



# Promote up, ingratiate down: Status comparisons drive warmth-competence tradeoffs in impression management



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- Impression management strategies diverge across social status divides
- Downward comparers downplay their own competence to appear warmer
- Upward comparers downplay their own warmth to appear more competent
- Diverging strategies result from stereotype-disconfirming and trait-matching goals
- Disconfirming and matching goals may depend on the comparison direction

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## ABSTRACT

We hypothesized participants would adopt diverging impression management strategies when interacting with lower- versus higher-status others, to disconfirm status-based stereotypes of their own respective coldness or incompetence. In Study 1, downward comparers downplayed their own competence to appear warmer, and upward comparers downplayed their own warmth to appear more competent. In status comparisons with counter-stereotypical targets, Studies 2a and 2b showed impression management strategies no longer diverge, but effects do not reverse, suggesting a combination of stereotype-disconfirming and target trait-matching goals. Study 3 replicates diverging strategies in downward and upward status comparisons and suggests diverging reasons for these strategies: Downward comparers perceive reason to disconfirm status-based stereotypes, while upward comparers perceive reason to match their comparison target. Together, these studies show mere status differences shift individuals' interaction goals in conveying two central dimensions of impression formation, warmth and competence.

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## 1. Introduction

Status hierarchies pervade human societies and organizations, so interpersonal interactions with lower- or higher-status others are inevitable. Comparison to a subordinate or superior can help people feel good about themselves, or motivate self-improvement (Festinger, 1954). However, comparisons also yield emotions, stereotypes, and behaviors that harm relationships (Fiske, 2010, 2011). If status determines how people perceive others, then individuals may have different goals for self-presentation in cross-status interactions, depending on the comparison direction.

The current research investigates how people portray themselves when interacting with lower- or higher-status others. These experiments ask whether comparing downward versus upward shifts individuals'

strategies to appear relatively warm versus competent, two dimensions that dominate impression formation.

### 1.1. Warmth-competence tradeoffs

Social perceivers use common dimensions of warmth and competence to determine others' good or ill intentions, and their ability to act on those intentions (Fiske, 2011; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Theoretically, warmth and competence judgments vary independently (Wojciszke, 2005), but in practice they are often negatively correlated, so that groups are stereotyped ambivalently as warm but incompetent, or competent but cold — an effect termed social compensation (Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, & Kashima, 2005; Kervyn, Yzerbyt, & Judd, 2010). For example, older people are perceived as warm but incompetent, and regarded with pity, whereas rich people are perceived as competent but cold, and regarded with envy (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2006; Fiske et al., 2002). Though it may seem less harmful to perceive groups as positive on one dimension

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rather than negative on both, regarding people with envy (up) or scorn (down) is detrimental to targets, perceivers, and relationships between them (Fiske, 2011).

These ambivalent stereotypes are so ingrained that accentuating only one positive dimension about a person actually implies negativity on the omitted dimension — a secret language of stereotypes perpetuated by communicators and listeners (Kervyn, Bergsieker, & Fiske, 2012). Indeed, the tendency to focus on the positive dimension of an ambivalent stereotype while implying the negative dimension has increased as social norms against expressing prejudice have developed (Bergsieker, Leslie, Constantine, & Fiske, 2012).

Applying not just to specific groups, ambivalent stereotypes also imbue how people think about higher- and lower-status others. People infer competence from status cues (Darley & Gross, 1983; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2007), with status and competence judgments correlated at 0.77 across 19 countries (Cuddy et al., 2007, 2009; Fiske et al., 2006, 2002). Ambivalent tradeoffs also apply: People judge higher-status others as more competent but less warm, while lower-status others are judged as warmer but less competent (Cuddy et al., 2007, 2009; Fiske, 2010; Fiske et al., 2002; Kay & Jost, 2003). These status judgments are more relative than absolute (Fiske, 2010, 2011; Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2009; Moore, Merchant, Kahn, & Pfeifer, 2013).

Seeing rich people as clever but cold, or poor people as unintelligent but happy, helps people feel better about the unequal status quo (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Kay, 2005; Kay & Jost, 2003). Reflecting this possibility, cross-national research shows stereotypes are more ambivalent in countries with higher income inequality (Durante et al., 2012). If people in more unequal societies perceive others more ambivalently, then people in cross-status interactions may use self-presentational strategies to counteract these one-sided stereotypes about themselves.

The current research investigates how people portray themselves in terms of warmth and competence across status divides. The literature on compensation between warmth and competence in impression management provides an empirical precedent, and suggests impression management strategies depend on the social context.

### 1.2. Compensation effects in impression management

Warmth and competence judgments matter for the self as much as they do for others (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). Indeed, appearing warm and appearing competent are two central strategies people reliably use to affect the impressions others form about them (Jones & Pittman, 1982; Leary & Kowalski, 1986; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). When trying to “ingratiate” themselves, or appear warm, people act agreeable; when trying to “self-promote,” or appear competent, they assert themselves (Jones & Pittman, 1982).

