Status Lenses: Mapping Hierarchy and Consensus in Status Beliefs

LAUREN VALENTINO

Research on status beliefs demonstrates that judgments of status are not always universally shared and are shaped by social structural factors. Building on this literature, I introduce the concept of status lenses, reflecting a hierarchical-nonhierarchical dimension and a consensus-dissensus dimension of how social groups view the status order. Using data from the 2012 General Social Survey module on occupational prestige, the most common measure of status in sociology, I find that groups use different status lenses depending on their proximity to the traditional centers of power in the United States. Men, Whites, college-educated, and higher-earning groups have a diffuse consensus status lens; women have a discriminating consensus status lens; and Black, noncollege degree, and lower-earning groups have a discriminating dissensus status lens.

Keywords: status, inequality, occupational prestige

Status is a form of social standing distinct from class. Although both involve perceptions, class is derived from an individual's (perceived) relationship to the market, yet status has a uniquely intersubjective quality. Weber defines status as "an effective claim to social esteem in terms of positive or negative privileges" (1968, 305). Thus, status—unlike other dimensions of social inequality, such as class or power—is fundamentally rooted in shared cultural perceptions of who deserves honor, respect, and esteem (Ridgeway 2019; Lamont 2012).

Yet the extent to which perceptions of status are widely shared remains an open question. How do we understand where someone falls in the status order? To what extent is our view similar to—or different from—others' views of the social hierarchy? This study examines the cognitive processes underlying the way people in the United States make judgments of social status. I focus on Americans' mental maps of the occupational status hierarchy, using a cultural cognitive approach at the intersection of the sociology of culture and social psychology. In so doing, this study develops a new concept around perceptions of status—*status lenses*.

Lauren Valentino is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at The Ohio State University, United States.

This concept captures two dimensions related to perceptions of status: how flat or hierarchical the status order is seen as (sensitivity or discrimination) and how much a given group agrees or disagrees about the status order (consensus and dissensus). Further, I examine the extent to which different social groups use different status lenses. In particular, I consider the hypothesis that individuals closer to the traditional centers of power in American society (Whites, men, more educated, higher earning) have a status lens distinct from that of those who have been historically excluded from core American institutions (ethno-racial minorities, women, less educated, lower earning).

To test this hypothesis, I use data on judgments of occupational prestige, which is historically one of the most common measures of status sociologists use.[1] Occupational prestige reflects the way we value the division of labor within a society by expressing whose role is most important, worthy, and deserving of social acclaim. It captures not just how much talent, hard work, or experience is required to perform that role or how much a person should be materially rewarded for fulfilling it—occupational prestige also reflects a moral (MacKinnon and Langford 1994) and deferential (Freeland and Hoey 2018; Maloney 2020; see Maloney, Rogers, and Smith-Lovin 2022, this issue) component of that role, in addition to inscribing elements of existing gender and racial inequalities (Valentino 2020, 2022). Thus occupational prestige is an ideal test case for examining perceptions of status, whether certain social groups vary in terms of how sensitive or discriminating they are in perceiving the status order, and whether there is more or less consensus within those groups.

SHAREDNESS IN STATUS PERCEPTIONS

Much research on status—particularly in the area of occupational prestige—assumes a relatively high degree of uniformity in how people perceive the status hierarchy. Early social theorists argued that society itself is defined by its singular, homogeneous view of the status order. Émile Durkheim's (1912) notion of the *conscience collective* captures the idea of a set of fundamental representations or symbols shared among all members of a society. For Durkheim, these shared representations or symbols encode social categories and classification systems. In the transition from a "primitive" society (characterized by mechanical solidarity) to a "modern" one (characterized by organic solidarity), the division of labor comes to prescribe a set of fixed roles that enable social cohesion. Durkheim argues that social meanings are widely shared precisely because everyone understands where they fit into society's hierarchy. Talcott Parsons also views societies as having a relatively unified set of agreed-upon values. This purported value consensus leads to several core features that, in Parsons's view, characterize a social system: a system for categorizing people, places, and things; role definitions; a system for allocating people to those roles; and, most important, a system for allocating "sanctions and rewards, especially prestige and status" based on the performance of these roles (Parsons and Shils 1951, 257). For Parsons, much like Durkheim, a society is in fact defined by its members' adherence to a singular view of status.

Specific to occupational prestige, studies throughout the twentieth century have documented high correlations between the mean values of a given occupation's prestige rating among members of different education and income levels, occupations, genders, ages, regions, and even countries and time periods (for a review, see Wegener 1992). In his study of more than sixty societies, Donald Treiman (1977) famously asserts that "there is extraordinary consensus throughout each society regarding the relative prestige of occupations" (59), indicative of what he calls a "single world-

1. Status can be measured in various ways, certainly, such as consumption patterns and tastes (Bourdieu 1984), symbolic boundaries (Lamont 1992, 2000), third-party rankings (Sauder 2006), subjective social status (Nielsen, Roos, and Combs 2015), and sociometric status (Jiang and Cillessen 2005). Expectation states theory in sociological social psychology argues that identities such as sex, race, education level, or even right- versus left-handedness can acquire a particular status (in the language of expectation states, they become diffuse status characteristics), leading to performance expectations (Berger et al. 1977; see also Ridgeway 2014).

wide prestige hierarchy" (159). In fact, the universal agreement regarding which occupations are high prestige and which are low prestige is known among sociologists as the Treiman constant. Even in more contemporary studies of occupational prestige, perceptions of an occupation's status are often assumed to be equivalent across individuals, regardless of background.

Yet recent evidence from work on perceptions regarding other types of status suggest that a universal view of status may not always— or even often—be the case. Women and men use different bases on which to determine their subjective class identification (Luo and Brayfield 1996), and individuals of different social class backgrounds use different bases for determining social worth of other groups in the United States and France (Lamont 1992, 2000; Gorman 2000), as well as in China (Wang 2017). Race and ethnicity have been shown to be particularly important determinants of how a person views a particular group's status (Kahn et al. 2009; Wolff et al. 2010; Melamed et al. 2019). Kevin Leicht (2022) argues that different inequality regimes entail different perceptions of status due to an individual's social distance from their near-status peers.

Even in terms of occupational prestige, there is reason to doubt its universality. Xueguang Zhou (2005) finds that a person's education, race, and gender are important determinants of the bases upon which they confer prestige to a given job. Gordon Gauchat and Kenneth Andrews (2018) find that a person's income and degree of scientific literacy determine the extent to which Americans emphasize scientific prestige when understanding expert professions. Using inductive techniques, Lauren Valentino (2021) finds evidence for five distinct logics of occupational prestige in the United States, and which logic a person uses to order the hierarchy depends on their race, gender, education, income, age, religiosity, and geographic region. In Sweden, Dustin Avent-Holt, Martin Hällsten, and David Cort (2020) uncover substantial variation across organizations in terms of how occupations' statuses are perceived within the workplace.

Yet most of these studies emphasize differences in mean status beliefs, saying little about dispersion or disagreement between and within groups in terms of how prestige is perceived. Freda Lynn and George Ellerbach (2017) are an important exception: they find that highly educated individuals are more consistent in their views on occupational status, particularly when it comes to occupations requiring more educational credentials. They posit that education is a socializing institution that creates more uniformity in how people see the occupational structure. Using interview data, Amy Binder, Daniel Davis, and Nick Bloom (2016) find evidence for this process: they observe that elite colleges expressly narrow students' ideas about what constitutes a prestigious job. Indeed, Fabien Accominotti, Freda Lynn, and Michael Sauder (2022) demonstrate that status hierarchies vary in their architectural features, depending on the context. Thus it is reasonable to expect that people perceive these architectural features differently as well depending on their position in society.

STATUS LENSES

A cultural cognitive approach lies at the intersection of the sociology of culture and social psychology, imploring scholars to focus on "processes or mechanisms, cognitive and social, through which cultural elements are acquired, rendered salient, linked to broader patterns of meaning, and displaced" (DiMaggio and Markus 2010, 348). The cultural cognitive approach thus invites social scientists to consider the sharedness of status beliefs as an empirical question rather than an orienting assumption. Based on the emerging research regarding the way social structural factors (such as class, race, and gender) shape status judgments as well as the nascent evidence regarding key variations in how status is perceived, I use the cultural cognitive approach to propose the existence of a more general concept: status lenses.

