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Status and Performance Characteristics in Social Interaction: A Theory of Status Validation

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This study investigates how consistently-evaluated performance and status characteristics structure social inequalities. Berger, Fisek, Norman, and Zelditch (1977) have presented a theory of expectation formation in multicharacteristic situations. The present paper extends the scope of that theory by addressing the problem of whether status stereotypes are reinforced by information concerning the competence of an actor. We argue that actors strive to validate inferences formed on the basis of differential evaluations associated with status characteristics. When this occurs, differential evaluations are strengthened and the organizing influence of status characteristics is increased. In this manner, validated status stereotypes may exacerbate inequalities in social interaction. Experimental results are consistent with the theory's predictions: inequalities in influence created by performance or status differences alone were significantly exacerbated when subjects were distinguished by consistently high or consistently low evaluations on both characteristics. Implications of this study for expectation states theory and for practical attempts to resolve inequalities in contemporary society are discussed.

This study is a theoretical investigation of the processes by which status stereotypes structure social inequality. Inferences based upon diffuse status characteristics such as sex, age, and ethnicity seem to have a ubiquitous effect on human relationships. Despite the pervasiveness of this status generalization process, however, many aspects of the phenomenon are poorly understood. The present research is directed toward one such aspect: are status stereotypes reinforced by information concerning the competence of a specific actor? More particularly, can ability or performance information strengthen or reinforce existing status stereotypes, resulting in even greater inequalities?

A research tradition known as expectation states theory (Berger et al.,

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1974; Berger et al., 1977) is clearly relevant to this question for it presents a formal explanation of the status generalization process. The theory argues that diffuse status characteristics are accompanied by differential evaluations (Greenstein and Knottnerus, 1980), which in turn lead to differential performance expectations, resulting in inequalities of power and prestige. Even if it has no explicit relevance to abilities necessary for task success, status group membership is (in the absence of more task-relevant information) used to infer performance ability. Evidence concerning this and other predictions of the theory has been obtained in a variety of experimental tests.

Since these initial studies of the elementary status situation (Moore, 1968; Berger et al., 1972), research in the expectation states tradition has focused on a variety of problems, including the operation of consistently- and inconsistently-assigned specific status characteristics (Berger and Fisek, 1970), equating characteristics (Webster, 1977), expectations and reward allocation (Cook, 1975; Parcel and Cook, 1977; Harrod, 1980), the role of individual differences in status generalization (Martin and Greenstein, unpubl.), and the effects of inconsistently-assigned diffuse and specific status characteristics (Freese and Cohen, 1973; Webster and Driskell, 1978; Zelditch et al., 1980). For a comprehensive review and discussion of current trends in the expectation states tradition, the reader is referred to Berger et al. (1980).

In the present research we have focused upon the effects of *consistently*-assigned diffuse and specific status characteristics, a problem that has received little theoretical or empirical attention. Specifically, we are interested in situations in which actors are discriminated by one *diffuse* status characteristic (e.g., race, age, sex) and one *specific* status characteristic (e.g., mathematical ability, artistic skills, mechanical aptitude) sharing the same evaluation: for example, a male (high diffuse status) competent in auto repair (high specific status) interacting with a female (low diffuse status) lacking auto repair skills (low specific status).[1]

How might consistently-evaluated diffuse and specific status characteristics structure social interaction? Three distinct outcomes are empirically possible. First, expectations might develop that are consistent with the states of the diffuse status characteristic alone. In terms of the example given above, this outcome would be characterized by the highly competent male ignoring the female's lack of competence, and vice versa.

A second possible outcome might see expectations developing consistent with the states of the specific status characteristic alone. This outcome suggests that the highly competent male would ignore the less competent female's gender by treating her as he would anyone—male or female—lacking in auto repair skills, and that the female would react to the male in a similar fashion.

Finally, the specific status characteristic (auto repair skill) and the diffuse status characteristic (sex) might be combined to form expectations. Here, the highly competent male's reaction to the less competent female would be more negative—i.e., lower expectations—than for a female *or* a person lacking in auto repair skills. In short, the two consistently-evaluated characteristics would combine to produce a status-organizing effect more powerful than either characteristic alone might be. This outcome is by far the most invidious of the three, for it suggests the creation of even greater inequalities.

