

The Association between System Justification Belief and Level of Happiness

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Introduction

- System justification theory proposes that justifying for prevailing social, economic, and political arrangements may help mitigate dissonance, anxiety, guilt etc. for both advantaged and disadvantaged groups. (Bahamondes et al. 2019).
- Previous studies have shown a general positive association between system justification beliefs and happiness for disadvantaged groups, especially for sexual minorities, women, and ethnic minorities. But studies disagree on if system justification's palliative effect is greater for more disadvantaged groups that are impacted by intersecting demographic factors like social status (Sichel et al. 2022 & Hadarics et al. 2021 & Bahamondes-Correa et al. 2016).

Research Questions

- Are people who justify for the system more likely to be happy?
- If so, how does the relationship change for more disadvantaged groups, according to race and class?

Methods

- Codebooks:** GSS 2021 and GSS 2018
- Sample:** Samples are chosen from adults 18 or older in the United States who live in noninstitutional housing at the time of interviewing. The GSS 2021 sample size was 4,032, and the GSS 2018 sample size was 2348.
- Measures:**
 - Happiness level is collapsed into happy (1) and unhappy (0)
 - System justification belief is measured by the response to the reasons for racial disparity: internal reasons (ie. justified for the system), discrimination (i.e. did not justify for the system), both
 - Race is grouped into white, black, and other people of color.
 - Class is grouped into middle-upper class (1) and low-working class (0)

Results

Univariate and Bivariate

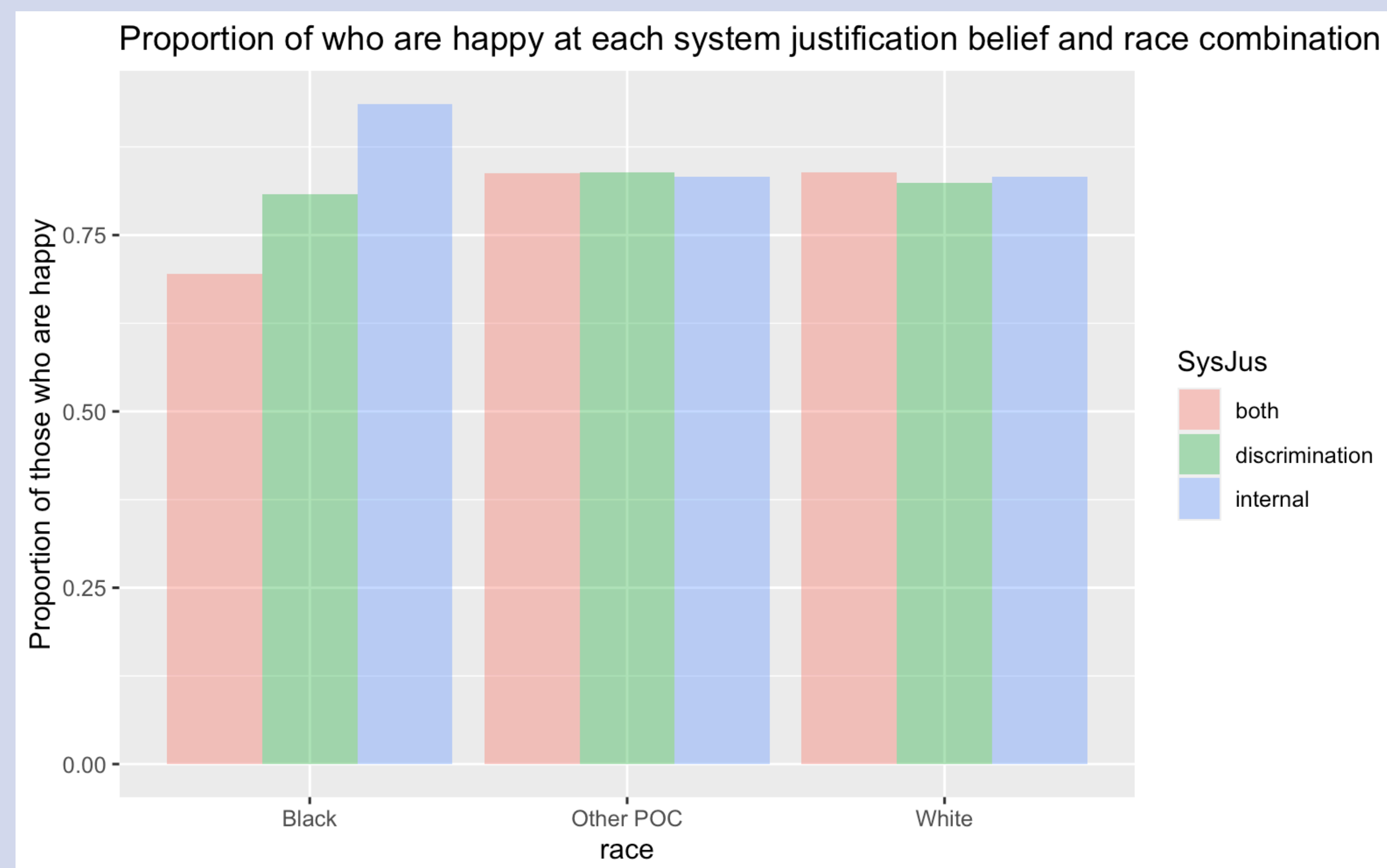
56.0% of respondents chose “**discrimination**” as the reason for racial disparity i.e. didn't justify for the system; **28.4%** of respondents chose “**motivation or willpower**” as the reason for racial disparity i.e. justified for the system

There was **no significant relationship** between system justification belief and happiness level among all of the respondents ($X^2 = 2.96$, $p\text{-value} = 0.23$)

Multivariate

However, the relationship between system justification belief and happiness level changes when considering race as a moderating variable.

