

The Minority Premium: How Fashion Markets Revalue Racialized Signals

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Abstract

Racial classifications typically reproduce status hierarchies, disadvantaging minority-associated identities in domains from hiring to housing. This paper identifies a boundary condition of that pattern in the women’s fashion market, where retailers assign human first names to products. Using more than 1.3 million Shopify listings, I show that minority-named products command systematically higher prices than comparable White-named products. I call this reversal the *minority premium*. Using an abductive approach, I evaluate two explanations: an *omnivorousness* account, in which elite consumers value minority-associated products as a form of cosmopolitan or diversity-signaling consumption, and a *differentiation* account, in which minority-associated names simply mark a product as distinct from an implicitly White market default. Four preregistered experiments with 1,248 participants replicate the premium at the consumer level, and the evidence favors differentiation. Experimentally fixing differentiation reduces the premium, whereas income, education, race, and omnivorous consumption do not reliably moderate it. These findings show that the evaluative meaning of racialized signals depends on market context: classifications that reproduce disadvantages when attached to people can generate value when attached to products in markets organized around uniqueness and differentiation.

Keywords: Racial classification, Symbolic differentiation, Market evaluation, Computational text and image analysis

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1 Introduction

Racial identities are a powerful social classification. Across many institutional contexts in the United States, they serve as signals of quality and competence. And the evaluations that follow tend to reproduce existing status hierarchies, with white-associated identities receiving more favorable assessments and minority-associated identities being penalized (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004; Einstein and Glick, 2017; Kugelmass, 2016; Pager and Shepherd, 2008; Ridgeway, 2014). This status-reproduction pattern is consistent enough across domains that it functions as a default expectation wherever racial classification enters an evaluation.

This article identifies a boundary condition of this status-reproduction pattern. I examine the women’s fashion market, where firms commonly assign human given names to products: the *Emma* sweater, the *Aliyah* dress, the *Sofia* blouse¹. I show that the racial identities of those names carry shape evaluations in the direction opposite to what the reproduction account predicts. Products bearing names associated with racial minorities tend to command higher prices than observationally similar products bearing white-associated names. This gap holds both within and across retailers, even after accounting for product category, product attributes, and model presentation. I call it the *minority premium*.

The *minority premium* poses a theoretical puzzle. Where racial identity enters evaluation, it typically works to the disadvantage of minorities; here it does the reverse. Why should the fashion market invert the usual pattern? Resolving this puzzle clarifies the conditions under which social classifications retain or change their evaluative meaning across contexts.

I consider two explanations for the *minority premium*. The first draws on the sociology of consumption, particularly research on cultural omnivorousness, which argues that cultural elites have shifted from consuming highbrow culture exclusively to consuming a broad mix of cultural forms (Peterson and Kern, 1996). By extension, elites may consume symbols associated with racial minority identities to display cosmopolitan taste (Khan, 2011), claim

¹These names differ from eponymous brand names. Within a single store, individual products are each assigned a different human first name.

authenticity (Hahl et al., 2017), or accumulate social and cultural capital (Koppman, 2016). More recent synthetic work describes this broader pattern as elites’ “conspicuous openness to diversity” (Childress and Lizardo, 2026). From this perspective, the minority premium arises because culturally advantaged consumers place greater value on products that symbolically incorporate minority identities.

The second explanation draws on research on atypicality and differentiation in markets and organizations. This literature shows that products departing from competitors’ offerings may confer advantages by attracting attention and signaling novelty (Askin and Mauskopf, 2017; Uzzi et al., 2013; Zhao et al., 2017). Applied to the fashion market, minority-associated names may differentiate products from a taken-for-granted racial default (Brekhus, 1998; Perry, 2001). Because White-associated identities are more common and less marked, minority-associated names may signal that a product is distinct from the mass market. Under this account, the minority premium results from symbolic differentiation rather than from consumers’ generalized preference for racial diversity.

The paper develops these arguments through an abductive research design (Karell and Freedman, 2019; Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) and proceeds in two parts. Part one develops the puzzle. I review the theories behind the reproduction account and explain why the field expects status hierarchies to be reproduced even in a product market, where racial identity is attached to objects rather than people. Drawing on large-scale archival data, I then show that the fashion market violates this expectation, yielding a minority premium rather than a penalty (Study 1). Part two compares two explanations: minority identity as an object of omnivorous consumption, and minority identity as a signal of differentiation. In a set of pre-registered online experiments (Study 2), I show that the minority premium replicates on the consumer side, and that results are more consistent with the differentiation account.

The findings contribute to theories of classification and evaluation by showing that the evaluative meaning of a social classification is not fixed. Classifications acquire meaning

through their relationship to the objects, audiences, and institutional contexts in which they are deployed. In labor markets, for example, minority-associated names may be interpreted as signals of lower competence or status. When attached to fashion products, however, the same names may be interpreted as signals of uniqueness and differentiation. The use of racialized first names deliberately parallels audit study designs, making the same classificatory cue comparable across evaluative domains. Taken together, the results show how a classification system that reproduces inequality in one market can generate a premium when transferred to another.

2 Part One: A Minority Premium or Penalty?

2.1 Theory: The Persistence of Status Hierarchy

A long tradition of research on discrimination documents the persistence of status hierarchies across institutional domains. Audit studies test for discrimination by comparing trained testers or fictitious profiles that are equivalent on all observed characteristics except a socially salient attribute, typically race or gender. Across labor, credit, housing, and health-care settings, these studies consistently find that members of disadvantaged groups receive less favorable treatment, including fewer callbacks and promotion opportunities, worse lending and housing outcomes, and lower-quality medical care ([Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004](#); [Block et al., 2021](#); [Einstein and Glick, 2017](#); [Kugelmass, 2016](#); [Pager and Shepherd, 2008](#)).

The persistence of racial status hierarchies in evaluation has been explained through several theoretical viewpoints, including taste-based discrimination ([Becker, 2010](#)), statistical discrimination ([Arrow, 1973](#); [Phelps, 1972](#)), implicit bias and stereotyping in social psychology ([Fiske et al., 2002](#); [Greenwald and Banaji, 1995](#)), and status characteristics theory in sociology ([Berger et al., 1972](#); [Ridgeway, 1991](#)). Because the present study concerns the culturally shared meanings conveyed by racialized names, I focus primarily on this last perspective.

Status characteristics theory explains the persistence of hierarchy through the concept of status beliefs. A status belief is a cultural belief that some social groups are more competent or worthy of esteem than others. Such beliefs are widely shared across a population, and they are self-reinforcing: they operate partly independently of material resources and power, yet they create a feedback loop in which groups with more resources and power come to be seen as more competent and worthy of esteem (Ridgeway, 1991, 2014; Ridgeway et al., 1998). For example, beliefs that portray men as more competent than women in many organizational tasks contribute to the gendering of occupations, helping sustain gender gaps in wages and access to higher-paying jobs (Ridgeway, 2011; Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). Similar dynamics apply to race: organizational processes that implicitly treat whiteness as a credential help justify unequal distributions of wages and resources across racial groups (Ray, 2019). These feedback loops help explain why status hierarchies are durable (Tilly, 1999) and difficult to disrupt.

An important analytical clarification is that, in most of these cases, classifications such as race and gender are applied to humans, not objects. This raises two questions: when applied to nonhuman objects, does the classification remain meaningful at all? And if so, should we expect it to reproduce status hierarchy? These questions matter because status characteristics theory treats task relevance as a boundary condition: status beliefs matter most when they are salient and relevant to the task at hand (Berger et al., 1972; Correll and Ridgeway, 2006). It would be reasonable to assume that when a category no longer evaluates individual humans, its task relevance disappears as well.

Yet there is reason to believe that status beliefs originally developed for humans can still shape evaluations of nonhuman products. One source of indirect evidence comes from extensions of status characteristics theory to product markets, which show that status beliefs attached to producers transfer to the products they make. Sellers who are women or racial minorities receive lower prices for identical products on platforms such as eBay (Ayres et al., 2015; Kricheli-Katz and Regev, 2016). Follow-up experiments suggest that this penalty

reflects diffuse status beliefs rather than task-specific competence beliefs alone: comparing female-typed and male-typed markets, this research finds that products by female producers are penalized in male-typed markets, but products by male producers are not penalized in female-typed markets (Tak et al., 2019). This asymmetry suggests that a more diffuse status belief, associating maleness with competence in general, transcends task relevance and attaches to the products men make. This evidence, however, remains indirect: although it is the product being evaluated, group membership is still attached to the producer, and its effect on evaluation is only indirect, mediated through the product.

More direct evidence comes from research on anthropomorphism, which shows that social categories originally applied to humans can function as cognitive schemas that shape how people perceive and evaluate nonhuman objects (Aggarwal and McGill, 2007; Guthrie, 1995; Waytz et al., 2014). When people perceive an object or event as possessing salient human traits, without necessarily regarding the entity as human, they may apply human-based schemas to interpret it. For example, using a pet-adoption dataset, research finds that dogs with names perceived as more White are adopted faster, in part because adopters project racial schemas developed for humans onto the dogs, producing warmer feelings toward dogs with more White-sounding names (Quadlin and Montgomery, 2022).

Human given names are one of the most common ways to invoke anthropomorphism (Brédart, 2021). It is therefore reasonable to expect that the associations and status beliefs carried by a name’s social identity function as cognitive schemas that shape people’s perceptions of the product it labels, and consequently their evaluations of it. Because culturally based status beliefs are a central part of these associations, the reproduction account predicts that status hierarchy should persist even when it is attached to product evaluation.

2.2 Empirical Setting and the Abductive Research Design

Fashion Product Naming

The naming practices of the fashion industry are well suited to testing the effect of racial classification on product evaluation for three reasons. First, names carry racial associations that are widely shared and strong enough to produce behavioral consequences, a property documented across decades of audit research ([Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004](#); [Kugelmass, 2016](#); [Pager et al., 2009](#)). This makes the setting a close mirror, in product space, of person-level audit studies. It allows direct comparison to that literature’s stimuli and findings, even though the object of evaluation here is a product rather than a person. Second, names are analytically separable from the products they label. Nothing about a name determines a garment’s fabric or cut, so the symbolic association carried by the name can be cleanly separated from the product’s material characteristics. This sidesteps the essentialism confound that complicates research on gender typing and racialization, two domains where status characteristics theory has traditionally been tested ([Cech, 2013](#); [Levanon and Grusky, 2016](#)). Third, the data contain substantial natural variation in name-product pairings at scale, which makes it possible to isolate the effect of racial association from product-level confounds such as fabric, cut, and occasion. Together, these three properties separate what belongs to the product from what is imposed on it by the classification attached to its name.

