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White ≠ Poor: Whites Distance, Derogate, and Deny Low-Status Ingroup Members

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Abstract

Throughout society, White people of low socioeconomic status (SES) face prejudice, often from racial ingroup members. The present research tested the *ingroup distancing effect*, which predicts that Whites' negative reactions to low-SES ingroup members are motivated responses to perceived threats to their personal and group-level status. To cope with perceived status threats, White people psychologically and physically distance themselves from low-SES Whites. Four studies provide converging support for this theorizing. Among White participants, low-SES Whites elicited derogation, impaired racial categorization and memory, and inflated perceived personal status. White participants explicitly perceived low-SES Whites as greater status threats than low-SES Blacks, and these perceptions of threat predicted increased discomfort in anticipated social situations with low-SES White targets. Moreover, threatened status led Whites who strongly identified with their racial ingroup to physically distance themselves from a low-SES White partner. This research demonstrates that concerns with status motivate prejudice against ingroup members.

Keywords

dominant-group identity, intergroup relations, Whiteness, prejudice

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As a socially accepted target of prejudice, few groups in contemporary society elicit antipathy like poor White people. However, unlike other forms of prejudice, many of the most negative attitudes toward poor Whites seem to come from racial ingroup members (Berube & Berube, 1997). Why do White's respond so negatively to poor White people? Although there is evidence that high-status groups sometimes exhibit bias against low-status subgroups (Hornsey & Hogg, 2002) and that low-status individuals are frequently discriminated against by their upper-class peers (e.g., Lott, 2002), research has not tested how race and class interact to determine psychological and social responses to low–socioeconomic status (SES) racial ingroup members. This lack of research is telling, given the American Psychological Association's (APA) call over a decade ago to investigate class and classism (APA, 2000; Lott, 2012). The present work answers the APA's call and fills gaps in the empirical literature by integrating research on race and class to test the general hypothesis that Whites' prejudice against low-SES White people is a motivated response to protect the status of the racial ingroup.

Central to the current work is the prediction that Whites perceive low-SES White people as a threat to the racial ingroup's status and prestige. We contend that when high-status group members perceive a subgroup as a threat to the privileges and standing of the superordinate ingroup, psychologically distancing the subgroup from the ingroup protects both personal and group-level status. We term this *the ingroup distancing effect.* We predicted that—as members of a high-status group in the United States—Whites' responses to low-SES White people would be a quintessential example of the ingroup distancing effect. To cope with perceived threats to the ingroup—and by extension, personal status—we predicted that Whites would psychologically and physically distance themselves from low-SES Whites. The current work reports four studies testing the ingroup distancing hypothesis and provides evidence that Whites' automatic (Study 1) and controlled (Studies 2-4) responses to low-SES ingroup members are characterized by distance, derogation, and denial.

Ingroup Benefits, Race, and Status

At a basic psychological level, White people should be motivated to protect the considerable psychological, social, and

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material rewards conferred by group membership. Not only do Whites receive generic psychological benefits from their racial ingroup (e.g., acceptance, affiliation, social identity, self-enhancement; see Correll & Park, 2005, for review), they also receive considerable benefit from the privileges associated with being White in America. In addition to higher median incomes than Black and Hispanic Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006), White people live longer and are more likely to have health insurance to cope with illness and injury (Woolf, Johnson, Fryer, Rust, & Satcher, 2004). Compared with low-status racial and ethnic minority group members, Whites are also favored in social and professional contexts where White stereotypes communicate safety, expertise, and competence (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Huffcutt & Roth, 1998; McIntosh, 2004), and are advantaged in the criminal justice system where they receive lighter sentences in simulated and actual criminal trials (e.g., Johnson, Whitestone, Jackson, & Gatto, 1995; Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006). Moreover, research on social class implies that as a high-status group, White people can also often count on their values, norms, and goals to be reflected in public spaces and social institutions (e.g., Universities; Snibbe & Markus, 2005). Consequently, White people are advantaged in many institutional contexts because their knowledge of formal and informal social rules increases their likelihood of success and inherently affirms their institutional belonging (Kraus & Stephens, 2012; Lareau, 2015; Stephens, Brannon, Markus, & Nelson, 2015; Walton & Cohen, 2007). As this research collectively attests, there are profound psychological, social, material, and legal privileges conferred by Whiteness in the United States.

Responses to Ingroup Threats

As members of an advantaged group, numerous sociological and social psychological theories predict that White people should be motivated to protect their ingroup's high status. Sociologists have long argued that it is Whites' desire to maintain economic and social advantages that gives rise to prejudice and intergroup conflict (e.g., Blumer, 1958; Bobo & Kluegel, 1997). From this perspective, prejudice and derogation are tools that high-status groups can use in conjunction with other forms of material, social, and institutional capital to maintain their dominant position in society (see Fiske & Markus, 2012; Lareau & Conley, 2008). This sociological evidence is complemented by theories in social psychology like Social Identity, Social Dominance, and System Justification, which all predict that people should seek to maintain their group's high status and prestige (e.g., Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This work, however, almost exclusively focuses on tactics to defend against outgroup threats to status. Status can also be threatened by ingroup members.

Group members who violate important ingroup norms, free-ride, or are of low ability may threaten the group's status and prestige (e.g., Correll & Park, 2005). Notably, when it comes to large superordinate categories like racial identities, we theorize that status could be threatened both by deviant individuals and deviant subgroups. At the individual level, research on the "black sheep effect" suggests that people derogate deviant ingroup members to protect important ingroup boundaries and social norms (see Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988; Scheepers, Branscombe, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). At the subgroup level, there is also evidence that a host of psychological effects are moderated by concerns that low-status subgroups "drag down" high-status superordinate groups (e.g., Hornsey, van Leeuwen, & Van Santen, 2003). For example, when superordinate identities are threatened, high-status subgroup members decategorize and disengage from group-based identities more than low-status subgroup members (Hornsey et al., 2003) and sometimes exhibit bias against members of the lower-status subgroups (Hornsey & Hogg, 2002). Hence, superordinate identities can be threatened both by individuals and subgroups. In keeping with this past research, we predicted that low-SES Whites—both as individuals and as a subgroup—would threaten the status and prestige of Whites' superordinate racial identity.

Further evidence for the prediction that low-SES Whites would be viewed as a status threat to the racial ingroup comes from the clash between race and class stereotypes (Fiske, 2010). Although research is relatively silent on the content of White stereotypes, empirical evidence suggests that Whites are generally perceived as wealthy, educated, and competent (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998), implying that high status, at least in part, defines the racial category. By contrast, stereotypes of low-SES individuals are some of the most negative in modern society (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002; Fiske et al., 2002). These stereotypes portray poor people as free-riders who are dirty, uneducated, incompetent, and lazy (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Fiske et al., 2002; Lott, 2002). This strong incongruity between stereotypes of race and class may contribute to the perceptions of low-SES White people as deviant ingroup members who pose a threat to the racial ingroup's status and prestige.

