CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO: SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION THEORY AND IMPRESSIONS OF ACTIVISTS

BY

MIKAELA K. SPRUILL

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Approved By:

Catherine E. Seta, Ph.D., Advisor

Lisa Kiang, Ph.D., Chair

Gregory S. Parks, J.D., Ph.D.

John V. Petrocelli, Ph.D.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES, AND TABLES........................................................................ iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS............................................................................. v
ABSTRACT...................................................................................................... vi
INTRODUCTION ..............................................................................................1
  The Study of Impression Formation: Classic research ............................... 5
  The Adventurous or Reckless “Donald” Impression Formation Task........ 7
  Social Categorization and Impression Formation......................................9
  The Present Research ............................................................................. 11
METHOD .........................................................................................................15
  Participants and Design........................................................................... 15
  Materials ................................................................................................. 16
  Procedure ............................................................................................... 18
RESULTS .........................................................................................................20
  Manipulation Check .............................................................................. 20
  Impression Analysis ............................................................................. 20
  Ratings of the Target Individuals ............................................................ 21
  Ratings of the Ambiguous Behaviors ...................................................... 24
  Evaluative Personality Traits .................................................................. 25
DISCUSSION ....................................................................................................28
  Limitations, Implications and Future Directions ...................................... 31
  Conclusions ............................................................................................ 33
REFERENCES ................................................................................................ 34
APPENDIX ......................................................................................................38
CURRICULUM VITAE .................................................................................... 44
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

FIGURES
1 Two Way Interaction: System Justification Motive by System Threat Condition ..........5
2 Predicted Effect of System Threat on the Impression Formation of an Activist ..........13
3 Effect of System Threat on the “Adventurous/Reckless” Impression Formation of Activists ...........22

TABLES
I Adventurous/Reckless Rating Descriptive Statistics ..................................................21
II Target Rating Descriptive Statistics ..............................................................................23
III Negative Evaluative Personality Traits Descriptive Statistics .....................................26
IV Positive Evaluative Personality Traits Descriptive Statistics .....................................27
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Black Lives Matter</td>
<td>..................................................................BLM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>System Justification Motivation</td>
<td>..................................................................SJM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>System Justification Theory</td>
<td>..................................................................SJT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

Challenges to the societal status quo often garner partisan support along two sides: people who are for a cause and people who are against it. System justification motivations (SJM) serve as critical underlying factors in the maintenance of our current social system and the reception of challenges to the status quo (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). The current research built upon this understanding by investigating the influence of system justification motivation on the formation of impressions of sociopolitical activists. Our results indicated that under systemic challenge, the impression of the activist target was not significantly different from the non-activist target. However, when the system was affirmed, a strong positive impression of the activist target as was formed along an adventurous/reckless trait dimension, and the activist was also seen as more adventurous than non-activists in affirmation conditions. This work holds important implications for activists, suggesting that in contexts where the system they are working within is regarded positively, system challenging activists will be received in a positive manner. These results could directly impact how parties effectively communicate their stances in order to be heard by those that have opposing views.

Keywords: Social Justice, Person Perception/Impression
INTRODUCTION

From boldly defending the worth of Black Lives to openly expressing gentle “Me Too’s” in solidarity, it seems as if a large number of individuals within American society today have a sociopolitical cause that they personally hold dear. It is also evident that the social labels attached to these causes can lead to scrutiny from others that may affect whether or not we outwardly identify with being an activist for that cause (Yeung, Kay & Peach, 2014), as well as influence our impressions of the activists. While some causes seem to garner general support if not indifference, activism that pushes against the status quo tends to have a more polarizing effect on people.

System Justification Theory (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004) is especially relevant to the question of how expressions of sociopolitical beliefs affects perceptions of political activists. System justification theory states that individuals are motivated to believe that the social system they exist in is legitimate and fair. It is assumed to serve a palliative function, assuring even those that are disenfranchised by the status quo, that things are operating how they should be (Jost et al., 2004). The theory seeks to explain people’s tendency to maintain the current state of social systems that benefit some members of society over others. This status quo bias was explained in Baron & Jurney’s (1993) study which showed that participants were more likely to vote against enacting a new social reform than to vote to repeal that exact same reform once it passed. This preference for the status quo allows systems to maintain their structure. If opposition arises, people are expected to favor preserving the accepted traditions of the institution (Robinson & Kray, 2001; Baron & Jurney, 1993; O’Brien & Crandall, 2005). Individuals seem to be unaware that they are operating through this status quo bias and
may be impervious to its effects on their decisions (Schweitzer, 1994). System Justification Theory also highlights that social hierarchies are not solely reinforced by in-group favoritism, but also by positive evaluations from outgroup members – that is, disadvantaged groups that are actually harmed by the system at hand often offer positive evaluations that bolster the legitimacy of system’s structure (Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002; Hinkle & Brown, 1990, Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). System Justification is suggested as the motivated cognitive process by which existing social arrangements are legitimized, even at the expense of personal and sub-group interest (Jost et al., 2004).

Events or people that challenge the status quo of a system are believed to heighten the system justification motive and, similarly to a defense mechanism, lead to a bolstering of said system’s legitimacy (Kay & Freisen, 2011; Hafer, 2000). These system threats are events that potentially jeopardize the system’s legitimacy in some way, like foreign criticism or terrorist attacks. In the same way individuals respond defensively when personally threatened, when the system is threatened societies often uphold the legitimacy of the system defensively rather than addressing any pitfalls and correcting them. This defensive reaction is characterized by an increase in motivation to justify the actions of the system and view them as correct. The purpose of the present research is to investigate how this motive can lead to biased perceptions of political activists.

Prior research by Yeung, Kay and Peach (2014) has shown that system justifying motivations have an impact on our sentiments towards movements when the system at hand is challenged. They empirically tested if opposition to feminists is motivated by the threat that feminism presents to the legitimacy of the status quo. Through three studies, they observed how heightening the motive to justify the system by challenging it would
affect participant’s level of agreement with identical pro-equality statements attributed to a feminist or a non-feminist (Studies 1 and 2), as well as how participants’ system justification individual difference scores related to their agreement (Study 3). They found that agreement with the non-feminist target was unaffected by system justification motivation, but when the statements were attributed to a feminist, agreement decreased significantly, which they termed Anti-Feminist Backlash (Yeung et al. 2014). When participants’ motivation to justify the system was heightened, merely identifying a target’s involvement with a specific sociopolitical movement influenced their agreement with the targets’ views. This work drew a clear connection between activism and system justification, by highlighting that it is more than the cause itself that leads us to agree or disagree with a movement, but rather who is making the statement and the manner in which it is presented bears weight on our reception of that cause.

