

Legislating Status: The Political Fight for Prestige

By

Beth A. Estes

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Approved:

Cindy D. Kam, Ph.D.

Marc J. Hetherington, Ph.D.

Efrén O. Pérez, Ph.D.

Christopher M. Federico, Ph.D.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **A Theory of Status Politics**

On election night 2016, the world watched as Donald Trump won one state after another, taking not only the solid red south but also many swing states on his way past the 270 electoral votes needed to secure the 45<sup>th</sup> presidency. Despite the media's confidence in a Clinton victory and Trump's unconventional, bombastic personality and rhetoric, Trump struck a chord with many Americans that reverberated more strongly through the nation than was easily predicted. The root of their unyielding support for Trump, however, continues to baffle both everyday Americans and scholars alike.

One popular theory is that Trump support is grounded in concerns about economic welfare among Americans who are struggling to find work in communities historically supported by manufacturing. Trump's focus on immigration and trade policy certainly would suggest that these concerns might play a role, and Trump won the vote in the Rust Belt and other similar areas. However, pre-election surveys showed that Trump supporters were no more likely to be personally affected by foreign trade, immigration, or unemployment than Trump opponents (Ehrenfreund and Guo 2016). Another possibility is that Trump support has its roots in hate—in outright animosity towards racial minorities, religions other than Christianity, women, the LGBTQ community, and those with disabilities. Supporters' silence about his harsh rhetoric regarding members of these groups did little to quell any suspicions about this motive. While these explanations undoubtedly account for at least some of

Trump's support, there is reason to suspect that the picture is more complicated than these theories would lead us to believe.

Rather than exclusive concern about economic welfare or hostility towards others, a growing number of Americans are beginning to consider the possibility that Trump supporters reacted to what can essentially be described as a feeling of disrespect—they felt as though people like them were losing their voice and value in American society. In an interview for *The Atlantic*, Chris Arnade, a Wall Street trader turned traveling photographer commented on the moment he began to understand Trump support while exploring working-class America:

There was a working-class, white bar I spent two days in and that's where it really struck me: This man is really resonating. This message is really taking hold and really hitting people. What sociologists and others have long talked about when you go to a poor, working-class black neighborhood is that there is this code of honor, this demand for respect. That same thing was taking place in the white bar I was seeing. And Trump was fulfilling that respect. It was all about respect, regaining respect. (Chandler 2016)

Arnade's speculation that concerns about respect are a driving force behind politics is supported by academic research as well. Through extensive qualitative analysis, Katherine Cramer, in *The Politics of Resentment*, finds that feelings of disrespect are an important ingredient in working-class Wisconsinites' attitudes toward government. And Trump supporters' apparent concerns about respect may be well-founded: fully 58 percent of Clinton supporters in a Pew survey said they had a hard time respecting Trump supporters compared to only 40 percent of Trump supporters who felt the same about Clinton's voters (Gramlich 2016).

Even Trump seemed to recognize that concerns about respect were critically important for his supporters. So much so, in fact, that in his first post-election tweet he did

not mention the economic benefits he would bring to suffering Americans or his distaste for minority groups, nor did he even mention conventional conservative values or principles. Rather, he focused squarely on working-class American's concerns about their fading relevance in society: "...The forgotten man and woman will never be forgotten again..." (Trump 2016).

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Politics, at its heart, is about groups fighting for government protection of their goals. Whether race, immigration, religion or a host of other policy areas, intergroup dynamics play a fundamental role in shaping how individuals feel about various policies that influence who gets what. Often, we understand the "what" to be economic benefits and occasionally power, which can lead to economic gain; however, as the above exploration of Trump support makes clear, there are potentially other interests to consider in intergroup policy dynamics. This project seeks to further our understanding about the factors that lead groups to institute these group-based policies, to expand our conception of the "what." Specifically, it explores a factor highlighted by Trump support and typically underappreciated by political scientists—status dynamics between groups.

Including status into the conversation allows us to gain new insight in difficult questions surrounding numerous intergroup policy debates. For example, although conventional arguments such as religious convictions and economic concerns may drive opponents and supporters of gay marriage to some extent, these considerations fail to address the complexity of the debate. Why, for example, are many religious believers so troubled by gay marriage while essentially ignoring other behaviors admonished in religious

texts? Why are many LGBT Americans unsatisfied with civil unions, which provide most of the economic benefits of marriage? I argue that status concerns fuel many intergroup conflicts and influence public opinion regarding intergroup policies, such as the debate over gay marriage. Group members desire group status, they use political resources to affirm or alter their group's status in society.

In this chapter, I first define what I mean by status, explain why group members care about status, and show the connection between politics and status. Second, I develop a framework for understanding how perceptions of status influence support for intergroup policies. Lastly, I discuss the divergence between my work and existing political science research on intergroup public opinion.

## **2. GROUP STATUS**

Prior to developing my theory about how group status influences intergroup attitudes and group-based policy preferences, it is necessary to spend considerable time providing a conceptual definition of group status, exploring why group members care about the status of their group, and how politics is connected to the quest for status.

### **2.1 Defining Status**

Imagine for a moment that you must walk into a room full of strangers and, after socializing a bit with the crowd, announce one of your group identities, say, your religious affiliation. How do you think most people in the room would react to learning this information about you? Would they warmly smile in an expression of affirmation? Or would they point their noses in the air and move away from you? Do you think they would like you

better—respect you more—after learning your religious preferences or would they like you less than before? Now imagine you announced a different group identity, such as your sexual orientation. Maybe you imagine others would have a similar reaction as before, or maybe they would respond to this information with more or less affinity. The amount of respect you believe others would give you upon announcing any particular group identity is what I mean by group status. If you perceive that others would respect you more after your announcement, you perceive your group to have high status; conversely, if you believe others would respect you less after learning your identity, you perceive low status for the group. Group status is, essentially, the amount of perceived social prestige or respect one's group receives in society.

A perception-based understanding of group status aligns closely with one of Luhtanen and Crocket's (1992) four types of collective self-esteem: public collective self-esteem. Public collective self-esteem indicates the extent to which one perceives that others respect the group. It is fundamentally a perception of a perception, a belief about someone else's belief. You either believe that others respect your group or you believe that they don't.

Importantly, one's perception of her group's status is not inherently connected to her own beliefs about the group. One can simultaneously believe that others do not respect the group while being a proud member of it. Luhtanen and Crocket (1992) refer to this personal feeling about one's group as private collective self-esteem, as opposed to public collective esteem. One may, for example, be very happy with his identity as a Christian (high private collective self-esteem) yet believe that others have no respect for his religious preferences (low public collective self-esteem). Group status is about what one perceives others to think about his group identities, not what he himself thinks about them.

Additionally, perceptions about group status may or may not align with others' actual views about one's group. It is very possible that one may be wrong in her assessment of others' perceptions. To return to our previous thought experiment, you may believe that others will respect you less after learning your religious preference or sexual orientation, but you might be wrong. Indeed, they may do everything in their power to convince you of their respect for your group, and you may still perceive disrespect. For this project, I focus on the perception of respect, rather than others' professed views and beliefs.

It is also critical to note that status, as I define it, does not require an economic component, nor does it necessitate power or majority status. Status is about respect, not wealth, power, or identity prevalence. It is about admiration, honor, and deference. Although high income, power, and being a social majority may influence the prestige of a group in society, status does not always coincide with these factors. For example, Fiske (2013) points out that TSA officers have a considerable amount of power but are typically not respected; they lack social prestige. Likewise, white Americans are increasingly losing their hold as America's racial majority, but this does not mean they receive less respect than other racial groups. In this project, when I talk about group status I am focusing exclusively on the respect one perceives her group to receive in society, regardless of how one feels about her own group, how others actually feel about the group, and how wealthy, powerful, and prevalent the group may be.

## **2.2 Why Do Group Members Care about Status?**

Presumably, when you thought about how others would react to you after learning your group identity in our thought experiment, you didn't enjoy feeling as though others

might have negative opinions of your group. Rather, you would prefer others to think highly of your associations; you would prefer to feel as those others respect the groups to which you belong. This desire for others to respect one's groups is rooted in a more basic desire to feel good about oneself, to have positive self-esteem. Social Identity Theory (SIT) argues that one of the main reasons people identify with a group in the first place is to gain self-esteem through that identification (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Because people associate with groups in hopes that their group membership will contribute positively to their self-esteem, it logically follows that people want their group be respected in society. The perception that others do not respect their group affiliations is an unsettling indication that their group membership is failing to serve one of its primary purposes.

Given the role that status plays in group identification, it is no surprise that group members strive to enhance the status of their group. Evidence in psychology supports the importance people place on group status and shows that people want their group to do better relative to other groups. In an experiment using minimal groups, participants who were given the choice to make their own group better off in absolute terms, an out-group better off, or their own group relatively better off (but no better off in absolute terms) chose the last option (Tajfel 1982); it was not that they wanted their group to gain as much as possible but that they wanted their group membership to have bigger payoffs relative to another group. They were actively comparing the position of their group to another. Ultimately, although focused on the acquisition of material goods rather than status, this research suggests that group members care about their position relative to other groups and will make choices that further this interest.

It is possible, of course, to argue that people only care about group status insofar as it will ultimately lead to power and, consequently, economic goals. However, just as status does not necessarily correlate with money and power, the desire for status operates separately from these goals. Experimental evidence suggests that status goals work independently of financial considerations, and people are willing to sacrifice some material gain to achieve a higher status, even when the identities of participants remain anonymous and thus the prospects for future power and economic gains as a result of the status improvement are bleak (Huberman et al. 2004). Therefore, status can operate on a completely social level without ties to economic goals. Achieving respect, or a high status within society, is a goal in and of itself.

### **2.3 Perceptions of Status**

Regardless of whether you anticipated positive or negative reactions about your group identities from others in our thought experiment, it is likely that you were able to decide how you think others would react to learning about your religious affiliation or sexual orientation without a great deal of contemplation. What drove these perceptions? Why do you think others would react this way?

As mentioned above, it is possible that your perception is wrong, but it is also likely that you assessed the situation based on a variety of factors that could serve as status barometers. One possibility is that you based your expectation on personal experience. Maybe you simply thought about how you've been treated by others in the past. If others have personally treated you poorly in the past due to one or more of your group identities, it is reasonable that you might be anxious about revealing this information to new people



and anticipate a negative response. Or perhaps you've overheard favorable or negative comments about people with your group identities and feel you have a sense of how disclosure would be received.

The media and entertainment industries also likely contribute to your perceptions about your groups. Seeing others like yourself on TV and in the movies can serve as an indicator of not only the prevalence of your group identity in society but how well-received people like you are. Whether members of your groups are routinely portrayed as desirable and well-respected by other characters or looked down upon sends a clear message about your groups' place in society.

Beyond personal experiences and media coverage, broader influences such as elite rhetoric and government action also likely play into your perceptions about the status of your groups. When politicians talk about groups, they act as opinion leaders in society and give us direction for understanding the state of people like us. They may say overtly positive or negative things about a group or mention their own affiliation, signaling the level of respect a group receives by society. For example, politicians may routinely talk about and acknowledge Christianity as a guiding force in their personal life or society as a whole. Conversely, they may make subjective observations about the status of a group, stating that certain groups deserve more or less respect than society currently offers them. Statements about the need to recognize the dignity of immigrants, for example, conveys a sense that this group is currently undervalued.

The governments' orientation toward our groups' ideals and preferences can also serve as a status barometer. When government performs an action that upholds a group's ideals and preferences, it announces its affirmation of the group. Sociologist Joseph Gusfield

(1985), explains this relationship well: “The public acceptance of a set of idea norms confers prestige and respect on them... Correspondingly, acceptance of such ideal norms confers respect and prestige on those groups whose behavior is closest to them” (p. 66). By accepting certain norms as “good” in society, government accepts the group that adheres to those norms. For example, when local governments display nativity scenes in front of city hall, they implicitly say, “We support Christians.” When the Supreme Court upheld the marriage of gay couples as valid, it loudly proclaimed, “We support gays.” Essentially, by performing these actions, government is offering a societal stamp of approval on the group or the group’s claims; it is contributing to assessments of the group’s status in society.

Importantly, however, not all government action makes a statement about status; sometimes government action serves primarily to uphold principles of equality, civil liberty, or some other value that is unrelated to the group in question. For example, allowing a nativity scene to be placed on government property alongside other religious symbols implies that we value free religious expression while requiring that the nativity scene stands alone sends the signal that Christianity is superior to other faiths; the critical difference between these two policies is even constitutionally-recognized in the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. In addition to serving primarily as a statement on broader values, some government action gives a group certain benefits but does not imply an improvement in status. When government upholds civil unions rather than gay marriage, for example, it provides for the practical needs of the group without giving it the status recognition of marriage.

### **3. GROUP STATUS AND POLITICS**

Because elite rhetoric and government action are two of the many factors that signal group status, status likely also influences group members' interaction with politics. In this project, I argue that we can understand why people support the policies they do by considering their status perceptions, that people are aware of the connection between government action and status and use the political realm to express and change their position in society. Research from psychologists provides insight into how group status influences intergroup attitudes and offers a springboard for understanding the relevance of status for politics.

#### **3.1 Status Dissonance**

I propose that status is particularly influential for politics when there is an imbalance between two key perceptions: the amount of respect one's group deserves and the amount of respect the one's group receives. In other words, one's desire to turn to government is likely strongest when she wants to change the status of her group, rather than just validate it, when she experiences some level of status dissonance. Although focused more on the disconnect between personal satisfaction and public affirmation, Luhtanen and Crockett (1992) note the possibility that imbalance plays a role in group members' desire to become political on behalf of their group; activists, they postulate, may have an imbalance between public and private collective esteem, suggesting that those who take action on behalf of their group personally find the group worthy (i.e., they are proud to be a member of their group) but do not perceive that society values the group. Here, I'm proposing that the critical imbalance is between what one perceives society to believe and what one thinks society

*should* believe, which may or may not correlate strongly with private feelings about group membership.

### 3.2.1 *Status Deserved > Status Received*

The most likely form of status dissonance occurs when group members feel that their group receives less respect than it deserves (i.e., their group receives *too little* respect). This dissonance is present when persistent imbalances exist between deserved and received respect; it occurs when a group chronically receives less respect than its members feel they deserve. It can also occur when changes in the amount of respect deserved, received, or both disrupt a previous status equilibrium. For example, group members may feel their group is unjustly losing the respect it once received in society; their received respect falls below their deserved respect. These group members will, I argue, look to government to reaffirm their high status, whether through policies that benefit the ingroup or restrict the outgroup. This is true even for groups that typically lean conservative and, thus, are generally less inclined to support government intervention in public life; Christians' support of religious policies serves as an example. Conversely, group members may begin to feel their group deserves more respect than it has ever received before; their deserved respect rises above their received respect. These group members should also look to government to grant the status they feel they deserve, so long as there is enough societal support to sustain the effort; LGBTQ Americans' push for gay marriage is an example of this effect.

Much of the literature in psychology and sociology that supports the notion that group members will bolster the ingroup and lash out at the outgroup when they feel their group deserves more status than it receives focuses on groups experiencing a threat or loss

to previously received respect, rather than a rise in deserved respect. For example, simply being told one's performance will be compared to a member of a low-status group is enough to induce threat (Pettit and Lount 2010). Furthermore, Scheepers and Ellemers (2005) find that members of an artificially created high status group are more worried about an upcoming intergroup competition than members of the low status group. In their experiment, they create minimal teams and have them perform a task. After the task, they provide false results to establish the current hierarchy. They then measure the blood pressure of the participants. A bit later they announce that there will be another competition, and, after the announcement, they measure blood pressure again. The "low" status group (i.e. the losing team) exhibits higher blood pressure than the "high" status group (i.e. the winning team) immediately following the loss, but the high status group exhibits higher blood pressure than the low status group after the announcement, suggesting that the high status group viewed the impending competition as potentially threatening to their status. Follow-up research using more specific cardiovascular measures finds that high status groups view competition as a threat as opposed to a challenge (Scheepers 2009). These findings align with research on loss aversion, suggesting that the desire to maintain status is perhaps more motivating than the desire to gain new status (Tversky and Kahneman, 1991). Additional studies show a threat to status induces outgroup animosity. Morrison et al. (2009) find that respondents who perceive their political party to be of high status express generalized negative outgroup attitudes (as measured by the social dominance orientation scale) when exposed to information about the other party's frontrunner. These studies support the idea that individuals in groups, particularly those perceiving high status, strive to maintain status

and react negatively when faced with the possibility that the respect they receive may fall below the respect they deserve.

Existing scholarship outside of psychology also supports the idea that groups express animosity toward outgroups when experiencing a perceived threat to the respect their group receives. This threat often occurs when lower status groups begin to perceive that their group deserves more respect than it receives—when newfound status dissonance for the low status group results in an imbalance for those belonging to the high status group. Gusfield (1986) argues that high status groups initially may try to help those who deviate from societal norms; however, as soon as “deviants” begin to assert the value of their lifestyle choices high status groups often look to government to affirm their superiority. Essentially, when members of a low status group stop believing they are unworthy of respect and begin to demand social status, the high status group’s only real option is to block the outgroup’s attempt to disrupt the status hierarchy either by blocking or passing relevant legislation.

Sociologists provide evidence that some political movements are largely an effort to resolve status dissonance. Gusfield (1986) argues that the Temperance Movement, for example, represented an attempt by rural, Protestant Americans to reclaim their declining status over urban, Catholic Americans; importantly, they were just as interested in the symbolic importance of prohibition legislation as they were actually policing alcohol consumption. Wald et al. (1989) find a similar connection between status and adherence to group traditional norms. They present empirical evidence that suggests the mobilization of the “New Christian Right” is partly a result of status concerns, measured by perceived societal respect for that group. Focusing more equally on groups who are losing received respect and those who are increasing deserved respect, Luker (1985) contends that

positions on abortion, at least at the onset of the political debate, were largely about the status of motherhood as opposed to any deep-seated convictions about the personhood of a fetus or women's rights. All of these provide examples of how groups take status grievances to the political arena in hopes to increase the respect they receive so that it matches the respect they feel they deserve.

It is important to reiterate at this point that attempts to bolster the ingroup and restrict the outgroup are not solely driven by a realistic conflict (i.e. a struggle over economic resources) between the ingroup and outgroup. In fact, many policies designed to target groups are not economic in nature. Policies about whether or not religious groups can practice their religion in a community, for example, are not about money. These and many other group-based policies are fundamentally about legislating respect: allowing some groups to (socially) thrive while limiting the capacity of others. When groups feel that there is an imbalance between the respect their group receives and the respect their group deserves they will adjust their political attitudes and policy preferences in a way that works toward resolving their status dissonance.

### *3.2.2 Status Deserved < Status Received*

In a departure from social identity theory, which suggests that groups can never receive too much esteem, I argue that group members are not endless consumers of prestige. Rather, the balance between perceptions about the respect they receive and deserve is more critical than boundless respect. In some cases, ingroup members may actually feel that their group receives more respect than it deserves (i.e., their group receives *too much* respect). As with the previous case, this dissonance can be the result of longstanding imbalances or a

change in the amount of respect deserved, the amount of respect received, or both simultaneously. For example, members of one group may begin to feel that their group does not deserve the respect it receives; its deserved respect falls below its received respect. For example, when whites perceive that their racial group unfairly receives more respect than minorities, they may experience white guilt and become allies in movements such as Black Lives Matter. Conversely, members of another group may gain status without feeling like they deserve it; their received respect rises above their deserved respect. In both of these cases, group members should become less supportive of policies that benefit their group and more supportive of policies that benefit the outgroup in an effort to obtain balance.

Evidence from psychology supports the idea that group members will express lowered ingroup support and outgroup animosity when they feel their group receives more status than it deserves. For example, Baumeister et al. (1996) argues that in order for outgroup aggression to occur there must be a discrepancy between internal and external appraisals of the individual (i.e. the individual must reject the negative external appraisal of oneself); when the individual accepts the external appraisal they express negative emotions toward themselves and withdraw rather than attack. Similarly, when group members perceive a discrepancy between a *positive* external (received) and internal (deserved) appraisal, they should reject the assessment and work to fix it by supportive, rather than opposing, the outgroup. Another way to think about this status imbalance is in terms of legitimacy. In an experiment altering the reason for the current status hierarchy, Harth et al. (2008) find that when members of a high status ingroup believe their position is a result of a structural (illegitimate) rather than an outgroup (legitimate) flaw they are less likely to express pride and a desire to help the ingroup by withholding money from outgroup support



and excluding outgroup members. Essentially, ingroup members who perceive that they receive too much respect refrain from lashing out at outgroups.

### **3.2 Marginalized Groups**

While I argue that all groups desire status and will seek to correct imbalances in the respect they perceive their group deserves and receives, there is reason to believe some groups may experience barriers to their willingness to fight for these goals. Members of groups that feel their group is losing status, as opposed to seeking to gain status for the first time, may find it relatively easy to express their concerns; after all, they are appealing to a society that previously supported their group. Conversely, members of marginalized groups that have never enjoyed status may find it intimidating and challenging to attempt to address their status dissonance, as they must make appeals to a society that has never considered their perspective or concerns.

Perceiving that their group has never, and perhaps will never, be supported by society, severely marginalized groups may actually retreat from government, rather than push for ingroup interests. Research in psychology highlights the tendency of low status groups to subvert their interests. For example, evidence supporting system justification theory shows that low status groups sometimes justify and reinforce the very system that marginalizes them (Jost et al. 2004). Other evidence suggests that it is a sense of powerlessness that prevents people from questioning social hierarchies (Toorn et al. 2015). For members of groups who feel powerless in the face of status dissonance, it is unlikely that they will attempt to correct the imbalance. For example, when discussing early stages of the gay rights movement, advocates note they delayed a push for gay marriage because they

simply felt it was an impossible goal (Fetner 2008). These advocates felt their group did not receive the respect it deserved, but they did not try to remedy the situation because they believed it would be a lost cause.

As marginalized groups begin to feel some level of respect by others, however, they may gain confidence and decide it's time for government to solidify what others seem to already know: their group deserves status. Having gained enough support to believe their group is capable of correcting status dissonance, members of marginalized groups can begin to express the ingroup bolstering and outgroup animosity necessary to fully correct their status imbalance. Evidence suggests this is precisely what happens when marginalized groups gain some level of support. For example, Prislun et al. (2011) find that new majorities sometimes utilize their power to discriminate. Ultimately, although members of groups at all levels of the status hierarchy desire to correct status dissonance, a certain degree of societal support is likely necessary before members of marginalized groups act on their concerns.