In response to this perceived status threat, we argue that White people are motivated to derogate and distance themselves from low-SES Whites. Consistent with this prediction, in various settings, low-SES individuals report being excluded, or "held at arm's length," by middle- and upper-class people (Lott, 2002). In stores and service contexts, sales personnel often ignore or refuse to serve low-SES individuals (Ehrenreich, 2001; Lott, 2002). Moreover, when interpersonal contact is unavoidable, low-SES people report that affluent individuals physically distance themselves, standing as far away from low-SES people as they can (Lott, 2002). However, this previous work does not provide an explanation for the underlying psychological processes that leads people to distance themselves from the poor. We argue that the ingroup distancing effect provides a mechanism by which these derogation and ostracism effects occur.

The Current Work

Across four studies employing diverse methods, we tested the ingroup distancing hypothesis on Whites' automatic and controlled responses to low-SES ingroup members. In these studies, we predicted that White people would distance, derogate, and deny low-SES White people membership in the racial ingroup. Moreover, we expected that White people would uniquely link low-SES Whites with threats to the ingroup's status and desire the greatest distance from low-SES Whites when personal status was threatened.

Study 1 tested whether White participants distance low-SES White people from their racial ingroup at basic, automatic levels of cognition. Study 2 explored whether exposure to low-SES Whites led White participants to distance themselves from low-SES ingroup members by overestimating their personal SES. Study 3 directly tested whether Whites perceive low-SES ingroup members as status threats and consequently expect discomfort in social interactions with low-SES White people. Finally, Study 4 investigated whether status threats would lead White people to physically distance themselves from low-SES ingroup (but not outgroup) partners. In addition, our final study examined whether this response would be strongest among White people who highly identified with their race.

Study 1

To the extent that low-SES Whites threaten the ingroup's status, we expected that White participants would be motivated to distance low-SES Whites from the ingroup at a basic psychological level. To test this hypothesis, participants in Study 1 racially categorized White and Black targets from high- and low-SES roles. We predicted that White participants would be slower to accurately categorize low-SES White targets compared with other target groups (e.g., high-SES Whites, high-SES Blacks).

As part of the categorization task, participants also classified White and Black basketball players. Including athletes in a stereotypically "Black" sport[1] was important for two related reasons. First, White basketball players provide a counterstereotypic control to rule out stereotypicality as the only explanation for categorization differences between low- and high-SES White targets. Second, comparisons between White basketball players and low-SES White targets provide an initial test of the hypothesis that status concerns add to the psychological distancing White people direct at low-SES ingroup members. That is, if status concerns contribute to White people's negative reactions to low-SES Whites, deficits in categorization should be greater for low-SES White targets than White basketball players who, though counterstereotypic, should not threaten the ingroup's status.

Participants also completed a recall test in which they estimated the percentages of the White and Black targets from high- and low-SES groups. Consistent with past work on memory that finds people are motivated to forget information that threatens important group identities (e.g., Eagly, Chen, Chaiken, & Shaw-Barnes, 1999; Rotella & Richeson, 2013), we predicted that Whites' psychological distancing would manifest itself through impaired memory for low-SES White targets compared with the other target groups.

Method

Participants. White-identified undergraduates ($N = 68$; 64.0% female; $M_{age} = 19.38$, $SD = 1.40$) completed the present study in exchange for course credit. Four participants were excluded from analyses for failing to follow instructions on the categorization task.

Materials and procedure. Participants completed the categorization task on a PC. Participants racially categorized targets as Black or White. Responses over 2 s and below 300 ms were excluded from analyses. Pictures were acquired using an online search for images of Black and White people whose attire indicated they were from a high-SES profession (e.g., doctor, business person), low-SES profession (e.g., janitor, garbage collector), or were amateur basketball players. Four pictures were selected for each of the six categories. Participants completed 96 trials (approximately 16 trials per target group).

A separate sample of 20 participants rated the perceived SES, attractiveness, and positive affect of all targets to ensure they were equivalent across race and class categories. Among Black and White targets, high-SES targets were rated as having higher SES ($M = 6.14$, $SD = .54$) than the low-SES targets ($M = 2.64$, $SD = .93$), $t(19) = 12.85$, $p < .0001$, $d = 4.60$, 95% confidence interval (CI) [3.96, 5.51]. High- and low-SES targets did not differ in displays of positive affect, $t(19) = -1.13$, $p = .27$, $d = -.31$, 95% CI [−.77, .23]. Although there were no differences in the attractiveness of White targets, $F(2, 16) = .563$, $p = .563$, $\eta_p^2 = .069$, there was a tendency for the Black basketball players to be rated as more attractive than low-SES Black targets, $t(19) = 6.53$, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.54$, 95% CI [.947, 1.85]. Pilot participants accurately categorized the race of all targets.

Following the categorization task, participants recalled what percentage of pictures in the task featured low-SES Whites, low-SES Blacks, high-SES Whites, and high-SES Blacks. Basketball players were not included to prevent participants from reporting percentages that could easily be added to 100.

Results

Racial categorization. To test whether SES influenced the basic racial categorization of low-SES White people, a repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on the log-transformed categorization latencies with target race (Black, White) and target group (low-SES,

high-SES, basketball player) as within-subjects factors. There was a significant main effect of target race, $F(1, 62) = 6.05$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .089$, which was qualified by the predicted interaction between target race and category, $F(2, 62) = 11.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .267$, 95% CI [.085, .414] (see Figure 1). Follow-up paired t tests revealed that low-SES Whites were categorized as White slower than either high-SES Whites, $t(63) = 4.50$, $p < .001$ ($d = .57$), 95% CI [.32, .82], or White basketball players, $t(63) = 2.15$, $p = .035$ ($d = .27$), 95% CI [.02, .52]. Low-SES Whites were also categorized significantly slower than low-SES Blacks, $t(63) = 3.95$, $p < .001$ ($d = .50$), 95% CI [.25, .76] and marginally slower than high-SES Blacks, $t(63) = 1.92$, $p = .06$ ($d = .24$), 95% CI [−.01, .49]. These results suggest that SES influences racial categorization and that low-SES Whites are seen as less "White" than their high-SES counterparts or counterstereotypic White basketball players.