This outcome—a combining of elements of information of like signs—is accounted for by the Berger et al. (1977:122–126) aggregate-combining model in terms of a process they call the attenuation principle. The present paper attempts to build upon the Berger et al. model by considering the consistently-evaluated specific and diffuse status characteristics situation as a special case of this attenuation principle. In this way we hope to expand upon the theoreti-

[1] By employing the male-female status distinction as an example we do not mean to encourage perpetuation of this distinction; we have, only for purposes of illustration, drawn a common example of a diffuse status distinction from contemporary society.

cal framework of expectation states theory and to investigate a situation which has not previously been the subject of empirical study.

The present study suggests that, undesirable as it may be, it is precisely this kind of exacerbating effect that can be expected in multicharacteristic situations. We account for this phenomenon in terms of a process we call *status validation,* and we present below a formal theory explaining how diffuse status characteristics and the stereotypical beliefs associated with them operate to produce this effect. Empirical support for this formulation would contribute not only to a growing theoretical program, but to those practical attempts to remedy status inequalities in contemporary society as well. Indeed, it is from just such a theoretical foundation that the knowledge necessary for mitigating the effects of status characteristics will most likely be derived.

A THEORY OF THE PROCESS

The theory discussed below is applicable only when certain conditions are met. These scope conditions are identical to those of the elementary status situation examined by expectation states theory (cf. Berger et al., 1977:95), except for the nature and number of characteristics which discriminate between actors.

In this status validation situation (S) two types of social information about actors are available. The first type of social information—diffuse status (D)—is defined by Berger et al. (1977:94) as being comprised of two kinds of evaluations. An actor may be inferior or superior with respect to (1) specific traits associated with the characteristic and (2) a general evaluation associated with these specific traits. A global evaluation is made of the actor, defining his or her overall worth or competence. Within American society, for example, ethnicity has been a status characteristic in which blacks have, in relation to whites, been negatively ranked both on a variety of specific traits such as intelligence or responsibility, and on their overall value, as in the imputation of general competence or morality.

The second type of information available in S is that of a specific status characteristic (C). Such characteristics differ from diffuse status characteristics in that they are not associated with a general expectation state (Berger et al., 1977:94).

To this point we have said nothing about the task-relevance of D and C. If either C or D is initially relevant to the task (T), then the result is a generalization effect called a demand process (Freese, 1976:195), and the analysis of expectation formation is straightforward: expectations will form based on the characteristic believed to be task-relevant. This trivial case is not nearly so interesting from our point of view as that in which neither C nor D is initially believed to be relevant to T. Here, the result is a halo process (Freese, 1976:195) in which C or D (or both) serve as a cue from which expectations concerning some ability believed to be instrumental to task success are formed. We will assume the nontrivial case—that is, that neither C nor D is believed to be directly task-relevant—for the remainder of our discussion.

Situation S, then, is characterized by two actors striving to perform successfully on a collective task. They are discriminated by a single C and a single D that are consistently-evaluated and not associated with, or dissociated from, each other or from the task. We assume that both characteristics will form bases for social comparison from which a subject (p) can discriminate two social objects, self (p') and one other (o) in S. This perception creates a distinction between p' and o due to p's focusing upon these cues and attributing to p' and o those qualities and evaluations associated with the appropriate states of these characteristics.

Assumption 1: Activation
If C and D are available in S, and C and D are not specifically associated nor dissociated, then C and D are activated in S.

With the activation of these social characteristics, status beliefs will be modified and attributions of ability altered. What must be shown is why and how this takes place. We assume that once activation occurs in the status validation situation beliefs associated with D are increased. In

order to explain this, however, it is necessary to introduce a term that conceptualizes the aspect of a status characteristic that is made up of beliefs.

Definition 1: Stereotype
A stereotype is the collection of evaluated and nonevaluated beliefs associated with specific states of D.

This definition is essential for it allows us to focus upon the cognitive domain that is most relevant to status validation: evaluated beliefs. Specific status information, which is information about the capabilities of an individual actor, may serve to confirm the evaluative dimension of the diffuse status stereotype. This confirmation is accomplished through an inclusion operation in which C is defined by the actor as an attribute included among those traits associated with D. Evaluated beliefs associated with C become part of the collection of evaluated beliefs in the status stereotype.

