

## CHAPTER 2

# Expectation States Theory

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### INTRODUCTION

Women in work groups often feel that their ideas are ignored or mistakenly credited to one of their male coworkers. African Americans often say they feel that they have to perform twice as well as their white counterparts to be given the same level of recognition. The ideas of people who talk more in a group are often judged to be more valuable than those offered by less talkative members. People with more prestigious jobs are more likely to be chosen leader of a group, such as a jury, even when their job has little, if anything, to do with the task at hand. Women are more likely than men in a group to be interrupted. Ideas often “sound better” when offered by someone perceived to be attractive.

What all of these observations have in common is that some members of a group seem to have real advantages that are denied to others. They have more opportunities to speak, their ideas are taken more seriously, and they have more influence over other group members. In expectation states theory these hierarchies of evaluation, influence, and participation are referred to as the “power and prestige structure” or the “status structure” of the group. The theory seeks to explain how these inequitable structures emerge and are maintained, and how they are related to other aspects of inequality in society.

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## HISTORY

Expectation states theory began as an effort to explain some of the most striking findings of Robert F. Bales' (1950) influential early studies of interpersonal behavior in small groups (Berger, Conner, & Fisek, 1974; Berger & Zelditch, 1998, pp. 97–113).

Bales (1950, 1970) recorded the interactions of homogeneous, initially leaderless decision-making groups of three to seven unacquainted Harvard sophomore males over multiple hour-long sessions. Despite the initial lack of group structure and the social similarities of the members, inequalities in interaction developed quickly, stabilized over the first session, and then guided interaction thereafter. If inequalities emerge quickly in unstructured groups of social equals, Bales (1950) reasoned, status hierarchies are very likely in any group.

The inequalities Bales observed consisted of four correlated behaviors: participation initiated, opportunities given to participate, evaluations received, and influence over others. Bales (1970) found, for instance, that groups developed a most talkative member who talked considerably more than the others in the group. This most talkative person was also the one addressed most often by the others. The more a person talked, compared to the others, the more likely he was to be rated by others as having the best ideas and doing the most to guide and influence the group. The founders of expectation states theory, Joseph Berger, Bernard Cohen, Morris Zelditch, and colleagues, sought to explain why these correlated inequalities, labeled the group's "power and prestige" (i.e., status) structure, emerge together and how this happens even in a group of social equals.

Berger and his colleagues were also influenced by two additional sets of early studies. One set demonstrated the power of status structures, once formed, to bias group members' evaluations of each other and their behavior in the group. Riecken (1958) showed that the same idea was rated as more valuable when it came from a talkative group member than from a less talkative one. Sherif, White, and Harvey (1955) demonstrated that group members overestimate the performance of high status members and underestimate the performance of low status members. Whyte (1943), in his classic study of a street corner gang, showed that group members actually pressured one another to perform better or worse to keep their performances in line with their status in the group.

Another influential set of early studies demonstrated that when members of a goal-oriented group differed in socially significant ways, the interactional status structures that emerged tended to reflect the social status attached to each member's distinguishing characteristics. Strodbeck, James, and Hawkins (1957), for instance, found that mock jury members' occupational status and gender predicted how active and influential they became, how competent and helpful they were judged to be by others, and how likely they were to be chosen foreman of the jury. Yet, the question left unanswered was *how* this occurred.

These studies encouraged Berger and his colleagues to formulate expectation states theory as a theory of an underlying process that (1) accounts for the formation of interactional status structures and (2) can explain *how* these structures develop both in groups of social equals and in groups where people differ in socially significant ways (Berger et al., 1974; Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977; Berger & Zelditch, 1998). The way people's socially significant characteristics, such as race, gender, occupation, or age, shape their access to participation, influence, and positive evaluation is an important aspect of social stratification in society. As a consequence, although expectation states theory began by explaining status structures in homogeneous groups, its explanation of status structures among people with significant social differences has become the most highly developed and commonly used aspect of the theory.

## AN OVERVIEW OF EXPECTATION STATES THEORY

Expectation states theory seeks to explain the emergence of status hierarchies in situations where actors are oriented toward the accomplishment of a collective goal or task. *Collective orientation* and *task orientation* are the scope conditions of the theory (i.e., the conditions under which the theory is argued to hold). Individuals are task oriented when they are primarily motivated towards solving a problem, and they are collectively orientated when they consider it legitimate and necessary to take into account each other’s contributions when completing the task.

While not all groups have collective task orientations, groups that do are a part of everyday experiences in socially important settings such as work and school. Informal work groups, committees, sports teams, juries, student project groups, explicitly established work teams, and advisory panels are just a few examples. By contrast, people talking at a party or a group of friends having dinner generally lack these orientations and, therefore fall outside of the theory’s scope.

The shared focus of group members on the group’s goal (i.e., the collective orientation) generates a pressure to anticipate the relative quality of each member’s contribution to completing the task in order to decide how to act. When members of the group, for whatever reason, anticipate that a specific individual will make more valuable contributions, they will likely defer more to this individual and give her or him more opportunities to participate. These implicit, often unconscious, anticipations of the relative quality of individual members’ future performance at the focal task are referred to as *performance expectation states*.

Once developed, performance expectation states (hereafter, “performance expectations”) shape behavior in a self-fulfilling fashion. The greater the performance expectation of one actor compared to another, the more likely the first actor will be given chances to perform in the group, the more likely she or he will be to speak up and offer task suggestions, the more likely her or his suggestions will be positively evaluated and the less likely she or he will be to be influenced when there are disagreements. The actor with the lower performance expectations, by contrast, will be given fewer opportunities to perform, will speak less and in a more hesitant fashion, will frequently have his or her contributions ignored or poorly evaluated, and will be more influenced when disagreements occur. In this way, relative performance expectations create and maintain a hierarchy of participation, evaluation, and influence among the actors that constitutes the group’s status hierarchy, as depicted on the right side of Figure 2-1.

Given the importance of relative performance expectations for the formation of status hierarchies, it is crucial to specify how social factors influence the formation of the performance expectations themselves. As shown on the left side of Figure 2-1, expectation states theory posits three distinct processes. These involve: (1) socially significant characteristics (e.g., race, gender,

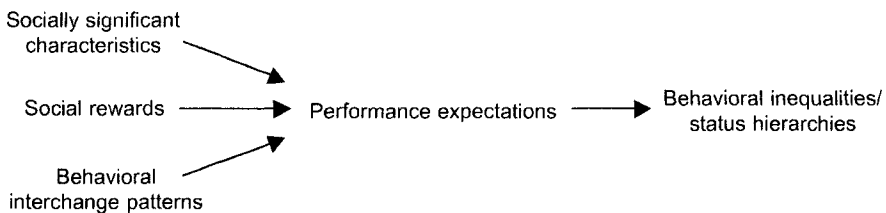


FIGURE 2-1. The formation of performance expectations and status hierarchies.

physical attractiveness), (2) social rewards, and (3) patterns of behavior interchange between actors. We describe these three processes next along with empirical evidence in regard to them.

