Is Support for Redistribution Flexible to Perceptions of Inequality? The Effect of Inequality Frames and Self-Affirmation

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Abstract

Perceptions of inequality are complex, related to motivations and ideological beliefs that are thought to predict how people wish to rectify inequalities (e.g., through support for redistribution). Inequality is comparative, which means that information about inequality can be framed or described as some being better off (privileged) or worse off (disadvantaged) than others. The research is mixed as to whether a privilege or disadvantage frame leads to more support for redistribution. However, it is understood that privilege is more threatening and may have the potential to steer individuals away from rectifying inequalities. Self-affirmation has been shown to reduce defensive responses to threat and is applied in this study to assess its influence on support for redistribution. This study also uses framing to compare responses to inequality and assess whether redistribution is supported more when the focus is on privilege or disadvantage. This study was conducted using an online questionnaire, recruiting participants from New Zealand (N = 214). It was hypothesised that a focus on privilege would increase support for redistribution, and this was marginally supported. It was also predicted that self-affirmation would reduce support for redistribution across different frames. This was not supported, but self-affirmation did influence perceptions of inequality and opinions of taxation across frames. It was also found that ideological beliefs were associated with perceptions of inequality and support for redistribution – as expected. These findings may have implications for policy and framing and inequity research in the future.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed: _____ Date: 05/04/2023

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Ethical Approval

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Chapter 1

Introduction

It seems we are living in an age of inequality – or at the very least one of inequality concern – and it is a topic of debate for politicians, researchers, and the public alike. Equality is a fundamental value in many Western nations; however, there exists a key distinction in New Zealand equality discourse aptly highlighted by Rashbrooke (2013): we tend to say we get a "fair go" as opposed to having a fair society. This instead implies a chance or opportunity and that it is the individual's prerogative to follow through and "get on with it". Nevertheless, there is an enduring myth (or assumption) that Aotearoa, New Zealand (NZ) is a fair and equal society, likely born out of the fundamental belief that we are all treated equally as individuals. However, this believed equality of opportunities does not carry over to equality of outcomes, particularly in New Zealand where wealth inequality is above average (Nel, 2021; Rashbrooke et al., 2021).

Our wealth inequalities have been laid bare by the 2017-18 Household Economic Survey which highlighted that the wealthiest individuals have nearly 70 times more assets than the typical Kiwi (Rashbrooke et al., 2021). The same study shows that the richest 10% have 59% of NZ's assets and the poorest half with just 2%. The egalitarian ideals of Aotearoa are also tarnished by the persistently worse outcomes for Māori. More recent net worth figures from the Household Economic Survey ending June 2021 have shown the median net worth for Europeans at $468,800, for Māori $153,000, Pacific people at $85,600, and $292,700 for Asian people and MELAA[1]/other individuals[2]. This means that the average European has 300% more net worth than a Māori individual, 550% more than a Pacific individual, and 160% more than an Asian individual and MELAA/other individual. Although net worth is a static measure it does account for both debts and assets, in which wealth generates wealth and is therefore an important indicator of inequality. This information is quite revealing for a country oft argued to be egalitarian, or fair and equal. Though, this information may be clouding higher inequalities as often the wealthy are

[1] MELAA refers to the ethnicities of Middle Eastern, Latin American, and Asian.
[2] Source: Stats NZ, customised report and licensed by Stats NZ for re-use under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence.

reluctant to take part in studies related to wealth, and considerable wealth in NZ is veiled by trusts (Rashbrooke, 2013; Rashbrooke et al., 2021).

The OECD recently reported that inequality is at its highest now than across the last 50 years in OECD countries (OECD, 2019). They posit that the benefits of general economic growth have not been distributed evenly, where already high levels of inequality have intensified. With widening gaps in individual circumstances, people lose the ability to understand and empathise with others, which reduces social cohesion erodes trust, and fuels crime (Rashbrooke, 2013). Rashbrooke et al. (2021) highlights that large inequalities can raise profound ethical questions about the numerous negative social outcomes related to differences in access to good healthcare, housing, education, and the like. Furthermore, different income and wealth levels establish differential access to opportunities, which influence social mobility and future opportunities These wealth disparities perpetuate and entrench existing inequalities for some (Rashbrooke, 2013). Ultimately, inequality is undesirable for all as it fosters unhappiness, harms wider economic growth, robs the most opportunity from the most disadvantaged, and disables people from achieving their human capital potential (Marriott & Alinaghi, 2021).

Despite the evidence of vast inequalities in NZ we have a somewhat unique relationship to inequality and what to do about it. Generally, those who are better off are more tolerant of inequalities (Trump, 2020; Walker et al., 2021), therefore it is of no surprise that those in the highest income bracket in NZ or *the 1%* perceived the political and the economic systems to be legitimate significantly more than all other groups (Sengupta & Sibley, 2019). Counterintuitively, low-status groups seem to also legitimise the status quo in NZ – which is ultimately unfair – by seeing it as fairer than high-status groups (Sengupta et al., 2015). However, those in the low-status groups do harbour distaste for the political systems unlike the wealthier who present greater faith in the system (Sengupta et al., 2015; Sengupta & Sibley, 2019).

This is important because the way individuals view inequality will directly relate to how people seek to resolve inequalities. We would expect that considerable inequality is not desirable, but action to reduce inequality has achieved limited success in NZ (Nel, 2021). It is argued that reducing inequality requires various political decisions concerning the distribution of economic resources, such as increasing insurance, strengthening benefits, more progressive taxation of

citizens, but also more control of the economy to be given to the public (Atkinson, 2015). Redistributive policies seeking to reallocate resources to the poor overwhelm the discussion around inequality resolution. Whatever approach is implemented it is argued that most strategies require governments to have a more potent role in regulating economy and redistribution. Despite the need for redistributive change such measures are surprisingly unpopular among the public. In fact, across a large-scale study, NZ presents uniquely low support for government measures to reduce income inequality and progressive taxation (García-Sánchez et al., 2020; Nel, 2021).

Inequality has far-reaching consequences which have seemingly eluded resolution due to its lingering presence and its worsening state. Improving outcomes for individuals has understandably been the focus of research for a long time though inequality remains a crux for modern societies. Investigation of privilege in inequality has more recently entered the debate and is increasingly gaining traction. Research about it nonetheless remains limited, therefore the focus of this thesis is privilege in the context of inequality and redistribution. I argue that privilege may differentially influence perceptions of inequality and how people may want to rectify inequalities in response, and that the threat that arises from realising privilege may have a determining role in resolving inequality.

To address inequality, we must first grasp how our understandings of inequality emerge. As such, this thesis will first explore how we perceive inequality and how these perceptions are influenced by the kind of inequality one is exposed to (e.g., real-world inequality and inequality framing), motivation, and individual differences. Secondly, I address how privilege influences inequality perceptions and the possibility that threat arises from inequality particularly when the focus is on privilege. Thirdly, I highlight the association between threat produced by inequality and cognitive dissonance theory and the role ego-defensiveness may have to help address the gaps in dissonance theory. Next, this association is evidenced through the curious responses for resolving inequality, where threat and ego-defensiveness can help explain how individuals may differentially support rectifying inequalities through redistribution, if at all. Lastly, I argue that support for inequality reduction may serve to offset threat instead of charity to reduce inequality. The remainder of the thesis outlines how I investigated this possibility and whether I find evidence to support my claim.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

There are considerable differences between the haves and the have-nots in NZ and changes are necessary to prevent the gap from widening any further. Therefore, the spotlight should land on stemming the sources of inequality for a fairer socio-economic landscape for everyone in Aotearoa. To do so, it is crucial to first focus on where understandings of inequality first emerge from. In NZ, it seems only 30% of the time do we correctly characterise our society's economic distribution of wealth, and we are the only country among 28 to overestimate the average wage for a full-time worker (Gimpelson & Treisman, 2015). Our misperceptions of inequality vary widely and have come under intense debate in recent years (Norton & Ariely, 2011). Generally, we fall short of accurately grasping real inequality in our society typically underestimating it, and we do not seem to really know the magnitude of this inaccuracy (Hauser & Norton, 2017). As we are so inaccurate in our perceptions, it is argued that any consideration of inequality from individuals should rely on the basis that these are *mis*perceptions and treated as such (Hauser & Norton, 2017; Kraus et al., 2019).

2.1 (Mis)perceiving Inequality

The research illustrates that *how* individuals perceive inequality, as opposed to *actual* inequality, is a better predictor of how people wish to rectify inequalities through their policy preferences and political action. The research also tells us that perceptions of inequality are complex and many factors can influence how individuals perceive inequality (Phillips et al., 2020). Though one of the first determining factors of our inequality perceptions is our exposure to inequality information. So, if an individual exists in the upper echelons of society and rarely encounters the reality of inequality, their perceptions are distorted in line with a view that accounts for less inequality (Dawtry et al., 2015). However, people are motivated in different ways and motivations can influence how one interprets the inequality information they witness. For example, it has been shown that the visibility of very contextually relevant inequality could suggest that reactions can steer against (or potentially for) certain groups (Hauser & Norton, 2017). Evidence from airlines has shown that the visibility of first-class seats when boarding

passengers has been associated with increased antisocial behaviour and air-rage (DeCelles & Norton, 2016). Conversely, we also do see that visible inequality can motivate people to be less fair and to avoid taking steps toward greater equality (Nishi et al., 2015). Very interestingly, experiments undertaken in well-off areas have shown that the presence of a poor person in this context reduces preferences for redistribution. As such, wealthy inhabitants of rich neighbourhoods were asked about their support of a "millionaires' tax" and support for this was reduced when a poor person was in the vicinity of the experiment (Sands, 2017). This strengthens the association that perceptions of inequality are sensitive to the cues one has access to, and that our motivations can be susceptible to the particular cues of inequality we are exposed to and indeed such exposure may perpetuate inequalities.

2.2 Framing

Information about inequality is not only influential in the different ways it is observed but can be influential in the different ways it can be communicated. Inequality is an "inherently comparative phenomenon", which means that some individuals are better or worse off than others (Dietze & Craig, 2021, p. 349). Because of this inequality can be accurately framed describing one group's advantages (i.e., the rich have more) or by describing another's disadvantages (i.e., the poor have less) even though these descriptions depict the same inequality. Therefore, perceptions of inequality can be sensitive to how inequality is framed, specifically, investigation of racial inequality (i.e., differences between groups) and racial inequity (i.e., explicitly *unfair* differences between groups), has indicated that privileged individuals respond to framing in several different ways. Of which, it has been shown that a focus on advantage impacts the group esteem of Whites (Lowery et al., 2012), increases guilt (Powell et al., 2005), and increases defensive responding through denials of privilege and claims of hardship (Phillips & Lowery, 2015, 2020). What is less straightforward is how framing influences actions to reduce inequalities/inequities. Other research has shown that a focus on the rich seems to increase support for redistributive policies and also increase the magnitude of perceived inequality (Bruckmüller et al., 2017; Chow & Galak, 2012; Lowery et al., 2009), but not always (Dietze & Craig, 2021; Howlett et al., 2021; Lowery et al., 2012). Similarly, Quarles and Bozarth (2022) highlighted that

people show preferences for the language used in online discussions, and the inclusion of the term "white privilege" decreased support for proposed changes and lower quality responses toward social justice. Jun et al. (2022) highlighted media preferences for language in which gender and race inequalities are chronically described as the disadvantage of the marginalised group whereas wealth inequality is more likely to have no frame. Therefore, framing is hugely relevant in the context of economic inequality and further investigation of the nuanced reactions to inequality frames is needed, particularly so for advantaged or privileged individuals.

2.3 Motivations to (Mis)perceive

Motivation is a core influence in one's perceptual processing of the world. It can help us determine a view or perspective that fits, protects, and reinforces one's experiences and needs (Aronson, 1992; Kunda, 1990). Therefore, in the context of inequality motivations play an integral role in how individuals construct their understandings of inequality in their minds. Motivations, as Kunda (1990) explains, refer to:

> any wish, desire, or preference that concerns the outcome of a given reasoning task…motivation can be construed as affecting the process of reasoning: forming impressions, determining one's beliefs and attitudes, evaluating evidence, and making decisions." (p. 480).

Therefore, people may be differentially motivated to view inequality in ways that protect their perspective. For this reason those who actively benefit from an unequal system are often motivated to view the society they exist within as more equal than it is (Phillips & Lowery, 2020).

Similarly, Cote et al. (2021) showed those who have sustained privileged positions throughout their lives present uniquely strong entitlement wherein they believe they are particularly deserving of the resources and privileges they have. While those who transcend the social group that they were born into do not reflect the same entitlement, instead they recognise the assistance they received while climbing up the hierarchy. Interestingly, lower-income earners perceptions of inequality tend to be more accurate, and their perceptions and actual inequality are strongly linked, however, this is not found among higher-income earners (Newman et al., 2018). Furthermore, we see general consistency in preferences for how those in low-status jobs should be paid, argued to be closely tied to political attitudes, high socioeconomic status, and

conservatism, however, such consistency deviates in preferences about how those in elite jobs should be paid, varying considerably between age, personal income, and context (Kelley & Evans, 1993; Walker et al., 2021). Similarly, less accurate and less strongly associated with political attitudes are the estimates of the wealth of society's richest (Gimpelson & Treisman, 2018; Walker et al., 2021). Potentially, lower-income earners have more motivation to be correct in their understanding of inequality as it is a more prominent focus for this group, and high-income earners may not experience the same motivation.

2.3.1 Memory and Inequality Perceptions

It is also argued that memory could also play a distinct role in these perceptions as we store representations of social groups in memory and that these memories may become more or less activated by cues related to those memories in the environment (Bodenhausen et al., 1995). It is suggested that memories may reinforce a certain perspective which can be dependent on the motivation one has to maintain this perspective. To this point, it has been shown that motivations can flexibly influence the type of exemplar that will best satisfy an individual's motivational concerns (Kraus et al., 2019; Sinclair & Kunda, 1999). Kraus et al. (2019) reinforces this, highlighting that when individuals are reflecting on current racial economic equality, they will call to mind Black exemplars who are characteristically high-status and/or high achieving such as Oprah Winfrey and LeBron James. In turn, these exemplars serve to support popular and desirable narratives of racial progress (Kraus et al., 2019), but also broader motivational concerns for the individual. This is relevant in the context of economic inequality because an individual who is motivated to believe that inequality does not exist, may call to mind a mental representation or an exemplar of equality that can be used as evidence to agree with this point.

Individual economic progress or social mobility – where individuals may transcend the social class that they were born into – is interpreted as an indicator of meritocracy or the "American Dream" and is considered a commendable achievement (Shariff et al., 2016). Thus, examples of social mobility can be used to reinforce or validate one's perspective about inequality. For example, Kim (2022) found that the American Dream and its relation to rags-to-riches media about upward social mobility can distort economic perceptions of general social mobility (Kim, 2022). Similarly, Kuo et al. (2020) studied exemplars of Asian Americans and the

conception of their group as a prosperous “model minority”, finding that wealth equality was significantly overestimated between Whites and Asian Americans. Meanwhile, this same perception or direct experience also increases poverty blaming on individual characteristics (e.g., lack of willpower or laziness), and less attributions of failures to systemic issues of inequality (Gugushvili, 2016). This research highlights the relationship our understanding of inequality has with our memory and could suggest that mental representations or exemplars of social mobility such as Bill Gates, Jeffery Bezos, or other examples of rags-to-riches entrepreneurial stereotypes may skew one's vantage point for inequality. Thus, a potential implication of this evidence is that the misperceptions of economic equality may be guided by figures of economic progress that obscure existing wealth disparities. This is important when considering your average person who consequently may believe “if they can do it, so can I”, which negates the systemic factors that influence one’s economic position in society, and therefore places the onus of inequality on the individual. So the influence of social mobility perceptions or the mere belief of economic mobility can be a powerful legitimiser of inequality (Trump, 2020), but also increases tolerance of inequality (Shariff et al., 2016), thereby greatly influencing one's perceptions of inequality where outside of these representations and beliefs exists real inequality.

2.3.2 Ideological Motivation

People are also motivated to protect their worldviews, these being the associated ideologies, values, and beliefs that makeup how one understands the world works (Phillips et al., 2020). These worldviews could involve preferences for hierarchy through social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994), or beliefs about opportunity and justice through belief in a just world (Lerner, 2013). In turn, these worldviews can affect how individuals may process inequality cues. To the extent that an individual believes that the world is just and that inequality is fair they are therefore motivated to maintain their worldview which can influence their perceptions of inequality (Phillips et al., 2020).

There is a good deal of support for the influence of worldview and ideological preferences on inequality perceptions. Waldfogel et al. (2021) have highlighted that ideologies shape how people explain inequality-related information but also that they affect the likelihood that this information is attended to in the first place. Further to this, individuals may selectively focus on

aspects of information that confirms their world view, which means that individuals may filter information differentially based on their motivations (Kteily et al., 2017). It has also been shown that individuals of higher socio-economic status tend to look less frequently at people of lower socioeconomic status (Dietze & Knowles, 2016), and those who ideologically prefer equality more readily pay attention to cues of inequality around them (Waldfogel et al., 2021). Therefore, individual motivations can influence perceptions and even behaviour, and these ideological preferences may be a key factor in determining how individuals comprehend inequality as they tend to be distinct and measurable. Consequently, these preferences are more stable than situational cues of inequality.

2.3.2.1 Belief in a Just World

A belief in a just world reflects a motivation to perceive the world as fair, and that individuals get what they are deserving of (Lerner, 2013). More specifically, a belief in a just world agrees that good people will more likely be rewarded and bad people will more likely be punished. Though this belief also works in reverse, individuals will decide that an individual with markers of success likely deserves them, and this individual is subsequently cast in a better light and seen as more worthy in the observer's eyes (Lerner, 2013). Kraus (2019) discusses how belief in a just world influences perceptions of inequality highlighting that more support for belief in a just world is positively correlated with overestimates of racial economic equality, and this is consistent for both Whites and Blacks despite Whites tending to support belief in a just world more (Kraus et al., 2017). In turn, these misperceptions lead to more negative attitudes toward resolving inequalities. It appears to be a meaningful concept related to inequality perceptions and Norton and Ariely (2011) in their provocative study about misperceptions of inequality highlighted that belief in a just world and its association towards wealth equality are robust to several control variables such as gender, age, race, income, education, and individuals' perceptions of wider inequality. Moreover, belief in a just world relates to more legitimisation of the incomes of the bottom 10% than the incomes of the top 10% (García-Sánchez et al., 2021). Other research also shows more support for a belief in a just world is associated with more favour of members of higher status groups than members of lower status groups (McCoy & Major, 2007). The research is numerous highlighting the association between belief in a just world and negative

attitudes toward the disadvantaged and positive attitudes to the privileged (García-Sánchez et al., 2021), though the literature looking at the attitudes related more generally to belief in a just world and the privileged is lacking.

2.3.2.2 Belief in Meritocracy

Another prominent value or worldview associated with beliefs about inequality is meritocracy, this is an influential worldview within the western world that asserts that success is had through individual merits (i.e., hard work, talents, and ability) (García-Sánchez et al., 2019). This seems quite a simple value however, it is important to delineate it from the simple belief that work will reward you, it instead reflects that success is the result of hard work making this belief inextricably linked with inequality as those who adhere to meritocracy beliefs would say of someone successful that "they must have worked hard to get there". Unsurprisingly, inequality perceptions are influenced by a belief in meritocracy, where those who strongly support meritocracy generally perceive less inequality, and the opposite is shown for those who support meritocracy less (García-Sánchez et al., 2020). This pattern also emerged with belief in equal opportunities (García-Sánchez et al., 2020), a concept similar to belief in a just world. It has also been shown that the adherence to these beliefs – most often characterised among wealthier and politically right-leaning individuals – produces greater tolerance of inequality (Trump, 2018). However, meritocratic beliefs have been seen to reduce among low-status individuals in places where greater inequality exists (Newman et al., 2015) – which typically increases perceived inequality (García-Castro et al., 2020). However, meritocratic values are seen to increase among high-status individuals in a context of high inequality (Newman et al., 2015) which may in turn reduce perceptions of inequality. Therefore, support for the ideology of merit can have a determining role in an individual's understanding of inequality.

