

MY BOSS IS YOUNGER, LESS EDUCATED, AND HAS A SHORTER TENURE: WHEN
AND WHY STATUS (IN)CONGRUENCE INFLUENCES SUBORDINATES' FAIRNESS
PERCEPTIONS

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Supervisors are usually older, more educated, and of longer tenure than their subordinates, a situation known as status congruence. However, increasingly subordinates experience *status incongruence*, in which their supervisors lack the traditional status markers (such as age, education, and tenure) that their subordinates have. We examine how status congruence/incongruence interacts with supervisors' competence to influence subordinates' perceptions of promotion system fairness and their subsequent work motivation. Grounded in system justification theory, we found that when the supervisor was relatively less competent, status congruence was more likely to serve as a basis of system justification and thus enhance the perceived fairness of the promotion system (Study 1). Moreover, this interaction was stronger among subordinates who experienced low power, a known elicitor of people's system justification motivation (Study 2). In further support of the system justification mechanism, when the supervisor was less competent, status congruence influenced the fairness perceptions of low-power but not high-power subordinates (Study 3). Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, the strongest and most selfless person I know,

Yanying Shen

谨以此博士论文献给我的母亲，世上最坚强而无私的人，

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Subordinates usually expect their supervisors to be older, more educated, and of longer tenure than themselves, a situation known as status congruence. However, they increasingly experience *status incongruence*, in which status markers (such as age, education, and tenure), traditionally associated with supervisor and subordinate positions are reversed (Triana, Richard, & Yücel, 2017). Status incongruence is experienced by a large percentage of the working population in the U.S. Take age for example; in 2014, 38% of American workers had a younger boss, up from 34% in 2012 (CareerBuilder Survey, 2014); whereas managers, with an average age of 45.2 years old, were younger than about 50% of their direct reports (Governing.com, 2012). The trend toward status incongruence is only likely to grow as employees are retiring later due to increased longevity and financial necessity (Kunze, Boehm, & Bruch, 2001), and as companies rely less on seniority-based promotions to prevent stagnant hierarchies and to reinforce the importance of merit as a basis of promotion (Chiang & Birtch, 2007). Given the growing ubiquity of status incongruence (Triana et al., 2017), it behooves us to know how, when, and why status incongruence influences employees' work attitudes and behaviors.

Prior theory and research on status markers has provided little insight into the consequences of status incongruence. Instead, status characteristics theory has mainly studied the effect of status markers (e.g., age, education, and tenure) on the *attainment* of high-status positions (see Wagner & Berger, 1993 for a review). Typically, that relationship has been positive, mediated by perceptions of competence (i.e., people with higher status markers are more likely to be seen as competent and as a result be promoted to managerial positions). This line of work has overlooked status incongruence, in which the positive link between status markers and high-status positions is severed. The increasing prevalence of status incongruence

raises important questions not easily answered by previous status research, in particular, how status incongruence affects subordinates' work attitudes and behaviors.

One plausible and important consequence of experiencing status incongruence, for example, is for subordinates to view the promotion system of their organization to be unfair. Theory and research has shown that employees are more likely to experience unfairness when their expectations are violated (e.g., Folger & Cropanzano, 1998; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). Hence, if certain status markers are often linked to high-status positions, then when this is not the case (as in status incongruence), employees may experience unfairness. We focus on subordinates' fairness perceptions of their organization's promotion system for two reasons: (1) because the promotion system is often the mechanism through which formal hierarchies are created in organizations and (2) perceptions of fairness are quite consequential, e.g., they influence employees' work attitudes and behaviors, as shown in decades of research on the consequences of organizational justice (e.g., Colquitt, Greenberg, & Zapata-Phelan, 2005).

Whereas research derived from status characteristics theory has shown that employees use others' status markers to form perceptions about others' competence, we examine a different question: how might supervisors' status markers (age, tenure, and education) influence employees' fairness judgments of their organization's promotion system when employees also have information about their supervisors' competence? Previous work has conceptualized perceived competence as an outcome of status markers (e.g., older, more educated, and longer tenured employees are seen as more competent). However, we suggest that this may not always be the case. For example, subordinates may view some supervisors who lack status markers as competent at their jobs, whereas subordinates may also view some supervisors who have status markers as less competent. The present studies examine the joint influence of status

characteristics and perceived competence on employees' perceptions of the perceived fairness of their employers' promotion system, as well as a downstream consequence of such fairness perceptions: work motivation.

Based on system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004) and as further explained below, we expect the joint influence of status characteristics and perceived competence to take the form of an interactive relationship. When the supervisor's competence is relatively high, then he/she deserves to be in the supervisory position, in which case the subordinate would likely perceive the promotion system to be relatively fair, regardless of whether the supervisor has the traditional status markers. However, when the supervisor is seen as less competent, subordinates still have a need to justify their organizational system as fair. In this case, compared to status incongruence, subordinates would likely perceive the promotion system as more fair under conditions of status congruence because they can use the supervisors' status markers as bases of system justification.

By conducting two survey studies and one experiment, we aim to go beyond grounded (system justification) theory to help explain employees' reactions to the growing workplace trend of status incongruence; we also seek to contribute to previous research in three ways. First, this paper seeks to extend status characteristics theory (e.g., Berger, Zelditch, & Anderson, 1966; Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972), which explains the process through which people organize status hierarchy in a group (Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980). It has been shown that status markers (e.g., age, education, and tenure) determine the distribution of status because they affect people's perceptions of competence. We seek to contribute to prior research that has treated status markers and perceptions of competence as positively linked to each other by examining the under-studied yet prevalent instances in which these factors are unrelated or even negatively

related to one another. We examine the interactive influence of status (in)congruence and supervisory competence on employees' perceptions of fairness.¹

Second, we seek to extend system justification theory to the organizational setting. Proudfoot and Kay (2014) recently suggested that system justification theory has great potential to account for people's work attitudes and behaviors, while also noting that relatively little empirical research has been conducted in this area (for exceptions, see the recent papers by Hafenbrädl & Waeger, 2017 and Proudfoot, Kay, & Mann, 2015). While the seminal research on the system justification motive generally has focused on the theory's implications for stereotyping and out-group attitudes (e.g., Jost & Burgess, 2000; Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002), we contribute to the still-nascent wave of empirical work that demonstrates the role of the system justification motive in accounting for employees' reactions.

Third, this paper seeks to enrich theory and research in organizational justice by examining fairness as a dependent variable and also from a motivated reasoning perspective. Decades of organizational justice research has shown the pervasive effects of the various elements of fairness on employees' work attitudes and behaviors (Colquitt et al., 2005). Having shown these effects, organizational justice scholars have shifted the paradigm by examining the antecedents of fairness (Brockner, Wiesenfeld, Siegel, Bobocel, & Liu, 2015). Our study contributes to this latter effort in revealing a widespread yet under-explored factor – status (in)congruence – as an antecedent of employees' perceptions of fairness. Moreover, longstanding theories of justice (e.g., equity theory) often adopt a relatively rational (or information processing) approach, focusing on how, for example, consistent procedures, equitable distribution of rewards, and

¹ When we use the term “status (in)congruence,” we are referring to the variable of congruence versus incongruence, whereas when we use the terms “status incongruence” or “status congruence,” we are referring to that particular level of the variable.

respectful interactions influence fairness perceptions. We propose that the motivated process inherent to system justification theory can also influence employees' fairness judgments of their system, which may help us understand how they come to see a flawed system as fair.

CHAPTER 2 THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

System justification theory

System justification theory posits that individuals have a motivated tendency to view the systems in which they are embedded as fair and legitimate. This motive may lead them to rationalize unfair or flawed aspects of their systems. Intriguingly, system justification may occur even when a system is obviously flawed and even when engaging in it may not be in the perceivers' long-term interests. People justify their systems because doing so can have a soothing "palliative function" (Jost & Hunyady, 2003), insofar as it helps people avoid the psychological threat or anxiety resulting from acknowledging that they are embedded in a flawed, unfair system (Jost & Hunyady, 2005). Most work on system justification has focused on people's tendency to justify their socio-political systems and how this tendency perpetuates socioeconomic inequality (Jost et al., 2004, Kay & Zanna, 2009). For example, earlier work on system justification theory examined how out-group favoritism and stereotypes influenced ideological support for the status quo (Jost & Banaji 1994, Jost & Kay 2005, Kay & Jost, 2003). More recently, some empirical work has shown that people justify small-scale systems (e.g., students justifying their universities) in the same way that they justify large-scale socio-political systems (Laurin et al., 2010, Wakslak et al., 2011). However, much less research has explored the system justification motive in organizational contexts (as recently called for by Proudfoot & Kay, 2014).