### Status Characteristics and Performance Expectations

Perhaps one of the most important ways that actors develop differentiated performance expectations is by using socially significant attributes of individuals, called *status characteristics*, to anticipate the quality of their future task performances. Status characteristics are attributes on which people differ (e.g., gender, computer expertise) and for which there are widely held beliefs in the culture associating greater social worthiness and competence with one category of the attribute (men, computer expert) than another (women, computer novice). Status characteristics can be either *specific* or *diffuse*. Specific status characteristics, such as computer expertise, carry cultural expectations for competence at limited, well-defined range of tasks and, consequently, only impact the formation of performance expectations in this limited range of settings. Diffuse status characteristics, on the other hand, carry very general expectations for competence, in addition to specific expectations for greater or lesser competence at particular tasks. They affect performance expectations across a wide range of settings.

Gender is an example of a diffuse status characteristic in the United States and elsewhere. Widely shared cultural beliefs about gender have been shown to include expectations that men are diffusely more competent at most things, as well as specific assumptions that men are better at some particular tasks (e.g., mechanical tasks) while women are better at others (e.g., nurturing tasks) (Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996; Wagner & Berger, 1997; Williams & Best, 1990).

It is useful to compare the cultural beliefs that constitute a status characteristic to group stereotypes and to social identity based on group categorization. It is well known that mere categorization encourages beliefs that favor one's own category over another (Brewer & Brown, 1998; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992; Tajfel, 1978). Status beliefs, in contrast to in-group favoritism, are social representations that *consensually* evaluate one category as more status worthy and competent than another. This means that rather than simply preferring one's own group, even those disadvantaged by a status belief accept, as a social fact, that the other group is socially evaluated as better than their own (Jost & Burgess, 2000; Ridgeway, Boyle, Kuipers, & Robinson, 1998; Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000).

As a set of evaluative beliefs about social categories, status beliefs form an element of many widely shared group stereotypes. Importantly, the status element of group stereotypes, if present, is fairly similar across stereotypes that otherwise differ dramatically in content (Conway et al., 1996; Jost & Banaji, 1994). For instance, the stereotypes of gender, of race/ethnic categories, and of occupations differ enormously in specific content. But each of these stereotype sets has in common a status element that associates greater worthiness and competence with one category of the distinction (men, whites, professionals) than another (women, people of color, blue-collar workers). Because of this similar status element, expectation states theory argues that otherwise very different social distinctions can have comparable effects on the organization of interactional status hierarchies.

In discussing status beliefs, we should be clear that we are not endorsing the content of these beliefs. Nor are we suggesting that the self-fulfilling consequences of status beliefs are inevitable. Instead, it is our contention that reducing social inequalities in everyday contexts requires first acknowledging that status beliefs exist and then attempting to understand and expose the inequitable processes they prime. It is to that task that we now turn.

**STATUS CHARACTERISTICS THEORY.** Status characteristics theory is a formal subtheory of expectation states theory that seeks to explain *how* beliefs about status characteristics get translated into performance expectations, which in turn, shape the behaviors of individuals in a group (Berger et al., 1977; Webster & Foschi, 1988). Some refer to status characteristics theory as a *theory of status generalization*, which is the process of attributing specific abilities to individuals based on the status characteristics they possess.

At the heart of the theory is a set of five assumptions that link beliefs about status to behavior (Balkwell, 1991; Berger et al., 1977). According to the *salience* assumption, for any attribute to affect performance expectations, it must be socially significant for the actors in the setting. A status characteristic is salient if it either differentiates actors, or if actors believe that the characteristic is relevant to completing the group's task. Consequently, situational goals and the way actors compare one another on the characteristic impact how and if a status characteristic affects performance expectations. The same characteristic (e.g., having a college degree) can advantage an actor in one setting (with a less educated group), have no impact in another (in a group where all have university degrees), and disadvantage the actor in a third setting (with a more educated group). Importantly, this implies that no status characteristic advantages or disadvantages an actor in all settings. Whether the status beliefs culturally available to actors shape performance expectations in any actual setting depends on the structure of the local setting itself.

The second assumption is called the *burden of proof* assumption and concerns the way status characteristics that differentiate actors but are not initially relevant to the performance of the group's task impact the formation of performance expectations. Actors act as though the burden of proof rests with showing that a salient status characteristic should *not* be taken into account when forming performance expectations. All salient information is incorporated, unless something in the setting explicitly dissociates the status characteristic from the task. So, for example, if gender is salient in a setting it will differentiate the performance expectations for men and women even though gender itself is not relevant to the task at hand. It is through the burden of proof process that diffuse status characteristics such as gender, age, race/ethnicity, and social class have modest but pervasive effects on the status hierarchies that emerge across a large range of settings in which they have no obvious task relevance.

The *sequencing* assumption specifies what happens in the more complicated situation when actors either enter or leave an existing social setting. The main point is that no status or competence information is lost. The performance expectations that formed in one encounter carry over to the next encounter, even if the specific actors change. This assumption has been used to intervene in the status generalization process. For example, if a man observes a woman performing a task better than he does, this can positively impact the performance expectations he forms for women in future encounters (Pugh & Wahrman, 1983). The effect may wear off over time without a "booster" experience, however (Markovsky, Smith, & Berger, 1984).

The *aggregation* assumption explains how the status information associated with multiple characteristics is combined to form aggregated performance expectations. In actual groups, such as work groups or committees, people commonly differ from one another on several status characteristics at the same time, and often these multiple status characteristics generate inconsistent expectations for performance. For example, on a legal team, a member may be not only a Harvard trained lawyer, but also an African American woman. A distinctive advantage of status characteristics theory is it offers a procedure for making exact predictions for the order of performance expectations actors will construct from a given set of salient consistent and inconsistent status characteristics. To continue with our example, if

another member of the legal team is a white man who attended a lower status law school and a third member is an African American man who attended the same lower status law school, the theory provides us with a method for incorporating all the salient status information (i.e., that based on gender, race, and school attended) to determine the order of performance expectations the team members will likely construct.

A principle of subset combining is used to calculate aggregated performance expectations (Berger et al., 1977). The first step involves combining all of the positive status information about an actor into one subset and all negative information into another. In the second step, positive and negative subsets are combined to form an overall expectation.

Two principles describe how consistent and inconsistent status information is combined. The *attenuation effect* assumes that additional consistent information is subject to a declining marginal impact. If we already know that a person is a Harvard trained lawyer, learning that he is also a white man will have only a slight positive effect on raising performance expectations for him.

The *inconsistency effect* assumes that a single piece of positive status information in a field of negatively evaluated characteristics will be accorded more weight than it would have if it were the only piece of status information present. If we already know that a person is an African American woman, the fact that she is also a lawyer will carry more weight than it would have in the absence of information about her ethnicity and gender.