#### **4. DIVERGENCE FROM EXISTING THEORIES**

By focusing on status, this project seeks to add clarity to our understanding about when and why group members support a variety of group-based policies. Of course, there already exist numerous theories that help us make sense of intergroup public opinion. In this section, I explore how my theory differs from existing literature and what it adds to this important conversation.

## 4.1 Dispositional Worldviews

Much of the existing research relevant to understanding intergroup attitudes focuses on dispositional factors that predispose individuals to express opposition to outgroups. Although these factors are helpful for understanding why certain individuals may express opposition to a range of different groups, they do not allow for a full understanding of the importance of group dynamics in public opinion.

For example, research on authoritarianism—a worldview which values the status quo and obedience to authority—shows that authoritarian individuals are less supportive of a wide variety of social groups than nonauthoritarians (Hetherington and Weiler 2009). While authoritarians are indeed more likely to express hostility towards certain groups, their primary concern is maintaining the security provided by the status quo, regardless of whether or not the status quo has positive or negative implications for the groups they belong to; my theory proposes that one’s group identities—and how those identities are perceived by society—can be critical for understanding which intergroup policies they will support. In Chapter 2, I provide evidence supporting this distinction; while status concerned Christians are more supportive of pro-Christian policies, status concerned Agnostics/Atheists are *less* supportive. However, both authoritarian Christians and Agnostics/Atheists are more supportive of the policies, highlighting the distinction between the authoritarian worldview and group-oriented concerns.

Ethnocentrism is another important dispositional factor used to explain outgroup hostility. Kinder and Kam (2010) find that ethnocentric individuals—people who have a strong propensity to divide the world between ingroups and outgroups—also oppose numerous policies that could potentially bolster outgroups. Ethnocentric individuals are

primarily concerned about their own feelings toward in-groups and out-groups, whereas this project posits that an important consideration is one's perception of what *others* think about her group identities. Although I do not yet have empirical evidence to test the distinction, it is worth theorizing about the implications. For example, ethnocentric individuals should support policies that support their group over others regardless of how society feels about their group identities while status concerned individuals' intergroup policy preferences are very sensitive to societal perceptions and only reflect their own feelings about their group insofar as they believe their group deserves more or less respect than it receives.

Perhaps the most status-relevant disposition is social dominance orientation (SDO), a disposition which leads people to strongly value social hierarchy and discriminate against low-status groups (Sidanius and Pratto 2001). Those high in SDO are primarily concerned with promoting status hierarchies and will support policies that enforce inequality—whether by nature or when framed to highlight inequality—while those low in SDO are primarily concerned with dismantling status hierarchies and will support policies that attenuate inequality, regardless of how those policies affect the groups with which they identify. Focusing on a general liking or disliking for status hierarchies per se, although helpful in some cases, limits our ability to fully explain intergroup dynamics, particularly when faced with the reality that individuals belong to groups with divergent statuses and may have non-static feelings about each group identity that are independent of feelings about other group identities. Here, I allow for the likelihood that intergroup policy preferences emerge largely from perceptions about the status of one's own groups and the desire to correct any perceived imbalances. In fact, research suggests that even SDO

fluctuates in the face of intergroup changes (Morrison 2009). Therefore, considering the importance of group identity and perceptions about that identity seems very appropriate for exploring intergroup policy opinion.

#### **4.2 Realistic and Symbolic Threats**

When scholars focus more heavily on group identity and the dynamics between groups, they tend to focus on either realistic or symbolic threat to the group's interests, two of the most influential components of integrated threat theory (Stephan and Stephan 2000). Realistic threats include threats to the ingroup's physical and material well-being as well as threats to the group's political and economic power (Stephan and Stephan 2000). Research on immigration, for example, shows that concerns about the national economy result in restrictive immigration attitudes (Citrin et al. 1997). In this case, material well-being influences intergroup attitudes.

Other research focuses on symbolic, rather than realistic, threats to group interests. Symbolic threats primarily involve threats to the ingroup's morals, values, and beliefs (Stephan and Stephan 2000). Research in a number of policy areas highlights the relevance of symbolic threat for intergroup attitudes. Immigration research, in addition to finding that realistic threats influence attitudes, also shows the importance of symbolic threats. For example, Brader et al. (2008) find that Americans are particularly concerned about Latino, as opposed to white European, immigrants. Additionally, interaction with non-English speakers and exposure to the Spanish language heightens perceptions of cultural threat and, consequently, increases anti-immigrant policy preferences (Newman et al. 2012).

Race relations offer another area where scholars have considered the influence of symbolic threats. Sears et al. (1979) show that self-interest has little influence on American's opinions about busing, and follow-up research indicates that busing attitudes are particularly informed by the view that the civil rights movement poses a symbolic threat (Bobo 1983).

Symbolic threats also play a role in international affairs. For example, perceived threat to cultural values, not just resource conflict, has been shown to influence opposition to the European Union (McLaren 2002). Moreover, evidence suggests that when respondents are made aware of value similarities between another nation and their own they perceive less international threat and are more willing to cooperate with the outgroup (Garcia-Retamero et al. 2012). Ultimately, political science research does little in the way of explicitly talking about status for either low or high status groups, although it does consider the importance of symbolic threat for groups with high status. In the next few paragraphs, I discuss the extent to which research on symbolic threat does an adequate job assessing the importance of status.

#### *4.2.1 Unpacking Symbolic Threat*

Political scientists have long utilized symbolic threats in explaining intergroup attitudes and policy preferences, particularly among those with historically high status. However, while realistic threat is relatively easy to understand—groups perceive that another group will gain access to scarce resources—scholars tend to be less clear in their definition of symbolic threat. In one of the first studies to systematically introduce and test symbolic threat, Bobo (1983) states that blacks are a symbolic threat to whites insofar as

they are a threat to “their life-styles, as well as to other valued resources and accepted practices” (p. 1198). Similarly, McLaren (2002) defines symbolic threat as threats to “culture and way of life” (p. 558). She notes in the case of the European Union that citizens have been socialized to accept the “power and sovereignty” of their nation-state, and that the European Union poses a symbolic threat to all that the nation-state symbolizes (p. 555).

Even when scholars attempt to delve deeper into the concept of symbolic threat they often maintain the same surface level conceptualization. For example, Newman et al. (2012) note that symbolic threat, which they define as “violations to a group’s core set of beliefs, values, cultural norms, or identities,” can also occur at a realistic and personal level (p. 637). Using the case of immigration, they argue that contact with non-English speaking immigrants creates “cultural disorientation” among Americans and limits “intergroup communication and exchange” in a personal and realistic, as well as symbolic, ways (p. 636).

What these scholars do not fully explain, however, is exactly why symbolic threats emerge and thus, what they really mean. Presumably threats emerge when certain changes take place in society, whether it’s the presence of a new immigrant group or shifts in a community’s religious makeup. Scholars tend to assume any cultural change produces a threat and thus define symbolic threats as simply “threats to culture” without explaining why cultural changes are perceived as threatening.

What makes these shifts a threat? A threat to what, exactly? Why isn’t diversity welcome? These questions arise because literature on symbolic threat often fails to maintain a group-centered focus. It is not cultural change in and of itself that is threatening but rather the specific group dynamics involved. With this in mind, it is possible that changes are threatening because the ingroup believes that the outgroup will gain political power and

force their values on the public at-large via policy changes. Indeed, this is what some people fear the Muslim community is attempting to do with Sharia Law. Another less severe possibility is that ingroup members simply want to be prototypical; they want their characteristics to represent the typical member of society. A third, more compelling, possibility is that ingroup members view cultural changes as a threat because they view the accepted presence of other customs and norms as evidence that their own customs and norms are no longer valued as much as they once were. In other words, their group is losing the social prestige they once enjoyed; their status is threatened by another group.

The last, status-oriented, understanding of why societal changes are sometimes viewed as threatening seems to come close to what Bobo means when he says that whites probably see busing as a threat to “a social world and position in society they accept and value” (p. 1198). However, his measurement of this threat hinges on the extent to which respondents believe the Civil Rights movement is moving too fast. Although this type of measure might represent concerns about status, it could also indicate other fears, such as that blacks are gaining policy influence.

Ambiguous questions assessing symbolic threat plague other studies as well. McLaren (2002) simply asks respondents whether or not they agree that the religious practices of minority groups “threaten our way of life” (p. 558). Once again, it is unclear whether minorities threaten the prestige of “our way of life”, the practice of “our way of life” (via policy change), the prototypicality of “our way of life” or something else.

This project adds some clarity on exactly why cultural changes are “symbolic threats” and, consequently, exactly what a symbolic threat really is, arguing that status concerns are an integral component of symbolic threat. By focusing on status, this project also seeks to



bring low status groups into the conversation by examining how concerns about status influences intergroup attitudes and policy preferences among both groups that are losing long-held status and those who wish to obtain it for the first time.

## **5. PLAN OF DISSERTATION**

Intergroup dynamics are central to politics, and people fight for policies that best serve to meet their group's goals. Here, I propose that one force behind public opinion is intergroup status and the desire for status influences the political attitudes and policy preferences. When group members feel there is an imbalance between the respect their group deserves and the respect their group receives, they support policies that resolve their status dissonance. Often, in cases where group members perceive too little respect, they will support policies that uphold the ingroup and/or restrict the outgroup. For example, English-speaking Americans who encounter menus and instructions written in Spanish may feel threatened and support the English as Official Language movement. Sometimes, in cases where groups perceive too much respect, they may actually become less supportive of policies that uphold their group and/or restrict the outgroup. For example, whites who perceive that they enjoy unearned privileges due to their race may advocate for an end to racially-charged policies such as stop and frisk.

While political scientists spend a great deal of time trying to explain why people support and oppose various intergroup policies, this project addresses important gaps in their standard approaches. Many dispositional approaches focus on one's worldview or feelings about group hierarchies in general, as opposed to her group identities and their positions in society, while other theories tend to focus group members' realistic concerns

about economic benefits. Although scholars do acknowledge the importance of symbolic threats, they do not offer clear conceptualization of what these threat mean. Furthermore, they do not do enough to include groups with low status in the conversation. Throughout the remaining chapters, I utilize a variety of methods to explore the relationship between group status and public opinion.

The first empirical chapter of my project explores my theory through the lens of religion. Here, I use both existing and original survey data to examine how perceptions of status among Christians and non-Christians influence their support for a variety of policies. In line with my theory, I find that when Christians perceive a deficit in status, as compared to perceiving a surplus of status, they become more supportive of policies that affirm their religion—such as allowing schools to teach creationism in the science classroom. Conversely, non-Christians who perceive a status deficit are less supportive of the same policies than their counterparts. Additionally, I find that status concerns have no influence on support for non-religious issues such as energy policy. Furthermore, my research suggests that Christians and non-Christians perceive status as a zero sum game.

Having shown general support for the importance of intergroup status concern for public opinion in one issue area, in Chapter 3 I turn to an exploration of how status arguments make their way into political communication surrounding policy issues. Focusing on gay marriage, I conduct a content analysis of national newspaper articles from 2003-2013 to assess the nature and frequency of status arguments within the debate among both supporters and opponents. Next, I build a framework for identifying the presence of status arguments in other policy debates. To conclude the chapter, I use existing survey data to determine the relationship between status concern and support for gay marriage among

Christians and LGBTQ Americans, finding that status concerns correlate strongly with attitudes surrounding gay marriage among both groups.

In Chapter 4, I consider the potential importance of intragroup status for group members' desire and willingness to support policies that bolster their group. Specifically, I conduct two experiments to test the hypothesis that marginalized ingroup members will be more supportive of policies that benefit their group than group members with average status in an effort to show loyalty to group goals and, thus, bolster their status within the group. Focusing on gender, the first experiment experimentally marginalizes male and female undergraduates relative to students with their gender and then asks for their views on university policies such as affirmative action for women. I find that while marginalized females are more supportive of pro-female policies than status secure females, marginalized males are *less* supportive than their counterparts. The second experiment unpacks the complicated dynamics of women's status in society by focusing on mothers and their family roles. I find that marginalized working moms are more supportive of policies such as paid maternity leave than working moms with an average status while marginalized stay-at-home moms are less supportive of the same policies than stay-at-home moms with average status. In other words, the influence of status on support for women's policies depends heavily on women's perceptions of what being a woman rightfully entails.

Ultimately, the results from these three empirical chapters offer strong support for the relevance of group status for intergroup public opinion. This insight into how the status of one's group within society affects attitudes toward policies and other groups within society is valuable because it helps us understand when and among whom ingroup bolstering and outgroup hostility should occur, as well as allows for changes over time in

which individuals or subgroups of the population actively support intergroup policies. Additionally, it has implications for scholars and policymakers who advocate policies that might shift the status dynamics within society. This project provides important insight into these inquiries and adds important considerations for those interesting in uncovering ways to reduce intergroup conflict.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Influence of Group Status on Public Opinion

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although the Supreme Court found school-initiated prayer to be in violation of the First Amendment in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), the battle over school prayer and other religious issues is far from over. According to a 2010 First Amendment Center poll, a strong majority—80 percent of Americans—support student-led prayer at public school events.<sup>1</sup> A FOX News Poll from 2009 reports that an almost equally high number of Americans, 74 percent, support public displays of the Ten Commandments.<sup>2</sup> And a 2012 survey shows that 57 percent of Americans believe state and local governments should be allowed to require the reading of the Lord’s Prayer or Biblical passages in public schools (Lipka, 2013). The desire for religious symbols in the public sphere goes beyond opinion; South Carolina lawmakers recently tried to bring prayer, in the form of a moment of silence, back into South Carolina’s public schools (“Local”, 2013). Further, the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled last year that a Ten Commandments monument be removed from the lawn of the Oklahoma Capitol after years of controversy (Pérez-Peña, 2015). And Tennessee, just months ago, tried to make the Bible its official state book (Merod, 2016).

Most scholarship investigating public opinion on Establishment Clause issues tends to focus on school prayer, and much of this research finds that various demographic

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<sup>1</sup> State Of The First Amendment Survey, September 2010, [www.ropercenter.cornell.edu](http://www.ropercenter.cornell.edu)

<sup>2</sup> FOX News/Opinion Dynamics Poll, August 2009, [www.ropercenter.cornell.edu](http://www.ropercenter.cornell.edu)

characteristics lie at the root of support for these policies. The importance of religion to the believer's life and church attendance, as well as age, gender, and education are strongly related to support for school prayer (Woodrum and Hoban 1992). Additionally, political conservatives tend to be more supportive of school prayer (Green & Guth 1989; Woodrum and Hoban 1992; Moore 2005). Research also shows a divergence among religious believers on this point; while liberal-leaning religious folk have become less supportive, religious conservatives still strongly support school prayer (Hoffman and Miller 1997; Schwadel 2013). Although existing research establishes the importance of many key factors in understanding support for religious policies, this chapter seeks to build on this knowledge by addressing how intergroup status concerns play a role.

There is reason to believe that a desire for religion in the public sphere is rooted partially, if not primarily, in an effort for religious believers to assert their group's status. For example, Gusfield (1986) notes that prayer, when incorporated into public events, can serve as a gesture of differentiation, symbolizing which group government finds deserving of prestige (p. 172). While there are many reasons one might oppose gay marriage, a desire to permit school prayer or other religious symbols is primarily a desire to promote the social recognition of a particular set of values. There are not, for example, economic gains that may arise from these symbols. Rather, placing religious symbols and rituals in the public sphere is one way for religious believers to support the social status of their group.

A quick look at commentary surrounding religious policy issues indicates that status may be of concern to those who desire their implementation. In a 1999 op-ed for the *New York Times*, Michael Novak argues that school prayer would teach atheists "respect for American pluralism" and that prayer is part of a "generic, majority vision -- a vision with

deep roots in the nation's founding principles" (Novak, 1999). He goes on to suggest that Christians *deserve* prayer (i.e. respect for their values):

Nonetheless, prayer in the schools seems to alarm those who would prefer the establishment of a totally secular frame of reference, no matter what the majority deserves. Although they may say that prayer is essentially meaningless, so much wasted breath or mental energy, that isn't really how they feel about it. It positively threatens them. (Novak, 1999)

Novak essentially argues that school prayer is rooted in tradition and that this Christian tradition deserves respect by atheists. Others echo his sentiments and refer to those who are against school prayer as "dark forces" trying to "do harm" (Eckholm, 2011). They ask, "Why should our fellow Christians have to give up their right to a Christian nation?" and offer a radical solution to what they see as a grave predicament: "we should offer them residence in an atheist nation, then help them move there" (Letter, 2014). As for the ACLU—the organization that often leads the fight against public displays of religion—concerned believers argue it is "an atheist organization that has no place in a Christian nation" (Letter, 2013). Indeed, those on the other side of the issue clearly recognize that religious symbols send a strong signal of Christianity's status in America. As one man recalls about his childhood experience with school prayer, "It was a painful social lesson that I didn't belong" ("Pressure", 2001).

In this chapter, I explore the influence of status concerns on support for religious policies, arguing that people adjust their policy views on religious issues in an effort to alleviate status grievances. When religious believers feel that their status in society is slipping, for example, they will presumably become more supportive of policies that recognize and promote their religion as a way to bolster the position of their group in society. In the next section, I begin a quantitative exploration of this general hypothesis.

## 2. PROOF OF CONCEPT

### 2.1 Data and Hypotheses

The first set of data I use to test my hypothesis comes from a Newsweek poll of Evangelical Protestants conducted in November 2006.<sup>3</sup> To measure status concern, I rely on the following question: “Do you believe that religion plays too big a role in American political and cultural life today, too small a role, or is it about right?” This question, although admittedly imperfect, allows me to get a sense of how the respondent perceives religion’s place in society and whether or not it deserves more or less prominence. When the three responses options are coded from 0 to 1, where 0=“too big” and 1=“too small” Evangelical respondents lean toward viewing religion’s role as too small (mean=0.75; s.d.= 0.36). Figure 2.1 highlights the distribution of responses. On the whole, 14 percent of Evangelicals perceive that religion plays too big of a role, 22 percent think the role of religion is just right, and 64 percent reported they believe religion plays small of a role.

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<sup>3</sup> I focus on Evangelicals because the relevant policy questions are not presented to other religious groups; I do not have divergent expectations for Evangelical and non-Evangelical Christians. With that in mind, my sample contains 331 Evangelical Protestants. The average respondent is female, has some schooling after high school, and is 54 years old. The sample is 83 percent white, 11 percent black, and 3 percent Hispanic. Ideologically, the sample is 46 percent Republican, 27 percent Democrat, and 27 percent Independent.



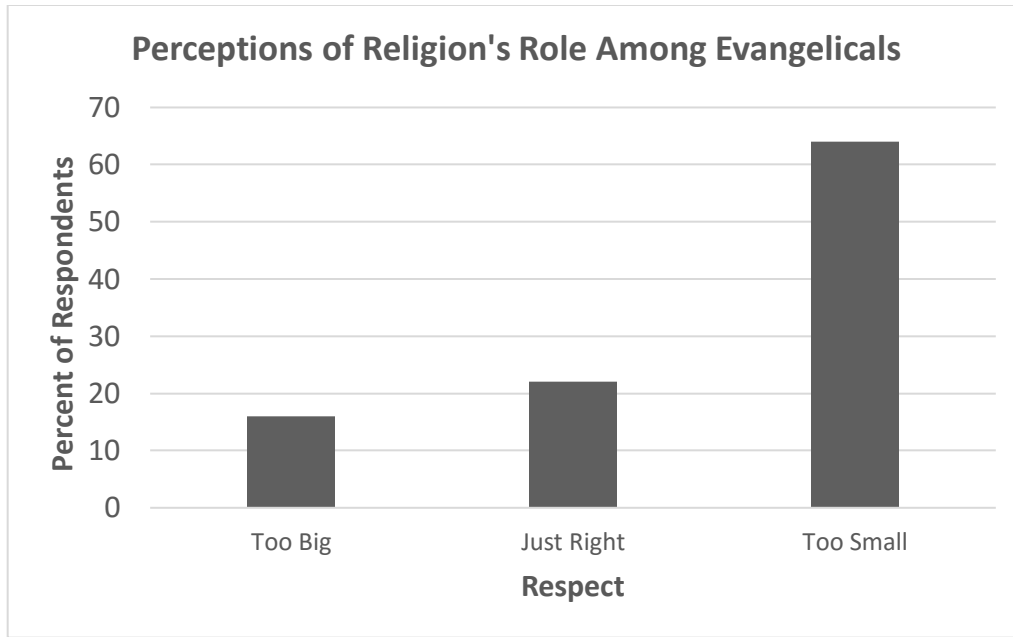


Figure 2.1 Perceptions of Religion’s Role Among Evangelicals (Newsweek Poll, 2006)

My primary dependent variables assess the extent to which respondents desire to promote religion through policy. Specifically, they ask respondents about their level of support for three religious policies: a constitutional amendment to permit school prayer, vouchers to help families send their children to religious schools, and allowing Biblical creationism to be taught in science classrooms.<sup>4</sup> These variables are coded on a 1 to 4 scale where 1=“strongly oppose” and 4=“strongly favor” the given policy. Support for each policy varies. Support for school prayer is the highest (mean=3.39; s.d.=0.85) while religious school vouchers receive the least support (mean=2.79; s.d.=0.98). Allowing Biblical creationism to be taught in science classrooms falls in between (mean=3.23; s.d. 0.91).

Given my arguments that support for various policies offer a way for status concerned group members to resolve their status grievances, my expectation is that Evangelicals who

<sup>4</sup> Full question wording for each item is in the Appendix

perceive religion's role is too little will be *more* supportive of school prayer, vouchers, and teaching creationism than those who perceive its role is about right or too big. In other words, believers who feel their group does not have enough status in society will express a desire to promote religion by supporting religious policies and, consequently, their group. This expectation leads to my first hypothesis:

H1: Evangelicals who believe religion's role is "too little" in politics and culture will be more likely to support school prayer, school vouchers, and teaching creationism than those who say religion's role is "about right" or "too big".