Organizations, like governments and social institutions, impose a structure for individuals' behaviors and outcomes, such as assigned roles, interrelationships with other people and structures, and norms that organize work life to be predictable (Proudfoot & Kay, 2014). Similarly, as in other systems, people's welfare depends on the effective functioning of their organizations. For these reasons, not only can organizations be viewed as systems, but also they possess many of the same properties as other entities in system justification research and thus are likely to be justified and defended (Proudfoot & Kay, 2014). We believe that the basic tenets of system justification theory can help explain employees' attitudes and behaviors. When subordinates have chosen to remain in a flawed organizational system, for example, when working under a supervisor perceived to be less competent, they will have the motive to justify the system and thereby see it as fair.

Specifying the interaction between status (in)congruence and supervisor competence

When supervisors have high competence, subordinates are likely to view the promotion system in their organization as fair, regardless of status incongruence. When supervisors are high in competence, it supports meritocracy, a principle that prescribes that capable individuals are rewarded (e.g., with higher positions) and thereby signifies that the system is fair (Clayton & Tangri 1989; Winkelman & Crosby, 1994). Corroborating this reasoning, the functional perspective of status (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009b) argues that the promotion of those who are the most competent to higher positions (e.g., supervisor) best serves the group's interest (to confer greater influence on those higher in competence). Thus, when the supervisor is high in competence, subordinates are likely to perceive the promotion system to be fair regardless of status (in)congruence.

In contrast, when the supervisor is seen as less competent, subordinates are expected to perceive their promotion system to be fairer when the supervisor has status markers (e.g., education, age, and tenure) than when he/she does not via the motivated process of system justification. When the supervisor is perceived as less competent, subordinates are faced with the potential discomfort of seeing themselves as embedded in a flawed system. One way to deal with this discomfort is to focus on the supervisor's socially valued status markers, such as being more educated, older, and having greater organizational tenure (e.g., a subordinate might think that "after all, the supervisor is older/more-educated/has a longer tenure"). Such attributes may help employees to justify their supervisor's position in the hierarchy and thereby see the promotion system as fair. However, when a less competent supervisor is also status *incongruent*, subordinates may find it difficult to justify the system. Although subordinates facing this circumstance would still prefer not to live with the discomfort produced by acknowledging and staying in an unfair system, supervisors' status markers as potential basis for system justification are not present. Thus, when a supervisor's perceived competence is relatively low, the presence of status congruence allows for subordinates to engage in system justification, thereby leading to perceptions of greater promotion system fairness than in the presence of status incongruence. Based on the above reasoning, we predict the following:

Hypothesis 1. Supervisor competence and status (in)congruence interact to predict subordinates' perception of promotion system fairness such that when supervisor competence is relatively low, the positive relationship between status congruence and subordinates' perception of promotion system fairness will be stronger than when supervisor competence is high.

Power as a boundary condition

We seek to provide evidence supporting the proposed system justification mechanism by investigating the effect of power. We specifically examine whether power, which is hypothesized to make people more likely to engage in system justification, has a moderating impact on the interaction between status (in)congruence and supervisor competence. Thus, we seek to shed light on *why* the interaction effect set forth in Hypothesis 1 occurs by identifying *when* it is more versus less likely to occur. Recent developments within system justification theory have suggested that power influences people's system justification motive (Kay & Friesen, 2011). Power is defined as control over valued resources in social relations (Fiske, 1993; Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). It captures the relative state of dependence between two or more parties (Emerson, 1962). It also involves both control over important outcomes and independence from others in obtaining these outcomes (Galinsky, Magee, Gruendelf, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008).

Research on system justification theory suggests that having diminished control and increased dependence on systems enhances people's tendency to justify their systems, suggesting that those experiencing lower power are more likely to engage in system justification. In one experiment (Kay, Gaucher, Napier, Callan, & Laurin, 2008), participants recalled either a recent event over which they possessed control or one over which they did not have control; they then reported the extent to which they support system changes in the current socio-political system. Participants in the low-control condition were more likely to resist system change in favor of the status quo of their systems relative to those in the high-control condition (Kay et al., 2008). This is because people may compensate for their own lack of control by psychologically outsourcing it to external systems (e.g., governments, religions, and organizations). Similarly, another study

using cross-national survey data showed that low control was associated with increased feelings of dependence on the government and a resultant justification of its fairness (Kay et al., 2008).

If system justification is the mechanism that accounts for the predicted interaction between status (in)congruence and supervisor competence on perceived promotion system fairness, we should find that among subordinates with lower levels of power, whose system justification tendencies are stronger, the interactive effect of status (in)congruence and supervisor competence on system fairness perceptions should be more pronounced.

Hypothesis 2. Subordinate's power will moderate the interactive relationship between status (in)congruence and supervisor competence such that when subordinates' power is lower, the interaction between status (in)congruence and supervisor competence set forth in Hypothesis 1 will be more pronounced than when subordinates' power is higher.

An Important Downstream Consequence: Subordinates' Work Motivation

Fairness evaluations have been shown to predict important employees behaviors (for reviews, see Colquitt, 2001 and Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). When employees view themselves as treated fairly, they are more motivated to do their jobs well (Colquitt, 2001). This may be explained by several frameworks in organizational psychology, including expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), which posits that the belief that effort will lead to a certain outcome (e.g., a promotion) influences people's motivation to exert effort. We propose that when employees view their company's promotion system as fair, they are likely to be motivated to work hard, whereas when employees view their company's promotion system as unfair, they are likely to be demotivated. Thus, we expect subordinates' perceptions of promotion system fairness to predict their work motivation.

Given: (1) the predicted interactive effect of status (in)congruence and supervisor competence on subordinates' perception of promotion system fairness as described in Hypothesis 1, and (2) the well-established tendency for perceptions of fairness to be positively related to work motivation, we propose a moderated mediation model (Edwards & Lambert, 2007), in which supervisor competence moderates the indirect effect of status (in)congruence on subordinates' work motivation via promotion system fairness. Figure 1 shows the model.

Hypothesis 3. Supervisor competence moderates the indirect effect of status congruence on subordinates' work motivation via subordinates' perception of promotion system fairness, such that the indirect relationship will be more positive when supervisor competence is low than when it is high.

 Insert Figure 1 about here

The present studies

Below we present three studies that tested how status (in)congruence and supervisor competence affect employees' fairness perceptions and work motivation. Study 1 tested Hypotheses 1 and 3 with two waves of surveys to capture subordinates' actual reactions to status incongruence. In a field setting with surveys administered in organizations, Study 2 extended the previous study by evaluating whether, as set forth by system justification theory, subordinates' level of power would moderate the focal interactive relationship between status (in)congruence and supervisor competence, as set forth in Hypothesis 2. Study 2 also sought to provide generalizability to the results of Study 1 (whose participants came from the U.S.), by examining participants from a different culture (China). In Study 3, we focused on instances in which the

supervisor always was relatively low in competence because the results of Studies 1 and 2 showed that status (in)congruence had a much stronger effect on subordinates' perception of promotion system fairness when the supervisor's competence was relatively low. With a U.S. sample, we tested the effect of employee power in a different way than we did in Study 2. Given relatively low competence, we expected status congruence to have a more positive effect on fairness perceptions among subordinates with lower power as opposed to higher power. To the extent that converging results emerge across different research methodologies and samples, we gain increased confidence in their validity and generalizability.

CHAPTER 3 STUDY 1

Study 1 used a survey design to test Hypothesis 1, whether status (in)congruence and supervisor competence interact to influence participants' perceptions of promotion system fairness. Study 1 also provided an initial test of Hypothesis 3, whether supervisor competence moderates the mediation effect of participants' perceptions of promotion system fairness between status (in)congruence and subordinates' work motivation.

Method

Participants and Design. Two waves of surveys were administered to full-time employees in the United States recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk. The two waves were measured about 10 days apart. We utilized two waves of surveys to reduce concern with common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). While the interaction effect predicted in Hypothesis 1 is unlikely to be an artifact of common method variance (Siemsen, Roth, & Oliveira, 2010), we separated, in time, the measurements of promotion system fairness and employee work motivation to test Hypothesis 3. In the first wave of surveys,

participants were asked to provide information on status (in)congruence as well as their perception of supervisor competence and their organization's promotion system fairness. The second survey included questions about work motivation.

