
A Senior Honors Thesis
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By

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ABSTRACT

Extending research on social dominance orientation (SDO), the present study compared the SDO of gay and heterosexual men. As members of a low-status group, gay men have lower SDO than heterosexual men. A positive correlation was found between general opposition to equality (OEQ), which is a component of SDO, and self-esteem (SE) for heterosexual men. Conversely, there was a negative relationship between OEQ and SE for gay men. When positively manipulating perceived group-status of gay men, the relationship between OEQ and SE reversed, so that participants of the high status manipulation showed a positive relationship between OEQ and SE similar to heterosexual men. SDO was once considered a static personality variable, but it is now shown that SDO varies based on the perception of an in-group’s social position.
Social dominance orientation (SDO) is an individual-difference variable that predicts social and political attitudes. Social dominance orientation is a measure of an individual's preference for perpetuating a hierarchical social system (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). SDO has been positively correlated with stereotypes and prejudice regarding anti-Black racism, sexism, and nationalism (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle, 1994). SDO has been negatively correlated with hierarchy-attenuating positions such as supporting civil-rights policies and social welfare (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle, 1994). Past research has suggested that high-status groups tend to have higher SDO than low-status groups (e.g., Jost and Thompson, 2000). For instance, men tend to score higher on SDO measures than women (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999), and whites tend to score higher than Blacks (Sidanius, 1993). Although SDO originally was proposed to be a stable individual difference, existing research shows that SDO can change in accord with changes in group-status. For instance Schmitt, Branscombe, and Kappen (2003) showed that college students induced to believe that their college was high (low) in status reported higher (lower) SDO.

There are two main components of SDO. Group-based dominance (GBD) and general opposition to equality (OEQ). GBD is a group-specific form of upholding controlling conduct by one social group against another. For example, a person high in GBD would probably agree with the sample scale item: “Some groups are of people are just more worthy of others” (Jost & Thompson, 2000). GBD is the result of individuals' inherent desire to be superior to others (Jost & Thompson, 2000). An individual feels superior when a group that he or she identifies with is perceived as superior. Jost and Thompson have shown that GBD is related positively to ethnocentrism for both European
and African Americans. People high in ethnocentrism are more willing to place their culture above others, and as a result, more likely to support social policies solely benefiting their cultural in-group (Jost & Thompson, 2000). OEQ, in contrast, is a wide-ranging, general opposition to egalitarian social systems, one not focused on specific group dynamics. For example, a person high in OEQ would probably disagree with the sample scale item: “Increased social equality would be a good thing.” (Jost & Thompson, 2000). Jost and Thompson found that higher OEQ was associated with less egalitarian values. Examples of hierarchy-attenuating values negatively associated with OEQ include support for women's rights, racial equality, gay and lesbian rights, and environmental activism.

OEQ is associated with self-esteem in different ways in different groups. Jost and Thompson (2000) found that OEQ correlated negatively with self-esteem for African Americans and correlated positively with self-esteem for European Americans. Jost and Thompson reasoned that European-Americans, as high-status group members, have high OEQ as a manifestation of group self-interest. The preservation of superior status can then provide a source of group-based self-esteem. High OEQ for low status groups does not have the same self-esteem consequences. Where for high status groups high OEQ justifies one’s group’s high status position and predicts higher self-esteem, high OEQ justifies, or perhaps in a way psychologically legitimizes one’s own group’s low status position for low status groups. This dynamic leads to OEQ predicting low self-esteem in low-status groups. For example, as a disadvantaged group, it is in African-Americans’ group-interest to promote equality. Black’s high OEQ stands in opposition to this equality, and to the extent group status is used as a basis for self-esteem, low self-esteem
The current research investigated differences in SDO as a function of sexual orientation, and attempted to determine whether situationally manipulated group-status would change the nature of the relationship between OEQ and self-esteem. Specifically, this research sought to establish whether gay and heterosexual men have different SDO levels, and the manner in which gay men’s OEQ levels would be associated with self-esteem under conditions of manipulated and non-manipulated group status. It was expected that gay men would have lower SDO than straight men. Further, we expected that while gay men’s low group status would result in a negative relationship between their OEQ levels and self-esteem, when gay men’s group status was increased via a manipulation, that this relationship might then reverse.