Understanding that the work of an activist may be perceived as a direct challenge to the current American system, our first research project (Spruill & Seta, 2017) similarly aimed to see if a relationship existed between system justification motivation and perceptions of a Black Lives Matter activist. We recognized that previous work in this area had not addressed how system justifying motivations directly impact the impressions formed of activists. It has been inferred from the research described above measuring agreement, but not directly assessed through measures of impressions. Thus, in our previous study, we hypothesized that challenging or affirming the system itself would influence individuals’ resultant impression of a BLM activist and non-activist target and investigated whether these impressions were affected by differences in system justification motivation. In their conclusion, Yeung, Kay and Peach (2014) questioned if
the Anti-Feminist Backlash they observed was due to the perceptions of systemic
criticism or the possibility of social change. Thus, we proposed that system justifying
motives would have an impact on our explicit perceptions of activism due to systemic
challenge. We hypothesized that there would be a three-way interaction between
individuals’ level of motivation to justify the system, whether or not the system was
challenged, and their reported perceptions of the targets. The predicted direction of this
interaction was that under systemic challenge, higher system justifying motives would
lead to less positive evaluations of BLM activists than non-activist targets. Additionally,
we also hypothesized that under challenge, lower system justifying motives would lead to
more positive evaluations of activists versus non-activists.

The participant’s system justifying motivations were measured as a function of
supposed challenge (or not) to the present social status quo; that is, participants were
assigned to conditions which manipulated the status of the system (challenge or
affirmation). They then evaluated a short biographical profile of a BLM activist or a non-
activist target and the positivity of their evaluations was assessed. This study revealed
that system threat had a significant influence on participants’ perceptions of both activist
and non-activist targets, as shown in Figure 1. It was originally hypothesized that
challenge would only lead to changes in the evaluation of activists, such that when a
system is challenged, higher system justifying motives would lead to less positive
evaluations of activists whereas lower system justifying motives lead to more positive
evaluations of only the activists. We did not expect that system justification motives
would influence impressions of non-activists. In preview, one purpose of the present
research is to further investigate whether this unexpected finding is an artifact of low power or is in fact veridical. We will discuss this issue in more depth, but it is useful to discuss some of the classic research on impression formation processes more generally prior to describing the present thesis experiment.

**The Study of Impression Formation: Classic research**

The assumption that context matters and humans selectively attend to pertinent external cues to make sense of their immediate environment is basic to the study of social cognition (Bargh & Pietromonaco, 1982). Relatively automatic processes involved in selective attention allow us to quickly form impressions about the state of our environments and the individuals surrounding us. The study of impression formation, heralded by Higgins, Rholes and Jones (1977), addressed how our impressions of ambiguous social environments can be influenced by explicit and implicit social cues.

Categorization of individuals upon the presentation of information about them can mediate later judgements of that person (Higgins et al., 1977). We naturally think of
others in terms of their group memberships, and through social categorization, we place them into meaningful groups that allow us to draw conclusions about who that person might be (Allport, 1954). This categorization occurs when we think of someone as a woman (versus a man) or Latinx (versus Asian or White). When a target individual is categorized with a distinct label, personal bias can influence the conclusions that are drawn about them. For example, when an average build African American man on break in a park was categorized as “lazy” by an observer in Bruner’s 1958 classic study, participants later recalled him as a “a big, healthy, Black sprawling idly in the park doing nothing all day” (see Higgins et al., 1977). The participant’s negative interpretation of the individual was primed by the word “lazy” and their resulting judgements were influenced by this concept and other related stereotypes. The observer’s statement increased the negative concept’s cognitive accessibility (Srull & Wyer, 1979). While forming their interpretation of the individual’s behavior, the negative concept “lazy” was more accessible and therefore more likely to be used to encode behavioral information about the target. The primed term colored their impression of the neutral target in a powerful way. Thus people incorporated the trait into their judgement of the individual, a process known as assimilation (DeCoster & Claypool, 2004). Similarly, in the present research, we assumed that labelling impression formation targets as activists would result in the assimilation of that target into relatively negative categories when perceivers’ motive to maintain existing societal structures were heightened. Activists’ approach to democracy are commonly thought of as self-interested, irrational, unreasonable or even extreme by political powers (Young, 2001). By labelling an individual who openly identifies with a system challenging ideology as an “activist,” we suspected that the
impression formed of this individual would reflect the associated concepts surrounding this categorization.

In order to capture this without exclusively relying on overt self-report, we employed Higgins, Rholes and Jones (1977) impression formation paradigm which asks participants to indicate their impressions of behaviors that can equally be viewed positively or negatively. Through an adaptation of the classic “Donald” impression formation task we aimed to tap into the relationship between system justification motivation and perceptions of activists.

The Adventurous or Reckless “Donald” Impression Formation Task

In 1977, Higgins, Rholes and Jones developed an impression formation task centered around one character, Donald. In their study they wrote a paragraph about a hypothetical target person (Donald) who exhibited a series of behaviors that were ambiguous in terms of several specific personality traits (for example, confidence or independence). This impression formation task allowed them to capture judgements of the target person and his individual behaviors in respect to several valenced primes that the participants were introduced to beforehand. The subsequent vignette was strategically written to contain four behavioral items that elicited each adjective at an equal proportion. It reads as follows:

“Donald spent a great amount of his time in search of what he liked to call excitement. He had already climbed Mt. McKinley, shot the Colorado rapids in a kayak, driven in a demolition derby, and piloted a jet-powered boat--without knowing very much about boats. He had risked injury, and even death, a number of times. Now he was in
search of new excitement. He was thinking, perhaps, he would do some skydiving or maybe cross the Atlantic in a sailboat (adventurous/reckless). By the way he acted one could readily guess that Donald was well aware of his ability to do many things well (self-confident/conceited). Other than business engagements, Donald's contacts with people were rather limited. He felt he didn't really need to rely on anyone (independent/aloof). Once Donald made up his mind to do something it was as good as done no matter how long it might take or how difficult the going might be. Only rarely did he change his mind even when it might well have been better if he had (persistent/stubborn)."