Impression management strategies vary, and next we describe three different strategies that all tradeoff warmth and competence. First, when *unconstrained by group stereotypes*, individuals emphasize either their own warmth or competence, depending on whether the group they want to join seeks someone friendly or intelligent (Holoien & Fiske, 2013). Here, not only do participants emphasize the relevant positive dimension, they also downplay the other dimension: To come across as more competent, participants actively *avoid* describing themselves as warm, and to come across as warm, actively *avoid* describing themselves as competent. This compensation effect uniquely emerges between warmth and competence, not other dimensions, showing these tradeoffs’ strategic nature. The current research extends these studies to impression goals activated spontaneously by a hierarchical social context.

Second, compensation between warmth and competence occurs not only when given explicit social goals, but also in interracial interactions when *individuals’ (lack of) warmth and competence are presumed based on stereotypes*. Bergsieker, Shelton, and Richeson (2010) show members of different racial groups seek to disconfirm group-based stereotypes in interracial interactions. Because of stereotypes of Blacks and Latinos as

unintelligent, and Whites as racist (immoral), members of these minority and majority groups show diverging goals in impression management. In both preexisting interracial relationships, and in laboratory interactions, racial minorities prefer to be seen as competent more than Whites do, and Whites prefer to be seen as warm, more than minorities do. The more these goals differ, the more negative results from interracial (but not same-race) interactions, suggesting these strategies foster misunderstandings. The current research extends these interracial investigations to mere status.

Third, some strategies *might claim a stereotyped trait intentionally*, rather than try to disconfirm it — specifically, when that trait reflects a positive social identity related to one’s group. One such strategy involves taking pride in the domain in which one’s group is stereotyped as being strong, while discriminating against outgroups who are presumed weak in that domain. For example, students at a high-status school emphasize superiority on competence, and show ingroup favoritism based on academic skills but not athletic skills, while students at a low-status school emphasize superiority on warmth, and showed favoritism based on athletic but not academic skills, all dependent on the students’ school identification levels (Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2010). As long as the current social situation is amenable to the ingroup’s stereotypical strength, claiming the positive dimension can help maintain a positive, distinct social identity.

All three strategies (stereotype-free, stereotype-rejecting, and stereotype-claiming) suggest impression management goals that focus on one dimension while downplaying the other. We sought to understand the core phenomenon, diverging impression management goals, as one reason for difficult interactions across social status divides. From previous research on stronger ambivalent stereotypes in more unequal societies (Durante et al., 2012), diverging impression management in interracial interactions (Bergsieker et al., 2012), and social compensation in impression management (Holoien & Fiske, 2013), it follows that impression management in downward and upward status comparisons may also require tradeoffs to disconfirm status-based stereotypes. If so, then we would expect downward comparers to emphasize their warmth, and upward comparers to emphasize their own competence, to disconfirm stereotypes about one’s own high- versus low-status.

To our knowledge, no studies to date have investigated (1) whether diverging impression management goals toward warmth versus competence emerge from interactions across mere status generally, in addition to interracial interactions already studied, and (2) whether social compensation tradeoffs in impression management arise spontaneously from upward and downward status comparisons, not just when people are prompted to appear competent or warm. If people see others more ambivalently when status divides are starker (Durante et al., 2012), then people may manage impressions accordingly: ingratiating themselves in downward comparisons, and self-promoting in upward comparisons.

### 1.3. Study overview

The current studies investigate the strategies people use to manage interpersonal aspects of status hierarchies. We define status as a relative position in a social hierarchy. Because the workplace is the most prominent example of status in Americans’ day-to-day lives (Fiske, 2010), we draw on workplace scenarios that place individuals in a ranked order. We hypothesize individuals seek to appear more warm versus competent in downward comparisons, and more competent versus warm in upward comparisons, showing compensation effects (as in Kervyn, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2009).

Study 1 tested whether downward versus upward status comparisons caused a selective focus on conveying participants’ own warmth versus competence. Studies 2a and 2b sought to disentangle two possible mechanisms for these diverging strategies: Participants might emphasize their own warmth or competence to disconfirm their own

stereotyped deficits, but they also might try to match their partner's (oppositely) stereotyped warmth and competence levels. Further untangling these two possibilities, Study 3 suggests participants' motivation differs based on the comparison direction, with downward comparers focusing on disconfirming stereotypes, and upward comparers focusing on matching their partners.

## 2. Study 1: diverging strategies

Study 1 investigated whether diverging impression management strategies emerged from upward and downward mere status comparisons. Participants imagined interacting with someone in their workplace who was ranked below, above, or equal to them, with no reporting responsibilities to each other (to isolate status from power differentials; Fiske, 2010). We hypothesized participants would prioritize describing themselves using warmth- (versus competence-) related traits when interacting with a subordinate; conversely, we expected participants would prioritize describing themselves using competence- (versus warmth-) related traits when interacting with a superior. If *conscious* ingratiation and self-promotion strategies are relevant, then participants may also report higher importance of appearing warm versus competent in downward versus upward comparisons.

