Empirical Research Paper

Welcome to Be Like Us: Expectations of Outgroup Assimilation Shape Dominant Group Resistance to Diversity

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Abstract

We propose a theoretical framework for when and why members of dominant groups experience threat and express intolerant attitudes in response to social change. Scholarship on symbolic threat suggests that the detection of intergroup differences in values and norms is sufficient to elicit negative intergroup attitudes. Building on this theory, we argue that the experience of threat is actually shaped by *prospective* beliefs about difference (i.e., expectations of whether outgroups will assimilate to ingroup norms over time or not). Across two studies and two accompanying pilots, we show how outgroup assimilation expectation shapes dominant groups' experiences of threat, specifically as it relates to their ability to define the norms of their superordinate category (prototypicality threat). We observe that members of dominant groups are surprisingly tolerant of both social change and intergroup difference in the present, so long as they expect outgroup assimilation in the future.

Keywords

intergroup relations, diversity, intergroup threat theory, prototypicality threat

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Social psychologists have long sought to understand why we sometimes accept and other times reject groups different from our own (Sherif, 1966; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Intolerance of group differences underlies countless examples of intergroup conflict and the forced assimilation of vulnerable minority groups (e.g., the Canadian Indian residential school system, Chinese "re-education camps" in Xinjiang). Even when not expressed in such violent terms, resistance to diversity in the form of support for nativist politics (Major et al., 2016) or the skepticism around inclusion efforts in the workplace (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016) is a problem many would like to solve.

One prominent explanation for intergroup intolerance is that people feel threatened by those who they see as possessing values and norms different from their own. This idea of *symbolic threat* was conceptualized as part of intergroup threat theory (W. G. Stephan et al., 2009; W. G. Stephan & Stephan, 2000) as an effort to expand thinking of group threat beyond simple competition over resources (i.e., realistic threat). A core assumption embedded in the literature on symbolic threat is that the mere recognition of intergroup difference in terms of values or norms should be sufficient to trigger a threat response. This can be seen clearly in common operationalizations of symbolic threat, which focus on perceptions of intergroup difference in the present (e.g., participants expressing agreement with statements like "The values of Blacks regarding work are different from those of Whites," W. G. Stephan et al., 2002; "Men put too little emphasis on family values," C. W. Stephan et al., 2000; or "The values and beliefs of Eritrean immigrants are not compatible with the values and beliefs of most Americans," Bahns, 2017). Given that anxiety is an anticipatory psychological state, however, we argue that it is necessary to consider how individuals perceive group difference, not just in the present, but changing over time as well. In this work, we examine how people think about intergroup difference prospectively—what we term *outgroup assimilation expectation*—and the role this plays in shaping intergroup threat.

Our examination of outgroup assimilation expectation helps us to address another potential limitation of the theorizing around symbolic threat, its broad conceptualization. In contrast to how narrowly it has often been operationalized, the theoretical construct of symbolic threat is expansive (e.g., any perceived threats to a group's culture, values, worldview, or way of life; W. G. Stephan et al., 2009). Here,

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we argue that not all non-material threats are the same, and that not all groups experience these threats equally. For example, dominant groups (those with the greatest power and resources in their social hierarchy) are unique in that they enjoy the privilege of being the group against which non-dominant groups are judged and expected to assimilate (i.e., they are prototypical of their broader superordinate categories; Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Waldzus et al., 2004). The extent to which dominant groups can continue to be prototypical depends on whether or not non-dominant outgroups will actively assimilate. If non-dominant groups do assimilate, dominant group prototypicality is secure. If they do not, this privilege is threatened. Therefore, we argue that focusing on dominant groups' specific concerns around losing their claim to represent the superordinate category (i.e., *prototypicality threat*; Danbold & Huo, 2015) is the best way to measure the consequences of outgroup assimilation expectation on perceptions of threat.

We offer a theoretical framework that predicts not only when and why dominant groups will reject intergroup differences (i.e., when they perceive non-dominant groups as failing to assimilate and threatening dominant group prototypicality) but also when they would embrace those who are different (i.e., when they expect non-dominant groups to assimilate over time). This framework challenges the assumption embedded in the symbolic threat literature that the detection of intergroup difference in norms and values is sufficient to spark threat and highlights how it is not just the magnitude of intergroup difference but the *trajectory* of this difference that shapes intergroup relations.

Intergroup Threat From the Dominant Group's Perspective

We predict that dominant groups' perceptions of whether or not non-dominant groups are assimilating to dominant group norms determine whether or not they experience threat in response to social change. This prediction diverges from core theorizing on symbolic threat, which predicts that the mere detection of intergroup difference is sufficient to trigger threat. Indeed, although some measures of symbolic threat have focused on a quite general assessment of threat (e.g., "To what extent do you think that [ingroup]'s core values are being threatened?"; Rios et al., 2010), many directly capture static assessments of intergroup difference in the present (e.g., "[Outgroup] and [ingroup] have different family values."; C. W. Stephan et al., 2000; W. G. Stephan et al., 2002). Although people are clearly sensitive to these static perceptions of intergroup difference, we propose they are also attentive to whether or not these differences will grow or attenuate over time (i.e., outgroup assimilation expectation). For example, in a national context, whether an immigrant group is perceived to be actively conforming to the norms of the native-born group versus maintaining distinct traditions in isolated enclaves has important implications for intergroup relations in that context.

Although outgroup assimilation expectation should be something that all groups consider, we argue that it has particular significance for members of dominant groups. Here again, our theorizing differs from another central assumption embedded in theorizing around symbolic threat, which proposes that concerns about norms and culture can be experienced by "majority and minority group members alike" (Rios et al., 2018; W. G. Stephan et al., 2002). The effects of social hierarchies and categorization are such that outgroup assimilation expectation has direct implications for dominant groups' concern that they may lose the claim to best represent their superordinate category. Research has established that dominant groups enjoy the privilege of being the most prototypical subgroup in their shared superordinate categories (e.g., nation, profession; Rubin, 2012; Waldzus et al., 2004).[1] For example, White Americans, the dominant ethnic group in the United States, are consensually regarded as the most prototypical of the superordinate category of Americans and as setting the norms to which immigrant groups are expected to conform to (Devos and Banaji, 2005; Zou and Cheryan, 2017). Similarly, men are the dominant and prototypical gender group in professions like science (Cheryan & Markus, 2020).

Being the most prototypical group in a superordinate category gives dominant groups a unique set of psychological advantages. By serving as the group against which all others are judged and expected to conform, dominant groups readily enjoy a feeling of being an insider and are spared the pressures of conforming to a different group's norms (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Oakes et al., 1998; Rosch, 1978; Turner, 1987; Wenzel et al., 2007). This default sense of belonging and normativity awarded by prototypicality represents a set of privileges distinct from the material advantages dominant groups enjoy by virtue of their standing. When social change (e.g., declining group size) suggests the potential loss of the privileges of prototypicality, members of dominant groups become susceptible to the experience of prototypicality threat (Craig & Richeson, 2017; Danbold & Huo, 2015, 2017). This is not to say non-dominant groups do not experience motivations around enhancing their prototypicality (as would be consistent with the ingroup projection model; Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Wenzel et al., 2007), but rather that non-dominant groups cannot worry about losing a privilege (i.e., being the most prototypical subgroup in their relevant category) that they do not actually hold.