(Higgins et. al., 1977, p.145)

Each of the italicized statements blurred the lines between the two adjective poles, leaving the participants to come to their own conclusions. This paradigm allowed the researchers to see the influence that positive or negative personality trait primes can have on the impressions we form of others. This work helped establish the understanding that external factors unrelated to the target can directly influence our perceptions of that individual. This paradigm has since been applied to a broad range of research questions and various types of manipulations have been shown to influence whether people perceive Donald in terms of positive or negative traits (e.g. Banaji, Hardin, & Rothman, 1993; Devine, 1989; Martin, 1986; Herr, 1986).

The “adventurous or reckless” Donald paradigm was specifically chosen by L.L. Martin (1986) in his analysis of priming and its effect on later impressions. We followed
his lead on this focus. He reasoned that the adventurous/reckless trait dimension was semantically related to his primed concepts of being bold or foolhardy. He similarly assumed that the conceited/self-confident trait dimension was semantically related to his primed concepts of self-assurance and egotistical. The two other dimensions (independent/aloof, stubborn/persistent) were assumed to be evaluative affectively and were not descriptively related to the primes. The evaluative concepts were related the general positive or negative affective judgement produced by the primes, while the descriptive concepts captured the content along semantic dimensions that were specifically related to the content of the primes. Like Martin, we employed the “adventurous or reckless” Donald trait dimension which varied affectively (e.g., positive implications of adventurous) to be descriptively related to an activist performing the ambiguous behaviors in the vignette (e.g., skydiving). In contrast to Martin, the trait dimensions of “self-confident or conceited” was not semantically or descriptively related to the description of our target. Understanding that activists are commonly viewed as irrational and rebellious, the “adventurous or reckless” dimension was descriptively related to our research question, while the other trait dimensions were concluded to be evaluatively related to our research question. Utilizing the “adventurous or reckless” Donald paradigm with our social category of interest (activists) allowed us to create the target profiles (see Appendix B) that served as the impression formation task.

Social Categorization and Impression Formation

In order to illustrate the impact that social categorization has on the formation of impressions of others, Banaji, Hardin, & Rothman (1993) performed an experiment in which they altered the gender of a target by explicitly naming them either “Donna” or
“Donald”. They primed their participants with stereotypical traits for each gender, respectively and had the subjects rate them in terms of “dependence” and “aggression”. Specifically, they observed that exposure to stereotyped information influenced the participants’ impressions of a stereotype consistent target through assimilation. The target’s social category was shown to moderate the influence of the primed information on their impressions such that female targets were rated as more dependent following feminine-stereotyped primes than neutral primes and male targets were rated less dependent following feminine primes than neutral primes. Similar findings were observed for aggression such that, male targets were rated as more aggressive following masculine-stereotyped primes than neutral primes and female targets were rated less aggressive following masculine-stereotyped primes than neutral primes. Our general understanding of primes might have led us to assume that the stereotyped primes would have led the participants to rate all of the targets as more feminine in the first condition and all of the targets as masculine in the second condition; however, the target’s categorization resulted in polarized views of the targets. The target’s social category influenced the judgements produced about them.

Devine (1989) utilized racial categorization as the prime to see how the various labels for African Americans would influence impressions of a hostile Donald paradigm (Srull & Wyer, 1979). The social category was presented as a part of an unrelated task before the participants were asked to form an impression of a race-unspecified target. Completely out of their conscious control, the social category triggered stereotypic associations and the participants rated the target as more hostile than when they were shown neutral primes, implying that they linked African Americans and hostility
together. The stereotypes surrounding the social category were assimilated into the participants’ judgements of the race-unspecified target, meaningfully coloring what they concluded about the target’s character. These studies reinforce the notion that social judgments are influenced by contextual information while demonstrating that the social categories a target belongs to moderates the impressions formed about them. We do not form our impressions in a social vacuum, but rather, human beings utilize the information presented to us to create our judgements of other.

The current study aimed to subtly capture the impact of system justification motivation on the impressions and judgements we make of others. Thus, employing the classic Donald paragraph in our study allowed us to assess the interpretations and perceptions of the somewhat ambiguous behavior of impression formation targets. This research adapted this paradigm to study the influence of systemic threat on the interpretation of ambiguous behaviors performed by a target that is categorized as activist compared to an identical target that will not be described as an activist.

The Present Research

In the current study, we expected explicit identification as an “activist” within different system justifying contexts to influence impressions of the target. Since system justification motives influence our views and behaviors, we proposed that when the system is threatened, impressions of activists would tend to be more negative, in contrast to contexts in which the system was not threatened.

Therefore, we hypothesized that system justification motivation influences the impressions formed of sociopolitical activists. If system justification motivation is
activated through systemic challenge, we expected that the actions of activist targets would be judged more harshly than the same actions performed under situations in which the system is not challenged. Thus we expected a difference between challenge versus affirmation in the System Threat conditions when trait impressions of activists were measured. Specifically, we expected our activist target to be seen as more reckless under challenge conditions than under conditions of systemic affirmation. In contrast, we did not expect the challenge versus affirmation contexts to differentially influence “adventurous/reckless” impressions of non-activists (See Figure #1). This prediction is predicated on the assumption that SJM are constrained to specific targets. On the other hand, if these motives are more generalized, as we observed in the first year research, then impressions of non-activists would follow the same pattern of impressions found in the activist conditions.

Further, when the American status quo is affirmed, both the activist target and the non-activist targets were expected to have similar overall ratings on the evaluative adjective measures (conceited-self-confident, aloof-independent and stubborn-persistent). However, when the American status quo is challenged, the activist target may have more negative trait ratings on the evaluative adjectives, relative to the non-activist target. This would be consistent with the findings of the first year project research and indicate that the motivational impact of SJM generalizes beyond directly related targets.

Lastly, we will assess the impressions formed of the ambiguous behaviors themselves. Our aim is to capture whether or not the manipulations in this study distinctly impact the target impressions or if the ambiguous behaviors themselves influence the type of impression formed. This analysis is intended to help us distinguish what might be
driving the predicted effects. We predict that the individual behaviors will not show a significant difference in their ratings as a function of the manipulated independent variables of Target Activism and System Threat (see Figure #2). We hope this will clarify if the potential effects are directly related to the targets of interest or just broadly related to the ambiguous behaviors.

