

Group Processes & Intergroup Relations

<http://gpi.sagepub.com>

The Space between Us and Them: Perceptions of Status Differences

Kimberly Kahn, Arnold K. Ho, Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto

Group Processes Intergroup Relations 2009; 12; 591

DOI: 10.1177/1368430209338716

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://gpi.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/12/5/591>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://gpi.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://gpi.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations <http://gpi.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/12/5/591>

The Space between Us and Them: Perceptions of Status Differences

Kimberly Kahn

University of California, Los Angeles

Arnold K. Ho and Jim Sidanius

Harvard University

Felicia Pratto

University of Connecticut

The current study examines perceived status differences among ethnic groups. Consistent with a group dominance perspective, three samples of American university students revealed that perceived ethnic status differences increased to the extent that individuals had low ethnic status, perceived their society to be unfair, and were lower on social dominance orientation. In addition, social dominance orientation moderated the relationship between perceived status differences and perceived societal fairness such that perceived unfairness was associated with perceived status differences only for those low on social dominance orientation. Discussion suggests that variability in perceived status differences stems from group position, and that understanding the origins of individuals' perceptions of status differences may be a basic and necessary step to improve intergroup relations.

KEYWORDS dominance, ethnicity, fairness, hierarchy

GROUP-BASED social hierarchy, often formed on the basis of race or ethnicity, is a ubiquitous form of social organization across various human societies (Hraba, Hagendoorn, & Hagendoorn, 1989; Hagendoorn, 1995; Verkuyten, Hagendoorn, & Masson, 1996; Hagendoorn, Drogendijk, Tumanov, & Hraba, 1998; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). In such societies, people in every strata generally agree with one another as to which groups are 'high' in social status and which groups are 'low.' To illustrate, within the former Soviet Union, strong consensus in the ordering of the ethnic group hierarchy was found across 27 different ethnic groups (Hagendoorn et al., 1998). In the United States, across White, Latino,

Asian-Americans and African-Americans, there was strong agreement that Whites occupy the top position, followed by Asians, followed by Latinos and African-Americans at the bottom of their society (Sidanius, Levin, Liu, & Pratto, 2000; see also Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Similar consensuses on ethnic status within societies have been established in different countries and

Author's note

Address correspondence to Kimberly Kahn, Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles, 1285 Franz Hall, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563, USA. [email: kimkahn@ucla.edu]

in studies with youths as well as adults (e.g. see Verkuyten et al., 1996). Without such relatively universal acknowledgment on which groups are high or low in status, the existence of a group status system is questionable (see Anderson, Srivastava, Beer, Spataro, & Chatman, 2006, for a similar argument concerning individual status).

Despite consistency in the ordering of the ethnic status hierarchy within society, individuals vary in the *extent* to which these status differences are perceived. Although much empirical research has focused on documenting the consensual nature of status hierarchies, individual differences in these ratings have been largely unexplored. Examining why people might not accept group status differences is important for understanding the potential for dynamic change in intergroup relations (e.g. Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). The limited research on perceptions of status differences has reported group mean differences (Corenblum & Stephan, 2001) or used status perceptions as predictor variables (Federico & Levin, 2004). The research literature lacks a systematic and theoretical investigation of the variables that should impact an individual's perceptions of societal status differences. The current studies seek to address this gap.

At present, a number of theories of intergroup relations offer conflicting hypotheses as to whether people in different groups will tend to concur, exaggerate, or minimize group status differences, and how these perceptions relate to their motivations and sense of justice. The present research draws upon social identity theory (see Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), system justification theory (see Jost, Burgess, & Mosso, 2001; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004), and social dominance theory (see Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) to consider how one's ethnic group status, social dominance orientation, and perceptions of societal fairness correspond to the amount of observed status differences among ethnic groups. The status perception variable will be termed 'perceived status differences' (PSD; Corenblum & Stephan, 2001).

The first question the current studies address is whether members of ethnic groups that have different statuses should exaggerate or minimize status differences among ethnic groups (PSD).

Social identity theory holds that people are motivated to view themselves as having positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Turner, 1999; Brown, 2000), implying that lower status groups may perceive their group's status to be higher than high status groups perceive it to be. However, social identity theory also states that a society's common social reality would lead to consensus on perceived group status. Lower status group members may therefore accept their low status, while then creating alternative judgment dimensions to social status on which to compare favorably (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Hinkle & Brown, 1990; Turner, 1999; Brown, 2000). On the whole, social identity theory expects consensus in perceived group status, with the possibility of attenuated perceived differences among low status groups. On the other hand, system justification theory holds that, in some circumstances, subordinates are even *more strongly* motivated than dominants to perceive the social system as just and fair (Jost et al., 2001; Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003; Jost & Banaji, 2004; Jost et al., 2004). For this reason, system justification theory may imply that lower group status should be associated with smaller PSD, compared to those with high status. Hence, even though high status individuals may feel some pressure to justify the system by minimizing status differences, system justification theory may predict a positive relation between group status and PSD such that the status gap is perceived to be smaller with decreasing group status due to the overjustification of the system by subordinates.

Social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) makes a different prediction for societies that hold egalitarianism as a normative ideal. Social dominance theory argues that people with high levels of social status are likely to feel the need to justify and/or explain their anti-normative social privilege. One means of doing so is to minimize how much social inequality exists and perceive smaller status differences between ethnic groups. For members of subordinate groups, though, recognizing their subordinate status can be a basis for social redress and serve as the starting point for social reallocation in their group's interest. Hence, low status group

members should perceive larger group status differences than high status group members (Sidanius, Levin, Federico, & Pratto, 2001). Prior studies lend support to this inverse status-perception relation. Native Canadians perceive higher levels of social inequality than did White Canadians (Corenblum & Stephan, 2001), White Americans report smaller mean status differences than Black Americans (Federico & Levin, 2004), and White Americans perceive that more progress towards racial equality has been made than Black Americans do (Eibach & Ehrlinger, 2006; Brodish, Brady, & Devine, 2008).

