The Significance of Status: What It Is and How It Shapes Inequality

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Status, a form of inequality based on esteem, respect, and honor, pervades social life but is poorly understood and underestimated in terms of significance. We offer a new look at status as a dynamic relationship between the shared views of others and the self that organizes behavior at the micro, meso, and macro levels of society. The status process is governed by a taken-for-granted sociocultural schema consisting of implicit norms for allocating status based on the perceived value of the individual to the group, as well as on historically changing status beliefs about what types of people are more worthy and competent than others. Status plays a role as a powerful motive for individual and group action and in the construction of durable patterns of inequality based on social differences such as race and gender. The pernicious effects of status processes can be mitigated by undermining status beliefs, stereotypes, and norms.

Status is everywhere. But what is it, how does it work, and why can't we ignore it? Why is it that a concern with status no longer seems to be just a vanity, a concern of insecure status-seekers, or the abstract scholarship of social scientists? Why do these questions seem so urgent? Examples of threats to status, ways to mitigate threats, ways to claim status, and situations and conversations that turn on status can be picked from the headlines.

In rural and white working-class contexts, people are pushing back against the status threat of cultural dominance by urban elites. Many now claim that social class status was at least as important as economics in driving support for Donald Trump as president (Cramer 2016; Gidron and Hall 2017; Hochschild 2016; Mutz 2018). In the racial reckoning that followed the murder of George Floyd, companies and organizations rushed to claim allyship status by pledging to support Black businesses (Hsu 2020). The state of California announced that lunch is now free for public school students—a bold move to reduce the stigma and

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low status associated with free lunch programs (James 2021). American Meghan Markle captured worldwide attention when she joined the British royal family and struggled with a change in a status, one that required deference to the queen. Of course, in all of these examples, social media played a powerful yet still uncharted role in status-making, enhancing the status of some and challenging the status of others, often overnight.

In this double issue, we take another look at status, answering some of the questions of status and how it works and why we care now. We approach status not as an entity that is obvious and that some groups and people have and others do not, but as an ongoing set of processes that have often been too invisible for too long and that may be both more complex and consequential than we realize. We show here that status deserves much more attention and recognition (one might say more status) for the way it holds social worlds together but sometimes rearranges them, and especially for its role in inequality.

STATUS: WHAT IS IT?

Max Weber ([1918] 1968) famously highlights status as a form of inequality that is different from power and wealth and that, although often correlated with them, has its own distinct effects on social relationships and life outcomes. Wealth is possession of valued, exchangeable resources, such as money and goods; power derives from control over positions in organizations that produce and distribute valued resources (Emerson 1962; Tilly 1998). But status is different. It is inequality based on differences in the esteem, honor, and respect accorded individuals and groups in the social worlds in which they participate. These terms and many others used variously in different contexts and disciplines (dignity, worth, value, reputation, standing, face) belong to a large family of concepts that refer to the shared views of others and that communicate the evaluative position an individual or group has in their mutual social world. In the workplace, some become more admired, prominent, and influential than others and are often favored for good opportunities. The same thing happens among students in the classroom. It also

happens among senators on a task force. Relative esteem and status attaches as well to the significant groups to which people belong— their preschool, college, retirement home, church, and nation— but also, importantly, to their racial group, their gender, and their class background. The status of people's group identities affects how they are treated by others in all aspects of their lives, including the institutional contexts such as work, school, and health organizations that are consequential for their life outcomes.

As all this suggests, status is everywhere in social life, a ubiquitous form of inequality that interpenetrates modern, ostensibly meritocratic institutions such as schools, workplaces, and government. Status even attaches to objects, such as a BMW versus a Kia automobile, but does so through association with high- and low-status individuals and groups, so we do not deal separately with that here (Veblen [1899] 1953). Status is also an ancient form of inequality and is apparently universal in human societies (van Vugt and Tybur 2016). It emerges from the deep sociality of humans, the way they look to others for their sense of worth and depend on them for what they want and need in life (Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015). Yet, despite its deceptive familiarity, that it is right in front of our faces in everyday life, status is so taken for granted as to be oddly invisible to us as scholars of inequality. The fundamental nature of status as a form of inequality—what it is, how it works, and why it matters for life outcomes—remains poorly understood.

Status may be poorly understood partly because its significance in social life is often underestimated which has reduced scholars' motivation to study it closely. From the perspective of social sciences that focus on collective and group-level processes, such as sociology, political science, and some parts of economics, status is often thought of as a mere gloss on more powerful, underlying inequality processes based on wealth and power. From the perspective of social sciences focused on individual-level processes, such as psychology and other parts of economics, status is highly implicated in well-known concerns such as belonging or group identity yet is rarely analyzed for its broader array of sources and consequences.

Status Emerges in Interaction Between Others and the Self

Appreciating the pain or the humiliation of a threat to status, the anxiety that anticipates the threat, or the comfort that accompanies having status affirmed or assured is relatively easy. But discerning and investigating what status is, why status is continually manifest and how it works has been harder, even for social scientists. One part of the difficulty of fully grasping the centrality of status in the United States is that it emerges in interaction and in the relationship between others and the self.

Capturing and analyzing the relationality that is status and the inequality it generates may be particularly taxing in highly individualist cultures like those of North America. Here, most people, and even some social scientists, when they seek to explain behavior, are likely to emphasize the actions of the individual but less likely to emphasize the ongoing connection between the individual and others. In the more collectivist contexts common in much of the world, relational dynamics are more evident and elaborated as the source of behavior (Markus and Kitayama 1994; Rai and Fiske 2011; Vignoles et al. 2016; Triandis 1995). In U.S. contexts, although "others" are acknowledged, scrutiny often goes first to the preferences, motives, goals, and capacities of the individual.

American ideology also makes the relational process of status harder to see. A cultural emphasis on the self and an ideological focus on equality among unconstrained individuals is built into America's foundational documents and continually stoked by everyday narratives and cultural products. Despite the many overlapping status hierarchies that organize social life for almost everyone in the United States, the American Dream says it does not and should not matter. No matter who you are or where you have come from, if you work hard, you should have an equal opportunity to succeed (Hochschild 2016). Echoing this powerful theme, a recent cultural product—a best-selling children's book—urges girls to push against the gender status hierarchy —"don't let

anyone tell you who you are. *You* tell them who you are" (Harris 2021, emphasis added).

Another part of the difficulty in appreciating the significance of status and understanding its nature is that status is manifestly a multi-level process. It involves status among individuals in interpersonal groups as well as status among groups in societies. Moreover, status, as esteem granted one individual or group relative to another, is a kind of reputation. That is, it operates through the shared beliefs of others toward the individual or group. These shared beliefs are part of the culture of the group or society. Thus, in contrast to better-known inequality processes such as wealth or power, status is primarily a cultural process.[1] We explain these points in more detail.

Although status may be distinctive as an inequality process, we argue that the failure to take it seriously is a major mistake. At the micro level, we will never understand the motives involved in the struggle for precedence that lies behind inequality if we do not take into account how much people care about being seen as worthy and valued in the eyes of their group and society. At the macro level, we argue that we will never come to terms with inequality based on categorical differences among people, such as race, gender, and class (understood as lifestyle and culture) if we do not understand the role status plays in such inequalities.