A comparison of effect sizes for the differences between high- and low-SES targets for Black and White targets demonstrated that the effect of class was greater for White targets ($d = .57$), 95% CI [.32, .82], than for Black targets ($d = -.21$), 95% CI [−.03, −.31].

Recall of targets. We next tested whether recall from the categorization task was impaired for low-SES Whites. Consistent with hypotheses, paired-samples t tests revealed that low-SES White targets were remembered significantly less often than high-SES White targets, $t(63) = -3.67$, $p < .001$ ($d = -.46$), 95% CI [−.71, −.21]; low-SES Black targets, $t(63) = -2.23$, $p < .05$ ($d = -.28$), 95% CI [−.53, −.11]; or high-SES Black targets, $t(63) = -3.78$, $p < .001$ ($d = -.48$), 95% CI [−.73, .23] (see Figure 2). The percentage recall did not significantly differ among other groups, ps > .40.

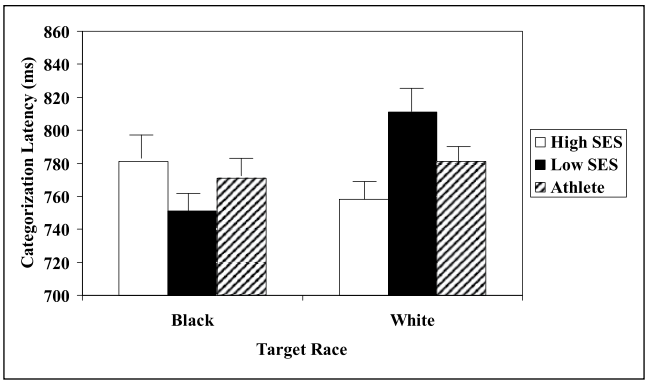

Figure 1. The effect of target race and class on categorization latency.
Note. For ease of interpretation, untransformed latencies are presented. Error bars indicate standard error. SES = socioeconomic status.

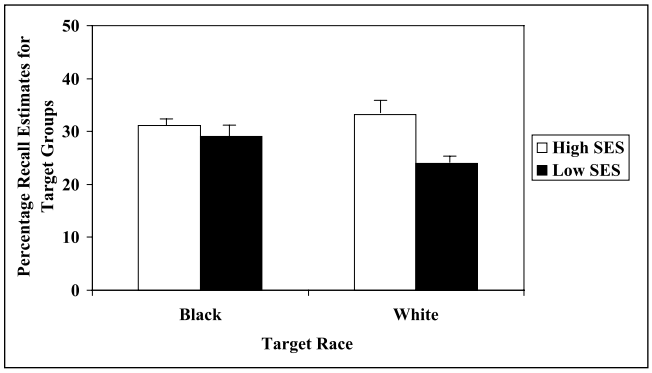

Figure 2. The effect of target race and class on target recall.
Note. Error bars indicate standard error. SES = socioeconomic status.

Discussion

The current study's results suggest that at a basic psychological level, Whites distance themselves from low-SES ingroup members. Consistent with our predictions, participants categorized the race of low-SES Whites significantly slower than low-SES Blacks, high-SES Whites, and even counterstereotypic White basketball players, suggesting that differences in categorization are not merely the product of stereotypicality. In addition, in keeping with past memory research, which finds people forget or distort information that threatens important ingroups (e.g., Eagly et al., 1999), White participants showed a distinct impairment for recalling low-SES Whites. These findings also suggest that the invisibility reported by low-SES people (e.g., Lott, 2002) may well be based on an actual tendency to be forgotten by other Whites. In considering both the memory deficits and categorization latencies together, these effects suggest that even though White participants spent more time looking at low-SES White targets, they were less likely to recall having seen them. Thus, they were most likely to forget the very targets they had looked at the longest. These results provide evidence consistent with the ingroup distancing effect. In the minds of White participants, low-SES Whites are distanced and denied racial ingroup membership.

Study 2

Study 2 expanded upon the findings of Study 1 by testing a different form of psychological distancing, namely, biased estimates of participants' self-rated SES. That is, to distance themselves from low-SES Whites and affirm personal status, we predicted that Whites would exaggerate personal SES and thereby inflate the difference between themselves and low-SES Whites. This conception of distance is consistent with past work that finds threats to the self motivate people to signal their high status to others (e.g., Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010). By overestimating personal SES, White participants signal their high status to others and distance themselves from low-SES Whites. To test this hypothesis, we primed participants with low-SES White, low-SES Black, or nonhuman targets and then had them rate their subjective SES. We predicted that White participants primed with the

low-SES White targets would overestimate their SES more than those in the other two priming conditions.

Method

Participants and procedure. White-identified undergraduates (N = 123) completed the current study in exchange for course credit. Based on the latency effect from Study 1 (comparing the latency to categorize low- versus high-SES White targets), we determined that this sample would be sufficiently powered to detect our predicted effect (G*Power; Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Data from seven participants were excluded from analyses because of computer crashes during the priming manipulation, leaving a final sample of 116 participants (71% female; M_{age} = 19.01, SD = 1.39).

Participants first completed demographic measures of age, race, and household SES. Because all participants were university students mostly in their first two years of college, we used participants' primary childhood caregiver as an estimate of participants' objective SES. Hollingshead's (1965) measure of SES was used to calculate participants' household SES by combining the weighted scores of caregivers' education and occupation, such that low scores indicated high SES. When participants reported on two caregivers (e.g., mother/father), the higher SES rank was analyzed. Participants' SES ranged from 11 to 65. On average, participants were from upper-middle class backgrounds (M = 23.17, SD = 11.30). Initial analyses indicated that random assignment successfully distributed upper-, middle-, and lower class individuals across conditions, $F(2, 113) = .19$, $p = .83$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$, 95% CI [−.001, .035].

Next, participants completed one of three categorization tasks designed to prime participants with low-SES White people, low-SES Black people, or neutral control concepts. In the low-SES conditions, participants were asked to categorize pictures of humans and animals (e.g., koala, horse) as quickly as possible. Participants completed 50 trials on this task. In the low-SES White (Black) condition, all the human stimuli were the low-SES White (Black) targets from Study 1. To avoid priming social categories, participants in the control condition categorized animals and furniture.

Following this categorization task, participants estimated their personal SES by marking an X on a line anchored (*low-SES*) and (*high-SES*). The distance to this mark was measured in centimeters (cm), such that large values indicated high estimates of SES (range = 0.4-15.6 cm, M = 9.86, SD = 2.68). Finally, participants were debriefed and exited the lab.

