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Creating and Spreading Status Beliefs[1]

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In this article, two experiments support status construction theory's claim that interaction spreads status beliefs through behavior, creating a diffusion process that makes widely shared beliefs possible. The first demonstrates that people who hold a status belief can "teach" it by treating the other in accord with the belief. The second shows that third-party participants who witness such behavioral treatments also acquire the status belief. The first experiment also verifies a general mechanism by which interaction creates status beliefs: nominally different participants developed shared status beliefs about the difference from the repeated enactment of influence hierarchies corresponding to the difference. This general mechanism suggests that any structural condition that gives one group a systematic advantage in gaining influence over another group in intergroup encounters will foster the development of widely shared status beliefs favoring the advantaged group.

INTRODUCTION

From the teenager seeking respect on the streets to the executive jockeying for status among the board members, it is impressive how concerned people are with relations of social evaluation, esteem, and influence. As Weber (1968) observed, status is a fundamental dimension of social inequality in human societies, along with social power and material wealth. As a type of inequality, status has a dual aspect. On the one hand, it can be thought of as an evaluative relationship between social groups within society, such as the status differences often observed between occupations, between racial or ethnic groups, or between the sexes (Weber 1968). On the other hand, status inequality can also be understood as a hierarchical relationship among individuals that is enacted through differences in def-

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erence and influence (Fişek, Berger, and Norman 1991; Goffman 1970; Skvoretz and Fararo 1996).

Status inequalities between groups and between individuals are linked through a society's *status beliefs*. Status beliefs are widely shared cultural beliefs that people who belong to one social group are more esteemed and competent than those who belong to another social group (Berger, Norman, Fişek, and Zelditch 1977; Webster and Foschi 1988). Status beliefs construct and justify social inequality between the categories of people created by a social distinction such as occupation, education, age, race/ethnicity, or gender by asserting differences between the categories in social worth and competence. In so doing, status beliefs affirm the significance of the categorical distinction for social relations in a society. Decades of research have demonstrated that status relations among individuals are largely organized by the way in which the individuals' distinguishing characteristics evoke cultural status beliefs about the social categories to which they belong. (See Webster and Foschi [1988] for a review and see Lovaglia et al. [1998] and Troyer and Younts [1997] for recent developments.) Status beliefs tell people who they are dealing with. As a result, engineers tend to become more influential on juries than factory assemblers, even though the jury case may have nothing to do with either occupation.

Given the importance of status beliefs for social inequality, it is surprising that we know so little about how such beliefs emerge and become widely shared in society or what social processes maintain or change them. Few sociologists would dispute Weber's (1968) observation that the acquisition of superior material resources by one group compared to another is a common precondition to the development of cultural status beliefs that favor the resource-advantaged group. This observed association, however, does not explicate the social processes that transform a structural inequality in the distribution of resources into cultural beliefs that favor members of one group over the other, even when those members do not personally possess superior resources. It also does not explain how people from the disadvantaged group are constrained to share status beliefs that cast their own group as less esteemed and competent than another group.

It is well known that the creation of any "mere difference" between people is enough to create in-group favoritism, where those from each category assume that their own group is "better" and act to favor their own group over the other (Brewer and Kramer 1985; Messick and Mackie 1989; Dovidio and Gaertner 1993; Turner 1987). With the formation of status beliefs, however, both groups come to agree, as a matter of social reality, that one group is socially evaluated as better than the other. As this suggests, a degree of consensuality, or at least the appearance of consensuality, is essential for status beliefs to form and carry force in

social relations. Thinking that *most people* hold a status belief gives it an apparent social reality that even those disadvantaged by it feel they must concede and deal with whether or not they personally endorse it. Thus, the concession of status beliefs by those in the disadvantaged group distinguishes status beliefs from in-group bias.

Status construction theory is a recent effort to specify a systematic set of social processes that are sufficient to create widely shared status beliefs about a recognized categorical difference among people in a society (Ridgeway 1991, 1997, 2000; Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997; Webster and Hysom 1998). The processes described by the theory are not likely to be the only way status beliefs arise. However, if these processes can be shown to be *sufficient* to produce status beliefs, and if they are plausibly present in society in regard to a socially salient distinction such as gender or race, then they are likely to be important for maintaining or changing status beliefs about that distinction. These processes can contribute to or undermine current status beliefs about a social distinction whether or not they played a role in the actual historical origin of those beliefs.

