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Realistic group conflict between humans and robots: The rise of skilled robot workers triggers characteristic negative outgroup evaluations and judgments of robots

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This paper applies the ideas of realistic group conflict to robots in the workplace. We hypothesized that when people learn about the rise of skilled robot workers, they experience it as a realistic intergroup threat, which leads to unfavorable evaluations and judgments about robots. 220 participants recruited online were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. Participants read vignettes about robots with either neutral information (control condition) or information emphasizing the continued rise of automation in the workplace (job threat condition). The job threat condition, compared to the control group, caused more negative feelings towards robots, greater anti-robot bias (modeled after a human outgroup bias measure), and lower estimates of robots' mental capacities. The results suggest that increased presence of robot workers may be met with strong resistance: People appear to treat robots like humans in that they respond to a realistic threat with negative outgroup evaluations and competence judgments. This work demonstrates the emergence of robots as an outgroup and illuminates some of the psychological responses that may arise as a result of their outgroup status.