There are two main reasons why this could be the case. First, recent SDO literature (e.g., Jost & Thompson, 2000) suggests that high-status groups generally have higher SDO than low-status groups. Gay men are seen as belonging to a stigmatized, low status group (Whitley, 1999), and it follows that this lesser status may be reflected in their SDO scores. Second, social identity theory shows that the position of an individual's in-group in a social system affects attitudes toward equality (Oakes, Haslam, and Turner, 1994). Based on social identity theory, it was expected that gay men would, as did the low-status participants in Jost and Thompson (2000), show a negative relationship between OEQ and self-esteem, while low OEQ would be associated with positive group-image and high self-esteem for gay men.

Beyond examining the pre-existing differences in SDO between gay and heterosexual men, this research investigated whether SDO changed among gay men in
response to group-status manipulations. Although Schmitt et al. (2003) have demonstrated that status manipulations can have this effect in some populations, it is currently an open question as to whether such manipulations can change the relationship between OEQ and self-esteem among gay men.

It is in gay men's group-interest to support an egalitarian social system, as it is also for other minority groups such as African-Americans. The individual views his or her societal position partially based on group identification. As an identified group member, what benefits the group should also benefit the individual. In this case, supporting egalitarian values that benefit the group and, in turn, the individual, should be associated with high self-esteem. When low status group members (in this case gay men) are led to believe that their group is actually of high status, it is a question of whether or not this will have an effect on how they view of egalitarianism. In addition, self-esteem trends can be predicted from group members' SDO depending on their groups' perceived social status. Groups with high social status previously have demonstrated positive relationships between OEQ and self-esteem, and experimentally increasing gay men’s perceived social status might result in similar effects. However, there may be differences in societal struggles between the two minority groups that result in different patterns of interactions between OEQ and self-esteem. We therefore sought to test these ideas with two studies. The first study compared SDO, its component scales, and the relationship between SDO and self-esteem (SE) among heterosexual men to confirm similar patterns as in the Jost and Thompson (2000) study. Study 2 involved status manipulations used to change perceived group-status among gay men to determine whether temporary changes in perceived group status might alter the relationship between SDO and SE. It was
predicted that the relationship between SDO and SE for gay men would be similar to that of heterosexual men’s when gay men were led to believe that their group is high in status due to a manipulation.

Study 1 Method

Participants

The group included 42 heterosexual, male participants who were students enrolled in an introductory psychology course at The Ohio State University. Participants were recruited through a program via the psychology department website set up for experiment participation. In return for their participation in the experiment, students received partial class credit.

Materials

Jost and Thompson’s (2000) SDO scale was used to measure the SDO of all participants. It was an 11-point scale used to measure the agreement or disagreement of the SDO items (see appendix A). The questions were composed of two subscales for both components of SDO--group-based dominance (GBD) and general opposition to equality (OEQ). The negatively worded items were reverse-scored.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a reliable and valid measure of self-esteem used to measure the self-esteem of all participants (see appendix C). The scale is a 10-item Likert scale with 4 points from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Someone with high self-esteem would likely agree with the sample item: I take a positive attitude toward myself (Rosenberg, 1965).

Procedure

Heterosexual men took the survey on paper administered at The Ohio State
University. Approximately 25 participants took the survey. Responses were anonymous to ensure privacy of the participants’ information.

All groups took the SDO measure and then the Rosenberg self-esteem measure, after which they were debriefed.

Study 1 Results

Data screening showed 5 people who had the lowest possible score on the RSE. Because this is quite rare, these people who showed floor effects on the RSE were removed from the sample before continuing. Scores on the OEQ and GBD scales were computed as in Jost and Thompson’s (2000) study. Participants’ RSE scores then were regressed on opposition to equality and group based dominance items, and their interaction. Variables were standardized before analysis (c.f. Aiken & West, 1991). Results showed that OEQ was marginally positively \( (B = 0.35, SE = 0.09, t(37) = 1.75, p = .089) \) related to RSE, and that GBD was significantly negatively associated with RSE scores \( (B = -0.45, SE = 0.09, t(37) = 2.26, p = .030) \). No interaction was present \( (p > .25) \).

A subsequent examination of the \textit{DFBETAS} (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) showed that one participant had a \textit{DFBETA} value for the OEQ coefficient more than twice the size of its next nearest neighbor. Other \textit{DFBETA} values followed a smooth progression for this coefficient. When this single case was excluded, and RSE once again was regressed on OEQ, GBD, and their interaction, OEQ was significantly positively associated with RSE \( (B = 0.505, SE = 0.08, t(36) = 2.59, p = .014) \). As before, GBD was significantly negatively associated with RSE \( (B = -0.52, SE = 0.08, t(36) = -2.66, p = .011) \), and there was no significant interaction between the two \( (p > .25) \).

