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## Group Status

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## Group Status FREE

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### **[-] Summary and Keywords**

Group status refers to the extent to which members of a group are respected and admired by others. All known societies are characterized by status stratifications, with the most advantaged groups enjoying a more-than-fair share of the total wealth and prestige. Most ordinary criteria to categorize people into groups possess value connotations that eventually uphold prestige hierarchies. Gender, ethnicity, and age—but also disability, weight, sexual orientation, and of course education, income, and class background—are major criteria of social stratification. Established status characteristics may consist of ascribed (e.g., gender) or achieved (e.g., occupation) qualities. They may further consist of groups with more (e.g., gender) or less (e.g., race, social class) contact and mutual interdependence. Status hierarchies are manifold, and the best metaphor encompassing their diversity is that of a *vertical dimension* that ranks groups' status and prestige. Generally, members of high-status groups praise individualistic and autonomous self-conceptions and show self-directedness, whereas the opposite tendencies prevail toward the bottom of the status hierarchy. Socialization practices (e.g., parental education, peers, school, and the workplace) take center stage in explaining how members of status groups acquire these contrasting habits and characteristics. However, recent social psychological research sheds light on more general processes related to how people interpret and react to specific situations. Major contributions of social psychological analyses of group status are found in social identity theory, social role theory, status construction theory, the stereotype content model, and social dominance and system justification theories. Despite substantial differences, these perspectives complement each other to account for the formation, the maintenance, and the change of status hierarchies. Status hierarchies are not only pervasive and inevitable but also crucial in their consequences. Status contributes to a wealth of phenomena, including subjective well-being, mental, and physical health, etc. Important for the present discussion is research investigating how group status affects verbal and nonverbal communication between members of high- and low-status groups.

Keywords: social hierarchy, personal uniqueness, depersonalization, attentional asymmetries, nonverbal behavior, intergroup communication

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Does group status influence how people think about and act toward ingroup and outgroup members? Echoing Sherif and Sherif's (1969) statement that "differential status and power is one of the most essential properties making a group what it is" (p. 140), this chapter provides an affirmative answer to this question. Group status influences the ways people conceive of themselves, relate to other people, and act to improve or secure their condition. It is a central notion of the social and the psychological sciences, although some scholars argue that research on group status is still in a "nebulous" state (e.g., Leavitt & Fryberg, 2013; see also Côté, 2011).

The chapter is organized into four sections. Section 1 (Definitions) provides a general definition of group status, and a description of the common characteristics of high- and low-status groups. Section 2 (Origins) considers major theories that account for the emergence of group status divides, and Section 3 (Maintenance and Change) summarizes what is known about processes that lead to the maintenance and change of status hierarchies. Section 4 (Communication) considers how group status influences communication, within and between groups.

### Definitions

Group status is typically conceived of as the extent to which a group is respected and admired by others. Being the outcome of the rank ordering of groups on consensually valued dimensions, this concept is inherently comparative. "It involves at least two persons: One to claim it and another to honor the claim" (Mills, 1951, p. 239). Status is often represented as vertical (high versus low) positions in the social space (see Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Sorokin, 1959; Zitek & Tiedens, 2012), and is reflected in lifestyles that convey differential prestige, respect, and deference. It should be distinguished from power (control over valued resources), authority (control over decisions), and dominance (an individual disposition), although members of high-status groups are often endowed with high levels of these other closely connected attributes (Lovaglia, 1994; Weber, 1946; but see Blader & Chen, 2012; Fragale, Overbeck, & Neale, 2011). Status structures tend to be consensually recognized: studies of the perception of groups' social distance in many societies typically produce, at a given point in time, similar rankings of the groups as viewed from the top and from the bottom of the social hierarchy (e.g., Coxon & Davies, 1986).

### Variety of Status Cues

Group status originates from a number of categorical distinctions and is divided in two types: the ascribed and the achieved (Linton, 1936). Ascribed statuses are inherited at birth (gender, skin color, ethnicity, etc.). They represent fixed status positions and are not controllable by the group members; plus they tend to produce chronic outcomes—that is, similar effects across multiple contexts. Achieved statuses are attained through competition and by demonstrating effort and ability (education, occupational prestige, income, etc.). They are more flexible, under a fair amount of control by the individual, and their influence depends on the contextual salience of the status cue (e.g., being involved in between-status encounters, or performing on status-relevant tasks). Importantly, societies differ in their appraisals of ascribed and achieved statuses. Typically, Western societies praise achieved status based on individuals' accomplishments and judge the ascribed with suspicion, if not contempt. An indirect demonstration of the major role of achieved statuses comes from Rosenberg and Pearlin (1978) on the relationship between ingroup status and self-esteem. Rosenberg and Pearlin aimed to explain why evidence of an association between status and self-esteem only exists among adults. Their interpretation is based on the premise that self-esteem derives from the observation of one's personal accomplishments, which are mostly reflected in high-prestige occupations free from close supervision and implying complex and non-routine tasks. Younger people are not yet exposed to such class-related expectations. In their more homogeneous social world, no one child is socially superior or inferior to the other.

Instead of being viewed as polar opposites, ascribed and achieved criteria of group status should be considered as laying on distinct continua. For example, gender and ethnicity are rather unalterable criteria of status, but social class and socioeconomic status are often considered by some as being inherited (the poor, who make sense of their disadvantage), and by others as being achieved (the rich, who consider their advantage as merited). Consider Penner and Saperstein's (2008) findings showing that even the judgment of a person's racial membership is fluid. Using longitudinal data, the authors demonstrated that this judgment is partly contingent on the person's social status: Black people who have improved their social standing lighten themselves and are perceptually lightened by interviewees as being white, despite the fact that the same persons had self-identified and had been judged as being black before this improvement. Likewise, Freeman, Penner, Saperstein, Scheutz, and Ambady (2011) demonstrated that people whose faces are racially ambiguous are more likely to be categorized as black when they wear manual workers' clothes than when they wear white-collar workers' clothes. Thus, self-identification and social designation as black or white is partly situational and intertwined with status inequalities<sup>1</sup>.

Starting with the observation that achieved status is deemed more important than the ascribed, Rosette and Thompson (2005) contend that in many circumstances claims of achieved status are all a pretence. The authors provide demonstrations of men's and whites' capacities to conceal the origins of status hierarchies by transforming inherited privileges based on gender and race into individual achievements. What individuals do matters more than where they come from. For instance, Khan (2011) found a tendency of students in an elite school to deny social heritage to the benefit of individual work and effort—and the criticisms they endure by their peers when not doing so. These camouflage effects occur because in contemporary societies privilege that derives from inherited criteria is felt as unearned and is a source of unflattering self-images.

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Those high in status legitimize their privileges by denying that collective support, and therefore structural forces, play a role in securing their advantage<sup>2</sup>.

### High-Status Collections and Low-Status Aggregates

In social and psychological sciences, typical understandings of what a group is are associated with notions that express the group members' depersonalization, deindividuation, similarity, or interchangeability with other ingroup members. However, a mere glance at social hierarchies reveals a more complex picture: groups may also encompass individual distinctiveness. Lorenzi-Cioldi (2006, 2009) coined the notions of *collection* (high status) and *aggregate* (low status) groups to distinguish between tendencies of the group members to emphasize the personal or the collective. The author makes the case for the role of group status in shaping how group members interpret their world in terms of individualistic versus collectivistic orientations. Individualistic self-conceptions prevail in groups located at the top of status hierarchies. Members of these groups perceive themselves (and are perceived by others) as steeped in unique qualities. They indulge in defining themselves with attributes that seem to be gained outside their group membership. At best, the group is conceived of as the juxtaposition, with no blending, of its members' characteristics. Collectivistic self-conceptions predominate toward the other end of the status hierarchy. Members of these groups define themselves (and are defined by others) as parts of a relatively undifferentiated entity. Their group is defined by holistic features that distinguish it from other groups and prompt the group members' perceptual similarity and interchangeability.

Below, this chapter borrows from the work of various scholars to deepen distinctions between the characteristics of high- and low-status groups.

### High-Status Groups

After a visit to America in the early 19th century, De Tocqueville (2000) wrote that "[A]lthough there are rich, the class of the rich does not exist; for the rich have neither common spirit nor objects, neither common traditions nor hopes. There are then members, but no corps." (p. 526). More than a century after De Tocqueville's claim, Blalock (1967) maintained that high-status groups act through a "series of uncoordinated though similar individual acts no one of which has more than short-run significance" (p. 160). Interestingly, Granovetter (1983) demonstrated that *weak ties* (i.e., connections among people who are little socially involved with one another, for example a friend of a friend's acquaintance) build extended social networks that prove useful in status attainment, compared to *strong ties* (i.e., dense and homogeneous networks, for example close friends). The crucial issue here is that the groups "making the greatest use of weak ties are those whose weak ties do connect to social circles different from one's own" (p. 208). Members of high-status groups accrue social capital by virtue of this "strength of the weak ties." They form many connections based on personal preferences and interests by navigating across group boundaries, which facilitates the gathering of nonredundant information and resources<sup>3</sup>. Central to the present discussion is that weak and strong ties instigate different forms of interpersonal relationships. Weak ties accentuate individual differences and personal distinctiveness. Strong ties are typically anchored into relations with other ingroup members, who may also have limited access to resources and information if they are disadvantaged as well (see Cook, 2014, p. 218; see also Lin, 2001).