Prototypicality threat, therefore, offers a lens through which to evaluate the impact of outgroup assimilation expectation on responses to social changes. Although under the broad definition of symbolic threat as "any threat" to a group's non-material resources (i.e., values, culture, etc.; W. G. Stephan et al., 2009), prototypicality threat must be classified as a form of symbolic threat, a prototypicality threat-specific approach leads to predictions about changing

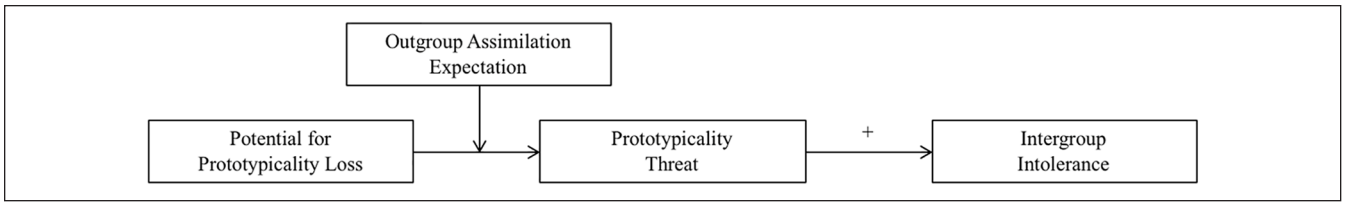

Figure 1. Theoretical model.

perceptions of intergroup difference that would not be easily derived from a conventional symbolic threat perspective. Confronted with information that their group's prototypicality may be imperiled (e.g., facing projections of the growth of non-dominant groups), members of dominant groups who think that non-dominant groups are *not* assimilating to their norms should be most vulnerable to experiencing prototypicality threat. However, those who believe that non-dominant groups *are* assimilating should be relatively buffered from this threat. In fact, the observation that other groups are different now, but that this difference will decrease over time, is evidence of prototypicality working as it should.

To illustrate how our model represents a valuable extension beyond the theoretical predictions offered by symbolic threat, imagine a superordinate category containing one dominant group and one non-dominant group. Say that members of both these groups observe a high degree of intergroup difference in terms of their norms and values. As such, both groups should score high on traditional measures of symbolic threat. Examining these high symbolic threat scores, an observer may conclude that everyone in the shared category is equally intolerant and conflicts might emerge from almost anywhere. In contrast, our framework argues that we should focus on feelings of threat within the dominant group, and that even within this group, the experience of threat will vary. Some members of the dominant group will expect the intergroup difference they observe in the present to persist over time. This trajectory of continued and perhaps growing group difference, especially in combination with growing demographic diversity, would be interpreted as a threat to dominant group prototypicality and lead to more intolerant attitudes. Others, however, may expect this difference to decline over time, and instead interpret the presence of difference in the present as an affirmation of their prototypicality.

Empirical Predictions

We test a theoretical framework examining how outgroup assimilation expectation shapes dominant groups' experiences of prototypicality threat. Under this framework, illustrated in Figure 1, we generate two predictions.

First, we predict that social change will provoke increased prototypicality threat among members of dominant groups low in outgroup assimilation expectation (i.e., those who do not believe non-dominant groups will assimilate), but not among members of dominant groups high in outgroup assimilation expectation (i.e., those who do believe non-dominant groups will assimilate). Because our conceptualization of outgroup assimilation expectation assumes some degree of intergroup difference already in place, we do not contrast the effects of difference in the future versus difference in the present. Rather, we focus on the effect that the perceived trajectory of this intergroup difference has on reactions to social change.

Second, we predict that once prototypicality threat is activated, it will lead members of dominant groups to adopt more intolerant intergroup attitudes. Similar to the predictions of symbolic threat (e.g., Riek et al., 2006; W. G. Stephan et al., 2009), we predict that prototypicality threat will lead to increased hostility toward the non-dominant outgroup. However, we also predict that prototypicality threat will lead to a set of attitudes directly aimed at preserving dominant group prototypicality. First, we aim to replicate the finding that prototypicality threat is associated with the increased endorsement of non-dominant groups assimilating to dominant group norms, a clear reassertion of the privileges those under threat are seeking to preserve (Danbold & Huo, 2015, 2017). Extending this, we also predict that prototypicality threat will lead to an aversion toward both intergroup contact and outgroup representation in the media. If members of dominant groups under prototypicality threat promote assimilation as a way to lift up their own ingroup norms, we predict this should be mirrored by a distancing from, or derogation of, the norms of others. Another novel outcome specifically relevant to prototypicality threat concerns the fact that dominant groups normally enjoy the privilege of seeing themselves as representative of their entire superordinate category, not "just another subgroup." For example, African Americans and Asian Americans are often labeled as such, whereas White Americans are often spared this marked or "hyphenated" identity (Knowles & Peng, 2005). Similarly, it is typically the case that international students are "marked" as such at universities, whereas non-international students regard themselves as simply "students." The experience of prototypicality threat, therefore, should be accompanied by an aversion to this "marking" (e.g., non-international students preferring not to be labeled "domestic students").

We test these predictions across two studies, varying in both method and context, with closely replicating pilot studies for each reported in the Supplementary Materials.

In Study 1, we measure White Americans' outgroup assimilation expectations for immigrants to the United States and examine the role of these expectations in reaction to information that suggests their prototypicality may be lost. In Study 2, we look at an ethnically diverse sample of U.S.-born students at a large public university, manipulating both the potential for prototypicality loss (whether or not the number of international students at their university is increasing) and outgroup assimilation expectation (whether or not international students are assimilating to traditional student norms). Demonstrating the importance of outgroup assimilation expectation across these distinct contexts supports both our theoretical model and broader argument that perceptions of group difference in the future, not just the present, are key for understanding intergroup tolerance.

Study 1: Outgroup Assimilation Expectation and Prototypicality Threat Among White Americans

In Study 1, we tested the prediction that outgroup assimilation expectation would determine whether or not White Americans experience threat in the face of the potential loss of their prototypicality. In recent work, scholars have used projections showing that White Americans will lose their numerical majority status by around 2042 as a manipulation of the potential for prototypicality loss (e.g., Craig & Richeson, 2014; Danbold & Huo, 2015). Adapting this work to our theoretical focus, we first ran a pilot ($N = 134$; see Supplementary Materials). Using a single-factor experimental design, we observed that exposing White Americans to information about the imminent loss of their majority status (as opposed to a neutral control) triggered prototypicality threat only among those who self-reported as low in outgroup assimilation expectation.