### 2.1. Method

#### 2.1.1. Participants

We recruited 151 participants (83 female) through Amazon Mechanical Turk, all from the United States with at least 95% approval ratings.<sup>1</sup> Compensation and selection criteria were identical in all studies.

#### 2.1.2. Procedure

Participants were asked to imagine their workplace organized a new initiative in which employees were paired with others from non-overlapping divisions. Participants were randomly assigned to imagine being paired with an employee who was in a higher-ranked position, lower-ranked position, or a same-rank position. They were also informed, for upward, downward, and neutral comparisons respectively: They did not report to their partner, their partner did not report to them, or they were not connected to their partner in any way.

After free-responding to describe how they thought the interaction would go, participants rated the extent to which they wanted their partner to know each of 20 different traits about themselves. Ten traits conveyed competence (e.g., *ambitious*; *capable*), and ten conveyed warmth (e.g., *considerate*; *generous*). Traits were chosen from Anderson (1968), pre-tested on an independent sample for similar overall likability, presented in randomized order, and rated from 1 = *definitely do not want them to know*, to 7 = *definitely want them to know*. Ratings were averaged within warmth and competence dimensions.

Next, participants were asked directly about their self-presentation goals, and rated how important it was to be liked versus respected on a scale of 1 (*most important to be liked*) to 7 (*respected*), and how important to be seen as *competent* (1) versus *warm* (7) by their partner. Participants could also free-respond, listing up to 5 other items to share. Participants then rated how they would feel about the interaction, using 22 emotion items (Appendix A).

### 2.2. Results and discussion

Our main interest was whether an emphasis on presenting competence versus warmth would emerge spontaneously from upward versus downward comparisons. Indeed, a 3 (downward vs. upward vs. neither)  $\times$  2 (warmth vs. competence) ANOVA showed a significant

interaction ( $F(2,148) = 4.14$ ;  $p = .02$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ ; Fig. 1). Specifically, downward comparers rated warmth ( $M = 5.90$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) significantly higher than competence ( $M = 5.73$ ,  $SD = .76$ ) ( $F(1,148) = 4.66$ ,  $p = .03$ ) traits, and upward comparers rated competence ( $M = 5.92$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) marginally higher than warmth ( $M = 5.74$ ,  $SD = .83$ ) ( $F(1,148) = 3.56$ ,  $p = .06$ ) traits. Neutral comparers did not differentiate ( $p = .76$ ).

Status also shifted participants' explicit self-reported importance of appearing warm versus competent: ANOVA showed a significant effect of status, ( $F(2,148) = 5.48$ ;  $p = .005$ ), with Tukey's test showing downward comparers ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ) held significantly stronger warmth goals than neutral comparers ( $M = 2.33$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ,  $p = .004$ ), and marginally stronger warmth goals than upward comparers ( $M = 2.65$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ,  $p = .12$ ). Though we predicted similar differences in liking versus respect goals, explicit self-reports did not differ by status ( $p$ 's  $> .14$ ). As one possible interpretation, liking goals seem similar to goals to appear warm, but participants may have wanted to appear warm (or competent) for other, perhaps simpler, reasons than wanting to be liked or respected. Nonetheless, participants' explicit impression goals, in addition to traits shared, depended on the comparison direction, with downward comparisons shifting goals toward warmth.

Lastly, emotion ratings did not differ by condition, suggesting explicitly measured emotional responses to status cannot explain diverging impression management strategies. We also included emotion ratings in Studies 2a and 2b. They did not differ and are not discussed further.

Study 1 supports a compensation effect in impression management across status divides, in which participants disconfirm stereotypes of themselves as either competent-but-[relatively] cold or warm-but-[relatively] incompetent. However, an alternative explanation suggests participants may be trying to match what they assume are the target's levels of warmth and competence, based on status stereotypes. For example, participants might downplay their own warmth when interacting with a superior, not to differentiate themselves from their (assumed) warm-but-incompetent low-status peers, but to appear similar to the (assumed) competent-but-cold superior. Studies 2a and 2b sought to disentangle these explanations by describing targets' *actual* warmth and competence, in addition to relative status.

## 3. Study 2a: disconfirming coldness, or matching warmth?

Study 2a investigated whether an interaction partner's status or actual traits would drive participants' impression management strategies when the target's traits conflicted with status-based stereotypes. In addition to learning the target's relative rank at work, participants also learned that the target was rumored to be *very friendly* or *not very*

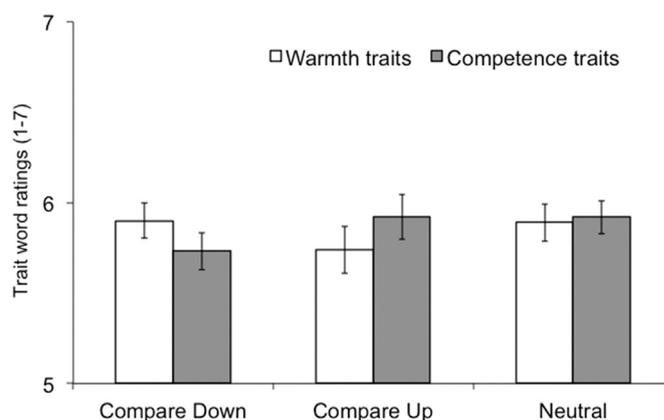


Fig. 1. Study 1. Downward comparers wanted to convey warmth vs. competence traits, and upward comparers wanted to convey competence vs. warmth traits, with no difference in neutral comparisons.