## 2.2 Descriptive Statistics and Analysis

First, I examine which demographics influence perceptions about the status of religion in politics and culture, finding that women are more likely to believe religion plays too small a role in society than are males ( $p < 0.01$ ); the correlation between being female and these views is 0.13. The same results emerge for partisanship, with Republicans more likely to say religion plays too small a role than their Democrat counterparts ( $p < 0.01$ ). The correlation between partisanship and believing religion plays too small a role is 0.20. Given the close alignment of religious believers with the Republican Party, this finding is not surprising. Education, age, and race have no statistically significant influence on Evangelicals' perceptions.<sup>5</sup> These results are shown in Table 2.1.

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<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, other potentially important demographic variables such as political ideology and household income were not included in the survey.

	Too Small Role
Republican	0.55*** (0.18)
Female	0.40*** (0.15)
Education	-0.38 (0.38)
Age	-0.69 (0.64)
Black	-0.03 (0.25)
Hispanic	-0.42 (0.48)
_cut1	-0.62 (0.71)
_cut2	-1.38 (0.71)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.04
N	297

Note: These are weighted, ordered probit analyses. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. All variables coded 0 to 1.

Table 2.1 Demographic Correlates for Perceptions of Status (Newsweek Poll, 2006)

Next, I explore how perceptions about religion's status influence support for my three religious policies. Given the nature of my dependent variables, I use ordered probit to test my hypotheses. Controlling for partisanship, gender, age, education, and race, I find that when compared to those who believe religion has appropriate or too much status in society, Evangelicals with a perception that religion lacks status are more supportive of all three religious policies (p<0.01).<sup>6</sup> This finding supports the theory that when Evangelicals

<sup>6</sup> All independent variables are coded 0 to 1.

perceive a deficit in status for religion, they become more supportive of policies that promote religion. I also find that Republican respondents are more supportive of these policies than Democrats ( $p < 0.01$ ). Full results for these analyses are shown in Table 2.2.

	Prayer in School	Vouchers for Religious School	Creationism in Classroom
Too Little Status	0.90*** (0.19)	0.79*** (0.19)	0.67*** (0.19)
Republican	0.49*** (0.18)	0.66*** (0.17)	0.85*** (0.18)
Female	0.17 (0.14)	0.06 (0.13)	0.23 (0.14)
Education	-0.86** (0.39)	-0.42 (0.35)	-0.82** (0.38)
Age	0.07 (0.63)	-1.19** (0.60)	-0.72 (0.61)
Black	0.16 (0.24)	0.10 (0.23)	0.31 (0.24)
Hispanic	1.16* (0.63)	0.97** (0.51)	0.87 (0.55)
_cut1	-0.63 (0.70)	-0.05 (0.65)	-0.47 (0.68)
_cut2	-1.52 (0.71)	-1.09 (0.65)	-1.45 (0.69)
_cut3	2.24 (0.72)	-1.99 (0.66)	-2.24 (0.70)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.08	0.07	0.09
N	296	283	284

Note: These are weighted, ordered probit analyses. \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . All variables coded 0 to 1.

Table 2.2 Support for Religious Policies among Evangelicals (Newsweek Poll, 2006)

To get a sense of the magnitude of the effect of religion’s status on these policies, it is useful to turn to predicted probabilities.<sup>7</sup> For example, while the probability of strongly supporting school prayer is only 0.31 among those who believe religion’s role is too big, the probability of supporting prayer rises to 0.66 among those who feel its role is too small, an increase of 35 percentage points. Support for vouchers increases by 20 percentage points (from 0.09 to 0.29), and support for teaching creationism increases by 25 percentage points (from 0.27 to 0.52). These probabilities are shown in Figure 2.2. These results offer compelling evidence to support the idea that when people feel their group does not get the status it deserves they will turn to policies that advance their group’s position in society.

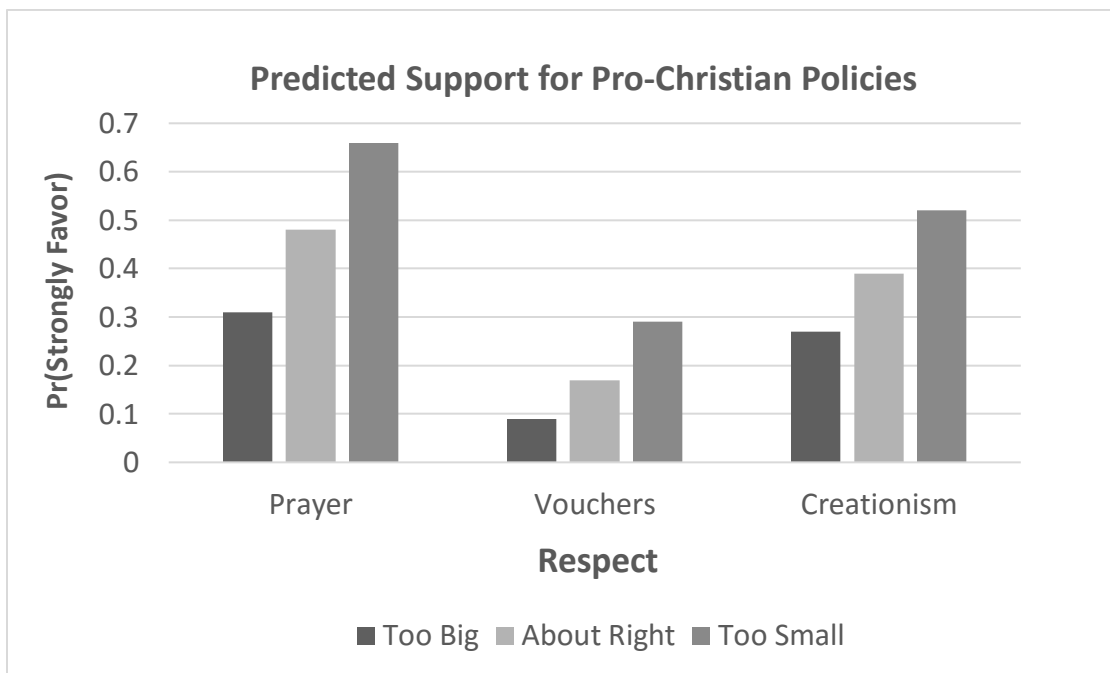


Figure 2.2 Predicted Support for Pro-Christian Policies (Newsweek Poll, 2006)

<sup>7</sup> All predicted probabilities are based on white, female respondents who are Republican, age 54, and have some schooling after high school.

To ensure that my measure of status is not simply serving as a proxy for another, more encompassing ideological or personality variable, I conduct a placebo test utilizing two distinctly partisan but non-religious policy issues, all of which are coded from 1 to 4 where 1="strongly oppose" and 4="strongly favor": a gas tax to encourage the use of alternative energy sources (mean=1.46; s.d.=1.01) and increasing taxes on the wealthy to support government programs for the poor (mean=1.79; s.d.=1.06).<sup>8</sup>

My expectation is that perceptions about religion's status will have no effect on support for these non-religious policies, as these policies do not offer a way to resolve religious status concerns. Using ordered probit, I find that while Republicans are less supportive of both of these policies than their Democratic counterparts, perceptions about the status of religion have no effect on support for any of these policies, controlling for the same demographics. These null findings are detailed in Table 2.3.

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<sup>8</sup> Full question wording in Appendix

	Gas Tax to Support Alternative Energy	Increase Taxes on Wealthy to Support Poor
Too Little Status	-0.00 (0.16)	0.12 (0.18)
Republican	-0.29* (0.17)	-1.16*** (0.18)
Female	0.36*** (0.13)	0.23* (0.13)
Education	0.67* (0.37)	0.37 (0.36)
Age	-0.20 (0.61)	0.57 (0.59)
Black	0.06 (0.23)	0.00 (0.24)
Hispanic	0.42 (0.47)	0.30 (0.48)
_cut1	1.71 (0.68)	0.69 (0.66)
_cut2	0.80 (0.67)	-0.30 (0.66)
_cut3	-0.10 (0.67)	-0.99 (0.66)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.07
N	274	285

Note: These are weighted, ordered probit analyses. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. All variables coded 0 to 1.

Table 2.3 Support for Non-Religious Policies among Evangelicals (Newsweek Poll, 2006)

Ultimately, these correlational results align with the idea that status concerns play a role in policy views on issues that will allow group members to improve their group's status while their concerns do not influence their opinions on issues without the same benefit. In other words, they strategically adapt certain policy views that will serve their status needs. In the next section, I utilize original survey data to build on these results.

### **3. REFINING MEASUREMENT**

Although the above survey results offer strong support for the idea that status concerns influence support for religious policies, they are not without limitations. In this section, I present results from an original module on the Vanderbilt Poll, a survey of Tennessee residents conducted in May 2014 that builds on the results in the previous section in four important ways.<sup>9</sup> First and foremost, the new survey offers a better measure of status concern. Secondly, while the previous survey was limited to Evangelical respondents, I include both Evangelical and non-Evangelical respondents in this survey. Thirdly, I include a new dependent variable that moves outside of policies targeted at education—support displaying the Ten Commandments on public property—to expand the scope of policies examined. Lastly, I include a measure of identity strength, which allows me to see if certain members of a group are more likely to respond to concerns about status than others.

#### **3.1 Data and Hypotheses**

The question in the previous survey asks respondents about religion’s role in politics and culture: whether it is too big, too little, or about right. Although a belief that religion plays too little a role likely indicates a perception that religion no longer has the respect it once had and still deserves, a more precise measure of status would be ideal. To add clarity to this measure, for this survey I draw from Luhtanen and Crocker’s (1992) public collective self-esteem scale and ask respondents about the respect their religious group receives.

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<sup>9</sup> This sample is 83 percent white, 12 percent black, and three percent Hispanic. It is 53 percent female, 50 percent conservative/16 percent liberal, and 53 percent Republican. The average respondent attends church “less than once a week,” has a household income around \$45,000, has “some college”, and is in the 45-54 age range.



Specifically, I ask respondents the following question: “Would you say [respondent’s religious group] receives too much respect, just the right amount of respect, or too little respect in this country?” Responses are coded on a five-point scale of 0 to 1 where 0=“far too much respect”, 0.5=“just the right amount of respect”, and 1=“far too little respect”. In this sample, Christians express slightly more status concern (mean=0.69; s.d.=0.26) than those in the previous study.<sup>10</sup> Figure 2.3 shows the distribution of responses: only eight percent of respondents said their group gets “too much” respect, while 34 percent said they get the “right amount” of respect and the majority—58 percent—of respondents said their group gets “too little” respect.

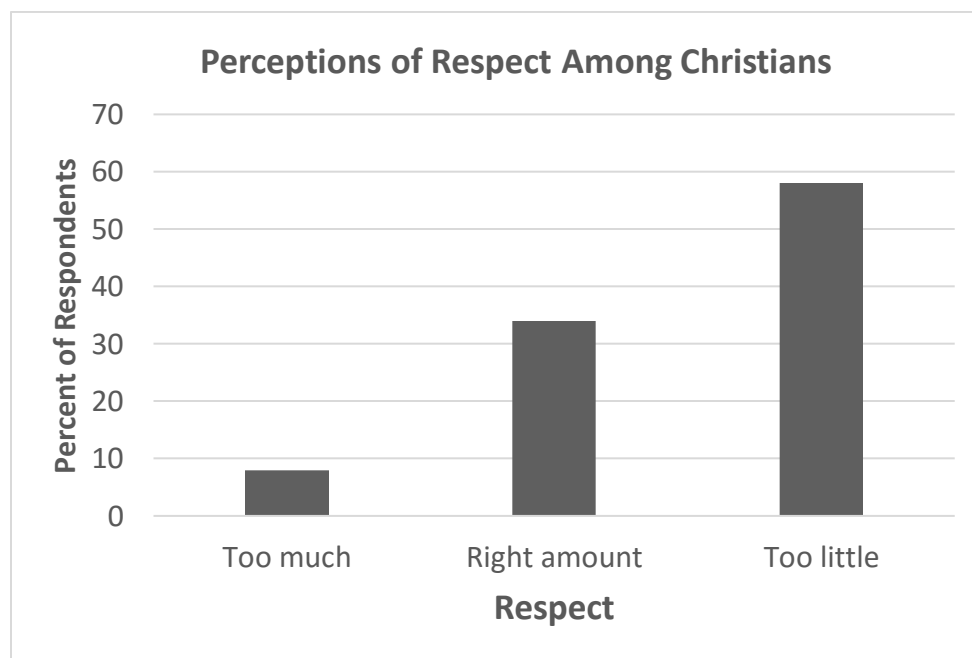


Figure 2.3 Perceptions of Respect Among Christians (Vanderbilt Poll, 2014)

<sup>10</sup> My sample of Christians includes both Evangelicals (N=543) and non-Evangelical Protestants (N=22); I exclude Catholics given that my dependent variables relate closely to Protestant issues.

The primary dependent variables assess respondents' support for two religious policies: school prayer and the displays of the Ten Commandments on public property. These variables are on a five-point scale and coded from 1 to 5, where 1="strongly oppose and 5="strongly favor". Overall support for these policies among Christians is high, as one might expect, and support for school prayer (mean=3.50; s.d.=1.05) is slightly higher than support for the Ten Commandments (mean=3.40; s.d.=1.12).

My expectations for the effect of status concern on support for these policies are the same as my expectations in the previous analysis. I expect that Christians who feel that their religious group does not get enough respect in society will be more likely to support school prayer and the public displays of the Ten Commandments than those who are more satisfied with the respect their religion receives. Additionally, I expect that the relationship between status concerns among Christians and support for these policies will be strongest among those who strongly identify with the ingroup. (Here, I will use church attendance as a proxy for ingroup identity strength.<sup>11</sup>) My hypotheses are as follows:

H2: Christian respondents who feel their religion deserves more respect than it receives will be more likely to favor policies that support Christianity in the public sphere than those who feel their religion receives too much respect.

H3: The relationship between status concerns and opinions on Christian policies will be greater for Christian respondents with a stronger religious identity than for those for whom religion is less important.

### **3.2 Descriptive Statistics and Analyses**

To get a sense of the root of status concern, I first looked to see which, if any, demographic characteristics correlate with status perception among Christians. Four

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<sup>11</sup> Church attendance is measured on a five-point, 0 to 1 scale. Its correlation with Christians' status concern is 0.19.

demographics appear to relate to status concern: church attendance ( $p < 0.01$ ), partisanship ( $p < 0.01$ ), ideology ( $p < 0.01$ ), and age ( $p < 0.01$ ).<sup>12</sup> Those attending church more regularly, conservatives, Republicans, and older respondents are all more likely to report that Christians get “too little” status than those attending church less frequently, liberals, Democrats, and younger Christians. These demographic correlates are shown in Table 2.4.

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<sup>12</sup> These coefficients and standard errors were calculated using ordered probit analysis; all independent variables are coded 0 to 1.

	Too Little Respect
Attendance	0.58*** (0.16)
Female	0.11 (0.09)
Republican	0.54*** (0.15)
Conservative	0.70*** (0.15)
Black	-0.14 (0.16)
Hispanic	-0.18 (0.35)
Income	-0.02 (0.17)
Education	-0.10 (0.12)
Age	0.57*** (0.15)
_cut1	-0.35 (0.21)
_cut2	0.02 (0.20)
_cut3	1.37 (0.20)
_cut4	2.30 (0.21)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.07
N	601

Note: These are ordered probit analyses. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. All variables coded 0 to 1.

Table 2.4 Demographic Correlates of Perceptions of Status (Vanderbilt Poll, 2014)

Next, I use ordered probit to look at the effect of status concerns on support for the religious policies, controlling for sex, party identification, ideology, income, education, age, and church attendance. Table 2.5 shows the effect of status concern on support for religious

policies among Christians. The primary independent variable, status concern, lights up for both policies, with Christians who feel that their religion gets too little respect expressing more support for both school prayer ( $p < 0.1$ ) and the Ten Commandments ( $p < 0.01$ ). Additionally, church regulars, conservatives, and the less educated are more likely to support both school prayer and posting the Ten Commandments than Christians who attend church infrequently, liberals, and more educated folks ( $p < 0.01$ ).

	Prayer	Ten Comm
Too Little Status	0.43* (0.24)	1.06*** (0.23)
Attendance	0.53*** (0.20)	0.49*** (0.19)
Female	0.18 (0.11)	0.10 (0.11)
Republican	0.25 (0.20)	0.36* (0.19)
Conservative	1.02*** (0.18)	0.95*** (0.18)
Black	0.11 (0.19)	0.20 (0.18)
Hispanic	-0.58 (0.41)	4.21 (138.40)
Income	-0.29 (0.21)	-0.21 (0.21)
Education	-0.94*** (0.23)	-0.83*** (0.23)
Age	-0.23 (0.20)	-0.10 (0.18)
_cut1	-1.01 (0.28)	-0.47 (0.26)
_cut2	-0.69 (0.27)	-0.15 (0.25)
_cut3	-0.39 (0.27)	0.34 (0.26)
_cut4	0.08 (0.27)	0.79 (0.26)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.11	0.12
N	593	596

Note: These are ordered probit analyses. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. All variables coded 0 to 1.

Table 2.5 Support for Religious Policies among Christians (Vanderbilt Poll, 2014)

To make sense of these tables, I next examine the predicted probabilities of “strongly favoring” school prayer and posting the Ten Commandments by the level of status concern.<sup>13</sup> Moving from a perception that Christians receive “far too much” respect to the perception that they receive “far too little” respect results in jump from 0.79 to 0.89 for support for school prayer and a leap from 0.57 to 0.89 for support for posting the Ten Commandments—a whopping 32 percentage points. These results support my hypothesis that status concerns correlate with more support for religious policies among historically high-status religious groups for whom the policies are designed to benefit; status concerned Christians are more supportive of pro-Christian policies than those who are not concerned. These predicted probabilities are shown in Figure 2.4.

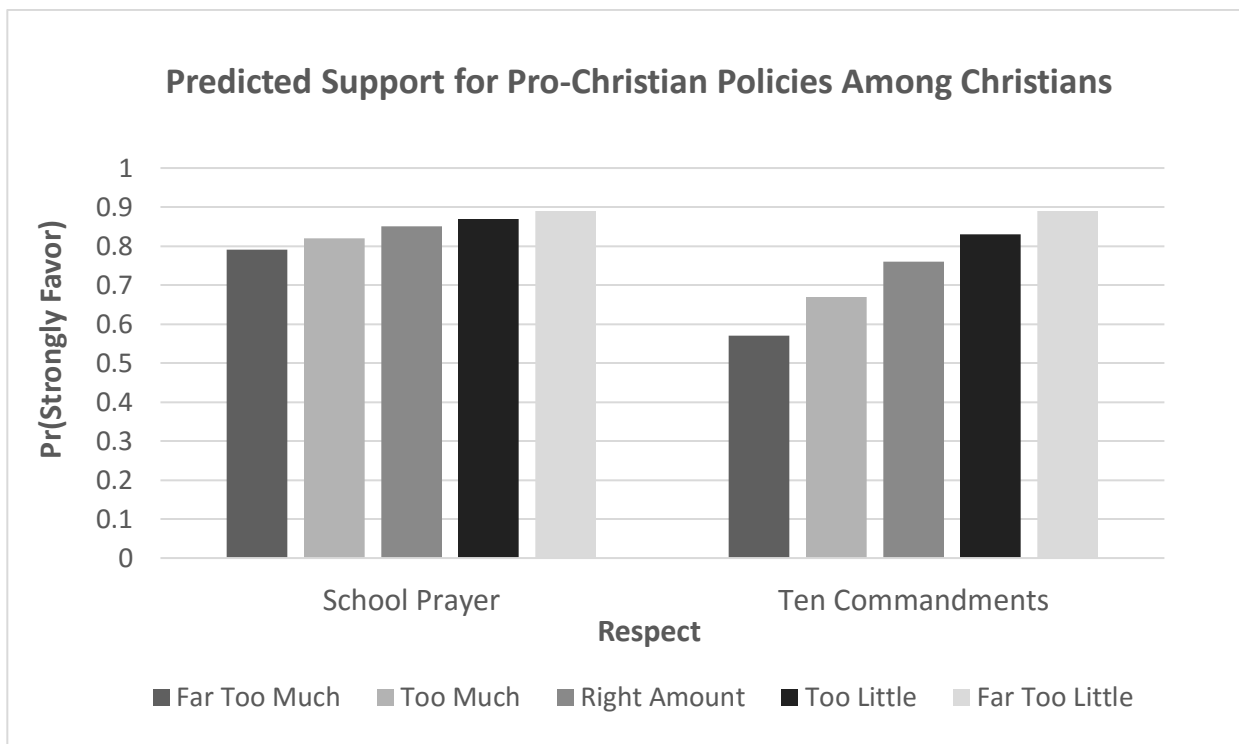


Figure 2.4 Predicted Support for Pro-Christian Policies Among Christians (Vanderbilt Poll, 2014)

<sup>13</sup> All predicted probabilities are based on white, female respondents. All other values are set to their means. See Footnote 9 for details.

I also investigated whether or not there was an interaction between church attendance and status concern for Christians, with the expectation that those who attend church regularly would be more closely identified with the group and thus more acutely moved by status concerns, but I found no statistically significant evidence of this interaction for either school prayer ( $p=0.73$ ) or posting the Ten Commandments ( $p=0.37$ ).

Although I do not find that identity strength moderates the relationship between status concern and policy support, I find strong evidence that status concern does influence policy preferences: status concerned Christians are more likely to support religious policies that promote their religion than those who are less concerned. In some cases, this effect rivals and even surpasses that of ideology. Also note that the DVs were asked *prior* to the status questions.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, status concerns do seem to correlate with support for religious policies in predictable ways.

#### **4. INCLUDING OUTGROUPS**

While the previous two surveys begin to tell the story of how status concerns inform support for religious policies, this section adds breadth to the investigation at hand. First, I expand the policy questions to include a religious liberty question as well as a question about desire for Christian presidential candidates, which allows me to see how far-reaching status concerns are. Second, I include a large sample of Agnostic/Atheist respondents to get a better sense of how status concerns influence those with a religious identity other than Christianity.

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<sup>14</sup> In many ways, this design is beneficial, as respondents were not primed to think about the status of their group prior to answering questions about group-based policies. However, it is also possible that raising these policy issues, in and of itself, primed respondents to be status-conscious. This would not be theoretically problematic, however, as I believe the causal arrow between status concern and policy runs both ways; group members who are concerned about status have different policy preferences than their counterparts and the presence of policies says something about the status of the group.



