, 2014), it may also be the case that part of what drove information selection in Study 1 was not just the racial content of the information, but also what it may signal about the broader political leaning of the information. The fact that racial identity centrality moderated racial differences in information selection provides some confidence that effects are at least partially explained by racial identity-based motivations, but accounting for the political leaning of the information may nonetheless help to disentangle identity-based processes from attitudinal ones. For this reason, article titles were sampled and tested to vary in their political leanings more systematically, with half of the titles more targeted towards conservatives and half towards liberals.

Methods

Participants and procedure. We recruited 171 participants through MTurk. 109 were White and 62 were people of color. Participants completed a revised version of the manipulation from Study 1, but this again had no effect on any variables in this study. Participants then completed the selective exposure task with a set of article titles including more titles that explicitly reference White identity. Afterwards, participants completed all individual difference measures and demographic questions.

Measures and materials. All individual difference measures were the same as in Study 1. Because information was varied in its political leaning, Study 2 also included a one-item political ideology measure (1, very liberal, to 7, very conservative).

Participants again saw 12 article titles that either threatened White identity by linking it to racism or affirmed White identity by exonerating it from racism or denying racism. Each of these were also varied so that they ostensibly targeted either liberal or conservative audiences. Although participants did not see any information about the source of any article, I aimed to sample titles of actual articles from sources that varied in their partisan lean (Fox News, The Guardian) or that ostensibly targeted more liberal and more conservative audiences. However, most information threatening White identity also tended to lean liberal or were from liberal sources, making it difficult to find White identity threatening article titles congenial to conservative attitudes. For this reason, all article titles were pretested on how liberal or conservative they seemed in addition to the key pretest of how threatening or affirming they were to White identity.

Pilot testing articles. I conducted a separate pilot study to test whether the article titles were perceived as intended. I recruited 76 MTurk participants and asked them to rate each article title in terms of how threatening/affirming it was to White identity (scale of -4 to 4, extremely negative about White people to extremely positive about White people) and how generally liberal/conservative the title was (scale of -4 to 4, extremely liberal to extremely conservative). I looked at the results for the 55 White participants because I was most interested in confirming that they found the article titles sufficiently threatening to White identity.

Pilot ratings of the article titles confirmed that the article titles intended to threaten White identity were indeed rated as being more negative about White people ($M = -0.82$, $SD = 2.34$)

than those intended to affirm White identity ($M = 1.07$, $SD = 2.13$; $B = -0.95$, $SE = 0.21$, $t(9.00) = -4.54$, $p = .001$, $d = -0.81$). Similarly, article titles intended to target liberal audiences were on average rated as being more liberal ($M = -0.55$, $SD = 2.46$) than those intended to target conservatives ($M = 0.18$, $SD = 2.35$; $B = 0.73$, $SE = 0.24$, $t(9.00) = -2.97$, $p = .016$, $d = -0.58$). However, mean pilot test ratings of the identity threat and the liberal/conservative slant of the titles were highly correlated ($r = .61$) and the political leaning of the titles were not as cleanly delineated as the identity content (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.4

Study 2 Article Titles

White ID content	Intended political leaning	Article Title	Post-test threat ratings	Post-test ideology ratings
Threatening	Liberal	Confronting Racism is not about the Needs and Feelings of White People	-1.74	-2.11
		How to Stop the Racist in You	-0.68	-1.33
		Yes, White ‘Privilege’ Is Still the Problem	-2.23	-2.39
	Conservative	White Privilege is Real, but White Liberals Perpetuate It	-1.21	1.14
		Does the Second Amendment Only Apply to White People?	-1.32	-1.24
		White Christian Conservatives Should Oppose Protests by White Supremacists	-0.25	0.44
Affirming	Liberal	In March on Washington, White Activists Were Overlooked, but Essential	1.72	0.26
		Americans Should Come Together to End Racism	0.54	-1.22
		What White Activists Mean for Black Lives Matter	0.14	-1.19
	Conservative	Can White People Experience Racism?	0.32	0.33
		How America’s Identity Politics Went from Inclusion to Division	NA	NA
		Demonizing White People Doesn’t Improve Race Relations	1.79	1.14

Note. Post-test ratings were on scales of 1 to 9 and then rescaled do center the midpoint. Ratings were from the 55

White participants in the pilot test.

Analysis plan. I again used logistic multilevel models to test the probability that an article would be selected based on its identity content (White identity threatening = .5; White identity affirming = -.5), its ideological leaning (lean conservative = .5; lean liberal = -.5), participants' race (White = .5; participant of color = -.5), participants' political ideology (mean-centered), and their interactions. The test of the key hypothesis is the two-way interaction between participant race and the identity content of the article. The primary model specified the random intercept for participants and for the individual article titles and all possible random slopes. Random slopes were removed from models with moderators because of issues with convergence, although this did not affect any of the fixed effects.

Finally, the probability that a given article in a given category was selected was estimated from the model. Because there were more articles from each of the key categories than participants selected (i.e., six identity threatening and six identity affirming), the probabilities do not add up to 100%. For ease of interpretation, the probabilities were used to estimate the proportion of articles of each type that participants selected, which did add up to 100%.

Results

The results replicated the effects of Study 1 with new article titles and while accounting somewhat for the political leaning of the information and participants' political ideology. There was again a two-way interaction between participant race and the identity content of the articles, with White participants selecting fewer White identity threatening articles than White identity affirming articles (44.3% to 55.7%) and participants of color doing the opposite (55.3% to

44.7%; $B_{logit} = -0.67$, $SE = 0.20$, $z = -3.28$, $p = .001$, $OR = 0.51$), although neither of these individual simple effects were significant.¹

Moderation analyses also replicated Study 1. First, racial differences in selection of White identity threatening articles were moderated by racial egalitarian attitudes (three-way interaction: $B_{logit} = 0.46$, $SE = 0.16$, $z = 2.89$, $p = .004$, $OR = 1.59$). Analysis of the simple effects again revealed that racial differences in selection of the White identity threatening articles disappeared for participants who had more antiegalitarian attitudes (two-way interaction at high SDO: $B_{logit} = -0.19$, $SE = 0.27$, $z = -0.69$, $p = .488$, $OR = 0.82$) and were greater when they had more egalitarian attitudes (two-way interaction at low SDO: $B_{logit} = -1.58$, $SE = 0.38$, $z = -4.22$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.21$). Further analyses of the simple effects showed that participants of color who had more egalitarian attitudes (i.e., low SDO) selected more articles that threatened rather than affirmed White identity (68.3% to 31.7%; $B_{logit} = 1.14$, $SE = 0.39$, $z = 2.91$, $p = .003$, $OR = 3.13$). Simple effects were not significant for White participants, although they were again in the opposite direction as participants of color, as egalitarian White participants selected fewer White identity threatening articles (42.6% to 57.4%; $B_{logit} = -0.44$, $SE = 0.28$, $z = -1.60$, $p = .110$, $OR = 0.64$). Another way of looking at this is that egalitarian attitudes had no effect on selection of presumably attitude-consistent information for White participants ($B_{logit} = 0.07$, $SE = 0.09$, $z = 0.71$, $p = .478$, $OR = 1.07$), but it did for participants of color ($B_{logit} = -0.40$, $SE = 0.13$, $z = -3.04$, $p = .002$, $OR = 0.67$).

Racial differences in information selection were also moderated by racial identity centrality ($B_{logit} = -0.64$, $SE = 0.19$, $z = -3.42$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.52$). The tendency for White

¹ This effect replicated when the mean threat ratings for each article in the pilot study were used in place of the contrast code for the a priori categories (i.e., White identity threatening = .5; White identity affirming = -.5). See Appendix A for details.

participants to select less White identity threatening information than participants of color was more pronounced when racial identity was more central ($B_{logit} = -0.73$, $SE = 0.24$, $z = -3.00$, $p = .003$, $OR = 0.48$) but the opposite was true when racial identity was less central ($B_{logit} = 0.87$, $SE = 0.43$, $z = 2.04$, $p = .042$, $OR = 2.39$). However, further analysis of the simple effects suggests that this was driven primarily by participants of color, who selected slightly, although not significantly more White identity threatening articles when racial identity was more central (58.5% to 41.5%; ($B_{logit} = 0.51$, $SE = 0.27$, $z = 1.88$, $p = .061$, $OR = 1.67$), but selected far fewer when racial identity was less central (29.8% to 70.2%; $B_{logit} = -1.30$, $SE = 0.46$, $z = -2.89$, $p = .004$, $OR = 0.27$). However, White participants were not significantly less likely to select White identity threatening information when racial identity was more central (46.3% to 53.7%; $B_{logit} = -0.22$, $SE = 0.27$, $z = -0.81$, $p = .418$, $OR = 0.81$) or less central (42.9% to 57.1%; $B_{logit} = -0.43$, $SE = 0.26$, $z = -1.68$, $p = .093$, $OR = 0.65$).

Discussion

Study 2 largely replicated the effect of Study 1 with information that more directly threatens White identity. Together, these studies demonstrate that selective exposure to information about race depends on racial identity. For participants of color, racial identity and egalitarian attitudes aligned to predict information selection in the same direction. For White participants in Study 1, identity centrality affected information selection as expected—by increasing preferences for identity affirming rather than identity threatening information, although this did not replicate in Study 2. Furthermore, egalitarian attitudes did not lead White participants to prefer information highlighting racism, which also threatened White identity. In this way, Studies 1 and 2 did not find that racial attitudes could fully explained how White Americans selected information.

Studies 1 and 2 also provide initial evidence that perceived threats to White racial identity are in part what shapes how White Americans select information about racism and racial inequality. Particularly when racial identity was more central, White participants in Study 1 preferred race-irrelevant information to information highlighting inequality more than participants of color did, although identity centrality did not significantly affect information selection for White participants in Study 2. However, pilot testing for articles in Study 2 provided further evidence that perceived threats to White identity specifically played a role in White participants' information selection. This is consistent with past research suggesting that information highlighting systemic inequalities is threatening to White people's identity (e.g., Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). However, the present studies provide only preliminary evidence of the role of White racial identity threat. The article titles were tested for their tendency to threaten White identity but were not all designed to explicitly implicate Whiteness. Using information that more explicitly and consistently implicates White identity would make it possible to make clearer inferences about the effect of White identity threats on information selection. Furthermore, the mixed findings for identity centrality for White participants point to a greater need to understand information selection motivations specifically for White participants.

Another important caveat is that there was not attitudinal content that was separate from the identity content (i.e., the attitudes tested were directly related to the racial identity content). This makes it somewhat more challenging to delineate attitudes and identity as potentially separate influences on information selection. Although both the identity threatening and identity affirming titles in Study 2 were sampled to vary somewhat in terms of their ideological leaning (how liberal or conservative they were), separate pilot testing suggested that the perceived identity threat posed by information was highly correlated with the perceived political leaning of

the information, with White identity threatening information being rated as much more liberal. Furthermore, how liberal or conservative information appears is an imprecise proxy for attitudes. Liberal/conservative ideologies are often described as a value system that may systematically organize an array of political attitudes, although what those values are and how attitudes are organized around it are not completely straightforward (see Jost, Federico, & Napier, 2009). Additionally, some evidence suggests that one of the values organizing conservative ideology is a preference for inequality (e.g., Jost et al., 2003). Furthermore, political ideology often functions less as an organized system of attitudes and more as a social identity organized around political groups and interests (Mason & Wronski, 2018). Together, this makes it difficult to theoretically distinguish liberal/conservative ideologies not only from attitudes about inequality but also from political identities.

For this reason, it may be easier to disentangle the independent and potentially competing influences of attitudes and identity by focusing on a specific attitude about an attitude object other than race or inequality. With this in mind, the studies in the following chapter were designed to more precisely test the separate influences of attitudes and identity in shaping perceptions and selection of White identity threatening information.

CHAPTER 3

Attitudes, White Identity, and Information Selection

The next three studies focus on the motivations driving selective exposure for White Americans, specifically on the distinct influences of attitudes and identity on White Americans' selection of information about racism. A challenge for understanding the separate influences of attitudes and identity is the fact that they typically align to guide behavior together. People form attitudes that are favorable to their social identities, that align with other group members, or that signal important social identities (Katz, 1960; Mackie & Cooper, 1984; Hogg & Smith, 2007). Similarly, people form identities around strongly held attitudes (e.g., Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018; Downing & Roush, 1985).

This dovetailing of attitudes and identity makes it challenging to delineate their separate motivational influences on behavior. In some cases, what were conventionally considered to be attitudinal processes are increasingly understood to be driven by identity (Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018; Huddy & Bankert, 2017). Conversely, what are often expected to be identity processes may be better explained by attitudes (e.g., Cassese & Barnes, 2019). Most research on motivated reasoning explains patterns either in terms of attitudes or identity, but because many important topics implicate both, neglecting either would risk overlooking important patterns.

White racial identity provides a useful context for understanding attitude-identity conflicts. Past research, as well as the findings from Studies 1 and 2, suggests that the motivation to protect White identity from threat regularly conflicts with egalitarian attitudes many White people hold (e.g., Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). Studies 1 and 2 provided evidence that White people are less inclined to select information that confirms their racial attitudes if it also threatens their racial identity. However, it is difficult to disentangle attitudes and identity in these studies because the same cue is activating both (i.e., information about racial inequality activating White identity threat and attitudes about inequality).

The remaining studies address this by having information that directly threatens White identity while also having attitudinal content clearly defined on a separate issue, in this case gun control. This will allow clearer inferences about how racial identity and political attitudes may shape information selection when in conflict. This will also provide useful insight into how White Americans process information about political topics that are not always discussed in terms of race, but that are nonetheless linked to racial attitudes and increasingly racialized in mainstream political discourse.

