

Lecture 14: Social Dominance Theory (SDT), (Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto)

- Part I: Basic Observations and Assumptions
- Part II: Schematic Overview of SDT
- Part III: Social Dominance Orientation
- Part IV: The Power of Consensual Ideology

The Big Questions

Why do people from one social group oppress and discriminate against people from other groups?

Why is this oppression so difficult to eliminate?

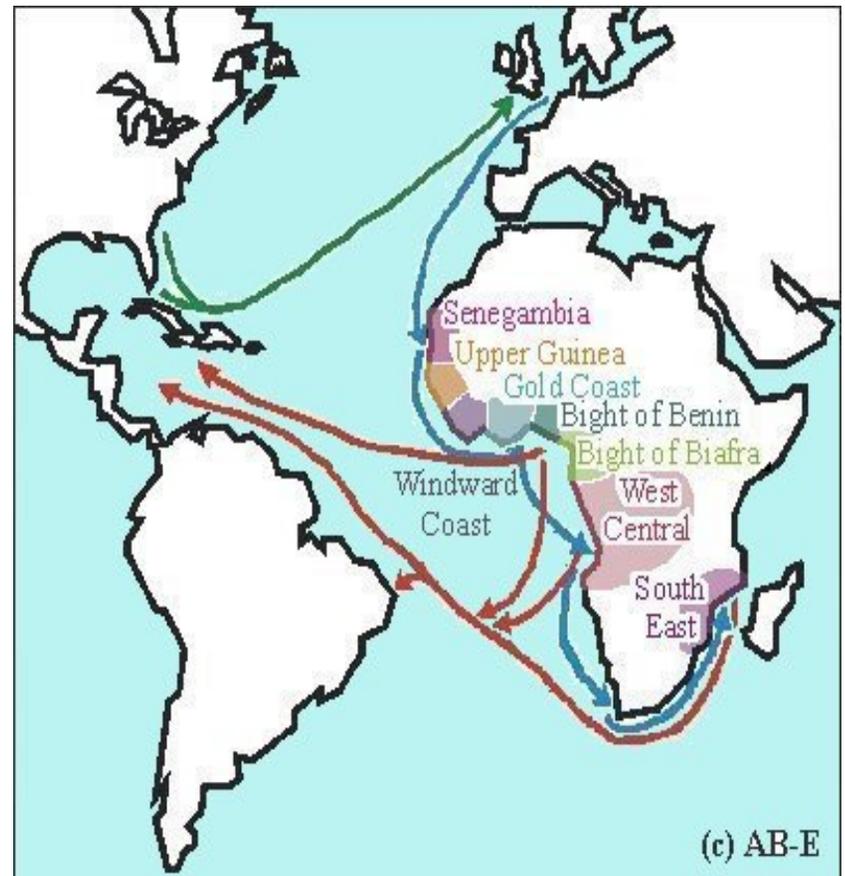
We will focus on racial/ethnic groups and social dominance in the next two lectures.

History, Women and Power

- There are no known matriarchal societies in which females have more power and control over resources than men.
- Historical evidence of women being excluded from political and military power for the last 5,000 years.

Slavery and Social Dominance

- If interested, read the book, “King Leopold’s Ghost”



Total Africans Kidnapped into slavery and where they were taken

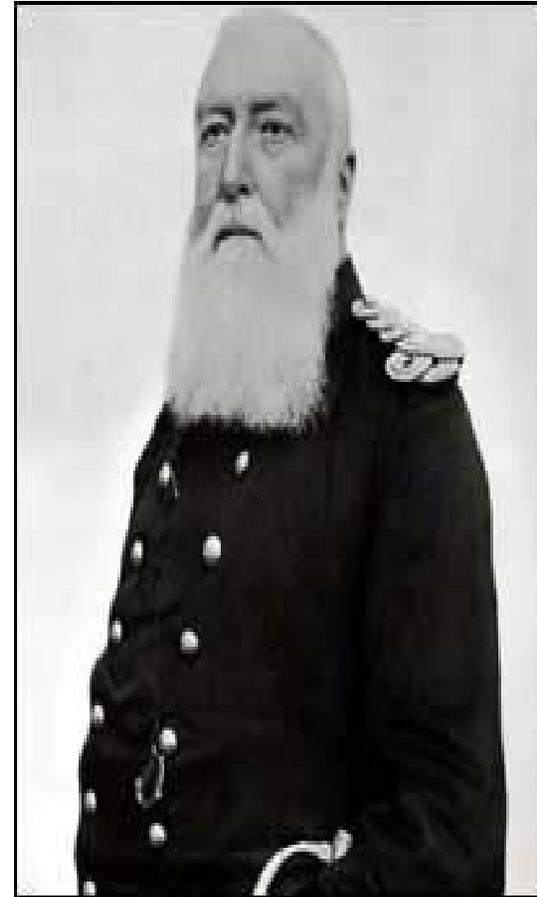
- 1650-1700 497,500
 - 1700-1750 2,261,600
 - 1750-1800 3,828,100
 - 1800-1850 3,186,800
 - 1850-1900 231,700
 - Total 10,005,700
- Brazil 35.4%
 - Sp. Emp. 22.1%
 - Br. Indies 17.7%
 - Br. N. Am. 4.4%

Scramble for Africa

- 1880—90% of Africa ruled by Africans
- 1900—almost all ruled by Europeans
- 1884—Berlin West Africa Conference—Africa carved up by diplomats to prevent European war over spoils of conquest
- Brutality characterized the so-called “civilizing mission”

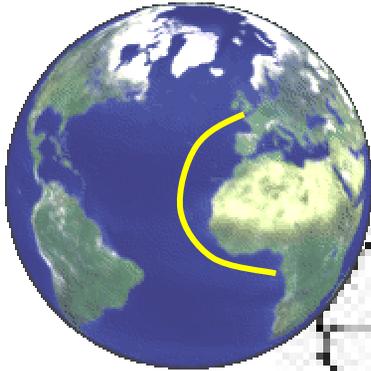
Leopold II and the Congo

- Rationale: protect Africans from Arab slave traders, convert Congolese to Christianity, and to bestow blessing of capitalism
- Reality: Congo Free State was labor camp; rape and torture were routine; rubber quotas were imposed and workers failing to meet them had their hands chopped off



Beneficiary of Civilization?