Much existing research on fashion in sociology and management studies focuses on established, higher-end fashion houses ([Cappetta et al., 2006](#); [Godart and Galunic, 2019](#)). This paper instead draws on product listings from Shopify, an e-commerce platform that hosts online storefronts for independent retailers. Studying fashion listings on Shopify offers two further advantages beyond this shift in empirical focus. First, the scale of the data (more than 1 million products from over 10,000 retailers) makes it possible to detect subtle associations between naming and product characteristics that would be invisible in a smaller sample. Second, the sample is concentrated among small, independent businesses, which

strengthens the independence of each storefront’s naming decisions: fashion houses in more traditional datasets often belong to larger conglomerates that may impose a unified naming policy across brands, making decisions in that setting less reflective of individual producer choice. Because Shopify storefronts vary enormously in customer base, price point, and aesthetic identity, the resulting data capture a genuine cross-section of the independent fashion market rather than a single, narrow niche.

Abductive Research Design

This paper follows an abductive logic, in which analysis begins from a theoretically anticipated expectation and treats departures from it as findings to be explained ([Tavory and Timmermans, 2014](#); [Timmermans and Tavory, 2012](#)). Abduction was developed for ethnographic and comparative-historical work and has more recently been extended to large-scale computational analysis ([Karell and Freedman, 2019](#); [Nelson, 2020](#)). I follow this computational extension. Specifically, I entered the analysis with the status reproduction account as my prior. I organized Study 1 around two questions that follow from this prior: whether name race is meaningful in the product space at all, and, if so, whether name-based evaluation reproduces the status hierarchy or departs from it. The reproduction account predicts that name race association is meaningful and that we should observe whiter names commanding higher prices and minority names lower, mirroring the penalties in person-level audit studies. Because this reversal is the paper’s central puzzle, I treat Study 1 as exploratory: its role is to robustly establish the anomaly, not to test a pre-specified explanation. The explanation for the anomaly is developed only afterward, in Part 2.

2.3 Study 1: Racialized Classification and the Minority Premium

2.3.1 Data

The primary dataset consists of women’s apparel products listed on independent U.S. Shopify storefronts, scraped between 2025 and 2026 from sites identified through the BuiltWith and StoreLeads² directories of Shopify-powered domains. After applying a sequence of filters to retain genuine single-brand retailers selling women’s clothing at plausible consumer price points (between \$10 and \$1,000), the catalog contains 1,386,306 products from 10,561 storefronts. Approximately 15.8% of products carry human first names in their titles, and 7,395 stores engage in this naming practice. For each product I observe the title, brand, list price, written description, category tags, and images. Table S1 shows the descriptive statistics of the product data.

To identify products named after people, I assemble a dictionary of human first names and match each product title against it. The candidate pool draws on the intersection of three population registers: the U.S. Census 2020 name file, Social Security Administration birth records, and the L2 voter file. Because many common words, places, and colors also appear as names in these registers (e.g., “White,” “Rose,” or “Georgia”), register membership alone is not sufficient. I classify each candidate token with a large language model (GPT-5-nano) based on whether it functions primarily as a human given name in fashion product titles, then flag a product as human-named when a qualifying name appears as a title token, excluding matches that also occur in the store or brand name. I validate this classification against manual ratings of 200 products. The LLM achieves 97% accuracy.

²BuiltWith (builtwith.com) and StoreLeads (storeleads.app) are commercial directories that index websites by the technology stack they use, including e-commerce platforms such as Shopify.

2.3.2 Measures

Name Associations

Whiteness: The primary independent variable is name whiteness: the proportion of a first name’s bearers who are non-Hispanic White, ranging from zero to one. I construct this measure from the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2020 frequently occurring first-name file, which reports living-population counts for names held by approximately 90 or more people ([Comenetz, 2026](#)) and classifies bearers into six mutually exclusive race and Hispanic-origin groups: non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native, non-Hispanic Asian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic two or more races, and Hispanic. I construct analogous shares for each group, which sum to one. Because these classifications are self-reported in the census, the measures capture the observed demographic composition of each name.

Age: A name’s age association is the average age of its bearers, weighted by their birth-year counts in Social Security Administration records ([Social Security Administration, 2026](#)), with each cohort’s age calculated as of 2025. Higher values indicate names concentrated among earlier birth cohorts. Because the measure does not adjust for differential mortality, it captures a name’s typical birth cohort rather than the age distribution of its living bearers.

U.S. share: U.S. share is the estimated proportion of a name’s global bearers who reside in the United States, based on a Facebook-derived global name dataset ([Remy, 2021](#)). Higher values indicate greater U.S. prevalence.

Rarity: Rarity is the negative log of a name’s total frequency in the 2020 Census, so less common names receive higher values.

Income: Income association is constructed from the L2 consumer file ([Labels & Lists, Inc., 2024](#)), which assigns individuals to 19 household-income bands. I collapse these into three tiers, coded zero to two: lower-income (under \$50,000), middle-income (\$50,000–\$149,999), and upper-income (\$150,000 or more), then average the tier across individuals sharing each

first name. Higher scores indicate names concentrated among higher-income households

Table 1 reports correlations among the resulting name association measures, illustrating that name whiteness is empirically related to but distinct from other name dimensions including age, income, rarity, and U.S. share. To assess validity, I benchmark these measures against two published sets of human-coded name-perception ratings (Crabtree et al., 2023; Johfre, 2020), independent administrative birth-record demographics (Gaddis, 2017), and an original perception survey of 200 first names. Across these sources, the constructed measures correlate strongly with external benchmarks for race, age, and gender, and more moderately for socioeconomic status and U.S. share (Table S2).

Price and Product Characteristics

The dependent variable is the natural log of the product’s list price in U.S. dollars, which reduces the influence of the right tail and lets coefficients be interpreted approximately as percentage differences.

I control for product category and for material and aesthetic characteristics extracted from product descriptions. Using an open-source large language model (Bai et al., 2023), I code each description into 15 standardized fields, including material, construction, fit, neckline, sleeve type, garment length, closure, pattern, occasion, style, season, and color. I convert these into binary indicators and retain features appearing in at least 100 products, yielding approximately 2,300 product-feature controls, and validate them by checking whether they appear verbatim or near-verbatim in the source text.

For products displayed on human models, I use FairFace (Karkkainen and Joo, 2021), a computer-vision model previously used in social-science research (Boucherie et al., 2026), to measure the model’s predicted racial presentation. This lets me assess whether the association between name whiteness and price reflects the model’s racial presentation rather than the name itself. Because FairFace analyzes one face at a time, I first detect and align faces in each image using a RetinaFace detector, keeping only reliable detections, then apply Fair-

Face to the most prominent face in the image, identified as the largest by area. I aggregate to the product level by averaging FairFace posteriors across images containing a detectable face. This lets the price model account for whether and how a human model is shown, while racial presentation is measured only where a face is observed.

2.3.3 Analytic Strategy

Study 1 asks two questions: whether names’ racial associations are meaningful in the product space, and if so, whether name-based evaluation reproduces the status hierarchy or departs from it.

To answer the first question, I test whether product characteristics predict a product’s classification as White- or minority-associated, using indicators for product category and extracted features as predictors. I estimate logistic-regression classifiers with five-fold cross-validation, training on four-fifths of the data and evaluating on the remaining fifth in each fold. I run this both across the market and within retailers: the market-wide analysis tests whether product characteristics distinguish White- from minority-associated names across the full sample, while the within-retailer analysis adjusts for each retailer’s typical mix of product features (equivalent to retailer fixed effects), so predictive performance reflects only comparisons among differently named products sold by the same retailer.

I next estimate OLS regressions predicting logged list price on continuous name whiteness; because higher values indicate stronger White association, a negative coefficient indicates that more minority-associated names command higher prices. I estimate a sequence of models that successively add product-category indicators, the full set of extracted product features, other name associations (age, gender, income, rarity, and U.S. share), and measures of model racial presentation. This lets me assess whether the whiteness-price association is explained by observable product characteristics or by other meanings correlated with the name. I estimate both market-wide models, which capture the overall relationship between name whiteness and price, and retailer-fixed-effect models, which compare differently named

products sold by the same retailer and hold constant stable retailer characteristics such as price level, market position, customer base, and naming practices.

Finally, I examine a subsample of apparently dropshipped dress products. That is, identical dresses listed under different names by different retailers. I identify these matches using perceptual image hashing, a technique that generates a compact 64-bit fingerprint for each product’s primary image and treats two images as identical when their fingerprints match exactly (Hamming distance of zero). Grouping listings by matching image yields photo blocks, each spanning at least two distinct names and two retailers. I then estimate the effect of name whiteness on log price using photo-block fixed effects, comparing prices only among listings within the same block.

2.3.4 Results

Racialized Names Organize Product Space

The first set of results addresses whether projecting racial categories onto the product space produces meaningful patterns, or whether names are simply noise. The results show that racialized names are not distributed randomly. Figure 1 maps product features in a two-dimensional space defined by name whiteness and price association: the x-axis captures how strongly a feature is associated with white-associated names, and the y-axis captures the feature’s price premium. As Figure 1 shows, less white-associated names cluster systematically with features like silk, organza, beading, and embroidery, and with occasions such as ceremonial and bridal. More white-associated names cluster with casual and athleisure wear, including materials such as spandex and polyester, as well as plus-size fits. The negative slope indicates that features associated with minority-associated names tend to command higher prices, while features associated with white-associated names tend to cluster at lower price points. Because this sorting is correlational, subsequent analyses test whether the price premium survives once these product-level associations are held constant.

I formalize this sorting pattern using a binary prediction task. Product aesthetics predict

a name’s racial association above chance, both across the market ($\text{AUC} \approx 0.58\text{--}0.66$) and within the same retailer ($\text{AUC} \approx 0.54\text{--}0.60$). This holds across different cutoffs for classifying names as white- versus minority-associated along the continuous whiteness spectrum. Accuracy also rises monotonically as a name’s racial coding sharpens, reaching $\text{AUC} = 0.66$ (pooled) and 0.60 (within-retailer) when only the most clearly coded names are compared.

The Minority Premium

The second results ask how name whiteness affects price once the product itself is held constant. Figure 2 and Table 2 report OLS regressions of logged list price on name whiteness, with controls introduced sequentially across models. In the baseline model with product-category fixed effects, moving from the least to the most white-associated name is associated with an approximately 14.5 percent lower list price (Model 1). The estimate declines to 8.5 percent after accounting for observed product features (Model 2), then increases to 10.6 percent after controlling for other name associations (Model 3) and to 12.1 percent after adjusting for the model’s racial presentation (Model 4). The most demanding specification adds brand fixed effects, comparing differently named products within the same brand and absorbing stable differences in brand positioning and average price levels. Although the estimate falls substantially, a fully white-associated name remains associated with an approximately 2.6 percent lower list price (Model 5).

The increase in the coefficient between Models 2 and 3 is consistent with statistical suppression: Name age and income are both positively associated with price. Because more white-associated names tend to be older and linked to higher-income populations, these associations confer status advantages that partially offset the negative whiteness-price relationship. At the same time, rarer and more foreign-sounding names receive higher prices, consistent with the idea that cultural uncommonness is valued in fashion. Once these correlated meanings are separated, the whiteness penalty grows larger rather than disappearing.