In sum, although Yeung et al., 2014 demonstrated that system justification motivation influences agreement with activists’ statements it is important to research how these motives influence perceptions of activists. In a society of polar opinions and increased collective action, understanding the effect of the social context in which we present our views could lead to better public reception of activist viewpoints. Negative emotional reactions, like anger, reduce citizens’ likelihood to compromise and be open to opposing views (MacKuen, Wolak, Keele, & Marcus, 2010). Our previous work aimed to capture the perceptions of activists through system justification theory; yet, the findings were inconclusive and we observed that system threat influenced evaluations of both activists and non-activists. One reason for this finding may have simply been a lack of

Figure 2: Predicted Effect of System Threat on the Impression Formation of Activists
significant power to detect a difference. In order to further develop this topic, the present thesis project employed an impression formation paradigm to see if differential views of activists are related to systemic threat. By capturing the influence of system challenge or affirmation, we hope this work will provide empirical evidence that differential views of activists may be formed when people feel that the status quo that they have grown accustomed to is being challenged to change.
METHOD

Participants and Design

In this study, 205 undergraduate college students from a private liberal-arts college in the southeast were recruited to participate in this study. Due to the nature of the research question regarding the American system, 22 subjects that were not born in the United States of America were removed from the study, leaving us with a total sample of 173 participants. Of the 173 participants, 80 participants indicated that they were male, 93 participants indicated that they were female and 0 indicated that they were non-binary when asked about their sex. 1 participant indicated that they were 17 years old, while the other 172 participants indicated that they were between the ages of 18-24 years old. Family household income was negatively skewed, with 131 of our participants indicating that their families made 80,000 or above in yearly income. The median income reported was “$100,000 to $149,999”. For their political ideology, 69 participants indicated that they had liberal leanings, 26 identified themselves as being in the middle of the political spectrum and 78 participants indicated that they had conservative leanings.

All subjects were recruited from Wake Forest University’s Introductory Psychology courses and they were each offered course credit in exchange for their participation. Each student was randomly assigned into one of two between subjects manipulated conditions for both Target Activism and System Threat, with the restriction that equal proportion of males and females were assigned to these conditions in order to ensure proportionate ratios of male: female participants.
This experimental study employed a 2 (Target Activism: Activist vs. Non Activist) × 2 (System Threat: system affirmation vs. system challenge) design. The target profiles and system threat conditions served as the manipulated variables. The primary dependent variable was assessed through the subjects’ evaluative impressions of the target based on a description that either explicitly categorized the target as an activist or a description that was neutral with no mention of activism.

Materials

The System Threat Manipulation. The study design includes two manipulated types of system context (system challenge versus affirmation), which were simulated through two similar, but different global opinion polls that expressed other foreign countries’ criticism or praise of the United States of America. Kay & Freisen (2011) explained that events like terrorist attacks or international criticism, jeopardize a nation’s legitimacy and are seen as system threats. In the same way individuals respond defensively when personally threatened, when the system is threatened societies often uphold the legitimacy of the system defensively rather than addressing any pitfalls and correcting them. Thus, in a context where the system has been threatened, motivation to justify the system is heightened (Kay & Freisen, 2011). The selected excerpts were both from the Pew Research Center and offered authentic international critique of the state of America, pointing to specific countries’ impressions of American political acts (see Appendix A). The excerpts were previously utilized (Spruill & Seta, 2017) and served as valid manipulations of system threat due to their descriptions of other nations views of America on social, political and economic fronts.
The Target Vignettes. Given the Donald paragraph and the ambiguous individual behaviors contained within it, the target vignettes (Appendix B) were developed to serve as the impression formation task for this study. As the central component of this thesis, it was critical that the profiles were developed to embody aspects of the Donald paragraph while simultaneously categorizing the targets with their social label clearly and succinctly. The ambiguous behaviors from the original impression formation task were specifically placed within the filler information in order to make a believable story. The unisex name Jaime, was selected as an attempt to avoid any strong gender-related stereotypes from influencing the results. The exact activist movement remained unidentified in the activist target’s vignette because various sociopolitical movements carry their own positive and negative connotations within American society. The profiles do make it clear that the activist engages in system-challenging activism. In making this decision we previously asked 106 undergraduate students how negatively and how positively they believed certain sociopolitical movements are viewed by society. We observed that the Black Lives Matter movement was believed to be viewed significantly more negatively ($M=2.42, SD=.93$) and less positively ($M=2.22, SD=.96$) by society than other causes, like the similar Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s (negative $M=1.58, SD=.80, t (102) = 8.47, p<.01$; positive $M=2.83, SD=.98; t (105) = -5.41, p<.01$). Therefore, we decided to simply use the label “activist,” in order to avoid unintentionally skewing their impressions of the target because of their personal beliefs for or against a certain cause.

As shown in the appendix, the two profiles are essentially identical, the only difference lies in the activist vignette where “Jaime” clearly self-identifies as an activist
and has three additional statements that describe his involvement and views on activism. These profiles merged the Donald paradigm with the social category of interest and were projected to serve as strong tools for assessing our hypothesis. With this methodological foundation, we hoped to capture the nuances of the hypothesized relationship and see if system justifying motives influenced the impressions of activists.

**Procedure**

Once they consented to the study, each participant completed the study through Qualtrics Online Research and Experience software. According to the condition that they had been assigned to, the participants received the appropriate system challenging or affirming article excerpt as a manipulation of system challenge or system affirmation. In the threat condition, a paragraph from a Pew Research Center (2008) article was presented to the participants that described America as being rated negatively by other nations in a global opinion poll. Conversely, in the affirmation condition, an excerpt of the Pew Research Center’s Global Opinion Poll from 2016 which rated America positively socially, politically and economically was utilized. By challenging or affirming the social system our participants subscribe to, we aimed to activate their motivation to justify the American system.

Then, the subjects indicated whether or not they would describe the individual as either: adventurous or reckless, stubborn or persistent, self-confident or conceited, independent or aloof. (Higgins et al., 1977) These evaluations had a clear positive and negative connotation and thus the selections along each trait dimension provided ratings of the target. These ratings of the target served as the primary dependent variables since they indicated whether the subject formed a positive or negative impression of the target.
Further, the participants were asked to rate their target along several evaluatively loaded and relevant personality traits, such as hostile, unfriendly, dislikable, selfish, narrow-minded, kind, considerate, dependable, interesting and thoughtful (Srull & Wyer, 1979). These traits were captured along a 5-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). The evaluative ratings of the target’s individual behaviors on the specified personality traits were analyzed through a multivariate analysis of variance detailed in the results below.