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Bourdieu and de Saint Martin (1978) provide a vivid description of employers as a collection-type group. Indeed, employers' distinctive feature is "to be delimited by statistical boundaries that never take the shape of strict demarcation lines: not all members of the group possess all the attributes that define the group. [The] fact that the different group members ... can never be identified with one another in all respects, and exceptions can always be opposed to any definition, produces the subjective illusion of the mystery of the undetermined 'person' and of the group, founded as it is on the celebration of the election, that is nothing more than a sum of 'exceptional' individuals or, as one says, of 'personalities'" (pp. 33–34). As Guillaumin (1972) wrote, the existence of the dominant group "can only be conceived through the absence of clear-cut, limiting criteria as distinct from groups which are explicitly categorized and narrowly defined" (translated in Tajfel, 1978, p. 7). In accordance with this speculation, Dahrendorf (1964) maintained that *enumeration* is the only feasible method to provide a definition of an elite. Elites are instances of top-of-status groups. The necessity to engage in piecemeal counting emerges when a group lacks substance so that it allows (or constrains) perceivers to make fine differentiations among the group members. The sociological literature is replete with allusions to the "hidden," "hazy," and "vague" features of high-status groups, to their "fragmented," "dispersed," and "unmarked" appearance, and to their consisting of an "adding up of incomparable and remarkable persons" (reviewed in Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2009). As Kraus, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, Rheinschmidt, and Keltner (2012) point out, "Upper-class individuals' solipsistic tendencies will lead them to conceptualize the self in terms of individual agency and to think about the self in terms of personal choice, autonomy, and one's uniqueness relative to others." (p. 552). On most occasions, high-status people avoid making external attributions for negative events and performances (which are generally considered as "self-serving") because they fear being perceived as lacking control over critical resources (Lee & Tiedens, 2001). As a consequence, they equally emphasize their own competencies and their own weaknesses in order to protect feelings of personal control over the situation. In sum, high-status groups bring individuality into the fore. Their members mingle in the group without confusing one with another.

### Low-Status Groups

Low-status groups put individuality in the background. "[T]he bottom of society is evoked as all of a piece" (DeMott, 1990, p. 204). These people are more focused on context than on individuals' dispositions and therefore express considerable awareness of the intergroup boundaries and of the groups' arrangement in social hierarchies, often to the point of damaging recognition of their personal uniqueness (Jackman & Selters, 1980; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978). Social-psychological research demonstrates that members of low-status groups perceive greater overlap between their representations of themselves and their ingroup, compared to members of high-status groups. The former, in a top-down process, derive their own personal characteristics from the ingroup's characteristics, whereas the latter, in a bottom-up process, project the self-characteristics onto the ingroup (Latrofa, Vaes, Cadinu, & Carnaghi, 2010; see also Brewer & Weber, 1994; Otten & Epstude, 2006). Low-status groups are indeed assigned labels of primary potency that obscure within-group differences. Lewin's (1948) account of the Jewish people's consciousness of belonging to the Jewish group is an illustration. He maintained that Jewish people are often urged to think about their cumbersome group membership. When prompted to describe themselves, they are continuously reminded of their group membership, so it is difficult for them to resist the self-damaging implications of reflected appraisals (i.e., what outgroup members think of them). As Jackman and Jackman (1983) contend, "subordinate status is experienced more sharply than is

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dominant status” (p. 81), a conclusion that Stuber (2006) corroborates in an interview study showing that working-class college students refer abundantly to social class, whereas this topic is a blind spot among upper-middle class students (see also Brantingler, 2003; Perry, 2001; Stuber, 2010). Accordingly, members of subordinate groups tend to explain social inequality in ambivalent ways by using *both* meritocratic and social structural causes, whereas the dominants stick more exclusively to the individualistic causes (Hunt, 2014; McCall, 2013; Mann, 1970).



### A Status-Individualization Relationship

Sociologists have variously asserted a nearly continuous relationship between status rank and emphasis on individuality. Kohn (1977) has demonstrated that members of high social classes favor qualities related to self-direction (referring to the individual's internal standards and intellectual flexibility) for themselves and for their children, whereas conformity to external standards is favored in lower social classes. More generally, Lipset and Bendix (1963) claimed that the "higher the social class, the more likely it is that an individual's rank is determined by his personal attributes. As one moves down the social-class ladder ... men employ more general attributes as criteria for placing an individual in the structure." (p. 275). Fussell (1992) similarly contended that "at the bottom [of the social hierarchy], people tend to believe that class is defined by the amount of money you have. In the middle, people grant that money has something to do with it, but think education and the kind of work you do is almost equally important. Nearer the top, people perceive that taste, values, ideas, style, and behavior are indispensable criteria of class, regardless of money or occupation or education" (p. 16). In fact, as one looks upward, the criteria to define members of a group become more numerous and individualized. A nice illustration of this relationship between social stratification and individualization can be seen in studies that connect social status to cultural taste. The findings suggest that members of high-status groups are "omnivores" and members of low-status groups are "univores." The former display taste eclecticism and interest in a wide range of highbrow and lowbrow cultural practices, whereas the latter limit themselves to a restricted range of lowbrow practices (e.g., Chan, 2010; Chan & Goldthorpe, 2007). These notions echo important sociological propositions of commodity theory (Brock, 1968). Members of high-status groups show preference for the assertion of original opinions and the consumption of scarce products, and the gradual diffusion of these practices to lower strata results in their depreciation and replacement by new uncommon opinions and products (see Boltanski, 1975, 1976; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2007). In sum, at the top of the social hierarchy there are individuals, not groups. Bourdieu (1984) epitomized this hierarchical ordering of groups' representations by distinguishing between the lower classes' choice of the necessary, the middle classes' cultural goodwill, and the upper classes' sense of distinction.

There is abundant empirical evidence of this status-individualization relationship, according to which self-conceptions in higher strata reflect a preference for interpersonal differentiation, while self-conceptions in lower strata reflect a preference for similarity to and connection with others. Stephens, Markus, and Townsend (2007) asked participants from low- and high-status backgrounds (in terms of parents' level of education) to choose a pen out of five pens as thanks for participating in the study. One pen was of one color (e.g., red), and all the other pens were blue. The findings showed that low-status participants more often chose a majority pen, whereas high-status participants usually chose the minority pen. In another study, the authors asked participants for an evaluation of the chosen pen after another participant (who was actually a confederate) had made the same or a different choice. Low-status participants (but not the high-status ones) gave more praise to the pen they had chosen when the confederate had made the same choice. In the perspective of social identity theory, Lorenzi-Cioldi (2002, pp. 77-98) performed a series of experiments aimed at showing that such individualization dynamics are not necessarily grounded in long-standing socialization histories but in the relative status position of the membership group. The author recruited students from different grades at secondary school and asked them to judge the interpersonal similarity of their ingroup members versus students from a higher or a lower grade (i.e., higher or lower status). Ingroup and outgroup perceptions showed sharp differences depending on the ingroup's relative status in the



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primed intergroup setting. Pupils emphasized the outgroup's individualistic tendencies when comparing their group with a group with superior status, and they emphasized the ingroup's individualistic tendencies when compared with a lower-status outgroup.

Finally, note that if group status is most often represented via *up* versus *down* metaphors of the social space, it is also represented by a wealth of other metaphors, notably size. These metaphors concur to emphasize the individualization of high status. A few illustrations are in order. Estimates of a person's height increases along with the increase of this person's status (e.g., student versus demonstrator, lecturer versus senior lecturer, senior lecturer versus professor), although the target person presented to participants is the same person (Wilson, 1968). Freshmen's distortion of the height (actual versus estimate) of a fellow student and three officials at progressive rank positions in their school correlate with the target's status, although participants are equally familiar with each target person (Dannenmaier & Thumin, 1964; see also Judge & Cable, 2004). A person's signature size (height multiplied by length) varies as a function of the person's motivation to assert his or her uniqueness, and this motivation increases as a person's social status increases (e.g., blue-collar worker versus student versus professor in a large university; see Zweigenhaft, 1970). In a similar vein, Lorenzi-Cioldi, Buschini, Baerlocher, and Gross (2010) content analyzed a large sample of job offers from daily newspapers and showed that the size of the job offer and the amount of individuating information provided about the occupation and the prospective applicant increased as a function of the job's prestige. Even the size of a nation is largely overestimated in blank maps according to the target nation's perceived status and wealth (Lorenzi-Cioldi et al., 2011).

The next section considers the major theories that account for the production of social hierarchies.

## Origins

The literature proposes three main and nonexclusive kinds of interpretations of the production of status hierarchies. One is in terms of material resources. The possession of greater resources allows members of higher classes more access to opportunities and thus more freedom over their lives, fostering the belief that one is in control of one's life (e.g., Kraus et al., 2012). Another interpretation focuses on cultural processes and socialization practices. In higher strata, education in the family and the workplace encourages self-concepts and worldviews in terms of uniqueness and independence, whereas in lower strata it promotes similarity, connectedness, and interdependence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1984; Kohn & Schooler, 1969). A final, distinct interpretation calls attention to symbolic values associated with group status per se. It stresses transient situational factors that trigger different expectations about the behavior of individuals in status divides. The following sections review the major contributions of these approaches.

### Status Construction Theory

Ridgeway (2011) has provided one of the most comprehensive approaches to how social forces at the micro and macro levels operate to develop and maintain status structures. Status construction theory is a model of how any kind of categorical differences between people transform into status distinctions. The theory asserts that a variety of group memberships, such as gender, race, occupation, and social class—but also more nominal differences between people such as physical attractiveness or height—become associated during concrete interactions with differential expectations about the group members' values, competences, and performances. Individual differences are associated with (and eventually juxtaposed to) signs of status and competence to form stereotypes that are perpetuated. In the end, members of both groups share a status belief about the intergroup hierarchy by agreeing (at the top) and conceding (at the bottom) that one group is worthier than the other. Once established, diffuse status beliefs advantage or disadvantage people over an unlimited range of situations. Thus, status beliefs do not equate with ingroup favoritism. For those with high status, fostering group inequality and ingroup favoritism work together, while for those with low status they compete.