These varying predictions stemming from system justification theory, social identity theory, and social dominance theory consider one's group position as providing motivations for perceived status differences. Individuals' values concerning group equality, or social dominance orientation, may also motivate their perceptions. If people see what they hope for, then people higher on social dominance orientation may perceive larger status differences, in line with their values, than people lower on social dominance orientation (SDO). However, Eibach and Ehrlinger (2006) argued and showed that high and low social dominance orientation is associated with different standards for comparison when considering group equality, such that high SDO people perceive reality as falling short of their *hierarchical* ideal whereas low SDO individuals see reality as falling short of their *egalitarian* ideal. This implies that as SDO increases, PSD should decrease.

Third, the theories under consideration here also predict that perceived status differences should be related to perceived fairness of the social system. Social identity theory suggests that under some circumstances, perceived inequality may be perceived as unfair and lead to perceptions of an illegitimate system (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986; Turner, 1999; Brown, 2000). Social dominance theory holds that in societies in which belief in equal opportunity is normative, the fairer the society is perceived to be, the smaller the perceived ethnic status differences will be (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Research consistent with this expectation has

shown that endorsing beliefs that legitimize the status hierarchy ('legitimizing myths') leads to fewer attributions of discrimination in fictitious encounters (Major et al., 2002). On the other hand, system justification might predict that one may see the system as fair and yet still acknowledge large status differences in society. Instead of denying that status differences exist, individuals may still justify the system by believing that these status gaps are valid or deserved (Jost & Banaji, 2004; Jost et al., 2004). If this reasoning is correct, then the relationship between perceived societal fairness and perceived status differences might be null or even positive.

We propose that the relation between perceived societal fairness and perceived status differences can be clarified by considering social dominance orientation. That is, we predict that social dominance orientation will moderate the relationship between fairness and PSD. For low SDO individuals, who value egalitarianism, a fair society will be one in which status differences between groups are small. Large status differences will be perceived to be unfair. Therefore, for low SDO people, there should be a negative correlation between perceived societal fairness and perceived status differences. However, for anti-egalitarian people who are high on SDO, a fair system does not have to exhibit equality between groups. For high SDO people, societal fairness may be less related to perceptions of status differences.

In summary, the present research tested the following four hypotheses using three independent samples of university students. The hypotheses have been stated in the direction consistent with social dominance theory; for Hypotheses 1 and 2, system justification theory suggests alternative predictions.

Hypothesis 1: Lower status group members will perceive larger ethnic group status differences than higher status group members.

Hypothesis 2: Those who perceive their society to be unfair, especially to subordinate ethnic groups, will perceive larger status differences among ethnic groups than those who perceive their society as fair.

Hypothesis 3: Social dominance orientation should correlate negatively with perceived group status differences.

Hypothesis 4: SDO should moderate the relation between PSD and perceived societal fairness such that the relation is more negative among those lower on SDO.

Study 1

Method

Participants and procedure Two large and independent samples were collected for Study 1 and utilized data originally collected for other purposes. The data for Sample 1 was part of a larger survey of student life at UCLA. The sampling frame used was derived from listings of all first year residential students as well as listings obtained from the Residential Advisors. Dormitory residence is mandatory for all incoming freshmen. The students were informed of the study during dormitory meetings, by flyers posted on dormitory bulletin boards, and by email. The sample used here consisted of 772 first year students, giving us a response rate of 53%.

The participants were invited to a free pizza party in exchange for participation. Students within each dormitory were given the student life questionnaire in a large group. The average age of the participants was 18.4 years. Only the students who classified themselves as White, Asian, Latino, or Black and who were either native born or naturalized American citizens were used in the analyses, leaving an effective sample size of 502 (273 women, 229 men). Some 224 of the participants were White, 180 were Asian, 64 were Latino, and 34 were Black. This ethnic distribution was roughly equivalent to the proportion of each ethnic group on campus.

Sample 2 consisted of a stratified random sample of UCLA undergraduates across all four academic years (i.e. freshman to seniors). Students were given the opportunity to win one of four \$50 prizes for their participation. To include a larger number of minority students, the sampling frame stratified registered students into one of four 'ethnic' strata (Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians). A random sample from

each stratum was then contacted by mail to participate in the study. Only the students who classified themselves as White, Asian, Latino, or Black and who were either native born or naturalized American citizens were used in the analyses, leaving an effective sample size of 673 (375 women, 296 men, 2 with unreported gender). Of these students, 213 were White, 200 were Asian, 133 were Latino, and 127 were Black, and yielding an overall response rate of 41%. Because Sample 1 consisted of only freshmen, Sample 1 was slightly younger than the students in Sample 2 ($m = 21.5$ years).

Measures

The questionnaire measured perceived societal fairness, social dominance orientation, and perceived ethnic status of Whites, Blacks, Latinos, and Asian-Americans in the United States. In addition, demographic characteristics (e.g. gender, social class) were measured in order to control for their potential covariation with the theoretical variables of interest. Because Samples 1 and 2 were originally collected for other purposes, the precise operationalizations of certain constructs vary slightly between the two samples.