In what follows, we argue that status is best understood as a sociocultural schema people use to manage situations in which they are cooperatively interdependent to achieve valued goals that they want or need, but competitively interdependent to maximize their personal outcomes from the collective effort. Such situations are fundamental to the human condition, which is one reason that status is ubiquitous in social life. Before we turn to explaining the sociocultural schema model of status, however, we begin with the evidence that status is in fact both a motivating concern for individuals and an inequality process that is apparent over a wide range of social spheres. After describing the sociocultural schema model, we

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1. Culture is defined in various ways in the social sciences. We use culture to mean shared ideas, beliefs, and values as well as the norms and practices that reflect them both at the interpersonal level and at the organizational level (Hamedani and Markus 2019; Ridgeway 2019).

then use it to show more clearly how status has powerful and distinctive effects at the societal level.

Status Shapes Individual Motivation

Social psychologists have been especially active in demonstrating some aspects of status as a motivating concern even if they have not always used the term in their studies. Since Gordon Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice* was published in 1954, studies have tracked how the negative and devaluing views of others toward the groups that people identify with matter for their life outcomes. Status is all about what other people think. Research across the social sciences has revealed how the devaluing views of prejudice and the group stereotypes they are based on are often driven by and reflect status concerns (see, for example, Bobo 1999; Fiske 2011).

Status as Stereotypes

A vivid demonstration of the power of group stereotypes in the way people assign status and also how status changes with the situation was on display in a recent European soccer championship in which Italy defeated England (Burdick 2021). The English team included a number of Black players from African countries. When England lost, viewers hurled racial slurs and epithets at the Black players on the team who had missed their penalty shots. The pundits noted this status-making and status-taking in action, reporting, "when you win, you're English; when you lose, you're Black." A related study compared the performance of all Black soccer players in the European league during the first half of the 2019/2020 season with their performance on second half of the season, which occurred during the pandemic when no audience was present (Caselli, Falco, and Mattera 2021). Relieved of the devaluing views of others during the game, the Black players who were most commonly targeted showed a 10 percent improvement in performance when they played to empty stadiums.

    Sometimes people are well aware of the influence of others on their status or their sense of worth or value. In many other cases, they are not, or, given the individualist cultural press to resist the influence of others, claim not to be.

The agenda-setting contribution of the theory of stereotype threat and research has been to illuminate how being seen through the lens of a stereotype about one's gender, race, social class, or age can have a pervasive influence on all aspects of performance across multiple domains (Steele 2010). As we will see, it is the status content of stereotypes that links group identity to performance (Fiske et al. 2002). Claude Steele and his colleagues reason that for negatively stereotyped groups, the negative views of others did not need to be explicitly invoked, as in the soccer example, to undermine performance. Instead, the pressure not to confirm a stigmatizing view of one's self is sufficient to undermine performance.

    Black college students who think a task is a test of academic competence score more poorly than Black students who believe the same task requires trying out a new puzzle (Steele 2010). Asian women reminded of their gender identity on a questionnaire before a math test score more poorly than Asian women reminded of their ethnic identity (Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady 1999). White people talking to a stranger showed a greater increase in blood pressure when talking to a Black stranger than to a White stranger (Mendes at al. 2002). Why?

    When performing in the shadow of historically and societally pervasive stereotypes that links class or race or gender to poor performance, people become vigilant. This is the case for Black students who assume a task is a test of academic competence and for women who take a difficult math test. It is also the case for White students in conversation with an unknown Black partner, aware that their race may be linked to general racial insensitivity. In these situations, people's heart rates and blood pressures can change, their minds race, and distracting and self-doubting thoughts can enter (Schmader and Hall 2014; Krendl et al. 2008). Notably, these stereotype threat effects are most apparent when people are strongly identified with the activity at hand and among people who do not themselves believe the stereotype. A concert of internal activity can divert attention from the task at hand, dampen performance, and generate anxiety. Often people report no awareness of the stereotype. Yet rearrange the situation so that the

stereotype is lifted and no longer relevant, and performance returns to normal higher levels. Hundreds of studies demonstrate similar and related effects of group stereotypes in multiple domains, showing the relevance of status for almost all forms of individual behavior (for reviews, see Liu et al. 2021; Schmader and Hall 2014).

Across studies of stereotype threat, the activation of a well-known stereotype reflecting the views of others devalues some aspect of identity and generates anxiety over one's individual or group status in that moment. The source of that anxiety is some awareness of one's relative positioning in a broader social system that confers more advantage and worth to some over others. Although people commonly talk about people who *have* status, at school, work, or in the organization, these studies underscore the fact that status is not a natural, basic, or permanent attribute of a person. And whether one's status is threatened by a stereotype depends on the constellation of relational realities that make up particular situations, including how one is treated or has been treated in similar situations relative to how others are treated, how one infers one's group (racial, ethnic, gender, class, or other) is perceived and how one believes they and other members of their group should be treated relative to others, and what is at stake for them and others in that situation, and of course how the others in the situation respond to the stereotype.

People at the top of the ladder often think, feel, and behave differently from those on the lower rungs, whether the ranking is objectively anchored with clear indications of status, subjectively experienced, or manifest through the temporary manipulation of status and social comparison (for reviews, see Fiske and Markus 2012; Kraus, Côté, and Keltner 2010; Wilkinson 2000) For example, with respect to psychological experience, those at the top of the status ladder tend to be more optimistic, experience more positive and few negative emotions, and feel less threatened and anxious than those at the bottom (Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson 2003). They also have a relatively stronger sense of themselves as relatively independent from the others, have more interest in expressing their preferences, choices, and goals, and more

practice in influencing and controlling social interactions (Stephens et al. 2012).

Of course, people individually and together find multiple ingenious ways to navigate status threats, to counter status disavowal and to reclaim and assert status. For example, African Americans, many of whom are continually subject to the cold wind of negative stereotypes, often report the highest self-esteem scores of all ethnic groups. (Twenge and Crocker 2002; Gray-Little and Hafdahl 2000). Yet, when people repeatedly experience situations in which they are cast into lower-status positions by cultural stereotypes, institutional policies, and devaluing interpersonal interactions, some enduring consequences are likely. It is here where the growing volume of work linking status with health and well-being is particularly informative (Hoebel and Lampert 2020).

Status Under the Skin

A serious concern with how status can shape health and well-being began with the Whitehall studies of civil servants in England (Marmot et al. 1991). In these investigations, those in low occupational grades had much worse health and higher mortality than those in higher grades, but surprisingly improvements in health and mortality were evident at each occupation level up to the very highest occupation levels. These findings challenged the widespread view that social class differences were primarily a matter of economic circumstances, and underscored that status is indeed more than just a reflection of material resources. Studies in the United States confirm this clear gradient between social class and health (Adler et al. 1994; Adler and Stewart 2010). Although socioeconomic status is important in explaining race disparities in health outcomes, significant differences in health inequalities remain even when SES is controlled (Franks et al. 2006; House and Williams 2000). These disparities track a deficit in status as indexed by stereotype exposure, ongoing devaluation across multiple domains, and disrespectful treatment (Phelan and Link 2015). Confronting and negotiating pervasive and multilevel insults to status can result in a cumulative wear and tear on the body's systems (Brown and Turner 2014)—on their biological health as indexed by levels of

inflammation, cardiovascular and immune system functioning, body mass index, and so on.