Status construction theory has received empirical support. In a typical study (e.g., Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000), participants are given a test that allegedly allows for their categorization into different “personal response style” groups, with no particular hierarchy between the response styles except that, for instance, members of one group get paid slightly more for their participation. Participants then work on a task with a partner from the response style outgroup, and an influence hierarchy develops between them. After a few experiences like this in which people in one response style group are consistently more influential than those in the other group (e.g., they interrupt and disagree more, and guide the interaction), participants from both groups form status beliefs about each of the response style groups—that is, beliefs that “most people” would rate members of the more influential group as more respected, powerful, and competent than members of the other group. Overall, these studies show that people form status beliefs about a previously *unevaluated* categorical difference from repeated encounters in which the local influence hierarchies consistently correspond to the participants' group membership.

The status construction theory further allows for *specific* status beliefs. These are “beliefs that people from one group are more competent at a specific range of tasks and, therefore, more esteemed in that realm, but not in all realms.” (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 47). So for instance, despite a diffuse status belief according to which men have superior status to women, men pursue positive distinctiveness using mostly agentic (i.e., competence) dimensions, and women, in a parallel process, pursue positive distinctiveness using more exclusively communal (interpersonal) dimensions (e.g., Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2010; Maccoby, 1998). In contrast to diffuse status beliefs resulting in a single, overall gender hierarchy, specific status beliefs result in more egalitarian sharing of power between men and women (see also Parsons & Bales, 1955). However, differential access to preexisting status spheres (e.g., men in management positions in the corporate world) may jeopardize this relatively equal value of the gender competences.

### Social Role Theory

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Social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Wood & Eagly, 2010) focuses on the social structure to account for beliefs about the characteristics of men and women. The theory posits that it is because of the gendered division of labor—not because of biology, individual dispositions, or evolution—that women are perceived as concerned with others, unselfish, and emotionally expressive and men as independent, assertive, and instrumentally competent<sup>4</sup>. Less prestigious roles and occupations (e.g., child-rearing and other domestic work, low-paid employments such as secretary, nurse, and elementary teacher) require communal behavior, whereas more prestigious ones (e.g., managers, lawyers, physicians) require agentic behavior. Thus, sex differences stem from “accommodations to the differing restrictions and opportunities that a society maintains for its men and women” (Eagly & Wood, 1999, p. 409). The fact that people observe that men and women are unevenly distributed in such roles and occupations strengthens the perception that they actually possess inherent psychological qualities suited to these roles: that is, the essentialist belief that men *are* agentic and women *are* communal. These alleged psychological differences between men and women then contribute to rationalize, justify, and explain gender inequalities (Hoffman & Hurst, 1990).

In a seminal demonstration of this central hypothesis of social role theory, Eagly and Steffen (1984) showed that knowing only the gender of the protagonists of an influence scenario, participants inferred more success for men. In contrast, when both genders were portrayed in an ostensibly similar occupational role (employee or manager), the impact of gender stereotypes on the perceived ability to influence was reduced, and parallel differences emerged between the high- and the low-status professional roles. A large body of research supports the idea that agency and communion produce a strong divide between men and women, but only when gender gains primacy over social structure as a perceptual cue (Johnson, 1994; Molm & Hedley, 1992). For instance, employees of both sexes act more agentially when interacting with a subordinate than when interacting with a superior (e.g., Moskowitz, Suh, & Desaulniers, 1994).

More recently, Eagly and colleagues extended the social role perspective by devising a “congruency hypothesis” to account for the resistance to women in leadership roles (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, 2003). The managerial personality profile conforms to the masculine stereotype (Schein, 1973), and there is evidence that dominant communication styles lead to negative evaluations of women compared to men, because they violate the cultural expectation of women’s subordinate status (e.g., Mayo & Henley, 1981). Prejudice against women is rooted in the incongruity between the female stereotype (calling for communal behavior) and the requirements of leadership roles (calling for agentic behavior), triggering the opinion that female leaders “are not in their place.”

In sum, gender differences are firmly bound to status differences. The prospect of increased equality between the sexes, notably in the workplace, leads to the prediction of a gradual decline of the stereotypical differences in the representation of women and men (see Diekmann & Eagly, 2000). Even though social role theory originated as a theory of gender differences, it has the potential to be more broadly applied to the study of any kind of social hierarchy. This potential is fulfilled by the stereotype content model, a theory of how agency and communion shape the social representations of a variety of high- and low-status groups.

## Stereotype Content Model

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Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick's (2008) stereotype content model offers an account of the way in which group stereotypes are shaped by social hierarchies. Moving beyond classic approaches conceiving of stereotypes and prejudice as mere antipathy, the model adds the further insight that the content of group stereotypes varies along two main dimensions of social judgment, warmth (friendliness, helpfulness, trustworthiness, etc.) and competence (ability, intelligence, skill, efficacy, etc.). Both dimensions are assumed to be of roughly equivalent positive valence and to be independent from each other. The model specifies structural variables that predict the assessment of the two content dimensions. In Western societies, competence results from perceived status of the target group, and warmth results from perceived cooperative (versus competitive) intent of the target group. Although social groups may fall within each of the four combinations of high and low levels of competence and warmth, the majority of them show ambivalence by falling into one of two mixed clusters. High-status groups (e.g., managers, rich people, etc.) are respected and envied for being competent but are disliked for lacking warmth. Low-status groups (e.g., housewives, the elderly, and the disabled) are liked for being warm but are disrespected for lacking competence. To illustrate, Madera, Hebl, and Martin (2009) showed that the greater use of communal than agentic traits in letters of recommendation for women in academia reduced their employability compared to men's. Only a few groups are regarded as both competent and warm (typically, ingroups and close allies), or incompetent and not warm (welfare recipients, and the poor).

The most relevant part of the model, from the present perspective, is about the behavioral and attitudinal consequences of the location of an outgroup in this content typology. Members of low-status groups often elicit pity and sympathy. These are ambivalent emotions insofar as they communicate subordinate status but also paternalistic assistance. Members of high-status groups elicit envy, jealousy, and resentment. These are also ambivalent emotions, insofar as they acknowledge superior abilities and status but involve malicious intent. Less ambivalent groups, loading either high or low on both content dimensions, tend to elicit plain admiration or plain contempt, respectively.

## Mere Status Hypotheses

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The aforementioned interpretations of the origins of group status hierarchies confer primacy to either material resources or socialization practices in shaping individuals' self-perception and worldviews. For instance, status construction theory focuses on repetitive interactions to predict that any categorical distinction between the interacting individuals will eventually result in the differential and relatively stable evaluation of the competencies of members of the two groups. Lifetime socialization histories and the possession of material resources are certainly major sources of differentiation between status groups and the maintenance of status divides (e.g., Kohn, 1977; Lareau, 2003). But are they the whole story? In the following, this chapter considers research that suggests limitations of an exclusive focus on these processes as explanations of status effects.

In real-world contexts, the examination of status effects is complicated by the many confounds between group status and other correlated preexisting group characteristics. Fortunately, group status may also be studied in experimentally created situations where it is only temporarily primed in homogeneous populations with the use of ostensibly random and arbitrary criteria of status divide. Such situations make it easier to identify pure status processes. For example, Thye (2000) showed that resources possessed by high-status groups are consensually granted more value than identical resources possessed by low-status groups. Clearly, resources have no fixed status. Their status comes from those who possess them. By and large, controlled experiments show that status effects emerge not only because of long-term mutual dependence among the groups, but also because of the behavioral expectations associated with a group's mere position or rank in a status hierarchy. Group status per se creates expectations, and expectations produce status effects. Generally, members of high-status groups are presumed to be more competent than members of low-status groups (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Research shows that this expectation is so powerful that it can override differences in actual behaviors and performances of the two groups. Moreover, expectations have self-fulfilling effects on the group members' behaviors and performances: if a perceiver expects a target to lack competence, this can subtly cue the target to act in more incompetent ways (Snyder & Swann, 1978).

### Subtle Status Cues

In a seminal demonstration of the impact of a subtle manipulation of social status, Darley and Gross (1983) ran a study on the role of a performer's social class membership in the evaluation of her cognitive performances. In the main conditions, observers were presented with a young girl portrayed in a middle- or working-class environment and a brief description of parental occupations. The young girl performed ambiguously on math, reading, and arts tests. Participants then assessed her performance. The findings showed that participants thought that the child had been smarter when she had been presented in a high rather than a low socioeconomic background, even though in both conditions participants saw the same girl taking the same tests. Observers thus attributed different levels of performance to the child, not on objective grounds, but because they held different competence expectations for people of different social status. Open-ended questions corroborated this expectancy-confirmation interpretation. To illustrate, when the child was from the disadvantaged background, her ambiguous performance suggested to participants that she had "difficulty accepting new information," whereas when she was from the advantaged background the identical performance suggested them that she had the "ability to apply what she knows to unfamiliar problems" (p. 28).

### Random Assignment

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There is a disparate strand of fascinating research in which group status is created with the use of ostensibly random procedures. The rest of this section reviews some examples of this research.

Russell and Fiske (2008) assigned participants to a high- and a low-status role and led them to work individually on a game. Participants then reported their impressions of their game partner. Though objective performances were similar among participants in both status conditions, participants consensually granted the high status more competence than the low status. Also of interest is a study by Bigler, Brown, and Markell (2001), showing that status cues that covary with meaningless visual markers of group memberships (e.g., “blue” versus “yellow” T-shirts groups) foster 7- to 12-year-old children’s tendency to display preference for high-status others. Unfortunately, methodological factors limit the conclusions that can be drawn from these studies. For instance, Russel and Fiske informed participants that the high-status person would be allowed some power in the choice of the game, and Bigler and colleagues used objective status cues to anchor the divide of the two groups. These limitations were surmounted in the following studies.