A group-level decomposition provides additional evidence that pricing reflects both racial

markedness and status-related meanings. Relative to products with white-associated names, products with Asian-associated names receive the largest price premium (+28.8%, $p < 0.001$), well above Black-associated (+10.2%, $p < 0.001$) and Hispanic-associated names (+6.4%, $p = 0.006$). The latter two estimates are similar in magnitude and are both substantially smaller than the premium associated with Asian names. This is informative because Asian, Hispanic, and Black names are all culturally distanced from white names, yet carry different income connotations. Asian-associated names combine racial markedness with comparatively high-income associations and receive the largest premium (Zou and Cheryan, 2017). Pricing in this market therefore appears to weigh cultural distance and a status/income cue simultaneously, rather than treating minority association as a single undifferentiated signal.

A more stringent test uses dropshipped dresses: identical product images displayed by multiple retailers. Figure 3 illustrates two such cases: one dress listed as “Estella” (whiteness 0.24) at \$259 and as “Katelyn” (whiteness 0.82) at \$113; another listed as “Leilani” (whiteness 0.15) at \$188 and as “Serena” (whiteness 0.47) at \$70. Regression models with photo-block fixed effects produce the same general pattern: a fully white-associated name is associated with approximately 26% lower list price than a fully minority-associated name ($\beta = -0.303$, $p = 0.023$, $N = 672$ listings across 202 photo-blocks). The design does not eliminate every difference among retailers, but it strengthens the inference that the association reflects more than the product’s material properties.

The minority premium presents a puzzle. The reproduction account predicts that whiter names should command higher prices. The data show the opposite. Minority-associated names are rewarded, not penalized, and the effect survives the material characteristics of the garment, the model’s racial presentation, and even the same photograph listed under different names. Because the data are observational, Study 1 cannot tell us why. Part Two develops two potential explanations and tests them in pre-registered experiments.

3 Part Two: What Explains the Minority Premium?

3.1 Theory

The Multidimensionality of Social Classifications

The status-reproduction account rests on a simplification: it treats a social classification as though it carried a single, dominant evaluative meaning. Yet a growing body of work suggests that social classifications rarely carry just one meaning. Race, for example, has been shown to organize at least two independent dimensions: a status axis (superiority versus inferiority) and a separate axis of cultural foreignness (Brekhus, 1998; Devos and Banaji, 2005; Zou and Cheryan, 2017). Stereotype research similarly represents group stereotypes along two broadly distinct dimensions, warmth and competence, rather than a single evaluative scale (Fiske et al., 2002; Martin and Slepian, 2021). The cultural embedding tradition has formalized this insight, modeling social classifications as positions in a multidimensional space of traits, where combinations of classifications generate meanings that cannot be reduced to the sum of their parts (Charlesworth et al., 2023). These perspectives suggest that a social classification does not carry one fixed evaluative signal. It carries a repertoire of meanings whose relevance may vary across situations.

More broadly, cognition research suggests that people represent the world along a multitude of intersecting semantic dimensions. This tendency extends beyond humans to non-human objects such as animals, products, and even organizations (Gouvard et al., 2023; Hannan et al., 2019; Kim and Askin, 2024).

These multidimensional accounts create a tension within the status-reproduction account. One view predicts that a single hierarchy of worth should travel with a classification wherever it goes; another suggests that classifications carry several, potentially conflicting, hierarchies at once, and says little about which one will govern evaluation in a given setting. The tension is not merely theoretical: a smaller body of research suggests that the disadvantages attached to minority identities can weaken and occasionally reverse (Chan and Wang, 2018; Jiménez

and Horowitz, 2013; Lee and Huang, 2018). Female-led ventures, for example, are typically penalized relative to male-led ventures. But when a venture is framed around its social and environmental impact, a framing shown to elicit stereotypically feminine attributions of warmth, this penalty diminishes. In other words, evaluating a venture on competence disadvantages women; evaluating the same venture on warmth does not.

Applied to the present case, this multidimensionality suggests that different evaluation logics can generate outcomes that depart from the simple reproduction of status hierarchies. In the next section, I introduce two such competing logics as alternatives to the reproduction account.

Differentiation as a Dimension of Product Evaluation

Beyond status and competence, differentiation constitutes another important dimension of evaluation in many product markets. Evaluators assess not only the quality of an offering but also ask: “how different is the product or service offered by one company from those of its competitors?” This does not imply that greater differentiation invariably produces more favorable evaluations. Rather, differentiation provides an independent basis of comparison whose meaning and value audiences interpret in relation to a market’s prevailing evaluative criteria.

Much of the evaluation of differentiation happens at the organization level, asking how firms establish recognizable positions relative to competitors. Financial analysts, investors, and other market intermediaries evaluate not only whether an organization belongs to a recognizable industry or category, but also how it distinguishes itself within that category (Zuckerman, 1999). For investors, for example, differentiation may signal a distinctive value proposition, reduced exposure to direct competition, or the possibility of creating a new market (Pontikes, 2012; Shen et al., 2025). For analysts and other audiences, departures from prevailing organizational practices may also be interpreted as evidence of innovation, creativity, or a distinctive strategic identity (Gouvard et al., 2023). These studies show

that perceived difference from competitors can become salient in evaluation, even though its consequences may vary across audiences and settings.

Differentiation similarly enters evaluations of products and creative outputs. Research in creative industries such as music, film, art, and cuisine shows that audiences and critics evaluate offerings partly in relation to existing categories and competing products ([Askin and Mauskopf, 2017](#); [Cattani and Ferriani, 2008](#); [Hsu, 2006](#); [Kovács and Johnson, 2014](#)). A work’s similarity to or distance from prevailing offerings can shape whether it is perceived as original, creative, or sometimes confusing and difficult to classify. Related research on scientific production finds that the atypicality of the knowledge combined in a paper is associated with its subsequent impact ([Shi and Evans, 2023](#); [Uzzi et al., 2013](#)). Across these settings, distinctiveness is not merely an objective property of an offering; it is a relational judgment produced through comparison with what audiences understand to be typical.

Importantly, the differences that audiences perceive need not be rooted solely in material features or functional attributes. Organizations and producers also construct differentiation through cultural and symbolic elements, including labels, narratives, storytelling, and visual styles. For example, black metal bands use distinctive album colors both to differentiate themselves from other musical genres and to reinforce their niche positioning ([Sgourev et al., 2023](#)). Entrepreneurs similarly craft distinctive narratives and stories to create “symbolic differentiation” and attract the attention of resource-providing audiences, such as venture capitalists ([Taeuscher and Lounsbury, 2025](#); [Taeuscher et al., 2022](#)). These symbolic elements may substitute for functional differentiation by distinguishing otherwise similar offerings, or they may complement and amplify differences already embedded in a product’s features or category position. Differentiation may therefore arise not only from what a product does or how it is made, but also from the meanings through which it is presented and interpreted.

Applied to fashion, differentiation turns out to be a central part of the industry’s value proposition ([Aspers and Godart, 2013](#); [Blumer, 1969](#); [Simmel, 1957](#)). The fashion industry does not typically advance through improvements that make a garment perform its function

better; its innovations are, overwhelmingly, new styles meant to help wearers stand out (Cappetta et al., 2006). This logic is visible in fashion’s well-documented cycles, in which a style rises because it is socially validated and then falls once it becomes too common to support the individual differentiation it once conferred (Liebersohn, 2010). The industry also has a vertical structure: high-end, editorial fashion produces the stylistic and aesthetic innovations that trickle down to lower-end, mass-market fashion, which imitates elements of high fashion and gradually erodes the distinctiveness those innovations once carried (Aspers and Godart, 2013; Mears, 2010). Together, fashion’s value proposition and vertical status structure make differentiation a central dimension of evaluation and a core source of worth.

As in other markets, fashion producers can construct differentiation through symbolic meanings that extend beyond observable stylistic features (Kim and Sullivan, 2019). I argue that product names provide one such symbolic resource. This is possible because, as noted above, racial identity carries not only a status dimension but also a second, independent dimension: a group’s distance from the cultural default. Different literatures converge on this second dimension under different names. Social psychologists call it *foreignness* (Zou and Cheryan, 2017), the perceived cultural distance between a group and the mainstream. Under this account, asian and hispanic identities are more foreign than white and black identities. Sociologists describe the same underlying pattern as cultural markedness, the degree to which a category is understood as a deviation from an unlabeled, implicit default rather than passing as neutral or generic (Brekhus, 1998). In American society, whiteness typically functions as this unmarked, “cultureless” baseline (Devos and Banaji, 2005; Perry, 2001), while minority identities are read as more culturally marked, and therefore as standing at greater distance from the default. Applied to fashion markets, a product paired with a minority identity is therefore more likely to be perceived as different from competing products than an otherwise identical product paired with a white identity.

In many other organizational contexts, differentiation does not invariably increase value (Askin and Mauskopf, 2017; Zhao et al., 2017), because a tradeoff tends to exist between

conformity (i.e., following industry norms to gain legitimacy) and standing out, producing a case of optimal distinctiveness. In those cases, the penalty for differentiation typically comes from departures from established expectations that reduce comprehensibility and legitimacy. The present setting, however, concerns differentiation among products that remain clearly recognizable members of their categories (i.e., clothing). Given this caveat, greater perceived distance from the typical offering is likely to increase evaluation, particularly in markets that value novelty and distinction.

The Omnivorous Consumption of Minority Identity

A parallel, alternative explanation holds that racialized names function not as a device for symbolic differentiation but as a form of diversity signaling tied to elite consumption of minority identities. This account draws on the sociology of consumption, and cultural omnivore theory in particular.

Cultural omnivore theory identifies the rise of cultural omnivores among the elite class as one of the biggest shifts in consumption patterns over the past several decades ([Peterson and Kern, 1996](#)). In the age of Veblen and Bourdieu ([Bourdieu, 1984](#); [Veblen and Mills, 1992](#)), consumption was often segregated along class lines: people in the upper class had access to distinctive lifestyles and consumption opportunities, such as classical music and opera, which in turn conferred a distinctive form of “cultural capital.” Over recent decades, this tendency toward exclusive consumption has been replaced by a more cosmopolitan, omnivorous consumption culture, in which elites are marked by the flexibility to consume both highbrow and lowbrow forms: classical music and golf, but also pop music and soap operas. Several accounts explain this shift, ranging from rational accounts, such as cosmopolitanism as a new form of social capital that eases navigation of diverse social interactions ([Khan, 2011](#)), to moral accounts, such as elites’ anxiety to justify their privilege and their need to display authenticity ([Hahl et al., 2017](#); [Sherman, 2017](#)). These individual motives sit atop a broader institutional shift: over the past half-century, openness to diversity has become

institutionalized as a dominant social value, such that its absence now carries real reputational costs for organizations and individuals alike (Childress and Lizardo, 2026). Ollivier (Ollivier, 2004) terms the resulting behavior as *conspicuous openness to diversity*.