Societal fairness The societal fairness measure assessed how much participants perceived social processes and outcomes pertaining to social inequality as fair in two different ways in the two samples. Participants in both samples rated statements on seven-point scales, ranging from '1 = strongly disagree' to '7 = strongly agree.' In Sample 1, five items indicated perceived societal fairness: (1) 'Minority groups (e.g. Blacks and Hispanics) usually don't get fair treatment in the courts and the criminal justice system' (reverse coded); (2) 'If people work hard they almost always get what they want;' (3) 'Most people who don't get ahead should not blame the system; they really have only themselves to blame;' (4) 'It is possible for ethnic groups with lower status to achieve higher group status;' and (5) 'America is an open society where one's achievement depends on individual merit' ($\alpha = .75$). In Sample 2, three items measured societal fairness: (1) 'Differences in status between

ethnic groups are fair; (2) 'Differences in status between ethnic groups are the result of injustice' (reverse coded); and (3) 'America is a just society where difference in status between ethnic groups reflects actual differences' ($\alpha = .64$). The societal fairness items used for Sample 1 and Sample 2 reflect slightly different aspects of the societal fairness construct. Using these different operationalizations across the two samples allows us to both replicate as well as test the robustness of our hypothesized relationships.

Social dominance orientation (SDO) In Sample 1, SDO was measured using four items from the SDO_{6 Scale} (see Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), namely, (1) 'It is not really a big problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others;' (2) 'This country would be better off if inferior groups stayed in their place;' (3) 'If we treated people more equally we would have fewer problems in this country' (reverse coded); and (4) 'To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups of people' ($\alpha = .63$). In Sample 2, SDO was measured using the entire 16-item SDO Scale (see Pratto et al., 1994; $\alpha = .89$). To get a slightly more normal distribution of these scores, the SDO scores were log transformed in both samples.

Perceived ethnic status Participants rated the social status of the four major ethnic groups in the United States. The specific question read:

'There are many people who believe that the different ethnic groups enjoy different amounts of social status in this society. You may not believe in this yourself, but if you had to rate each of the following groups as such people see them, how would you do so?'

The groups to be rated were described as 'White/Euro-Americans,' 'Blacks/African Americans,' 'Asians/Asian Americans,' and 'Latinos/Hispanic Americans.' By asking people to rate the status of ethnic groups as many people in the society view it, it is possible to measure how large people perceive the consensual status differences to be, free from an individual's desire or preference. This technique has been

commonly employed to assess status perceptions (see Federico & Levin, 2004; Levin, 2004; also Sidanius et al., 2000). All ratings were done on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1 = 'low status' to 7 = 'high status.' These status ratings were used to calculate consensual ethnic status and perceived status differences (PSD).

Ethnic status Each participant's ethnic status was determined as the average status rating given to that participant's ethnic group by all participants who did *not* belong to that ethnic group. As such, it represents the average degree of social status that members of other ethnic groups perceive one to have.

Perceived status differences (PSD) Our major dependent variable was defined as the degree to which participants view ethnic groups as having different levels of social status. Hence, it was operationalized as the standard deviation of an individual's social status ratings of the four ethnic groups. Thus, a PSD score of 0.00 indicates that the participant views all four ethnic groups as having equal social status, and the greater the PSD score, the greater the degree to which participants view the ethnic groups as having different levels of social status.

Socio-economic status (SES) In Sample 1, SES was measured by use of three indices: (1) the mother's level of education; (2) the father's level of education (both measured on a seven-point scale ranging from: 1 = elementary school to 7 = completed graduate school/professional degree); and (3) family income (assessed from 1 = poor to 5 = upper class). The three individual items were standardized, and the mean of these standardized scores comprised the total SES measure ($\alpha = .78$). In Sample 2, SES was measured by two items: (1) family socio-economic position (1 = poor to 5 = upper class scale); and (2) yearly family income in dollars. The variables were standardized and the reliability was found to be adequate ($\alpha = .60$).

Results

The means and standard deviations for Samples 1 and 2 are shown in Table 1. Figure 1 shows

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of variables in Samples 1, 2 and 3

Variables	Sample 1		Sample 2		Sample 3	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Perceived status differences (PSD)	1.35	.66	1.57	.59	1.44	.64
SDO*	.33	.21	.28	.17	.33	.19
Perceived fairness	3.98	1.22	2.73	1.25	4.19	1.05
Gender (female)	.54	.50	.57	.50	.66	.47
Ethnic status	5.27	1.02	4.78	1.42	5.26	1.29
SES	.04	.79	.02	.85	5.37	1.33

Note: * The SDO scores were log-transformed in all three samples.

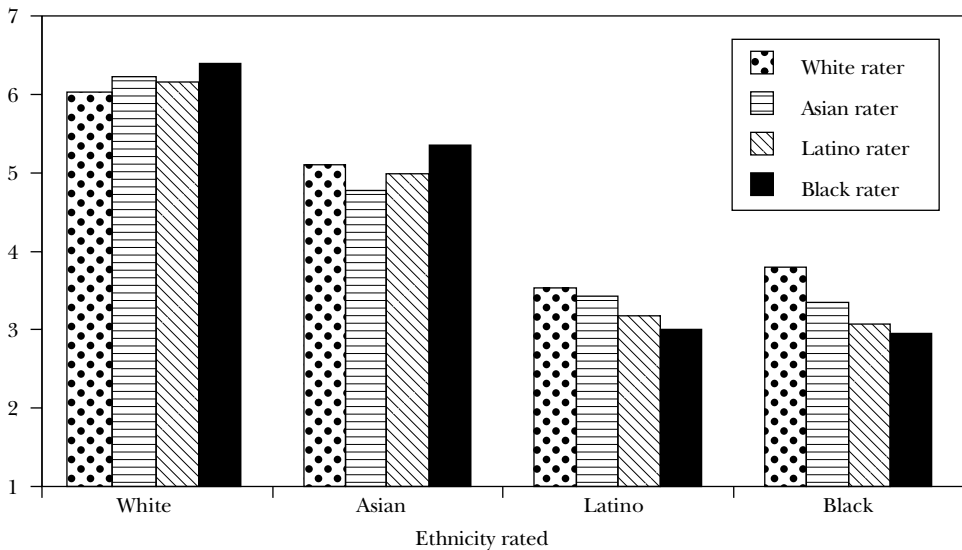


Figure 1. Status ratings of White, Asian, Latino, and Black ethnic groups in Sample 1. Raters' ethnicities correspond to the different colored or shaded bars for each listed ethnic group.