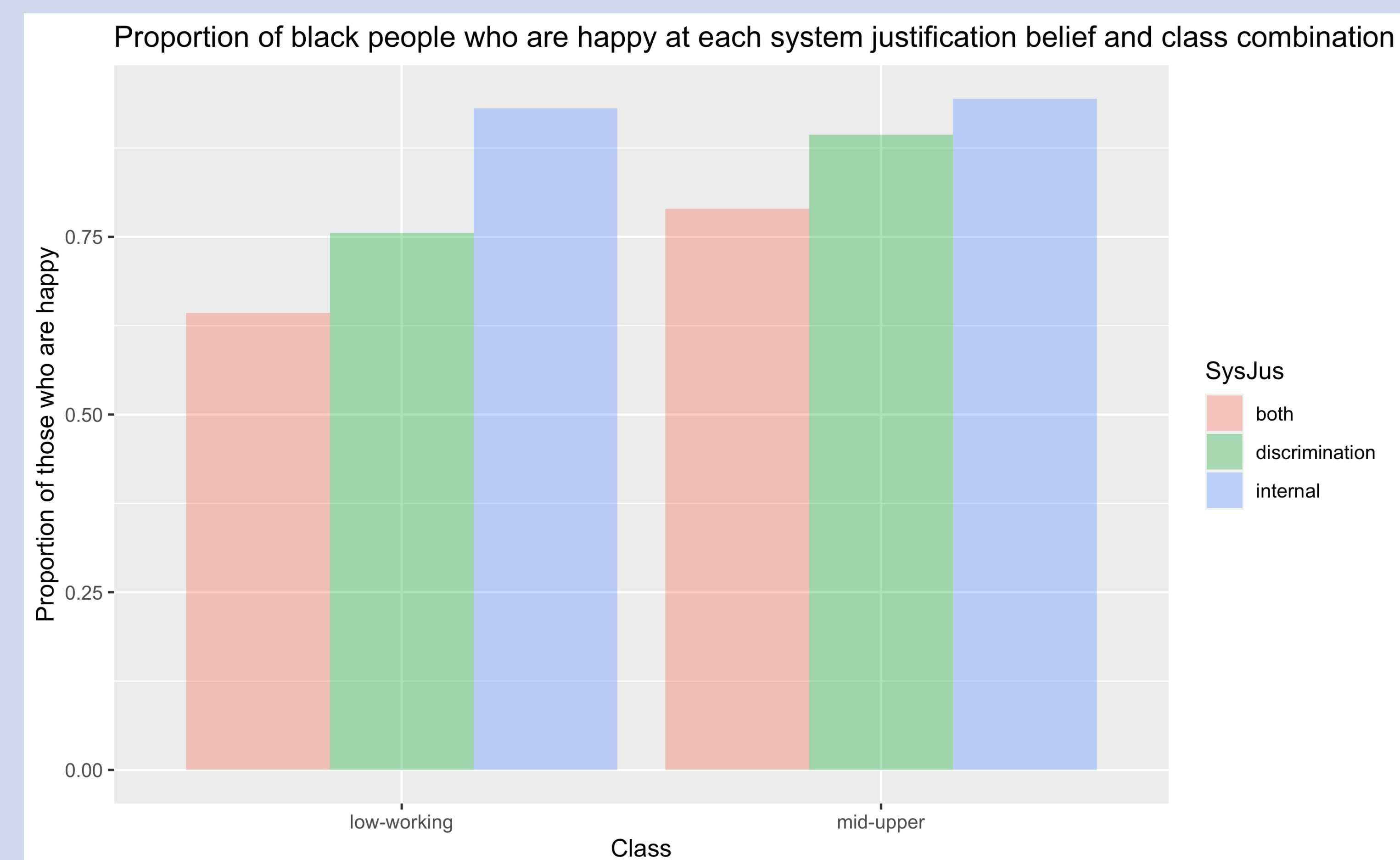
1. Race



Across three racial groups, only black people's system justification belief is significantly associated with happiness level ($X^2 = 12.783$, $p\text{-value} = 0.0017$), and the logistical regression has shown that there is a significant difference across people who chose all three different options.

Furthermore, class is added as a moderating variable for the black subgroup.

2. Race and Class



It is found that for people who are black and in low-working class, there is a significant association between system justification belief ($X^2 = 9.25$, $p\text{-value} = 0.0098$)

Discussions

- It is found that system justification belief is significantly and positively related to one's happiness level for low-working class black people, which is the more disadvantaged group, but does not influence with other groups. This result might complicate the theory that claims system justification would benefit both the advantaged and disadvantaged group.
- The result may help social workers and social psychologists understand why marginalized groups might accept their current position
- Further research can look at other discriminatory systems like sexism or racism targeted at other groups to see if system justification belief only makes the targeted group happier.
- Additionally further studies can include other demographic factors as moderating variables, for example, gender, sexual orientation etc. can make people more advantaged or disadvantaged in particular social systems and thus having more palliative result from system justification belief.

Suppes, A., Napier, J.L. & van der Toorn, J. (2018) The palliative effects of system justification on the health and happiness of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 45, 372-399.

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