Status construction theory argues that interaction among individuals is not only an arena in which shared status beliefs are at play, but also a potent forum for the creation, spread, maintenance, or change of status beliefs. The theory argues that when people on opposite sides of a social difference boundary regularly interact in regard to shared goals, the terms on which they interact, which will be shaped by structural conditions such as resource differences, affect the hierarchies of influence and esteem that emerge in the encounters. The repeated association between social difference categories and influence and esteem in encounters induces participants to form shared status beliefs about the social difference. People carry these status beliefs to subsequent encounters with individuals from the other category and, by acting on the beliefs, induce some of those others to take on the status beliefs as well. This creates a diffusion process that, under some structural conditions, will create roughly consensual (i.e., widely shared) status beliefs (Ridgeway 1991; Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997). In effect, status construction theory argues that interactional contexts "bootstrap" the formation of consensual status beliefs about social categories by creating powerful local realities for people that embody for them and appear to presume a particular status belief before the belief is actually accepted on a wider scale.

Simulations of the processes described by status construction theory indicate that, if interaction does indeed induce people to form and spread status beliefs as theorized, widely shared status beliefs would be a logical result under many structural conditions (Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997). Clearly, however, the theory depends on the capacity of interactional encounters to actually create and spread status beliefs. An initial test has

demonstrated that certain types of encounters between people from different social categories do indeed cause them to form status beliefs about their difference, as theorized (Ridgeway, Boyle, Kuipers, and Robinson 1998). In addition, an application of the theory to an ongoing social problem suggests its potential utility. The application shows that the power of interaction to continually recreate and maintain status beliefs, if verified, could help explain the persistence of gender inequality over major transformations in the socioeconomic organization of society (Ridgeway 1997).

Yet important questions remain about the status construction argument. The theory depends heavily on the power of encounters not only to create status beliefs, but to spread them more widely in the population. Furthermore, in an extension of the theory, Webster and Hysom (1998) point out that the theory actually predicts a more general mechanism by which interactional contexts create status beliefs than that examined by Ridgeway et al. (1998). If this more general mechanism can be empirically documented, the theory can be generalized to explain the development of status beliefs in a much wider set of social circumstances.

In this article, we present two experiments that provide critical tests of status construction theory. These experiments address the theorized capacity of interaction to spread status beliefs to others. In so doing, they test the plausibility of the theory's claim to describe processes that are sufficient to produce widely shared status beliefs. If people who have acquired status beliefs in interactional encounters cannot "teach" them to others by treating the others in accord with the beliefs, then the processes described by the theory cannot create consensual beliefs that play a role in the structure of inequality for the society as a whole. The first experiment also tests Webster and Hysom's arguments about a general mechanism by which interaction creates status beliefs.

We first describe status construction theory, the situations in which it predicts the formation of status beliefs, the experimental tests and simulations that have addressed it, and the questions that remain unanswered. Then we turn to Webster and Hysom's (1998) predictions about a more general mechanism by which interaction creates status beliefs. With these tools in hand, we derive our hypotheses and turn to the experiments.

STATUS CONSTRUCTION THEORY

As initially formulated, status construction theory begins with Weber's (1968) precondition for the development of status beliefs: one group acquires superior material resources compared to another. The theory

tries to specify the processes through which such a precondition could create and maintain widely shared status beliefs that favor the resource-advantaged group (Ridgeway 1991).

Weber's precondition can be conceptualized as the development of a correlation between an inequality in exchangeable material resources and a socially recognized, but as yet unordered (i.e., nominal), distinction among the population. Say 60% of As become resource rich while only 40% of Bs are similarly rich. The theory assumes that the nominal distinction (the A/B distinction) is a relatively salient distinguishing social attribute in that people in the culture easily perceive differences on it but it has not yet acquired a status evaluation that is widely shared in the population. Since the more distinctive a social attribute is, the more susceptible it is to acquire status value, the theory assumes that the nominal distinction at stake here is not systematically correlated with distinguishing attributes (other than resources) that are more salient than itself.