Results

To test whether participants in the low-SES White condition overestimated their SES more than participants in the other conditions, we compared participants' SES estimates with an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) that included their household SES as a covariate. The objective measure of household SES was a highly significant covariate suggesting that, on average, participants were somewhat accurate in their SES estimate, $F(1, 112) = 17.24$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$, 95% CI [.038, .251]. In addition, this analysis also yielded a significant effect of condition, $F(2, 112) = 3.61$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, 95% CI [.038, .251] (see Figure 3).[2] Follow-up regression analyses, with dummy codes where the low-SES White prime condition was the reference group, revealed that over-and-above household SES, participants primed with low-SES White targets overestimated their SES more than participants in the control condition, $t(112) = -2.44$, $p = .016$, $r_{partial} = -.22$, $B = -1.35$, 95% CI [−2.44, −.251], or low-SES Black prime condition, $t(112) = -2.15$, $p = .034$, $r_{partial} = -.20$, $B = -1.19$, 95% CI [−2.283, −.091]. In addition, regression analyses in which the control condition was coded as the reference group yielded a non-significant comparison of participants' status ratings in the low-SES Black target and control conditions, $t(112) = .28$, $p = .78$, $r_{partial} = -.03$, $B = -.16$, 95% CI [−1.29, .97].

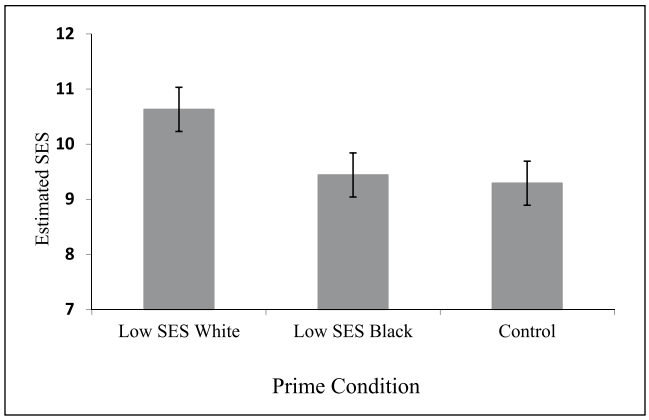

Figure 3. The effect of prime condition on estimated SES controlling for household SES.
Note. Error bars indicate standard error. SES = socioeconomic status.

Discussion

These results provide additional support for the hypothesis that White people psychologically distance themselves from low-SES ingroup members. When primed with low-SES White targets, White participants inflated their personal SES more than participants in the control and the low-SES Black target conditions. This latter comparison is particularly telling because it suggests that the relatively high estimate of personal SES was unique to exposure to low-SES ingroup members and was not elicited by exposure to low-SES people more generally.

These results build upon the findings from Study 1 by revealing that White people not only distance low-SES Whites from the general racial group, but also distance themselves personally from low-SES Whites by actively

shifting their subjective perception of personal SES away from low-SES ingroup members. These findings demonstrate a more explicit reaction than Study 1's findings, revealing distancing biases in both Whites' automatic and controlled responses to low-SES Whites. However, to the extent White people are more likely to compare and contrast themselves with racial ingroup—as opposed to outgroup—members, contrast effects could have contributed to the present results. To rule out a pure contrast account and directly connect low-SES Whites with perceptions of status threat, we conducted Study 3 with an alternate explicit operationalization of social distance.

Study 3

Study 3 directly tested the hypothesis that low-SES White people are perceived as threats to Whites' status and prestige. Moreover, Study 3 tested whether this perception of low-SES Whites as a status threat was associated with an increased desire for social distance from low-SES White people. We operationalized social distance as expected discomfort in social situations that were close (e.g., having a low-SES White person marry into one's family) and distant (e.g., working at a company that employs low-SES White people). As close social relationships have the greatest potential to threaten the ingroup's status, we expected Whites would be particularly averse to close, intimate social situations with low-SES White people.

To test these hypotheses, White participants reported their perceptions that low-SES White and low-SES Black people threaten the prestige of Whites generally. Participants then reported expectations of discomfort when in close and distant social situations with poor and middle-class White and Black people. We hypothesized low-SES White people would be perceived as a greater status threat than low-SES Black people. In addition, we predicted that the perception that low-SES Whites pose a status threat would be associated with increased social discomfort in anticipated contact with these individuals as compared with middle-class Whites. Moreover, we expected this effect would be particularly strong in close social situations. In contrast, we did not expect that perceptions of threat from low-SES Black people would be associated with greater discomfort regarding contact with low-SES Blacks compared with middle-class Black people.

Method

Participants and procedure. Sixty-two White American Mechanical Turk users (48% female; M_{age} = 36.40, *SD* = 12.02) participated for $0.30. Eight participants failed the study's attention check and were removed from analyses, leaving a final sample of 54 participants. Based on Study 1's effect size estimate, this sample sufficiently powered analyses.

Participants first completed four Likert-scaled items (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), which were then averaged to assess perceived status threat for low-SES White (α = .88) and low-SES Black people (α = .80). Sample status threat items included ("Poor White [Black] people in America threaten the general status of White Americans," "The prestige of middle- and upper-class White people is threatened by poor White [Black] people").

Participants then completed a series of Likert-scaled items indicating comfort (1 = *very uncomfortable*, 7 = *very comfortable*) with a series of close and distant social situations. Participants completed the same items for four groups, low-SES White [Black] and middle-class White [Black] target groups. Averaged composites for the socially close (e.g., "Having a poor White person marry into your immediate family") and distant (e.g., "Going to a restaurant that is mostly frequented by poor White people") situations each contained five items. Table 1 contains reliability analyses, means, and standard deviations for the social discomfort indices for the four target groups.

Results

We first tested whether low-SES White people were perceived as a greater status threat than low-SES Black people with a paired-samples *t*-test. As hypothesized, low-SES White people (*M* = 3.47, *SD* = 1.45) were perceived as a greater status threat than low-SES Black people (*M* = 2.78, *SD* = 1.26), $t(53) = 5.23$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.44, .98], $d = .51$.

Next, we conducted a 2 (target race: White/Black) × 2 (target class: low/middle-class) × 2(social context: close/distant) repeated-measures ANOVA to determine participants' expected social discomfort with target groups. To aid interpretability, comfort scores were reversed so that higher scores indicated discomfort. Results of this analysis yielded main effects of target race, target class, and social context, Fs > 15.00, ps < .001. Main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between target SES and social context, $F(1, 53) = 4.75$, $p = .034$, $\eta_p^2 = .082$, 95% CI [.00, .24]. Lower-order effects were further subsumed by the hypothesized three-way interaction between target race, target class, and social context, $F(1, 53) = 4.17$, $p = .046$, $\eta_p^2 = .073$, 95% CI [.00, .23].

