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Publication Date

2013

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

Two Sides of the Same Coin? Behavioral and Cognitive Responses to Social Rejection
on the Basis of Higher and Lower Socioeconomic Status

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Psychology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

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Fall 2013

Abstract

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Existing research shows that individuals seek to avoid painful and costly social rejection (Ayduk, Mendoza-Denton, Mischel, Downey, Peake, & Rodriguez, 2000; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002). Some of this past research has debated the nature of socioeconomic status-based rejection and whether there is similarity between the nature of lower and higher SES rejection (Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel, 2011; Exline & Zell, 2012). In my research, I tested whether SES-based rejection anxiety exists for both lower and higher SES individuals and whether anxiety over such rejection would predict context-specific behavioral changes, namely identity concealment. To this end, I developed a scale measuring an individual's anxiety over potential social rejection based on his or her socioeconomic status (RS-s anxiety). I hypothesized that individuals all along the SES continuum would be vulnerable to rejection anxiety and that anxiety would be positively related to concealment behaviors. I expected greater sensitivity and concealment among lower SES individuals than higher SES individuals. Lower SES individuals experience less control of their environment and are more likely to encounter social rejection (Gallo, Espinosa de los Monteros, & Shivpuri, 2009). I measured identity concealment across two environments: at the university and at home. In the measure development stage and across two studies, RS-s anxiety was reported by individuals of both lower and higher SES. Across two studies greater SES identity-based rejection anxiety was found to predict greater self-reported SES identity concealment in the university setting. This positive relationship emerged among both lower and higher SES participants (Study 1 and Study 2). Greater SES identity-based rejection anxiety also predicted greater self-reported identity concealment in the home setting, but only for participants who reported a strong sense of belonging to a lower SES group (Study 2). RS-s anxiety was positively associated with existing social comparison measures and negatively correlated with self-esteem measures (Study 2).

Two Sides of the Same Coin? Behavioral and Cognitive Responses to Social Rejection on the Basis of Higher and Lower Socioeconomic Status

“Looking through friends’ closets and seeing nice clothes, knowing that I had plain, older clothes in my closet...I was self-conscious, though I’m not sure my peers noticed.”

-Anonymous undergraduate participant

"I was out and someone found out I was from Marin [an affluent county in northern California] – all of a sudden they’re like – ‘oh she’s from MARIN, she must be rich’, etc....and a ton of stereotypes and labels were immediately placed on me.”

-Anonymous undergraduate participant

"I often have good conversations with old friends back home. We usually talk about the typical activities and patterns that occur where we live. Often, when we discuss further education, I get responses like, ‘Oh, you go to community college now and work?’ But, when I reply with, ‘No. I go to UC Berkeley.’ The conversation is cut short because my old friends feel intimidated or see the reply as a sort of boasting. So, I try to stay away from that topic in conversations.”

-Anonymous undergraduate participant

People pay great attention to social rejection and with good reason (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Gardner, Pickett, Jefferis, & Knowles, 2005). Social rejection can lead to painful emotions, such as sadness, shame, and anger (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Leary, 2009). The distress caused by social rejection, and particularly prolonged exposure to social rejection, can also result in physiological changes linked to increased risk of respiratory problems, heart disease, and other stress-related illnesses (Blascovich & Mendes, 2010; DeWall & Bushman, 2011). Neuroimaging research has suggested that social pain and physical pain share neural circuitry (Eisenberger & Lieberman, 2004; Kross, Berman, Mischel, Smith, & Wager, 2011), providing evidence that the human body inherently prioritizes avoiding both physical and social threats. Furthermore, social rejection can lead to financial, physical, and legal disadvantages, such as difficulty obtaining and retaining employment, violent harassment, and discrimination (Brown, 2011, for review). The consequences of social rejection reach far and wide.

Given the potential cost of social rejection it makes sense that people are mindful of potential rejection and prepare a response or even a preemptive strategy (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Leary, 1999). Researchers have found evidence of sensitivity to and preparation for rejection based upon a wide range of variables, including romantic appeal (Romero-Canyas, Downey, Berenson, Ayduk, & Kang, 2010), ethnicity and race (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Mendoza-Denton, Page-Gould, & Pietrzak, 2006; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002), and physical appearance (Park, 2007). While individuals can be rejected for many reasons this research focuses on one influential social characteristic: socioeconomic status.

Socioeconomic status is defined as an individual’s position within a hierarchical social structure based on a combination of social and economic factors, including an individual’s income, occupation, education, and wealth (Adler & Newman, 2002). Socioeconomic status (SES) influences most of our life experiences: what we eat, what we wear, what schools we attend, what type of care we provide for our ailing children.

The socioeconomic status hierarchy within the United States is marked by great disparity. The 2011 United States Census report illuminates some aspects of that hierarchy. In the United States in 2011, the median reported household income was \$50,054. Households in the lowest quintile had incomes of \$20,262 or less in 2011; households in the third quintile had incomes of \$38,521 to \$62,434; while households in the highest quintile had incomes of \$101,583 or more. The top five percent of earners had incomes of \$186,000 or more. 15 percent of U.S. households were below the poverty threshold in 2011. Turning to education, in 2010, 28 percent of the US population held a bachelor's degree or greater; 86 percent held a high school diploma or the equivalent (US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011).

An individual's placement in the SES hierarchy influences many life outcomes. Individual differences in SES are associated with differences in consumption patterns. Compared to lower SES individuals, higher SES individuals consume more luxury items, spend more time on vacation, consume healthier foods, purchase better health care, and more often employ assistants for childcare, domestic work, and personal needs (Houle, 2011). SES differences affect political and military involvement also. In 2010, 61 percent of citizens with at least a bachelor's degree voted, compared to 25 percent for those without a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Also, SES differences influence multiple health outcomes. Lower SES individuals are more likely to suffer minor health problems (i.e. headaches and colds) and major health problems (e.g. major illness and lower life expectancy) than higher SES individuals (Morin & Motel, 2012). In addition, lower SES individuals are more likely to experience stressful life events than their higher SES counterparts, in part due to fewer resources with which to arm themselves against potential stressors (Brunner, 1997).

Research in emotion and cognition provides further evidence supporting differential social experiences for individuals at varying rungs of the SES ladder. Compared to higher SES individuals, lower SES individuals report less sense of control over their life outcomes and less personal freedom (Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Kraus, Piff, Keltner, 2009). Lower SES individuals are also more attentive to others' negative emotion in social interactions (Kraus, Horberg, Goetz, & Keltner, 2011). In addition, the mechanisms between empathy and prosocial behavior seem to vary among SES levels. Piff, Kraus, Cote, Cheng, & Keltner (2010) found that lower SES individuals were more spontaneously compassionate and generous than higher SES individuals when given the chance to assist a peer. Ma, Wang, & Han (2011) found that after watching video footage of an individual in pain, higher SES individuals with greater neural responses to the perceived pain gave greater charitable contributions. However, lower SES individuals who had stronger neural responses to the perceived pain of another person gave smaller charitable contributions. These findings speak to the increasing collection of literature that describes a complicated culture of SES.

Not all of the effects of SES on individual's behavior and well-being are observable by quantifying objective measures of SES (e.g. income or education). An individual's perception of his or her SES (also called subjective SES; Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000) can influence that person's behavior and outcomes (Adler & Snibbe, 2003). Likewise, how other people perceive an individual's SES can influence both the perceiver and the target's behavior (Exline & Lobel, 1999). The influence of

perceived SES on behavior can exist even when actual SES differs from perceived SES (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000).

Subjective SES has been linked to variation in several physiological, psychological, and behavioral traits and processes. Ostrove, Adler, Kupperman, & Washington (2000) found that subjective measures of SES predicted health outcomes better than objective measures for objectively higher SES individuals; while objective SES measures were most predictive for lower SES individuals. Kraus, Cote, & Keltner (2010) found that lower SES individuals were better able to infer others' emotions than their upper SES peers when SES was measured using subjective SES instruments. (The lower SES individuals' advantage was partially explained by their focus on environmental features that impact social situations.)