Definition 2: Status Validation
Status validation occurs if the evaluated beliefs associated with C become part of the collection of evaluated beliefs associated with the stereotype of D.

Such an alteration in status beliefs occurs when consistently-evaluated specific status and diffuse status information is available in a task situation. Indeed, this is the second assumption of the status validation process.

Assumption 2: Status Validation
Status validation occurs if a single C and a single D, which are consistently-evaluated and neither associated nor dissociated from each other or the task, are activated in S.

The question that arises at this point is why status validation occurs. The reason is that a burden of proof process (Berger et al., 1977:108–109) operates between status characteristics. Unless the specific status characteristic is specifically dissociated from the diffuse status characteristic, p will infer that C is a part of the collection of evaluated beliefs of the status stereotype. This may occur in one of two ways. Under some circumstances, certain performance information may already be part of the status stereotype. In Western societies, for example, females are generally perceived to be kinder and more understanding than males (Ward and Balswick, 1978). Thus, if a male learns that a particular female is kind and understanding, this will probably have little effect on the male's attributional processes because this information is already contained in the stereotype the male holds for females in general. Because the information is redundant, it would probably not affect the expectation formation process (cf. Berger et al., 1977:125–126). This situation, however, is qualitatively different from the one with which we are primarily concerned.

In the second situation—the focus of this investigation—the specific status characteristic has no prior association with the status stereotype. Due to the globalizing quality of D, however, status and performance characteristics are "linked." Such a global evaluation is an essential part of D because the fundamental "accomplishment" of a status indicator is to serve as a symbolic referent for identifying *differences* in the valued worth of actors. Diffuse status attributes provide such a referent. Because of the importance such evaluative distinctions hold for people, the designation and substantiation of status differences are basic features of social life. We believe that unless circumstances bring status stereotypes under some kind of challenge, the validity of status evaluations is routinely accepted, and that inferences will be made on the basis of such information. To buttress these evaluations, people will use the simplest and most efficacious strategy. Interpreting performance or specific status attributes as being related to the evaluative dimension of a diffuse status characteristic provides just such a device, and in this manner may confirm status distinctions.

This bias in strategy is enhanced by the status stereotype being a cognitive construct made up of a set of "typical" traits that can be used as standards for interpreting social reality. Through the use of such status typifications, a previously ambiguous social reality can now be structured (for recent studies of a preference to use confirmatory strategies for testing hypotheses about social reality, see Snyder and Cantor, 1979; Snyder and

Swann, 1978). Because of cognitive "short-cuts" for understanding and prediction provided by these conceptual schemas and the referential quality of status characteristics for designating social valuation, we predict that a validating strategy will be utilized by p.

At this point the reader will note the similarity between our discussion of the status validation process and Berger et al.'s (1977:123–126) attenuation principle. If (as we noted earlier) it is reasonable to view the status validation process as a special case of the more general attenuation principle, then the effects of the two processes are probably similar: information of like signs is combined to form an aggregated expectation state whose organizing strength is greater than that of either of the individual elements. A major distinction between the attenuation principle and our concept of status validation is that we explicitly see specific status information being assimilated into the diffuse status characteristic's stereotype, whereas Berger et al. do not speculate on such an assimiliation process (although such a process is not ruled out by their model).

The effect of status validation on the diffuse status stereotype is clear. With evaluated performance beliefs now linked to and included with status beliefs, the number and consistency of evaluated beliefs associated with the diffuse status characteristic increases.

Assumption 2.1: Status Validation Effect
If a consistently evaluated C and D are activated in S, the number and consistency of differentially evaluated beliefs associated with the stereotype of D increases.

What is the impact, however, of the diffuse status characteristic on interaction? Expectation states theory provides an answer in its fundamental assumption that the ability of status characteristics to organize interaction results from the differential evaluation accompanying the characteristic. This assumption has been confirmed in a test demonstrating that a differential evaluation is a necessary condition for a status characteristic to initiate inequalities in interaction (Greenstein and Knottnerus, 1980). In order to further clarify this process, we suggest that the organizing ability of a status characteristic emerges from the cognitive activity of p, which is elicited by the evaluated beliefs. The differential evaluation represents an affective response to the evaluative component of a status stereotype.