the perceived ethnic status of the four ethnic groups as a function of the perceiver's ethnic status in Sample 1. As has been shown before (e.g. Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), Whites were perceived as having the highest level of social status, Latino and African-Americans were perceived as having the lowest and approximately equal levels of social status, while Asian-Americans were perceived as having intermediate levels of social status. This is true regardless of perceivers' ethnic status. Consistent with previous findings, the same pattern was found with respect to Samples 2 and 3 (see below) as well.

To test Hypothesis 1, that participants with lower ethnic status will perceive greater group

status differences, participants' ethnic status was correlated with participants' PSD. In both Samples 1 and 2, these correlations were reliably negative, as expected, $r_s = -.22, -.19, p_s < .01$, respectively.

To test Hypothesis 2 that participants who perceive their society to be unfair will perceive larger ethnic status differences, societal fairness was correlated with PSD. In both Samples 1 and 2, these correlations were reliably negative, as expected, $r_s = -.23, -.23, p_s < .01$, respectively.

To test Hypothesis 3, which predicts that participants lower on SDO should perceive greater PSD, participants' SDO levels were correlated with their PSD. As expected, the correlations

were reliably negative in Sample 1, $r = -.15$, and in Sample 2, $r = -.16$, $p < .01$.

To test whether PSD remained associated with ethnic status, perceived societal fairness, and SDO while controlling for each other and for other potentially confounding variables, PSD was regressed on centered predictors including participant gender and SES, ethnic status, SDO, and societal fairness. Results are shown in Table 2 under Model 1.

To test Hypothesis 4, the interaction of societal fairness and SDO was added to the regression. Results are shown in Table 2 under Model 2.

For Model 1, in Sample 1 the results showed that only two hypothesized independent variables made clear, independent, and statistically significant contributions to the prediction of perceived status differences. These variables were: the social status of one's ethnic group ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .01$), and the perceived fairness of society ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .01$; see Table 2, Sample 1, Model 1). The greater the rated social status of one's ethnic group and the fairer one perceived the social system to be, the less the social statuses of the ethnic groups were perceived to differ. In addition, SDO was also found to predict a marginally significant and independent portion of PSD such that the higher one's SDO, the greater the perceived status homogeneity of ethnic groups ($\beta = -.09$, $p < .10$).

Despite the slight differences in the operationalizations of these two variables, the results for Sample 2 were essentially the same as found for Sample 1. PSD decreased with increasing ethnic status ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .01$), and

with perceptions of societal fairness ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .01$), similar to the results in Sample 1. While SDO was only able to make marginal net contribution to PSD in Sample 1, it made no net contribution to the prediction of PSD in Sample 2 ($\beta = -.04$, $p > .10$).

Consistent with Hypothesis 4, the interaction between SDO and societal fairness in Model 2 was reliable for both Samples 1 and 2, showing moderation of SDO for societal fairness. To illustrate this moderation effect, simple slopes analyses (Aiken & West, 1991) were performed to show the relationship between societal fairness and PSD at low (1 std below the mean) and high (1 std above the mean) levels of SDO. As can be seen in Figure 2 for Sample 1, among those low on SDO there is a significant negative relationship between societal fairness and PSD ($\beta = -.25$, $t(465) = -4.03$, $p < .001$). Thus, for low SDO participants, the larger they perceived differences among ethnic groups to be, the less they perceived their society to be fair. However, among those high on SDO, the relationship between societal fairness and PSD was essentially zero ($\beta = -.04$, $t(465) = -.42$, $p = .57$). Likewise, for Sample 2, for those with low levels of SDO (1 std below the mean), there was a significantly negative relationship between social system fairness and PSD such that PSD decreased with increasing levels of perceived fairness of the social system ($\beta = -.30$, $t(619) = -4.99$, $p < .001$). Among those with high levels of SDO, there was no relationship between perceived fairness and PSD ($\beta = -.08$, $t(619) = -1.46$, $p < .15$; see Figures 2 and 3).^{1,2}

Table 2. Perceived status differences (PSD) as a function of demographic and ideological variables

Independent variables	Sample 1		Sample 2		Sample 3	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Gender (female)	-.05	-.03	.00	.00	-.09	-.06
SES	.06	.05	.03	.03	-.02	-.07
Ethnic status	-.18**	-.17**	-.15**	-.15**	-.23*	-.20*
Perceived fairness	-.16**	-.14**	-.18**	-.19**	-.20*	-.18*
SDO	-.09+	-.09+	-.04	-.06	.02	-.02
Fairness \times SDO		.11**		.12**		.20*
R _{adjusted}	.27**	.29**	.27**	.28**	.29**	.34**

Notes: + $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. In Samples 1 and 2, entries are standardized regression coefficients.