In Study 1, we aimed to replicate and expand upon this finding by testing a more rigorous manipulation, isolating White Americans' potential loss of prototypicality from their potential loss of numerical majority status. Using a single-factor experimental design, we manipulated the dominant group's potential loss of prototypicality directly by telling participants about trends in the public's association between being American and being White, while holding constant across conditions the fact that White Americans' share of the U.S. population is declining. Doing this served two purposes. First, although we were not manipulating prototypicality loss directly (i.e., the loss of the public's implicit association between being White and American does not guarantee the end of White prototypicality), we were able to manipulate something closer to our theoretical mechanism (prototypicality threat) than what was offered by manipulations rooted in changing demographics (Spencer et al., 2005). Second, this manipulation provides a more conservative test of the role of outgroup assimilation expectation. If participants high in outgroup assimilation expectation (i.e., those that think immigrants to the United States will readily assimilate to their norms) can be primed with information suggesting their prototypicality could be lost and still not experience prototypicality threat, this speaks to the importance of these prospective perceptions of intergroup difference.

Method

Procedure. Self-identified White American participants were recruited via TurkPrime (Litman et al., 2017). Participants were asked to view and interpret what they were told was data randomly selected from a large set of "recent scientific articles" (see methodology file for verbatim copies of this manipulation). In both conditions, participants were reminded that White Americans are projected to lose their numerical majority within a few decades. Also, in both conditions, participants read that researchers had been studying the relationship between "being American and being White" (e.g., as in Devos & Banaji, 2005, although this specific research was not mentioned), and that these researchers had been tracking this association over time. In our No Potential Prototypicality Loss condition, participants were told that "although changing demographics are causing White Americans' share of the population in the US to shrink," this was *not* changing Americans' widely held association between being American and being White (shown in a graph to be consistently high for over a decade). In the Potential Prototypicality Loss condition, in contrast, participants read that there was a weakening association in people's minds between being American and being White.

Participants. A simulation-based power analysis using our pilot study estimated a sample of at least 160 participants to achieve 80% power. Given, however, we were using a different manipulation and wanting to ensure we did not end up underpowered, we aimed to recruit as close to 500 participants as possible. Five hundred and three White Americans completed our survey. In our final sample, the average age was 40.64 years (SD = 12.82). One hundred and ninety-two participants identified as men, 256 identified as women, two identified as non-binary, and one declined to state their gender identity. 44.79% identified as liberal, 17.52% as neither liberal nor conservative, and 37.69% as conservative.

Measures

Outgroup assimilation expectation. To measure outgroup assimilation expectation, participants rated the extent to which they thought "the typical immigrant from each of several world regions cares about successfully assimilating to (i.e., conforming to and fitting in with) traditional American culture and values?" Participants evaluated eight world regions: "Africa (e.g., Nigeria, Ethiopia)," "East Asia (e.g., China, Korea)," "Europe (e.g., England, France)," "Latin

America (e.g., Mexico, Guatemala)," "Caribbean (e.g., Haiti, Jamaica)," "Middle East (e.g., Syria, Iraq)," "South Asia (e.g., India, Bangladesh)," and "Southeast Asia (e.g., Vietnam, The Philippines)" (1 = "Not at all interested in assimilating," 7 = "Extremely interested in assimilating").

Although outgroup assimilation expectation was significantly higher on average for perceptions of European immigrants (M = 4.80, SD = 1.47) than for other immigrant groups (M = 3.15–4.09, SD = 1.48–1.62), all ratings were positively correlated and reliability was very high when considering responses to all eight groups (α = .89 for all target groups, increasing to α = .92 when European immigrants are excluded). Given this, we concluded that participants hold a general sense of outgroup assimilation expectation and used a composite variable comprised of all target groups for all subsequent analyses. There was no effect of manipulation on outgroup assimilation expectation (p = .444) and no results change meaningfully if European immigrants are excluded from our composite.

Prototypicality threat. We asked participants to, "Please consider what you see to be the relationship between your ethnic identity and the American identity in the future," and then reminded them of their ethnicity was White American. We assessed their agreement with six items: "I worry that in the future, my ethnic group will no longer represent what it means to be American"; "I am concerned that in the future, it won't be clear what it means to be American"; "It troubles me that in the future, when people think about what it means to be American, they won't think about my ethnic group"; "It makes me uneasy that in the future, other groups will represent American more so than my ethnic group"; "I don't like to think that in the future, my ethnic group will represent America less than it does now"; and "I am confident that in the future, people will still think about my ethnic group when thinking about what it means to be American" (reverse-coded; 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"; α = .87).

Intergroup intolerance. We measured intergroup intolerance, the outcome variables in our full model, using three scales: assimilation endorsement, aversion to outgroup contact, and opposition to diversity in the media.

Assimilation endorsement: We asked participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following nine statements, adapted from prior research (Danbold & Huo, 2015; Hehman et al., 2012): "If people want to succeed in the US, they should adopt traditional American values"; "It is best if everyone in the US conforms to existing cultural norms"; "What makes the US strong is that we are a mix of different racial cultures" (reverse-coded); "It would be better if America were an English-only country"; "I think it's a good thing to teach all children a foreign language" (reverse-coded); "I think it is important for children to learn about the cultures and traditions of other societies" (reverse-coded); "I think not enough attention is given to teaching children traditional American values and traditions"; "In day-to-day life, people should conform to traditional American values and customs"; and "All Americans should start their school or work day by reciting the Pledge of Allegiance" (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"; α = .91).

Aversion to outgroup contact: Seven items were used to measure aversion to contact—the degree to which participants dislike and seek to avoid the cultures and norms of non-dominant ethnic groups: "I would generally rather spend time with people of my own race/ethnicity than with people from other groups"; "I get uncomfortable going to restaurants where the menus aren't in English"; "Some ethnic food is too strange for me to try"; "I like American food (e.g., burgers and hot dogs) better than other foods"; "It bothers me when I call somewhere and am told to 'Press 1 for English'"; "I think it's fun and exciting to explore different ethnic neighborhoods" (reverse-coded); and "I like to be in ethnically diverse social settings" (reverse-coded) (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"; α = .84).

Opposition to diversity in the media: As an extension of our measure of aversion to contact, participants were also asked to express their agreement with three statements regarding diversity in the media: "The media tries too hard to make film and television appear diverse"; "Efforts to diversify mainstream media have gone too far"; and "White people are overrepresented in the media" (reverse-coded; 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"; α = .80).

Realistic threat. As a control variable, four items were adapted from past research on realistic threat (W. G. Stephan et al., 1999) and were presented with a similar frame as prototypicality threat measures (i.e., asking participants to think about the relationship between their ethnic ingroup and other ethnic groups in America, reminding them that they identified themselves as White American). Participants were asked to express their agreement with statements that "In the future . . ."; ". . . Other groups will get more from this country than they contribute"; "The growth of other groups will increase the tax burden on members of my ethnic group"; "Other groups will displace members of my ethnic group from our jobs"; and "Social services will become less available to my ethnic group because of the growth of other groups" (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"; α = .94).