Joseph Conrad
(1857-1914)

Conrad's
1889-90 journey into

***"Heart of
Darkness"***



Chained Congolese Women.

Social Dominance Theory

- In the next two lectures, we will focus on the two important questions asked by Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto.
- A framework that integrates most (if not all) of the theoretical frameworks discussed so far.
- A complicated theory, but we will attempt to cover most of its attributes.

Overview

- Why such a detailed analysis of this theory?:
- 1.) An interesting integrated theory
- 2.) May motivate us to question the degree to which our institutions of social control are “fair” or “just”.
- 3.) Provides a sophisticated socio-political explanation for conflict and conflict resolution, and illustrates the **complexity** of the problem.

Part I: Basic Observations and Assumptions

- In our discussion of evolutionary theory, we discussed how individuals have different needs, and they often cooperate to obtain such needs.
- This theory shows that POWER is important.

Group-based Social Hierarchies

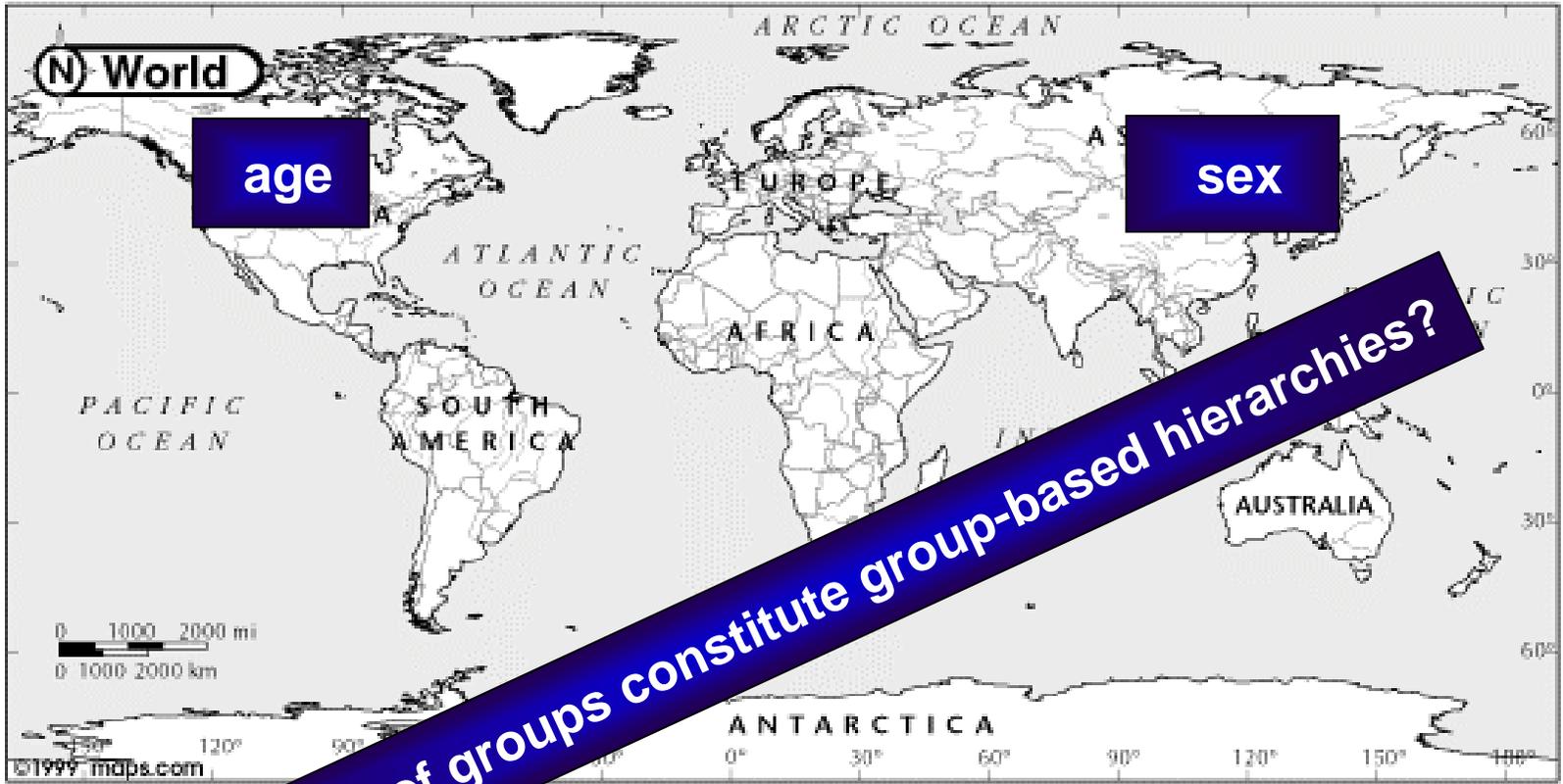
- All human societies tend to be structured as systems of group-based social hierarchies.
- Hierarchical structure consists of one or small number of **dominant** (hegemonic) groups at the top, and one or a number of **subordinate** groups at the bottom.
- Dominant groups enjoy the material and symbolic thing that people strive for: money, health, status, happiness, political power.