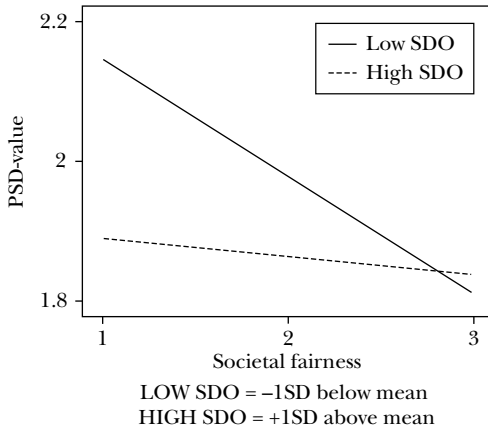


Figure 2. Simple slopes analysis of perceived status differences (PSD) as a function of perceived societal fairness at high and low levels of SDO (Sample 1).

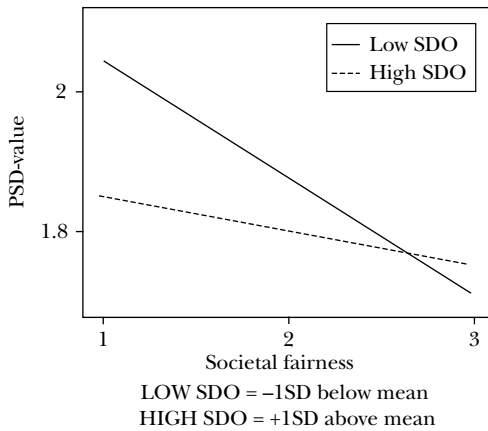


Figure 3. Simple slopes analysis of perceived status differences (PSD) as a function of perceived societal fairness at high and low levels of SDO (Sample 2).

Discussion

Although both of the ethnically-diverse samples in Study 1 showed high consensus that Whites have higher status than Asian-Americans, who in turn have higher status than Hispanics and Blacks, those with lower ethnic status perceived larger status differences among ethnic groups than those with higher ethnic status. This finding is consistent with social dominance theory's group positions outlook inasmuch as

it holds that people's understandings of their society reflect their groups' positions. That is, high status groups may be motivated, in an egalitarian context, to minimize their status, whereas low status groups may be acutely aware of their status because of the contrast between their life experiences and the alleged egalitarian norm of their society. The finding that one's own ethnic status holds a negative relation with perceived ethnic status is also consistent with work implying that White privilege is largely invisible to Whites (e.g. Powell, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2005; Lowery, Knowles, & Unzueta, 2007). Importantly, it is also inconsistent with the false consciousness idea in system justification theory that subordinate groups do not perceive their subordinate position. Our results show that those with lower ethnic status perceive greater status differences, even controlling for all other effects found.

This finding alone does not indicate whether low status groups are more aware of status differences than high status groups, or whether both low and high status groups are motivated to perceive differences in ways that justify their group position. However, it was also found that those who perceived their societies to be more unfair regarding subordinate ethnic groups perceived the largest status differences between ethnic groups. This finding implies that in the normative egalitarian context of the US, group inequality is generally perceived as unfair. This finding can be seen as consistent with social identity theory, system justification theory, and social dominance theory.

The moderation effect found helps to clarify the possible interpretations of the other findings. Those low on social dominance orientation showed a strong correspondence between their perceptions of societal unfairness and the size of ethnic status differences. For people high on social dominance orientation, there was no relation between perceived fairness and perceived status differences. That is, to high SDO individuals, a legitimate system does not imply anything about societal status differences, as there can be large differences in a system still seen as fair. Both low and high SDO people may then hold beliefs about status differences that are

internally consistent with their sense of justice, but these senses of justice are not the same. Low SDO people do not perceive large differences as fair, whereas high SDO people who are more tolerant of inequality need not perceive any relation between inequality and fairness.

Study 2

The results of Study 1 (Sample 1 and Sample 2) were consistent across both samples, across slightly different operationalizations of key concepts, and with the predicted hypotheses following the logic of social dominance theory. These results showed that perceiving large status differences is associated with lower ethnic status, lower perceptions of fairness, and an interaction between SDO and perceived fairness. In Study 1, perception of status differences, the primary variable of interest, was defined as the participants' perceptions of what most *others* perceived the status positions of the various ethnic groups in society to be. This operationalization has been used before in previous research (Federico & Levin, 2004; Levin, 2004). However, the respondents' perception of relative status of major ethnic groups, as perceived by most people in society, is conceptually different than the individual's own perception of the status differences between ethnic groups. Individuals' perceptions of what others in society believe may be a type of reflected appraisal about their own status (e.g. Federico & Levin, 2004), which may differ from their personal beliefs. On the other hand, reporting what others think may free participants to reveal their own beliefs, and thus these responses may be closely tied to their own views of status differences.

In order to determine whether the relationships found in Study 1 also hold using the individual's own perceptions of social status differences, we embarked on Study 2. In Study 2, an index of perceived status differences which assessed the participants' *own perceptions* of the social status of the major ethnic groups in society was created, and labeled Personally Perceived Status Differences (PPSD). While it is possible individuals' responses to how they think 'others' or society view status differences will vary from

their own predictions, it is hypothesized that this difference will be relatively small. Therefore, the hypotheses from Study 1 are expected to replicate in this new sample with a new operationalization of perceptions of status differences, which will further add to and enhance our understanding of status perceptions.

Method

Participants Sample 3 consisted of 145 participants recruited at Harvard University from the Department of Psychology's study pool and from student ethnic organizations. Participants were awarded course credit for completing our survey online or given \$5.00 for participation in person using a paper-based survey. Both the online and paper-based versions were identical. As in Samples 1 and 2, only participants who identified as 'Black /African-American' ($n = 33$), 'Asian /Asian-American' ($n = 24$), 'White /Euro-American' ($n = 60$), or 'Latino/Hispanic American' ($n = 19$) were eligible for inclusion in the analyses. There were 45 males and 91 females. After discarding those respondents who did not have complete data for all of the variables of interest, our effective sample size was 134, with an average age of 19.73 years ($sd = 2.64$).