The strong relationship between status and health suggests that people's sense of their position on the social ladder—their subjective socioeconomic status gets under the skin and affects health above and beyond their objective socioeconomic status. A relatively lower status can instigate a recursive cycle of poorer mental and physical health in which those who experience the compounding stress of discrimination, invisibility, less respect, and less personal worth typically have worse health and shorter lives. In contrast, multiple forms of higher status can instigate a recursive cycle of higher mental and physical health in which those who experience the compounding positive effects of visibility, no explicit discrimination, a sense of respect and personal worth, and favorable social comparisons have better health and longer lives. The mechanisms that tie status to health are complex and both social psychological and psychoneurobiological (Hoebel and Lampert 2020). The accumulating evidence implies, however, that a critical element of reducing inequality and thereby enhancing individual and group motivation, performance, health and general well-being is restoring or elevating both individual and collective respect, worth, and value.

Belongingness and Affirmation
Can Mitigate Status Threats

When people are affirmed and included rather than threatened and excluded and when they sense that they are seen and accorded some appropriate standing, they tend to feel comfortable and that they belong (e.g., Walton and Crum 2021). Studies in the social psychological literature organized by the label of self-affirmation or belongingness do not invoke the concept of status explicitly. Yet they demonstrate that when people experience a sense of being valued and of worth, motivation and performance improve. In one study, Black and White students in a racially integrated school characterized by a strong racial achievement gap were given a chance to write down some of their most important values. They wrote about family, music, friends, or religion. Other students wrote about their least important value

and why others thought they were important. This affirmation improved the performance of the Black students, reducing the achievement gap with the White students (Cohen et al. 2006). Explicitly recognizing and affirming a person's relevant identity groups has similar positive effects on performance (Brannon, Markus, and Taylor 2015).

Transitions from one social situation to another is a time when many worry about whether they will fit in or belong and, as we see, this involves a sense of whether they will be respected or devalued in the new situation. Focusing on the transition from high school to college, one study followed first-generation and African American college students who read the stories of older college students who told them not to worry about whether they belong in college and assured them that if they felt worried about their belonging, their situation would improve with time. This exercise increased the percentage of students who stayed full-time enrolled in college, relative to those in a randomized control condition, by 10 percent. These students chose to live on campus, used academic support services, and joined student groups (Walton and Cohen 2011; Walton and Wilson 2018). Similar interventions have been effective in mitigating a chilly climate for women in male-dominated spaces. One study in which students heard stories from older engineering students and also wrote a letter to a future engineering student raised the grades and motivation of women in male-dominated engineering majors, eliminating the gender gap in achievement (Walton et al. 2015). A wide variety of other methods, some much more indirect and involving seemingly small changes to the social environment can also increase people's sense that people "like them" belong in a particular situation. These include school websites, mission statements, or walls of fame that represent and explain the value of a diverse student body and thus strive to flatten the status hierarchy and foster a sense of inclusion. For example, a study with a diverse sample of adolescents from more than one hundred schools finds that when schools emphasize the value of diversity (indexed by mentioning diversity in their mission statements), the health of students of color in these schools is better as re-

flected in multiple physiological measures (Levine et al. 2019). This difference was not observed for the White students.

Status in Norms and Institutional Forms
Thus it is evident from studies on stereotype threat, self-affirmation, and belonging that one's sense of self, one's position or status in the situation, emerges between people, depends on the relations among them, and is consequential for individual behavior. My status in this situation depends on your view of me. Of course, if the devaluing reaction was just one person's view—one teacher with low expectations, one potential boss who passes over a résumé, one neighbor who never says hello, it is possible to avoid or ignore the particular encounter and maintain a sense of esteem and respect. Yet stereotypes are so powerful and inequality-generating because we presume them to be the beliefs of "most people." They are shared beliefs that are dispersed deeply, that are widely reinforced, and that package and deliver inequality through people's ongoing relations with one another at school, at work, and in the community, shaping their life outcomes.

A situation may appear free of a concert of the devaluing views of others, or chock full of indications of one's belongingness, but one never knows about the next situation. Many people in many situations seem to "just know" that women or people from working-class backgrounds, or one of many minoritized groups are less competent in STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) fields than men. The views of others are ever present, and the reflections of stereotypes with their devaluing status implications are built into all levels of organizational and institutional cultures, including the physical environment (see, for example, Cheryan et al. 2009). In some settings, stereotypes can be effectively kept at bay by shoring up people's sense of value and worth and with strategies for alternate ways of making meaning in a situation (Thomas et al. 2020). Yet, in many cases, they are easily brought to mind. As Steele theorizes, they constitute "a threat in the air." They are compelling evidence at the level of the individual for the ubiquity and power of status. They also illuminate sta-

tus as an inequality-generating force that extends well beyond its powerful influence on the individuals' feelings of their belongingness or group identity.

In some cases, the status-allocating views of others—particularly those related to race, ethnicity, gender, and social class—are so widely shared and have been taken for granted for so long that they are reflected in unmarked organizational and institutional norms and seldom recognized as biasing, stereotyping, or devaluing. Instead, these norms are seen as standard, neutral, or necessary policies and practices (Cheryan and Markus 2021). For example, many organizations that are currently actively engaged in efforts to mitigate gender bias are still rooted in a powerful foundation of masculine beliefs and norms that prevent the full participation of women. This mostly hidden foundation can be found in the valuing and rewarding of employees who behave independently, policies requiring that employees nominate themselves for promotion, and interaction styles in which assertively interjecting and debating is necessary for being heard and having influence (Cheryan and Markus 2021; Diekman et al. 2011; Kang 2014; Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2014; Wynn and Correll 2018). Taken for granted, invisible norms that value and reward independence as the most worthy and competent way to be are also common in many universities, colleges, and workplaces. These norms can devalue the more interdependent motivations and actions that often drive students from working-class backgrounds to attend college and can undermine their achievement and performance (Stephens et al. 2015).

THE MULTILEVEL AND SOCIOCULTURAL NATURE OF STATUS
We said at the outset that one of the difficulties in coming to grips with status as an inequality process is that it is primarily a cultural process, in contrast to the more material and concrete processes of wealth, which involve exchangeable resources, and power, which is based on the control of valued resources. That status is a cultural process would benefit from a little unpacking. Because status is the esteem and perceived social value accorded one individual or group relative to another, as we have seen, it

is rooted in the beliefs of others. It reflects these others' roughly shared beliefs about which individuals and which groups are "better" than others at what the group values. As Erving Goffman and others have pointed out, individuals can take strategic actions to claim status, but they cannot directly seize and possess it as they can wealth or power (Goffman 1956; Goode 1978; Gould 2002). The same is true for groups in society. Status must be granted by the collective views of others. If these views change or become less widely shared, status can be lost. For instance, Bill Gates can engage in philanthropy to gain esteem and status in the eyes of his countrymen. But if information becomes public that undercuts shared views of the value or sincerity of his philanthropy, his status will decline despite his continued wealth and power and that decline will reduce his appeal as an exchange partner for others.