Lastly, to assess the impact of the ambiguous behaviors, the subjects were asked to indicate how they would describe the behaviors along the trait dimensions: adventurous or reckless, stubborn or persistent, self-confident or conceited, independent or aloof (Higgins et al., 1977). By analyzing both the ratings of the target and the ratings of the individual ambiguous behaviors we were able to see a holistic picture of the judgements the subjects made and how those judgements were influenced by activist categorization.
RESULTS

Manipulation Check

Evaluations of the international ratings of the American system demonstrated that the manipulation of System Threat was successful. In the affirmation condition \((n = 90)\), the non-threatening excerpt of the international poll’s evaluation \((M = 3.92, SD=0.61)\) was significantly different than the challenge condition’s \((n = 83)\) evaluation of their system threatening excerpt of their international poll \((M = 2.27, SD=0.61)\), \(t(171) = 17.71, p < .01\). These differences suggest that the current status of the United States was believed to be viewed positively by other foreign powers in the affirmation condition, whilst in the challenge condition, the U.S. was believed to be viewed negatively by the other foreign powers, as intended by our manipulation.

Impression Analysis

The primary analysis consisted of 2 × 2 between-participant ANOVAs with each of the four valenced target ratings as dependent variables, and System Threat (system affirmation vs. system challenge) and Target Activism (Activist vs. Non Activist) as independent variables\(^1\). The target ratings were highly correlated with one another which led us to decide to conduct four univariate analyses rather than one multivariate analysis in order to avoid losing degrees of freedom and ultimately, statistical power.

\(^1\) When gender was included as a covariate in the univariate analysis, no significant effects were observed. Therefore, all further analyses excluded gender as a factor.
Ratings of the Target Individuals

The first univariate analysis was performed on the adventurous/reckless rating on the target Jaime and no significant main effects were observed for either System Threat, \( F(1, 169) = 1.81, p=0.18 \), or Target Activism, \( F(1, 169) = 1.51, p=0.22 \). See Table I for all of the cell means for this analysis. However, this analysis revealed a significant interaction between Target Activism and System Threat, \( F(1, 169) = 5.75, p=.02, \eta^2=.03 \). Simple effects analysis for the reckless/adventurous interaction revealed a significant difference in the impression formed of the activist and non-activist targets in the affirmation condition, \( F(1, 169) = 6.88, p=.01 \), such that more positive impressions of the activist were formed (\( M=6.49, SE=0.19 \)) than the impressions of the non-activist (\( M=5.80, SE=0.19 \)). The simple effects analysis for the target impressions in the challenge condition was not significant, \( F(1, 169) = 0.80, p=0.37 \).

Four planned pairwise contrasts were performed between the four individual conditions. These contrasts revealed a significant difference in the impressions formed between the activist and non-activist targets in the affirmation condition (\( t(169) =-2.63, p<0.01 \)), as well as a significant difference in the impressions formed between the activist

### Table I: Adventurous/Reckless Rating Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SJM Condition</th>
<th>Target Condition</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adventurous/Reckless</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>1.392</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>.727</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.414</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>1.347</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
target in the affirmation condition and non-activist targets in the challenge condition ($t(169) = 2.70, p<0.01$). There was not a significant difference in the impressions formed between the activist and non-activist targets in the challenge condition ($t(169) = 0.80, p=0.42$), nor was there a significant difference in impression formed of the activist in the affirmation condition and the non-activist target in the challenge condition ($t(169) = -0.72, p=0.47$). This pattern of data is shows that the activist is seen as more adventurous than the non-activist under systemic affirmation, as well as being seen as more adventurous than the activist and non-activist targets under systemic challenge. Both of these patterns of effects contribute to the interaction shown below in Figure #3.

![Observed Effect of Systemic Threat on "Adventurous or Reckless" Target Impression](image.png)

**Figure 3:** Effect of System Threat on the “Adventurous/Reckless” Impression Formation of Activists

The other trait ratings of the target were analyzed identically to the adventurous/reckless trait dimension through univariate analysis. The observed main effects of System Threat for each rating were insignificant (stubborn/persistent, $F(1, 169)=0.92, p=.34, \eta^2=.005$, conceited/self-confident, $F(1, 169)=1.20, p=.28, \eta^2=.007$
aloof/independent \( F(1, 169)=1.74, p=.19, \eta^2=.010 \) and the observed main effects of Target Activism for each rating were also insignificant (stubborn/persistent, \( F(1, 169)=1.50, p=.22, \eta^2=.009 \), conceited/self-confident, \( F(1, 169)=0.99, p=.32, \eta^2=.006 \),

### Table II: Target Rating Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SJM Condition</th>
<th>Target Condition</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adventurous/Reckless</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>1.392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>.727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.414</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>1.347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistent/Stubborn</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>1.735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>1.638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>1.510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>1.628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Confident/Conceited</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>1.684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>1.408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>1.630</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>1.583</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent/Aloof</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>1.451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
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<td>1.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>5.79</td>
<td>1.277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>1.403</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
aloof/independent $F(1, 169) = 1.74, p = .19, \eta^2 = .010$). Converse to the adventurous/reckless trait dimension, these trait target ratings did not yield significant interactions between Target Activism and System Threat (stubborn/persistent, $F(1, 169) = 0.11, p = .74, \eta^2 = .001$ conceived/self-confident, $F(1, 169) = 0.73, p = .40, \eta^2 = .004$ aloof/independent $F(1, 169) = 1.33, p = .25, \eta^2 = .008$). Although only the interaction term for the reckless/adventurous target rating reached significance, we note that three other target ratings were descriptively in the same direction, with the activist target in the affirmation condition obtaining the highest mean. Table #2 shows all of the cell means for each of the ratings.

**Ratings of the Ambiguous Behaviors**

To gain clarity on the effect of rating the target person versus rating the ambiguous behaviors themselves, the four ratings of the ambiguous behaviors were also assessed via four univariate 2 x 2 between participant ANOVAs and revealed no significant main effects or interactions of the independent variables on the dependent variables. Specifically, for the univariate analysis performed on the reckless/adventurous rating of the statement “*Now I am in search of new excitement. I’m thinking, perhaps, I would do some skydiving or maybe cross the Atlantic in a sailboat...*” no significant main effects (System Threat, $F(1, 169) = .001, p = .98, \eta^2 = .000$; Target Activism, $F(1, 169) = 1.08, p = .30, \eta^2 = .006$) or interactions, $F(1, 169) = 0.42, p = .52, \eta^2 = .002$, were observed. For the univariate analysis performed on the conceited/self-confident rating of the statement “*By the way he acted one could readily guess that Jaime was well aware of his ability to do many things well,*” no significant main effects (System Threat, $F(1, 169) = 1.05, p = .31, \eta^2 = .006$; Target Activism, $F(1, 169) = 0.05, p = .82, \eta^2 = .000$) or
interactions, $F(1, 169) = 0.01, p=0.91, \eta^2 = .000$, were observed. For the univariate analysis performed on the aloof/independent rating of the statement “I feel like I don't really need to rely on anyone,” no significant main effects (System Threat, $F(1, 169) = 0.02, p=0.90, \eta^2 = .000$; Target Activism, $F(1, 169) = 0.42, p=0.52, \eta^2 = .002$) or interactions, $F(1, 169) = 1.36, p=0.25, \eta^2 = .008$, were observed. For the univariate analysis performed on the stubborn/persistent rating of the statement “Only rarely do I change my mind even when it might well have been better if I had,” no significant main effects (System Threat, $F(1, 169) = 0.38, p=0.54, \eta^2 = .002$; Target Activism, $F(1, 169) = 1.38, p=0.24, \eta^2 = .008$) or interactions, $F(1, 169) = 0.08, p=0.78, \eta^2 = .000$, were observed. These findings suggest that the manipulations did not influence the participants’ impressions of the behaviors themselves, but rather it impacted the participants’ impressions of the targets as a whole.