To explain how a structural condition, the correlation between resources and the A/B distinction, creates widely shared status beliefs favoring As, the theory offers an account that proceeds at two levels. At the macrolevel, the theory describes how the correlation shapes who encounters whom and, consequently, what distribution of encounters between differing types of people will result in society. At the microlevel, the theory examines the different types of encounters created by the correlation and makes predictions about the likelihood that they will induce their participants to form status beliefs about the A/B distinction. The two levels of arguments come together in the consideration of whether status beliefs acquired in local encounters have the potential to spread widely in society or whether they are likely to dissipate in a cacophony of conflicting local beliefs.

The theory draws on Blau's (1977, 1994; Blau and Schwarz 1984) structural theory of association to specify how the correlation between resources and the nominal distinction affects who encounters whom. Blau calculates the likelihood of associations between categories of people based on the way people's effective preferences for similar others are constrained by the availability of others in the population. Using Skvoretz's (1983) formalization of Blau's principles, status construction theory predicts the percentages of encounters in the population that are likely to be between people who differ on the nominal distinction and who are also either similar or different in resources, given various assumptions about the strength of the correlation, the distribution of the population across categories of the resource and nominal distinctions, and the strength of preferences (if any) for associates that are similar in resources or the nominal distinction (Ridgeway 1991; Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997).

Influence Hierarchies and Belief Formation

Status construction theory then turns to the hierarchies of influence and esteem that are likely to develop in these different types of encounters. Using expectation states theory, it predicts which actors are likely to be perceived as more worthy and competent compared to others in goal-oriented encounters between different types of actors (Berger et al. 1977; Webster and Foschi 1988; Fişek, Berger, and Norman1991). According to status construction theory, these implicit, often unconscious assumptions about the worthiness of particular actors in the encounter can, under the right circumstances, provide the seeds out of which those actors form more general beliefs about the worthiness and competence of whole categories of social actors.[2]

The theory argues that, in encounters between actors who differ on the nominal distinction, the actors may come to associate the influence and esteem with which they are treated in the encounter with their nominal category and form fledgling status beliefs about the assumption. Say, in an encounter between an A and a B, the A becomes more influential. Both the A and the B experience a local reality where the person who is an A is defined as having more to offer in the situation, as being more competent, confident, and proactive, while the person who is a B is thrust into the role of reacting to A. The B finds herself cast into and unintentionally abetting to a local reality in which Bs are constructed as less worthy and competent than As. From the social reality with which they are confronted in the encounter, both the A and the B may make guesses about what other people think is the social worthiness and competence of As and Bs generally. This is especially likely if a future A/B encounter repeats for the person the experience of the A becoming more influential and esteemed than the B. Repeatedly experiencing Bs cast as less esteemed and able in encounters with As gives the appearance of a broader reality in which As in general are held to be more competent and worthy than Bs. From such experiences, even Bs may be forced to concede, as a matter of social reality, that "most people" believe As are better than Bs.

In this way, the influence hierarchies that develop in encounters between As and Bs can induce their participants to form status beliefs about the A/B distinction, according to the theory. In the society as a whole, however, the result of all these A/B encounters could simply be a noisy array of conflicting status beliefs favoring As or favoring Bs that undermine each

[2] Expectation states theory uses theoretical graphs to represent one actor's advantage (or disadvantage) over another in expected competence and esteem in a given situation (Berger et al. 1977). For a representation of status construction theory's arguments about the formation of status beliefs in terms of expectation states graphs, see Ridgeway (2000).

other and dissipate. For a status belief about As and Bs to become widely shared in society, there must be some "tipping" or "biasing" factor or process that systematically advantages people from one category in gaining influence over those from the other category in A/B encounters. Resource differences between As and Bs provide an advantaging factor that biases the development of influence hierarchies in favor of As in A/B encounters. The theory argues that this is the means by which interactional processes transform a structural inequality in resources (60% of As are rich, but only 40% of B are rich) into widely shared beliefs that As in general are more esteemed and competent than Bs are.