In this way, as we have said, status exists in the social space between the individual or group and the surrounding community, that is, in the relationship between them. And that relationship is continually being negotiated through the actions of the individual or group and the ongoing evaluative reactions of the community, as reflected in its emergent shared beliefs and norms in regard to the individual or group. Thus status is a process, something people and groups do and continually redo rather than a fixed personal attribute. Because this process is governed by shared beliefs and the associated practices of a group or community of people, we refer to status as primarily cultural in nature.

As the description of status as an ongoing process illustrates, status is inherently a multilevel process, involving the interplay between an individual and the surrounding interpersonal group or between a group and the surrounding community or society. Because status hierarchies or inequalities develop among individuals in interpersonal groups as well as among groups such races or genders in society, status is a multilevel process in this sense too. Decades of research on the development of status hierarchies in interpersonal groups, particularly that associated with status characteristics and expectation states research, has shown that the status society attaches to individuals'

group identities, such as race, gender, education, or class background powerfully shapes their esteem, status, and influence in interpersonal groups (Berger et al. 1977; Berger, Rosenholtz, and Zelditch 1980; Correll and Ridgeway 2003; Ridgeway and Nakagawa 2014; Berger and Webster 2018). This is the message of the stereotype threat research we reviewed as well (Schmader and Hall 2014; Steele 2010).

As such research clearly shows, status between groups in society and between individuals within groups are not separate processes but instead fundamentally linked in the way status works as a system of inequality. Widely shared beliefs about the relative status of groups in society are part of the macro-level culture of that society. But they affect inequality most directly by affecting the evaluative treatment of individuals at the micro level of interpersonal relations, including mediated relations, such as when someone assesses the résumé of another. In other words, the inequality embedded in society's status beliefs about people's significant group identities is delivered home to the individual and shapes their life outcomes at the level of what people do every day in their work-oriented relations with one another. To understand what status really is as an inequality process and what its significance is for inequality in people's valued life outcomes, we need a model of status that can account for its multilevel and processual-cultural nature as well as its ubiquity in social life.

Status as a Sociocultural Schema of Norms and Status Beliefs

Status is ancient, universal, and ubiquitous, we suggest, because it arises out of a fundamental tension in the human condition. Whether people like it or not, they have to cooperate with others to get most of what they want and need in life from the basics of survival to what it takes to make them happy. We have to work with others to make a living, to find meaningful relationships and develop satisfying self-identities, and to form families and raise children. But this deep cooperative interdependence that is built into the human condition has nested within it an inherent competitive tension. When people coordinate their efforts, questions necessarily arise about the terms on

which their relationship will be conducted and
how the spoils of their joint efforts will be di-
vided. Who will be the center of attention? Ac-
cording to whose will and judgments will joint
actions be determined? Everyone has an un-
avoidable interest in forming cooperative en-
deavors but everyone also has an interest in
maximizing what they get from those endeav-
ors. Status is best understood, we argue, as a
sociocultural schema or blueprint for organiz-
ing social relations to manage this basic ten-
sion and produce collective outcomes (Ridge-
way 2019).

William Sewell (1992) has argued that social
structures have a dual nature, consisting on the
one hand of a cultural schema of rules for en-
acting the structure and, on the other, of the
material distribution of behaviors and re-
sources that result from that enactment. The
sociocultural schema of status is a structural
schema in this sense.[2] It is a set of deeply
learned, taken-for-granted cultural rules that
people use to organize their behavior with oth-
ers in a manner that produces a status hierar-
chy—that is, a behavioral ranking in esteem
demonstrated through deference, prominence
and, typically, influence over collective deci-
sions. As people draw on the familiar, if im-
plicit, sociocultural schema of status to orga-
nize the many shared endeavors they engage
in, status pervades social life from the interper-
sonal to the organizational (Ridgeway 2019).

To some, the claim that status is regulated
by a sociocultural schema of rules might seem
controversial. The obvious alternative would
explain status entirely in terms of long-standing
evolutionary theories of dominance and hier-
archy and more recent evolutionary arguments
about prestige (Cheng and Tracy 2014; Henrich
and Gil-White 2001; van Kleef and Cheng 2020).
Yet recent analyses show that these evolution-
ary arguments cannot fully account for status
hierarchies as they are commonly observed,
particularly in groups of three or more (Ridge-
way 2019). Furthermore, they do not explain the
reach of status beyond the interpersonal group.
If, instead of a cultural process based on shared
beliefs and rules, status were based solely on

evolved, individual attributes and response ten-
dencies, it would be confined to interpersonal
hierarchies. Yet, as we have seen, status pro-
cesses as we observe them involve hierarchies
among groups in society, such as races, gen-
ders, and classes, as well as among individuals.
This is difficult to explain without understand-
ing status as a sociocultural process. The status
schema may be a cultural development laid on
a residue of evolved responses, this suggests,
but it is not reducible to them. In this it is like
language, which is fully cultural in nature but
developed on top of evolved capacities.

The Basic Norm of Status
Especially if people might have some evolved
tendencies for rank and deference, why might
they develop a sociocultural schema of rules to
regulate deference and status? Cecilia Ridge-
way (2019) argues that it is the interdependent
interest of group members in who ends up high
status that gives rise to the development of cul-
tural rules, or norms for status. Under goal in-
terdependence, who ends up high status in the
group affects all our interests. If, for example,
that person who likes to talk but does not seem
to know much about our problem ends up high
status rather than the quieter one with experi-
ence, that affects my outcomes as well as theirs.
As a result, whatever status we egoistically de-
sire for ourselves, we want others in the group
to defer to others who appear most able and
willing to contribute to the collective effort be-
cause this will maximize success and the shared
benefits that flow from that (Ridgeway and
Diekema 1989). This means we are likely to
pressure others to defer on the basis of ex-
pected value to the group. The consequence,
though, is that, by the same token, we will be
faced with pressure from others to defer on this
basis ourselves. In this way, as Christine Horne
(2004) shows, such an interdependence of ex-
change interests gives rise to group norms that
members enforce. Here it creates implicit
norms for deference on the basis of perceived
value to the group's goal efforts.

Evidence is overwhelming that interper-
sonal status hierarchies grant deference and

2. We call the status schema *sociocultural* rather than just *cultural* to emphasize its nature as a structural schema in Sewell's (1992) sense.

influence to group members in proportion to their perceived value to the collective effort (Anderson and Willer 2014; Correll and Ridgeway 2003; Magee and Galinsky 2008). Note the emphasis on perceived value, given the possible disjunction between perceived and actual value (Correll et al. 2017; Lynn, Poldolny, and Tao 2009). This is the basic norm of status, which people learn from observations and treatment by others and pass on through their own behavior so that it becomes deeply learned, taken for granted cultural knowledge for most people. The norm is a means by which the group exercises some control over a would-be dominator who threatens to take over the group without contributing to the shared endeavor. In a study of status among MBA students, Cameron Anderson and his colleagues (2006) show that students who tried to claim higher status than their peers felt was justified by their value to the team were isolated and disliked. Ridgeway and David Diekema (1989) also find that when a member of a decision-making group attempted to seize influence through dominance that was not backed up by competence, other members turned on the dominator and rejected him or her. Norms can be recognized not just by their enactment, but also by their enforcement. Here we see evidence that people enforce the basic status norm with sanctions against violators and do so spontaneously (Anderson, Ames, and Gosling 2008).

