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Anthony Micale am387@uakron.edu

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Antecedents to Self-Perceived White Privilege and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

Anthony M. Micale

Department of Psychology, University of Akron

Author Note

Anthony M. Micale, Department of Psychology, University of Akron.

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Address correspondence concerning this article to Anthony Micale at am387@uakron.edu.

Abstract

White privilege in organizational settings often gives White employees an undeserved edge over employees of color. The current study functioned to determine the precursors to self-awareness of one's White privilege, specifically focusing on participants' multicultural experiences as well as personal and parental education levels. Increased self-awareness of White privilege was also suspected to increase the frequency of engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). Finally, White privilege attitudes were hypothesized to mediate the relationship between multicultural experience and OCBs. White participants (N = 98) were asked to complete an online questionnaire designed to assess multicultural experience, self-perceptions of White privilege, and engagement in OCBs, as well as a demographics survey. Results indicated that multicultural exposure correlated positively with recognition of White privilege. However, multicultural interaction and education levels did not correlate with self-awareness of White privilege. Similarly, White privilege showed little evidence of mediation between multicultural experience and engagement in OCBs. Nevertheless, in line with previous research was the finding that White privilege predicted engagement in OCBs. Further research is needed to identify antecedents to self-awareness of White privilege in order to increase organizational justice and boost engagement in OCBs.

Keywords: White privilege, self-perceptions, organizational citizenship behaviors, multicultural experience, education, organizational justice

Antecedents to Self-Perceived White Privilege and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

The journey towards social equality in the workplace has yielded inconclusive results in the pursuit of identifying the source of organizational injustice. Such a quest has, over time, unveiled a plethora of deeply complex interactions between one's cultural exposure, characteristic attributes, and personal beliefs of oneself in the workplace. The interactions of cultural exposure and individual demographics, specifically with respect to personal and parental education, are believed to be contributing factors in the self-appraisal of one's White privilege. Self-perception of one's White privilege has been shown to be related to organizational citizenship behaviors (Shuck et al., 2016). The overarching interplay of multicultural experiences and demographics are proposed antecedents to the self-evaluation of White privilege.

The notion that exposure to different cultures could have the propensity to influence evaluations of White privilege is not a new concept, but the method of measuring such exposure is a rather recent development. Specifically, Aytug et al. (2018) devised a method of capturing dimensions of cultural exposure, referred to as multicultural experience, via the Multicultural Experiences Assessment Scale (MExA). The MExA seeks to evaluate the frequency of multicultural experiences using two classifications: multicultural exposure and multicultural interaction (see Appendix B). Multicultural exposure refers to every occurrence of an individual perceiving, but not interacting with, a component of a different culture. Multicultural exposure could refer to an individual hearing others speaking in a foreign language, watching foreign celebrations, or consuming foreign cuisine. Multicultural interaction represents all verbal or non-verbal communication and behavior that is reciprocated between an individual person and members of foreign cultures, indicating that such experiences must go beyond simple sensory awareness. For example, multicultural interaction could be manifested in the form of mingling

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with people of a different culture, electronic or written correspondence with a person of a foreign culture or sharing personal emotions with a person from another culture. The MExA is used to assess individuals' multicultural experience, as it is believed to positively contribute to individuals' perceptions of White privilege. Multicultural experience may affect White privilege perceptions which result in various reactions and behaviors. To measure the extent of these interrelated dimensions of White privilege, a multidimensional measurement scale is necessary and described as follows.

For the purposes of this study, White privilege is defined as "unearned advantages of being White in a racially stratified society and has been characterized as an expression of institutional power that is largely unacknowledged by most White individuals" (Neville et al., 2001). Self-awareness of one's own White privilege has the potential to elicit intense reactions along emotional, cognitive, and behavioral strata, referred to as White privilege attitudes and quantified by the White Privilege Attitudes Scale (WPAS) (Pinterits et al., 2009). The White Privilege Attitudes Scale is employed to evaluate four facets of White privilege attitudes, as follows: Willingness to Confront White privilege, Anticipated Costs of Addressing White Privilege, White Privilege Awareness, and White Privilege Remorse (see Appendix C). In combination, these four aspects constitute White Privilege in the present study, and are intended to assess behavioral, cognitive, and affective responses of White privilege attitudes in individuals. Affective dimensions of White privilege attitudes include, but are not limited to, fear or apprehension, guilt or shame, and anger as a defense mechanism. Similarly, cognitive elements of White privilege attitudes lie on a continuum, ranging from a denial and minimization of White privilege to critical consciousness of the phenomenon, which includes invoking change at personal and systematic dimensions. Furthermore, behavioral aspects of White privilege

attitudes rest on a continuum spanning from avoidance or refusal to acknowledge the reality of White privilege to aspirations and efforts to address and deconstruct White privilege. For the sake of this study, an extension is made to apply data from the WPAS to a workplace setting in order to determine the level of influence an individual's attitudes of White privilege have on their willingness to partake in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs).