Gun control messaging is an excellent example of this. The gun control debate has been traditionally framed without reference to race or racism. For example, one study examined 58,000 social media posts from gun control and gun rights groups between 2008 and 2017 and found that only 1.5% of posts from gun control groups and 0.4% of posts from gun rights groups explicitly referenced race, and only about 3% of posts from each group implicitly referenced race (Merry, 2018). However, gun control is nonetheless racialized, as White Americans' gun control attitudes are strongly correlated with their racial attitudes (O'Brien, Forrest, Lynott, & Daly, 2013; Filindra & Kaplan, 2016; Hayes, Fortunato, & Hibbing, 2020).

Furthermore, in a political climate where race is increasingly salient for White Americans (e.g., Jefferson & Takahashi, 2021), discussions of gun control and racism do appear together in mainstream political discourse (e.g., McLeod, 2021; Manson, 2019).

Some research has tested how race cues impact receptivity gun control information. These typically focus on how race cues activate racial attitudes (e.g., Wetts & Willer, 2019) or how race may act as a peripheral cue for relevance (e.g., Wojcieszak, 2019), although with mixed results. One study, for example, found that Black Americans were more likely to select and spend time reading high-quality information in support of their gun control attitudes regardless of whether it quoted a Black or a White source (Wojcieszak, 2019). However, the initial findings from Studies 1 and 2 suggest that White people do select racial and political information to avoid White identity threats, even if other work suggests they are unaffected by race as a peripheral cue for relevance (e.g., Appiah et al., 2013). The question then becomes less whether racial identity in the abstract shapes information selection and more about *how* racial identity can be activated to motivate selective exposure.

There is ample research suggesting that political messages with race cues impact White Americans' receptivity to messages by activating negative attitudes they may hold about racial and ethnic minorities (e.g., Valentino, Hutchings, & White, 2002; Hutchings & Jardina, 2009; Wetts & Willer, 2019). However, racial animus toward outgroups is different from identification with the racial ingroup. For White people, racial identification is a powerful motivating force that shapes political attitudes and behaviors above and beyond the hostile racial attitudes that have overshadowed it in the literature (Jardina, 2019).

How White Americans select information relevant to both their attitudes and their identity may depend on how information may threaten each. It is plausible that both attitudes and

identity may shape selective exposure through defense motives, as people are similarly motivated to protect the self from information that threatens their attitudes or their identity (Chaiken et al., 1989; Major & O'Brien, 2005). Directly testing whether attitudes and identity operate on defense motives may prove useful for predicting how people will select information when their attitudes and identity are in conflict.

The goal of Studies 3A and 3B were to test how competing attitudinal and identity cues may activate defense motives. Specifically, these studies test how information with clear identity content (White identity threatening vs. affirming) and attitudinal content (pro- vs. anti-gun control) shape perceptions of how threatening information is to the self (i.e., activating defense motive). Study 4 then tests whether these perceptions of threat map onto patterns of actual information selection in a separate sample.

Studies 3A and 3B: Attitudes, Identity, and Defense Motives

Studies 3A and 3B aimed to disentangle political attitudes from racial identity by using information that had clearly defined attitudinal content (pro- vs. anti-gun control stance) as well as identity content (threatening vs. affirming to White identity). Having a clearly defined attitude object (gun control) manipulated independently of the identity content positions Studies 3A and 3B to delineate motivations for information selection. Studies 3A and 3B also included additional measures of important components of social identity that are known to be critical for understanding how people respond to identity threats, namely private regard, or people's positive affective attachment to a social ingroup (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Sellers et al., 1998; Kachanof et al., 2016; Ho & Sidanius, 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and public regard, or people's sense of how well regarded their group is in society (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Sellers et al., 1998; Ho & Sidanius, 2009; Major & O'Brien, 2005).

Studies 3A and 3B were designed to validate article title stimuli for subsequent studies; however, I included and preregistered an additional measure to test the effect of the attitudinal and identity content of information on perceptions of how generally threatening or affirming each title was to the self. Because there were not enough article titles that met our selection criteria in the first round of testing (Study 3A), I revised the article titles and conducted the study again (Study 3B). Because these studies were preregistered separately, primary analyses were run separately. For increased power, exploratory moderation analyses were conducted by collapsing across studies, although any inconsistencies across studies are noted. Preregistrations are available on OSF (Study 3A: <https://osf.io/c5ewt>; Study 3B: <https://osf.io/zjwub>).

Methods

Participants and procedures. I used CloudResearch's paneling services (formerly TurkPrime) to recruit 100 White Republicans and 100 White Democrats on MTurk for each study (total N across Studies 3A and 3B = 407). Participants all passed CloudResearch's screeners for suspicious geolocations, duplicate IP addresses, and IP addresses outside the United States (see Moss & Litman, 2018).

Participants saw 16 article titles randomly sampled from the 32 article titles included in each study. Each title was designed to have cues for both the attitudinal and White identity content. This led to a 2 (pro- vs. anti-gun control) x 2 (threatening vs. affirming) within-subjects design with eight titles in each cell. See Table 3.1.1 for White identity threatening titles and 3.1.2 for White identity affirming titles.

Materials and measures. Each study included 16 White identity threatening titles and 16 White identity affirming titles, half of each were pro- gun control and half were anti-gun control. The strategy for generating article titles was to sample different ways of implicating or

distancing Whiteness from racism. For this reason, half of the White identity threatening articles had White racism implicated or called out (e.g., “Protecting Our Gun Rights While Recognizing White Racism against Black Gun Owners”) and half decentered or silenced Whiteness (e.g., “Guns in Black and White and White and White: Why the Fight for Stronger Gun Regulations Needs to be Less White”). Similarly, half of the White identity affirming titles evoked a White savior complex (e.g., “White Gun Owners Are an Example of How All Americans Should Protect Their Families”) and half used more subtle colorblind or appeasing language (“Why We Must Unite as a Nation to Regulate Gun Ownership;” see Tables 3.1.1 for identity threatening titles and Table 3.1.2 for identity affirming titles). Titles in each of these categories affected perceived positivity or negativity toward White people as intended.²

Participants saw article titles one at a time and rated them on three dimensions using nine-point semantic differential scales. With these scales (-4 to 4), participants rated the attitudinal content of the article (“Anti-Gun Control” to “Pro-Gun Control”), the identity content of the article (“Negative toward White People” to “Positive toward White People”), and how generally threatened/affirmed the content made participants feel (“Makes me feel threatened” to “Makes me feel affirmed”). The first two dimensions were used to select stimuli for Study 4. The final dimension measured how likely a title should be to activate defense motives. To ensure participants were interpreting this item consistently and did not interpret the item in ways that would preclude either attitudes or identities, they were given definitions at the beginning of the study. They were instructed to indicate that an article was threatening if it made them feel that their “beliefs, attitudes, or identities are invalidated, attacked, or discomforted” and indicate it was affirming if it made them feel “validated, supported, or comforted.”

² None of the subcategories were notably ineffective, and each were represented in the final 12 titles ultimately selected for Study 4 (4 implicating racism, 2 decentering Whiteness, 3 White savior, and 3 colorblind).

Table 3.1.1

White Identity Threatening Articles by Gun Control Stance and Type of Identity Threat

GC Stance	ID Threat	Study 3A	Revised for Study 3B
Anti-gun control	Racism implicated/ called out in advocacy	If We Really Want to Protect Our Gun Rights, Whites Must Recognize Racism against Black Gun Owners	Protecting Our Gun Rights While Recognizing White Racism against Black Gun Owners
		White Americans Lead the Fight to Protect Second Amendment Rights for All Americans. Except African Americans To Stop Our Guns from Being Taken Away, White People Need to Stop Shooting Schoolchildren	Second Amendment Rights Are for <u>Everyone</u> : Why White People Need to Stop Fearing Black People with Guns
		If Black People Want to Protect Themselves from White People, They Should Support Gun Rights	White People Shooting Children Give Democrats Ammunition to Take Our Guns Away
	Decentering or Silencing White People	We Need the Black Gunowners Association More than the NRA	Gun Control Leaves Black Americans Defenseless against the Tyranny of White People
		We've Heard Enough about Why White People Need Second Amendment Rights. Let's Hear Why Black Americans Need It	The NRA is Too White: Why the Black Gunowners Association Should Be in Charge of the Gun Rights Movement
		Protecting Gun Rights Would Be Easier if the Debate Weren't So White	Enough about White People. Let's Talk about Why People of Color Need Their Gun Rights Protected
Pro-gun control	Racism implicated or called out in advocacy	We Need to Protect 2nd Amendment Rights, but Not Just for White People	People of Color Should Oppose Gun Regulation Too. White People Are Just Too Out of Touch to Convince Us
		To Move Forward, White Gun Control Advocates Must Confront the Racism in Their Advocacy	Protecting Gun Rights for Minorities is More Important than Protecting Gun Rights for White People
		As Long as White People Ignore Their Racism, Gun Control Will Only Help White Children	We Can Come Together to Make Gun Control a Reality, but White Gun Control Advocates Have to Confront Their Racism
	Decentering or Silencing Whites	We Won't Have Sensible Gun Control if White Gun Control Advocates' Remain Silent When Black Children Are Killed	I Want Gun Control to Protect My Children. White People Want Gun Control to Criminalize Them
		Black People with Guns, Not Black Victims, Make Whites Want Gun Control	We Would Already Have the Gun Control We Need if White People Cared about Black Gun Victims
		People Only Listen to White Gun Control Advocates and Victims. It's Time to Put People of Color Front and Center	Everyone Should Want More Gun Control. White People Just Want It for Racist Reasons
Decentering or Silencing Whites	White Americans Are Almost Half as Likely to Support Sensible Gun Control. Why Are They the Faces of the Movement?	Guns in Black and White and White and White: Why the Fight for Stronger Gun Regulations Needs to Be Less White	
	The White Elephant in the Room: Sensible Gun Control Is Only a 'Debate' for Whites	Who Is Okay with Dead Children? White Americans Are the Only Racial Group Who Prefer Dead Children to Gun Control	
		Whitewashing: Why Gun Control Became about Disarming Citizens and Not Cops	The White Elephant in the Room: White People Are the Only Racial Group that Denies Necessity of Gun Control
			Why Not Disarm Cops Too? White Supremacy Is Why We Never Hear about the Most Important Gun Control

Table 3.1.2

White Identity Affirming Articles by Gun Control Stance and Type of Identity Affirmation

GC Stance	ID Affirm	Study 3A	Revised for Study 3B
Anti-gun control	White Savior	White Americans Are the Greatest Protectors of the Right to Bear Arms for All Americans	The New Civil Rights Movement: How White Americans Are Protecting Second Amendment Rights
		Black Americans Increasingly Want the Gun Rights White Americans Have Been Fighting for	Learning from Middle America: Rural American Values Are How We Can Have More Guns and Less Murder
		White Gun Owners Are an Example of How All Americans Can Protect Themselves	White Gun Owners Are an Example of How All Americans Should Protect Their Families
	Colorblind or Appeasing	The NRA Is the Biggest Defender of the Gun Rights Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks Enjoyed	The NRA Is the Biggest Defender of the Gun Rights Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks Enjoyed
		Gun Rights Help Everyone Protect Themselves Equally	Unregulated Gun Ownership Helps All Americans Protect Themselves
		Responsible Gun Ownership Knows No Race or Gender	Responsible Gun Ownership Knows No Race or Gender
		Instead of Attacking Gun Owners, We Need to Teach Our Children to Bridge Divides	Protected in the Heartland: Rural Americans Prove that More Guns Does Not Mean More Violence
White Men with Guns Are Not the Problem. Bullying and Exclusion Are	Guns Don't Create School Shooters. Bullying and Exclusion Do		
Pro-gun control	White Savior	What White Allies Mean for Black Gun Control Activists	How Can White Allies Save Black Lives? Fight for Stronger Gun Control
		In Chicago, White Gun Control Advocates Work with Black Communities to End Gun Violence	Want to Help Black Communities? Help Them Get Better Gun Regulations
		Black Activists Take to the Streets to End Gun Violence While White Allies Help from behind the Scenes	White Allies are Essential in the Fight to Get Guns off the Streets
	Colorblind or Appeasing	The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence Helps Communities of Color Get Guns off the Street	The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence Helps Communities of Color Get Guns off the Street
		To Get Sensible Gun Control, We Need to Put Race Aside and Come Together	We Need to Put Race Aside and Come Together for Lifesaving Gun Regulations
		If We Want Sensible Gun Control, We Must Understand Rural White Americans	To Get the Gun Control We Need, We Must Understand Rural White Americans
		Uniting as a Nation to End Gun Violence	Why We Must Unite as a Nation to Regulate Gun Ownership
Rising Tides: How Sensible Gun Control Will Lift All Communities	Sensible Gun Control Will Help <i>All</i> Americans		

Political ideology was again measured with a one-item scale (1, very liberal, to 7, very conservative). The sampling plan was successful in getting the average political ideology toward the midpoint of the scale (Study 3A: $M = 4.25$, $SD = 2.02$; Study 3B: $M = 3.97$, $SD = 2.02$). Gun control attitudes were measured with six semantic differential items, where participants were asked to use a scale of 1 to 9 (rescaled to -4 to 4) to indicate their opinion of gun control (e.g., “Negative” to “Positive”; Study 3A: $M = 1.26$, $SD = 2.56$, $\alpha = .97$; Study 3B: $M = 0.97$, $SD = 2.93$, $\alpha = .99$). Because this survey was long, I prioritized exploratory individual difference measures related to racial identity and removed those related to racial attitudes. In addition to the same racial identity centrality measure (Study 3A: $M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.22$, $\alpha = .83$; Study 3B: $M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.39$, $\alpha = .91$), I included an adapted a four-item measure of private regard, or a positive affective attachment to a social identity (e.g., “I am happy that I am White;” Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Sellers et al., 1997).³ I also included an adapted four-item measure of public regard (how good people think others feel about White people; e.g., “In general, others respect White people;” Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Sellers et al., 1998). Each of these measures used a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). On average, participants were somewhat high on private regard (Study 3A: $M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.21$, $\alpha = .80$; Study 3B: $M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.08$, $\alpha = .83$) and public regard (Study 3A: $M = 4.50$, $SD = 0.99$, $\alpha = .86$; Study 3B: $M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.09$, $\alpha = .90$).