Beyond these additions, I also ask respondents about the status of those holding different religious beliefs. Asking respondents about the status of both the ingroup and outgroup helps me examine how perceptions of the ingroup influence perceptions of the outgroup and, thus, the extent to which status is perceived as a zero sum game between groups.

#### **4.1 Data and Hypothesis**

To address these issues, I run an original survey using Qualtrics panel respondents in April 2016.<sup>15</sup> My primary independent variables for this survey are the same ones used in the previous study. On a five-point scale of 0 to 1 where 0 = “far too much” and 1 = “far too little” respect, both groups perceived that their group receives too little respect. Christians were slightly less status concerned (mean=0.67; s.d.=0.25) than their Agnostic/Atheist counterparts (mean=0.79; s.d.=0.28). This outcome, shown in Figure 2.5, is not entirely surprising given the historical prominence of Christianity in American culture and politics.

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<sup>15</sup> My sample includes 1,050 respondents: 525 Protestants and 525 Agnostics/Atheists. 63 percent of the Protestants sampled identify as evangelical. There are 258 Agnostics and 227 Atheists. The entire sample is 80 percent white, seven percent Hispanic, five percent African American, four percent Asian, two percent Native American, and two percent “other”. Females make up 64 percent of the sample. The average respondent has completed some college, has a household income of \$60,000-\$69,000, is between 35-44 years old, leans Democrat and is ideologically moderate.



Figure 2.5 Perceptions of Group Respect (Qualtrics Survey, 2016)

My primary policy dependent variables in this survey assess respondents' support for four religious policies, two of which were previously tested and two of which are new: school prayer, displays of the Ten Commandments in court houses, displays of nativity scenes on public library lawns, and allowing businesses to refuse service to gay couples if it violates their religious beliefs. These variables, all on a four-point scale, are coded so that a higher value signals more support for the policy, where 1="strongly oppose" and 4="strongly favor". I also ask respondents whether they would be more or less likely to vote for a presidential candidate who is a Christian; this four-point variable is coded from 1 to 4, where 1="much less likely" and 4="much more likely".

Support for these policies varies by religious identity. Among Christians, support for nativity scenes is the highest (mean=3.56; s.d.=0.68) followed by school prayer (mean=3.32; s.d.=0.89), posting the Ten Commandments, (mean=3.08; s.d.=1.01) and religious liberty

(mean=2.27; s.d.=1.18). For Agnostics/Atheists, support is much lower, although the same pattern emerges. Support for nativity scenes is highest (mean=2.98; s.d.=0.87) followed by school prayer (mean=2.17; s.d.=0.97), the Ten Commandments (mean=1.74; s.d.=0.90) and religious liberty (mean=1.30; s.d.=0.70); the difference in support between the two groups is highly significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). As for a desire to vote for a Christian presidential candidate, Christians are much more supportive (mean=3.27; s.d.=0.63) than Agnostics/Atheists (mean=2.14; s.d.=0.59); again, this difference is significant ( $p < 0.01$ ).

As for the relationship between status perceptions and support for religious policies and candidates, my expectations here mirror those in previous sections. I expect that perceptions of status will influence support for religious policies and candidates among both Christians and Agnostics/Atheists. Specifically, I expect that Christians who feel status deprived will be more likely to support policies that uphold their religious preferences and candidate who belong to their group than those who perceive their group receive the right amount or too much respect. Conversely, I expect Agnostics/Atheists who feel status deprived to be less supportive of religious policies and Christian candidates than their more content counterparts. Theoretically, I expect both groups to adjust their policy preferences in a way that promotes the status of their group. Furthermore, I expect that both Christians and Agnostics/Atheists will view status as a zero sum game, becoming more likely to say that the outgroup receives too much respect as they perceive their own group to receive too little.

My hypotheses are as follows:

H4: Christian respondents who feel their religion deserves more respect than it receives will be more likely to favor policies that support Christianity in the public sphere than those who feel their religion receives too much respect.

H5: Agnostics/Atheists who feel their religious groups deserve more respect than they receive will be less likely to favor policies that support Christianity in the public sphere than those who feel their religion receives too much respect.

H6: Christian respondents who feel their religion deserves more respect than it receives will express more support for a Christian presidential candidate than those who feel their religion receives too much respect.

H7: Agnostics/Atheists who feel their religious groups deserve more respect than they receive will express less support for a Christian presidential candidate than those who feel their religion receives too much respect.

H8: Christian respondents who feel their religion deserves more respect than it receives will be more likely to perceive too much respect for Agnostics/Atheists than those who feel their religion receives too much respect.

H9: Agnostics/Atheists who feel their religious groups deserve more respect than they receive will be more likely to perceive too much respect for Christians than those who feel their religion receives too much respect.

## 4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Analysis

Before looking at the importance of status for my dependent variables, I first look again at which demographic variables correlate with status concern, including measures previously used as well as new measures of in-group identity, self-esteem, and authoritarianism.<sup>16</sup> Among Christians, ideology, age, identity, church attendance, race, and authoritarianism all light up. Christians who are conservative ( $p < 0.01$ ), older ( $p < 0.1$ ), strongly identify as a Christian ( $p < 0.01$ ), attend church regularly ( $p < 0.01$ ), and are authoritarian ( $p < 0.01$ ) express more status concern than their counterparts. Black

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<sup>16</sup> All indices are based on standard measures of the concept (Leach et al, 2008; Helmreich and Stapp 1974; Hetherington and Weiler, 2009). The wording of the questions and response options used to construct these indices are listed in the Appendix. The scales are coded from 0 to 1, as are all other independent variables. Descriptive statistics for Christians: Identity (mean=0.19; s.d.=0.23), Self-Esteem (mean=0.69; s.d.=0.25), Authoritarianism (mean=0.53; s.d.=0.29). Descriptive Statistics for Agnostics/Atheists: Identity (mean=0.46; s.d.=0.27), self-esteem (mean=0.57; s.d.=0.27), and authoritarianism (mean=0.30; s.d.=0.29).

Christians are less likely to express status concern than Christians of other racial groups ( $p < 0.01$ ). Among Agnostics/ Atheists, gender, age, income, identity, and church attendance play a role. Agnostics/Atheists who are female ( $p < 0.01$ ), older ( $p < 0.1$ ), and identify strongly ( $p < 0.01$ ) as Agnostic/Atheist perceive more status concern than their counterparts, while those with high income ( $p < 0.01$ ) and those who attend church regularly ( $p < 0.05$ ) are less status concerned than those with a lower income and those who attend church infrequently. Full results for this analysis are in Table 2.6.

	Christians	Agnostics/Atheists
Republican	0.19 (0.20)	0.01 (0.25)
Conservative	1.67*** (0.34)	0.09 (0.36)
Ideology DK/RF	-0.65*** (0.25)	-0.09 (0.30)
Female	0.10 (0.10)	0.27*** (0.10)
Age	0.39* (0.22)	0.52* (0.31)
Income	-0.13 (0.18)	-0.58*** (0.18)
Education	-0.14 (0.25)	0.23 (0.26)
Black	-0.47** (0.21)	0.00 (0.24)
Hispanic	-0.24 (0.22)	0.00 (0.18)
Church Attendance	0.48*** (0.15)	-0.73** (0.35)
Identity	1.01*** (0.25)	0.94*** (0.19)
Self-Esteem	0.03 (0.21)	0.34 (0.21)
Authoritarian	0.71*** (0.18)	-0.28 (0.18)
_cut1	0.03 (0.34)	-1.78 (0.39)
_cut2	1.05 (0.33)	-0.99 (0.33)
_cut3	2.13 (0.33)	0.03 (0.32)
_cut4	3.48 (0.35)	1.42 (0.32)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.15	0.05
N	525	525

Note: These are ordered probit analyses. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. All independent variables coded 0 to 1.

Table 2.6 Demographic Correlates for Perceptions of Respect among Christians and Agnostics/Atheists (Qualtrics Survey, 2016)

To determine what effect status perceptions have on support for the aforementioned religious policies, I combine the four policy questions into an index (scored from 1 to 13) and use OLS regression to look at the effect of status perceptions on support, controlling for standard demographic variables as well as the additional measures of identity, self-esteem, and authoritarianism.<sup>17</sup> As expected, Christians' perceptions of the status of their group influences support for the policy index.<sup>18</sup> As the perception that Christians receive too little respect increases, support for policies that affirm Christianity increases ( $p < 0.01$ ). These correlations support the idea that Christians react to perceptions about intergroup status by adjusting their policy positions in a way that addresses the imbalance. For Agnostics/Atheists, the results are the exact opposite ( $p < 0.01$ ). Agnostics/Atheists who feel concerned about the status of their group are less supportive of policies that promote Christianity.

Importantly, these results highlight the difference between group-oriented status concerns and other, more general worldviews such as authoritarianism. While status concerns are positively correlated with support among Christians and negatively correlated with support among Agnostics/Atheists, authoritarian respondents are more likely to support the policies than non-authoritarians, regardless of group identity ( $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that status concerns are not merely a reflection of other worldviews but have

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<sup>17</sup> The mean score on the policy index among Christians is 9.22 (s.d.=2.85); for Agnostics/Atheists, the mean is 5.19 (s.d.=2.38).

<sup>18</sup> The survey also included an experimental manipulation in which respondents were either told that Christianity is losing status/Agnostics/Atheists are gaining status or that Christians maintain high status while Agnostics/Atheists maintain low status. While the treatment impacted perceptions of respect for Christians among Christians ( $p < 0.05$ ) and perceptions of respect for Agnostics/Atheists among both Christians ( $p < 0.01$ ) and Agnostics/Atheists ( $p < 0.01$ ) as expected, the treatment did not have a direct impact on support for the policy index among Christians ( $p = 0.87$ ) or Agnostics/Atheists ( $p = 0.49$ ).

distinct, group-specific implications for policy preferences. Table 2.7 shows the results for both Christian and Agnostic/Atheist respondents.



	Christians	Agnostics/Atheists
Too Little Status	4.03*** (0.41)	-1.73*** (0.47)
Republican	1.18*** (0.36)	0.49 (0.45)
Conservative	2.88*** (0.61)	3.47*** (0.66)
Ideology DK/RF	-1.53*** (0.45)	-1.20** (0.54)
Female	0.04 (0.18)	0.29 (0.19)
Age	0.83** (0.39)	-0.18 (0.53)
Income	-0.36 (0.33)	-0.41 (0.33)
Education	-1.14*** (0.44)	-0.66 (0.47)
Black	1.21*** (0.38)	0.29 (0.42)
Hispanic	-0.17 (0.40)	-0.04 (0.32)
Church Attendance	0.07 (0.27)	1.87*** (0.65)
Identity	1.52*** (0.45)	-0.83** (0.34)
Self-Esteem	-0.11 (0.36)	0.35 (0.38)
Authoritarian	1.26*** (0.33)	1.31*** (0.32)
_cons	13.68*** (0.59)	11.24 (0.64)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.53	0.22
N	525	525

Note: These are OLS regression analyses. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. All independent variables coded 0 to 1.

Table 2.7 Support for Religious Policies (Qualtrics Survey, 2016)

Next, I use ordered probit to examine support for Christian candidates, controlling for the same variables as before. Here, I once again find when Christian respondents feel Christians receive too little respect they are more likely to say they would vote for a Christian candidate than when they perceive Christians receive too much respect ( $p < 0.01$ ). Conversely, when Agnostic/Atheist respondents perceive that Agnostics/ Atheists receive too little respect they are less likely to say they would vote for a candidate who is Christian than when they perceive Agnostics/Atheists receive too much respect ( $p < 0.01$ ). Group members' status grievances inform not only their policy support but voting preferences as well. These results are shown in Table 2.8.

	Christians	Agnostics/Atheists
Too Little Status	0.68*** (0.26)	-0.75*** (0.28)
Republican	0.11 (0.23)	-0.26 (0.27)
Conservative	1.07*** (0.39)	1.86*** (0.40)
Ideology DK/RF	-0.28 (0.28)	-1.13*** (0.32)
Female	0.00 (0.12)	0.27* (0.11)
Age	0.37 (0.25)	0.63* (0.33)
Income	0.11 (0.20)	0.19 (0.20)
Education	0.08 (0.28)	-0.12 (0.28)
Black	-0.01 (0.24)	0.30 (0.25)
Hispanic	0.12 (0.25)	0.05 (0.19)
Church Attendance	0.22 (0.17)	1.10*** (0.38)
Identity	1.19*** (0.28)	-0.65*** (0.21)
Self-Esteem	0.27 (0.23)	0.07 (0.22)
Authoritarianism	0.36 (0.21)	0.45** (0.19)
_cut1	2.87 (0.39)	3.07 (0.44)
_cut2	0.60 (0.37)	1.05 (0.38)
_cut3	0.06 (0.38)	-1.17 (0.38)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.14	0.11
N	525	525

Note: These are ordered probit analyses. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. All independent variables coded 0 to 1.

Table 2.8 Desire to vote for Christian Presidential Candidate (Qualtrics Survey, 2016)

I next calculate predicted probabilities to better show these relationships. For Christians, a move from the perception that Christians receive “far too much” respect to a perception they receive “far too little” respect results in a jump from 0.26 to 0.43 in saying they would be “much more likely” to vote for a candidate who is Christian. For Agnostics/Atheists, the change in probability is non-existent (0.00 to 0.00), likely due to the very low priority most Agnostics/Atheists place on electing Christian presidents.

Lastly, I examine how perceptions about in-group status influence perceptions about the status of the out-group using ordered probit, with the expectation that group members view status as a zero sum game. This is precisely what I find. The correlation between ingroup and outgroup status for Christians is -0.46 while the correlation for Agnostics/Atheists is only -0.23, suggesting that intergroup status may be perceived as a zero sum game more among Christians than Agnostics/Atheists. When analyzing the relationship with a standard ordered probit model, I confirm that both Christians and Agnostics/Atheists who perceive that their group receives too little respect are more likely to perceive that the other group receives too much respect than Christians and Agnostics/Atheists who are less status concerned, controlling for other relevant covariates ( $p < 0.01$ ). These correlations support the idea that group members perceive status as at least somewhat of a zero sum game, adjusting their perception of the outgroup based on their perception of the in-group. These results are shown in Table 2.9.

	Christians	Agnostics/Atheists
Too Little Status	1.69*** (0.23)	1.19*** (0.26)
Republican	0.54*** (0.20)	0.06 (0.24)
Conservative	-0.20 (0.34)	-1.68*** (0.36)
Ideology DK/RF	0.19 (0.25)	1.00*** (0.29)
Female	-0.44*** (0.10)	-0.04 (0.10)
Age	0.73*** (0.22)	-0.04 (0.30)
Income	-0.05 (0.18)	0.07 (0.18)
Education	-0.24 (0.24)	0.04 (0.26)
Black	0.22 (0.21)	0.16 (0.26)
Hispanic	-0.04 (0.22)	-0.10 (0.18)
Church Attendance	0.17 (0.15)	-0.50 (0.35)
Identity	0.15 (0.25)	0.49*** (0.19)
Self-Esteem	-0.29 (0.20)	0.24 (0.21)
Authoritarianism	-0.49*** (0.18)	-0.24** (0.17)
_cut1	2.12 (0.34)	1.14 (0.35)
_cut2	1.01 (0.33)	0.11 (0.35)
_cut3	0.08 (0.34)	-1.33 (0.36)
_cut4	-0.91 (0.33)	-2.36 (0.42)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.12	0.07
N	525	525

Note: These are ordered probit analyses. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. All independent variables coded 0 to 1.

Table 2.9 Effects of Status on Perceptions of Outgroup (Qualtrics Survey, 2016)

Once again, I calculate predicted probabilities to get a better sense of these relationships. Among Christians, moving from the perception that Christians receive “far too much” respect to “far too little” respect results in a jump from 0.09 to 0.62 probability that the respondent will perceive that Agnostics/Atheists receive too much respect, a whopping 53-point jump. Among Agnostics/Atheists, the same move in in-group perception results in a jump from 0.39 to 0.81 probability that the respondent will perceive that Christians receive too much respect, a 42-point jump. These predicted probabilities are in Figure 2.6.

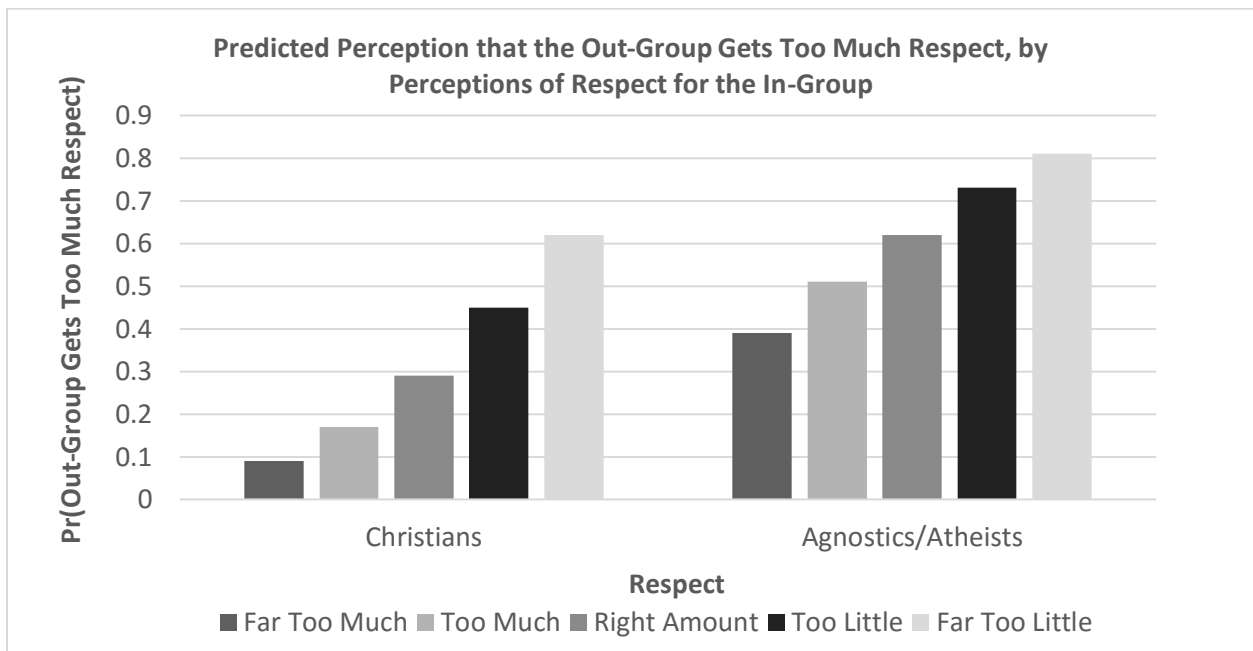


Figure 2.6 Predicted Perception that the Out-Group Gets Too Much Respect, by Perceptions of Respect for the In-Group (Qualtrics Survey, 2016)

## 5. CONCLUSION

This chapter examines the influence of status concerns on support for policies intimately connected to religion among both historically high and low status religious groups. Using existing and original survey data, I have shown that Christians who feel their religious groups lack the status they deserve are more supportive of pro-Christian policies—

including prayer in public school, school vouchers for religious schools, teaching creationism in public school, allowing public displays of the Ten Commandments, allowing nativity displays on public property, and allowing business owners to deny services to gay customers if it violates their religious beliefs—than Christians who are content with the status they receive or feel their group receives too much status, even when other relevant demographic and personality factors are controlled. I have also shown that Christians' concerns about status do not influence their support for policies disconnected from the religious realm. Although these results are correlational and cannot speak directly to causality, they are in line with my theory that group members who are concerned about status strategically adjust their support for policies that will serve to alleviate their status concerns. Beyond policy, I have shown that Christians are more likely to support candidates who are Christian when they feel their group does not receive the respect it deserves. These findings expand existing literature by considering a wide range of policies, showing that status concern is not merely a proxy for another political or personality trait, as the placebo tests confirm, and examining the extent to which status concerns influence voting preferences, as well.

Beyond the importance of status for Christians, I have shown that Agnostics/Atheists who feel their group does not get adequate respect are less supportive of pro-Christian policies and Christian candidates. These group members' policy views also correlate with status grievances in predictable ways. This addition is important for research on status, which tends to focus heavily if not exclusively on high status groups who feel they are losing status. Here, I show that status concerns affect both high and low status groups. Members of low status groups also desire status and work to improve their societal prestige.

The evidence in this chapter also helps us understand how closely related perceptions of ingroup and outgroup status are. Here, I find that perceptions about religious groups' status are highly correlated among Christians (the traditionally high status group) and less correlated among Agnostics/Atheists (the low status group); furthermore, I show that perceptions of the in-group's status correlate with perceptions of the outgroup's status among both groups but particularly among Christians. Additional research is needed to understand whether Christians in particular are more prone to view status as a zero-sum game or if that is common among high, but not low, status groups. Ultimately, however, the results presented in this chapter make a strong case for the importance of intergroup status in public opinion. In the next chapter, I build on these results and explore the extent to which status concerns are present in the communication surrounding policy issues.



## **APPENDIX**

### **Newsweek Poll 2006**

Do you believe that religion plays too big a role in American political and cultural life today, too small a role, or is it about right?

- 1) Too Big a Role
- 2) Too Small a Role
- 3) About Right

Now I'm going to read you some programs and proposals being discussed in this country today. Please tell me if you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose each one.

A constitutional amendment to permit prayer in the public schools  
"Vouchers" or government financial aid to help parents pay the costs of sending a child to a church-run or other private school  
Teaching the Biblical account of creation in high school science classes

Increasing taxes on higher income people to pay for more government services to the poor  
A new gas tax to encourage conservation and support development of alternative energy sources

- 1) Strongly Oppose
- 2) Oppose
- 3) Favor
- 4) Strongly Favor

### **Vanderbilt Poll 2014**

Would you say [previously identified religious group] receive too much respect, just the right amount of respect, or too little respect in this country? [IF TOO MUCH/TOO LITTLE, PROBE: Would you say they get far too (much/little) or somewhat too (much/little)?]

- 1) Far too much
- 2) Somewhat too much
- 3) Just the right amount
- 4) Somewhat too little
- 5) Far too little

Please tell me how much you favor or oppose each of the following. (First,) how about [INSERT ITEMS; RANDOMIZE]? Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, neither favor nor oppose, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose this?]