Organizational citizenship behaviors are described as representing "individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization" (Organ, 1988). In order to understand what is considered citizenship behavior, Williams & Anderson's (1991) Task Performance Scale first evaluates in-role behavior, or objective measures of job performance in a work context (See Appendix D). Next, OCBs, also known as extra-role behaviors, are typically characterized into two general categories. First, there are OCBs that are directed at the organization (OCBO). Such behaviors include an employee offering early notification when he or she is unable to be present at work or following rules that promote a general sense of order. The second category of OCBs describes those behaviors that are directed at particular people in the organization (OCBI), as well as secondarily benefiting the organization itself. Behaviors of this category include assisting colleagues who have been away from work or taking a genuine interest in other individuals at the organization. The extent to which a participant engages in OCBs are measured via the Task Performance Scale, as developed by Williams & Anderson (1991). Based on the constructs and scales reviewed, it is hypothesized that:

H₁: Individuals with more cultural exposure and education are more likely to recognize
 White privilege.

- H₂: Individuals who are more apt to recognize White privilege are more likely to engage in OCBs.
- H₃: White privilege mediates the relationship between cultural exposure and OCBs.

This hypothesis is summarized in the following model:

Cultural Exposure
$$\rightarrow$$
 White Privilege \rightarrow OCBs

Method

Participants

100 undergraduate students participated in this experiment: 29 men, 69 women, 1 individual who identified as gender variant/non-conforming and 1 individual whose identity was not listed. To be eligible, it was required that the participant's race be White and the participant be at least 18 years of age. Participants were recruited from the Introduction to Psychology subject pool and completed the survey via the Psychology Research Participation System at the University of Akron. Participants ranged from 18 to 64 years of age, with 91% of participants reporting their age in the range of 18-24 years old, 4% ranged from 25-34 years old, 2% ranged from 35-44 years old, 1% ranged 45-54 years old, and 2% ranged 55-64 years old. Participants were compensated for their engagement in the experiment in the form of course credit and were fully aware of the incentive.

Materials and Apparatus

A survey was prepared for electronic delivery via Qualtrics. The first section of the survey served to gather demographic information, specifically to collect data related to the

participants' age, gender, and the level of participant's personal education as well as education level of participants' parental unit or units. The second section utilized the Multicultural Experiences Assessment Scale in order to evaluate participants' multicultural experience, including both multicultural exposure and interaction. Third, the White Privilege Attitudes Scale was administered to appraise participants' self-perceptions of White privilege. The final part of the survey employed Williams and Anderson's (1991) Task Performance Scale to assess participants' probability of engaging in OCBs.

Procedure

Participants were first asked for their consent to participate in the electronic survey.

During testing, all participants were given the same instructions. Participants were instructed to carefully complete the survey in its entirety to the best of their knowledge and ability.

Participants were assured that their data would be kept secure and strictly confidential.

Additionally, participants were fully informed of the risks associated with completing the survey.

All participants were reminded that they reserve the right to opt out of the survey at any time without penalty.

First, participants logged into the University of Akron's Psychology Research

Participation System to access the online survey. Next, participants completed the first section of
the survey by providing their demographic information, relating to age, gender, personal and
parental education levels (see Appendix A). Participants then completed the Multicultural

Experiences Scale as designed by Aytug et al. (2018). In addition to answering questions about
the frequency of multicultural experiences, participants also answered questions about the
breadth and duration of their multicultural experiences. This was done by having participants
write-in the cultures to which they had been exposed via the experiences mentioned in the

MExA, and for how long they had been exposed to such experiences, if at all. After responding to all parts of the MExA, participants moved on to the next part of the study. The third section tasked participants with completing the White Privilege Attitudes Scale as formulated by Pinterits et al. (2009), and then continued to the final section of the survey. Lastly, participants responded to Williams and Anderson's (1991) Task Performance Scale before submitting the survey. After testing was completed, participants were, again, debriefed about the purpose of the study.

Results

Of the 100 participants that completed the survey, two participants' data were excluded from analysis because they were found to be incomplete. It is worth noting that there does not seem to be any significant gender or age differences in the variables of this study (see Table 1). Analyses corresponding to each hypothesis are as follows.

