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## Case Report

Effective to a fault: Organizational structure predicts attitudes toward minority organizations<sup>☆</sup>Sean Fath<sup>a,b,\*</sup>, Devon Proudfoot<sup>d</sup>, Aaron C. Kay<sup>a,b,c</sup><sup>a</sup> Duke University<sup>b</sup> Management and Organizations Department, 100 Fuqua Dr., Durham, NC 27708, USA<sup>c</sup> Psychology and Neuroscience Department, 417 Chapel Dr., Durham, NC 27708, USA<sup>d</sup> Cornell University, ILR School, Human Resource Studies Department, Ithaca, NY 14853, USA

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## ABSTRACT

We consider how the structure of groups seeking collective action on behalf of minorities impacts attitudes toward them. We predicted that hierarchical minority organizations are perceived as more effective social agents than non-hierarchical minority organizations and thus are particularly unlikely to be supported by those who prefer to maintain inequality. In a pretest, a hierarchical organization was judged more efficacious than a non-hierarchical organization. In two experiments (N = 814; N = 809), organizational structure (hierarchical vs. non-hierarchical) and membership (baseline vs. minority) were manipulated. Stronger preference for maintaining inequality was associated with increased desire to limit a minority organization's access to power, specifically when that organization was hierarchical. Findings suggest structure may signal the extent to which minority organizations pose a threat to the dominant social order and thus can drive responses to them. That is, minorities who organize may face unique pushback from those invested in maintaining inequality.

“Don't agonize, organize...until we organize and move in our self-interest, we'll continue as a powerless group.”

- Tish Sommers, founder of the National Organization for Women's Task Force on Older Women (Mahoney, 1974)

The current research aims to deepen our understanding of the factors that drive people's opinions about minority groups by considering how the *structure* of minority-based action groups—such as formal collectives of minority individuals that seek to advance their standing in a certain profession or occupation—may impact individuals' attitudes toward them. Throughout history, members of marginalized populations—those individuals facing discrimination in society based on their group membership—have often attempted to band together to fight for equal status and fair treatment. As Tish Sommers' above quote suggests, a minority group's ability to organize—that is, to develop a coordinated group structure capable of getting things done—is a necessary precursor to affecting social change. Yet, paradoxically, it is possible that highly organized minority groups may face unique pushback from those invested in maintaining current social hierarchy, specifically because having a coordinated group structure is likely to *signal* the minority group's potential to upset the dominant social order. Here, we examine

whether the structure of a professional organization composed of minorities, by communicating how organized and thus efficacious the group might be at achieving its goals, influences people's attitudes toward them.

## 1. Attitudes toward historically marginalized populations

Social psychological theories of intergroup relations have long sought to understand the factors that influence people's attitudes toward society's marginalized and disadvantaged members (Allport, 1979; Brewer & Brown, 1998; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986; Fiske & Taylor, 2013). Among the myriad variables identified as important predictors of people's attitudes toward minority group members are those related to individuals' generalized desire to maintain existing intergroup inequality (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). A relatively strong preference for maintaining existing inequality in society has been shown to predict negative attitudes toward members of disadvantaged populations and policies favorable to them (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). Individual differences along this dimension are captured by a person's social dominance

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orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994)—a measure of preference for group-based hierarchy, which includes both overt support for inequality, such as the belief that certain groups should dominate others in society (referred to herein as SDO-Dominance or SDO-D), as well as subtler expressions of support for inequality, such as belief in meritocracy (referred to herein as SDO-Egalitarianism or SDO-E) (Ho et al., 2015). We consider a context in which members of minority populations may find themselves particularly likely to elicit negative reactions from individuals with a desire to maintain inequality. Specifically, we examine people's support for minority-based professional organizations and consider how the structure of these organizations—that is, the manner in which they are formally organized—may be an important and novel predictor of how people respond to them.

## 2. Signaling efficacy through organizational structure

In becoming organized, groups of minorities may communicate to the world their ability to engage in collective action on the group's behalf, and in doing so, they may also signal their potential to threaten the unequal status quo. As unfavorable views toward minority groups may be particularly pronounced when minority group members are perceived as threatening existing social hierarchy (Jost et al., 2004), we reasoned that a minority-based professional organization that organizes itself in a highly effective way may be viewed particularly negatively by those who prefer to maintain the existing social hierarchy.

Hierarchy is widely lauded as the most effective structural form for the organization of people (Gruenfeld & Tiedens, 2010; Leavitt, 2003). Groups and organizations that structure themselves into a hierarchy are more effective at coordination, delegation, and efficiency (Halevy, Chou, & Galinsky, 2011; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Thus, it is also possible that lay people might see a hierarchical organizational structure as an important signal of the organization's ability to be effective. If so, we would expect those individuals who desire to maintain intergroup inequality to be particularly unsupportive of minority-based professional organizations when those organizations are structured into a hierarchy. Thus, in the current research, we investigated whether the structure of a minority-based action group—specifically whether the organization has a hierarchical structure or not—may be a unique factor predicting people's favorability toward the organization, especially among those who wish to maintain current social inequality.