Cultural omnivorousness is not only about consumption across class lines; it is also closely tied to elite consumption across racial lines. Privileged, disproportionately White consumers increasingly seek out cultural forms associated with racial minority groups: cuisines tied to immigrant communities (Johnston and Baumann, 2009; Oleschuk, 2017), art once dismissed as “ethnographic” or “primitive” (Clifford, 1988; Price, 2002), and “authentic” ethnic neighborhoods, at times contributing to displacement (Stock and Schmiz, 2019; Zukin, 2008). This pattern has two consequences: it renders minority cultural practices desirable objects of consumption in their own right, and it turns racial boundary-crossing itself into a form of capital that converts into economic advantage (Oshotse et al., 2024).

This openness is not necessarily egalitarian, however. The same boundary-crossing that omnivorousness rewards is also what critics identify as cultural appropriation: dominant-group consumers detaching cultural signs from the communities that produced them, converting otherness into a resource for status and identity (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009; hooks, 1992). On this account, minority identity itself becomes commodified, valued because it signals authenticity or cosmopolitan sophistication, broadening what counts as legitimate taste without eliminating hierarchy, since elites retain the power to select and assign that value.

Like other creative industries, the fashion industry is shaped by this omnivorous consumption tendency and the embrace of diversity as a social value. The industry has a long tradition of incorporating elements of ethnic cultures into product offerings (Scafidi, 2005; Woets and Delhaye, 2015). In recent years, fashion houses have also embraced diversity through the recruitment of models varying in demographic background and body type, appealing to different consumer segments. High-end fashion houses go further still, recruiting ethnic models not only to reach diverse consumers, but because ethnic models can project a cultured, boundary-pushing image that appeals to high-paying consumers (Mears, 2010).

Whether this dynamic extends to product naming, and whether consumers respond to racialized names as a diversity signal, is the question this paper tests directly.

If racialized names function as a diversity signal appealing to elite omnivore consumers, then their use in fashion naming should produce a heterogeneous reaction. Specifically, it predicts that minority-associated names will be most appealing to consumers for whom cosmopolitan breadth functions as a valued marker of status, namely those who are White, high-income, and highly educated, and who have themselves engaged in omnivorous consumption.

3.2 Study 2: Consumer Perceptions and the Distinction Mechanism

Study 1 speaks to producer-side patterns. Study 2 turns to survey experiments to test whether the minority premium replicates at the level of consumer perception, and, if it does, to adjudicate between the two accounts: whether the premium reflects perceived product differentiation, or whether it instead reflects an omnivore-style preference concentrated among the consumers most invested in diversity as a marker of taste and status. I report four preregistered experiments that test replication, identify the underlying mechanism, rule out alternative explanations, and test for the consumer heterogeneity the omnivore account predicts.

Across the four experiments, participants were U.S. adult women with online clothing-shopping experience, recruited from the Prolific platform. Three of the four experiments use a “TierGame” paradigm: participants see a series of dress names drawn from real retail listings (e.g., “The Latoya Dress”) and classify each one, via binary choice and with no other product information shown, as more likely to belong to a boutique line (\$100) or a budget line (\$50). All names were drawn from the archival product data and span the full whiteness range, with low, mid, and high whiteness names roughly evenly represented. No participant rated the full stimulus set: each saw a subset of about 30 randomly assigned names. Participants received a performance bonus for accuracy, to incentivize effortful judgment.

Each experiment draws on a pool of 90 names, all of which appear in the archival product data. Experiments 1 and 2 used the same pool of names; Experiments 3 and 4 used a second, independently constructed pool to address potential name-covariate concerns. Table S3 lists the names used in each experiment. In Experiments 1 through 3, the outcome was a binary boutique classification, analyzed with mixed-effects models that include crossed random intercepts for participant and name, controlling for which subset of names a given participant happened to see. I report these effects as percentage-point changes from linear-probability models and as odds ratios from logistic models. Experiment 4 instead measured four continuous outcomes, perceived differentiation, quality, price, and willingness to pay, reported as regression coefficients in that experiment’s own results section.

Finally, at the end of the study I collected a set of participant-level measures. Standard demographic covariates included age, race and ethnicity, income, education, and political ideology. To test the omnivore account, I measured participants’ omnivore consumption habits (“How much do you agree with the following statement about yourself? ‘I seek out fashion or style inspiration from cultures other than my own.’”). I additionally collected two measures serving as methodological controls: boutique-purchase frequency, to account for participants’ baseline familiarity with boutique pricing (“In the past 12 months, how many times have you purchased something from a designer or boutique store?”), and perceived name usage, to check how participants interpreted the function of the names they saw (“Earlier you saw products with names. What did you think the name was mainly meant to suggest?”) For descriptive statistics, see Table S4 in the supplement.

3.2.1 Experiment 1: Main Effect

Data and Design

Experiment 1 tests whether consumers reproduce the minority premium observed in the archival data. A total of 353 participants were recruited from Prolific. After excluding five attention-check failures and one duplicate, 347 participants were analyzed. Together, they

produced 10,410 boutique/budget judgments, with an overall boutique-classification rate of 0.509. Participants were mostly between the ages of 25 and 44; 79 percent were White, 51 percent were liberal, and about 57 percent had at least an undergraduate degree.

Results

Figure 4, Panel A, shows the main effect. Name whiteness negatively predicted boutique classification. The linear probability model estimated a -23.3 percentage-point effect across the full minority-to-white range (95% CI $[-35.1, -11.6]$, $p < .001$). Logistic regression produced a consistent result, with an odds ratio of 0.39 (95% CI $[0.24, 0.62]$, $p < .001$). Adding other name-level covariates, including rarity, income, age, and U.S. share, shrank the effect to -6.0 percentage points, no longer statistically significant (95% CI $[-19.1, +7.0]$, $p = .35$; Table S5). This attenuation was driven primarily by name rarity and, secondarily, by U.S. share, not by income or age, raising rarity as a plausible alternative explanation for the whiteness effect, one that Experiment 3 addresses directly by design. Overall, these results reproduce the archival minority premium at the level of consumer perception.

3.2.2 Experiment 2: Product Differentiation as Mediation Mechanism

Data and Design

Experiment 2 tests whether perceived product differentiation mediates the effect of name whiteness on boutique classification. The design follows the controlled-direct-effect approach (Acharya et al., 2018). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two arms. In the natural arm, participants saw the name alone, replicating the total-effect condition from Experiment 1. In the manipulated arm, each name appeared with a one-sentence cue that experimentally fixed perceived differentiation: the dress was described as either “similar to most dresses on the market” or “different from most dresses on the market.” These low- and high-differentiation cues were assigned within participants and counterbalanced. The

natural arm estimated the total effect, and the manipulated arm estimated the average controlled direct effect (ACDE); the difference between the two identifies the portion of the whiteness effect that operates through perceived differentiation. In total, 480 participants were recruited. After excluding one duplicate participant, two participants who failed the Prolific bot screen, and nine attention-check failures, 468 participants were analyzed, 234 in the natural arm and 234 in the manipulated arm, producing 14,040 ratings.

Manipulation Check

The differentiation cue produced the expected shift in boutique classifications. The boutique-classification rate increased monotonically from .34 in the low-differentiation condition, to .52 in the natural arm, to .68 in the high-differentiation condition, a 34-percentage-point span confirming that the cue successfully shifted perceived differentiation and created the leverage needed for the ACDE comparison.

Results

Figure 4, Panel B, shows the key result. In the natural arm, the total effect of name whiteness was -32.4 percentage points (95% CI $[-43.5, -21.2]$, $p < .001$). When differentiation was experimentally fixed, the whiteness effect became smaller but remained significant: the ACDE was -22.2 percentage points under the low-differentiation cue (95% CI $[-31.5, -13.0]$, $p < .001$) and -18.6 percentage points under the high-differentiation cue (95% CI $[-27.6, -9.5]$, $p < .001$). The eliminated portion of the effect, captured by the whiteness $\times$ condition interaction, was $+10.7$ percentage points under the low-differentiation cue (95% CI $[4.5, 16.9]$, $p < .001$) and $+13.9$ percentage points under the high-differentiation cue (95% CI $[7.7, 20.1]$, $p < .001$). Together, these estimates indicate that approximately 38 percent of the total whiteness effect is mediated by perceived product differentiation: differentiation partially mediates the premium associated with less white-associated names. The persistence of a sizable controlled direct effect, however, indicates that differentiation does not exhaust

the meanings through which racialized names shape product classification.

3.2.3 Experiment 3: Rarity as an Alternative Explanation

Data and Design

Experiment 3 tests whether the minority premium reflects racial association or merely name rarity. A plausible alternative is that consumers associate boutique positioning with unusual names in general, regardless of their racial meaning. Because less white-associated names are, on average, less common in U.S. Census data, a generic rarity effect could generate an apparent racial-association effect.

Experiment 3 addresses this possibility using a popularity-matched stimulus set in which name whiteness and Census frequency were decorrelated by design. The correlation between whiteness and logged Census frequency was only .07. The design also addressed the secondary concern raised by U.S. share in Experiment 1: the correlation between whiteness and U.S. share was $-.01$. If the minority premium persists when these associations are removed from the stimulus set, neither rarity nor U.S. share can readily account for the effect.

This design does not imply that names can be perfectly matched on every dimension. As the audit-study literature has long recognized (Gaddis, 2017), names carry multiple social associations at once, so no name set can perfectly hold all other associations constant while varying only racial association. Accordingly, remaining name-level covariates, including name age and income, were included in the regression analysis. In total, 200 participants were recruited. After excluding three attention-check failures, 197 participants were analyzed. Together, they produced 5,910 ratings, with an overall boutique-classification rate of .502.

Results

Figure 4, Panel C, shows the key result. Name whiteness again negatively predicted boutique classification, replicating Experiments 1 and 2 in the popularity-matched stimulus

set. The linear probability model estimated a -23.3 percentage-point effect (95% CI $[-34.7, -12.0]$), and the logistic model estimated an odds ratio of 0.34 (95% CI $[0.20, 0.56]$, $z = -4.16$, $p < .001$).

The key implication is that neither name frequency nor U.S. share accounts for the minority premium in this experiment. The baseline estimate was -23.3 percentage points. Adding Census frequency produced an estimate of -23.2 percentage points, while adding U.S. share produced an estimate of -23.6 percentage points. Because both variables were decorrelated from whiteness by construction, their inclusion produced virtually no attenuation. The effect observed in Experiments 1 and 2 therefore cannot be reduced to a general preference for uncommon names.

Name-income association, by contrast, again functioned as a suppressor. Controlling for income strengthened the estimated whiteness effect substantially: the odds ratio declined to 0.13 ($z = -7.43$, $p < .001$), and the linear-probability estimate increased in magnitude to -42.9 percentage points (95% CI $[-54.7, -31.1]$). This pattern suggests that whiter names are associated with higher income, which in turn is also associated with a boutique (rather than budget) classification, partially masking the racial-identity effect in the baseline model. A full-covariate model controlling for income, name age, U.S. share, and rarity continued to show a strong minority premium (OR = 0.21 , LPM = -32.4 percentage points, $p < .001$; Table S5). The result parallels the suppression pattern in the archival study: status-related meanings favor whiter names, but holding those meanings constant reveals a larger minority premium than the baseline estimate suggested.