Study 1 Discussion
Analysis showed that as predicted, the relationship between the OEQ component of SDO for heterosexual men followed similar trends as European-Americans in the Jost & Thompson (2000) study. It is in heterosexual men’s group interest to value a hierarchical social system because of the desire to maintain their group’s high status. It follows that heterosexual men with high SDO tend to have high SE because a high SDO is beneficial to the group that they identify with.

It is unclear why GBD, as a component of SDO, showed an inverse relationship with RSE among heterosexual men. These findings were not found in the Jost and Thompson (2000) study among European-Americans. It is possible that participants’ answers were influenced by testing conditions. Participants were run in a room filled with other heterosexual men, and being with fellow group-members may have influenced how they responded to the measures.

Study 2 Method

Participants

Participants were recruited from a local gay website to take the survey. Our sample contained 95 male participants who stated that they were homosexual on their profiles at www.outincolumbus.com. Individuals were individually contacted using the information on their profiles. If they agreed to participate, they were randomly assigned to a web address that directed them to one experimental condition. No monetary incentive was given for participation.

Materials

The same SDO scale and SE measures in Study 1 were also used in Study 2. The status manipulation used with the gay groups was directly based on the group-status
manipulation used by Schmitt et al. (2003) with University of Kansas students. Based on Schmitt et al. (2003), the manipulation was framed to look like a questionnaire measuring participants’ knowledge of positive or negative group attributes. In this case, it measured knowledge about members of the gay community. The status-enhancing manipulation consisted of positive “facts” about the gay community in addition to neutral fillers. The “facts” were false, but written in such a way as to appear credible. The status-reducing manipulation consisted of negative “facts,” with fillers identical to the other manipulation. The questions were framed so that the “facts” were comparisons of homosexual and heterosexual men. Participants indicated how aware they were of the “facts” on a 7 point Likert scale (see appendix B).

**Procedure**

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two status-manipulation groups, or to a control group. The experiment was run on an online server (www.surveymonkey.com).

After logging into the website, one group received a status-enhancing manipulation, the other received a status-reducing manipulation, and the control group did not complete a status manipulation. All groups then completed the SDO scale, and then the Rosenberg self-esteem scale. They subsequently were debriefed, and the nature of the status-manipulation was explained (please see Appendix D for a copy of the debriefing).
Study 2 Results

Before separately analyzing the data from Study 2, we compared our heterosexual sample with our gay sample with respect to SDO and its component scores. Sample sizes reported vary slightly from analysis to analysis because of missing data. Independent t-tests revealed that, as expected, there was a significant difference in overall SDO scores between the heterosexual (M = 72.8; SE = 3.9) and gay control (M = 56.7; SD = 4.2) samples (t (84) = 2.8; p = .007). In addition, t-tests also revealed that both components of SDO, GBD (t(84) = 2.7, p = .010) and OEQ (t(87) = 2.1, p = .035), were significantly different between the heterosexual (MOEQ = 38.3; MGBD = 34.5) and gay (MOEQ = 31.0; MGBD = 26.9) control groups.

Turning to the data collected from our gay sample, inspection of DFBETAS for the test of status manipulations on the relationships between OEQ, GBD, and self-esteem (c.f. Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) showed that one case had a value approximately twice the size of the next largest DFBETA for the OEQ coefficient. Further examination of the person’s internet protocol address revealed that this person had completed the survey from a location in Latin America, and had self-identified as Latino. This case was removed before proceeding.

Condition was dummy-coded, with control being the reference condition, and RSE, OEQ, and GBD separately were regressed on these condition dummy variables. There were no effects of condition on any of these individual difference measures, with all p’s > .45. The group status manipulations were not powerful enough to change participants’ absolute SDO levels.

For exploratory purposes, we first examined correlations between OEQ and RSE
in each of our experimental conditions in the gay male sample. In the control condition, as expected, OEQ was negatively associated with RSE ($r (40) = -.43, p = .004$), indicating that higher OEQ was associated with lower self-esteem for gay men. In the negative status condition, OEQ also was negatively associated with RSE ($r (28) = -.33, p = .079$), albeit marginally. RSE was unrelated to OEQ in the positive status condition ($r (38) = .23, p = .16$).