A total of 613 participants responded to the first wave of surveys, among which 432 participants responded to the second wave, yielding a retention rate of 70.47%. When recruiting participants, we required that they were employed in an organization in the finance or business sector (rather than being students, self-employed, or working in other sectors such as art and entertainment, to make it likely that the participants were working in organizations with direct supervisors) and were working for an organization that had more than five formal hierarchical levels (as fewer organizational levels may signify atypical organizational structures and promotion systems in this industry). In the final sample of 432, participants were on average 36.66 years old ($SD = 8.29$) and 57.4% were male. They had an average organizational tenure of 7.42 years ($SD = 6.71$). A total of 5.6% of all participants had a high school degree or equivalent (GED), 14.8% an associate degree, 35.0% a bachelor's degree, and 44.6% a graduate degree.

Status (in)congruence. In addition to reporting their demographic information, participants compared their own and their supervisors' age, education level, and organizational tenure. Specifically, participants were asked to select an option for each of the following three questions: "Compared to your age, your supervisor is (1) younger than me, (2) of the same age as me, (3) older than me," "Compared to your education level, your supervisor has a (1) lower, (2) same, (3) higher degree," and "Compared to your tenure at your current organization, your supervisor has worked in your organization for (1) less, (2) same amount of, (3) more years." For all of these attributes, answering (3) indicated that the supervisor had greater status-congruent attributes than the employee for that variable. Then, following Triana et al. (2017) and Jarmon

(1976), we dummy coded each of the three answers (coded as 1 = status congruence or 0 = status incongruence) to create three indicators of status congruence. Finally, we added these three status congruence indicators to create an overall measure of status congruence between the supervisor and the employee, ranging from 0 to 3.

Supervisor competence. We measured employees' perception of their supervisor's competence using six items adjusted from Mayer and Davis's (1999) scale. We asked participants to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each statement (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Two sample items were: "My supervisor is very capable of performing his/her job," and "My supervisor has much knowledge about the work that needs to be done." $\alpha = .96$.

Work motivation. We measured work motivation using nine items from the job engagement scale (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002). We asked participants to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statements (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Two sample items were: "I work with intensity on my job," and "I strive as hard as I can to complete my job." $\alpha = .94$.

Promotion system fairness. We measured employees' perception of promotion system fairness with three items adjusted from McEnrue (1989) and Kaplan and Ferris (2001). We asked participants to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statements (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The three items were: "The promotion system in my organization is fair," "Everyone in my organization has a just chance of gaining promotion," and "Decisions regarding promotions in my organization are fair." $\alpha = .94$.

Control variables. We controlled for gender, age, education level, and organizational tenure of all subordinates and their supervisors. We also controlled for procedural justice to

evaluate the effect of the perceived fairness of their organization's promotion system above and beyond the procedural justice they may have experienced. We asked participants to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with six items adjusted from Colquitt (2001, 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Sample items include: "I have been able to express my views and feelings during those procedures about promotion," and "Those procedures about promotion have been applied consistently." $\alpha = .92$.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Status congruence and supervisor competence were positively correlated but weakly so ($r = .10, p = .04$), suggesting that participants are able to form perceptions of their supervisors' competence separately from status (in)congruence. For the interaction effect analyses, we followed the method proposed by Aiken, West, and Reno (1991), delineating the nature of the interaction by examining the slope of the regression lines of promotion system fairness on status (in)congruence at one standard deviation below and above the mean of supervisor competence. In addition, to test the mediating influence of promotion system fairness on the interactive effect of status (in)congruence and supervisor competence on work motivation, as Edwards and Lambert (2007) and Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007) suggested, we tested the differences in the mediating effects of promotion system fairness across the two levels (i.e., high vs. low) of supervisor competence, utilizing the PROCESS macro in SPSS by Hayes (2013) with 5000-time bootstrap.

Insert Table 1 about here

Promotion system fairness. The results from the regression analysis involving the interaction of status congruence and supervisor competence on promotion system fairness are presented in Table 2. Model 1, only including the control variables, showed that subordinates' perception of procedural justice was significantly related to their perception of promotion system fairness ($b = .82, p < .001$) whereas none of the subordinates' or supervisors' demographic information (i.e., gender, age, education, and organizational tenure) was related to promotion system fairness. $R^2 = .51, F(9, 422) = 49.64, p < .001$. Model 2 showed that the main effect of status congruence was not significant ($b = .11, ns$), while the main effect of supervisor competence was positive and significant ($b = .32, p < .001$). $\Delta R^2 = .05, F(2, 420) = 24.18, p < .001$. Of greater significance, Model 3 revealed a significant interaction between status congruence and supervisor competence ($b = -.13, p = .01$). $\Delta R^2 = .01, F(1, 419) = 6.10, p = .01$. Results of simple slope analyses showed that status congruence was positively related to promotion system fairness when supervisor competence was relatively low ($b = .23, p = .01$), but not when supervisor competence was relatively high ($b = -.04, ns$). The interactive pattern can be seen in Figure 2. Supporting the robustness of our results, Model 4 revealed that the main effects of status congruence ($b = .11, ns$) and supervisor competence ($b = .65, p < .001$) as well as the interaction effect of status congruence and supervisor competence ($b = -.12, p = .08$) showed the same pattern when control variables were excluded. $R^2 = .24, F(3, 428) = 44.49, p < .001$.

Insert Table 2 and Figure 2 about here

Work motivation. Supporting the moderated mediation effect specified in Hypothesis 3, we found that the conditional indirect effect of status congruence on work motivation via

promotion system fairness was significant ($b = -.01, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.03, -.0004]$, excluding zero). Specifically, as shown in Table 3, the indirect effect was significant when supervisor competence was relatively low ($b = .02, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI } [.001, .05]$, excluding zero), whereas the indirect effect was not significant when supervisor competence was relatively high ($b = -.004, ns, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.02, .01]$, including zero). In other words, we found that supervisors' competence moderated the indirect effect of status congruence on employee work motivation via perceptions of promotion system fairness. In summary, Study 1 supported Hypotheses 1 and 3.

 Insert Table 3 about here

While the results supportive of Hypotheses 1 and 3 are consistent with system justification theory, they are open to an alternative explanation. According to equity theory (Adams, 1965), fairness is perceived when people's outcomes are proportional to their inputs or contributions. Specifically, in our case, relevant inputs in judging the fairness of the promotion system include supervisor's status markers and subordinates' perceptions of the supervisors' competence. The condition that seems most unfair from an equity theory perspective is when the supervisor is incompetent and status-incongruent, which is what we observed.

The key difference between the equity theory and system justification explanations is whether fairness perceptions are the result of a *motivated* process as in system justification theory or a reasonable ("unmotivated") inference based on fairness-relevant information ("inputs and outcomes," as equity theory suggests). One way to evaluate whether the motivated process set forth by system justification theory is accounting for the results of Study 1 is to hold fairness-relevant information (i.e., supervisors' status markers and perceived competence) constant while

varying a condition (i.e., power) that is known to affect system justification but not equity theory-based reasoning. If, as set forth in Hypothesis 2, the predicted moderating effect of power on the interaction between status (in)congruence and supervisory competence is supported, it would provide evidence that the system justification mechanism is accounting for the two-way interaction between status (in)congruence and supervisory competence set forth in Hypothesis 1.

CHAPTER 4 STUDY 2

Study 2 seeks to evaluate our premise that system justification reasoning accounts for the interactive effect of status (in)congruence and supervisor competence on perceived fairness. We do so by examining whether level of felt power, a factor that makes people more versus less likely to engage in system justification, has a moderating impact on the interaction effect between status (in)congruence and supervisor competence found in Study 1. As proposed in Hypothesis 2, we expect the two-way interaction between status (in)congruence and supervisor competence to be more pronounced when participants' level of power is relatively low. As in prior research, we measured subordinates' power within organizations as the extent to which they saw themselves having control over valued resources (Fiske, 1993; Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; Keltner et al., 2003; Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

Method

Participants and Design. A total of 354 subordinate surveys and 59 matching supervisor surveys from Chinese companies were included in our sample. Supervisors were asked to provide their demographic information including gender, age, education, and organizational tenure. The subordinate questionnaire included questions about their own demographics, perceptions of supervisor competence, promotion system fairness, and work motivation.