Status lenses reflect two aspects of how status beliefs can vary within a society: their level of sensitivity or discrimination, and their level of agreement. These dimensions are illustrated in figure 1. First, drawing on signal detection theory (Gambetta 2009; Wickens 2002), I argue that social groups may vary in how sensitive or discriminating they are—that is, how hierarchi-

cal they perceive the status order. Some may have a more discriminating mental map of status that includes a large social distance between the bottom and top positions. Other individuals, by contrast, may have a more diffuse one in which the positions are less differentiated or distanced from one another. In social theory, this is known as a rhizomatic system (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), and in information science and complex systems as a heterarchy (McCulloch 1945).
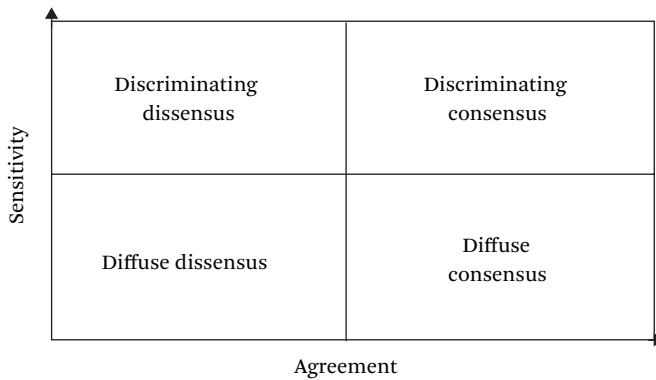
Second, social groups may vary in terms of the degree to which they exhibit consensus or dissensus about the status hierarchy. A group may uniformly agree about its hierarchy: it may order its positions identically or very similarly. High consensus about status is often the result of commensuration, the process by which qualitative entities become publicly defined or ranked by a single set of metrics (Espeland and Stevens 1998). Conversely, a social group may exhibit very little agreement about which positions fall where in the hierarchy. This phenomenon is known as status disagreement (Kilduff, Willer, and Anderson 2016) and may occur as a result of internal heterogeneity within groups (Boltanski and Thévenot 1983).

Figure 1 illustrates how these two axes work together to produce different types of status lenses. The first cell, *diffuse dissensus*, reflects a status lens in which a group perceives a relatively flat hierarchy, and their mental map of the status order varies, reflecting a heterogeneous set of views. An example of the diffuse dissensus status lens occurs when sportscasters speculate about the performance of various teams in a professional sports league at the beginning of the season. In most leagues, the difference between the team with the best record and the team with the worst is still relatively small—both are composed of professional athletes with very high levels of talent and ability. Furthermore, at the beginning of the season, fans and experts debate vigorously about who will have a winning record and who will not this season—disagreement about which teams are best and which are the worst is considerable. The next cell, *diffuse consensus*, reflects a reality in which the group agrees, relatively speaking, about the nature of the hierarchy, but that hierarchy is much flatter. Consider small tribes

of hunter-gatherers, which are known to be relatively egalitarian but still exhibit a minimal division of labor (see Sterelny 2021), or certain nonprofit organizations (see Benjamin 2022, this issue).

The third cell, *discriminating dissensus*, would mean the status order takes the shape of a multimodal distribution: this status lens reflects a situation in which a group has subgroups with distinctly different understandings of the status hierarchy, a state Pierre Bourdieu refers to as "classification struggles" (1984, 483). University rankings are emblematic of this view: although most people likely agree that the distance between the very worst and very best universities are quite large, disagreement is significant in terms of how the universities should be ranked. Indeed, we have seen a proliferation of different types of rankings (for example, *U.S. News and World Report*, *QS World and University Rankings*, *Niche*, and so on) that reflect this dissensus (see also Espeland and Sauder 2016). Finally, *discriminating consensus* represents the dominant view in the existing literature on occupational prestige and status beliefs more generally. This status lens captures the idea of a uniform prestige hierarchy about which all members of a given group make fine-grained distinctions. Modern bureaucratic organizations such as the military or hospitals are excellent examples: everyone agrees on highly prescribed and differentiated roles, and the status distance between a private and a four-star general or between an orderly and an attending physician is large (see Jenkins 2020).

Critically, status lenses may be socially patterned, reflecting what Kimberly Rogers (2019) calls "cultural variegation"—the existence of distinctions across social groups in terms of cultural meanings, including (but not limited to) status beliefs. Earlier research leads to several predictions. Norman Alexander (1972, 767) argues that "the lower the perceiver's actual, imagined, or aspired-to status, the smaller the dispersion of his status judgments." The mechanism here is in essence self-enhancement bias: individuals on a lower rung of the status ladder are motivated to move the rungs closer together to minimize the distance between their status and the highest status on the ladder. Alexander finds evidence for this process

Figure 1. Conceptual Representation of Four Status Lenses

Source: Author's conceptual diagram.

in terms of occupational prestige as well as high school popularity in observing that raters who are lower in occupational prestige and students who are less popular exhibited smaller dispersion in their ratings of others' prestige and popularity. This prediction implies that these groups will therefore have less sensitive or discriminating status lenses but says little about consensus differences between groups.

In terms of consensus, the institutional logics perspective suggests that socializing institutions such as schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods will lead to converging views of what constitutes high status versus low status within certain groups (see Zhou 2005). Here two mechanisms are relevant. First, consistent views of status enable coordination within organizations. Thus organizations such as workplaces have a vested interest in imposing explicit status hierarchies as a way of facilitating efficiency and productivity. They may also emerge inductively and become entrenched through path dependency as individuals solve coordination problems on the ground—for instance, when deciding who should take notes at an office meeting, or nominating someone to run for president of a school's parent-teacher association. Second, once individuals have been socialized within these formal institutions—especially schools and universities—they become invested in justifying the allocation of rewards (such as status) on the basis of these institutions' credentials. Those who are the most likely to reap rewards from these credentials—Whites, men, the higher earning in the United

States—are the most likely to see these credentials as fair bases for resource distribution (see Cech and Blair-Loy 2010). This prediction implies that these groups have more consensus in terms of their status lens but says little about whether they are more or less sensitive or discriminating. It is therefore vital to consider the two dimensions of status lenses simultaneously.

This study thus seeks to first answer the question of whether status lenses exist. It then determines the degree to which different social groups have different status lenses—that is, whether they exhibit varying levels of sensitivity or discrimination about the status hierarchy and agreement (consensus versus dissensus) about the rank order of that hierarchy. I focus on two key sets of groups in American society: those who are closer to the traditional centers of power (men, Whites, the college educated, and higher earners), and those who are farther away (women, racial minorities, those without a college degree, and lower earners). Using the case study of occupational prestige judgments, I bring a cultural cognitive approach to bear on what has largely been an orienting assumption for much of the existing research on status.

DATA AND METHODS

The source of data for this study is the 2012 occupational prestige module from the General Social Survey (GSS). Every few decades, to update its prestige score variable, the National Opinion Research Center, which administers the GSS, asks a subset of its survey-takers to

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of GSS Sample

	Proportion	
Male	.449	
Female	.551	
White	.792	
Black	.142	
Hispanic	.026	
Asian	.026	
Other race	.008	
Work less than full time	.527	
Working full time	.474	
	Mean	SD
Prestige rating	4.538	.928
Education (years)	13.661	2.911
Income	58173.30	42549.74
Age	51.633	16.326
Prestige score of own job	43.991	13.185

Source: Author's calculations.
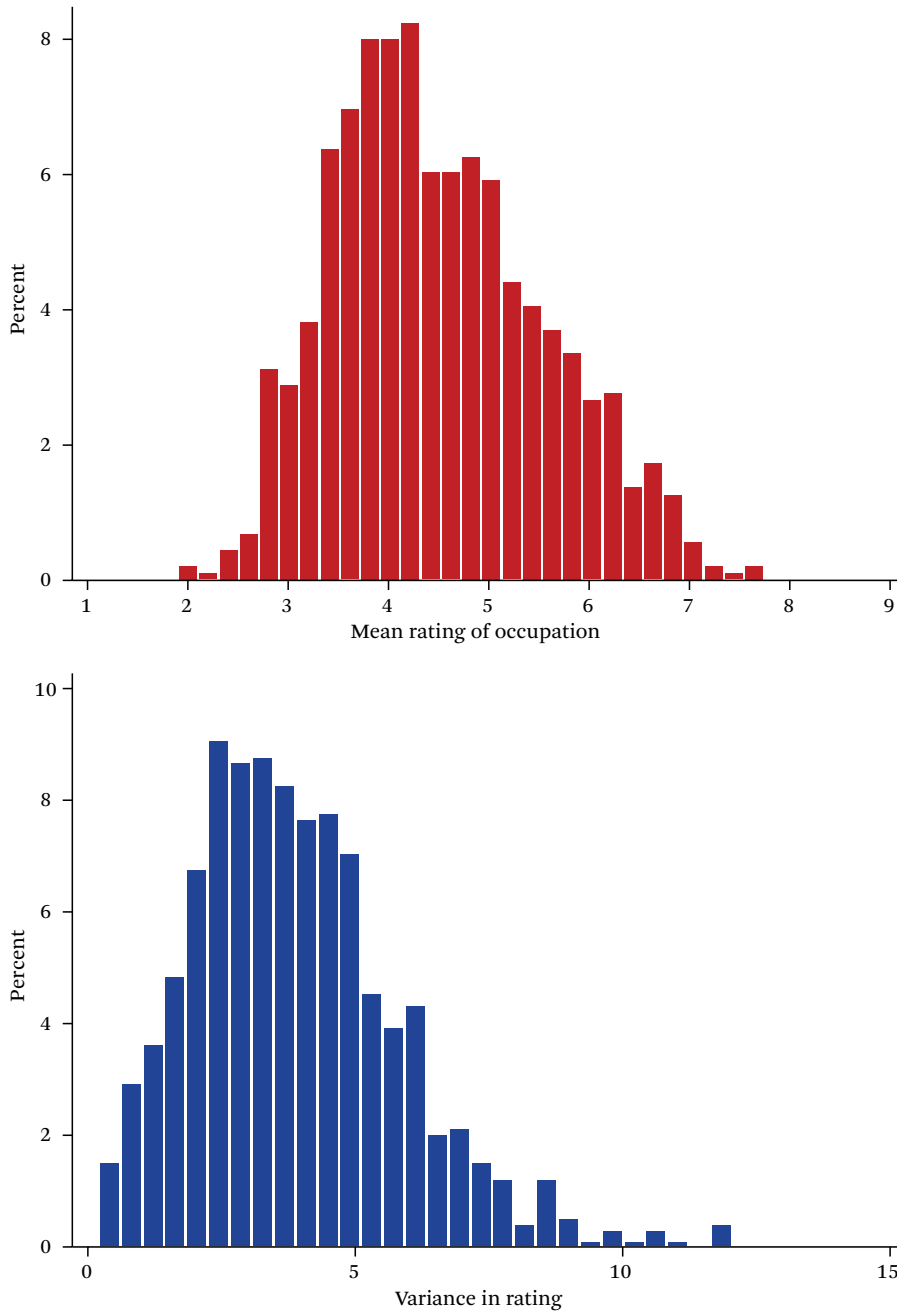*Note:* Descriptives shown for full sample (*N* = 1,001).