Cultural Status Beliefs

The sociocultural schema of status is more complex than the basic status norm, however. The expectation the norm creates for deference to others on the basis of perceived value to the group immediately confronts the individual member with a second question. How can she figure out what her fellow members will take to be the signs of greater or lesser value to the group? Ridgeway (2019) argues that people solve this coordination problem by developing shared cultural *status beliefs* about the attributes and behaviors that indicate higher or lower levels of status worthiness and types of competence. Especially in a Western, achievement-oriented society such as the United States, beliefs about status, that is, who is "better," and therefore more valuable to the

collective endeavor, are closely associated with presumptions of instrumental competence (Fiske et al. 2002; Fiske 2011).

Experiments show that people form shared status beliefs about the indicators of worthiness and competence quite easily and act on these newly formed status beliefs in their subsequent treatment of people (Ridgeway et al. 2009). Other evidence shows that such beliefs are widespread in U.S. culture. Research shows that status beliefs form central elements in the widely held cultural stereotypes of all the major social difference groups by which inequality is patterned in the United States, including race, gender, class, education, and occupation (Fiske et al. 2002; Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2007). It is because beliefs about status and competence are embedded in group stereotypes that stereotype threat can affect performance. North Americans also have status beliefs linking assertive, agentic behavior with greater status and competence (Conway, Pizzamiglio, and Mount 1996). These same studies show that status beliefs are recognized by people as "common knowledge" in that they are presumed to be the beliefs of "most people" (Fiske 2011). In that way, common knowledge status beliefs function as ready bases for coordinating judgments of value to the group (Chwe 2001; Thomas et al. 2014). They allow group members to form roughly shared perceptions of who in the group is "better" than whom for the collective effort (Anderson et al. 2006; Anderson et al. 2012; Troyer and Younts 1997).

Common knowledge status beliefs work to coordinate status in the group because each group member presumes that the others will act according to them and thus must take those beliefs in account in their judgments and behavior. In other words, widely known status beliefs act as a kind of social map that we all presume we are all looking at in figuring out how to behave. For instance, in a work group in which some have Ivy League credentials and others do not, all are implicitly aware of the expectations this difference evokes and take that into account in their behavior whether they agree with the expectations or not. Thus common knowledge status beliefs allow group members to quickly converge on a rough working consensus in their relative ranks in the group status hier-

archy even if not everyone in the group fully endorses the status beliefs as correct (Anderson et al. 2012; Correll et al. 2017). They similarly draw on shared status beliefs to make sense of subsequent events in the group in an ongoing process through which they jointly maintain or renegotiate the hierarchy. Indeed, the formation and maintenance of an ongoing, working consensus on status in interpersonal groups is probably only possible because it does not require complete agreement at the level of what each member "really deserves."
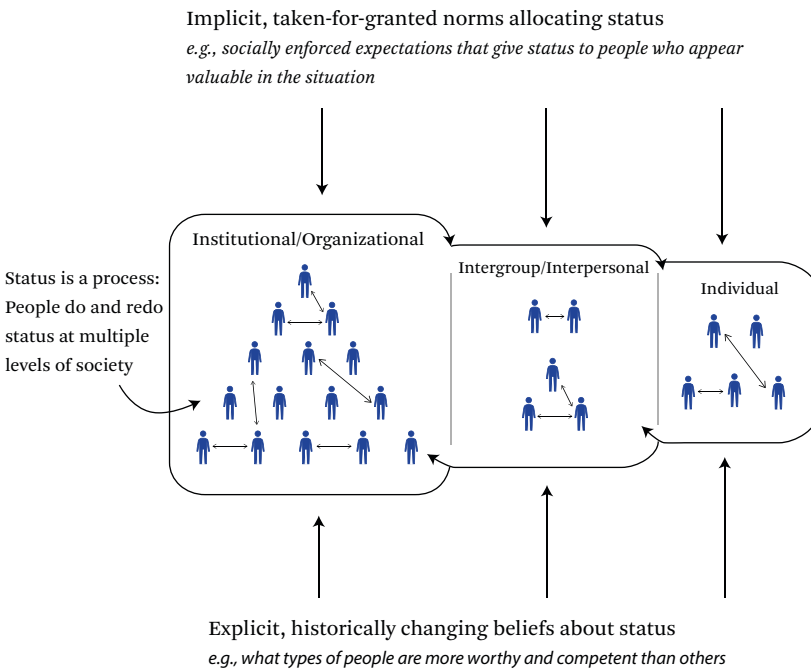
A Twofold Status Schema
The sociocultural schema for status, then, would seem to be twofold (figure 1). We have a taken-for-granted but fundamental basic status norm that we learn from experience and pass on to others through our behavior. We combine this deeper, more implicit normative rule with a more explicit, variable, and historically changing set of shared cultural status beliefs that we use to anticipate what others will see as "better," more competent, and valuable in various

situations. It is through the combination of a shared basic status norm and shared status beliefs that people are able to quickly form status hierarchies in the real time of interaction, as evidence shows they do (Bales 1950, 1970).

Understanding status as a sociocultural schema helps us account for some of its distinctive characteristics as a form of inequality. First, because the sociocultural schema approach shows how status hierarchies work through a combination of status beliefs, which typically are shared at the macro level of a broader community or society, and an application of those beliefs at the micro level of social relations among actors, it helps explain the inherently multilevel and cultural nature of status inequality as we observe it around us. Second, in so doing, the sociocultural schema approach clarifies for us the powerful link between status processes and inequality based on social differences and group identity. Finally, it also helps explain the wide range of status rankings in society.

As Sewell (1992) points out, a cultural

Figure 1. A Sociocultural Schema of Status: Societally Specific, Learned and Shared Norms and Beliefs for Organizing Social Relations

Implicit, taken-for-granted norms allocating status
e.g., socially enforced expectations that give status to people who appear valuable in the situation

Institutional/Organizational

Intergroup/Interpersonal

Individual

Status is a process: People do and redo status at multiple levels of society

Explicit, historically changing beliefs about status
e.g., what types of people are more worthy and competent than others

Source: Authors' diagram.

schema or blueprint for organizing social relations in a certain way can be applied permissively to new situations and phenomena beyond the contexts of its origins. It is like acquiring a tool for a certain purpose and then finding new ways to use it. It is because of its cultural nature that people can apply status as a way of coordinating with others in regard to a broad range of social phenomena well beyond the interpersonal group. Wendy Espeland and Michael Sauder (2016), for instance, studied how status rankings of law schools develop and become consequential points of reference for both schools and students alike. Shelley Correll and her colleagues (2017) show how, when people must make a decision whose success depends in some degree on the reactions of others, they draw on beliefs about the status of various options to make a choice that will coordinate well with the likely reactions of others. Unfortunately, this can mean that even if a decision-maker thinks, say, that the woman candidate for police chief is as good as or slightly better than the male candidate, the decision-maker may still favor the male candidate as easier to "sell" to others. Indeed, without something like the sociocultural schema approach, the very broad reach of status rankings in advanced industrial societies is much harder to explain.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STATUS FOR INEQUALITY BASED ON GROUP IDENTITY

Understanding status as an inequality process regulated by a deeply learned and shared sociocultural schema helps us see how diverse status phenomena like those between groups in society and those among individuals in groups work together. It also illuminates the processural-cultural nature of status and its basis in the ongoing relationship between the actor and the surrounding group (Grusky, Hall, and Markus 2019). How much does the group value that actor, relative to others, given what counts with the group as important, worthy, and valuable? But for our purposes here, the most important advantage of the sociocultural schema approach is the further insight it provides into the powerful role status plays in creating and maintaining durable patterns of in-

equality in valued life outcomes among identity groups based on social differences such as race, gender, and class background. These insights derive from the way the status beliefs component of the schema shapes people's evaluative reactions and behaviors toward one another to create status advantage, legitimates inequality between groups based on social difference, and fosters a sense of group position and resistance to status threats.