- a. Amending the U.S. Constitution to allow voluntary prayer in public schools
- b. Posting the Ten Commandments in the lobby of a public courthouse
  - 1) Strongly favor
  - 2) Somewhat favor
  - 3) Neither favor nor oppose
  - 4) Somewhat oppose
  - 5) Strongly oppose

### **Qualtrics Survey 2016**

Would you say Christians receive too much respect, just the right amount of respect, or too little respect in this country?

- 1) Far too much
- 2) Somewhat too much
- 3) Just the right amount
- 4) Somewhat too little
- 5) Far too little

Would you say Agnostics and Atheists receive too much respect, just the right amount of respect, or too little respect in this country?

- 1) Far too much
- 2) Somewhat too much
- 3) Just the right amount
- 4) Somewhat too little
- 5) Far too little

Do you favor or oppose amending the U.S. Constitution to allow voluntary prayer in public schools?

Do you favor or oppose posting the Ten Commandments in the lobby of a public courthouse?

Do you favor or oppose allowing Christmas displays on public property?

Do you favor or oppose allowing a small business owner in your state to refuse to provide products or services to gay or lesbian people, if doing so violates their religious belief?

- 1) Strongly oppose
- 2) Somewhat oppose
- 3) Somewhat favor
- 4) Strongly favor

Regardless of the specific candidates who are running for president, would you be more likely or less likely to support a candidate for president who is a Christian?

- 1) Much less likely
- 2) Somewhat less likely
- 3) Somewhat more likely
- 4) Much more likely

## Identity Scale

I often think about the fact that I am a Christian/Agnostic/Atheist.

The fact that I am a Christian/Agnostic/Atheist is an important part of my identity.

Being a Christian/Agnostic/Atheist is an important part of how I see myself.

- 1) Strongly Agree
- 2) Somewhat Agree
- 3) Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4) Somewhat Disagree
- 5) Strongly Disagree

## Self-Esteem Scale

I'm going to make a few statements about people's mentality in general and yourself. Please tell me whether you think they are true or false.

When in a group of people, I usually do what others want, rather than make suggestions.

I would have been more successful if people had given me a fair chance.

I certainly feel useless at times.

Teachers often expect too much work from their students.

I commonly wonder what hidden reason another person may have for doing something nice for me.

## Authoritarianism Scale

Although there are a number of qualities that people feel that children should have, every person thinks that some are more important than others. I am going to read you pairs of desirable qualities. Please tell me which one you think is more important for a child to have:

Independence or respect for elders

Curiosity or good manners

Obedience or self-reliance

Being considerate or well-behaved

## CHAPTER 3

### The Presence and Structure of Group Status Arguments in Policy Debates

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter, I showed that status concerns play an important role in public opinion, that people adjust their policy preferences to resolve their status dissonance. This result requires, at minimum, that group members believe a given policy issue is related to the status goals of their group. Recall, for example, that status concerns played no role in Evangelicals' support of policies that are disconnected from the status of their religious identity despite the overtly partisan nature of the issues; these issues are not a statement on their status. Or, at least, the respondents did not view them this way. In some cases, the tie between an issue and concerns about status are intrinsic; group members may naturally sense that a given policy is intimately tied to their group's value. This is likely the case with the symbolic religious policies examined in the last chapter. More often, however, the connection between status and a given policy may be less obvious. In these cases, it is incumbent upon elites to establish the connection by framing the issue so that group members view a link between the two. By talking about an issue in terms of how it affects the status of a given group, elites can, theoretically, build a bridge between intergroup status and any given policy.

In this chapter, I explore what status framing looks like by examining the presence and structure of status arguments in the communication surrounding one of the most widely discussed social issues of the last decade: gay marriage. Over the course of the past several

years, support for recognizing gay marriage has risen sharply; in 1996 only 27 percent of Americans favored the legal recognition of gay marriages whereas by 2013 support had doubled, reaching 54 percent.<sup>19</sup> And on June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court ruled in a 5-to-4 decision that same-sex couples have the same right to marry as straight couples (Liptak, 2015). Even with this dramatic increase in support, gay marriage remains a contentious social issue. I focus on this divisive issue primarily because of the numerous arguments surrounding the topic, some which are tied heavily to realistic concerns about resource allocation and some that are more symbolic in nature.

A quick look at the commentary on gay marriage suggests that status arguments are present in the debate. For example, on election night in 2004, numerous states passed amendments banning gay marriage, or as one member of the LGBT community described it, “many states loudly decided that some people are deserving of second-class status” (Hiser, 2004). Two years later, as the gay marriage debate continued, Monte Stewart—lawyer and president of the Marriage Law Foundation—told the *New York Times* that gay marriage supporters were trying to “hijack” the institution of marriage and proclaim that “all different types of intimate adult relationships are equally valid and should be equally respected” (Hartocollis, 2006). Here, I systematically examine the gay marriage debate for evidence that status concerns play a role and a influential for opinion on the issue.

First, I utilize a qualitative approach to determine the extent to which status arguments inform opinions on gay marriage and gain insight into how people talk about status in the real world. I conduct a content analysis of national newspaper articles to get a sense of both the prevalence and nature of status arguments in the debate. The content

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<sup>19</sup> Statistic from In-Depth: Topics A to Z “Marriage” page on [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com).

analysis reveals that the desire to maintain and acquire status is present in the arguments made by opponents and supporters, respectively. Additionally, by unpacking the components of status arguments and clearly articulating how to identify their presence, this content analysis helps us to begin to understand the general structure of status arguments and how to locate those arguments in the political communication surrounding a variety of intergroup policies.

Next, I use survey data to gain insight into the importance of status for public opinion on gay marriage for groups on both sides of the debate. These analyses reveal that perceptions about status influence support for gay marriage among both supporters and opponents. Taken together, the content analysis and survey data make a strong case for the importance of status in the gay marriage debate, and they offer a springboard for other areas of inquiry.

## **2. CONTENT ANALYSIS**

In the first half of this chapter I focus on exploring the presence and structure of status arguments within the gay marriage debate in hopes of ascertaining both their relevance for this intergroup policy issue as well as developing a framework for understanding how to locate status arguments in other policy debates.

### **2.1 Method**

To search for status arguments within the gay marriage debate I focus on national news coverage of the issue from 2003 through 2013. Although efforts to expand gay rights in other areas began far earlier than 2003 and these formative years likely tell an important

story about the relevance of status for gay rights, the time span utilized here adequately encompasses America's strongest attempts to either outlaw or legalize gay marriage at both the national and state level. The news sources I utilize include four national newspapers and one national news magazine: *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *Newsweek*. I decided to use national print media because these sources contain national elite discourse on the issue.

While I focus on national media, I could have utilized entirely different types of sources to examine the gay marriage debate. For example, I could have focused on amicus briefs surrounding the recent Supreme Court cases concerning DOMA and Prop 8. However, these documents are typically quite legalistic and removed from the everyday language of Americans. Ordinary citizens do not discuss the rights of homosexuals to marry in terms of whether or not they can be considered a "suspect class", for example. Using national newspapers and magazines serves as a good starting point for understanding the arguments within the gay marriage debate.

### *2.1.1 Sampling Protocol*

To search for arguments within these sources and time frame I use LexisNexis and ProQuest, limiting my search to articles containing either "gay marriage," "same-sex marriage" or "same sex marriage" in the headline. Once obtaining the search results, I randomly sampled 440 articles.<sup>20</sup> Articles had to 1) focus on gay marriage in the United

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<sup>20</sup> To obtain the sample, I divided the time frame into 44 three-month blocks and randomly sampled 10 articles from each time block. This stratified sampling approach ensured that the articles sampled were not heavily concentrated in one particular year or election cycle and represent the scope of the gay marriage debate over the past decade.

States and 2) be longer than 100 words to remain in the sample. I imposed these criteria on the sample because I am interested in the frames people use as they think about the gay marriage debate in the United States and wanted to ensure that each article was long enough to contain at least one argument. Furthermore, articles that contained more than one letter-to-the-editor or were written for the New York Times Blog were excluded. I excluded multiple letters so that each article contained only one author. I removed blog posts to maintain consistency in the type of articles found across the 11-year time frame. After applying these criteria and exclusions, I was able to retain 410 articles for the analysis. The final sample includes news briefings, letters-to-the-editor, opinion pieces, and, primarily, editorials.

### *2.1.2 Coding Protocol*

In reading the articles, I looked for both support and opposition argument frames. Articles mentioning a particular frame—no matter how elaborately or often—were coded as having the frame present. If multiple frames were intertwined in the same statement, all frames were counted. Importantly, these frames sometimes emerged in general descriptions of legislation as well as within the passionate pleas of legislators, leaders, and ordinary citizens—regardless of whether or not the person supported the frame they evoked. I decided to count even brief, descriptive statements as frames rather than focusing exclusively on well-articulated arguments primarily because even the simplest word choice can signal one’s approach and orientation towards an issue. Given that there is always more than one way to say the same thing, I consider all word choices as meaningful. That being said, it is difficult to frame the formal names of legislation and organizations. Therefore,



although these names often signal a particular frame (e.g. Family Research Council, Defense of Marriage Act), I did not include these mentions in the final analysis. In the next sections, I explore the types of frames I found and their prevalence in the gay marriage debate.

## **2.2 Results**

### *2.2.1 Opposition's Status Arguments*

When considering which frames to expect among opponents I primarily consulted the arguments made by interest groups opposed to gay marriage. As anticipated, arguments made by opponents of gay marriage in the present content analysis span across a wide range of concerns. Despite a tendency to overlap, these concerns can be categorized into four broad areas. First, many opponents reject gay marriage for religious reasons or out of concern for religious liberty. For example, they argue that “the Bible condemns homosexuality” and gay marriage “attacks our religious liberty.”<sup>21</sup> Arguments rooted in religious belief appeared in 40.7 percent of the articles while those focused on religious liberty were found in 8 percent. Second, others express concern about how gay marriage will affect children’s well-being and the family structure. They argue that “children need both a mother and a father” and that heterosexual marriage is “critical for the health of our society and the well-being of families.”<sup>22</sup> These arguments appeared in 19.4 percent of the sample. Third, some oppose gay marriage because they view it as unnatural and disgusting. They claim that “same-sex marriage violates natural law” and makes them “want to vomit.”<sup>23</sup> Arguments focused on

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<sup>21</sup> Case No. 317 and 350

<sup>22</sup> Case No. 113 and 186

<sup>23</sup> Case No. 177 and 210

nature appeared in 4.1 percent of the articles and disgust-based arguments appeared in merely 1.2 percent of the sample.

Although these three categories are crucial for understanding the scope of the gay marriage debate, I also found evidence that status arguments play a role. This fourth category—Status and Tradition—is the most important for the present project. Status-concerned opponents believe that gay marriage should be illegal because it poses a threat to the respect their beliefs and lifestyles receive in society. Unlike those who are worried about their religion, their right to practice their religion, the well-being of children and families, whether or not homosexuality is unnatural and disgusting, or the problems that gay marriage may create for society, status-concerned opponents are worried about the status of those beliefs and lifestyles. They are opposed to gay marriage because it creates a social situation where respect is no longer reserved for solely their preferences. Overt status concerns are present among opponents in this content analysis, appearing in 14.4 percent of the articles sampled.

Opponents argue that heterosexual marriage, which is “unique and special,” is “denigrated,” “cheapened,” and “no longer held in high esteem” when gay marriage is allowed.<sup>24</sup> These opponents are also prone to catastrophizing, claiming that gay marriage poses an “ominous threat” to society (Case No. 66). As one opponent put it:

If I have an ounce of gold and the government suddenly announces that sandstone will now be called gold and valued equally, what will happen to the value of my gold? It will crash, and so will the economy. So will it be with gay

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<sup>24</sup> Case No. 14, 121, and 399

marriage. Marriage will be further devalued, and so will our entire social order. (Case No. 221)

Although not explicitly about preserving status, *per se*, appeals to tradition (present in 21.7 percent of the articles) also contain status elements in the sense that a desire to protect the status quo necessarily implies a desire to protect the existing social hierarchy—a hierarchy that benefits some social groups more than others. When people express concerns about tradition, they are expressing concerns about preserving socially esteemed norms. Recall that lifestyles, and by consequence the groups for whom those lifestyles matter, gain status because they perceived to be socially accepted. To state that something is a “tradition” or “traditional” is to imply acceptance, at least historically, in society and, therefore, a certain level of status. Gusfield was aware of how tradition intertwines with status and notes that “supporters of Prohibition identified the struggle to dry up American society as a part of the defense of a ‘way of life’ against groups who subscribed to others cultures” (Gusfield 1986, 124). In other words, they were concerned about the social order they had grown to love—a social order that favored their lifestyle and tradition over others. In the case of gay marriage, even adopting the term of “traditional marriage” as opposed to “heterosexual marriage” implies status is at stake. In the present content analysis, a desire to “preserve the historic definition of marriage” (Case No. 144) and protect the institution that “states have traditionally honored and recognized” (Case No. 274) account for the second most common opposition frame. Ultimately, for many opponents, allowing gay marriage is undesirable primarily because it sends the message that heterosexual relationships are losing social status.

Arguments made by status-concerned opponents tend to focus on 1) the social importance of current norms and lifestyles and/or 2) a perception that these norms and lifestyles are under attack. When talking about gay marriage, status-concerned opponents routinely point out the social respect given to heterosexual marriage and how homosexual marriage will alter this respect. Using words like “unique,” “special,” “valued,” “precious,” “respected,” “enduring,” “traditional,” “important,” and “fundamental” to describe the institution of marriage, opponents convey their understanding of heterosexual relationships as being high status and positively distinct from other groups, as Social Identity Theory suggests.<sup>25</sup> Unlike words that contain value judgments of different types of marriage, such as “holy,” “sacred,” “immoral,” and “sinful,”<sup>26</sup> status words say nothing about whether the norm is right or wrong based on a sense of morality, religious or otherwise, but rather focus on the social respect given to the norm.

Although often not explicitly mentioned, these word choices imply that homosexual marriage should not be allowed because it would alter the social value placed on heterosexual marriage. In other words, it should not be allowed because it would change the current status dynamic. Sometimes, this concern is explicit. As mentioned above, opponents fear that heterosexual marriage will be “denigrated,” “cheapened,” “devalued,” and “no longer held in high esteem” by allowing gay marriage, and they want to “defend” and “protect” the institution as they understand it. Ultimately, high status groups utilize comments about the social respect given to their group as a way to reinforce the status quo

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<sup>25</sup> Case No. 23, 33, 45, 83, 125, 127, 189, 197, 217, 221, 265, 281, 290, 322, 325, 378, 393, 394, 398, 399, and 410

<sup>26</sup> Case No. 19, 44, 186, 221, 223, 224, and 310

and current social norms. They perceive themselves to be of high status and are reluctant to share that position.

Another way that opponents in the gay marriage debate make status arguments is by focusing on protecting heterosexual marriage against attack. In doing so, they often utilize militaristic language and describe a threat that is all-encompassing. For example, they say that marriage is “under siege” and “under attack,” and that gay marriage poses an “ominous threat” to society.<sup>27</sup> They say that supporters are “trampling” marriage, have “betrayed” the institution, and are attempting to “hijack” and “flush marriage down the drain.”<sup>28</sup> When they mention the group perceived to be responsible for the attack, they talk about how undeserving the attackers are. For example, they argue that supporters of gay marriage have an “exaggerated sense of entitlement” (Case No. 346). These types of comments display a sense that high status groups are in a battle with lower status groups. Unlike concrete concerns about the effectiveness or ethical nature of a policy, however, these perceived attacks represent a more elusive threat to the high status group’s understanding of the social order.

### *2.2.2 Supporters’ Status Arguments*

The arguments made by supporters of gay marriage essentially boil down to two things: practical rights and status rights. Supporters focus heavily on either the practical, tangible benefits that gay marriage would afford the gay population and their families or the emotional, intangible benefits the right would provide. Although supporters do discuss

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<sup>27</sup> Case No. 38,66, and 400

<sup>28</sup> Case No. 262, 277, 340, and 343

things such as the effect of gay parents on children and the extent to which homosexuality is natural, these are only mentioned as rebuttals to the arguments put forth by opponents as opposed to sources of support, per se. Here, I focus on the status arguments made by supporters, excluding vague references to things such as “equality,” “rights,” “recognition,” and “protection” which could refer to either economic or status concerns. Even with this constrained coding scheme, status arguments are present in fully 21 percent of the articles sampled.<sup>29</sup>

Status-conscious supporters are concerned with how gay marriage would make them or their gay family and friends feel. Just as opponents are worried about how gay marriage would impact the respect their beliefs and lifestyles receive, supporters are also concerned about social esteem. They deny opponents’ view of homosexuality as deviant, demanding that society recognizes homosexuality as equal to heterosexuality. The articles here clearly show the importance of status for supporters. Statements about how gay people are treated as “second-class citizens” who ultimately just want “acceptance” highlight the concern that there exists a social hierarchy in America that leaves the gay population without the respect and dignity they feel they deserve.<sup>30</sup>

The distinction between economic and status concerns most clearly surfaces when considering why civil unions are often unsatisfying for supporters. In a publication titled “Civil Unions Are Not Enough”, Lambda Legal argues that if the word “marriage” did not convey a level of societal approval and respect beyond mere unions those opposed to gay marriage rights would not deny it to every interested party; denying marriage allows those

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<sup>29</sup> Economic arguments appear in 26.6 percent of the articles.

<sup>30</sup> Case No. 11, 111, 114, 149, 177, 239, 245, 305, 340, 367, and 388

interested in preserving the place of heterosexual marriage in society to do so.<sup>31</sup> Essentially, civil unions resolve realistic concerns but do not address status concerns and, therefore, are not good enough. This distinction appears frequently in the articles sampled. Supporters want to know how opponents can “come here and say I am going to give you rights, but I am not going to give you the right to have the same title -- marriage?” (Case No. 218). They want to “end the stigmatization and disrespect the state imposes upon [gay people] and their children by relegating them solely to the inferior status of civil union” (Case No. 387). In other words, allowing gay people to obtain civil unions but not marriage, many supporters feel, gives them rights without giving them respect. It gives them economic benefits but not social status, and status is what these opponents really want.

Arguments made by status-focused supporters usually focus on 1) the value of homosexual relationships and/or 2) how the current social hierarchy deprives them of legally recognized status. Just as opponents talk about the value of heterosexual relationships, supporters talk about the value of homosexual relationships, noting that gay couples deserve status. For example, they argue that gay couples “deserve respect” and “equal dignity.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, they want others to “recognize” their relationships as “just as valid as anyone else’s,” (Case No. 144) craving “social acceptance” above all else (Case No. 11). Rather than discussing their worth in an attempt to maintain social norms, as high status groups do, low status groups focus on why their group deserves respect as a way to challenge the social hierarchy.

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<sup>31</sup> [www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org)

<sup>32</sup> Case No. 129, 142, 151, and 156

When supporters aren't focused on the respect homosexual relationships deserve, they focus on the existence of the social hierarchy between gay and straight couples. Supporters readily note that laws prohibiting gay marriage relegate homosexuals to a lower social status. They argue that homosexuals are treated as "second class citizens" with "inferior legal and social status" (Case No. 270). The system treats their relationships as "not valid, not recognized and second rate" (Case No. 128). Civil unions, although providing many economic benefits, create a "separate status" that is "demeaning."<sup>33</sup> Ultimately, denying the right to gay marriage, for supporters, sends the message that a gay relationship is "not as important as that of a straight couple" (Case No. 369) and that gay couples are "not worthy" of respect.<sup>34</sup> These types of comments also illustrate the negative dynamic between the two groups, but unlike the ambiguous attack perceived by high status groups, low status groups focus on the longstanding social structure, presumably created and supported by the high status group, that subtly attacks their self-esteem.

### **2.3 Implications**

Through a content analysis of newspaper articles covering the gay marriage debate, the first part of this chapter reveals that status concerns do play a role in both opposition and support of gay marriage: overt status frames used to oppose gay marriage were present in 14.4 percent of articles and status frames used to support gay marriage were present in 21 percent of articles. The actual prevalence of status concerns in the gay marriage debate is likely, if anything, underestimated in this analysis. First of all, status frames were limited to

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<sup>33</sup> Case No. 24, 83, and 87

<sup>34</sup> Case No. 70 and 329



those that clearly indicated concern about status, although status was likely at play in other frames as well. For the opposition, appeals to tradition, as mentioned above, contain compelling status elements. Among supporters, many vague mentions of equality and recognition are likely about status just as much as they are about economic rights. Because I exclude any comments that could reasonably be thought to convey a different concern, the coding scheme I use here is quite constrained.

Secondly, it is possible—even probable—that concerns about status reach beyond what people are willing to openly profess in an attempt to maintain some level of political correctness. A similar outcome can be seen for those who oppose gay marriage due, at least in part, to disgust. Research shows that disgust sensitivity plays a prominent role in opposition to gay marriage, even when other factors are considered (Inbar et al., 2009; Kam and Estes, 2016). Despite the importance of disgust for opinion on gay marriage, mentions of disgust occur in only 1.2 percent of the articles I coded. One conclusion is that disgusted people sense that being disgusted by gay relationships is not necessarily the most acceptable argument against gay marriage, as Nussbaum (2010) notes, even if it greatly influences their opinion. Similarly, status-concerned people may be reluctant to voice status concerns even if these concerns drive their views.

Voicing status concerns may be particularly difficult for opponents because of the current structure and goals of each group. Supporters do not argue that homosexuals should get more respect than heterosexuals; they simply demand the same level of respect. Conversely, in order for opponents to use status arguments openly they must assert that one group (their group) deserves to maintain more status than another. While supporters of gay marriage fight for equal status, opponents must defend unequal status. This is difficult due

to people's general unwillingness to bluntly state that they are worried their values are no longer respected more than and held in higher esteem than other values. In a nation that values the principle of equality, it is much more acceptable to demand equal respect than it is to demand higher respect. With the exception of meritocracy, which is typically applied to matters of economic gain, there is no deeply-held value system to support this type of argument. People who demand to be at the top of the status hierarchy, at least in cases where achievement is not directly involved, risk losing respect instead of maintaining it.

Importantly, it is not merely that opponents of gay marriage value status hierarchies while supporters do not. Each group simply wants to improve (in the case of supporters) or maintain (in the case of opponents) their status. If supporters were at the top of the status hierarchy, they too would likely be reluctant to lose their elevated prestige. Ultimately, the percentages offered here likely underestimate the importance of status concerns in the gay marriage debate, particularly among opponents. Nonetheless, even conservative measures and coding reveal that a full understanding of this issue requires that scholars consider the importance of status.