The theory argues that these processes occur mostly outside the realm of conscious thought. It does not contend that people literally weight and combine multiple bits of information before acting. Instead, people act *as if* they went through this chain of reasoning. *As if* approaches are quite common in mathematical models of information processing. This approach is appropriate here since status characteristics theory is ultimately a theory of behavior, not thought.

The emphasis on behavior, not thought, allows the theory to explain how status generalization processes can occur pervasively in a society and not just among individuals with strong conscious prejudices. For example in the case of gender, we know that men often speak more frequently than women in mixed-sex groups (Aries, 1996; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). Explanations that focus on individual attitudes might conclude that this pattern is due to the fact that some men are sexist or that some women fear success. By contrast, status characteristic theory claims that the fact that men are generally believed to be more competent than women makes gender a salient status characteristic in mixed-sex situations and, therefore, impacts the performance expectations formed by *all* men and women in the setting, including non-sexist men and highly confident women.

Finally, the fifth assumption describes how aggregated performance assumptions are translated into behavior. Relative aggregated performance expectations for any two actors are compared. The higher the expectations that an actor holds for herself compared to another actor, the greater the expectation advantage she will have over the second actor. The greater the performance expectation advantage of one actor over another, the more likely the first actor will be to receive opportunities to act, the more likely she will be to accept the opportunity to act, the more positive will be the evaluation of her action, and the more likely she will be to reject influence when the two actors disagree.

**GRAPH THEORETIC REPRESENTATION.** Status characteristics theory uses graph theory to represent its arguments in a way that allows precise predictions of behavior. These graphs are also useful for comparing one status situation to another. We provide a brief overview of this approach here. (For a more complete description see Berger et al., 1977.)

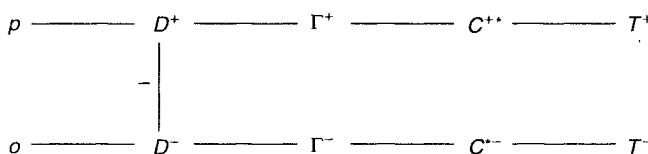


FIGURE 2-2. Graph theoretic representation of two actors differing on one diffuse status characteristic.

Signed graphs, like the one in Figure 2-2, link actors to expected task outcomes (positive or negative) through a series of paths. Since performance expectations are relative for each pair of actors in a setting, the structure represents the status situation for two actors, *p* (for self) and *o* (for other). Figure 2-2 depicts the relatively simple status situation where only one diffuse status characteristic, symbolized *D*, is salient in the setting. The positive sign attached to *D* for actor *p* indicates that *p* has the more valued state of the diffuse characteristic compared to actor *o*. For example, *p* might be a man interacting with a woman, *o*. A negative dimensionality line connects the two states of *D*. Since the actors possess oppositely valued states of *D*, the characteristic *D* is salient in the setting.

Proceeding to the right, the symbol  $\Gamma$  represents the expectation of an actor's general competence. Since actor *p* has the more valued state of *D*, the expectation for *p*'s general competence is high relative to actor *o*. Higher expectations for general competence lead to higher expectations for competence at the group's focal task. The symbol *C\** refers to the expectation for an actor's competence at a specific task. As the positive and negative signs attached to *C\** indicate, the expectation for competence at the focal task is higher for actor *p* compared to actor *o*. This path exists because, as stated in the burden of proof assumption, a salient status characteristic is believed to be relevant unless it is somehow explicitly dissociated from the task at hand. *T*<sup>+</sup> refers to a successful task outcome, and *T*<sup>-</sup> refers to an unsuccessful task outcome.

There are two paths linking actor *p* to expectations about his future task performance. The first is the path: *p*—*D*<sup>+</sup>— $\Gamma$ <sup>+</sup>—*C*<sup>+</sup>\*—*T*<sup>+</sup> and the second path is: *p*—*D*<sup>+</sup>—*D*<sup>-</sup>— $\Gamma$ <sup>-</sup>—*C*<sup>-</sup>\*—*T*<sup>-</sup>. Two important features of these paths are their lengths and their signs. Shorter paths have a greater impact on the magnitude of the expectation. Conceptually, as paths become longer it becomes harder for an actor to reason from the path to the task outcome. By simply counting the links between actor and task outcome, we determine that the first path diagramed above has a length of 4, compared to a length of 5 for the second path. The sign of the paths are determined by the method commonly used with signed graphs: We multiply the signs of the path by the sign of the task outcome to which the path leads. Doing so for the two paths above indicates that both are positive.

If we now apply the aggregation assumption, we first combine all like signed paths to compute the expectations for the positive and negative subset for actor *p* according to the formulas

$$e_p^+ = \{1 - [1 - f(i)] \cdots [1 - f(n)]\}; \tag{1a}$$

$$e_p^- = \{1 - [1 - f(i)] \cdots [1 - f(n)]\}; \tag{1b}$$

and then the aggregate expectation is represented by:

$$e_p = e_p^+ - e_p^-. \tag{2}$$

A similar calculation is made for actor *o*. Actor *p*'s expectation advantage over actor *o* is simply the difference between their individual expectations (*e*<sub>*p*</sub> - *e*<sub>*o*</sub>).

Values for  $f(i)$  have been estimated empirically (Berger et al., 1977). Fisek, Norman, and Nelson-Kilger, (1992) have also derived a functional form for  $f(i)$ , which fits existing data well:

$$f(i) = 1 - \exp(2.618^{2-i}). \quad (3)$$

In Figure 2-2, actor  $p$  has two positive paths, one of length 4 and one of length 5, and no negative paths. Therefore, equation (1a) becomes:

$$e_p = \{1 - [1 - f(4)][1 - f(5)] - 0\}. \quad (4a)$$

Likewise, actor  $o$  has two negative paths, one of length 4 and one of length 5 and no positive paths, making equation (1b)

$$e_o = 0 - \{1 - [1 - f(4)][1 - f(5)]\}. \quad (4b)$$

Using Fisek et al.'s derivation (equation [3] above),  $f(4) = 0.1358$  and  $f(5) = 0.0542$ . Substituting these values into equations (4a) and (4b),  $e_p = 0.1827$  and  $e_o = -0.1827$ , making the expectation advantage of actor  $p$  over actor  $o$  as 0.3653.

**EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE.** Status characteristics theory, and expectation states theory more generally, have been subjected to rigorous empirical evaluation, which has generated considerable evidence in support of the theory. Most of this evidence has come from social psychological experiments. Experiments afford the researcher the ability to isolate and manipulate variables of key theoretical interest, while controlling for potentially confounding factors. As such, experiments produce data that can more clearly establish the extent to which a change in an independent variable *caused* a change in the dependent variable, rather than being the result of some confounding or spurious factor.