Status Advantage

We have seen that widely held status beliefs are associated with all the social difference groups by which inequality is patterned in the United States. Status beliefs are a central part of the content of the stereotypes of these groups (Fiske et al. 2002). Status beliefs about a social difference such as race, gender, or class, link people in one category of the difference (men, Whites, the middle class) not only greater esteem, but also with cultural presumptions of greater *competence*, especially at what "counts" in society, relative to people in other categories of that difference (women, people of color, the working class) (Berger et al. 1977; Ridgeway and Erickson 2000; Ridgeway et al. 2009; Berger and Webster 2018). Status beliefs suggest that people in a higher-status category of a social difference such as race, gender, or class, are typically "better" and can be expected to be diffusely more competent than those in lower-status categories of the difference.

Status beliefs about a social difference become salient for people in a goal or work-oriented situation when people differ on the characteristic as well as when the social difference is culturally understood to be relevant to the setting's goals, as in a gender-, race-, or class-typed setting (Berger and Webster 2018). When implicitly salient in a setting, status beliefs create a cascading set of subtle biases in people's evaluations and treatments of one another that jointly create *status advantage* (Correll et al. 2017; Ridgeway and Nakagawa 2014). Status advantage is the treatment of people labeled high status by the status beliefs, such as Whites or men, as more valued and competent in the situation than they otherwise would be and favoring them for rewards and opportunities as a consequence. And, as a corresponding

part of status advantage, those labeled low status by the beliefs find themselves treated as less valued, competent, and favored for rewards than they would otherwise be.

Status advantage based on status beliefs about social differences is the foundation of why status matters for broader patterns of inequality in society. With status advantage, a rich, powerful person from a higher-status group, say, a White person, has an added advantage over an equally rich, powerful person from a lower-status group, say, an Asian, Latinx, or African American. At least three types of bias created by status beliefs compound to create status advantage: status bias, legitimacy bias, and associational bias.

Status bias refers to a series of self-fulfilling evaluative competence biases triggered by status beliefs that have been documented by status characteristics and expectations states research (Berger and Webster 2018; Correll and Ridgeway 2003; Ridgeway and Nakagawa 2014). By this analysis, stereotype threat effects on performance would also fall under the category of status bias (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Schmader and Hall 2014). Implicitly salient status beliefs bias people's expectations for others' relative to their own competence and suitability for authority in a situation. Biased expectations, in turn, have self-fulfilling effects on people's behaviors, performance, evaluations, and outcomes. By subtly shaping one person's behavior toward another, status beliefs create inequalities in assertive versus deferential behavior, actual task performance and evaluations of performance, attributions of ability, influence, and situational rewards between otherwise equal Whites and non-Whites, men and women, and middle- and working-class people (Correll and Ridgeway 2003; Kahlkoff et al. 2020; Melamed et al. 2019; Ridgeway 2011; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Ridgeway and Fisk 2012; Webster and Driskell 1978).

As people go about their everyday efforts to achieve the valued outcomes by which we judge inequality, such as wealth, health, and positions of power, status bias acting in the social relationships through which they pursue these outcomes shape both their behavior and others' treatment of them. They affect the confidence and energy with which people put themselves forward in a situation and others' willingness to pay attention to their efforts and evaluate them positively. Expecting themselves to be more competent, the status advantaged speak up eagerly while the status disadvantaged hesitate. The same idea or performance seems better to others coming from the status advantaged. In addition, to both others and themselves, the status advantaged seem more the sort for leadership (Berger and Webster 2018; Ridgeway and Nakagawa 2014). Because of the way people use status beliefs to coordinate evaluations, status bias can even cause people to favor a status advantaged candidate, say for hiring, promotion, or school admission, over a similar or slightly more qualified status disadvantaged candidate if they think the status advantaged candidate will be more readily accepted by others in the situation (Correll et al. 2017). In these ways, status bias, acting through the many goal-oriented encounters that take place in consequential contexts such as the workplace, schools, government or health organizations subtly, but systematically, direct people from higher-status groups toward more valued resources and positions of power than otherwise similar people from lower status groups.

In addition to status bias, status advantage is also fostered by *legitimacy bias*, which is the tendency to treat people from more privileged, higher-status groups as more legitimate occupants of high-status positions of authority in groups and organizations (Berger et al. 1998). Legitimacy matters for people in leadership roles because it affects their ability to act authoritatively and expect compliance (Johnson, Dowd, and Ridgeway 2006; Zelditch 2018). Experimental evidence shows, for instance, that people from lower-status groups who attain a leader role on skill-based merit nevertheless experience more resistance and less compliance from those they lead than those from higher-status groups in the same position (Ridgeway, Johnson, and Diekema 1994). When a distinguished-looking White man is named to lead a government task force, his power and influence is bolstered by the fact that he looks "right" for the role in a way that a Latinx woman in the same role does not.

Legitimacy bias is behind the resistive, back-

lash reaction that women and African American men sometimes experience when they try to act dominant in a leadership setting (Brescoll, Okimoto, and Vial 2018; Livingston, Rosette, and Washington 2012; Rudman et al. 2012; Williams and Tiedens 2016). When a person from a lower status group (a woman or person of color) acts "too dominant," it implicitly challenges the accepted status hierarchy reflected in status beliefs about the difference (Rudman et al. 2012). Those present from the more status-advantaged groups (men or Whites) frequently react with hostility to the status threat that undercuts the status disadvantaged leader's ability to succeed and rise to positions of greater power. Further, if a leader from a status disadvantaged group does make a mistake, it is often criticized more severely than a similar mistake by a leader whose legitimacy is bolstered by a privileged status group background (Rosette and Livingston 2012).

Finally, status beliefs about social difference groups also create *associational preference bias* that further contributes to status advantage. Status spreads through association among both individuals and organizations (Hysom 2009; Poldolny 2005; Thye 2000). Because the status of those you associate with affects your status, status beliefs bias people's associational preferences toward higher-status others, especially in work or goal-oriented settings. Status beliefs intensify in-group preferences on the part of those from higher-status groups who see every reason to prefer their own for network ties, recommendations, and information about new opportunities (Rivera 2015). For those from lower-status groups, status-driven preference biases undercut solidarity as they are torn between networking with higher-status people to improve their opportunities and supporting their in-group (Cabrera and Thomas-Hunt 2007; Duguid, Lloyd, and Tolbert 2012; Krysan et al. 2009; Tajfel and Turner 1986).