To investigate more formally our hypotheses about the relationships between SDO and self-esteem as a function of group status, standardized Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scores then were regressed on dummy-coded condition as in the previous analysis, standardized opposition to equality, and standardized group-based dominance scores (c.f. Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). This analysis revealed an interaction between the high-status condition dummy variable and opposition to equality ($B = 0.56, SE = 0.20, t(95) = 2.80, p = .006$). There was no corresponding interaction between the low-status condition and OEQ, or any other effects involving the low-status manipulation (all $p$’s $> .10$). In the control condition, opposition to equality was negatively related to RSE ($B = 0.59, SE = 0.15, t(95) = -2.37, p = .02$). Simple slopes tests showed that the high-status manipulation resulted in a significant decrease ($B = -0.86, SE = 0.37, t(95) = -2.34, p = .022$) in RSE for low OEQ participants (operationalized as -1 SD on the OEQ distribution) and a significant increase in RSE for high OEQ participants (+1 SD on OEQ; $B = 1.06, SE = 0.51, t(95) = 2.10, p = .038$). These results indicate that a high group-status manipulation can reverse the relationship between OEQ and RSE. When a group is low in status, high opposition to equality is associated with low self-esteem. However, when a group is high-status, high opposition to equality is associated with
higher self-esteem. This relationship between control and positive status manipulation conditions and self-esteem is shown in figure 1.

Figure 1:

![Effect of High Group Status Manipulation on Relationship between standardized Opposition to Equality and Rosenberg Self Esteem](image)

Study 2 and General Discussion:

As expected, based on previous SDO research about African Americans and European Americans, overall SDO scores for heterosexual men were significantly higher than gay men's. It follows that as a low-status group, like other low-status groups such as women and African-Americans, gay men are more likely to support hierarchy-attenuating positions associated with egalitarianism (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, and Malle, 1994). Heterosexual men, on the other hand, are more likely than gay men to promote stereotypes such as racism and sexism that conflict with generalized equality among social groups. It is in heterosexual men’s group interest not to share their privileged group status, possibly out of the fear that equal status among social groups would result in higher levels of competition in settings such as the workplace. As a result, heterosexual men are less likely to promote nonhierarchical social systems and have high
The gay men’s control group results followed what would be predicted from previous research with African Americans. It is in gay men's group-interest to promote equality among various groups since their group is not seen as equal in status by the majority. Gay men tend to have higher self-esteem when they have a low general opposition of equality. It makes sense that they would want what is best for the group that they identify with in addition to themselves. Conversely, they tend have lower self-esteem when they do have a general opposition of equality, since OEQ is disadvantageous for their group, and in turn, themselves.

The selection of gay men from gay community website may have resulted in a participant sample more sensitive to the status manipulations that were used. That is, closeted gay men, while they are aware of their sexual orientation, may not as strongly identify with the gay community. It follows that they might not be as strongly affected by statements about gay males’ status. Differential gay ingroup identification remains an issue for future research.

Most interestingly, when gay men are led to believe that their in-group is not seen as inferior, they begin to adopt similar views as heterosexual men. When given positive information, and led to believe that gay men are viewed positively in society, it was found that the status manipulation changed the relationship between SDO and SE. As a result, gay men tend to have higher self-esteem when they have a higher general opposition to equality. Further studies might examine the behavioral consequences of such temporary changes in the relationship between SDO and SE.

Evidence that gay men show similar characteristics as heterosexual men when
they perceive themselves as a dominant, high status group can be seen in real life, as well. Consider an example reported by *The Boston Globe* in July of 2006 in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Provincetown is known as one of the top destinations for gays to reside and vacation. Heterosexual residents, as the minority, reported being discriminated against by gays. Some heterosexuals of the area claim to have been called terms such “breeders” in a derogatory manner. This research can explain these incidents, because when gays feel like the majority, they are more likely to behave in ways to show that they are the dominant group in the area and would prefer it to stay that way.

Most of the time prejudice is shown to be a product of majority group-interest conflicting with group-interests of minority groups; however, minority groups are just as susceptible to displaying prejudicial behavior in contexts allowing them to do so. Individuals of any group are susceptible to the same negative characteristics, regardless of the group’s status. In the end, seemingly different groups have much more in common with each other than one might initially think. Variables such as SDO have less to do with innate personality characteristics than they have to do with social constructs of group-identification within a hierarchical social system. Recognizing that these prejudicial attitudes are situational shows that there is potential to reconstruct social attitudes so that everyone is treated equally regardless of the groups that they identify with.
References


Appendix A: Jost & Thompson Social Dominance Orientation Scale

(In the packets, each statement was followed by a table providing responses -5 – 5, with -5 = Strongly Disagree and 6 = Strongly Agree.)