<sup>1</sup> In all studies, we decided a priori to recruit 50 participants per between-participants cell, recommended by Simmons (2014).

friendly, yielding an opportunity to match these warmth traits, regardless of relative status.

We made three different predictions: (1) In the *stereotype-disconfirming* hypothesis, participants manage impressions based on relative status: conveying more warmth- than competence-traits to subordinates, and more competence- than warmth-traits to superiors, across all friendliness conditions. (2) In the *matching* hypothesis, participants manage impressions based on their partner's high or low warmth: conveying more warmth- than competence-traits to friendly coworkers, and more competence- than warmth-traits to unfriendly coworkers, across all status conditions. (3) In the *intermediate* hypothesis, participants combine disconfirming and matching strategies: conveying more warmth- than competence-traits toward the stereotypical friendly subordinate, and more competence- than warmth-traits to the stereotypical unfriendly boss, with little or no discernible difference between warmth and competence when interacting with a counter-stereotypical friendly boss or unfriendly subordinate. In this intermediate case, neither disconfirming nor matching would be the sole reason for diverging strategies (and neither hypothesis could be ruled out entirely).

### 3.1. Method

#### 3.1.1. Participants

We recruited 202 participants (83 female) through Mechanical Turk.

#### 3.1.2. Procedure

As in Study 1, participants were randomly assigned to imagine being paired with a superior or subordinate, with no interdependence (Studies 2a and 2b had no same-rank condition).

New to Study 2a, participants also learned the target's reputed friendliness: "...you hear from a co-worker that this person is [not] very friendly."

Also new, participants chose which traits about themselves they would share, instead of rating each trait. Participants could share anywhere from 0 to 20 traits from a combined, randomized list (10 warmth and 10 competence; same traits as Study 1). We used this dichotomous measure to permit fewer unsure responses. The number of warmth and competence traits shared served as impression management measures. Participants were also asked about their self-presentation goals and emotions (Appendix B).

### 3.2. Results and discussion

Replicating Study 1's status compensation effects, a 2 (downward vs. upward)  $\times$  2 (warmth vs. competence) ANOVA showed a significant interaction ( $F(1,198) = 14.86; p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$ ; Fig. 2). Collapsing across friendliness conditions, downward comparers shared significantly more warmth ( $M = 6.66, SD = 2.84$ ) than competence ( $M = 5.58, SD = 2.80$ ;  $F(1,198) = 11.94, p = .001$ ) traits, and upward comparers shared more competence ( $M = 6.39, SD = 2.64$ ) than warmth ( $M = 5.83, SD = 3.20$ ;  $F(1,198) = 4.03, p = .046$ ) traits.

These compensation effects were strongest in stereotype-consistent conditions: Participants shared significantly more competence ( $M = 7.04, SD = 2.63$ ) than warmth ( $M = 5.59, SD = 3.39$ ) traits with unfriendly superiors ( $F(1,198) = 10.07, p = .002$ ) and significantly more warmth ( $M = 7.38, SD = 2.56$ ) than competence ( $M = 5.63, SD = 2.75$ ) traits with friendly subordinates ( $F(1,198) = 16.44, p < .001$ ), but did not compensate toward counter-stereotypical friendly superiors or unfriendly subordinates ( $p$ 's  $> .39$ ). In other words, participants compensated for stereotypes of their relative status, but counter-stereotypical targets mitigated this effect, suggesting an "intermediate" combination of disconfirming and matching strategies.

In addition to the disconfirming effect, a 2 (friendly vs. unfriendly)  $\times$  2 (warmth vs. competence) ANOVA also showed a significant interaction ( $F(1,198) = 11.93; p = .001, \eta^2 = .06$ ), supporting matching as well. This effect seems driven by sharing more warmth versus competence traits with friendly targets: Collapsing across status, participants shared significantly more warmth ( $M = 6.70, SD = 2.89$ ) than competence ( $M = 5.74, SD = 2.64$ ) traits with friendly targets ( $F(1,198) = 10.44, p = .001$ ), while participants shared marginally more competence than warmth traits with unfriendly targets ( $p = .09$ ). This result supports matching, in addition to disconfirming, when targets are described as friendly.

Further supporting the intermediate hypothesis, the three-way interaction between status, stereotypicality, and trait dimension ( $F(1,198) = 11.93; p = .001, \eta^2 = .06$ ) reiterates that, in line with status stereotypes, participants compensated between warmth and competence toward stereotypical but not counter-stereotypical targets.