Beyond numbers, the analysis also reveals important information about the nature of status arguments surrounding this issue and potentially any legislation that might alter status dynamics in society. Based on the content analysis of the gay marriage debate, we can begin to understand how status arguments emerge in arguments surrounding a variety of intergroup policies. Both high and low status groups readily talk about the value of their group in an effort to maintain or change social norms. High status groups talk about defending their socially important lifestyles and low status groups demand equal respect. Both groups also tend to talk about how the other side negatively impacts them in intangible

ways. High status groups refer to the opposition's efforts as an all-encompassing, ambiguous attack and low status groups focus on how current social structures undermine their group's esteem. When investigating other intergroup policy debates, scholars should look for these types of arguments in an effort to understand the extent to which status concerns are driving public opinion for that particular issue. Here are examples of what a plea from each group might look like, in general terms, in the face of status-altering legislation:

**High Status Plea:** This law poses a grave threat to our group. This law sends the message that our way of life, which has held society together since the beginning of time, is no longer held in high-esteem. We cannot let these deviant lifestyles receive undeserved recognition.

**Low-Status Group:** This law is an important step for social equality. It shows, once and for all, that our group is just as valuable and worthy of respect as any other group in society. We are tired of being treated like second-class citizens and demand that the dignity of our lifestyle be recognized.

Ultimately, the content analysis shows that status arguments play a role in the gay marriage debate and reveal important information about the general nature of status arguments that can be applied to other issues where status is relevant. When investigating other intergroup policy debates, scholars can look for these types of arguments in an effort to understand the extent to which status concerns are present. Additionally, understanding the general structure of status arguments is helpful when exploring the influence of status

on public opinion. Scholars who are interested in uncovering the extent to which status concerns influence public opinion can utilize the framework presented here in a variety of survey and experimental designs to capture concerns about status and test the breadth and depth of its importance for various intergroup policy attitudes.

### **3. SURVEY DATA**

Having shown that status arguments appear in the qualitative communication surrounding the gay marriage debate, I now turn to survey data to shed light on the extent to which group status influences public opinion on this issue. Here, I examine the attitudes of groups typically thought to be on opposing sides of the gay marriage debate in America: Christians and those identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

#### **3.1 Public Opinion among Christians**

Although not exclusively or overtly a religious policy, gay marriage is an issue that is particularly salient among interest groups with Christian influence such as the Family Research Council, and public opinion research shows strong links between religious belief and opposition to gay marriage (Brewer, 2007). Beyond this, Christianity holds a particularly high status in America and has long been closely connected to what it means to be an American. Tocqueville (1840/2003) spent a great deal of time discussing the importance of religion for early American settlers, and Hugh Heclo (2009) took these claims a bit further, arguing that it is impossible to talk about American political development without talking about religion in general and Christianity in particular. Indeed, even the Implicit Attitude Test (IAT) shows that Americans possess a strong psychological link between American

identity and Christianity (Butz and Carvalho, 2015). Given the importance of heterosexual relationships for many believers and the prestige of Christianity in America, it is reasonable to expect that Christians are likely a group that perceives a loss of social prestige—primarily as a result of elite framing—by the government’s legalization of gay marriage.

Although opposition to gay marriage may be rooted in Biblical doctrine for many Christians, as the content analysis above makes clear, there is already suggestion within literature on religion and politics that opposition to gay marriage is about more than principled opposition. Wolfe (2000), for example, shows that gay marriage is an issue where otherwise tolerant believers begin to show reluctance. Additionally, Nussbaum (2010) points out that there are numerous things listed in Leviticus that Christians opposed to gay marriage could also try to outlaw, but for whatever reason they focus exclusively on the passages about homosexuality; furthermore, although many argue they are interested in protecting children, they do not, for example, try and limit heterosexual marriage to those who will make fit parents. Indeed, many of status arguments I found in the content analysis came from religious believers. For example, Executive Director of the New York Christian Coalition, Rev. Bill Banuchi, argued in 2004 that marriage is a “special relationship between a man and a woman” that gay marriage “devalues” (Case No. 221). Rather than focusing on a Biblical argument against gay marriage, Banuchi highlighted the status of heterosexual marriage and the threat gay marriage poses. Here, I test the extent to which group status influences public opinion on gay marriage among Christians.

### *3.1.1 Method*

To assess the influence of status on public opinion among Christians I utilize a Kaiser Family Foundation/Washington Post Poll conducted in late summer 2012. My primary measure of group status is a question asking respondents whether religious and spiritual values should have more, less, or about the same influence in politics and public life as they do currently, a three-point variable where 0 = “less influence”, 0.5 = “about the same”, 1 = “more influence” (mean = 0.54; s.d. = 0.40).<sup>35</sup> This measure allows me to get a sense of how Christians feel about their current level of status in the United States. My primary dependent variable is a simple question assessing the respondents’ support for gay marriage on a four-point scale coded from 1 to 4, where 1 = “illegal, strongly” and 4 = “legal, strongly” (mean = 2.32; s.d. = 1.28). In line with the theory presented in the previous chapter, my expectation is that as Christians move from perceiving that their group deserves less status to a perception that their group deserve more status they will express less support for gay marriage. In other words, as they desire more status than they currently receive they will feel compelled to restrict outgroups and become less accepting of policies that benefit, in this case, the LGBT community in an effort to resolve their status dissonance.

### *3.1.2 Results*

First, I examine which demographic variables correlate with perceptions of status concern among Christians. Using ordered probit analysis, I find that compared to those who say they would like “less influence,” those who say they would like “more influence” in American life are more likely to be ideologically conservative ( $p=0.00$ ), attend church more

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<sup>35</sup> The question wording for the key variables used in this analysis are in the Appendix.

frequently ( $p=0.00$ ), have less income ( $p=0.00$ ), score higher in moral traditionalism ( $p=0.00$ ) and lower in egalitarianism ( $p=0.07$ ). Hispanic Christians are less likely to express status concern than their white counterparts ( $p=0.00$ ), and female Christians are more likely express status concern than males ( $p=0.00$ ).<sup>36</sup>

Next, I examine the effect of status on support for gay marriage. As expected, I find that status concerned Christians express less support for gay marriage than their counterparts ( $p=0.00$ ), controlling for standard demographic variables such as party affiliation, ideology, sex, race, age, income, education, and church attendance as well as two dispositional factors known to influence opinion on gay marriage: moral traditionalism and egalitarianism (Brewer, 2007). The predicted probability of supporting gay marriage among Christians who perceive a gain in status is 0.53 while the probability of supporting gay marriage for those who perceive a loss in status is 0.34, a 19-point decrease in support that crosses the majority threshold. These results are presented in Table 3.1 and Figure 3.1.

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<sup>36</sup> All variables are coded from 0 to 1. The data is weighted in all analyses.

Support for Gay Marriage	
Too Little Status	-0.50*** (0.09)
Church Attendance	-0.47*** (0.13)
Moral Traditionalism	-1.77*** (0.16)
Egalitarianism	0.49*** (0.15)
Republican	-0.55*** (0.12)
Conservative	-0.65*** (0.15)
Female	0.25*** (0.07)
Age	-0.75*** (0.14)
Education	0.45*** (0.16)
Income	0.38*** (0.11)
Black	-0.56*** (0.12)
Hispanic	0.05 (0.11)
Weight	-0.04 (0.06)
Cut 1	-2.20 (0.25)
Cut 2	-1.71 (0.24)
Cut 3	-1.04 (0.24)
N	1395

Note: Ordered-probit analyses; weighted. All variables coded 0 to 1. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Table 3.1 Christian Support for Gay Marriage (Kaiser Family Foundation/Washington Post Poll 2012)



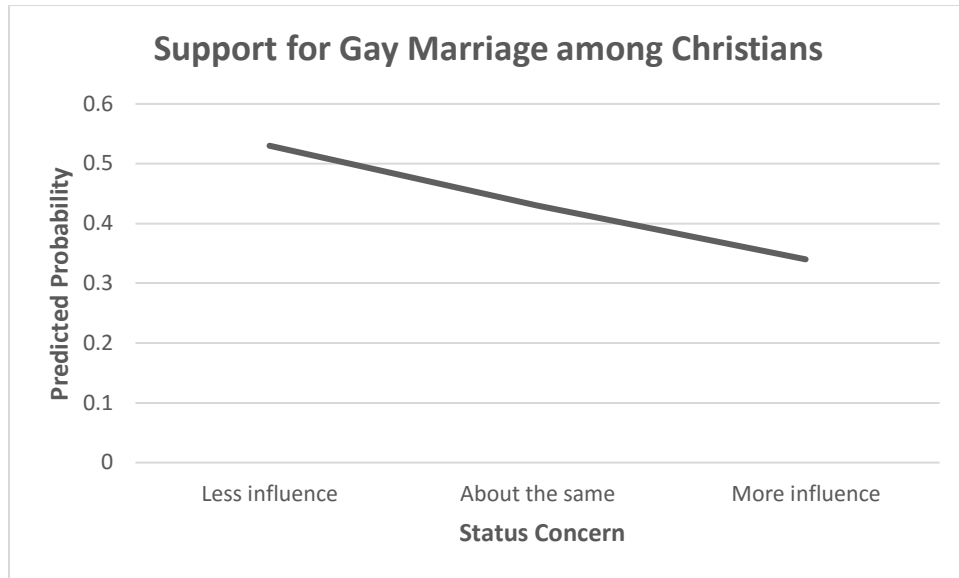


Figure 3.1 Support for Gay Marriage among Christians (Kaiser Family Foundation/Washington Post Poll 2012)

This finding shows that status concerns influence public opinion on the issue of gay marriage among opponents. As Christians feel concerned about their group’s status, they become less supportive of policies designed to benefit the outgroup.

### 3.2 Public Opinion in LGBT Community

The group that stands to gain the most status from the legalization of gay marriage is arguably the LGBT community. In this section, I use a different survey to test the influence of group status on support for gay marriage among lesbians, gays, and bisexuals.

#### 3.2.1 Method

To obtain a large enough sample of LGBT respondents, I turn to a Pew Research Center survey of 1,105 self-identified lesbian, gay, and bisexual Americans conducted in April of 2013. My primary measure of status is the extent to which respondents perceive that LGBT

individuals are socially accepted in this country on a four-point scale ranging from 0 = “none at all” to 1 = “a lot” (mean = 0.33; s.e. = 0.21).<sup>37</sup> Although this question does not ask respondents whether or not their group receives an appropriate amount of respect, it does allow for a baseline measure of perceived societal respect for the LGBT community among its members. My primary policy question is whether or not the respondent favors or opposes allowing gays and lesbians to marry, using a four-point scale where 1 = “strongly oppose” and 4 = “strongly favor” (mean = 3.64; s.d. = 0.80).

Here, given that my primary independent variable measures respondents’ level of perceived status rather than their views about deserving more or less of it, my expectation is that as respondents perceive more social acceptance of the LGBT community, they will express more support for the legalization of gay marriage in an effort to legalize status for the ingroup. I base this expectation primarily on the idea that marginalized groups require some degree of efficacy before they are willing to push for their rights and act on their desire for more respect, as discussed in Chapter 1. Furthermore, research on the push for marriage equality highlights that LGBT advocates were initially reluctant to fight for marriage because they didn’t believe the social climate would support the policy, even if they wanted the policy and respect it implied; in fact, they had to quickly organize their opposition when conservatives began to preempt their right to marry with a flurry of state constitutional amendments (Fetner, 2008; Dorf and Tarrow, 2014; Stone, 2016). Indeed, the Supreme Court’s decision to affirm gay marriage was more of a rescue effort against anti-gay policy than a result of LGBT advocates’ strategic push for marriage equality (Pinello, 2016). With this in mind, I expect that support for gay marriage should rise as LGBT respondents feel

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<sup>37</sup> See the Appendix for the question wording of the key variables used in this analysis.

their group has the social acceptance necessary to support the policy. In other words, as LGBT respondents begin to feel as though they have social support, they will begin to push for change rather than settle for other, status-neutral rights.

Beyond exploring support for gay marriage, I also draw on a series of questions gauging how much of a priority various LGBT issues should be, measured on a four-point scale where 1 = “not important at all” and 4 = “top priority,” to add nuance and explore when concerns about status do and not matter. For example, as the content analysis above highlights, many supporters of gay rights view gay marriage and civil unions as distinct policies with different meanings: civil unions provide economic benefits while gay marriage provides status benefits. Here, I compare the desire to prioritize gay marriage (mean = 3.20; s.d. = 1.20) with the desire to prioritize civil unions (mean=2.76; s.d. = 1.32). My expectation is that as perceptions of social acceptance increase respondents will place higher priority on issues that directly relate to the group’s social status, such as gay marriage. Conversely, as perceptions of social acceptance increase respondents should become *less* concerned about issues that do not acknowledge status, such as civil unions; in other words, as LGBT respondents feel their group has the social clout to secure the right to marry they will focus on this right rather than civil unions, the less ambitious policy.

### 3.2.2 Results

First, I use ordered probit to test the extent to which perceptions of social acceptance influence support for gay marriage.<sup>38</sup> As expected, a higher perception of social acceptance

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<sup>38</sup> I also examined which demographic factors contribute to a perception of high social acceptance, finding that age positively correlates with a perception of social acceptance (p=0.03). Party identification, ideology,

leads to an increase in support for gay marriage ( $p=0.00$ ), controlling for church attendance, party identification, ideology, sex, race, age, education, and income.<sup>39</sup> In other words, LGBT respondents who perceive that their group has a fair amount of status are more likely to support policies that validate the ingroup than those who feel their group does not receive respect. For example, moving from “none at all” to “a lot” of social acceptance increases the probability of strongly favoring gay marriage from 0.88 to 0.97, a full nine points. Table 3.2 and Figure 3.2 show the results of this analysis.

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sex, race, education, income, and church attendance do not correlate with perceptions of social status among LGBT Americans.

<sup>39</sup> All variables coded from 0 to 1. The data is weighted.

	Support for Gay Marriage
High Social Acceptance	0.69*** (0.22)
Church Attendance	-0.73*** (0.16)
Republican	-0.74*** (0.16)
Conservative	-1.86*** (0.24)
Female	0.29*** (0.10)
Age	-0.67** (0.19)
Education	0.28 (0.22)
Income	0.43*** (0.17)
Black	-0.54*** (0.17)
Hispanic	-0.01 (0.15)
Weight	-0.00 (0.05)
Cut 1	-4.03 (0.31)
Cut 2	-3.16 (0.28)
Cut 3	-2.05 (0.27)
N	1,062

Note: Ordered-probit analyses. All variables coded 0 to 1. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Table 3.2 LGBT Support for Gay Marriage (Pew Research Center 2013)

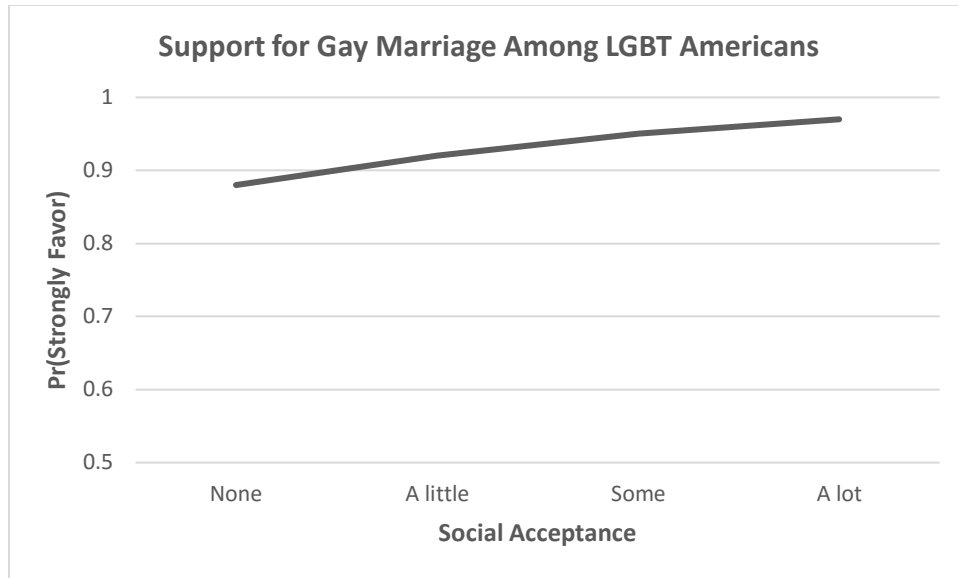


Figure 3.2 Support for Gay Marriage Among LGBT Americans (Pew Research Center 2013)

Next, I examine the influence of social acceptance on the priority respondents place on various issues of importance to the LGBT community. Here, the results again match my expectations and add clarity to how concerns about status influence various types of policies: respondents who perceive high social acceptance place *more* priority on gay marriage ( $p=0.02$ ) and *less* priority on civil unions ( $p=0.04$ ) than those who feel that the LGBT community receives less respect, controlling for the same demographics listed above as well as an index measuring the priority of other issues. While those who feel there is no social acceptance for the LGBT community have similar probabilities of rating gay marriage and civil unions as a “top priority,” those perceiving higher acceptance have very different priorities: the probability of prioritizing gay marriage jumps from 0.68 to 0.83 while the probability of prioritizing civil unions drops from 0.49 to 0.35, ultimately leaving a gap of 48 percentage points between prioritizing gay marriage and civil unions among those who perceive a lot of social acceptance for the LGBT community. Importantly, there was no

relationship between perceived social acceptance and a desire to prioritize other economic-focused LGBT issues such as equal employment rights ( $b=0.02$ ;  $s.e.=0.21$ ;  $n=1,030$ ). Table 3.3 and Figure 3.3 illustrate the divergent effect of social acceptance of support for gay marriage and civil unions.

	Gay Marriage Priority	Civil Unions Priority
Social Acceptance	0.48** (0.20)	-0.37** (0.18)
Priority of Other Issues	0.74*** (0.04)	0.43*** (0.03)
Republican	-0.31** (0.15)	0.03 (0.14)
Conservative	-0.43** (0.20)	0.78*** (0.18)
Church Attendance	-0.32** (0.14)	-0.01 (0.13)
Female	0.28*** (0.09)	0.07 (0.08)
Age	-0.42** (0.17)	0.31** (0.15)
Education	0.25 (0.19)	-0.31* (0.17)
Income	0.49*** (0.14)	-0.07 (0.12)
Black	-0.43*** (0.16)	0.16 (0.15)
Hispanic	-0.24* (0.13)	0.13 (0.12)
Weight	0.02 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.04)
Cut 1	0.85 (0.29)	0.75 (0.26)
Cut 2	1.79 (0.30)	1.49 (0.26)
Cut 3	2.87 (0.30)	2.45 (0.27)
N	1,030	1,030

Note: Ordered-probit analyses, weighted. All variables coded 0 to 1. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Table 3.3 LGBT Gay Marriage and Civil Unions Priority (Pew Research Center 2013)



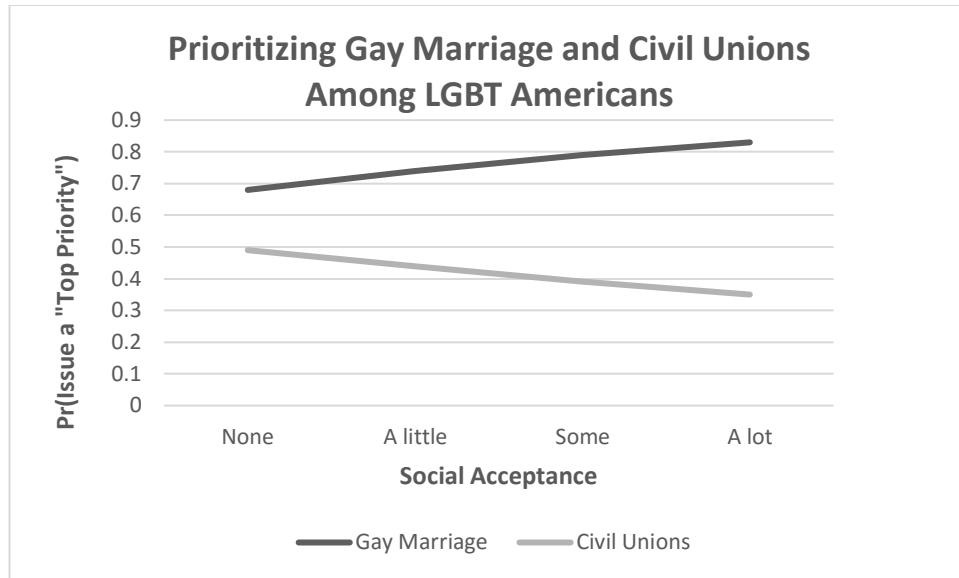


Figure 3.3 Prioritizing Gay Marriage and Civil Unions among LGBT Americans (Pew Research Center 2013)

Just as the results from the last section highlight the relevance of status for public opinion on gay marriage among the opposition, the findings here indicate that status also plays a role in public opinion among supporters of gay marriage. It also shows that status is more influential for policies that are tied to social prestige than those that are tied to economic benefits. Although these survey of LGBT Americans does not include an exhaustive list of worldview variables known to play a role in public opinion on gay marriage (such as moral traditionalism and egalitarianism), taken together these surveys offer evidence that intergroup status is an influential force in public opinion on both sides of the gay marriage debate.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Gay marriage, one of the most important social issues of the past decade, attracts support and opposition for a variety of reasons. Everything from economic benefits, to

religious principles and liberty to disputes over what family structure is best for children come up when Americans think about gay marriage. Here, I have used a content analysis to explore the presence and structure of status arguments in the gay marriage debate, finding that concerns about status permeate the arguments made by both opponents and supporters. I have also used these qualitative results to build a framework for understanding how status arguments can look in intergroup policy debate more broadly. Additionally, I have used data from two surveys to show that perceptions of status lead to more and less support for gay marriage among the LGBT community and Christians, respectively. I have also shown that a deficit in status does not affect concern about all intergroup policies equally, with differences centered on how policies influence the group's social prestige. Together, the qualitative and quantitative results presented here show that status is a noteworthy feature of communication surrounding the gay marriage debate and plays an important role in public opinion on the issue.