Contrast to “Individual-based Social Hierarchies”

- Individuals might enjoy power, prestige, and wealth. This can be based on some of their individual traits such as intelligence, luck, or family inheritance.
- Group-based Hierarchies refer to the positive things people have *because* of their membership to socially constructed groups (race, clan, tribe, religion, etc.).
- Individual-level “forces” matter, but simple group affiliations are also important. For example, being from a particular social group might give a person a greater advantage in getting a job.

Trimorphic Structure

- 1.) *Age system*: adults and middle-age people have disproportionate social power over children and younger adults.
- 2.) *Gender system*: Males have disproportionate social power over females (patriarchy)
- 3.) *Arbitrary-set*: socially constructed and highly salient groups based on characteristics such as religion, clan, ethnicity, nation, race, caste.



(N) World

age

sex

What type of groups constitute group-based hierarchies?

arbitrary set

Main Assumptions of SDT

- 1.) While age and gender-based hierarchies will tend to exist within all societies, arbitrary-set systems of social hierarchy will invariably emerge with social systems producing sustainable economic surplus.

Main Assumptions of SDT

- 2.) Most forms of group conflict and oppression (e.g., racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, nationalism, classism, regionalism) can be regarded as different manifestations of the same basic human predisposition to form group-based social hierarchies.

Main Assumptions of SDT

- 3.) Human social systems are subject to the counterbalancing influences of hierarchy-enhancing (HE) forces, producing and maintaining ever higher levels of group-based **social inequality**, and hierarchy-attenuating (HA) forces, producing greater levels of group-based **social equality**.

MAIN ASSUMPTIONS

- Group based social hierarchy is ubiquitous -

1. Gender- and age systems:

exist in all societies,

Arbitrary-set systems:

exist in societies producing economic surplus

2. Most forms of group conflict are based on basic human predisposition toward group-based social hierarchy

3. Societies are influenced by the counterbalance of HE and HA Legitimising Myths

Part II: Overview of SDT

- Given the assumptions, this section lays out the theoretical concepts used to identify and understand the specific intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, and institutional mechanisms that produce and maintain group-based hierarchies, and how, in turn, this hierarchy affects these contributing mechanisms.

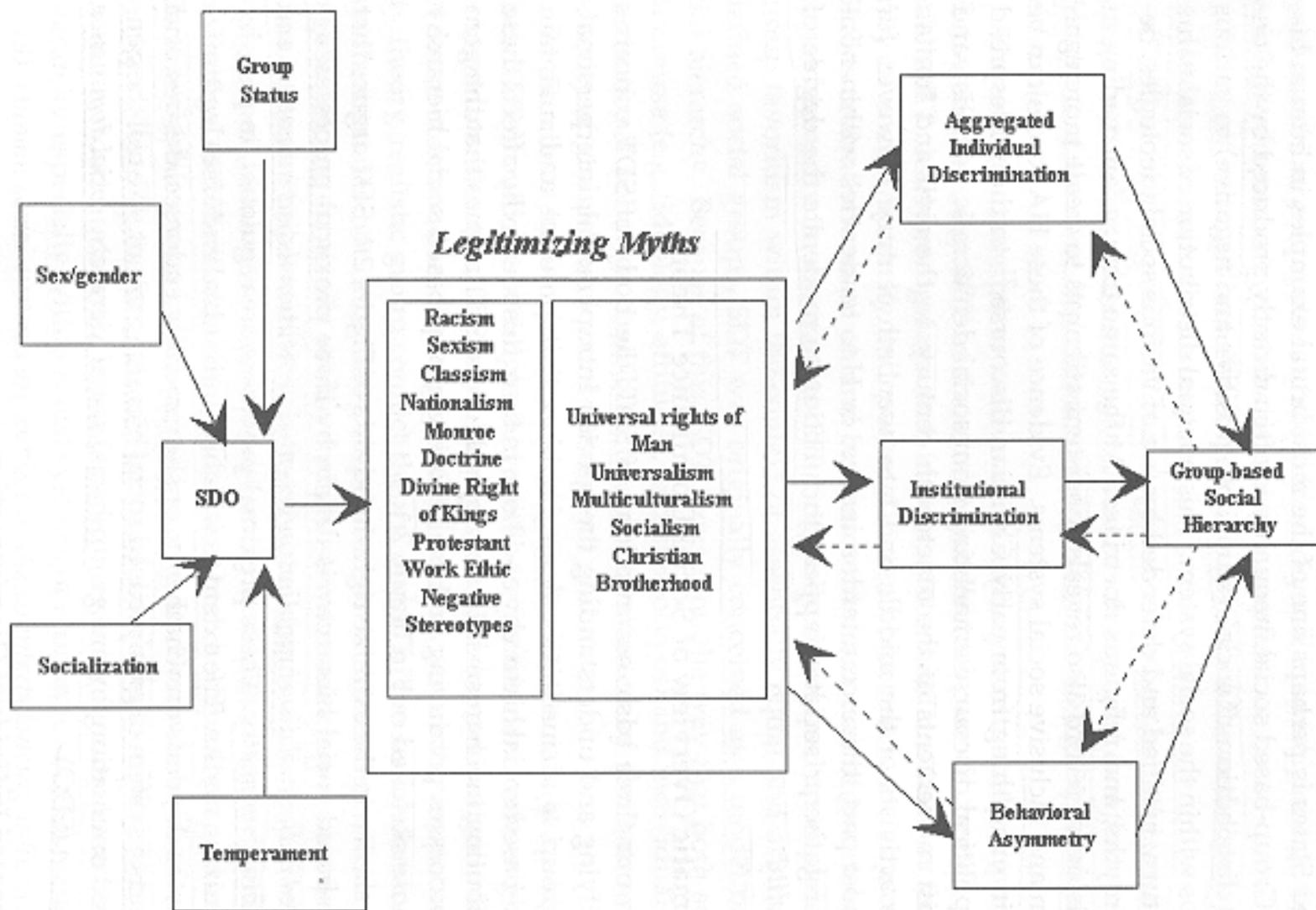


Figure 2.1. Schematic overview of social dominance theory.

