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What is This?

Appeasement: Whites' Strategic Support for Affirmative Action

Rosalind M. Chow[1], Brian S. Lowery[2], and Caitlin M. Hogan[3]

Abstract

This article explores the possibility that dominant-group members will attempt to appease subordinate groups to protect the hierarchy. In four studies, we find that (a) prohierarchy Whites perceive more intergroup threat when they believe ethnic minorities hold Whites in low regard, (b) prohierarchy Whites respond to ethnic minorities' low regard for Whites by increasing their support for redistributive policies (e.g., affirmative action), (c) the increase in support only occurs when prohierarchy Whites perceive the hierarchy to be unstable, and (d) prohierarchy Whites perceive the hierarchy to be more stable if they believe Whites support redistributive policies. These results suggest that prohierarchy dominant-group members' support for redistributive policies can stem from a concern about maintaining the hierarchical status quo, and provides evidence that support for redistributive policies can be a hierarchy-enhancing strategy.

It's good to be on top. For example, the dominant ethnic group in the United States, Whites, make more money, receive better treatment by the educational establishment and in job and retail markets, and have relatively little negative contact with the criminal justice system (Brown et al., 2003; Kozol, 1991; Loury, 2002; Massey & Denton, 1993; Oliver & Shapiro, 1995; Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2003). Not surprisingly, some members of dominant groups are motivated to protect this status quo. These individuals use myriad tactics to safeguard existing systems that favor their group, such as endorsing ideologies that legitimize existing inequalities (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, 2004) and opposing policies they perceive to undermine their dominant position in the hierarchy (Bobo, 2000; Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, 2006; Sears, Henry, & Kosterman, 2000; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius, Singh, Hetts, & Federico, 2000).

We posit the existence of a hierarchy-maintenance tactic that has received little attention: appeasement. Specifically, we predict that when groups perceive intergroup threat, they will engage in appeasement behaviors that, on the surface, appear to be hierarchy-attenuating but are actually designed to prevent or reduce threats to the existing hierarchy. We examine this possibility by investigating White Americans' intergroup attitudes. We hypothesize that prohierarchy Whites believe that minorities' negative attitudes toward Whites indicate a potential threat to Whites' dominant position in the hierarchy. We suggest that the perceptions of threat elicited by this interpretation of negative ethnic minority attitudes can result in attempts to appease minorities with increased support for measures believed to benefit minorities. Thus, prohierarchy Whites might engage in behaviors that seem to attenuate the hierarchy, when in truth they intend to enhance, or at least stabilize, the hierarchy.

Hierarchy Maintenance Through Consent

Once established, social hierarchies tend to be more stable, durable, and free of conflict than one might expect if their achievement and maintenance were simply due to coercion by the dominant group (Gould, 2002), suggesting that subordinate groups' willingness to accept their subordinate posi-

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tion is critical to the maintenance of hierarchy. The possibility that subordinate groups are complicit in their own subordination has sparked research on how subordinate-group members may be motivated to justify the status quo (e.g., Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004) and highlights the importance of the subordinate group's willingness to accept the status quo (Gramsci, 1975/2007; Marx & Engels, 1848/2011; Mosca, 1896/1939).

Subordinate groups' willingness to accept their low status position goes a long way toward keeping the hierarchy stable, but this comes with the cost of poor group outcomes linked to low status, which might eventually lead subordinate groups to challenge the status quo (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Jackman, 1994; Reicher & Haslam, 2006; Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For this reason, it behooves prohierarchy dominant-group members to be attuned to subordinate-group attitudes toward the dominant group and to respond appropriately; effective hierarchy maintenance might require active management of subordinate-group members' perceptions of the hierarchy and attitudes toward the dominant group. Consistent with the importance of subordinate-group attitudes, groups that disapprove of the dominant group are more likely to challenge the status quo (Jackman, 1994; also see Saguy et al., 2009). Thus, an interest in maintaining the hierarchy might produce a tendency among dominant groups to monitor subordinate-group attitudes and attempt to cultivate positive attitudes toward the dominant group (Jackman, 1994).

Consistent with this hypothesis, research suggests that dominant-group members are motivated to maintain positive relationships with members of subordinate groups. For example, in interracial interactions, Whites are motivated to be liked and seen as moral, and highly biased Whites are also more likely to regulate their behavior during interracial interactions (Shelton, 2003; Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005). Moreover, dominant-group members prefer to focus on commonalities and avoid topics that highlight differences in power when engaging with subordinate-group members, thereby fostering positive social interactions (Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008). Taken as a whole, this evidence suggests that some Whites might be motivated to avoid topics and behaviors they believe might anger minorities. Of course, these behaviors are not necessarily in service of hierarchy maintenance; however, this pattern of behavior is consistent with a model of hierarchy maintenance based on cultivating positive subordinate-group attitudes.

Appeasement

At its core, appeasement is the granting of concessions in an attempt to placate a party that poses a threat to something of value to the appeaser. Social psychological work on appeasement has focused on the possibility that individuals will engage in behaviors to maintain or repair desired relationships

(Keltner, Young, & Buswell, 1997). This work differs from the present work in that in the interpersonal context, a threat to the relationship between the appeaser and the target of the appeasement motivates appeasement behavior. In contrast, in our work, perceived threats to the hierarchy motivate appeasement behavior. We conceptualize intergroup appeasement as a prohierarchy strategy designed to reduce the threat of unrest from subordinate groups, so that existing hierarchies can be maintained. Specifically, we propose that dominant groups might seek to appease subordinate groups, and thus stabilize the hierarchy, by supporting redistributive policies that benefit subordinate groups. In our formulation, the immediate effect of the dominant group's actions might belie the long-term intended consequences. In other words, whether an action should be understood as hierarchy-enhancing or hierarchy-attenuating cannot necessarily be determined by the most proximal outcome of the action.

To our knowledge, there is no social psychological research on this conceptualization of appeasement, but other social sciences provide theoretical precedent. For example, the theory of interest-convergence posits that all actions taken by the dominant group, even those that appear to be driven by a sense of moral propriety, are designed to serve the dominant group's material interest (Bell, 1980). Proponents of this theory argue that in the United States, elite Whites' concern for the United States' international standing drove racial desegregation more than concerns about the moral bankruptcy of racial segregation (Dudziak, 2000). Similarly, in an attempt to understand why elites would dilute their power by extending the franchise, some economic models suggest that elites weigh the cost of the expanded franchise against the cost of social unrest, and only extend voting rights when this analysis suggests that doing otherwise would be too costly (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006; Lizzeri & Persico, 2004). Both of these theoretical perspectives highlight the possibility that dominant groups might act strategically, engaging in behavior that appears to contradict their immediate material interests in an effort to maintain the integrity of the hierarchy.