Recall check. Participants were asked to respond to a multiple-choice question asking whether or not the article they read at the beginning of the survey stated that the association between being American and being White had "weakened" or "stayed strong," or "I don't recall anything about the article I read."

Results

Thirty-one participants failed our recall check and were excluded from subsequent analyses. There was no

Table 1. Study 1 Descriptives and Correlations.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Outgroup assimilation expectation	Prototypicality threat	Assimilation endorsement	Aversion to contact	Opposition to diversity in the media	Realistic threat
Outgroup assimilation expectation	3.96	1.16	—					
Prototypicality threat	3.18	1.43	−.38**	—				
Assimilation endorsement	3.27	1.37	−.39**	.75**	—			
Aversion to contact	3.50	1.29	−.47**	.66**	.77**	—		
Opposition to diversity in the media	3.82	1.64	−.41**	.63**	.74**	.62**	—	
Realistic threat	3.47	1.75	−.44**	.78**	.75**	.69**	.70**	—

Note. All scales range from 1 to 7.
**$p < .010$.

association between condition and recall check failure ($\chi^2 = 0.060$, $p = .806$). Eight participants who identified as non-White, and thirteen participants were born outside of the United States were also removed, leaving us with a final sample size of 451 participants. Study 1 means, standard deviations, and inter-item correlations for our key dependent variables are shown in Table 1.

Interaction between prototypicality loss manipulation and outgroup assimilation expectation. We tested our first prediction that participants low in outgroup assimilation expectation would show the greatest prototypicality threat in response to our prototypicality loss manipulation. We did so controlling for realistic threat as well as age and ideology (both generally associated with negative diversity attitudes; Teixeira et al., 2013). The predicted interaction remains significant without these controls, so their inclusion primarily functions to demonstrate that our effects hold over and above other theoretically relevant predictors.

Predicting prototypicality threat in this model, we observed a significant main effect of condition ($\beta = .21$, $p = .012$, 95% confidence interval [CI] = [0.05, 0.38], $\eta_p^2 = .014$), a non-significant main effect of outgroup assimilation expectation ($\beta = .04$, $p = .419$, 95% CI = [−0.06, 0.15], $\eta_p^2 = .003$), and a significant interaction between the two ($\beta = -.18$ $p = .017$, 95% CI = [−0.32, −0.03], $\eta_p^2 = .013$). As seen in Figure 2, participants low in outgroup assimilation reported greater prototypicality threat when they were primed with the potential loss of their prototypicality (via a declining association between being American and White) than when they were told it was unlikely their prototypicality would be lost. In contrast, those relatively high in outgroup assimilation expectation appeared buffered from this increase in threat.

Path model. After demonstrating the predicted interaction, we examined our second prediction by testing our full path model displayed in Figure 1. We ran three separate models looking individually at the downstream relationship between prototypicality threat and three outcome variables: assimilation endorsement, aversion to contact, and opposition to diversity in the media. We tested these relationships using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013) Model 7, controlling again for ideology, age, and realistic threat. As seen in Table 2, we observed a significant indirect effect of our manipulation on each of our outcome variables through prototypicality threat, but only among participants low (−1 *SD*) and at the mean in outgroup assimilation expectation. In other words, participants who did *not* think immigrants to the United States would conform to existing cultural norms reported greater prototypicality threat when exposed to information about the potential loss of their prototypicality, which in turn predicted lower support for diversity. Those who are higher in outgroup assimilation expectation (+1 *SD*), likely reassured by the belief that their prototypicality would be preserved, did not show this pattern of results.

Discussion

In Study 1, we observed that White Americans' reactions to information about whether the association between being White and American was in decline versus stable were contingent upon perceptions of outgroup assimilation. As predicted, all those who were told that the "White = American" association was stable expressed little anxiety about losing their prototypicality. However, among those primed with the potential loss of their prototypicality (i.e., that the "White = American" association was in decline), outgroup assimilation expectation played a key role. Those who held the expectation that non-dominant immigrant groups were interested in assimilating appeared unbothered by this declining association, suggesting that their prototypicality was secure in their minds. Only when information about the potential loss of prototypicality was met with a preexisting skepticism about non-White groups assimilating did we observe a spike in prototypicality threat.

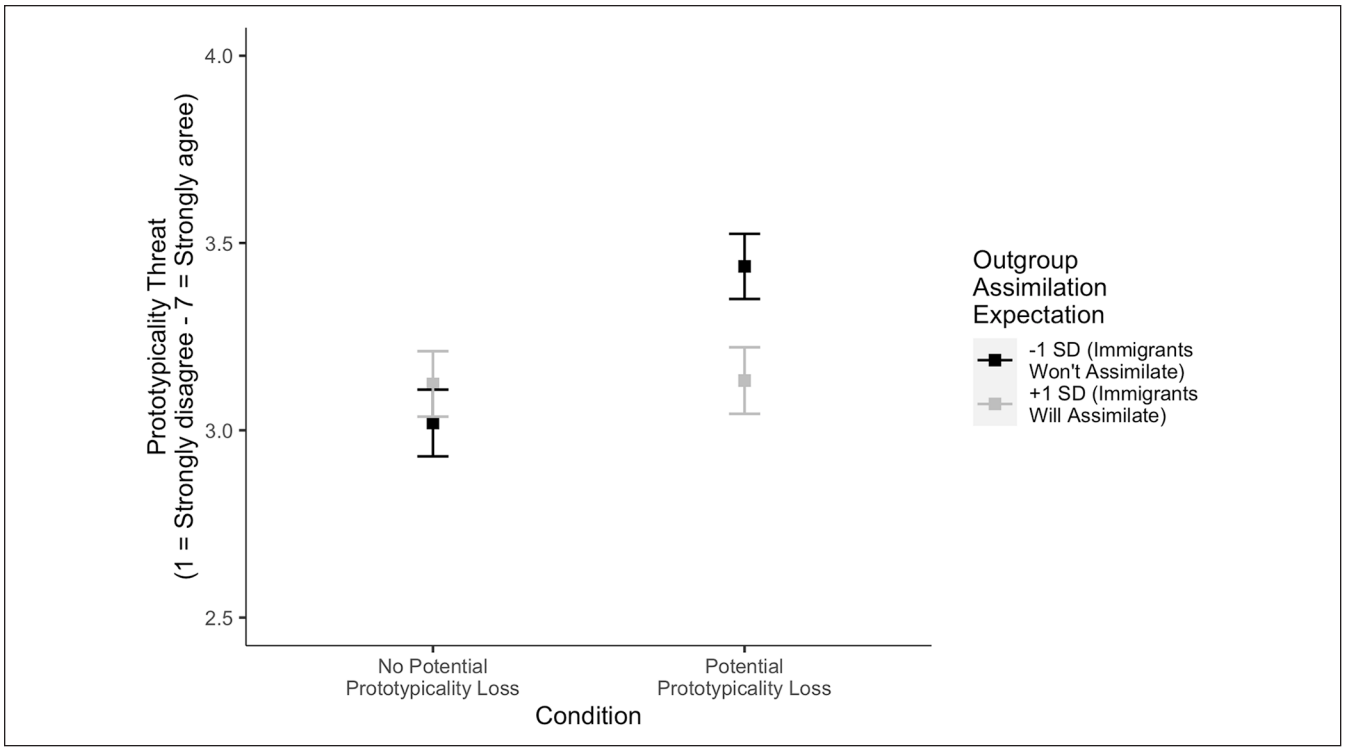

Figure 2. Study 1 interaction of outgroup assimilation expectation and condition on prototypicality threat controlling for ideology, age, and realistic threat.
Note. Points represent point estimates from regression analyses. Error bars represent standard errors.