Analysis plan. For preregistered analyses, I analyzed the results from each study separately. However, all key results replicate independently for each study, so results are

³ This was originally five items, but one reverse-scored item was weakly or negatively correlated with the other items depending on the study and was ultimately removed from the scale.

reported with the combined sample both for presentation purposes and to maximize power for exploratory moderation analyses.

I first tested whether perceived threat/affirmation depended on both the attitudinal and identity content of information as well as the political attitudes of participants. I used linear mixed effects models with the White identity content (threatening = 0.5, affirming = -0.5), the attitudinal content (pro-gun control = 0.5, anti-gun control = -0.5), and participants' political attitudes as fixed effects. A contrast code for study was added as a covariate (Study 3A = -.5, Study 3B = .5) and the random slope for study within article title was also included because the wording of each title varied somewhat across studies. All models also included all possible random effects unless it could not converge or was not positive definite, in which case random slopes were removed.

Because one goal of these studies was to test whether political attitudes influenced the perceived threat of the White identity content, the preregistered analysis focused general liberal/conservative ideology as a proxy for attitudes rather than gun control attitudes specifically. However, I also conducted the same analyses but with gun control attitude instead of political ideology, which allowed us to more precisely test attitude congeniality effects as well (see Figure 3.2).

Results

Preregistered analysis. Independently, White identity threatening information was rated to be significantly more threatening than White identity affirming information ($B = -1.39$, $SE = 0.12$, $t(27.8) = -11.22$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.65$; see Figure 3.1). There was also a significant interaction between the gun control position of the articles and participant political attitudes, indicating a strong congeniality effect on perceptions of threat/affirmation posed by information

($B = -0.40$, $SE = 0.02$, $t(6019.9) = -18.6$, $p < .001$). Pro-gun control information was rated as much more affirming than anti-gun control information for more liberal participants (at -1 SD: $B = 0.89$, $SE = 0.13$, $t(35.0) = 6.77$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.42$) and the opposite was true for more conservative participants (at +1 SD: $B = -0.73$, $SE = 0.13$, $t(35.1) = -5.54$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.34$).

There was also a significant three-way interaction between the attitudinal content, participant attitudes, and the identity content ($B = 0.55$, $SE = 0.04$, $t(6020.0) = 12.7$, $p < .001$). Analyses of the simple effects indicated that this reflected the fact that the attitude congeniality effect was weaker for White identity threatening information ($B = -0.12$, $SE = 0.03$, $t(6049.3) = -4.05$, $p < .001$) than for White identity affirming information ($B = -0.67$, $SE = 0.03$, $t(6046.2) = -21.9$, $p < .001$). In other words, attitude consistent information generally rated as more affirming to the self, but attitude consistency provided less of a boost for information that was still threatening on another dimension.

Figure 3.1

Ratings of Threat/Affirmation to the Self by Article Content and Political Ideology

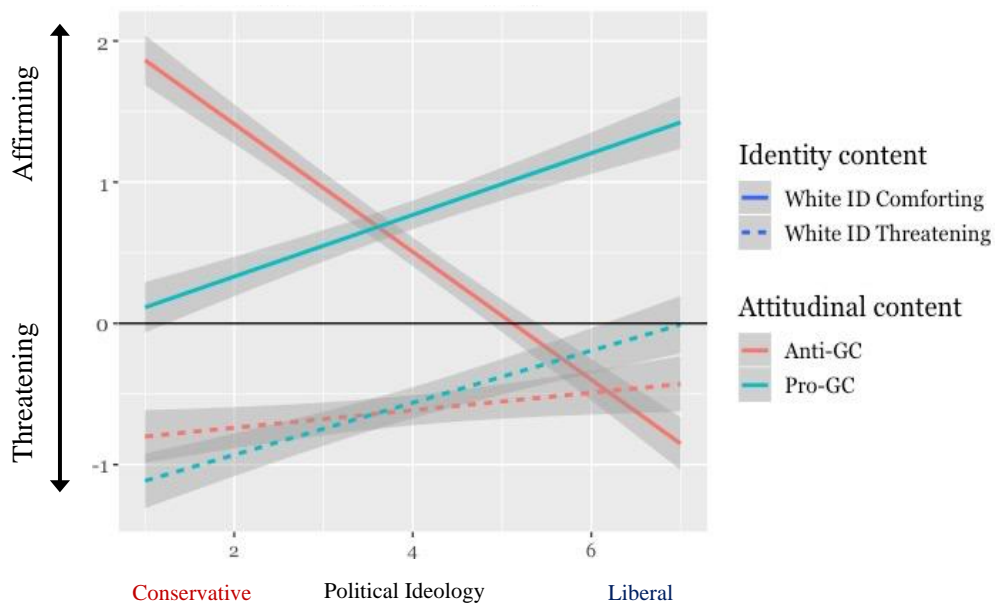
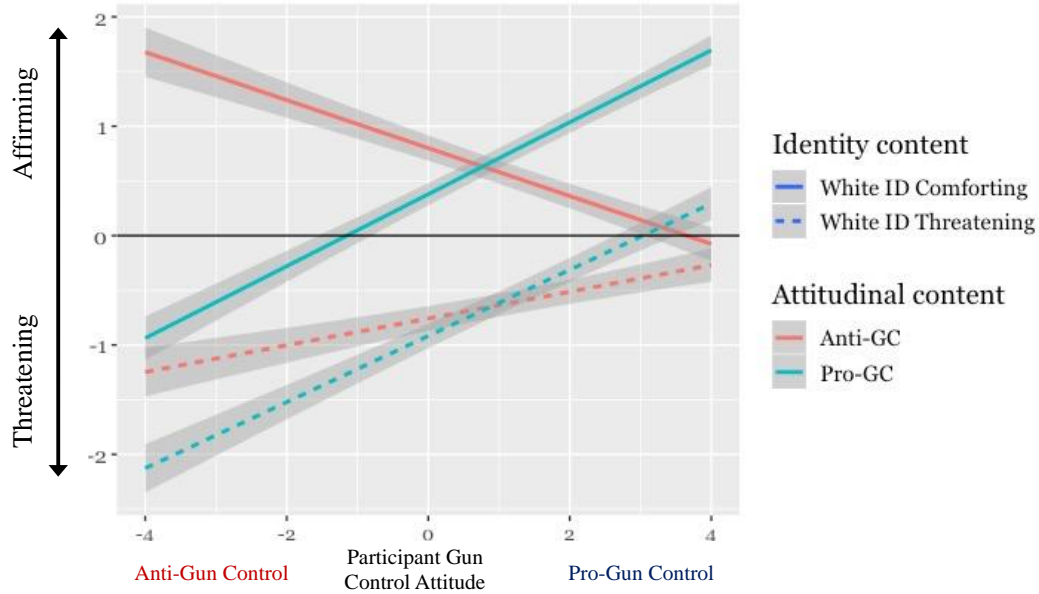


Figure 3.2

Ratings of Threat/Affirmation to the Self by Article Content and Gun Control Attitudes



Although both attitude congeniality and identity threats mattered for participants across the political spectrums, there were still important asymmetries (two-way interaction: $B = -0.25$, $SE = 0.02$, $t(6019.7) = -11.6$, $p < .001$). Analysis of the simple effects suggested that White conservatives rated the White identity threatening information as more threatening ($B = -1.89$, $SE = 0.13$, $t(35.1) = -14.4$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.89$) than White liberals did ($B = -0.88$, $SE = 0.13$, $t(35.0) = -6.74$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.42$), although both rated them as significantly more threatening.

One pattern from the current findings is that for conservative participants, the effect of White identity threat on ratings of threat were larger than the effect of the gun control position of the article ($d = -0.83$ to $d = -0.34$) but were roughly the same for liberal participants ($d = -0.42$ to $d = 0.42$). Formal tests of the difference between coefficients confirmed that identity was indeed more powerful than gun control attitudes for White conservative participants ($\chi^2(1) = 39.5$, $p <$

.001), although the attitude congeniality effects were not significantly stronger than identity threat effects for White liberal participants ($\chi^2(1) = 0.00, p = .987$).⁴

Moderation analyses. Moderation analyses found that racial identity centrality weakly moderated some results. The finding that congeniality effects were weaker for identity threatening information were somewhat truer when racial identity was highly central to the self (four-way interaction: $B = 0.07, SE = 0.03, t(602.2) = 2.32, p = .020$).⁵ Identity centrality did not, however, moderate ratings of the identity threatening information on its own (two-way interaction: $B = 0.02, SE = 0.03, t(602.1) = 0.70, p = .482$).

Private racial regard functioned similarly, although not significantly so (four-way interaction: $B = 0.07, SE = 0.04, t(604.3) = 1.93, p = .063$). However, participants who felt more positive about being White rated White identity threatening information as significantly more threatening (two-way interaction: $B = -0.36, SE = 0.04, t(604.3) = -8.50, p < .001$). Interestingly, private regard also moderated ratings of the gun control information, with more positive feelings about Whiteness making pro-gun control information more threatening (two-way interaction: $B = -0.36, SE = 0.04, t(604.3) = -7.47, p < .001$).

Results were similar for public racial regard. Participants who believed White people are more positively regarded in society rated White identity threatening information as significantly more threatening (two-way interaction: $B = -0.10, SE = 0.04, t(604.3) = -2.48, p = .013$). This was also moderated by political ideology, suggesting that the moderating effect of public regard was greater for White liberals (three-way interaction: $B = 0.05, SE = 0.02, t(604.3) = -2.58, p =$

⁴ To make sure the effect sizes were coded in the same direction so that the absolute values of the effect sizes would be comparable, the analysis for liberal participants reverse-scored the attitudinal content so that the effects would be in the same direction as the identity threat effects (i.e., avoidance of anti-gun control information instead of selection of pro-gun control information).

⁵ This interaction was significant in Study 3b ($p = .04$) and nonsignificant in Study 3a ($p = .15$).

.001). Public regard also moderated ratings of the gun control information, as participants with higher public regard rating pro-gun control information as more threatening (two-way interaction: $B = -0.09$, $SE = 0.04$, $t(604.2) = -2.07$, $p = .039$).

These results generally suggest that features of identification—particularly how White participants feel about their group membership—shapes how threatening they perceive White identity threatening information to be. However, identity centrality, private regard, and public regard seem to affect responses to both the identity and the attitudinal content in complex ways.

Discussion

Studies 3A and 3B find that both the attitudinal content and the identity content of information influenced assessments of how generally threatening information to the self, an important mechanism for selective exposure. If perceived threat, as operationalized for Studies 3A and 3B, does indeed drive selective exposure, then these findings set up clear predictions for actual information selection. People should be most likely to select information that affirms both their attitude and identity, and attitude-consistency should influence information selection significantly less if the information also threatens racial identity.

Studies 3A and 3B also provide some insights into the overlap between political attitudes and White racial identity, as White conservatives were more averse to White identity threatening information. This is perhaps unsurprising given that White conservatives tend to identify somewhat more with their Whiteness (Jardina, 2019). In fact, conservatism was correlated with White identity centrality ($r = .20$, $t(406) = 4.03$, $p < .001$), private regard ($r = .42$, $t(406) = 9.27$, $p < .001$), and public regard ($r = .13$, $t(405) = 2.72$, $p = .007$). Additionally, White conservative participants rated White identity threatening information as more generally threatening than attitude-inconsistent information, while White participants rated them as equally

threatening. This may be due in part to the fact that for White conservatives, information implicating White people in racism is threatening to their racial identity *and* to their racial and political attitudes. This political asymmetry in the identity threat effect may reflect the fact that political ideology is a complex organization of various political attitudes, including gun control, as well as a more general preference for inequality (Jost et al., 2009; Jost et al., 2003). Racial identity threats may threaten ideologically interrelated beliefs and attitudes for conservatives and affirm them for liberals. Thus, although attitudes and identity do matter for information processing across the political spectrum, the data suggest that the overlap between attitudes and identity may be critical to consider as well.

Furthermore, there was some weak evidence that racial identity centrality and public racial regard affected threat ratings of information and somewhat stronger evidence that private racial regard did so. The findings with centrality were somewhat consistent with the previous studies, although still somewhat inconsistent. The private regard findings are consistent with past research showing that high private regard increases susceptibility to identity threats (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1990; Ho & Sidanius, 2010); however, these effects are not consistently found (see Neblett & Roberts, 2013; Burrow & Ong, 2010). Although the moderating role of identity is unclear from Studies 3A and 3B alone, these findings do point to identity-based motivations that are more complex, converging and diverging with political attitudes in complex ways. How this complex pattern of results translates to actual selective exposure is the focus of Study 4.

Study 4: Selective Exposure to Racial and Political Information

Study 4 formally tested the independent and competing effects of attitudes and identity on White Americans' selective exposure to White identity threatening gun control information. Using a matched subset of article titles from Study 3B, Study 4 assessed whether the effects of

attitudinal and identity cues on perceived threat translated to information selection in an independent sample.