Social psychological research also supports the possibility that Whites will sometimes act against their presumed short-term interests to bolster the legitimacy of the hierarchy. For example, evidence suggests that some prohierarchy Whites might have voted for the United States' first Black president because they believed that doing so would undermine complaints of racism, a charge that challenges the legitimacy of Whites' dominant status (Knowles, Lowery, & Schaumberg, 2009). Thus, in addition to the broad social analysis and theoretical models offered by legal scholars and economists, empirical psychological work provides preliminary evidence that prohierarchy Whites might act against their short-term interest in an effort to buttress their groups' position in the long term. In this article, we extend this theoretical line to focus on how dominant groups might

engage in behaviors that are designed to foster positive relationships between the dominant group and subordinate groups, in the service of maintaining hierarchical differences.

In the present work, we study the possibility of appeasement by focusing specifically on the policy attitudes of White Americans toward race-based affirmative action policies, which are defined as organizational policies that are designed to improve employment or educational outcomes for ethnic minorities (cf. Shteynberg, Leslie, Knight, & Mayer, 2010). A significant amount of research suggests that Whites' attitudes toward affirmative action policies are strongly negative (Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006; Kinder, 1986; Kluegel & Bobo, 1993; McConahay, 1982; Myrdal, 1944; Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986). Moreover, opposition to affirmative action policies is particularly strong among prohierarchy Whites, which suggests that prohierarchy Whites' opposition stems from a desire to maintain the in-group's dominant position within the social hierarchy (Federico & Sidanius, 2002; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Kluegel & Bobo, 1993; Lowery et al., 2006; Sears & Funk, 1990; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Yet our conceptualization of appeasement suggests that despite their tendency to oppose affirmative action, when prohierarchy dominant-group members perceive their group to be held in low regard by subordinate groups, they might increase their support for affirmative action policies in an attempt to appease subordinate groups, and thereby minimize the threat to the stability of the existing hierarchy.

Overview of Studies

We conducted four studies that examine the way ethnic minority groups' attitudes toward Whites, the dominant ethnic group in the United States, affects Whites' perception of intergroup threat and their attitudes toward affirmative action. To assess Whites' attitudes toward hierarchy, we measured their social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

In Study 1, we tested the hypothesis that prohierarchy White Americans will engage in a strategy of appeasement in response to low subordinate-group regard for the dominant group. Study 2 examined the possibility that prohierarchy Whites interpret low subordinate-group regard as evidence of intergroup threat. Studies 3 and 4 provide additional evidence that the appeasement behavior is due to a desire to stabilize the hierarchy by demonstrating that appeasement only occurs when the hierarchy is said to be unstable, and that prohierarchy Whites believe that in-group support for redistributive policies will stabilize the hierarchy. Taken in total, our results suggest that prohierarchy Whites will increase their support for affirmative action policies when they perceive the hierarchy to be under threat, and that this support for affirmative action policies is driven by their desire to maintain the existing hierarchy.

Study 1

In Study 1, we tested the prediction that Whites with relatively high SDO scores would be more supportive of affirmative action policies when they perceive ethnic minorities to harbor negative attitudes toward their group, compared with when they perceive ethnic minorities to have positive attitudes toward Whites.

Method

Participants. One hundred and thirteen self-identified White participants (88 women, 25 men) ranging in age from 19 to 70 years ($M = 37.96$, $SD = 10.91$) were recruited from an online panel maintained by a private California university. They were sent a $5 gift certificate for their participation.

Procedure. Participants were emailed a link to the study website. After linking to the site, participants were told that, as part of an effort to document how Americans' social attitudes have changed over time, the online session would consist of a survey of social attitudes. They were then exposed to information that suggested that Blacks' attitudes were becoming more negative or more positive. Participants then completed measures of their attitudes toward hierarchy and their support for affirmative action policies.

Materials, Manipulations, and Measured Variables. All participants were told that, prior to indicating their own social attitudes, they should consider the results of contemporary research on Americans' social attitudes. Our manipulation of subordinate-group regard was embedded in the description of research.

Subordinate-group regard manipulation. Participants in the *High regard* condition read, "In 2008, researchers conducted a personal phone interview survey of 1,374 U.S. households. Some of the questions included in the survey asked about perceptions of other races. Of the households called that were Black, the majority indicated that their attitudes toward Whites are more positive than they were 10 years ago." Participants in the *Low regard* condition read identical information, except that Blacks' attitudes toward Whites were described as "more negative."[1]

Attitudes toward hierarchy. After reading the description of Blacks' attitudes toward the dominant group, participants were asked to complete a four-item measure of SDO used in previous research (Sidanius, Pratto, Sinclair, & van Laar, 1996). The items were as follows: "It is not really that big a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others"; "This country would be better off if inferior groups stayed in their place"; "If we treated people more equally, we would have fewer problems in this country" (reverse-scored); and "To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups of people" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*, α = .69).

Affirmative action support. To assess support for affirmative action policies, participants were asked, "How much do you support affirmative action policies?" (1 = *strongly oppose*, 7 = *strongly support*).

Demographic information. Prior to concluding the study, participants were asked a series of demographic questions. To measure political conservatism, participants were asked to indicate their overall political orientation (1 = *extremely liberal*, 7 = *extremely conservative*). They were also asked to indicate their level of education (1 = *less than high school*, 2 = *high school student*, 3 = *high school graduate*, 4 = *college student*, 5 = *college graduate*, 6 = *graduate student*, 7 = *completed graduate school*).

Results

Preliminary Analyses. Participants, on average, had some college education ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.25$) and were politically moderate ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.65$). Gender, education, and political orientation did not moderate any of the results reported in the article, and are therefore not discussed further.

We first tested the possibility that our manipulation of subordinate-group regard also influenced participants' levels of SDO. An independent samples *t* test revealed no effect of the manipulation on participants' levels of SDO, $t < 1$.

Main Analyses. Our primary hypothesis was that Whites with relatively high SDO levels would support affirmative action more when they were led to believe that Blacks had low regard for Whites than when they were led to believe that Blacks had high regard for Whites. To test this hypothesis, we first effects-coded the subordinate-group regard manipulation (1 = *low regard*, −1 = *high regard*), mean-centered the SDO measure, and then multiplied them to create an interaction term (Aiken & West, 1991). We then regressed affirmative action support on the subordinate-group regard manipulation, SDO measure, and their interaction term. The subordinate-group regard manipulation did not significantly affect affirmative action support, $t < 1$. However, the higher participants' levels of SDO, the less they supported affirmative action, $B = -.33$, $SE\ B = .16$, $\beta = -.19$, $t(109) = 2.04$, $p < .05$. Importantly, we also found the predicted subordinate-group regard × SDO interaction on affirmative action support, $B = .49$, $SE\ B = .16$, $\beta = .28$, $t(109) = 3.04$, $p < .005$, see Figure 1.