Table 2. Study 1 Conditional Indirect Effect of Potential Prototypicality Loss on Dependent Variables Through Prototypicality Threat and Realistic Threat at Low (−1 *SD*), Moderate (*M*), and High (+1 *SD*) Levels of Outgroup (Immigrant) Assimilation Expectation.

Conditional level of outgroup assimilation expectations	Indirect effect	Bootstrapped standard error	Bias-corrected lower limit	Bias-corrected upper limit
Dependent variable = Assimilation endorsement				
−1 *SD* (2.80)	**.14**	**.05**	**0.06**	**0.27**
***M* (3.96)**	**.07**	**.03**	**0.02**	**0.14**
+1 ***SD*** (5.12)	.01	.04	−0.08	0.08
Dependent variable = Aversion to contact				
−1 *SD* (2.80)	**.10**	**.04**	**0.03**	**0.20**
***M* (3.96)**	**.05**	**.02**	**0.01**	**0.11**
+1 ***SD*** (5.12)	.00	.03	−0.06	0.06
Dependent variable = Opposition to diversity in the media				
−1 *SD* (2.80)	**.07**	**.03**	**0.02**	**0.17**
***M* (3.96)**	**.04**	**.02**	**0.01**	**0.09**
+1 ***SD*** (5.12)	.00	.02	−0.05	0.05

Note. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals were calculated using 5,000 bootstrap samples (with replacement). Significant conditional indirect effects (*bootstrapped confidence interval does not span zero*) are highlighted in boldface. Ideology, age, and realistic threat are included as covariates.

In addition, in tests of our full theoretical model, those highest in prototypicality threat expressed the strongest endorsement of assimilation as well as heightened levels of aversion to intergroup contact. This manifested not only in a rejection of the food, culture, and company of other groups but also in a more specific rejection of efforts to increase diverse representation in the media.

Study 2: Manipulating Outgroup Assimilation Expectation Among University Students

Study 2 aimed to conceptually replicate the findings of Study 1 in a different context, U.S.-born undergraduates at a public university responding to an increase in the number of

international students. Expanding upon Study 1, here we employed a 2 × 2 experimental design, manipulating both potential prototypicality loss (via changing demographics) and outgroup assimilation expectation. Again, we predicted that our dominant group participants would only experience threat in response to the potential loss of their prototypicality if they lacked the reassurance that the non-dominant group was readily assimilating.

A few things made this new context helpful in testing the robustness of our theoretical framework. First, this sample is marked by younger age, greater ethnic diversity, and a more liberal politics than the general American population, making it a potential challenge for us to capture overt expressions of threat and intolerance. Second, because international students pay higher fees, and thus subsidize the tuition of U.S.-born students, we theorized this as a context in which realistic threat, although potentially present to some degree, was not the primary concern. To confirm this, we ran a pilot of 97 U.S.-born undergraduates (see Supplementary Materials). In addition to finding the predicted interaction between perceptions of the growth of international students and perceived outgroup assimilation expectation on prototypicality threat, we observed no significant relationship between prototypicality threat and realistic threat ($r = .09$, $p = .400$), and that the inclusion of realistic threat in our models did not impact the effect of prototypicality threat in explaining U.S.-born students' opposition to international students. As such, realistic threat was excluded from Study 2.

Method

Procedure. Student participants were contacted via the university registrar to participate in a survey titled "Data in the News." Participants were told that the purpose of our study was to examine how students interpret data presented in the news. We asked participants to read and recall information from an article, which we told them was randomly selected from a larger set of articles describing findings from recent polls and surveys at the university. Participants were assigned to read one of four articles. Each article represents a condition in our 2 (international students increasing/decreasing) × 2 (high/low assimilation among international students) experimental design (see methodology file for verbatim copies). All articles purported to present data from a recent report about international students at the university. Across conditions, participants read that the number of international students at the university had increased in recent years to around 13%, but we varied the projected change in this number over the next 4 years as a decrease to around 6% (International Students Decreasing condition) or an increase to around 45% (International Students Increasing condition). Next, participants were told that the university had been tracking the extent to which international students were interested in assimilating into campus culture (i.e., knowing university rituals and trivia, attending student-organized and athletic events, etc.). We then varied the trajectory of international student assimilation. In the International Students Not Assimilating condition, participants were told that assimilation has been low recently (decreasing from around 22% to around 18% over the past 6 years), and that, "as it appears most international students are disinterested in integrating into campus culture, it is unlikely that this number will increase soon." In the International Students Assimilating condition, participants were told that assimilation had been steadily increasing (from around 22% to around 63% over the past 6 years) and that, "as it appears most international students are now highly interested in integrating into campus culture, it is likely that this number will continue to rise." We predicted that prototypicality threat would be highest among those who were told that the number of international students at their university was increasing but that these students were not assimilating to university norms.

Participants. Six hundred and eighty-nine U.S.-born undergraduate students at a large West Coast research university participated. We had no prior data of similar design on which to run a power analysis, but building off of Study 1, we set a target sample size of 500 students and did not limit the number of students who could participate. In our final sample, the average age was 19.93 years (SD = 2.80). Two hundred and twenty participants identified as men, 424 identified as women, two identified as genderfluid, and two declined to state their gender identity. 67.44% identified as liberal, 14.51% as neither liberal nor conservative, and 17.90% as conservative. We recruited participants from a range of ethnic groups (72.69% White American, 12.19% Latino/Hispanic Americans, 5.25% Asian Americans), and dummy-coded participant ethnicity as White/Non-White.

Measures

Prototypicality threat. Prototypicality threat was measured adapting the items from Study 1 to this novel context (e.g., "I worry that in the future, students like me will no longer represent what it means to be a [university nickname used to represent students in general]"; $\alpha = .71$).

Intergroup intolerance. We measured intergroup intolerance, the outcome variables in our full model, using five scales: assimilation endorsement, aversion to outgroup contact, anti-international student attitudes, support for fewer international students, and aversion to marking.