The conceptual advances within status characteristics theory can largely be attributed to the reliance of researchers on a standardized experimental setting. This setting consists of a set of standardized procedures for introducing manipulations and operationalizations of key theoretical variables (e.g., status characteristics), assessing the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable, which is usually a measure of social influence, and employing manipulations to achieve the scope conditions under which the theory is argued to hold (Troyer, 2001). By holding these aspects of the setting constant across studies whenever possible, the results that are produced can be compared across studies, which allows researchers to build on the results of others with confidence.

The standardized setting begins by instructing research participants that they are participating in a study designed to evaluate a “newly discovered skill.” They are told that they will participate in a decision-making task with a “partner.”\* The task will evaluate their ability in regard to the skill. Several different “abilities” are commonly evaluated, including “contrast sensitivity ability,” “meaning insight ability,” and “spatial judgment ability.” Participants are told that these skills are unrelated to known abilities, such as mathematical competence or artistic ability. These instructions and the use of a task associated with a fictitious ability are

\*Quotes around phrases in this section indicate that the phrase represents an experimental deception. For example, the phrase “newly discovered skill” is communicated to the research participant. In actuality, the skills are usually fictitious. Likewise, “partners” are often computer programs, unbeknownst to the subject.



intended to keep participants from relying on prior beliefs about the skills when forming their expectations about competence at the task.

Before beginning the task, participants receive information about whether their partner is higher, lower, or equal status than they are. For example, if the subject is a college freshman, she might be told that her partner is a graduate student, a high school student, or another freshman. Importantly, research participants never see their partner since doing so could introduce other status information into the setting.

After introducing the manipulation of the key theoretical variable, which is the relative status of self and partner, participants learn that they will participate in several trials of the task with their partner. They are told that prior research establishes that groups have higher average scores on the task than individuals. For each trial, participants first make an individual choice about the best answer, then they are shown their partner's initial choice. Using this information, participants make a final choice about the best answer. They are told that their score will be based only on their final choices. This set of instructions is used to establish collective orientation by encouraging participants to consider the answers of their partner.

The feedback about the partner's initial choice is actually an experimental manipulation. Typically, on about 80% of the trials, the experimenter provides feedback that the partner has made a different initial choice than the participant. For these trials, the researcher is interested in whether the subject stays with his or her initial response or changes to match the partner's answer. When the subject makes a final choice that is the same as his or her initial choice, this is an operational measure of rejecting influence, one of the behaviors affected by having higher performance expectations relative to another actor in the setting. If the subject instead changes answers to agree with the partner, the subject is said to have been influenced by the partner, an event that the theory predicts is more likely when the partner is higher status relative to the participant. The dependent variable is the proportion of the trials that the subject stays with his or her initial response, abbreviated "P(s)" for "proportion of stay responses." The empirical prediction is that the higher the status of partner relative to self, the lower the P(s) value. In other words, higher status actors are more likely to reject influence.

Research relying on variants of this standardized setting has generated a substantial body of evidence that supports the theoretical account of the status generalization process. In a meta-analysis of studies involving a variety of diffuse (educational attainment, gender, military rank, race) and specific (pretest scores) status characteristics, Driskell and Mullen (1990) found support for the theory's central argument that external status affects power and prestige behaviors (influence, task contributions, etc.) indirectly through the performance expectations members form for one another rather than directly. Experiments also have demonstrated that, as the theory predicts, simple knowledge alone of an interactional partner's status characteristics relative to a participant's own is sufficient to affect willingness to accept influence from the partner in task settings (for gender, Pugh & Wahrman, 1983; race, Webster & Driskell, 1978; age, Freese & Cohen, 1973; educational attainment, Moore, 1968; specific abilities, Wagner & Berger, 1982; Webster, 1977). This occurs both when the status characteristic differentiates actors but is not initially task relevant (Moore, 1968; Pugh & Wahrman, 1983; Webster & Driskell, 1978) and when it is task relevant (Webster, 1977). Thus the impact of status characteristics on standing in interactional hierarchies does appear to be mediated by performance expectations and cannot be accounted for by assumptions about correlated differences in actors' behavioral assertiveness or nonverbal style.

Experiments also confirm the theory's prediction that task relevant status characteristics have a stronger impact on influence than do differentiating status characteristics that are not initially relevant to the task at hand (Wagner & Berger, 1982; Webster & Driskell, 1978). The

differential impact of status characteristics based on their relevance to the task leads to some distinctive predictions of the theory. For instance, the theory predicts that in a mixed sex group with a gender-neutral task, men will have an advantage over women in participation and influence. If the task is a masculine typed one, men's advantage over women in these behaviors will be even greater. But if the task is a feminine typed one, women will have a modest advantage over men in participation and influence. A large body of research supports this pattern of behavioral inequalities in mixed sex contexts (for reviews, see Ridgeway, 2001a; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999).

Experiments further confirm that people form influence hierarchies *as if* they were combining consistent and inconsistent status information, as predicted by the aggregation assumption (Webster & Driskell, 1978; Zelditch, Lauderdale, & Stublarec, 1980). There is evidence as well for the inconsistency effect. Recall that the addition of another status characteristic in a situation is argued to have a greater marginal impact on the status hierarchy if it is inconsistent, rather than consistent with other salient status information (Berger, Norman, Balkwell, & Smith, 1992; Norman, Smith, & Berger, 1988). Berger et al. (1992) compared the ability of subset combining to account for the interactional hierarchies participants in experiments formed from sets of consistent and inconsistent status information with three other information processing principles. They found that subset combining provided the best fit for the data. In a broader evaluation of status characteristic theory's ability to predict group status structures with its graph theoretic model of salience, relevance, and aggregation, Fisek et al. (1992) compared theoretical predictions to data from 24 experiments, reporting a good fit.

## Rewards and Performance Expectations

Recall that expectation states theory posits three processes by which differentiated performance expectations emerge (see Figure 2-1). We have discussed at length the impact of salient status characteristics. We now turn to the other processes, beginning with the impact of socially valued rewards.

The theory argues that when a socially valued reward is distributed unequally among members of a group, the actors will infer performance expectations from their reward differences (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Wagner, 1985). In this way, the differential distribution of rewards, like status characteristics, can actually create a status hierarchy among actors or modify positions in an existing hierarchy. In an experimental test of this argument, Cook (1975) showed that when a third party gave differential rewards to group members who had no other basis for evaluating their performances on a shared task, the members used the reward differences to infer ability differences. Harrod (1980) and Stewart and Moore (1992) showed that allocating differential pay levels to participants in an experiment created corresponding influence hierarchies among them during interaction. These results highlight how the power or good luck represented in the unequal possession of rewards generates status distinctions that are considered legitimate by those in the setting. By creating performance expectations, the unequal rewards appear to be "deserved" and, thus, justly bring respect, deference, and influence. Unequal rewards, according to the theory, combine with other factors, such as salient status characteristics, to determine the aggregated performance expectations that shape the behavioral status order in the setting.