Definiton 3: Differential Evaluation
A differential evaluation is the affective response generated by the collection of evaluated beliefs of the stereotype associated with a specific state of D.

This collection of evaluated status beliefs is the basis from which a cognitive response emerges. This, however, does not yet explain how validated status characteristics structure interaction. Another feature of the status evaluation must first be described: the strength of the differential evaluation. Simply stated, the affective intensity of the differential evaluation is variable. One might have strong feelings concerning a particular racial characteristic but a more moderate attitude with regard to sexual group membership. What determines such variation in strength are differences in the evaluated beliefs associated with status characteristics. We argue that the simplest and most plausible reason such differences exist is variations in the number and consistency of evaluated beliefs associated with a status stereotype. The greater the number and consistency of evaluated beliefs, the greater its overall strength or affect (and vice versa). Intensity of the differential evaluation is, therefore, a positive function of these two features of evaluated status beliefs.

Assumption 3: Strength of Differential Evaluation
The strength of the differential evaluation associated with a specific state of D is a positive function of the number and consistency of evaluated beliefs of the stereotype associated with that state of D.

Now is is possible to more accurately describe the effects of a validated status characteristic upon expectation formation. Status validation results in an increase in the number and consistency of evaluated beliefs associated with a status attribute. From Assumption 3 we can conclude that such an alteration of the

status stereotype will strengthen its differential evaluation. Assumption 3.1 formalizes this conclusion.

Assumption 3.1: Effects of Status Validation
If status validation occurs in S, the differential evaluation associated with D will increase in strength.

Although we will not specify a precise mathematical function to allow numerical prediction of the increase in strength of a differential evaluation following status validation, we would expect it to be similar in form to Berger et al.'s (1977:125–126) attenuation principle.

If differential evaluations are a necessary condition for the emergence of inequalities in group interaction, and if the strength of differential evaluations is capable of variation, then what remains to be specified is the relationship between strength of a differential evaluation and the initiation of expectation states. In the situation under examination we assume that variations in the strength of the differential evaluation have a corresponding impact on the expectation advantage (Berger et al., 1977:41, 74) enjoyed by p (or o, depending upon the assignment of states of D and C). The greater the strength of the differential evaluation of D, the greater the expectation advantage held by p (or o).

Assumption 4: Formation of Expectation States
Following status validation in S, p will develop expectation states for p' and o consistent with the states and strength of the states of D possessed by p' and o.

Having developed expectations for the performances of p' and o, we need only to describe how these expectations relate to the power and prestige ordering of the group. Following Berger et al. (1977:130), we assume that p's power and prestige position in the group is some positive function of the expectation advantage p holds over o.

Assumption 5: Basic Expectation Assumption (from Berger et al., 1977)
Given that p has formed expectation states for p' and o, p's power and prestige position relative to o will be a direct function of p's expectation advantage over o.

As a result of this theoretical formulation it is anticipated that inequalities in influence created by performance or status differences alone will be significantly exacerbated when actors are distinguished by consistently high or consistently low evaluations on both characteristics. Two predictions follow from this formulation.

Prediction 1: Positive Status Validation Effect
If p possesses the positively evaluated states of C and D, the only characteristics available in S, then (as a result of p's expectation advantage over o) p's power and prestige position relative to o is greater than that associated with either C or D in isolation.

Prediction 2: Negative Status Validation Effect
If p possesses the negatively evaluated states of C and D, the only characteristics available in S, then (as a result of o's expectation advantage over p) o's power and prestige position relative to p is greater than that associated with either C or D in isolation.

The following experiment was designed to test these predictions.

