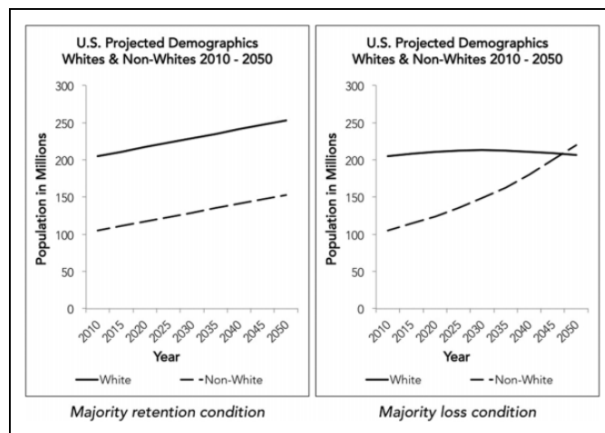


### Recognizing Elements of Experimental Research

**Example 1: Danbold, Felix and Yuen J. Huo. 2014. “No Longer ‘All-American’? Whites’ Defensive Reactions to Their Numerical Decline.” *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 6(2):210–18.**

Danbold and Huo attempted to understand how the changing demographics of American society affect white Americans’ racial attitudes. They note that, by 2050, white Americans will no longer be the biggest demographic group. They ask whether white Americans will respond by embracing or rejecting diversity when they are no longer the majority racial group.



**Figure 3.** Study 2 White majority status manipulation conditions.

2050 (see Figure 3).

Then participants were asked to complete a survey. They used 6 different survey questions to measure how much participants supported diversity. For example, one question asked how much the participant agreed with the statement “It is important to have multiple perspectives in America (i.e., from different cultures, races, and ethnicities).”

The researchers found that participants in the experimental group supported diversity less than those in the comparison group. They conclude that being exposed to information about the changing demographics of the US causes white Americans to reject diversity.

In one study, they tested whether reading information about the changing demographics of the United States causes opposition to diversity. All participants were white and were randomly assigned to the experimental group or the comparison group. Participants in the comparison group (the “majority retention condition”) saw a graph that showed whites would continue to be the majority racial group in the US, while participants in the experimental group (the “majority loss condition”) were shown a graph that showed the population of non-whites would surpass the population of whites in size in

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**Example 2: Walton, Gregory M. and Geoffrey L. Cohen. 2011. "A Brief Social-Belonging Intervention Improves Academic and Health Outcomes of Minority Students." *Science* 331(6023):1447–51.**

Walton and Cohen designed a program that they hoped would improve college students' sense of belonging on campus. In this paper, they evaluated that program. They write that sense of belonging, or having positive relationships with others, is a fundamental human need and that feeling isolated could harm students' health and academic success. They note that social isolation may especially be a problem for Black students, as they were a small minority of students at this university.

In this study, they tested whether their program improved students' sense of belonging long-term. About half of the participants were white and half were Black; all were college first-years. They were randomly assigned to the experimental group or the comparison group. Participants in the experimental group ("the belonging-treatment condition") read a report of a survey of more senior college students. The report said that, even though many students wondered if they belonged in college during their first year, they became more confident and comfortable over time. Participants in the experimental group then wrote an essay about how their own experience in college so far was similar to those of the students quoted in the report. Participants in the comparison group ("the control condition") also read a report and wrote an essay, but on a topic unrelated to belonging (change in political views during college).

Three years later, participants completed a survey. The researchers used several survey questions to measure social belonging. For example, one question asked how much the participant agreed with the statement "When something bad happens, I feel that maybe I don't belong at [university name]."

The researchers found that there was no difference in social belonging between white participants who were in the experimental group and white participants who were in the comparison group. However, they found that Black participants in the experimental group reported higher social belonging than Black participants in the comparison group. They conclude that the intervention did work for Black college students.

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**Example 3: Spencer, Steven J., Claude M. Steele, and Diane M. Quinn. 1999. "Stereotype Threat and Women's Math Performance." *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 35(1):4–28.**

This group of researchers attempted to understand how stereotypes about math influence men and women's performance on math tests. They note that there is a stereotype that women are bad at math, so when women take math tests they risk being judged negatively. They hypothesize that this problem, which they call "stereotype threat," causes women to feel anxiety and makes them perform worse, thus lowering their test scores.

In one study, they tested whether the presence of stereotype threat affects women's math performance. Participants were men and women college students and were randomly assigned to the experimental group or the comparison group. All participants were told they would take a difficult math exam. Before they took the exam, participants in the experimental group were told that, typically, there were gender differences in performance on the exam (meaning that men typically performed better). Participants in the comparison group were told there were typically no gender differences in performance on the exam. Then the participants took the exam.