Three proximal mechanisms that drive group-based hierarchies

- 1.) Aggregated individual discrimination
- 2.) Aggregated institutional discrimination
- 3.) Behavioral asymmetry

1.) Aggregated individual discrimination

- Simple, daily, and sometimes inconspicuous individual acts of discrimination by one individual against another.
- Examples: employer does not hire based on race, landlord does not give a room to a person based on their race.
- When thousands of such individual acts are added up, these can have substantial influence on power differences between groups. How?

2.) Aggregated Institutional Discrimination

- Recall our definition of institutions of social control. Also consider economic, education, and health institutions.
- In sum, various substantive and procedural rules can influence balance of power between groups.
- Institutions not only pattern who can obtain “social value”, but these also direct patterns of violence through systemic terror.

Systematic Terror

Use of violence or threats of violence

disproportionately against subordinates to maintain dominant power.

- Official Terror: public and legally sanctioned
- Semiofficial Terror: State violence that is not public and overt.
- Unofficial Terror: violence perpetrated by private individuals (e.g., KKK).

3.) Behavioral Asymmetry

- On average, there are differences in the behavioral repertoires of people from different social groups.
- These differences both contribute to AND reinforce group based hierarchies.

3.) Behavioral Asymmetry

- Important difference in SDT from other macro-sociological theories; while other models emphasize how elites oppress and manipulate subordinate groups, SDT also points out that subordinates themselves **ACTIVELY** participate in and contribute to their own subordination.
- Subordinates **DO** actively resist dominants, but this may be a rare event as compared to other behaviors.
- **Four Varieties of Behavioral Asymmetry....**

a.) Asymmetrical ingroup bias

- Most human groups are ethnocentric, and favor their own in-groups in comparison to outgroups.
- However, social “dominants” tend to show more ingroup bias than individuals from subordinate groups.

b.) Deference, out-group favoritism

- In some cases, subordinates actually have a bias in favor of dominant groups.
- Example: “Uncle Tom-ing of some African Americans towards Euro-Americans”

c.) Self-debilitation

- Subordinates show higher level self-destruction than dominants do.
- Self-debilitating behaviors (e.g., violence, drugs) are often consistent, but not exclusive, to negative stereotypes of subordinates.
- Self-fulfilling prophecies

d.) Ideological Asymmetry

- All else held equal, dominants will have attitudes and policy preferences that are more strongly driven by social dominance values than subordinates.
- Example: dominants will be more likely to have strong preferences about affirmative action than subordinates.

Legitimizing Myths

- LMs consist of attitudes, values, beliefs, stereotypes and ideologies that provide a moral and intellectual justification for social practices that influence groups.
- LMs have been of focus by many other theorists; Marx and “ideology”; Durkheim’s notion of “collective representations”.

LMs can justify **inequality**

LMs that justify inequality **ENHANCE** social dominance.

Example: “white man’s burden”--In this view, non-European cultures are seen as child-like, with people of European descent having an obligation to dominate them until they can take their place in the world.

LMs can justify **equality**

- LMs can also attenuate, or reduce notions that some groups should, or can dominate other groups.
- Examples: communism, socialism, feminism, universal rights of man, U.S. declaration of independence, Gettysburg address.

Potency of LMs

- Refers to the degree to which it will help promote, maintain, or overthrow a given group-based hierarchy.
- Four important factors: consensuality, embeddedness, certainty, mediational strength.

LEGITIMIZING MYTHS

Hierarchy Enhancing LM

- Racism
- Sexism
- Nationalism
- Protestant Work Ethic
- Negative Stereotypes

Hierarchy Attenuating LM

- Universal Rights of Man
- Multiculturalism
- Socialism
- Christian Brotherhood

Part III: Social Dominance Orientation

- **The degree to which an individual wants his/her group to dominate other groups and to be socially and materially superior to them.**

People who score high in Social Dominance Orientation are prejudiced against weaker groups, including:

- **Arabs, blacks, and gays (in the U.S.)**
- **Natives and Asian immigrants (in Canada)**
- **Native Taiwanese (in Taiwan)**
- **Sephardic Jews and Palestinians (in Israel)**

Measuring Social Dominance Orientation

- Psychologists use “scales” (sets of questions) to measure peoples preferences regarding how other groups of people should be treated.
- There is a lot of variation in how people respond. What causes such variation?

SOCIAL DOMINANCE ORIENTATION

SDO₆ scale (examples)

1. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.
2. If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.
3. Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place.
4. It would be good if groups could be equal.
5. Group equality should be our ideal.
6. All groups should be given an equal chance in life.

Table 3.2. Items on The SDO₅ and SDO₆ Scales

Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDO₅)

1. Some groups of people are simply not the equals of others.
 2. Some people are just more worthy than others.
 3. This country would be better off if we cared less about how equal all people were.
 4. Some people are just more deserving than others.
 5. It is not a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others.
 6. Some people are just inferior to others.
 7. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on others.
 8. Increased economic equality.^a
 9. Increased social equality.
 10. Equality.
 11. If people were treated more equally we would have fewer problems in this country.
 12. In an ideal world, all nations would be equal.
 13. We should try to treat one another as equals as much as possible. (All humans should be treated equally.)
 14. It is important that we treat other countries as equals.
-

Social Dominance Orientation Scale (SDO₆)

1. Some groups of people are simply inferior to other groups.
 2. In getting what you want, it is sometimes necessary to use force against other groups.
 3. It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others.
 4. To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups.
 5. If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems.
 6. It's probably a good thing that certain groups are at the top and other groups are at the bottom.
 7. Inferior groups should stay in their place.
 8. Sometimes other groups must be kept in their place.
 9. It would be good if groups could be equal.^b
 10. Group equality should be our ideal.
 11. All groups should be given an equal chance in life.
 12. We should do what we can to equalize conditions for different groups.
 13. Increased social equality.
 14. We would have fewer problems if we treated people more equally.
 15. We should strive to make incomes as equal as possible.
 16. No one group should dominate in society.
-

^a Items 8–14 should be reverse coded. The response scale was 1 = *very negative* to 7 = *very positive*.