In established hierarchies, actors' expectations for rewards in a task setting are interdependent with their expectations for performance and, consequently, with their positions in the status structure (Berger et al., 1985; Cook, 1975). It is a common observation in established hierarchies that valued rewards (pay, a corner office) tend to be distributed in accordance with

rank and help maintain the relative power of those ranks (Homans, 1961). Because of the interdependence of performance and reward expectations, the theory predicts that when a status characteristic is salient in a setting, those disadvantaged by it will implicitly expect lower levels of rewards for themselves than will those advantaged by the characteristic. Research on women's lower sense of entitlement to rewards compared to men supports this prediction (Bylsma & Major, 1992; Jost, 1997; Major, McFarlin, & Gagnon, 1984).

### **Behavioral Interchange Patterns and Performance Expectations**

In addition to status characteristics and rewards, a third factor that can have independent effects on performance expectations is the *behavioral interchange pattern* that develops among two or more actors (Fisek, Berger, & Norman, 1991; Skvoretz & Fararo, 1996). Such a pattern occurs between two or more actors when one engages in assertive, higher status behaviors (e.g., initiating speech, making a task suggestion, resisting change in the face of disagreement) that are responded to with deferential, lower status behaviors by the other actor(s) (e.g., hesitating to speak, positively evaluating the other's suggestion, changing to agree with the other). The more frequently these types of patterns are repeated between the actors, the more likely the actors are to view the behavioral patterns as cultural *status typifications*, which are shared beliefs about typical high-status–low-status, “leader–follower” behaviors. Following the common assumption that people speak up more confidently about things at which they are more expert, salient status typifications induce actors to assume that the more assertive actor is more competent at the task than the more deferential actor, creating differential performance expectations for them. In support of this argument, a variety of assertive verbal and nonverbal cues including taking a seat at the head of the table, having an upright, relaxed posture, speaking up without hesitation in a firm, confident tone, and maintaining more eye contact while speaking than listening have been shown in the United States to make an actor's ideas “sound better” and increase influence (for reviews see Dovidio & Ellyson 1985; Ridgeway, 1987; Ridgeway, Berger, & Smith, 1985).

Behavior interchange patterns shape performance expectations most powerfully among those actors in a group who are equals in both their external status characteristics and their reward levels, such as between two women in a mixed sex group (Fisek et al., 1991). Behavioral interchange patterns are the means by which expectation states theory accounts for the development of status structures in homogeneous groups like those studied by Bales (1950, 1970).

When actors differ in status characteristics, the differentiated performance expectations created by the status characteristics shape the actors' verbal and nonverbal assertiveness. Consequently, differences in status characteristics shape behavioral interchange patterns, as several studies have shown (Dovidio, Brown, Heltman, Ellyson, & Keating, 1988; Ridgeway et al., 1985; Smith-Lovin & Brody, 1989). In a clear demonstration of expectation states theory's predictions in this regard, Dovidio et al. (1988) showed that when mixed sex dyads shifted from a gender neutral task, where the man had a status advantage, to a feminine typed task, where the woman had a status advantage, the actors' participation rates and assertive nonverbal behaviors reversed from a pattern favoring the man to one favoring the woman. Thus, between actors who already differ on status characteristics, behavior interchange patterns often add little new information to the existing order of performance expectations.

Fisek et al. (1991) used the graph-theoretical methods described earlier to develop a model of how behavior interchange patterns combine with status characteristics and rewards to create an aggregated order of performance expectations for actors in the setting, which impacts the status structure of the group. They evaluated this model's ability to account for participation

rates in unconstrained, face-to-face interaction by fitting it to several existing data sets including Bales' (1970) original data from 208 groups. The results supported the model. Skvoretz and Fararo (1996) updated the model to provide more detailed predictions about the dynamic evolution of status structures from combinations of status characteristics and behavioral interchange patterns. They similarly report a good fit of the model with participation data from six person groups that systematically varied in composition from all male to all female.

To this point, we have described the core ideas, assumptions, and scope conditions that constitute expectation states theory, experimental methods used to test it, and some of the key evidence that supports it. We now turn to some of the ways that the theory has been expanded.

## THEORETICAL ADVANCES

Instead of seeing individuals as following rigid social scripts that dictate status relations, expectation states theory envisions individuals as possessing a basic vocabulary of cultural beliefs about the socially significant categories by which persons, settings, and events can be classified. When some of this cultural information is made salient by the particularities of a given situation, the theory assumes that individuals also possess shared rules for combining this information to generate a course of action toward self and others that is predictable, but nevertheless flexibly adjusted to the specifics of the situation at hand (Berger, Wagner, & Zelditch, 1992; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1994). As a result, people can respond even to unusual situations in a way that makes social sense to those present. Unfortunately, these socially sensible responses also reproduce, often inadvertently, society's meaningful axes of social inequality within the relationships among individuals.

This general metatheoretical image of how the cultural vocabulary of status beliefs shapes individual behavior and evaluations has guided recent advances in expectation states theory. Each of these advances seeks to account for the relationships between status beliefs and situational behavior across a wider range of contexts, social outcomes, and processes than that addressed by the original, core theory. In the following sections we describe some of these advances. Some retain the theory's focus on group status structures, but expand the aspects of these structures that the theory explains. For instance, double standards theory examines how status beliefs affect the inference of an actor's ability from performance. The theory of second order expectations addresses the impact on status relations of *other* people's situational expectations for an actor, rather than his or her own expectations. The theory of legitimation examines the impact of status beliefs on the authority of group leaders and the stability of status structures.

Other advances in expectation states theory reach beyond the focus on group status structures to examine a broader framework of status processes. Status construction theory asks how interactional encounters between people who differ on a socially recognized characteristic might create widely shared status beliefs about that characteristic. Other advances expand the scope conditions of expectation states theory to explain the impact of status beliefs on individual judgments and behavior on socially important tasks that are performed individually, rather than in groups, such as mental ability testing. We first review the theories that retain a focus on status structures and then discuss those that move beyond this focus.

### Double Standards Theory

In the book, *Reflections of an affirmative action baby*, Carter (1993) describes one hurdle that African Americans face when they attempt to establish their competence in school or at

work: "Our parents' advice was true: We really do have to work twice as hard [as whites] to be considered half as good" (p. 58). Carter describes a common observation by members of low status groups: Due to status beliefs that disadvantage them, they must actually perform at *higher* levels than members of high status groups to be judged as *equally* competent. More generally, the level of performance required for inferring ability varies with the status characteristics individuals possess.

In an extension of expectation states theory, Foschi (1989, 2000) incorporates insights from the psychological literature on attribution to account for these kinds of observations. She introduces "standards" as the mechanism by which actors attribute performance to ability. Foschi regards standards as a function of salient diffuse status characteristics that create differential performance expectations for actors. According to double standards theory, these differential performance expectations activate the use of different standards for attributing ability. When lower status individuals perform well at the group's task, their performances are critically scrutinized since a good performance is inconsistent with what was expected based on their position in the group's status hierarchy. When higher status individuals perform equally as well, their performances are consistent with status-based expectations and are, therefore, less scrutinized. Thus, those possessing the more valued state of a status characteristic are judged by a more lenient standard than are those with the more devalued state. As a result, equal task performances are more likely to be judged as indicative of ability when performed by a higher status member of the group.

