

The Psychology of Social Status

Joey T. Cheng • Jessica L. Tracy
Cameron Anderson
Editors

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 Springer

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Joey T. Cheng
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley
USA

Cameron Anderson
University of California, Berkeley
Berkeley
USA

Jessica L. Tracy
University of British Columbia
Vancouver
Canada

ISBN 978-1-4939-0866-0 ISBN 978-1-4939-0867-7 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-4939-0867-7
Springer New York Heidelberg Dordrecht London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014940395

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Printed on acid-free paper

Springer is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

Preface and Acknowledgments

There has never been a more exciting time to study social status and hierarchy. Over the past several decades, researchers from across the social sciences have come to recognize the importance, complexity, and ubiquity of individual differences in social rank. These scholars have made great strides in shedding light on such fascinating yet long perplexing questions as: Why are societies everywhere structured hierarchically? What function might hierarchy serve, for individuals and for groups? How do rank differences emerge, and what determines who rises to the top? What are the psychological, neural, and hormonal mechanisms that underlie status attainment? What are the consequences of high and low rank on relationships, mating, and reproductive success? Psychologists, neuroscientists, health researchers, sociologists, anthropologists, and management scientists are working together to seek answers to these questions, and to build a comprehensive and interdisciplinary science of the psychological underpinnings of social status.

This volume was conceived several years ago when we were attending the annual Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) conference, the single largest annual meeting place for social and personality psychologists. As researchers broadly interested in the psychology of social status and rank dynamics, we were naturally attracted to many symposia sessions and presentations themed around the topic of power and status. One thing we noticed, however, was that the research agenda seemed to be dominated, to a certain extent, by *power*—or institutionally driven rank differentials (exemplified by a boss/employee relationship)—to the neglect of research on social status and dominance—or naturally emerging hierarchical differences that arise in everyday interpersonal relationships. Further reflecting this state of affairs, an excellent volume reviewing the extant literature on power was published several years ago (Guinote and Vescio 2010), but the present volume marks the first comprehensive review of research on the psychology of status and broader rank-attainment processes.

Although there are important similarities between power and status, the two concepts are quite notably distinct. Whereas status refers to a form of influence and control that arises spontaneously in everyday social situations, power involves formally endowed control over valued resources, often resulting from institutionally legitimized positions in the workplace, politics, or broader society. As a result,

while many of the consequences may be similar, the psychological underpinnings of status and related processes are unique from those that lead to power. Given this distinction, we believed that the field was in need of a book dedicated to the large bodies of research that have emerged on status and naturally occurring social rank.

With this volume, our goal was to showcase the major foundational insights that have emerged to date on the psychology of social status. The scientific study of status—which began over 40 years ago with classic studies in sociology by Berger, Ridgeway, Driskell, and others—has grown tremendously in recent years. Many of the most influential psychology papers on the topic—such as those by Tiedens, Anderson, and Willer, to name a few—were published within the last 15 years. Moreover, the study of status has become an interdisciplinary enterprise, crossing the boundaries of sociology, psychology, organizational science, anthropology, and other fields. Essential to this volume is the inclusion and synthesis of these interdisciplinary approaches. Among the 16 chapters included are the latest perspectives and cutting-edge empirical findings from across these disciplines; contributors include social, personality and evolutionary psychologists, organizational scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists. Furthermore, all of these contributors are leading experts in the field, whose work has broken theoretical and empirical ground. It is our hope that this collection will provide a one-stop shop for those who wish to learn about the latest and most important developments in this flourishing area of research.