rate a number of occupational titles spanning the breadth of occupations in the United States.[2] In 2012, members of the in-person rotating panel were asked to complete the occupational prestige module, a total of 1,001 respondents. The module uses a split-ballot design, in which 860 total occupational titles are rated, but each survey respondent is randomly assigned to one of twelve possible ballots including seventy occupations. Every respondent is also asked to rate twenty core occupations. Respondents are presented with a stack of cards with the ninety occupational titles and a box with slots labeled one through nine. They are instructed to place each occupation in the slot corresponding to its social standing, one being the lowest and nine being the highest (for data collection details, see Smith and Son 2014). Although most researchers use the scaled occupational prestige scores that are trimmed and aggregated measures of occupational status, I obtained the raw ratings data from NORC in order to examine the micro-level, cognitive process by which these status judgments are made.

The GSS is a national probability sample of Americans, and thus the subset of those who participated in the occupational prestige module are largely representative of the United States in 2012 (see table 1). The analytic sample includes 1,001 respondents and detail about their gender, race-ethnicity, educational attainment, income, and age. Demographic data and work-related variables (work status and prestige score of own job) are also included in some models as well.

Beginning with occupations, we can see that the mean occupational rating is 5.7 of 9. As we can see in panel A of figure 2, however, some occupations were rated very low on average (street corner drug dealer received a mean rating of 1.902) and some were rated very high on average (surgeon received a mean rating of 7.744), indicating an occupational hierarchy. Further, respondents varied dramatically in how dispersed their ratings were, as evidenced by the histogram in panel B. Some respondents exhibited high dispersion, with variances as large as 12.053; others exhibited low dispersion, as low as 0.198. I use this within-respondent dispersion as a measure of sensitivity and discrimination.

2. This list also includes a handful of unusual or unofficial occupations, such as street corner drug dealer and panhandler.

Figure 2. Occupational Means and Rater Variances in Prestige

Source: Author's calculations.

To assess whether this dimension of status lenses varies across social groups, I examine person-specific variance in occupational prestige ratings. Because different people rated different occupations, looking at the overall dispersion of respondents' occupational prestige ratings is the best way to ascertain sensitivity and discrimination. Higher levels of individual dispersion indicate that a rater perceives a large status distance between the lowest-prestige and highest-prestige occupations, whereas lower levels of individual dispersion

indicate that a rater perceives a small status distance between the lowest-prestige and highest-prestige occupations. I begin by looking at descriptive differences between groups in terms of variance in their ratings to assess whether they may be more or less sensitive or discriminating in how they perceive the hierarchy. Next, I model person-level variance in prestige ratings as a function of these group variables to isolate the specific relationship between each demographic characteristic and the variation in prestige ratings. I use Poisson regression with variance as the outcome because this variable is noticeably right-skewed (see figure 2, panel B) and follows a Poisson distribution (its mean and variance are nearly identical); furthermore, this modeling approach avoids the problem of producing negative predictions, which are nonsensical in the case of variances. All models include robust standard errors to account for potential violation of the dispersion assumption (see Cameron and Trivedi 2013). I also include ballot controls in all models to account for possible anchoring effects in terms of how respondents rated the particular list of occupations they received.

To examine agreement (level of consensus versus dissensus) within groups, I focus on how respondents ranked the twenty core occupations because these were the only ones that all members of the sample rated. I convert each respondents' ratings into rankings to account for potential differences in the sensitivity-discrimination component of status perceptions. Rankings focus on the order of occupations without regard for the distance between them, and disregarding distance is necessary to isolate the consensus dimension of status lenses. I next compute all pairwise dyads of respondents ($N = 500,500$) in these rank orderings, which allows me to examine the extent to which every possible combination of raters agree with one another in terms of how these occupations should be ordered. I use Spearman's rho, as well as Kendall's tau, to calculate these pairwise correlations. To assess whether groups agree or disagree about these orderings, I focus on whether pairs of matched dyads from the far group (for example, women) are more or less likely to exhibit a higher ordinal correlation relative to matched dyads of the close group (for example, men). I first examine descriptive differences in these correlations, and then regress the group-level variables on these correlations to examine their unique contributions to level of consensus.
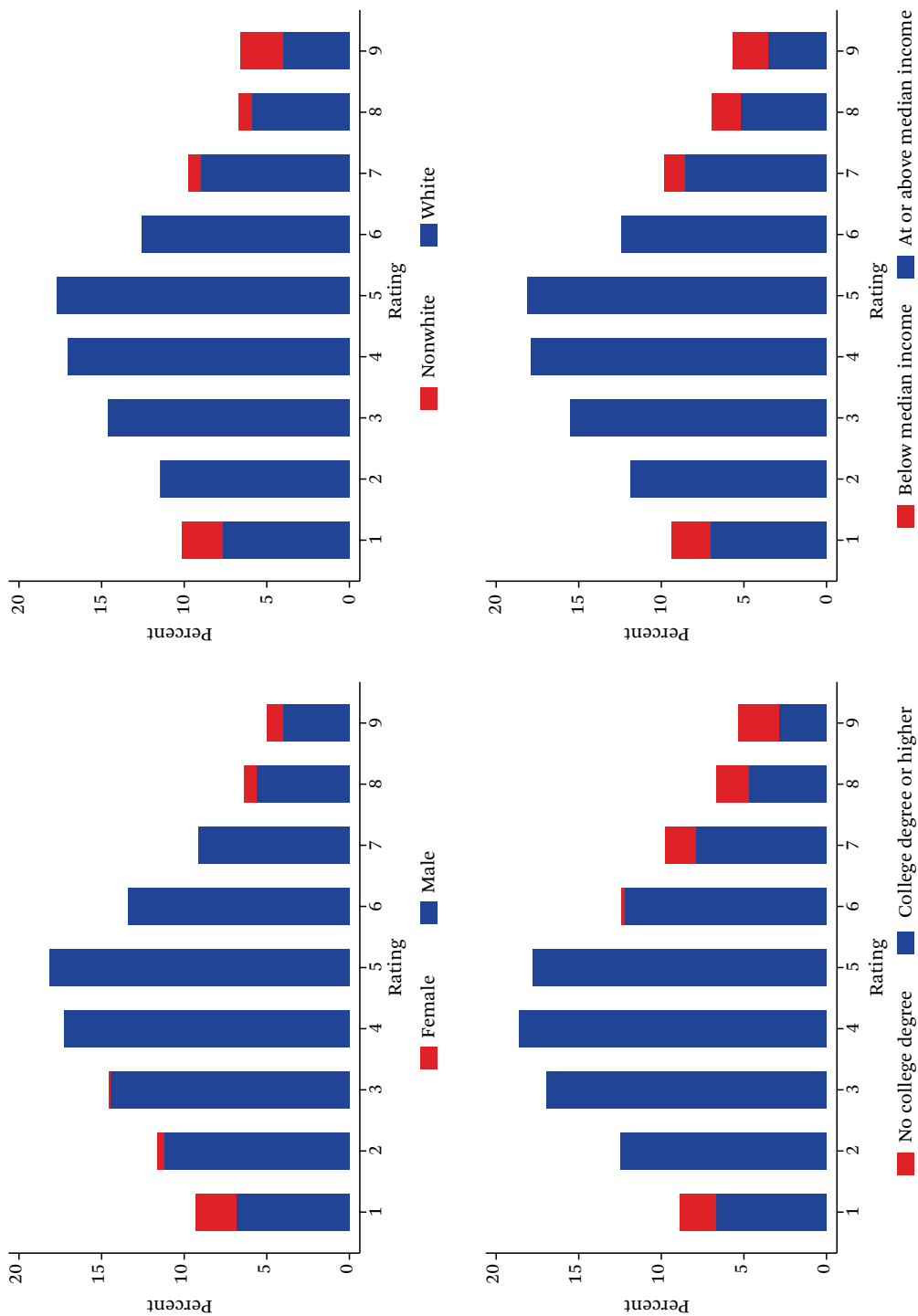
FINDINGS

I begin by examining descriptive differences in sensitivity-discrimination between groups. To simplify comparisons in figure 3, I dichotomize education into those who do not have a college degree versus those who have a college degree (or higher credential) and income into below median income versus at or above median income.[3] I consider those who identify as White versus non-White and those who identify as male versus female.