The evidence supporting double standards theory ranges from accounts and descriptions, to results from surveys and experiments (for a review see Foschi, 2000). For example, in one experiment subjects in mixed sex dyads were informed that the group's task was one on which men generally perform better (Foschi, 1996). After completing this task, subjects were told that they scored in the mid range and either slightly higher or slightly lower than their opposite-sex partners. Subjects were then asked to estimate what percentage of questions the higher performing subject would need to have answered correctly in order to determine that s/he possessed task ability. As predicted, subjects set a significantly higher standard for ability when the better performer was a woman rather than a man. Biernat and Kobrynowicz (1997) report similar results for race as well as gender.

As with expectation states theory more generally, the predictions of double standards theory are dependent on features of the setting. For example, when gender is salient in the setting, the theory predicts that men will be held to a more lenient standard than women *either* when men are thought to be better at the task at hand or, according to the burden of proof assumption, when gender differentiates people in a setting but is not specifically linked to the task. If the setting is instead one where women are thought to be better at the task, the theory predicts that women would be judged by a more lenient ability standard.

Double standard theory shows that in addition to being given fewer opportunities to participate initially in the group, when lower status members do participate, their performances are evaluated by a stricter standard. This makes it difficult for competent performances by lower status members to be noticed as such, which further reduces their ability to achieve high status in the group.

## Second Order Expectations

Status hierarchies have been shown to emerge in collectively oriented task groups because actors in the group develop differentiated performance expectations for themselves and their group mates. The performance expectations described in expectation states theory are *first*

*order expectations*: they are the *personal* expectations an actor, *p*, holds for self and other, *o*. However, it is likely that the expectations actor *p* believes are held by *others* in the group also influence the emerging status structure. This idea has its roots in the long standing insight from social psychology that our perceptions of others' expectations influence our sense of self and our behavior in interaction (Cooley, 1902; Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934). Recent theoretical elaborations in expectation states theory have sought to explain how these beliefs about others' expectations—called *second order expectations*—influence the power and prestige order of groups (Moore, 1985; Troyer & Younts, 1997; Webster & Whitmeyer, 1999).

Second order expectations refer, more specifically, to what an actor, *p*, believes that another in the situation, *o*, thinks about *p*'s and *o*'s relative abilities (Moore, 1985; Webster & Whitmeyer, 1999). Since people generally overestimate the extent to which others see things as they do (Marks & Miller, 1987), actors usually presume their own self–other expectations are shared by those in the situation and act on them accordingly (Troyer & Younts, 1997; Zelditch & Floyd, 1998). In this situation, second order expectations provide no new information. However, when second order expectations are communicated and they either conflict with first order expectations or are expressed when an actor has no self–other (first order) expectations, they will likely influence the first order expectations of actors in the setting and, consequently, the status structure of the group.

Consistent with these ideas Moore (1985) found that when participants in an experiment with no information about their competence compared to a partner heard their partner's views about their relative competence levels, these second order expectations shaped the first order expectations participants formed for themselves compared to the partner. Troyer and Younts (1997) showed that when group members receive second order expectations that conflict with their own first order expectations, they combine the information in the two sets of expectations to create aggregate, revised performance expectations that become the basis for their interaction in the group. They also found that in some instances, second order expectations actually had *more* influence than first order expectations in guiding interaction.

Drawing on previous research, Webster and Whitmeyer (1999) propose that the impact of another's second order expectations on *p*'s own expectations is a function of the performance expectations *p* holds for that other. Second order expectations communicated by an actor held in high regard will have a stronger impact than will expectations imputed by a less well regarded actor. Webster and Whitmeyer (1999) update expectation states theory's graph-theoretic model to show how second order expectations combine with all other salient status information to create the aggregate performance expectations upon which group members enact their status structure.

While social psychologists have long believed that our perceptions of others' expectations are important in making sense of self and guiding interaction, the incorporation of this insight into expectation states theory makes it possible to generate precise predictions about the relative impact of first and second order expectations in various settings. Consequently, this body of theoretical and empirical work not only represents an important elaboration of expectation states theory, but it also provides a systematic and empirically supported account of one of the key insights of social psychology.

## Legitimacy

Empirical evaluations of expectation states theory have clearly demonstrated that individuals who possess a diffuse status characteristic that is devalued in society experience interactional

disadvantages if the characteristic is salient in the setting. Women, people of color, or others with status disadvantages in society do nevertheless achieve high-ranking positions in status structures by acquiring advantaging status characteristics such as education and by their own successful task behaviors and performances in the context. Even when they gain a position of influence in the group, however, such people often encounter resistance from others when they attempt to go beyond persuasion to wield directive power over lower ranking members. An assistant professor in his late twenties, for instance, may encounter problems when he attempts to act authoritatively in a classroom filled with older adults. This resistance phenomenon has been most clearly documented in regard to gender. A wide variety of studies have shown that women leaders in mixed sex contexts in business and elsewhere are more likely than similar men to face resistive “backlash” and dislike when they assert directive authority over subordinates (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rudman & Glick, 2001).

Expectation states theory conceptualizes the resistance faced by leaders who come from status disadvantaged groups as a problem in the *legitimation* of a status structure that puts these people ahead of those from more status advantaged groups (Berger, Ridgeway, Fisek, & Norman, 1998; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). As Weber ([1918] 1968) observed, beyond persuasion and force, it is legitimacy that allows high-ranking members (i.e., leaders) of social hierarchies to issue directive commands and receive compliance. Since legitimacy underpins authority, it is important to the stability of social hierarchies of any kind including interpersonal status structures (Walker & Zelditch, 1993).

Expectation states theory argues that the status beliefs associated with diffuse status characteristics, in addition to affecting performance expectations, also provide outside cultural support for status hierarchies in which leaders are those with diffuse status advantages. This outside cultural support helps make the hierarchy seem “right” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). More meritocratic leaders, however, who achieve their positions by demonstrating their skills in the situation despite low diffuse status do not have such added cultural support for their leadership to draw on. As a result, there is a lower likelihood that others in the situation will treat such meritocratic leaders as legitimate by willingly complying with their directive orders.

Specifically, the theory argues that when diffuse status characteristics are salient in a group context, the associated status beliefs implicitly cause members to expect that those advantaged by the diffuse characteristics will be more likely to occupy valued status positions in the group. When those advantaged by diffuse status do in fact become the high-ranking members, because members expected this to happen, they have a tendency to react as if this is what *should* have happened by treating the high-ranking members with honorific deference. If no one in the group challenges such honorific deference, others tend to assume it is appropriate and the hierarchy becomes implicitly legitimate so that compliance with the leader is expected (Berger et al., 1998; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986).