Participants in a Sande, Ellard, and Ross (1986) study first engaged in a small group interaction with the aim of selecting one of four candidates for a job. After this interaction, participants were assigned to a high-status (supervisor), low-status (worker), or observer role, allegedly for a future task. Notice that these roles were appointed *after* actual interaction and by chance, not with regard to the individuals’ performances during the discussion. Nonetheless, participants’ retrospective accounts of the selection process during the small group interaction showed clear differences between supervisors and workers. Following the expected pattern, supervisors rated themselves and were rated by observers as having behaved in a more leaderlike manner than the otherwise similar workers, and as having been more responsible for the final candidate choice. Humphrey (1985) recruited college students to simulate a typical corporate office by randomly assigning participants to the roles of managers and employees. The experimenter then emphasized the divide between high-skilled, important, and challenging tasks for managers (for instance, being in charge of the company’s sales and marketing division), and low-skilled, repetitive, and boring tasks for employees (taking dictations and assisting in the writing of reports). After a two-hour period, participants answered a series of questions aimed at assessing self-perception and perception of others, expected career success, etc. Despite the ostensible arbitrariness of the group hierarchy, managers and employees attributed greater competence to managers on a variety of leadership-relevant personality traits and skills, and greater success in their future careers. Thus, employees clearly showed an ingroup derogation effect. Greenberg’s (1988) field study took the opportunity of a general refurbishing of the workplace in a large insurance company to randomly assign employees in higher-, lower-, or equal-status new offices in comparison to their past offices (in terms of number of persons per office, space per person, and width of desk). Employees worked in these new offices during two consecutive weeks and then returned to their original offices. Their work performances were measured before, during, and after random assignment to the offices. During the two weeks after reassignment, employees who had worked in offices of higher status were more productive (and those who had worked in offices of lower status less productive) than those assigned to offices of equal status. Apparently, employees reduced the experienced discrepancy in status by adjusting their performances to their randomly acquired status. Langer and Benevento (1978) yielded similar findings. Participants successfully performed on a task, and were then assigned on a random basis to a “worker” or a “boss” condition prior to repeating the task. After being assigned to the inferior status, participants performed worse than they had in the first phase of the experiment.



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Conversely, superior status led to an improvement in performance. Clearly, labels may induce by themselves not only negative or positive expectations about the group members' performances but also the actual quality of their performances.

### Minimal Groups

In minimal group studies, participants are randomly assigned to groups that have no history of cooperation or hostility, involve anonymous membership, and provide no individuating information about the group members (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Because of such characteristics, minimal procedures may be profitably used to advance our knowledge of status effects. By creating minimal status hierarchies, group status is uncontaminated by the group members' histories of mutual dependence. In these settings, interpretations of the findings based on socialization premises are ruled out, and status effects can more genuinely be observed (see Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1998, 2002).

Iacoviello and Lorenzi-Cioldi (2015, 2017) examined self-depersonalization tendencies in high- and low-status minimal groups. Drawing on the collection-aggregate groups distinction, they hypothesized that members of the low-status group would self-depersonalize in the ingroup, whereas members of the high-status group would not. The typical experimental procedure involved a performance on an aesthetic task, where participants were asked to identify the best paintings among a series of pairs of paintings. After completion of the task, participants were randomly assigned to the group who had succeeded (high status) or failed (low status) in the task. Various measures related to self-depersonalization were then introduced. For example, in some of these studies participants were instructed that in order to present themselves to other participants of the study, they could choose a logo among different logos. The logos ranged from a group pole, where the logo only mentioned the ingroup's name, to an individual pole, where the logo only mentioned a participant's freely chosen pseudonym. The findings accorded with predictions: members of the low-status group were more likely than their higher-status counterparts to match the self to their group membership by preferring the group logo.

Together, this research on mere status hypotheses extends previous research by showing that individualistic (high status) and collectivistic (low status) self-images and worldviews are not necessarily bound to lifetime socialization. This is not to deny that socialization plays an important role in producing status effects. The mere status hypothesis asserts that similar effects may occur even in the absence of considerations about socialization practices. As such, it protects against the temptation to essentialize status identities. Status labels, even when only transient and ephemeral, induce group members to think in specific ways. In the examples reviewed above, pervasive status effects occurred in the absence of any information about the characteristics of the group members, in the absence of objective signs concerning discrepancies of performance and merit, when participants were fully aware that the status hierarchy was created by random procedures, and when they were assigned to status positions only after actual interaction. Participants in these studies gathered hypothesis-confirming evidence by searching for, focusing selectively on, or giving more weight to information that is consistent with the label. It is noteworthy that even research on social class, most often grounded on socialization premises, has provided evidence of mere status effects. For instance, Kraus, Piff, and Keltner (2009) found a positive relationship between individuals' subjective rank in the socioeconomic hierarchy and individualistic self-perception (e.g., personal sense of control). This relationship persisted after controlling for a number of objective indicators of



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social class that are related to the individuals' past histories, such as family income and education, political ideology, and ethnicity.

### Maintenance and Change

Once hierarchies are established, several mechanisms intervene to account for their maintenance and change. This section considers major approaches that have been developed to explain these dynamics.

### Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (SIT) posits that individuals have an intrinsic motivation to strive for a positive self-concept and that this motivation is fulfilled by establishing favorable ingroup-outgroup comparisons (Tajfel, 1978). Group status is a key concept in this dynamics, especially in early formulations of the theory (see Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2015). Typically, high-status groups provide their group members with a satisfactory self-esteem, whereas low-status groups do not. In this latter case, the group members may adopt various strategies to respond to this unpleasant state. Major strategies are social mobility (members leave or aspire to leave the ingroup to pull themselves up to a higher-status outgroup), social creativity (they actively work to redefine or reinterpret the elements of the status comparison to increase the attractiveness of ingroup attributes), and social change (they act as representatives of the group to improve its condition through direct intergroup competition). SIT specifies conditions that increase the likelihood of the occurrence of one or the other type of identity management strategies. These conditions refer to the individuals' beliefs about the social hierarchy in terms of its legitimacy, stability, and permeability of the group boundaries. Legitimacy refers to the group members' perceptions of just and fair (versus unjust and unfair) relations between their own group and other groups. Stability refers to their perception that status positions in the social hierarchy are set in stone or that they can be changed or even reversed, that is, that there are alternatives to the status quo. Permeability refers to feelings of how easy it is to move up the status hierarchy as an individual (regardless of the cause of the movement: luck, hard work, talent, ability, etc.). Note that despite its apparent simplicity, the notion of permeability conveys a number of crucial and uncomfortable issues. Individuals must overcome a variety of barriers to upward mobility. On the one hand, the upwardly mobile may be accused by other ingroup members of breaking ingroup loyalty—that is, the ties that bind them to the membership group. People who identify with groups other than their own are typically treated with marked negative affect (see Merton, 1968). Tajfel emphasizes that this may dissuade individuals from leaving the group even if moving upward presents personal advantages and happens to be relatively easy for them. On the other hand, the mobile must be accepted by members of the group in which they are seeking membership (Granfield, 1991; Kaufman, 2003). Members of the higher-status group may be reluctant to accept these new individuals either because they do not meet the ingroup's standards or because their move poses a competitive threat to their own standing (see the *glass ceiling* and the *backlash* phenomena; Lorenzi-Cioldi & Kulich, 2015). The mobile person "has a natural tendency to think of himself in terms of that status or rank which is highest, and to expect others to do the same. Meanwhile others ... have a vested interest in doing just the

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opposite, that is, in treating him in terms of his lowest status or rank” (Lanski, 1966, p. 87). As a result, mobile individuals are always at risk of moving out of their group but not up (i.e., being ostracized by the ingroup members and rejected by members of the higher-status group).

Legitimacy, stability, and permeability beliefs combine one with another to produce an eight-cells typology. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to summarize all the complexities of Tajfel and his collaborators’ thoughts about the individual and collective strategies that work to secure a positive social identity (see Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, & Hume, 2001). A few examples will suffice to illustrate the heuristic power of the theory. The legitimate, stable, and impermeable configuration of beliefs produces the most constraining and restrictive conditions for members of a low-status group. For instance, past work documented its role in self-hatred and outgroup favoritism among Jewish people (e.g., Lewin, 1948) and American blacks (Clark, 1965). Using data from the 1964 General Social Survey, Jackman and Jackman (1983) examined how subjective class identification among whites and African Americans was related to their level of education, occupational status, and income. As expected, the more of these achieved characteristics whites possessed, the more they identified with a higher subjective social class. Surprisingly, however, the class identification of African Americans did not appear to be sensitive to their achieved status. The authors speculated that “the prestige of the low ascriptive status appears to assume such overwhelming significance that prestige resulting from achieved statuses takes on relatively minor significance in the individual’s self-location in the socioeconomic structure” (p. 82)<sup>5</sup>. Thus, a legitimate, stable, and impermeable social structure fosters the disadvantaged’s feelings of being trapped in inescapable conditions. However, this same configuration of beliefs may lead the group members to creatively develop strategies to overcome their disadvantage without notable change in their location in the social structure. The “black is beautiful” battle for recognition is a historical illustration of such an attempt to reappraise a stigmatizing attribute in order to fit more comfortably with disadvantage. Similarly, language use may lead to an increase in the perceived similarity among ingroup members. A field study in a Texas restaurant showed that Latino employees made extensive use of Spanish for communication with other ingroup members as a sign of solidarity and resistance to the Anglo managers (Barrett, 2006; see also Lacy, 2007). Other strategies may consist of focusing on more favorable dimensions of comparison with the higher status outgroup (e.g., from “the rich are competent” to “the poor are morally superior”), of comparisons with an outgroup of even lesser status (see an interesting illustration of this phenomenon in Anderson’s study, 1990, of working-class blacks seeking favorable comparisons with the underclass in their own community), of establishing psychological distance with the ingroup by downgrading some worse-off ingroup members (e.g., downward comparisons), or of comparing one’s present self to one’s past self.