2.3.2.3 Social Dominance Orientation

Social dominance orientation is a concept that captures individual variation in support or opposition to hierarchy in society. It is a concept that influences who one perceives the world, so in the context of inequality, individuals possessing high and low social dominance orientation who are shown identical levels of inequality are likely to explain the inequality differently based on their motivations for or against hierarchy, so they may either defend the inequality as a social

issue worthy of attention or downplay it (Kteily et al., 2017). It has also been shown that individuals' support versus opposition to hierarchy can bias perceptions of inequality between social groups. Specifically, social dominance orientation was significantly associated with reporting a smaller power gap between advantaged and disadvantaged groups (Kteily et al., 2017). The more motivated an individual was to maintain hierarchy, therefore individuals high in social dominance orientation, perceived representations of inequality as less hierarchical than they were, while the individuals who were less motivated to maintain hierarchy, perceived them as more unequal/hierarchical than they really were. This means that individuals motivated by social dominance orientation will understate or overstate inequalities (Kteily et al., 2017), which has a considerable influence on how individuals will seek to rectify inequalities. Lucas and Kteily (2018) investigated group-based egalitarianism or those who support equality and empathy. This concept is closely linked to social dominance orientation, as individuals with high social dominance orientation (i.e., relative anti-egalitarians) appear to be more motivated to maintain and enhance the differences between groups, whereas those with low social dominance orientation (i.e., relative egalitarians) are motivated towards group equality (Lucas & Kteily, 2018). They found anti-egalitarians showed less empathy for members of disadvantaged groups experiencing harmful situations, than for members of advantaged groups. Whereas, egalitarians presented the opposite, further, seeing situations as more harmful when a disadvantaged person was hurt and the opposite for an advantaged person experiencing the same.

Ultimately, this research on inequality perceptions suggests that our views of inequality are sensitive to a multitude of situational and motivational influences, and these influences do not stand alone, ideologies, perspectives, memories, and experiences all function as guiding forces in how inequality is understood. However, it is important to note perceptions of inequality are not direct, "two individuals may equally access, attend to, comprehend, and even motivatedly process cues to inequality and yet ultimately combine them differently, resulting in differing perceptions of inequality" (Phillips et al., 2020, p. 22). For example, wealthy individuals may pass off cues of poverty as unrelated to broader societal inequality, whereas someone's experience of poverty may cause individuals to put greater emphasis on cues of inequality and as a result perceive greater inequality (Irwin, 2018). Alternatively, people may be aware of economic inequality in their daily

surroundings though do not apply these perceptions when they reflect on the state of economic conditions in their wider society (Hopkins, 2013). Likewise, individual differences in social dominance orientation, belief in a just world, and other ideological or moral preferences may influence the weight individuals place on particular cues of inequality. To conclude, understandings of inequality are highly subjective and particularly subjective to the perceiver and their environment, though the literature tidily highlights the key influence of experience, motivation, and ideology in how an individual constructs their understanding of inequality.

2.4 Legitimising Inequality

Economic inequality is not always considered fair, but it may be if the inequality is a result of fair processes or normative understandings about how wealth is distributed. García-Sánchez et al. (2019) highlights that the underpinnings of inequality acceptance tend to be demonstrated through system-justifying ideologies, and their results find a link between perceptions of inequality determining an individual's ideal or acceptable levels of inequality. They found that the perceived-ideal relationship was stronger for those who support meritocratic ideals, so those who seem to prefer a less equal society are motivated by truths that people get what they are deserving of and thus legitimate said inequality and they legitimise inequality the more ideologically motivated they are. Therefore, it seems that even when someone perceives economic inequality is high this does necessarily translate to unfairness and likely does not urge people to reduce the unfair disadvantages/advantages, instead such beliefs seem to raise acceptable levels of inequality (García-Sánchez et al., 2019).

Jun et al. (2022) highlights that the way the media chronically frames inequality is also related to the perceived legitimacy of inequality, for example, race and gender inequalities are recognised as less legitimate than wealth inequality. While, Heiserman and Simpson (2017) tentatively link the legitimacy of inequality to the perceived competence of the advantaged and disadvantaged in an unequal system wherein, the more inequality the more people tended to believe that those who have less deserve less. Moreover, the more unequal the system the more it produces or is explained by the most competent rich people and least competent poor people. Furthermore, upward social mobility is influential in determining broader perceptions of inequality, where the belief of economic mobility, where individuals may experience movement

out of a poorer social class can be a powerful legitimiser of inequality (Trump, 2020), as people believe that disadvantage can be overcome. Moreover, beliefs about social mobility also increase an individual's tolerance of inequality (Shariff et al., 2016), thereby greatly influencing one's perceptions of inequality.

These findings are in line with predictions from system justification theory, whereby one is more likely to justify an unequal system if they are disadvantaged by it, in part because they desire to resolve discomfort that arises with the reality of inequality, despite it being counterproductive to an individual's current situation (Jost et al., 2003). Indeed, experimental research has reinforced this, individuals are more likely to justify the system when they have hope that their group will transcend their current status in the future (Owuamalam et al., 2016; 2017). We also see a similar trend when individuals are misinformed about inequality or where inequality is invisible which leads individuals to punish the poor and reward the rich (Hauser et al., 2021), however when informed of the real inequality individuals were more likely to penalise the rich because it was revealed to participants that the rich were not contributing as large a proportion of their income toward social progress as the poorer participants – a similar scenario as in the real world. Specifically, 'system justification' involves the needs both social and psychological for one to reinforce the economic situation as good, just, and beneficial. Group justification within this theory overlaps nicely with social dominance orientation which can reflect one's motivation to maintain differences between groups but also to see these differences favourably and reason the behaviours of group members (Jost et al., 2004). Therefore, against this theoretical backdrop, it is easy to see that in the context of inequality some individuals may be more or less likely to rationalise or justify in line with their ideological stances.

Largely, this picture of perceptions and legitimacy fits in the realm of self-interest, where people seek to achieve the best outcomes for themselves and their social group. As in, the wealthy are motivated to view themselves as more meritorious and therefore deserving of their wealth. Consequently, those who see themselves as having more, or those with a higher subjective status, are more likely to believe that the system is fair and just (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2015; Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2021; McCoy & Major, 2007). However, the self-interested argument for perceptions of inequality diverges among the poor. There appears to be a bias toward

misperceiving inequality even among those who may be disadvantaged by such a view, which violates assumptions about self-interest. The disadvantaged experience greater motivation to defend the system (Buchel et al., 2021). Sengupta et al. (2015) highlighted minority groups here in NZ, who for unknown reasons do not strongly support the political system but perceive extreme fairness in ethnic relations, despite the distinct disparities these groups experience in income, education, employment, and health. The authors proposed Māori possess a highly politicised group identity, though they "legitimised ethnic-group relations at least as much as the group that benefits from the ethnic-group hierarchy" (p. 12). Overall, this paints a confusing picture, wherein it is not unreasonable that there is no broad agreement that inequality is a problem as it is not always recognised as an issue, rather it is more reinforced by those who have the least to gain from doing so.

2.5 Privilege

As I have already addressed, the existence of inequality infers that some are doing better, and others are worse off. While inequality assumes that there is an uneven distribution of resources, inequity suggests undeserved or unearned advantages coexist with undeserved *dis*advantages for specific groups. There has been much investigation of inequality concurrent with its rise, though the literature seems to lack focus on the privileged – or those more comfortably understood as 'advantaged' – of their awareness of inequity and their social standing and how they manage that identity.

What we do know is that those who actively benefit or those who are privileged in an unequal system are often motivated to view the society they exist within as more equal than it is (Phillips & Lowery, 2020). Relatedly, thinking of benefits offered by mere membership to a privileged group can threaten social identity and invokes justification and defensive responses by those who are implicated by it (Knowles et al., 2014). More recent research has corroborated this highlighting the privileged are conscious of the fact their belonging to the group grants them certain benefits and are threatened by the perception that these benefits are unearned (Phillips & Lowery, 2020). Reinforcing that privilege can and does represent inequity rather than just inequality. Inequity, put simply, is unjust differences between groups whereas inequality is simply differences between groups. This information reinforces that awareness of privilege can create

awareness of unearned advantages by those who profit from them. This awareness influences interpersonal behaviour where imbalances in social standing come in where those from wealthy backgrounds will downplay their upper-class status when interacting with individuals from lower-class backgrounds (Côté et al., 2017; Swencionis & Fiske, 2018). The knowledge that "being privileged" is not always a desirable perception also influences how privileged people view themselves. Lowery et al. (2012) showed that whites who support meritocracy strive to see themselves as high in merit maintaining this view of themselves by denying any privilege afforded them by their race. And privileged groups may also alter their descriptions of inequality depending on its legitimacy (Dover, 2022). While, dominant group members are also motivated to remain neutral in the face of inequality and will argue innocence to awareness or involvement in inequalities instead of owning them to protect the self (Phillips & Lowery, 2018).

Much to this point, the influence of meritocratic ideology, particularly for a privileged group, seems to extend beyond mere perceptions of inequality but also through actual levels of inequality. As such, when confronting the reality of inequality in one's society, those in the highest income groups preferred to attribute wealth to merit though most people were more likely to explain an individual's wealth in terms of a wealthy family (i.e., non-meritocratic factors) (Mijs & Hoy, 2021). Furthermore, when realising one was wealthier than they thought, this increased attributions for merit and less emphasis on family wealth, whereas when individuals realised they were poorer than first thought they decreased blaming of poverty on a lack of merit while also placing less significance on coming from a wealthy family. Inequality leaves the economically advantaged vulnerable to the idea that their position was not a result of hard work and as such, they reinforce this notion. They appear motivated to view their positions in terms of merit, so when they realised they were more advantaged than they first thought they seek to emphasise their hard work. This is not so for the lower to middle classes who perhaps do not experience the same need to justify their positions when considering real inequality.

These findings could be explained by Cooley et al. (2021) who found that many members of the dominant group felt relatively lower status within their group, and these perceived status disparities are associated with reduced stereotyping of welfare recipients as lazy. However, once informed of group privileges, the opposite occurs for those who accepted this privilege and whose

acceptance increased perceptions of their status within the group. Thus, awareness of privilege for those whose status perception increases may justify the systems that likely allowed them their perceived high status therefore, they infer lower status individuals are disadvantaged due to their lack of merit. This is further corroborated by Knowles and Lowery (2012) who showed that among those who highly identify with their membership, priming the ideology of meritocracy reduces perceptions of privileges of members of the dominant group which in turn produces denial by the dominant group for group inequality. Once again it seems that perceptions of inequality and legitimacy of inequality are flexible to how that information is detrimental to one's social image, or one's self-image.

2.6 Inequality as Self-Concept Threat

For some, inequality can highlight that one is not as deserving of success as one once thought. Not only does inequality threaten one's achievements but simply the awareness of others' hardships can create discomfort (Batson et al., 1983). This can relate to the concept of 'meritocratic threat' coined by Knowles et al. (2014) which is argued to occur when "individuals worry they are failing to live up to culturally sacrosanct achievement values" (p. 598). Wherein, privilege represents an external reality that discounts personal merit as a determining factor in an individual's success, they reference racial privilege, where one has succeeded not entirely by their own hands but through being White (Knowles et al., 2014).

Indeed Kunda (1990) highlights that when individuals are given information that contradicts pre-existing understandings those who are highly involved in the topic or whose lives are affected by the message content and are motivated to preserve their attitudes and desire to avoid the recognition of counter attitudinal realities. Social psychological research on threat in recent years has involved threat being something that can elicit what appears to be irrational defensive reactions. Therefore, if something elicits such a response, it provides some sort of defence against a deficit or vulnerability as exposed by the stimulus threat (Xu & McGregor, 2018). This idea is supposedly supported by the lack of personal awareness of the threat or defensiveness caused by the information on the part of those 'threatened'. For this reason 'threat' is difficult to measure as it is outside of the perceiver's awareness, which is argued to lend support to its existence (Xu & McGregor, 2018), but equally, this does not mean threat is the mechanism

by which responses are drawn from. Still, measurement tools for threat are considerably lacking as self-report will insufficiently assess its existence. A great deal of research has argued threat/defensiveness is behind a multitude of findings in the realm of inequality but through indirect assessments of threat such as defensive responding, self-reported guilt, and measures of policy change (Lowery et al., 2012; Phillips & Lowery, 2020; Powell et al., 2005) or through manipulating threat conditions (Knowles & Lowery, 2012; Phillips & Lowery, 2020). Many studies do not comment about the techniques nor validity of assessment used to identify defensiveness as a concept, nevertheless threat has become a cornerstone in the realm of justice and inequality research.

Typical markers of threat are physiological and measured through skin conductance and heart rate. Dover (2022) applied these methods to assess the existence of threat concerning group-based inequality and privilege. This seems to be the first study to directly assess threat in this context and using advantage framing, it was shown that threat is aroused in privileged individuals at a physiological and a cognitive level – through whether inequality framing influences individuals' performance on a demanding task. Furthermore, finding members of privileged groups will avoid the threat arising from their privilege through strategic inequality framing, wherein they used advantage frames less when describing legitimate inequality as opposed to illegitimate inequality (Dover, 2022).

2.7 Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Threat research is intimately based on early dissonance research. Festinger (1957) argued that cognitive dissonance occurs when inconsistency arises between two cognitive elements and as a result produces negative arousal. It is explained that motivation develops to reduce the inconsistency to avoid or reduce that negative arousal (Carpenter, 2019). Festinger would stress the proximity an issue has to the self-concept could increase dissonance but never fully clarified this point (Aronson, 1992), though Aronson (1968) later posited that maintaining positive self-concept is the main force of cognitive dissonance. Therefore, one can assume that motivations related to the self-concept or maintaining one's sense of self are likely to arise to resist any dissonance. Rokeach (1973) further clarified the self-concept and argued that an individual's values are bound to their self-concept. Further noting that generally individuals are motivated to

"maintain and enhance one's total conception of oneself" (Rokeach, 1973, p. 216). To summarise, Carpenter (2019) suggests that upon realising one's attitude may be inconsistent with a value, they are more likely to alter the attitude than the value because values are so closely tied to the self-concept.

More generally, research has demonstrated that after self-image threat an individual is more likely to respond in a self-serving way (Kunda, 1990). This appears evident when looking at research in the area of privilege and inequality wherein Phillips and Lowery (2020) showed that in the face of class privilege, people seem to justify or reason with these benefits by emphasising hardships. It is unclear whether this is to reduce the visibility of their privilege or reduce the burden their privilege has on their esteem to protect their sense of merit (Phillips & Lowery, 2015, 2018). Potentially, meritocracy promotes these individuals to assert their experience of hardships as dominant group members will also deny benefiting from privileges afforded to them from their membership to the group to retain a sense of personal merit (Phillips & Lowery, 2015, 2018). In other words, individuals would rather see their hardship than their privilege, because they value merit and prefer to see this in themselves. This means individuals will change the frame of reference they have of their privilege toward it being deserved through their perceived hardship to sit with their privilege more comfortably and therefore inequality more comfortably. However, in doing so, individuals may legitimise societal inequities, those disadvantages perpetuated systemically, as simple inequalities that would be interchangeable with their version of 'hardship' which remains unaffected by an unfair system. This is because inequity is more uncomfortable than inequality. Consequently, individuals may blind themselves from their unearned privileges because "they address the discomfort associated with naked privilege, by cloaking it with the fig leaf of hardship" (Phillips & Lowery, 2020, p. 17).

2.8 Ego-Involvement

Against the backdrop of cognitive dissonance theory, cognitions and motivations surrounding inequality are arguably inextricably linked to one's self-concept. As mentioned, Festinger originally argued that the proximity of an issue to the self-concept will determine the level of cognitive dissonance that arises, though he never clarified how to identify this proximity (Aronson, 1992). It has since been proposed that ego involvement is a good predictor for the

closeness of values, attitudes, and identities to self-concept. Sereno (1969) posited that ego-involvement can improve predictions for cognitive dissonance because it clarifies that dissonance is more likely to be reduced when the self is implicated. It has been highlighted, by Aronson (1968) and Kunda (1990) that current theory is unable to predict what action one may take to reduce dissonance, it seems we understand that one will reduce dissonance, and may do so by potentially any motivated means. Overall, it is suggested that ego-threatening information will be resisted (Aronson, 1968, 1992; Rokeach, 1973). Though, Sereno proposed the inclusion of ego-involvement within consistency theory could contribute toward which path may be chosen for dissonance reduction because individuals will select the route that best satisfies their self-concept.

At this point, the association of motivational and ideological biases with inequality is clear, though these biases also seem to be intertwined with the self-concept. Sherman and Cohen (2002) highlight that the motivation an individual has to maintain their concept of self is powerful and that because of this, individuals "could resist information that could ultimately improve the quality of their decisions" (p. 120). For instance, the extent in which information may threaten the self-concept or is presented in a way that can do so, individuals may employ motivated reasoning to deny, dismiss or distort the information so that instead it can serve to maintain their concept of self, which perhaps may be a well-reasoned, critical thinker (Sherman & Cohen, 2002). Though this motivation to maintain and protect such an image of the self may ironically produce defensiveness and irrationality. It is stated that people will tend to interpret ambiguous information in line with pre-existing beliefs via motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990). Therefore, where framing is concerned, the description of inequality would differentially motivate individuals to perceive inequality in line with their beliefs. Though, for most individuals motivated reasoning can only come up against the truth so much and in the face of unambiguous information individuals will not reason away the truth no matter how motivated they may be, because individuals still need to maintain their concept of self as a reasonable individual (Kunda, 1990). Ultimately, individuals will only employ motivated reasoning when they perceive there is no obvious adverse consequence for doing so (Carpenter, 2019). Nevertheless, researchers seek to find methods to reduce motivated reasoning, the most notable in the literature is self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988).

2.9 Self-Affirmation

Steele's (1988) theory of self-affirmation was a development in dissonance theory, whereby the theory argues that 'dissonance motivation is stirred by the implication of the inconsistency that one is not adaptively or morally adequate' (p. 278). Though a significant insight of this theory was that motivated reasoning could be reduced by motivating individuals to affirm their competence and/or morality in some unrelated area to the desired area of motivated reasoning. Therefore, this finding indicated that an individual could handle threats to the ego/self-concept by reaffirming their value in some other area. Steele (1988) argued self-affirmation can bolster an individual's overarching goal of maintaining a positive sense of self. Therefore, self-affirmation can be considered an act that validates an individual's adequacy (Steele, 1988). The most prominent experimental manipulation of self-affirmation prompts individuals to write about their core personal values (McQueen & Klein, 2006), where personal values can be considered internalised standards by which an individual can evaluate the self (Rokeach, 1973).