Together, results support the intermediate hypothesis: participants used diverging strategies toward stereotypical friendly subordinates and unfriendly bosses, an effect attenuated by counter-stereotypical friendliness information. Participants are not solely disconfirming stereotypes, nor are they solely matching their interaction partners:

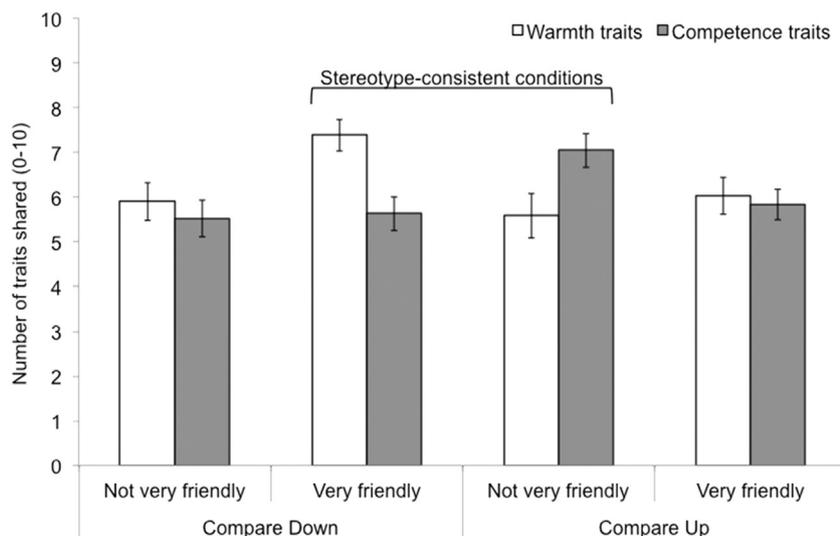


Fig. 2. Study 2a. Downward comparers shared more warmth than competence traits and upward comparers shared more competence than warmth traits, but only when the target's friendliness matched status stereotypes.

The target's status and traits are both important. Neither the stereotype-disconfirming hypothesis nor the matching hypothesis is exclusively supported, but neither is ruled out.

**4. Study 2b: disconfirming incompetence, or matching competence?**

In Study 2b, complementary to Study 2a, participants learned about a lower- or higher-ranked coworker's intelligence, yielding an opportunity to match an intelligent target's competence, regardless of status. Three alternate predictions followed from Study 2a: (1) stereotype-disconfirming, (2) matching, and (3) intermediate.

**4.1. Method**

**4.1.1. Participants**

We recruited 200 participants (92 female) through Mechanical Turk.

**4.1.2. Procedure**

The procedure was identical to Study 2a, except participants learned about the target's reputed intelligence: "...this person is [not] very intelligent." Dependent variables were identical to Study 2a.

**4.2. Results and discussion**

Replicating Study 1 and Study 2a, participants sought to disconfirm status stereotypes, supported by a 2 (downward vs. upward) × 2 (warmth vs. competence) ANOVA showing a significant interaction ( $F(1,196) = 9.71; p = .002, \eta^2 = .05$ ; Fig. 3). This interaction appears driven by participants' downplaying competence to subordinates: Collapsing across target intelligence conditions, downward comparers shared significantly more warmth ( $M = 6.52, SD = 2.96$ ) than competence ( $M = 5.22, SD = 2.83; F(1,196) = 16.91, p < .001$ ) traits, while upward comparers did not share more competence than warmth traits in this study ( $p = .78$ ).

Again, participants compensated more toward stereotypical targets. Downward comparers shared significantly more warmth ( $M = 6.83, SD = 2.69$ ) than competence ( $M = 4.79, SD = 2.81$ ) traits with stereotypical unintelligent subordinates ( $F(1,196) = 19.79, p < .001$ ), and did not differentiate toward counter-stereotypical intelligent subordinates ( $p = .19$ ). Upward comparers shared marginally more competence ( $M = 6.83, SD = 2.69$ ) than warmth ( $M = 6.07, SD = 3.08$ ) traits with stereotypical intelligent superiors ( $F(1,196) = 2.63, p = .11$ ), but

did not differentiate toward counter-stereotypical unintelligent superiors ( $p = .18$ ).

In addition to disconfirming, results also support matching, evidenced by a 2 (intelligent vs. unintelligent) × 2 (warmth vs. competence) ANOVA yielding a significant interaction ( $F(1,196) = 9.62; p = .002, \eta^2 = .05$ ). This matching effect appears driven by downplaying competence-traits toward unintelligent targets: Collapsing across comparison directions, participants shared significantly more warmth ( $M = 6.60, SD = 2.98$ ) than competence ( $M = 5.34, SD = 2.81$ ) traits with unintelligent targets ( $F(1,196) = 17.45, p < .001$ ), while not differentiating toward intelligent targets ( $p = .79$ ). This result supports matching in addition to disconfirming, specifically for stereotypical unintelligent subordinates.

Again supporting the intermediate hypothesis, the three-way interaction between status, stereotypicality, and trait dimension ( $F(1,196) = 9.62; p = .002, \eta^2 = .05$ ) shows status divides prompted social compensation toward stereotypical but not counter-stereotypical targets.