H1

It was hypothesized that individuals with more cultural exposure and education are more likely to recognize White privilege. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient indicates no significant relationship between White privilege attitudes and personal education, showing a lack of support for the hypothesis (see Table 1). Interestingly, a statistically significant finding established a positive correlation between White privilege and multicultural exposure, r(96) = .25, p = .01. Consistent with the hypothesis, this finding indicates that a higher degree of multicultural exposure is related to an increased likelihood of White privilege recognition. However, no correlation of significance was established between multicultural interaction or education level and White privilege, thus suggesting a degree of independence between

multicultural experiences, education, and awareness of White privilege. Finally, although it was not hypothesized, it is worth noting that a negative relationship was found to exist between personal education level and OCBOs, implying that the more educated participants are, the less likely they were to exhibit OCBOs, r(96) = -.21, p = .04. While the data does not support the hypothesis overall, it is worth noting that the relationship between multicultural exposure and White privilege signifies a need for further testing.

Table 1

Correlations Examining the Relation of the WPAS to Multicultural Exposure, Multicultural Interaction, OCBIs, OCBOs, and Demographics

Variable	Multicultural Exposure	Multicultural Interaction	White Privilege	OCBI	ОСВО	Mean (SD)	α
Multicultural Exposure						14.98 (5.48)	.82
Multicultural Interaction	.57**					13.77 (6.16)	.96
White Privilege	.25*	.15				11.78 (1.97)	.47
OCBI	.39**	.21*	.63**			23.57 (3.12)	
OCBO	.17	.32**	.32**	.24*		16.48 (3.99)	
Age	.11	11	11	.02	.02	1.19 (0.71)	
Gender	.50	.13	02	06	14	1.31 (0.46)	
Personal Education	.15	.15	07	.14	21*	1.35 (0.48)	
Parent A Education	04	04	.05	03	05	1.33	

(0.47)

Parent B Education	16	05	06	12	18	1.43	
						(0.49)	

Note. N = 98. OCBI = Organizational Citizenship Behaviors directed toward Individuals. OCBO = Organizational Citizenship Behaviors directed toward an Organization. Analysis used was Pearson's r correlations. Age was provided in ranges, with 1 = 18-24 years old, 2 = 25-34 years old, 3 = 35-44 years old, 4 = 45-54 years old, and 5 = 55-64 years old. Education was a dichotomous variable, with 1 = attended college and 2 = did not attend college. Gender was a dichotomous variable, with 1 = female and 2 = male. $p \le 0.05$, $p \le 0.01$.

H2

It was hypothesized that individuals who are more apt to recognize White privilege are more likely to engage in OCBs. Consistent with this hypothesis, a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient demonstrated a strong positive relationship, which suggests that participants who reported high levels of self-perceived White privilege were more likely to engage in OCBIs, r(96) = .63, p < .01. A statistically significant correlation with OCBOs and self-perceptions of White privilege, r(96) = .32, p = .01 was also uncovered. Although both correlations were significant, the decision to keep the variables of OCBI and OCBO separate underscored a clearly stronger correlation between OCBIs and White privilege awareness that was found to a much lesser degree with OCBOs. Combining the variables into one scale would have blurred this distinction.

H3

It was hypothesized that White privilege mediates the relationship between cultural exposure and OCBs. After running mediation analyses with PROCESS from Hayes (2013), there does not appear to be any evidence of an indirect effect of mediation on OCBOs or OCBIs. The

indirect effect was tested using a percentile bootstrap estimation approach with 5000 samples. Results indicated that White privilege awareness was not a significant predictor of OCBOs, B = .02, SE = .01, 95%CI[-.02,.04], or OCBIs, B = .04, SE = .02, 95%CI[-.04,.09]. Since confidence intervals include zero, the hypothesized mediation is not supported. Thus, it appears multicultural exposure is not enacting its effect on OCBIs or OCBOs through awareness of White privilege.

Discussion

Addressing White privilege in organizations could benefit people of color by mitigating the effects of injustice and partiality in the workplace, as well as organizations as a whole by way of OCBIs and OCBOs. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the variables that may contribute to attitudes of White privilege as well as how such attitudes might affect workplace behaviors in the form of OCBs. There are three key findings of the present research. First, the results of this study did not show overall support for a relationship between the factors of multicultural experience, personal education, and parental education with selfperceptions of White privilege. Interestingly, results indicated a significant correlation between multicultural exposure and White privilege but reported no such relationship between multicultural interaction and White privilege. The correlation between multicultural exposure and White privilege is promising because it implies that a significant and potentially valuable relationship exists that may not have been totally encompassed by the measures employed in this study. Nevertheless, further research is needed to clarify such relationships. Lastly, there was no evidence in support of the hypothesis that higher levels of education would predict recognition of White privilege. This could be due in large part to an unknown third variable that was not accounted for in the correlational research design used to investigate this hypothesis.