This figure reveals key differences between groups with regard to how discriminating they are in their prestige ratings. In terms of gender, we see that women exhibit more dispersion than men. This is borne out in the median-centered Levene's test of equality of variances ($F = 181.329$, $p < .001$). In terms of race, respondents who are racial minorities exhibit more dispersion than White respondents, also confirmed by the median-centered Levene's test ($F = 347.318$, $p < .001$). Looking at education, respondents who do not have a college degree exhibit more dispersion than those who do have a college degree, evidenced by the significant median-centered Levene's test ($F = 645.447$, $p < .001$). Finally, respondents whose household income is below the median exhibit more dispersion than those whose income is at or above the median level, again supported by the median-centered Levene's test ($F = 568.566$, $p < .001$).

Yet we know that many of these variables are interrelated; thus it is important to disentangle

3. The median household income in 2012 was $51,371 (Noss 2013). Because the GSS asks respondents to provide their household income in categories, I consider a respondent "at or above median income" if they selected an income category of $50,000 or more. Calculations in regression models use logged midpoint values of the income category to account for right-skewness in the distribution.

Figure 3. Observed Dispersion in Prestige Ratings Across Social Groups Far and Close to Traditional Power in the United States

Source: Author's calculations.

Table 2. Poisson Regression of Ratings Variance on Group Level Variables

	Model 1		Model 2	
Female	.144***	(.032)	.138***	(.032)
Black[a]	.186***	(.044)	.187***	(.045)
Hispanic[a]	−.078	(.113)	−.066	(.119)
Asian[a]	−.080	(.080)	−.075	(.082)
Other race[a]	.197	(.167)	.181	(.166)
Education (years)	−.027***	(.006)	−.023**	(.008)
Income (logged)	−.034**	(.012)	−.039**	(.011)
Age	−.001	(.001)	−.002	(.001)
Working full time			−.046	(.035)
Prestige score of own job			−.001	(.001)
Constant	2.051***	(.144)	2.083***	(.144)
Ballot controls?	Yes		Yes	
Deviance goodness-of-fit	785.282		758.642	
Pearson goodness-of-fit	779.289		754.772	
N	927		903	

Source: Author's calculations.
[a] Reference group is Whites.
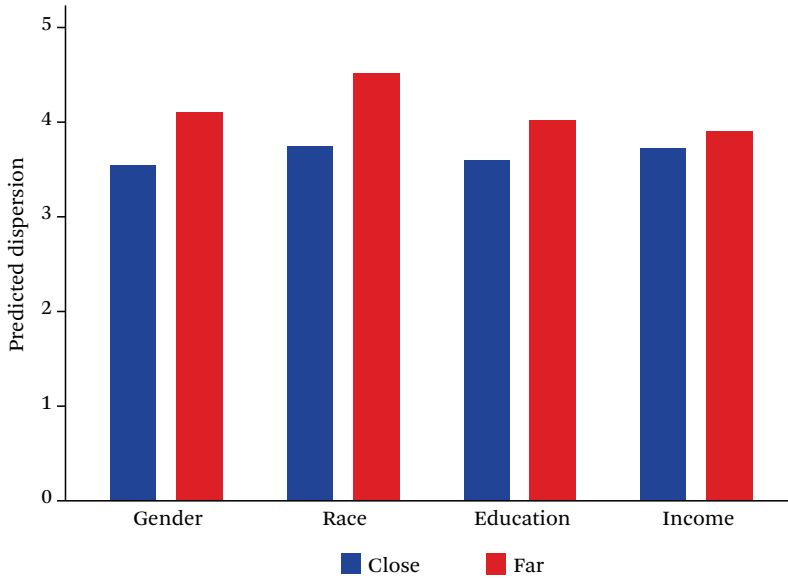* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

the unique impact of each social structural factor on the sensitivity of prestige ratings. I therefore turn now to the Poisson regression models, which simultaneously estimate the impact of gender, race, education, and income, with controls for age and ballot. Model 1 estimates these group-level variables. Model 2 introduces the work-related variables to capture whether a respondent is working full time, part time, or not at all, and the prestige score of a respondent's own job. As seen in table 2, both models exhibit nonsignificant goodness-of-fit statistics ($p > .05$) for the deviance and Pearson tests, suggesting that the Poisson specification fits the data well in both cases.

Results from model 1 demonstrate that women have a larger variance than men, net of race-ethnicity, education, income, and age, by about 16 percent. Black respondents have around 20 percent larger variance than White respondents, all else equal, although Hispanic and Asian respondents do not significantly differ from White respondents. The more education and income a respondent has, the smaller

their variance, net of other variables. For every additional year of education, the ratings variance decreases by about 2.7 percent; for every $10,000 of additional household income, they decrease by about 3 percent. Finally, a respondent's age does not have an independent effect on the dispersion of their ratings.[4] Introducing work-related variables in model 2 very slightly attenuates the gender, race, education, and income variables, but differences between social structural groups remain significant nonetheless. A person's work status as well as the average prestige score of their own occupation do not seem to impact the degree of sensitivity or discrimination with which they view prestige. Overall, then, these results demonstrate that women, Black respondents, less-educated and lower-income respondents are more likely to have a dispersed view of the occupational hierarchy—evidence that those furthest from the traditional centers of power in American society have higher levels of sensitivity and discrimination in their status views.

The results for sensitivity-discrimination

4. Additional analyses testing for a quadratic effect of age did not change the nonsignificance of the variable and did not improve model fit. Tables A.1 and A.2 test alternative specifications of dispersion using a log-linear and generalized binomial approach, respectively. Both alternative models demonstrate patterns consistent with the Poisson results presented in table 2.

Figure 4. Predicted Dispersion for Groups Close to and Far from Centers of Power

Source: Author's calculations.

are illustrated in figure 4 using predicted values of key independent variables, holding all other variables at their means and modes. These figures help demonstrate the magnitude of each social structural variable net of other factors. All else constant, men's dispersion is smaller than women's by 0.552, and White respondents' dispersion smaller than that of Black respondents by 0.765. In terms of education, going from a high school diploma to a college degree decreases a respondent's prestige dispersion by 0.408. Going from the 25th percentile of household income to the 75th percentile of median income diminishes a respondent's dispersion by 0.178. We can conclude that race (specifically, White versus Black) is the most important determinant of how sensitive or discriminating a respondent is in their perceptions of the status hierarchy, followed by gender, followed by education, followed by income.
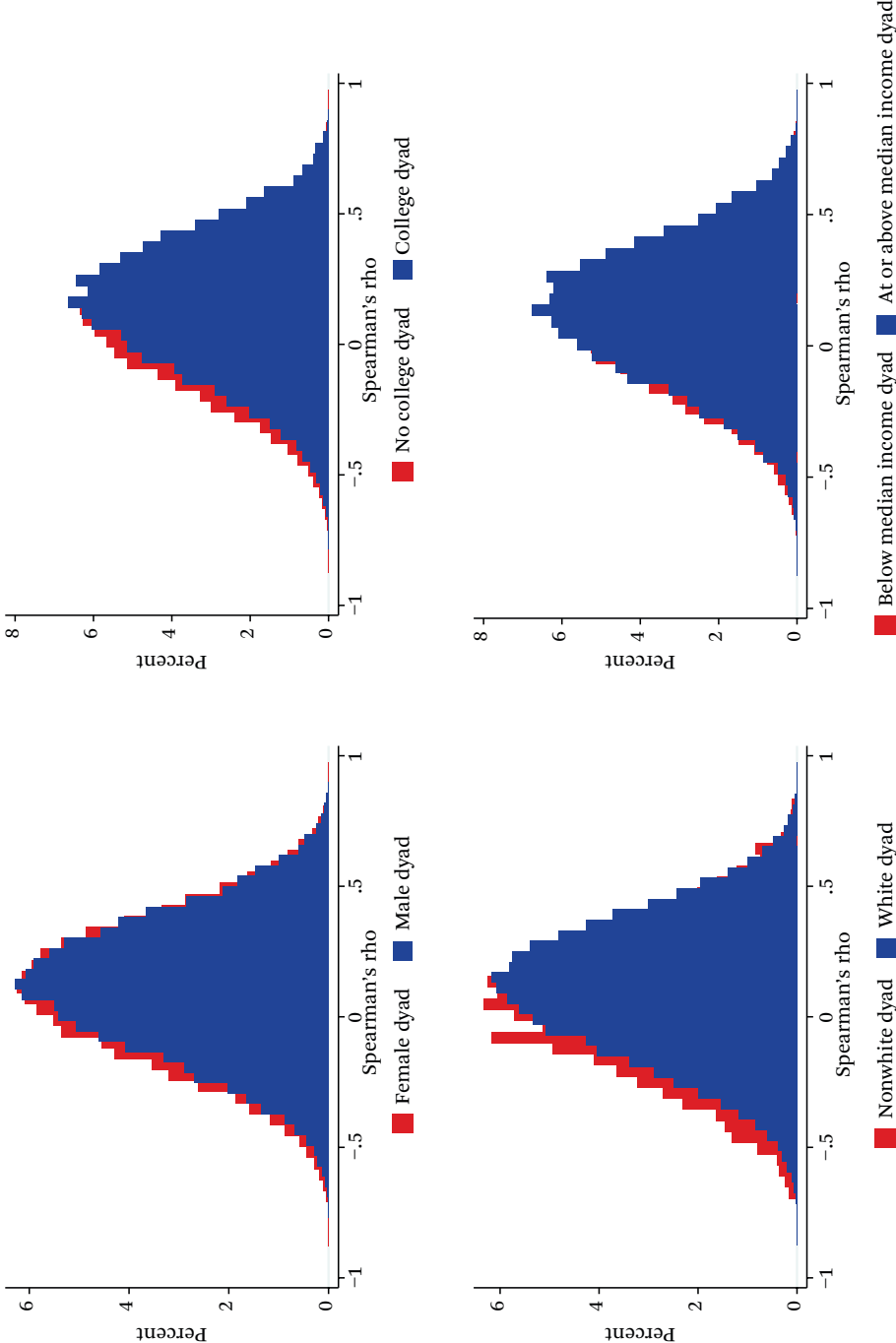
I now turn to the question of agreement. We have seen that women, racial minorities, less-educated, and lower-earning respondents perceive a more hierarchical status order in terms of occupational prestige. But can we claim that these groups necessarily perceive a more highly differentiated occupational status hierarchy—a discriminating consensus status lens? Or do they simply exhibit more heterogeneity overall in their views of the status order—a discriminating dissensus status lens? To investigate this second dimension of status lenses, I now turn to the pairwise rankings data. Spearman correlations for the rankings of close dyads (men, Whites, more educated, higher earning) versus far dyads (women, racial minorities, less educated, lower earning) are shown in figure 5.[5]