There is a plethora of self-affirmation research that reinforces its use as a tool to reduce motivated reasoning in which Sherman and Cohen (2002; 2006) have reviewed self-affirmation studies and indicated that it may potentially be an especially effective way to reduce ego-defensive responses. One of the most notable studies was conducted by Cohen et al. (2000) who presented persuasive reports about the effectiveness of the death penalty contradicting the beliefs of individuals with strongly polarised attitudes about the punishment. The direction of the report determined the attitudes about capital punishment for self-affirmed participants, who were also less critical of the report and suspect less bias. It seemed self-affirmation reduced the desire participants may have had to protect their self-worth related to their beliefs and values, meaning they read and responded to the report with less defensiveness. Similar effects have been shown for abortion (Cohen et al., 2007) and risk of contracting AIDS (Sherman et al., 2000) where in this study the effect of self-affirmation went beyond the perceived personal risk of contracting AIDS but influenced prevention behaviour, where half of the affirmed participants purchased condoms so as opposed to a quarter of non-affirmed participants. Affirmation has also encouraged individuals to provide better apologies to victims, this is interesting as apologies encapsulate several layers of threat as they require the recognition of several intimidating elements such as

fault, shameful emotions, and the promise of change but often are challenged by defensive strategies of justifications of behaviour or blame (Schumann, 2014).

Kim and McGill (2017) followed this logic and posited that to avoid the discomfort of inequality individuals may downplay others' misfortune when considering charitable assistance which may function to justify not assisting in resolving the inequality. People who identified/related more with victims of inequality (i.e., high identifiers) were more likely to offer charity than those who identified less (i.e., low identifiers). Interestingly, the self-affirmation manipulation increased charitable giving the most among low identifiers, but affirmed high identifiers, did not offer any more assistance. This is argued to be because low-identifiers will employ more motivated reasoning to downplay the issues of the beneficiary, again highlighting the interplay of ego-defensiveness with self-affirmation, which can go so far as to alter how deserving an individual in need is to an individual who would typically lack any sort of desire to assist. More recent evidence has shown that self-affirmation has increased support for action to address inequality in real-world charity campaigns (Shuman et al., 2022).

Contrastingly, research has also shown individuals may increase self-serving behaviours in the face of inequality. As previously mentioned, Phillips and Lowery (2020) demonstrated that when exposed to evidence that one benefits from class privilege, people seem to justify or reason by emphasising hardships they have experienced like divorce, for example. They seem to anticipate that these experiences are worthy counterevidence. It seems by not realising their unearned advantages this strategy protects their sense of merit and defends their self-regard as this kind of response can be reduced when respondents are given the opportunity to self-affirm, such as writing about an instance when succeeding independently, or by listing moral strengths (Phillips & Lowery, 2020).

Similar effects have been found in the context of racial inequity (Phillips & Lowery, 2015), however, the influence of privilege and affirmation were extended to assess their influence in resolving inequities. It was shown that participants who were affirmed acknowledged more personal privilege, claimed hardships less, and subsequently showed increased support for inequity-reducing policies – policies that would help achieve group equity. However, denial of personal privilege was mediated by increased claims of hardship and in turn associated with less

support for inequity-reducing policies (Phillips & Lowery, 2015). Therefore, affirmation only went so far to increase support to reduce inequity when an individual realised their privilege but, when privilege was denied, this led to even less support for inequality. This is an interesting interplay of privilege acceptance and affirmation, wherein affirmation may have allowed individuals who accepted their privilege to more effectively manage threat, and as a result, were able to effectively assess the need for affirmative action. Adversely, affirmation may not have buffered threat for the individuals who denied privilege which subsequently increased their defensive hardship claims and led them to decrease their support for inequity reducing policy beyond what would be expected. This research highlights that in the face of privilege, defensive responding can be reduced but, how this self-affirmation could link into support to reduce inequalities and prosocial behaviour like other self-affirmation research has demonstrated remains unaddressed.

2.10 Threat Management

Support for reducing inequality, such as redistribution, may at least in part draw on ideas for people based on how they think the world should look but are more likely to lean heavily on perceptions and beliefs they have about inequality (Garcia-Sanchez et al., 2020). Intriguingly, when perceptions of inequality and social progress are threatening, it has been shown that interpretations of the same evidence of social progress are different across social groups, with progress evoking threat pronouncedly among high-status groups (Georgeac & Rattan, 2022). As such, it appears that threat can be a key determining factor in whether individuals may support redistribution and by what means this support serves.

2.10.1 Framing

Framing manipulations can identify differential support for reducing inequalities through different descriptions of the same inequality. For example, Rosette and Koval (2018), showed that privileged individuals engaged with redistributive measures more when the framing about inequities focussed on another *individual's* disadvantage as opposed to a frame focussing on another *group's* disadvantage. It seems the individual-level frame prompted fewer negative evaluations of disadvantaged others than a group-based frame reinforcing how meritocratic ideals

can perpetuate unequal systems. Where the disadvantaged individual is not perceived as lazy, the same way a disadvantaged group may be. Similarly, unequal distributions were seen as fairer when presented with an individual than a group, also less support for redistribution was shown when representing successful individuals as opposed to a representation of group success (Walker et al., 2021). Seemingly, we are sensitive to descriptions of inequality insofar that they are not threatening to ourselves, which potentially shapes how we perceive inequality and in turn, could influence how we might go about addressing inequality.

This highlights how pervasive the mentality of power and advantage is, which seemingly influences preservation tendencies even when this power is hypothetical, in turn, emphasising the potential for negative downstream consequences for inequality-reducing measures. As such, when participants were assigned to a high-power role, as opposed to having one in reality, those participants were significantly less supportive of egalitarian policies, therefore, the more motivation an individual had to maintain differences between groups the more they rejected measures to reduce it and vice versa (Kteily et al., 2017). Similarly, research has determined that people tend to believe they are poorer than they are, and after being informed of this demand less redistribution and increased support for the Conservative party (Karadja et al., 2017). Additionally, dominant group members informed of group privileges who subsequently felt higher status after identifying with these personal privileges supported welfare less and blamed welfare recipients and viewed them as lazier (Cooley et al., 2021). This effect was also produced when individuals were primed with meritocratic ideology, these reduced perceptions of privileges afforded to those in the dominant group who highly identify with their membership (Knowles & Lowery, 2012). So, we have clear motivations towards maintaining that privileges are our own, even when we realise that they are not effortfully earned but also minimising their visibility potentially to themselves but also to others. Consequently, individuals are sensitive to the threat seemingly produced by the ownership of privileges and will seek to maintain them by avoiding redistribution. This seems most apparent in privileged folk who seem to want to perceive themselves as deserving of it and desire to maintain them. However, disadvantaged individuals also seem to inadvertently follow the trend that preserves privileges for those who already possess them, perhaps seem to view themselves as undeserving of privileges as they lack them.

2.10.2 False Charity?

Generally, individuals are opposed to inequality and inequities and so it would not be unusual to assume that given the opportunity, individuals may opt to reduce differences more often than not. In the literature we tend to see that individuals are particularly attuned to privilege and disadvantage, it also seems that individuals are attuned to the effects of charitable or equitable actions. Support for inequality reduction also tends to show individuals may instead lean toward inequality-attenuating actions, and that we are not as egalitarian as we may collectively desire to be. Indeed, Chow et al. (2010) have reviewed the literature that supports this trend, discussing the many ways that privileged group members will respond to inequity that are specifically *against* reducing inequalities such as support for affirmative action i.e., policies that would reduce inequalities, in ways that do not resolve inequalities (Lowery et al., 2012), denial of inequities in the first place (Dobbs & Nicholson, 2022; Lowery et al., 2012) or denial of personal wrongdoing (Phillips & Lowery, 2018). They also discuss how privileged group members will disidentify from the group, as well as construe inequities in line with their motivations and use ideologies toward the perpetuation of inequalities (Chow et al., 2010). All of which tend to maintain the status quo or avoid the remedy of inequities.

As already emphasised, privileged group members are more threatened by inequalities that may impact how they perceive themselves but also how others perceive them, of which there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that privileged group members are particularly more likely to avoid reducing inequalities. Jun et al. (2017) suggested that a motivation to maintain hierarchy might counterintuitively encourage dominant group members to reduce support for a highly racially identified political figure of their group despite this going against the immediate interests of their group and themselves. This is argued to be because the appointment of those candidates may disrupt the existing hierarchy, by upsetting members of minority groups (Jun et al., 2017). This suggests that dominant group members may perceive threat to their positions in the hierarchy and consequently strategise the maintenance of their position by going against their interests to remain 'on-side' with the minority group (Jun et al., 2017). Chow et al. (2013) further reinforces this as the more an individual perceived the subordinate group to harbour distaste for the dominant

group (perceived as a threat to hierarchy stability), in turn, increased their support redistributive action to return balance to the hierarchy.

Likewise, perceptions of ingroup advantage or privilege by the advantaged group, accordingly increased support for actions harmful to the ingroup but not when the same policies are perceived to help minorities (Lowery et al., 2012). Interestingly, this evidence suggests that individuals will opt to punish themselves a little to avoid overall equality or the uplifting of the lesser outgroup. Therefore, support for inequality-reducing measures depends on whether one's privileged status concerning inequality is perceived to be legitimate or secure, or otherwise non-threatening (Phillips & Lowery, 2018). Again, this research shines a bright light on outcomes that broader goals to reduce inequality are intentionally avoided at the individual level based on personal desires to avoid losing the privileges one enjoys. Importantly, these findings are also characterised by the way these actions are performed in a way that does not subvert the outgroup's perception of the privileged group. These findings align with Phillips and Lowery (2018), who argued that strategies that reduce the visibility of privilege can justify less support for redistributive measures, insofar that "the cover of innocence is provided, individuals can pursue advantages freely" (p. 160).

Interestingly, these findings can be more pronounced for individuals of particular ideological stances, of which, Ho and Unzueta (2015) showed that antiegalitarians (i.e., those who tend to oppose equality) only oppose strong policies to reduce inequities less when these policies may strengthen racial hierarchies. Specifically, people who oppose equality will withdraw their opposition for inequality reducing measures more when those policies will counteractively enhance differences or maintain inequities. This potentially highlights that one's assessment of support for reducing inequality may reflect self-protection as opposed to any sense of charity, which indicates redistribution may reflect an "I will help, only when it suits me" mentality. Likewise, Harding and Sibley (2011) have indicated the possibility that New Zealander's meritocratic beliefs are flexibly expressed by those who have a strong social dominance orientation in ways that benefit the privileged group's position. Specifically, social dominance orientation could encourage individuals to malleably express their support for meritocracy to strengthen their social position. However, threat also seems to have the potential to override

ideological stances. It has been shown that after experimentally induced threat, liberals became more conservative, going as far as for liberals to become “as conservative as conservatives chronically were” (Nail et al., 2009, p. 905). These findings appear to be a defensive reaction, suggesting that conservative social cognition, in a political or psychological sense, may be used to defend against personal vulnerability.

Furthermore, Chow and Galak (2012), showed that among those who would most agree that hard work pays off (i.e., strong conservatives) showed that a disadvantage frame (inequality described as “poor make less”) was associated with less external attributions for the success of the wealthy and the poverty of the poor. So, when the focus is on the poor, groups either rich or poor, are seen to be the cause of their current success or hardship – a strongly meritocratic sentiment. However, in the advantage frame (inequality described as the "rich make more") no such effect was found, though, more conservativism was linked to more support for reducing inequality in this condition. So, individuals were not attributing the reasons for success or poverty any more or less externally when told the rich make more, but in this condition, they are more likely to support external assistance (e.g., redistributive tax policies) to reduce this inequality. This means that there was no agreement for the reasons for inequality when the inequality focussed on the rich like there was for a disadvantage frame, however redistribution was supported more. This highlights that what individuals believe people should have does not necessarily carry across from perceptions or explanations of poverty or wealth. Perhaps the reluctance to acknowledge that reasons for inequality are external (or not systemic) also suggests that individuals are privileged due to unfair advantage, instead of hard work, and this is demonstrated through desires for fixing disadvantage when the focus is on the rich. This is further evidence to suggest that increased support for inequality reducing measures may not reflect true charity but ultimately a motive to offset threat to the self or the hierarchy.

2.11 Where Does This Leave Us?

We understand that inequality that focuses on advantage produces more threat among members of the advantaged groups as it is more self-relevant and therefore more threatening than inequality described as the disadvantages of the subordinate group (Chow et al., 2010; Dover, 2022). Threat, therefore, steers support for measures to reduce inequality, what complicates this

further is that these preferences are also subject to several ideological values (García-Sánchez et al., 2021; Harding & Sibley, 2011; Ho & Unzueta, 2015). Furthermore, members of privileged groups are more likely to support these ideologies and system-justifying beliefs and therefore less likely to support redistributive policies (García-Sánchez et al., 2020; 2019; Kteily et al., 2017). Furthermore, individuals with high social dominance orientation or the desire to maintain hierarchy have a negative influence on perceptions and redistribution more so than actually being a member of the group who most benefits (Kteily et al., 2017). Ultimately, privileged groups seem to respond to inequality in hierarchy-attenuating and hierarchy-enhancing ways (Chow et al., 2010; Harding & Sibley, 2011; Jun et al., 2022).

More broadly, the literature lacks consensus as to whether inequality with a focus on advantage, rather than disadvantage increases the desire to rectify inequalities. Some research supports that a focus on advantage increases support to reduce inequality (Bruckmüller et al., 2017; Chow & Galak, 2012), alternatively, other research suggests that a disadvantage frame increases support for inequality-reducing policies (Dietze & Craig, 2021; Howlett et al., 2021; Lowery et al., 2012). It is argued that the psychological discomfort that arises from a focus on advantage is thought to increase preferences for eliminating the inequity however, those preferences centre around *reducing advantages* as opposed to reducing disadvantages, which in essence does not actively reduce inequities (Chow et al., 2010). This aligns with dissonance theory which suggests threat and dissonance increase motivated reasoning which potentially explains the findings that privileged group members may strategically support redistribution. Potentially, given the right conditions support for redistribution does not reflect egalitarian intentions but rather strategic hierarchy maintenance if and when hierarchy is perceived to be unstable or where the inequality is threatening. Ultimately, supporting redistribution may buffer an individual from experiencing the threat and discomfort of benefitting in an unequal system.

In sum, the research presents a complex picture where there is a possibility that findings that show support for redistribution may actually reflect a desire – conscious or unconscious – to maintain inequalities for and by those most benefitting from inequality. Alternatively, these findings could also be driven by the motivation to reduce dissonance in the form of threat, of which charity or opting for redistribution may be an avenue through which to achieve this.

Therefore, the motivation to reduce dissonance is likely to be greater alongside greater threat (i.e., the advantage frame). The uncertainty in this space also appears to exist within the wider theoretical sphere of cognitive dissonance, where Aronson (1968) and Kunda (1990) have indicated the inability of current theory to predict what action one may choose to reduce dissonance. Overall, it is suggested that ego-threatening information will be resisted (Aronson, 1968, 1992; Rokeach, 1973). It may well be that the possibility that support for redistribution being performative or malleable sits in this space as well, wherein people may choose to redistribute as a means of reducing dissonance. Nevertheless, there is a real possibility that individuals truly think their support for inequality reduction echoes a desire for egalitarian outcomes instead of unconsciously maintaining differences. Nevertheless, support for redistribution may not reflect charitable intentions, but this is also not to say that support for redistribution is not always ingenuine, though the research reinforces that we cannot assume this. This possibility is highlighted by the differences seen in support for redistribution between advantage and disadvantage frames.

This subsequently poses the question as to whether it is possible that suggestions of charity through support for redistribution are ego-involved and serve to offset perceived threat/dissonance. If so, self-affirmation may serve to offset any ego-defensiveness and then truer beliefs about redistribution could be assessed. In which case there is a plethora of evidence suggesting self-affirmation reduces defensive responding (Phillips & Lowery, 2015, 2018, 2020). Therefore, I argue that these mixed findings may lend to perceived threat. People may not always support measures to reduce inequality, however, individuals *are* differentially motivated by threat towards reducing inequality. Therefore, individuals under the right conditions may be motivated to reduce the discomfort that arises from the reality of inequality, not necessarily by reducing inequality in and of itself. So, I wish to extend these findings by assessing whether reducing threat may influence support for inequality-reducing measures i.e., redistribution.

2.12 The Current Research

I seek to address the question of whether support for redistribution is malleable by using inequality framing and self-affirmation manipulation to examine inequality perceptions and redistribution preferences. The current research proposes that inequality framing may function as

a proxy for threat whereby this threat can be reduced under the influence of self-affirmation. Threat is suggested to arise but does so differentially for those who perceive themselves as privileged or disadvantaged. Threat affects privileged groups through realising their illegitimate privileges and underprivileged groups realising undeserved disadvantages. Therefore, the first goal of this research is to assess whether advantage versus disadvantage frames describing group-based inequality differentially influence perceptions of inequality and redistribution. This is because advantage frames are thought to be more threatening due to the uncomfortable reality that some individuals unfairly thrive in an unequal system. The second goal of this research is to assess whether an affirmation manipulation differentially influences perceptions of inequality and redistribution preferences between frames. A third goal is to assess how ideological preferences (i.e., social dominance orientation and belief in a just world) influence these relationships. Therefore, the following research will test the following hypotheses:

1. It is hypothesised that more inequality will be perceived in an advantage frame.
2. It is hypothesised that non-affirmed participants in the disadvantage frame will perceive more inequality than affirmed participants.
3. It is hypothesised that advantage frames will be more threatening than disadvantage frames and would increase support for redistribution.
4. Therefore, it is hypothesised that affirmed participants will support redistribution less as they are less likely to defensively respond to inequality as their self-worth is less affected by the discomfort of inequality and produce more honest responses for redistribution.
5. It is anticipated that social dominance orientation and belief in a just world will be associated with lower perceptions of inequality and reduce support for redistribution.

Chapter 3

Method

This study used a 2 (inequality framing: ‘advantage’ vs. ‘disadvantage’) x 2 (self-affirmation vs. control) factorial design. We used an anonymous online questionnaire where participants were presented with one of two vignettes that differed only in how they described the same magnitude of inequality. They then engaged in a writing task that either did or did not encourage them to affirm themselves. The subsequent questions were identical for each group and asked about their perceptions regarding the vignettes and privilege, support for economic redistribution, belief in a just world, social dominance orientation and various basic questions about their demographic.

3.1 Participants

Participants were primarily recruited online, and through advertisements posted around the Auckland public libraries. Recruitment commenced from early October 2022 over an eight-week period. Recruitment online consisted of public posts on Facebook and Instagram across neighbourhood groups, personal pages and resharing across the researcher’s family network and friends. The public poster advertisements (Appendix B) were placed on bulletin boards in high-traffic areas across several public libraries. Potential participants were invited using a general introduction to the study briefly informing them of the study and what will be required of them. It also contained details of how to participate and a QR code or web link to access the online questionnaire.

An a priori power analysis indicated a sample size of 210 for a medium effect size comparable to other studies. We aimed to recruit approximately 200-250 participants also aligning with similar studies. Eligible participants were required to be over the age of 16 and to be fluent in English. The study had 414 responses over an eight-week period; however, the study produced an unusually high attrition rate whereby only around 200 of these responses were completed in full. Although this rate of attrition was disappointing, the intended sample size was still reached.

The final sample included 206 participants who ranged from 20-93 with a median of 40. There was an overrepresentation of females (n = 148) in the sample making up 71.8% compared to males (n = 25) making up 12.1% of the sample. Gender diverse (n = 4) participants and those who preferred not to say (n = 5) made up 4.3%, and the remaining 11.7% did not report their gender. Most of the participants were employed either full time (44.2%), part time (15%) or self-employed (9.2%). The remainder were students (6.8%), retired (4.4%), unemployed (5.9%) or other (2.9%), and the remaining 11.7% did not report their employment status. The ethnicity information reported by participants can be found in Table 1 below. The remaining 12% of participants did not report their ethnicity.