To visualize this interaction, we plotted the effect of subordinate-group regard on affirmative action support at high (+1 *SD*) and low (−1 *SD*) levels of SDO (Aiken & West, 1991). As predicted, these analyses revealed that high-SDO Whites supported affirmative action policies more in the *low regard* than in the *high regard* condition, $B = .46$, $SE\ B = .22$, $\beta = .27$, $t(109) = 2.14$, $p < .05$. In contrast, low-SDO Whites supported affirmative action policies more in the *high regard* than in the *low regard* condition, $B = -.47$, $SE\ B = .22$, $\beta = -.28$, $t(109) = 2.20$, $p < .05$.

Alternatively, analyses conducted at the different levels of the subordinate-group regard manipulation revealed that in the
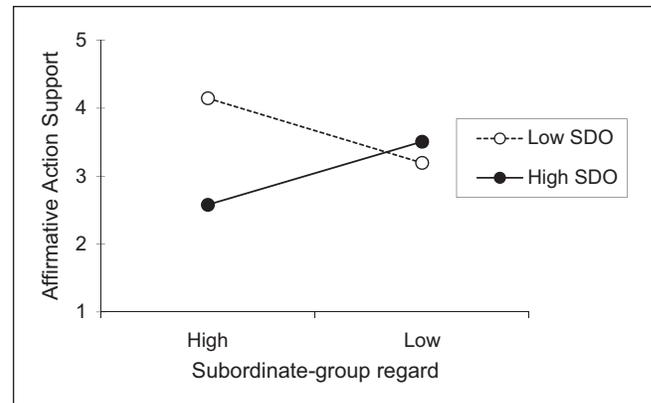

Figure 1. Affirmative action support as a function of subordinate-group regard condition and SDO (Study 1)
Note: SDO = social dominance orientation.

high regard condition, higher levels of SDO were associated with less support for affirmative action policies, $B = -.82$, $SE\ B = .21$, $\beta = -.46$, $t(109) = 3.87$, $p < .001$. In contrast, SDO was not associated with affirmative action support in the *low regard* condition, $B = .16$, $SE\ B = .24$, $\beta = .09$, $t < 1$, $p = .51$.

Discussion

Study 1 provides evidence that prohierarchy dominant-group members will increase their support for redistributive policies when they believe a subordinate-group holds them in low regard. Interestingly, low-SDO participants reduced their support for affirmative action policies when they were told that Blacks harbor negative attitudes toward Whites, suggesting an unwillingness to help those who view their group negatively.

From our perspective, appeasement behavior is a response among dominant-group members to concerns about subordinate groups' propensity to challenge the status quo. Thus, we would expect prohierarchy dominant-group members to interpret low subordinate-group regard for the dominant group as an indicator of potential intergroup threat and respond to these perceptions with appeasement. These hypotheses are explored in Studies 2 and 3.

Study 2

In Study 2, we tested the hypothesis that prohierarchy dominant-group members perceive negative subordinate-group attitudes toward the dominant group to be an indicator of potential intergroup threat.

Method

Participants. Ninety-five self-identified White participants (66 women, 29 men) ranging in age from 19 to 70 years ($M = 39.95$, $SD = 12.35$) were recruited from an online panel maintained by a private California university and were

entered into a drawing for $25 gift certificate. Participants were moderate in political orientation (*M* = 3.98. *SD* = 1.54) and, on average, had completed their college education (*M* = 4.95, *SD* = 1.31).

Procedure. Procedures were similar to those used in Study 1. After reading a description of research that depicted Black attitudes as being either positive or negative toward Whites, participants completed measures of their attitudes toward hierarchy and of their perceptions of potential intergroup threat from Blacks.

Materials, Manipulations, and Measured Variables. All participants were told that, prior to beginning the study, they should consider the results of contemporary research on social issues.

Subordinate-group regard manipulation. Participants in the *high regard* condition were told, "Researchers at Stanford University recently conducted a personal interview survey of 1,374 U.S. households. Interestingly, the poll indicates that Blacks' attitudes toward Whites are more positive than they were 10 years ago." Participants in the *low regard* condition were given the same information, except that Blacks' attitudes toward Whites were more negative.

Attitudes toward hierarchy. Participants completed the same four-item measure of SDO used in Study 1 (α = .61).

Perceived intergroup threat. To measure participants' perceptions of intergroup threat, they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following two items: "The more aggressively Blacks pursue political clout, the less political power Whites will have" and "Many Blacks have been trying to get ahead economically at the expense of Whites" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*, *r* = .56, *p* < .001).

Demographic information. To measure political conservatism and education levels, participants were asked to complete the same measures used in Study 1.

Results

Preliminary Analyses. We first tested the possibility that our manipulation of subordinate-group attitudes also influenced participants' levels of SDO. An independent samples *t* test of the effect of the regard manipulation on SDO revealed no effect of the manipulation, *high regard* (*M* = 2.74, *SD* = .94), *low regard* (*M* = 2.49, *SD* = .81), *t*(93) = 1.44, *p* = .15.

Main Analyses. We hypothesized that perceptions of negative attitudes among Blacks would increase prohierarchy Whites' perceptions of threat, but would have no effect on antihierarchy Whites. To test this possibility, we effects-coded the subordinate-group regard manipulation (1 = *low regard*, −1 = *high regard*), mean-centered the SDO measure, and multiplied them to create an interaction term (Aiken & West, 1991). We then regressed perceived threat on subordinate-group regard, SDO, and their interaction. There was no main
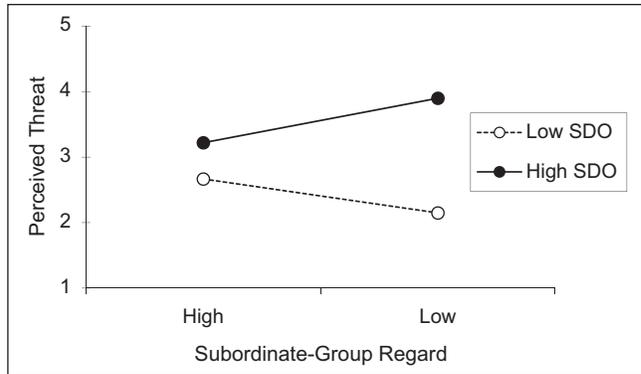

Figure 2. Perceived intergroup threat as a function of subordinate-group regard condition and SDO (Study 2)
Note: SDO = social dominance orientation.

effect of subordinate-group regard on perceived threat, *t* < 1. However, there was a main effect of SDO, such that the higher participants' levels of SDO, the more threat they perceived, *B* = .66, *SE B* = .13, β = .47, *t*(91) = 5.25, *p* < .001. Importantly, in support of our hypothesis, there was also a significant subordinate-group regard × SDO interaction on perceived threat, *B* = .34, *SE B* = .13, β = .24, *t*(91) = 2.73, *p* <.01, see Figure 2.