Assimilation endorsement: Assimilation endorsement was measured using two items adapted from prior studies: "If international students want to succeed at [university name], they should adhere to existing [university nickname] values and traditions," and "It is best if everyone at [university name] conforms to existing [university nickname] values and traditions" (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"; $r = .67$, $p < .001$).

Aversion to contact: As in earlier studies, three items measured aversion to contact: "It bothers me when I walk around campus and hear students speaking languages other than English"; "I get uncomfortable sitting in classrooms or other places in campus surrounded by students speaking in languages that aren't English"; and "Some of the food that international students at [university name] eat is too strange for me to try" (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree," $\alpha = .69$).

Anti-international student attitudes: Six items measured the extent to which participants expressed prejudice against international students at their university: "I don't like international students at [university name]"; "I rarely try to befriend international students at [university name]"; "The number of international students at [university name] bothers me"; "I appreciate the new perspectives that international students bring to [university name]" (reverse-coded); "I try to get to know international students at [university name]" (reverse-coded); and "I like to attend cultural events put on by international students at [university name]" (reverse-coded) (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree," $\alpha = .83$).

Support for fewer international students: Participants were asked how much more or less each of a series of targeted groups (international students, transfer students, and out-of-state students[2]) they would like to see on campus (1 = "much less" to 7 = "much more").

Aversion to marking: Participants were told that given the presence of international students at their university, there had been a proposal to officially label students from the United States as "domestic students." Participants were then asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following four statements about this proposal: "I am opposed to labeling U.S.-born students 'domestic students'"; "[University name] students from the US should just be called students, not 'domestic students'"; "I like the label 'domestic student' to describe U.S.-born students at [university name]" (reverse-coded); and "I wouldn't mind being labeled a 'domestic student'" (reverse-coded) (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree," $\alpha = .86$).

Manipulation checks. Participants responded to two manipulation checks about the article that they read at the beginning of the study. To assess the effectiveness of our first manipulation (international student decrease/increase), we asked participants to indicate their perceptions of how "the percentage of international and U.S.-born students at [university name] will increase or decrease between now and 2020" (1 = "rapidly decrease," 11 = "rapidly increase"). To assess the effectiveness of our second manipulation (high/low international student assimilation), we asked participants to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with two statements: "International students at [university name] successfully conform to existing campus culture," and "International students at [university name] prefer to keep to themselves and not integrate into the broader campus community" (reverse-coded) (1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree"; $r = .67$, $p < .001$).

Results

We excluded five international students and 36 non-U.S.-born participants for a final sample of 648 U.S.-born domestic undergraduates. Means, standard deviations, and inter-item correlations for our key dependent variables are shown in Table 3.

Manipulation checks. There was a significant main effect of our International Student Population Change manipulation on perceived growth of international students at the university, $F(1, 646) = 1{,}186.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .647$, such that participants in the Increase condition anticipated a significantly greater proportion of international students ($M = 8.89$, $SE = .10$) than participants in the Decrease condition ($M = 3.86$, $SE = .10$). Also as predicted, there was a significant main effect of our International Student Assimilation manipulation on the extent to which participants thought international students were successfully assimilating on campus, $F(1, 646) = 229.60$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .262$, such that participants in the International Students Assimilating condition perceived a greater degree of international student assimilation ($M = 4.64$, $SE = .07$) than participants in the International Students Not Assimilating condition ($M = 3.14$, $SE = .07$). Neither manipulation had a significant effect on the non-relevant manipulation check.

Interaction between international student increase and outgroup assimilation expectation. Paralleling Study 1, we tested our first prediction by examining the interaction between the International Student Change manipulation and the Assimilation manipulation on prototypicality threat. To parallel Study 1, we controlled for ideology, year in school, and ethnicity (coded White/non-White), though the significance of our interaction and patterns of results do not change with their exclusion. There was no significant main effect of the Change manipulation, $F(1, 639) = 0.14$, $p = .705$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$, a significant main effect of the Assimilation manipulation, $F(1, 639) = 8.59$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .011$, and a significant interaction between our two manipulations, $F(1, 639) = 7.53$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .012$, such that participants in the International Student Increase and Low Assimilation conditions reported the greatest prototypicality threat (Figure 3). Students who were told that international students were decreasing reported relatively low prototypicality threat whether or not they were told that international students would ($M = 3.24$, $SE = .08$, 95% CI = [3.08, 3.40]) or would not ($M = 3.25$, $SE = .08$, 95% CI = [3.08, 3.41]) assimilate. Among students who were told that international students

Table 3. Study 2 Descriptives and Correlations.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Prototypicality threat	Assimilation endorsement	Aversion to contact	Anti-international student attitudes	Support for fewer international students	Aversion to marking
Prototypicality threat	3.26	1.09	—					
Assimilation endorsement	3.72	1.42	.11**	—				
Aversion to contact	2.35	1.04	.23**	.28**	—			
Anti-international student attitudes	2.67	1.00	.21**	.23**	.59**	—		
Support for fewer international students	3.84	1.19	.18**	.23**	.43**	.58**	—	
Aversion to marking	4.26	1.32	.15**	.12**	.17**	.15**	.14**	—

Note. All scales range from 1 to 7.
**$p < .010$.