Measures

A survey questionnaire assessed the theoretical variables of interest, including perceived ethnic status, societal fairness, and social dominance orientation, as well as control variables such as gender and socio-economic status.

Social dominance orientation (SDO) As in Sample 2, the full 16 item SDO scale was used ($\alpha = .93$).

Socio-economic status (SES) SES was computed using three items: (1) the mother's level of education (scored on an 8-point scale ranging from 1 = no formal education, to 8 = holds graduate/professional degree); (2) the father's level of education, scored the same way; and (3) family social class (scored on a five-point scale from 1 = poor to 5 = upper class. As before, the composite SES index was a simple sum of the three standardized components ($\alpha = .78$).

Societal fairness This variable was assessed using the same five items used in Sample 1 ($\alpha = .79$). This measure of fairness was strongly related to our three-item measure used in Sample 2 ($r = .52, p < .01$). Given that the three-item scale had lower reliability ($\alpha = .71$), the larger five-item scale was used in the subsequent analyses, although the pattern of results remains largely unchanged regardless of which scale was used.³

Perceived ethnic status As in Samples 1 and 2, participants were asked to rate the social status of the four major ethnic groups in the United States as they believed others saw it. One critical difference was that, in Sample 3, participants were asked to assess the amount of social status they *personally* thought each of the ethnic groups enjoyed. Thus, the specific question read: 'There are many people who believe that the different ethnic groups enjoy different amounts of social status in this society. What amount of social status do you personally think each of the following ethnic groups enjoy?' Again, all ratings were made using a seven-point scale, ranging from 1 = 'low status' to 7 = 'high status' and served as the basis of our ethnic status and perceived status difference indices.

Ethnic status As in Samples 1 and 2, this variable represented the status of a participant based on his or her ethnicity, as rated by participants not sharing his or her ethnicity.

Personally perceived status differences (PPSD) This variable was calculated in the same way as PSD was for Samples 1 and 2. However, the PPSD variable used in analyses for Sample 3 was based on the item asking participants what they 'personally think' about the status of ethnic groups. For comparison, consensual PSD (the version in Samples 1 and 2) was also asked and calculated. These two variables were strongly correlated, with $r = .52, p < .01$.

Results

The means and standard deviations of the variables are found in Table 1 (for Sample 3), and the

social status ratings across ethnic groups followed the same pattern as in Samples 1 and 2.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, participants' own ethnic status correlated negatively with their personally perceived ethnic status differences (PPSD), $r = -.28, p < .01$. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, perceived unfairness of their society also correlated with personal perceived ethnic status differences, $r = -.22, p < .01$. The correlation between SDO and PPSD was in the predicted direction, but not reliable, $r = -.13$. This unreliability may be due to having a substantially smaller sample size in Study 2 than in either sample for Study 1.

Considering participants' ethnic status, perceived societal fairness, social dominance orientation, and controlling for gender and SES in a simultaneous regression, the effects of ethnic status and societal fairness were both reliable (see Sample 3, Model 1 in Table 2).

The moderation of SDO on societal fairness in Hypothesis 4 was also obtained (see Sample 3, Model 2 in Table 2). As found in the first two samples, simple slopes analysis revealed that perceived societal fairness was negatively associated with PPSD among those with low levels of SDO (i.e. those one standard deviation below mean SDO; $\beta = -.37, t(127) = -3.25, p < .01$), but was essentially orthogonal to PPSD among those with high levels of SDO (i.e. those one standard deviation above mean SDO; $\beta = .01, t(127) = .12, p < .91$; see Figure 4).⁴ In Study 2, this moderation effect reduced the direct effect of participants' ethnic status on personally perceived status differences. With the exception that social dominance orientation was not reliably related to personally perceived status differences, Study 2 confirmed all four hypotheses evidenced in two samples in Study 1 using perceived consensual status differences.⁵

General discussion

The present studies examined what determines how large or small people perceive status differences among ethnic groups within a particular society to be. Although ethnic hierarchies have been repeatedly observed across a multitude of cultures and are largely acknowledged by their

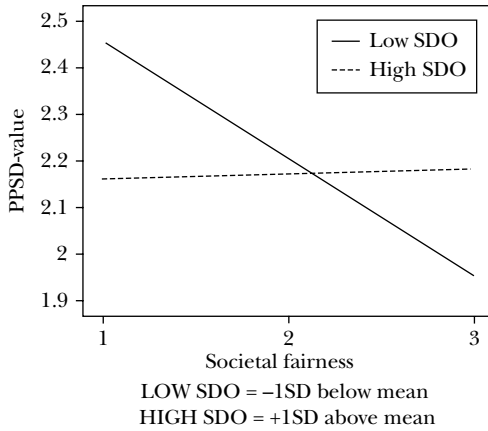


Figure 4. Simple slopes analysis of personally perceived status differences (PPSD) as a function of perceived societal fairness at high and low levels of SDO (Sample 3).

members, individual differences in the perceived degree of status differentiation among ethnic groups has been essentially unexamined in the literature. Three independent samples of Whites, Asians, Latinos, and African-Americans in the United States demonstrated the impact of ethnic status, perceived societal fairness, and social dominance orientation on an individual's perceptions of status differences. Further indicating the robustness of these relationships, our findings were consistent across different operationalizations of societal fairness, as well as across two forms of status perceptions: others' perceptions and personal perceptions.