Subjective and objective SES may sometimes contradict each other because like all social traits SES is determined by relative position. Incomplete or inaccurate knowledge of our peers' resources may make determining one's own SES difficult. A 2012 Pew Research Center poll found that most Americans believe the U.S. middle class yearly income ranges from between \$70,000 and \$149,999 (Morin & Motel, 2012). \$70,000 would actually give someone an income in the fourth quintile income bracket in the United States. A yearly income of \$149,999 would put someone in the top ten percent of income earners (US Census Bureau, 2011).

Differing degrees of social desirability associated with belonging to one category or another can influence SES perception as well (Exline & Lobel, 2001). Researchers have found that SES can be signaled by individuals and perceived by other individuals based on material items (Hans, Nunes, & Dreze, 2010), behavioral cues (Kraus & Keltner, 2009), and speech (Hay, Nolan, & Drager, 2006). As some of these cues can be altered intentionally, inconsistency between perceived and actual SES can occur. One of the most infamous examples of such disconnect is the case of Christian Karl Gerhartsreiter, a German immigrant to the United States who without a college degree assumed the identity of a Rockefeller and worked as a corporate management consultant at top firms in New York and Boston for years (Seal, 2011). While such extreme deception is rare, the example demonstrates the potential vulnerability of our perceptions to misdirection. More commonplace examples, such as borrowing a friend's expensive coat to wear on a first date or responding that one went to college in California rather than at UC Berkeley, demonstrate the potential pervasiveness of our desire to misdirect.

Given socioeconomic status' importance (particularly what it potentially says about the way a person should be treated) it makes sense that people attend to how others' perceive their socioeconomic status and try to shape those impressions favorably. The divide between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is a meaningful one. It is a divide often signaled by clothes and cars but indicative of much more: one's place in the world and freedom within it. This research investigates the process of SES-based rejection management, seeking to better understand who is susceptible to SES-based social rejection, how they cope, and the cognitive and social consequences of coping.

The Nature of Socioeconomic Status-Based Rejection

This research conceptualizes socioeconomic status (SES) as an individuals' income, wealth, occupation, and educational status. This research examines the social rejection that may occur based on any one or a combination of these elements. The anonymous comments that opened this manuscript attest to the variety of rejection

sources (familiar and unfamiliar others), triggers (clothing, hometown, university) and consequences (self-consciousness, stereotyping, general interpersonal threat) associated with SES-based rejection. The third statement alludes to the unstable nature of SES-based rejection. Depending on the company, a person may be rejected for being the only person in a group who did not graduate from college or for being the only person in a group who did. Depending on the environment, a yearly salary of \$40,000 might be considered a large income or a small one.

When surrounded by dissimilar others the threat of social rejection exists whether one feels lower or higher SES. Due to the socially constructed quality of identity, the relevance and nature of an identity may vary from one context to another (Major & O'Brien, 2005). The immediate social environment determines if someone is lower or higher SES and he or she can be socially rejected for either norm violation. For example, the third anonymous commentator may be considered low SES on campus, but high SES "back home."

At first blush this assertion might seem counterintuitive. It might seem that having more money, a higher status job, and a glamorous alma mater would always be a good thing or good enough that it would never be a significant cause for alarm. After all, doesn't everyone want to be of a higher status? Doesn't everyone want to avoid being of a lower status? The answer to both questions is yes and no.

Both higher and lower SES can evoke positive and negative social expectations making their social desirability complicated and context-dependent. Higher SES suggests wealth, power, opportunity, and freedom – generally desirable traits (Lott, 2002). In the aforementioned 2012 Pew Research Center survey individuals of both lower and higher SES agreed that higher SES individuals were usually more intelligent and harder working than lower SES individuals (Morin & Motel, 2012). Simultaneously, lower SES suggests humility, honesty, perseverance, and wholesomeness, again, generally desirable traits (Alvarez & Kolker, 2001; Morin & Motel, 2012). Thus both low and high SES can be socially desirable.

However negative expectations are also prevalent for both lower and higher SES individuals (Drentea, 2000). While higher SES and power are associated with positive approach-related behaviors there are social costs to elevated status (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). Stereotypes commonly applied to higher SES individuals include being spoiled, arrogant, snobbish, callous, and abusive of power. Individuals who are seen as not willing to share resources with their group or act against self-interest in favor of the group are often viewed negatively and earn lower social status (Willer, 2009).

Outperformers and other high status individuals face envy, retaliation, and interpersonal rejection from their lower stationed peers (Exline & Lobel, 1999; Exline & Zell, 2012). First lady Michelle Obama was widely criticized in early 2009 when she volunteered at a food bank wearing \$540 designer sneakers (Malcolm, 2009). Similarly, media outlets criticized both U.S. presidential candidates, Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, for their elite status throughout the 2012 election campaign (Christian Science Monitor, 2012; Slate, 2012). Note that these examples illustrate that race/ethnicity (frequently associated with SES in psychological research) is not a proxy for SES. Meanwhile lower SES individuals are often stereotyped as less intelligent and competent than their higher SES peers, lazy, uncultured, and uneducated (Bullock, 1999; Lott, 2002; Morin & Motel, 2012). They are also blamed for their lower status, social excluded,

discriminated against by others, and are conscious of these perceptions (Fiske, Xu, Cuddy, & Glick, 1999). Thus, socioeconomic status can be a source of interpersonal anxiety for all individuals.

While the threat of SES-based rejection is available to all individuals, it is not necessarily equally applicable or accessible. Research shows social rejection is more costly to individuals with fewer resources due to increased exposure to threats and decreased ability to respond to threats (Gallo & Matthews, 2003; Gallo, Espinosa de los Monteros, & Shivpuri, 2009). Therefore in this research lower SES individuals are expected to be more susceptible and alert to SES-based rejection.

Capturing Socioeconomic Status-Based Rejection Concerns

To my knowledge no current measurement of SES-based social rejection concerns applicable to both higher and lower status individuals exists. Several measures of individual differences in social rejection concern do exist, such as the race-based rejection sensitivity questionnaire (RS-race) (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). In order to measure SES-based social rejection concerns I have chosen to design a measure derived from existing rejection sensitivity measures.

There are three reasons why rejection sensitivity seems an appropriate and useful construct in this study of SES-based social rejection. First, rejection sensitivity measures interpersonal rejection specifically rather than measuring more global or tangential rejection constructs (such as self-esteem, self monitoring, or negative mood). Second, rejection sensitivity has been used to study social identity and rejection in the past (race, gender, etc.) and has done so for identities that contain simultaneously positive and negative connotations such as Asian Americans stereotyped as a model minority (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008, RS-asian). Third, rejection sensitivity assumes that previous experiences with rejection or knowledge of others' rejection increases vulnerability to sensitivity (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). This focus on past, present, and future behavior lends itself well to the study of coping.

Coping with Socioeconomic Status-Based Rejection Concerns

Previous research has elucidated various methods of social rejection management such as concealment, psychological disengagement, self-distancing, and goal-directed self regulation (Goffman, 1963; Smart & Wegner, 1999; Major & Schmader, 1998; Ayduk & Kross, 2010; Swim & Thomas, 2006). Additionally, individual differences, such as rejection sensitivity, influence coping (Downey & Feldman, 1996; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002) with individuals higher in these differences engaging in more rejection prevention behavior.

In this research I examine how concealment is used as coping strategy for individuals wary of SES-based rejection. I conceptualize concealment as hiding certain aspects or all of one's identity (Smart & Wegner, 1999; Miller & Kaiser, 2001). I chose to research concealment for several reasons. Concealment is a well-studied coping mechanisms in the social rejection literature (Major & Gramzow, 1999; Frible, Platt, & Hoey 1998, Pachankis, 2007, Frost & Bastone, 2008). Factors such as perception of social disapproval and reproach influence whether individuals choose to conceal a socially rejected identity (Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988; Major & Gramzow, 1999). Individuals also attend to contextual factors such as the absence or presence of similar others when choosing to conceal an identity (Frible, Platt, & Hoey, 1998). Rejection sensitivity with its attention to interpersonal situations, belonging, and context should

capture many factors influencing concealment attempts. Additionally, researchers have found that many of the traits that signal SES are concealable (Hans, Nunes, & Dreze, 2010) and our anonymous respondents have mentioned concealable signals (clothing) and concealment opportunities (changing conversation topics). Some of this previous research has found evidence of lower SES individuals attempting to conceal their SES identity when working with upper SES partners (Garcia, Hallahan, & Rosenthal, 2007). However, this existing research has not found evidence of higher SES concealment, nor examined individual differences in motives to conceal within SES group levels as my research approach does.

More specifically, I propose that rejection sensitivity will predict the concealment of SES identity in contexts where social rejection is relevant. Lower SES individuals will be likely to conceal their maladaptive SES identity in both university and home environments. Higher SES individuals will conceal their maladaptive SES identity in their university environment only. This asymmetrical prediction reflects the expected difference in threat relevance for lower and higher SES students in the home context.

The Present Research

In this research I sought to empirically explore whether SES-based social rejection sensitivity exists for both lower and higher SES individuals and, if so, in what contexts. Next, I examined what changes in behavior, if any, occur as a result of SES-based rejection sensitivity. Elucidating the mechanisms and consequences behind individuals' everyday struggles with social rejection and SES may have far reaching consequences especially for students navigating twin poles of rejection: low and high SES.

Race-Based Rejection Sensitivity (RS-s) Measure Development

The design of the RS-s questionnaire parallels that of existing rejection sensitivity questionnaires (RSs), specifically the RS-person (Downey & Feldman, 1996), RS-race, (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002), the RS-asian (Chan & Mendoza-Denton, 2008) and RS-gender (London, Downey, Rattan, & Velilla, 2004). The initial step in creating the measure was developing SES-based rejection relevant scenarios. Ideas for appropriate scenarios were generated from reviews of SES and social class literature, reviews of first person experiences of SES-based rejection (Alvarez and Kolker, 2001), and laboratory meeting discussions. Each scenario was designed so that an individual could be rejected, regardless of whether his or her SES was high or low.

The scenarios were pretested for issues of clarity and appropriateness within an undergraduate population. From this process, I selected 11 scenarios in which individuals might be rejected based their SES. For example, (Item 3 in Table 1) "Imagine that your college boyfriend/girlfriend's parents want to come and visit you at your house over the summer. His/her parents are from a different socioeconomic status background than your parents." The inconsistency between the individual's status and his/her romantic partner's parents' status creates the potential for rejection, for both low and high SES individuals. The potential for rejection in the scenarios is not contingent on the level of socioeconomic status, but rather on one individual's SES being inconsistent with another's. The scenarios involved interactions with familiar and unfamiliar others. All scenarios focused on peer relationships or relationships with those closely associated with

a peer (such as the parents in the example above). Table 1 contains the full list of scenarios.

Paralleling existing RS questionnaires, the RS-s I measured participants' anxiety about and expectation of rejection (in this case, SES-based) for each scenario provided. Participants responded to two prompts for each scenario, one tapping anxiety (for Item 3, "How concerned or anxious would you be that his/her parent's would reject you because of your socioeconomic status?") and the other expectation (for Item 3, "His/Her parents would reject me because of my socioeconomic status"). Participants' ratings were made on a six-point scale ranging from "very unconcerned/very unlikely"(1) to "very concerned/very likely"(6). Anxiety about rejection was expected to amplify the impact of the expectation of rejection on attempts at coping. I expected to weigh the expectation score for each situation by the anxiety score to capture this amplification process, as is done with other RS measures.

Measure Validation and Characteristics

Participants

90 undergraduates (61 females, 28 males, one participant declined to report; $M = 21.3$, $SD = 4.71$) participated for partial credit towards fulfillment of their university psychology course research participation requirement. Participants were recruited from the research participant pool at a public university in California, UC Berkeley. Self-identified parental income was as follows: 46%, below \$30,000; 26%, between \$30,000-100,000; 28%, above \$100,000. Self-identified ethnicity of the participants was as follows: 5%, African-American; 33%, Caucasian/White; 29%, East Asian; 2%, First Nation/Native-American; 11%, Latino; 4%, Middle Eastern; 10%, Southeast Asian; and 15%, other.

Setting

The research was conducted at UC Berkeley, a large, selective research university in the United States. The university undergraduate community consists of students with diverse socioeconomic status backgrounds. Of the undergraduate students at the university between fall 2002 and fall 2005, 17% had an annual parental income below \$30,000 and 23 % had an annual parental income above \$100,000. In 2005, the median income in the United States was roughly \$43, 000 (US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2006). Parental education level varied as follows: 11% of students had fathers who had not completed high school, 11% had mothers who had not completed high school, 32% had fathers who had completed post-graduate training, and 22% had mothers who had completed post-graduate training.

At the time of data collection, undergraduate enrollment by ethnicity was: 0.5% American Indian/Alaska Native, 41% Asian/Asian-American/Pacific Islander, 4%

African-American/Black, 11% Hispanic, 31% White/Caucasian, 2% Other, 3% International students, and 8% had provided no ethnicity data.¹

Task

Participants completed an online version of the RS-s in group sessions of up to 11 persons per session but completed all the measures at private workstations. The average number of participants per session was four. Participants arrived at the session where they completed an informed consent form and were instructed to complete the online survey. Participants were assigned an anonymous identification number for their responses. Participants were thanked and debriefed after completing the measurement scales.

Measure Properties

Rejection Sensitivity Questionnaire-ses (RS-s). The anxiety and expectation items for the measure were highly correlated ($r = .80, p < .001$). Factor analysis with Varimax rotation was performed separately on the anxiety items, expectation items, and their interaction term. Each factor analysis and Scree plot examination revealed 1 factor: at an Eigenvalue of 2 for both individual terms and at an Eigenvalue of 1 for the interaction term.

Given the high correlation between the anxiety and expectation items I choose to forgo using the interaction term with this measure (as traditionally done with RS measures). I chose to instead use only the anxiety items in assessing SES-based rejection sensitivity as the data suggests that the expectations were already affect laden and the anxiety items were more directly related theoretically to rejection sensitivity. Descriptive statistics for the individual RS-s components are listed in Table 2.

Having developed a reliable measurement tool to assess who might feel especially susceptible to rejection based on their SES, I moved on in Study 1 to examine how individuals might cope with SES-based social rejection threats. Specifically, I examined whether concealment would emerge as a coping mechanism for both lower and higher SES individuals.

Study 1

The primary purpose of Study 1 was to investigate whether socioeconomic status-based rejection sensitivity (RS-s anxiety) would predict concealment of socioeconomic status (SES) in the university and home environments. Of particular interest was whether RS-s anxiety would predict concealment for only one SES level or across SES levels. Frable, Platt and Hoey's (1998) research on concealable stigmas found that not every group with a concealable stigma chooses to conceal and within a group individual differences exist in concealment practices. I hypothesized that a positive relationship would emerge between RS-s anxiety and concealment for both lower and higher SES individuals. However, I expected lower SES individuals to report greater identity concealment as

¹ Demographics data obtained from the Office of Student Research at the University of California-Berkeley.

rejection concerns are applicable to them in a greater number of contexts (home and university).

Method

Participants

525 undergraduates (371 females, 149 males, five participants declined to report; $M = 21.4$, $SD = 3.52$) participated for partial credit towards fulfillment of their university psychology course research participation requirement. Participants completed the measures as part of a prescreening survey for the university psychology department's research participant pool program. The survey was completed online and at the location of the participant's choosing.

Procedure

The questionnaires for the study were assembled with other survey items to form a larger prescreening battery to be completed by students who wished to participate in the psychology department's research participation program. The battery was assembled and made available in an online format.

Respondents participated in the online battery using anonymous identification numbers. The relevant questionnaires for this study were the following: university-identity concealment, home-identity concealment, rejection sensitivity questionnaire, socioeconomic status, and an age and gender demographics questionnaire. Participants first completed a consent form, then the various survey items and, lastly, a debriefing procedure.

Measures

Socioeconomic Status Identity Concealment-University (SESIC-U). The SES Identity Concealment-University measure was a four-item scale measuring self-reported concealment of socioeconomic status in the university environment. The scale ($M = 6.0$, $SD = 2.30$, Cronbach's standardized $\alpha = .70$) was comprised of questions assessing how frequently individuals attempted to conceal three aspects of their socioeconomic status identity: social class, educational level, and economic status; and how frequently they lie about their global university socioeconomic status. The question format was face valid, e.g., "When at the university, how frequently do you attempt to conceal your social class?". The items were answered on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = never to 5 = all the time) with a highest possible total score of 20.

Socioeconomic Status Identity Concealment – Home (SESIC-H). The SES Identity Concealment - Home measure was a four-item scale measuring self-reported concealment of socioeconomic status in the home environment. The scale ($M = 5.3$, $SD = 1.95$, Cronbach's standardized $\alpha = .65$) was comprised of questions identical to the SESIC-U items but assessing behavior at home rather than at the university, e.g. "When at the home, how frequently do you attempt to conceal your social class?".

Subjective Socioeconomic Status (SSES). Objective socioeconomic status was assessed using an adapted version of the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Status used in previous socioeconomic status research (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000; Ostrove, Adler, Kupperman, & Washington, 2000). The scale asked the participant to identify the socioeconomic status he or she believed he or she held within specific communities on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from lowest to highest). Participants were asked to provide estimates of their position in two communities: at the university ($M = 3.2$, $SD = .84$) and at home ($M = 3.2$, $SD = .82$). For example,

“On the scale below, please mark the position that corresponds to where would you place yourself in terms of your SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS (SES) within each community?

-YOUR HOME (this can include people such as your neighbors or people from your high school). Please consider everyone who lives in the area you would consider your hometown.”

Since an individual’s SES is socially constructed and relative to other individuals in the environment, subjective SES may shift with varying frequency depending on the diversity of one’s environment. Participants may feel a sense of belonging to more than one SES groups. Therefore I also included objective SES as a predictor.

Objective Socioeconomic Status (OSES). Objective socioeconomic status ($M = 14.9$, $SD = 11.83$, $Min = 1$, $Max = 48$) was assessed using participants’ self-reported estimates of their parents’ income, education levels of their mother, father, and maternal and paternal grandparents. Income, education level, and occupation are traditionally used as measures of socioeconomic status, however, given the student population I adjusted my measurement to be more reflective of parental status which is frequently found to be consistent with student status (Houle, 2011). Participant OSES was determined by creating a composite score consisting of the average familial education level multiplied by parental income level. The average parental income level of the sample was between \$60,000-80,000, which was higher than the national average of \$50,046. The average level of familial education for this sample was “some college”, which was slightly higher than the national average (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

RS-s anxiety. In order to attain a shorter and more internally consistent RS-s anxiety measure, only items with a factor loading above .6 were kept in the version of the measure used in Study 1. Eight of the 11 items from the original RS-s measure were used in Study 1 to form the final version of the RS-s anxiety ($M = 2.4$, $SD = .90$, Cronbach’s standardized $\alpha = .86$). The items retained are available in Table 3. No changes were made to the format of the items of the six-point Likert response scale.

Results

There were no significant differences by age or gender so those variables are not included in the following analyses. Table 4 presents the intercorrelations between objective SES, RS-s anxiety, and the concealment measures discussed below. Table 5 presents the corresponding intercorrelations for subjective SES.

As expected, RS-s anxiety was positively related to SES concealment in both the university and home environments. A series of zero order correlations were conducted to examine the associations among the RS-s anxiety and global SES concealment (ICU & ICH) and concealment of individual SES aspects (social class, educational level & economic status). When controlling for objective socioeconomic status (Table 4), RS-s anxiety was positively associated with concealment of global SES at the university ($r(509) = .29, p < .001$) and global SES concealment at home ($r(509) = .19, p < .001$). The more specific aspects of SES concealment were also positively correlated with RS-s anxiety with the exception of concealment of educational level in the home environment. Educational level (in the home and in the university environment) were the most weakly correlated variables overall. Educational level may not have been as salient or as readily concealable as social class and economic level to participants in this sample.

When controlling for subjective SES at home, RS-s anxiety was positively associated with concealment of global SES at the university ($r(516) = .29, p < .001$) and at home ($r(516) = .18, p < .001$). When controlling for subjective SES at university, similar results were obtained (concealment at home $r(516) = .18, p < .001$); concealment at the university $r(516) = .29, p < .001$). The more specific aspects of SES concealment were, again, also positively correlated with RS-s anxiety with the exception of concealment of educational level in the home environment when controlling for subjective SES at home and at university. Educational level (in the home and in the university environment) was the most weakly correlated variable overall. The reasons may be similar to those found mentioned above.

Objective socioeconomic status was negatively, but not significantly correlated with RS-s anxiety, $r(509) = -.05, ns$. Subjective socioeconomic status was also non-significantly correlated with RS-s anxiety (subjective SES home $r(509) = .004, ns$; subjective SES university $r(509) = .022, ns$). Objective and subjective SES home and university were positively correlated at $r(302) = .44, p < .001$ and $r(509) = .30, p < .001$.

Also shown in Table 6, SES concealment significantly differed across both low and high rejection sensitivity individuals, in particular concealment of SES at home. Concealment of SES at home was significantly higher for higher RS-s anxiety individuals than lower RS-s anxiety individuals ($p < .05$) while concealment of SES at the university was marginally statistically significant higher for higher RS-s anxiety individuals than lower RS-s anxiety individuals ($p = .05$).

Regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis that RS-s anxiety would predict concealment of SES in each of the target environments: university and home.

RS-s anxiety and Concealment of SES at the University

The overall model predicting SES concealment at the university, using rejection sensitivity, OSES, and their two-way interaction was significant ($R^2 = .09, F = 17.79, p < .001$). Both predictors and their two-way interaction accounted for a significant amount of variance: RS-s anxiety ($\beta = .18, t = 2.68, p < .008$); OSES ($\beta = -.27, t = -2.14, p < .03$); two-way interaction ($\beta = .31, t = 2.36, p < .02$). Concealment of SES at the university was not predicted by any of the models using subjective SES (home or university).

RS-s anxiety and Concealment of SES at Home

The overall model predicting SES concealment at home, using rejection sensitivity, OSES, and their two-way interaction was significant ($R^2 = .19$, $F = 6.07$, $p < .001$). Only RS-s anxiety accounted for a significant amount of the variance: RS-s anxiety ($\beta = .13$, $t = 1.86$, $p < .06$); OSES ($\beta = -.135$, $t = -1.04$, $p > .10$); two-way interaction ($\beta = .144$, $t = 1.05$, $p > .10$). The two-way interaction term of RS-s anxiety and subjective SES at home approached significance ($p < .09$) in the overall model using each predictor and their interaction term, but no models using subjective SES predicted concealment of SES at home.

Discussion

Overall, the findings suggest that SES-based rejection sensitivity can be helpful in predicting SES concealment across contexts in university and home environments, as the regression model using RS-s anxiety, objective SES, and their interaction term significantly predicted identity concealment in the home and university context. My results suggest that for individuals with a potentially rejected identity, in this case SES, it is not only objective categorization that prompts identity concealment, but also anxiety over rejection. In Study 1, I found that after controlling for objective socioeconomic status and subjective socioeconomic status, RS-s anxiety was still related to and predictive of concealment. It is important that the phenomenon of SES concealment was not exclusive to lower SES individuals or higher SES individuals. This finding is consistent with the idea that interpretations of stimuli as threats are at least equally as important as the physical or objective properties of the stimuli for predicting interpersonal and physiological response (Berry Mendes, Blascovich, Lickel, & Hunter 2002; Skinner & Brewer, 2002). If an individual experiences her or his SES as threatening, which I posit potentially occurs with own- versus-other SES inconsistency, then she or he will attempt to cope with that threat. One potential coping mechanism is SES concealment. The findings from Study 1 suggest that individuals who are higher in RS-s anxiety are predisposed to interpreting situations where SES is salient as interpersonally threatening. Higher RS-s anxiety individuals are more likely than lower RS-s anxiety individuals to cope with the increased presence of threat by attempting to conceal their SES.

The lack of predictive findings in the RS-s anxiety and subjective SES model was counter to my hypothesis, in that theoretically, subjective SES is more closely tied to personal interpretations of status than objective SES (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000). Therefore, subjective SES was expected to influence when one interprets SES belonging threats and, in turn, when one attempts to conceal SES. While the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Status, from which my subjective SES scale was developed, has been effective in predicting certain health outcomes in previous research (Adler & Snibbe, 2003), it is possible that to predict a social identity-related variable like concealment the strength of the social identity needs to be taken into account. This was not captured by the MacArthur Scale-based subjective SES measure used in Study 1.

My hypothesis that lower SES individuals would conceal more than higher SES individuals received partial support. Lower SES predicted greater concealment behaviors

but only using objective SES and only in the university environment. Again, this was unexpected as I thought subjective SES would be more sensitive to the social environment than objective SES and therefore a better predictor of social outcomes.

One limitation of the present study was that I failed to include other existing rejection sensitivity measures in the battery completed by participants in this study. Therefore, I could not control for sensitivity to personal or race-based rejection which may influence SES-based rejection and concealment. Given the positive association between race and SES, controlling for race-based rejection sensitivity would further my argument that SES-based rejection distinctly captures SES-based rejection sensitivity and SES-identity related concealment. I explored some of these possibilities in Study 2 and attempted to better measure students' subjective SES and methods of concealment, testing whether concealment behaviors across subjective SES levels may have been masked in Study 1 due to my use of relatively broad measures of behavior and identity.

Study 2

The results of Study 1 showed that anxiety about rejection can lead to a coping strategy of concealment in contexts where one's SES is salient. More specifically, having developed a measure to capture individual differences in RS-s anxiety, I found RS-s anxiety is related to concealment among both higher and lower SES groups. In Study 2, I extended the investigation of participants' concealment behavior to look more closely at the differences in concealment across the two different social contexts: the participants' school and home environments. I predicted that when looking more closely at levels of subjective SES, RS-s anxiety would predict lower SES individuals' SES identity concealment at school and at home and higher SES individuals' concealment at school. This asymmetrical prediction was the result of an expected difference in the likelihood of social rejection at home for low and high SES students.

As in Study 1, I expected both lower and higher SES individuals to be susceptible to threats of rejection in the school environment. The socio-economically diverse student population provides the possibility of social interactions with peers whose SES differs from one's own. The negative stereotypes associated with both low and high SES groups provide the possibility for stigmatization of anyone's personal identity.

Previous research has also found that communities tend to be segregated by socioeconomic status and that individuals tend to interact largely with those who share their socioeconomic status backgrounds, especially higher SES individuals (Benard & Willer, 2007). At home, I predicted that only lower SES students would feel an inconsistency between their personal status and that of their peers. College degrees, especially from competitive universities, are less common in low SES communities (Walpole, 2003). For lower SES students, being a university student will mean that they are becoming different from the rest of their community – more privileged. Privilege has social rewards but there are also costs of privilege, as discussed earlier. It is these costs which will weigh heavily on lower SES individuals. At home, these students are potentially seen as “snobs” and “sell-outs” who think they're better than everyone else or who have “forgotten where they come from”, so to speak. The interpersonal punishment for such behavior is high: jealousy, scorn, rejection (Exline & Lobel, 1999). As a result, I

predicted that concealing one's SES will be a more salient concern for lower SES individuals. Higher SES students were not expected to experience the same status inconsistency. Receiving a college education is normative among higher SES groups and would not create an own-versus-other status inconsistency. Therefore I did not expect RS-s anxiety to predict SES concealment at home for higher SES students.

Theoretically, higher SES students could experience SES-based interpersonal rejection threats at home if they were to encounter situations where their status was inconsistent with their peers. For example if they were to have a summer job working with lower SES individuals. However, I believed this is less likely to occur than the interactions lower SES students are likely to face. Lower SES students face the challenging predicament of negotiating both relatively low SES (when at the university) and relatively high SES (when at home). Depending on the environment (peers with consistent status or peers with inconsistent status) either identity could be activated and result in interpersonal acceptance or rejection.

RS-s anxiety predicted concealment at home in Study 1 with no differences across subjective SES levels. In Study 2, I expected that if individuals were allowed to self-identify their SES in a more detailed fashion differences across SES levels would appear. It is possible that satisfaction with group membership and others' perceptions of the group play a role in susceptibility to SES-based rejection anxiety. Therefore, the classification of subjective SES was more nuanced in this study than in Study 1, tapping into sense of belong, satisfaction with SES, and perception of how others view one's SES group. I expected that a strong sense of belong, especially among the lower SES individuals would help predict concealment at home given the aforementioned rejection concerns.

Finally, in Study 2, I examined RS-s anxiety's relationship to several existing psychological variables closely related in content: Rejection Sensitivity-race, Rejection Sensitivity-person, Rosenberg's self-esteem scale, a social comparison scale, and the Tang Money Ethic scale. I expected that RS-race and RS-person would not account for RS-s anxiety's positive association with SES identity concealment. I expected RS-s anxiety would have a positive relationship with RS-race and RS-person due to the three measures' underlying theme of social rejection concern. I expected a positive relationship between RS-s anxiety and social comparison (downward and upward) for the same reason. I expected a positive relationship between RS-s anxiety and the Tang Money Ethic scale as SES-based anxiety should increase with beliefs that money is powerful. Lastly, I predicted a negative association between RS-s anxiety and self-esteem consistent with other RS findings.

Method

Participants

149 undergraduates (108 women, 41 men; average age = 20.6, SD = 4.40) participated in the study. Participants were recruited from the research participant pool at UC Berkeley and compensated with one research credit towards their class requirements for their participation in the one hour long study. Self-identified parental income was as

follows: 28%, below \$30,000; 53%, between \$30,000-75,000; 19%, above \$75,000. Self-identified ethnicity of the participants was as follows: 3%, African-American; 33%, Caucasian/White; 35%, East Asian; 9%, Latino; 18%, Southeast Asian; and 5%, other.

Procedure

The materials and procedure were identical to those in Study 1, with four exceptions. First, participants completed both the RS-r ($M = 6.6$, $SD = 5.24$) and RS-p ($M = 10.7$, $SD = 3.72$). Second, the participants completed a Likert-style (ranging from one to five) scale adapted from Luhtanen and Crocker's Collective Self-Esteem Scale (1992) to measure collective SES identity related self-esteem. Third, participants completed a social comparison scale measuring concern with being the target of downward and upward social comparison. Fourth, participants completed the *Rosenberg* self esteem scale (1965) and the Tang money ethic scale (1995). The measures were completed in the following order: RS-s anxiety, *Rosenberg* self esteem scale (1965), SES Concealment at School scale, SES Concealment at Home scale, Social Comparison scale, RS-r, *Tang* Money Ethic scale (1995), RS-p, Subjective SES scale, Collective SES Self-esteem scale, and demographics information including measurements of objective SES.

Procedure

Participants were recruited via the psychology department's research participant pool. Participants attended the study session in groups of up to 11 persons per session, but completed all measures online over a secure shell connection at private workstations. The average number of participants per session was four. Participants arrived at the session where they completed an informed consent form and were instructed to complete the online battery of questionnaires. Participants were assigned an anonymous identification number for their online responses and were told not to enter any identifying information. After completing the battery, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Measures

RS-s anxiety. As in Study 1, only anxiety scores were used in the analysis ($M = 2.7$, $SD = .75$). All analyses were run with expectation scores and the interaction of anxiety*expectation term traditionally used in RS measures. Any significant differences in results attained with expectation or interaction term scores are reported here. The internal reliability of the anxiety items for the RS-s anxiety scale reached an acceptable level (Cronbach's standardized $\alpha = .80$). Factor analysis with Varimax rotation revealed one factor (explaining 42% of the variance) for the RS-s anxiety items at an Eigenvalue of 1.

Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (1965). This scale ($M = 3.0$, $SD = .52$) measures trait self esteem on a four point Likert type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. Items such as, "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" measure global self esteem.

Socioeconomic Status Identity Concealment-University (SESIC-U). This measure ($M = 1.3$, $SD = .09$) consisted of four items assessing self-reported behavioral

concealment of one's SES identity when at school. The items asked about macro level concealment tendencies such as, "When at school, how often do you lie about your SES?" on a scale of 1 (*never*) to 5 (*all of the time*). The internal reliability for this scale reached acceptable levels (Cronbach's standardized $\alpha = .64$) within this sample.

Socioeconomic Status Identity Concealment – Home (SESIC-H). This measure ($M = 1.6$, $SD = .26$) consisted of four items assessing self-reported behavioral concealment of one's SES identity when at home. The items mirrored those of the SES Concealment at School scale. The internal reliability for this scale reached acceptable levels (Cronbach's standardized $\alpha = .72$) within this sample.

Social Comparison Scale. This scale assessed concern over being the target of social comparison. The scale was divided into two parts: concern over being the target of upward comparison ($M = 3.2$, $SD = .24$) and concern over being the target of downward comparison ($M = 3.4$, $SD = .56$). In each part, participants were asked items such as, "I do not want others to think they are better than me" and "I do not want others to think I am better than they are" and responded on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The internal reliability for this scale reached acceptable levels for both the target of upward comparison items (Cronbach's standardized $\alpha = .63$) and the target of downward comparison items (Cronbach's standardized $\alpha = .66$) within this sample.

RS-race (Mendoza-Denton et al, 2002). The RS-r measure ($M = 6.5$, $SD = 5.24$) was a rejection sensitivity questionnaire designed to measure sensitivity to race-based rejection. Race relevant scenarios were presented and individuals responded on a six point Likert type scale to assess how anxious they would be in the interaction and how much they expected to be rejected. The anxiety and expectation items were then multiplied to obtain an interaction term which captures the additive effect of rejection expectation on rejection anxiety. A sample item follows below:

Imagine that you are in class one day, and the teacher asks a difficult question. A few people, including yourself, raise their hands to answer the question.

How concerned/anxious would you be that the professor might not choose you because of your race/ethnicity?

I would expect that the professor might not choose me because of my race/ethnicity.

Tang Money Ethnic Scale (1995). This scale ($M = 4.6$, $SD = .81$) measured attitudes toward money by assessing disagreement and agreement with several ideas about money on a seven point Likert scale (1) strongly disagree (7) strongly agree. The scale assessed broad attitudes about whether power can be obtained through money and whether amassing large sums of money is good or bad. Sample items include, "Money helps you gain freedom" and "Money is the root of all evil" (reverse scored). Higher scores indicated a positive view of money.

RS-person (Downey & Feldman, 1996). The RS-person (short) measure ($M = 10.7$, $SD = 3.72$) consisted of three items describing situations in which personal rejection may be relevant, such as asking a classmate out to coffee. Participants reported how anxious they would be about potential rejection and how much they expected to be

rejected on a scale of 1 (*very unconcerned/very unlikely*) to 6 (*very concerned/very likely*). As with the RS-r, the anxiety and expectation items were then multiplied to obtain an interaction term which captures the additive effect of rejection expectation on rejection anxiety.

Subjective SES. The same adapted MacArthur Subjective SES Scale used in Study 1 was used in Study 2. The range was 1 (*lowest SES group*) to 5 (*highest SES group*) with similar means for all four measure of subjective SES: at home (M = 3.2, SD = .80), at school (M = 3.1, SD = .90).

Collective SES Self-Esteem Scale. This scale assessed various aspects of SES group identity and related self esteem. Adapted from Luhtanen and Crocker's Collective Self-Esteem Scale (1992) the scale measured how much individuals feel they belong to the SES group, how happy individuals are to belong to the SES group, and how negatively they believe others feel about their SES group. On a five point Likert type scale, individuals indicated their agreement with the statements such as: "I feel I am a member of the low SES group" (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

Objective SES. The same formula for assessing objective socioeconomic status in Study 1 was used in Study 2. Objective SES percentages were as follows: 29% of students were classified as low SES, 51% were classified as middle SES, 20% were classified as high SES.

Results

There were no significant differences by age or gender so those variables are not included in the following analyses. I also controlled for RS-r and RS-p, which were correlated with RS-s anxiety, $r(149) = .51, p < .001$ and $r(149) = .44, p < .001$, respectively, in all analyses.

As expected and shown in Table 7, RS-s anxiety was positively correlated with SES concealment at the university, concern with being the target of social comparison (upward and downward), and beliefs that money is powerful and positive. RS-s anxiety was negatively correlated with self-esteem. RS-s anxiety was not significantly related to SES concealment at home.

Objective SES was positively correlated with self-reported subjective SES home $r(149) = .27, p < .01$, university $r(149) = .30, p < .001$ and national $r(149) = .33, p < .001$. Interestingly, among the adapted Collective SES self esteem items, objective SES was only significantly correlated with items for the low SES group. More specifically, objective SES was negatively correlated with sense of belong to the low SES group $r(149) = -.36, p < .001$; gladness about membership in the low SES group $r(149) = -.37, p < .001$; and belief that the low SES group is viewed positively by others $r(149) = -.17, p < .05$.

RS-s anxiety and Concealment of SES at the University

The overall model predicting SES concealment at the university, using rejection sensitivity, OSES, and their two-way interaction was significant ($R^2 = .21, F = 13.03, p$

<.001). Only RS-s anxiety accounted for a significant amount of the variance: RS-s anxiety ($\beta = .34$, $t = 4.79$, $p < .001$); OSES ($\beta = .002$, $t = .31$, *ns*); two-way interaction ($\beta = -.17$, $t = -.91$, *ns*). As in Study 1, concealment of SES at the university was not predicted by any of the models using subjective SES (home or university) nor using the more specific subjective SES identity items from the Collective SES Self Esteem Scale. As mentioned in the earlier methods, I investigated whether SES concealment would be more relevant for low SES individuals and whether specific aspects of subjective SES identity would predict concealment better than the more global subjective SES measure. Therefore, I looked at the pattern of concealment by the three collective SES self esteem variables: belonging, gladness, and perceptions of group worthiness using the Collective SES Self-Esteem scale.

RS-s anxiety and Concealment of SES at Home

The overall model predicting SES concealment at home, using rejection sensitivity, OSES, and their two-way interaction was not significant ($R^2 = .02$, $F = .92$, *ns*). Only RS-s anxiety accounted for a significant amount of the variance: RS-s anxiety ($\beta = .34$, $t = 4.79$, $p < .001$); OSES ($\beta = .002$, $t = .31$, *ns*); two-way interaction ($\beta = -.17$, $t = -.91$, *ns*).

Once again, concealment of SES at the home was not predicted by any of the models using subjective SES (home or university). However, categorizing participants by their responses to the belonging variables of the Collective SES Self-esteem scale resulted in significant predictions of concealment by RS-s anxiety. For individuals who reported that they strongly identified with a low SES group, RS-s anxiety predicted concealment at home ($\beta = .642$, $t = 3.35$, $p < .01$). For individuals who strongly identified with the high SES group, RS-s anxiety did not significantly predict concealment at home ($\beta = -.075$, $t = 7.12$, *ns*).

Discussion

SES-based rejection sensitivity was associated with the social attitude and personality variables as hypothesized. Greater SES-based rejection sensitivity was associated with lower self-esteem and greater concern with social comparisons, both upward and downward. Additionally, the Tang's Money Ethic scale, which measures a belief that money is powerful and positive, was positively associated with SES-based rejection sensitivity for both lower and higher SES participants. Taken together, these results provide further evidence that RS-s anxiety is a reliable measure of social rejection concerns.

The results of Study 2 support the Study 1 finding that RS-s anxiety predicts concealment in the university environment for all individuals regardless of SES. The nonsignificant finding of the overall model with OSES to predict home concealment conflicts with Study 1's earlier finding, but suggests a more nuanced process of identity negotiation. The results of Study 2 suggest that individuals do not feel anxious about their SES and conceal it indiscriminately. Rather they apply their concealment strategies in context specific fashions. Rejection sensitive individuals of both higher and lower SES conceal in the university setting where the heterogeneous environment presents a rejection threat.

However, rejection sensitive, lower SES individuals also conceal their SES identity at home, if they feel strongly identified with the lower SES group, because their home also represents a heterogeneous environment.

General Discussion

There is a general consensus in social science literature that social acceptance is a desire held by many people that goes unfulfilled for many reasons (DeWall, Maner, Rouby, 2009; Stangor, Sullivan, & Ford, 2000). Past research on socioeconomic status and social rejection documents negative, though not equivalent, emotional and social consequences for low and high individuals. My research contributes to the existing literature by providing additional evidence that considering underlying psychological processes and situational context along with social identity provides unique insight into behavior (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Kraus, Piff & Keltner, 2009).

Building on existing research documenting individual differences in sensitivity to rejection and the existence of negative stereotypes associated with both lower and higher SES individuals, I hypothesized that both lower and higher SES individuals would be susceptible to SES-based rejection concerns. I hypothesized that an inconsistency between the target individual's identity and the identities of the perceivers in the environment would elicit rejection concerns. Construction of an internally reliable measure of SES-based rejection concerns, RS-s anxiety, provided support for the hypothesis that individuals across the SES spectrum were vulnerable to SES-based rejection anxiety. I hypothesized that individuals higher in RS-s anxiety would be more likely than individuals lower in RS-s anxiety to conceal their identity at the university. Study 1 and Study 2 provided support for this hypothesis. I also hypothesized that lower SES individuals would experience greater RS-s anxiety and be more likely to conceal in their home environment. Study 2 provided partial support for this hypothesis. This research adds to the literature on the malleable nature of socioeconomic identity, the negative consequences of higher and lower socioeconomic status, and the individual coping mechanisms for social rejection.

Possible Explanations of Subjective SES as an Inconsistent Predictor of Concealment

Most of my hypotheses regarding subjective SES as a predictor of concealment at the university and at home were not supported by the data. However, one key hypothesis was supported in Study 2, that high rejection sensitive individuals who felt they were low SES would conceal their UC Berkeley identity at home lest it marked them as high status. Measuring the strength of the subjective SES identity proved important to capturing that variable's influence. Health psychologists have developed a robust literature on the complicated nature of subjective SES and health outcomes (Operario, Adler, & Williams, 2004) and my original means of measuring the concept may have been too simplistically applied.

Consequences of Socioeconomic Status-Based Rejection Concerns

The research on social rejection management and identity concealment has yielded mixed well-being results, suggesting the strategy has maladaptive and adaptive

components. Concealment is associated with increased psychological distress and increased intrusive thoughts of the concealed identity (Major & Gramzow, 1999; Smart & Wegner, 1999). Empirical results support arguments claiming that repeated exposure to anxiety impairs cognitive performance (especially memory). Efforts to regulate emotion often result in decreased efficacy even with high motivation to succeed at a task (Baumeister, Muraven, & Tice, 2000; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). Furthermore, anxious emotions often lead to truncated decision making as resources that could be devoted solely to decision making are spent regulating negative emotion (Taylor & Stanton, 2007). Johnson, Richeson, & Finkel (2011) found that lower SES students concerned about negative stereotypes regarding their academic performance exhibited signs of depleted self-regulation resources on cognitive tasks in front of unfamiliar others.

Yet, practiced efforts at emotion regulation and stressful coping can lead to improved performance when more adaptive strategies are employed (Goldin & Gross, 2010; Ayduk, Mischel, & Downey, 2002). Emotion regulation and coping seem to be easier for individuals higher on certain psychological and physical variables (such as lower rejection sensitivity and better cardiovascular fitness) and strategies that involve reappraising events and focusing on less on immediate emotions (Berry Mendes, Major, McCoy, & Blascovich, 2008; Gross & John, 2003; Ayduk & Kross, 2010). Successful concealment has its benefits. Research has shown that individuals treat non-stigmatized individuals with greater positive affect, social support, and closeness (Schwarzer & Weiner, 1991; Link, Struening, Rahav, Phelan, & Nuttbrock, 1991; Frable, 1993; Pryor, Reeder, Yeadon, & Hesson-McInnis, 2004).

Importance of Understanding Socioeconomic Status-Based Rejection Concerns in Undergraduate Populations

The RS-s anxiety measure I developed was specifically designed for use with an undergraduate population, although the underlying principles of status inconsistency and rejection could apply more broadly. Increased levels of race-based rejection sensitivity have been associated with a decreased sense of belong at the university and a dissatisfaction with the university in previous research. Attending university-supported, minority group social events and having out-group friendships decreased feelings of isolation at the university (Mendoza-Denton et al. 2002; Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008). My research found that both lower and higher SES students worried they would not be social accepted at their university. These students may benefit from similar interventions and out-group friendships. Given the increasing cost of a university education, more students may be struggling financially and more concerned about obscuring that fact. The Wall Street Journal (Simon & Barry, 2012) recently reported that more than three million American households owe at least \$50,000 in student loans with upper-middle-class households showing the greatest increase in borrowing.

However, when SES-based rejection sensitivity students use identity concealment as a coping mechanism they may unintentionally restrict their access to social support. Having a concealable social identity can be a double-edged sword. Research on students self-identifying as sexual minorities found that voluntarily disclosing one's sexual orientation was associated with greater perceived social support and well-being (Beals, Peplau, & Gable, 2009). My research suggests that when it comes to SES-based rejection

concerns the very students who could most benefit from social support may be the least likely to seek it. My research suggests that attending to the context-dependent nature of SES-based rejection concerns, using constructs such as RS-s anxiety, may help identify at-risk students better than traditional markers such as wealth or parental education could do alone.

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Table 1. *Factor loadings and psychometrics for RS-s*

RS-s Items	Factor Analysis Varimax Rotation (Anxiety)	Factor loading
1.	Imagine you are in a class at the start of the Spring semester talking about what you did over the winter break. You realize that several of the students around you come from a very different socioeconomic background than you do.	.74
2.	Imagine that you need to go to Student Services to complete an information update. As part of the update, you are asked for an estimate of your parents' income. One of your classmates is at the Student Services office, as well, and offers to hand your form in with his. If you give him your form he will clearly be able to see your parents' income.	.65
3.	Imagine that your college boyfriend/girlfriend's parents want to come and visit you at your house over the summer. His/her parents are from a different socioeconomic status background than your parents.	.73
4.	Imagine that your new roommate is heading to class one morning, but can't find her/his coat. You offer her/him your coat. You notice her/him pausing as she/he looks at the coat...	.57
5.	Imagine that you and your friend are going to lunch and deciding who should drive. You offer to drive. As you approach your car...	.57
6.	Imagine that you and a friend have stopped at the ATM to grab cash before going to the movies. As you withdraw money, you realize that your friend is standing very close to you and may be able to see your account balance.	.61
7.	Imagine that your brother is getting married and would like you to bring your boyfriend/girlfriend to the wedding. This will be the first time your boyfriend/girlfriend meets your family.	.81
8.	Imagine that one of your college friends is traveling to your city and you offer to let her/him stay at your house for a few days.	.72
9.	Imagine that you are in class having a discussion about living in different types of neighborhoods. Your neighborhood comes up, but no one knows you live there.	.68
10.	Imagine that you are responding to an ad for a roommate in a two bedroom apartment. The other person has asked for some more information about you, including socioeconomic status-related information	.66
11.	Imagine that you are moving in with a new roommate and as you unpack your stereo you notice her/him staring at it.	.54
M		5.19
Mdn		3.72
SD		5.12
Minimum score		1.18
Maximum score		23.45
n		90

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics for RS-s components*

	RS-s	RS-s anxiety	RS-s expectation
Mean	9.5	2.1	1.9
STD	7.85	.87	.70
Cronbach's α (standardized)	.86	.86	.83
% of variance explained	44%	42%	40%

Table 3. *Eight-item RS-s anxiety*

RS-s Items for Study 2
1. Imagine you are in a class at the start of the Spring semester talking about what you did over the winter break. You realize that several of the students around you come from a very different socioeconomic background than you do.
2. Imagine that you need to go to Student Services to complete an information update. As part of the update, you are asked for an estimate of your parents' income. One of your classmates is at the Student Services office, as well, and offers to hand your form in with his. If you give him your form he will clearly be able to see your parents' income.
3. Imagine that your college boyfriend/girlfriend's parents want to come and visit you at your house over the summer. His/her parents are from a different socioeconomic status background than your parents.
4. Imagine that you and a friend have stopped at the ATM to grab cash before going to the movies. As you withdraw money, you realize that your friend is standing very close to you and may be able to see your account balance.
5. Imagine that your brother is getting married and would like you to bring your boyfriend/girlfriend to the wedding. This will be the first time your boyfriend/girlfriend meets your family.
6. Imagine that one of your college friends is traveling to your city and you offer to let her/him stay at your house for a few days.
7. Imagine that you are in class having a discussion about living in different types of neighborhoods. Your neighborhood comes up, but no one knows you live there.
8. Imagine that you are responding to an ad for a roommate in a two bedroom apartment. The other person has asked for some more information about you, including socioeconomic status-related information

Table 4. Intercorrelations controlling for OSES

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6. Identity Concealment at University (ICU)	7.	8.	9.	10.	11. Identity Concealment at Home (ICH)
1. <i>RS-s-A</i>		.29***	.08*	.27***	.19***	.29***	.18***	.065	.16***	.10**	.18***
2. ICU social class		-	.31***	.78***	.36***	.88***	.52***	.22***	.45***	.14**	.49***
3. ICU educational level			-	.28***	.16***	.57***	.35***	.46***	.26***	.092**	.42***
4. ICU economic status				-	.31***	.87***	.50***	.22***	.53***	.10**	.50***
5. ICU - lie					-	.56***	.22***	.11**	.13**	.30***	.25***
6. <i>ICU</i>						-	.56***	.34***	.50***	.20***	.58***
7. ICH – social class							-	.32***	.69***	.15**	.80***
8. ICH – education level								-	.38***	.22***	.69***
9. ICH – economic status									-	.18***	.84***
10. ICH – lie										-	.46***
11. <i>ICH</i>											-

*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01

Table 5. Intercorrelations controlling for SSES at home/SSES at university

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6. Identity Concealment at University (ICU)	7.	8.	9.	10.	11. Identity Concealment at Home (ICH)
1. <i>RS-s-A</i>		.29*** .29***	.076ns .076ns	.27*** .27***	.19*** .19***	.29*** .29***	.18*** .19***	.066ns .065ns	.16*** .16***	.10** .10**	.18*** .18***
2. ICU social class		-	.31*** .31***	.78*** .78***	.36*** .36***	.88*** .88***	.52*** .52***	.23*** .22***	.46*** .45***	.14** .14**	.49*** .49***
3. ICU educational level			-	.29*** .29***	.16*** .16***	.57*** .57***	.35*** .35***	.46*** .45***	.26*** .26***	.10** .10**	.42*** .42***
4. ICU economic status				-	.31** .32***	.87*** .87***	.50** .50***	.22*** .22***	.53** .53***	.11** .12**	.51*** .50***
5. ICU - lie					-	.57*** .57***	.22*** .22***	.11** .11**	.14** .14**	.30*** .30***	.26*** .26***
6. <i>ICU</i>						-	.56*** .56***	.34*** .34***	.50*** .50***	.20** .21***	.58*** .58***
7. ICH – social class							-	.32*** .32***	.69*** .68***	.14** .15***	.80*** .80***
8. ICH – education level								-	.38*** .38***	.22** .22***	.69*** .69***
9. ICH – economic status									-	.18*** .19***	.84*** .84***
10. ICH – lie										-	.47*** .47***
11. <i>ICH</i>											-

*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01

Table 6. Means Comparison for low and high RS-s anxiety.

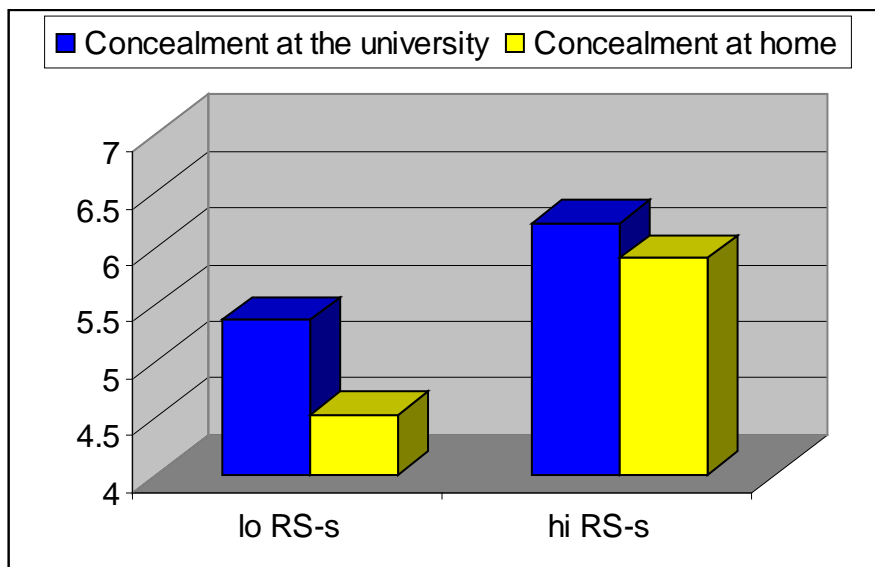


Table 7. Intercorrelations controlling for RS-r and RS-p

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. RS-s A	-	-.16*	.36***	-.002 ns	.25**	.15*	.18**
2. Self esteem		-	-.15*	-.079 ns	-.069 ns	-.12 ns	-.17**
3. SESICU			-	.51***	.10 ns	.19**	.13 ns
4. SESICH				-	-.042 ns	.20**	.043 ns
5. Downward comparison					-	.17**	.24**
6. Upward Comparison						-	-.18**
7. Money							-

* $p < .10$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$