To visualize this interaction, we plotted the effect of subordinate-group regard on perceived threat at relatively high (+ 1 *SD*) versus low (− 1 *SD*) levels of SDO. Simple slope analyses revealed that for high-SDO Whites, perceived threat was higher in the *low regard* than in the *high regard* condition, *B* = .34, *SE B* = .15, β = .28, *t*(91) = 2.20, *p* <.05. Low-SDO Whites, on the other hand, did not differ in their perceptions of threat as a function of the regard manipulation, *B* = −.26, *SE B* = .16, β = −.21, *t*(91) = 1.66, *p* = .10.

We also conducted simple slope analyses across the subordinate-group regard conditions. These analyses revealed that among participants in the *low regard* condition, SDO was positively associated with perceptions of threat, *B* = 1.00, *SE B* = .18, β = .71, *t*(91) = 5.71, *p* < .001. However, this tendency was significantly weaker among participants in the *high regard* condition, *B* = .32, *SE B* = .18, β = .26, *t*(91) = 1.76, *p* = .08.

Discussion

In Study 2, we found that prohierarchy Whites perceive higher levels of potential threat to their dominant position when they believe that Blacks hold them in low regard. In contrast, antihierarchy Whites' perceptions of Blacks' attitudes toward Whites did not affect the extent to which they perceived Blacks to pose a threat to Whites' dominant position.

To this point, we have provided evidence that prohierarchy dominant-group members (a) respond to negative subordinate-group regard for the dominant group by increasing their support for redistributive policies and (b) perceive

negative subordinate-group regard for the in-group to be an indicator of potential intergroup threat. These findings are consistent with the possibility that prohierarchy Whites will support affirmative action policies in an attempt to appease restive ethnic minority groups and thus, by extension, maintain existing inequalities. However, it stands to reason that if the hierarchy is stable and unlikely to change, prohierarchy Whites will not respond to negative minority attitudes toward the dominant group by increasing their support for affirmative action policies; appeasement is not necessary if minorities do not pose a *credible* threat to the hierarchy. Study 3 was designed to test this possibility.

Study 3

In Study 3, we test the prediction that high-SDO Whites will only respond to negative attitudes of minorities with increased support for affirmative action when the hierarchy is perceived to be unstable. We did this by manipulating participants' perceptions of hierarchy instability and measuring participants' perceptions of subordinate-group regard for the dominant group.

Method

Participants. Sixty-two self-identified White participants (47 women, 15 men) ranging in age from 20 to 72 years ($M = 39.32$, $SD = 11.54$) were recruited from an online panel maintained by a private California university and were entered into a drawing for a \$10 gift certificate. Their levels of political conservatism were moderate ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.80$), and on average, participants had some college education ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.26$).

Procedure. Participants first read a description of recent research that indicated that social hierarchy in America was either stable or unstable. After reading the description of research, participants completed measures of their attitudes toward hierarchy, their perceptions of subordinate-group regard for the dominant group, and their support for affirmative action policies.

Materials, Manipulations, and Measured Variables

Hierarchy stability manipulation. All participants were told that, prior to beginning the study, they should consider the results of contemporary research on social issues. Participants in the *stable hierarchy* condition read, "Researchers have concluded that it is unlikely that the distribution of income and political power within the United States will change substantially within the next 10 years." Participants in the *unstable hierarchy* condition read, "Researchers have concluded that it is likely that the distribution of income and political power within the United States will change substantially within the next 10 years."

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Variables in Study 3

Variable	M	SD	1	2
SDO	2.56	1.00		
Perceived subordinate-group regard	5.17	0.86	−.14	
Affirmative action support	3.47	1.54	−.43***	−.06

Note: SDO = social dominance orientation.
***$p < .01$.

Attitudes toward hierarchy. We assessed participants' attitudes toward hierarchy with the same four-item SDO scale used in the previous studies ($\alpha = .64$).

Perceived subordinate-group regard. To assess White participants' perceptions of ethnic minorities' regard for Whites, we administered a modified version of the four-item Public Regard subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). These items were designed to assess how positively or negatively participants perceive their racial group to be evaluated by other groups. The measure consisted of the following items: "Overall, my racial/ethnic group is considered good by other groups"; "Most people consider my racial/ethnic group, on the average, to be more ineffective than other groups" (reverse-scored); "In general, other groups respect my racial/ethnic group"; and "In general, other groups think that my racial/ethnic group is unworthy" (reverse-scored, 1 = *strongly* disagree, 7 = *strongly* agree, $\alpha = .61$). This measure was subsequently reverse-scored, such that high values indicate low regard and low values indicate high regard.[2]

Affirmative action support. Participants were asked, "How much do you support affirmative action policies?" (1 = *strongly oppose*, 7 = *strongly support*).

Demographic information. To measure political conservatism and education levels, participants were asked to complete the same measures used in Study 1.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are provided in Table 1.

Preliminary Analyses. We first tested the possibility that our manipulation of hierarchy stability also influenced participants' levels of SDO and perceived subordinate-group regard. An independent samples t test of the effect of the hierarchy stability manipulation on SDO revealed no effect of the manipulation, $t < 1$. The same analysis conducted on perceived subordinate-group regard also revealed no effect of the manipulation, $t < 1$.

Main Analyses. We predicted that the more high-SDO Whites perceived ethnic minority regard for Whites to be low, the

Table 2. Affirmative Action Support as a Function of Hierarchy Stability Condition, SDO, and Perceived Subordinate-Group Regard in Study 3

Variable	Unstandardized B	SE	t(54)
Hierarchy stability condition	−.21	.18	1.20
SDO	−.93	.20	4.60***
Perceived subordinate-group regard	.10	.21	0.49
Stability × SDO	.17	.20	0.81
Stability × perceived regard	.20	.21	0.96
SDO × perceived regard	.12	.20	0.60
Stability × SDO × perceived regard	.41	.20	2.04**

Note: SDO = social dominance orientation.
**p < .05. ***p < .01.

more they would support affirmative action policies, but only when told that the hierarchy is unstable. This amounts to a three-way interaction between hierarchy stability, SDO, and perceived subordinate-group regard on affirmative action support. To test this hypothesis, we effects-coded the hierarchy stability manipulation (−1 = *stable*, 1 = *unstable*), mean-centered the SDO and perceived subordinate-group regard variables, and then multiplied them to create interaction terms (Aiken & West, 1991). We then regressed affirmative action support on the hierarchy stability variable, SDO, perceived subordinate-group regard, and their interaction terms.