Table 1

Ethnic distribution of sample

		n	%
1 Ethnic group		150	75
	NZ European only	109	52.9
	Māori only	6	2.9
	Pacific only	8	3.9
	European only	7	3.4
	MELAA only	12	5.9
	Other only	8	3.9
2 Ethnic groups		27	13.5
	NZ European/Māori	8	3.9
	NZ European/European	5	2.4
	NZ European/Pacific Island	3	1.5
	NZ European/Other	5	2.5
	Other 2 ethnicities	6	3.0
3 Ethnic groups		4	2.0

Note. MELAA includes Middle Eastern, Latin American, African, and Asian ethnicities.

3.2 Prize Draw

A prize draw was used to incentivise participation in this study. Participants were informed that there was a prize pool of up to $1,000 in $20.00 shopping centre vouchers. The prize draw was also a measured aspect of this study to add a behavioural dimension to the

redistribution outcome measure as self-report measures are limited and fall short at measuring *actual* donation behaviour (Randall & Fernandes, 1991).

Participants were asked at the end of the questionnaire and prior to entering the draw if they wished to donate half of their winnings should they be drawn as a winner. This meant that at the conclusion of the study the number of winners would depend on the number of individuals who elected to donate their 'winnings'. However, the prize draw would reduce hence the offer of a prize draw of *up to* $1,000. For example, if half of the participants indicated that they wished to donate their winnings then $500 dollars will be donated anonymously to Child Poverty Action Group and the remaining $500 will be drawn for participants in $20 vouchers. Therefore 25 participants are drawn to receive a $20 voucher to Westfield Shopping Centre or Kiwi Property Mall, participants still received the full amount regardless of whether they opted to donate because the responses were anonymous, and we could not determine whether the participant did or did not. This information was also summarised to participants on the recruitment advertisements.

3.3 Materials and Procedure

After accessing the questionnaire via the anonymous links provided in the recruitment advertisements, participants were presented with information page (Appendix C) which detailed all the information related to their participation. Participants were required to confirm they were over the age of 16 to proceed to the questionnaire. Each participant was randomly allocated to one of the four experimental groups. These groups differ by the infographic they viewed (framed in terms of either advantage or disadvantage), and whether they had the opportunity to self-affirm or not. The conditions/groups are as follows, Advantage Affirmation, Advantage Control, Disadvantage Affirmation and Disadvantage Control. The questionnaire proceeded in the following order.

3.3.1 Experimental Manipulations

3.3.1.1 Infographic Framing

Participants were presented with the following preamble adapted to fit the NZ context from Phillips and Lowery (2020). The bracketed information refers to the wording for the advantage condition.

> In the past several decades, we have given considerable attention to matters of inequality as New Zealand's level of wealth inequality is above average. Despite increased attention to the issue, most social scientists agree that inequities based on class persist. For example, people from households in the *bottom [top]* 10% of incomes are considered *impoverished [wealthy]* in New Zealand. This *impoverished [wealthy]* status means they *suffer disadvantages [enjoy advantages]* that go beyond what would be expected based on differences in skills or hard work; these *disadvantages [advantages]* are based on their economic position alone. People from households in the *bottom [top]* 10% are disproportionately *disadvantaged [advantaged]* throughout their lives in the domains of housing, health care, jobs, and more.
>
> Several groups in New Zealand are making a concerted effort to bring attention to these issues and bring about change to reduce the *disadvantages [advantages]* of the *poor [wealthy]*.
>
> The following infographic highlights differential outcomes in eight areas for the disadvantaged [advantaged] in New Zealand:

Participants then view the infographic broken up over 8 slides highlighting the differential outcomes disadvantage or advantage depending on their condition in the domains of schooling, housing, healthcare, wealth, mortality, job opportunity, access to resources and crime victimisations. The infographics are appended in full (Appendix D) and describe the same inequality with language that frames the information to be perceived as depicting either advantage or disadvantage. This means the infographics present the same information and only differ in their description. For example, the advantage condition utilises "more than" wording as opposed to "less than" wording for the disadvantage condition. Further examples include most/least, less likely/more likely, and higher/lower. The time that participants spent with each slide was measured to assess engagement.

3.3.1.2 Self-Affirmation

Following standard procedures for manipulating self-affirmation (McQueen & Klein, 2006), all participants rank-ordered a list of 11 values (e.g., artistic skills, independence) in terms

of their personal importance. Participants were then randomly assigned to write for three minutes about their top-ranked value and why it was personally meaningful (affirmation group) or why their bottom-ranked value might be important to someone else (control group). Anyone who was allocated to the affirmation condition and did not write any information about their important values were removed from the study as they could not be considered affirmed. This meant eight participants were excluded from analysis.

3.3.1.3 Socioeconomic Status

Participants then were asked about their social positioning via several established measures of economic status. We needed thorough assessment of this aspect as we are assessing who can identify/relate most to the inequality information, as only self-relevant information is threatening (Chow et al., 2010; Lowery et al., 2012). In this case, those who are at the very top and very bottom of the socioeconomic spectrum are of particular interest as this information will be most relevant to these individuals. Further, socio-economic questions were administered at this point in the questionnaire as socioeconomic status questions could be considered to be imposing when asked directly after the infographic, which may induce more threat (Bradburn et al., 1978) or make one's positioning towards their own privilege salient.

The subjective social status scale (Adler et al., 2000), was used to assess participants' perception of their own social standing it is a robust and easily understood measure. An image of a ladder with 10 rungs was presented with the following statement: "At the top of the ladder are the people who are the best off, those who have the most money, most education, and best jobs. At the bottom are the people who are the worst off, those who have the least money, least education, worst jobs, or no job". This item was adapted for the online questionnaire format and asked participants to click or tap on the rung of their choosing. Participants were also asked to indicate the class they belong to on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*upper class*) to 5 (*lower class*). Yearly household income was also measured ranging from 1 (*less than $30,000*) to 6 (*more than $200,000*). Conservatism was also assessed in this section of the questionnaire adapted from Dietze and Craig (2021) participants were asked participants to indicate their agreement or disagreement with the following statement: "I endorse many aspects of conservative political

ideology" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The questions related to socioeconomic status correlated well and were standardised to form a reliable scale ($\alpha = .85$). The class and ladder questions were reverse scored so that a high score reflects high socioeconomic status as this is more intuitive.

3.3.2 Outcome Measures

3.3.2.1 Perceptions of Vignettes

Exposure to threatening information is thought to produce more negative thoughts (or counter arguments) than positive thoughts (Knight Lapinski & Boster, 2001). Furthermore, this effect is more pronounced for individuals who are threatened by the information than those who are not threatened by the information (Abelson, 1968, as cited in Knight Lapinski & Boster, 2001). Questions assessing the perceptions of the vignettes were based on message acceptance ideas adapted to fit the context of the infographics (Good & Abraham, 2007). As per Sherman et al. (2000), participants were asked to list any thoughts they had while reading the infographic in the provided text box. The thoughts listed by participants were independently coded by two raters, blind to the participants' condition. The thoughts were tallied across four dimensions: incongruent thoughts, congruent thoughts, neutral relevant thoughts, and neutral irrelevant thoughts. Following procedures utilised in other studies a measure of message agreement was created by subtracting the number of incongruent thoughts from the number of incongruent thoughts (Bruckmüller & Braun, 2020; Killeya & Johnson, 1998). Accordingly, positive values indicated more agreement and negative values indicated disagreement. Interrater reliability analysis using the Kappa statistic for agreement between the two raters indicated strong agreement across all dimensions (incongruent Kappa = .70; congruent Kappa = .61; neutral relevant Kappa = .90; neutral irrelevant Kappa = .77). It was recognised while coding the data that emotions were frequently mentioned in the responses to the inequality information, a previously overlooked aspect of the question, therefore it was decided to capture this information on a 5-point scale (1 = *strong positive emotion* to 5 = *strong negative emotion*). Interrater agreement for the emotional responses were also near perfect (Kappa = .84). Any inconsistencies were resolved through discussion of the coded responses between raters.

3.3.2.2 Perceived Inequality

How participants interpreted the vignettes can assess whether inequality framed in terms of another's advantage may be perceived as more unequal than inequality framed in terms of another's disadvantage. The perceived magnitude of inequality was assessed on a scale from 1 (*very small*) to 5 (*very big*). Participants were also presented several statements adapted from Kim and McGill (2017), and participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a 5-point scale. (e.g., "The issues of economic inequality described earlier are worthy of attention"). Participants were then asked to rate the perceived accuracy of the infographic on a scale ranging from 1 (*not accurate at all*) to 5 (*extremely accurate*). The scores for each measure were averaged to form a moderately reliable scale ($\alpha = .67$).

3.3.2.3 Legitimacy

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements pertaining to perceived legitimacy rephrased from Bruckmüller et al. (2017), such as "All in all, I think the differences between the rich and poor described earlier must somehow be justified". These items did not prove reliable to form a scale so were removed from further analysis.

3.3.2.4 Redistribution

Redistribution refers to governmental decisions to reallocate economic resources to the less fortunate to reduce inequalities. As one of the main outcome variables, participants were asked about how they perceive redistribution to assess how participants desire to resolve inequalities. Adapted from García-Sánchez et al. (2020) to fit the New Zealand context, participants were asked about the taxes of those with high incomes on a 5-point scale (1 = *taxes are much too high*; 5 = *taxes are much too low*). The same question was added for the taxes of those with low incomes for exploratory purposes. Participants then indicated their level of agreement on a 5-point scale with two questions asking whether people with incomes over $1 million and $5 million should be taxed more heavily (Chow & Galak, 2012). Reliability analysis of this scale indicated that the item regarding the taxes of low-income earners included for exploratory purposes was not a good fit for the scale and so was removed from the analysis, resulting in a highly reliable scale ($\alpha = .88$).

3.3.3 Moderators/Predictors

3.3.3.1 Perceived Personal Privilege

Perceived privilege was included to assess the participant's personal belief in whether they have experienced privilege in their lives. Personal privilege was measured using three items adapted from Phillips and Lowery (2015; e.g., "I have had some advantages in my life") with 5-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). These questions were reliable for this sample using Cronbach's reliability analysis (α = .89).

3.3.3.2 Belief in a Just World

Belief in a just world reflects a motivation to perceive the world as fair, and where people get what they are deserving of (García-Sánchez et al., 2021). This scale was adapted to measure on a 5-point Likert scale instead of the original 10-point scale for consistency across the questionnaire for ease in responding from Dalbert (1999) (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). This measure included 12 items made up of the personal justice and general justice sub-scales each with six items. The scale includes questions such as "I believe that, by and large, I deserve what happens to me." The overall scale was reliable for this sample (α = .82) and also for the subscales of personal justice (α = .83) and general justice (α = .74).

3.3.3.3 Social Dominance Orientation

Social dominance orientation is an ideology that refers to beliefs/motivations people have towards maintaining differences between groups (Pratto et al., 1994). As such, support or opposition for these values can guide how individuals respond to inequality. This was measured using the $SDO7_{(s)}$ from Ho et al. (2015) and adapted to measure on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). For example, "An ideal society requires some groups to be on top and others to be on the bottom." The con-trait items were reverse coded, and the scale was reliable (α = .76).

3.3.4 Additional Outcome Measures

3.3.4.1 Further Reading and Donation Behaviour

We included an additional measure to assess participants' willingness to read further about inequality. This is included as research has shown that affirmed participants spend more time reading about others' misfortunes (Kim & McGill, 2017). Participants were asked "How

interested are you in receiving more information about economic dis/advantage and inequality?" and indicated on a scale ranging from 1 (*not interested at all*) to 5 (*extremely interested*). We also included a behavioural dimension directly asking participants if they wished to continue reading about economic inequality in New Zealand; if they did, they selected a "More information" option and were presented an article about wealth inequality (Appendix E). Their time spent reading was recorded. Those who did not wish to read on continued with the questionnaire.

3.3.4.2 Demographic Questions/Covariates

Gender was assessed by asking participants to report whether they were male, female, gender diverse, or preferred not to say. Education was assessed by asking participants to report their highest level of education (e.g., less than high school, high school, diploma/certificate, undergraduate degree, postgraduate degree). Ethnicity was assessed by asking to report the ethnicity they identified with, they could select more than one (e.g., NZ European, Māori, Pacific Island, European, Middle Eastern, Latin American, African, Asian, or other). Employment was also assessed by participants reporting their current employment status (e.g., self-employed, employed full time, employed part-time, unemployed looking for work, unemployed not looking for work, retired, student, or other). Age was also assessed where participants reported their year of birth.

3.3.4.3 Donation Behaviour/Prize Draw

Participants were then thanked for their participation and reminded of the prize draw. They were then asked to "Please indicate if you wish to have half of your winnings donated to a charity should you win. We will donate the funds to Child Poverty Action Group NZ." Participants either responded with a "Yes, I would like half my winnings donated to charity" or "No, I would not like half my winnings donated to charity". They were then directed to enter the prize draw by providing an email address via a different anonymous link so their emails could not be linked to their responses.

Chapter 4

Results

At the completion of data collection, the data were cleaned, and aggregate scores were created. Preliminary analyses included tests for normality and reliability across variables. Correlations were calculated to see the relationships among the variables. The following section presents the findings and details the analyses for hypothesis testing and any further exploratory analyses.

4.1 Exclusion Criteria

Participants who completed less than half of the questionnaire were excluded from analysis (n = 200). Participants who were in the affirmation condition and who did not complete the affirmation manipulation were excluded from analysis (n = 8).

4.2 Correlational Analysis

To assess the relationships amongst our variables, we conducted a series of Pearson correlations. The following section introduces some of these relationships. Table 2 provides all the correlations across the main variables of interest.

4.2.1 Social Dominance Orientation and Belief in a Just World

The relationships between social dominance orientation and belief in a just world, and the outcome variables of redistribution and perceived inequality will be covered under the fifth hypothesis section. The subscales of personal justice and general justice for the belief in a just world measure were moderately and positively correlated (r = .36), indicating that these subscales measure different but related concepts. Belief in general justice had moderate negative correlations with perceived inequality (r = -.38) and support for redistribution (r = -.37), suggesting that the more an individual believed in general justice the less inequality they perceived and the less they supported redistribution. The belief in personal justice had weak negative correlations with perceived inequality (r = -.14) and support for redistribution (r = -.22), this indicating a weak association between increased beliefs about the world being just to oneself and reduced perceptions of inequality and less support for redistribution.

Table 2

Table showing the means and standard deviations for main variables and their correlational relationships.

		Pearson correlation coefficient (*r*)											
	M (*SD*)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Perceived inequality	3.88 (.67)		.64**	-.58**	-.31**	-.14*	-.38**	- .13	-.39**	.32**	.24**	.22**	- .14
2. Support for redistribution	3.63 (.93)			-.59**	-.35**	-.22**	-.36**	- .14	-.41**	.29**	.29**	.17*	- .07
3. SDO	2.10 (.68)				.33**	.13	.43**	.18*	.42**	- .12	-.27**	- .06	.08
4. BJW	34.25 (7.51)					.85**	.80**	.29**	.22**	.08	- .05	- .09	.04
5. BJW personal justice subscale	20.13 (4.83)						.36**	.37**	.01	.28**	.05	- .12	- .02
6. BJW general justice subscale	14.13 (4.25)							.09	.36**	-.18*	- .14	- .02	.09
7. SES	-								.00	.29**	- .04	- .10	.05
8. Conservatism	2.47 (1.25)									-.26**	-.17*	- .10	.16*
9. Perceived privilege	13.32 (5.75)										.22**	.05	-.23**
10. Emotion	3.43 (.74)											.15	-.20*
11. Gender	1.94 (.52)												-.24**
12. Age	41.73 (15.10)												

Note. SDO refers to social dominance orientation. BJW refers to belief in a just world, Emotion refers to emotional responses to inequality. SES does not have a mean or standard deviation as it is made up of standardised Z scores.

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.2.2 Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status had a moderate positive correlation with the personal justice belief in a just world subscale (r = .37), this indicates that the higher the participants socioeconomic status the more they believed the world was just to them. Socioeconomic status also had a weak positive correlation with perceived privilege (r = .29) which suggests that the higher socioeconomic status the more privileged the participant perceives themselves to be.

4.2.3 Conservatism

Conservatism had moderate negative correlation with perceived inequality and support for redistribution (r = -.39 and -.40, respectively). Conservatism also moderately positively correlated with social dominance orientation (r = .42) and general justice subscale for the belief in a just world measure (r = .36), which suggests that the more conservative the individual the more they support differences between groups and that they believe that world is generally a just place. Conservatism also has a weak negative correlation with perceived privilege (r = -.26) which suggests the more conservative the individual the less privileged they perceive themselves to be.

4.2.4 Emotional Response to Inequality

The opportunity to capture emotional responses to the infographic arose when coding the open-ended responses and so were coded and included in the analysis. The emotional responses had a weak positive correlation with perceived inequality (r = .24) and support for redistribution (r = .29) which indicates that the more negative emotions presented in response to the inequality information were associated with more perceived inequality and more support for redistribution. Emotion had a weak negative correlation with social dominance orientation (r = -.27) which indicates that the more an individual supports hierarchy between groups the less negative emotions they presented in response to the infographic.

4.2.5 Gender and Age

Gender had a weak positive correlation with perceived inequality (r = .22), which suggests a small association between females perceiving greater inequality than males. Age had a weak negative correlation with perceived privilege (r = -.23), which suggests that the older the individual the less privileged they perceive themselves to be.

4.3 Hypothesis Testing

The goals of this research were to assess the influence of inequality framing and self-affirmation on perceptions of inequality and redistribution. The following section details the analyses conducted for each hypothesis.

4.3.1 Framing, Affirmation and Perceived Inequality

One of the main outcome variables was perceived inequality. It was hypothesised that more inequality would be perceived when inequality was framed with either a focus on advantage or disadvantage. It was also anticipated that this variable could also serve as a manipulation check to assess whether there was a measurable difference between frames. This hypothesis was not supported as the following analysis demonstrates.

It was further hypothesised that affirmed participants would perceive less inequality. We conducted a two-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) exploring the impact of the framing and affirmation manipulations on perceived inequality. There was no significant interaction effect between framing and affirmation groups, F (1, 189) = 2.61, p = .11. The main effect for affirmation, F (1, 189) = 1.81, p = .18, did not reach significance and the effect size was small (partial η^2 = .01). The main effect for framing also did not reach significance, F (1, 189) = .43, p = .51. Which suggests that affirmed participants did not perceive more inequality between the disadvantage and advantage framing conditions. Therefore, hypothesis one and two relating to perceived inequality and the affirmation and framing were not supported.