Methods

Participants and procedures. I recruited 150 White Democrats and 150 White Republicans using CloudResearch's MTurk paneling services while also screening for suspicious geolocations, duplicate IP addresses, and IP addresses outside the U.S. (see Moss & Litman, 2018). Data collection was automatically stopped when the target number of people completed the study and submitted the HIT on MTurk; a number of participants completed the survey and did not submit the HIT, leading to a final sample of 321 participants. At the time of the survey, 147 reported being Democrat, 146 reported being Republican, and 28 reported independent or other. Participants first completed the selective exposure task before completing individual difference and demographic measures.

Materials and measures. For the selective exposure task, participants were shown 12 article titles in a random order and were asked to select at least four to read. No participants selected more than four articles. This led to a 2 (pro- vs. anti-gun control) x 2 (threatening vs. affirming) within-subjects design with three article titles in each cell (see Table 3.2). Intentionally, this meant that participants would have to select at least one article title that was not in the cell that affirmed both their attitude and identity, making it easier to test information selection when attitudes and identity conflict.

This study used the same measures of identity centrality ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.36$, $\alpha = .90$), private regard ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.22$, $\alpha = .84$), and public regard ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 1.14$, $\alpha = .90$). In addition to race-specific SDO as a general measure of racial (anti)egalitarianism ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 1.37$, $\alpha = .92$), this study included feeling thermometers to capture explicit attitudes about

Black people (salient and relevant racial outgroup; scale of 1 to 10, $M = 8.46$, $SD = 1.62$) and about White people (racial ingroup; $M = 8.69$, $SD = 1.76$), although this measure ended up being redundant with private racial regard ($r = .77$, $p < .001$).

Table 3.2

Study 4 Article Titles and Pilot Test Ratings

White ID Content	Gun Control Stance	Article Title	Threat Rating	GC Rating
Threatening	Anti-Gun Control	Protecting Our Gun Rights While Recognizing White Racism against Black Gun Owners	-2.27	-1.54
		Gun Control Leaves Black Americans Defenseless against the Tyranny of White People	-3.16	-2.12
		People of Color Should Oppose Gun Regulation Too. White People Are Just Too Out of Touch to Convince Us	-2.71	-1.90
	Pro-Gun Control	We Can Come Together to Make Gun Control a Reality, but White Gun Control Advocates Have to Confront Their Racism	-2.63	2.79
		Everyone Should Want More Gun Control. White People Just Want It for Racist Reasons	-3.26	2.16
		Who Is Okay with Dead Children? White Americans Are the Only Racial Group Who Prefer Dead Children to Gun Control	-3.46	2.53
Affirming	Anti-Gun Control	The New Civil Rights Movement: How White Americans Are Protecting Second Amendment Rights	1.35	-1.64
		White Gun Owners Are an Example of How All Americans Should Protect Their Families	2.18	-1.98
		Protected in the Heartland: Rural Americans Prove that More Guns Do Not Mean More Violence	1.17	-1.96
	Pro-Gun Control	White Allies are Essential in the Fight to Get Guns off the Streets	1.58	2.77
		We Need to Put Race Aside and Come Together for Lifesaving Gun Regulations	0.59	2.47
		Why We Must Unite as a Nation to Regulate Gun Ownership	0.70	2.57

Analysis plan. Results were again analyzed with multilevel logistic regression in R using the lme4 package. The primary, preregistered model estimated the probability that an article title would be selected based on its attitudinal content (pro- vs. anti-gun control), its identity content (White identity threatening vs. affirming), and participant’s gun control attitudes. The initial

model specified random intercepts for participants and individual article titles as well as all possible random slopes. In this study, the primary preregistered model used gun control attitudes as the measure of political attitudes rather than general political ideology because the closer match between the attitude and attitude object is better suited for pinpointing attitudinal processes. Results were generally the same when using general political ideology as the attitude measure, although discrepancies are noted. Because gun control attitudes were skewed ($M = 1.52$, $SD = 2.57$, $\alpha = .99$), simple effects were analyzed at one standard deviation above or below the midpoint, which represents a completely neutral attitude.

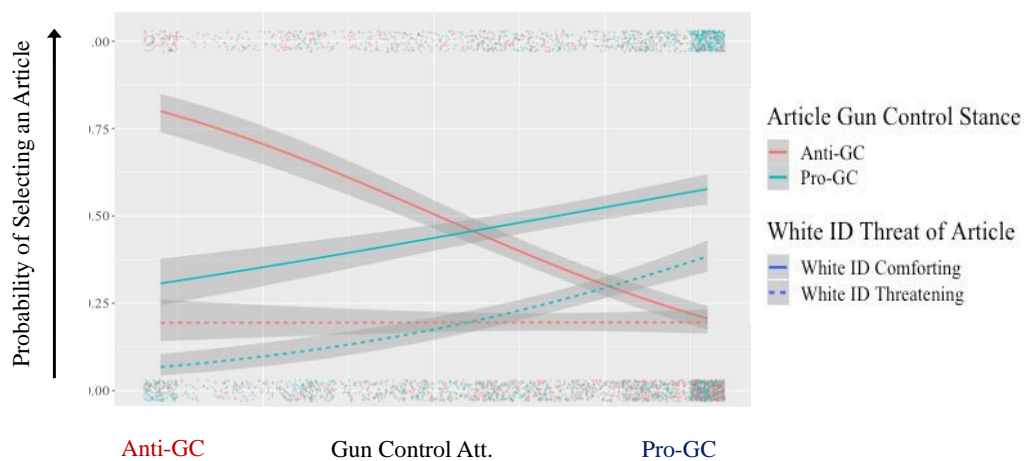
For moderation analyses, I tested separate models with the fixed effect for a given mean-centered moderator and its interaction with all other key variables. For any model that either did not converge or was not positive definite, I removed random slopes one-by-one in a preregistered order until the model estimated properly. Any random effects removed are noted model-by-model. However, the general pattern of results was robust to this specification. Proportions were estimated the same way they were in Study 2.

Results

Preregistered analysis. All key effects almost exactly mirrored results from Studies 3A and 3B (see Figure 3.3). There was again a strong attitude congeniality effect, whereby participants strongly preferred information consistent with their gun control attitudes (two-way interaction: $B_{logit} = 0.46$, $SE = 0.06$, $z = 7.54$, $p < .001$, $OR = 1.59$). Participants with more conservative gun control attitudes selected more anti-gun control information (73.2% to 26.8%; $B_{logit} = -1.38$, $SE = 0.29$, $z = -4.77$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.25$) and those with more liberal gun control attitudes selected more pro-gun control information (66.8% to 33.2%; $B_{logit} = 0.98$, $SE = 0.33$, $z = 2.95$, $p = .003$, $OR = 2.67$).

As predicted, participants selected much fewer articles that threatened White identity (24.1%) than those that affirmed it (75.9%; $B_{logit} = -1.60$, $SE = 0.29$, $z = -5.58$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.20$). Furthermore, there was again a three-way interaction ($B_{logit} = -0.33$, $SE = 0.11$, $z = -2.89$, $p = .004$, $OR = 0.72$), which simple effects confirm was because the attitude congeniality effect was again significantly weaker when information was identity threatening ($B_{logit} = 0.30$, $SE = 0.08$, $z = 3.60$, $p < .001$, $OR = 1.35$) than when it was identity affirming ($B_{logit} = 0.62$, $SE = 0.08$, $z = 7.42$, $p < .001$, $OR = 1.87$).⁶

Figure 3.3
Information by Article Content and Participant Gun Control Attitudes



Again, participants' attitudes shaped selection of the identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = 0.26$, $SE = 0.07$, $z = 3.80$, $p < .001$, $OR = 1.30$). Participants with more conservative gun control attitudes again selected far fewer White identity threatening articles (16.3%; $B_{logit} = -2.27$, $SE = 0.33$, $z = -6.92$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.10$) than participants with more liberal gun control

⁶ All effects replicated (although more weakly) when liberal/conservative ideology was used as the attitude measure rather than gun control attitudes. Results also held when controlling for education level, income, age, and gender.

attitudes (34.1%; $B_{logit} = -0.93$, $SE = 0.34$, $z = -2.69$, $p = .007$, $OR = 0.40$). Furthermore, testing differences between coefficients confirmed that participants with conservative (anti) gun control attitudes selected information in favor of their racial identity primarily and their attitude secondarily ($\chi^2(1) = 4.09$, $p = .043$); conversely, participants with liberal (pro) gun control attitudes equivalently selected information in favor of their attitude and their racial identity ($\chi^2(1) = 0.02$, $p = .900$).

Moderation by racial attitudes. The race-specific SDO acted similarly to gun control attitudes, perhaps unsurprisingly given that it was highly correlated with gun control ($r = -.50$, $t(319) = -10.4$, $p < .001$) as well as liberal/conservative ideology ($r = .56$, $t(319) = 12.0$, $p < .001$). Racial egalitarian attitudes led to greater selection of pro-gun control information (two-way interaction: $B_{logit} = -0.35$, $SE = 0.07$, $z = -5.03$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.71$). Similarly, this preference was blunted when information was identity threatening ($B_{logit} = 0.33$, $SE = 0.13$, $z = 2.40$, $p = .016$, $OR = 1.39$). However, egalitarian attitudes did not seem to explain selection of the identity threatening content ($B_{logit} = 0.04$, $SE = 0.07$, $z = 0.50$, $p = .619$, $OR = 1.04$). Similarly, attitudes about Black people did not moderate selection of White identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = 0.01$, $SE = 0.05$, $z = 0.96$, $p = .335$, $OR = 1.01$). Across racial attitude measures, it thus does not seem that racial attitudes account for the avoidance of White identity threatening information.

Racial identity. On the other hand, there was evidence that features of participants racial identification did explain selection of identity threatening content, although in complex ways. The asymmetry in selection of identity content, whereby White liberals were relatively less responsive to identity threat than White conservatives, was significantly moderated by racial identity centrality (three-way interaction: $B_{logit} = 0.10$, $SE = 0.03$, $z = 3.67$, $p < .001$, $OR = 1.11$).

When racial identity was not central, White liberals selected information based on the attitudinal content ($B_{logit} = 1.60, SE = 0.26, z = 6.06, p < .001, OR = 4.93$), but not the identity content ($B_{logit} = -0.23, SE = 0.26, z = -0.88, p = .381, OR = 0.79$). When racial identity was highly central, White liberals selected information based on both the attitudinal ($B_{logit} = 0.73, SE = 0.29, z = 2.52, p = .012, OR = 2.07$) and the identity content ($B_{logit} = -0.59, SE = 0.29, z = -2.04, p = .041, OR = 0.55$). This is consistent with the prediction that identity threatening information should be more aversive if race is highly linked to the self.

However, racial identity centrality functioned differently for anti-gun control participants. When racial identity was not very central, they selected information based on its identity content ($B_{logit} = -2.22, SE = 0.29, z = -7.63, p < .001, OR = 0.11$) and not its attitudinal content ($B_{logit} = -0.35, SE = 0.29, z = -1.21, p = .225, OR = 0.70$). When racial identity was highly central, they selected information based on both the identity ($B_{logit} = -1.46, SE = 0.26, z = -5.62, p < .001, OR = 0.23$) and attitudinal content ($B_{logit} = -0.71, SE = 0.26, z = -2.72, p = .007, OR = 0.49$).

Private regard moderated the political asymmetry in selection of White identity threatening information in the same way ($B_{logit} = -0.09, SE = 0.03, z = -3.22, p = .001, OR = 0.92$). White pro-gun control participants who felt more negative about being White did not select significantly fewer identity threatening articles (35.6%; $B_{logit} = -0.41, SE = 0.25, z = -1.63, p = .103, OR = 0.66$), although those who felt more positive did (23.6%; $B_{logit} = -1.32, SE = 0.26, z = -5.06, p < .001, OR = 0.27$). This is consistent with the prediction that White people who value their group membership may be more threatened by information that challenges those positive feelings. However, anti-gun control participants again were not affected by private regard as expected. Anti-gun control participants were avoidant of White identity threatening information regardless of whether they felt more negative about being White (20.6%; $B_{logit} = -$

2.06, $SE = 0.38$, $z = -5.38$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.13$) or more positive (22.3%; $B_{logit} = -1.88$, $SE = 0.29$, $z = -6.46$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.15$).

Again, private regard did not on its own moderate selection of White identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = -0.15$, $SE = 0.09$, $z = -1.61$, $p = .107$, $OR = 0.86$). Similarly, public regard did not moderate selection of White identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = 0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $z = 1.51$, $p = .131$, $OR = 1.12$).⁷

Discussion

Selective exposure to racial-political information almost perfectly mirrors the ratings of threat from Studies 3A and 3B. There is again clear evidence of the classic attitude congeniality effect, whereby people strongly prefer information that is consistent with their attitudes.

However, not only did participants avoid information when it was threatening to White identity, attitude congeniality effects were much weaker. These data strongly support the hypothesis that White people are motivated to avoid identity threatening information even when it is consistent with their gun control attitudes. These patterns of selective exposure match almost exactly what would be expected if information selection were driven by the same perceptions of threat demonstrated in Studies 3A and 3B. This is an initial indication that racial identity and political attitudes simultaneously activate defense motives for White Americans in ways that ultimately reflect their information selection decisions.