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement for each item on a scale of -5 to 5. A score of -5 indicates that you disagree strongly, 0 indicates that you neither agree nor disagree, and 5 indicates that you agree strongly.

1. Group equality is not a worthwhile ideal.
2. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups.
3. No group of people is more worthy than any other.
4. It would be good if all groups could be equal.
5. In getting what your own group wants, it should never be necessary to use force against other groups.
6. Increased social equality would be a bad thing.
7. All groups should be given an equal chance in life.
8. If certain groups of people stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.
9. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups.
10. Superior groups should not seek to dominate inferior groups.
11. Inferior groups should stay in their place.
12. Treating different groups more equally would create more problems than it would solve.
13. There is no point in trying to make incomes more equal.
14. It’s a real problem that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.
15. No one group should dominate in society.
16. Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place.
Appendix B: Group Status Manipulations

(In the packets, each statement was followed by a table providing responses 1-5, with 1 = Not at all and 5 = Entirely.)

High Group-Status Manipulation

We are looking at the knowledge about the gay community when compared to heterosexual males. In this study we are looking at how this knowledge is distributed within the Columbus gay community. Please indicate your awareness of each fact below by circling your response on the scale below each item.

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to be members of the ACLU compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to know about Stonewall Columbus compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more sexually responsible compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to live in urban areas compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to shop at a malls compared to heterosexual men
to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to be socially established compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to use their influence to achieve their workplace goals compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men’s developed communication skills enhance their successful relations compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to socialize by dancing in clubs compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to be physically fit, and on average, more muscular compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that studies show that gay men are more likely to be better institutional leaders compared to heterosexual men
Low Group-Status Manipulation

(In the packets, each statement was followed by a table providing responses 1-5, with 1 = Not at all and 5 = Entirely.)

We are looking at the knowledge about the gay community when compared to heterosexual males. In this study we are looking at how this knowledge is distributed within the Columbus gay community. Please indicate your awareness of each fact below by circling your response on the scale below each item.

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to be members of the ACLU compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to know about Stonewall Columbus compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to engage in sexually risky behavior compared to heterosexual men.

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to live in urban areas compared to heterosexual men
To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to be unemployed compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to shop at malls compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more often emotionally dependent compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to occupy low-status positions in the workplace compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to socialize by dancing at clubs compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to receive higher rates of government assistance compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men have more difficulty maintaining stable relationships compared to heterosexual men

To what degree were you aware that gay men are more likely to suffer from disturbed body image compared to heterosexual men
Appendix C: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

(In the packets, each statement was followed by a table providing responses 1 – 6, with 1 = Disagree Very Much, and 6 = Agree Very Much.)

Instructions: We are interested in how the next set of statements describes you. Please rate how characteristic each statement is of you by entering the number from the corresponding scale that best represents your answer.

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel that I do not have much to be proud of.
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. I certainly feel useless at times.
10. At times I think that I am no good at all.
Appendix D: Debriefing after Positive and Negative Manipulations

Debriefing:
Thank you for participating in this study. Sometimes we don’t disclose all information about a study until it is over so that we can get people’s natural responses.

The part of the study where we asked you to rate how aware you were of certain “facts” about the community were not true. We made the “facts” up in order to investigate the research question being studied here.

We had two different surveys. One had negative “facts” and another had positive “facts” about gay people. We did this to see if changing how an individual views the group they belong to affects their view of other groups.

We’re interested in people’s perceptions of how they think power should be distributed in society. We hope that with our findings from this study we’ll be able to contribute to a world where one day we will all view each other as equals.

Your responses are anonymous. No one can link you to your answers. Data are kept in locked areas, and are not released to those outside of this research project. If the study made you uncomfortable and you don’t want your data analyzed, if you have any questions about the experiment, or want to more information about what we’re studying, contact Derek Bower at bower.96@osu.edu, Aaron Wichman at wichman.3@osu.edu, or Marilynn Brewer at brewer.64@osu.edu.

Thank you for participating.