Surveys were provided to subordinates and their supervisors by the HR managers with a letter explaining the purpose of the study, assuring confidentiality, and informing them that their participation was voluntary. Each participant was required to put his/her completed questionnaire in an envelope and seal it. HR managers collected all envelopes (while matching supervisors' and subordinates') and mailed them to the researchers. We received completed questionnaires from 457 employees and their matching 70 supervisors. Because demographic information is required for calculating status congruence (more details below), we deleted the surveys with missing values for age, education level, or organizational tenure (103 subordinates and 11 supervisors); our retention rates were 77.46% and 84.29%, respectively.

The subordinates were, on average, 32.18 years old ($SD = 7.37$) and 60.5% were male. A total of 19.5% of the subordinates had a high school degree, 40.1% an associate degree, 36.4% a bachelor's degree, and 4.0% a master degree. They had an average organizational tenure of 4.57 years ($SD = 5.70$). The supervisors were, on average, 37.43 years old ($SD = 6.45$) and 72.9% were male. A total of 13.6% of the supervisors had a high school degree, 42.4% an associate degree, 33.9% a bachelor's degree, 6.8% a master's degree, and 3.4% a doctoral degree. They had an average organizational tenure of 4.99 years ($SD = 4.86$).

The survey was administered in Chinese. The translation of the original English language version of the questionnaire into Chinese was accomplished following the standard translation and back-translation procedure of Brislin (1980). Specifically, in the first stage, the bilingual translator translated the English version of the survey into Chinese. The translated version was then translated into English by another bilingual translator, and then back into Chinese and back into English once again. This process was used to ensure an accurate and precise translation (Werner & Campbell, 1970). Prior to administering the surveys, we edited the surveys based on

the feedback of six Chinese management scholars and 20 employees in three industries (i.e., finance, manufacturing, and technology) regarding the language clarity of the surveys and their relevance to the work context.

Status congruence. Ages of both supervisors and subordinates were measured as a continuous variable between 20-60 years old using eight age bands (e.g., 26-30, 31-35, etc.). Education levels of both supervisors and subordinates were measured by questions regarding their highest education degree received. Education was coded as 1 = high school, 2 = associate degree, 3 = bachelor's degree, 4 = master's degree, and 5 = doctoral degree. Organizational tenure of both supervisors and subordinates was measured as a continuous number in months (rather than in years) to achieve higher accuracy. Then, following Triana et al. (2017), Perry, Kulik, and Zhou (1999), and Jarmon (1976), we calculated the supervisor attributes (age, education, or organizational tenure) minus the employee attributes for each variable. This resulted in three calculations: one for age, one for education, and one for organizational tenure. Positive results indicated that the supervisor had greater (i.e., status-congruent) attributes than the employee for that variable. Then, following Triana et al. (2017) and Jarmon (1976), we dummy coded each of the three resulting calculations (with 1 = status congruence and 0 = status incongruence) to create three indicators of status congruence. Finally, we added these three indicators to create an overall measure of status congruence between the supervisor and the employee, ranging from 0 (most incongruent) to 3 (most congruent).

Supervisor competence. As in Study 1, we measured employees' perception of their supervisor's competence using four items adjusted from Mayer and Davis's (1999) scale (excluding two items that did not apply to the scenario). $\alpha = .96$.

Work motivation. We used the same items as those in Study 1. $\alpha = .96$.

Promotion system fairness. We used the same items as those in Study 1. $\alpha = .96$.

Power. We measured employees' power in their organizations using three items adjusted from Anderson et al.'s scale (2012). We asked participants to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statements (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). The three items were: "In my organization, I think I have a great deal of power," "In my organization, I have a lot of resources," and "I have control over important resources in my organization." $\alpha = .96$.

Control variables. We controlled for gender, age, education level, and organizational tenure of supervisors and subordinates.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Similar to Study 1, we conducted a regression analysis involving status congruence and supervisor competence as independent variables on promotion system fairness to test the focal two-way interaction of status (in)congruence and supervisor competence. In addition, we also included subordinates' power in the regression and tested the three-way interaction of status (in)congruence, supervisor competence, and power on promotion system fairness.

In the results presented below, we followed the method proposed by Aiken and West (1991), delineating the nature of the three-way interaction effect by examining the interaction of status (in)congruence and supervisor competence at one standard deviation below and above the mean on power. We predicted that the interactive effect of status (in)congruence and supervisor competence on promotion system fairness would be more pronounced among those employees with low, rather than high, power. To test this prediction, we conducted a regression analysis including status (in)congruence, supervisor competence, and power as main effects, all three

possible two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction of status (in)congruence, supervisor competence, and power.

Promotion system fairness. Model 1 in Table 4 showed that the main effect of status congruence was not significant ($b = .15, ns$), while the main effects of supervisor competence ($b = .58, p < .001$) and power ($b = .17, p < .001$) were significantly positive. $\Delta R^2 = .22, F(3, 342) = 34.68, p < .001$. Model 2 revealed support for the focal two-way interaction of status congruence and supervisor competence ($b = -.26, p < .001$). $\Delta R^2 = .03, F(1, 341) = 14.36, p < .001$. Results of simple slope analyses showed that status congruence was positively related to promotion system fairness when supervisor competence was low ($b = .41, p < .01$), but not when supervisor competence was high ($b = -.16, ns$). These results support Hypothesis 1 and replicate the results in Study 1. Supporting the robustness of our results, Model 4 revealed that the interaction effect of status congruence and supervisor competence ($b = -.27, p < .001$) showed the same pattern when control variables were excluded. $R^2 = .28, F(4, 349) = 33.24, p < .001$.

 Insert Table 4 about here

The results of Model 3 also showed a significant three-way interaction between status congruence, supervisor competence, and subordinate power ($b = .10, p = .02$), supporting Hypothesis 2. $\Delta R^2 = .02, F(3, 338) = 3.31, p = .02$. Results of simple slope analyses showed that the focal interaction between status congruence and supervisor competence was significantly related to promotion system fairness when subordinates' power was low ($b = -.41, p < .001$) but not when it was high ($b = -.07, ns$). More specifically, among low-power subordinates, status congruence was positively related to promotion system fairness when supervisor competence

was low ($b = .82, p < .001$), but not when it was high ($b = -.12, ns$). However, among high-power subordinates, there were no significant effects of status congruence on promotion system fairness when supervisor competence was low ($b = .04, ns$) or high ($b = -.13, ns$). The three-way interactive pattern can be seen in Figure 3. Supporting the robustness of our results, Model 5 revealed that the three-way interaction effect ($b = .10, p = .03$) showed the same pattern when no control variables were included.

 Insert Figure 3 about here

Work motivation. Testing the moderated mediation effect in Hypothesis 3, we found that the conditional indirect effect of status congruence on work motivation via promotion system fairness was significant ($b = -.10, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.17, -.05]$, excluding zero). Specifically, as shown in Table 2, the indirect effect was stronger when supervisor competence was low ($b = .17, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [.04, .31]$, excluding zero), whereas the indirect effect was not significant when supervisor competence was high ($b = -.07, ns, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.20, .06]$, including zero). Once again, we found that employees' perceptions of promotion system fairness mediated the interactive effect of status (in)congruence and supervisor competence on employees' work motivation.

In an additional analysis we found that subordinate power also moderates the moderated mediation effect in Hypothesis 3 (i.e., supervisor competence moderates the indirect effect of status congruence on subordinate work motivation via perceived promotion system fairness). This conditional moderated mediation effect was significant ($b = .04, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [.01, .08]$, excluding zero). Specifically, the conditional indirect effect of status congruence on work motivation via promotion system fairness (i.e., the moderated mediation in the above paragraph

as proposed in our Hypothesis 3) was significant when subordinates' power was low ($b = -.17, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.26, -.09]$, excluding zero), whereas it was not significant when power was high ($b = -.03, ns, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.11, .04]$, including zero).

In summary, Study 2 tested the system justification mechanism by examining whether one's level of power, which has been shown to influence people's tendencies to engage in system justification (Kay & Friesen, 2011), has a moderating impact on the interactive effect of status (in)congruence and supervisor competence. By finding the predicted moderating effect of subordinates' power as set forth in Hypothesis 2, we provide support for the system justification explanation of the focal interaction effect between status (in)congruence and supervisory competence on promotion system fairness over an unmotivated explanation along the lines of equity theory.