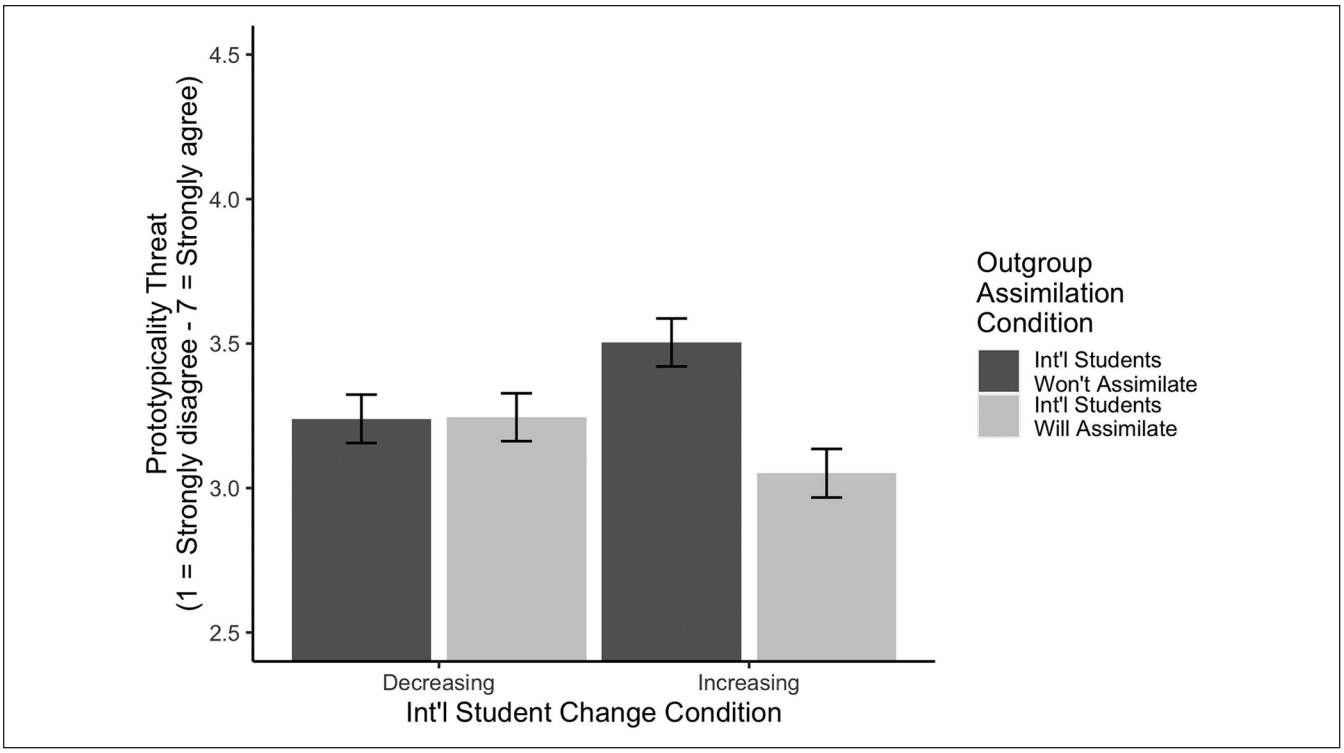

Figure 3. Study 2 interaction of international student increase manipulation by international student assimilation manipulation on prototypicality threat.
Note. Error bars represent standard errors.

were increasing, however, we observed the predicted effect of outgroup assimilation expectation, such that those who were told that international students would not assimilate ($M = 3.50$, $SE = .08$, 95% CI = [3.34, 3.67]) reported the highest prototypicality threat and those who were told that international students would assimilate ($M = 3.05$, $SE = .08$, 95% CI = [2.89, 3.22]) reported the lowest. Ideology ($p = .002$), year in school ($p = .022$), and being White ($p = .003$) were all significant covariates in our model as well.

Path model. We next tested our full theoretical model (Figure 1). As seen in Table 4, we found a significant indirect effect of perceived international student increase on each of the five measures of intergroup intolerance (assimilation endorsement, aversion to contact, anti-international student attitudes, support for fewer international students, and aversion to marking) through prototypicality threat, but only for participants who were told that international students were not assimilating to traditional undergraduate norms.

Table 4. Study 2 Conditional Indirect Effect of International Student Increase on Dependent Variables in the International Students Not Assimilating and International Student Assimilating Conditions.

Conditional level of outgroup assimilation expectations	Indirect effect	Bootstrapped standard error	Bias-corrected lower limit	Bias-corrected upper limit
Dependent variable = Assimilation endorsement				
No assimilation	**.03**	**.02**	**0.00**	**0.10**
Yes assimilation	−.03	.02	−0.07	0.00
Dependent variable = Aversion to contact				
No assimilation	**.06**	**.03**	**0.01**	**0.12**
Yes assimilation	−.04	.03	−0.10	0.00
Dependent variable = Anti-international student attitudes				
No assimilation	**.05**	**.03**	**0.01**	**0.11**
Yes assimilation	−.04	.02	−0.09	0.00
Dependent variable = Support for fewer international students				
No assimilation	**.05**	**.03**	**0.01**	**0.11**
Yes assimilation	−.04	.02	−0.09	0.00
Dependent variable = Aversion to marking				
No assimilation	**.05**	**.03**	**0.01**	**0.11**
Yes assimilation	−.04	.02	−0.09	0.00

Note. Bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals were calculated using 5,000 bootstrap samples (with replacement). Significant conditional indirect effects (*bootstrapped confidence interval does not span zero*) are highlighted in boldface. Ideology, year in school, and ethnicity are included as covariates.

Discussion

Conceptually replicating Study 1, Study 2 offered further support for our predictions. By manipulating (as opposed to measuring) outgroup assimilation expectation, we show this construct's critical role in whether or not members of dominant groups report threat in the face of social change. Facing the prospect of an increasing number of international students at their university, those who were told that international students are not assimilating reported greater prototypicality threat than those who were told that international students are assimilating. Once activated, prototypicality threat was, in turn, positively associated with not only assimilation endorsement and aversion to contact but also with more explicit measures of outgroup prejudice and a theoretically consistent aversion to "marking." That we were able to elicit such consistent expressions of intolerance in a population that is usually encouraged to embrace intergroup difference speaks to the robustness of our theory.

General Discussion

In this article, we challenge the assumption, embedded in theorizing around symbolic threat, that intergroup threat can be sufficiently understood by assessing people's perceptions of intergroup difference as it exists in the present (W. G. Stephan et al., 2009; W. G. Stephan & Stephan, 2000). Across two studies (with two accompanying pilots), we show that *prospective* beliefs about whether intergroup difference will grow or shrink over time play a critical role in the activation of threat. In addition, we show that this threat is best captured by focusing on members of dominant groups' concerns about losing their claim to best represent the superordinate category. Consistent with our theorizing, members of dominant groups believing that non-dominant groups would not readily assimilate to their norms were the most susceptible to prototypicality threat in the face of social change. In contrast, those who believed or were led to believe that non-dominant groups would assimilate were relatively buffered from this threat and the expression of intolerant attitudes that follow.

In addition to highlighting how outgroup assimilation expectation plays a key role in the activation of prototypicality threat among dominant groups, we also extended our understanding of this specific threat by linking it to a series of new outcomes, including aversion to intergroup contact, opposition to diversity in the media, and an aversion to marking. All of these outcomes are theoretically derived responses to threats to prototypicality specifically, underscoring how our model can generate novel, testable conditional predictions beyond what would be offered by a more generalized symbolic threat approach. To demonstrate the robustness of our model, we found support for its replication even in an ethnically diverse and politically liberal context, and after controlling for other reliable predictors of negative attitudes toward diversity such as ideology, age, and realistic threat.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this research provides consistent evidence in support of our predictions, there are several limitations to note. One limitation is that, by focusing on the change over time central to our research question, our treatment of outgroup assimilation expectation assumes an unspecified degree of perceived intergroup difference in the present. By adopting

more complex empirical designs, future research may be able to see whether variations in the ways that people perceive intergroup difference in the present, as well as the timescale over which they expect change to occur, may moderate the effects we observed.

Another limitation is that we did not fully examine the complexities of multiple group identities. One may wonder whether the findings presented hold for those who simultaneously belong to a dominant and non-dominant group (e.g., Are White women just as susceptible to prototypicality threat as White men?). Although post hoc analyses revealed no significant three-way interactions with non-focal demographic variables (e.g., participant gender did not moderate the effects in Study 1 [$p = .502$] or Study 2 [$p = .143$]; participant race did not moderate the effects in Study 2 [$p = .964$]), future research should test whether or not making multiple identities salient may differentially shape both outgroup assimilation expectation and experiences of intergroup threat (Rosette & Tost, 2013; Shih et al., 1999).