The second key finding of this investigation demonstrated evidence in support of the notion that individuals who are more apt to recognize White privilege are at an increased likelihood of engaging in OCBs. Not only was the hypothesis supported by the results, but it is also consistent with previous research on the same topic (Shuck et al., 2016). In the present study, while White privilege attitudes correlated with both OCBIs and OCBOs, the strength of the relationship was nearly twice as strong between White privilege and OCBIs than it was between White privilege and OCBOs. This finding may be explained by Field Theory (Pratkanis & Turner, 2019). In this case, Field Theory would posit that awareness of the dynamic interrelationships between individuals and the implications of privilege strongly contribute to individuals' inclination to behave in ways that assist other associates in the workplace rather than the organization. While the inherent nature of a correlational research design does not shed light on the question of causality, it provides strong rationale in favor of more extensive future research to determine what specifically about one's awareness of White privilege warrants an increase in OCBIs at a higher degree than OCBOs.

The final key finding of this inquiry showed a lack of evidence of mediation by self-awareness of White privilege. Results fail to support the hypothesis that self-awareness of White privilege mediates the relationship between multicultural experience and OCBs. This finding does not propose that self-awareness of White privilege is inconsequential to the variables under investigation. Rather, such an outcome simply indicates that multicultural experience is not enacting its effect on OCBIs or OCBOs through self-awareness of White privilege. It remains possible that another unobserved mediator exists, thus creating a need for future research.

Certain limitations of this study could be addressed in future research. First and foremost, the sample of the study was almost exclusively young, female respondents from a convenience

sample of undergraduate psychology students. Future research should seek out a sample more diverse in gender, age, and education level. Second, the White Privilege Attitudes Scale used in this study showed questionable reliability (α = .47), which may have wholly or in part affected the results and subsequent conclusions drawn from this investigation. Future research should seek out scales with higher consistency when measuring White privilege. Lastly, additional research should utilize an experimental research design in order to draw conclusions on causality, which were not present in the current study by use of its correlational methods. Despite these limitations, the current research provides clear support for a relationship between White privilege and OCBs. It also functions as a first step towards better understanding the antecedents to White privilege recognition and its intricate implications. A great deal of work remains to be done before a complete understanding of the extent of White privilege is established.

Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

- 1. What is your age?
 - a. 18-24 years old
 - b. 25-34 years old
 - c. 35-44 years old
 - d. 45-54 years old
 - e. 55-64 years old
 - f. 65-74 years old
 - g. 75 years or older
- 2. To which gender identity do you most identify?
 - a. Female

		b. Male			
		c. Transgender Female			
		d. Transgender Male			
		e. Gender Variant/Non-Conforming			
		f. Not Listed:			
		g. Prefer Not to Answer			
	3.	What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?			
		a. Some High School			
		b. High School/GED			
		c. Some College			
		d. Associate's Degree			
		e. Bachelor's Degree			
		f. Master's Degree			
		g. Ph.D. or Higher			
		h. Trade School			
		i. Prefer Not to Answer			
	4.	What is the highest degree or level of education your PARENTAL FIGURES have			
		completed?			
I.		Parent A:			
	a.	Some High School			
	b.	High School/GED			
	c.	Some College			
	d.	Associate's Degree			

- e. Bachelor's Degree
- f. Master's Degree
- g. Ph.D. or Higher
- h. Trade School
- i. Prefer Not to Answer
- j. Not Applicable
- II. Parent B:
 - a. Some High School
 - b. High School/GED
 - c. Some College
 - d. Associate's Degree
 - e. Bachelor's Degree
 - f. Master's Degree
 - g. Ph.D. or Higher
 - h. Trade School
 - i. Prefer Not to Answer
 - j. Not Applicable

Appendix B

Multicultural Experiences Assessment Scale (Aytug et al., 2018)

Instructions: Please read these important notes before you answer the questions:

• In this survey, "culture" refers to cultures of countries. For example, Italian culture, French culture, Kenyan culture.

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• Please choose one culture as your primary/dominant culture, even if you are bicultural or

multicultural. In this survey, "foreign or different culture" means any culture other than

the primary culture you chose.

Please respond to the statements using the following 6-point Likert-type scale:

1 = never; 2 = once a year or less frequently; 3 = 2-11 times a year; 4 = 1-3 times a month; 5 = 1-3 times a month

1-6 days a week; and 6 = every day or multiple times a day.