Consistent with previous research, the higher participants' levels of SDO, the less they supported affirmative action policies, $B = −.93$, $SE\ B = .20$, $\beta = −.60$, $t(54) = 4.60$, $p < .001$. Importantly, consistent with our prediction, there was also a significant hierarchy stability × SDO × perceived subordinate-group regard interaction on affirmative action support, $B = −.41$, $SE\ B = .20$, $\beta = −.27$, $t(54) = 2.10$, $p < .05$, see Table 2. No other main effect or interaction was significant.

If prohierarchy Whites' increased support for affirmative action policies stems from a desire to protect the status quo, we would expect the interactive effect of SDO and perceived subordinate-group regard on affirmative action support to only occur in the *unstable hierarchy* condition. To test this hypothesis, we conducted the SDO × perceived subordinate-group regard interaction across the two levels of hierarchy stability (Aiken & West, 1991).

As predicted, the SDO × perceived subordinate-group regard interaction on affirmative action support was significant among participants in the *unstable hierarchy* condition, $B = .53$, $SE\ B = .23$, $\beta = .35$, $t(54) = 2.35$, $p < .05$. Replicating the results of Study 1, among participants relatively high in SDO, the lower they perceived ethnic minority regard to be for Whites, the more they supported affirmative action policies, $B = .84$, $SE\ B = .33$, $\beta = .47$, $t(54) = 2.57$, $p < .05$. Affirmative action support among participants who were low in SDO was not related to their perceptions of how ethnic groups viewed Whites, $t < 1$, see Figure 3.
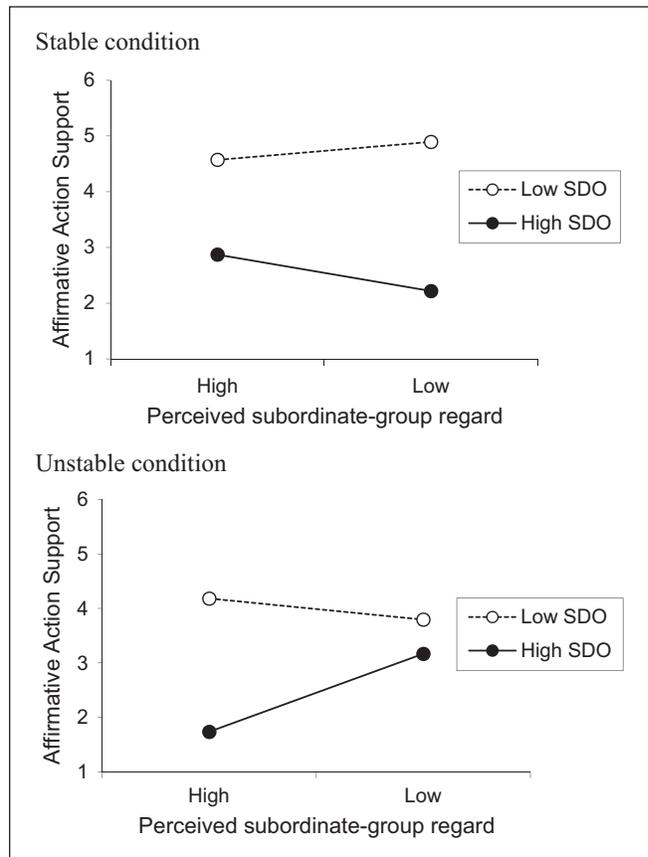

Figure 3. Affirmative action support as a function of perceived subordinate-group regard and SDO, split across hierarchy stability conditions (Study 3)
Note: SDO = social dominance orientation.

Alternatively, analyses of the interaction at high (+1 *SD*) and low (−1 *SD*) levels of perceived subordinate regard indicated that among participants who perceived ethnic minorities to have relatively high levels of regard for Whites, SDO was associated with lower levels of support for affirmative action policies, $B = −1.22$, $SE\ B = .35$, $\beta = −.79$, $t(54) = −3.46$, $p = .001$. In contrast, among participants who perceived ethnic minorities to hold Whites in relatively low regard, SDO was not related to their support for affirmative action policies, $B = −.31$, $SE\ B = .24$, $\beta = −.20$, $t(54) = −1.27$, $p = .21$.

Finally, we examined the SDO × perceived subordinate-group regard interaction among participants in the *stable hierarchy* condition. The interaction was not significant, $t < 1$.

Discussion

The results of Study 3 are consistent with the argument that dominant-group members' increased support for affirmative action policies is driven by the desire to maintain the hierarchy, rather than to help subordinate groups. When prohierarchy Whites perceived the hierarchy to be unstable, they responded

to perceptions of low regard for Whites among ethnic minorities by increasing their support for affirmative action. However, when the hierarchy was stable, thereby alleviating concerns about threats to their group's dominant position, low subordinate-group regard was not associated with increased support for affirmative action policies.

Thus far, we have provided evidence that prohierarchy dominant-group members can and do engage in a strategy of appeasement when confronted with the threat of hierarchy instability. We contend that they do so because they believe that dominant-group support for redistributive policies will stabilize the hierarchy and reduce intergroup threat. In Study 4, we turn our attention to providing evidence of this belief by manipulating participants' perceptions of Whites' support for affirmative action policies. We predict that high-SDO Whites believe that the hierarchy is more stable when Whites support affirmative action policies, and therefore perceive lower intergroup threat, than when they believe that Whites oppose affirmative action policies.

Study 4
Method

Participants. Ninety self-identified White participants (58 women, 31 men, 1 unreported) ranging in age from 19 to 77 years ($M = 47.17$, $SD = 15.53$) were recruited from a third-party sampling company and were paid in accordance with their agreement with the company. Participants were, on average, politically moderate ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.59$) and had some college education ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.38$).

Procedure. As in previous studies, Study 4 was presented as a survey of social attitudes. Participants first read a description about recent research that indicated that Whites were either more or less supportive of affirmative action policies than they had been in the past. After reading this description of research, participants completed measures of their attitudes toward hierarchy, of their belief that the hierarchy might change, and their perceptions of intergroup threat.