The biases that together make up status advantage are rarely noticed by those involved as they happen. They take place through many small behaviors, judgments, and responses among individuals as they carry out their efforts to achieve the valued outcomes they seek, a job, a promotion, an educational degree,

good health care. Here again, we see the processural aspect of status inequality as something we continually do in our goal-oriented social relations. The effect of any one of these biases in a given work- or goal-oriented encounter can be large, but most often is small. But over the many such encounters taking place in consequential environments, the effect of these biases accumulates (Botelho and Abraham 2017; Korver-Glenn 2018). Together, they silently but systematically steer people from higher-status groups—Whites, men, the middle class—toward positions of greater resources and power while constraining and interrupting the progress of those from lower status groups.

Through the process of status advantage, which we argue results from people's everyday reliance on the status schema to manage their interdependent, goal-oriented efforts, status functions as an independent force in the maintenance of inequality in power and wealth between social difference groups such as race, gender, and class background. This is the foundation of status's significance as an inequality process over and above power and wealth.

Two additional aspects of that significance are worth pointing out. First, because status beliefs work their effects through multiple small, mostly unremarked biases, the effect for participants in the situations is that those from status-advantaged groups are simply revealed to be "better," more competent and valuable, for the work at hand. This aspect of status advantage, that people rarely see the way that they participate in its production, is how status processes legitimate advantage on the basis of merit in a meritocratic society (Ridgeway 2014). In this manner, status-based inequality based on social difference interpenetrates ostensibly meritocratic institutions.

Second, notice that status creates advantages for some types of people relative to others based only on those people's group identities. That is, status advantages people from high-status groups over those who are just as accomplished but from a lower status group. A job candidate's blinded résumé shows a record of accomplishment. In the interview, however, where the candidate's group identities become apparent, she is clearly also an African Ameri-

can woman with a working-class accent. Or he is a White man with a smooth upper-middle-class manner. By advantaging people based on their status-valued social differences alone, status gives inequalities based on social differences such as race, gender, and class background an endogenous capacity to reproduce themselves independent of the accomplishments or other attributes of the people with these identities (Ridgeway 2011, 2019). This further suggests that to overcome inequality based on social differences, status processes must be taken into account.

Sense of Group Position and Status Threat as a Political Motive

As we have seen, status, including that attached to social identity groups, has a public character in that the arena in which it is supported or contested is in the eyes of others. The position of one's social identity groups in the surrounding society's status rankings is known to all both through common-knowledge status beliefs and the everyday status and deference behaviors observed by all who are driven by these beliefs. Status beliefs also function as public, legitimating ideologies for these observed inequalities in life outcomes by linking presumptions of greater competence with people in some social difference groups but not with people from others. Status beliefs give people in higher-status social groups few reasons to doubt that they have fairly won their relative advantages. Together, the public and legitimating effects of status beliefs create for people what Herbert Blumer (1958) called a *sense of group position*, a sense of the deserved public dignity due to people of their group relative to those ranked as lower in status.

A sense of group position motivates people to react with anger and even aggression not just to threats to their personal status in an interpersonal context, but to perceived threats to the status of their social identity group relative to other groups, in the public arena, including media representations and public policies (Blumer 1958; Bobo 1999). Examples include challenges to policies that favor a lower-status group over a higher one, such as loans targeted to Black farmers rather than White farmers. Studies show, for instance, that highlighting

for Whites changing racial dynamics that will eventually make Whites a racial minority evoked status threat in them and led them to endorse more conservative political ideologies as well as oppose welfare programs seen to benefit non-Whites (Craig and Richeson 2014; Wetts and Willer 2018).

As we saw at the outset, status threats evoked by the growing cultural dominance of urban elites who are perceived as disparaging rural and working-class whites as well as the greater political prominence of women and racial minorities has fueled political support for political movements like the Tea Party and iconoclastic candidates such as Donald Trump (Cramer 2016; Gidron and Hall 2017; Hochschild 2016; Mutz 2018). Studies of these effects suggest that it is not those at the very top of the societal status hierarchy, such as upper-class White men, nor those at the bottom, such as lower-class people of color, who have been the most politically reactive to status threats to their group identities. Rather, in recent events, it has been people in the threatened middle or lower middle of the societal status hierarchy who have reacted most strongly. These are people who have felt that their respectable position as White, hard-working, Main Street Americans has been threatened by changing demographics and cultural and political representations that appear to favor previously lower-status groups above them (Cramer 2016; Hochschild 2016; Vance 2016). By fostering political resistance to social, economic, and political changes that challenge the established status hierarchies among social groups, the sense of group position created by status processes is a second way that these processes independently and significantly contribute to inequality in life outcomes based on group identity.

FINAL THOUGHTS

To make sense of the interactional, processual, and yet inherently multilevel nature of status, we proposed that status is best understood as a sociocultural schema that people use to manage situations in which they are cooperatively interdependent with one another to achieve valued goals but competitively interdependent to maximize their personal outcomes from the collective effort. Status is everywhere in social

life partly because such situations are fundamental to the human condition. But if status is a cultural invention to manage a fundamental tension in the human condition, is it likely that people will ever stop doing and redoing status in one work or goal-oriented situation after another? Probably not. Indeed, widespread evidence shows that people's sense of how much they are valued relative to others in the eyes of their group or community is and will probably remain a powerful motivating force in their behavior across social spheres (Anderson, Hildreth, and Howland 2015).

If the everyday doing of status is not going away, then we must take status processes into account and consider how to address their effects if we want to create more egalitarian societies. This is especially the case if we seek a society in which social differences like race or gender are no longer powerful, independent determinants of unequal life outcomes. Status may be an ancient and deeply rooted form of inequality but it is nevertheless cultural and therefore not beyond our control. Although we may never undo status inequality altogether, we can undo its most pernicious effects by undermining the status beliefs embedded in widespread stereotypes of major social groups. It is these status beliefs that link social groups to greater or lesser worthiness and competence and by doing so, transform the everyday doing and redoing of status into the production and maintenance of durable patterns of inequality between these groups.

As cultural beliefs, status beliefs about social groups have to be widely held in a population to have effect. The assumption that status beliefs are what "most people" think is what makes them a basis by which people across multiple social encounters implicitly coordinate their doing and redoing of status. Evidence shows that disrupting the appearance of consensuality and validity that supports status beliefs reduces people's tendency to act on them in their social encounters (Ridgeway and Correll 2006; Seachrist and Stangor 2001). This suggests that changing material circumstances and persistent social and political efforts can create growing public challenges to our most pernicious status beliefs such as those about race, gender, and class background. And, with

growing public challenges, even if these spark status threat and resistance, the appearance of consensuality nevertheless erodes. And, as it erodes, the power of these status beliefs to organize local status hierarchies narrows in range and declines. We used to have widely held, devaluing status beliefs about some White ethnic groups, such as the Irish, for instance, but these beliefs lost consensuality and dissipated in effect. Social change is possible, then, but will not happen without sustained effort.