CHAPTER 5 STUDY 3

Given that Studies 1 and 2 consistently showed that status congruence was much more influential when supervisor competence was relatively low, Study 3 focused only on the instance in which supervisor competence was relatively low. In Study 3, we experimentally manipulated power, which was operationalized differently than in Study 2 to evaluate the robustness of our findings. Based on the negotiation literature, in which power is often based on having viable alternatives (Kim & Fragale, 2005; Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007), we operationalized power as the extent to which people have desirable alternative employment opportunities. This way of operationalizing power is also in line with the theory of power-dependence (e.g., Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; Mannix, Thompson, & Bazerman, 1989), which states that "the power of A over B is equal to and based upon the dependence of B upon A" (Emerson, 1962, *p.* 32-33). Power is

inversely related to the availability of a valued outcome through alternative sources. According to this logic, employees have higher power in the employment relationship when they have desirable employment alternatives than when they do not.

We examined the moderating role of power on the relationship between status (in)congruence and promotion system fairness to further evaluate the system justification mechanism. We expect that when one's power is low (as opposed to high), the system justification tendency will be stronger, and consequently, the effect of status (in)congruence on perceived promotion system fairness will be stronger. Thus we predict that when supervision competence is low, status (in)congruence will interact with one's sense of power to influence perceptions of promotion system fairness, such that the tendency for status congruence to lead to higher levels of perceived fairness than status incongruence will be stronger when participants experience lower power.

Method

Participants and Design. A total of 306 workers on Amazon Mechanical Turk completed the study. We required that they were 25-60 years old, working in finance and business-related professions, and working in an organization with more than five levels of formal hierarchical rank in the organization. Participants were on average 35.8 years old ($SD = 8.57$), and 64.4% were male. 7.8% of all participants graduated from high school or equivalent, 12.4% had an associate degree, 54.2% had a bachelor's degree, and 25.5% had a graduate degree. All collected measures, items, and conditions are reported.

Study 3 consisted of a 2 (status congruence vs. incongruence) x 2 (power: high vs. low) design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions. Study 3 was described to participants as intending to better understand people's experiences in the workplace.

The study took eight minutes on average and participants were compensated \$1 for their time. We instructed the participants to read the following scenario carefully and to imagine how they would feel and think in this situation. Half the participants were randomly told that the supervisor (Chris, a gender-neutral name) was male and the other half female. The supervisor's gender had no effect on our results. The scenarios always contained the description of supervisor Chris as relatively low in competence.

- KBC was founded in 1896 in Massachusetts. KBC provides financial services including credit cards, mortgages, personal loans, commercial loans, and lines of credit. As a hierarchical organization, KBC's headquarters are in New York City, and it has a total of 348 branches in the United States.
- You are one of the bank tellers in KBC. At the branch, you are responsible for providing account services to customers by receiving deposits and loan payments; issuing savings withdrawals; answering questions in person or on telephone.
- Chris is your supervisor. At the branch, Chris communicates the policies and programs from top management of the bank. In addition, Chris sets your job goals, action plans, and timelines. Chris is also responsible for evaluating your performance.
- Chris is poorly qualified to supervise. He/She fails at work he/she tries to do much more often than other branch managers in the bank. The projects he/she leads frequently have problems, and his/her performance is seen as mediocre by managers in KBC. As a branch manager, Chris lacks expertise and cannot apply his/her knowledge to the work that needs to be done.

Status congruence. We first asked participants for their demographic information including age and education level. We also told them to assume that their tenure at KBC (i.e., their current organization in the scenario) was four years. Then we informed them about their

supervisor's (Chris's) status markers. Regarding Chris's age, education, and tenure, participants in the status congruence condition were informed that Chris was older, more educated, and had a longer tenure at KBC, whereas in the status incongruence condition, they were informed that Chris was younger, less educated, and had a shorter tenure at KBC. Specifically, participants in the status congruence (incongruence) condition read the following:

- Chris's age: Participant's age + 5 years (Participant's age – 5 years)
- Chris's education: one level higher than the participant, e.g., graduate degree as compared to bachelor's degree (one level lower than the participant; e.g., associate's degree as compared to bachelor's degree).
- Chris's tenure in KBC: 6 (2) years, i.e., two years longer (shorter) than the participant

For participants with a high school degree or a graduate degree, because we could not specify degrees lower than a high school degree or higher than a graduate degree, we informed participants that Chris had the same degree as them.

Power. Power was manipulated by varying the employment alternatives available to participants. High power participants had more alternatives and therefore were less dependent on their current employer. Participants in the high (low) power condition read the following scenario:

- The economy is booming (declining), hence there is a very strong (weak) labor market. Many (Almost no) banks in your city are recruiting bank tellers. Your competence and professional knowledge as a bank teller are in high (low) demand in the banking labor market. If you quit from KBC, your professional credentials will (not) make it easy for you to get a new or better job at a different bank.

Work motivation. Participants read the following short scenario and answered a question: “In this year, KBC plans to expand its service scope and thus presents a higher goal of organizational performance. To achieve it, all employees, especially bank tellers, are encouraged to exert more effort and devote more energy to their work. Sometimes, it will require longer working hours.” Participants were asked how many extra hours per week they would be willing to spend at work.

Promotion system fairness. We used the same items as those in Studies 1 and 2. $\alpha = .92$.

Attention checks. The attention check for the *status congruence* manipulation asked whether participants agreed with the following statements: “Chris is older than me,” “Chris has an equivalent or a higher level of education than me,” and “Chris has a longer tenure than me at KBC.” In the status congruence condition, participants should choose “yes” for all these questions, whereas participants in the status incongruence condition should choose “no” for all questions. The attention check for the *power* manipulation (as measured by employment alternatives) asked participants to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements. The items were: “It is hard for you to find a new job at similar banks,” and “There is a lack of job alternatives for you in the labor market.” In the high power (high employment alternative) condition, participants should choose “disagree” to both questions, whereas participants in the low power (low employment alternative) condition should choose “agree” for both. For 32 (out of 338, 9.47%) participants who chose the wrong option on any of the five items and thereby failed the check, their surveys automatically ended, and they were not included in our analyses below. Chi-square tests showed that the likelihood of failing the checks did not differ as a function of the experimental conditions.

Results and Discussion

We conducted an analysis of variance to test the main effects of status (in)congruence and power and their interaction effect. Next, to test the moderating role of subordinate power, as Edwards and Lambert (2007) and Preacher et al. (2007) suggested, we tested the differences in the mediating effect of promotion system fairness (between status congruence and work motivation) across the high vs. low power conditions.

Promotion system fairness. Results showed a positive main effect of status congruence ($F(1, 302) = 5.37, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .02$) and a non-significant main effect of power ($F(1, 302) = .30, ns, \eta_p^2 = .001$). Of greater importance, the results showed a significant interaction between status congruence and power ($F(1, 302) = 4.54, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .02$) such that there was a stronger effect of status congruence on perceptions of promotion system fairness when power was low than when it was high. Specifically, as shown in Figure 4, when employees' power was low, status congruence significantly enhanced perceived promotion system fairness ($M_{\text{status congruence}} = 4.03$ and 95% CI [3.72, 4.35] vs. $M_{\text{status incongruence}} = 3.32$ and 95% CI [3.00, 3.64], $p < .001$), whereas when employees' power was high, status congruence was inconsequential ($M_{\text{status congruence}} = 3.78$ and 95% CI [3.46, 4.09] vs. $M_{\text{status incongruence}} = 3.75$ and 95% CI [3.43, 4.06], ns).

 Insert Figure 4 about here

Work motivation. We found that the conditional indirect effect of status congruence on work motivation via promotion system fairness was significant ($b = -1.45, p < .05, 95\% \text{ CI} [-3.18, -.12]$, excluding zero). Specifically, the indirect effect was stronger when employee power was low ($b = 1.51, p < .01, 95\% \text{ CI} [.46, 2.95]$, excluding zero), whereas the indirect effect was not significant when power was high ($b = .06, ns, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.90, 1.03]$, including zero).