Another lingering question concerns the extent to which the threats we have discussed are empirically distinct. Although we have offered both theoretical and empirical evidence for the distinction between prototypicality threat, symbolic threat, and realistic threat, it is possible that these threats often correlate with, and potentially influence, one another. This suggests that researchers must continue to be creative when attempting to disentangle these constructs, either through careful experimental design (e.g., Rios et al., 2018) or by selecting contexts in which they are less likely to overlap (as in our university sample). Future research should also examine the relationships between these threats and other threats identified in the literature such as status threat (Craig & Richeson, 2014; Outten et al., 2012) and other identity-focused threats like distinctiveness threat (Branscombe et al., 1999; Jetten et al., 1997).

Theoretical Implications

Intergroup threat theory (W. G. Stephan et al., 2009) has played an essential role in moving our understanding of intergroup threat beyond the simple competition over material resources to include concerns about values and norms. To build on this foundational work, however, scholars must develop more precise and conditional models of when and why intergroup threat occurs. Although scholars have been doing some of this within the framework of intergroup threat theory (e.g., looking at ingroup identification and political ideology as moderators; Riek et al., 2006; Rios et al., 2018), the current work shows how we can breathe new life into a classic theory by viewing it through a new set of lenses (i.e., those of dominant groups' responses to growing diversity). We hope this work encourages further theoretical and empirical exploration beyond the broad dichotomy of realistic and symbolic threats to generate additional predictions about when, why, and for whom intergroup intolerance occurs.

In addition to exploring novel theoretically derived outcome variables, this work also introduces a critical new boundary condition of prototypicality threat. Prior research has argued that the experience of prototypicality threat is conditional upon specific beliefs about their ingroup (i.e., if members of dominant groups see themselves as legitimately prototypical; Danbold & Huo, 2015, 2017). In contrast, the present work highlights how dominant groups' beliefs about outgroups are a critical boundary condition to the activation of this threat. In addition, we show that attitudes about the outgroup assimilation are dynamic and malleable, allowing us for the first time to experimentally "turn on and off" the activation of prototypicality threat in the face of growing outgroup size.

This research also complements and extends insights offered by scholarship on cultural inertia (e.g., Zárate et al., 2012, 2019). Cultural inertia theory makes similar predictions about dominant groups' preferences for assimilation, in that it spares dominant groups the discomforts of change. Our work shows that in addition to the avoidance of change, dominant groups are motivated by the preservation of the privileges of prototypicality. In addition, although cultural inertia theory proposes that cultures at rest will resist any initial change, it also predicts that people will embrace change once they see it as already occurring ("cultures in motion continue in motion"). Here, we examined participants' reactions to two significant changes—demographic shift and the perceived trajectory of intergroup difference. Even when these changes were presented as part of ongoing patterns of change, they were resisted strongly, suggesting that dominant group resistance to change may be even more persistent than predicted by cultural inertia theory. Future research further integrating our perspective with the insights of cultural inertia is certain to reveal even more critical nuance in explaining people's perceptions of intergroup difference and threat.

Another body of research related to the present work is research on people's general preferences to either acknowledge or ignore distinct group identities (e.g., in multiethnic contexts, the contrasting diversity ideologies of assimilation/color blindness, and multiculturalism; Apfelbaum et al., 2010; Rattan & Ambady, 2013). Although our research question is distinct (i.e., we focus on the descriptive beliefs captured by outgroup assimilation expectation rather than the prescriptive beliefs captured by the literature on diversity ideologies), one outcome variable we examined, assimilation endorsement, does speak to this literature directly. A general observation of the diversity ideologies literature, consistent with our own findings, is that members of dominant groups typically prefer assimilation over diversity ideologies that embrace group difference (Dovidio et al., 2016). However, this is not always the case (e.g., Ryan et al., 2010). Although, one interpretation of these findings could be that members of dominant groups low in explicit support for assimilation are genuinely tolerant, our findings suggest that this apparent

tolerance may actually be conditional on the expectation that non-dominant group will readily assimilate. Should this positive expectation be replaced with skepticism about outgroup assimilation expectation, we might observe these same individuals react with threat and the reassertion that assimilation is the best way to manage a diverse society.

Societal Implications

Many may wonder how we can utilize the insights of this research to improve intergroup tolerance and avoid dominant groups responding to social change with threat. Given the findings presented here, one might be tempted to argue that intergroup conflict can be efficiently avoided by simply encouraging non-dominant groups to assimilate to dominant group norms. For several reasons, we strongly discourage readers from viewing the forced assimilation of non-dominant groups as a reasonable strategy to reduce the intergroup tensions highlighted in this work. Pushing non-dominant groups to renounce or suppress their identities to placate the dominant group is not an equitable solution and not one likely to be embraced by non-dominant groups themselves (Huo & Molina, 2006; Plaut et al., 2009). Recalling that the forced assimilation of many indigenous and immigrant communities has historically been linked to violent oppression, it is impossible to regard this as an efficient or ethical approach to reducing intergroup conflict. Furthermore, research has shown that members of non-dominant groups who show an eager desire to assimilate can still evoke ire and violent intentions among those high in social dominance orientation (Thomsen et al., 2008), meaning there is no guarantee that assimilating members of non-dominant groups will actually be welcomed with open arms. Finally, forced assimilation directly undermines all of the well-documented benefits that diversity can bring to societies and organizations (e.g., Galinsky et al., 2015). As such, pursuing the forced assimilation of non-dominant groups to preempt the dominant group discomfort we highlight here will lead to negative outcomes for nearly everyone involved.

A similarly tempting strategy would be to encourage greater intergroup contact, one of the most well-evidenced strategies for improving intergroup tolerance (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The findings presented here, however, highlight an important challenge to this approach, as prototypicality threat leads members of dominant groups to avoid the very contact they would benefit from. Perhaps, therefore, the best strategy to reduce intolerance is to reframe the superordinate category in a way that does not deny or replace the norms of the dominant group but expands them to be more inclusive of multiple groups. Similar suggestions have been made in the past to reduce the degree to which members of dominant groups can lay claim to representing their superordinate category (Alexandre et al., 2016; Danbold & Bendersky, 2020; Waldzus et al., 2003). Although this approach also risks threatening members of dominant groups in the short term, encouraging people to see prototypicality as non-zero-sum may ultimately be the best long-term strategy to encourage the tolerance, or even celebration, of sustained intergroup difference.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material is available online with this article.

Notes

1. Our focus on prototypicality threat at the intergroup level (i.e., groups nested within a shared superordinate category) also distinguishes it from research on prototypicality concerns examined at the level of individuals within a group (e.g., men thinking about their relative masculinity; Maass et al., 2003; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001).
2. There was no significant relationship between prototypicality threat and attitudes toward transfer students or out-of-state students.

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