Doubly Dissimilar Encounters

Several studies show that when actors differ in resources or rewards, they tend to form corresponding assumptions about each other's competence and performance that encourage the resource advantaged to act more confidently and assertively. The typical result is an influence hierarchy that favors the resource advantaged (Cook 1975; Harrod 1980; Stewart and Moore 1992). Drawing on this research, status construction theory focuses on "doubly dissimilar" encounters between As and Bs who also differ in resources. These are the critical interactional contexts that power the emergence of widely shared status beliefs by tipping the process toward beliefs favoring As rather than Bs. In doubly dissimilar encounters, the resource-advantaged actor (more often an A) is likely to become more influential than the resource-disadvantaged actor (often a B). Once the influence hierarchy develops, however, actors may associate their apparent worthiness and competence in the situation, actually an effect of resource differences, with their corresponding difference on the nominal distinction and form status beliefs favoring the resource-advantaged category.

Due to the correlation between resources and the nominal distinction, there will always be more doubly dissimilar encounters occurring between rich As and poor Bs than rich Bs and poor As. As a result, while doubly dissimilar encounters do produce some conflicting status beliefs that undermine one another, these encounters will always generate a surplus of beliefs favoring As. Consequently, as people in the society circulate in and out of doubly dissimilar encounters, these encounters continually feed support for status beliefs favoring As into the population.

Ridgeway et al. (1998) tested whether doubly dissimilar encounters do in fact create shared status beliefs for their participants that favor the resource advantaged. As predicted, after two rounds of interaction where participants differed in resources (pay level) and an unevaluated nominal distinction, as well as experienced an influence hierarchy favoring the better paid, both pay-advantaged and disadvantaged participants formed

status beliefs favoring the nominal category of the better paid. A second experiment showed, as the theory predicts, that the experience of the influence hierarchy, which actually enacts a social reality in which the nominal distinction appears to be evaluated, was a necessary mediating factor in the creation of status beliefs in these doubly dissimilar encounters (Ridgeway et al. 1998). It appears, then, that doubly dissimilar encounters do indeed cause people to form status beliefs favoring the resource advantaged, as status construction theory claims.

Spreading Status Beliefs

Doubly dissimilar encounters are likely to be a minority of all encounters in the society (Ridgeway 1991; Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997). Evidence indicates, however, that when actors' status beliefs are modified in one situation, they transfer their modified beliefs to similar actors in other types of situations and act on them there (Markovsky, Smith, and Berger 1984; Pugh and Wahrman 1983). Consequently, the theory argues that people carry status beliefs they acquire in doubly dissimilar encounters to encounters with other As and Bs that are similar to them in resources. In these more common encounters between As and Bs who are similar in resources (e.g., both rich or both poor) the believers, by acting on their new status beliefs, "teach" them to others, creating a diffusion process that leads eventually to consensual status beliefs favoring As.[3]

Computer simulations of the processes described by status construction theory highlight the importance of the assumption that people can "teach" status beliefs to others by treating the others according to the belief in interaction (Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997). If status beliefs can be spread this way, then encounters between As and Bs who are similar in resources become a "booster" process that allows the relatively small "engine" of doubly dissimilar encounters to propagate status beliefs favoring As widely in the population. It is only through this booster effect, for instance, that "off diagonal" people (e.g., poor As and rich Bs) acquire the dominant status belief favoring As. They do not form beliefs favoring As from their own doubly dissimilar encounters, but rather, from a preponderance of encounters with nominally different but resource-similar others who treat them as though As are higher status than Bs. A rich woman, for instance does not learn that it is low status to be a woman from poor men, but from the way she is treated in her more common encounters with rich

[3] Given people's general tendency to associate with similar others, encounters between As and Bs who are similar in resources are likely to be more common than doubly dissimilar encounters. Status beliefs about the A/B distinction are not relevant to encounters where people do not differ on the A/B distinction.

men. With the booster effect created by the spread of status beliefs in encounters between resource-similar As and Bs, computer simulations suggest that the continual surplus of beliefs favoring As produced in doubly dissimilar encounters will eventually overcome the cacophony of conflicting beliefs about the nominal distinction fostered elsewhere. The eventual result will be consensual status beliefs that favor As (Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997).

The empirical question, then, is whether actors, by acting on status beliefs, can induce others in the encounter to take on these beliefs themselves. The viability of status construction theory's account of the emergence of status beliefs turns on this question. It is well documented that people can acquire expectations for themselves as individuals from the way they are treated in interactions (Harris and Rosenthal 1985; Miller and Turnbull 1986; Moore 1985). But can they take on beliefs about the social categories to which they belong by such a process? In particular, will those disadvantaged by status beliefs acquire them in this way, even when the status beliefs are not reinforced by resource differences among the participants? The theory uses the following logic to argue that they will (Ridgeway 1991, 1997; Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997).