Although I focus on gay marriage here, these findings offer a foundation for exploring the importance of intergroup status in other policy areas and leave many questions unanswered. For example, although I've shown that status concerns make an appearance in at least one social policy debate, I have not fully addressed when or how these concerns enter the conversation. Some policy debates naturally lend themselves to status arguments, as discussed earlier in the chapter, but many require an overt attempt to connect the policy issue at hand to intergroup status. When is this an ideal strategy? Why do elites choose to connect certain issues with status while framing other issues as disconnected from group status? Do status arguments take different forms, depending on the origin? Future research

should delve further into the origins of status-oriented political communication and its effects on the structure of its presence.

Additionally, how does policy change alter the presence and structure of status arguments, as well as public opinion on the issue? Now that gay marriage is affirmed by the Supreme Court, do Christians perceive a decrease in status? Do members of the LGBT community talk differently about their place in society? In other words, do group members' efforts to adjust the status dynamic in society work, relieving status concern? Or are they overly hopeful, advocating for policies they think will resolve their problems only to be left disappointed that things haven't changed? How effective is the political realm for relieving status dissonance? Additional research is needed to shed light on these important topics. For now, I have offered an important first step in establishing the relevance of status for intergroup policy debates.

## **APPENDIX**

### **Kaiser Family Foundation/Washington Post Poll 2012**

Would you rather see religious and spiritual values have (more) influence in politics and public life than they do now, (less) influence, or about the same influence as they do now?

- 1) Less influence
- 2) About the same
- 3) More influence

Do you think it should be legal or illegal for gay and lesbian couples to get married?

- 1) Illegal, strongly
- 2) Illegal, somewhat
- 3) Legal, somewhat
- 4) Legal, strongly

### **Pew 2013 LGBT Survey**

Overall, how much social acceptance, if any, of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people do you think there is in this country today?

- 1) None at all
- 2) Only a little
- 3) Some
- 4) A lot

Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally?

- 1) Strongly oppose
- 2) Oppose
- 3) Favor
- 4) Strongly favor

Thinking about some policy issues, do you think each of the following should be a top priority, a very important but not top priority, a somewhat important priority, or not a priority at all?

- a. Equal employment rights for LGBT people
  - b. Legally sanctioned marriages for same-sex couples
  - c. Adoption rights for same-sex couples
  - d. More efforts aimed at prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS
  - e. Legally sanctioned civil unions or domestic partnerships for same-sex couples
  - f. Support for organizations that provide services for LGBT youth
  - g. Coverage of transgender health issues by health insurance
- 1) Not a priority at all
  - 2) Somewhat important priority
  - 3) Very important but not top priority
  - 4) Top priority

## CHAPTER 4

### The Importance of Within-Group Status

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The previous empirical chapters offer an in-depth look at how group status influences support for a variety of public policies and the way concerns about status enter into political communication surrounding intergroup policy debates. Group members desire status for their group and turn to the political realm in an effort to validate or alter the status of their group in society. Having established the desire for group status and the relevance of this desire for politics, I now turn to another important question: which group members are most likely to fight for the status of their group? Which members should we expect to do the heavy lifting when it comes to protecting the status of the group? Which members should we expect to sit back and let others make the effort?

In this chapter, I answer these questions by exploring how status concerns *within* groups influence intergroup public opinion. In other words, I examine the extent to which one's status within her group has implications for her willingness and desire to bolster the ingroup and lash out at the outgroup. Specifically, I conduct two experiments to test the notion that marginalized group members—those who feel as though they have a low status within the group—are more supportive of policies that affirm the in-group and less supportive of policies that affirm the out-group than group members who feel secure in their position within the group. Just as intergroup status concerns prompt group members to rally around policies that benefit their group in an effort to validate the worth of their group,

intragroup status concerns cause group members to support the group's goals in an effort to show other group members they belong in the group. Before turning to the two experiments I use to test this theory, I lay out a theoretical framework to support my general hypothesis.

## **2. THEORY**

The previous chapters of this project argue for the importance of intergroup status, and a wealth of psychological research supports the notion that people desire status for their group in an effort to increase their own self-esteem. There is no reason to assume that the desire for status is limited to an intergroup context, of course; it is reasonable to assume people also desire status within the groups they identify. They desire to be well-respected members of their group.

Research in psychology supports the notion that individuals desire status within their group. For example, Brewer's (1991) optimal distinctiveness theory posits that people feel the need to be both adequately integrated into the ingroup and distinguished from relevant outgroups. In other words, they want to *belong* in their group. They want to be a "real" American or a "good" Democrat. They want others to view them as an important part of the team rather than a peripheral member. Blurring the boundaries between in-group and out-group.

Just as the perception that one's group does not receive the respect it deserves prompts an effort to improve the group's status, group members likely also respond to the feeling that they are not well-integrated into their group by attempting to improve their status within the group. One way that marginalized individuals might try to improve their ingroup status is by assimilating into ingroup norms. For example, immigrants who want to

fully identify with their new country may abandon the language and customs of their home, may celebrate local holidays with great enthusiasm, and fly their new country's flag with pride. Christians who feel inadequate may spend more time in religious services, donate more time and money to church-sponsored community projects, and support more fully their religion's stances on politically relevant issues such as gay marriage and abortion. Partisans, as one last example, who want to identify with their political group but do not fully support all of its policy preferences may devote a great deal of time to defending their position on the issues that do align with party preferences.

Experiments directly testing Brewer's optimal distinctiveness theory show that assimilation is often precisely what happens when ingroup members feel marginalized. For example, Pickett et al. (2002) uses a number of different ingroup-outgroup distinctions to show that individuals who are told their personality traits diverge from those of the average ingroup member are more likely to self-stereotype; they are even willing to use negative group stereotypes to describe themselves in order to feel included. Other research shows that marginalized group members are more likely to favor prototypical group members than their counterparts (Schmitt and Branscombe 2001). Additionally, group members who feel the need to affiliate with their ingroup are more likely to report experiencing what they believe to be stereotypical ingroup emotions (Moons et al. 2009).

In addition to expressing in-group similarity, marginalized group members also exhibit pro-group behaviors (Gomez et al. 2014). Similarity to other ingroup members is particularly important for one's sense of belonging when the group in question is a social category, rather than a social network (Easterbrook and Vignoles 2013). Marginalized

individuals adopt stereotypical, sometimes negative, traits and emotions to describe themselves in an attempt to improve their status within their group.

Beyond assimilation, group members may also exhibit outgroup aggression as a way to bolster their status within the group. Politically, this may take the form of outright physical attacks, such as assaulting outgroup members or political figures representing those groups or bombing politically-charged buildings such as abortion clinics, or as support for policies that limit the freedom of relevant outgroups, such as ballot initiatives to constitutionally ban gay marriage, laws that make English the official language of a city, opposition to allowing Muslims to build mosques, etc. Hostility toward outgroup members, whether by physical action or policy support, can serve as a way for marginalized ingroup members to both express their loyalty to the ingroup and distance themselves from the outgroup simultaneously.

Early research on intergroup conflict supports the connection between outgroup aggression and ingroup status. In the classic “Robber’s Cave” experiment on intergroup relations, for example, researchers found that it was often the boys ranked lowest by their fellow team members who were the most interested in picking fights with the opposing team (Sherif et al. 1988). This suggests that outgroup aggression may be one way for marginalized ingroup members to cope with their ingroup position. Literature on bullying also supports the idea that aggression towards others may occur as a means to improve one’s status. For example, research shows that bullies are not typically those with the highest social standing and often have a “rejected” status, receiving negative evaluations from their peers (Salmivalli et al. 1996). Not surprisingly, these individuals are rarely those with the greatest confidence but rather those who are relatively insecure in their social position; indeed, they often even



have lower self-esteem than non-bullies (O'Moore and Kirkham 2001). Bullies engage in proactive aggression—aggressive behavior that is unprovoked and perceived as instrumental for obtaining a social good—in hopes of improving their social status (Sijtsema et al. 2009). Ultimately, aggression serves as a way for marginalized individuals to improve their social standing. Here, I build on this research by testing the idea that marginalized group members adjust their political attitudes on group-relevant policies in an effort to showcase their loyalty to their group and, thus, bolster their status within the group.

### **3. STUDY ONE: MALE AND FEMALE STUDENTS**

My first test of this theory focuses on support for gender-based policies among men and women. Specifically, I used an experimental design to manipulate the within-group status of male and female students at Vanderbilt and then assess their support for a variety of group-based policies and initiatives. The study took place in the fall of 2016 as a part of the RIPS Lab fall study.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

To set up the experimental manipulation, male and female respondents were asked to write about the most important traits and characteristics of male and female students at Vanderbilt, respectively. This information, they were told, would be used to determine whether or not they would be invited to participate in an upcoming focus group of their same gender peers; participants would receive 100 dollars for participating, if selected. After completing the open-ended question, participants were randomly assigned to receive a response that either made them feel secure in their group membership or marginalized. In

the control condition, respondents were told that their score was an 80 percent match with other students of their gender and that were invited to participate in the focus group. In the treatment condition, respondents were told that their score was only a 20 percent match and that they were not invited to participate in the focus group at this time.

Both those receiving the control and treatment conditions were then told that their answers to the remainder of the survey would be forwarded to current focus group members: those in the control condition were told their responses would serve to foster conversation in the next meeting while those in the treatment condition were told their responses would be used to determine the potential for future participation. I include this information for two reasons. First, research shows that group members only adopt pro-group behaviors when other in-group members are watching (Teixeria et al. 2015). Second, marginalized group members who have been rejected by the ingroup may turn against, rather than toward their group (Ellemers and Jetten 2013). Therefore, providing subjects with the opportunity to show other group members they support the group and, thus, may improve their standing in the future addresses both of these important conditions.

After completing the open-ended task and receiving bogus feedback, respondents then answered a series of questions about gender-based policies that Vanderbilt might implement, including support for affirmative action for women in college admissions, a desire to prioritize increasing the number of male students studying the humanities and arts, support for equalizing funding for male and female sport programs, and the number of STEM scholarships females and males should receive. My expectation is that marginalized females will be more supportive of policies that benefit female students than non-marginalized

females while marginalized males will be less supportive of the same policies than their non-marginalized counterparts.

### **3.2 Results**

In total, there were 142 male respondents and 192 female respondents in the study. For both genders, there were more respondents in the treatment condition than in the control condition. Eighty-two males received the treatment and 59 received the control. Among females, 107 received the treatment and 85 received the control. Politically the sample was somewhat liberal and leaned Democrat. Racially, the sample was 71.94 percent white, 13.12 percent Asian, 6.87 percent black, and 5.97 percent Hispanic. Roughly two percent of the sample did not identify a race. I also included an index measure of modern sexism taken from the National Election Studies in my models. This additive index is comprised of three survey questions gauging the extent to which respondents believe that women who want equality really just want special favors, that discrimination does not prevent women from securing jobs, and that women who complain about harassment cause problems. As with all other independent variables, I code this index from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating more sexist views. The scale has good reliability ( $\alpha=0.70$ ) with a low average score (mean=0.19; s.d.=0.18).

First, I look at support for three gendered school policies: support for affirmative action in college admissions, a desire to prioritize increasing the number of male students studying the humanities and arts, and support for equalizing funding for male and female sports programs. All variables are coded from 1 to 4 such that higher values equal more support for female students and less support for male students.

A slight majority of women somewhat or strongly supported affirmative action, with 54 percent of women favoring the policy (mean=2.54; s.d.=0.81) while only 37 percent of men expressed agreement (mean=2.16, s.d.=0.87). A stronger majority of women somewhat or strongly favored equal funding for men and women's sports program, with 67 percent expressing support (mean=2.95; s.d.=0.81) while 35 percent of men felt the same (mean=2.63; s.d.=0.77). Thirty-three percent of women felt that increasing the number of men studying humanities and the arts was "not too important" or "not important at all" (mean=2.36; s.d.=0.62). A slight majority of men, on the other hand, agreed, with 51 percent finding this goal unimportant (mean=2.63; s.d.=0.77). To analyze the effect of the treatment on support for these policies, I combine the policies into an index coded from 1 to 13, with higher values meaning more support for pro-women policies. For women, the mean score on this index is 4.85 (s.d.=1.29; alpha=0.54). Among men, the mean score is 4.08 (s.d.=1.41; alpha=0.63).

Before looking at the primary independent variable in the model—exposure to the experimental treatment—it is useful to take a look at how the other demographic variables influence support for pro-female policies. Using standard OLS regression, I find that for both men and women, higher scores on the sexism scale correlated with lower scores on the pro-female policy scale ( $p < 0.05$ ). Among women, conservatism also reduced support for pro-female policies ( $p < 0.05$ ). These correlates emerge as expected and offer validation for the policy questions used.

Turning to the primary variable of interest, my expectation is that marginalized women will score higher on the index—expressing more support for efforts that benefit women rather than men—than their non-marginalized counterparts while marginalized

men will score lower than more status secure men. Indeed, this is precisely what I find. Women in the treatment condition scored 0.31 points higher on the pro-female student scale than those in the control condition ( $p < 0.10$ ). In other words, women who were made to feel marginalized acted in the predicted manner; they expressed more support for pro-female policies and initiatives than those who were made to feel secure in their group identity and, thus, did not need to prove anything to the group. For men, the predicted pattern also emerged. Men who received the treatment condition expressed less support for pro-female policies, scoring an average of 0.38 points lower on the scale than men whose in-group position was more satisfactory ( $p < 0.10$ ). Men who felt marginalized reacted in the predicted way; they reduced their support for pro-female policies in an effort to separate themselves from the out-group and, consequently, join their in-group. It is worth noting that the effect sizes, although small, are similar in size. The comparable effect size suggests that men and women (i.e., both low and high status genders) are equally reactive to feeling marginalized, although the effect was slightly larger for men. These results are shown in Table 4.1.

	Female Subjects	Male Subjects
Marginalization	0.31* (0.17)	-0.38* (0.21)
Conservative	-1.89** (0.73)	-1.29 (0.86)
Republican	0.25 (0.51)	0.43 (0.65)
Sexism	-1.36** (0.67)	-2.65*** (0.66)
Black	-0.04 (0.38)	0.27 (0.38)
Hispanic	0.35 (0.33)	-0.18 (0.57)
Household Income	0.13 (0.35)	0.19 (0.36)
_cons	8.29 (0.37)	8.16 (0.41)
N	191	141

Note: OLS Regression, \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01,

Table 4.1 Support for Pro-Female Policy Index (RIPS Study, 2016)

Next, I examined respondents' preferences in an allocation assignment. Respondents were told that Vanderbilt hopes to offer 500 new scholarships to students in STEM fields in an effort to increase the number of female students in these programs and were asked to use sliders to indicate their preference for how many scholarships male and students should receive. Male respondents were told that most male students select 150 scholarships for women and 350 for men; the sliders reflected this preference for initial placement. Female respondents were told the reverse and their sliders were placed accordingly.

On the whole, men wanted to give more scholarships to males than women did, while women wanted to give more scholarships to females than men did.<sup>40</sup> In terms of the distribution of scholarship allocation, however, males allocated scholarships more uniformly than did females; they expressed only a slight preference for male over female recipients while women were far more preferential toward female recipients. The distributions are shown in Figure 4.1 (for female respondents) and Figure 4.2 (for male respondents).



Figure 4.1 Scholarship Distribution among Female Respondents (RIPS Study, 2016)

<sup>40</sup> I also checked to see if respondents' allocated a total of 500 scholarships, per the instructions. Although only 43.23 percent of females and 38.73 percent of males had a cumulative scholarship allocation of exactly 500, the majority of participants were very close to the mark; 22.92 percent of females and 24.65 percent of males allocated 501 scholarships, and 16.15 percent of females and 15.49 percent of males allocated 502 scholarships. These respondents likely meant to allocate 500 but slightly misplaced their sliders. On the whole, it seems most respondents responded to the question appropriately.



Figure 4.2 Scholarship Distribution among Male Respondents (RIPS Study, 2016)

These distributions highlight an important difference between the way male and female participants responded to the question. Recall that the sliders were set at 350 for the ingroup and 150 for the outgroup. While men, on average, reduced the default number of scholarships male students would receive by 110 (s.d.=82.85), women only reduced the number of scholarships for female students by 53 (s.d.=60.68). And men, on average, increased the default number of scholarships for female students by 82 (s.d.=80.08) while women only increased the number of scholarships for male students by 49 (s.d.=57.63). In other words, although men still expressed a preference for male over female scholarships, they sought out a more balanced allocation than the women participants.

To analyze the relationship between feelings of in-group marginalization and results for this task, I once again use OLS regression. My expectation is that marginalized female



respondents will allocate more scholarships to females than their more status secure counterparts and marginalized male respondents will allocate less scholarships to female students than their counterparts.<sup>41</sup> Among women, I found that conservatives allocated less female scholarships than liberals ( $p < 0.10$ , one-tailed), while Republicans allocated more ( $p < 0.10$ , one-tailed). Hispanic women allocated more scholarships to females than did their non-Hispanic counterparts ( $p < 0.05$ , one-tailed). Among men, those scoring high on the sexism scale allocated fewer scholarships to women than their counterparts ( $p < 0.05$ , one-tailed), as did those with a higher family income ( $p < 0.10$ , one-tailed). Black and Hispanic men allocated more scholarships to females ( $p < 0.05$ ).

As for the treatment, I found that women increased the number of scholarships allocated to females while men decreased the number of scholarships allocated to females, as expected. Marginalized women wanted to give, on average, 13 more scholarships to fellow female students than their status-secure counterparts ( $p < 0.10$ , one-tailed), and marginalized men wanted to give 27 fewer scholarships to female students than non-marginalized men ( $p < 0.10$ , one-tailed). Although small sample sizes preclude strong interpretation, it appears that both women and men took efforts to bolster their group when their status within the group was threatened. Importantly, however, the effects for men and women in this analysis were not equal; men adjusted their scholarship allocation substantially more than women. This discrepancy is perhaps due to the power of loss aversion, as discussed elsewhere; while men likely perceive that they are giving up scholarships, women are hoping to gain more. These results appear in Table 4.2.

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<sup>41</sup> For this analysis, I removed respondents who allocated an equal (or essentially equal) number of scholarships to both genders (i.e., respondents who appeared to be allocating scholarships based on egalitarian principles). Egalitarian responses were not influenced by the treatment for either female or male respondents.

	Female Subjects	Male Subjects
Marginalization	13.39* (8.81)	-26.91* (16.89)
Conservative	-59.88* (39.70)	-79.82* (78.93)
Republican	36.42* (26.25)	38.90 (57.34)
Sexism	-15.43 (42.42)	-136.89** (59.68)
Black	15.51 (18.18)	62.88*** (25.61)
Hispanic	47.22** (19.19)	75.68** (40.15)
Household Income	-18.61 (15.87)	-38.49* (29.15)
_cons	338.29 (17.35)	320.68 (30.30)
N	127	64

Note: OLS Regression, \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01, one-tailed.

Table 4.2 Number of Female Scholarships Allocated (RIPS Study, 2016)

On the whole, the results from this study provide support for my theory that marginalized group members adjust their policy preferences in an effort to bolster the status of their group. Women become more supportive of pro-female policies and want to allocate more resources to female students when made to feel as though they have low status within their group, while men become less supportive of pro-female policies and want to allocate less resources to the female students when marginalized.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> I also tested to see if there was an interaction between feeling marginalized and sexism on policy preferences and the allocation task, but none emerged. There was also no interaction between the treatment and ideology or partisanship on dependent measures.

#### **4. STUDY TWO: MOTHERS**

Building on the results of Study One, I next tease apart nuances within gender identity to see how perceptions of gender roles play a role in relationship between within-group status and support for gendered policies. To do this, I focus on one particular subset of women: mothers. Specifically, I focus on the divergence between homemakers and working women, who tend to express divergent political attitudes (Anderson and Cook 1985). This focus allows me to build on Luker's (1985) exploration of the status dynamics between homemakers and working mothers by examining the extent to which marginalized homemakers and working mothers are more supportive of policies that promote their group's understanding of motherhood than group members who are more secure in their status.

My expectation is that working mothers who are made to feel marginalized will be more likely to support policies that benefit working moms than those who are comfortably average as a way to show their loyalty to their group and, thus, potentially improve their status within the group. Conversely, my expectation for homemakers is that those who are made to feel marginalized will be less supportive of the same policies in an effort to reinforce their perceptions of what motherhood means and, thus, improve their within-group status.

##### **4.1 Research Design**

To test these expectations, I conducted a survey of 600 mothers using Survey Sampling International's existing panels. As in the previous study, I chose to manipulate rather than measure status directly. In this study, I follow previous research and manipulate each participant's status as a mother by asking them to complete a self-assessment

questionnaire comparing themselves to other women on a wide variety of traits. I then randomly assign bogus feedback placing them as either average or below average, including a graphical representation of their score so that they can easily see how their score compared to other members of their ingroup. This false feedback closely mirrors the manipulation used by Pickett et al. (2002).<sup>43</sup> Similar to my last study, respondents are then told, based on whether they are average or below average, that they are invited to participate in a focus group of mothers or that they will be contacted in the future if their participation is needed, respectively.

Following the treatment, respondents answered a number of policy questions designed to assess their preferences and opinions on policies designed to benefit working moms. My general expectation is that marginalized mothers will be more supportive of these policies than their non-marginalized counterparts.

## **4.2 Results**

Of the 600 respondents, 428 were properly treated and retained for analysis.<sup>44</sup> Before getting to the results, it is first useful to note the demographics of my sample. Sixty-seven percent of the mothers in my sample are married while 17 percent have never been married. Sixty percent of the sample works while 29 percent are homemakers. The average age is 35-44. Forty-five percent of respondents are Democrat and 33 percent are ideologically liberal. The sample is 75 percent white, seven percent black, nine percent Hispanic, and five percent

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<sup>43</sup> The exact wording for the treatment conditions is in the appendix.

<sup>44</sup> I assessed whether or not the respondent was properly treated by looking at their response to a question gauging their perception of their status as a mother, asked directly after the treatment. I retained all marginalized mothers who stated that they were below average and all non-marginalized mothers who stated they were average. Importantly, compliers were not demographically different by treatment and did not differ across conditions.

Asian. In terms of religion, thirty-seven percent of respondents are Protestant, 18 percent are Catholic, and eight percent are atheist/agnostic; forty-eight percent of respondents “never attend” church while 15 percent attend every week.