## 3. SDO-Dominance and SDO-Egalitarianism

Recent advances in Social Dominance Theory suggest that a desire to maintain social inequality can be expressed along overt and/or subtle lines (Ho et al., 2012; Ho et al., 2015; Jost & Thompson, 2000; Kugler, Cooper, & Nosek, 2010). Reflecting these advances, social dominance orientation is now commonly considered to be an individual difference measure containing two sub-dimensions—SDO-Dominance and SDO-Egalitarianism—which map onto overt and subtle inclinations toward the maintenance of inequality, respectively (Ho et al., 2012; Ho et al., 2015; Jost & Thompson, 2000; Krosch, Berntsen, Amodio, Jost, & Van Bavel, 2013; Kteily, Bruneau, Waytz, & Cotterill, 2015; Kteily, Hodson, & Bruneau, 2016; Saucier, 2013). SDO-Dominance reflects an overt preference for inequality by capturing support for traditionally advantaged groups actively dominating and oppressing traditionally disadvantaged groups. SDO-Egalitarianism reflects a more subtle preference for inequality by capturing support for policies that maintain social hierarchy, such as an opposition to equal distribution of resources among social groups (Ho et al., 2012; 2015).

Relatedly, Ho et al. (2012) have theorized that the subscales measuring SDO-Dominance and SDO-Egalitarianism (which together comprise the full SDO scale) may differentially predict people's beliefs and attitudes toward particular minority groups, depending on the *socio-structural context* in which those minority groups are embedded. In first tests of this, Ho et al. (2012) demonstrate that in explicitly hierarchical

intergroup contexts, wherein relations between minority and majority groups are fraught with overt conflict and hostility, individual differences in SDO-Dominance more strongly predict beliefs related to those minorities and policies relevant to them than individual differences in SDO-Egalitarianism. Conversely, in less hierarchical intergroup contexts, wherein relations between minority and majority groups are not overtly conflictual and hostile, individual differences in SDO-Egalitarianism more strongly predict beliefs about those minorities and policies relevant to them than individual differences in SDO-Dominance (Ho et al., 2012). Little other research has examined whether the SDO subscales may differentially predict people's responses toward particular minority groups, depending on socio-cultural context.

Drawing from the theory and evidence put forth by Ho et al. (2012), we suggest that when an organization is composed of minorities whose relations with the majority are characterized by overt conflict and hostility, such as is the case for African Americans in a U.S. context, SDO-Dominance may more strongly predict attitudes toward them relative to SDO-Egalitarianism. Conversely, when an organization is composed of minorities whose relations with the majority are not characterized by overt conflict and hostility, as is the case for groups such as Jewish Americans in a U.S. context, SDO-Egalitarianism may more strongly predict attitudes toward them relative to SDO-Dominance.

## 4. Overview of current research

In two experiments, we manipulated the membership of a professional organization presented to participants, varying whether it was described as composed of minorities or not. We manipulated the organization's structure with an organizational chart that was either structured hierarchically or non-hierarchically, and measured participants' preference for intergroup inequality along both overt and subtle lines, captured by SDO-Dominance and SDO-Egalitarianism, respectively. To test whether SDO-Dominance and SDO-Egalitarianism differentially predicted favorability toward action groups composed of different types of minorities (Ho et al., 2012), in *Experiment 1*, we assessed support for an organization composed of African-American professionals, and in *Experiment 2*, assessed support for an organization composed of Jewish professionals. To measure support, we assessed the extent to which participants supported the organization having access to power. In both experiments, we predicted that a greater preference for the maintenance of inequality would be associated with less support for a professional organization composed of minorities, particularly when that organization was structured hierarchically.

As suggested by Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn (2011), in all experiments presented here, we determined, a priori, a termination rule for data collection. Following Gervais, Jewell, Najle, and Ng (2015), in all experiments presented, we aimed to recruit 100 participants per experimental condition. Each experiment had at least a 93.3% completion rate, suggesting that results were not substantively affected by participant attrition (Zhou & Fishbach, 2016). All measures and manipulations are disclosed, and no participants were excluded from analyses. Data was not analyzed until collection was complete.

## 5. Pre-test

Before examining our main predictions, we pre-tested the organizational chart stimuli we planned to use in our main experiments to manipulate organizational structure, to confirm that an organization visually depicted as having a hierarchical structure is perceived to be both more hierarchical and more efficacious than an organization visually depicted as having a non-hierarchical structure.

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