^b Items 9–16 should be reverse coded. The response scale was 1 = *very negative* to 7 = *very positive*.

Causes of SDO variation

- 1.) SDO is driven by one's membership in different social groups. Expect dominants to have higher levels of SDO
- 2.) SDO is affected by background factors (socialization, family, war, natural disasters)
- 3.) Personality variation and temperaments
- 4.) Gender: males likely to have higher SDO than females

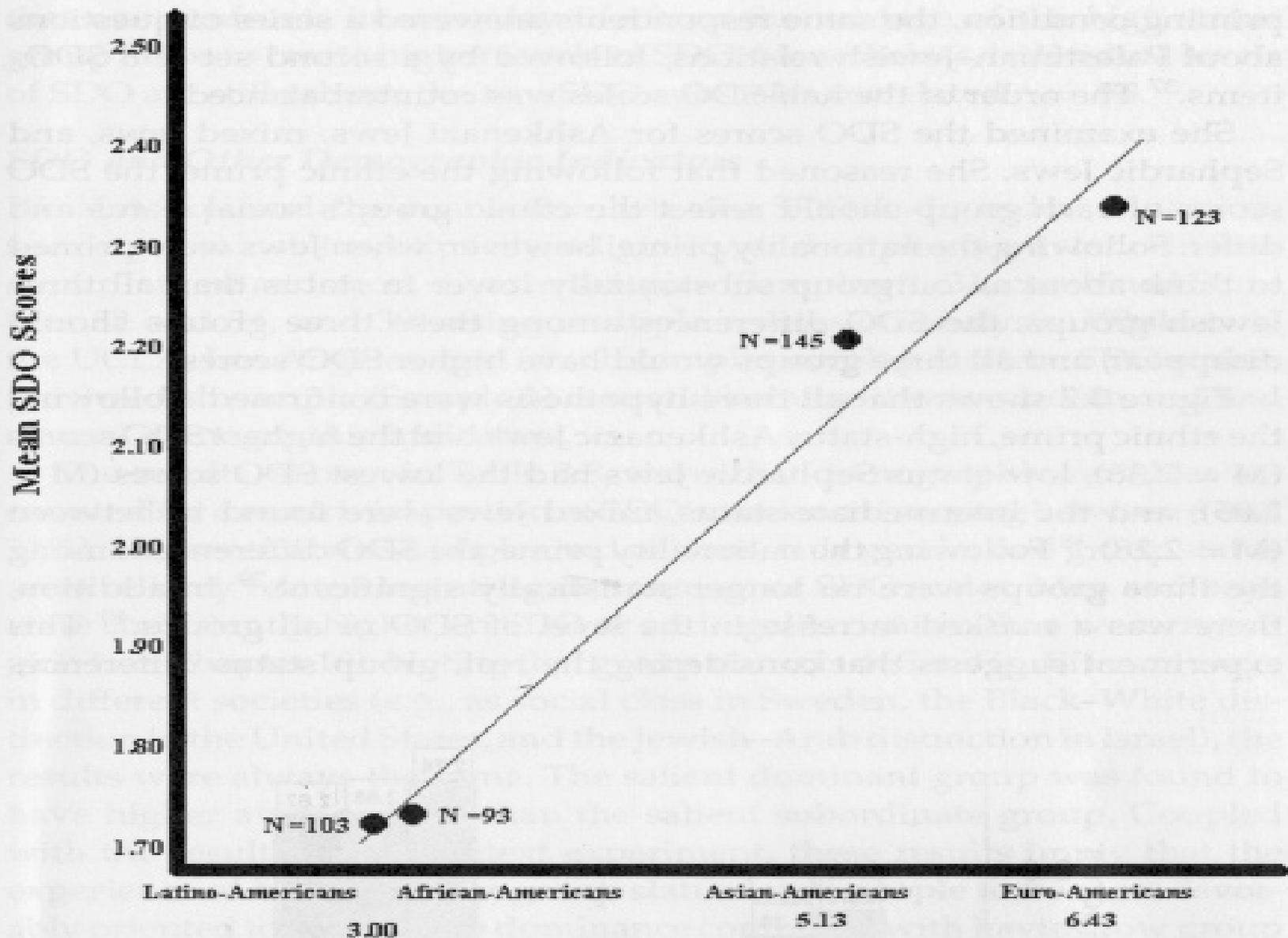


Figure 3.1. SDO as function of perceived ethnic status (UCLA Sample 31).

Table 3.9. Correlations Between Measure of Affect Toward Low- and High-Status Groups and SDO₄ and SDO₆ Scales

Group Affect and Group Identification	SDO ₄		SDO ₆	
	Median Correlation	Significance Ratio	Median Correlation	Significance Ratio
<i>Affect toward low-status groups and their supporters</i>				
Women	—	—	-.37	1:1
Poor people	—	—	-.39	1:1
Democrats	—	—	-.3	1:1
Blacks	-.13	1:1	-.41	2:2
Hispanics	-.16	1:1	-.38	2:2
Asians	-.1	1:1	-.38	—
Hispanic civil rights groups	-.2	1:1	—	—
Black civil rights groups	-.24	1:1	—	—
<i>Affect toward high-status groups and their supporters</i>				
Republicans	—	—	.24	1:1
Whites	.1	1:1	.09	—
Business executives	.16	1:1	—	—
Politicians	.15	1:1	—	—
<i>Identification</i>				
Ingroup identification	—	—	.18	2:2
Differential affect (Whites-Blacks)	.25	1:1	.39	1:1

Note: "—" means that data were unavailable.