When actors who have acquired status beliefs about the A/B distinction interact with resource-similar others who differ on the distinction, the status belief becomes salient for them, and they are likely to act on it. In their previous experience, say, Bs have been less influential and competent than As. So the believing A implicitly expects that in this situation also the B will have less to offer than she herself. The A speaks up confidently, offering suggestions about accomplishing their shared goal. The B, in turn, sees a display of confidence and assertiveness that is usually associated with competence and status. When B offers her own suggestions, A disagrees with them, implicitly assuming that they are less likely to be useful. In the face of A's confident disagreement, B hesitates, so that A's ideas come to dominate their collective decisions.

In this self-fulfilling way, A's initial status belief creates an interactional hierarchy of influence and perceived competence that corresponds to and confirms the status belief. B finds herself a participant in a local reality in which Bs are presumed to be less worthy and competent than As. Through the belief formation processes described earlier, there is a probability that this experience will induce B to adopt the status belief herself. If subsequent encounters with As repeat the experience for B, the probability increases that she will conclude that most people consider As to be more worthy and competent than Bs. Experiences of this sort are likely to be repeated for B more often than they are challenged because of the way the correlation between resources and the nominal distinction affects who encounters whom in society (Ridgeway 1991; Ridgeway and Balkwell

1997). A similar, repeated "status-casting" process by believing Bs who unconsciously hesitate and defer to resource similar As can also teach the status belief to As.

In sum, the theory argues that believers "teach" status beliefs by acting on them in A/B encounters and, by so doing, create an influence hierarchy between the A and B that corresponds to the status beliefs. The nonbeliever experiences an association between participants' nominal category and the esteem and presumption of competence with which they are treated in the situation. That creates a likelihood that the nonbeliever will take on the status belief as well, a likelihood that increases if the experience is repeated. We test this argument in our first experiment.

Acquiring Status Beliefs by Participant Observation

The language of the theory's argument about "teaching" status beliefs is implicitly dyadic, focusing on an influence hierarchy between an A and B. What would happen, however, if there were other As or Bs in the encounter who witness the enactment of this influence hierarchy? They, too, would experience the association between actors' nominal categories and the esteem and competence with which they are treated. As members of the encounter, they, too, enter into the local reality that enacts an apparent evaluative distinction between As and Bs. Would these third-party participants acquire the status belief as well? The logic of the theory's arguments about belief formation in influence hierarchies seems to suggest that they would. Observational learning is well documented (Bandura 1977).

In their computer simulations, Ridgeway and Balkwell (1997) examined the consequences of assuming that third-party participants in encounters do acquire status beliefs from observing the enactment of an influence hierarchy between someone like them and someone different from them. They found that if this occurs, the diffusion of status beliefs favoring one group rather than the other will proceed much more rapidly. As a result, consensual beliefs about the A/B distinction will be much more likely to emerge. In particular, encounters of three to six persons will become social dynamos that drive the spread and maintenance of consensual status beliefs (Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997). Consequently, the question of whether status beliefs can be "taught" to third-party participants turns out to be of substantial theoretical importance for understanding the emergence of status beliefs through interaction from economic or other advantages. Our second experiment is designed to answer this question.

A General Mechanism for Belief Formation

As initially formulated, status construction theory sought to explain how an inequality in resources between social groups could be transformed by interactional processes into consensual status beliefs favoring the resource-advantaged group. The mechanism by which interaction induces status beliefs, however, is by creating an association of the group distinction with differences in influence, esteem, and apparent competence in the local reality of people's encounters with one another. The role of resources is to give people from one group a systematic advantage in gaining influence over those from the other group.