The intergroup setting is radically altered with a sole modification in this configuration of beliefs, namely the permeability of the group boundaries. In meritocratic Western societies, where the credo is that anyone can be successful by working hard, individual mobility is the preferred strategy as a means of achieving a better valued identity. There is evidence suggesting that even mere tokenism brings about faith in the fluidity of the status hierarchy (see Vanbeselare, Boen, & Smeesters, 2003; Wright, 2001), with the risk that the disadvantaged believe that they are entitled to reach a better standing but feel unjustly deprived if they are unable to achieve it. Unless group boundaries are entirely permeable, which is highly implausible (see Griffin & Kalleberg, 1981), the assimilation of the few does not ease the problems of the many. Individual mobility has all too great a hold on the existing hierarchy’s arrangements. As has been mentioned, the disadvantaged must gain the promise of being accepted in the higher-status group. Thus, they publicize psychological distance between themselves and other ingroup

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members, show low solidarity with ingroup members, negative views of the ingroup, and compliance with majority values, notably meritocracy. The notion of anticipatory socialization (Merton & Kitt, 1950)—that is, the tendency to adopt the values of a group to which one aspires but does not belong—communicates this dilemma. Mobile persons attempt to absorb the norms and behaviors of the higher-status group even before they have actually changed their status standing. They thus overconform to the higher-status outgroup, becoming at the same time nonconformists, if not deviants, within their own group. Furthermore, assimilation calls for the “hiding” of one’s origins. Indeed, successfully passing into the higher-status group often carries the risk of being unmasked. In sum, individual mobility is conducive to proclamations of dislikes of the ingroup and conspicuous demonstrations of outgroup favoritism. As ingroup identification appears to be a strong predictor of collective action participation, these behaviors divert individuals from attempts to subvert the social order. Thus, mobile persons contribute despite themselves to perpetuating the status quo.

Notwithstanding the above complexities, examples of successful assimilation abound. In Sweden, a country in which changing one’s name does not present major legal difficulties, Arai and Thoursie (2009) observed that for immigrants originally from poor countries (Eastern Europe, Africa for instance), changing their name to a Swedish-sounding one was associated with increase in labor earnings (of about 140% from 1990 to 2001). Such economic returns were not apparent for immigrants who did not change their name or for immigrants who changed their name but preserved a foreign-sounding name—and for immigrants who originated from wealthy countries who did or did not change their name. In the case of women’s upward mobility in the corporate environment, this phenomenon has recently been labeled the “queen bee syndrome,” whereby women occupying executive roles give up prior social ties and habits and display some hostility toward (and hold derogatory opinions of) other women (e.g., Ellemers, 2001; Faniko, Ellemers, Derks, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2017). Kulich, Lorenzi-Cioldi, and Iacoviello (2015) provided evidence of this process in a variety of status settings. In one of their studies, they observed that women who had achieved high professional status in a hospital showed less concern for the careers of other women, lower perception of gender discrimination, and stronger beliefs in meritocracy, compared to both lower status women and men of high and low status. In another study, they surveyed white and nonwhite students from advantaged and disadvantaged social backgrounds on their opinions about affirmative action policies supporting equal opportunities in access to a Brazilian university. Nonwhite students from wealthy family backgrounds were less favorable to policies aimed at attaining racial equality, compared to the nonwhites from modest backgrounds, and this status effect was not apparent among white students.

SIT has paved the way for significant advances in theory and research on group status. However, some issues in the theory could still be refined and improved. Consider, for instance, Tajfel’s claim that an illegitimate social system is likely to eventually be perceived as unstable and that this interaction between the two subjective beliefs becomes “a powerful ingredient of the transition from the minority’s acceptance of the status quo to the rejection of it” (Tajfel, 1978, p. 8). This may not be the case, as our own research in corporate settings suggests (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2009). When employees believe that the professional hierarchy is permeable (i.e., that one can move up the ladder based on individual merit), they attribute more legitimacy to this hierarchy and eventually consider it as *unstable* (i.e., malleable) as a result of the many individuals’ moves.

## Social Dominance and System Justification Theories

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Tajfel and his colleagues pioneered a comprehensive approach to group status. Social dominance theory (SDT; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and system justification theory (SJT; Jost & Banaji, 1994) draw back to the late 1980s in the United States to take up this social-psychological European tradition. In fact, as many scholars have emphasized (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991) American social psychology traditionally focuses on individualistic and cognitive perspectives that obstruct the study of global social hierarchies. SDT and SJT bring status hierarchies into the fore and move away from this individualistic cultural background. These theories embody Marxist premises to explain how hierarchies are perpetuated.

SDT is a theory of how factors located at different levels of analysis (individual, group, institutional, ideological) concur to produce and to maintain group-based status hierarchies in terms of gender, age, race, or social class. The theory starts with the common observation that societies are built upon group inequality and posits that evolution has instigated in human nature a ubiquitous drive or predisposition to form social hierarchies in which powerful groups dominate and oppress subordinate groups (see Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015). A further important tenet of the theory is its emphasis on the analysis of institutional mechanisms that pervade group hierarchies. SDT claims that societies are permeated with ideologies and are sustained by institutions that either promote or attenuate group hierarchies. Preference for group-based inequality is typically more pronounced among members of high-status groups (e.g., men, whites, heterosexuals, Ashkenazi Jews) than the corresponding low-status groups (women, blacks and Latinos, homosexuals, and Sephardic Jews, respectively). To distinguish between these individuals' inbuilt tendencies, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) add the notion of social dominance orientation (SDO), a personality construct expressing the desire to see one's ingroup as dominant over other groups, and the willingness to adopt cultural values that facilitate oppression over subordinate groups. The SDO scale comprises quite explicit items, such as "Superior groups should dominate inferior groups," "Inferior groups should stay in their place," and "To get ahead in life it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups of people." According to radical interpretations of the theory, social dominance orientation would be a major cause of the maintenance of social hierarchies.

Hierarchy-enhancing forces are for instance the criminal justice system, police officers, large corporations, and the economics and law educational systems, whereas hierarchy-attenuating forces are human rights and civil rights organizations, aid groups for the poor, social workers, and social sciences and psychology educational systems. "Societies minimize group conflict by creating consensus on ideologies that promote the superiority of one group over others ... Ideologies that promote or maintain group inequality are the tools to legitimize discrimination. To work smoothly, these ideologies must be widely accepted within a society, appearing as self-apparent truths; hence, we call them *hierarchy-legitimizing myths*" (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994, p. 741). These myths consist of values, attitudes, beliefs, causal attributions, and ideologies (e.g., just world beliefs, meritocracy, classism, sexism, stereotypes) providing moral and intellectual justification for social practices that increase or maintain levels of inequality between social groups. They are generally disproportionately more powerful than the countervailing attenuating myths propagated by low-status groups.

SJT shares many predictions with SDT but gives exclusive priority to forces that perpetuate the status quo by focusing on how members of low-status groups rationalize and justify the social hierarchy. The basic assumption of the theory is that people are motivated to see the current social order as fair, desirable, and legitimate. While SDT emphasizes intergroup competition, SJT emphasizes the conscious and unconscious "collaborative game" between high- and low-status

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groups in the reproduction of group inequalities. SJT challenges SDT and SIT by claiming that these perspectives “tend to regard the social order as something that is imposed by one group and resisted by the other. ... In the social scientific imagination, it is as if the advantaged are relentlessly looking to cash in on their dominance and the disadvantaged are proud revolutionaries-in-waiting.” (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004, p. 883). Proponents of SDT and SIT are criticized for not accounting for “the degree to which psychological responses to the social and political status quo are characterized by active bolstering and system justification, especially among members of disadvantaged groups” (p. 885). According to SJT, the social hierarchy is maintained not only through ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation from the top but also by the inaction of members of subordinated groups who sustain group inequality through mechanisms such as outgroup favoritism. SJT proposes an individual-differences scale to account for tendencies to justify the social system. Sample items of the system justification scale are: “I agree with people who say that everything comes out even in the end,” “Equal distribution of resources is unnatural,” and “Social class differences reflect differences in the natural order of things” (Kay & Jost, 2003).

SJT further distinguishes between a “soft” and a “strong” form of system justification tendencies. The strong form claims that members of disadvantaged groups provide *even more* support for the social system and its authorities than do members of advantaged groups (Jost et al., 2004, p. 909). Thus, even those who have the most to gain by challenging the social order have reasons to abandon any attempt to change the existing status quo as they may believe that people get what they deserve. Drawing on cognitive dissonance and just world principles, this counterintuitive hypothesis assumes that “those who suffer the most from the system are also those who have the most to explain, justify, and rationalize” (Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003, p. 16). It posits that members of low-status groups reduce discomfort caused by their disadvantage by lowering the evaluation of their own worth and raising the evaluation of their superiors. By feeling that they deserve their fate, they can more easily accept it. In sum, SJT argues that the subordinates actively act to support the status quo, whereas in SDT perspective, perpetuation of the social system results from the imbalance between the opposing dominants’ and subordinates’ tendencies to propagate hierarchy-enhancing and hierarchy-attenuating forces, respectively.

Both SDT and SJT may appear as “one-sided” interpretations of Tajfel’s SIT, their “intellectual parent” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 38). The latter is a dynamic model that focuses on precursor conditions of exiting from, reinterpreting, or challenging a given hierarchical order, whereas SDT and even more so SJT place emphasis on maintenance and reproduction by conceiving of societies as set in stone. It is worth noting that Tajfel’s (1978) seminal work on disadvantaged groups opened with a section entitled “From Social Stability to Social Change” (p. 6). Nonetheless, every theory is valid under the right circumstances. As for SDT and SJT, these circumstances are narrower than SIT’s, insofar as they involve legitimate, stable, and impermeable social structures (see Huddy, 2004; Turner & Reynolds, 2003, p. 203; see also Federico, 1999; Martorana, Galinsky, & Rao, 2005). SDT and SJT are theories of how social systems reach and maintain stability and leave change motivations out of sight. They also tend to disregard situational variations of group behavior. There is indeed mounting evidence that SDO scores among members of a given group vary according to circumstances. For instance, the typical superiority of SDO scores of Israel’s Ashkenazim, compared to the Sephardim, vanishes when both groups are primed with the superordinate Israel-Palestine conflict (see Levin & Sidanius, 1999). Furthermore, SDO increases with the increase of the perceived status gap between the groups (Levin, 2004), of the contextual salience of intergroup comparisons (Schmitt,



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Branscombe, & Kappen, 2003), and of ingroup identification and feelings of intergroup threat (Morrison, Fast, & Ybarra, 2009). As Turner and Reynolds (2003) contend, SDO could be more a product than a cause of social life.