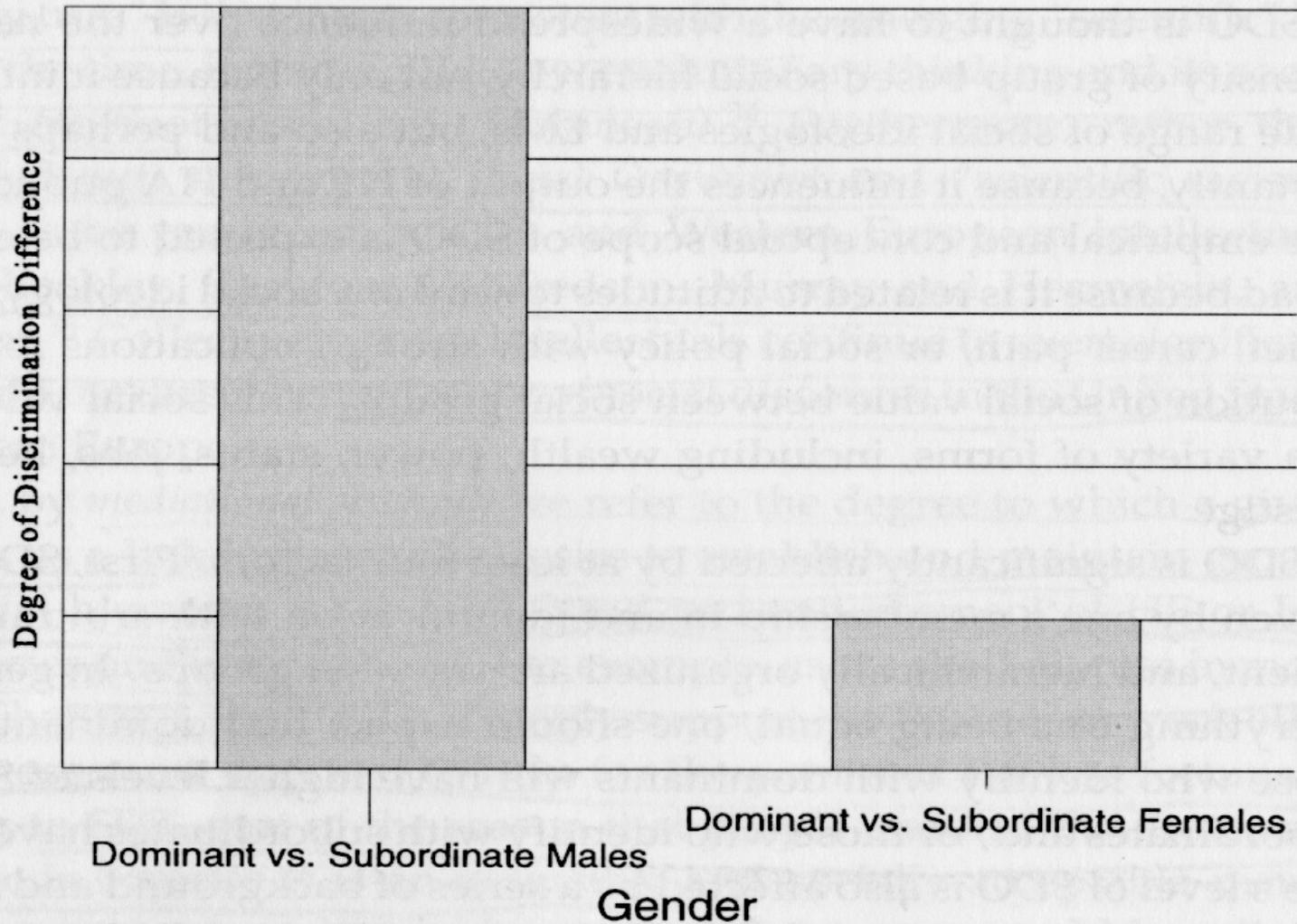


Figure 2.2. Difference in level of discrimination between dominant and subordinate males versus dominant and subordinate females.

Hierarchical Consensuality

- This means that there is a high degree of consensus within the social system as to which groups are dominant and which are subordinate.
- There is high degree of consensus by all groups.