Conceptualizing and operationalizing power in a different way than in Study 3, we found a significant interactive effect of status congruence and power on employees' perceptions of promotion system fairness. Specifically, status (in)congruence had a stronger effect when power was low than when it was high. This result provides further support for the system justification explanation of the effect of status (in)congruence, which posits that lacking power heightens people's system justification motive (Kay et al., 2008; Kay & Friesen, 2011).

CHAPTER 6 GENERAL DISCUSSION

Taken together, the results of all three studies show that status (in)congruence in supervisor-subordinate dyads influences subordinates' fairness perceptions of their promotion system and their subsequent work motivation. Drawing from system justification theory, we found that status (in)congruence and supervisor competence have an interactive effect on perceived promotion system fairness in which status (in)congruence had a stronger influence on promotion system fairness when the supervisor was perceived to be relatively low in competence. Furthermore, Studies 2 and 3 suggest that system justification provides a mechanism to account for our proposed effects. As predicted, because lacking power enhances people's tendency to justify their systems (Kay et al., 2008), the interactive effects of status (in)congruence and supervisor competence were predicted and found to be stronger among subordinates with lower power (in Study 2). Similarly, in Study 3, in which supervisors were always described as relatively low in competence, status congruence only increased subordinates' fairness perceptions in the low (but not high) subordinate power condition. The converging results across three studies provide strong support for the generalizability of the findings and for the system justification reasoning accounting for them.

Theoretical Implications

The findings have theoretical implications for the literatures on status, system justification, and organizational justice. First, the present studies are among the first to examine the consequences of the growing phenomenon known as status incongruence, in which traditional status markers (e.g., age, education, and tenure) associated with supervisor and subordinate roles are reversed (Triana et al., 2017). Thus, important questions such as (a) when and why subordinates view a system in which their supervisor is younger, less educated, and has a shorter tenure as relatively fair and (b) how this situation impacts subordinates' work motivation were answered by the present studies. Moreover, we contribute to status research by complementing status characteristics theory (Berger et al., 1966). Whereas a vast amount of research on status characteristics theory has found that status markers such as greater age, education, and tenure generally lead people to be assigned higher-status roles, changes in the contemporary workplace suggest that this is increasingly not the case. We disentangled status markers from competence and examined an important question that has not been investigated in prior research: how employees combine information about supervisors' status markers and perceived competence to form judgments of the fairness of their employer's promotion system. Testing the joint effect of status (in)congruence and supervisor competence on subordinates' fairness judgments and work motivation allows us to show *when* the presence of status congruence may induce subordinates to respond more positively (i.e., when supervisor competence is relatively low) and *why* this is the case (i.e., due to people's desire for system justification).

Second, this paper contributes to the nascent research that links system justification theory to the organizational domain. Despite the clear relevance of system justification theory's

basic tenets for the psychology of employees, previous research has paid relatively little attention to exploring the system-justification motive in the workplace relative to other systems such as governments and religions (Proudfoot & Kay, 2014), although that trend is beginning to change. (Hafenbrädl & Waeger, 2017; Proudfoot et al., 2015). We extend the theory by investigating how supervisors' competence and status markers interact to justify organizational systems and motivate employees. We draw on extant research to show how lacking power, by heightening people's motivation to justify the system, strengthens this interactive effect. More generally, the present research highlights the value of considering people's need to defend their systems as a powerful driver of workplace perceptions and motivation.

Third, complementing the numerous organizational justice studies showing the effects of fairness (Colquitt et al., 2005), our studies contribute to the trend of examining fairness as a dependent variable (Brockner et al., 2015) by revealing a prevalent yet under-studied antecedent – status (in)congruence – of employees' fairness perceptions of their work environment. In line with recent studies suggesting that judgments of fairness can be in the eye of the beholder (e.g., Bianchi & Brockner, 2012; Blader, 2007; Blader, Wiesenfeld, Fortin, & Wheeler-Smith, 2013; Ganegoda & Folger, 2015), we find that employees can view an organizational system as fair through a motivated reasoning process. We also highlight how individuals' felt power serves to moderate the influence of supervisors' status (in)congruence and competence on fairness perceptions. This effort not only enriches our understanding of organizational fairness, but it also fosters constructive cross-fertilization with other bodies of work in organizational and social psychology such as system justification and status characteristics.

Organizational Implications

As employees increasingly find themselves in situations of status incongruence, it is important to understand its effects on work beliefs (e.g., fairness judgments) and behavior (e.g., motivation). One implication of the present findings is that organizations should proactively convey the fairness of the promotion system under conditions of status incongruence, for example, by ensuring and communicating that the supervisors are (and are perceived to be) competent and thus suitable for leadership positions. For subordinates who perceive that they lack power or employment alternatives, there may be a counter-productive side to status congruence because it may make them justify an unfair system, potentially to their own disadvantage. It may be more useful in the long run for subordinates to curb their system justification tendency, form accurate perceptions of their system, and strategize their career paths accordingly. For supervisors who find themselves lacking the traditional status markers such as age, tenure, and education, the present findings may reassure them that when they are able to convey their high competence, their status-incongruent attributes are less likely to be held against them. More generally, supervisors also need to help their subordinates see the promotion system as fair to elicit high work motivation in them.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

In calling attention to the limitations of the present studies, we are simultaneously offering suggestions for future research. Following previous work on status congruence (Triana et al., 2017), we conceptualized and operationalized status congruence as a composite of multiple status markers such as age, education, and tenure simultaneously. Although theorizing and comparing the effects of status congruence in each attribute is beyond the scope of the current paper, we nevertheless conducted supplemental analyses to explore whether certain bases of (in)congruence might be more responsible than others in accounting for the present findings. In

Study 1 and 2, we found that the interaction of *age* (in)congruence and supervisor competence was significantly related to promotion system fairness. Moreover, in Study 2, the three-way interaction of age (in)congruence, supervisor competence, and power significantly predicted promotion system fairness. In Study 2 (not 1), we found that the interaction of *education* (in)congruence and supervisor competence as well as the three-way interaction of education (in)congruence, supervisor competence, and power significantly predicted promotion system fairness. However, *tenure* (in)congruence was not significant in either study. We suspect that the importance of tenure (in)congruence might differ across industries as a function of norms surrounding tenure as a basis of status, which represents an important question for future research.

While the current paper is one of the first to test the effects of status (in)congruence on employees, the understanding of status (in)congruence will benefit from increased nuances in future theorization and empirical testing. For example, it would be interesting to study whether subordinates' absolute levels of status markers (e.g., age, education, and tenure) moderates the effects of status (in)congruence on their fairness perceptions. Future research also needs to evaluate how the impact of status markers on outcomes may differ across various contexts, e.g., industrial sectors and organizational forms (Ridgeway, 1993). In certain industries and organizations, the norms around hierarchy and status markers such as age, education, and tenure between supervisors and subordinates are less strong. In these organizations, status incongruence may have weaker effects on subordinates' fairness perceptions and work motivation than in the present studies. For example, in technological start-ups, being young, traditionally a cue signifying low status, may well mean that one has fresh information and technological fluency, and thereby is a source of high status. We encourage future researchers to examine factors

related to the specific industry in which participants are employed. Structural characteristics of organizations, for instance, its stability and permanence, may also moderate the extent to which it is viewed as a significant system that must be justified and defended (Proudfoot & Kay, 2018). Other factors that have been shown to increase system justification tendencies, such as organizational identification and the presence of an external threat to a system (Proudfoot & Kay, 2014) might also heighten the interactive effect of status (in)congruence and leader competence on subordinate fairness perceptions. On a related note, while the present studies found results that are robust and consistent across two cultures (i.e., the U.S. and China), future research needs to examine multiple cultures in the same studies to examine whether and when national cultures may make a difference.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

Status incongruence, in which traditional status markers (e.g., age, education, and tenure) associated with leader and subordinate roles are reversed, is an increasingly prevalent phenomenon in contemporary organizations. The present research revealed that the interactive effects of status (in)congruence and supervisor competence on how fair subordinates perceive the promotion system to be is robust across experimental and field studies and across national contexts. Specifically, we found that when the supervisor was relatively less competent, status congruence was more likely to serve as a basis of system justification and thus enhance the perceived fairness of the promotion system. Given the growing importance of understanding the implications of status (in)congruence, we encourage management researchers to build on the present studies to integrate fairness perceptions from the justice literature with the organizational and social psychological theories of system justification and status characteristics. We hope the

insights gleaned from our theoretical integration and results will spark further cross-area research and empirical tests in the context of supervisor-subordinate relationships and beyond.

