



## **EFFECT OF RACIST LABELING THREAT ON ATTENTION**

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Research on race often focuses on the effects of racial group memberships on social interactions and relationships but neglects to see how the possibility of being labeled prejudiced can inhibit information processing. Previous studies have found that racially charged situations prompt White Americans to increase their self-regulation, leading them to become drained by trying to appear un-prejudiced. These aversive experiences lead them to avoid or distance themselves from diverse environments and individuals in the future. This study tested whether this psychological distancing generalizes to White Americans' comprehension of and attention to unrelated information following the potential threat of being labeled a racist.

In this study, White Americans completed a survey comprised of news articles created for the purposes of this investigation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions, first presented with either a racially charged or a non-reactionary control article. Next, participants were randomly assigned to a passage that contained strong or weak arguments advocating for implementation of senior comprehensive exams. Subsequent questionnaires aimed to measure participants' persuasion and comprehension of the second article, levels of prejudice, attention paid during the experiment, and awareness of the study's intent.

In order to collect a large enough sample to produce significant analyses, recruitment for the study is ongoing. With current participant distribution of  $N=57$ , with 33 female and 24 male, and mean age of 22 years. We expect to find that the threat condition will lower participants' ability to attend to argument information and will therefore reduce their distinction between persuasion on strong and weak arguments. It is anticipated that the control condition will exhibit increased persuasion for the strong argument passage relative to the weak argument.

The results of this study may have implications for racially charged situations where interaction and information-sharing are heightened. Threat reaction may diminish cognitive processing and the ultimate success of sensitive dialogues, with unconscious distancing behavior possibly having greater impact than conscious action.

Future investigations hope to expand upon this research by extending the measure and expanding its scope. If a relationship between racist labeling threat and persuasion is found, we anticipate applying it to other prejudice based labels, such as sexist, and other charged labels, such as political party affiliation. There could also be opportunity to test intervention techniques with intent to interrupt distancing and reduced attention when label threat is initiated.