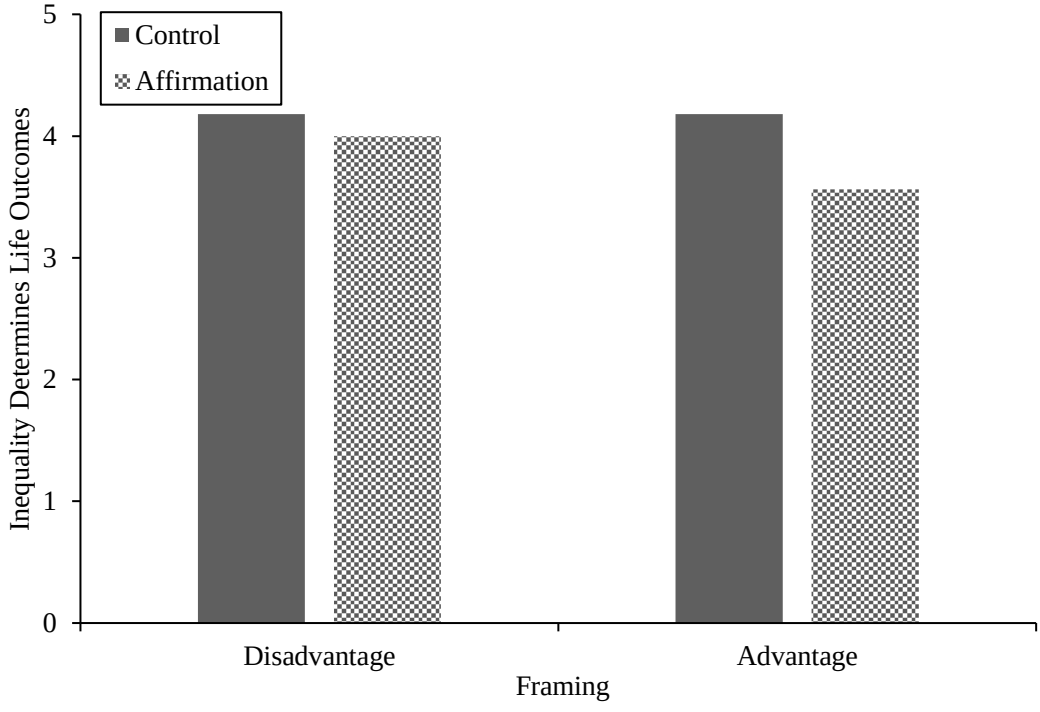
However, one of the questions pertaining to perceived inequality collapsed into the perceived inequality measure asked participants to indicate their agreement with the following statement: “Economic inequality determines people's life outcomes.” Testing this hypothesis against this question using a two-way between groups ANOVA produced a significant interaction effect between framing and affirmation, F (1, 189) = 4.01, p = .05, however the effect size was small (partial η^2 = .02). This indicates that the non-affirmed (control) participants in the advantage condition agreed that inequality determines outcomes less than the affirmed participants in the same condition, the participants in the disadvantage condition did not differ in their agreement of outcomes. The main effect for affirmation, F (1, 189) = 2.80, p = .10, did not reach significance,

nor did the main effect for framing F (1, 189) = .49, p = .55). Therefore, the use of this outcome variable could lend support for the third hypothesis as the affirmed participants in the advantage framing group significantly differed from the non-affirmed participants in their estimates of inequality determining individual outcomes.

To increase the sensitivity of the analysis conservatism was used as a control variable. For transparency, the covariates of interest in this study, were measured after the manipulations and therefore violate the assumption of the measurement of the covariate as the manipulations may have influenced participant scoring. No other assumptions were violated including, linearity, homogeneity of regression slopes. The inclusion of conservatism increased the strength of the interaction F (1, 188) = 5.50, p = .02, which was nevertheless a small effect (partial η^2 = .03). The main effects were largely unchanged with the inclusion of conservatism. This interaction is displayed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Bar graph showing the interaction effect between means for agreement of the life outcome measure across framing and self-affirmation groups controlling for conservativism.



Note. A higher score on this measure indicates greater agreement that life outcomes are determined by inequality.

4.3.2 Affirmation, Framing and Support for Redistribution

It was hypothesised that participants would support redistribution less in a disadvantage frame and affirmed participants would support redistribution less than control participants. A two-way ANOVA was conducted to assess the influence of the framing and affirmation manipulations on support for redistribution. The framing produced a marginal effect F (1, 186) = 3.30, p = .07. However, the interaction effect between framing and affirmation was not statistically significant, F (1, 186) = .72, p = .40, nor was the main effect for affirmation: F (1, 186) = 1.13, p = .25. Controlling for socioeconomic status increased the strength of the framing effect, but the effect still remained marginal F (1, 185) = 3.73, p = .055. This finding could suggest that when controlling for SES the advantage frame increased support for redistribution. Nevertheless, hypotheses three and four were not supported.

4.3.3 Ideological Beliefs, Perceived Inequality and Redistribution

The relationship between social dominance orientation and belief in a just world have with perceived inequality and support for redistribution was investigated using Pearson correlations. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure there were no violation of assumptions of normality and linearity. There was a large negative relationship between social dominance orientation and perceptions of inequality r = -.58, n = 184, p < .001, and support for redistribution r = -.60, n = 184, p < .001, this suggests that higher social dominance orientation is associated with lower perceptions of inequality and less support for redistribution. There was a medium negative relationship between overall belief in a just world and perceived inequality r = -.31, n = 186 p < .001 and support for redistribution r = -.35, n = 186, p < .001, which suggests that the more a participant supported a belief in a just world the less inequality they perceived and the less they supported redistribution. Therefore, this claim is supported as these beliefs reduced perceptions of inequality and support for redistribution.

Further analyses were conducted to assess the ability of social dominance orientation and belief in a just world to collectively predict levels of perceived inequality by conducting multiple regression analyses. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity. The overall

regression was statistically significant with social dominance orientation and belief in a just world explaining 34.8% of the variance in perceived inequality, F (2, 181) = 48.26, p <.001. The two variables each provided a unique statistically significant contribution in predicting levels of perceived inequality (social dominance orientation, β = -.52, p <.001; belief in a just world, β = -.01 p = .03). The same test was run using these moderators to assess their predictive ability of redistribution. The test violated no assumptions. The overall regression was statistically significant with social dominance orientation and belief in a just world explaining 37.9% of the variance in levels of redistribution F (2, 181) = 55.25, p <.001. The two moderators again provided a unique contribution to the model in predicting redistribution (social dominance orientation, β = -.74, p <.001; belief in a just world, β = -.02 p = .005). In each test social dominance orientation is shown to be a markedly better predictor of redistribution and perceived inequality.

4.4 Further Analysis

There were several other measures included in this study that could add detail to the bigger picture of affirmation and framing within the context of inequality. These included thought-listing measures about the frames, and behavioural measures related to real donation behaviour and further reading about inequality. It was anticipated that these measures would be influenced by the framing and affirmation manipulations. The following section details the analysis of these relationships.

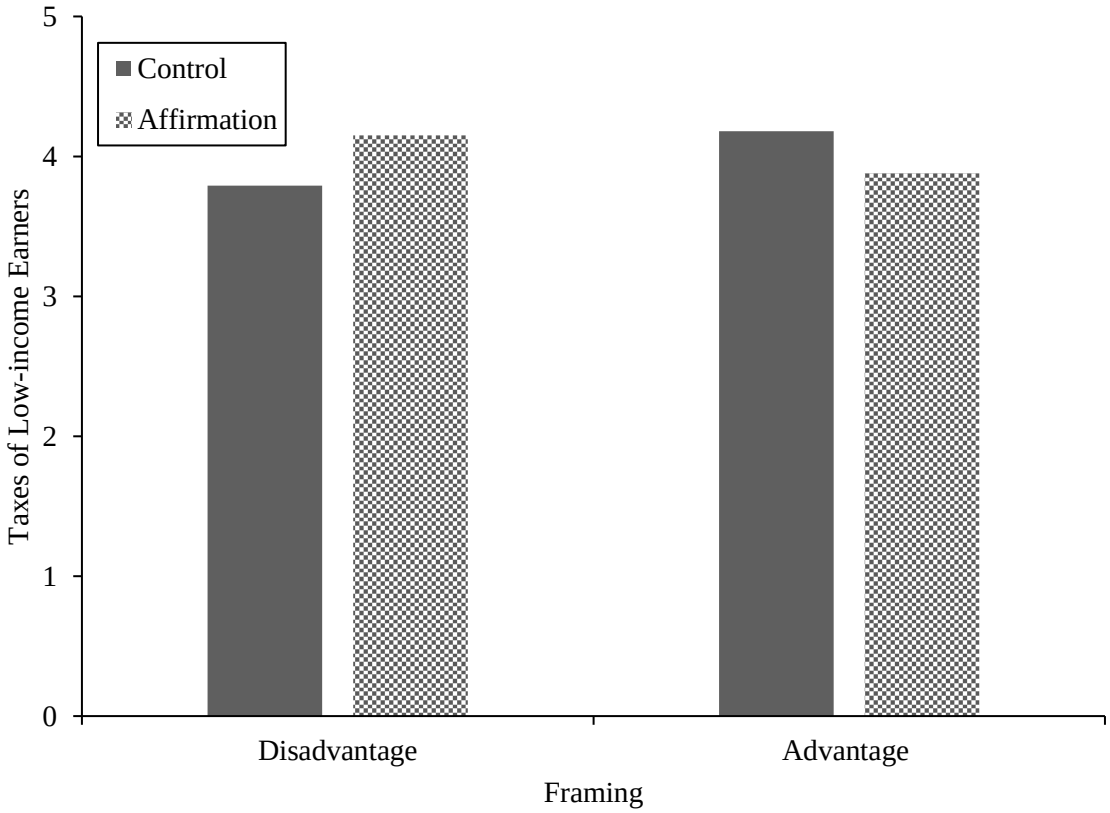
4.4.1 Taxes of Low-Income Earners

This was a measure that was removed from the redistribution scale as it was measuring a different concept from redistribution. Specifically, this measure asked participants about what they thought about the taxes that low-income earners paid. This question was added for exploratory purposes and aimed to see whether these views were influenced by framing and self-affirmation. A two-way between groups ANOVA was conducted, and there was a significant interaction between framing and affirmation, F (1, 186) = 7.96, p = .005, this was a small effect (partial η^2 = .04), see Figure 2 below. This suggests that in the disadvantage the affirmed participants tended to think that taxes were higher more than the non-affirmed participants, but the reverse occurred in the advantage condition, non-affirmed participants thought the taxes were

higher than the affirmed participants. Neither of the main effects were significant (framing: F (1, 186) = .23, p = .63; affirmation: F (1, 186) = .06, p = .80).

Figure 2

Bar graph showing the interaction effect of framing and self-affirmation manipulations for the taxes of low-income earners.



Note. The data was reverse scored so that a higher score reflects that taxes are much too high.

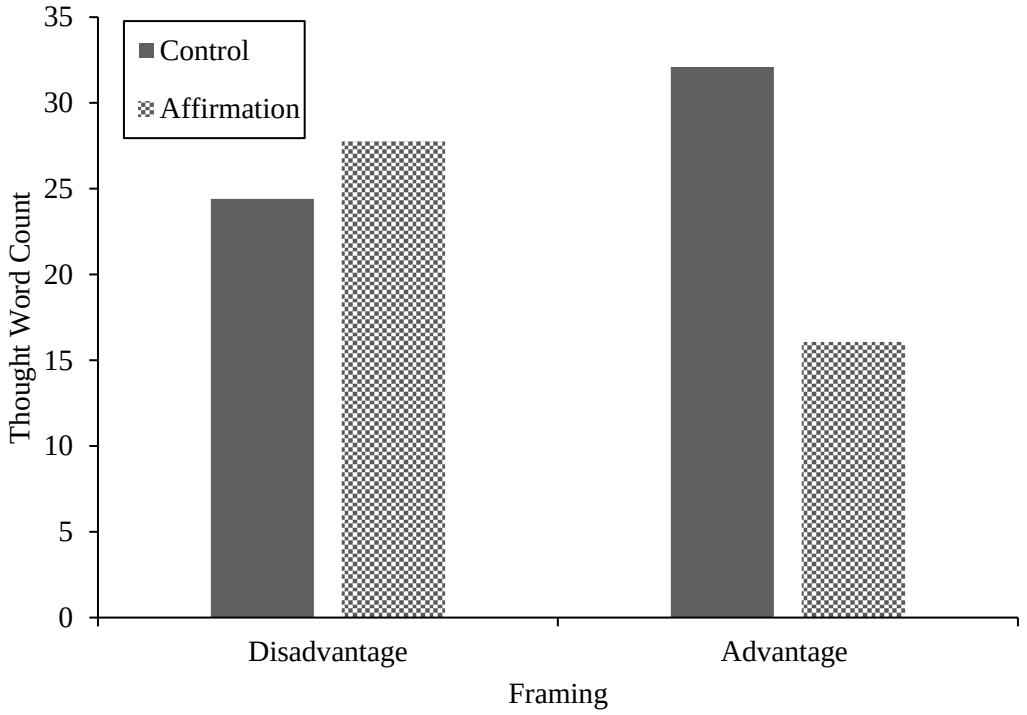
4.4.2 Framing Thoughts

Participants were asked to write about the positive and negative thoughts they had while reading the frame. It was expected that the amount written would differ between the framing and affirmation manipulations. A two-way between groups ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of the framing and affirmation on thought word count. There was a significant interaction between framing and affirmation, F (1, 202) = 4.79, p = .03, however this was a small effect (partial η^2 = .02). This interaction effect is depicted in Figure 3 below. This indicates that the affirmed participants in the advantage condition wrote significantly less than the non-affirmed participants in the same condition. The participants in the disadvantage frame did not differ much

in their amount of writing, but affirmed participants did write slightly more than the affirmed participants in this condition. Neither of the main effects reached significance (framing: F [1, 202] = .20, p = .65; affirmation: F [1, 202] = 2.05, p = .15).

Figure 3

Bar graph showing the interaction effect between means of framing and self-affirmation manipulations on thought word count.



The content of the listed thoughts was coded by their agreement/disagreement of the inequality information through the number of incongruent and congruent thoughts listed. A two-way ANOVA was used to assess the difference in agreement with the inequality information between participants framing and self-affirmation manipulations. The main effect for framing did not quite reach significance F (1, 143) = 3.01, p = .09, the other effects also did not reach significance (affirmation: F [1, 143] = 2.09, p = .15; interaction: F [1, 143] = .330, p = .57). This indicates that the agreement did not differ between groups.

The total number of thoughts listed included all thoughts that indicated agreement or disagreement and thoughts that were neutral or irrelevant to the inequality information. A two-way ANOVA was conducted to assess the difference in total thoughts between the framing and affirmation manipulations. The main effect for affirmation did not quite reach significance F (1, 613) = 3.07, p = .08, the other effects did not reach significance (framing: F [1, 161] = .652, p = .42; interaction: F [1, 161] = 1.13, p = .29). This indicates that there was no difference between the total number of thoughts between the framing and affirmation conditions.

4.4.3 Privilege and Inequality Perceptions and Support for Redistribution

It was expected that SES and perceived privilege would influence support for redistribution between framing and affirmation conditions. Hierarchical multiple regression was used to assess the ability of two control variables (SES and perceived privilege) to predict support for redistribution. Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity. Framing and affirmation were entered at Step 1, explaining 3% of the variance in support for redistribution. SES was entered at Step 2. The variance of the model was 5%, F change (1, 185) = 4.31, p = .04, and this model explained a further 2% of the variance. Perceived privilege was added at Step 3 and explained 16% of the variation (adjusted R^2 = .15), F change (1, 184) = 25.62, p < .001. The inclusion of perceived privilege significantly improved the model explaining an additional 12% of the variance in support of redistribution after controlling for SES. In the final model framing, SES and perceived privilege were statistically significant, with perceived privilege producing a higher semipartial correlation value (sr = .34, p < .001) than SES (sr = -.24, p < .001). This pattern of results suggests that perceived privilege best predicts support for redistribution, and SES also modestly contributes to this prediction. There was a marginal effect for framing (sr = .15, p = .05), which suggests that these effects are marginally expressed more for each variable in the advantage frame. Specifically, these results suggest that high SES is associated with less support for redistribution, and marginally associated with even less support in the advantage frame. Whereas high perceived privilege is associated with more support for redistribution and associated with marginally even more support in the advantage frame.

4.4.4 Donation Behaviour

One of the main outcome variables was support for redistribution, which could tell us how much individuals supported the redistribution of wealth through government intervention and progressive taxation. We wished to extend this measure to include a behavioural dimension by measuring individuals' propensity to *actually* donate to charity (Child Poverty Action Group). This was done through asking participants, if they won the prize draw ($20 shopping centre voucher), would they agree to donate half of their winnings to charity.

A three-way loglinear analysis was conducted to assess this in which the final model was not retained as the highest order interaction (framing x affirmation x donation behaviour) was not significant χ^2 (1) = .001, p = .98. This indicates that the framing and affirmation manipulations were not related to donation behaviour.

Direct logistic regression was conducted to test the influence of social dominance orientation and belief in a just world on the odds that participants would opt to donate to charity. The full model was statistically significant, χ^2 (2, N = 174) = 7.08, p = .03, indicating that the model was able to distinguish between participants who donated versus those who did not donate. The model as a whole correctly classified 73% of cases. Only social dominance orientation had a unique statistically significant contribution to the model (p = .02), the odds ratio of .52 was less than 1 and indicates that the higher the social dominance orientation score the odds were .52 times lower that participants would opt to donate, controlled for by belief in a just world.

4.4.5 Further Reading Behaviour

It was hoped that further reading behaviour could be assessed against the self-affirmation and framing manipulations; however, many participants did not read further. Therefore, our sample sizes were too small across conditions and log linear analysis assumptions were violated as the expected groups were fewer than 5.

To assess the influence of social dominance orientation and belief in a just world in the odds participants would read further, we used logistic regression. The full model was statistically

significant χ^2 (2, N = 184) = 14.52, p < .001, so the full model was able to distinguish between participants who did read further and those who did not; however, the Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness of fit test suggested poor fit, this may be because the model correctly classified only 59.8% of cases. Nevertheless, only social dominance orientation contributed significantly to the model (p = .003) and the odds ratio of .48 suggests that the higher the social dominance orientation score the less likely the participant is to read further about inequality.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The aim of this study was to assess whether support for redistribution is malleable by examining the influence of framing and self-affirmation manipulations on perceptions of inequality and support for redistribution. It was anticipated that inequality framing may function as a proxy of threat, and particularly so for advantage frames, whereby this threat would be reduced under the influence of self-affirmation. This study also aimed to assess how ideological preferences (i.e., social dominance orientation and belief in a just world) influence these relationships. Therefore, this research has many facets to be discussed along with the implications of the findings.

All in all, the findings were not entirely as expected for the self-affirmation and framing manipulations. However, this study identified that the framing manipulation marginally influenced support for redistribution, as when the inequality information focussed on advantage participants showed increased support for redistribution when SES was controlled for. Additionally, the affirmation and framing manipulations influenced the agreement as to whether inequality determines life outcomes. Specifically, affirmed participants in the advantage condition agreed that inequality determines life outcomes less than the non-affirmed participants in the same condition. Furthermore, it was found that inequality perceptions and support for redistribution were associated with social dominance orientation and belief in a just world: those who supported these beliefs more in turn perceived less inequality and supported redistribution less. This study also identified that the affirmation and framing manipulations led to differences in the self-reported thoughts that participants had while reading the inequality information. It was found that the affirmed participants in the advantage condition wrote considerably less than the non-affirmed participants in the same condition, whereas the disadvantage condition showed little difference in thoughts written about the inequality information. The framing and affirmation manipulations also influenced perceptions of the taxes that low-income earners pay. An interaction was found wherein affirmed participants thought taxes were higher for low-income earners in the disadvantage condition and showed the opposite in the advantage condition, they instead thought

that taxes were closer about right for low-income earners. While the non-affirmed participants showed the inverse, reporting that they thought taxes were closer to about right in the disadvantage frame and that taxes were too high in the advantage frame. Additionally, it was also found that perceived privilege increased support for redistribution and being of high SES reduced support for redistribution.