3.2.4 Experiment 4: Differentiation and Willingness To Pay

Data and Design

Experiment 4 tests whether the minority premium is limited to perceptions of market position or also extends to consumer preference. Participants rated each product on four dimensions: differentiation (“How distinctive is this dress compared with other dresses sold

online?”), expected price (“Compared with a typical online dress, how is this one probably priced?”), expected quality (“How would you expect the quality of this dress to compare with other dresses sold online?”), and willingness to pay (“Compared with what you typically pay for a dress, how much would you pay for this one?”). Each outcome was measured on a five-point scale. The differentiation scale ranged from “much more ordinary” to “much more distinctive”; the price scale from “priced much lower than typical” to “priced much higher than typical”; the quality scale from “much lower quality” to “much higher quality”; and the willingness-to-pay scale from “much less than I usually pay” to “much more than I usually pay.” I use relative rather than numerical scales for price and willingness to pay because numerical estimates tend to produce large noise and variance across participants, requiring a larger sample and more statistical power; earlier pilot experiments using direct numerical input produced results consistent with those obtained from the relative scales.

The stimulus set consisted of the same 90 names used in Experiment 3. Each participant rated 15 names; because these ratings are subjective, no performance bonus was offered in this experiment. In total, 240 participants were recruited. After excluding four attention-check failures, 236 participants were analyzed.

Results

Figure 4, Panel D, shows that name whiteness negatively predicted all four outcome variables. The effect was largest for differentiation ($\beta = -0.60$, 95% CI $[-0.80, -0.40]$, $p < 0.001$; Table S5): moving from a minority- to a white-associated name pulled the average differentiation rating down by more than half a point on the 5-point scale. The remaining three dimensions were smaller but all clearly negative and statistically significant: estimated price ($\beta = -0.35$, 95% CI $[-0.55, -0.16]$, $p < 0.001$), quality ($\beta = -0.35$, 95% CI $[-0.55, -0.15]$, $p < 0.001$), and willingness to pay ($\beta = -0.31$, 95% CI $[-0.48, -0.13]$, $p < 0.001$). In plain terms, the same dress was judged more differentiated, higher-quality, more expensive, and more worth paying for when it carried a minority-associated name than when it carried

a white-associated one.

Two features of this pattern are worth flagging. First, name whiteness shifts not only perceived market position, as measured by perceived price and consistent with the previous experiments, but also willingness to pay itself, suggesting that the minority premium reflects both a market-position account and a market-demand account. Second, differentiation stands well apart from the other three dimensions, at roughly 1.7 times the size of the quality effect (paired within-name contrast, $\beta = -0.25$, $p < 0.001$). Differentiation, in other words, responds to name whiteness substantially more than quality does, consistent with the account that minority-associated names signal differentiation specifically.

3.2.5 Analysis Across Experiments

Moderation Analysis

Table 3 presents exploratory moderation analyses across the four experiments. As noted earlier, the Prolific samples leaned White and liberal, so tests of race and ideology moderation may be affected by uneven statistical power across groups. Because the fourth experiment used continuous perception ratings rather than the binary boutique classification of the first three, its interactions are reported on the standardized (SD-unit) perceived-price rating, the outcome closest conceptually to the boutique-classification measure used in the other experiments. We therefore focus on the direction and significance of each interaction rather than comparing magnitudes across the differently scaled outcomes.

The results show essentially no evidence that the minority premium is confined to a particular audience. Of the forty-four interaction terms tested, four reach conventional significance before correction: White participants show a larger premium in Experiment 3 (-15.8 percentage points, $p = .006$), boutique-shopping frequency weakly predicts a smaller premium in Experiments 1 and 3 ($+4.1$ percentage points, $p = .048$; $+5.4$ percentage points, $p = .043$), and one category of perceived name usage shows a larger premium in Experiment 3 (-16.4 percentage points, $p = .040$). None of these effects survive Benjamini–Hochberg correction

for the full set of exploratory tests, and none replicate consistently across experiments: the race effect appears in only one of the four experiments, and the two significant terms involving market familiarity and name interpretation are not moderators either theoretical account predicts in the first place.

Most tellingly, the moderators the omnivore account directly implicates, including income, education, and omnivore consumption habits itself, show no signal. Coefficients are small, inconsistent in sign, and non-significant in all four experiments. If the minority premium reflected a preference concentrated among consumers most invested in cultural breadth as a status marker, these are precisely the moderators that should show it. Their absence, together with the broader pattern of null and non-replicating interactions, favors the differentiation account: the minority premium appears to reflect a broadly shared cultural inference about product position, rather than a preference specific to any elite or omnivore-identified subgroup.

Minority Group Decomposition

The analyses above test whether *who* shows the minority premium distinguishes between the differentiation and omnivore accounts. This section asks a separate question, unrelated to that adjudication: whether the premium itself is uniform across minority groups, or concentrated among some more than others.

The decomposition (Table S6) shows that the minority-name premium is not uniform: it is carried primarily by Hispanic- and Asian-associated names, with Black-associated names showing a weaker and less consistent pattern. This partially, though not perfectly, echoes the archival group decomposition in Study 1, where Asian-associated names showed by far the largest premium and Black- and Hispanic-associated names were closer to one another.

Two cautions apply. First, the number of names anchoring each group is uneven, roughly 18 Hispanic names but only 4 to 10 Black or Asian names, so the Black and Asian estimates are less precise and should be read as directional. Second, these are exploratory, post hoc

contrasts rather than preregistered tests. With that caveat, the pattern broadly resembles the group-level heterogeneity found in the archival data and reinforces the need to avoid treating all non-White identities as culturally interchangeable.

4 Discussion

This paper set out to explain a puzzle: why racial classifications, which typically reproduce status hierarchies, instead generate a minority premium in the fashion market, with minority-associated product names commanding higher prices than white-associated ones. Archival evidence from more than a million products (Study 1) and four preregistered consumer experiments (Study 2) converge on this pattern, which survives a battery of controls, a dropshipped-garment design holding the physical product constant, and direct tests against rarity and income as alternative explanations.

These findings identify a boundary condition of status reproduction. Existing research generally treats racial classification as carrying a relatively portable hierarchy: identities associated with socially advantaged groups confer competence and worth, and identities associated with disadvantaged groups produce penalties. The present findings show that classifications do not necessarily retain the same evaluative meaning when transferred across objects and institutional settings. When a racialized name classifies a person in an employment or housing market, its status and competence associations are likely to be salient. When the same name classifies a fashion product, its distance from the cultural mainstream can instead become evaluatively relevant. The minority premium does not show that the racial status hierarchy has disappeared or reversed generally; it shows that racial classifications carry multiple dimensions of meaning, and that markets selectively activate whichever dimension fits their prevailing criteria of worth.

Omnivorousness vs. Differentiation.

The paper considered two explanations for the minority premium. The omnivorousness account treats minority identity as part of what consumers value: minority-associated names appeal because they allow consumers to engage with diversity and cosmopolitanism. The differentiation account instead treats racial identity as a relational signal: because whiteness operates as the comparatively unmarked cultural default, minority-associated names make otherwise similar products appear farther from the mainstream. In the first account, consumers value the identity represented by the name; in the second, they use the name to infer where the product sits in the market. These accounts are not logically incompatible: minority-associated names may simultaneously increase perceived differentiation and appeal to consumers who value cultural diversity.

Nevertheless, the results favor differentiation as the more general mechanism. Experiment 2 showed that experimentally fixing a product’s differentiation attenuated the minority premium, and Experiment 4 provided convergent evidence: name whiteness affected perceived differentiation substantially more than it affected quality, estimated price, or willingness to pay. Together, these findings indicate that racialized names operate especially strongly as signals of where products sit relative to the perceived market mainstream. The effect also does not reliably concentrate among respondents who are themselves cultural omnivores or members of the socioeconomic groups most likely to use diversity as elite cultural capital. Finally, product names offer relatively limited opportunities for public identity display once the garment has been purchased, weakening an account centered on conspicuous openness to diversity. These results do not definitively rule out an omnivorous preference for minority-coded products, particularly among elite populations underrepresented in the Prolific sample, but they suggest that such preferences are not necessary for the premium to arise.

This distinction refines both literatures. For research on omnivorousness, it shows that apparent preferences for socially or culturally distant goods may partly reflect the goods’ differentiation from a mainstream default rather than a generalized taste for diversity. Prefer-

ences for minority-coded or lowbrow goods may consequently combine at least two processes: attraction to their cultural content, and attraction to the market distance that content communicates. Separating these processes matters because they imply different audiences and social consequences.

For research on market differentiation, this paper identifies social classifications as a product-level positioning device. Existing work on symbolic differentiation is concentrated at the organizational level, examining how firms distinguish themselves through category positions, narratives, or storytelling; product-level analysis has been comparatively rare, since the symbolic meaning of an individual product is usually inseparable from its material features. Fashion names offer a rare exception: because a name can vary independently of a garment’s material construction, its symbolic contribution can be isolated from the product itself. The findings show that this contribution need not come from organizational narrative at all: racial identity, carried by a name, can itself function as a cultural coordinate, telling audiences whether a product sits nearer to, or farther from, the mass-market center.

Interpreting the minority premium

At first glance, the minority premium appears to create an arbitrage opportunity: sellers could increase prices simply by assigning minority-associated names to more products. Several features of the market constrain this response. First, names are not freely interchangeable. Product features systematically predict a name’s racial association, suggesting that sellers tend to pair names with particular styles, materials, and occasions. Replacing one name with another may disrupt the perceived coherence of the offering. Second, name whiteness explains only a small share of price variation: the premium is detectable across many observations but is too noisy to provide a reliable pricing rule for any particular product. Third, naming practices appear to be path-dependent; supplementary analyses suggest that founders draw product names partly from their own social networks and cultural repertoires rather than selecting from the complete universe of names. Finally, differentiation

is self-limiting: widespread adoption of minority-associated names would make them less unusual, and would therefore erode the positional value from which the premium arises. The persistence of the premium is thus compatible with a market in which sellers respond incompletely to a constrained and endogenous signal.

Two further aspects of this paper’s central finding warrant cautious interpretation. The first concerns the definition of the “minority premium” itself. Audit studies face a similar debate over whether the effects they document reflect a preference for White candidates or a penalty against minority ones (Aboud, 2003; Block et al., 2021; Polavieja and Fischer-Souan, 2023). I use the term “minority premium” in a relational sense: relative to white-associated names, minority-associated names are associated with better outcomes. It does not necessarily mean that white-associated names reduce value relative to the absence of a name. Supplementary analyses show that human-named products generally command higher prices than products without human names, regardless of the name’s racial association. White-associated names may therefore provide a smaller naming premium, while minority-associated names provide a larger one. This pattern is consistent with differentiation operating at two levels: a human name individuates and anthropomorphizes a product (Brédart, 2021; Waytz et al., 2014), and a culturally marked human name further distances it from the unmarked market default.