METHOD

To study the effects of consistently-evaluated performance and status characteristics on interaction, we created 131 collectively-organized, success motivated task groups, each composed of two persons. Subjects were female undergraduate volunteers, aged 18–25, paid for their participation. Depending upon the condition to which she was randomly assigned, the subject found that in relation to her partner she possessed (1) a low state of a specific status characteristic; (2) a high state of a specific status characteristic; (3) a low state of a diffuse status characteristic; (4) a high state of a diffuse status characteristic; (5) a low state for both the specific and diffuse status characteristics; or (6) a high state for both the specific and diffuse status characteristics.[2]

Upon arrival each subject was seated in a small room equipped with a two-way video and audio communications system. A research aide explained that all further

[2] Detailed research protocols are available from the authors upon request.

communication with the subject would be over this system and, after having paid her a nominal sum, left the room. Throughout the experiment the subject neither saw nor had direct communication with her partner, nor was she led to expect such contact at any time in the future.

Another experimenter then appeared on the television screen and explained that the subject would be taking part in two separate studies. The first study required the subject to take a test supposedly measuring an ability known as "Modes of Perception." This test involved determining which geometric figure predominated on an ambiguous arrangement of differently shaped figures. Fifteen test slides were presented. Upon completion of the test, a research aide collected the forms. After a short delay the experimenter came back on the screen and gave the subjects their test performance results. At no time did the experimenter associate these test results with the experimental task, and postexperimental interviews indicated that few subjects perceived such a relationship.

Having completed the "first" study, the experimenter continued with instructions for the "second" study. The study was described as an experiment in communication effectiveness examining how effectively two people could work together while communicating over a two-way video system. The task on which the partners would cooperate involved forming "relatively uncommon words" from groups of 16 letters that appeared on the screen. The rules for the task were sufficiently ambiguous to permit the formation of almost any word. The object of the task was for the team to correctly form as many "uncommon words" as possible.

As each letter set came on the screen a subject would be asked for word suggestions or would hear a suggestion made by her partner. All suggestions were relayed by a research aide using an intercom, who also relayed decisions concerning acceptance and rejection of words. The suggestion itself represents an influence attempt requiring either acceptance or rejection. If a subject accepts a word suggestion, she has been influenced; if she rejects a word, she has not been influenced. The word task consisted of thirty such trials, and a measure of influence as an indicator of power and prestige was computed by finding the proportion of trials on which a subject had been influenced. Subjects, however, never interacted with real partners. All interaction was controlled by the experimenter according to a set of random word suggestions. Fifty percent of the subject's word suggestions were accepted according to a random schedule.

The manipulation of the specific status characteristic was conducted prior to beginning the word task. Scores on the "Modes of Perception" test were communicated by the experimenter to the subject. This information was presented over the television screen with scores written on a chalkboard by the experimenter. Based on these results, the subject learned that she possessed an "alpha" or "beta" perceptual style, while her partner possessed the other perceptual style. The experimenter explained that previous research had found a difference in the accuracy of people's perceptions. Those possessing a beta mode of perception were said to be superior in perceptual sensitivity to those possessing the alpha mode.

Diffuse status distinctions were generated by manipulations of the stated age of the subject's partner prior to beginning the word task. The subject was given this information by a research assistant during a brief review of word task procedures. Subjects in the high status conditions learned that their partner was 15 years old; those in the low status conditions learned that their partner was 28 years old.

After the word task was finished, each subject completed a debriefing questionnaire and was interviewed at length. The purposes of these procedures were (1) to determine if a subject had violated any of the theoretical or empirical conditions of the experiment, and (2) to give a complete explanation of the experiment and its purpose.

RESULTS

A total of 131 subjects took part in the experiment, but 38 of these were either

Table 1. Design of the Experiment and Influence Rates by Condition

	Manipulations						
	Specific status		Diffuse status		Influence measure		
Condition	self	other	self	other	N	R_i	s
(1) Low specific status	low	high	?	?	16	.806	.11
(2) High specific status	high	low	?	?	17	.688	.15
(3) Low diffuse status	?	?	low	high	15	.796	.06
(4) High diffuse status	?	?	high	low	15	.680	.10
(5) Low specific status low diffuse status	low	high	low	high	15	.882	.05
(6) High specific status high diffuse status	high	low	high	low	15	.593	.09

Note: ? = no information supplied to subject.

suspicious of the experimental procedures or failed to understand the experimental instructions.[3] Because these subjects failed to meet the conditions specified by the theory, they were dropped from subsequent analyses. This left a total of 93 subjects randomly assigned to the six conditions.