5.1 Perceptions of Inequality

5.1.1 The Influence of Framing and Affirmation on Perceived Inequality

To get more granular with the findings of this study, the framing and affirmation manipulations did not appear to influence inequality perceptions as anticipated. The study failed to demonstrate framing and affirmation to influence perceptions of inequality as there were no effects between these variables. Despite this a single item used in the measure used to assess inequality perceptions included a single item about outcomes of inequality ("Economic inequality determines people's life outcomes"), in which participants would indicate their level of agreement. This question was analysed in isolation as it was believed that this tapped into a specific dimension of inequality depicted in the infographics which emphasised the different outcomes that advantaged and disadvantaged individuals face because of inequality. For example, the infographic highlights the better housing, education, and healthcare that advantaged individuals experience, as opposed to the poorer or worse outcomes that disadvantaged individuals experience in the same domains. Therefore, the focus on advantage or disadvantage would have cast a different light on the implications of the described inequality.

Consequently, there was an interaction in the agreement of outcomes between disadvantage and advantage frames and the affirmed and non-affirmed participants. This showed that for the advantage frame control participants indicated more agreement in that outcomes were determined by inequality than affirmed participants, which can indicate support for this hypothesis by which there were discernible differences between frames. Nevertheless, it appears that affirmation influenced the responding of participants in the advantage condition. These results could suggest that individuals may provide performatively egalitarian responses due to threat. At first blush the increased agreement that inequality determines outcomes by control participants appears support the negative impact that inequality has, however as research has

highlighted this type of response can be hierarchy enhancing (Chow et al., 2013; Ho & Unzueta, 2015; Jun et al., 2017). This is further evidenced through the different response shown by affirmed participants who reported less agreement that inequality determines outcomes. This suggests that affirmation reduced participants agreeing that inequality determines outcomes, a response that instead suggests people themselves would be the cause of their own success or failure. Therefore, the increased agreement in the determining role of outcomes from control participants seems less honest and is potentially performative, instead reflecting a perspective that maintains the status quo.

5.1.2 The Influence of Motivation in Inequality Perceptions

In line with theory, this finding potentially suggests that non-affirmed participants are employing motivated reasoning, which is argued to occur when individuals are given information that contradicts pre-existing understandings, and for people whose lives are affected by the information (Kunda, 1990). The self-relevance to the information means that individuals are motivated to preserve their attitudes and to avoid recognising a conflicting reality. In particular, individuals may employ motivated reasoning to deny, dismiss or distort information so that it can serve to maintain their view (Sherman & Cohen, 2002). Likewise, Phillips and Lowery (2018), argued that strategies that reduce the visibility of privilege can serve to justify less support for redistributive measures or potentially the mere existence of inequalities, insofar that "the cover of innocence is provided, individuals can pursue advantages freely" (p. 160).

The advantage frame highlights how much better off some individuals are than others, which could be perceived as a negative view of privilege or the world, and this may threaten one's personal privileges or the way they believe the world should look. Therefore, agreeing that inequality determines outcomes seems harmless and acknowledges the reality of inequality, however, this evidence is muddied against the backdrop of literature that demonstrates strategic hierarchy maintenance. For example, it has been shown that individuals will intentionally show support for changes, or reduce support for changes in ways that go against their interests (Chow et al., 2013; Ho & Unzueta, 2015; Jun et al., 2017) – which could be related to perceived threat that greater equality poses to them personally. Therefore, those who were not affirmed, and were potentially more threatened, had a higher agreement that inequality determines people's

outcomes. So, agreeing that inequality *can* determine people's outcomes – which would typically be seen as egalitarian – appears strategic when considering the difference in responses between the affirmed and non-affirmed participants. Potentially what is revealed in these findings is a motivation in the non-affirmed participants to "people please", as affirmed participants (i.e., who are less threatened) reduce their agreement that inequality determines outcomes. This reflects that individuals may agree that outcomes are determined by inequality in order to maintain the differences between groups while also preserving privileges. Because they have indicated changes that should equalise differences which allows privileged individuals to pursue advantages freely, and this also allows individuals to blind themselves of privilege or even their own disadvantage (Jost et al., 2003; Phillips & Lowery, 2018).

Another view suggests that the inequality information may leave people vulnerable to the idea that wealth and success may not be a result of hard work. This could threaten ones view of their successes as given rather than earnt; this is because individuals appear motivated to view their economic positions in terms of merit, and so they seek to emphasise their hard work when they realise they are more advantaged than they first thought (Mijs & Hoy, 2021). Similarly, Phillips and Lowery (2020) discuss the need for individuals to maintain their self-worth and in doing so will seek to maintain that their achievements are had by hard work and not privilege and therefore prefer to see success as meritorious. The crux here is that affirmation is thought to reduce motivated reasoning and defensiveness however, affirmed participants report a less egalitarian ideal which is less socially desirable. Therefore, they do not seem to 'people please', which less agreement to inequality determining outcomes directly reinforces that they believe there may be other factors that determine outcomes. Which for the affirmed participants bolsters their sense of self-worth and potentially suggests that inequality can be overcome. Therefore, if the findings were to follow this view of motivation, then the non-affirmed participants would be more threatened that success is not had through hard work and show even less agreement that outcomes are determined by inequality. However, the arguably less threatened affirmed participants presented this response because they would prefer to see success as achieved by hard work.

These findings can further reinforce the motivational nature of inequality which has downstream effects for measures to reduce inequality. Therefore, it is important to consider that

responses to inequality rely first on individual perceptions of inequality which are susceptible to individual differences and are biased toward individual goals and worldviews (Gimpelson & Treisman, 2018; Hauser & Norton, 2017). Therefore, any consideration of inequality should not assume that support for redistribution is static or clear cut because the very foundation of such decisions rest on the perceptions of inequality.

5.1.3 Ideological Differences in Perceptions of Inequality

It was anticipated that ideological differences would influence perceived inequality and indeed, the data showed that those who more strongly support social dominance orientation or belief in a just world were more likely to perceive less inequality. Therefore, participants who strongly believed that people get what they are deserving of or supported differences between groups were more likely to say that less inequality was perceived in the infographics they were presented. These findings replicate previous work demonstrating that the support of ideologies can influence how inequality is perceived (García-Sánchez et al., 2021; Kteily et al., 2017; Lucas & Kteily, 2018).

To contextualise these findings, motivational theory would argue that support for ideologies can distort perceptions in line with the perceiver's worldview (Phillips & Lowery, 2020), in which individuals will respond to the inequality they perceive. Therefore, the suggestion that individuals are differentially motivated by social dominance orientation, which can alter representations of inequality to be perceived as more or less unequal that they really are, means that individuals will understate or overstate inequalities (Kteily et al., 2017). Unsurprisingly, this will influence how one may go about resolving inequalities. Equally, research has shown that perceptions of inequality have been associated with more support for redistribution when individuals reject these ideologies (García-Sánchez et al., 2019), therefore these findings are influential in how they relate to the wider influence of inequality.

5.2 Support for Redistribution

5.2.1 The Influence of Framing on Support for Redistribution

The current study sought to clarify the mixed findings in the framing literature. It was anticipated that threat may increase support for redistribution, whereby the advantage frame would be linked to more support for redistribution as it is potentially more threatening. This study

was able to contribute to the existing research and demonstrated that an advantage frame produced marginally more support for redistribution. In other framing studies that have directly assessed measures to increase redistribution – of which the literature is limited – there is some support that an advantage frame increases redistribution support (Chow & Galak, 2012; Chow et al., 2010). However, other research has shown that a focus on advantage has decreased such support (Dietze & Craig, 2021; Howlett et al., 2021; Lowery et al., 2012; Quarles & Bozarth, 2022).

The analysis in the current study showed that redistribution was marginally supported more in an advantage frame, despite the lack of differences in perceived inequality, this suggests that when the focus was on privilege participants were more likely to agree that inequality should be reduced. Specifically, the results showed that when controlling for SES redistribution was supported more in the advantage condition. Therefore, when removing the influence of a participant's SES people were more likely to support redistribution when they read about the advantages of the wealthy than when they read about the disadvantages of the poor.

In one of the few studies addressing the influences of framing, Chow and Galak's (2012) findings support those demonstrated in the current study. The authors investigated the influence of conservatism and found that among strong conservatives a disadvantage frame was associated with clear reasons for inequality. This means that individuals were seen to be the cause of their current success or hardship, however, in an advantage frame there was no association to the reasons for inequality, but more conservatism was linked to increased support for reducing inequality unlike the disadvantage frame. Although the findings in the current study were marginal, both studies demonstrate that how individuals view inequality and what can be done about it depends on how differences in outcomes are described and what aspects of the inequality are salient. Comparatively, Bruckmüller et al. (2017) showed that an advantage frame increased legitimacy concerns which reinforce that the salience of privilege was important in the advantage frame, much like Chow and Galak's (2012) study.

Potentially, these findings are centred around the influence of threat in constructing support to reduce inequality. Evidently, in Chow and Galak's (2012) study there is no clear reason why redistribution was supported more in an advantage frame, more questionably why this support came from strong conservatives. Possibly, privilege may be seen as unfair hence the

increased support for redistribution as privilege can be a threatening reality, especially for conservatives who are more likely to believe in the sentiment that hard work pays off. Consequently, these findings could also serve to demonstrate that threat, generated through perceptions of advantage, could increase support to reduce inequities.

5.2.2 The Interpretation of Redistribution

These findings are interesting and can direct interpretations in line with threat however, it is important to consider how the questions in this study may be interpreted by participants, as this can offer different explanations as to why the findings were as they were. As such, the redistribution questions in this study refer to the reallocation of economic resources from the wealthy to the poor through government intervention and progressive tax policies (e.g., "People earning more than $1 million should be taxed more heavily than they are now."). Perhaps these questions suggest that the wealthy are to be forcibly burdened with rectifying inequalities. As such, it may be perceived that rectifying inequalities is not the burden of the wealthy to carry, which under meritocratic ideals makes sense and NZ has shown high support for these beliefs and low beliefs in structural inequalities (Mijs, 2019). Therefore, what may be reflected in support for redistribution is how the framing influences perceptions of what the individuals described *should* have. For example, Lowery et al. (2009) who found that as a corrective action individuals would take away more resources from a dominant or privileged actor when inequality was described using "more than" language as opposed to the same inequality described using "less than" language. Similarly, individuals were given the opportunity to rectify inequalities by giving more resources to the disadvantaged actor, the results showed that more resources were given when "less than" language was used than when "more than" language was used. In essence, "more than" framing increased the removal of resources, and "less than" framing increased the giving of resources.

The important difference this study has with the current study is that these solutions seem to be independent of each other, where redistribution is a taking away of resources and the giving of those resources to another. Consequently, redistribution may be perceived as detrimental to the wealthy, and this was explicitly stated by participants in the thought-listing question:

> …On the other side of the coin, there are those who rose above their circumstances and made a great change, but had to work hard to get there. They should not be penalised because others aren't willing to do the same. – Participant #200

> When does the rich become too rich and should give to the poor? But these people may have worked their way to the top, so why should they have to give up their money they worked so hard for. It's hard to have a balance with fairness and class in order to not become a communist country. – Participant #50

Therefore, more support for redistribution in the advantage frame could reflect that participants believed that that the poor should have more but not necessarily that the privileged should have less. And that these findings could be reflective of the meaning of redistribution and the implications of the enactment of redistributive policy, which individuals more broadly seem to be sensitive to (Lowery et al., 2012). This can also highlight larger issues related to the legitimacy of wealth and the legitimacy of poverty.

5.2.3 Perceptions of Advantaged and Disadvantaged Individuals

Additionally, the disadvantage frame describes the experiences of poor individuals, which may serve to illustrate that a focus on the poor could communicate the role the disadvantaged individual may play in their own circumstances. For example, the belief in a just world has roots in victim-blaming and argues that seeing an individual's suffering can suggest to an observer that that individual must have done something to deserve it (Lerner, 2013). Therefore, it may be interpreted that the individual is to blame for their suffering which in turn does not incline participants to support to reducing inequalities in this frame. Furthermore, the focus on privilege in the advantage frame may suggest that because the wealthy are wealthy, they have access to resources that are earnt simply because they have them – which is also applicable to a belief in a just world (Lerner, 2013). Subsequently, redistribution has been shown to be supported less in an advantage frame. So, this effect may reflect the type of proposed resolution to inequality, when the frames match the intervention approach people support the suggested change more. This is supported by research that follows this effect (Chow & Galak, 2012; Dietze & Craig, 2021). Additionally, research shows that perceptions of ingroup advantage or privilege by the advantaged

group, increased support for actions harmful to the ingroup but not when the same policies are perceived to help minorities (Lowery et al., 2012). Importantly, this interpretation means that any support for redistribution may not actively help to reduce inequities and may not even reflect desires to resolve inequality at all but may instead be a more harmless interpretation of the findings than what could be strategic perpetuation of inequalities. Ultimately, this interpretation suggests that the persuasiveness of redistributive policy may rely on the way it is framed and how well this framing matches perceptions of inequality by those who are impacted by the policy change (Phillips et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, this kind of interpretation could be promising for policy; by altering how inequality is described to better align with the changes that best resolve inequity may prove more effective in reducing inequalities than always communicating the best approach in terms of facts. So, matching policy in line with perceptions of those affected by those changes could more impactfully improve outcomes for the disadvantaged. Additionally, future research could explore framing redistributive policy for the efficacy of this suggestion. There is considerable potential that more focus on privilege could have toward achieving social justice, as simply describing inequality in terms of privilege may increase support to reduce inequality, and when applied in policy contexts this may help to reduce inequalities societally.

5.2.4 The Influence of Framing and Affirmation on the Support for Redistribution

It was shown that the inequality framing marginally influenced support for redistribution, however the data was not able to link the influence of threat to support for redistribution as self-affirmation did not produce any differences. Nevertheless, there is a large body of evidence that supports the possibility that threat is a key influence in how inequality is grappled with (Dover, 2022; Knowles et al., 2014). Indeed, it is argued that more psychological discomfort results from and advantage frame and that this is thought to increase support for redistribution however, this support seems to stem from a defensive desire to reduce advantages as opposed to reducing disadvantages, which in essence does not actively tackle inequities (Chow et al., 2010). Furthermore, affirmation is a central facet in cognitive dissonance and ego-defensiveness literature where it has been applied more broadly to reduce defensive and anti-social behaviours (Cohen et al., 2007; Kim & McGill, 2017; Sherman et al., 2000; Sherman & Cohen, 2002). The

literature has also demonstrated the influence of affirmation in the context of various forms of inequality and social progress (Kim & McGill, 2017; Phillips & Lowery, 2015, 2020; Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Shuman et al., 2022). Therefore, the failure to link support for redistribution and affirmation in the current study may reflect methodological shortcomings rather than theoretical oversights as there remains a solid theoretical foundation that links these bodies of research. Nevertheless, the limitations of this study will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

5.2.5 Privilege and Support for Redistribution

Unsurprisingly it was shown that redistribution was supported less by those with high SES, this aligns with the existing research that shows this effect. This is because the wealthy are motivated to view themselves as more meritorious and are significantly less supportive of egalitarian policies or redistribution as a result (Karadja et al., 2017; Kteily et al., 2017). It is uncertain whether this reflects a distaste for redistributive policy generally or 'hand-outs'. Nevertheless, it is understood that the greater motivation an individual has to maintain inequality, or to otherwise preserve their own social position the more they will reject measures to reduce inequality and vice versa (Kteily et al., 2017).

Interestingly, in the current study redistribution was supported more in the advantage frame but particularly so by individuals with high perceived privilege than those who perceived themselves as less privileged and that more support was had for redistribution. This appears to run counter to what you may expect for a "privileged" individual, however this measure is differentiated by it reflecting identification of a privileged person and also the willingness to report their privileged status. Therefore, individuals who indicate high perceived privilege are individuals who accept that their situation has been made possible due to their privileges, and those who have low perceived privilege suggest otherwise. Across other studies, it has been shown that acceptance of privilege can increase support for redistribution and equalising measures, while denial or lack of acknowledgement of privileges can also be associated with reduced support for redistribution (Cooley et al., 2021; Phillips & Lowery, 2015). Highlighting that self-reflection of privilege can have positive effects for support for redistribution. Similarly, research has also shown that generally people believe they are poorer than they are, and when they are informed of their more privileged status they demand less redistribution and increased

support for the Conservative party (Karadja et al., 2017). This highlights the possibility that the advantage frame may have encouraged some individuals to realise they were more privileged than they originally thought, and for those who accepted this to be true (i.e., those who reported that they were privileged) in turn increased their support for redistribution.

These findings have implications for future attempts to stimulate support for redistribution. It was illustrated that individual perceived privilege was shown to increase redistribution support, and this was important due to the findings that showed SES negatively influenced support for redistribution. Comparatively, informing people of their economic social standing has not consistently improved support for redistribution, as monetary success is meritorious (Mijs & Hoy, 2021), similar to the findings in the current study. However, privilege could be perceived as comparative, should someone experience certain unearned advantages, those same advantages may not be afforded to someone else and may help explain ones advantaged or otherwise disadvantaged position and better justify support to reduce inequities. Therefore, potentially getting people to realise their own privileges could be fruitful in increasing action to reduce inequalities in broader contexts.

5.2.6 Ideological Preferences and Support for Redistribution and Donation Behaviour

The final hypothesis anticipated that ideological differences would influence support for redistribution, consequently, it was shown that those who more strongly support social dominance orientation or belief in a just world were less likely to support redistribution. Therefore, participants who strongly believed that people get what they are deserving of or supported differences between groups were less likely to support redistribution. This finding replicates previous work demonstrating that the support of ideologies can influence whether redistribution is supported (Kteily et al., 2017; Lucas & Kteily, 2018). We also assessed donation behaviour to extend the findings of support for redistribution as this measure can only demonstrate what individuals say they will do and not necessarily what they will do, therefore the finding that donation behaviour was significantly predicted through social dominance orientation is impactful. Especially when the more an individual supports social dominance orientation this halved the likelihood they would donate.

Other studies have shown that informing people about inequality will increase their concerns about it, but this largely does not impact their policy preferences (Kuziemko et al., 2015). This may largely be because supporting redistribution is largely a political decision and ultimately tied to one's beliefs about the world. Therefore, beliefs about inequality are motivated, of which support for redistribution does not stem from factual understandings of inequality but rather it is susceptible to individual differences. This therefore suggest that findings of increased support for redistribution may not be as clear cut as they appear, this is because ideologies can be predictive of whether redistribution is supported – due to their motivational nature. Further, findings that suggest redistribution is supported in the context of inequality first need to consider in conditions of which this inequality is perceived as this could determine redistribution support. It may be that redistribution is supported more through perceived threat as this has been shown to influence related responses (Dover, 2022). This idea leans into the original aim of the research: to determine whether support for redistribution is genuine, which highlights that we cannot assume that it's support is genuine. Conversely, it may be malleable to the conditions in which it is perceived.

5.3 Other Findings

5.3.1 Influence of Framing and Affirmation on Thoughts about Inequality Frames

Further analyses were conducted that showed that the thought-listing question demonstrated differences between the framing and affirmation conditions. This presented an interaction effect which showed that non-affirmed participants in the advantage condition had much more to say about the inequality information than affirmed participants. Importantly, this finding does not tell us about what the participants had to say but potentially it could reflect a desire to off load information or just that the non-affirmed participants had much more to say. This finding could also potentially speak to the defensiveness literature that demonstrates that self-affirmation treatments in the context of inequality and privilege have reduced defensive responses (Kim & McGill, 2017; Phillips & Lowery, 2015, 2020). Nevertheless, the non-affirmed participants had more to say, whether this was agreement or disagreement.