Recently, Webster and Hysom (1998) have argued that the theory can be expanded to account for the development of status beliefs from a broader set of conditions than the acquisition of superior material resources by one group compared to another. They point out that the theory's mechanism for belief formation actually has more general implications than those derived by Ridgeway and colleagues. The theory predicts that the association of a nominal difference with positions in an interactional influence hierarchy will be sufficient to induce status beliefs, even without supporting resource differences. Therefore, *any* factor or process that systematically biases the development of influence hierarchies in favor of one nominal group over the other will lead to widely shared status beliefs favoring the advantaged group (Webster and Hysom 1998). Differences between the groups in technology or computer literacy or any other factor that gives people from one group a systematic edge in gaining influence in intergroup encounters would foster shared status beliefs that favor the advantaged group.[4] Webster and Hysom (1998) use this implication of status construction theory to provide an account for how differences in the moral evaluations attached to heterosexuals and homosexuals could be transformed by interactional processes into widely shared status beliefs that heterosexuals are more esteemed and competent than homosexuals.

While Ridgeway et al. (1998) have shown that an influence hierarchy associated with resource differences was sufficient to induce participants to form status beliefs about their nominal difference, it has yet to be shown that an influence hierarchy alone would induce such beliefs. Therefore, while there is evidence that the doubly dissimilar encounters emphasized

[4] In addition to "tipping" factors such as resource or technology advantages, Mark (1999) has argued that random processes may act as a biasing factor if strings of encounters by chance produce a substantial preponderance of status beliefs favoring one category (e.g., As) over another. When widely shared status beliefs emerge through random, path dependent processes, however, the group that is favored by the beliefs (e.g., As or Bs) cannot be predicted in advance.

in the theory do induce status beliefs as predicted, the theory's general mechanism for belief formation has yet to be directly verified. Fortunately, we can test the efficacy of this general mechanism for belief formation with the same experiment that we use to examine whether status beliefs can be "taught" to another by treating that other according to them. Both arguments require that status beliefs be formed from the behavioral enactment of an influence hierarchy between nominally different participants without supporting differences in resources. Thus, our first experiment will also provide a test of the general mechanism for inducing status beliefs pointed out by Webster and Hysom.

EXPERIMENT 1

Goals and Hypotheses

For the first experiment then, we have two goals. We wish to test whether a person who holds a status belief can "teach" it to another just by treating the other according to the status belief so that an influence hierarchy develops that corresponds to the belief. This argument is crucial to status construction theory's claim that status processes can spread widely through interaction and affect inequality in society as a whole. The argument is particularly important for explaining how "off diagonal" people (e.g., poor As or rich Bs) acquire a dominant status belief that As are more esteemed and competent than Bs. We also wish to test Webster and Hysom's (1998) general mechanism for belief formation by examining whether nominally different participants without resource differences between them will develop status beliefs about their difference simply from the behavioral enactment of an influence hierarchy that corresponds to the difference.

A large body of research has shown that when a person holds a status belief that advantages her over another, she tends to treat the other in a confident, assertive manner, speaking up with her own opinions and holding to them in the face of the other's disagreement. When she holds a status belief that disadvantages her, she tends to treat the other deferentially, hesitating with her opinions and deferring in the face of disagreements (see Berger and Wagner [1993] and Webster and Foschi [1988] for reviews). Therefore, a situation in which someone treated a nominally different other either assertively or deferentially and this resulted in a corresponding influence hierarchy between them would allow a test of whether a believer could "teach" a status belief to another by treating the other according to the status belief. Since this same situation results in the behavioral enactment of an influence hierarchy between nominally different participants without supporting resource differences, it also is

useful to test Webster and Hysom's general mechanism for belief formation.

Consequently, we designed an experiment where, in repeated, goal-oriented encounters, a person treats a nominally different partner either (1) assertively and nondeferentially and this behavior results in an influence hierarchy favoring the assertive person or (2) deferentially and this treatment results in an influence hierarchy favoring the partner. There are no resource differences between the participants. For subjects in this experiment, we hypothesize that those who experience being less influential than their nominally different partners in repeated encounters will form beliefs that less esteem and competence are attributed to their own nominal group than to the other nominal group. We further hypothesize that subjects who experience being more influential than their nominally different partners in repeated encounters will form beliefs that greater esteem and competence are attributed to their own nominal group compared to the other. If these hypotheses are supported, they will demonstrate that status beliefs can be "taught" or spread to another by treating that other according to the beliefs in a way that creates an influence hierarchy that corresponds to the belief. These same results will also support Webster and Hysom's prediction that status beliefs can be induced without supporting resource differences by the repeated association of a nominal difference with influence in encounters.