**Evaluative Personality Traits**

For the ten personality traits that the participants were asked to rate the target on (hostile, unfriendly, dislikable, selfish, narrow-minded, kind, considerate, dependable, interesting and thoughtful) we conducted a multivariate analysis of all ten traits. A significant main effect of target condition for the trait *unfriendly* was observed $F(1,169) = 8.22, p<0.01$. No other main effects or interactions were significant. The activist targets were rated as significantly less unfriendly ($M=1.19, SD=0.49$) than the non-activist targets ($M=1.47, SD=.80$). The observed descriptive statistics are included on the following pages in Table III and Table IV.
Table III: Negative Evaluative Personality Traits Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SJM Condition</th>
<th>Target Condition</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Aggression</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
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<td>.935</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
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<td>.977</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Unfriendly</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
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<td>Challenge</td>
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<td>.795</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dislikeable</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
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<td>.915</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
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<td>.739</td>
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<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>.823</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1.69</td>
<td>.793</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
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<td>Selfish</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
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<td>.953</td>
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<td>.821</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>.955</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.902</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow-minded</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
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<td>1.167</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1.73</td>
<td>.939</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
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<td>.860</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>.997</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table IV: Positive Evaluative Personality Traits Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SJM Condition</th>
<th>Target Condition</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>.925</td>
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<td>Activist</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Considerate</td>
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<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.852</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
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<td>.978</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
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<td>1.009</td>
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<td>Dependable</td>
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<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>2.82</td>
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<td>Activist</td>
<td>3.13</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Interesting</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
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<td>.885</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>.773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.956</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>.830</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Activist</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>1.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>Non-Activist</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1.063</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.079</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCUSSION

This research investigated the effect of system threat on impressions of activist and non-activist targets. Previous research has linked heightened motivation to justify the system to agreement with activists (Yeung, Kay & Peach, 2014), but this work aimed to extend field’s understanding by analyzing SJM’s impact on our subjective impressions of activists.

The study revealed a significant interaction effect of system threat and target activism along the adventurous/reckless trait dimension. The predicted interaction was obtained, but its pattern was different than expected. We originally hypothesized that when the American status quo was affirmed, both the activist target and the non-activist target would be perceived relatively the same along the positive trait of adventurousness, and when the American status quo was challenged, the activist target would be seen perceived more negatively, as reckless. However, we found through simple effect analyses that under systemic challenge, the impression of the activist target was not significantly different from the non-activist target. Rather when the system was affirmed, a strong positive impression of the activist target as adventurous was formed, and the activist was also seen as more adventurous than non-activists in affirmation conditions.

In our first study we observed that the motivational impact of system threat generalized across targets (Spruill & Seta, 2017). The observed effect of the present study impacts the interpretation of the first study by clarifying that SJM does have an effect on directly related targets, specifically activists in this line of research. Although the first study revealed a significant two-way interaction between the participant’s level of system justification and manipulated system challenge or affirmation, the present study offers
evidence that low power in the first study may have masked the true effect of target categorization.

In the present research, the affirmation condition was expected to act as a baseline within the study; according to system justification theory, we go through our day to day believing that the current system is correct and good, thus the affirmation condition was thought to mimic this mental state. However, it is plausible that the positive rating of the United States by foreign powers provided meaningful information through which the participants interpreted the activist target. One could hypothesize that the participants contributed the positive rating of the United States to the system challenging actions of the activist working to make the American system better. They could have reasoned that the U.S. was viewed so highly because the social justice driven work of activists has positively impacted this country. Instead of assimilating the concepts of activists being irrational and self-interested, it is possible that they viewed the activist as working towards advancing the system and assimilated positive concepts surrounding activism into their impression of the activist target.

The general literature aligns with our original hypothesis, so why would our data suggest a tendency for the participants to view the activist more positively in the affirmation condition? These findings may be attributed to generational effects and the current prevalence of protesting in the United States. All of the participants were between the ages of 17 and 24, which categorizes them as millennials and members of Generation Z. Public opinion polls, like those captured in Pew Research Center’s summary of Millennial behavior (Pew RC, 2010) have consistently shown that younger generations are more tolerant and view social change more positively than the generations that have
come before them. They express these views freely through networked civic engagement via social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram (Loader, Vromen & Xenos, 2014). This “digitally networked action” has been at the root of organizing several grassroots protests, such as Occupy Wall Street and the Black Lives Matter Movement. This form of civic engagement is distinct among younger generations and may have placed activism in a more positive, trendy, normalized light for them.

The fact that the significant interaction was observed along the adventurous or reckless trait dimension confirmed its direct relevance to the research question. The negative conceptions of activists were expected to produce an impression of recklessness, but it appears that positive concepts were elicited in the affirmation condition, leading to a strong impression of adventurousness, which is related to traits like being bold, audacious, brave and carefree. The adventurous/reckless trait dimension was presented immediately following the presentation of the activist profile. Since it was immediately presented after the participants finished reading the target profiles, this dimension was especially subject to the influence of the system threat manipulation. There was less time for participants to overthink and adjust their explicit response in this question. In Martin’s work he reasoned that subjects “utilize the evaluative tone of the priming stimuli with the descriptive implications of the stimulus paragraph to elicit the applicable concepts” (Martin, 1986, p.501). In the case of our study, subjects applied the positive tone of the affirmation SJM manipulation to the actions of the activist to draw conclusions about the target’s adventurousness.