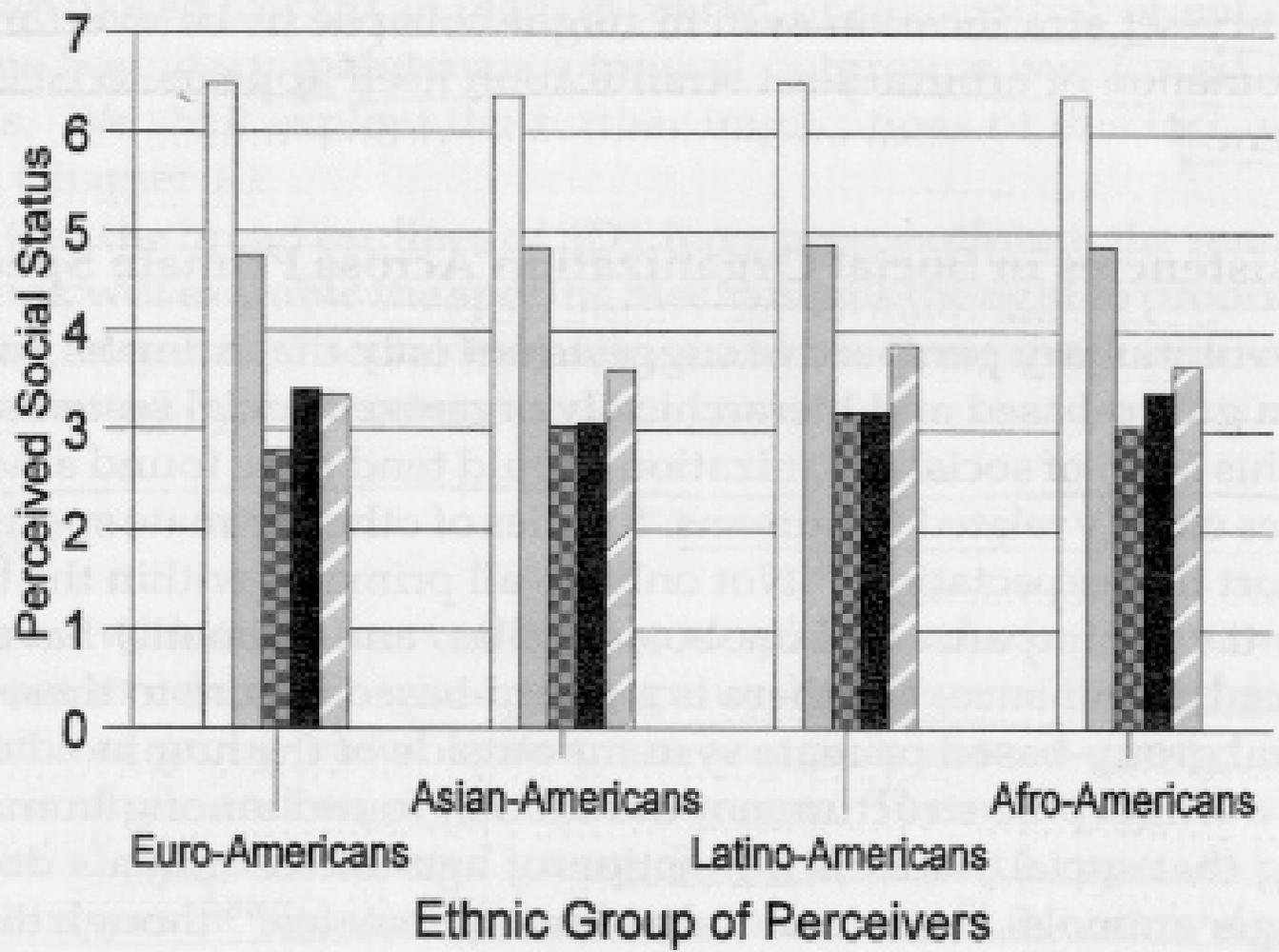


Figure 2.3. Perceived social status of U.S. ethnic groups as a function of ethnic group membership (UCLA Sample 31).

Part IV: The Power of Consensual Ideology

- There are two primary means by which dominant groups maintain their hegemonic position over subordinates.
- 1.) the threat or actual exercise of force
- 2.) control over ideology and “legitimate” social discourse.

Maintaining control by violence is unstable and risky.

Ideology

- Ideologies and social attitudes are used to convince both dominants and subordinates of the righteousness, justice, and fairness of hierarchically organized social relations.
- These can function even if the ideology has no truth (e.g., “Jews are in alliance with the Devil”).