The three-way interaction was decomposed with separate repeated-measures ANOVAs for White and Black targets in which class (low/middle) and social context (close/distant) were entered as within-subjects factors. Among White targets, there were significant main effects of class and social context, Fs > 15.00, ps < .001, and these main effects were qualified by the interaction between target class and social context, $F(1, 53) = 8.39$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$, 95% CI [.01, .31]. Paired-samples *t*-tests indicated that participants expected more discomfort in contact with low-SES Whites than middle-class Whites, and as hypothesized, this difference was particularly large for close contact situations (see Figure 4).

Table 1. Comparisons Between Target Race, Target Status, and Social Closeness on Participants' Ratings of Social Comfort.

	Low SES			Middle class			
Subscale	α	*M*	*SD*	α	*M*	*SD*	*t*-value
White; Close	.87	4.75_a	1.14	.92	5.83_a	1.00	8.21***
White; Distant	.94	5.01_b	1.23	.98	5.87_a	1.08	6.88***
Black; Close	.93	4.31_c	1.49	.94	5.21_b	1.38	6.92***
Black: Distant	.93	4.61_a	1.46	.94	5.43_c	1.20	6.13***

Note. Large values indicate greater expected social comfort. Differing subscripts within column indicate significant differences between traits at ^ < .05. *t*-values indicate comparisons across status. SES = socioeconomic status.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

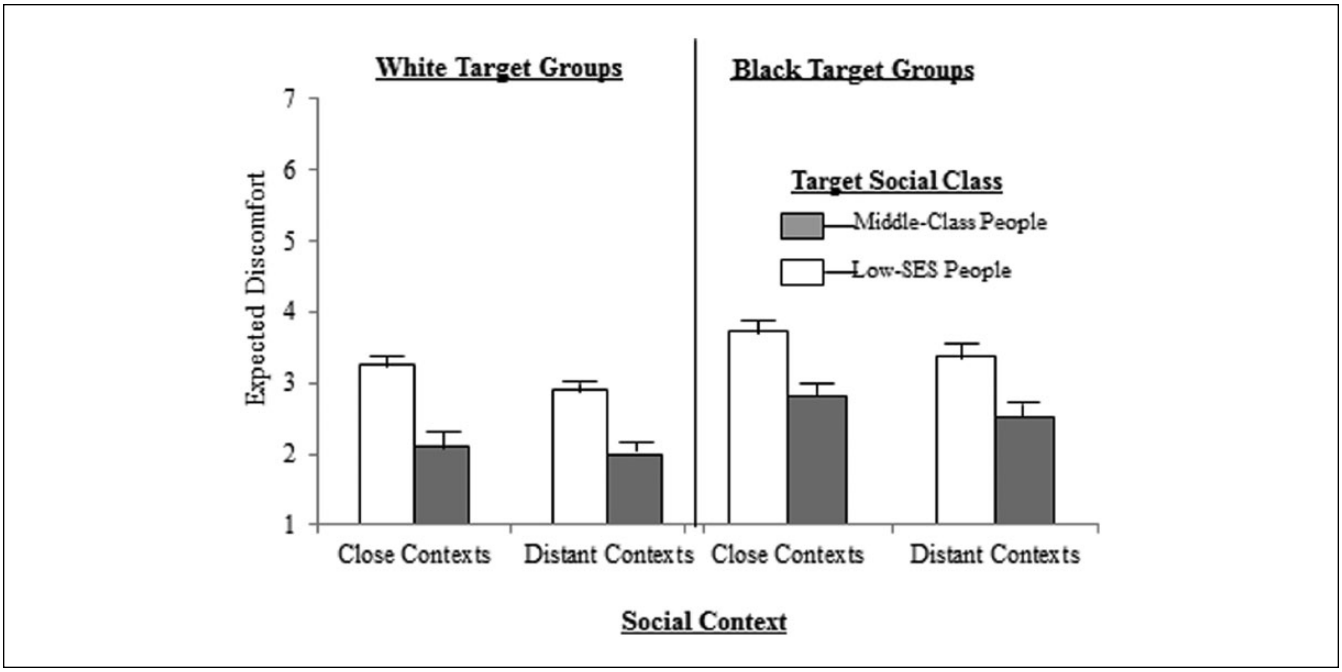

Figure 4. Expected discomfort as a function of target race, target SES, and social context.
Note. SES = socioeconomic status.

Among Black targets, main effects of target class and social context were again significant, but slightly smaller, *F*s > 10.00, *p*s ≤ .002. However, unlike White targets, the interaction between target class and social context was not significant, $F < 1.00$, $p > .50$. The current results not only indicate the effect of social class on discomfort was greater for White targets compared with Black targets, it also indicates that class moderated discomfort in close versus distant social contexts with White, but not Black targets.

When comparing low-SES White and Black target groups, in both close and distant contexts, participants expected more discomfort with low-SES Black targets than low-SES White targets, $p = .004$. This effect also extended to comparisons between middle-class White and Black target groups in socially close ($p < .001$) and distant contexts ($p = .001$). These effects suggest that regardless of class, White participants felt less comfortable with Black people than White people. However, among White targets, participants were less comfortable with low- than middle-class targets, particularly when the contact was close. In addition, the key question in the present study is whether bias against low-SES Whites reflects the perception that low-SES Whites represent a status threat. Therefore, we examined whether the increased discomfort regarding contact with low- versus middle-class White people was related to the perceived status threat posed by low-SES Whites.

To test the relationship between status threat and discomfort, we next computed within-race difference scores between low- and middle-class target groups for close and distant contexts (e.g., discomfort with low-SES Whites in close contexts = close contact with low-SES Whites—close contact with middle-class Whites).[3] Status threat regarding White and Black low-SES targets was then used to predict discomfort scores for White and Black target groups, respectively.

Among White targets, perceptions that low-SES Whites were a status threat predicted discomfort with low-SES Whites relative to middle-class White in both socially close, $t(52) = 3.46$, $\beta = .43$, $p = .001$, $r_{partial} = .43$, 95% CI [.14, .51], and distant social contexts, $t(52) = 2.71$, $\beta = .35$, $p = .009$, $r_{partial} = .35$, 95% CI [.07, .44]. By contrast, perceptions of low-SES Blacks as status threats did not significantly predict expected discomfort in close, $t(52) = 1.65$, $\beta = .22$, $p = .11$, $r_{partial} = .23$, 95% CI [−.04, .41], or distant, $t(52) = 1.30$, $\beta = .18$, $p = .20$, $r_{partial} = .18$, 95% CI [−.08, .38], social contexts with low-SES relative to middle-class Black people.