Table 1 presents the mean rate of influence (proportion of partner's suggestions that were accepted) for each of the six conditions. This influence measure (R_i) is different from the p(s) measure generally employed in the expectation states literature in that it measures *acceptance* of influence as opposed to *rejection* of influence. R_i is, in the dyadic case, the complement of p(s) [$R = 1 - p(s)$].

An examination of the influence rates presented in Table 1 shows that subjects were differentiated in the performance and status conditions. Influence rates in the low and high states of the specific status only conditions are .806 and .688, while influence rates in the low and high states of the diffuse status only conditions are .796 and .680. Both of these differences are significant below the .05 level using the Mann-Whitney U-test as shown in Table 2.

Further examination of the influence rates presented in Table 1 shows that the predictions concerning the compounding effects of consistently-evaluated characteristics were confirmed. The low specific status–low diffuse status condition had an influence rate of .882, which is significantly different from both low specific status (R_i = .806) and low diffuse status (R_i = .796). In the high specific status–high diffuse status condition, R_i = .593, which is significantly different from the high specific status (R_i = .688) and high diffuse status (R_i = .680) conditions.[4]

As an independent check on the validity of the status manipulations, after comple-

Table 2. Mann-Whitney *U*-tests for Differences Between Conditions

Prediction	*U*	*Z*	*p**
(1) > (2)	72.0	2.31	.021
(3) > (4)	38.0	3.11	<.001
(5) > (1)	68.0	2.09	.018
(5) > (3)	29.5	3.50	<.001
(6) < (2)	79.0	1.84	.033
(6)< (4)	57.5	2.30	.011

* All tests are directional (one-tailed) hypotheses.

[3] These 38 subjects were excluded for the following reasons: *p*-centric or competitive (n = 2); suspicion of experimental procedures (n = 7); failure of the manipulation (n = 15); failure to understand instructions (n = 4); failure to complete thirty trials of the experimental task due to time constraints (n = 10). Of 26 published studies in the expectation states tradition, five do not report exclusion rates; the average for the 21 studies that do report is 18.3%, ranging from a low of 3.8% to a high of 50%. These figures are typically based on exclusions for cause (that is, not counting failures to complete); the comparable rate for our study was 23.1%.

[4] There are no data available for a control condition that might indicate a baseline propensity for accepting influence in this particular experimental situation. Such a control condition could be studied by creating a situation in which $(e_p - e_o) = 0$, that is, no expectation advantage of *p* over *o*. We believe there are no compelling theoretical reasons to expect that this control condition would exhibit an influence rate equal to that of the no-information condition studied in our earlier work (Greenstein and Knottnerus, 1980). In the absence of empirical evidence this issue remains an open question.

Table 3. Subjective Evaluation of Task Performance by Condition

Condition	*P* perceived her performance to be:				
	Better than *o*	Same as *o*	Worse than *o*	Total	(N)
(1) Low specific status	0.0	43.8	56.3	100.1	(16)
(2) High specific status	29.4	64.7	5.9	100.0	(17)
(3) Low diffuse status	6.7	26.7	66.7	100.1	(15)
(4) High diffuse status	20.0	80.0	0.0	100.0	(15)
(5) Low specific status low diffuse status	6.7	33.3	60.0	100.0	(15)
(6) High specific status high diffuse status	40.0	60.0	0.0	100.0	(15)

Note: Table entries are percentages; $\lambda = .27$.

tion of the word task we asked each subject to judge whether she had performed (a) better than, (b) the same as, or (c) worse than her partner. Table 3 summarizes these data, which indicate that a moderate relationship ($\lambda = .27$) existed between subjective perception of task performance and treatment condition, thus suggesting the effectiveness of the manipulations.

DISCUSSION

These results are clearly consistent with the predictions generated by the theory of status validation. Inequalities in influence created by performance (i.e., specific status) or age (i.e., diffuse status) differences alone were significantly exacerbated when subjects were distinguished by consistently high or consistently low evaluations on both characteristics.