Unfortunately, across all the coded dimensions of the thought content the results did not produce significant effects, though some marginal trends were indicated. Therefore, we could not

assess the content of the thoughts listed across the dimensions or agreement/disagreement or neutral thoughts. Nevertheless, it seemed that participants the advantage frame listed more thoughts that agreed with the message in the infographics and the participants in the disadvantage frame listed less thoughts in agreement with the infographic. Also, it appeared as though affirmed participants tended to agree with the infographic information less than non-affirmed participants, but it is necessary to consider that non-affirmed participants had less thoughts. Nevertheless, this does indicate a trend in the content of thoughts that deserves further investigation. Potentially, recruiting suitably larger sample sizes would increase the power of the analyses and may produce larger effects. Better assessment of the thoughts surrounding inequality could provide better context for why redistribution may be supported more or less and particularly how framing and self-affirmation manipulations may be reflected in these thoughts. Potentially, message acceptance and defensiveness could allude to perceived threat between frames as the literature has previously highlighted (Good & Abraham, 2007; Knight Lapinski & Boster, 2001)

5.3.2 The Influence of Framing and Affirmation on Perceptions of the Taxes of Low-Income Earners

It was also found that the framing and self-affirmation influenced how participants viewed the taxes of low-income earners. This is an interesting finding as it is the only question that refers to low-income earners. It was demonstrated that the affirmed and non-affirmed participants had opposing views between frames. Specifically, in the advantage frame affirmed participants reported that taxes were closer to about right than the non-affirmed participants who tended to report that taxes were too high. It would appear that affirmed participants support the status quo unlike the control participants. While the opposite occurs for the disadvantage frame, where the affirmed participants report that taxes tended to be too high for low-income earners, and control participants reported that taxes tended to be closer to about right. Here, the non-affirmed participants tended to support the status quo more than the affirmed participants. Ultimately, this shows that the framing elicited quite different responses between participants, highlighting that the language used to describe inequality is impactful in how it influences perceptions, similar to existing research (Bruckmüller et al., 2017). Overall, these findings reflect opposing effects for each group, in the disadvantage condition (argued to be less threatening) self-

affirmed participants are seem more likely to have doubts about the taxes of low-income earners. This kind of response would advantage those individuals and aligns with research that shows that a disadvantage frame would increase egalitarian outcomes (Dietze & Craig, 2021; Howlett et al., 2021; Lowery et al., 2012). While the advantage frame (argued to be more threatening) has shown the opposite effect and presents a potentially anti-egalitarian response toward low-income earners by affirmed participants.

These effects are specific to the particular conditions between the frames and the influence of self-affirmation, these findings are similar to the question related to the outcomes of inequality, and similarly such effects could be tied to motivational concerns and potentially ego-defensiveness. The mechanisms of self-affirmation are not well-understood but, in this context, it does seem to influence an individual's willingness to address or at least report issues related to incomes of groups on opposite sides of the inequality divide. Without the inclusion of affirmation these findings may not indicate a difference between the framing alone. Ultimately, the disadvantage frame shows that self-affirmed participants present more prosocial responses, which this increase in prosociality from self-affirmation is seen in the literature (Kim & McGill, 2017; Schumann, 2014). Potentially, this is because the disadvantage frame is not as threatening, because in the advantage condition, self-affirmed participants did not respond prosocially, however the non-affirmed participants did. It may be that the focus on privilege is more threatening and encourages self-protective responses in the non-affirmed because it is more self-relevant and/or closer to the self-concept. Therefore, affirmed participants respond more in line with their beliefs, which ultimately are not always egalitarian.

5.4 Strengths and Limitations

The current study was not without limitations; there were several key areas for improvement in the design and execution of the study. Of which, reflection of the issues within this study can enhance research in this subject area and research of inequality generally. Therefore, this section will discuss the shortcomings of this study and how these could be addressed to improve the quality of related research in the future.

However, this study also had its strengths. Firstly, this study was conducted online which offers the benefit of greater accessibility and increases the pool of potential participants beyond

the characteristically WEIRD[3] participants who are typically recruited in these studies (Henrich et al., 2010). Furthermore, studies that are conducted online can offer a more varied assessment of the research topic and many of the authors utilise novel paradigms in this context to assess existing ideas (e.g., Dietze & Craig, 2021). Many of the studies in the area are conducted in a lab environment and this raises questions for the use of traditionally robust and reliable measurement tools in an online setting, self-affirmation specifically has been shown to be reliable in lab settings but efficacy in online settings is still uncertain (McQueen & Klein, 2006). Relatedly, some of the measures in this study were not reliable which limits the subsequent findings. For example, the measure for the legitimacy of inequality was removed from analysis for this reason, and this aspect of inequality is integral in contextualising why individuals may not support redistribution (Bruckmüller et al., 2017; Sengupta et al., 2015). Therefore, this can take meaning away from the findings which could have been explained with the support of these variables.

Another strength of this study was the use of the thought-listing, where most participants contributed their thoughts. The inclusion of such questions provided a depth to the responses that was not limited by the parameters typical of a scale. Furthermore, the inclusion of the open-ended questions provided an otherwise overlooked aspect of the study design: emotional responses to inequality. Emotions has associations within the inequality literature, where exposure to inequality can increase emotions and reactivity (DeCelles & Norton, 2016; Hauser & Norton, 2017), and different ideological beliefs can actually reduce emotional responses to inequality (Goudarzi et al., 2020). Many participants offered emotional responses of which the researchers took this opportunity to also code and analyse. We did not seem to find any notable effects but nevertheless this was another angle to explore. Additionally, this sample had a good spread of age, many of the studies in psychology tend to recruit student populations which can tend to limit the generalisability of the findings (Henrich et al., 2010).

5.4.1 Attrition Rate

Another of the more glaring issues with this research was the attrition rate, just over half of all prospective participants did not make it through the questionnaire. Many of them reading

[3] WEIRD refers to White, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic individuals (Heinrich et al., 2010).

the infographic/vignette but exited the questionnaire before answering any further questions. As demographic information was not collected until the very end of the questionnaire there was no way of knowing whether there were systematic differences between who did or did not drop out. Although online studies produce considerably more participant drop-out than studies conducted in lab settings (Zhou & Fishbach, 2016). However, this rate of attrition raises several questions about the dropouts in the current study; who were they, and of those who did complete the study what motivations do they possess that differentiates them from those who checked out of the questionnaire early? Potentially, the people who dropped out are likely to be very different and may hold different views on inequality. Alternatively, it may have been because the affirmation questions that followed the infographic were too left of field that individuals thought it was confusing or couldn't reconcile its purpose and so dropped out. A study by Hoerger (2010) supports this, wherein participant drop out with online studies tends to be based primarily on the initial information provided as opposed to fatigue or any unanticipated or harmful content from the study, it is also highlighted that more controversial topics would likely have more participant drop out. The same author also suggests that participants will tend not to drop out if they have invested enough into the study that they will then opt to see it through to the end (Hoerger, 2010). The participant drop out in this study could signify a sample that is less representative of the general population which lends to less generalisable findings (Hoerger, 2010). Furthermore, as Zhou and Fishbach (2016) highlight, attrition could lead to surprising or meaningful but false findings. In their study, condition specific drop-out violated random assignment of participants between conditions by introducing a confound of overrepresentation of certain individuals who were more likely to present certain characteristics and respond in accordance with these. In the context of the current study, there is a possibility that the participants who were more dedicated to completing the questionnaire may have been less selfish or otherwise had different characteristics that would differentiate them from the wider population. Alternatively, the due to the demands of the questionnaire, specifically the self-affirmation questions, this may have meant that the retained participants were more agreeable or conscientious (Zhou & Fishbach, 2016).

5.4.2 Exploration of Participant Drop-Out

For exploratory purposes we continued participant recruitment after reaching the desired sample size using the same recruitment strategies. The questionnaire was altered to include demographic information before any of the manipulations, as measuring demographics or covariates prior to any manipulations has been previously suggested to enable the assessment of participant attrition (Zhou & Fishbach, 2016). 57 additional responses were gathered, and it was found that the sample had a strikingly similar make up to the primary sample in terms of ethnicity, age, employment status and gender. Around 20 of the 57 participants dropped out which is still relatively high at 35% but not as high as the primary sample at 51%. The means across the outcome measures of both samples were relatively similar, however the secondary sample seemed to support redistribution slightly less, and the participants were slightly more conservative and perceived themselves as less privileged.

The most obvious reason that may explain the drop off in participants in the primary sample is the self-affirmation questions, majority of the participants who dropped out did so at the beginning of the self-affirmation manipulation. Potentially, participants could not reconcile the point of ranking their values in a study they were told was about inequality, which makes sense, it is quite a contrast to the infographics describing the disadvantages or advantages that some people experience. Consequently, the rapid switch into ranking their values related to humour and religion in the self-affirmation task is quite left of field and may have damaged the value they may have seen to initially take part in the study. Being familiar with these assessment tools in the world of psychology research meant that the relevance of these questions for anybody else was overlooked. Furthermore, the content at the beginning of the questionnaire is important as this is the information that participants will base their judgements about whether it is worth their while to partake. This explanation is reinforced by the fact that the drop out was lower for the secondary sample which could suggest that including the demographic questions at the start of the questionnaire provided enough investment in the study so upon reaching the self-affirmation section (where participants in the primary sample dropped out) they were sufficiently motivated to see it through to the end (Hoerger, 2010). Overall, the participants do not appear to differ widely, as there were no obvious demographic differences. Perhaps, self-selection and other

biases may be more at play than differences between people who did or did not drop out of the study (Randall & Fernandes, 1991).

5.4.3 Measurement of Variables

One important limitation in this study is the lack of a measure to directly assess the degree of threat generated by the infographic. As per Knight Lapinski and Boster (2001), ego-defensive attitudes or responses are outside of awareness, this means that participants do not know their reasons for having them and more than likely lack the ability and willingness to reliably report their perceived threat to the message. Further research is required to produce measures to accurately measure threat but nevertheless threat can only be understood as a proxy as opposed to a predictor in the current study. Dover (2022) has shown physiological assessment of threat to inequality and privilege, though this was outside the bounds of the current study, further exploration of these methods could prove fruitful in this area of research. Additionally, the use of self-affirmation in the broader theoretical sphere does not really offer real explanations as to how its application influences motivated reasoning as we do not fully understand why self-affirmation appears to reduce ego-defensive reactions or what self-affirmation actually does to people (Aronson, 1968; McQueen & Klein, 2006). Furthermore, this method of self-affirmation is very successful in lab studies although more research is needed to demonstrate its use in other applications such as in online settings as employed in the current study (McQueen & Klein, 2006). In hindsight, attempting to quantify threat or ego-involvement would have improved this study by providing better explanation for differences in outcome measures. Similarly, the measure to assess the perceived legitimacy of inequality in the study was not reliable and removed from analysis. Which means that the responses to the outcomes lacked clear explanation, as legitimacy could reflect what individuals believe others *should* have (Bruckmüller et al., 2017; García-Sánchez et al., 2021).

Initially, it was intended that the measure of inequality perceptions may serve as a manipulation check to confirm that the infographic was sufficiently different, or differentially threatening between the groups, we did not find support for this. In hindsight, this is not overly surprising as the infographics were intended to depict the same magnitude of inequality and were not a direct measure of threat. More generally, there has been some support for differences in

perceived inequality between frames, where a disadvantage frame produces more agreement in the existence of inequalities (Howlett et al., 2021), however, this is not always a consistent finding as other framing research did not find differences in perceived inequality between descriptions focussed on disadvantage or advantage (Bruckmüller et al., 2017; Lowery et al., 2009). Potentially, no differences in perceived inequality between frames could be interpreted as a good thing; a lack of perceptible differences in the magnitude of inequality may therefore lend greater weight to other outcome measures. So, if there were no perceived differences in magnitude of inequality why was redistribution supported more?

Additionally, many of the questions in this study could arguably have been presented in a different order. All the questions that did not relate to the treatments could have been presented prior to the manipulations so as not to have responses to those questions also be influenced by the manipulations. For example, all the participants read the inequality information and then completed affirmation treatment, later they answered all the questions about their ideologies, and demographics (e.g., SES, conservatism, privileged status etc) as such their responses to social dominance orientation and belief in a just world may also be influenced by the manipulations which could reduce the effects shown. This is a necessary assumption of the statistical analyses that are conducted in research of this kind (Pallant, 2003). Therefore, counterbalancing the question order in this study would have improved this study and closer consideration may have influenced the findings of this study. Furthermore, counterbalancing the question order may also reduce the possibility that asking these questions earlier would also influence the manipulations. This still remains a possibility despite the assumptions of statistical analyses. Future research should ensure that question order follows the required assumptions of statistical analyses or at least accounts for the potential effects for doing so to reduce the impact of this on the findings.

5.4.4 Sample Characteristics

Further limiting factors of this study relate to the sample recruited which are necessary to consider as all meaning for the results of this study directly relate to who provided the results this study produced. The sample was predominantly recruited online, through Neighbourly.com, which in the last month (February 2023) it was shown via Similarweb.com that 59.2% percent of the audience was female and the remaining 40.8% were male, with the largest group of users

being between the ages of 45-50 (*Similarweb*, n.d.). The use of Neighbourly.com for recruitment meant the sample was recruited from a group of individuals fairly representative of the population. The only form of in-person recruitment was library noticeboards in Auckland of which the patrons of public libraries are widespread but arguably are not generalisable to the wider population. Furthermore, the makeup of the sample needs to be considered, there is a large overrepresentation of females. Of which, this distribution of gender is not expressed in the greater population, which therefore should caution any generalisations of the findings to the wider population.

For this study across the four conditions the sample size tended to be between 30-50, which is cautioned to be the minimum for many of the statistical analyses conducted (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), therefore these sample sizes could be too small to detect differences that may be there in larger sample sizes especially when many of these measures were also non-normal. Typically analyses of variance are quite robust to sampling and normality issues (Pallant, 2003), but sample size could nevertheless be improved upon in future studies. An a priori power analysis indicated a sample size of 210 for a medium effect size comparable to other studies. After exclusion criteria the sample included only 204 participants, and some of these participants had missing data therefore, the analyses of some measures were well below the suggested sample size for sufficient power. In hindsight, the sample should have been larger and only included complete responses.

5.5 Future Research

In the current study most of the effects were demonstrated in the advantage frame. The advantage framing stood to represent an assessment of privilege which did indicate that the effects found in this study centred around the focus on privilege. These findings are particularly interesting when considering the lack of research in privilege as it relates to inequality and wealth. Therefore, we can no longer tiptoe around privilege in the debates surrounding inequality because there are differences in how this influences inequality. The effects of this study signal that more research is needed to assess the influence of privilege, specifically in terms of inequality but also the wider economic and psychological sphere. These findings are also pertinent to NZ where there is a high aversion to redistribution (García-Sánchez et al., 2021; Nel, 2021), therefore, finding ways to better approach redistribution here is important to work towards broader social justice.

These results suggest that a focus on privilege could improve support for redistribution and may be impactful here in NZ.

This study identified the potential for privilege to influence individual constructions of inequality and therefore how one goes about rectifying these. Direct comparison of underprivileged and privileged participants could be fruitful in future research. There is a great deal of research that suggests privileged folk tend to have a different perspective about inequality entirely (e.g., Dover, 2022; Knowles et al., 2014; Phillips & Lowery, 2015; Phillips & Lowery, 2020). Therefore, assessing how one's privileged status may influence motivated reasoning about perspectives on inequality and redistribution in comparison to underprivileged folks should be investigated. Further, the comparison of privilege could also be included in future studies that also include framing and self-affirmation. Potentially privilege could be used to determine differences in motivated reasoning and ego-defensiveness. Rokeach (1973) highlighted that the use of variables closer to the self-concept (i.e., highly self-relevant concepts) may better isolate the mechanisms that determine motivated reasoning and/or self-affirmation as these still confound dissonance researchers (Aronson, 1968). Therefore, privilege could be used to assess this as it has been found to be very self-relevant and to influence defensiveness (Phillips & Lowery, 2015, 2020) – all of which closely relate to dissonance and ego-defensiveness literature.

This study reinforced that support for social dominance orientation and the belief in a just world are related to inequality, these findings are also backed by a plethora of existing research that also emphasised how instrumental these beliefs are in terms of inequality. However, other research has shown that ideological beliefs can be altered and are flexible to other broader motivational concerns (Harding & Sibley, 2011). Therefore, further investigation into these phenomena should be the focus of further research and particularly if this can occur within the context of inequality and redistributive policy. If so, this would have considerable influence in social justice and inequity research. This study also highlighted a possibility that support for redistribution may be malleable, of which the findings can only reflect what individuals tell us they support and can be susceptible to all kind of self-reporting biases (Randall & Fernandes, 1991). Future research should focus on investigating whether these findings are also reflected in participants behaviour. Further assessment of behaviour will be able to sharpen the focus on how

we respond to information that opposes individuals' views but also can greatly enhance how to produce attitude change toward social justice.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Research on inequality has grown in interest alongside its growth in societies. Many have addressed the issues and outcomes of inequality; however, the evidence continues to suggest that perceptions of inequality may be key in understanding inequality. Research has also largely focussed on the disadvantaged, which is nevertheless important, though privileged groups have influence and great power that might intensify the negative effects of inequity. Importantly though only half of the story is portrayed when inequality is framed in terms of disadvantage, and this can allow for the pervasive nature of privilege to go unnoticed by those who most benefit and by those most disadvantaged by it. Whereas inequality framed in terms of privilege can offer a more complete account of inequality and inequity. From this perspective inequality is cast in an equal but different light, which is not just about disadvantaged groups as less hardworking beneficiaries, instead those who profit in this system are also implicated. Therefore, a focus on privilege may enhance our understanding of inequality and better clarify how to better address inequities.

This study integrated self-affirmation and inequality framing and found that these influenced how inequality was perceived. These perceptions are understood to determine support for inequality reducing changes which therefore could be malleable to conditions under which inequality is perceived. As such this research demonstrated that perceptions of inequality were influenced by how the inequality was described, presented through marginal support that advantage frames increased support for redistribution. These differences could be explained by threat, as privilege is considered more threatening and in turn could backfire against inequality reducing measures. However, this remains hypothetical as this study failed to produce direct evidence to suggest that support for redistribution may be performative as a result of threat, so further research is needed to assess how this can impact policy and social justice. Nevertheless, there was marginally greater preference to redistribute in an advantage frame, which is an important finding and can potentially influence future societal-level approaches to reduce inequality. Inequality is an ugly beast and hopefully, psychology can help address these issues

and rewrite the narrative of disadvantage that also includes privilege because there is always the other side to the coin.

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Appendix A: Ethical Approval Letters

29 August 2022

Jay Wood

Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Jay

Ethics Application: 22/231 Perceptions of inequality and redistributive measures

Thank you for submitting your application for ethical review. We are pleased to advise that a subcommittee of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) approved your ethics application at their meeting on 26 August 2022, subject to:

1. Clarification about how the two surveys involved are being data matched and how anonymity (i.e. the researchers cannot know who the participants are) will be assured. AUTEC advises that in its current form the study is not anonymous and that the study needs to be altered so that the surveys are not linked and that participants cannot be directly or indirectly identified;
2. Provision of further justification for the future use of the data and for its indefinite storage;
3. Clarification about whether or not the inclusion of the 'further reading' option within the survey is part of the experiment. If it is, then advice needs to be provided in the form of a debrief at the end of the survey to advise participants about the deception and to give them the option of not submitting the survey if they no longer wish to take part in the study;
4. Amendment of the withdrawal statement in the Information Sheet to indicate that as the survey is anonymous, it will not be possible for their data to be identified and withdrawn from the study once the survey has been submitted;
5. Amendment of the advice being provided to participants about the prize draw as follows:
    a. Provision of consistent advice in the advertisement, Information Sheet, and survey so that participants know exactly what is involved in the prize draw process;
    b. Alteration of the advertisement to provide consistent and accurate information about the prize draw voucher amounts.