## Ambivalent Sexism

Drawing on stereotype content model, Glick and Fiske (1996) present an ambivalent sexism inventory in order to tap contemporary forms of sexism. In this questionnaire, the negative component of the gender stereotype is reflected in hostile, old-fashioned sexism (e.g., “Many women are actually seeking special favors, such as hiring policies that favor them over men, under the guise of asking for ‘equality’”) and the positive one in benevolent sexism. The latter is divided into three subcomponents: protective paternalism (e.g., “Women should be cherished and protected by men”), complementary gender differentiation (e.g., “Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess”), and heterosexual intimacy (e.g., “Men are not complete without women”). A combination of hostile and benevolent components produces ambivalence. Benevolent sexism fulfils social norms that demand that men protect women. But its supposedly positive message conveys an underlying desire to keep women in their place by fostering the perception that women need protection and that they are unable to do things by themselves, especially in male-dominated fields.

Though benevolent sexism is generally not *intentionally* malicious, it can be as harmful as hostile sexism but through a different process. Its ostensibly flattering and friendly character conceals the underlying expression of hostility, making it difficult to detect and to oppose and more likely to be accepted by women. As such, the ambivalent gender stereotype is a powerful force to legitimize the gender hierarchy and to abate potential conflicts and tensions between the sexes. Experimental research has shown that women find it more difficult to resist benevolent than hostile treatment (e.g., Becker & Wright 2011) and that benevolence harms women’s feelings of competence and even their actual performances (e.g., Dardenne, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007). These are pernicious phenomena that have been similarly observed in various communication contexts, such as when young people address older people with the use of a patronizing “baby language” (simplified vocabulary, sweet and slower talk, repetition, etc.) that places emphasis on the elderly’s dependence (Reid & Ng, 1999).

### Stereotype Threat

Group status inequalities are further perpetuated through a powerful mechanism that has been labeled stereotype threat (e.g., Spencer, Logel, & Davies, 2016). This is a context-dependent phenomenon (“a threat in the air,” as alluded to by Steele, 1997). Low-status and stigmatized groups are typically targeted by numerous negative stereotypes and are particularly subject to devaluation in domains related to the groups’ status differentials (e.g., female sex and “math” performance). Threat is experienced when the negative stereotype is salient in the context of a relevant performance, say when women performing on a math test are given the information that men have superior performances in math tests, or more simply that there are sex-differences in such performances. When context triggers the stereotype, the group members become concerned about being evaluated based on such stereotype. Fear of confirming the negative stereotype, even if individuals do not believe in this stereotype, may generate anxiety, depletion of working memory capacity, extra effort to suppress negative thoughts, etc., which harm performance. Chronic feelings of threat may lead the group members to decrease aspirations, to disinvest or withdraw from the stereotyped domain, to engage in self-handicapping, etc. (see Betz, Ramsey, & Sekaquaptewa, 2013). In turn, these behaviors act as self-fulfilling prophecies: the negative stereotype effectively harms the individuals’ performance, providing behavioral evidence that substantiates the individuals’ lower competence in the targeted domain. Typically, members of high-status groups are unaffected by such negative outgroup stereotypes, or else, as it has been occasionally observed, may experience a boost of their performance as a result of a downward comparison (a stereotype “lift”; see Walton & Cohen, 2003)<sup>6</sup>.

Stereotype threat effects are tightly bound to specific categorical distinctions, their related stereotypes, and the situational salience of these stereotypes. Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999) used Asian American female participants to demonstrate how priming either gender or cultural identities could differentially affect women’s performance on a math test. Indeed, the female membership is stereotyped as having low math skills, whereas the Asian membership is stereotyped as having high math skills. The findings showed that participants who were primed with their cultural identity had improved math performances, while those who were primed with their gender identity performed badly. Most research on stereotype threat has been carried out in the gender and ethnicity domains. However, there are demonstrations of the existence of the phenomenon using other status-disadvantaged groups, notably social class (e.g., Croizet & Claire, 1998; Croizet & Dutrévis, 2004). In Croizet et al.’s studies, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds performed worse than their higher-status counterparts when an ability test was presented as diagnostic of intellectual competences. These findings are consistent with Steele, Spencer, and Aronson’s (2002) broader analysis of stereotype threat that encompasses threats to the ingroup’s social identity, which is typically the case in low-status groups (Iacoviello & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2017).

Interventions for reducing the negative effects of stereotype threat take advantage of the situational nature of the phenomenon. Several strategies can be imagined. For instance, Van Loo and Rydell (2013) allowed women in stereotype threat conditions to think about an incident in which they had or did not have power over another individual, a clear reference to status attainment and self-worth. After recalling the former type of incident, participants were buffered against stereotype threat and performed to their full potential. Another strategy consists of exposing participants to *role models*—that is, the few ingroup members that are sought for



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emulation for having achieved outstanding success in the threat domain (e.g., Gibson, 2004; Latu, Schmid Mast, Lammers, & Bombari, 2013; Marx & Roman, 2002). These well-performing individuals may contribute to raising expectations about the future performances of other ingroup members.

This next section considers how group status influences communication patterns in established social hierarchies.

### Communication

Group status shapes communication, both within and between groups. This section first outlines how status influences communication in high- and low-status groups. It will then focus on intergroup communication.

### Language in Status Groups

Bernstein and Bourdieu have provided rigorous and empirically documented accounts of the relationships between group status and language. Bernstein (1971) defines two linguistic codes: the *elaborated*, used by the middle class and adjacent social strata, and the *restricted*, used by everybody but more exclusively by the lower strata<sup>7</sup>. At the linguistic level, the main distinction between the two codes is the range of the alternatives from which users choose elements that organize the meaning. The elaborate code draws on an extended lexicon and complex syntax, whereas the restricted code draws on a narrower lexicon and offers a relative paucity of counterfactual and conditional statements, thus increasing prediction of language use. But the key difference between the two codes centers on the psychological level, and it is in terms of the codes' capacities to symbolize subjective intent—that is, the verbal transmission of an individual's own experiences. The elaborate code facilitates this verbal transmission, whereas the restricted code inhibits it. Consistent with claims this chapter has made in the preceding sections, the elaborated code focuses predominantly on “me versus not-me” interpersonal comparisons, whereas the restricted focuses on “us versus them” between-groups comparisons. Bernstein (1971) anchors the tendencies of the language to emphasize individuality or group assimilation and intergroup contrast to different forms of social relationships. He maintains that “a restricted code is generated by a form of social relationship based upon a range of closely shared identifications self-consciously held by the members. An elaborated code is generated by a form of social relationship which does not necessarily presuppose such shared, self-consciously held identifications with the consequence that much less is taken for granted. ... The community of like interests underlying a restricted code removes the need for subjective intent to be verbally elaborated and made explicit” (pp. 108–109). Thus, dense and close interpersonal relationships prompt the use of the restricted code, whereas more open and individualized relationships prompt the use of the elaborate code. The codes' properties remind us of the differences between collection (high status) and aggregate (low status) groups. The elaborated code triggers forms of communication that are more individuating, universalistic, and context-free, compared to the restricted code. These contrasting uses of language rest on a relationship between ingroup status and modes of communication. Bernstein (1964) insists that the codes are

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not a function of intelligence or competence but of specific forms of social relationships related to the ingroup's position in the social structure. The social structure is the independent (i.e., causal) variable of their emergence.

Bourdieu's perspective similarly stresses the ways in which group status is internalized and embodied in *habitus*—dispositions, language skills, and preferences that cohere along class lines. Possession of greater cultural capital and notably linguistic capital is what accounts for better achievement at school. The educational system propagates ideal conceptions of the self, of forms of communication, and of how to relate with other people that better fit the cultural habits and language skills of higher status families (see Kohn, 1977; Kusserow, 2004; Lareau, 2003). In environments where the ideal is that of a person who is an independent, self-contained, and autonomous entity, those who are educated to take on conceptions of the self that focus on interdependence, social connection, and conformity, experience a disadvantage (Stephens, Markus, & Phillips, 2014). They may eventually “find themselves adrift in a ‘foreign’ culture” (Milkie, Warner, & Ray, 2014, p. 564).

Bourdieu and Passeron (1984) stress the conservative (rather than the enlightenment) implications of education. They maintain that the educational system operates a “social alchemy” whereby it transforms the inherited privilege (e.g., being born in a higher class) in purely individual gift and merit. The meritocratic ideology “explains differential access to qualifications by reference to the inequality of innate ‘gifts,’ thereby reinforcing the effect of the mechanisms that mask the relationship between qualifications obtained and inherited cultural capital.” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 133; see also Jackman & Muha, 1984; Rosette & Thompson, 2005). Bourdieu (1984) elaborates that “it would be no small undertaking to describe the whole range of institutional mechanisms ... which help to encourage the cult and culture of the ‘person,’ that set of personal properties, exclusive, unique and original, which includes ‘personal ideas,’ ‘personal style’ and, above all, ‘personal opinion.’ It could be shown that the opposition between the rare, the distinguished, the chosen, the unique, the exclusive, the different, the irreplaceable, the original, and the common, the vulgar, the banal, the indifferent, the ordinary, the average, the usual, the trivial ... is one of the fundamental oppositions ... in the language of bourgeois ethics and aesthetics.” (p. 414). In fact, language use reveals the differing tendencies of high- and low-status groups to stress individuality. As Holtgraves (2002) points out, “Speakers of the standard language variety will usually receive higher ratings on status dimensions such as competence, intelligence, confidence, and so on. But speakers of the nonstandard variety will sometimes receive higher ratings on solidarity dimensions such as friendliness, generosity, and so on.” (p. 67). Bernstein and Bourdieu offer a Durkheimian perspective on language use in groups that possess or lack status. They have both been criticized for implying a “deficit hypothesis” whereby lower classes mirror, in impoverished ways, the habits of higher classes. Labov's (1972) research aimed at rehabilitating the working-class speech by demonstrating that it is different from, rather than inferior to, the high-class speech. This research shows that low-class speech is highly contingent on concrete interaction (e.g., within-group versus outgroup encounters; see Diamond, 1996).