The second concerns whether the minority premium translates into an economic advantage for minority people or businesses. Supplementary analyses offer a possible route through which symbolic value could generate modest material consequences. If minority and White founders disproportionately draw names from their own social networks, minority-owned firms may be somewhat more likely to select names that happen to receive a premium in this market. In that limited sense, a market preference attached to minority-associated symbols may incidentally benefit some minority entrepreneurs. This optimistic reading faces two challenges, however. First, name whiteness explains only a small share of the variation in actual product prices relative to the many other signals that shape a listing’s price, so

its practical import for any individual seller’s revenue is likely small. Second, even where a benefit exists, it is unclear whether it is large enough to offset the broader structural disadvantages that minority-owned businesses face (Bates, 1997; Fairlie and Robb, 2008). The findings therefore identify an evaluative advantage attached to a symbol, yet do not establish a general economic advantage for the people associated with it.

Limitations

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The first concerns the survey stimuli. Across all four experiments, the stimuli were name-only, so participants faced considerable information uncertainty and had to rely on names alone to infer product positioning and worth. I chose this design over pairing names with images or additional product information because richer stimuli risk acting as a more potent and familiar cue than names, and could easily override the name signal in participants’ judgments. Style perception is also highly personal, so introducing visual stimuli risks layering in participants’ idiosyncratic taste for particular styles, along with other unobserved confounds. More generally, stimuli that better mimic a real shopping experience trade a smaller, noisier signal for greater realism, raising the sample size and budget needed to detect the effect of interest. Because the archival analysis in Study 1 already demonstrates the field-level pattern, the survey experiments prioritize a simple, clean, name-only design that isolates the consumer-level evaluation mechanism, at some cost to ecological realism.

A second limitation concerns the temporality of the archival data, which is cross-sectional. Aesthetic perceptions are plausibly contextual and time-varying (Sgourev et al., 2023), and the cultural associations and prestige attached to particular groups can shift (Ray, 2020), so the paper’s conclusions are temporally bound. Furthermore, the analysis cannot determine when the minority premium emerged, whether it has grown alongside the institutionalization of diversity, or whether diffusion will eventually weaken it. The differentiation account and the omnivorousness account imply potentially different temporal dynamics. If the premium

primarily reflects distance from the default, greater adoption of minority-associated names should gradually reduce their distinctiveness. If it reflects an increasingly institutionalized valuation of diversity, broader diffusion may sustain or even increase their appeal. Future study with longitudinal data could then examine whether changes in name prevalence precede changes in price associations.

A final limitation concerns generalizability. The empirical context, independent Shopify retailers in a comparatively niche industry, raises the question of how confidently these findings project onto other fields. The hope is that the underlying logic travels even where this specific setting does not. Fashion is an extreme case of a market organized around distinction, but the pursuit of distinctiveness and strategies of optimal differentiation recur across product markets ([Askin and Mauskopf, 2017](#); [Leonardelli et al., 2010](#)). This paper therefore also speaks to research on how market actors use cultural and symbolic resources to construct categories and differentiation ([Navis and Glynn, 2010](#); [Taeuscher et al., 2022](#); [Zhao et al., 2017](#)). Within this agenda, I show that the pursuit of distinctiveness can have the unintended consequence of altering, rather than reproducing, the transfer of status hierarchies. Future research could test how the magnitude of the minority premium varies across product market and creative industries, and, within a single industry, how experimentally manipulating the evaluative criteria at hand, for example cueing competence versus cueing differentiation, shifts the evaluation of the very same set of names.

Conclusion

This paper documents a minority premium in fashion: products bearing minority-associated names receive higher prices and more favorable evaluations than comparable products bearing White-associated names, and this pattern persists across both archival market data and consumer experiments. The evidence suggests that the premium arises primarily because minority-associated names make products appear more unique and differentiated from the mainstream, rather than because a narrow group of elite consumers holds a distinctive pref-

erence for minority culture. The central implication is that the evaluative meaning of a social classification is not fixed across settings: the same racialized marker that signals lower status or competence when attached to a person can signal greater value when attached to a product in a market that rewards differentiation. As more of American consumption is organized around uniqueness and differentiation rather than function alone (Reckwitz, 2020), other markets built on the same logic may generate similar reversals, turning categories that carry stigma elsewhere into sources of market distinction.

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Tables

Table 1: Correlations Among Name Association Measures

	Source	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Age	SSA	1.00					
(2) Female share	Census	0.05	1.00				
(3) Income	L2	−0.19	−0.18	1.00			
(4) Rarity	Census	−0.09	0.25	−0.05	1.00		
(5) U.S. share	Facebook	−0.03	0.04	−0.24	0.21	1.00	
(6) Whiteness	Census	0.19	−0.07	0.42	0.19	0.15	1.00

Table 2: OLS Regressions of Log List Price on Name Whiteness

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Baseline	+Features	+Name assoc.	+Model race	+Brand FE
<i>Dependent variable: log(list price)</i>					
Name whiteness (0→1)	−0.1453*** (0.0291)	−0.0848*** (0.0191)	−0.1056*** (0.0227)	−0.1212*** (0.0223)	−0.0259*** (0.0073)
Name age (z)			0.0403*** (0.0046)	0.0420*** (0.0046)	0.0020 (0.0014)
Name female share (z)			−0.0353*** (0.0056)	−0.0374*** (0.0056)	−0.0025* (0.0014)
Name income (z)			0.0302*** (0.0046)	0.0323*** (0.0045)	0.0007 (0.0017)
Name rarity (z)			0.0403*** (0.0048)	0.0393*** (0.0047)	0.0043*** (0.0014)
Name U.S. share (z)			−0.0293*** (0.0042)	−0.0295*** (0.0042)	−0.0028** (0.0013)
Product category FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Product feature controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Name associations	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Model racial presentation	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Brand FE	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	204,170	204,170	203,437	203,437	203,437
R^2	0.070	0.321	0.327	0.335	0.837

Standard errors, clustered by brand, are in parentheses.

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Table 3: Exploratory Moderation Analyses Across Experiments

Moderator	Experiment 1 (main effect) <i>boutique, pp</i>	Experiment 2 (distinction manip.) <i>boutique, pp</i>	Experiment 3 (rarity-matched) <i>boutique, pp</i>	Experiment 4 (dress perception) <i>price rating, SD</i>
Conservative ideology	+3.7 (0.071)	+3.3 (0.238)	-0.7 (0.817)	+0.04 (0.521)
White participant	-8.9 (0.056)	-8.2 (0.129)	-15.8** (0.006)	-0.11 (0.355)
Hispanic participant	+1.9 (0.775)	+2.8 (0.673)	+4.2 (0.653)	-0.11 (0.639)
Age	+2.9 (0.162)	+1.0 (0.722)	-2.3 (0.457)	-0.02 (0.775)
Household income	+0.7 (0.750)	+2.6 (0.308)	+0.4 (0.896)	+0.09 (0.065)
Education	+3.4 (0.101)	-0.3 (0.895)	-1.3 (0.657)	-0.01 (0.882)
Boutique-shopping freq.	+4.1* (0.048)	+2.6 (0.342)	+5.4* (0.043)	-0.01 (0.825)
Cross-cultural interest	-2.5 (0.235)	-4.0 (0.129)	+3.3 (0.254)	-0.02 (0.753)
Read name → customer	+3.3 (0.566)	+4.6 (0.495)	+2.9 (0.730)	-0.26 (0.072)
Read name → style	-5.6 (0.180)	-7.2 (0.171)	-1.6 (0.782)	+0.01 (0.953)
Read name → nothing	+1.6 (0.787)	+2.0 (0.792)	-16.4* (0.040)	+0.10 (0.505)

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Cells are the whiteness $\times$ moderator interaction (participant-clustered SEs; p in parentheses). Experiments 1–3: boutique-rate DV, percentage points. Experiment 4: perceived-price rating (z -scored), SD units. Ordinal moderators standardized. No interaction survives BH-FDR correction.

Figures

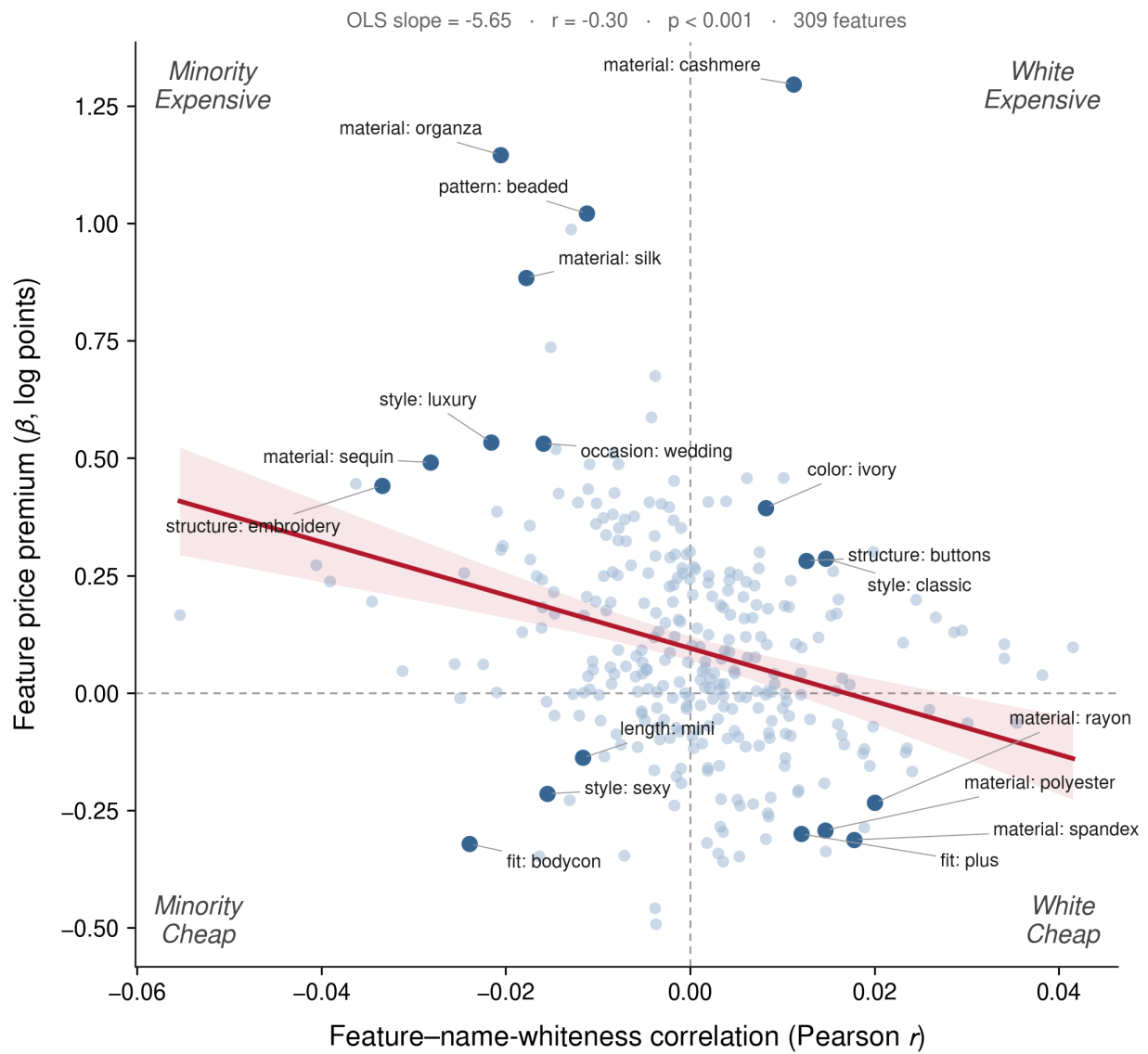


Figure 1: Name Feature Sorting. Each point represents a product feature. Only features appearing in at least 0.2% of products are shown ($N=309$); all 2,292 extracted features are used in the regression.