Discussion

The current study tested the hypothesis that low-SES White people are perceived as a threat to Whites' status and this perception of threat leads White people to anticipate discomfort in social situations with low-SES White people. The results provide direct support for this hypothesis. Low-SES White people were perceived as a greater threat to Whites' status than low-SES Black people, and these perceptions of threat predicted discomfort in close and distant social contexts with low-SES White relative to middle-class Whites. The more White people perceived low-SES ingroup members as a threat to the group's status, the more uncomfortable they expected to be in social contexts with low-SES relative to middle-class White people. Importantly, these effects were specific to low-SES White people and did not extend to discomfort with low-SES Black people. Although White participants expected more discomfort in interactions with low-SES Black than middle-class Black people, these effects were not related to perceived status threat. When considered in total, these findings provide direct evidence that low-SES White people are perceived as a threat to Whites' status and these perceptions of status threat motivate the desire for social distance from low-SES Whites relative to middle-class Whites.

Study 4

The primary goal of the final study was to build on the threat and distancing effects documented in Study 3 by directly manipulating status threat. We hypothesized that threatening Whites' status would amplify desires to distance themselves from low-SES ingroup members. If negative reactions toward low-SES Whites are fueled by status threat, concerns with subordination and low status should uniquely heighten distancing from low-SES ingroup—but not outgroup—members. To test this hypothesis, we manipulated threat and then measured responses to low-SES ingroup and outgroup members using a seating distance task. White participants were expected to distance themselves more from low-SES ingroup members when in a status threat condition compared with a non-threat control condition. We also anticipated that they would distance themselves more from a low-SES ingroup member than a low-SES outgroup member.

Recent research suggests outgroups tend to be associated with concerns with safety and self-protection (e.g., Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; S. L. Miller, Maner, & Becker, 2010). Thus, we expected that threats to physical safety would increase distancing directed toward low-SES outgroup members, but not low-SES ingroup members. Absent a threat manipulation, we were less certain what results to expect on the seating distance task, as both low-SES groups may be naturally threatening on some level, but for different reasons.

The current study also tested whether status threat's effect on ingroup distancing was moderated by racial ingroup identification (Collective Self-Esteem [CSE]). In keeping with Social Identity Theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986), highly identified group members should be the most motivated to protect their group's status, because group membership is central to personal identity. When status is threatened, these individuals should desire the greatest distance from low-SES ingroup members who undermine the ingroup's prestige, providing evidence for a motivated account of the ingroup distancing effect.

We manipulated threat at the individual level—as opposed to the group level—because personal status concerns were expected to represent the more proximal cause of social distancing. Moreover, as concerns with group status are theorized to shape responses via individual concerns (i.e., people are distressed by threats to the ingroup's status because such threats imply a decline in personal standing), we reasoned manipulating threat at the individual level provided the most direct test of the immediate relationship between status threat and social distance.

Method

Participants. White undergraduate students ($N = 102$; 74% female; $M_{age} = 19.35$, $SD = 1.06$) who were middle or upper-class (Hollingshead, 1965) completed the present study in exchange for course credit. Of this original sample, 18 participants were excluded from analyses for failing the study's manipulation check regarding the race, gender, or SES of their partner ($n = 9$) or expressing suspicion about their ostensible partner ($n = 9$). Using the effect estimate of Study 1, a post-hoc power analysis indicated this sample had 71% power to detect the predicted interactive effect of condition and ingroup identification.

Design and procedure. The current study had a 3(threat: status threat/safety threat/ neutral control) × 2(anticipated partner race: White/Black) between-subjects design. Participants arrived expecting to take part in two unrelated experiments. As part of the first study, participants completed one of three essays depending on experimental condition. Adapted from previous work on power and status (e.g., Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008), in the status threat condition participants wrote

about a time they were placed in a subordinate or low-status position. In the safety threat condition, participants wrote about a time they were afraid for their physical safety. In the control condition, participants wrote about the events of the previous day. All participants were asked to recall their thoughts and feelings in the event.

For the second ostensibly unrelated experiment, participants were told they would have a brief interaction with another student after forming a first impression of that individual. Participants completed a brief "getting to know you" questionnaire that presumably would serve as the basis for their and their partners' evaluations. The questionnaire featured demographic information (e.g., age, race, SES) and questions about life on campus (e.g., "What is your favorite class?"). Participants then exchanged information with their presumed partner. Depending on condition, participants learned that their partner was White or Black and from a low-SES background. On the demographic form, the ostensible partner reported being from a single parent home where his/her mother had a high school education and worked part time as a janitor.

To measure physical distance, the experimenter brought participants into a room where they were told they would interact with their partner. The experimenter asked participants to set up two chairs around a large conference table for their interaction with their partner. The space between these chairs was then surreptitiously measured to serve as an index of physical distance.

Participants then completed a questionnaire packet including the CSE Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The identity subscale of the CSE is a four-item measure on which participants responded to items on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale (e.g., "My racial group is an important reflection of who I am." A = .79). Following this questionnaire, participants were debriefed and exited the lab.

Results

A regression analysis was conducted on the seating distance variable. Condition was dummy coded to reflect comparisons between each of the threat conditions and the neutral control condition. The analysis included the condition dummy codes, anticipated partner race (Black, White), participants' racial ingroup identity, and all possible interactions as predictors. The analysis revealed no significant effects involving the code contrasting the control condition and the safety threat condition, suggesting that participants responded similarly across the control and safety threat conditions, ps > .25, Bs < .5.18 and > −5.10. The analysis revealed a significant two-way interaction between partner race and participants' ingroup identity, which was qualified by a three-way interaction involving the condition code comparing the status threat and control condition, partner race, and ingroup identity, $t(81) = 2.88$, $p = .01$, $r_{partial} = .33$, $B = 19.49$, 95% CI [6.00, 33.98].

Tests of simple effects revealed an effect of condition code among participants who were highly identified with their race and expected to interact with a White partner, $t(81) = 2.13$, $p = .04$, $r_{partial} = .25$, $B = 31.51$, 95% CI [1.94, 61.08], such that, consistent with predictions, participants in the status threat condition sat farther away from the low-SES White partner than did participants in the control condition. In contrast, highly identified White participants who expected to interact with a Black partner sat marginally further away in the control than the status threat condition, $t(81) = -1.98$, $p = .05$, $r_{partial} = -.23$, $B = -26.12$, 95% CI [−52.41, .17]. There was also an effect of condition among participants low in racial identification who expected to interact with a White partner, $t(81) = -2.01$, $p = .048$, $r_{partial} = -.23$, $B = -33.98$, 95% CI [−67.69, −.28], indicating that low-identified participants sat closer to their partner in the status threat compared with control condition. There were no significant effects for low-identified participants who expected to interact with a Black partner, $t(81) = 1.20$, $p = .234$, $r_{partial} = .14$, $B = 16.94$.