Together with Study 1 and Study 2a, these results suggest both motivations to disconfirm stereotypes and match one's partner contribute to diverging impression management strategies.

**5. Study 3: different comparisons, different goals**

Study 3 sought to replicate diverging impression management strategies in cross-status interactions, and to examine whether participants' goals (disconfirming versus matching) depend on the comparison direction. At the study's end, participants rated their partner's warmth and competence, and also rated how they thought their partner perceived them. If participants report a difference between their partner's warmth and competence, then they have reason to match their partner's traits. If, on the other hand, participants report a difference between how their partner perceives their warmth versus competence, then participants may seek to disconfirm these one-sided stereotypes about themselves.

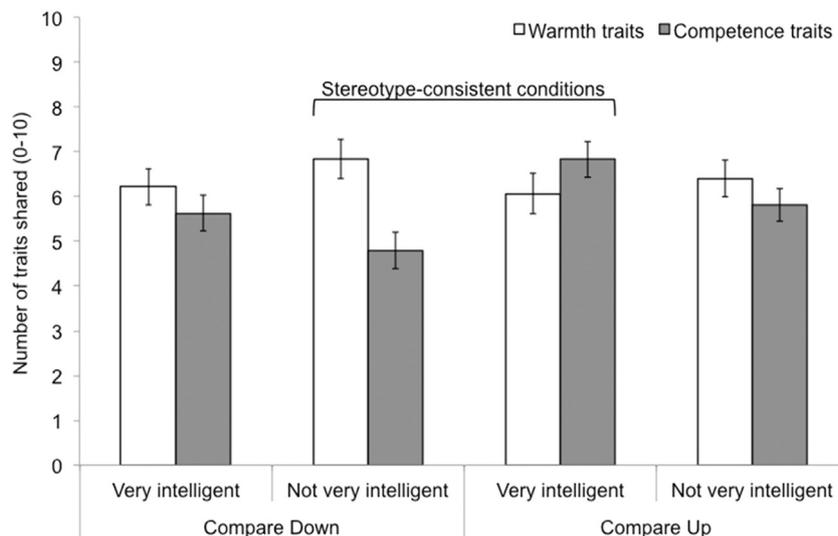
**5.1. Method**

**5.1.1. Participants**

We recruited 152 participants (82 female) through Mechanical Turk.

**5.1.2. Procedure**

The procedure was similar to previous studies, with these changes: First, to encourage participants to immerse themselves in a real



**Fig. 3.** Study 2b. Downward comparers shared more warmth than competence traits and upward comparers shared more competence than warmth traits, but only when the target's intelligence matched status stereotypes.

comparison, we asked them to write down the initials of an actual person in their workplace who was higher, lower, or the same as them in rank.<sup>2</sup> Second, as in Studies 2a and 2b, we used the dichotomous version of our main dependent variable, allowing participants to share 0–10 warmth traits and 0–10 competence traits about themselves.

Third, we asked participants to rate perceived warmth and competence of their interaction partner, and also how warm and how competent they thought their interaction partner would rate *them* (i.e., meta-perceived warmth and competence). These perceived and meta-perceived warmth and competence ratings would determine whether there was reason to disconfirm status stereotypes or match one's partner. For example, if participants rated their higher-status partner as competent but cold, that would be a basis for matching. If participants thought their higher-status interaction partner would rate *them* as warm but incompetent, that would be a reason to disconfirm stereotyped incompetence.

Fourth, we included an exploratory public and private self-consciousness measure, hypothesizing status effects on impression management might depend on individuals' tendencies to mold to their social surroundings (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975).<sup>3</sup> Last, we included a manipulation check to confirm explicit recognition of the partner's higher, lower, or similar social status (3-point scale).

## 5.2. Results and discussion

Replicating results from Studies 1, 2a, and 2b, status shifted participants' self-promotion and ingratiation, as shown by a 3 (downward vs. upward vs. neutral)  $\times$  2 (warmth vs. competence) ANOVA yielding a significant interaction ( $F(2,148) = 11.989; p < .001, \eta^2 = .14$ ; Fig. 4). Downward comparers shared significantly more warmth ( $M = 6.92, SD = 3.09$ ) than competence ( $M = 5.23, SD = 2.98$ ) ( $F(1,149) = 20.54, p < .001$ ) traits, and upward comparers shared significantly more competence ( $M = 6.86, SD = 2.52$ ) than warmth ( $M = 5.94, SD = 2.98$ ;  $F(1,149) = 5.82, p = .02$ ) traits, not differentiating in neutral comparisons ( $p = .25$ ). Confirming the status manipulation ( $F(2,149) = 46.97; p < .001$ ), downward comparers perceived targets as significantly lower ( $M = 1.51, SD = .64$ ), and upward comparers perceived targets as significantly higher ( $M = 2.63, SD = .56$ ) status, both compared to neutral ( $M = 2.10, SD = .56$ ; Tukey-corrected  $p$ 's  $< .001$ ).