Descriptively, we can see that groups further from the traditional centers of power have lower dyadic correlations, suggesting a relative lack of agreement (dissensus) within these groups in terms of how they perceive the status order. T-tests between group dyads reveal that men are significantly more likely to agree than women ($t = 6.726$, $p < .001$), Whites are significantly more likely to agree than racial minorities ($t = 11.370$, $p < .001$), those with a college degree are significantly more likely to agree than those without ($t = 17.568$, $p < .001$), and those at or above the median income are significantly more likely to agree than those below it ($t = 15.106$, $p < .001$). However, it is once again

5. Figures A.1 and A.2 chart these relationships using Kendall's tau. The overall pattern remains the same to the results using Spearman's rho shown here.

Figure 5. Observed Correlations of Dyads in Rank Orderings of Core Occupations by Social Group

Source: Author's calculations.

Table 3. Linear Regression of Ranked Correlations on Group Level Variables

	Spearman's ρ		Kendall's τ A		Kendall's τ B	
Male	.010	(.007)	.005	(.004)	.010	(.006)
White	.037***	(.008)	.022***	(.005)	.032***	(.007)
College	.036***	(.009)	.024***	(.005)	.031***	(.008)
At or above median income	.017*	(.008)	.010*	(.005)	.015*	(.007)
Constant	.050***	(.007)	.031***	(.004)	.043***	(.006)
N dyads	49,234		48,692		48,692	

Source: Author's calculations.
Standard errors clustered by respondent ID. Reference category is "far" group (female, non-Whites, no college degree, below median income).
* *p* < .05; ** *p* < .01; *** *p* < .001 (two-tailed tests)

important to parse out unique effects of each social structural variable because we know these four factors are deeply interrelated. I therefore regress these four structural variables onto the correlations using linear regression with robust standard errors clustered by respondent to account for the dyadic structure of the data. These results are presented in table 3.

Results indicate that women are not statistically significantly different from men in terms of their level of agreement once controls are included in the models. However, Whites exhibit significantly higher levels of consensus, as do those with a college degree, and those at or above the median household income relative to non-Whites, those without a college degree, and those below the median income, respectively. These differences are illustrated using predicted values in figure 6. As we can see, race once again has the largest impact on consensus, with a difference of 0.037 between Whites and non-Whites in terms of their Spearman correlations. Education is next in importance, with a difference of 0.036 between those with a college degree and those without. Finally, income is third in importance, showing a difference of 0.011 between those at or above the median income and those below it.[6]
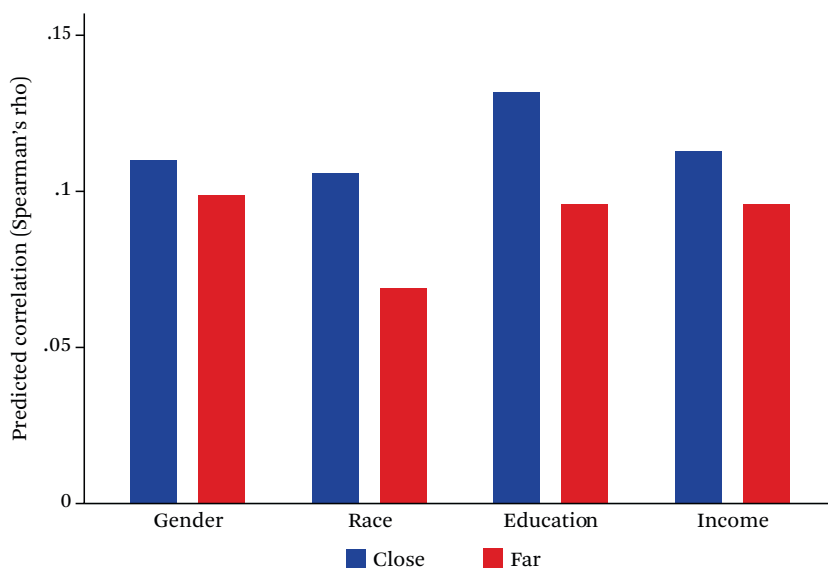
Results from the second part of the analysis provide evidence that gender does not shape level of agreement—both men and women are similar in their degree of consensus regarding the status order—but race, education, and income do shape level of agreement—respon-

dents who are racial minorities, have less education, and have lower income all have significantly lower levels of consensus. Overall, then, we can conclude that gender affects sensitivity and discrimination but not consensus, whereas race, education, and income affect both dimensions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Using perceptions of occupational prestige as a measure of status beliefs, this study finds evidence for three different types of status lenses among social groups in the United States. Women have a discriminating consensus status lens: they perceive a highly differentiated occupational hierarchy and tend to agree about how the positions should be ranked. Men, Whites, highly educated respondents, and high-earning respondents have a diffuse consensus status lens: they tend to perceive a relatively flat occupational status hierarchy and they agree about the order of the occupations within that hierarchy. Black, less-educated, and lower-earning respondents have a discriminating dissensus status lens: they perceive considerable distance between the high and low positions within the hierarchy, and they exhibit heterogeneity in terms of where they think those positions should rank within that hierarchy, consistent with Andrei Boutyline and Stephen Vaisey's (2017) findings regarding how lower educated individuals exhibit less organized political attitudes and David Harding's (2007) findings regarding the presence of cul-

6. Figures A.3 and A.4 illustrate these relationships with Kendall's tau, once again demonstrating a similar pattern in terms of differences and effect sizes.

Figure 6. Predicted Correlations of Dyads in Rank Orderings of Core Occupations by Social Group

Source: Author's calculations.

tural heterogeneity in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Altogether, these results indicate that analysts should no longer conclude that everyone uses a widely agreed-upon, highly sensitive, and discriminating status lens to make sense of the occupational hierarchy. As I show, this is only true for one group—women—in the United States.

Instead, consistent with the nascent evidence on how social structure shapes a person's status beliefs, I find that gender, race-ethnicity, and social class play an important role in which status lens a person uses. What is driving these differences in status lenses? Findings align with the idea that groups that are farther away from the traditional centers of power in the United States—women, racial minorities, the less educated, and lower-earning individuals—are more likely to experience status threats during interactions and to have to navigate situations in which status is visible and highly salient to them (see Ridgeway and Markus 2022, this issue). This helps explain why they perceive larger social distance between low-status and high-status roles and positions. The results regarding group differences in consensus and dissensus can likely be explained by the institutional logics perspective: socializing institutions and on-the-ground coordina-

tion problems have likely led to greater levels of agreement regarding the status hierarchy among Whites, the college educated, and higher-earning individuals as a result of time spent in schools, universities, workplaces, associations, and other formal organizations. Racial minorities, the less educated, and lower-earning individuals have likely had less formative experience in these socializing institutions and therefore are less likely to hold unified views of the status order. Nevertheless, future studies should directly examine the degree to which status threat and socializing institutions can explain these differences in perceptions of status. Furthermore, the present analytic approach is limited in its ability to draw conclusions about the intersectional impact of these social groups on status lenses. Overcoming this limitation using intersectional techniques is another important avenue for future research.

The extent to which these particular status lenses are used in realms other than occupational status remains an open question. In particular, I suspect that other-regarding status beliefs, such as sociometric status, may follow the pattern observed here, whereas status beliefs that are self-regarding (for example, subjective social standing and class identification) may not, given their complex relationships to

identity and self-perception. Further, the current findings raise questions about whether and how these status lenses change over time. Is it possible that Treiman was correct in the mid-twentieth century when he argued for the existence of a singular, discriminating consensus lens, but that other status lenses have emerged since then as the United States has become more diverse but also more unequal? Looking forward, one question is whether other aspects of social structure—such as political affiliation, due to increasing political polarization—will also become salient factors that shape our view of the occupational hierarchy (see Koenig 2022). In addition, researchers should consider the behavioral consequences of different status lenses, particularly in the realm of status attainment. For example, we can imagine that having a discriminating status lens might restrict the range of occupational and educational aspirations an adolescent develops or the occupational mobility they ultimately pursue throughout their career trajectory; relatedly, having a dissensus status lens might make it more difficult for individuals to realize their aspirations accordingly (Harding 2007; Frye and Trinitapoli 2015). These are also critical questions for future research.

