



Research Proposal:

Can the prosocial power of gratitude dismantle privilege?

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Introduction

Gratitude

- **State Gratitude:** A transient feeling of gratefulness, distinct from other positive social emotions (Layous et al., 2017)
- **Trait Gratitude:** A personality measurement that assesses how much people feel gratitude in their day to day lives (Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley, et al., 2008)

Gratitude and Prosocial Behavior

- Participants in a gratitude condition exerted more effort to perform a favor for a stranger than in a control condition (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006)
- Participants gave more money to a confederate after the confederate did them a favor (Tsang, 2006)
- High levels of trait gratitude predict an increase in both charitable donations and returns in an incentivized trust game (Yost-Dubrow & Dunham, 2018)

Dismantling White Privilege in the United States

- When taught about white privilege in the U.S., whites have been shown to:
 - 1) Claim more personal hardships
 - 2) Deny that the advantage is unearned
 - 3) Acknowledge the existence of a problem, but continue to knowingly benefit from their white privilege (Phillips & Lowery, 2018)
- When asked to give up a portion of a bonus that they received due to white privilege, whites will redistribute less money when reminded of their *individual* privilege, relative to when reminded of their *group* privilege (Rosette & Zhou Koval, 2018)

The Present Study

This study investigates if the previously demonstrated prosocial effects of both state and trait gratitude are replicated when the opportunity to engage in prosocial behavior is framed in a political context, specifically that of equity restoration between blacks and whites in the contemporary United States.

Hypotheses

- **For trait gratitude:** Trait gratitude will positively correlate with the amount of money given up for redistribution in both conditions.
- **For state gratitude:** Participants in the gratitude condition will give up more money for redistribution on average than participants in the control condition.

Methods

Participants

- $N = 200$, recruited using Amazon Mechanical Turk
- 100% white
- $M_{age} = ?$, $SD_{age} = ?$
- ?% female

Procedure

- To avoid priming effects from the Gratitude Questionnaire, the experiment will be conducted in two online sessions of 5-10 minutes each, scheduled 7 days apart
- Each session is administered as an online survey that participants can independently access using a link emailed to them by experimenters

Session One:

Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6) (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002)

"I have so much in life to be thankful for." (1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree)

Demographic Questionnaire

Self-report questionnaire collecting demographic information including gender, education level, income, and political orientation

Randomized into two conditions:

Session Two:

Gratitude Condition (N=100)

"Counting Blessings" listing exercise (Emmons & McCullough, 2003)

"There are many things in our lives, both large and small, that we might be grateful for. Reflect on this week and list 5 things you are grateful for, and briefly explain why."

Manipulation Check (Lambert et al., 2012)

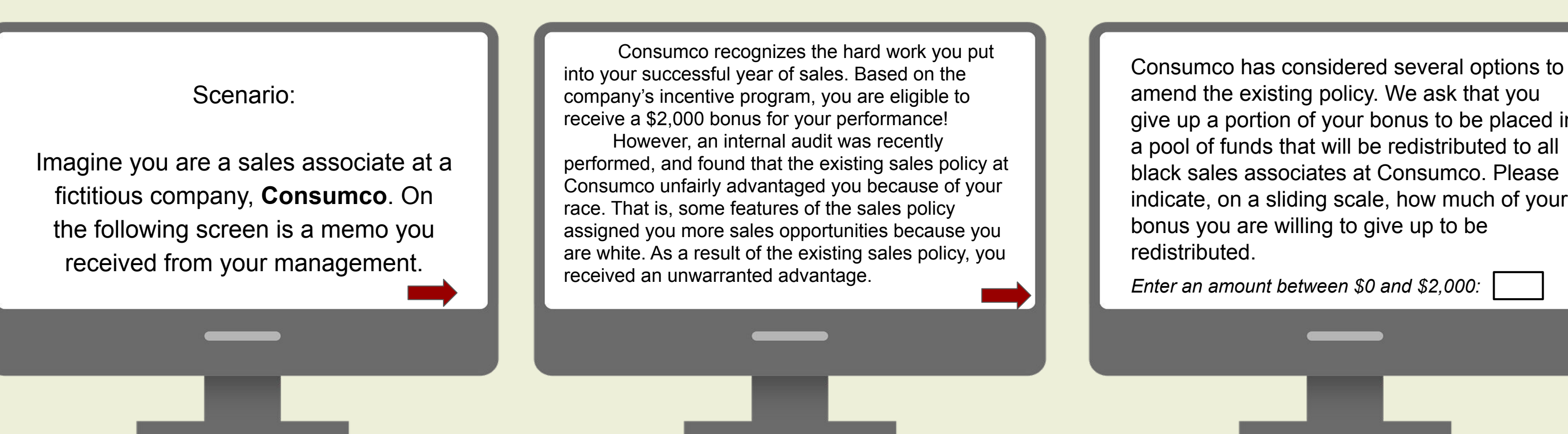
"Right now I feel a profound sense of gratitude." (1=Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree)

Control Condition (N=100)

"Neutral Life Events" listing exercise (Emmons & McCullough, 2003)

"What were some of the events or circumstances that affected you in the past week? Think back over the past week and describe the five events that had an impact on you."

Inequity Scenario (all participants) (Rosette & Zhou Koval, 2018)



Analysis Strategy

- 1) Perform a manipulation check to confirm if the "Counting Blessings" exercise induces state gratitude
- 2) Utilize a t-test to identify if the gratitude and control conditions differ significantly in the amount given up
- 3) For each condition, run a correlational analysis on the relationship between trait gratitude and amount of money given up
- 4) For each condition, run a linear regression, controlling for political orientation, gender, education level, and income level

Conclusions

- This is the first study to connect gratitude research with research on social privilege and will hopefully promote more inquiry into the potentially remedial effects of gratitude in political contexts
- We designed this study to be done online in anticipation of long term social distancing recommendations. Future studies should look at the relationship between state gratitude and equity restoration by using in-person gratitude manipulations.

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