This volume is divided into five sections. The first section provides an overview of prominent overarching theoretical perspectives that have shaped much of the current research agenda on social status. These chapters lay out the theoretical foundations for much of the rest of the work presented in the volume, and address core questions about the nature of social status and hierarchy. In Chap. 1, Cheng and Tracy explore the evolutionary origins of human status hierarchies, and review a large body of evidence supporting the Dominance-Prestige theoretical account. According to this model, there are two fundamental pathways to social rank attainment in human societies: dominance (inducing fear in others) and prestige (gaining others' respect). In Chap. 2, Barkow explores the evolutionary emergence of prestige, and discusses the pivotal role of culture and cultural transmission in the rise of complex, socially stratified groups and societies, from an anthropological perspective. Complementing these chapters on the distal forces that favor the emergence of hierarchical relationships, in Chap. 3 Anderson and Willer offer a broad account of the proximal drivers of status allocation. They argue that, although humans are motivated to develop hierarchies based on prestige—by allocating social rank only to the most skilled and committed group members—their ability to do so is constrained by a number of interesting psychological biases and traps. Finally, in Chap. 4 Blader and Chen synthesize across these distinct theoretical perspectives to explore the multidimensional nature of hierarchical relationships, with a close review of the conceptual overlap and distinctions among these diverse forms of hierarchy. This chapter helps to explain the different ways in which researchers have conceptualized each of the key constructs relevant to the central topic of this

volume: status, power, influence, socioeconomic status, leadership, dominance, and prestige.

The second section of the volume examines the personality, demographic, situational, psychological, emotional, and cultural underpinnings of status attainment. This section, in essence, addresses questions about who attains status, and why. In Chap. 5, Anderson and Cowan survey the extant empirical research on the personality determinants of status attainment. They find that high status individuals consistently exhibit lower neuroticism but greater extraversion, dominance, and self-monitoring, and, in some group contexts, greater conscientiousness, narcissism, and openness to experience. Moving beyond personality, in Chap. 6 Blaker and van Vugt examine the link between physical stature and social status. Their review indicates that physical attributes such as height and muscularity promote rank, but through different mechanisms. Whereas tall individuals acquire status via both dominance and prestige, the high rank of muscular individuals results from dominance. In Chap. 7, Kafashan, Sparks, Griskevicius, and Barclay explore the complex bidirectional associations between prosocial behavior and status attainment. Certain forms of prosocial behavior, they suggest, both influence and is affected by status gains to a greater extent than others.

In Chap. 8, Leary, Jongman-Sereno, and Diebels offer insights into the psychological processes that underpin individuals' pursuit of status, and focus specifically on the role of impression management—the attempt to shape and influence one's reputation and public perception. Their theoretical analysis shows that acts of self-presentation are not only pervasive in status pursuits, but also entail a delicate and difficult balance between the often conflicting goals of getting ahead and getting along. In Chap. 9 von Rueden addresses the universality of social hierarchy from a cultural anthropological perspective. As his review of ethnographies and recent empirical work in small-scale societies reveals, hierarchy is a human universal, found even in highly egalitarian foraging and horticultural societies. Interestingly, status in these populations is largely determined by a similar suite of factors observed in industrial societies—such as skill and generosity, or prestige more broadly, as well as physical stature. He shows that men's status bears important consequences for his reproductive success. Finally, in Chap. 10 Steckler and Tracy provide an in-depth overview of the distinct emotional underpinnings of status hierarchy. They highlight the critical functions that basic emotions—such as happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, and fear—and more complex social emotions—pride, shame, envy, contempt, and admiration—serve in facilitating hierarchy navigation.

The volume's third section focuses on the intra- and inter-personal benefits and costs of possessing and lacking status, examining the downstream consequences of high and low status on cognition, self-perception, and interpersonal and inter-group relations. In Chap. 11 Fast and Joshi explore two fundamental cognitive forces—subjective sense of control and role expectations—that are triggered by high rank, and examine the benefits and barriers that these forces present in organizational settings. They argue that these rank-related cognitions are not always advantageous, and in fact often create surprising barriers for those atop the social hierarchy in domains such as decision-making, task performance, social relationships, and well-

being. Broadening the scope to status hierarchies that exist at a societal level, in Chap. 12 North and Fiske discuss prevailing sociological and psychological insights into social inequality. Their review highlights the socio-structural forces, cultural stereotypes, and other psychological biases that jointly create and sustain social inequality and prejudice among groups who differ in race, gender, age, weight, sexuality, and social class.