Materials, Manipulations, and Measured Variables

In-group support of affirmative action manipulation. All participants were told that, prior to beginning the study, they should consider the results of contemporary research on social issues. Participants in the *High support* condition were told, "Researchers at Stanford University recently conducted a personal interview survey of 1,374 U.S. households on their social attitudes. Among the many topics discussed during the interview, respondents were asked about their attitudes toward affirmative action policies. Interestingly, the poll indicates that White Americans' support for affirmative action policies is higher than it was 10 years ago." Participants in the *low support* condition were given the same information, except that White Americans' support for affirmative action policies was reported to be lower.

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Variables in Study 4

Variable	M	SD	1	2
SDO	2.61	0.90		
Perceived hierarchy instability	4.60	1.09	.18*	
Perceived intergroup threat	3.51	1.16	.40***	.45***

Note: SDO = social dominance orientation.
*$p < .1$. ***$p < .01$.

Attitudes toward hierarchy. After reading the description of Blacks' attitudes toward the dominant group, participants were asked to complete the same four-item measure of SDO used in prior studies ($\alpha = .59$).

Perceived hierarchy instability. To measure participants' perceptions that Whites were in danger of losing their dominant position within the social hierarchy, they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following two items: "The distribution of income and political power between racial groups within the United States will change substantially in the next 10 years" and "The political and economic power of Whites in the United States is decreasing as the political and economic power of other groups is growing" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*, $r = .33$, $p = .001$). Higher numbers correspond to greater perceptions of hierarchical instability.

Perceived intergroup threat. To measure participants' perceptions of intergroup threat, they were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with four items, which included the two items used in Study 2. The additional two items were as follows: "Economic gains for Blacks will not affect the life outcomes of most Whites" and "The influence of Blacks on American issues and policies will not have an effect on most Whites" (both reverse-scored, 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*, $\alpha = .84$). Higher numbers indicate greater perceptions of intergroup threat.

Demographic information. To measure political conservatism and education levels, participants were asked to complete the same measures used in Study 1.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations for measured variables are provided in Table 3.

Preliminary Analyses. We first tested the possibility that our manipulation of in-group support for affirmative action also influenced participants' levels of SDO. An independent samples *t* test of the effect of the in-group support manipulation on SDO revealed no effect of the manipulation, $t < 1$.

Main Analyses

Perceived hierarchy instability. Our overarching hypothesis is that prohierarchy dominant-group members might support affirmative action policies out of a desire to stabilize
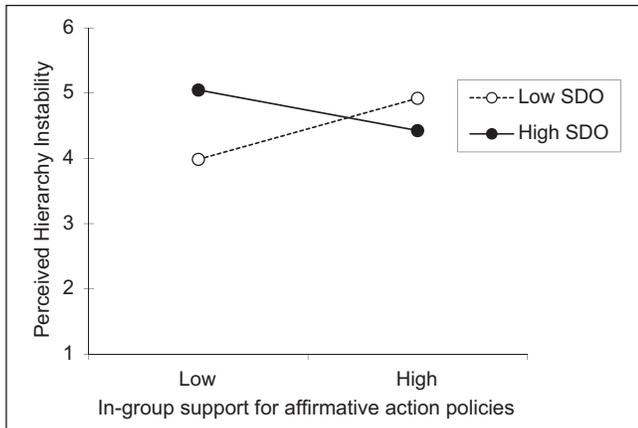
Figure 4. Perceived hierarchy instability as a function of in-group support for affirmative action condition and SDO (Study 4)
Note: SDO = social dominance orientation.

Figure 5. Perceived intergroup threat as a function of in-group support for affirmative action condition and SDO (Study 4)
Note: SDO = social dominance orientation.

the social hierarchy. This requires a belief that supporting affirmative action policies will result in greater hierarchy stability. Thus, we predicted that high-SDO Whites would perceive higher levels of hierarchy stability when they were told that Whites supported affirmative action policies than when Whites did not. To test this possibility, we effects-coded the subordinate-group regard manipulation (-1 = *low support*, 1 = *high support*), mean-centered the SDO measure, and multiplied them to create an interaction term (Aiken & West, 1991). We then regressed perceived hierarchical instability on in-group support for affirmative action, SDO, and their interaction. There was neither a main effect of the in-group support manipulation, $t < 1$, nor a main effect of SDO on perceived hierarchy instability, $B = .16$, $SE B = .12$, $\beta = .13$, $t(86) = 1.31$, $p = .19$. Importantly, in support of our hypothesis, there was the predicted significant in-group affirmative action support × SDO interaction on perceived hierarchy instability, $B = -.43$, $SE B = .12$, $\beta = -.36$, $t(86) = 3.57$, $p = .001$.

To decompose this interaction, we plotted the effect of subordinate-group regard on perceived hierarchy instability at high (+ 1 *SD*) versus low (− 1 *SD*) levels of SDO (see Figure 4). These analyses revealed that for high-SDO Whites, perceived hierarchy instability was higher in the *low support* than in the *high support* condition, $B = -.31$, $SE B = .15$, $\beta = -.29$, $t(86) = 2.02$, $p < .05$. Low-SDO Whites, on the other hand, demonstrated the reverse pattern, such that they perceived greater hierarchy instability in the *high support* than the *low support* condition, $B = .47$, $SE B = .15$, $\beta = .43$, $t(86) = 3.08$, $p < .005$.

We also conducted simple slope analyses across the in-group support conditions. These analyses revealed that among participants in the *low support* condition, SDO was significantly positively associated with perceptions of hierarchy instability, $B = .59$, $SE B = .16$, $\beta = .49$, $t(86) = 3.75$, $p < .001$. However, SDO was not significantly related to
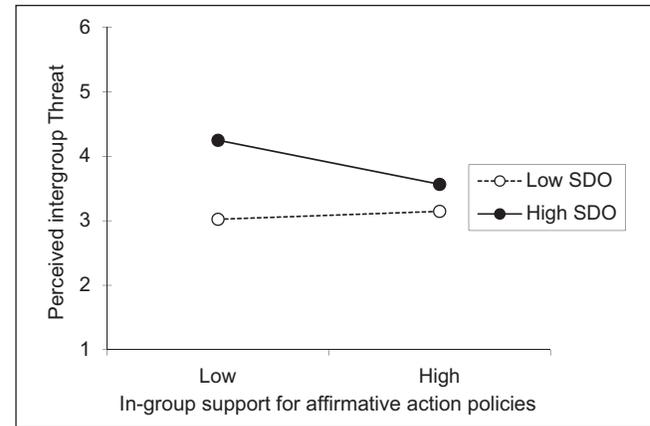
perceptions of hierarchy instability among participants in the *high support* condition, $B = -.27$, $SE B = .19$, $\beta = -.23$, $t(86) = 1.49$, $p = .14$.