Studies 3A, 3B, and 4 also provide additional information about the role of racial and political attitudes as well as racial identification. Although participants' racial attitudes certainly mattered, they did not fully explain key patterns of selective exposure. Racial egalitarian

⁷ This was one of the results that differed depending on whether gun control attitudes or general political ideology were used as the political attitudes measure. When political ideology was used, public regard significantly moderated selection of identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = 0.17$, $SE = 0.07$, $z = 2.42$, $p = .016$, $OR = 1.18$).

attitudes seemed to function similarly to gun control attitudes or political ideology; they seem to be as predictive of selection of gun control information as White identity threatening information. This may reflect the fact that racial attitudes overlap with attitudes about other political issues, often organized loosely under a broader political ideology (Jost et al., 2003; Jost et al., 2009). However, it is not only racial attitudes that overlap with political attitudes. White racial identity also seemed to do so in similarly complex ways. Both racial identity centrality and private racial regard predicted selection of identity threatening information, but in ways that were dependent on political attitudes. White pro-gun control participants with greater racial identity centrality and higher private regard were more avoidant of White identity threatening information. This may be due in part to the fact that for more liberal White participants, who also tend to have stronger racial egalitarian attitudes, information linking White identity to racism is attitude consistent and threatening to their identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Gaertner, Dovidio, & Pearson, 2017; Hughey, 2012). This leads to conflicting motivations for selection of White identity threatening information, with racial identity motivating avoidance and attitudes motivating approach. It makes sense that participants would select less White identity threatening information when White identity was more central to the self, as people tend to show stronger reactions to identity threats when identity is more central (Branscombe et al., 2007; Knowles & Peng, 2005; Major et al., 2018). Similarly, pro-gun control White participants were more avoidant of identity threatening information when they felt more positive about being White, suggesting heightened threat posed by information that challenges a more positively valued social identity.

For White participants with more conservative gun control attitudes, however, high identity centrality and private regard led to greater selection of anti-gun control information, but

not necessarily identity threatening information. One partial explanation for this may be that there is greater overlap between White racial identity and conservative political attitudes (Jardina, 2019; Bai, 2009). This is certainly the case for opposition to gun control (O'Brien et al., 2013; Filindra & Kaplan, 2016; Hayes et al., 2020). When different aspects of the self have greater overlap, threats to one bleed over more easily to threaten the other (Linville, 1985; Koch & Shepperd, 2004). This may explain why identity centrality led participants with more conservative gun control attitudes to be even more inclined to select fewer pro-gun control articles and more anti-gun control articles. This spillover explanation would also suggest that for White Americans with more conservative political attitudes, how central their gun control attitudes are to their self-concept may similarly spillover to their selection of information threatening their racial identity. Whether or not attitude centrality operates similarly to identity centrality is an open question. However, especially considering that these findings are unexpected and difficult to interpret, they would benefit from replication before strong conclusions can be drawn. Furthermore, the correlational nature of the moderation tests thus far limits inferences about the role of racial identity in shaping information selection. Experimental designs may help to clarify the precise role that racial identity may play in causally shifting information selection.

The studies thus far also provide initial evidence that racial identity affects selective exposure for White Americans, although in complex ways that require understanding overlap and conflict between racial identity and political attitudes. The remaining studies will replicate these effects and test conditions under which the motivation to avoid White identity threatening information may be heightened.

CHAPTER 4

Heightened White Identity Threat and Selective Exposure

There is converging evidence that White Americans are less likely to select information highlighting racism (Studies 1 and 2) and that political attitudes and identity shape the selection of information that threatens White identity (Studies 3A, 3B, and 4). These findings diverge from predictions informed by prior research, which finds that White racial identity is not salient enough to motivate selective exposure, although this research most often tested the effect of source race (e.g., Appiah et al., 2013; Fleming & Petty, 2000). A key feature of the studies presented thus far is that they test selective exposure to information that threatens White identity rather than just subtly signaling relevance to it. An important next step is to further test what kinds of identity threats may shape White Americans' information selection.

Like attitudes, social identities serve many functions, each of which can be threatened in different ways. For example, a key function of social identity is to maintain social status conferred along group lines (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As a result, White identity can be threatened by anything that undermines the societal status afforded by group membership (*status threat*; e.g., Outten et al., 2012). For White Americans, status threats can be induced by information that they will not be the majority of the U.S. population in the near future, something they find threatening in part because of a perceived loss of control over American culture (Craig & Richeson, 2014; Craig & Richeson, 2017; Danbold & Huo, 2015).

Social identity can also function to bolster self-esteem through favorable comparisons to other groups (Tafel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). Anything that tarnishes the reputation or public image of White people may undermine this important function of social identity (*group image threat*; e.g., Allpress et al., 2014; Knowles et al., 2014). This kind of threat could more broadly be described as threats to *public regard*, or subjective perceptions about how positively or negatively one's social identity is regarded by others. People are often aware of negative associations others may have with their social identity, and identity threat occurs when some contextual cue makes these societal perceptions accessible (Major & O'Brien, 2005). For White Americans, research suggests that White people are generally aware that their group is seen as privileged and racist, and that this identity threat leads to a variety of avoidant or defensive behaviors (Goff et al., 2008; Hughey, 2012; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005; Jefferson & Takahashi, 2021).

Two important questions for the current investigation are whether selection of White identity threatening information would further decrease under heightened identity threat and what kinds of identity threat may matter. The remaining two studies in the dissertation test these questions by investigating the effect of heightened status threats (Study 5) and public regard threats (Study 6) on selection of information threatening White identity. Secondly, these studies will continue to explore the overlap between racial identity and political attitudes to understand how White Americans across the political spectrum respond to both the attitudinal and identity-based content of information.

Study 5: Status Threats and Selection of Identity Threatening Information

The goal of Study 5 is to test whether selection of White identity threatening information decreases when group status is experimentally threatened. An effective way to do so is to present

White Americans with information that the United States is projected to become a “minority-majority” nation, whereby White people are no longer the majority of the population (Craig & Richeson, 2014; Richeson & Sommers, 2016). Past research demonstrates that information about these demographic shifts threatens White identity in ways that make White Americans more motivated to protect their group status (Major et al., 2018). Importantly, these demographic shifts lead to perceived status threats among highly identified White Americans regardless of their partisan affiliation, although they can also lead to other kinds of threats for those on the far-right (Major et al., 2018; Bai & Federico, 2021).

To the extent that White Americans may avoid identity threatening information out of concern for declining power or status, we may expect that making their status feel more vulnerable would make them even more inclined to avoid White identity threatening information. Study 5 was designed to test this possibility by having participants complete the same selective exposure task from Study 4 after reading either racial identity threatening information (racial demographic shift) or control information (geographic population shifts; Craig & Richeson, 2014). Preregistration of the central hypotheses and analysis plans are available on OSF (<https://osf.io/367z4>).

Study 5 also included measures of gun control centrality, racial attitude centrality, and perceived overlap between Whiteness and political attitudes. Details on these measures and exploratory results may be found in the Appendix.

Methods

Participants and procedures. I recruited 450 White American participants (225 Democrats and 225 Republicans) through CloudResearch. Participants’ reported party affiliation

differed somewhat from the data used for screening, leaving 235 Democrats, 185 Republicans, 25 Independents, and 5 with other affiliations.

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of two article excerpts for the status threat manipulation, completed the same information selection task from the previous study, and then reported demographics and completed attitude measures.

Materials and measures. Participants were randomly assigned to read a roughly 300-word article that described projected demographic shifts (status threat condition) or geographic mobility in the United States (control; Craig & Richeson, 2014, Study 3). The demographic shift article described projections based on U.S. Census Bureau data suggesting that White people would no longer be the majority in the United States by the year 2042. The geographic mobility article described trends in how often people change residences in the United States.

Article titles. 12 article titles were again selected from the 32 pretested in Study 3B. The articles selected for Study 4 were matched so that the identity threatening were rated as negative about White people as the affirming articles were positive and so that the pro- and anti- gun control articles were rated as equally extreme in their position. In order to more cleanly test for asymmetries in how pro- and anti- gun control participants selected information, the article titles were matched on all dimensions for each cell in the 2 x 2 matrix (i.e., pro-gun control identity threatening titles vs. anti-gun control identity affirming titles, etc.). See Table 4.1.

Measures. This study included shortened versions of measures included in previous studies as well as new measures to assess the centrality of both gun control and racial attitudes as well as exploratory measures of perceived overlap between various attitudes and identity. Egalitarian attitudes were again measured with the SDO 7, short form, but using only the anti-egalitarianism subscale (Ho et al., 2015; four items, $\alpha = .89$). Racial identity centrality was

measured with only the four items from the centrality subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; $\alpha = .90$). To measure private regard (attitudes about one's own group membership), participants answered one item about how they feel about White people on a scale of 1 (extremely negative) to 9 (extremely positive). Participants answered the same item about Black people and a similar item for their perceptions of how society regards White people (public regard).

Table 4.1

Study 5 Article Titles and Ratings

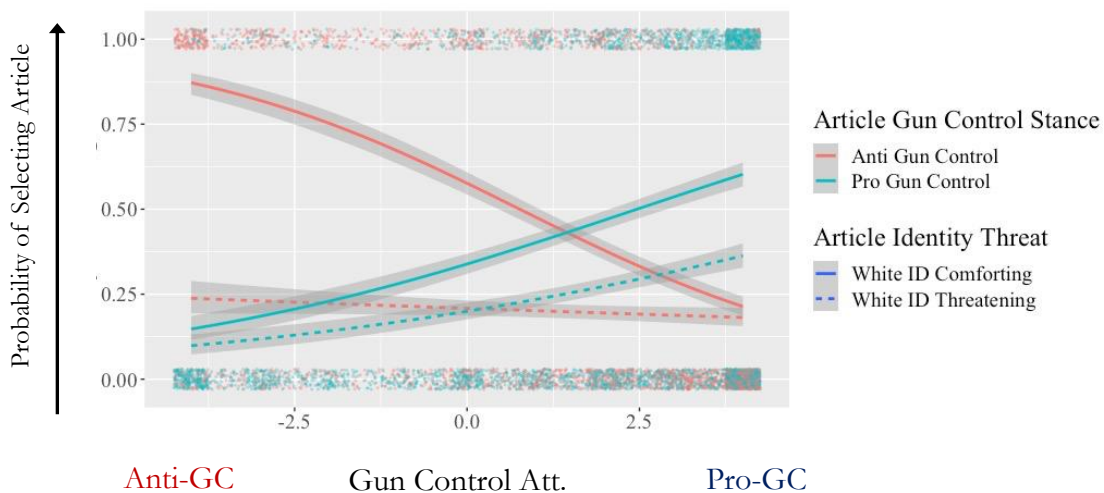
White ID Content	Gun Control Stance	Article Title	Threat Rating	GC Rating
Threatening	Anti-Gun Control	Protecting Our Gun Rights While Recognizing White Racism against Black Gun Owners	-2.27	-1.54
		White People Shooting Children Give Democrats Ammunition to Take Our Guns Away	-2.39	-1.78
		Gun Control Leaves Black Americans Defenseless against the Tyranny of White People	-3.16	-2.12
	Pro-Gun Control	We Can Come Together to Make Gun Control a Reality, but White Gun Control Advocates Have to Confront Their Racism	-2.63	2.79
		I Want Gun Control to Protect My Children. White People Want Gun Control to Criminalize Them	-2.72	2.26
		Guns in Black and White and White and White: Why the Fight for Stronger Gun Regulations Needs to Be Less White	-2.30	2.49
Affirming	Anti-Gun Control	The New Civil Rights Movement: How White Americans Are Protecting Second Amendment Rights	1.35	-1.64
		Learning from Middle America: Rural American Values Are How We Can Have More Guns and Less Murder	1.07	-1.82
		Protected in the Heartland: Rural Americans Prove that More Guns Does Not Mean More Violence	1.17	-1.96
	Pro-Gun Control	White Allies are Essential in the Fight to Get Guns off the Streets	1.58	2.77
		We Need to Put Race Aside and Come Together for Lifesaving Gun Regulations	0.59	2.47
		Why We Must Unite as a Nation to Regulate Gun Ownership	0.70	2.57

Results

Analyses were identical to the previous study, but with the experimental condition and its interactions with all other variables as fixed effects. First, this study replicated Study 4 (see Figure 4.1). Participants were three times less likely to select White identity threatening information than identity affirming information ($B_{logit} = -1.15$, $SE = 0.26$, $z = -4.37$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.32$). Participants also strongly favored information consistent with their gun control attitudes ($B_{logit} = 0.48$, $SE = 0.02$, $z = 19.6$, $p < .001$, $OR = 1.62$). The preference for attitude-consistent information was again moderated by the identity content of information, as the relative preference for attitude consistent information was significantly weaker when the information was threatening to White identity ($B_{logit} = -0.47$, $SE = 0.05$, $z = -9.51$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.62$). Finally, there was an interaction between article threat and participant gun control attitudes, with those more in favor of gun control being slightly less avoidant of gun control information ($B_{logit} = 0.14$, $SE = 0.02$, $z = 5.57$, $p < .001$, $OR = 1.15$).

Figure 4.1

Replication of Selective Exposure Effects in Study 5



However, the status threat manipulation did not have any effect on information selection. Notably, participants were not significantly less likely to select White identity threatening information following a status threat ($B_{logit} = -0.10$, $SE = 0.15$, $z = -0.69$, $p = .491$, $OR = 0.90$).