The volume's fourth section reviews emerging research on the biological and bodily manifestation of status attainment, identifying specific endocrinologies, neural systems, and nonverbal behaviors that create and reflect status differences. In Chap. 13, Knight and Mehta review the mounting empirical findings on the neuroendocrinologies that underpin hierarchical differences. This body of research provides compelling evidence for complex reciprocal relations between status attainment and a number of hormones—namely testosterone, cortisol, estradiol, and oxytocin—in both humans and nonhuman animals. In Chap. 14 Pornpattananangkul, Zink, and Chiao provide an overview of research on the neural networks and patterns that encode status-related information in the human brain. Their review indicates that the serotonergic and dopaminergic neurotransmitter systems—which are regulated by intricate gene-by-environment interactions—play pivotal roles in facilitating the perception, recognition, and expression of dominance and submission patterns in humans and other species. In Chap. 15, Hall, Latu, Carney, and Schmid Mast summarize the large bodies of research on the nonverbal expression of status. As they show, high and low relative rank are each associated with distinct nonverbal cues emitted from the face, eyes, body, and voice. By signaling one's rank position to others and activating rank-related cognitions and behavioral patterns, these cues both shape and reflect individuals' rank in complex yet predictable ways.

Finally, the fifth section of the volume is comprised of a single stand-alone chapter by Cheng, Weidman, and Tracy, which provides a broad review of available research methods for measuring and experimentally manipulating social status. The goal of this review is to provide researchers with an easy-to-access means of determining how best to measure or manipulate the status-related constructs in which they are interested. Together, these 16 chapters collectively form what we hope to be a useful resource for researchers, students, policy-makers, and others interested in learning about the remarkable proliferation of knowledge that has accumulated across many decades of research, along with the latest and most exciting theoretical and empirical insights into human social status dynamics.

A volume of this scope would not have been possible without the help of many individuals. First and foremost, we are extremely grateful to each and every one of the volume's contributors, who generously devoted their time and energy to this project. Our heartfelt appreciation also goes to the editors at Springer, in particular Morgan Ryan and Anna Tobias, for their encouragement and support throughout this project. Finally, we thank our publisher, Springer, without whom this effort would not be possible.

February 2014

Joey T. Cheng
Jessica L. Tracy
Cameron Anderson

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Contributors

Cameron Anderson Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, USA

Pat Barclay Department of Psychology, University of Guelph, Guelph, Canada

Jerome H. Barkow Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada

Steven L. Blader Stern School of Business, New York University, New York, USA

Nancy M. Blaker Department of Social and Organizational Psychology, VU University, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Dana R. Carney Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley Berkeley, USA

Ya-Ru Chen Johnson School of Management, Cornell University, Ithaca, USA

Joey T. Cheng Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, USA

Joan Y. Chiao Department of Psychology and Interdepartmental Neuroscience Program, Northwestern University, Evanston, USA

Jon Cowan Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley, Berkeley, USA

Kate J. Diebels Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Duke University, Durham, USA

Nathanael J. Fast Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA

Susan T. Fiske Department of Psychology, Princeton University, Princeton, USA

Vladas Griskevicius Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, USA

Judith A. Hall Department of Psychology, Northeastern University, Boston, USA

Katrina P. Jongman-Sereno Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Duke University, Durham, USA

Priyanka D. Joshi Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA

Sara Kafashan Department of Psychology, University of Guelph, Guelph, Canada

Erik L. Knight Department of Psychology, University of Oregon, Eugene, USA

Ioana Maria Latu Department of Psychology, Rutgers University, Camden, USA

Mark R. Leary Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Duke University, Durham, USA

Marianne Schmid Mast Department of Organizational Behavior, University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland

Pranjal H. Mehta Department of Psychology, University of Oregon, Eugene, USA

Michael S. North Department of Psychology, Columbia University, New York, USA

Narun Pornpattananangkul Department of Psychology and Interdepartmental Neuroscience Program, Northwestern University, Evanston, USA

Christopher von Rueden Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond, Richmond, USA

Adam Sparks Department of Psychology, University of Guelph, Guelph, Canada

Conor M. Steckler Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

Jessica L. Tracy Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

Mark van Vugt Department of Social and Organizational Psychology, VU University, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Aaron C. Weidman Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

Robb Willer Department of Sociology, Stanford University, Stanford, USA

Caroline F. Zink Division of Cognitive Neuroscience, Lieber Institute for Brain Development, Baltimore, USA