Perceived intergroup threat. We also expected that high-SDO Whites would perceive lower levels of intergroup threat when they were told that Whites supported affirmative action policies than when Whites did not. To test this possibility, we regressed perceived intergroup threat on the in-group support manipulation, SDO, and their interaction term. This analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between SDO and perceived intergroup threat, $B = .46$, $SE B = .13$, $\beta = .36$, $t(86) = 3.65$, $p < .001$. There was no effect of the in-group support manipulation on perceived intergroup threat, $B = -.14$, $SE B = .11$, $\beta = -.12$, $t(86) = 1.26$, $p = .21$. However, there was a marginally significant in-group support × SDO interaction on perceived intergroup threat, $B = -.22$, $SE B = .13$, $\beta = -.17$, $t(86) = 1.78$, $p = .08$.

To decompose the interaction, we conducted simple slope analyses at high (+1 SD) and low (−1 SD) levels of SDO (see Figure 5). These analyses revealed that among high-SDO Whites, perceptions of intergroup threat were significantly higher in the *low support* condition than the *high support* condition, $B = -.34$, $SE B = .16$, $\beta = -.30$, $t(86) = 2.14$, $p < .05$. In contrast, low-SDO Whites' perceptions of intergroup threat did not differ across in-group support conditions, $B = .06$, $SE B = .16$, $\beta = .05$, $t < 1$, $p = .70$.

Analyses conducted across the in-group support conditions revealed that among participants in the *low support* condition, SDO was significantly positively associated with perceptions of intergroup threat, $B = .68$, $SE B = .16$, $\beta = .53$, $t(86) = 4.18$, $p < .001$. However, SDO was not significantly related to perceptions of intergroup threat among participants in the *high support* condition, $B = .24$, $SE B = .19$, $\beta = .18$, $t(86) = 1.23$, $p = .22$.

Mediational analyses. We hypothesized that when high-SDO Whites believe that the in-group supports affirmative

action policies, they believe that the hierarchy is stabilized, and therefore experience less threat. To test this possibility, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005). This analysis has four components: (a) the interaction between the independent variable (in-group support) and the moderator variable (SDO) must predict the dependent variable (perceived intergroup threat), (b) the interaction between in-group support and SDO should predict the mediator variable (perceived hierarchy instability), (c) perceived hierarchy instability needs to predict perceived intergroup threat, and (d) perceived hierarchy instability must account for the in-group support × SDO interaction on perceived intergroup threat.

As described above, the first two conditions were met. There was also a positive correlation between perceived hierarchy instability and perceived intergroup threat, $r = .40$, $p < .001$. To test the final condition, we regressed perceived intergroup threat on in-group support, SDO, and their interaction term, controlling for the effect of perceived hierarchy instability. This analysis revealed that the magnitude of the in-group support × SDO interaction on perceived intergroup threat dropped significantly, $B = -.05$, $SE\ B = .12$, $\beta = -.04$, $t < 1$, $p = .70$, while the effect of perceived hierarchy instability remained significant, $B = .40$, $SE\ B = .10$, $\beta = .38$, $t(85) = 3.90$, $p < .001$.

Mediation is inferred when the size of an indirect effect differs significantly from 0 (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). To test for mediation, we conducted a bias-corrected bootstrap procedure (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007), which revealed that among high-SDO participants, decreases in perceived threat in response to high in-group support for affirmative action were driven by the decrease in perceived hierarchy instability (indirect effect = $-.12$, 95% confidence interval [CI] = [$-.29$, $-.03$]). Among low-SDO participants, increases in perceived threat in response to high in-group support for affirmative action were driven by increases in perceived hierarchy instability (indirect effect = $.19$, 95% CI = [.06, .40]). Analyses testing the reverse mediation, with perceptions of perceived threat driving the interactive effect of in-group support and SDO on perceptions of hierarchy instability, were not significant.

Discussion

In Study 4, we found that when prohierarchy Whites believe that fellow Whites support affirmative action policies, they perceive the hierarchy to be more stable and perceive less intergroup threat than when they believe that Whites oppose affirmative action policies. This finding is consistent with the possibility that prohierarchy Whites' increase in support for affirmative action is driven by the belief that doing so will stabilize the hierarchy, and that the belief that the hierarchy is stable leads to lower perceptions of intergroup threat. In contrast, antihierarchy Whites perceive the hierarchy to be more susceptible to change when affirmative

action is supported by Whites than when it is opposed, leading to higher perceptions of intergroup threat.

General Discussion

We propose that dominant-group members who are motivated to maintain the hierarchy will sometimes engage in behaviors that appear to run counter to group-interest in an effort to appease potentially restive subordinate groups. We argue that prohierarchy dominant-group members use subordinate-group regard for the dominant group as an indicator of intergroup threat. When they perceive low subordinate-group regard for the dominant group, prohierarchy dominant-group members respond to the perceived threat by increasing their support for redistributive policies in a bid to stabilize the hierarchy. The results of Study 1 lend support to the possibility that prohierarchy Whites will attempt to appease ethnic minorities by increasing their support for affirmative action policies when they perceive ethnic minorities to hold Whites in low regard. Study 2 provided evidence that prohierarchy Whites perceive greater threat when they believe ethnic minorities hold Whites in low regard. The results of Study 3 suggest that prohierarchy Whites' increased support for affirmative action policies is driven by dominance motives; when the hierarchy is stable, prohierarchy Whites do not increase their support for affirmative action in response to ethnic minorities' negative attitudes toward Whites. Finally, Study 4 demonstrated that prohierarchy Whites believe that affirmative action support stabilizes the hierarchy.

From our perspective, the sensitivity that prohierarchy dominant-group members show toward subordinate-group members' attitudes reflects a deep-seated concern for maintaining status and resource differentials. Ironically, this concern can manifest itself in what seems to be behavior that goes against group-interest, but is in fact driven by a desire to maintain a status quo that favors the in-group. In this case, prohierarchy dominant-group members appear to support redistributive social policies because they believe that to do so will attenuate the threat to the hierarchy posed by restive subordinate groups. To the extent that the dominant group can persuade subordinate-group members that their interests and concerns are being addressed, they might prevent subordinate-group members from engaging in collective action that might destabilize the existing social hierarchy.