After the treatment, respondents were asked about three policies that would potentially benefit working mothers: paid leave to employees for maternity and dependent care obligations, whether or not employers should offer child care benefits if the cost of benefits leads to a reduction in benefits elsewhere for all employees, and unemployment benefits for new mothers. These questions serve as my primary dependent variables and are on a four-point scale where 1 represents the strong opposition for the policy and 4 represents strong support for the policy. In my sample, sixty-five percent of mothers strongly favor paid leave, 19 percent strongly favor child care, and 32 strongly favor unemployment benefits for new mothers.

For the analysis, I combine the three policies ( $\alpha=0.59$ ) into a 1 to 9 scale, with higher values indicating more support for the policies. I use simple regression to see if there is a main treatment effect. As expected, I find that within-group marginalization does not have a statistically significant impact on support for the policy scale, controlling for identity, self-esteem, self-assessment (the experiment questionnaire), age, partisanship, ideology, a dummy for no ideology, race, income, and church attendance ( $p=0.92$ ).<sup>45</sup>

However, given that the meaning of motherhood varies and my dependent variables all focus on pro-working mom policies, my expectation is the effect of marginalization will likely influence support for pro-working mom policies differently depending on whether the

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<sup>45</sup> The identity battery was taken from Leach et al.’s (2008) measurement of group centrality ( $\alpha=0.83$ ). Full question wording for both batteries are listed in the Appendix.

mother identifies as a working mom or a homemaker. To examine this interaction, I created a dummy variable where 0="mothers who stay at home and want to stay at home" and 1="women who work (full or part time) and prefer to work". I created this variable by drawing on two other variables: employment status and desire to work or stay home. Including only working mothers who *want* to work and homemakers who *want* to stay home allows for a cleaner test than either employment status or preference alone, as mothers whose current employment status does not match their preferences may have conflicting interests. I then created an interaction between this dummy and the treatment and re-run the model (n=208).

In this new analysis, I find a statistically significant, positive interaction between marginalization and whether or not the mother works on support for the policy index ( $p < 0.05$ ), as shown in Table 4.3. As expected, marginalized homemakers are less likely to strongly support the policies than average homemakers, while marginalized workers are *more* likely to strongly support the policies than average workers. In other words, members of both groups, when marginalized, seek to promote their group by adjusting their positions on relevant policies. It is important to note, however, that non-marginalized homemakers are *more* supportive of the policies than working mothers in the control condition, suggesting that homemakers differ from working mothers in ways I have not controlled for. I will return to this puzzling finding in the conclusion.

Support for Working Mom Policies	
Marginalization	-0.62* (0.34)
Working Mom	-0.81** (0.38)
Treat X Working Mom	1.00** (0.46)
Republican	-0.12 (0.08)
Conservative	-0.19* (0.10)
No Ideology	-0.09 (0.07)
Age	-0.14 (0.13)
Education	0.00 (0.10)
Income	0.01 (0.04)
Black	-0.50 (0.47)
Hispanic	-0.14 (0.41)
cons/_cut1	9.57 (1.06)
N	208

Note: OLS Regression, \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01,

Table 4.3 Support for Working Mom Policies (SSI Sample, 2016)

Ultimately, these results suggest that just as marginalized male and female students adjust their policy preferences in a way that bolsters their group, marginalized mothers also adjust their preferences to promote their understanding of motherhood.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> I also tested whether or not there was an interaction between the treatment and identity; none exists. However, I did find an unexpected, positive interaction between the treatment and partisanship on support for the policy index

## 5. CONCLUSION

While the previous chapters of this dissertation focus on the importance of intergroup status for public opinion, this chapter examines the role of within-group status on intergroup dynamics; that is, it explores how the status of group members within their group influences their desire to support policies that bolster the status of their group (and oppose policies that bolster the status of outgroups) as a way to express their group loyalty and improve their position within the group.

Through two experiments, I have shown that threats to within-group status tend to influence support for policies in the predicted way. Marginalized female students are more supportive of policies that benefit other female students and want to allocate more scholarships to the in-group than their non-marginalized counterparts, while marginalized male students are *less* supportive of the same policies and want to allocate more scholarships to the in-group than their non-marginalized counterparts. I have also shown that group members' understanding of what the group represents plays an important role in moderating the connection between status concerns and policy preferences. Marginalized working mothers are more supportive of policies that benefit working moms than their non-marginalized counterparts while marginalized homemakers are less supportive of pro-working mom policies than homemakers who are made to feel more secure as a mother.

Although these findings are informative, the studies presented here leave some questions unanswered. For example, in the second study I find that among non-marginalized

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( $p < 0.10$ ); while marginalization decreases support for the policies among Democrats, it increases support among Republicans. Although more research is needed to understand this puzzling result, it is possible that Democrat moms who are made to feel marginalized as mothers begin to tone down their support for working mom policies (while Republican moms increase their support) because they feel as though their partisan response might clash with other moms. If respondents were marginalized as partisans, not as mothers, we would likely see Democrats strengthening their support and Republicans lowering support.



respondents, homemakers are actually more supportive of pro-working mom policies than working moms themselves. As mentioned above, perhaps this oddity occurs because homemakers and working mothers differ in some way that I have not considered. It is also possible the policies themselves leave room for irregularities. For example, even though paid leave policies are designed to benefit working moms they also promote the ideals of homemakers (i.e. new mothers need to be at home with their babies). The question about child care benefits may also create problems, as it asks respondents to support the policy even if employees lose benefits elsewhere; it is entirely possible that working mothers who answer that question may be concerned about the other benefits they would lose, pitting their desires to be a working woman and a mother against each other. Ultimately, more research is needed to understand what is driving the gap in support between homemaker and working moms for pro-working mother policies.

Although the above result is puzzling, the treatment nonetheless influences opinion in the predicted way. Interestingly, the effects of feeling marginalized are much stronger for homemakers than working mothers. Two possibilities for the disparity come to mind. Perhaps the difference emerges because mothers who are homemakers are simply more affected by status concerns, for whatever reason. Another possibility is that marginalization prompts greater outgroup aggression than ingroup support. The policies used in this study are all geared toward supporting working mothers. So, homemakers' opinions on these issues represent their desire to distance themselves from the outgroup while workers' opinions on these issues represent their desire to support the ingroup. More research is needed to determine whether homemakers and working mothers simply relate to status

concerns differently or if both groups experience status threat similarly and outgroup aggression is simply a more appealing route for resolving status grievances.

On the whole, this chapter presents compelling evidence that group members care about their status within their group and adjust their preferences accordingly. It also raises important nuances that future research can address and build upon. Ultimately, however, it is clear that group members care not only about the status of their group in society but their status within the group; both have strong implications for public opinion and intergroup dynamics more broadly.

## APPENDIX

### RIPS 2016 Study

#### FEMALE VERSION

In the upcoming weeks, we will be conducting an on-line focus group of female students at Vanderbilt like you. We want to know what you think about a variety of issues, and we greatly value your opinion. Focus group participants will receive \$100 for their time.

To make sure you'd be a good fit with the group, our current panel of students would like for you to answer the following question.

What do you think are the most important traits and characteristics for female students at Vanderbilt to have?

(text box)

(Treatment – randomly assign to half of women)

We regret to inform you that your answer is only a 20% match with other female students' responses. At this time, you are not invited to join our next focus group aimed at obtaining female students' values and attitudes. However, our existing panel of students will review your responses to the remainder of this survey to see if you would be a good fit and contact you if they are interested in your future participation. More information will be provided at the end of this survey.

(Control – randomly assign to half of women)

Congratulations! Your answer is an 80% match with other female students' responses. You are invited to join our next focus group aimed at obtaining female students' values and attitudes. Our existing panel of students will use your responses to the remainder of this survey to facilitate your group's discussion. More information will be provided at the end of this survey.

Most female students at Vanderbilt favor affirmative action for women in college admissions, although some oppose it and believe admission should be based solely on merit. How about you? Do you favor or oppose affirmative action programs that give preferences to women in college admissions?

- 1) Strongly favor
- 2) Somewhat favor
- 3) Somewhat oppose
- 4) Strongly oppose

Vanderbilt is planning to offer 500 scholarships to students who want to pursue STEM fields, reserving some scholarships solely for female students in an effort to increase the number of women in math, science, and technology. Most female students at Vanderbilt believe the university should set aside 350 of these scholarships for women, leaving 150 for men. How about you? How do you think Vanderbilt should allocate the STEM scholarships?  
(Female and Male sliders, 0 to 500, increments of 25, must equal 500)

Vanderbilt is also interested in increasing the number of male students who study the humanities and arts. Most female students at Vanderbilt believe this should be a top priority, although some believe the university should focus its attention elsewhere. How about you? Do you think increasing the number of men who study humanities and art at Vanderbilt should be a top priority, important but not a top priority, not too important, or not important at all?

- 1) Top priority
- 2) Important but not a top priority
- 3) Not too important
- 4) Not important at all

[Most female students at Vanderbilt favor equal funding for men's and women's sports, although some believe the university should allocate more funding to men's than women's athletics because men's athletics create more revenue. How about you? Do you think funding for men's and women's sports should be equal, even if that means that Vanderbilt will have to cut men's athletic programs to provide equal funding for women's program?

- 1) Strongly favor
- 2) Somewhat favor
- 3) Somewhat oppose
- 4) Strongly oppose

#### MALE VERSION

In the upcoming weeks, we will be conducting an on-line focus group of male students at Vanderbilt like you. We want to know what you think about a variety of issues, and we greatly value your opinion. Focus group participants will receive \$100 for their time.

To make sure you'd be a good fit with the group, our current panel of students would like for you to answer the following question. Please be as honest as possible; there are no right or wrong answers.

What do you think are the most important traits and characteristics for male students at Vanderbilt to have?

(text box)

(Treatment – randomly assign to half of men)

We regret to inform you that your answer is only a 20% match with other male students' responses. At this time, you are not invited to join our next focus group aimed at obtaining male students' values and attitudes. However, our existing panel of students will review your responses to the remainder of this survey to see if you would be a good fit and contact you if they

are interested in your future participation. More information will be provided at the end of this survey.

(Control – randomly assign to half of men)

Congratulations! Your answer is an 80% match with other male students' responses. You are invited to join our next focus group aimed at obtaining male students' values and attitudes. Our existing panel of students will use your responses to the remainder of this survey to facilitate your group's discussion. More information will be provided at the end of this survey.

Most male students at Vanderbilt oppose affirmative action for women in college admissions and believe admission should be based solely on merit, although some favor it. How about you? Do you favor or oppose affirmative action programs that give preferences to women in college admissions?

- 1) Strongly favor
- 2) Somewhat favor
- 3) Somewhat oppose
- 4) Strongly oppose

Vanderbilt is planning to offer 500 scholarships to students who want to pursue STEM fields, reserving some scholarships solely for female students in an effort to increase the number of women in math, science, and technology. Most male students at Vanderbilt believe the university should set aside 150 of these scholarships for women, leaving 350 for men. How about you?

How do you think Vanderbilt should allocate the STEM scholarships?

(Female and Male sliders, 0 to 500, increments of 25, must equal 500)

Vanderbilt is also interested in increasing the number of male students who study the humanities and art. Most male students at Vanderbilt believe the university should focus its attention elsewhere, although some believe this should be a top priority. How about you? Do you think increasing the number of men who study humanities and art at Vanderbilt should be a top priority, important but not a top priority, not too important, or not important at all?

- 1) Top priority
- 2) Important but not a top priority
- 3) Not too important
- 4) Not important at all

Most male students at Vanderbilt believe the university should allocate more funding to men's than women's athletics because men's athletics create more revenue, although some favor equal funding for men's and women's sports. How about you? Do you think funding for men's and women's sports should be equal, even if that means that Vanderbilt will have to cut men's athletic programs to provide equal funding for women's program?

- 1) Strongly favor
- 2) Somewhat favor
- 3) Somewhat oppose
- 4) Strongly oppose

## SSI 2016 Study

### Identity Centrality Scale

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

I often think about the fact that I am a mother.

The fact that I am a mother is an important part of my identity.

Being a mother is an important part of how I see myself.

- 1) Strongly Agree
- 2) Somewhat Agree
- 3) Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4) Somewhat Disagree
- 5) Strongly Disagree

### Self-Esteem Scale

I'm going to make a few statements about people's mentality in general and yourself. Please tell me whether you think they are true or false.

When in a group of people, I usually do what others want, rather than make suggestions.

I would have been more successful if people had given me a fair chance.

I certainly feel useless at times.

Teachers often expect too much work from their students.

I commonly wonder what hidden reason another person may have for doing something nice for me.

## Experiment Set-Up and Treatments

In the upcoming weeks, we will be conducting an on-line focus group of mothers like you. We want to know what mothers think about a variety of issues, and we greatly value your opinion. Focus group participants will receive \$100 for their time.

To make sure you'd be a good fit with the group, our current panel of mothers would like for you to tell them a bit about yourself by answering a questionnaire. Please be as honest as possible; there are no right or wrong answers. After you complete the questionnaire, you will be given feedback on your results.

This questionnaire has to do with your attitudes about some of your activities and abilities. For the ten items below, you should rate yourself relative to other women your own age by using the following scale:

A Lot Below Average	Somewha t Below Average	A Little Below Average	Average	A Little Above Average	Somewhat Above Average	A Lot Above Average
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

- [SA1] intellectual ability \_\_\_\_
- [SA2] social skills/ social competence\_\_\_\_
- [SA3] artistic and/or musical ability \_\_\_\_
- [SA4] athletic ability \_\_\_\_
- [SA5] physical attractiveness \_\_\_\_
- [SA6] leadership ability \_\_\_\_
- [SA7] common sense \_\_\_\_
- [SA8] emotional stability \_\_\_\_
- [SA9] sense of humor \_\_\_\_
- [SA10] discipline \_\_\_\_

Marginalization Treatment [RANDOMLY ASSIGN TO HALF]

Studies of women have consistently demonstrated that one of the areas in which mothers and other women differ is in their scores on the previous questionnaire. The average score for mothers is 62. Your score is 48, as indicated by the dotted line on the distribution below. [Graphic]

Based on your results, at this time you are on standby to join our next focus group aimed at obtaining mothers' values and attitudes. Our existing panel of mothers will review your responses to the remainder of this survey and contact you if they are interested in your future participation. More information will be provided at the end of this survey.

[check] How did your overall score compare with the average score for mothers?

A Lot Below Average	Somewha t Below Average	A Little Below Average	Average	A Little Above Average	Somewhat Above Average	A Lot Above Average
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>

No Marginalization Treatment [RANDOMLY ASSIGN TO HALF]

Studies of women have consistently demonstrated that one of the areas in which mothers and other women differ is in their scores on the previous questionnaire. The average score for mothers is 62. Your score is 61, as indicated by the dotted line on the distribution below. [Graphic]

Based on your results, at this time you are invited to join our next focus group aimed at obtaining mothers' values and attitudes. Our existing panel of mothers will review your responses to the remainder of this survey and contact you with next steps. More information will be provided at the end of this survey.

[check] How did your overall score compare with the average score for mothers?

A Lot Below Average	Somewha t Below Average	A Little Below Average	Average	A Little Above Average	Somewhat Above Average	A Lot Above Average
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>



## Dependent Variables

Do you favor or oppose providing more paid leave to employees for maternity and dependent care obligations?

- 1) Strongly Favor
- 2) Somewhat Favor
- 3) Somewhat Oppose
- 4) Strongly Oppose

Do you think an employer should offer child care benefits if the cost of these benefits leads to a reduction somewhere else in the wage or benefit package for all employees?

- 1) Strongly Favor
- 2) Somewhat Favor
- 3) Somewhat Oppose
- 4) Strongly Oppose

Since many working mothers can't afford to take maternity leave without pay, some people say new mothers should be allowed to draw unemployment benefits while on maternity leave. Others say this could leave the unemployment insurance fund low when recession strikes, and that unemployment benefits should be reserved for the jobless. Do you favor or oppose unemployment benefits for new mothers?

- 1) Strongly Favor
- 2) Somewhat Favor
- 3) Somewhat Oppose
- 4) Strongly Oppose

## CONCLUSION

On January 20, 2017, Donald J. Trump moved into the White House and began his term as president of the United States amid deep concern about his ability to lead a divided nation. Indeed, the majority of Americans feel that Trump has little to no respect for a host of groups including women, racial minorities, religious minorities, and immigrants (Pew, 2016). If politics is all about the distribution of money and power, perceptions that Trump doesn't have respect for various groups in society might seem of trivial consequence. If, as I argue in this dissertation, people desire and fight for respect the way that they desire and fight for other more tangible goods, we must heed their concerns. Here, I recap my argument about the importance of group status in politics, provide an overview of my findings in support of this argument, and offer my thoughts on the normative implications within.

As individuals, people have an innate desire to feel good about themselves, to maintain some level of self-esteem. One way they seek to improve their self-esteem is by affiliating with groups; identifying with others who look like them, think like them, and share common experiences with them validates their worth. Of course, the benefits of identifying with a group assumes that the group is viewed positively in society, that association with the group actually results in the positive affect toward the individual that the individual craves. It assumes that others have positive perceptions about the group. When group membership fails to secure positive esteem, or, at least when group members *perceive* that others do not respect them, I argue that group members seek to improve the status of the group just as group members seek to improve their finances when they feel they don't make enough money.

One way that group members attempt to resolve concerns about status is through politics, by supporting policies that affirm the worth of their group and undermine the worth of other groups. Turning to the political realm is particularly likely, I argue, when groups members feel a disconnect between the status they believe their group deserves and the status they perceive their group receives. When group members believe they receive less respect than they deserve, they attempt to correct the imbalance by supporting policies that benefit their group and oppose policies that benefit outgroups; for severely marginalized groups, a baseline level of social acceptance may be necessary before members feel confident enough to seek validation. Conversely, when group members believe they receive more respect than they deserve, as is likely the case with those experiencing white guilt, they may actually show a preference for policies that benefit outgroups at the expense of their own.

To test whether or not there is empirical support for the connection between status concerns and public opinion, I first use a mixture of existing and original surveys focused on religious groups and relevant policies. I find that Christians who perceive their group receives too little respect are more supportive of pro-Christian policies than those who are more satisfied with the amount of respect their group receives; importantly, concerns about status have no influence on support for policies that are not tied to the status of religion. Additionally, I find that status concerned Agnostics/Atheists are *less* supportive of pro-Christians policies, and that both Christians and Agnostics/Atheists view status as a zero sum game.

Having established support for the importance of group status concern on public opinion, in Chapter 3 I turn my attention to how status arguments make their way into the political communication surrounding policy debates. Although group members may

naturally connect the relevance of some policies to the status of their groups, a fair amount of elite framing may be necessary to help group members see how a particular policy will affect the group. To get a sense of what this framing looks like and develop a framework for understanding how to locate status arguments in a variety of policy debates, I conduct a content analysis of newspaper articles surrounding the gay marriage debate. The analysis reveals that both opponents and supporters of the policy talk about status; while opponents focus on the worth of their group and ambiguous attacks by the other side, supporters talk about the way the current system undermines their worth. Furthermore, a look at existing survey data supports the connection between perceptions of status and support for gay marriage. Christians who feel religion should have more influence in society are less likely to support gay marriage than those who are satisfied with the status of their group. In line with the idea that a certain level of acceptance is necessary before low status groups gain the confidence to fight for validation, members of the LGBT community who perceive high levels of social acceptance are more supportive of status-affirming gay marriage (and less supportive of resource-affirming civil unions) than those who perceive low social acceptance.

In Chapter 4, I move beyond an exploration of intergroup status concerns to consider the possibility that group members not only care about the status of their group but also their status *within* their group. When group members feel marginalized, I argue, they will increase their support for policies that bolster the status of their group (and oppose policies that benefit the outgroup) in an effort to convince other members that they are loyal to the group. Using two survey experiments that focus on gender, I manipulate group members' within-group status and find support for my theory—group members who feel marginalized

express more support for policies that benefit their group and less support for policies that benefit outgroups than group members who feel more secure in their position.

The findings presented in this dissertation build a strong foundation for understanding the importance of including status in our research on intergroup public opinion and raise numerous normative implications for those interested in resolving intergroup conflict and, more broadly, promoting a society that nurtures and values all its members.

A superficial read of this dissertation would suggest that reducing intergroup conflict requires merely that we value and respect all groups in society, and, in some ways, this interpretation is valid. When people feel respected, they are less likely to express animosity towards others. Indeed, it seems that hostility is rooted, at least in part, not in negative feelings about others but insecurities about ourselves. Resolving these insecurities would serve the effort to reduce intergroup conflict well.

But the task is not that simple. Groups members view status, to some extent, as a zero sum game. In other words, group members have difficulty feeling respected in the midst of respect for others; they feel that if their group has respect, others must necessarily lack it. When others gain it, they view it as a loss for themselves. It's a balancing act that precludes the possibility of equal distribution. Even if changing perceptions of respect was as easy as offering words of affirmation, these words of affirmation would be in direct conflict with one another. We cannot all be important and valuable, it seems.

Importantly, the quest for status is not all bad. On the one hand, seeking status can lead to hostility towards others and resolving status concerns can relieve these negative tendencies. But becoming content with the status of one's group also seems to prevent

people from supporting policies that would directly benefit their group. Group members only support pro-ingroup policies when they feel undervalued in some way; artificially altering perceptions of respect without securing rights for the group might inadvertently *prevent* group members from fighting for their rights. For example, trying to convince women that they are valued in a society that chronically underpays and objectifies them, a challenge Donald Trump seems to enjoy, likely suppresses their efforts to remedy these imbalances. Indeed, the desire for status serves a very protective function, and it is perhaps not only opportunistic but morally irresponsible to allay these concerns when they emerge. To complicate things further, marginalized group members are more likely to fight for the status goals of the group than those who feel more secure. In this sense, making every group member feel as though they belong seems like an admirable goal, but it may have detrimental consequences for the well-being of the group. Societal progress is made, it seems, when people ache for change.

As we move into the next political phase, it is critical for policymakers and laymen alike to consider both the importance of status for intergroup conflict and the protective role it plays. If we want to improve the relationship between groups, we must, at a basic level, ensure that people with all identities feel valued and respected. But if we want the universally positive perceptions to persist, we must find a way to overcome the either-or mentality that tells us we cannot all have value, that if all groups are valuable then no group is valuable. In the midst of this challenge, we must also be careful to allow groups to reap all of the protective benefits of a desire for status without prematurely or artificially reliving their concerns. Ultimately, resolving intergroup conflict requires a delicate balance between alleviating and celebrating the quest for status.

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