The more *comprehensive* a status structure is, in terms of the number of diffuse status characteristics that are salient, and the more *consistent* these status characteristics are with one another, the greater the likelihood that group members will legitimate a status structure that corresponds with their expectations for who should occupy high status positions (see Berger et al., 1998, for a graph-theoretic statement of the legitimation theory). In an experimental test of these ideas, Ridgeway, Johnson, and Diekema (1994) created status structures in which the high-ranking member was either advantaged by two diffuse status characteristics (age and education) or known to be highly skilled at the task (a specific status characteristic) but disadvantaged by education (a diffuse characteristic). Both these types of leaders were initially equally influential in their groups. Yet when the leaders attempted to go beyond

persuasion to exercise dominant, directive power, group members, as the theory predicts, were significantly more likely to comply with status advantaged leader and to resist the meritocratic leader. Thus, group members were more likely to treat the diffuse status advantaged leaders as legitimate.

## Status Construction Theory

Distinguishing characteristics such as occupation or race become status characteristics in a society when widely shared status beliefs develop that associate greater status worthiness and competence with those in one category of the characteristic than in another category. One of the ways that expectation states theory has broadened its focus in recent years has been to ask how such status beliefs develop.

As we have seen, status beliefs play an essential role in connecting the status organization of society as a whole with the status experiences of individuals. Yet, sociology has little systematic knowledge about how these beliefs develop, are maintained, or change. Weber ([1921] 1946) suggested many years ago that social groups commonly acquire an economic advantage first before acquiring high status in society. Yet even this observation fails to explain how a purely economic advantage is transformed into shared cultural beliefs about social status.

There are probably many ways that widely shared status beliefs form in societies. Status construction theory, however, asks whether the insights of expectation states theory can be used to explain at least some of these processes (Ridgeway, 1991, 2001b). Since expectation states theory has shown that status beliefs are at play in goal-oriented encounters among people, status construction theory asks if these same encounters might be a potent forum for the development and spread of new status beliefs or the maintenance or change of existing status beliefs.

Status construction theory begins with a simple suggestion. When people who differ on a socially recognized characteristic interact in regard to a shared goal, a status hierarchy will emerge among them as it does in almost all goal-oriented encounters. There is a chance, however, that the participants will associate the relative status each is accorded in this hierarchy with the characteristic that differentiates them, and form a fledgling status belief about the characteristic.

Whether these fledgling status beliefs are supported in future encounters and become stable status beliefs depends on the nature of the beliefs other people in other encounters are also forming about the same characteristic. If there is some factor that gives people in one category of the characteristic (call them *As*) a systematic advantage in gaining influence and esteem in encounters with people in another category of the characteristic (call them *Bs*), then the majority of encounters between *As* and *Bs* will induce their participants to form status beliefs that *As* are more worthy and competent than *Bs*. Since more people develop status beliefs favoring *As* rather than *Bs* under such circumstances, people who hold beliefs favoring *As* are more likely to have their beliefs supported in future encounters than are those who hold contrary beliefs. Also, when people who form a status belief in one encounter act on it in a subsequent encounter between *As* and *Bs*, there is a chance that they will “teach” their status belief to the others present by treating those others either deferentially or assertively according to the belief.

In this way, the initial small advantage for status beliefs favoring *As* rather than *Bs* is likely to spread and grow among people in the society. Under many circumstances, argues



status construction theory, the eventual result will be widely shared status beliefs that *As* are more worthy and competent than *Bs*. Computer simulations of this process by which status beliefs spread through society suggest that, if people do form beliefs in encounters as the theory argues, then widely shared status beliefs would indeed be a logical result under many societal conditions (Ridgeway & Balkwell, 1997).

One factor that could give *As* an advantage in gaining influence and esteem in encounters with *Bs* is an economic advantage, as Weber suggested. As we have seen, differences in socially valued rewards such as pay or wealth tend to create corresponding differences in performance expectations that, in turn, create differences in influence and esteem in goal-oriented encounters. Therefore, if more *As* become economically advantaged in society than *Bs*, *As* will have a systematic advantage in gaining influence and esteem in the majority of encounters between *As* and *Bs*. As a result, widely shared status beliefs favoring *As* over *Bs* are likely to develop in the society. In this way, an economic advantage is transformed into cultural beliefs about the status of social groups.

To test whether people form status beliefs in this way, Ridgeway and colleagues (1998) told participants in an experiment that their partners differed from them in "personal response style." They were also told that they would be paid either more or less than their partners. While working on a decision task with their partners, influence hierarchies developed that corresponded to pay differences. After two such experiences, participants formed beliefs that "most people" see the typical person in the better paid response style group as more respected, more competent, more leader-like, higher status, but not as likeable as the typical person from the less well paid response style group. In other words, participants formed status beliefs favoring the economically advantaged response style group. Importantly, these status beliefs were consensual in that people from the less well paid group also agreed that most people see those from the better paid group as more respected and competent than those from their own group.

Economic advantages are one factor that can bias the development of status hierarchies between people who differ on a socially significant characteristic and cause status beliefs to form about the characteristic. Other factors, such as control of technology or valuable information (e.g., computer literacy), could have this effect as well, as long as these factors systematically bias the development of status hierarchies among people who differ on a characteristic. Webster and Hysom (1998), for instance, show how society's moral evaluations of homosexuality systematically bias the development of influence hierarchies between homosexuals and heterosexuals and foster status beliefs that disadvantage homosexuals in perceptions of worthiness and competence.

For widely shared status beliefs to develop in society, however, it is important not only that people form beliefs from their encounters, but also that they "teach" the beliefs to others by treating those others according to the beliefs in subsequent encounters. To examine this, participants in another experiment were again told that they differed from their partners in response style (Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000). While working on a task, the partners, who were confederates, treated the participants as if they held status beliefs about the difference by acting deferentially or assertively, causing influence hierarchies to form. After two such experiences, participants developed status beliefs about the response style groups that corresponded to their partner's treatment of them, confirming that status beliefs can be spread by acting on those beliefs. An additional experiment showed that third party participants who witnessed someone different from them defer to or assert influence over someone similar to them also acquired corresponding status beliefs, suggesting that encounters spread status beliefs widely (Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000).

Status construction theory and the evidence that supports it suggest that goal-oriented encounters between people who differ on socially significant characteristics are not only contexts where existing status beliefs are enacted, but also contexts where new status beliefs, perhaps about the digital divide, for instance, can take root and spread and existing status beliefs can be refreshed or, potentially, undermined.