Interpreting Hierarchy-Enhancing and -Attenuating Behavior

Intergroup behavior is typically classified into two categories: those that maintain existing disparities (i.e., hierarchy-enhancing) and those that attenuate them (i.e., hierarchy-attenuating; Federico & Sidanius, 2002; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius, Pratto, van Laar, & Levin, 2004). According to social dominance theory, individuals will tend to support policies that

match their level of SDO, such that individuals who are high in prohierarchy sentiment support hierarchy-enhancing policies, such as increasing military spending, whereas individuals who are low in prohierarchy sentiment support hierarchy-attenuating policies, such as government-sponsored health care (Pratto et al., 1994). Although we agree with this basic proposition—that prohierarchy individuals will engage in behaviors designed to maintain the hierarchy, and that anti-hierarchy individuals will engage in behaviors designed to attenuate hierarchy—we suggest that a distinction needs to be made between the apparent outcome of an action and the outcome the action is designed to produce. For example, the present findings suggest that support for policies that appear to attenuate the existing hierarchy might actually be motivated by a desire to maintain the hierarchy. Our idea of appeasement indicates that a given policy can have more than one consequence, and it is the supporters' intended consequence that determines whether their policy support represents a hierarchy-enhancing or attenuating act. Thus, it is possible that support for a redistributive policy like affirmative action is designed to buttress the existing hierarchy (i.e., is hierarchy-enhancing), rather than to remedy social inequalities (i.e., is hierarchy-attenuating).

Our findings also dovetail with recent research that suggests that prohierarchy dominant-group members will engage in seemingly hierarchy-attenuating behavior in the service of hierarchy maintenance. For example, prohierarchy dominant-group members can and will co-opt ideologies that are normally associated with promoting equitable outcomes and recast them into hierarchy-enhancing forms that prevent challenges to the hierarchy (Knowles, Lowery, Hogan, & Chow, 2009). Moreover, high-SDO Whites will vote for a minority candidate if it allows them to claim the end of racism, thereby undercutting subordinate group claims that inequity continues to exist and needs to be redressed (Knowles, Lowery, & Schaumberg, 2009). The present research suggests that the maintenance of dominance is a complicated and subtle affair that requires constant vigilance and effort on the part of the dominant group to shape a narrative that protects the hierarchy from agents and arguments designed to destabilize it.

The Experience of Dominance

While a significant amount of literature suggests that being a member of a dominant group confers both material and psychological benefits upon group members, the research reported here indicates that the experience of dominance, particularly among those who wish to maintain it the most, is one that also involves some degree of vigilance. For example, high-SDO Whites respond to information about negative minority attitudes toward Whites with increased perceptions of intergroup threat, whereas low-SDO Whites are not threatened by this information (Study 2). Moreover, it appears that high-SDO Whites see the hierarchy, and by

extension, their dominant position within it, as chronically unstable and subject to change; high-SDO Whites supported affirmative action policies in response to negative subordinate-group regard for the dominant group even when the stability of the hierarchy was not explicitly mentioned (Study 1). However, in Study 3, high-SDO Whites were willing to express their prohierarchy desires only when their concern about the hierarchy was allayed, suggesting that the default perception of hierarchy, at least for high-SDO Whites, is one of flux and challenge.

Although we have focused on prohierarchy dominant-group members' support for redistributive policies in a bid to appease subordinate groups, some of our findings suggest that more egalitarian-minded dominant-group members do not unhesitatingly support hierarchy-attenuating actions; low-SDO Whites decreased their support for affirmative action policies when they perceived Blacks to hold negative attitudes toward Whites. These findings suggest that a desire for more egalitarian outcomes can be overridden by the nature of the relationship between groups. That is, it is possible to believe in egalitarian outcomes in the abstract, but still respond to negative attitudes from another group by being less willing to support policies that benefit them. However, it is important to note that these findings were not consistent across studies, suggesting that there is room for more research on how antihierarchy individuals experience and respond to hierarchy.

The Benefits and Boundaries of Appeasement

Although the present results suggest that dominant-group members believe that using a strategy of appeasement can help protect the hierarchy, they do not speak to the actual effectiveness of appeasement behavior. However, research indicates that a hierarchy-maintenance strategy based on maintaining a positive relationship with subordinate groups may be successful at placating subordinate groups. For example, not only do highly biased Whites regulate their behavior more in interracial interactions (Shelton, 2003; Shelton et al., 2005), ethnic minorities report enjoying their interactions more with high-bias Whites than with low-bias Whites (Shelton et al., 2005), and subordinate-group members who have positive social interactions with dominant-group members believe dominant-group members to be concerned about the subordinate group's interests (Saguy et al., 2009). Moreover, implementing policies that allow for even a small number of subordinate-group members to succeed can reduce subordinate-group members' willingness to engage in collective action (Wright, 1997; Wright & Taylor, 1998). Thus, it is possible that dominant-group support of redistributive policies is effective in two ways: (a) by convincing subordinate-group members that the dominant group has engaged in egalitarian efforts on their behalf and (b) by reducing subordinate-group members' perceptions that intergroup boundaries are impermeable, stable,

and illegitimate (Haines & Jost, 2000; Wright, 1997). Either possibility might placate members of subordinate groups and consequently decrease the likelihood of future challenges to the hierarchy.

In addition to the material benefits of diminishing the likelihood of challenges to the hierarchy, the use of appeasement may also confer psychological benefits on dominant-group members by alleviating concerns about the (im)morality of intergroup differences. Although the present research does not speak to the extent to which appeasement is a conscious strategy utilized by prohierarchy dominant-group members, it is possible that these individuals honestly believe that their policy support reflects a desire for egalitarian outcomes, rather than a strategy rooted in prohierarchy sentiment. The ability to claim, both to the self and to others, that one supports hierarchy-attenuating actions might alleviate guilt associated with the existence of intergroup differences.

Importantly, we do not assume that all efforts by subordinate-group members to challenge the hierarchy will be met with appeasement from dominant-group members. Appeasement is not the same as capitulation; appeasement is a group-serving strategy designed to protect the existing hierarchy, whereas capitulation assumes an acceptance of change. We believe, and history strongly suggests, that there are limits to the willingness of dominant groups to maintain the hierarchy by making concessions to mollify subordinate groups. There is undoubtedly a tipping point, beyond which the attempt to garner subordinate-group consent will yield to the use of force.

Notes

1. A separate sample of 159 White participants were provided with the subordinate-group regard manipulation, and asked to complete a public regard subscale designed to measure participants' perceptions of how other groups view their racial group (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Participants' perceptions of how other groups viewed the White racial group was significantly lower in the *Low regard* condition, $M = 5.04$, $SD = .96$, than the *High regard* condition, $M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.03$, $t(157) = 2.14$, $p < .05$.
2. Because this version of the public regard subscale did not specify the "other groups" under consideration, we asked 20 participants

(12 women, 8 men) to complete two versions of the public regard subscale: one with items that did not specify the target "other group," and one with items that specified that the "other group" referred to other ethnic/racial groups. The correlation between the two scales was highly significant, $r = .87$, $p < .001$, suggesting that participants' ratings on the scale refer to their perceptions of how other racial/ethnic groups perceive Whites.

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