Lastly, although unfriendly was the only personality trait to show a significant effect, it is a meaningful one. The activist target was rated lower on unfriendliness than
the non-activist target. This rating provides evidence that the participants in this sample may have more positive views towards activists, which may have resulted in them perceiving the activist as more friendly than the non-activist.

**Limitations, Implications and Future Directions**

Although our sample of 173 participants was sufficient for our analyses, we did not reach our intended $n$ of 300 participants. We originally intended to secure 75 participants per cell to help avoid being underpowered. Like our first study that assessed the connection between system justification theory and perceptions of a Black Lives Matter activist, the observed effects for this study were quite small. Our hope was to ensure that we had enough participants to represent the true effect, but participant sign ups were lower than expected. As evidenced in Table #1, the number of participants in each cell were between 38 and 45. In their 2013 presentation at the annual Society for Personality and Social Psychology Conference, Simmons, Neilson and Simonsohn recommended that in order to test effects that are small, researchers should utilize a minimum of 50 participants per cell. Future replications of this work will aim to obtain a larger sample size to ensure that each cell has a minimum of 50 participants in it.

The findings of this study hold important implications for system challenging activists across the board. From environmental causes to the fight for civil liberties, system challenging activists are inherently bringing about changes that redistribute a society’s values, like political authority, economic power and status, in the name of justice. This work suggests that in contexts where the system they are working within is regarded positively, system challenging activists will be received in a positive manner. This effect is distinct to activists and is expected to generalize across system challenging
causes. Translating these results to the real-world, it is plausible that activists would be received positively in contexts in which they affirm the aspects of the system that are operating well before pointing out the systemic flaws that they would like to address. Although a seemingly passive approach, this may lead to more open conversations across ideological lines because the audiences’ motivation to justify and defend the system would not be raised. Ultimately, the implementation of these findings could increase the efficacy of activists by helping them further their cause with broader audiences. Our society is currently divided on numerous political, social and economic issues, and these findings can directly impact how parties effectively communicate their stances in order to be heard by those that have opposing views.

In the future, conducting this study with a sample from Generation X or the Baby Boomers could provide comparative data to assess if a generational effect is occurring. The prospect of a generational effect has important implications of the interpretation of our results, thus seeing how this effect operates in former generations would be a fruitful endeavor. It may also be theoretically interesting to see how this effect manifests for system supporting activists, like those associated with the Alt-Right. Twenge, Carter and Campbell (2015) found that although millennials are more tolerant of controversial causes and groups, tolerance for racists has increased the least over time which suggests that we might observe results that meaningfully contrast with our findings.

It is also clear that system justification is not the only determinant of the impressions we form of activists. Observing how race, gender, religion, orientation, or political leanings intersect with system justification to form these perceptions would add a great deal of depth to this area of research. Acknowledging that this process doesn’t
occur in isolation from other influences would allow research to see not only how we perceive those that take a stand on the issues they find important, and how we interpret the message coming from varying groups. This perspective would hopefully bring a bit more clarity to how intergroup processes operate alongside system justifying motivations.

Conclusion

Overall, the present research provides evidence that systemic threat underlies the impressions formed of activist. This relationship manifested in a different direction than originally hypothesized, yet it still provides meaningful information about how activists are perceived in society. The observed interaction of System Threat and Target Activism for the adventurous/reckless trait dimension showed that when the system is affirmed, activists are seen more positively than when the system is challenged and they are also seen more positively than non-activist targets. Future research should continue to explore this relationship to understand what drives these differences and how they may impact the effectiveness of a social justice driven activist movements.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Positive Affirmation of the System

INSTRUCTIONS: Please carefully read the below excerpt from an international poll.

“…the overall image of the United States among key publics in North America, Europe and the Asia-Pacific region is generally favorable. In addition, U.S.-led military action against ISIS in Iraq and Syria wins broad approval, and many say America is as important a world leader as it was a decade ago. U.S. image, in part, is linked to impressions of the American people. In general, Americans are perceived as optimistic and hardworking, although those outside of the U.S. are divided as to whether Americans can be described as tolerant.”


Negative Non-Affirmation of the System

INSTRUCTIONS: Please carefully read the below excerpt from an international poll.

“The U.S. image abroad is suffering almost everywhere. Particularly in the most economically developed countries, people blame America for the financial crisis. Opposition to key elements of American foreign policy is widespread in Western Europe, and positive views of the U.S. have declined steeply among many of America’s longtime European allies. In Muslim nations, the wars in Afghanistan and particularly Iraq have driven negative ratings nearly off the charts. The United States earns positive ratings in several Asian and Latin American nations, but usually by declining margins. And while the most recent Pew Global Attitudes survey finds that favorable views of America edged up in 2008, only in sub-Saharan Africa does America score uniformly favorable marks.”

Impression Formation Vignette- Activist

A local newspaper is highlighting several artists in the area to help spread the word about their work. This week’s piece is on Jaime, an up and coming photographer. Below you will read an excerpt of the interviewer’s raw notes from the day.

I arrived at Jaime’s studio apartment around 9:35 am, and was welcomed inside the artist’s bright and modern home. I walked in, took a seat on the spacious couch and we began the interview promptly.

Interviewer: “So, first of all I would just like to thank you for inviting The Weekly Report into your home to interview you today.”

Jaime: “Oh, no problem, I am happy to have you!”

Interviewer: “Well, let’s get started then! So tell me a bit about yourself.”

Jaime: “Okay, so I am a photographer and activist, originally from a small town but I moved out here a few years ago because of all the opportunities available here. I have spent a great amount of my time in search of what I like to call excitement. I have already climbed Mt. McKinley, shot the Colorado rapids in a kayak, driven in a demolition derby, and piloted a jet-powered boat--without knowing very much about boats.”

Interviewer: “Wow that’s something! Did these excursions inspire you to pick up your camera?”
Jaime: “Yeah I had to capture the moment. Now I am in search of new excitement. I’m thinking, perhaps, I would do some skydiving or maybe cross the Atlantic in a sailboat…”

By the way he acted one could readily guess that Jaime was well aware of his ability to do many things well.

Interviewer: “Well then... what are you passionate about? What would you say drives you in life?”

Jaime: “Wow, that is a tough question… A lot drives me, motivates me, I guess. I’m incredibly passionate about my photography and being able to creatively express myself. I’ve been capturing images at a lot of rallies I’ve been attending lately in support of activist movements. It’s wonderful to see people fight so fervently for what they believe and capturing every moment is an incredible feeling. Society is unfair and when you are being denied rights you should be able to stir up change. Honestly, I really feel like being behind my lens gives me an opportunity to capture the world around me, as it is happening. I don’t think we take enough time to appreciate all aspects of the world around us so, I guess, I’m just really passionate about capturing the good and the bad things that are often overlooked in our world today.”