Based on social dominance theory, it was expected that those who belonged to higher status ethnic groups would perceive differences among groups to be smaller than those belonging to lower status ethnic groups. This finding is consistent with the limited existing research on status differences using different ethnic groups in Canada (Corenblum & Stephan, 2001) and in the United States (Federico & Levin, 2004). One interpretation that social dominance theory provides for the finding that PSD is negatively related to one's own ethnic status is that within societies with egalitarian norms, those at the top of the status hierarchy are motivated to

minimize the status gap as a way to justify their privilege. Conversely, low status individuals may report larger levels of status differences as a way to call for social change and improve their group position. Although there is no direct evidence for this interpretation, it is bolstered by the fact that perceived unfairness of the society also corresponded with greater perceived ethnic status differences. The Marxist false consciousness notion that subordinates do not perceive their disadvantage, and system justification theory's thesis that people, especially subordinates, are motivated to view the social system as just and fair, are incompatible with the finding that group status differences are larger among people with lower ethnic status.

On the whole, Americans' egalitarian norm may make inequality among groups seem unfair. This suggests that providing information about inequality may play on justice motivations to produce social change. However, the moderation effect found in all three studies shows that this link between perceived inequality and perceived unfairness does not hold for people relatively high on social dominance orientation. Because people higher on social dominance orientation are indifferent at best towards social equality, they do not perceive ethnic status differences to be unfair. It would appear unlikely that they would be persuaded that inequality alone makes a society unfair. Thus, our research points out that methods of gaining consensus for egalitarian change need to consider different audiences, as merely highlighting ethnic status differences within society to high SDO individuals may be unproductive in promoting change.

Identifying naturally-existing differences among ethnic groups and individuals is an important first step in understanding the dynamic role that perceived status differences have in intergroup relations. The current study is the first to systematically examine correlates and predictors of PSD. However, considerably more research remains to be done in identifying the motivational or other causal processes that may underlie the differences in perceived status documented here. For example, the general motivated social cognition paradigm

(e.g. Dijksterhuis, van Knippenberg, Kruglanski, & Schaper, 1996; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003) might suggest additional factors that might be associated with and possibly help determine one's perceptions of status differences in society (e.g. need for closure).

Besides expanding the nature of the samples used, future research should also employ experimental methods (e.g. inducing participants to see status differences as large or small) in order to determine the causal relationships among the factors explored here, as the data reported in this study cannot address such issues. For instance, although we have demonstrated that perceptions of societal fairness are significantly related to status perceptions, we cannot comment on the causal directions of these relationships, as the causal arrows may in fact be bi-directional. Experiments could test whether perceptions of status differences increase by inducing perceptions of societal unfairness (e.g. race discrimination in hiring) and whether providing information about status differences can make general societal unfairness more plausible to people high on SDO, with high ethnic status, and those who feel their society is generally fair. Similarly, experiments could test whether motivations to maintain dominance lead high status individuals to deny status differences as a means of protecting their status, particularly within a society that has egalitarian norms. For example, one might prime high status participants with their status and with egalitarian norms, to see if this influences PSD.

Another research goal would be to examine whether PSD would uniquely impact prejudice or policy preferences, above and beyond other associated variables. One may hypothesize that the more individuals perceive there to be great status differences in society, the more they may support programs or policies aimed at reducing this gap, such as affirmative action or welfare. A similar analysis revealed that less perceived racial progress in the United States predicted higher support for affirmative action policies (Brodish et al., 2008). Research has also demonstrated that, for high status group members, increased status perceptions are associated with greater amounts

of ingroup bias (Federico & Levin, 2004). In addition to enhancing positive perceptions about the ingroup, perceptions of status differences may also impact outgroup prejudice.

In conclusion, despite the considerable amount of research on ethnic hierarchies, relatively little research has focused on what causes different people to perceive ethnic status differences. At least within societies with relatively egalitarian norms, perceived status differences are negatively related to an individual's ethnic status, the value one places on social inequality, and one's feelings about the fairness of the social system. Further, understanding how and why individuals view the social order differently is a basic step in deepening our understanding of ethnic and racial prejudice in general. For instance, policies directed at reducing intergroup status differences will likely fall on deaf ears if individuals do not believe that differences are either very large or are unjust. Minority groups that argue for more equal representation and standing will likely be met with large resistance if majority group individuals perceive such status differences as minor. This basic disconnection between minority and majority group members likely leads to increased tension, inherently stemming from opposing views about group standing in society. By better examining what factors lead to these alternative perceptions, researchers can attempt to target ways to improve intergroup relations in society.

Notes

1. To assure ourselves that the basic results would hold if we used the same 4-item SDO scale in Sample 2 as in Sample 1, the analyses in Sample 2 were re-estimated using this same 4-item scale. All of the essential results did hold in the second analysis. Thus, the significant main effects found before were still significant (i.e. for ethnic status and perceived fairness), and there was also the same type of interaction between perceived legitimacy and social dominance orientation (i.e. $t(614) = 3.06, p < .002$).
2. In addition, defining SES strictly in terms of family income rather than parental education had no substantive effect on the outcome of the analyses.

3. Using the 3-item fairness scale, fairness significantly predicted PPSD net of other variables in the final model ($\beta = -.34$, $t(127) = -2.91$, $p < .01$). Simple slopes for the fairness \times SDO interaction revealed the same pattern, with $\beta = -.48$, $t(127) = -2.85$, $p < .01$ at low levels of SDO (1 standard deviation below the mean) and $\beta = -.21$, $t(127) = -1.77$, $p = .08$ at high levels of SDO (1 standard deviation above the mean). While the fairness \times SDO interaction term did not reach statistical significance ($t = 1.61$, $p = .11$), the effect size ($B = .42$) was actually bigger than in Sample 2 ($B = .31$), where we used the same 3-item fairness scale, but had a much larger sample size.
4. Essentially the same results are obtained when using the PSD index that was used in Samples 1 and 2.
5. Once again, defining SES strictly in terms of family social class, rather than parental education, did not affect the nature of the results.