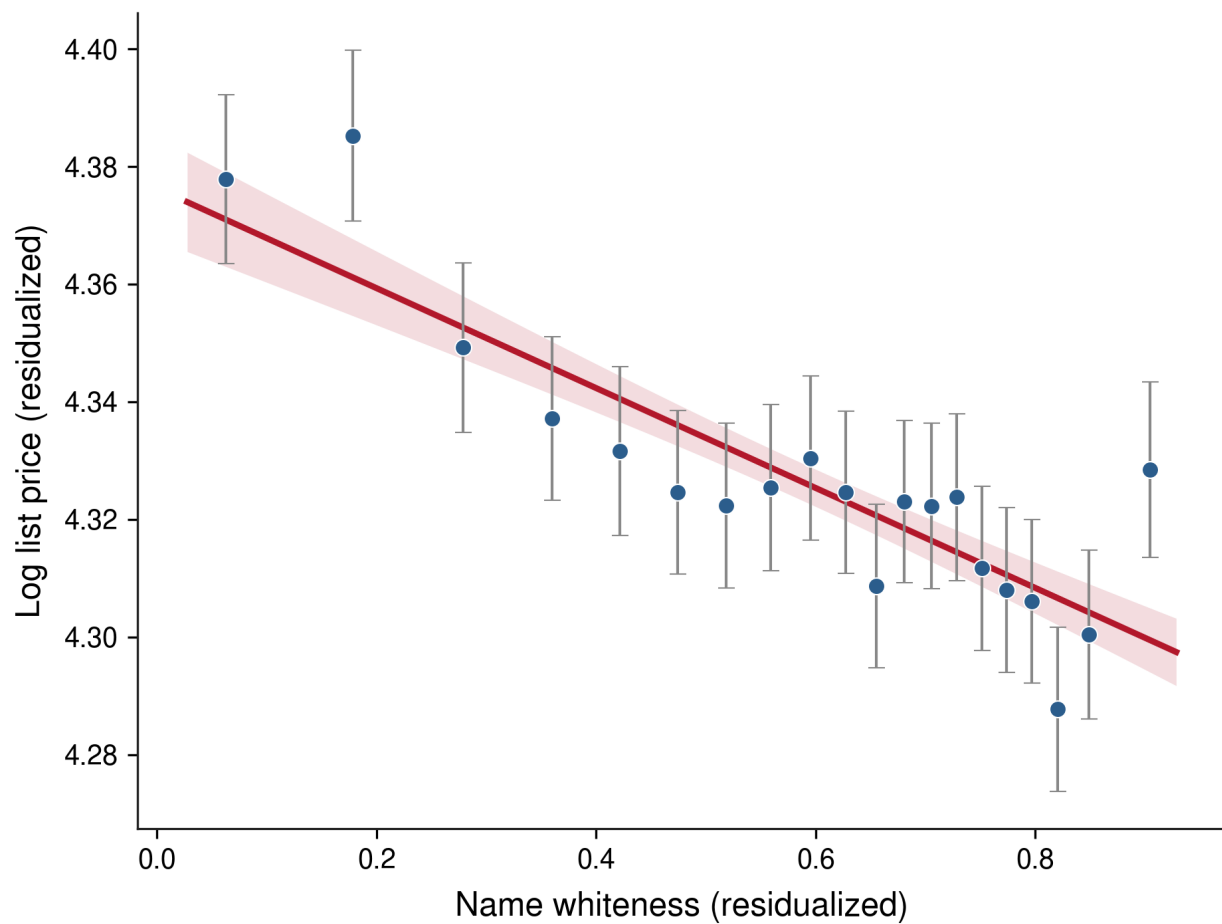


Figure 2: Name whiteness and list price, holding product characteristics constant. Binned means of log list price against name whiteness, both residualized on product category and 2,292 extracted product features (Frisch–Waugh); shaded band is the 95% confidence interval of the fit. Slope is -0.085 across the whiteness range; $N = 204,170$.

(a)



“Estella”
lower whiteness (0.24)
\$259
SunsetFashionLA



“Katelyn”
higher whiteness (0.82)
\$113
SCTAO

(b)



“Leilani”
lower whiteness (0.15)
\$188
Lavish Ivy Club



“Serena”
higher whiteness (0.47)
\$70
Miloe

Figure 3: Drop-shipping Examples

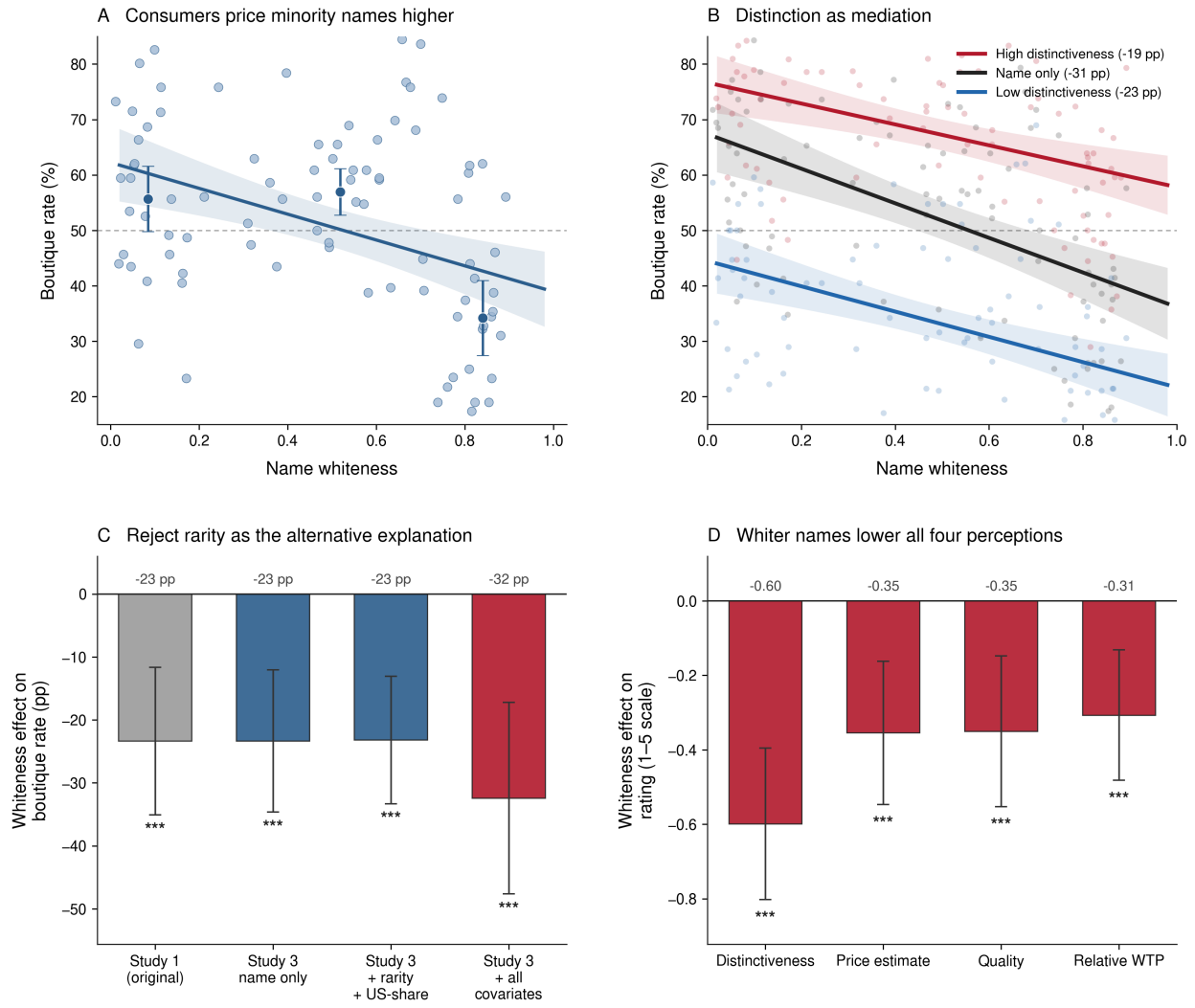


Figure 4: Summary of results across Experiments 1–4

Appendix

Table S1: Descriptive Statistics: Products, Storefronts, and Named Products

Variable	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
A. Products						
List price (USD)	1,386,306	95.59	127.86	10.01	52.00	999.99
Log list price	1,386,306	4.10	0.87	2.30	3.95	6.91
Contains human name	1,386,306	15.8%	—	—	—	—
Number of product images	1,386,306	5.4	6.5	0.0	4.0	299.0
Title length (words)	1,386,306	5.4	3.4	1.0	5.0	41.0
Description length (words)	1,386,306	85.6	87.0	1.0	63.0	3,276.0
B. Storefronts						
Products per storefront	10,561	131.3	159.6	2.0	70.0	999.0
Uses ≥ 1 named product	10,561	70.0%	—	—	—	—
Uses ≥ 5 named products	10,561	47.0%	—	—	—	—
Uses ≥ 10 named products	10,561	36.0%	—	—	—	—
Named share of catalog (naming stores)	7,395	21.6%	21.6%	0.1%	13.2%	100.0%
C. Named products						
Name whiteness	216,104	0.587	0.233	0.002	0.647	0.990
Name frequency	216,104	10.67	1.76	5.27	10.77	15.06
U.S. share	215,337	0.251	0.211	0.001	0.181	0.990
Name income score	216,104	0.79	0.15	0.21	0.79	1.43
Name age	216,104	41.9	23.4	5.1	37.7	123.3

Table S2: Validity of Name-Based Demographic Measures Against External Benchmarks

Constructed measure	Johfre 2020 <i>age/gender/</i> <i>race/class</i> (<i>perc.</i> , <i>1st-name</i>)	Crabtree 2023 [†] <i>race/income/</i> <i>citizen</i> (<i>perc.</i> , <i>full-name</i>)	Gaddis 2017 [‡] <i>race/</i> <i>education</i> (<i>births</i> , <i>1st-name</i>)	This survey [§] <i>race/age/</i> <i>income/pop.</i> (<i>perc.</i> , <i>1st-name</i>)
Race: White share	0.88 (226)	0.65 (59)	0.89 (159)	0.77 (200)
Black share	—	0.97 (59)	0.96 (159)	0.78 (200)
Hispanic share	—	0.97 (59)	—	0.69 (200)
Asian share	—	0.66 (59)	0.62 (159)	0.84 (200)
Female share	0.97 (205)	—	—	—
Age	0.85 (205)	—	—	0.66 (200)
Income	0.75 (205)	0.75 (52)	0.78 (156)	0.20 (200)
U.S. share	—	0.51 (59)	—	—
Rarity	—	—	0.72 (159)	0.71 (200)

Note. Cells report Pearson correlations between each constructed name measure and its name-level benchmark, with matched-name N in parentheses. All correlations are significant at $p < .01$ ($p < .001$ except the own-survey income cell, $p = .005$). The Johfre whiteness benchmark is perceived “White” minus “Black” on a 5-point scale (perceived-White alone: $r = 0.89$). For income, the constructed measure is L2 bearer income; benchmarks vary by study (Johfre: perceived parental education; Crabtree: perceived income). For U.S. share, the constructed measure is the Facebook-derived share of bearers located in the U.S.; the benchmark is perceived U.S. citizenship.