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, Coefficient Alphas, and Intercorrelations Between Scales for All Studies

Scale	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Study 1 (N = 432)														
1.Subordinate gender (1=M, 2=F)	1.43 (0.50)	—												
2.Subordinate age	36.66 (8.29)	0.12*	—											
3.Subordinate education	3.19 (0.89)	-0.18**	-0.07	—										
4.Subordinate tenure (in years)	7.42 (6.71)	0.01	0.49**	-0.16**	—									
5.Supervisor gender (1=M, 2=F)	1.41 (0.49)	0.33**	-0.02	-0.04	-0.11*	—								
6.Supervisor age	46.31 (9.23)	-0.02	0.16**	-0.05	0.20**	-0.03	—							
7.Supervisor education	3.91 (1.27)	-0.02	-0.01	0.32**	-0.10	-0.05	-0.00	—						
8.Supervisor tenure (in years)	12.77 (8.21)	-0.03	0.16**	-0.06	0.33**	-0.08	0.54**	-0.12*	—					
9.Procedural fairness	4.76 (1.32)	-0.08	-0.06	-0.03	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	(0.92)				
10.Status congruence	1.90 (0.85)	0.09	-0.32**	-0.20**	-0.30**	0.05	0.26**	0.08	0.19**	0.06	—			
11.Supervisor competence	5.92 (1.10)	-0.05	0.04	-0.02	0.07	-0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.13**	0.40**	0.10*	(0.96)		
12.Promotion system fairness	4.84 (1.52)	-0.05	-0.10*	-0.03	0.01	0.00	-0.04	0.03	-0.02	0.71**	0.11*	0.48**	(0.94)	
13.Work motivation	5.68 (1.01)	0.10*	0.03	-0.06	0.06	-0.00	0.02	0.04	-0.01	0.43**	0.07	0.39**	0.38**	(0.94)
Study 2 (N = 354)														
1.Subordinate gender (1=M, 2=F)	1.40 (0.49)	—												
2.Subordinate age (in years)	32.19 (7.37)	0.01	—											
3.Subordinate education	2.25 (0.81)	-0.08	-0.26**	—										
4.Subordinate tenure (in months)	54.89 (68.35)	0.11*	0.45**	-0.19**	—									
5.Supervisor gender (1=M, 2=F)	1.24 (0.43)	0.20**	0.05	0.06	0.02	—								
6.Supervisor age (in years)	37.43 (6.45)	-0.01	0.21**	-0.06	0.18**	-0.19**	—							
7.Supervisor education	2.43 (0.94)	-0.41	-0.10	0.37**	-0.15**	-0.03	-0.19**	—						
8.Supervisor tenure (in months)	59.83 (58.28)	0.16**	-0.03	-0.09	0.31**	0.05	0.23**	-0.24**	—					
9.Status congruence	1.57 (0.81)	0.06	-0.51**	-0.06	-0.33**	-0.05	0.14**	0.30**	0.20**	—				
10.Supervisor competence	5.86 (1.14)	0.03	-0.07	-0.02	0.08	-0.06	0.02	-0.03	0.03	0.01	(0.96)			
11.Power	3.63 (1.63)	0.07	-0.03	0.08	0.04	0.04	-0.16**	0.04	-0.05	-0.08	-0.01	(0.96)		
12.Promotion system fairness	5.12 (1.49)	-0.02	-0.15**	-0.07	-0.01	-0.13*	-0.06	-0.05	0.06	0.09	0.45**	0.18**	(0.96)	
13.Work motivation	5.34 (1.20)	-0.01	-0.01	-0.04	-0.01	-0.16**	-0.03	-0.01	0.03	0.03	0.52**	0.29**	0.52**	(0.96)
Study 3 (N = 306)														
1.Status congruence	—	—												
2.Power	—	-0.02	—											
3.Promotion system fairness	3.73 (1.42)	0.12*	0.02	(0.92)										
4.Work motivation	7.21 (8.70)	0.13*	-0.11	0.36**	0.31**	—								

Note. Numbers in the parentheses are the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each scale.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

Table 2. Regression Analyses (Study 1)

Variable	Promotion system fairness			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Controls				
Subordinate gender (1=M, 2=F)	0.04 (0.11)	0.03 (0.11)	0.06 (0.11)	
Subordinate age	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	
Subordinate education	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.06)	
Subordinate tenure (in years)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	
Supervisor gender (1=M, 2=F)	-0.05 (0.11)	-0.05 (0.11)	-0.07 (0.11)	
Supervisor age	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	
Supervisor education	0.04 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	0.03 (0.04)	
Supervisor tenure (in years)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	
Procedural fairness	0.82 (0.04) ^{***}	0.71 (0.04) ^{***}	0.71 (0.04) ^{***}	
Main effects				
Status congruence		0.11 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)	0.11 (0.08)
Supervisor competence		0.32 (0.05)^{***}	0.32 (0.05) ^{***}	0.64 (0.06) ^{***}
Interaction				
Status congruence × Supervisor competence (H1)			-0.13 (0.05)[*]	-0.12 (0.07)⁺
R ²	0.51	0.56	0.57	0.24

Note. N = 432. H1: Hypothesis 1.

⁺ $p < 0.10$, ^{*} $p < 0.05$; ^{**} $p < 0.01$; ^{***} $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Table 3. *Path Estimates for Hypothesis 2 (Study 1 and Study 2)*

	Effects				
	Status congruence -> Promotion system fairness	Promotion system fairness -> work motivation	Indirect	Direct	Total
Study 1 (N = 432)					
High supervisor competence	-0.04	0.09*	-0.004 [-0.02, 0.01]	0.07	0.07
Low supervisor competence	0.23**	0.09*	0.02* [0.001, 0.05]	0.07	0.09
Difference	-0.27**	—	-0.03* [-0.06, -0.001]	—	-0.01
Study 2 (N = 354)					
High supervisor competence	-0.16	0.42***	-0.07 [-0.20, 0.06]	0.02	-0.12*
Low supervisor competence	0.41**	0.42***	0.17** [0.04, 0.31]	0.02	-0.19*
Difference	-0.57**	—	-0.24** [-0.39, -0.11]	—	-0.24

Note. Unstandardized regression coefficients are presented. Differences in the effects were computed by subtracting the effects when supervisor competence was high from the effects when supervisor competence was low. Test of the difference in the indirect effect is equivalent to the test of moderated mediation. Significance tests for the indirect and total effects and differences in them are based on the bias-corrected confidence intervals derived from bootstrapping estimates with 5,000 samples, as explained in Edwards and Lambert (2007).

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Table 4. *Regression Analyses (Study 2)*

Variable	Promotion system fairness				
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Controls					
Subordinate gender (1=M, 2=F)	-0.14 (0.15)	-0.14 (0.14)	-0.12 (0.14)		
Subordinate age	-0.06 (0.07)	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.06 (0.07)		
Subordinate education	-0.12 (0.11)	-0.11 (0.11)	-0.14 (0.10)		
Subordinate tenure (in months)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)		
Supervisor gender (1=M, 2=F)	-0.39 (0.17)*	-0.39 (0.17)*	-0.35 (0.17)*		
Supervisor age	-0.10 (0.06)	-0.10 (0.06)	-0.10 (0.06)		
Supervisor education	-0.09 (0.10)	-0.06 (0.10)	-0.07 (0.10)		
Supervisor tenure (in months)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)		
Main effects					
Status congruence	0.15 (0.13)	0.14 (0.13)	0.15 (0.13)	0.19 (0.08)*	0.21 (0.08)*
Supervisor competence	0.58 (0.06)***	0.57 (0.06)***	0.59 (0.06)***	0.58 (0.06)***	0.60 (0.06)***
Subordinate power	0.17 (0.04)***	0.18 (0.04)***	0.18 (0.04)***	0.17 (0.04)***	0.18 (0.04)***
Promotion system fairness					
Interactions					
Status congruence × Supervisor competence		-0.26 (0.07)***	-0.24 (0.07)***	-0.27 (0.07)***	-0.26 (0.07)***
		(H1)			
Status congruence × Subordinate power			-0.12 (0.05)*		-0.12 (0.05)*
Supervisor competence × Subordinate power			0.01 (0.04)		0.01 (0.04)
Status congruence × Supervisor competence × Subordinate power			0.10 (0.04)*		0.10 (0.04)*
			(H3)		
R ²	0.28	0.31	0.33	0.28	0.30

Note. N = 354. H1: Hypothesis 1 and H3: Hypothesis 3.