As previously suggested, the status validation process may be viewed as a special case of Berger et al.'s (1977:122–130) more general aggregate-combining model, and particularly the attenuation principle. Because of this, the ordinal predictions generated by our theory for the situation studied in our experiment are identical to those of the aggregate-combining model, and for this reason there is probably no definitive way of choosing between these explanations on the basis of empirical evidence. Both formulations focus primarily on unobservable cognitive processes, and consequently many of the key assumptions of these explanations are not capable of being tested experimentally.

There is, however, at least one situation in which these formulations make different predictions for observable behaviors. A major distinction between the present theory and the aggregate-combining model lies in our treatment of the assimilation of specific status information into the stereotype associated with the diffuse status characteristic, a process which the aggregate-combining model does not explicitly address. This distinction may allow our formulation to explain some findings reported by Berger et al. (1972) that have been problematic for the Berger et al. (1977) model.

Part of Berger et al.'s (1972) experiment studied a situation similar to that addressed by our theory. All of Berger et al.'s (1972) subjects were Air Force staff sergeants, each led to believe that his task partner was either (a) an airman third class or (b) a captain. Fifty-eight subjects in the "burden of proof" conditions were informed that their partner's general classification score was higher or lower than their own, consistent with their partner's relative rank. As it is reasonable to think of military rank as a diffuse status characteristic and general classification score as a specific status characteristic, we believe it is appropriate to view Berger et al.'s (1972) "burden of proof" conditions as consistently-evaluated diffuse and specific status conditions conceptually similar to those studied in our research. Berger et al.'s (1972:251) findings in the "burden of proof" conditions do *not* suggest an exacerbation effect. In fitting their aggregate-combining model to these data, Berger et al. "call attention to this discrepancy as a problem requiring further study" (1977:149), while noting a generally good fit to the data.

The theory of status validation leads us

to believe that the failure of Berger et al. (1972) to observe an exacerbation effect was due to the fact that the specific status information provided in their study (general classification score) was already contained in the stereotype associated with the diffuse status characteristic, Air Force rank. That is, we believe an Air Force staff sergeant would assume that a captain would possess a higher classification score and an airman third class a lower classification score than himself.[5] The specific status information was redundant with that implied by the diffuse status stereotype, and consequently would not be expected to affect the expectation formation process. Just such an effect is suggested by Berger et al.'s (1972:251) data, in which the influence rates in the "burden of proof" conditions are not substantially different from those in the "activation" conditions.

In a general sense, the present study is concerned with the way social actors use characteristics to make attributions of task ability about one another. Actors do not, it is suggested, simply combine performance and status information in an additive manner to form an overall evaluation. Nor do they ignore one of these two types of information. Rather, beliefs about ability are linked to the status stereotypes and then combined to form the perception of an actor. For example, if in the task situation it is learned that a high status actor (e.g., male) possesses high verbal ability, he will be perceived not as a person who is male and verbally competent, but as a verbally competent male. Or, if it is learned that a low status actor (e.g., black) possesses low ability on a perception test, he will be viewed as an unperceptive black, not as a person who is black and also unperceptive. The judgmental process described here extends the Berger et al. (1977) theory by providing a specific explanation of a process suggested by that theory.

It is also possible to better understand other types of multicharacteristic situations on the basis of the theoretical model developed in this study. Why, for example, have mixed results been obtained in investigations of the effects of *inconsistent* performance and status characteristics in task groups? It is argued here that actors seek to validate their inferences regarding the differential evaluations associated with status characteristics, rather than block the burden of proof process as suggested by Freese and Cohen (1973). If status characteristics vary in their strength due to the number and consistency of evaluated beliefs within their stereotypes, this factor may determine the degree to which a status characteristic is used to make inferences of task ability in such a situation.

From this perspective, a status characteristic whose differential evaluation is relatively less pervasive would be more easily neutralized by contradictory performance information. Depending on the strength of these evaluated status beliefs, the potential effect of conflicting performance and diffuse status characteristics would range from no effect of the performance or specific status characteristic, through some type of combining in which both specific and diffuse status characteristics affect the interaction, to total neutralization or elimination of status effects. The affective strength of a status stereotype would determine the extent to which performance or specific status information would invalidate the status characteristic, thereby reducing its viability as a basis for future inferences.