A LOOK AHEAD TO THE ARTICLES

In the sixteen articles that make up this double issue, social scientists from several disciplines take a new look at the nature and significance of status as an inequality process.

We organize them into three categories, each addressing different aspects of the questions of what is status and why does it matter for inequality. The first section features articles that define status as a fundamental form of equality that shapes broad institutional and interactional patterns of inequality and that also functions as a powerful motive at the individual level. Poulomi Chakrabarti begins the double issue with an article titled "Status and Development: How Social Hierarchy Undermines Well-Being," in which she synthesizes literature from multiple disciplines to compare the legacy of slavery in the United States and the caste system in India to illustrate how status plays a powerful and unacknowledged role in both development and redistributive politics. Tali Mendelberg in "Status, Symbols, and Politics: A Theory of Symbolic Status Politics" maintains that status has been seriously undertheorized in politics; she makes the compelling case that government is an official authority for the allocation of status, and as such almost all important political events, issues, movements, and laws arise as groups seek to gain or maintain their status. Biko Koenig in "Politicizing Status Loss Among Trump Supporters in 2020" agrees that status is fundamental in politics and based on interviews argues that Trump supporters were mobilized by "identity entrepreneurs" who sold the idea that status loss was a result of the Democratic Party's rejection of working-class values—hard work, manual

occupations, small-town family-centric culture.

In "The Architecture of Status Hierarchies: Variations in Structure and Why They Matter for Inequality," Fabien Accominotti, Freda Lynn, and Michael Sauder direct our attention to the structure, or "architectural features" of status hierarchies themselves. They show how these features can differ in ways that exacerbate the inequality in rewards that the status hierarchy distributes, affecting inequality based on power and resources as well as status. The relation between status inequality and inequality based on resources is also the theme of Kevin Leicht's "Inequality and the Status Window: Inequality, Conflict, and the Salience of Status Differences in Conflicts over Resources." He introduces the idea of the status window in which people transform their sense of resource differences in society into a status distinction between those with "more" than them and those with "less" than them, which blinds them to the further reaches of resource inequality. Especially in highly unequal societies, narrow status windows increase the salience of status differences in social conflict to the neglect of resource differences. In "To Forgive Is Devine? Morality and the Status Value of Intergroup Revenge and Forgiveness," Stephen Benard, Long Doan, D. Adam Nicholson, Emily Meanwell, Eric L. Wright, and Peter Lista explore both the fundamental nature of what status is based on and the role it plays in intergroup conflict. They examine the circumstances under which not just perceived competence but also the perceived morality of a group member's actions of forgiveness or revenge toward the other group functions as a basis for status in their own group.

The second section includes articles highlighting the relational, cultural, and multilevel nature of status and revealing that implicit norms for allocating status are shared, enacted, and reinforced by people in both high- and low-status positions. Hilary J. Holbrow, in "When All Assistants Are Women, Are All Women Assistants? Gender Inequality and the Gender Composition of Support Roles," demonstrates that changing the link between women and low-status positions is as or more important for improving pay equity and the status of women in

organizational culture than is bringing women into managerial positions. Natasha Quadlin in her article "Do Perceptions of Privilege Enhance—or Impede—Perceptions of Intelligence? Evidence from a National Survey Experiment" finds that despite scholarly criticism of meritocracy and the growing awareness of the degree to which educational success can be purchased, a nationally representative study reveals that public opinion still holds that educational credentials are indicative of a person's intelligence.

E. K. Maloney, Kimberly B. Rogers, and Lynn Smith-Lovin in their article "Status as Deference: Cultural Meaning as a Source of Occupational Behavior" argue that we need a more relational measure of occupational status that captures the extent to which the cultural meanings associated with a given set of occupations imply voluntary deference to people in another set of occupations. They use affect control theory and data measuring the cultural meanings of occupations to explore culturally expected deference relations among classes of occupations. Lauren Valentino's "Status Lenses: Mapping Hierarchy and Consensus in Status Beliefs" introduces the concept of *status lenses* to reflect how flat or hierarchical the status order is and how much a given group agrees or disagrees about that order, finding that people use different status lenses depending on their proximity to traditional centers of power in the United States.

The third and final group of articles in this double issue illuminates that status is a process that people do and redo through their social relations, that status beliefs (such as about race, gender, or class) systematically bias outcomes, and that the effects of these biased outcomes accumulate over multiple social relations. Using in-depth interviews with very wealthy White women (median net worth $16.6 million), Annette Lareau in "Downplaying Themselves, Upholding Men's Status: Women's Deference to Men in Wealthy Families" finds that women perform an abdication of interest and expertise in financial matters, revealing what she calls the "stickiness" of gender in shaping family dynamics and maintaining implicit status norms. In "Racial and Ethnic Status Distinctions and Discrimination: The Effects of

Prior Contact and Group Interaction," Bianca Manago, Jane Sell, and Carla Goar tackle the doing of racial status in two experiments testing techniques from intergroup contact and status characteristics theory for interrupting the formation of status hierarchies based on race in work groups. The experiments, which involved Black-White and Mexican American–White work groups that met multiple times, find that it is necessary to alter status-biased perceptions of competence, not just reduce intergroup anxiety, to reduce racial inequality in influence.

Mesmin Destin, Régine Debrosse, Michelle Rheinschmidt-Same, and Jennifer A. Richeson in their article "Psychological Challenges and Social Support That Shape the Pursuit of Socioeconomic Mobility" examine status uncertainty and the doing of status among college students, finding that status uncertainty can have negative consequences for achievement and well-being, and that social support may provide some buffer against these negative outcomes.

In "'But the Fellows Are Simply Diversity Hires!' How Organizational Contexts Influence Status Beliefs," Sandra Portocarrero and James Carter show how the dynamics of status and race shift over organizational contexts in their study of the fates of Pickering Fellows as they take up careers in the U.S. Department of State. Although the fellowships bring prestige to the winners in college, in the State Department workplace, the fellowships mark them (inaccurately) as "diversity hires," undercutting their perceived competence and status in the workplace.

In a different institutional context but one also consequential for individual careers, Kevin Nazar, Roberta Spalter-Roth, and James C. Witte in "Who Gets Accepted and Who Gets Rejected? Status in the Production of Social Science" examine the impact of race and gender on the peer review process that leads to publication in the *American Sociological Review*, a high-status, flagship journal of an academic discipline. Their unique data set includes not only the race and gender of authors and articles accepted for publication in the journal over several years, but also all those articles that were

submitted but rejected. Finally, Lehn M. Benjamin in "How Helping Can Reinforce or Attenuate Status Inequalities: The Case of Nonprofit Organizations" highlights how status is maintained in helping exchanges between staff and participants in nonprofit organizations (such as those for addiction, unemployment, homelessness), observing the effects on participants of three status attenuation practices—sharing control, establishing commonalities, and questioning causes, and comparing them with three status maintenance strategies—asserting control, reinforcing differences, and assuming causes.

As the collection of articles in this double issue demonstrates, we are gaining increasing insight into what status is, how it operates, and what its consequences are for unequal life outcomes. The next great challenge we face as researchers is to learn to use what we know about status processes to more effectively interrupt durable patterns of inequality based on social differences among people in society.

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