References

- Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Anderson, C., Srivastava, S., Beer, J. S., Spataro, S. E., & Chatman, J. A. (2006). Knowing your place: Self-perceptions of status in face-to-face groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *91*, 1094–1110.
- Brodish, A. B., Brady, P. C., & Devine, P. G. (2008). More eyes on the prize: Variability in White Americans' perceptions of progress toward racial equality. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *34*, 513–527.
- Brown, R. (2000). Social identity theory: Past achievements, current problems and future challenges. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *30*, 745–778.
- Corenblum, B., & Stephan, W. G. (2001). White fears and native apprehensions: An integrated threat theory approach to intergroup attitudes. *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science*, *33*, 251–268.
- Dijksterhuis, A., van Knippenberg, A., Kruglanski, A. W., & Schaper, C. (1996). Motivated social cognition: Need for closure effects on memory and judgment. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *32*, 254–270.
- Eibach, R. P. & Ehrlinger, J. (2006). Keep your eyes on the prize: Reference points and racial differences in assessing progress toward equality. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *32*, 66–77.
- Federico, C. M., & Levin, S. (2004). Intergroup biases as a function of reflected status appraisals and support for legitimizing ideologies: Evidence from the USA and Israel. *Social Justice Research*, *17*, 47–73.
- Hagendoorn, L. (1995). Intergroup biases in multiple group systems: The perception of ethnic hierarchies. *European Review of Social Psychology*, *6*, 199–228.
- Hagendoorn, L., Drogendijk, R., Tumanov, S., and Hrabá, J. (1998). Inter-ethnic preferences and ethnic hierarchies in the former Soviet Union. *International Journal on Intercultural Relations*, *22*, 483–503.
- Hinkle, S., & Brown, R. (1990). Intergroup comparisons and social identity: Some links and lacunae. In D. Abrams & M. Hogg (Eds.), *Advances in social identity theory* (pp. 48–70). New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Hrabá, J., Hagendoorn, L., & Hagendoorn, R. (1989). The ethnic hierarchy in the Netherlands: Social distance and social representation. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *28*, 57–69.
- Jost, J. T., & Banaji, M. R. (2004). *The role of stereotyping in system justification and the production of false consciousness*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Jost, J. T., Banaji, M. R., & Nosek, B. A. (2004). A decade of system justification theory: Accumulated evidence of conscious and unconscious bolstering of the status quo. *Political Psychology*, *25*, 881–919.
- Jost, J. T., Burgess, D., & Mosso, C. O. (2001). *Conflicts of legitimation among self, group, and system: The integrative potential of system justification theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Jost, J. T., Glaser, J., Kruglanski, A. W., & Sulloway, F. J. (2003). Political conservatism as motivated social cognition. *Psychological Bulletin*, *129*, 339–375.
- Jost, J. T., Pelham, B. W., Sheldon, O., & Sullivan, B. N. (2003). Social inequality and the reduction of ideological dissonance on behalf of the system: Evidence of enhanced system justification among the disadvantaged. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *33*, 13–36.
- Levin, S. (2004). Perceived group status differences and the effects of gender, ethnicity, and religion on social dominance orientation. *Political Psychology*, *25*, 31–48.

- Lowery, B. S., Knowles, E. D., & Unzueta, M. M. (2007). Framing inequity safely: Whites' motivated perceptions of racial privilege. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 33*, 1237–1250.
- Major, B., Gramzow, R. H., McCoy, S. K., Levin, S., Schmader, T., & Sidanius, J. (2002). Perceiving personal discrimination: The role of group status and legitimizing ideology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 269–282.
- Powell, A. A., Branscombe, N. R., & Schmitt, M. T. (2005). Inequality as ingroup privilege or outgroup disadvantage: The impact of group focus on collective guilt and interracial attitudes. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31*, 508–521.
- Pratto, F., Sidanius, J., Stallworth, L. M., & Malle, B. F. (1994). Social dominance orientation: A personality variable predicting social and political attitudes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*, 741–763.
- Sidanius, J., Levin, S., Federico, C., & Pratto, F. (2001). Legitimizing ideologies: The social dominance approach. In J. Jost and B. Major (Eds.), *The psychology of legitimacy: Emerging perspectives on ideology, justice, and intergroup relations* (pp. 307–331). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sidanius, J., Levin, S., Liu, J., & Pratto, F. (2000). Social dominance orientation, anti-egalitarianism and the political psychology of gender: An extension and cross-cultural replication. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 30*, 41–67.
- Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 94–109). Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of inter-group conflict. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7–24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Turner, J. C. (1999). Some current issues in research on social identity and self-categorization theories. In N. Ellemers, R. Spears, & B. Doosje (Eds.), *Social identity: Contexts, commitment, content* (pp. 6–34). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Verkuyten, M., Hagendoorn, L., & Masson, K. (1996). The ethnic hierarchy among minority and majority youth in the Netherlands. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 26*, 1104–1118.

Biographical notes

KIMBERLY KAHN is a PhD candidate in the department of psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA).

ARNOLD K. HO is a PhD student in the department of psychology at Harvard University.

JIM SIDANIUS is a full professor in the department of psychology and African and African American studies at Harvard University.

FELICIA PRATTO is a full professor in the department of psychology at the University of Connecticut.