The findings and conclusions of this research are also suggestive for efforts to remedy social inequalities in society. It is important to emphasize that these implications are of an indeterminate nature, because any situation not meeting the scope conditions of the present study does not fall within the theory's explanatory range. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to consider certain implications of this research, since it is concerned with a fundamental process by which social inequalities are created, maintained, and exacerbated.

The essential finding of this and other research within the expectation states tradition is that social beliefs are a pow-

[5] Two SPQ reviewers disagreed concerning our interpretation of the Berger et al. (1972) experiment. One reviewer contended that the implications of this interpretation were "quite misleading"; the other called it "extremely persuasive."

erful force in shaping behavior. Because this program provides an explanation of how inequalities based on diffuse status characteristics such as race or sex may emerge, it would seem that these insights would be of great interest to those undertaking programmatic efforts seeking to remedy discriminatory practices.

Directly relevant to this issue are three specific implications concerning the problem of remedying discriminatory behavior provided by expectation states theory. First, we are led to expect that in the absence of contradictory information, status characteristics provide the basis for the maintenance of interaction inequalities. Both experimental and field studies support this assumption. Second, information about the abilities of low status persons is important for eliminating status generalization. While questions concerning this elimination effect have yet to be resolved, it is clear that performance information can in varying degrees mitigate the impact of status characteristics. Third, this study suggests that consistently-evaluated performance information can validate status beliefs, thereby amplifying inequalities. What this suggests is that in certain conditions involving interaction between status unequals, the perception of low status persons as incompetent could intensify status stereotypes and inequality. That such an unforeseen outcome could result from programmatic measures facilitating the entry of low status persons into the institutional sector would indeed be a tragedy. The conflicting evidence to date concerning the success of such programs may reflect the occurrence of just this sort of generalization process.

What is implied, of course, is that the alleviation of social problems such as inequality is a complex and difficult endeavor requiring an understanding of the basic forces that shape social life. The research presented here expands our understanding of one such dimension—status validation—and through such knowledge we should be able to develop a more effective framework for remedying these problems. At the very least, this study suggests that the elimination of social inequalities requires *not only* institutional change, but alteration of the tenacious beliefs people hold with regard to status distinctions as well. If status conceptions interact with performance and ability information to produce even stronger stereotypes, then the obstacles facing women and minorities in their struggle for equality of opportunity are even greater than is generally perceived. It is essential that these status generalization and validation processes be understood in order to develop theoretically-based means for dealing with their consequences.

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Humor as a Technique of Social Influence

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In a dyadic bargaining paradigm, at a predetermined point in the negotiation, subjects received an influence attempt from a confederate that varied in size and was administered in either a humorous or a nonhumorous way. Results support the major hypothesis that humor results in an increased financial concession. The use of humor led to a more positive evaluation of the task and marginally lessened self-reported tension, but did not increase liking for the partner. Consistent with past research using social tasks, females laughed and smiled more than males.

> He made humor a tool of diplomacy. His banter inspired banter in others and usually led to a more relaxed atmosphere in the private, formal discussions or negotiations with world leaders. The humor opened the door to more frankness and less ritualized recitations as well. In that regard, Kissinger lightened the whole heavy international diplomatic scene. (Valeriani, 1979:9)

Henry Kissinger's use of humor to aid negotiation is well known. More generally, students of social behavior have suggested for years that humor may facilitate social influence (e.g., Goodchilds, 1972; Kane et al., 1977; Powell, 1977), but laboratory studies to examine this suggestion have not been conducted. The purpose of the present paper is to test this hypothesis.

The humor literature shows that using appropriate humor increases the likeability of a communicator (Goodchilds, 1972; Gruner, 1976; Mann, 1961; Mettee et al., 1971), and persuasion studies indicate that liked communicators are more influential (e.g., McGuire, 1968; Norman, 1976). In bargaining, Chertkoff and Esser's (1976) review concludes that bargainers are more cooperative when their social relationship is positive. Thus, these findings suggest that humor should increase influenceability by increasing communicator attractiveness.

Direct evidence for this proposition, however, is somewhat mixed. First, reviews by Markiewicz (1974) and Gruner

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