Procedural Overview

The experiment had a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ design that crossed a nominal distinction with the deferential or nondeferential behavior and corresponding influence of a partner (actually a confederate) and the sex composition (all male or all female) of dyadic teams. In all conditions, subject and partner belonged to different nominal groups but were the same in resources (assigned pay level). Eighty-nine undergraduates (41 males and 48 females), randomly assigned to condition within sex, participated in two rounds of a decision-making task, each time with a different confederate partner, supposedly as part of a study of diversity and decision making. There were between 10 and 13 subjects in each condition. To reduce the effect of confounding status characteristics such as ethnicity or attractiveness without eliminating the experience of interaction, subjects and partners sat in separate rooms and discussed via an audio link a task presented on a computer monitor.[5]

[5] Since this design crosses the nominal distinction with the partner's deferential or nondeferential behavior and influence, it protects against the possibility that subjects have prior evaluative associations with the nominal distinction that might independently produce the predicted results.

To this fully balanced design, we added two extra conditions to examine whether "off diagonal" people, such as rich Bs in the example, can be "taught" status beliefs disadvantaging their own group despite the fact that they, personally, have the same resources as rich As when most Bs do not. Subjects in these conditions were paid the same as a partner who differed from them on the nominal distinction (either A/B or B/A, forming the two conditions). However, these subjects also received information that most others in their nominal group were paid less than they personally were and less than people in their partners' group were. Their different partners for each of the two rounds of decision making treated them nondeferentially, asserting influence over them. According to the theory, these subjects should form status beliefs favoring their partners nominal group over their own despite their own equal pay level. Due to limited resources, only female dyads were assigned to these two exploratory conditions, for a total of 23 additional female subjects. Status beliefs formed in these extra conditions can be informatively contrasted with the equivalent female nondeferential conditions in the main design to see if, as the theory predicts, they are similar. Without a full complement of contrast conditions, however, results from the extra conditions must be regarded as suggestive of the general processes they explore.

Nominal Distinctions and Resource Information

All subjects first completed a brief "background information sheet" on their GPA, birthplace, siblings, and employment history. Then, to create the nominal distinction, they completed a task adapted from social identity studies of "mere difference" requiring them to choose between Klee and Kandinsky reproductions (Tajfel 1978). Using procedures from Ridgeway et al. (1998), subjects were told that this personal response-style test differentiates between two kinds of people, S2s and Q2s, whose very different response styles were stable aspects of their selves. Supposedly, there are roughly equal numbers of S2s and Q2s in the world.

After completing the test, subjects were told that, based on the information the laboratory had about them, they had been assigned to pay categories according to an established fee schedule. They were shown a sheet with categories from $6–$13, where $11 was circled as the level they and their partners had been assigned to. A separate part of the sheet indicated results of the personal response-style test. The subjects saw that they were S2s or Q2s and that their partner was the opposite (a Q2 or an S2), creating a nominal distinction in all dyads. To reinforce these manipulations, subjects copied their own and their partner's response styles and pay levels on an "information cover sheet" purportedly for laboratory records.

In the two extra conditions only, subjects received referential information about resources and the nominal distinction by signing a pay record with one column labeled S2 and another labeled Q2. Under each were four signatures and pay amounts apparently from previous participants. Subjects saw that people in their own response-style group (S2s in one condition, Q2s in the other) received between $7 and $11 while those in the other group were paid $9.50–$12. Thus, subjects in these conditions saw that while they were paid the same as their partner, most in their group were paid less than were most in their partner's group.[6]

Deference Behavior and Influence Hierarchies

Subjects then were put in audio contact with their partners and started working on a 10 trial "meaning insight" task requiring them to associate English words with words reconstructed supposedly from an early language. On each trial, first the subject then the partner announced an initial choice, they discussed the alternatives, and privately typed a final choice on their keyboards. Their performance, they were told, would be scored as a team, earning credit only if both members agreed on the correct choice. The best team earned a bonus of $100.

Partners were undergraduate confederates who followed a script dictating their choices and arguments. On all but trials 3 and 8 in round 1 and trials 2, 6, and 8 in round 2, confederates announced an initial choice that was different from the subjects' choice. Confederate influence is the proportion of these disagreement trials on which the subject changed choices to agree with the confederate on the final choice.