Please provide us with a response to the points raised in these conditions, indicating either how you have satisfied these points or proposing an alternative approach. AUTEC also requires copies of any altered documents, such as

Information Sheets, surveys etc. You are not required to resubmit the application form again. Any changes to responses in the form required by the committee in their conditions may be included in a supporting memorandum.

Please note that the Committee is always willing to discuss with applicants the points that have been made. There may be information that has not been made available to the Committee, or aspects of the research may not have been fully understood.

Once your response is received and confirmed as satisfying the Committee's points, you will be notified of the full approval of your ethics application. Full approval is not effective until all the conditions have been met. Data collection may not commence until full approval has been confirmed. If these conditions are not met within six months, your application may be closed and a new application will be required if you wish to continue with this research.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, we ask that you use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

We look forward to hearing from you,

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: bethany.willis@aut.ac.nz; erik.landhuis@aut.ac.nz

21 September 2022

Jay Wood

Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Jay

Re: Ethics Application: **22/231 Perceptions of inequality and redistributive measures**

Thank you for your request for approval of amendments to your ethics application.

The following changes have been approved:

- Reducing the questions for one measure from the original 16-items to 8-items.
- Stating the charity of choice (Child Poverty Action Group) for donation within the questionnaire and information sheet to emphasise the intended donation to participants.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Amendment of the Information Sheet in the 1st block of the survey as follows:
    a. Revision of the withdrawal information to reflect that this is an anonymous survey.
    b. Removal of the reference to a Consent Form.
    c. Removal of advice to participant that 'you were selected'.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval.

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.
8. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted. When the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all ethical, legal, and locality obligations or requirements for those jurisdictions.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: , bethany.willis@aut.ac.nz; erik.landhuis@aut.ac.nz

Appendix B: Public Poster Advertisements

Participants Needed!

There is up to $1000* up for grabs in gift vouchers.

We are investigating inequality in NZ, and your contribution to our study could help us better understand inequality and how to address it.

This online questionnaire should take no more than 25 minutes of your time.

We need people who are:

- 16 years of age or older
- Fluent in English

Scan this code with your camera to open the questionnaire

*You can donate half of your winnings to charity. This means the total prize draw amount and number of winners may be reduced. Prizes will be $20 shopping centre vouchers.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 13/09/22. AUTEC reference number 22/231.

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information
Date Information Sheet Produced: 11th April 2022

Project Title
Perceptions of inequality and redistributive measures

An Invitation
You are invited to take part in an online questionnaire looking at perceptions of inequality. This research is conducted by myself, Bethany Willis, a Master's student at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), and this research will directly contribute to my qualification. There are no conflicts of interest among the researchers nor between us and you that either advantage or disadvantage you. This information sheet should serve to help you decide if you would like to take part in our study. Please make sure you have read and understand all the information on this page.

What is the purpose of this research?
This research aims to gain insights into how we react to inequality and what may influence these perceptions. Further, this study also aims to uncover how personal ideologies and beliefs may play a role in these reactions. As mentioned, the findings of this research will be used to write my thesis, a requirement for my Master's degree in Psychology. This research may also be used for academic publications and presentations. The results of this study may also be used in secondary research.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?
You were invited to take part in this study from advertisements on social media, on posters around the AUT campuses or other community notice boards. The information presented to you across these formats was identical in presenting you with a general introduction to the study. You have been invited to participate as you have expressed interest to contribute to this research and have indicated that you are over the age of 16 and are fluent in English.

How do I agree to participate in this research?
Completion of the following questionnaire will be taken as consent to participate in this research. Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time before the questionnaire is submitted. If you choose to withdraw from the study, you will be offered the choice to have your data removed or allow it to be used. However, once you have submitted the questionnaire, removal of your data will not be possible.

What will happen in this research?
This research involves an online questionnaire that should take no more than 20 minutes of your time to complete. You will be asked to answer all the questions provided as honestly as possible and to the best of your ability. You will be given a description about inequality in New Zealand and questions related to this description. You will also be asked about your opinions about resolving inequalities and questions about yourself and questions related to your beliefs about the world.

What are the discomforts and risks?
You are unlikely to experience any discomfort, embarrassment or risk by taking part in this study. All questions asked of you are not sensitive or private in nature. However, if at any point you feel uncomfortable with answering a provided question, you are not required nor compelled to complete the questionnaire.
How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?
If you experience discomfort from your participation in this study, you are reminded that you can withdraw from the study at any time. You also are not required to answer every question within the questionnaire.

What are the benefits?
The benefits of this study directly come from your contribution as a participant, enabling us to better understand perceptions and reactions about inequality. Along with the opportunity to win a gift voucher, you may enjoy being a part of the research process or perhaps take interest in the topics discussed.

How will my privacy be protected?
You as the participant will remain anonymous. All responses will be anonymised and therefore will not enable the researchers or anyone to identify you or your responses. You should be aware the information you give us will be kept permanently and may be used for future research related to this area. It may also be given to other researchers for secondary analysis, but they will not be able to identify you from the data we give them.

What are the costs of participating in this research?
The questionnaire should take no longer that 20 minutes of your time to complete, and there are no other costs involved. As a token of thanks, you will have the opportunity to enter a prize draw of up to $1000 to win a voucher valued at $20.00. There is an option in this questionnaire where you may decide to donate half of your winnings to charity. This means the prize draw amount and number of winners may be reduced should you and other fellow participants be willing to donate half of your prize. Should no participant decide to donate, then the entire $1000 is still available for prizes. Child Poverty Action Group is the chosen charity.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?
Please take your time to consider your participation in this study. Data collection for this study will end after December 2022.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?
Upon completion of the questionnaire, you will have the opportunity to indicate whether you would be interested in a summary of the findings of the research once finalised. This will involve you following this link: https://bit.ly/3M1iCKY to which a summary of the research findings will be updated upon completion of the study. Please record this link or bookmark this webpage for the future when the findings become available.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?
Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Jay Wood, jay.wood@aut.ac.nz, (+64) 9 921-9999 ext 8506. Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, ethics@aut.ac.nz , (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

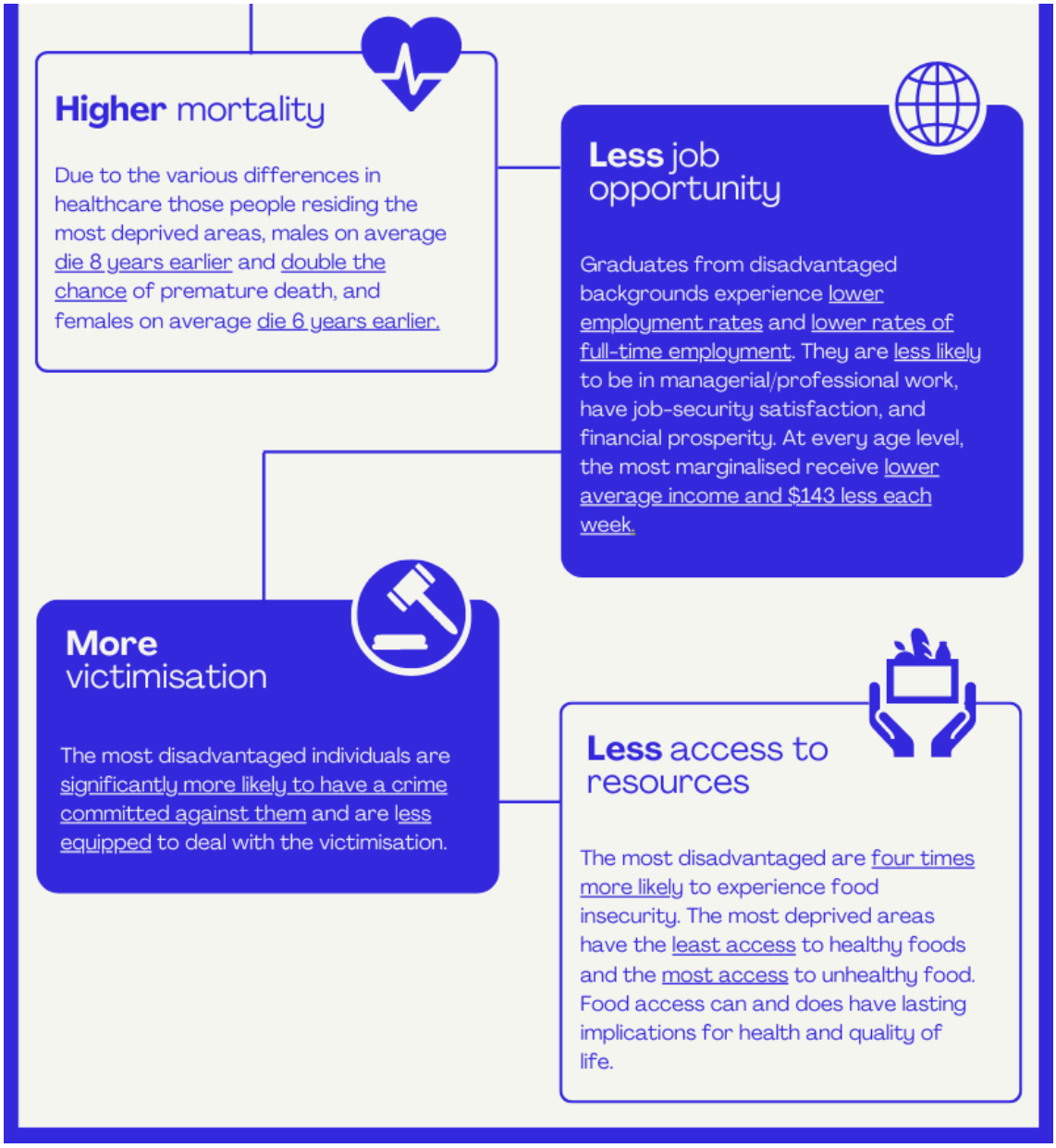
Whom do I contact for further information about this research?
Please keep this Information Sheet for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:
Bethany Willis, bethany.willis@aut.ac.nz.
Project Supervisor Contact Details:
Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Jay Wood, Jay.wood@aut.ac.nz.

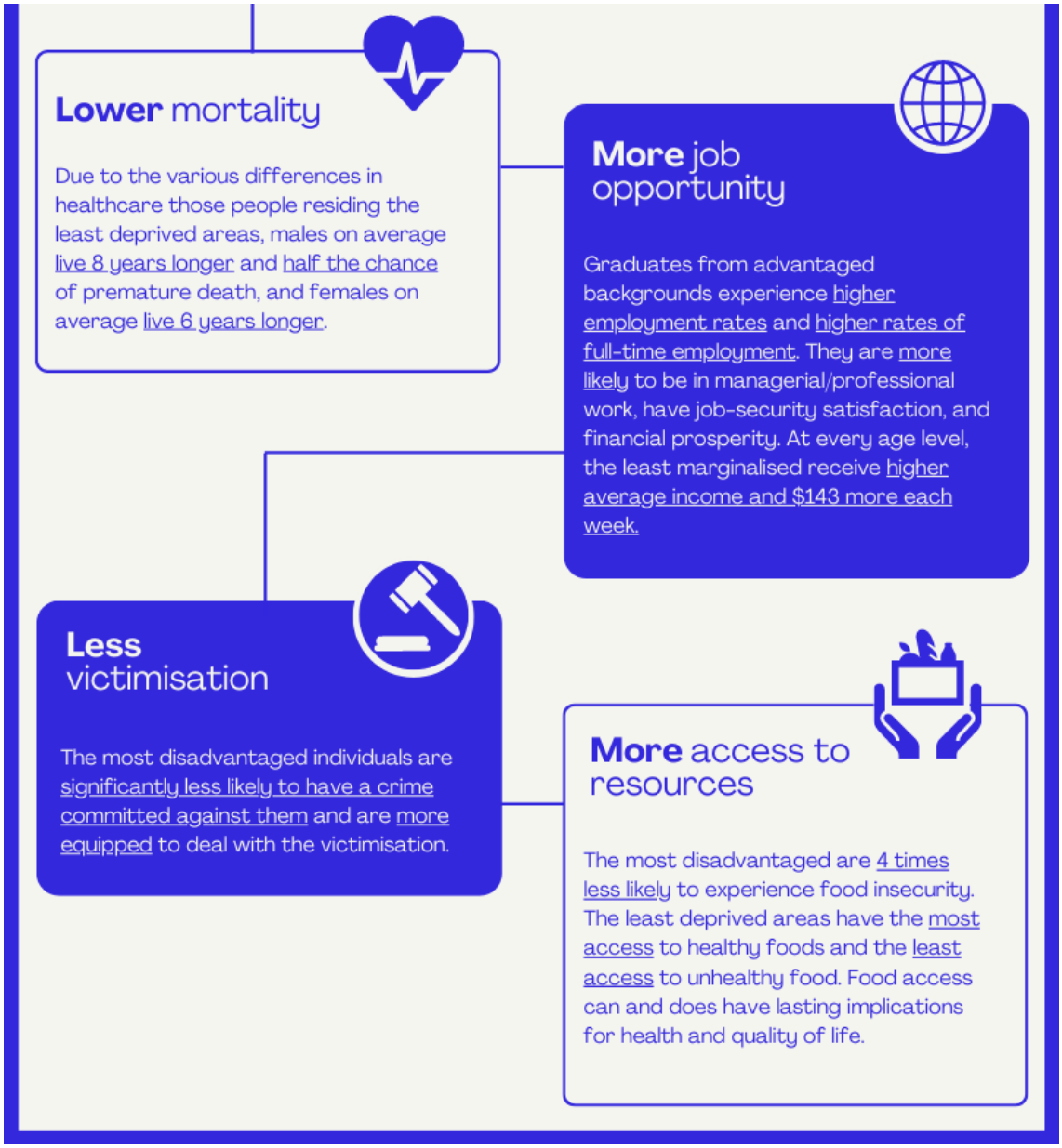
Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 13/09/22, AUTEC Reference 22/231.

Appendix D: Infographics/Frames

Disadvantage Condition


Higher mortality
Due to the various differences in healthcare those people residing the most deprived areas, males on average die 8 years earlier and double the chance of premature death, and females on average die 6 years earlier.
Less job opportunity
Graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds experience lower employment rates and lower rates of full-time employment. They are less likely to be in managerial/professional work, have job-security satisfaction, and financial prosperity. At every age level, the most marginalised receive lower average income and $143 less each week.
More victimisation
The most disadvantaged individuals are significantly more likely to have a crime committed against them and are less equipped to deal with the victimisation.
Less access to resources
The most disadvantaged are four times more likely to experience food insecurity. The most deprived areas have the least access to healthy foods and the most access to unhealthy food. Food access can and does have lasting implications for health and quality of life.

Advantage Condition


Lower mortality
Due to the various differences in healthcare those people residing the least deprived areas, males on average live 8 years longer and half the chance of premature death, and females on average live 6 years longer.
More job opportunity
Graduates from advantaged backgrounds experience higher employment rates and higher rates of full-time employment. They are more likely to be in managerial/professional work, have job-security satisfaction, and financial prosperity. At every age level, the least marginalised receive higher average income and $143 more each week.
Less victimisation
The most disadvantaged individuals are significantly less likely to have a crime committed against them and are more equipped to deal with the victimisation.
More access to resources
The most disadvantaged are 4 times less likely to experience food insecurity. The least deprived areas have the most access to healthy foods and the least access to unhealthy food. Food access can and does have lasting implications for health and quality of life.

Appendix E: Additional Further Reading Article

New Zealand's astounding wealth gap challenges our 'fair go' identity

Max Rashbrooke

New data shows the richest 1% are worth 68 times more than a typical New Zealander

The extent of wealth inequality in supposedly egalitarian New Zealand has been laid bare by figures showing the wealthiest individuals have over NZ$140bn (US$93bn) stashed away in trusts – and overall have nearly 70 times more assets than the typical Kiwi.

The new data, drawn from the 2017-18 Household Economic Survey, are likely to underestimate true inequality, as the ultra-wealthy are generally reluctant to take part in such surveys.

The data show that New Zealand's wealthiest 1% of adults – around 38,000 people – have $141bn in trusts. Another 150,000 or so people, rounding out the rest of the wealthiest 5%, have trusts worth a further $122bn.

Trusts are vehicles through which individuals can notionally give their assets to trustees to hold on behalf of named beneficiaries. In practice, the "givers" often retain control of the assets while having superficially ceded ownership. In the past this has allowed wealthy individuals to avoid taxes, hide assets from spouses and creditors, and receive care subsidies to which they are not entitled.

Although some of these practices have been curbed, the figures will raise renewed questions about the need to overhaul trust law. IRD research has revealed extensive use of trusts among wealthy individuals who pay relatively little tax.

The wealth inequality data, developed in conjunction with Statistics New Zealand researchers, also show that the 1% have an average (mean) of $3.6m held in trusts, $1.6m in shares and $470,000 in cash. Their debts are on average just $80,000.

The typical (median) person in the 1% is worth $6.2m. In contrast, the typical New Zealander is worth only $92,000 – 68 times less.

Among those in the poorest half of the country, meanwhile, the average person owns assets worth just $46,000 and has debts of $33,000, leaving them with a net worth of $12,000. They have negligible wealth in trusts and on average just $4,000 in the bank, leaving them vulnerable to sudden financial shocks.

When it comes to the middle classes – the 40% of the country who are above the mid-point but below the wealthiest 10% – have a higher net worth, on average $352,000, most of it tied up in housing.

Overall, the wealthiest 10% have 59% of all the country's assets, and the middle classes around 39%. That leaves the poorest half of the country with just 2%.

Some commentators would argue that New Zealand remains the land of the "fair go", a country where all have opportunities to get ahead. Its wealth inequality is only slightly worse than the developed country average. But it is difficult to see how it can be fair for any individual, however meritorious, to be "worth" nearly 70 times the typical New Zealander.

There are also good reasons to think that opportunities are far from equal. Wealthier parents are

able to provide their children with many opportunities unavailable to poorer kids, as well as access to exclusive schools and networks.

Analysis of the NBR Rich List shows a strong dynastic trend: over one-third of businesses on the list are actively being run by descendants of the fortune's originator, with the number of family members passively receiving the proceeds of that wealth undoubtedly higher still.

While some rich listers are entrepreneurs, developing useful new products, fortunes made in finance, insurance and real estate are predominant. Conversely, the country's essential workers – including health staff on the front line of the coronavirus pandemic – earn so little that they are often unable to save for a house deposit.

IRD research, meanwhile, shows that more than half the country's ultra-wealthy individuals – those with over $50m – declare incomes of less than $70,000, an implausibly low figure. They avoid tax, the IRD argues, by taking their income as untaxed capital gains, undervaluing the services they provide to their own companies, and transferring wealth to charities which they control but which make "little or no charitable donations".

Such findings are challenging to New Zealand's self-identity. The country's egalitarian image was once memorably described by the historian Melanie Nolan as "a rich amalgam of truth and myth". These new wealth figures suggest that the latter increasingly predominates.

This article can be found at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/31/new-zealands-astounding-wealth-gap-challenges-our-fair-go-identity