To examine these results another way, we explored the implications of partner race in each experimental condition. Among high-identified participants in the status threat condition, there was a simple effect of partner race, $t(23) = 2.33$, $p = .03$, $r_{partial} = .46$, $B = 24.20$, indicating that high-identified participants sat further away from the White than Black partner. In contrast, in the safety threat condition, highly identified participants sat further away from the Black than the White partner, $t(29) = -2.08$, $p = .048$, $r_{partial} = -.38$, $B = -25.58$. There were no significant simple effects of race for the low-identified participants across the conditions or for the high-identified participants in the control condition.

Discussion

The current study supported the hypothesis that status concerns lead some White people to distance themselves from low-SES ingroup members. Among highly identified Whites, a status threat increased the physical distance participants desired from a low-SES White partner compared with those in the control condition. In addition, identified Whites whose status was threatened sat further away from low-SES partners they expected to be White compared with Black. These results suggest that group identification plays a role in determining responses to low-SES ingroup members. Status threat only elicited a distancing response toward low-SES ingroup members for Whites who were highly identified with their race.

Ingroup identification's moderating effect on the present findings also provides additional evidence for the motivational underpinnings of the ingroup distancing effect. In keeping with motivational research on Social Identity Theory, highly identified ingroup members should be the most driven to maintain their group's status and prestige. Consistent with this theorizing, when status was threatened, Whites highly identified with their race desired the greatest

distance from low-SES ingroup partners. Moreover, although these data are consistent with a motivational account, they are not easily explained by broad theories of class-based prejudice that predict general disdain for low-SES people. Concerns with status and group identity jointly influenced negative responses to low-SES White people.

Results also illustrated that status threats produced unique responses to ingroup and outgroup members among people highly identified with their race. These responses were distinct from other forms of threat such as safety concerns. Whereas status threat led identified participants to sit further away from a low-SES ingroup relative to outgroup partners, safety threat had the opposite effect and led identified Whites to sit closer to low-SES ingroup versus outgroup partners. When concerns with status are salient, identified individuals may avoid low-SES ingroup members to avoid stigma by association. However, when concerned with safety, identified individuals may look to ingroup members as a source of protection and affiliation.

General Discussion

Unlike many forms of modern prejudice, classism is tolerated throughout contemporary society. Moreover, for low-SES White people, derogation is both pervasive and frequently comes at the hands of racial ingroup members. The current data provide convergent evidence that much of Whites' negativity toward low-SES ingroup members is a motivated response to protect the racial ingroup's status and prestige. In response to perceived status threats, we hypothesized that Whites would derogate and distance themselves psychologically and physically from low-SES ingroup members. We termed this response the ingroup distancing effect.

Findings from four studies using multiple methods and operationalizations of social distance provided evidence consistent with this ingroup distancing effect. In Study 1, White people showed significant impairments in their ability to categorize low-SES White targets as racial ingroup members. Paradoxically, White participants significantly underestimated the number of low-SES White targets they had seen, the very targets they had viewed the longest. These findings suggest that feelings of invisibility reported by low-SES people (e.g., Lott, 2002) may reflect an accurate perception of reality. Providing additional support, compared with those primed with control or low-SES Black targets, White participants in Study 2 primed with low-SES White targets overestimated their subjective SES, increasing the psychological distance between themselves and low-SES Whites. In conjunction with Study 1, these results suggest that psychological distancing characterizes both Whites' automatic (racial categorization) and controlled (SES ratings) responses to low-SES ingroup members.

Central to the ingroup distancing effect, Study 3 demonstrated that White participants explicitly viewed low-SES Whites as threats to the status and prestige of Whites generally. Moreover, perceptions of low-SES White people as status threats were associated with expected discomfort in social situations with low-SES White people compared with middle-class Whites. Importantly, although participants expected greater discomfort with Black than White people overall, the link between perceived status threat and discomfort did not extend to low-SES Black people. Study 3, therefore, provides direct evidence that low-SES White people are perceived as status threats and these perceptions of threat result in expected discomfort in social interactions with low-SES White (but not low-SES Black) people.

Finally, Study 4 tested whether status threats lead White people to physically distance themselves from low-SES ingroup members. When primed with a status threat, White people who strongly identified with their race sat further away from a low-SES White partner than control participants. Furthermore, within the status threat condition, highly identified White participants sat further away from a low-SES White than a low-SES Black partner. These results demonstrate the specificity of the ingroup distancing effect by providing evidence that (a) status threat enhances the physical distance Whites desire from low-SES ingroup members, (b) these results are unique to low-SES ingroup members and do not generalize to low-SES outgroup members, and (c) this response was specific to highly identified Whites. When viewed in conjunction with the other studies, these results provide comprehensive empirical support for the hypothesis that concerns with status lead White people to distance, derogate, and deny low-SES ingroup members.

Implications

Responding to the APA's call for research on classism, the current findings provide insight into prejudice against low-SES White people—an under-examined group that faces a virulent form of prejudice—and clarify why this form of prejudice may be particularly prevalent among White people. In doing so, the present work extends research on inter- and intragroup processes, status, and hierarchy by enhancing our understanding of how target race and SES interact to jointly shape prejudice and discrimination. Social class influences personal and professional outcomes that range from physical health to educational and professional advancement (e.g., Ehrenreich, 2001; Griskevicius et al., 2013; Lott, 2002). Yet, despite these various effects, surprisingly little empirical research has investigated the interaction of race and class-based prejudice (see Shriver & Hugenberg, 2010, for exceptions). The current work addresses this gap in the research literature and suggests that social class has implications for a range of psychological and social processes, shaping the way people think about and respond to others. Despite sharing a common racial ingroup, Whites derogated and distanced themselves both physically and psychologically from low-SES Whites.

The current work also enhances knowledge of multiple group membership's effect on racial categorization. Research suggests race can be categorized almost instantaneously (Ito & Urland, 2003). Some have taken these findings to suggest that racial categorization relies on rigid phenotypic criteria. Considerably less research has investigated how multiple group memberships interact to influence racial categorization. The results from Study 1 suggest that status cues can shape automatic processes and bias even the most basic of ingroup category judgments (see also Freeman, Penner, Saperstein, Scheutz, & Ambady, 2011). Moreover, they imply that motivated processes, like the desire to maintain positive perceptions of the ingroup, impact automatic responses to ingroup members.