[†]Crabtree stimuli are full names (first name plus a racially coded surname), so its race correlations reflect the whole name and are not separable to the first name alone; treat these rows as full-name design agreement rather than first-name validation.

[‡]Gaddis (2017, Table A1) uses actual New York birth-record race and education distributions rather than perceptions, providing a cross-source data check rather than a perceptual validation. The education benchmark is the share of mothers with at least some college; the rarity benchmark is $-\log$ birth frequency.

[§]Own name-perception pretest (200 first names, ≈ 13 raters per name): perceived race shares, age, income, and popularity (the rarity benchmark). Gender is omitted because the stimulus pool is $\approx 98\%$ female (no variance to validate); the income estimate is imprecise given the small number of raters per name.

Table S3: Stimulus Names Used in Each Experiment, by Name-Whiteness Bin

Experiment	Form	Minority (0–0.2)	Mid (0.4–0.6)	White (0.8–1.0)
Experiment 1	Form 1	Fatima, Priya, Anaya, Anika, Nisha, Leticia, Paloma, Lupita, Reyna, Estella	Vivienne, Aileen, Serena, Daria, Helena, Cecily, Matilda, Anya, Juliette, Sylvia	Judy, Lacey, Becky, Carly, Lainey, Lindsay, Allison, Melissa, Billie, Hannah
Experiment 2	Form 2	Aditi, Amrita, Meera, Delfina, Araceli, Raquel, Aisha (Eboney), Keisha, Kiara, Aaliyah	Theodora, Inez, Cosette, Nila, Adella, Josephine, Vera, Simona, Eloise, Leonora	Jenna, Bethany, Hilary, Caroline, Margaret, Ginny, Lisa, Melanie, Charlotte, Maren
	Form 3	Ayesha, Nikita, Riya, Rosa, Zariah, Dania, Indira, Yolanda, Giselle, Yasmin	Gloria, Annabel, Yvonne, Zelda, Kaia, Carola, Cleo, Sabrina, Farrah, Claudia	Caitlyn, Piper, Karen, Trisha, Lara, Gwen, Elle, Jennifer, Abigail, Michele
Experiment 3	Form 1	Aisha, Aniyah, Ayanna, Gabriela, Kiara, Lorena, Mayra, Priya, Silvia, Sonia	Angie, Ethel, Izabella, Johanna, Juliet, Kyra, Paulette, Serena, Tasha, Thelma	Carly, Christa, Kari, Leanne, Lynda, Marianne, Robyn, Sheryl, Tricia, Trudy
Experiment 4	Form 2	Aaliyah, Adriana, Alejandra, Ayesha, Daniela, Juana, Keisha, Leticia, Nyla, Priyanka	Belinda, Bernadette, Bernice, Desiree, Evangeline, Janette, Khloe, Ramona, Rochelle, Talia	Bridget, Cara, Corinne, Janis, Jayne, Kirsten, Lora, Shelley, Tami, Tessa
	Form 3	Anaya, Bibi, Camila, Irma, Jayla, Karina, Latoya, Mariana, Raquel, Valeria	Alana, Britney, Daphne, Edna, Ingrid, Marisa, Mila, Myrna, Nellie, Sheena	Becky, Elisabeth, Hayley, Jolene, Kate, Kristine, Lorie, Mollie, Rachael, Therese

Table S4: Sample Characteristics by Experiment

Characteristic	Exp. 1	Exp. 2	Exp. 3	Exp. 4
	<i>main</i>	<i>distinction</i>	<i>rarity-matched</i>	<i>dress perc.</i>
<i>N</i>	347	468	197	236
Age				
18–24	9	13	9	7
25–34	29	26	26	30
35–44	29	25	28	25
45–54	20	19	16	19
55–64	10	11	15	13
65+	3	6	6	6
Race (multi-select)				
White	79	70	77	76
Black	12	18	18	19
Asian	9	9	6	7
Am. Indian / Native	2	1	4	2
Native Hawaiian / PI	<1	<1	1	<1
Other	2	6	3	2
Prefer not to say	2	2	1	<1
Hispanic / Latino				
Yes	9	9	13	8
No	91	91	87	92
Political views				
Very liberal	16	18	20	18
Liberal	25	26	28	22
Slightly liberal	10	10	8	12
Moderate	22	23	19	24
Slightly conservative	13	9	9	10
Conservative	10	9	10	10
Very conservative	3	4	6	5
Household income				
Under 25k	9	11	15	12

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Table S4 (continued)

Characteristic	Exp. 1 <i>main</i>	Exp. 2 <i>distinction</i>	Exp. 3 <i>rarity-matched</i>	Exp. 4 <i>dress perc.</i>
25–50k	20	20	21	20
50–75k	21	19	19	20
75–100k	17	16	15	15
100–150k	17	20	18	19
150k or more	13	12	11	12
Prefer not	3	3	1	2
Education				
High school or less	1	1	<1	<1
HS diploma / GED	14	10	19	9
Some college	21	22	18	18
Associate’s	7	13	14	14
Bachelor’s	37	37	31	41
Graduate / professional	20	16	18	18
Prefer not	1	1	<1	<1
Cross-cultural interest				
Strongly disagree	7	6	8	7
Somewhat disagree	24	21	26	24
Neither agree nor disagree	19	24	22	20
Somewhat agree	39	41	36	41
Strongly agree	11	8	8	8
Boutique purchases (12 mo.)				
0	39	42	45	39
1	22	22	19	19
2–3	28	26	21	25
4–5	8	7	10	9
6+	3	3	4	7
Perceived name purpose				
Style / design	52	51	47	60
Brand / designer	16	16	17	11
Customer type	15	14	18	14

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Table S4 (continued)

Characteristic	Exp. 1	Exp. 2	Exp. 3	Exp. 4
	<i>main</i>	<i>distinction</i>	<i>rarity-matched</i>	<i>dress perc.</i>
Nothing in particular	15	15	15	12
Other	2	3	2	3
Usual spend on a dress (<i>Exp. 4</i>)				
Under \$40	—	—	—	25
\$40–79	—	—	—	36
\$80–149	—	—	—	20
\$150 or more	—	—	—	18
Social-desirability pressure (<i>Exp. 4</i>)				
None at all	—	—	—	54
A little	—	—	—	23
A moderate amount	—	—	—	15
A lot	—	—	—	5
A great deal	—	—	—	3

Cells are within-experiment percentages of the analyzed sample; “—” denotes a response option not offered or with no respondents. Race is multi-select.

Table S5: Robustness of the Whiteness Effect to Name-Level Covariates, by Experiment

Experiment	Outcome	Baseline	+ Rarity	+ Full covariates	<i>N</i>
Exp. 1 (<i>main</i>)	Boutique rate (pp)	-23.3 [-35.1, -11.6]***	-12.4 [-23.8, -1.1]*	-6.0 [-19.1, +7.0]	347
Exp. 2 (<i>distinction, name-only</i>)	Boutique rate (pp)	-32.4 [-43.5, -21.2]***	-21.0 [-31.2, -10.8]***	-11.9 [-23.4, -0.5]*	234
Exp. 3 (<i>rarity-matched</i>)	Boutique rate (pp)	-23.3 [-34.7, -12.0]***	-23.2 [-34.6, -11.8]***	-32.4 [-47.6, -17.2]***	197
Exp. 4 (<i>dress perc.</i>)	Distinctiveness (1–5)	-0.599 [-0.802, -0.395]***	-0.591 [-0.795, -0.387]***	-0.545 [-0.824, -0.266]***	236
	Quality (1–5)	-0.350 [-0.552, -0.148]***	-0.351 [-0.554, -0.147]***	-0.352 [-0.621, -0.083]*	236
	Price estimate (1–5)	-0.354 [-0.547, -0.162]***	-0.355 [-0.549, -0.161]***	-0.331 [-0.549, -0.114]**	236
	Relative WTP (1–5)	-0.307 [-0.482, -0.132]***	-0.307 [-0.483, -0.130]***	-0.260 [-0.483, -0.037]*	236

Note. Each cell reports the estimated whiteness effect on the indicated outcome, from crossed random-effects models with by-participant and by-name random intercepts and controls for block and counterbalancing assignment; 95% confidence intervals appear in brackets. Experiments 1–3 measure boutique classification, in percentage points; Experiment 4 measures mean ratings on a 1–5 scale. **Rarity** is the log of the Census 2020 name count. **Full covariates** adds income association, name age, and U.S.-born share, each *z*-scored at the name level; In the rarity-matched designs (Experiments 3–4), name whiteness is decorrelated from these attributes by construction ($r = 0.07$ with rarity), so the effect survives full adjustment; in the unmatched designs (Experiments 1–2), whiteness is correlated with them across the 90 names ($r \approx 0.38$ with rarity), so joint adjustment partly absorbs the effect. Because income association and U.S.-born share are themselves part of what a racialized name signals, the full-covariate column should be read as a conservative over-control rather than the preferred estimate. Experiment 2 reports the name-only (natural) arm. *N* is the number of participants. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table S6: Group Decomposition of the Consumer-Side Minority Premium

Minority share ($0 \rightarrow 1$)	Boutique classification			Dress perception (Exp 4)			
	<i>rate, pp</i>			<i>rating, 1–5 pts</i>			
	Exp 1	Exp 2	Exp 3	Distinct.	Price	Quality	WTP
Black	+14.9	+23.6	+3.3	+0.42**	+0.07	+0.08	+0.06
Hispanic	+21.6**	+30.6***	+26.5***	+0.56***	+0.38***	+0.39***	+0.33***
Asian	+25.8***	+32.2***	+36.6**	+0.88***	+0.53*	+0.46	+0.43
<i>N</i> names	90	90	90	90	90	90	90