Interviewer: “So, when you go on your shoots do you generally work alone or with a whole team?”

Jaime: “Other than business engagements, my contacts with people are rather limited. I feel like I don’t really need to rely on anyone.”

Interviewer: “Lastly, how would you describe your style of photography?”
Jaime: “Straight to the point. Point and shoot. You see, once I make up my mind to do something it is as good as done no matter how long it might take or how difficult the going might be. In life and photography. Only rarely do I change my mind even when it might well have been better if I had.”

Interviewer: “Well thank you for letting me interview you and discuss a bit about your creative process today.”

Jaime: “No problem! And thank you all for featuring me!!”

Impression Formation Vignette - Non-Activist

A local newspaper is highlighting several artists in the area to help spread the word about their work. This week’s piece is on Jaime, an up and coming photographer. Below you will read an excerpt of the interviewer’s raw notes from the day.

I arrived at Jaime’s studio apartment around 9:35 am, and was welcomed inside the artist’s bright and modern home. I walked in, took a seat on the spacious couch and we began the interview promptly.

Interviewer: “So, first of all I would just like to thank you for inviting The Weekly Report into your home to interview you today.”

Jaime: “Oh, no problem, I am happy to have you!”

Interviewer: “Well, let’s get started then! So tell me a bit about yourself.”

Jaime: “Okay, so I am a photographer, originally from a small town but I moved out here a few years ago because of all the opportunities available here. I have spent a great amount of my time in search of what I like to call excitement. I have already climbed Mt.
McKinley, shot the Colorado rapids in a kayak, driven in a demolition derby, and piloted a jet-powered boat--without knowing very much about boats.”

Interviewer: “Wow that’s something! Did these excursions inspire you to pick up your camera?”

Jaime: “Yeah I had to capture the moment. Now I am in search of new excitement. I’m thinking, perhaps, I would do some skydiving or maybe cross the Atlantic in a sailboat…”

*By the way he acted one could readily guess that Jaime was well aware of his ability to do many things well.*

Interviewer: “Well then… what are you passionate about? What would you say drives you in life?”

Jaime: “Wow, that is a tough question… A lot drives me, motivates me, I guess. I’m incredibly passionate about my photography and being able to creatively express myself. Honestly, I really feel like being behind my lens gives me an opportunity to capture the world around me, as it is happening. I don’t think we take enough time to appreciate all aspects of the world around us so, I guess, I’m just really passionate about capturing the good and the bad things that are often overlooked in our world today.”

Interviewer: “So, when you go on your shoots do you generally work alone or with a whole team?”

Jaime: “Other than business engagements, my contacts with people are rather limited. *I feel like I don't really need to rely on anyone.*”
Interviewer: “Lastly, how would you describe your style of photography?”

Jaime: “Straight to the point. Point and shoot. You see, once I make up my mind to do something it is as good as done no matter how long it might take or how difficult the going might be. In life and photography. Only rarely do I change my mind even when it might well have been better if I had.”

Interviewer: “Well thank you for letting me interview you and discuss a bit about your creative process today.”

Jaime: “No problem! And thank you all for featuring me!!”
CURRICULUM VITAE

SPRUIILL, MIKAELA K.

EDUCATION

Wake Forest University, Winston Salem, NC
Master of Arts in Psychology
Advisor: Dr. Catherine E. Seta

The College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, VA
Bachelor of Science in Neuroscience
Advisor: Dr. Cheryl Dickter 2016
Honors Thesis: “The Analysis of Person Perception within Minority Groups”

AWARDS

Full Graduate Assistantship and Tuition Waiver, Wake Forest University August 2016 - May 2018
Alumni Graduate Student Travel Award, Wake Forest University November 2017
Summer Research Grant, Wake Forest University May 2017 - August 2017
Honors in Undergraduate Research, The College of William & Mary May 2016
Vice Provost Research Grant, The College of William and Mary October 2015 – May 2016

PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS


RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

SETA SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY LAB, WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY, WINSTON SALEM, NC
Graduate Researcher 2016-Present
Questions the persistence of prejudice in our ever changing society and studies various societal factors that impact intergroup relations while working closely with my current advisor to develop new ideas and explore them.

Research Assistant 2016-Present
Collaborates with my advisor to collect data and conduct studies on regret and compensatory responses. Also aids with reporting and publishing the Wake Forest psychology department news.

PETROLAB IN ATTITUDES AND SOCIAL COGNITION, WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY, WINSTON SALEM, NC
Research Assistant 2017-Present
Develops new projects to investigate bias reduction and assists faculty and fellow lab members with the administration of their studies to participants.

SOCIAL COGNITION LAB, THE COLLEGE OF WILLIAM & MARY, WILLIAMSBURG, VA
Honors Researcher 2015-2016
Questioned within-group prejudices as influenced by social and economic elements, worked closely with my previous advisor to analyze and interpret the phenomenon discovered, and orally defended my final thesis in April 2016.

Research Assistant 2013-2015
Administered various psychological tests (i.e. Implicit Association Tests, reaction time paradigms, etc.), performed various statistical analyses on and cleaned large sets of raw data, and gained training in administering EEG assessments to various subjects.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**Guest Lecturer - Psychology 151**
Developed and led an introduction to Social Psychology focused on Intergroup Relations, Schemas and Stereotypes alongside Dr. Marissa Griggs at Wake Forest University.

**Teaching Assistant - Psychology 151, 260, 322, 355**
Directly works with students and faculty to make sure the students grasp the material to the best of their ability and achieve academically. Proctors and grades multiple exams, quizzes, and assignments throughout the semester for various faculty members.

**Tutor - Chemistry 108, Psychology 151 & 241, Sociology 151**
Works one-on-one with Wake Forest student-athletes in subjects including, but not limited to, Psychology, Chemistry, Biology, and Sociology. Develops and implements comprehensive lesson plans that accommodate the specific level of these learners while offering support to make certain each student was able to grasp the material presented.

SKILLS
- Proficient in SPSS
- Proficient in R
- Proficient in Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint)
- Proficient in SONA Experiment Management System, Qualtrics Panels and Amazon Mechanical Turk
- Experienced with Qualtrics Survey Research Suite, Inquisit and MediaLab

MEMBERSHIPS
- Society of Personality and Social Psychology
- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated