Distancing From a Stigmatized Social Identity:

State of the Art and Future Research Agenda on Self-group Distancing

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Abstract

Despite equal rights, minority groups such as ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ people, and people with mental or physical disabilities face discrimination on a day-to-day basis in subtle and hard to recognize forms. As discrimination slips beneath the surface, it becomes difficult to fight the stigma using collective social identity coping mechanisms. Instead, individual mobility responses such as distancing the self from the stigmatized identity ('self-group distancing') become more viable as a way to improve one's individual standing. In this overview of the state of the art, we take a social identity lens to reflect on the current empirical knowledge base on self-group distancing as a coping mechanism and provide a framework on what self-group distancing is; when, where and why self-group distancing likely occurs; and what its consequences are at the individual- and the collective level. The contributions in this special issue provide novel insights into how these processes unfold, and serve as a basis to set a future research agenda, for example on what can be done to prevent self-group distancing (i.e., interventions). Together, the insights highlight that while self-group distancing may seem effective to (strategically and temporarily) alleviate discomfort or to improve one's own position, on a broader collective level and over time self-group distancing tends to keep the current unequal social hierarchy in place.

Keywords: self-group distancing, stigma, social identity, individual mobility, intergroup relations, social inequality

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While in modern-day society blatant forms of bias and discrimination continue to flare up, many individuals face discrimination on the basis of their group membership in more subtle and harder to recognize forms (Ellemers & Baretto, 2015). For example, despite equal labour market participation, women and men face stigma and stereotyping in occupations traditionally dominated by the other gender (Croft et al., 2015; Meeussen et al., 2020). Also, despite formal laws to ensure equal rights, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ people, and people with physical or mental disabilities face stigma in many areas of their day-to-day lives (Hebl et al., 2002; Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008). As such, social inequality is increasingly perpetuated also through more informal and intangible cues (Emerson & Murphy, 2014).

When discrimination slips beneath the surface, it often leaves individuals unsure as to whether the discriminatory experience actually occurred, and whether it should actually be attributed to one's group membership ("is it just me, or is it the fact that I am a woman?"). This difficulty to claim that group-based discrimination occurred makes it harder for individuals to engage in collective coping strategies to improve the position of their stigmatized ingroup, such as collective action or protest (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Instead, individual mobility coping responses become more likely (Ellemers & Van Laar, 2010; Van Laar et al., 2019). One such individual mobility response is self-group distancing, where members of low-status groups seek to improve their personal situation by distancing from their stigmatized ingroup and by moving closer to the high-status outgroup. For example, think about a female CEO who presents herself as "tough" and denies that gender discrimination exists in her company (i.e., the "Queen Bee"; Derks, Ellemers & Van Laar, 2016), the African-American job applicant who conceals racial background information to "Whiten" their resume (Kang et al., 2016), or the gay employee who hides his homosexuality and uncomfortably joins in laughter when colleagues make a

homophobic joke (Cramwinckel et al., 2018). While these self-group distancing coping strategies may seem effective to (temporarily) alleviate discomfort or to improve stigmatized group members' status position on an individual level, on a broader societal level, and over time, self-group distancing responses do not challenge the status quo in current social inequalities and tend to keep the social hierarchy in place (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Faniko et al., 2017).

Why this special issue?

With this special issue, we aim to provide the state of the art on self-group distancing research, including its latest contributions. We reflect on current empirical knowledge about when, where, and why self-group distancing occurs and what its consequences are, at an individual level, but also for groups, organizations, and societies at large. Based on this, we signal knowledge gaps in current literature and set a future research agenda. We use the social identity approach as the theoretical lens through which we understand and define the scope of this state of the art on self-group distancing (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). The core premise of this approach is that people's self-understanding, self-esteem, and behaviour is fundamentally intertwined with the social groups to which they belong. The social identities that people derive from their group memberships have important consequences for how they view and feel about themselves, and also how they are viewed and evaluated by others. If social identities provide positive resources for group members, this positively reflects on individual self-esteem and well-being (Jetten et al., 2017). However, if social identities are stigmatized, devalued, or threatened this can have negative consequences for individual members. In the latter case, self-group distancing, by dissociating oneself from the stigmatized ingroup, is one of the ways in which individuals can protect or restore their self-esteem and create a better position for themselves.

Over the past 20 to 30 years, there has been a growing body of social psychological research taking a social identity lens to understand self-group distancing as a way of dealing with

disadvantage (Figure 1). For example, disidentification with a group (Becker & Tausch, 2014), hiding or concealing stigmatized identities (Barreto et al., 2006; Goh et al., 2019; Mackey et al., 2020; Newheiser & Barreto, 2014; Quinn et al., 2017), and 'Queen Bee' responses (Derks et al., 2016) all fall under the umbrella term of self-group distancing.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

From the increase in the yearly absolute number of journal articles on self-group distancing displayed in Figure 1, it seems that research on self-group distancing is thriving. At the same time, it seems that because of the many manifestations of self-group distancing, and the diverse ways in which it is discussed, it is time to take stock and provide a state of the art on what we know and what still needs to be understood about self-group distancing. In this editorial, we reflect on the empirical knowledge base on self-group distancing from the past 20 to 30 years, and combine the latest insights. To provide structure for this effort, we rely on an Input-Process-Output (IPO) model to discuss six key parameters to understand self-group distancing (Figure 2). In line with our social identity approach, the IPO model emphasizes the need to understand individuals' self-group distancing responses in direct relation to the social systems they inhabit (Ilgen et al., 2005).

The six key parameters we focus on are *Manifestations* (in what forms self-group distancing manifests), *Explanations* (why people engage in self-group distancing), *Contexts* (where and when self-group distancing is likely to occur), *Consequences* (the beneficial or detrimental consequences of self-group distancing), *Interventions (*what can be done to intervene in self-group distancing processes), and *Alternatives* (what other social identity strategies can be used instead to deal with stigma). Based on this model, we discuss the existing literature and the latest empirical contributions on self-group distancing as showcased in this special issue. Table 1 presents an overview of the eight empirical contributions to this special issue, each addressing two or more key parameters in the model on self-group distancing (and, naturally, all addressing

its manifestation). Moreover, for each paper the key message and a short methodological overview is provided.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Manifestations and Explanations: What is self-group distancing and why does it occur?

Self-group distancing can be defined as an individual mobility response whereby group members dissociate from their stigmatized ingroup, to avoid the negative experience of being stigmatized, to reap benefits from being less associated with the ingroup, or to better fit in with a high-status outgroup. For example, self-group distancing takes place when a Muslim woman at a job interview does not wear the headscarf that she usually wears to avoid being discriminated against in the hiring process, or when a 50-year old actor uses Botox and fillers to appear more youthful and to ensure he is still considered for roles. In an earlier review, Derks, Van Laar, and Ellemers (2016) divided the self-group distancing response into three components; (1) distancing oneself physically or psychologically from ingroup members (e.g., when homosexual men avoid contact with homosexual colleagues or emphasize that they are very different from other homosexuals), (2) presenting oneself as more like the high-status outgroup (e.g., when middle-aged people emphasize their youthfulness in order to pass as younger), and (3) by endorsing and legitimizing the current intergroup hierarchy (e.g., when women endorse stereotypes about other women's lack of ambition and communicate that most women just need to work harder).

An important reason why people engage in self-group distancing is because the (anticipated) experience of being a target of social devaluation or negative stereotypes poses a stressful social identity threat to core social motivations that govern human behaviour (Fiske, 2014; Major & Schmader, 2017). Specifically, experiencing that one's social identity is devalued or negatively stereotyped threatens the fundamental *need to belong* (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), the need for *positive self-esteem* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and one's sense of *self-efficacy* (Steele et al., 2002). Indeed, recent studies show that when people experience that their ingroup is

devalued or negatively stereotyped (i.e., social identity threat), they become more concerned about whether they are competent enough and whether they fit in (Barreto, 2014; Hall et al., 2015; Veldman et al., 2020). These motives can drive individuals to self-group distance with the goal of increasing fit with a high-status outgroup, protecting their sense of efficacy and competence in the domain, and more generally avoiding the negative experience of being stigmatized. The extent to which individuals think that self-group distancing will reach these goals likely influences whether they indeed show self-group distancing responses (see appraisal theory of stress and coping; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, rather than passively undergoing the devaluation of one's ingroup, members of stigmatized groups are quite resilient and actively cope with stigma (Barreto, 2014; Van Laar et al., 2010; Van Laar et al., 2019).

Work on self-group distancing conducted within the social identity framework (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) demonstrated that self-group distancing is not a general consequence of inherent personality or group characteristics of disadvantaged group members, but rather a situational predicament; a response that is triggered by cues or contexts where one's group membership is devalued, negatively stereotyped, or threatened in some way (Derks et al., 2016; Derks, Van Laar, et al., 2011; Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Faniko et al., 2016; Veldman et al., 2020). Because the investigation of self-group distancing in social psychological literature largely originated in relation to gender and gender discrimination at work (also called the Queen Bee phenomenon; Ellemers et al., 2004), the knowledge base on self-group distancing is most extensive with regard to women in leadership (Derks, Van Laar, et al., 2011; Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Faniko et al., in press). This has led some researchers to argue that self-group distancing is a generic tendency among women to be more conflictious and competitive with each other than men are, supposedly causing women to not allow each other to be successful, or to question that self-group distancing exists in the first place (Arvate et al., 2018; Sheppard & Aquino, 2013, 2017). Yet, mounting empirical evidence dismisses this 'gendered' argument and

supports self-group distancing as a situational response to deal with threats to social identity among any type of low-status group.

First, not all women display Queen Bee responses and women who do, do not do so in all situations. Specifically, Queen Bee responses typically only occur in situations where women work in a highly male-dominated work culture, for example when women report having experienced gender bias in their career, or when they recall instances of gender discrimination in their careers (Derks et al., 2016; Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Derks, Van Laar, et al., 2011). Second, counteracting the "women as more competitive with one another" argument, women in senior leadership positions have been shown to display Queen Bee behaviours towards junior women, but not towards fellow senior women who are in fact their direct competition (Faniko et al., 2016). Also counteracting this "women as more competitive with one another" argument is the finding that not only women, but also men in senior positions rated their own masculinity as higher than that of same-gender junior colleagues (coined the 'Alpha Male response' among men; Faniko et al., 2016). Third, recent research on self-group distancing responses – including contributions to this special issue – has increasingly shown self-group distancing responses in other social categories than gender, such as in a number of ethnic minorities (e.g., Hindustani workers in the Netherlands [Derks et al., 2015], Moroccan and Turkish-origin youth in Belgium [Kende et al., 2020], Asian-Americans [Kirby et al., 2020, this issue], Black Americans [Bourguignon et al., 2020, this issue]), older age groups (Giasson et al., 2020, this issue), LGBTQ+ people (Bourguignon et al., 2020, this issue; Pasek et al., 2017), and disabled and overweight groups (Essien et al., 2020, this issue). The fact that self-group distancing responses are found in other groups than women is key to our understanding of this phenomenon as a broader social-psychological phenomenon that can occur with any stigmatized social identity as a response to social inequality, and not as an isolated phenomenon relevant for specific groups (i.e., women) only.

One key factor that has been firmly established to determine *who* is likely to engage in self-group distancing is lower ingroup identification. Among women as well as other low-status groups, self-group distancing responses tend to be observed mainly among those for whom their group identity is a less important part of the self-concept. Specifically, empirical evidence in both experimental and in field studies shows that when in male-dominated work contexts women's gender identity was threatened, particularly low identifying women displayed Queen Bee responses (e.g., self-describe as highly masculine, oppose affirmative action and gender quota; display favouritism to promote a male over a female subordinate; Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Derks, Van Laar, et al., 2011; Kaiser & Spalding, 2015). Similar moderation effects have been found for ethnic and racial minority groups (e.g., Bourguignon et al., 2020; Essien et al., 2020; Kirby et al., 2020, all in this issue; Derks et al., 2015) and among gay people (Bourguignon et al., 2020). Thus, in line with the social identity account, self-group distancing is a coping response most likely used by those for whom their stigmatized group membership was not that important in the first place – for them there is likely less to lose on dissociating from this social identity.

The available research on self-group distancing has used quite diverse operationalisations of self-group distancing, signalling a need for more integrative theorizing in order to define and clarify what self-group distancing is (and what it is not) and in what forms it can manifest. In an effort to organize different forms of self-group distancing, we discuss three key dimensions along which self-group distancing responses can be understood, namely: (1) whether it involves a *move away* from the stigmatized ingroup or a *move toward* a high-status outgroup, (2) whether it manifests on a *cognitive*, *attitudinal,* or *behavioural* level, and (3) whether the nature of the self-group distancing response is *motivated, strategic, flexible, internalized, implicit* or perhaps a combination.

Moving away from the ingroup or moving toward the outgroup

Self-group distancing responses can take the form of a move *away* from the stigmatized ingroup or a move *toward* the high-status outgroup. Manifestations of self-group distancing as a move *away* from the low-status ingroup are, for example, disidentification as an ingroup member (Becker & Tausch, 2014; Kende et al., 2020), hiding one's ingroup identity (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014; Veldman et al., 2020), emphasizing how one is different from the ingroup and the stereotypes associated with it (Cohen & Garcia, 2005; Faniko et al., 2017; Kirby et al., 2020, this issue; Munder et al., 2020; Pronin et al., 2004), or having less concern for and interactions or friendships with other stigmatized group members (Bergsieker et al., 2020; Cifti et al., 2020, this issue; Cohen & Garcia, 2005; Faniko et al., 2017; Veldman et al., 2020).

Manifestations of self-group distancing as a movement *toward* the high-status outgroup are, for example, minority members presenting themselves as more similar to the high-status outgroup, like when people of colour "Whiten" information on their resumes (Kang et al., 2016), when older people report a 'younger' subjective age (Giasson et al., 2020, this issue), or when women emphasize their stereotypically masculine qualities (Derks, Van Laar, et al. 2011, Derks, Ellemers et al, 2011; Faniko et al, in press). Additionally, self-group distancing as a move toward the outgroup can also manifest through increased interaction with the outgroup, favouring the outgroup over the ingroup (Essien et al., 2020, this issue), or increased outgroup identification (Guimond et al., 2002; Kende et al., 2020).

The distinction between an understanding of self-group distancing as a move away from the ingroup or a move toward the outgroup is important as these two processes are not necessarily inversely related. Wanting to avoid the negative consequences of being stigmatized by dissociating from one's ingroup does not automatically imply a stronger desire to fit in more strongly to a high-status outgroup, or vice versa. For example, research on women in managerial positions has consistently found a strong tendency towards masculine self-presentation, but not a reduced feminine self-presentation (e.g., Derks, Van Laar, et al 2011; Derks, Ellemers, et al.

2011; Faniko et al., in press). Moreover, recent research also revealed that the pursuit of ingroup distancing goals (e.g., not wanting to be associated with or seen as a typical woman) was (unexpectedly) *positively* associated with the pursuit of group-benefitting goals (e.g., wanting a better position for women in society; Munder et al., 2020). Thus, minority members' self-preservation strategies in high-status positions can – but do not necessarily have to – coincide with a reduced concern for the position of their low-status ingroup.

Furthermore, one could compare self-group distancing to other theoretical identity frameworks involving multiple group memberships, such as Berry's (1980) acculturation model on immigrant's adaptation styles, or the Dual Identity Model (Gaertner et al., 2000). However, whereas these models focus on the way individuals define their identities in the context of multiple possible group memberships (such as one's migrant culture and the host culture), we see self-group distancing as a coping response by which individuals flexibly navigate their commitments to their low-status ingroup as well as the high-status outgroup depending on the context in which they find themselves.

Attitudes, behaviours, or cognitions

Another important distinction we see in different manifestations of self-group distancing is between attitudinal, behavioural, and cognitive forms. *Cognitive* manifestations of self-group distancing concern individuals' perception of self in relation to their perception of the ingroup or the outgroup. Self-stereotyping as an ingroup or outgroup member, or perceived similarity with the ingroup and/or outgroup are forms of such cognitive self-group distancing responses (Bourguignon et al., 2020, this issue; Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Derks, Van Laar, et al., 2011; Derks et al., 2015; Giasson et al., 2020, this issue; Kirby et al., 2020, this issue; Faniko et al., 2017). Examples are Asian minority members who describe themselves as more or less similar to the Asian ingroup in a U.S. organisational context (Kirby et al., 2020, this issue), or senior police women self-describing as highly masculine – that is, more in terms of stereotypes of the outgroup

(Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011; Derks, Van Laar, et al., 2011). Notably, research focusing on the cognitive manifestations of self-group distancing has shown that people might not always distance themselves from an entire identity or group, but particularly from the parts of the identity that are threatened in that outgroup context. For example, women in mathematics who experienced identity threat disavowed feminine characteristics strongly associated, but not those weakly associated, with stereotypes about women's potential for math success (Pronin et al., 2004). Similarly, women managers reported low affiliation specifically with women who prioritize their family life over their work, but did not report such distancing with successful women (Faniko et al., 2016).

Attitudinal measures of self-group distancing speak to the perceptions and feelings of the individual towards the ingroup or the outgroup. Examples are outgroup favouritism and more positive attitudes towards the outgroup, or lowered ingroup affect and more negative attitudes towards the ingroup (Derks et al., 2015; Essien et al., 2020, this issue; Guimond et al., 2002; Kende et al., 2020). Other examples are blaming the ingroup for their lower outcomes (Bourguignon et al., 2020, this issue), the endorsement of negative ingroup stereotypes (Derks, Ellemers, et al., 2011), denial of discrimination (Napier et al., 2020, this issue), and reduced support for collective action, affirmative action, or social change more generally (Derks et al., 2015; Faniko et al., 2017). These attitudinal forms of self-group distancing signal a distance or assertion towards the ingroup or outgroup without a direct reference to one's perceptions of the self in relation to one's own group memberships. Although these attitudinal responses do not explicitly include a measure of the self in relation to the ingroup or the outgroup, they do indirectly involve the self, in that they are geared toward avoiding the negative feeling of being stigmatized or reaping the benefits from being less sympathetic towards the ingroup, and therefore possibly being liked more by the high-status outgroup.

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Examples of *behavioural* manifestations of self-group distancing are identity expression or (attempts to) concealing one's stigmatized identity (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014; Veldman et al., 2020), turning one's gaze away from ingroup members towards outgroup members (Weiss & Freund, 2012), having fewer ingroup friendships (Ciftci et al., 2020, this issue; Ely, 1994), selecting outgroup members rather than ingroup members to join one's team (Duguid, 2011), showing less helping behaviour toward ingroup than outgroup members (Kaiser & Spalding, 2015), or showing reduced support towards the ingroup (e.g., lowered willingness to mentor ingroup members; Derks, Van Laar et al., 2011). In the current literature, behavioural manifestations of self-group distancing largely rely on self-report of past behaviour, or reflect a behavioural *intent* rather than the actual behaviour. Measures of behaviours are vastly scarcer in the literature (as in the general psychological literature).

Thus, the lion share of empirical research on self-group distancing focuses on cognitive and attitudinal indicators. Cognitive and attitudinal indicators are also often investigated simultaneously. This is valuable because it can either signal robustness of effects across several indicators of self-group distancing, or it can signal specificity of self-group distancing effects as manifesting on cognitive or attitudinal aspects only. Recent work has also begun to investigate cognitive and attitudinal manifestations of self-group distancing in sequential order, for example in path models demonstrating that female managers' tendency to emphasize one's difference from junior women explained their subsequent lower support for gender quota (Faniko et al., 2017). In future research we recommend adding the more scarce behavioural indicators of self-group distancing to such research designs.

Motivated, strategic, flexible, internalized, implicit?

Finally, across the literature, the nature of self-group distancing responses appear to differ from being a more strategically motivated response that is flexibly adjusted to the context, to a more implicit and internalized response that develops over time and that reflects changes in the

self-concept of group members facing stigma. From a social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individuals actively distance themselves from a stigmatized identity to restore a positive sense of self. The goal is to either avoid the negative feelings or consequences of being threatened, or to profit from not being associated with the stigma (Derks et al., 2016; Van Laar et al., 2019). In that sense, self-group distancing could be seen as a motivated and strategic process, because the stigmatized actor is perceived as an active agent, who flexibly copes with the identity threat to reduce this threat or to benefit in some other way. Examples of such motivated self-group distancing are often seen in research on concealable stigmatized identities, where sexual minorities or people suffering from mental or chronic physical illness make the conscious and motivated choice to not disclose their minority identity in some contexts in an effort to avoid being stigmatized or disadvantaged (Quinn et al., 2017). Similarly, experimental research on Queen Bee responses revealed that reminding women leaders in the police force of sexism at work led them to strategically present themselves as more masculine and different from other women, and to more strongly deny the existence of discrimination, a response that was less strong in the control condition (Derks, Van Laar et al., 2011).

However, as a coping mechanism, self-group distancing does not always have to be motivated or strategic. For example, socialization in a context that (implicitly) emphasizes the derogated status of a stigmatized ingroup or glorifies the high status of a dominant outgroup can also cause people from low-status groups to more or less automatically internalize properties of the high-status group as their own, and as such adjust to the status-quo in the hierarchy (e.g., Derks et al., 2016; see also related work on automatic tuning of attitudes towards influential others; Sinclair et al., 2005). For example, work by Faniko and colleagues (2017) demonstrates that women leaders' stronger resistance towards affirmative action policies is explained by the lack of similarity they perceive to young women, due to the fact that junior women have not (yet) made the high personal career sacrifices they themselves had to make to achieve success. Their

distancing from junior women is thus not so much strategic, but rather a result of how they perceive the situation. Another example of more internalized self-group distancing can be seen in academia, where standards of success are highly masculine. Here, female academics' professional self-descriptions tend to become increasingly agentic as they reach higher levels on the academic career ladder (e.g., from assistant to full professor; Faniko et al., in press). Likely, the highly masculine occupational stereotype of success in academia is internalized in women's self-concepts as they are socialized to become successful themselves.

Finally, another way to understand self-group distancing as either a more strategically motivated or more internalized response is by simultaneously examining self-perception ("Who I actually am") and self-presentation ("Who I appear to be"). In public (more than private) settings, particularly low identifying members of stigmatized groups tend to be more strategic in their tendency to either distance from or assert their ingroup membership (Barreto & Ellemers, 2000). For example, when non-religious people in highly religious Southern states in the United States experience identity threat, they are less likely to identify as "atheist" in public settings compared to in private settings (Mackey et al., 2020). Of course even such adaptations to the situation can be automatic, and need not be consciously made (see e.g., Sinclair et al., 2005).

These examples illustrate how self-group distancing can be a more internalized response that reflects how people actually see themselves in a given context, and how it can also be a more strategically motivated response, that may be flexibly adjusted or present the self in a particular way depending on the type of context or phase of group membership. Notably, pinpointing the exact nature of self-group distancing as being more strategic, motivated, flexibly adaptive, fixed and internalized, or implicit vs. explicit is still unexplored territory in current literature. For example, to date, there are no longitudinal studies providing insight into developmental changes in self-group distancing over time, such as among minority members who are newcomers in organisations or national cultures. Such research could shed more light on how self-group

distancing may, at first, be more of a strategic process with low-status group members wanting to achieve a positive representation of the self in relation to the majority group, while over time these self-presentations become part of an internalized self-perception.

In sum, manifestations of self-group distancing can be categorized as concerning a move away from the ingroup or toward the outgroup; as taking cognitive, attitudinal, or behavioural forms; and as being strategic, motivated, flexibly adjustable, internalized, and as implicit or explicit in nature. What connects these responses is that they all concern individuals dissociating from their stigmatized ingroup, either directly by moving the self away from the ingroup or towards the outgroup, or more indirectly by endorsing attitudes or behaviours that will have the consequence of dissociating the self from the ingroup. Depending on the type of research design and sample, the dynamics, manifestations and underlying nature of self-group distancing responses might differ. More systematic insight into these differences – for example, when are responses strategic or more internalized, or what contextual cues trigger more cognitive or more behavioural responses – forms an important avenue for future work.

Contexts: **When and where is self-group distancing more likely to occur?**

What are the contexts in which individuals are likely to distance themselves from a stigmatized identity? As a prerequisite for a self-group distancing coping mechanisms to be activated, individuals are generally in contexts where their social identity is devalued or threatened because their ingroup is underrepresented or negatively stereotyped, or because domains typically associated with the outgroup are strongly valued (Derks, Van Laar et al., 2011; Steele et al., 2002; Van Laar et al., 2010, 2019). These triggers can vary from relatively short-lived subtle cues and primes that signal bias (the micro-level; e.g., a reminder of a discriminatory experience, a sexist poster on the wall, a conversation with an outgroup member), to more institutionalized biased norms and regulations deeply embedded in societal and organizational systems and cultures (the meso- or macro-level; e.g., a highly competitive working climate, an

organisational culture that tolerates discrimination, unequal parental leave rights in society, lack of protection for LGBTQ+ in an organization or society; Cifti et al., 2020, this issue; Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Hall et al., 2015; Napier et al., 2020, this issue; Van Veelen et al., 2019). In the face of such ingroup threat or stigma, minority members typically cope by either defending and improving the position of the ingroup as a whole (e.g., collective action) or by improving their own position via individual mobility strategies (e.g., self-group distancing). Below we discuss three situations in which a self-group distancing response is particularly likely to occur, namely: (1) when group discrimination is *covert or ambiguous*, (2) when boundaries between ingroup and outgroup membership are (perceived as) more *permeable*, and (3) when inequality is seen as having some *legitimacy* (for similar discussion see Branscombe et al., 2012).

When group discrimination is covert or ambiguous

When acts of social discrimination are so overtly blatant, indisputably unjust, and victims of physical or psychological violence are to be mourned (e.g., Harvey Weinstein's sexual abuse; George Floyd's death caused by a White policeman), these instances tend to trigger moral outrage, anger and protest on a collective level in the form of social movements to fight for equality of an entire social category (e.g., #metoo and #blacklivesmatter movements; see also Van Zomeren et al., 2008 for a social identity model on collective action). However, outside of the public eye, there are many more covert and subtle forms of discrimination that take place on a daily basis at school, at work or in one's own local community. Because these forms of discrimination are often more implicit, intangible and hard to recognize, they are difficult to protest on a collective level and not easily warded off via formal anti-discrimination laws and policies. Therefore, covert or ambiguous forms of discrimination are likely to stimulate individual mobility strategies such as self-group distancing to deal with the discriminatory situation. Remaining group inequalities are then also increasingly explained as "individual

choices" of low-status group members to stay in the disadvantaged position they are in (Stephens & Levine, 2011; Van Engen et al., 2012).

There is mounting evidence supporting the idea that particularly covert forms of discrimination and bias may evoke self-group distancing responses. For example, at a societal level, Giasson and colleagues (2020, this issue) demonstrated that when regional levels of *implicit* age bias were high, older adults tended to distance the self more strongly from their older age (i.e., to report feeling younger than they actually are). No such distancing effects were found for regional levels of explicit age bias, suggesting that more covert implicit forms of ageism in society will trigger self-group distancing responses more so than explicit forms. Similarly, at the organizational level, colourblind diversity policies communicate a norm that everybody should be equal and that differences in demographic background or group membership should not matter in an organisation (Gündemir et al., 2019; Kirby et al., 2020, this issue; Plaut, 2002; Rattan & Ambady, 2013). Although often well-intentioned, these colourblind messages typically tend to *cover up* existing inequalities and biases in organisations, and lead racial minority members to feel pressured to distance from their identity (see Gutiérrez & Unzueta, 2010) and to "Whiten" their self-presentation (Kang et al., 2016; see also Kirby et al., 2020, this issue).

When group boundaries are (perceived as) more permeable

When group boundaries are perceived as more permeable, disadvantaged individuals' access to a high-status group seems a more realistic option, making it more likely to pursue self- rather than group-interest (Wright et al., 1990). Consequently, self-group distancing to improve one's individual status position seems a more viable option when group boundaries are considered more permeable (Bourguignon et al., 2020, this issue, 2015; Branscombe et al., 2012; Ellemers, 1993; Essien et al., 2020, this issue; Sealy, 2010). Particularly in today's diverse and global society group boundaries appear more permeable, because group identities are increasingly multifaceted and blended and it is often less obvious to differentiate people on the

basis of social categories such as wealth, gender or age (Bodenhausen, 2010). Thus, being rich or poor, masculine or feminine, young or old seems to increasingly become a matter of individual responsibility; a choice that is amendable, rather than fixed (Armenta et al., 2017; Stephens & Levine, 2011). We also see this in societal trends such that people increasingly adjust their clothing, skin colour or hair style to fit with certain ethnic or cultural groups (The New Yorker, 2019), people increasingly migrate and adopt new nationalities (International Organization for Migration, 2020), and people increasingly use cosmetic surgery to make themselves look younger than they actually are (Insider, 2019). These examples illustrate a strong societal narrative of individual mobility to improve one's standing in many places: group permeability causes upward mobility to be perceived as accessible for everyone as long as you make the right individual choices (Wright & Taylor, 1998; Wright et al., 1990).

An important factor that determines group permeability is perceived *meritocracy* – the idea that individuals advance in a social hierarchy based on their merit (e.g., in terms of intelligence, performance). For example, in the banking industry, research by Sealy (2010) revealed that the belief of early career women that 'the world is a fair place' and 'people get what they deserve' led them to mimic the masculine and aggressive communication styles of their successful male colleagues, and to pretend to be "one of the guys", in order to advance to male-dominated top positions in finance. Also, higher education has become more accessible to people from a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds. Yet an ironic consequence of this (perceived) meritocracy is that less educated people are seen as more responsible and blameworthy for having a more disadvantageous position in society (Kuppens et al., 2018). Finally, in highly sexist or racist societies, meritocracy beliefs can lead disadvantaged group members to downplay the severity of discrimination against them as a way to cope with inequality (Napier et al., 2020, this issue; Suppes et al., 2018). These examples illustrate that disadvantaged group members' meritocracy beliefs contribute to their perception that intergroup

boundaries are permeable and that it is thus their own individual responsibility and choice to make it to a higher-status position.

Another factor that increases the perceived permeability of group boundaries, and therewith the viability of self-group distancing, is the *concealability* of one's low-status group membership. Group members with *concealable* stigmas are likely to perceive group boundaries as more permeable, because their stigmatized identity is not always signalled, making it easier for them to pass as a high-status outgroup member. When stigmatized group identities are not directly visible (e.g., sexual orientation, mental health issues) this creates the option to conceal, more so than when stigmatized identities are directly visible (e.g., skin colour, age, weight). Indeed, self-group distancing tends to be stronger in samples with gay compared to samples with Black participants (Bourguignon et al., 2020, this issue; see also Quinn et al., 2017). Nevertheless, group members who deal with visible stigma also vary in their concealability depending on their *phenotypic prototypicality* (i.e.*,* the degree to which individuals' appearances are perceived to be similar to a group prototype; Davies et al., 2016; Kahn & Davies, 2010). Research shows that the lighter the skin tone of African-American individuals, the more they favoured White people over Black people in an implicit bias test (Essien et al., 2020, this issue). Also, the less prototypical Black and Latino group members' ingroup features the lower identification with their racial ingroup (Harvey et al., 2005; Wilkins et al., 2010), and the lower overweight people's self-reported weight status (i.e., the less overweight they perceive themselves to be) the stronger their outgroup favouritism towards normal versus overweight individuals (Essien et al., 2020, this issue). Taken together, the more individuals consider a stigma associated with their ingroup as concealable, the more permeable group boundaries are perceived, and thus the stronger self-group distancing responses.

When inequality is seen as having some legitimacy

When disadvantaged group members see social inequality as more *legitimate*, this spurs self-group distancing as a viable coping strategy. In some organisational cultures, the stereotypical standard of success is so inherently connected with attributes we typically associate with a heteronormative, White-male majority, that the preferential treatment of this majority group over for example a minority of women is perceived as legitimate. For example, in the military and police force (Veldman et al., 2017; Veldman et al., 2020), and among surgeons (Peters et al., 2012), engineers (Van Veelen et al., 2019), and economists (Derks et al., 2018), the occupational stereotype of success is highly masculine and connected to agentic attributes considered typically masculine, such as (physical) strength, cognitive brilliance, and being tough, self-focused and a superhero (Cejka & Eagly, 1999). In such contexts, women (and men) may actually perceive that the underrepresentation and devaluation of women is legitimate (Branscombe et al., 2012). To illustrate this, when women experience sexism in an organisation, the more co-workers seem to tolerate (i.e., legitimate) this sexism, the less women are likely to befriend their female co-workers, preventing them from seeking the collective support systems they might need (Ciftci et al., 2020, this issue; see also Napier et al., 2020, this issue).

Finally, it seems that in heteronormative, White-male dominant organisational cultures, particularly newcomers are likely to perceive that existing social hierarchies are legitimate, and in response to this, their tendency to engage in self-group distancing is stronger. This was for example suggested in the earlier discussed research among women in the banking industry (Sealy, 2010), where women were more likely to report engaging in self-group distancing strategies at the beginning of their careers than later on. Similarly, in a longitudinal study among Latino students entering White-majority US universities, in their first year they tried to assimilate to the White majority university culture in response to perceived discrimination. Yet by the time they reached their senior year they more strongly asserted their ethnic identity in response to such discrimination (Cronin et al., 2012). Allegedly, these longitudinal changes in newcomers' self-

group distancing responses are attributable to a change in the perceived legitimacy of the experienced stigma over time, yet further research to empirically support this is needed.

Consequences: What are the consequences of self-group distancing?

Contextual and individual difference variables form the input factors to explain when, where, and why self-group distancing occurs in our social environment. As illustrated in Figure 2, the important follow-up question is then what the consequences of distancing are. Does self-group distancing help stigmatized group members to avoid or alleviate negative feelings of bias and discrimination? Does it benefit their well-being, motivation and self-esteem? And ultimately, does it lead to upward mobility and improve their individual status position? The effects of self-group distancing point to contrasting results. We first discuss individual-level costs and benefits of self-group distancing, and then discuss collective consequences at the group, organisational and societal level.

Consequences for the individual

When self-group distancing is operationalized as *a move away from the ingroup* (e.g., disidentification, hiding one's ingroup identity, dissociating the self from the ingroup) its consequences seem to be largely negative, particularly in relation to health and well-being. For example, even though people believe that others may view them more favourably when they conceal a stigmatised identity (e.g., sexual orientation, mental health issues; Goh et al., 2019; Newheiser & Barreto, 2014), such concealment leads to lower performance-related self-confidence, authenticity feelings, work engagement, and well-being (Barreto et al., 2006; Newheiser et al., 2017; Quinn et al., 2017; Uysal et al., 2010; see also minority stress model, Dyar & London, 2018). Moreover, a daily-diary study among female soldiers showed that on days that women dissociated more from their female colleagues, they reported lower well-being and job motivation (Veldman et al., 2020). Similarly, the more gay individuals expressed their wish to not be homosexual or to be dissociated from homosexuality, the lower their psychological

well-being (Bourguignon et al., 2020, this issue). Finally, as people age, they tend to increasingly dissociate from becoming older (i.e., perceive themselves as younger than their chronological age; Weiss & Lang, 2012). Yet, large-scale longitudinal community research revealed that older adults (aged ≥ 50 years) who held more negative aging self-perceptions lived up to 7.5 years shorter across a 23 year timespan (Levy et al., 2002; see also Giasson et al., 2020, this issue; Westerhof et al., 2014). This demonstrates that age-group dissociation has negative consequences for longevity.

An important reason why moving the self away from a stigmatized ingroup has negative consequences for individuals' health and well-being is that it thwarts identity-specific motives, such as self-esteem, belonging, and efficacy, and in turn negatively affects felt authenticity (Crabtree & Pillow, 2020, this issue; see also Dormanen et al., 2020). Not being able to be your true self because of a discriminatory context takes its toll, psychologically and physically. Additionally, following the rejection-identification model (Branscombe et al., 1999) and research on the social cure (Jetten et al., 2011), assertion of one's stigmatized ingroup forms an important source of ingroup support and protection, sources from which one can no longer profit when one distances the self from the ingroup (Correll & Park, 2005; Haslam et al., 2005, 2018; Latrofa et al., 2009; Van Laar et al., 2014).

Even though the costs of self-group distancing can be high for one's health, well-being, and social support systems, people still do it. What then are its benefits? First, as an avoidance tactic, self-group distancing in response to a negative source of ingroup threat can *reduce immediate physical and psychological stressors*, such as pain and negative emotions. For example, in very hostile environments, hiding a concealable identity (e.g., sexual orientation) can be a way to prevent being physically harmed (Pasek et al., 2017). Similarly, to the extent that self-group distancing reaches the goal of not being stigmatized it can reduce stress levels (Major & Schmader, 2017; Schmader & Sedikides, 2017). Second, self-group distancing can *provide a*

sense of control in an otherwise uncontrollable stigmatizing context. For example, the mere *belief*
that one can conceal an identity can provide a sense of agency in navigating social contexts, such
that it results in less anxiety and more openness towards anticipated interaction with outgroup
members (Le Forestier et al., 2020, this issue). Similarly, the more elderly adults *believe* that they
look and feel younger than their peers, the more resilient they are against ageist stereotypes
(Eibach et al., 2010), the higher their self-esteem (Weiss et al., 2013), and the more positive their
future outlook in life (Armenta et al., 2017). Third, self-group distancing in the form of *denying*
that discrimination exists has also been shown to benefit stigmatized individual's well-being
(Napier et al., 2020, this issue; Suppes et al., 2019). By derogating the severity of the stigma
itself, people do not give up their ingroup membership (and hence still profit from being
identified with and supported by their ingroup), but rather disregard the problem of ingroup
stigma.

Ultimately, an important question is whether self-group distancing actually *contributes to*
attaining individual upward mobility, for example by being accepted in a high-status group.
Indirect support for the idea that self-group distancing could contribute to upward mobility comes
from research showing that distancing responses are particularly found among women who have
successfully attained senior leadership positions (Derks et al., 2016). Also, recent cross-sectional
field data shows that particularly female (more than male) academics' tendency to describe the
self as masculine becomes stronger with every step up in the academic rank (i.e., assistant,
associate or full professor; Van Veelen & Derks, 2020). There is also recent experimental work
showing that women who deny the existence of gender bias and the need for affirmative action
are perceived as less threatening by men, are evaluated more positively, and are selected more
often for leadership positions compared to men who express the same opinions and to women
who challenge the gender hierarchy (Derks et al., in prep; Domen et al., in prep). These findings
can be interpreted as suggesting that self-group distancing is helpful or even necessary for

women to move up the career ladder in male-dominated contexts. Nevertheless, recent evidence also points to backlash in response to self-group distancing, such that when women (but not men) presented themselves as less feminine and more masculine in their application for a job in a male-dominated profession, they were less likely to be hired, due to not adhering to their prescribed (i.e., communal) gender role (He & Kang, in press). These contradicting findings suggest that to attain upward mobility minority groups need to walk a tightrope: On the one hand, assimilation to the high-status outgroup seems strategic in order to fit in and attain prestigious positions, while on the other hand minority members are penalized for not adhering to the prescriptive stereotypes of their minority ingroup (Williams & Dempsey, 2018).

Taken together, it seems that there are benefits to self-group distancing when it protects against the negative effects of being stigmatized (e.g., temporarily alleviate stress, gain a sense of control), when it improves individual opportunities, or when individuals do not have to actually sacrifice their ingroup membership for it (i.e., by moving towards the outgroup, rather than away from the ingroup). However, when ingroup support is lost, when basic belonging and authenticity needs are threatened because stigmatized group members move away from a stigmatized ingroup identity, or when minority members are penalized for not adhering to prescriptive ingroup norms, then self-group distancing is likely detrimental to health, well-being and upward mobility.

Consequences for the collective

Self-group distancing does not only affect the individual, but also the collective: groups, organizations and society at large. When an individual ingroup member self-group distances in response to discrimination, this is often negatively judged by fellow ingroup members as a lack of ingroup loyalty (Bourguignon et al., 2020, this issue; Gaines, 2001; Haslam et al., 2004). As such, an individual's coping strategy to move away from an ingroup is likely to be accompanied by a collective push from fellow ingroup members to marginalize this group member and to retract their ingroup support (Van Laar et al., 2014). This is for example coined in derogatory

terms like "Bounty" and "Oreo" to address Black Americans who adopt "White" behaviours (see also Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). At the same time, self-group distancing responses coming from an ingroup member are less often recognized as being discriminatory than when outgroup members show the same behaviour (see also work on intergroup sensitivity; Hornsey et al., 2002). For example, junior women perceived female leaders displaying "Queen-bee type" behaviours as having more positive intent toward women relative to male leaders displaying the same behaviours (Sterk et al., 2018; see also Baron et al., 1991; Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Cunningham et al., 2009).

Moreover, through the eyes of high-status outgroup members, it can be quite a relief when low-status group members engage in self-group distancing responses to cope with stigma. First, recent evidence shows that when women legitimize (rather than oppose) current gender inequalities this evokes less negative emotions and cardiovascular threat responses among men (Domen et al., in prep). Second, if people conceal a stigmatized identity, for example to boost their confidence to interact with a high-status outgroup member (Le Forestier, et al., 2020, this issue), then this interaction ultimately does very little to improve or change majority members' stigmatized attitudes, because the outgroup partner likely does not know that they are interacting with someone who is facing stigma. Thus, low-status group members' self-group distancing may alleviate high-status group members from potential status threats, and from their responsibility to challenge an unequal status quo alongside minority groups. Nevertheless, recent work also shows that not acknowledging or disclosing one's membership to a low-status ingroup can carry social repercussions from the high-status outgroup. Specifically, when biracial Asian/White or Black/White students applying for a university program did not disclose their membership to multiple racial groups (but rather presented as monoracial), this led monoracial White participants to evaluate these students more negatively and as more untrustworthy (Albuja, Sanchez, & Gaither, 2018). Taken together, recent empirical work suggests that self-group

distancing coping mechanisms put already quite invisible and unrecognizable forms of discrimination even more deeply underground, and may even disturb trust relations with high-status outgroup members. Dissociating, denying, or hiding the stigma associated with one's ingroup membership functions as a vicious cycle for perpetuating existing intergroup inequalities, because the stigma is not addressed or made visible, and as such there is no incentive to address the discrimination or to take action on a collective level (Napier et al., 2020, this issue; Suppes et al., 2019).

Distancing the self from an underrepresented group also reduces the potential for organisations to benefit from diversity, for example in relation to the innovative capacity and improved performance that having diversity in perspectives and knowledge might bring (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Galinsky et al., 2015; Van Veelen & Ufkes, 2019), and in relation to capitalizing on diverse labour market talent by being an attractive employer for people from diverse backgrounds (Derks et al., 2016; Ellemers & Rink, 2017). First, for minority groups to consider an organisation to be an attractive workplace the representation of members of stigmatized groups is crucial (Avery et al., 2008; Richman et al., 2011; Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2002; Van Veelen et al., 2019). Such visibility of stigmatized groups normalizes their presence and helps to change social attitudes (Pasek et al., 2017). Reduced visibility of stigmatized groups due to self-group distancing (e.g., by concealing, hiding, denying) thwarts this need. Secondly, absence of identity safety also reduces the potential to benefit from diversity. For example, women in more senior positions in organizational contexts are more reluctant to help other women, especially those in junior positions (Faniko et al., 2017), and it is particularly such support from ingroup members in more senior positions that is needed to attract and retain junior employees in stereotyped domains (Dasgupta, 2011; Dennehy & Dasgupta, 2017; Sterk et al., 2018; Van Laar et al., 2014).

Finally, if self-group distancing benefits the personal situation of a small group of individuals from stigmatized groups then this further strengthens the societal narrative that individual mobility is the royal road to improving one's standing. The presence of a few members of disadvantaged groups in high-status positions (i.e., "tokens") feeds the narrative that upward mobility is accessible for everyone as long as you assimilate to the context and make the right individual choices (Wright & Taylor, 1998; Wright et al., 1990), and that group inequalities can be explained as "choices" that individual members of the group have made (Stephens & Levine, 2011; Van Engen et al., 2012).

Alternative strategies and interventions

The above overview shows that even though self-group distancing may benefit some individuals, it does not seem to be an optimal solution to reduce social inequality. Self-group distancing to improve one's position makes stigmatized people individually responsible for a systemic problem, without actually addressing the inequality itself. That is, social inequalities will not change with interventions in which stigmatized individuals learn how to better conform to a prevailing majority norm. We see this for example in assertiveness training and negotiation workshops for women and ethnic minority groups to help them advance their careers ('fix the women'). There is accumulating evidence that interventions that take a "targeted approach" to try and help minority members improve their status positions are not only often ineffective, they can even result in backlash (Crosby et al., 2014; Unzueta et al., 2010). For example, women (but not men) who display such more assertive behaviour during salary or promotion negotiations are penalized, because they are considered 'unkind' and 'bossy' – with negative consequences for their propensity to get promoted or to obtain a raise (Bowles et al., 2007). Instead of putting the onus on individual low-status group members to seek individual coping strategies such as self-group distancing to deal with stigma, interventions that target the biased systems and culture are more likely to be effective in reducing social inequality.

Research on interventions that deter stigmatized individuals from engaging in self-group distancing responses is scarce. However, other work, for example on diversity interventions, already suggests effective interventions likely to be relevant here as well (for an overview see Van Laar et al., 2019). First of all, research of Ciftci and colleagues (2020, this issue) shows the importance of anti-discrimination norms, especially among co-workers. When the norm among peers is to not tolerate discrimination, then people are more likely to cope with individual instances of discrimination by drawing towards other ingroup members instead of moving away from them. As outlined above, this ingroup support is important for protecting stigmatized group members' resilience against stigma and their positive self-regard and well-being. Hence, it is important that individuals of low-status groups do not feel isolated in their experience of stigma or threat, because this makes them more likely to think that the problem requires an individual solution.

Second, it is important that organisations communicate anti-discrimination norms, not merely via diversity statements or ideologies on a website (Gündemir et al., 2019; Plaut, 2002), but also by ensuring that the actual norm is enacted on the work floor and is felt among co-workers. As suggested by Kirby and colleagues (2020, this issue), one way to do that is via identity safety cues (Chaney et al., 2016; Emerson & Murphy, 2014). When stigmatized individuals signal identity safety cues (e.g., pictures displayed with co-workers from multiple backgrounds, fair and transparent promotion and reward systems), this can lead to greater feelings of acceptance due to lower perceived bias (Meeussen et al., 2014) and thus likely reduces the tendency to self-group distance. The difficulty is that an identity safe cue for one minority member or group, may act as a threat to others. For example, while a multiculturalist statement from a company CEO may lead some to assert their minority identity at work, for others it may evoke a distancing response, because it puts them in the "Minority Spotlight" (Kirby et al., 2020, this issue; Zhou & Cheryan, 2015). This teaches us that a one-size-fits-all approach to

organisational diversity interventions aimed at reducing self-group distancing tendencies among minority groups is difficult and that more research should be done on what works for whom.

Organisations can also change the norm on what it means to be successful and for whom this is attainable. Very narrowly-defined norms of success with steep "up-or-out" systems (such as in finance, consultancy, and academia) are very excluding and communicate that one should either adhere to a White heteronormative standard of success (which is likely to promote self-group distancing) or seek a career elsewhere. The presence of minority group role models in key positions in the organization can broaden the perspective on who fits these positions and improve performance, self-evaluations and aspiration among low-status groups (Lockwood, 2006; O'Brien et al., 2016; for a review see Morgenroth et al., 2015). Norms on what it means to be successful can also be changed by developing more inclusive reward and promotion structures. For example, academic research is a traditionally masculine domain and its reward and success is still very much driven by individualism and competition. Teamwork and collegiality, characteristics typically more associated with women, are valued less. When such reward systems become more inclusive, the image of what it means to be successful in the field broadens the scope for more diverse career trajectories (Van Veelen & Derks, 2020; VSNU, 2019) and is likely to reduce the need for minority members (women in this case) to assimilate to a majority norm.

Finally, societal systems and cultures at large may cause stigmatized individuals to seek individual coping mechanisms to deal with their disadvantage. Sexism (Napier et al., 2020, this issue) and ageism (Giasson et al., 2020, this issue) on the country- or regional-level drive women and older adults to deny or distance from the societal stigma that they face because of their gender and age identity. When entire subpopulations in society are not acknowledged as full-fledged group members in their country or region, such bias is so systematic that even minority members themselves justify their derogated position. These deeply-rooted biased societies should

be tackled from the top-down in formal governmental laws and regulations that ensure equal rights, but also from the bottom-up, by changing the narrative in informal conversations at work, on the street, and at home, because daily conversations on the micro-level about what is considered 'normal' can be a vehicle for social change on the macro-level (Koudenburg et al., 2017). At the meso-level, the role of the media, the arts, and advertisement in communicating positive (instead of negative or stereotype-confirming) messages about for example older age and health, women as leaders, and fathers as caregivers can be crucial to improve self-perceptions and well-being of minority groups in society (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Westerhoff et al., 2014).

Advancing the research agenda on self-group distancing

Based on the state of the art we have outlined we see the following as the most important avenues for future research on self-group distancing, in addition to the research directions discussed above. First, while the knowledge-base on the type of contexts that may trigger self-group distancing is quite extensive, far less is known about the *development of self-group distancing*. For example, when during childhood and puberty do children learn to strategically or perhaps automatically distance themselves from their stigmatized identity? And what role do parents, peers, and school systems have in this? Parents want their children to be accepted and to have friends, and not to be bullied or excluded, which may unconsciously manifest in pedagogical cues that communicate to hide or deny low-status group memberships. Secondly, another important avenue for future research is the longitudinal development of minority groups' self-group distancing responses among newcomers in organisations or countries. For example, when over the course of their careers do disadvantaged group members develop self-group distancing responses, and what are the "trigger points" that activate this? Does self-group distancing develop in a linear fashion – with distancing increasing over time – or curvilinear in that minority group members use distancing as long as it is effective but are able to reassert their ingroup identity once they have secured a position of power in an organisation? In that sense,

self-group distancing could be a strategic "Trojan Horse", such that at mid-career level, self-representing as similar to a high-status outgroup may help successful upward mobility, but once a high-status position is secured, "pretending" to be one of the White, heterosexual guys is less necessary.

A second point on the research agenda on self-group distancing is the need for more clarity on *short- and long-term consequences* of self-group distancing. What we conclude from our state of the art is that individual-level outcomes, for example in relation to health and well-being are paradoxical. Perhaps, while self-group distancing helps in the short run (e.g., to strategically avoid being discriminated against), over time, discarding crucial elements of one's social self is cognitively depleting and deteriorates one's needs for belonging and authenticity, with negative mental and physical health consequences. More insight is needed in whether paradoxical consequences of self-group distancing can be better understood when examined in the short- and long-term, and when strategic (self-presentation) or more internalized (self-perception).

Finally, recent research has started to focus not only on consequences of self-group distancing for minority groups, but also *for majority groups and organisations and societies at large* (Derks et al., in prep; Domen et al., in prep). Minority members' self-group distancing responses might help majority group members, alleviating them from potential status loss threats as the status quo is not questioned and social hierarchies are kept in place. But ultimately, endorsing self-group distancing as a viable approach for disadvantaged groups to deal with stigma leads to unhealthier, less fair, and more polarized societies. To this end, it is important to understand circumstances under which majority members too perceive that minority members' self-group distancing responses are counterproductive to instigate a change towards more equal and inclusive social systems.

To conclude, with this paper we provided an overview of the state of the art on self-group distancing, including the latest papers in this special issue. We reflected on the current empirical knowledge-base and provided a framework on what self-group distancing is; when, where and why self-group distancing likely occurs; and what its consequences are at the individual and the collective level. The contributions in this special issue provide novel insights into how these processes unfold over a variety of contexts and samples as discussed above and summarized in Table 1. Important lacunas that we identified in the current empirical knowledge-base on self-group distancing include its longitudinal development, the potential interventions and alternatives to prevent it, and how majority groups and institutional systems can be included as part of the dynamic to explain causes, consequences, and persistence of self-group distancing. We hope this provides a starting point for researchers when extending research insights on self-group distancing.