Next, we examined whether status influenced perceived and meta-perceived warmth and competence. A 2 (partner vs. self)  $\times$  2 (warmth vs. competence)  $\times$  3 (downward vs. upward vs. neutral) ANOVA showed a significant three-way interaction ( $F(2,149) = 11.40, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$ ; Fig. 5).

Breaking this down, for downward comparers, the two-way interaction between target and dimension ( $F(1,149) = 5.62, p = .02$ ) showed participants thought their partners would judge *them* as significantly more competent ( $M = 5.58, SD = 1.28$ ) than warm ( $M = 4.91, SD = 1.42$ ;  $F(1,149) = 12.59, p < .001$ ), but did not rate their partners as differentially warm versus competent ( $p = .84$ ). Higher-status participants therefore may be concerned about appearing competent but cold, a reason to disconfirm coldness stereotypes.

For upward comparers, the two-way interaction between target and dimension ( $F(1,149) = 18.78, p < .001$ ) showed participants do not rate their partner's perception of *them* as differentially warm versus competent ( $p = .69$ ), but participants *do* rate their partner as significantly more competent ( $M = 5.80, SD = 1.34$ ) than warm ( $M = 4.69, SD = 1.39$ ;  $F(1,149) = 32.80, p < .001$ ). Lower-status participants thus may be focused on their interaction partner's stereotyped high competence,

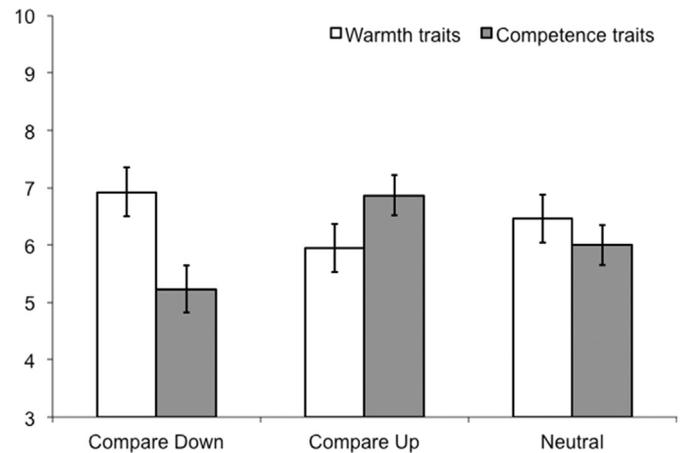


Fig. 4. Study 3. Replicating Studies 1, 2a, and 2b, downward comparers shared more warmth than competence traits and upward comparers shared more competence than warmth traits with a named coworker, with no difference in neutral comparisons.

not their own stereotyped competence deficits, a reason to try to match their interaction partner.

Participants in the neutral condition did not show the interaction between target and dimension ( $p = .71$ ), instead showing a main effect of dimension: Neutral comparers rated both themselves and their partners as significantly more competent ( $M_{self} = 5.52, SD_{self} = 1.05$ ;  $M_{partner} = 5.88, SD_{partner} = 1.02$ ) than warm ( $M_{self} = 4.81, SD_{self} = 1.35$ ;  $M_{partner} = 5.06, SD_{partner} = 1.39$ ;  $F(1,149) = 28.58, p < .001$ ); one reason may be a general emphasis on competence in the workplace. If self and partner are both more competent than warm, neutral comparers need not compensate, supported by their non-compensation in Studies 1 and 3.

Study 3 replicates diverging strategies, and suggests participants' goals depend on the comparison direction. Higher-status participants may focus more on what their interaction partner thinks about them, and avoid appearing competent-but-cold, while lower-status participants may try to match their (assumed) competent interaction partner, not necessarily trying to disconfirm stereotypes about themselves.