Finally, scholars of status have more recently argued for the importance of third-order status beliefs: a foundational aspect of status is not just what people believe is high or low status, but what people believe the generalized other believes about status (Correll et al. 2017; Melamed et al. 2019). Indeed, third-order beliefs about status lead to stereotype threat, in which a stigmatized group often carries a psychological burden of having to navigate a world in which the status order has been decided by those in positions of power—even though they themselves may not hold that belief (for a review, see Spencer, Logel, and Davies 2016). The current GSS data on occupational prestige ratings cannot disentangle first-order status beliefs from third-order status beliefs: are people rating occupations based on what they think is a high-status job, or are they rating them based

on what they think most other people think is a high-status job—regardless of their own views? Indeed, we cannot know whether part of the dissensus observed among racial minorities, low-education, and low-income groups is due to the fact that some may be reporting first-order status beliefs and some may be reporting third-order status beliefs. This vital question requires researchers to collect data on occupational status beliefs that is different than the way we have gathered prestige data for the past near-century.

A cross-disciplinary line of inquiry has established the many micro, meso, and macro domains in which social status impacts our life chances (see Ridgeway 2019; Fiske and Markus 2012). A person's occupational status is known to influence their stress level (Matthews et al. 2000), body mass index (McLaren and Godley 2012), cancer risk (Behrens et al. 2016), mortality rate (Christ et al. 2012), as well as their children's educational outcomes (Conley and Yeung 2005), above and beyond their material resources. Yet this study's cultural cognitive approach to status beliefs has demonstrated social patterning in status lenses, suggesting that these status beliefs are not necessarily widely shared. This means that existing work using occupational prestige as a measure of status is likely incomplete, given that standard occupational prestige scores use trimmed means of these ratings, erasing any systematic differences between social groups in these status perceptions (see Smith and Son 2014). Furthermore, status lenses are likely a driver of interactional inequality in the United States because the rewards of status are allocated based on the status lens of those closest to the traditional centers of power—men, Whites, the college educated, and the higher earning. These groups, in essence, create and enforce the rules of the game by making decisions on the basis of a status order that others do not necessarily hold. Acknowledging and even acquiring a different status lens may help equalize these status effects and allocate the rewards of status in a more just way.

Table A.1. Log Linear Approach to Modeling Sensitivity-Discrimination

	Model 1		Model 2	
Female	.183***	(.038)	.164***	(.039)
Black[a]	.206***	(.055)	.186**	(.059)
Hispanic[a]	−.086	(.123)	−.089	(.128)
Asian[a]	−.012	(.121)	−.031	(.126)
Other race[a]	.160	(.216)	.127	(.216)
Education (years)	−.028***	(.007)	−.024**	(.008)
Income (logged)	−.040**	(.013)	−.041**	(.014)
Age	−.001	(.001)	−.002	(.001)
Working full time			−.065	(.045)
Prestige score of own job			.000	(.002)
Constant	1.932***	(.174)	1.983***	(.184)
Ballot controls?	Yes		Yes	
N	927		903	

Source: Author's calculations.
Note: The log linear approach linearly regresses a logged outcome on the covariates. Unsurprisingly, this model violates the nonnormality assumption of OLS, as evidenced by the significant Shapiro-Wilk test ($p < .001$), as well as visual inspections of the residuals, so it is not preferred over the Poisson model in this case. Nevertheless, it produces very similar results to the Poisson approach in table 2.
[a] Reference group is Whites.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

Table A.2. Generalized Negative Binomial Approach to Modeling Sensitivity-Discrimination

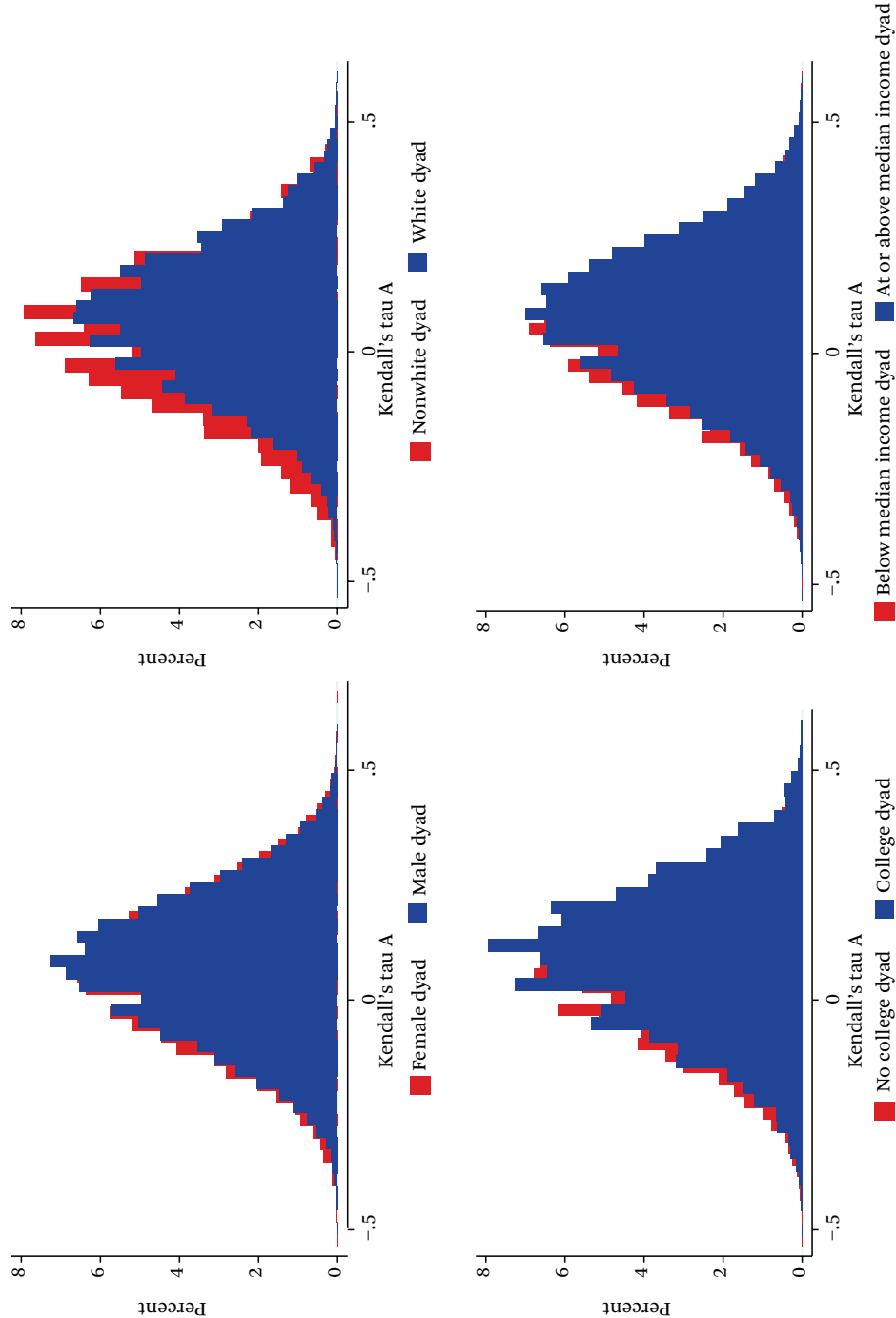|	Model 1		Model 2	
Female	3.170*	(1.528)	2.216***	(.544)
Black[a]	1.367***	(.117)	1.173***	(.113)
Hispanic[a]		b		b
Asian[a]		b		b
Other race[a]		b		b
Education (years)	−.192***	(.020)	−.125***	(.022)
Income (logged)	−.104**	(.031)	−.141***	(.029)
Age	−.014***	(.004)	−.015***	(.003)
Working full time			−.244	(.138)
Prestige score of own job			−.028***	(.005)
Constant	−2.955	(1.622)	−1.108	
Ballot controls?	Yes		Yes	
N	80,765		78,773	