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

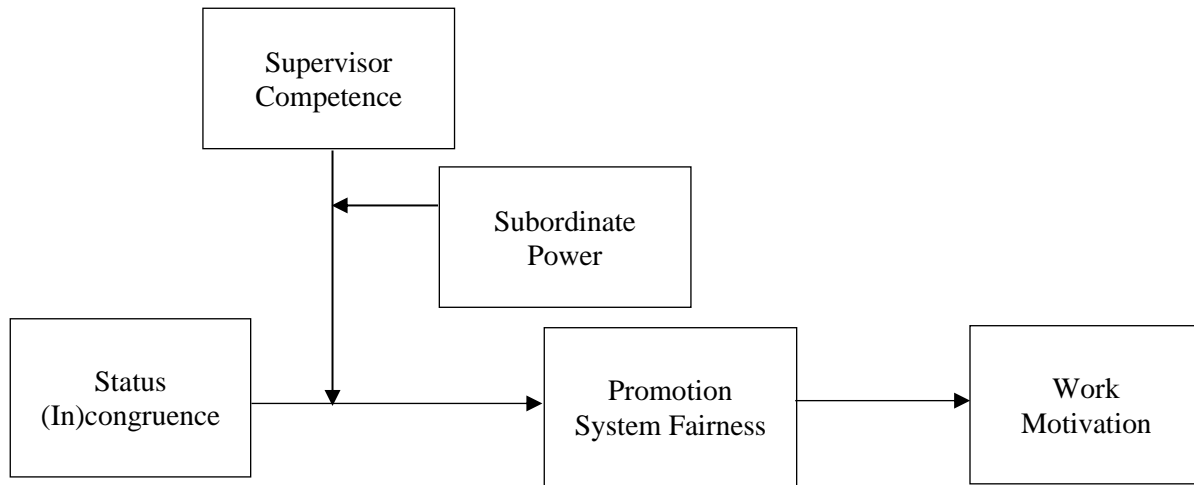


Figure 1. Model Framework

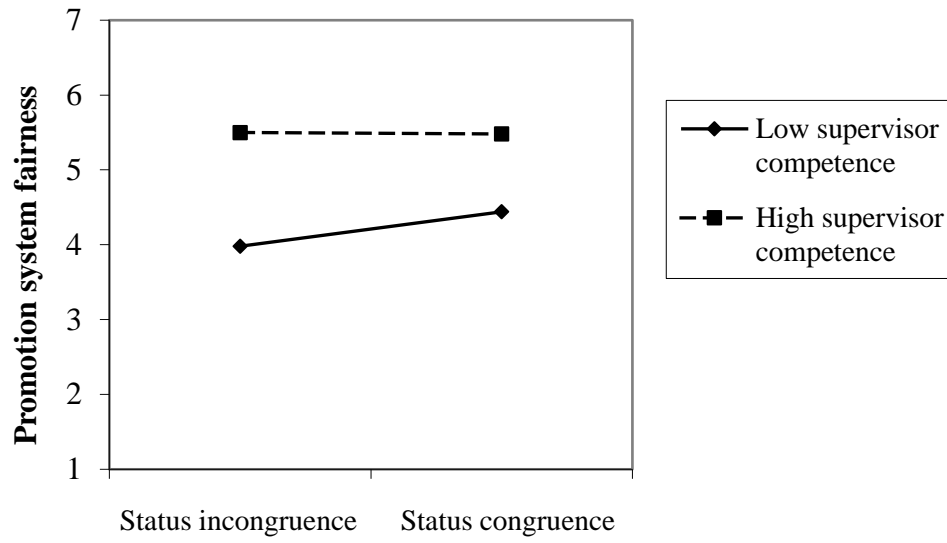


Figure 2. The Two-Way Interactive Effect of Status Congruence and Supervisor Competence on Promotion System Fairness (Study 1)

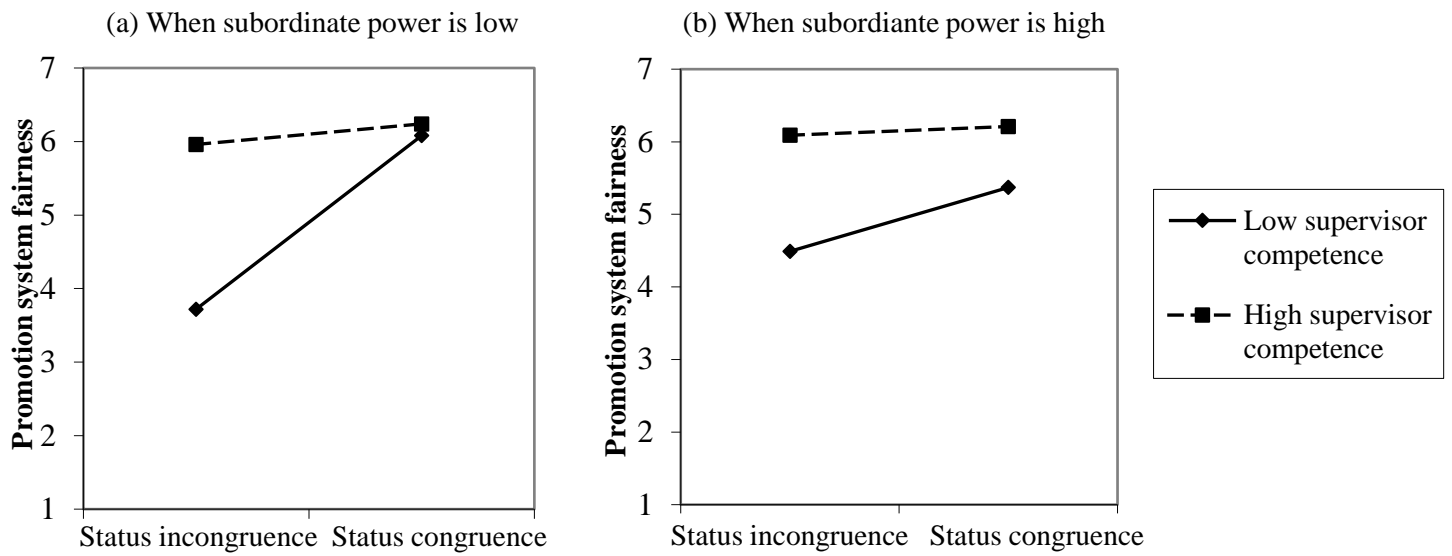


Figure 3. The Three-Way Interactive Effect of Status Congruence, Supervisor Competence, and Supervisor Power on Promotion System Fairness (Study 2)

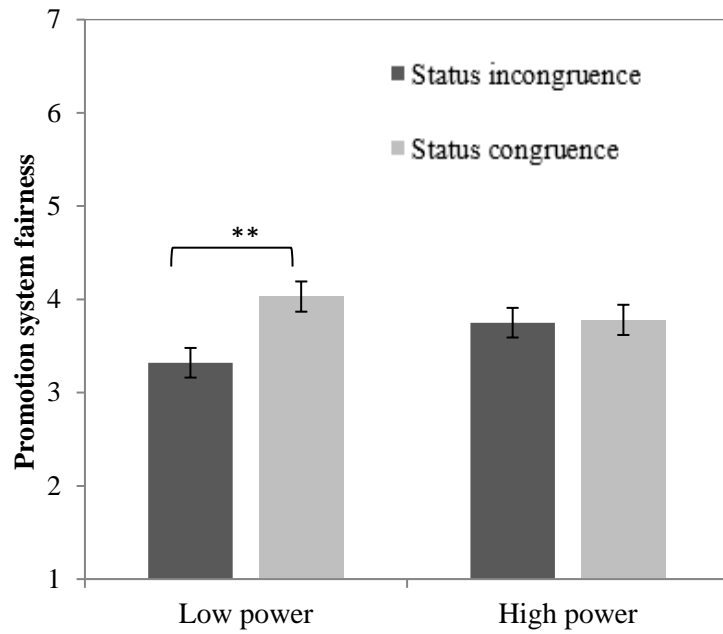


Figure 4. Interaction between Status Congruence and Supervisor Power on Promotion System Fairness (Study 3) with Standard Errors as Bars.