Multicultural Exposure Items

Frequency: How frequently do you:

1. Watch movies that take place in different cultures?

2. Read books about foreign people?

3. Listen to music of foreign cultures?

4. Watch foreign TV channels?

5. Watch different cultures' celebrations (e.g., festivals, parades) on TV?

6. See art (e.g., plays, opera, architecture, sculpture, paintings) of foreign cultures?

Multicultural Interaction Items

Frequency: How frequently do you:

1. Talk to people from different cultures?

2. Socialize with people from different cultures?

3. Share feelings with people from different cultures?

4. Communicate via writing (e.g., emails, text, messages, instant messaging) with people

from different cultures?

Additional questions were posed to assess the *duration* and *breadth* of exposure and interaction, as follows. To assess *duration*, respondents were asked to approximate the number of years that they have engaged in each activity.

• This question used the following 6-point Likert scale: 1 = never; 2 = 0-1 year ago; 3 = 1-2 years ago; 4 = 2-5 years ago; 5 = 5-10 years ago; 6 = 10 years ago or more.

To assess *breadth* of exposure and interaction, respondents were asked to write-in the cultures to which they are exposed via the activities presented.

Appendix C

White Privilege Attitudes Scale (Pinterits et al., 2009)

Instructions: Please read this important note before you answer the questions:

• White privilege is defined as unearned advantages of being White in a racially stratified society and has been characterized as an expression of institutional power that is largely unacknowledged by most White individuals (Neville et al., 2001).

Please respond using the rating scale below:

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Somewhat Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree; 4 = Somewhat Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

- 1. I intend to work toward dismantling White privilege.
- 2. I want to begin the process of eliminating White privilege.
- 3. I take action to dismantle White privilege.
- 4. I have not done anything about White privilege.
- 5. I plan to work to change our unfair social structure that promotes White privilege.

- 6. I'm glad to explore my White privilege.
- 7. I accept responsibility to change White privilege.
- 8. I look forward to creating a more racially equitable society.
- 9. I take action against White privilege with people I know.
- 10. I am eager to find out about letting go of White privilege.
- 11. I don't care to explore how I supposedly have unearned benefits from being White.
- 12. I am curious about how to communicate effectively to break down White privilege.
- 13. I am anxious about stirring up bad feelings by exposing the advantages that Whites have.
- 14. I worry about what giving up White privilege means for me.
- 15. If I were to speak up against White privilege, I would fear losing my friends.
- 16. I am worried that taking action against White privilege will hurt my relationships with other Whites.
- 17. If I address White privilege, I might alienate my family.
- 18. I am anxious about the personal work I must do within myself to eliminate White privilege.
- 19. Everyone has equal opportunity, so this so-called White privilege is really White bashing.
- 20. White people have it easier than people of color.
- 21. Our social structure system promotes White privilege.
- 22. Plenty of people of color are more privileged than Whites.
- 23. I am ashamed that the system is stacked in my favor because I am White.
- 24. I am ashamed of my White privilege.
- 25. I am angry knowing I have White privilege.
- 26. I am angry knowing that I keep benefiting from White privilege.

- 27. White people should feel guilty about having White privilege.
- 28. I feel awful about White privilege.

Appendix D

Task Performance Scale (Williams and Anderson, 1991)

Instructions: Please respond to the statements using the following 5-point Likert-type scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Somewhat Disagree; 3 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree; 4 = Somewhat

Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree

The following statements concern your perceptions about your colleagues.

- 1. Adequately completes assigned duties.
- 2. Fulfills responsibilities specified in job description.
- 3. Performs tasks that are expected of him/her.
- 4. Meets formal performance requirements of the job.
- 5. Engages in activities that will directly affect his/her performance evaluation.
- 6. Neglects aspects of the job he/she is obligated to perform. (R)
- 7. Fails to perform essential duties. (R)
- 8. Helps others who have been absent.
- 9. Helps others who have heavy workloads.
- 10. Assists supervisor with her/her work (when not asked).
- 11. Takes time to listen to coworkers' problems and worries.
- 12. Goes out of way to help new employees.
- 13. Take a personal interest in other employees.
- 14. Passes along information to coworkers.

- 15. Attendance at work is above the norm.
- 16. Gives advance notice when unable to come to work.
- 17. Takes undeserved work breaks. (R)
- 18. Great deal of time spent with personal phone conversations. (R)
- 19. Complains about insignificant things at work. (R)
- 20. Conserves and protects organizational property.
- 21. Adheres to informal rules devised to maintain order.

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