Source: Author's calculations.
Note: Generalized negative binomial models allow for the simultaneous estimation of the mean and dispersion parameters as a function of some vector of covariates. Results presented here model the mean prestige rating as a function of ballot ("ballot controls," results for which are not shown here to conserve space), and the dispersion in prestige ratings as a function of respondent-level independent variables (the results shown in table A.2). This model requires estimation on the full ratings dataset, as indicated by the very large sample size. Results are also very consistent with results from the Poisson regression approach.
[a] Reference group is Whites.
[b] Cell size is too small to produce reliable estimate using this estimation approach.
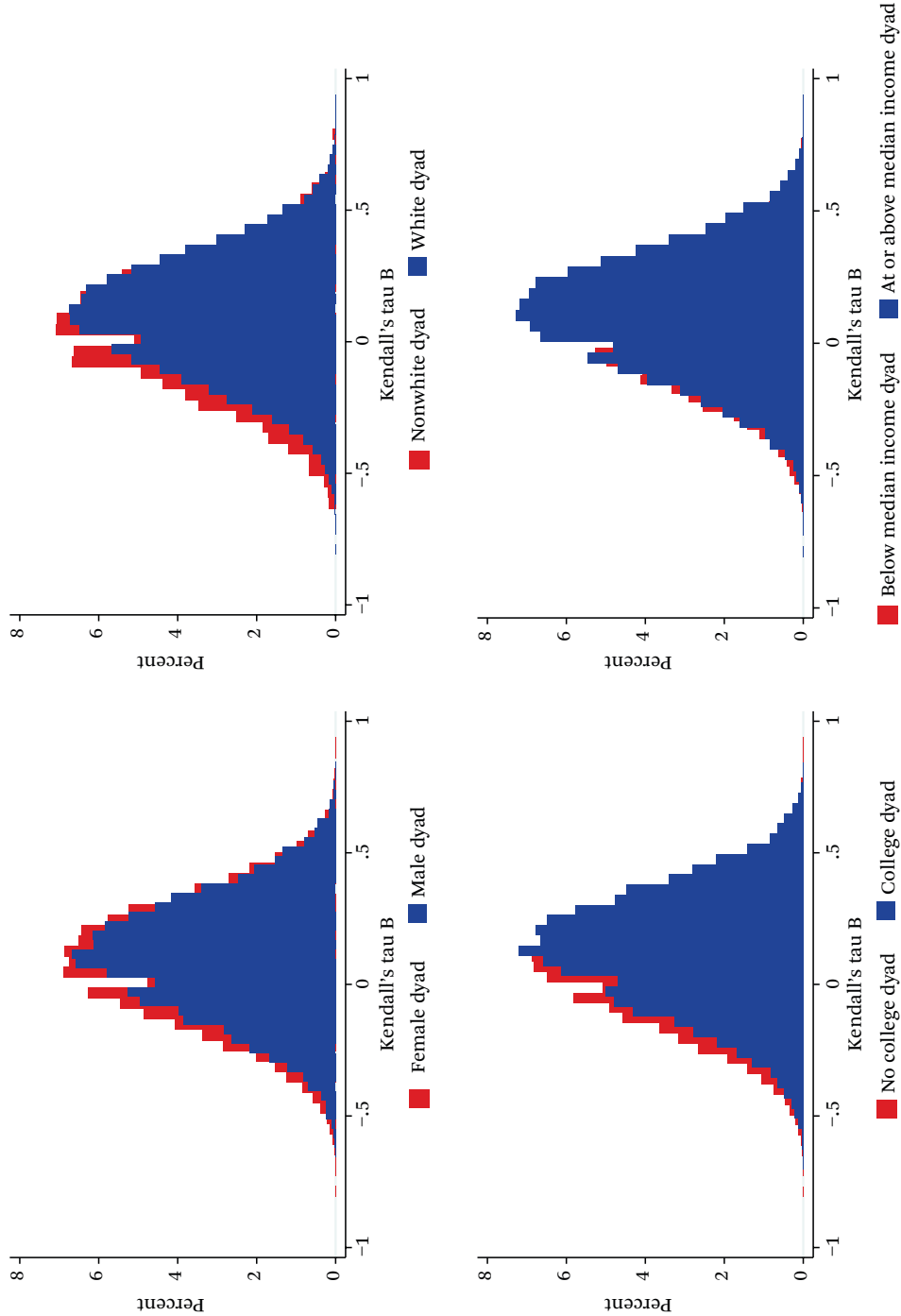* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed tests)

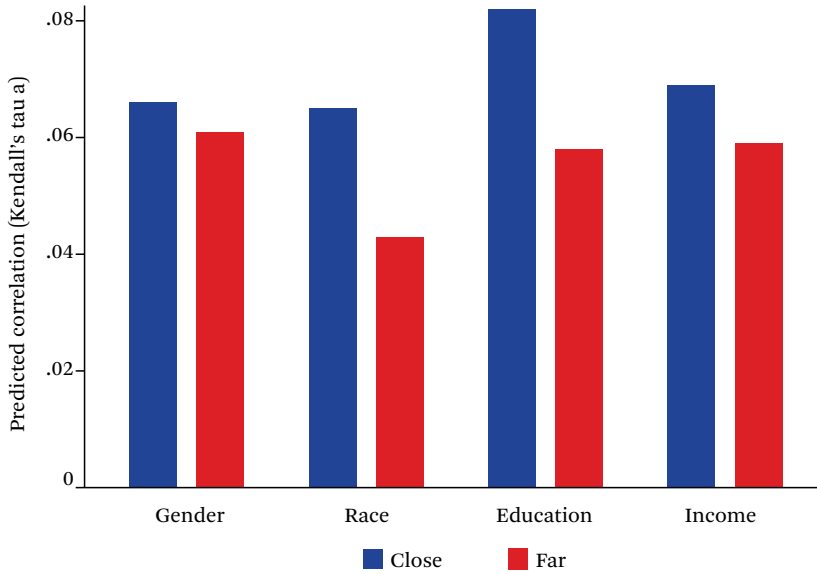**Figure A.1.** Descriptive Differences in Kendall's tau (a) Correlations by Dyad
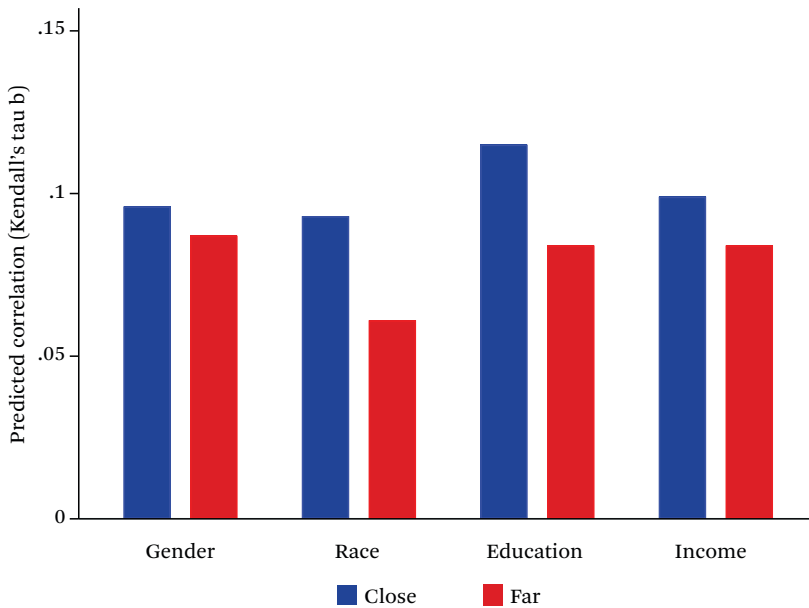
Source: Author's calculations.

Figure A.2. Descriptive Differences in Kendall's tau (b) Correlations by Dyad

Figure A.3. Predicted Values for Kendall's tau (a) by Social Group

Source: Author's calculations.

Figure A.4. Predicted Values for Kendall's tau (b) by Social Group

Source: Author's calculations.

Taken together, Figures A.1 through A.4 demonstrate that results presented for dyadic correlations of rank orderings are not sensitive to the measure of ordinal correlation used because they are consistent across all three measures (Spearman's ρ, Kendall's τ a and Kendall's τ b).

REFERENCES

Accominotti, Fabien, Freda Lynn, and Michael Sauder. 2022. "The Architecture of Status Hierarchies: Variations in Structure and Why They Matter for Inequality." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 8(6): 87–102. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2022.8.6.05.

Alexander, C. Norman. 1972. "Status Perceptions." *American Sociological Review* 37(6): 767–73.

Avent-Holt, Dustin, Martin Hällsten, and David Cort. 2020. "Occupational Status and Organizations: Variation in Occupational Hierarchies Across Swedish Workplaces." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 70: 100423.

Behrens, Thomas, Isabelle Groß, Jack Siemiatycki, David I. Conway, Ann Olsson, Isabelle Stücker, Florence Guida, Karl-Heinz Jöckel, et al. 2016. "Occupational Prestige, Social Mobility and the Association with Lung Cancer in Men." *BMC Cancer* 16(395). DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12885-016-2432-9.

Benjamin, Lehn M. 2022. "How Helping Can Reinforce or Attenuate Status Inequalities: The Case of Nonprofit Organizations." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 8(7): 210–27. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2022.8.7.11.

Berger, Joseph, Hamit Fişek, Robert Norman, and Morris Zelditch. 1977. *Status Characteristics and Social Interaction* New York: Elsevier.

Binder, Amy J., Daniel B. Davis, and Nick Bloom. 2016. "Career Funneling: How Elite Students Learn to Define and Desire 'Prestigious' Jobs." *Sociology of Education* 89(1): 20–39.

Boltanski, Luc, and Laurent Thévenot. 1983. "Finding One's Way in Social Space: A Study Based on Games." *Social Science Information* 22(4–5): 631–80.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Boutyline, Andrei, and Stephen Vaisey. 2017. "Belief Network Analysis: A Relational Approach to Understanding the Structure of Attitudes." *American Journal of Sociology* 122(5): 1371–447.

Cameron, A. Colin, and Pravin K. Trivedi. 2013. *Regression Analysis of Count Data.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Cech, Erin A., and Mary Blair-Loy. 2010. "Perceiving Glass Ceilings? Meritocratic Versus Structural Explanations of Gender Inequality Among Women in Science and Technology." *Social Problems* 57(3): 371–97.