Exploring identity threat effects. Because the status threat manipulation did not impact any variables of interest, I also tested for other signs of identity threat. As an error, this study did not include a measure of status threat, so identity threat was indirectly assessed by examining outcomes commonly affected by it. One common reaction White people have to racial identity threats is to disidentify with their Whiteness (e.g., Knowles et al., 2014). There was an effect of condition on identity centrality, with participants who read the status threatening article identifying less with their Whiteness ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.64$) than participants who read the control article ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.65$), although this effect was small (Welch's $t(501) = 2.04$, $p = .042$, $d = .18$). However, the status threat had no effect on either public regard (Welch's $t(500.4) = -0.22$, $p = .829$, $d = -0.02$) or private regard (Welch's $t(499.3) = 0.17$, $p = .869$, $d = 0.01$).

Moderation by identity factors. I also conducted exploratory moderation analyses by running separate models with racial identity centrality, public regard, and private regard. First, a model with identity centrality found that it moderated selection of identity threatening information in the predicted direction, although not significantly so ($B_{logit} = -0.07$, $SE = 0.04$, $z = -1.68$, $p = .092$, $OR = 0.93$). For every one-unit increase in identity centrality (on a scale of 1 to 7), the relative probability of selecting identity threatening information decreased by roughly 7%. No other interactions with identity centrality approached significance.

Similarly, public regard moderated selection of identity threatening information; those who believe White people are generally regarded positively were more willing to read White identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = 0.08$, $SE = 0.04$, $z = 2.19$, $p = .029$, $OR = 1.08$).

Conversely, those who personally felt more positive about White people (high private regard) selected less White identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = -0.12$, $SE = 0.05$, $z = -2.50$, $p = .012$, $OR = 0.88$).

Moderation by attitudinal factors. I also tested moderation by (anti)egalitarian attitudes, gun control attitude centrality, and racial attitude centrality. As with previous studies, participants higher on SDO selected fewer White identity threatening articles ($B_{logit} = -0.12$, $SE = 0.05$, $z = -2.52$, $p = .012$, $OR = 0.89$). They were also slightly less likely to select information consistent with their gun control attitudes ($B_{logit} = -0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, $z = -2.01$, $p = .044$, $OR = 0.97$).

Discussion

The results of Study 5 replicated those of Study 4 almost exactly, providing converging evidence that White Americans prefer to avoid White identity threatening information, that those with more conservative gun control attitudes were even more avoidant of White identity threatening information, and that identity threatening content blunts the preference for attitude-consistent over attitude-inconsistent information. Study 5 also provided additional evidence that individual differences in racial identity centrality, public regard, and private regard all affect selection of White identity-threatening information. Evidence across these studies is converging on the role of identity in motivating selection of this information, even as racial and political attitudes simultaneously motivate selective exposure and status threats do not.

However, the status threat manipulation did not affect information selection. There was weak evidence that reading the status-threatening article may have led to disidentification, but it did not seem to motivate avoidance of White identity threatening information presented later.

This highlights the challenge of predicting which of many possible identity management strategies people may choose for any particular identity threat (e.g., Knowles et al., 2014; Saleem & Ramasubramanian, 2019; Jefferson & Takahashi, 2021). Status threats, for example, have been known to make White people endorse more antiegalitarian policies (i.e., anti-immigration laws; Craig & Richeson, 2014; Major et al., 2018). Under certain conditions, however, it has also been found to increase support for egalitarian policies (i.e., affirmative action), specifically for White people who want to make small egalitarian concessions to stabilize social hierarchy they perceive to be precarious (Chow et al., 2013). In the present study, status threats led participants to disidentify with their Whiteness, a common coping strategy, although it did not lead to greater avoidance of information implicating Whiteness in racism.

In any case, the current study provides no evidence that status threats amplify the specific identity-based concerns that may motivate avoidance of information threatening identity by linking Whiteness with racism. An informative next step would be to test other forms of identity threat to see if they may impact selection of this kind of information.

Study 6: Public Regard Threats and Selection of Identity Threatening Information

The primary goal of Study 6 was to test for the effect of another kind of identity threat (public regard threat). One reason many White people may dislike information linking Whiteness to racism is that it calls the morality of White people into question and makes public perceptions of their group more negative, which threatens White people's self-image by association (Allpress et al., 2014; Knowles et al., 2014; Unzueta & Lowery, 2008; Jefferson & Takahashi, 2021). When confronted with this threat to the public image of Whiteness, many White people feel guilt that can motivate compensatory support for egalitarian policies or defensiveness that can motivate resistance to them (Allpress et al., 2014; Hughey, 2012; Knowles et al., 2014). Even so,

White people often prefer to avoid situations that draw attention to these negative perceptions in the first place (e.g., Goff et al., 2008; Shelton et al., 2006; Knowles et al., 2014). It remains to be seen whether making negative societal perceptions of Whiteness salient (e.g., heightened public regard threat) would make White people more avoidant of information that may confirm those negative perceptions.

Methods

Participants and procedure. I again recruited 250 White Democrats and 250 White Republicans from MTurk using CloudResearch’s recruitment tools. Participants’ self-reported party affiliation roughly matched the screening criteria, with 229 Democrats, 228 Republicans, and 48 independents/third party members. After sorting Independents and third-party members based on whether they leaned Democrat or Republican, this left 245 participants leaning Democrat, 247 leaning Republican, and 13 true Independents. Participants were randomly assigned to either a public regard threat or public regard boost condition before completing the same selective exposure task as Study 5, the demographic questions, and individual difference measures.

Materials and measures. For the public regard manipulation, participants were randomly assigned to list either five negative or five positive characteristics, traits, or behaviors they think other people associate with White people. On the next page of the survey, participants used a scale of 1 (extremely negative) to 7 (extremely positive) to rate each of the five associations they just listed. This rating task was intended to reinforce the manipulation as well as to assess task performance (i.e., whether people actually did list associations they considered positive or negative). As a manipulation check, participants then answered a single public regard item (“In

general, how negatively or positively do you think other people view White people?") on the same seven-point scale.⁸

This study included all of the measures from Study 5 with the exception of the exploratory attitude-identity overlap measures and with the addition of a status threat measure. The status threat items were included to explore correlational relationships that may not have emerged experimentally. Details and results of these exploratory tests may be found in the Appendix. Analyses were identical to Study 5. Preregistration of key analyses are available on OSF (<https://osf.io/25yf4>).

Results

Manipulation check. The average rating of each association indicated that participants completed the task as instructed; those in the public regard threat condition listed more negative associations ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 0.86$) and those in the public regard boost listed more positive associations ($M = 6.08$, $SD = 0.94$; Welch's $t(487.9) = -48.6$, $p < .001$, $d = -4.33$). The manipulation also significantly decreased public regard as expected (threat condition: $M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.22$; boost condition: $M = 4.60$, $SD = 1.22$; Welch's $t(499.1) = -8.31$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.74$).

Selective exposure and public regard threat. Results again replicated all key selective exposure effects. Articles were significantly less likely to be selected if they were White identity threatening (20.8%) than identity affirming articles (43.9%; $B_{logit} = -1.09$, $SE = 0.23$, $z = -4.85$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.33$). They were also more likely to be selected if they were consistent with participants' gun control attitudes ($B_{logit} = 0.45$, $SE = 0.02$, $z = 19.8$, $p < .001$, $OR = 1.56$), although the preference for information that is consistent rather than inconsistent with attitudes

⁸ This manipulation was pilot tested as part of a separate project (Takahashi & Jefferson, in prep; see also Jefferson & Takahashi, 2021). That experiment had 507 White participants complete this same task and public regard measure. Those instructed to list negative (vs. positive) stereotypes about White people reported perceiving significantly less positive societal regard of White people ($t(506) = -9.06$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.80$).

was weaker for information that was separately threatening to White identity ($B_{logit} = -0.39$, $SE = 0.05$, $z = -8.59$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.68$).

However, as with Study 5, the identity threat manipulation had no effect. Participants selected roughly as many White identity threatening articles in the public regard threat condition (21.4%) as in the public regard boost condition (20.1%; $B_{logit} = 0.15$, $SE = 0.13$, $z = 1.14$, $p = .265$, $OR = 1.16$).

Exploring identity threat effects. I again tested whether the public regard threat had any downstream effects on indicators of identity threat and coping strategies. Although participants generally reported feeling very positive about White people, they did feel slightly worse about their group after the public regard threat ($M = 8.31$, $SD = 1.77$) than after the public regard boost ($M = 8.71$, $SD = 1.82$; Welch's $t(497.2) = -2.49$, $p = .013$, $d = -0.22$). Additionally, the experimental manipulation also seemed to function as a status threat, as those who reflected on negative stereotypes others have of White people perceived White people as having significantly less control over American society ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 1.35$) than those who reflected on positive stereotypes ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.32$; Welch's $t(501.3) = -4.03$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.36$). The manipulation did not affect antiegalitarian attitudes (Welch's $t(501.5) = -0.05$, $p = .961$, $d = 0.00$) or perceived threat of diversity (Welch's $t(499.4) = 0.21$, $p = .831$, $d = 0.02$).

As with Study 5, there was also evidence that participants responded to the identity threat by disidentifying with their Whiteness, as those in the public regard threat condition reported significantly lower identity centrality ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.58$) than those in the public regard boost condition ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.72$; Welch's $t(490.1) = -3.58$, $p < .001$, $d = -0.32$).

Moderation by identity and attitudinal factors. The moderating effect of racial identity centrality did not replicate in this study. The interaction between racial identity centrality and the

identity content of the article was in the same direction as previous studies (e.g., greater White identity centrality leading to greater avoidance of identity threatening information), although it was not significant ($B_{logit} = -0.06$, $SE = 0.04$, $z = -1.43$, $p = .153$, $OR = 0.95$). Similarly, selection of identity-threatening information was also not moderated by public regard, which also functioned as the manipulation check in this study ($B_{logit} = -0.03$, $SE = 0.05$, $z = -0.60$, $p = .549$, $OR = 0.97$). However, private regard did moderate information selection as it did in previous studies, with participants who felt more positive about White people (+ 1 SD) being even less likely to select identity threatening information (18.1%) than those who felt negative about White people (25.7%; $B_{logit} = -0.23$, $SE = 0.04$, $z = -5.45$, $p < .001$, $OR = 0.79$).

The effects of egalitarian attitudes also moderated information selection, with those holding more antiegalitarian attitudes being less likely to select White identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = -0.12$, $SE = 0.05$, $z = -2.29$, $p = .022$).

Discussion

Study 6 again demonstrated the robustness of key patterns of selective exposure. White participants across the board preferred White identity affirming information to identity threatening information, although participants with more conservative gun control attitudes were more avoidant of the identity threatening information. There was again an attitude congeniality bias that was stark when information also affirmed White identity but attenuated when both the attitude-consistent and inconsistent information were threatening to White identity.

However, there was no effect of the public regard threat on information selection. There was strong evidence that it sufficiently threatened certain aspects of White racial identity, as it did decrease participants' public regard, and their perceived control over American culture. It also led to participants to disidentify with their Whiteness, a common strategy for coping with

identity threats. Together, this suggests that White participants were indeed threatened by thinking about negative perceptions others have of White people; however, they did not select any less White identity threatening information. The results of Studies 5 and 6 thus provide no evidence that heightening status threats or public regard threats motivate avoidance of White identity threatening information.

The exploratory moderation analyses across both studies suggest that both racial and political attitudes seem to influence the kinds of racial and political information White people select. Evidence across all studies also suggest that whether people select White identity threatening information depends in part on how they feel about their identity and how central White racial identity is to people's self-concept, albeit inconsistently. However, the fact that information selection was resistant to both a status threat and a public regard manipulation points to a number of possibilities and open questions.

A possible explanation is that participants in the current studies were more inclined to cope with these kinds of identity threats by disidentifying with their Whiteness than by subsequently selecting more information to affirm their identity and less information to threaten it. The identity relevance of information may matter less if people have decoupled their racial identity from their self-concept. Distancing oneself from a threatened identity is a flexible, effective, and common strategy for managing identity threat (e.g., Knowles et al., 2014), which is perhaps why participants opted more for that strategy than any other measured.

It is still possible that there are other aspects of racial identity that could be threatened or bolstered to shape selective exposure to White identity threatening information. In the same way that an attitude's function shapes the conditions under which people decide to act on or change it (Smith et al., 1956; Katz, 1960; Shavitt, 1989, Shavitt, 1990), it may be a matter of testing other

psychological functions of White racial identity may be protected by information selection.

However, it is surprisingly difficult to predict precisely how people will cope with any kind of identity threat (e.g., Jefferson & Takahashi, 2021; Saleem & Ramasubramanian, 2019; Knowles et al., 2014). What conditions may lead people to be more or less inclined to protect their identity through selective exposure is an important open question for future research.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications

Seven studies find consistent and robust evidence that White Americans prefer to avoid information about racism and inequality, particularly when it explicitly implicates Whiteness and even when it affirms their attitudes. Compared to participants of color, White participants selected less information highlighting racism and more race-irrelevant information. This difference was more pronounced for those with egalitarian attitudes, which increased selection of information highlighting racism for participants of color as expected but not for White participants. These patterns of selective exposure were explained in part by the perceived threats this information posed to White identity, which motivated information selection to a greater extent when racial identity was more central.

The evidence goes further to suggest that White racial identity impacts selective exposure by activating defense motives. White Americans simultaneously considered identity threats and attitude-consistency when assessing how threatening or affirming information will be to the self. These perceptions of threat to the self ultimately mirrored patterns of actual information selection in an independent sample, providing greater evidence conflicts between White racial identity and political attitudes can inform predictions about how White Americans across the ideological spectrum will select information. Across three studies testing selective exposure to

White-identity relevant gun control information (Studies 4-6), participants consistently showed a strong preference for information affirming rather than threatening White identity.