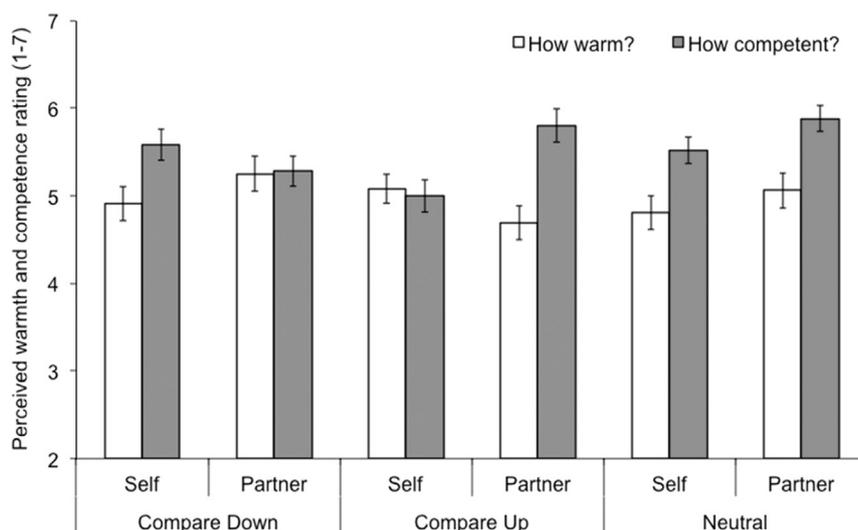
## 6. Discussion

The current research shows different impression management strategies arise from downward versus upward status comparisons. Relatively higher-status participants emphasize their own warmth, and relatively lower-status participants emphasize their own competence. These strategies arose from mere status comparisons, absent specific group-based stereotypes (Study 1), and were moderated by counter-stereotypical information about targets' actual warmth and competence (Studies 2a and 2b). Participants' goals may differ depending on the comparison direction, with higher-status participants disconfirming their own stereotyped coldness, and lower-status participants matching their partners' stereotyped competence (Study 3). In all cases, participants seek to minimize perceived gaps in warmth and competence assumed from status differences.

These studies advance research about social compensation in impression management, showing compensation effects emerge not only when given explicit social goals (Holoien & Fiske, 2013), but also spontaneously from hierarchical social contexts. These studies also expand research on goals to disconfirm group-based stereotypes: extending work on Whites' ingratiation versus racial minorities' self-promotion goals in interracial interactions (Bergsieker et al., 2010; Dupree & Fiske, under review), the current studies show diverging impression management goals extend to a broader set of cross-status interactions, even without specific racial categories.

<sup>2</sup> For participants not currently employed in hierarchical workplaces (15, gauged by open-ended end-of-survey "occupation" responses), this status manipulation remained hypothetical. Based on related power-priming research, even hypothetical primes affect felt power (or status); for a review: Galinsky, Rucker, and Magee (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Public and private self-consciousness did not affect the results described and are not discussed further.



**Fig. 5.** Study 3. Downward comparers may try to disconfirm competent-but-cold stereotypes, not worrying about matching their interaction partner, suggested by a difference between warmth and competence in the self but not the other. Upward comparers may try to match their interaction partner, who they rate as more competent than warm, with no difference for the self.

Though the current evidence advances our understanding of impression management across status divides, it does have limitations. First, future work should further disentangle matching and disconfirming accounts. Beginning to investigate disconfirming versus matching, Studies 2a and 2b show participants do not simply match targets' warmth and competence when their traits go against stereotypes, and Study 3 shows individuals' disconfirming versus matching goals may depend on the comparison direction; future work may distinguish further between these two explanations.

Status comparisons could also drive impression management for reasons other than matching and disconfirming. Pursuing one possible reason for different strategies, Studies 1–2 measured emotions felt in different comparisons; however, these emotions did not differ by condition. Other potential approaches include measuring expectations about the interaction, measuring activation of stereotypes about one's group that might predict disconfirmation, or measuring traits such as belonging needs, which could relate to matching. Evidence that status comparisons activate particular motive(s), which in turn predict impression management, would further explain diverging strategies.

Future research may also identify additional boundary conditions. For example, when faced with positive stereotypes about their groups (e.g., academics or athletics), individuals sometimes *embrace* these strengths by claiming them as strengths (Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2010). What determines whether someone downplays a stereotyped trait (as in the current research) or claims it with pride? Some possibilities include the stereotype's favorability, its malleability, or the identity's permeability. More broadly, different kinds of cross-status interactions may define when individuals care in the first place about appearing warm or competent. The current studies showed compensation both upward and downward, but superiors may not always care about subordinates' impressions. For example, superiors in toughness-oriented hierarchies, such as military, police, or athletic teams, may be less concerned with disconfirming coldness. Moreover, the current workplace domain draws on hierarchies that link status and competence, not always the case. Future studies should investigate additional moderators, and extend to different kinds of hierarchies.

Future experiments should also extend beyond hypothetical scenarios, to investigate whether real-life interaction behaviors diverge accordingly. Participants could be assigned status roles in a dyadic laboratory interaction, with verbal and nonverbal ingratiation and self-promotion measures. Additionally, dyadic laboratory studies could address how both parties feel after an interaction: Does focusing on

warmth or competence when an interaction partner is doing the opposite perpetuate difficulties in cross-status interactions, as in interracial interactions (Bergsieker et al., 2010)? If supported, mismatched impression management behavior could drive frustration in cross-status interactions.

All future directions should maintain awareness of status versus power effects. While the current status manipulations attempt to isolate status from power by specifying non-interdependence, power is not completely ruled out. Though no power relationship exists *between* the two partners, higher/lower-status individuals may consider their different levels of power within their respective divisions. To further isolate mere status, future studies could manipulate *both* status and power and observe the resulting strategies.

The current research contributes to literature on the psychology of social status and interpersonal relations, suggesting people use different impression management strategies to cope with interactions across status divides: emphasizing warmth while downplaying competence in downward comparisons, and emphasizing competence while downplaying warmth in upward comparisons. With income inequality growing around the world, and with the United States as the most unequal of the industrialized nations (OECD, 2011), ever-present social status divides complicate interpersonal interactions.

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#### Appendix. Supplementary materials and data

Supplementary materials and data to this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2016.01.004>.

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