### Expanding the Scope Conditions

A growing body of empirical evidence suggests that status generalization processes occur in a broader range of settings than those defined by the scope conditions of expectation states theory (i.e., collectively oriented task groups). For instance, the settings where individuals take socially important mental ability tests, such as intelligence tests, SATs, and GREs, are highly task oriented but clearly lack collective orientation. Yet, Lovaglia and colleagues (Lovaglia, Lucas, Houser, Thye, & Markovsky, 1998) demonstrate that individuals randomly assigned to low status conditions in experiments scored lower on a test of mental ability than those assigned to high status conditions. They contend that any attempt to measure mental ability needs to account for the way that salient status processes actually interfere with test taking performance.

Similarly, psychologist Steele (1997) theorizes that individuals experience a self-evaluative threat in the presence of salient negative stereotypes about their group's intellectual ability. Through arousal, anxiety, and task-irrelevant processing, the threat of social devaluation interferes with intellectual functioning, leading to decreased test performance (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Steele shows, for example, that when a difficult, standardized verbal exam is described as diagnostic of ability, African American students perform more poorly than white students. However, when the same test is not characterized as ability-diagnostic, African American and white students perform at the same level.

Foschi and colleagues (Foschi, Lai, & Sigerson, 1994) also present evidence that expectation states theory may hold under a broader set of scope conditions. They consider a situation in which either male or female undergraduates act as evaluators who individually rate fictitious male and female job candidates for a summer internship job in engineering. When the male candidate was the slightly better candidate, the researchers found that male (although not female) evaluators rated him as more competent and chose him more often for the position than they did the female candidate when she had the slightly better record. These results suggest that, at least for male subjects, gender functioned as a diffuse status characteristic in this setting even though the setting did not involve a collectively oriented task group.

Correll (2001a), likewise, argues that salient beliefs about gender impact the standard individuals use to evaluate their own task ability in noncollective settings. She hypothesizes that cultural beliefs that men have more mathematical (but not verbal) ability, prime a status generalization process that causes men to use a more lenient standard than women to judge their own mathematical competence. She finds that, controlling for grades and test scores in mathematics, male high school students rate their own mathematical ability (but not verbal ability) higher than female students do. These results, like those of Foschi et al. (1994), imply that double standards theory, which is an extension of expectation states theory, holds in some noncollective settings.

What is the theoretical rationale for why status generalization would occur in these socially important, highly task oriented, but not collectively oriented settings? Recall that the

reason why the theory has limited its scope to collectively oriented task groups is that in these groups individuals find it necessary to make *relative* anticipations of the likely task competence of group members. Importantly, the logic of the theory does not specifically require collective orientation as much as it requires individuals to consider themselves relative to another. Erickson (1998) has argued that whenever situational demands pressure actors to assess their task competence *relative* to others on a socially valid task, status processes should occur. While collectively oriented task groups readily create this pressure, settings where individuals engage in socially significant evaluative tasks, even if individually, also represent a setting where individuals are pressured to make relative assessments of their expected competence. Why is this so?

Individual evaluative tasks can provide the pressure to make relative assessments of competence in situations where actors know they will receive a socially important and socially valid performance evaluation. The use of evaluative tasks to rank individuals' performances is socially valid in the Weberian sense; that is, individuals expect *others* to accept the ranking as legitimate and, consequently, orient their behavior toward this expectation (see Weber [1918] 1968, pp. 31–33). The anticipation of this ranking creates a pressure for actors to assess their task competence relative to others who they imagine are also being or have been evaluated. This coordination of rank position requires evaluating oneself in relation to the social environment. However, the standards for what constitutes a competent performance are not usually clearly defined beforehand, and others' precise scores are rarely known. In this uncertain environment, salient status characteristics are available to influence performance expectations, as they do in collective task situations. Through the process of status generalization, individuals develop performance expectations for themselves that are consistent with their state on the salient status characteristic (Correll, 2001b; Erickson, 1998).

Assuming that a status characteristic is indeed salient in an individual evaluative setting, three theoretical predictions are implied. First, those with the more devalued state of the characteristic will perform less well on the task compared to those with the more valued state of the characteristic (cf. Lovaglia et al., 1998; Steele, 1997). Second, controlling for actual task performance, those with the more devalued state will evaluate their *own* task performance as less indicative of ability compared with the evaluations of those with the more valued state. Finally, when *others* evaluate the ability of high and low status actors, the same performance will be judged as more indicative of ability for high status actors (cf. Foschi et al., 1994).

In an experiment designed to meet Erickson's (1998) revised scope conditions and test the second of these predictions, Correll (2001b) compared how male and female subjects rated their competence at a "newly discovered ability" after taking a test purportedly designed to measure this ability. To make the test socially valid, participants were informed that the test was being considered for use in screening applicants for graduate school admissions. To make gender salient and task relevant, subjects in half of the conditions were told that men usually score higher on tests of the ability. To specifically disassociate gender from the task in the other conditions, subjects there were told that there is no gender difference in test scores. All subjects received the same slightly above average scores for their performance. In the first condition, where subjects had been told that males score higher on tests like the one they had just taken, male subjects rated their task ability significantly higher than female subjects did even though all subjects had received identical scores. In the gender irrelevant condition, no gender difference was found in how subjects rated their task ability. Since this experiment was specifically designed to meet the expanded scope conditions laid out by Erickson (1998), it provides the most convincing evidence to date that status processes occur in individual evaluative settings, settings that lack collective orientation.

Extending the scope conditions to include individual evaluative settings is an important advancement since this setting is both very common and highly consequential in its impact on educational and occupational attainment. It includes most standardized test settings, including those that are used to determine college, graduate school, and professional school admissions and those used for certification in a wide range of professional occupations. Expectation states theory has generated empirically supported propositions about how pre-existing inequalities are reproduced in collectively oriented task groups. This newer work in individual evaluative settings indicates that the impact of status processes on the reproduction of inequality is even more far reaching.

## CONCLUSION

Expectation states theory is, in many ways, a textbook example of a theoretical research program. It is deductive, programmatic, formalized mathematically, cumulative, precise, and predictive; and its propositions have been subjected to rigorous evaluation. More importantly, however, it is a theory that illuminates core issues in social psychology and sociology more broadly. It is fundamentally a “macro–micro–macro” explanation about one way that categorical inequality is reproduced in society. Cultural beliefs about social categories at the macro level impact behavior and evaluation at the individual level, which acts to reproduce status structures that are consistent with pre-existing macro-level beliefs. Status structures in groups can be thought of as the building blocks of more macro-level structural inequalities in society. For example, to the extent that status processes make it less likely for women in work groups to emerge or be accepted as leaders, in the aggregate we will observe that more men than women hold leadership positions in organizations, a stratification pattern that is reproduced at least partially by the way macro-level beliefs impact individual behaviors and evaluations.

By focusing on the role of differentiated performance expectations, expectation states theory provides a unifying explanation for how reward structures, behavioral patterns, and macro-level beliefs about a diverse array of social categories produce similar effects on the organization of interactional status hierarchies, the building blocks of societal stratification. It helps us understand how inequitable structures emerge in these smaller structures, which increases our understanding of the emergence and reproduction of inequality in society more generally.

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