Additionally, the identity content of the information shaped how White participants engaged with its attitudinal content. For information that reflected well on White people (i.e., White identity affirming information), White participants selected information based heavily on whether it was consistent with their gun control attitudes (i.e., attitude-congeniality bias). However, White participants showed a significantly weaker preference for attitude-consistent information over attitude-inconsistent information when both also implicated White identity in racism. A clear explanation for these effects attitude-consistent information does not satisfy defense motives as much if the information simultaneously threatens identity. In this way, the current studies not only demonstrate that White Americans avoid information that implicates Whiteness in racism and inequality, but also explains why they do so and how this maps onto what we already know about attitudinally motivated selective exposure.

Results across studies also revealed several important nuances that help to answer important theoretical questions and point to important questions to guide future research. In most, but not all studies, participants were more avoidant of White identity threatening information when their racial identity was more central (high identity centrality) and when they felt more positive about their own social identity (high private regard). The tendency to avoid threatening information more when centrality and private regard is high suggests that White participants were more avoidant of identity threatening information when they valued their social identity more, whether that was because it was a more important part of their self-concept or because they feel it is a positive part of their identity. However, the moderating effect of identity centrality was more inconsistent in the final studies. The inconsistency may be due in part to the

fact that for White people, identity centrality can mean a lot of different things and function differently.

Past research suggests that people can see Whiteness as more central to their self-concept for different reasons. White identity may be central to the self because people are proud of and enjoy the high status associated with Whiteness or because they acknowledge the impact that unearned advantages has on their life (Goren & Plaut, 2012). Although both of these forms of White identity may manifest as high scores on identity centrality measures, it is specifically the more prideful form of White identification leads to greater defensiveness and motivations to protect Whiteness (Croll; 2007; Goren & Plaut, 2012; Bai, 2019). The fact that White identity centrality can mean completely different things for different people makes it more complex to interpret and less consistent in its effects (Goren & Plaut, 2012). This may also mean that private regard, which captures this more prideful version of White identification, may serve as a better proxy for the kinds of identification with Whiteness that lead to defensiveness (see Kachanov et al., 2016). Indeed, private regard was the individual difference that most consistently led to greater avoidance of White identity threatening information, consistent with evidence that people who feel more positive about a social identity are more reactive to social identity threats (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990). How people feel about their racial identity thus seems to matter to some extent, although the experimental data did not provide any causal evidence. Whether other aspects of identity beyond status and public regard could be threatened to shift selective exposure is an open question for future research.

Theoretical implications

The present research provides a framework for understanding how attitudes and identity can simultaneously act as levers for selective exposure. Past research has tested competition

between attitudes and identity, although results have been mixed. Some research finds that social identity has no bearing on information selection when pitted against attitudes (Wojcieszak, 2019) and other research suggest that social identity can compete with attitudes to shift selective exposure (Dvir-Gvirsman, 2019). The studies presented in this dissertation provide direct evidence of a common mechanism, defense motives, through which social identity consistently influences selective exposure alongside attitudes. This provides a clearer roadmap for predicting when social identity may or may not affect selective exposure. When information can either affirm or threaten a social identity that people are motivated to protect, we may expect it to compete with countervailing attitudinal cues (e.g., Dvir-Gvirsman, 2019; Lewis et al., 2020). When information is relevant to but does not necessarily threaten a social identity, people may rely more on its attitudinal content (Wojcieszak, 2019). The current research provides an empirical demonstration of how competing motivations, such as to defend attitudes or identity, can be directly tested in ways that sufficiently explain complex patterns of selective exposure.

In doing so, this work also aligns selective exposure research with the growing body of research demonstrating that Whiteness, far from being invisible, can powerfully shape political attitudes and behavior—particularly when threatened (Major et al., 2018; Jardina, 2019). The bulk of existing research posits that White racial identity is particularly unlikely to impact selective exposure presumably because it is not salient enough to White people (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Appiah et al., 2013; Appiah, 2003; Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2008). The present studies not only provide robust evidence that White identity impacts selective exposure, but also provides a roadmap for understanding why it does. People are ultimately averse to information that challenges important parts of the self, whether that is the attitudes, values, and

beliefs they have committed themselves to or the social identities they are motivated to view in a positive light.

This contributes theoretical and methodological insights that complement existing theoretical models of selective exposure. There are other models of selective exposure that account for both attitudes and identity as potential motivators insofar as they change the affective or hedonic value of information (Zillman, 2000; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). These models posit that people select information as a way of regulating affect. If information can prompt positive affect (i.e., high hedonic value), people should select it; if it prompts negative affect, people should avoid it (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Earl et al., 2015). Insofar as attitudes and identity can both shape the hedonic value of information, these models posit that they should equivalently shape information selection (Zillman, 2000). Looking to affect as a proximal mechanism is incredibly useful for explaining selective exposure and attention (i.e., people avoid what feels bad and select what feels good; Jonas et al., 2006; Wegener & Petty, 1994; Takahashi & Earl, 2020). However, the current results suggest investigating more distal, functional mechanisms (e.g., what is it about an identity people are motivated to defend) can provide the granularity needed to understand complex patterns of information selection.

Practical implications

White Americans are particularly likely to underestimate how severe and persistent racial inequalities are (Kraus et al., 2017; Kraus et al., 2019; Onyeador et al., 2020; Norton & Sommers, 2011). This has serious implications for efforts to address inequality, as people who underestimate racism are less motivated to address it (Valentino & Brader, 2011; DeBell, 2017; Carter & Murphy, 2015; Matsueda & Drakulich, 2009; Rucker et al., 2019). A growing body of research finds that exposure to high-quality information about racism can make White

Americans perceive racial inequalities more accurately (Onyeador et al., 2020; Fang & White, 2020; Bonam et al., 2019). However, the current research suggests that White Americans prefer to avoid information that may disabuse them of their misperceptions, presenting a major practical barrier to racial progress.

Many efforts to address racism and racial inequality focus on public education to encourage support for policies to address them. However, many White Americans are resistant to these efforts, presenting a major problem for growing efforts to educate the public about racism. As a recent example, the 1619 Project, a comprehensive essay series from the New York Times dedicated to illustrating how slavery has shaped American institutions, received backlash from many White conservatives for its efforts to center racism in discussions of American history (see Woodruff, 2020; Charles, 2019). Threats to White identity have also recently led to concerted efforts to restrict discussion and education about racism. In 2021, dozens of U.S. states introduced legislation to restrict classroom discussions about racism embedded in American society and institutions, with some states specifically banning information suggesting that White people have privilege or are guilty of or culpable for racism (Forman, 2021; Camera, 2021). As momentum grows for these efforts, it is imperative to understand how and why many White Americans deny or disengage with information about racism and what may reduce defensiveness to it. Fully understanding this kind of resistance requires consideration of both its attitudinal and the identity-based underpinnings.

The current studies demonstrate that White Americans avoid information about racism in part because of the threat it poses to White identity (e.g., Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). Although backlash from White conservatives may be more vocal and apparent (e.g., Charles, 2019), the current data suggest that White identity threats also prompt defensiveness and avoidance from

White liberals. It may be doubly difficult to encourage receptivity to information about racial inequality, as it would require overcoming resistance on the basis of attitudes *and* social identity.

One approach for reducing identity-based defensiveness is to make the content of messages less identity threatening. However, this may only go so far if the topic of systemic racism itself threatens White audiences (Unzueta & Lowery, 2008). This is regularly a consideration for political messaging, as politicians across the aisle avoid progressive racial appeals to appease moderate and racially conservative White audiences, who do not want existing racial hierarchies disrupted (Stephens-Dougan, 2020). This issue has come to the forefront of discussions about political messaging in the United States, as Democratic Party elites increasingly discuss policies that are not explicitly about race in terms of the racial inequalities they may address (e.g., student loan cancellation; English & Kalla, 2021). The current research did find that White participants preferred to avoid White identity threatening information even if it affirmed their attitude on a separate political topic (i.e., gun control), and other recent research finds that White Republicans are less supportive of policies when they are framed as promoting racial equity (English & Kalla, 2021). However, removing White identity threatening content does not always promote greater engagement with issues of race, but instead appeases— or sometimes leverages— White racial fears in service of other policy or electoral goals (Stephens-Dougan, 2020). Notably, there are large-scale efforts to develop political messaging that references racial justice while also appealing to audiences who may otherwise be turned off by the topic (e.g., We Make the Future, 2021). If the goal is to improve public understanding of racism and inequality, however, identity threatening information may need to be conveyed without watering down its substance.

Messages about racism may be changed to be less threatening but doing so may risk inadvertently limiting the kinds of solutions people believe are appropriate or sufficient. For instance, White people may be less threatened by the idea of implicit bias because they are seen as less morally culpable for it than explicit bias (Cameron, Payne, & Knobe, 2010; Daumeyer, Onyeador, Brown, & Richeson, 2019; Daumeyer, Rucker, & Richeson, 2017). However, people are less supportive of accountability or reform for racism when it is framed as implicit rather than explicit (Daumeyer et al., 2019). Furthermore, public focus on implicit bias has led many organizations to address racism through implicit bias trainings, although these are often insufficient (Lai et al., 2016; Forscher & Devine, 2017; Onyeador, Hudson, & Lewis, 2021). If information about systemic racism threatens White identity, it may be difficult to avoid threatening White identity altogether without also sidestepping important nuances and steering audiences toward limited solutions.

It may instead be useful to help audiences engage with information they may otherwise find threatening (e.g., Takahashi & Earl, 2019). This approach has been successful for improving communication about stigmatizing health conditions such as HIV, where the topic itself evokes identity threats that distract or dissuade intended audiences from engaging (Derricks & Earl, 2019; Lewis et al., 2020; Earl et al., 2016; Earl et al., 2015). Understanding what specifically is threatened is important for developing interventions to increase information selection. If people worry that publicly attending to stigmatized health information would threaten their standing in important social groups, shifting the behavior of other ingroup members can make paying attention seem more identity congruent, leading to increased attention (Lewis et al., 2020). If people avoid information because they feel it would challenge their attitudes, making them feel more confident in their ability to defend their existing attitudes increases selection of attitude-

inconsistent information (Albarracín & Mitchell, 2004; Albarracín & Mitchell, 2008). These kinds of intervention strategies are successful because they address the specific motivation underlying information selection.

When adapting these approaches to White identity threatening information, it is important to consider how racial identity and political attitudes come together. In health contexts, intended audiences often have positive attitudes about the information itself; addressing identity threats that prompt avoidance can be sufficient to successfully engage audiences (e.g., Earl et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2020). If intended audiences do not have favorable attitudes about a topic, an intervention that only addresses identity threat may leave unfavorable attitudes intact to bias not only whether they select information, but whether they process it in unfavorable ways (e.g., Kunda, 1990; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Because White racial identity means different things to different people (Croll, 2007; Goren & Plaut, 2012; Helms, 1984), and because political attitudes can either align or conflict with identity-based motivations, developing interventions may require a greater understanding of White identity and the various ways it can be threatened across the ideological spectrum (Knowles et al., 2014; Takahashi & Jefferson, 2021).

However, identifying the specific levers that shift selective exposure to White identity threatening information turns out to be challenging. Neither manipulations of status threats nor public regard threats affected selection of identity threatening information, despite evidence that they successfully threatened White identity. Instead, participants seemed to cope with both identity threat manipulations by disidentifying with Whiteness. It is also worth noting that Study 6 included a condition that bolstered rather than threatened White identity, but this did not increase exposure to identity threatening information. Together, the experimental data provide

little causal evidence about the specific affordances of Whiteness that participants were motivated to protect, making it difficult to pinpoint an intervention target.

Future directions

The present research demonstrates how White racial identity and political attitudes jointly bias selective exposure to information about racism and inequality. Across studies, there are indications that individual differences such as racial identity centrality and positive private regard shape these selection patterns. However, the current efforts to translate these to experimental manipulations were unsuccessful at changing selective exposure. An important next step for future research is to identify conditions that may heighten avoidance of White identity threatening information and interventions that may attenuate it. One approach may be to use strategies that were traditionally designed to address attitude congeniality biases but may similarly work for White identity threat.

A critical insight that may inform future interventions is the finding that White racial identity and political attitudes seem to operate on the same levers to shape selective exposure to information about racism. To the extent that both White racial identity and political attitudes operate on defense motives, then intervention strategies proven to attenuate the motivation to defend attitudes may be useful for identity threat. For example, interventions to bolster people's confidence in their ability to defend their attitudes makes them less threatened by information challenging it (Albarracín & Mitchell, 2004; Albarracín et al., 2008). What a similar intervention may look like for an identity threat is an open question, but making people feel well-equipped to defend against it may make them less inclined to avoid the threat altogether.

The ineffectiveness of the threat manipulations in Studies 5 and 6 also demonstrates that there is room for a clearer understanding of the nature of White identity threats and their effects.

There is a wealth of evidence of the kinds of strategies people employ to defend against an identity threat, but it is not always clear who will select what strategy and why (e.g., Knowles et al., 2014; Saleem & Ramasubramanian, 2019; Jefferson & Takahashi, 2021). Especially given the increasing relevance and potency of White identity in American politics (Jardina, 2019), and given that more and more research is dedicated to understanding Whiteness, a clear theoretical framework for modeling White identity threats may prove incredibly useful.