These studies also contribute to psychologists' understanding of dominant or majority-group identity. Although research on stereotypes and prejudice have frequently cited the important role of group identification for intergroup processes (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986), most of this work has focused on group identification's effect on the experience of prejudice among minority-group members (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002; Pinel, 1999; see Knowles & Peng, 2005 for exception). Collectively, the current findings extend research on group identity by providing evidence for identification's effect on majority-group members' social responses toward racial ingroup members.

The current work also extends research on psychological strategies for protecting the ingroup from deviant group members. Although extensive work has established that people strive to protect the integrity of a variety of ingroups (e.g., race, ethnicity, profession, education), little research has tested the specific dimensions that trigger ingroup protective strategies like the "black sheep effect" (see Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988; Pinto, Marques, Levine, & Abrams, 2010, for exceptions). The current work provides empirical evidence for one such dimension and suggests that status is a closely guarded ingroup foundation for dominant social groups.

Findings from these studies also contribute to research at the intersection of power, status, stereotyping, and prejudice. Whereas past work on power's effect on intergroup dynamics has primarily focused on the actions of those in power (Fiske, 1993; Richeson & Ambady, 2003), Study 4 suggests the experience of low-power can also shape responses to ingroup and outgroup members. When status was threatened by feelings of subordination, highly identified Whites sought greater distance from low-SES ingroup compared with low-SES outgroup partners. These results add to research on power and prejudice by suggesting that the experience of both high- *and* low-power can shape intra- and intergroup dynamics.

The findings of Study 4 also complement and extend functional approaches to intergroup dynamics and hierarchy in two significant ways (e.g., Correll & Park, 2005; Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005). First, these results provide empirical evidence that distinct forms of threat (i.e., status and safety threats) elicit unique responses to *both* ingroup and outgroup members. Whereas past work has highlighted negative responses toward outgroup members when self-protective motives are activated (e.g., Miller, Zielaskowski, & Plant, 2012; Schaller, Park, & Mueller, 2003), far less work has looked at status threat's effect on intergroup dynamics (e.g., Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005; Mallett, Huntsinger, & Swim, 2011, Study 4), and prior research has not yet tested status threat's effect on responses to ingroup members. The present research addresses this empirical gap to provide experimental evidence that safety and status threats elicit distinct, functional responses to low-SES ingroup and outgroup members. When concerns with status were high, identified Whites distanced themselves from those that would undermine the ingroup's prestige. Conversely, when concerns with safety were salient, identified Whites approached fellow ingroup members and distanced themselves from low-SES outgroup members.

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations of the current work provide useful avenues for future research. Although the current work provides evidence that White people respond to low-SES Whites with distance and derogation, future work would benefit from testing whether the ingroup distancing effect is unique to White people's responses or whether they generalize to other high-status groups. It could be that members of high-status groups evince a similar status-based bias toward low-status ingroup members. For example, Asian stereotypes share many of the high-status traits associated with Whites (e.g., educated, hard-working); thus, Asians might evince a similar form of status-based bias against low-SES Asians. We suspect that the ingroup distancing effect would occur for any social group that perceives a subsection of the ingroup as damaging collective status.

Future research would also benefit by testing the effect of individual differences in SES on Whites' responses to low-SES ingroup members. Participants in the current work were primarily university students and data from Studies 2 and 4 suggest participants were from predominantly middle- to upper-class homes. Thus, it could be that low-SES Whites respond to other low-SES White individuals differently than people from affluent backgrounds. However, it is unclear whether responses from low-SES Whites will be more or less negative than upper-class Whites. Recent research suggests that low-SES individuals tend to value social relationships more than high-SES individuals (Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, & Keltner, 2012; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010, for review). Hence, affiliative motives may drive low-SES White people to respond favorably to other low-SES individuals. Alternatively, there is also reason to predict that low-status threatens low-SES

individuals more than high-SES individuals (e.g., Kraus, Horberg, Goetz, & Keltner, 2011). For example, Kraus and colleagues (2011) found that reminders of low-status had more negative effects on low-SES than high-SES individuals. Thus, compared with high-SES Whites, low-SES White people may have more negative responses to other low-SES White targets because they remind low-SES White people of their subordinate status.

Concluding Remarks

SES influences a vast array of outcomes that range from treatment in stores, schools, and society to physical health and mental well-being. For low-SES Whites, much experienced negativity and prejudice comes at the hands of fellow ingroup members. The current work tested whether concerns with ingroup status motivates White people's negative responses to low-SES White people. These studies suggest that White people associate low-SES ingroup members with threats to ingroup status and respond to these individuals with distance, derogation, and denial. In a sense, for some White people, social class seems to define the racial ingroup. For these individuals, White people are wealthy. White people are not poor. Beyond advancing an understanding of how class influences prejudice and discrimination, these results also have rather dour implications for helping alleviate issues of poverty in the United States. Whereas in many interpersonal contexts, White people can count on help and assistance from fellow ingroup members, the current studies suggest that when it comes to SES, class differences seem to trump racial similarities and the wealthy Whites most capable of helping low-SES ingroup members are the least likely to do so.

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Notes

1. For more on racial stereotypes and the sport of basketball see Stone, Perry, and Darley (1997). Pilot testing revealed that basketball ability was more strongly associated with the stereotype of Black (M = 6.47, SD = .74) than White (M = 3.20, SD = 1.21) people, $t(14) = 8.25$, $p < .001$. For Whites, these ratings were significantly below the scale mid-point, $t(14) = -2.57$, $p = .02$, suggesting that basketball ability is counterstereotypic for Whites. In contrast, "wealthy" was more strongly associated with the stereotype of Whites ($M = 5.87$, $SD = .64$) than Blacks ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .99$), $t(14) = 8.66$, $p < .001$. The effect sizes for "wealthy" ($d = 3.29$) and "basketball ability" ($d = 3.31$) indicated that the stereotypic racial disparities regarding wealth and basketball are similar in magnitude.
2. It is worth noting that if household socioeconomic status (SES) was not included as a covariate, the results were similar in pattern and significance, for example, prime condition: $F(2, 113) = 3.57$, $p = .031$.
3. Perceptions that low-SES Whites are a status threat also predict expected discomfort in close, $t(52) = 3.00$, $\beta = .38$, $p = .004$, $r_{partial} = .38$, 95% confidence interval [CI] [.10, .53], and distant, $t(52) = 1.98$, $\beta = .27$, $p = .053$, $r_{partial} = .27$, 95% CI [−.003, .444], contexts with low-SES White people.

Supplemental Material

The online supplemental material is available at http://pspb.sagepub.com/supplemental

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