Researchers scored the participants' performance on the exam. The researchers found that women in the experimental group performed worse than men on the math exam, on average. However, they found that women and men in the comparison group performed equally well on average. They conclude that stereotype threat does hurt women's math performance, but that stating explicitly that men and women perform equally well on a test can eliminate differences in performance.

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**Example 4: Lauren A. Rivera and András Tilcsik. 2016. "Class Advantage, Commitment Penalty: The Gendered Effect of Social Class Signals in an Elite Labor Market." *American Sociological Review* 81(6):1097–1131.**

Rivera and Tilcsik attempted to understand how a person's social class background impacts their likelihood of being hired into elite jobs. They write that these jobs come with high income and respect, so it is important to determine who has a better chance of getting them. In this study, they hypothesize that people who are working class are seen as worse cultural fits with elite companies.

In one study, they tested whether an applicant's class background affected how they would be rated in terms of cultural fit with a law firm. All participants were lawyers in the United States. They were randomly assigned to the experimental group or the comparison group. All participants were told they would be evaluating a real resume from a law school student applying to their firm (the application was actual fake). Participants in the experimental group ("the lower-class combination") reviewed a resume that indicated the applicant came from a working class family (e.g., they were a mentor for first-generation students; they were interested in country music). Participants in the comparison group ("the higher-class combination") reviewed a resume that indicated the applicant came from an upper class family (e.g., they were on the sailing team; they were interested in classical music). Besides these class signals, the applicants were equally matched (e.g., their GPA was the same).

After reviewing the applications, the participants took a survey that asked them to rate the applicants on several questions, including on how well the applicant would fit in at their law firm. For example, one question asked participants to indicate how much they thought the applicant "would fit with the culture of a large law firm."

The researchers found that participants in the experimental group (those that reviewed the "working class" applicant) rated the applicant as fitting less with the culture and clients of large law firms compared with participants in the comparison group (those that reviewed the "upper class" applicant). The authors conclude that hiring managers do perceive working class applicants as worse cultural fits with elite law firms.

Recognizing Elements of Experimental Research

**Example 5: Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record." *The American Journal of Sociology* 108(5):937–75.**

Pager attempted to understand how race and incarceration affect being hired for a job. She notes that the number of prisoners in the United States has increased by 600% over the last thirty years, and that most inmates are Black. She asks whether race (being white or Black) and being formerly incarcerated affects a person's likelihood of being hired.

This study is an "audit" experiment, meaning that it is not a "true" experiment, but one conducted in the real world. In audit studies, paired members of the research team (or "testers") apply for real jobs and see whether they are hired. In this study, the author had two pairs of male testers: one pair was white, and one pair was Black. All men were 23-years old; within each pair, men were similar to one another in terms of their appearance and dress. The pairs applied to 350 entry-level jobs. For each job, one tester in the pair was randomly assigned to pretend to have a criminal record. For each job opening, both testers in the pair would visit the employer (at different times) and fill out an application (including checking or not checking the box that indicated they had a criminal record). Besides one tester in the pair saying he has a criminal record, they were equally matched applicants (e.g., they had the same education and work experience). Then, testers waited to hear if they received a callback (i.e., were asked to be interviewed) for each job opening.

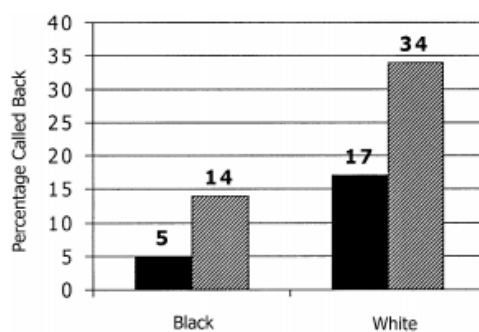


FIG. 6.—The effect of a criminal record for black and white job applicants. The main effects of race and criminal record are statically significant ( $P < .01$ ). The interaction between the two is not significant in the full sample. Black bars represent criminal record; striped bars represent no criminal record.

The researchers found that when white testers said they did not have a criminal record, they were called back for an interview 34% of the time, but when white testers said they did have a criminal record, they were called back for an interview only 17% of the time. On the other hand, when Black testers said they did not have a criminal record, they were called back for an interview only 14% of the time. Black testers who said they did have a

criminal record were called back for interviews the least: only 5% of the time. Pager concludes that being Black and having a criminal record hurt a person's chances of employment. Having a criminal record reduces white men's chances of being called back by 50%, but it reduces Black men's chances of being called back by approximately two thirds (~66%).