Finally, the current research can be extended to stages of the persuasion process beyond selective exposure. Selective exposure is important because it is the first barrier to effective persuasion (e.g., McGuire, 1968), but it is important to test whether a factor like attitudes or identity threat may have differential effects on later stages of the persuasion process. In health contexts, for example, people may show greater attitude change to messages that induce fear (Tannenbaum et al., 2015), but tend to avoid this information to begin with (Earl & Albarracín, 2007). Similarly, people may be motivated to attend to information, but their capacity to do so is limited by any negative, high-arousal affect the information may nonetheless evoke (Earl et al., 2015; Takahashi & Earl, 2020). Importantly, increased selection of information can also accompany resistance to the message. For instance, people are often motivated to select information that weakly challenges their attitudes specifically because they are motivated to counter argue it and bolster their existing attitudes (Lowin, 1967; Lowin, 1969). For this reason, it is important to test for divergent effects on different parts of the persuasion process.

Attenuating motivated avoidance of White identity threatening information is an important first step, but it is also critical to separately assess biased processing of such information and to ensure that any intervention to increase exposure does not inadvertently heighten other forms of defensive processing.

Conclusions

Counter to suggestions from prior research, White racial identity can motivate information selection in clear and impactful ways. White people are regularly threatened by the idea that they are implicated in racism and racial inequality as either perpetrators or beneficiaries (Hughey, 2012; Knowles et al., 2014). The present research provides robust evidence that White Americans across the political spectrum avoid information about racism because Whiteness is implicated by it. This kind of motivated avoidance presents a major barrier to a greater public understanding of racism and racial inequality. As perceptions of racial inequalities continue to be polarized across racial lines, it is imperative to understand how White identity threats, above and beyond racial and political attitudes, distort perceptions of pressing and persistent racial inequalities. Doing so may provide critical insights decreasing resistance to much needed efforts to address racial inequality.

Appendix: Supplementary Analyses

Study 1: Exploratory identity threat manipulation

Exploratory identity threat manipulation. Study 1 was initially designed to pilot test an identity threat manipulation for another project, and the selective exposure items were added later in the study to explore questions of interest to the current research. The manipulation that was tested aimed to threaten identity by having participants engage in message board discussions about race, where the first messages in the discussion were written by confederates who either encouraged or discouraged White participation and the rest of the messages were written by participants. Participants were also asked about how they felt during this discussion. On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 9 (extremely), they indicated how positive (happy, optimistic, comfortable; $M = 4.80$, $SD = 1.61$), angry (angry, frustrated, outraged; $M = 3.45$, $SD = 2.03$), anxious (helpless, anxious, nervous; $M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.66$), or uninterested (bored, apathetic; $M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.63$) they were. This manipulation was ineffective at threatening White identity, and there were no main effects or interactive effects of the chat condition on identity centrality, any of the emotion indices, or any attitudes of interest for the present analysis. Furthermore, there White participants and participants of color showed no differences on any of the emotion indices. There is thus no evidence that this discussion had any observable effect on participants.

In Study 1, there were also issues with participants failing to follow part of the instructions that would allow us to anonymously link their contribution to the message board to their survey data, as well as some problems with the embedded links to the survey chat. This

ultimately did not affect any of the variables of interest for the current analysis but did lead to Study 2 retesting the manipulation with more clear instructions. Again, this manipulation in Study 2 did not have any observable effect on any variables in the study.

Study 2: Probabilities, alternative models, and interactions

Estimating probabilities and proportions. The probabilities of any given article title being selected was estimated from the model. Because probabilities are estimated at the article level and participants could select four articles with only three titles in each category (e.g., three pro-gun control identity threatening articles), the probabilities do not always add up to 100%. For example, participants could select 100% of the three identity affirming anti-gun control articles and 33.3% of the three identity affirming pro-gun control articles. Additionally, because there were six identity threatening articles and six identity affirming articles and participants could only select four, probabilities for the main effect of identity threat also do not add up to 100%. For example, participants could select 66.6% of the identity affirming articles and 0.0% of the identity threatening articles.

Because the model tested effects at the article level, the probabilities estimated reflected the likelihood that a given article was selected based on the article type. For ease of interpretation, the proportion of article titles of a given category that participants selected was calculated based on probabilities from the model:

$$\frac{P(\textit{identity threatening info})}{P(\textit{identity threatening info}) + P(\textit{identity affirming info})}$$

The odds ratios reported in the main text are calculated from the coefficients at the article level and may not reflect the proportions reported at the participant level.

Replicating selection effects with article-level continuous variables. As an additional test, I replicated the primary model with the identity content (White identity threatening vs. affirming)

and political leaning (targeting liberals vs. conservatives) as article-level continuous variables based on the mean ratings for each article title from the pilot test. In other words, instead of contrast coding the identity content, the mean rating of each article was entered as an article-level fixed effect. These results replicated using the article-level ratings from the pilot test. There was again an interaction between participant race and the identity content of the articles, with participants of color being more likely to select an article title if it was rated as more negative toward White people in the pilot study and White participants being less likely to do so ($B_{logit} = -0.28$, $SE = 0.14$, $z = -2.04$, $p = .041$, $OR = 0.76$). As with the primary model, the simple effects again were not significant.

Additional results. Two additional interaction effects emerged regarding the political leaning of the information in Study 2, although the complexity of these interactions, alongside the challenge of cleanly interpreting this political dimension separately from the identity dimension, muddies inferences. First, there was a two-way interaction between article identity content and political leaning, suggesting that regardless of participants' race or politics, they were less likely to select information if it were White identity threatening and targeted towards conservatives ($B_{logit} = -1.25$, $SE = 0.48$, $z = -2.61$, $p = .009$, $OR = 0.28$). There was also a four-way interaction between participant race, political ideology, article identity content, and article political leaning. The pattern was that a conservative-targeted identity threatening article was least likely to be selected if participants were White and conservative (15.7%) and liberal-targeted identity threatening was most likely to be selected if participants were people of color and liberal (47.8%; four-way interaction: $B_{logit} = -0.51$, $SE = 0.19$, $z = -2.64$, $p = .008$, $OR = 0.60$). Although interesting, this interaction was not predicted and the sample size was small for an interaction this complex, which warrants caution in interpreting it.

Study 5: Exploratory measures and moderation analyses

Methods

Attitude centrality. New measures included measures of gun control attitude centrality (e.g., “My attitudes about gun control are a reflection of who I am as a person”) and one item about participants’ moral convictions about gun control (Skitka, Bauman, & Sargis, 2005; e.g., “My stance on gun control reflects something about my core moral values and convictions”). These items were all highly correlated (average inter-item correlation = .81) and were averaged into a single index of gun control attitude centrality (three items, $\alpha = .93$). Three comparable items measured racial attitude centrality (e.g., “My attitudes about issues of race and racism are a reflection of who I am as a person;” $\alpha = .95$).

Exploratory identity-attitude overlap measures. Study 5 also included exploratory measures of perceived overlap between White identity and various attitudes and identities. One was adapted from a measure of subjective sorting, originally designed to measure how closely people associate their various social identities with their political party (i.e., Christians being associated with Republicans; Mason & Wronski, 2018). This measure was adapted to ask participants what ideas and groups they associate with White people on a scale of 1 (not at all closely) to 4 (very closely). Ideas and groups included gun control, racism, anti-racism, liberals, conservatives, Republicans, Democrats, and Independents. With this, I created an index of racial-political overlap by averaging the two items that matched participants’ political groups (“Republicans” and “conservatives” for participants who identified as or leaned Republican, and “Democrats” or “liberals” for those identified or leaning as Democrats). I also included a similar measure of overlap, which looked at average identification with groups objectively overlapping with one’s own political party (Mason & Wronski, 2018). The adapted version of this measure

was redundant with the one-item measure of political ideology ($r = .87$), so it was not considered further.

Another measure of perceived attitude-identity overlap asked participants to use a scale of 0 (none) to 100 (all) to report the proportion of White people that oppose gun control, of White people that support gun control, of gun control opposers who are White, and of gun control supporters who are White (adapted from Roccas & Brewer, 2002). This was scored by averaging both items for overlap between White identity and one's own gun control position (e.g., overlap between White identity and gun control support for participants with pro-gun control attitudes).

Results

Results for the attitude centrality measures were less clear. Interestingly and unexpectedly, participants whose gun control attitudes were more central were not any more likely to select information consistent with their gun control attitudes ($B_{logit} = 0.02$, $SE = 0.02$, $z = 0.94$, $p = .350$, $OR = 1.02$), but were more likely to select White identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = 0.14$, $SE = 0.04$, $z = 3.21$, $p = .001$, $OR = 1.12$). No other interactions with gun control attitude centrality were significant. When looking at racial attitude centrality, there was only a three-way interaction between racial attitude centrality, participant gun control attitude, and article identity threat. Participants with pro-gun control attitudes whose racial attitudes were more central were more likely to select identity threatening information and anti-gun control participants whose racial attitudes were central were less likely to select identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = 0.06$, $SE = 0.01$, $z = 4.40$, $p < .001$, $OR = 1.07$).

Results for the exploratory identity overlap were inconsistent across measures. For the subjective sorting measure, people who associated Whiteness more closely with their political

groups (i.e., Republican and conservative) were less avoidant of identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = 0.30, SE = 0.11, z = 2.75, p = .006, OR = 1.36$). There was a trend toward this being more the case for those with more conservative gun control attitudes, although not significantly so ($B_{logit} = -0.07, SE = 0.04, z = -1.87, p = .061, OR = 0.94$). With the measure assessing overlap between White people and people who support or oppose gun control, the only effect was a small moderation of the three-way interaction suggesting that for identity threatening information, people were less motivated to select attitude-consistent information; this attitude congeniality bias for identity threatening information was even weaker for participants who perceived more overlap between Whiteness and their own gun control attitudes ($B_{logit} = -0.01, SE = 0.003, z = -2.72, p = .023, OR = 0.99$).

Discussion

Furthermore, how central attitudes are to the self seems to matter for selective exposure to racial and political information, although not necessarily in the most straightforward ways. Participants whose racial attitudes were more central to the self selected information in ways we may expect, with White liberals (e.g., pro-gun control attitudes) becoming slightly less avoidant of identity threatening information and White conservatives becoming slightly more avoidant. This is consistent with the suggestion that information linking Whiteness to racism may be attitude consistent and identity threatening for White liberals; when their racial attitudes become more central, they are pulled slightly more towards information consistent with those racial attitudes.

The same can be said about White conservatives although their racial attitudes would lead to greater avoidance of identity threatening information. Much less straightforward was the role of gun-control attitude centrality, which did not increase preference of information

consistent with gun-control attitudes but instead increased avoidance of White identity threatening information. The effect on selection of identity threatening information may be due in part to the fact that for White Americans, attitudes in favor of guns and against gun control are linked to racist attitudes (O'Brien et al., 2013; Filindra & Kaplan, 2016; Hayes et al., 2020). Even so, it is difficult to explain why gun control centrality may impact selection of White identity threatening information indirectly through associated racial attitudes and not affect selection of gun control information directly. The exploratory nature of the analyses combined with these unexpected findings makes it prudent to replicate any moderating effect of attitude centrality.

Study 6: Exploratory moderation analyses

Methods

Study 6 included the same gun control and racial attitude centrality measures.

Status threat measures. The status threat measure was drawn from past research (Outten et al., 2012; see also Major et al., 2018). This status threat measure originally included two items assessing the perceived threat posed by increasing diversity (seven-point Likert scale; e.g., “my ethnic group should be threatened by growing diversity,”) and two items about the perceived influence that White people and racial and ethnic minorities will have over American society (scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much); e.g., “how much influence will White people have over American society in the future”). Although these items loaded together in past research (Outten et al., 2012), only the two diversity threat items were reasonably correlated ($r = .45$), although there were too few items to translate to sufficient reliability ($\alpha = .62$). For exploratory analyses, I used the one item about perceived White influence over American society, as it is the most face-valid item for assessing threats to the status and power afforded by Whiteness.

Results

Centrality effects. The effects of racial attitude centrality did replicate Study 5. There was a three-way interaction between article identity threat, participant gun control attitudes, and racial attitude centrality. Again, participants with pro-gun control attitudes whose racial attitudes were more central were more likely to select identity threatening information; anti-gun control participants whose racial attitudes were central were less likely to select identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $z = 2.71$, $p = .007$). Unlike the previous study, gun control attitude centrality moderated information selection as expected. Participants whose gun control attitudes were more central were not any less likely to select White identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = 0.02$, $SE = 0.04$, $z = 0.68$, $p = .496$), but were much more likely to select information consistent with their gun control attitudes ($B_{logit} = 0.04$, $SE = 0.01$, $z = 4.40$, $p < .001$, $OR = 1.04$).

Status threat measures. Participants were even less likely to select White identity threatening information if they perceived diversity as threatening (+1 SD diversity threat: 19.9%; -1 SD status threat: 22.3%; $B_{logit} = -0.11$, $SE = 0.05$, $z = -2.27$, $p = .023$, $OR =$) or believed White people would have less control over American society in the future (-1 SD White influence: 22.3%; +1 SD White influence: 46.7%; $B_{logit} = -0.17$, $SE = 0.05$, $z = 3.47$, $p < .001$, $OR =$). Perceived White control over American society was also the only variable that moderated the effect of the experimental condition on selection of identity threatening information ($B_{logit} = -0.35$, $SE = 0.10$, $z = -3.54$, $p < .001$, $OR =$). Analysis of the simple effects suggest that among participants who believed White people have little control over American society, participants in the public regard boost condition selected less White identity threatening information (15.2%) than those in the public regard threat condition (21.3%; article threat x public regard threat

interaction: $B_{logit} = 0.69$, $SE = 0.20$, $z = 3.54$, $p < .001$, $OR = 2.00$). There was no effect of the public regard threat among those perceiving greater White control over American society (at +1 SD; $B_{logit} = -0.25$, $SE = 0.19$, $z = -1.31$, $p = .191$, $OR = 0.78$).

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