### Attentional Asymmetries

The verticality of the groups' arrangement in the social structure influences who is listened to or ignored, who speaks assertively, or who reacts submissively—that is the direction and the kind of exchanged information (Giessner & Schubert, 2007; Hall & Knapp, 2013; Holtgraves, 1994).

Generally, members of high-status groups lead the interaction, and their lower-status counterparts comply with or confront the outgroup (Holtgraves, 2002). Thus, high status incites assertive behavior, and low status promotes deference. But what are the main forms taken by this asymmetry?

People tend to look upward in the social hierarchy because high-status positions are desirable. Hierarchy commands attention and vigilance, with the low status being more tuned to the high status than vice versa (Ratcliff, Hugenberg, Shriver, & Bernstein, 2011). In most situations, high-status people attract a disproportionate amount of attention (though less so when leaders and subordinates share a common fate for task achievement; see Fiske, 2011; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2008). The low-status group members' awareness that their fate depends on their adaptation to the dominant group motivates them to steer attention outside their membership group. They therefore elevate members of higher-status groups as standards for social comparison, seeking knowledge about their attributes, preferences, and behaviors in order to cope with their dependency (i.e., to predict their approval or disapproval reactions, to respond appropriately, and possibly to influence them). Lorenzi-Cioldi (1998, 2002) has demonstrated that this focus on the outgroup fosters perceptions of outgroup heterogeneity among the low status, while the high status display the classically documented outgroup homogeneity effect. Furthermore, the motivation to direct attention outside the ingroup is often boosted by the subordinates' anticipatory socialization attempts in order to prepare for their move to a higher-status group. To illustrate, *ingratiation*—that is, strategic behavior performed to persuade another person (often of higher status) about the attractiveness of one's personal qualities—depends on the person's estimates of the possibility of gaining favorable outcomes (see Jones, 1964, pp. 118–160). Oppression or subordination hypotheses were initially developed to account for women's superior competence in the nonverbal domain by assuming that their lower status motivates them to be accurate in social perception (see Henley, 1977; LaFrance & Henley, 1994; Schmid Mast & Cousin, 2013). Proponents of these theories have led the way in thinking about attentional asymmetries in status hierarchies.

In a meta-analysis, Eagly and Wood (1991) found that a major difference between men and women was the latter's superiority at sending and receiving messages nonverbally. Accordingly, most research on attentional asymmetries in communication processes has used gender as a status cue (this is likely because, contrary to other ascribed statuses—notably ethnicity—men and women are highly interdependent and in close contact). Subsequent correlational research has demonstrated that this superiority generalizes to other status systems. Members of subordinate groups possess greater abilities to discern nonverbal cues among outgroup members, particularly facial expression and emotion (Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985), show “normative clear-sightedness” in their interactions (Beauvois, 1994), develop better skills of interpersonal sensitivity and intuition (Snodgrass, 1985), are more mindful of the social parameters that create or sustain group inequalities (Frable, Blackstone, & Scherbaum, 1990; Vonk, 1999), and hold less superficial and more accurate views of their opponents (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003).

### Nonverbal Competences

Bernstein's key insight with the distinction between linguistic codes was that "in the pure form of the restricted code individual intent can only be signaled through the *non-verbal components* of the situation, i.e., intonation, stress, expressive features, etc." (1962, p. 32, emphasis added). Deprived of the use of assertive language, those of low status develop more "oblique" and subtle communication skills in the nonverbal domain. As Hoggart (1957) maintained, working-class people "have an acute eye for faces and ear for voices, an eye and ear which can sometimes be fresher and truer than those of a person who filters his perceptions through his reading and discussion" (p. 82). Indeed, the nonverbal domain anchors important differences in communication styles between status groups. Low-status people appear more "engaged" in nonverbal behavior than high-status people (e.g., Kraus, Piff, & Keltner, 2011; see also Jones, 1964).

Research has highlighted status differences in the possession of skills related to nonverbal behavior. Holtgraves (2002) showed that "people are much faster at comprehending ambiguous remarks (specifically, nonconventional indirect requests such as, 'It's warm in here' as a request to open a window) when a speaker is described as being high (rather than low) in status" (pp. 34-35). Lorenzi-Cioldi and Doise (1994) asked participants to describe themselves and their gender ingroup and outgroup on various traits. These judgments occurred in two instructional sets: a habitual set asking for participants' opinion, and a perspective-taking set asking participants to guess the opinions held by a typical outgroup member. Men's judgments of women in general were found to be strongly related to women's judgments of *myself, as men see me*, but the reverse judgments (women's judgments of *men in general* and men's *myself, as women see me*) were unrelated. This finding suggests that women are more aware and concerned than men about how outgroup members see them. They decode men's feelings about them as individual persons, while detecting that those feelings are stamped with collective, stereotypical beliefs about women in general. This is reminiscent of Bourdieu's (2000) appealing depiction of female intuition as a particular form of the lucidity or perspicacity of the dominated: "Women are more sensitive than men to non-verbal cues (especially tone) and are better at identifying an emotion represented nonverbally and decoding the implicit content of a dialogue; ... they are capable of describing their husbands in great detail, whereas men can only describe their wives in very broad stereotypes valid for 'women in general'" (p. 31). Lorenzi-Cioldi and Doise's findings corroborate Magee and Galinsky's (2008) claim that "targets of stereotypes are often aware of what others think of them, and this awareness of stereotypes about one's group can cause them to see themselves through the stigmatizing eyes of others" (p. 374). This is also in line with recent demonstrations in research on perspective taking showing that upper-level people are less empathic, less likely to take into consideration that other people lack information they possess, and less likely to adopt the other person's perspective (e.g., Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Guinote, 2017). They thus stereotype rather than individualize the subordinates.

Nonverbal behavior is subtle, and its impact may occur in ways that the perceiver is unaware of. So for instance, Word, Zanna, and Cooper (1974) showed that white participants interviewing black (versus white) job applicants employed greater interaction distance, made more speech errors, and terminated the interview sooner. Nonverbal cues consist of gestures, body movements, touch, interruptions, facial expressions, eye contact, conversational distance, etc. They are generally considered as more automatic and involuntary than verbal behavior. The literature on nonverbal behavior is tremendously vast (see Ambady & Weisbuch, 2010). Below, this

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chapter gives a general outline of this literature as it relates to group status (Hall, 1984; Hall & Knapp, 2013; Mayo & Henley, 1981), using gender and smiling behavior as an illustration. Several meta-analyses come up with the conclusion that women are better in encoding and decoding facial expressions. Why?

Since Henley's (1977) seminal proposition that women possess greater competence and expertise than men in the nonverbal domain, considerable theoretical and empirical research has attempted to substantiate this superiority and to investigate the underlying causal mechanisms. Introducing a narrative review of gender differences in nonverbal behavior, Hall and Gunnery (2013) start with the observation that women smile more often than men. But the authors contend that although this gender difference is well documented, there is a paucity of research explaining it. There are many potential reasons for this female superiority: "Are women happier than men? Are they instead fulfilling a social role that requires them to look pleasant, regardless of how they feel? Are they displaying their low status? Are they responding unconsciously to how others treat them? Are they simply displaying an overlearned signal of gender group identification ('I am a woman, not a man'), without any particular message content beyond that?" (p. 640). Recall this chapter's discussion of the origins of social hierarchies: gender differences in nonverbal behavior can be interpreted in the light of each of the abovementioned perspectives. But despite the soundness of a multiplicity of interpretations, there is no shortage of evidence that the nonverbal dimension is related to group status: Expressive behavior denotes acceptance and submission, and inexpressive behavior denotes illegibility, indecipherability, and possibly superiority (Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985; Goffman, 1979; Johnson, 1994). Interestingly, although women smile and are smiled at more than men, this gender difference fades away when considering judgments on female targets who are managers or who occupy other high-status positions in the workplace: Women in authority positions receive more negative affect from both men and women, although they are rated as competent as men for the role (Butler & Geis, 1990; Koch, 2005). Social role perspective nicely accounts for this deviation: between-genders differences in smiling tend to be attenuated when men and women are in similar social settings.

In a series of studies, Lorenzi-Cioldi (1994) collected judgments of photographs of smiling and inexpressive male and female faces. Participants assessed the pleasantness and the gender prototypicality of each face and then completed a free-word association task for each face. Participants overall praised smiling faces compared to inexpressive ones, but this difference was far more pronounced among women than men. Judgments of gender prototypicality showed a similar pattern of means. Women, more than men, considered the *smiling woman* and the *inexpressive man* as the best representatives of their respective gender categories. However, the smiling man turned out to be far less remote from the male inexpressive prototype than was the inexpressive woman from the female smiling prototype.