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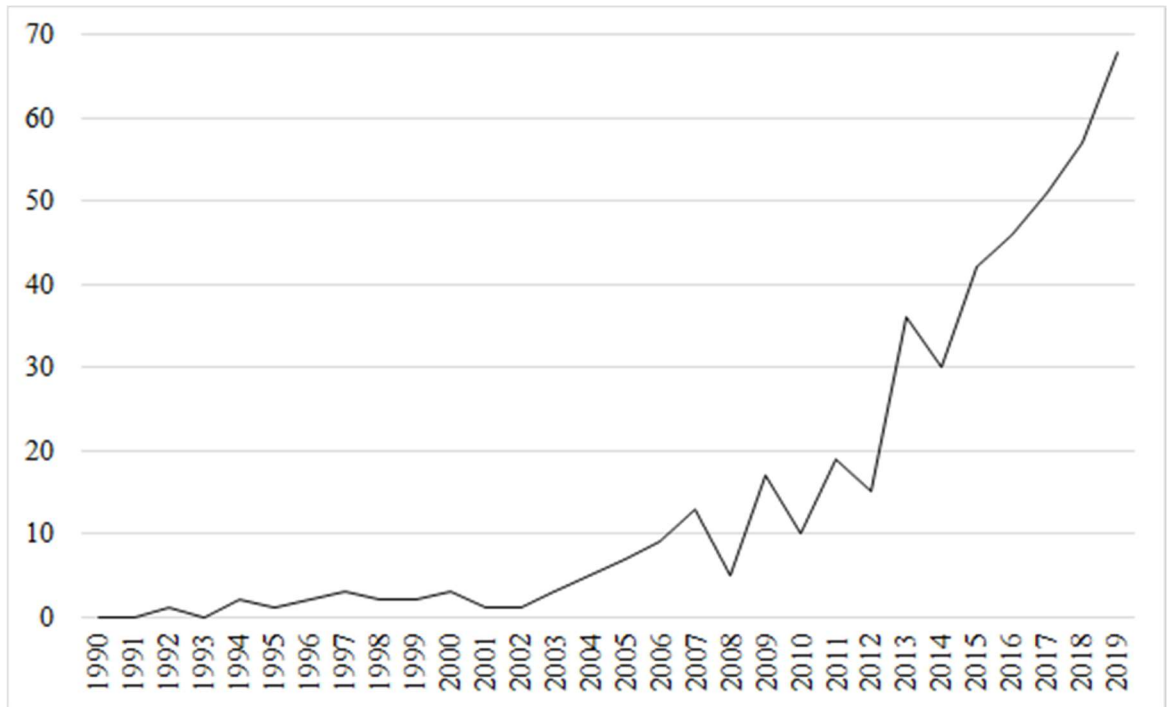
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Figure 1. The yearly absolute number of journal articles whose abstracts jointly reference distancing ("self-group distancing" or "concealment" or "disidentification" or "queen bee" or "hiding") and stigma ("social identity" or "social identity threat" or "identity threat" or "stigma"). Web of Science, 2020.
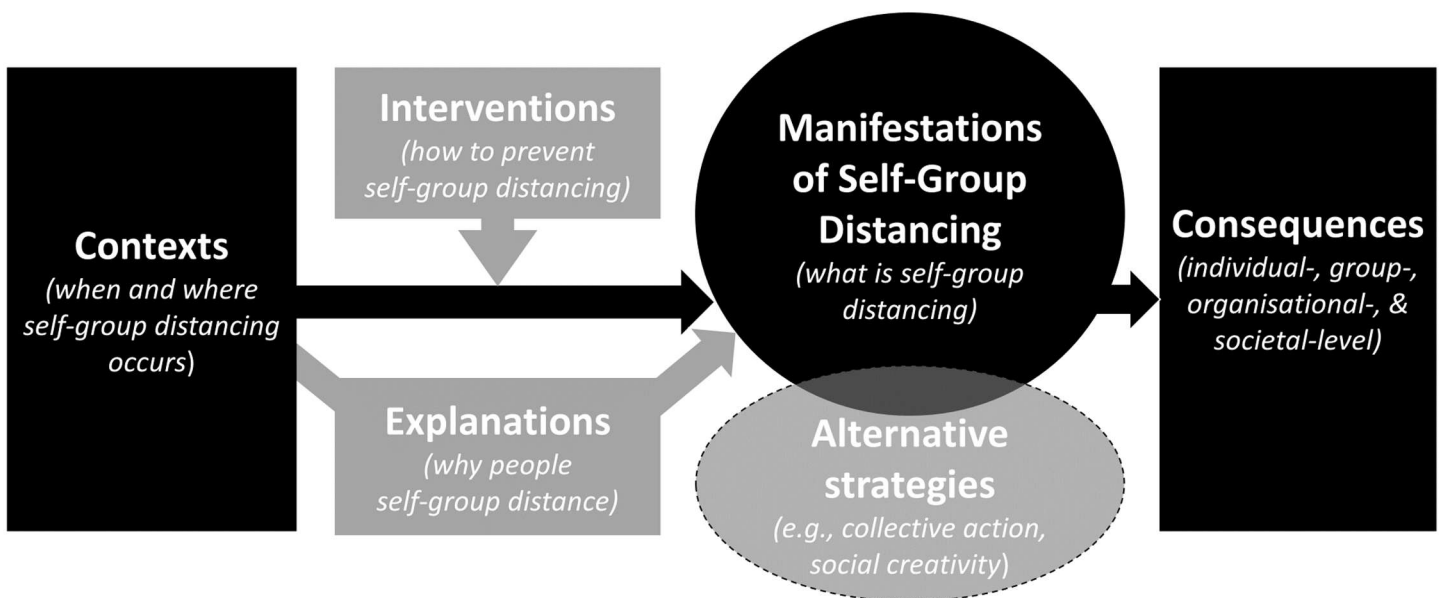

Figure 2. Input-Process-Output (IPO) model on the Manifestations, Explanations, Contexts, Consequences, Interventions, and Alternative Strategies in relation to Self-Group Distancing.

Table 1. Overview of papers included in this special issue

Authors	Key parameters addressed (Figure 2)	Key take-home message	Method	Sample (location)	N	Operationalisation self-group distancing	Independent variables	Dependent variables	Mediators (Med) & Moderators (Mod)
Essien, Otten, & Degner	Context; Explanations	Individuals who are less prototypical of their group (e.g., Black individuals with light skin) are less likely to identify with their group and more likely to self-group distance by (explicitly and implicitly) favouring the outgroup over their ingroup.	Correlational	Black individuals, overweight individuals, individuals with disabilities (Project Implicit online subject pool)	125915 + 766 + 147540 + 35058	Explicit and implicit outgroup preference	Ingroup typicality (more light-skinned Black individuals, lower body weight, less visible disabilities)	Outgroup vs. ingroup preference (explicit and implicit measures)	Ingroup identification (Med); Perceptions of discrimination (Med)
Bourguignon, Teixeira, Koc, Outten, Faniko, & Schmitt	Context; Explanations; Consequences; Alternative strategies	Identification predicts more engagement but less disengagement coping strategies (incl. less self-group distancing). Self-group distancing generally associated with lower well-being and lower life-satisfaction. Self-group distancing appears to be used more at low permeability; when more concealable.	Correlational	Lesbian/Gay individuals (Belgium, Canada, & USA); Black individuals (Canada & USA)	194 + 560 + 301+ 203	Identity concealment; Psychological distancing	Discrimination; Identification	Well-being (self-esteem); Life satisfaction	Ingroup engagement vs disenagagement (Med); Ingroup identification (Med)
Kirby, Rego, & Kaiser	Context; Explanations; Interventions	Organizations' diversity messages influence minority identity expression or assertion,	Experimental	Asian undergraduate students (USA)	325 + 282	Ingroup similarity; Self-stereotyping	Diversity messages (multiculturalism vs.	Ingroup similarity; Self-stereotyping	Ingroup identification (Mod); Trust and safety (Med)

		depending on their own racial identification.						colourblindness) in organisation	
Ciftci, Doyle, van Breen, & Darden	Context; Interventions; Alternative strategies	In organisational contexts where female co-workers have low tolerance for sexism, women respond to sexism experiences by moving towards other female co-workers, rather than distancing from them.	Correlational; Experimental	Women (UK)	405 + 377 + 391	(Lack of) workplace friendships; Closeness with other women	Organizational climate (tolerance for sexism); Sexism experienced	Workplace friendships with other women; Closeness to female co-workers	
Giasson & Chopik	Context; Consequences	State-level age biases affect older adults' individual tendency to distance from their chronological age and it appears to affect older adults' health outcomes on the state-level.	Correlational; Multi-level	Project Implicit online subject pool (USA)	803009	Distance score subjective age compared to objective age	Implicit age bias on state level	Distance subjective age compared to objective age; State-level health outcomes	
Napier, Suppes, & Bettinsoli	Context; Explanations; Consequences	Shows that a particular form of self-group distancing (denial of discrimination) may have positive effects for well-being as it has a palliative system justifying function. This is particularly likely in contexts where sexist ideas are readily endorsed.	Correlational; Multi-level	Men/women in the USA (National samples) and Cross-National samples from 23 countries.	803 + 5225 + 17131	Denial of discrimination	Denial of discrimination; Country-level sexism (Study 3)	Life satisfaction; Well-being	System justification (Mod)
Le Forestier, Page-Gould, Lai, & Chasteen	Explanations; Consequences	Believing that one's identity is concealable affords a person control over their social world that is not possible for	Correlational	Project Implicit online subject pool (various countries)	1012 + 592	Subjective identity concealability beliefs	Subjective identity concealability; Identity category;	Intergroup anxiety; Initiation of intergroup contact; Quantity and quality of	Intergroup anxiety (Med)

		less concealable identities; they are less anxious about contact with people who do not have that identity and more willing to engage in contact.					Stigmatized group status	cross-group friendships	
Crabtree & Pillow	Consequences; Alternative strategies	People feel more authentic when they enact (vs. conceal) their identities, because this enactment satisfies identity-specific motives. Stigmatized identities are enacted less and concealed more, in turn thwarting motives and relating to feeling less authentic.	Correlational	Undergraduate Psychology students (USA)	343 + 344	Identity concealment; Identity enactment	Identity concealment; Identity enactment; Stigmatized group status; Identity centrality	Authenticity	Motive fulfilment (self-esteem, efficacy, belonging, continuity, distinctiveness, meaning; Med)