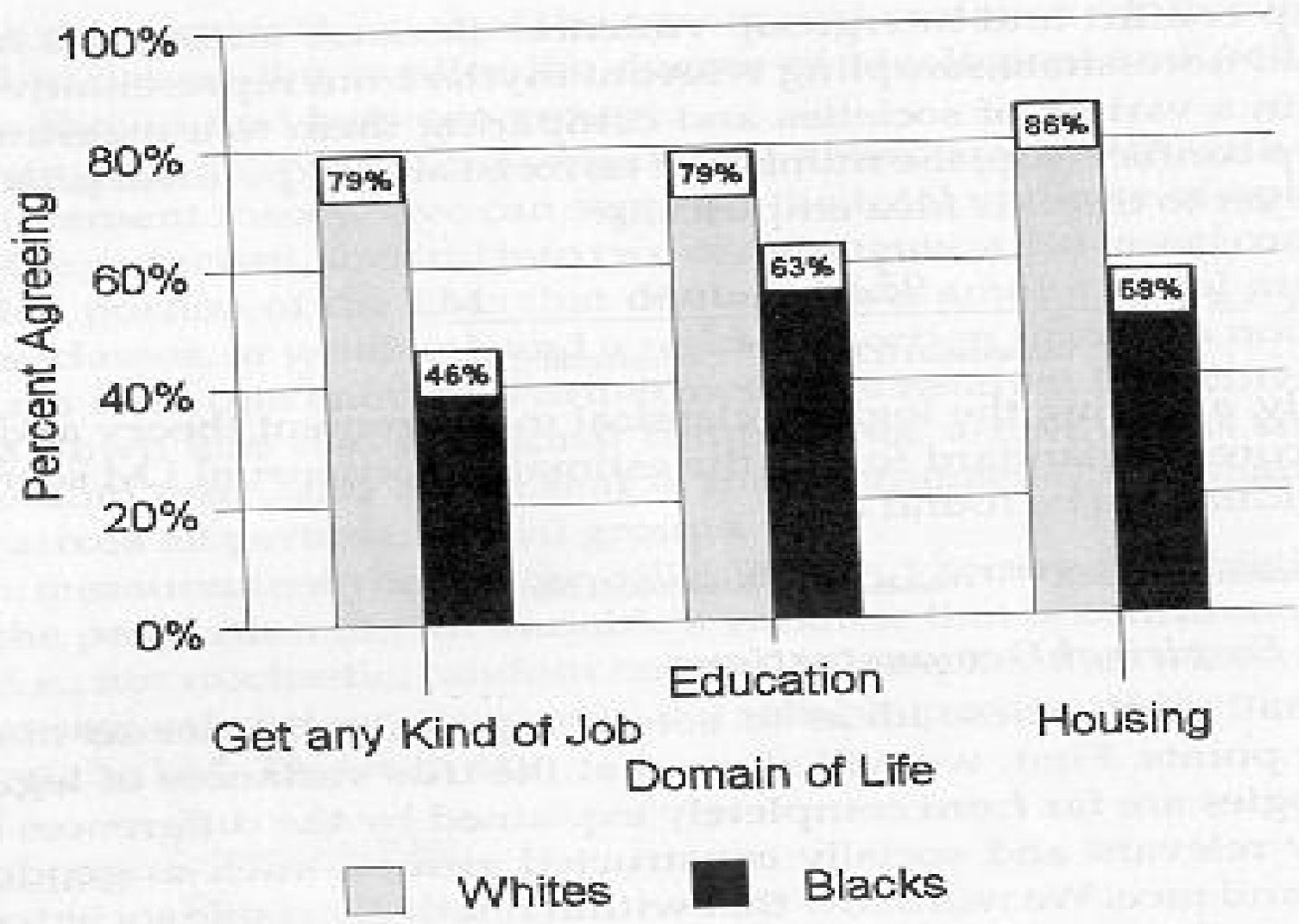


Figure 4.2. Percentage of Blacks and Whites who agree that blacks in their community have the same chance as Whites (Source: Gallup, 1997).

Why are these data surprising?

- 1.) Although there is overwhelming evidence of discrimination, most Whites believe that Blacks receive fair treatment.
- 2.) Most Blacks also believe the U.S. society is fair (56% on average)!!
- **3.) While the gap between White and Black perceptions is of interest, it may be MORE interesting that these two groups actually have somewhat SIMILAR perspectives.**

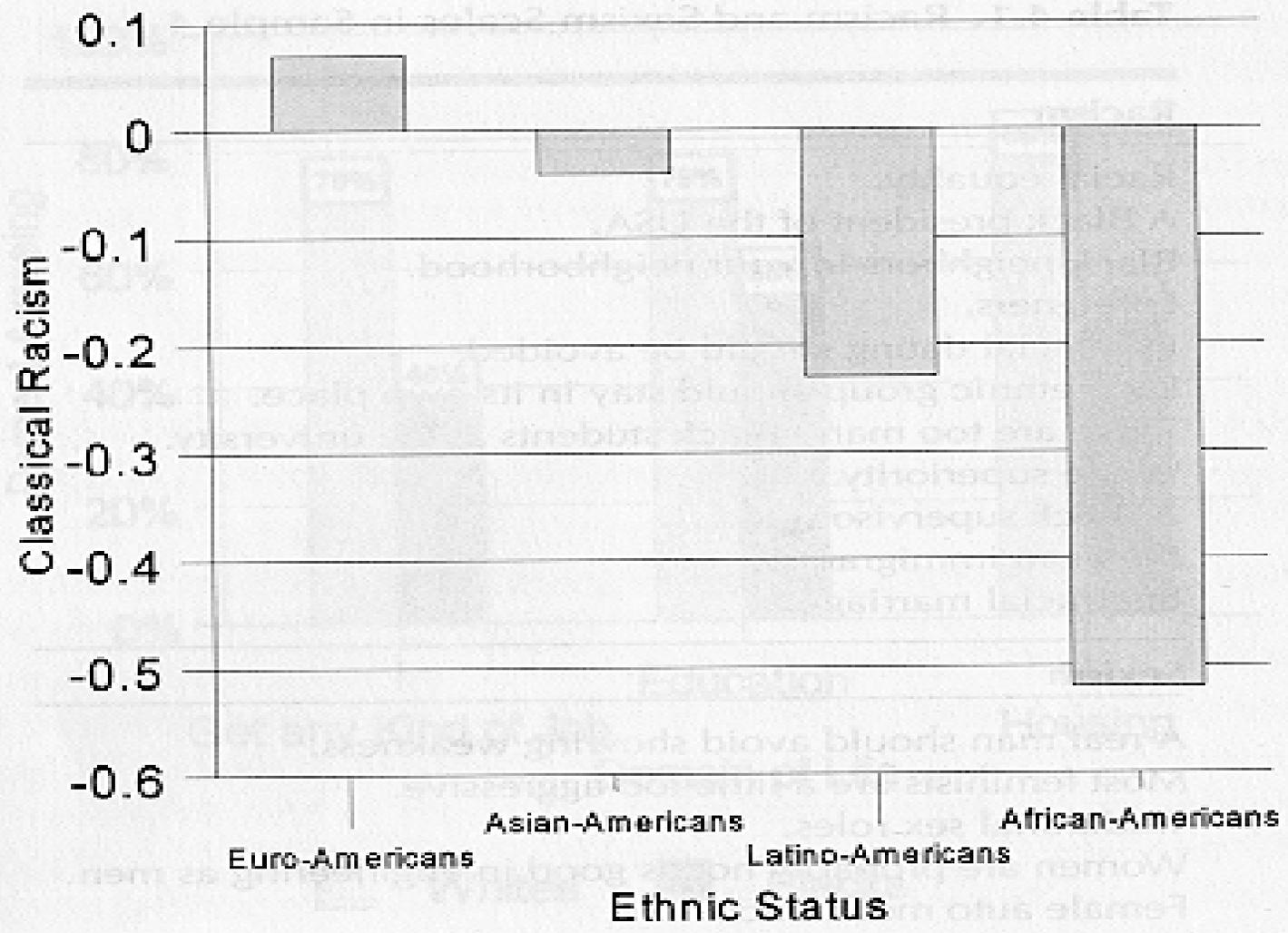


Figure 4.3. Classical racism scores (expressed as deviations from the grand mean) as a function of ethnic status (University of Texas Sample 4).