Analysis of the free association task revealed, unsurprisingly, that inexpressive faces (e.g., *reserved, introvert, indifferent, impassive*) contrasted with smiling faces (*friendly, open, sociable*). Again, however, women distinguished between smiling and inexpressive faces more strongly than men. A closer inspection of the findings confirmed that the violation of the stereotype was more penalizing for the female than the male target. The inexpressive woman was judged as *sad, harsh, withdrawn, severe*; the smiling man was judged to be *naive* but also, more descriptively, *self-satisfied, open, jovial, and ... smiling*. In sum, inexpressive female targets received the strongest disapproval and even more so by the female participants themselves. Apparently, men are freer to display a wider spectrum of expressions without incurring backlash for the violation of ingroup stereotypes—that is, they possess more idiosyncratic credit



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(Hollander, 1958). A later study testified to this higher sensitivity to the intergroup relationship that is attributed to women in the nonverbal domain (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2009). When instructed that male and female targets would interact in a future task, female targets with inexpressive faces were consensually perceived as *anxious* and *timorous*, whereas when smiling they were perceived as *assured* and *relieved*. For men, the corresponding perceptions comprised more descriptive, ego-oriented characteristics, such as *sad* and *happy*, respectively. These findings suggest that women smile to signal subordinate status, dependence, and appeasement, whereas men conceal emotions, possibly to hide their power games. In sum, emotions are not only controlled by internal processes. Accuracy of encoding and decoding the nonverbal behavior is not the only variable at stake. Social structure matters. Tiedens, Ellsworth, and Mesquita (2000) showed that high- and low-status people experience different emotions in similar circumstances. High-status people feel pride when things go well and anger when problems develop. In the corresponding circumstances, those of low status feel appreciation and gratitude toward others, or guilt and self-blame. Even laughter is affected by status, producing contrasting dominant and submissive forms (see Oveis, Spectre, Smith, Liu, & Keltner, 2016). Clearly, individuals' emotional reactions develop along status lines, with the potential to perpetuate social hierarchies.

In a narrative review of research on smiling behavior, DePaulo (1992) concluded, "If women were purposefully trying to convey the impression of being sociable, likable, and interested in the other person, they could hardly do better" (p. 223). However, there is still much debate about the intensity—and sometimes the very existence—of this phenomenon. The literature on this and other nonverbal behaviors is mixed. For instance, Hall (1984) contends that "the belief that women smile a lot is so strong that the authors of existing reviews state it as a fact with little or even no published empirical evidence to support the claim" (p. 58). Hall and Gunnery (2013) refute Henley's (1977) hypothesis—that women's advantage in the nonverbal domain has its origins in the female lower position in social hierarchies—but they do so by considering the weak correlations between nonverbal behavior and individual dispositions (dominance/power). This argument loses persuasiveness when considering how situations (not only personal dispositions) shape nonverbal behavior.

### Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to offer a general account of what group status is, where it comes from, and how it works—all from the perspective of a sociologically grounded social psychology. Group status is a central topic in virtually every discipline of the human sciences, because it has multiple consequences at the societal, group, and individual levels. Although necessarily limited in scope, the present chapter testifies to the flourishing state of the research on group status hierarchies. Considerable advance has been made in the knowledge of how group status influences self-conceptions, ways of relating to other people, emotions, communication styles, feelings of self-worth, health, professional attainments, etc. Ongoing research shows that the study of such influences is complicated by the fact that subjective status (feelings of one's relative rank or position in the social hierarchy) does not always correspond to objective status (as defined by consensual standards such as income, education, etc.) in predicting these outcomes (e.g., Liu, 2013, pp. 59–78). Subjective judgments of the social hierarchy are as real in their consequences as its objective features. For instance, relative deprivation theorists agree that feelings of disadvantage rather than objective disadvantage elicit reactions to solve the distress. Similarly, feelings of the legitimacy, stability, and permeability of the social hierarchy do not boil down to the objective properties of the current hierarchy. For instance, in organizational settings, beliefs regarding the permeability of the group boundaries are most often overstressed by the executives in order to blur status divides and to justify their advantage with considerations that connect to individual merit (e.g., Kraus & Tan, 2015; see also Stuber, 2010).

A further important consideration is that status hierarchies are not simply supported by those at the top and challenged by those at the bottom. Status hierarchies are imbued with widely shared ideologies and beliefs about the superiority of some and the inferiority of others that complicate such straightforward antagonistic and zero-sum views of social reproduction and change (see Hunt, 2014). We have seen that strategies used by members of low-status groups to cope with their disadvantage may have consequences that are detrimental to collective action aimed at establishing more equality. The aforementioned benevolent sexism, with its flattering image of a femininity that needs to be cherished and protected, undermines women's willingness to compete for higher-status roles and jobs. The same goes for the self-fulfilling implications of stereotype threat, which produce behavioral evidence of the alleged deficiencies of members of low-status groups, and for most social creativity strategies pictured by SIT. These strategies provide the subordinates with context-based and momentary reliefs to their self-worth but dissuade them from engaging in social protest. In concert, these processes make social-structural forces and group discrimination undetectable, and undermine the subordinates' efforts to resist or to challenge their disadvantage. As Wacquant claims, "Social hierarchy dissimulates itself, to those it dignifies no less than to those it excludes" (p. x).

Due to space limitations, theories and research reviewed in this chapter have been selected and are far from comprehensive. Much remains to be discovered about origins and consequences of the groups' positioning in social hierarchies. This chapter ends by urging an increased collaborative effort and greater dialogue and exchange between scholars from across the sociological to the psychological spectrum to advance our understanding of how group status influences human behavior. Neither strictly psychological nor strictly sociological perspectives may claim to cover all aspects of group status phenomena.



### Literature Review

The literature on group status is so vast that any attempt to clearly delineate its main aspects and tendencies is arbitrary at best. Early contributions to the study of group status came from sociologists (e.g., Kohn, 1977; Lenski, 1966; Lipset & Bendix, 1963; Merton, 1968; Sorokin, 1959; Weber, 1946), and were later increased by European (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984<sup>8</sup>) and American (e.g., Fussell, 1992; Kusserow, 2004; Lareau, 2003) scholars. Generally, sociological approaches to group status examine socialization practices in order to detect influences of social class on self- and others' views, self-esteem and well-being, mental and physical health (Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015), consumption styles (Halbwachs, 1913, Veblen, 2007), etc. This work has deepened the crucial distinction between ascribed and achieved statuses (e.g., Linton, 1936).

Since the late 20th century, social psychologists have been making major advances in the study of group status. They have done this by delving into psychological mechanisms that connect macro-level variables to individuals' representations of themselves and of others (e.g., Cheng, Tracy, & Anderson, 2014; Fiske, 2011; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Kraus et al., 2012; Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2006, 2009; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Tajfel, 1981). Social class, one of the most efficient ways in which societies rank their members, has been the focus of a flourishing number of recent academic articles (see for instance a 2013 special issue of *Psychological Inquiry*) and has even been popularized in large-audience (Fiske & Markus, 2012), and professional (Cheng, Tracy, & Anderson, 2014; Thomas-Hunt, 2005) edited volumes. Among the latter, McLeod, Lawler, and Schwalbe's *Handbook of the Social Psychology of Inequality* (2014) is of utmost interest to all social researchers. In fact, sociologists, social psychologists, and even psychologists now share an interest in the study of group status, and their advance is represented in significant scientific publications and in most international conferences. Furthermore, recent years have witnessed an upsurge in psychologists' interest in the physiological and neural correlates of group status (see for instance Cikara & Van Bavel, 2014).

A wealth of work has concerned status as applied to specific social categories. Gender has been a central topic in building theories about group status, notably social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Carli, 2007), status construction theory (Ridgeway, 2011), and stereotype content model (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008). Similarly, race and ethnicity have stimulated influential work on how status influences self-representations and worldviews (Clark, 1965; Jackman & Jackman, 1983; Lewin, 1948; see also Wolf, 1950).

In the communication domain, scholars have been highly productive in devising status explanations of nonverbal (Hall, 1984; Hall & Knapp, 2013) and verbal (Bernstein, 1971; Holtgraves, 2002; Labov, 1972) communication. Henley's (1977; Mayo & Henley, 1981) oppression hypothesis has been largely influential in setting the stage for the analysis of gendered communication patterns and has been extended to other kinds of asymmetrical status relationships (Levin & van Laar, 2006).

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## Notes:

### Notes

(1.) Furthermore, racial identification is contingent upon sociocultural contexts. To illustrate, black and white are considered to be binary and mutually exclusive categories in the United States, whereas in Brazil these categories dissolve into gradations of color with blackness and whiteness representing extremes on a continuum (see Daniel, 2006).

(2.) In an apparent paradox, this over-emphasis of achieved status is partly responsible for the rise of affirmative action measures devised to counterbalance the impact of ascribed memberships in creating social inequalities (see Foner, 1979; Lorenzi-Cioldi & Buschini, 2008).

(3.) This is reminiscent of Mills's (1956) analysis of social connections, that "[i]n these diverse contexts, prestige accumulates in each of the higher circles, and the members of each borrow

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status from one another. ... We find that, in an intricate series of overlapping circles, in the course of time, each meets each or knows somebody who knows somebody who knows that one” (pp. 282–283).

(4.) A more recent formulation of the theory proposes a “biosocial” extension that encompasses evolutionary considerations into the social account of the gender division of labor (see Wood & Eagly, 2010).

(5.) The Jackmans’ conclusion is still valid almost a half-century after its formulation. Analysis of more recent GSS-databases (1972–2016, retrieved from <http://www.norc.org/Research/Projects/Pages/general-social-survey.aspx>) by the author of this chapter corroborated their findings.

(6.) Those of high status themselves may be the target of negative stereotypes and stereotype threat but generally in competence domains that have comparatively low value in society (e.g., male gender and socio-emotional skills; see Koenig & Eagly, 2005).

(7.) Bernstein’s distinction between the two codes resonates with the omnivore-univore distinction between variegated and uniform cultural practices (see Peterson & Simkus, 1992, p. 170).

(8.) Bourdieu’s terminology is often deemed disheartening. One may turn to Swartz (1997) for a clear exposition of his theory.

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