Christ, Sharon L., Lora E. Fleming, David J. Lee, Carles Muntaner, Peter A. Muennig, and Alberto J. Caban-Martinez. 2012. "The Effects of a Psychosocial Dimension of Socioeconomic Position on Survival: Occupational Prestige and Mortality Among US Working Adults." *Sociology of Health & Illness* 34(7): 1103–17.

Conley, Dalton, and W. Jean Yeung. 2005. "Black-White Differences in Occupational Prestige: Their Impact on Child Development." *American Behavioral Scientist* 48(9): 1229–49.

Correll, Shelley J., Cecilia L. Ridgeway, Ezra W. Zuckerman, Sharon Jank, Sara Jordan-Bloch, and Sandra Nakagawa. 2017. "It's the Conventional Thought That Counts: How Third-Order Inference Produces Status Advantage." *American Sociological Review* 82(2): 297–327.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

DiMaggio, Paul, and Hazel Rose Markus. 2010. "Culture and Social Psychology: Converging Perspectives." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 73(4): 347–52.

Durkheim, Émile. 1912. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. London: Allen & Unwin.

Espeland, Wendy Nelson, and Michael Sauder. 2016. *Engines of Anxiety: Academic Rankings, Reputation, and Accountability*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Espeland, Wendy Nelson, and Mitchell L. Stevens. 1998. "Commensuration as a Social Process." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24(1): 313–43.

Fiske, Susan T., and Hazel Rose Markus. 2012. *Facing Social Class: How Societal Rank Influences Interaction*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Freeland, Robert E., and Jesse Hoey. 2018. "The Structure of Deference: Modeling Occupational Status Using Affect Control Theory." *American Sociological Review* 83(2): 243–77.

Frye, Margaret, and Jenny Trinitapoli. 2015. "Ideals as Anchors for Relationship Experiences." *American Sociological Review* 80(3): 496–525.

Gambetta, Diego. 2009. "Signaling." In *The Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology*, edited by Peter Hedstrom and Peter Bearman. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gauchat, Gordon, and Kenneth T. Andrews. 2018. "The Cultural-Cognitive Mapping of Scientific

Professions." *American Sociological Review* 83(3): 567–95.

Gorman, Thomas J. 2000. "Cross-Class Perceptions of Social Class." *Sociological Spectrum* 20(1): 93–120.

Harding, David J. 2007. "Cultural Context, Sexual Behavior, and Romantic Relationships in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods." *American Sociological Review* 72(3): 341–64.

Jenkins, Tania M. 2020. *Doctors' Orders: The Making of Status Hierarchies in an Elite Profession*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Jiang, X. Lu, and Antonius H. N. Cillessen. 2005. "Stability of Continuous Measures of Sociometric Status: A Meta-Analysis." *Developmental Review* 25(1): 1–25.

Kahn, Kimberly, Arnold K. Ho, Jim Sidanius, and Felicia Pratto. 2009. "The Space Between Us and Them: Perceptions of Status Differences." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 12(5): 591–604.

Kilduff, Gavin J., Robb Willer, and Cameron Anderson. 2016. "Hierarchy and Its Discontents: Status Disagreement Leads to Withdrawal of Contribution and Lower Group Performance." *Organization Science* 27(2): 373–90.

Koenig, Biko. 2022. "Politicizing Status Loss Among Trump Supporters in 2020." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 8(6): 69–86. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2022.8.6.04.

Lamont, Michèle. 1992. *Money, Morals, and Manners: The Culture of the French and American Upper-Middle Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 2000. *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*. New York / Cambridge, Mass: Russell Sage Foundation / Harvard University Press.

———. 2012. "Toward a Comparative Sociology of Valuation and Evaluation." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38: 201–21.

Leicht, Kevin T. 2022. "Inequality and the Status Window: Inequality, Conflict, and the Salience of Status Differences in Conflicts over Resources." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 8(6): 103–21. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2022.8.6.06.

Luo, Ye, and April Brayfield. 1996. "Women's and Men's Subjective Class Identification from the 1970s to the 1990s." *Sociological Spectrum* 16(1): 83–107.

Lynn, Freda B., and George Ellerbach. 2017. "A Position with a View: Educational Status and the Construction of the Occupational Hierarchy." *American Sociological Review* 82(1): 32–58.

MacKinnon, Neil J., and Tom Langford. 1994. "The Meaning of Occupational Prestige Scores: A Social Psychological Analysis and Interpretation." *Sociological Quarterly* 35(2): 215–45.

Maloney, Emily K. 2020. "The Social Psychology of Occupational Status Groups: Relationality in the Structure of Deference." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 83(4): 463–75.

Maloney, Emily K., Kimberly B. Rogers, and Lynn Smith-Lovin. 2022. "Status as Deference: Cultural Meaning as a Source of Occupational Behavior." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 8(7): 70–88. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2022.8.7.04.

Matthews, Karen A., Katri Raikkonnen, Susan A. Everson, Janine D. Flory, Christine A. Marco, Jane F. Owens, and Catherine E. Lloyd. 2000. "Do the Daily Experiences of Healthy Men and Women Vary According to Occupational Prestige and Work Strain?" *Psychosomatic Medicine* 62(3): 346–53.

McCulloch, Warren S. 1945. "A Heterarchy of Values Determined by the Topology of Nervous Nets." *Bulletin of Mathematical Biophysics* 7: 89–93.

McLaren, Lindsay, and Jenny Godley. 2012. "Social Class and BMI Among Canadian Adults: A Focus on Occupational Prestige." *Obesity* 7(2): 290–99.

Melamed, David, Christopher W. Munn, Leanne Barry, Bradley Montgomery, and Oneya F. Okuwobi. 2019. "Status Characteristics, Implicit Bias, and the Production of Racial Inequality." *American Sociological Review* 84(6): 1013–36.

Nielsen, François, J. Micah Roos, and Rose M. Combs. 2015. "Clues of Subjective Social Status Among Young Adults." *Social Science Research* 52: 370–88.

Noss, Amanda. 2013. "Household Income: 2012." *American Community Survey* brief no. ACSBR/12-02. Washington: U.S. Census Bureau. Accessed June 21, 2022. https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2013/acs/acsbr12-02.html.

Parsons, Talcott, and Edward A. Shils. 1951. "Values, Motives and Systems of Action." In *Toward a General Theory of Action*, edited by Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 2014. "Why Status Matters for

Inequality." *American Sociological Review* 79(1): 1–16.

———. 2019. *Status: Why Is It Everywhere? Why Does It Matter?* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Ridgeway, Cecilia L., and Hazel Rose Markus. 2022. "The Significance of Status: What It Is and How It Shapes Inequality." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences* 8(7): 1–25. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2022 .8.7.01.

Rogers, Kimberly B. 2019. "Sources of Consensus and Variegation in Cultural Affective Meanings." *Social Currents* 6(3): 219–38.

Sauder, Michael. 2006. "Third Parties and Status Position: How the Characteristics of Status Systems Matter." *Theory and Society* 35: 299–321.

Smith, Tom W., and Jaesok Son. 2014. "Measuring Occupational Prestige on the 2012 General Social Survey." GSS Methodological report no. 122. Chicago: NORC at the University of Chicago.

Spencer, Steven J., Christine Logel, and Paul G. Davies. 2016. "Stereotype Threat." *Annual Review of Psychology* 67(1): 415–37.

Sterelny, Kim. 2021. *The Pleistocene Social Contract: Culture and Cooperation in Human Evolution.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Treiman, Donald J. 1977. *Occupational Prestige in Comparative Perspective.* New York: Academic Press.

Valentino, Lauren. 2020. "The Segregation Premium: How Gender Shapes the Symbolic Valuation Process of Occupational Prestige Judgments." *Social Forces* 99(1): 31–58.

———. 2021. "The Heterarchy of Occupational Status: Evidence for Diverse Logics of Prestige in the United States." *Sociological Forum* 36(S1): 1395–418.

———. 2022. "Constructing the Racial Hierarchy of Labor: The Role of Race in Occupational Prestige Judgments." *Sociological Inquiry* 92(2): 647–73. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12466.

Wang, Chi Phoenix. 2017. "Perceived Positions Along the Social Spectrum: The Subjective Social Status of Contemporary Chinese in a Coastal Metropolis." *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* 5(1): 90–126.

Weber, Max. 1968. "Status Groups and Classes." In *Economy and Society*, vol. 1. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Translated by Ephraim Frischoff. First published 1918. New York: Bedminster Press.

Wegener, Bernd. 1992. "Concepts and Measurement of Prestige." *Annual Review of Sociology* 18(1): 253–80.

Wickens, Thomas D. 2002. *Elementary Signal Detection Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wolff, Lisa S., Dolores Acevedo-Garcia, S. V. Subramanian, Deanne Weber, and Ichiro Kawachi. 2010. "Subjective Social Status, a New Measure in Health Disparities Research: Do Race/Ethnicity and Choice of Referent Group Matter?" *Journal of Health Psychology* 15(4): 560–74.

Zhou, Xueguang. 2005. "The Institutional Logic of Occupational Prestige Ranking: Reconceptualization and Reanalyses." *American Journal of Sociology* 111(1): 90–140.