Although the confederates choices and arguments were constant across all conditions, the certainty and confidence with which they presented them were not. In the nondeferential conditions, confederates acted as though their own nominal group was higher status than the subjects' group by interacting in a confident, assertive, but nondomineering manner, a style shown to characterize those who hold higher status and competence expectations for themselves than the other (Carli, LaFleur, and Loeber 1995; Ridgeway, Berger, and Smith 1985). In deferential conditions, confederates behaved as though the subject's nominal category was higher status than their own by presenting their arguments in a hesitant, un-

[6] This referential information indicates that, while subject and partner are equally paid, the subject is at the top of her own nominal group while the partner is in the middle of the other nominal group in pay.

certain, and deferential manner. Multiple confederates were randomly assigned across conditions within sex.[7]

After the task in round 1, subjects completed a brief questionnaire and began a second 10-trial round of the same task with a different partner-confederate. Subjects were again shown a sheet indicating that the new partner would also be paid $11 (like the subject) but differed from the subject in response style. Confederates again followed a script for choices and arguments, presenting them in a deferential or nondeferential manner. Thus round 2 repeated round 1 with a different partner. At the end of round 2, subjects completed a postexperimental questionnaire, were debriefed, and were paid.

As we expected, the confederates' nondeferential or deferential behavior produced corresponding influence hierarchies on both rounds in both male and female dyads. As table 1 shows, subjects in nondeferential conditions changed to agree with the confederate on about three-quarters of the disagreement trials (round 1: $M = 79.4\%$; round 2: $M = 75.5\%$), creating influence hierarchies favoring the confederate. In the deferential conditions, confederates were influential less than half the time (round 1: $M = 44.5\%$; round 2: $M = 47.6\%$), resulting in hierarchies favoring the subjects. The differences in confederate influence in deferential and nondeferential conditions were highly significant in analyses of variance (round 1: $F = 118.622$, $P < .000$; round 2: $F = 47.551$, $P < .000$).[8]

Subjects clearly recognized their positions in these influence hierarchies. Their ratings on nine-point scales of how influential they and their partners were on each round yielded positive difference scores in deferential conditions, meaning that subjects perceived themselves to be the more influential member of the dyad (table 1). In nondeferential conditions, the difference between perceived influence of self and partner was consistently

[7] As a manipulation check, trained coders blind to the condition they were coding reviewed tapes of confederate-subject interactions, scoring the confederate as nondeferential (1) or deferential (0) on each trial. Summing scores over the 10 trials confirmed consistently appropriate confederate behavior in nondeferential conditions (round 1: males, $M = 9.944$; females, $M = 9.810$; round 2: males, $M = 9.833$; females, $M = 9.191$) and deferential conditions (round 1: males, $M = 0.056$; females, $M = 0.053$; round 2: males, $M = 0.000$; females, $M = 0.053$), producing powerful differences between them ($P < .000$ for both rounds). Analyses of variance indicated no differences in confederate behavior by response-style group ($F < 1$ for both rounds). The means show that sex differences were also very small but, because there was so little within condition variation, for round 2 only, there was a significant sex behavior interaction ($P = .019$) indicating that female confederates were slightly less nondeferential ($M = 9.191$) in the nondeferential conditions than male confederates ($M = 9.833$).

[8] Confederate influence did not differ by response-style group. There were no sex differences on round 2, but on round 1, a sex behavior interaction ($P = .031$) indicated that nondeferential males were more influential than nondeferential females on that round.

TABLE 1

EXPERIMENT 1: CONFEDERATE-SUBJECT INFLUENCE HIERARCHIES

	CONDITION MEANS									
	Male Dyads				Female Dyads					
CONFEDERATE BEHAVIOR	Deferential		Nondeferential		Deferential		Nondeferential		Referential-Nondeferential	
Confederate influence:*										
Round 1†	43.8	(.138)	86.3	(.111)	45.1	(.150)	73.5	(.185)	68.3	(.191)
Round 2†	47.9	(.198)	76.2	(.227)	47.4	(.140)	74.9	(.186)	70.2	(.211)
Subjects' perceived influence:‡										
Round 1†§	2.250	(1.888)	−2.667	(3.136)	1.844	(2.153)	−4.480	(2.815)	−3.565	(1.591)
Round 2†	2.150	(2.720)	−1.952	(2.854)	1.626	(1.958)	−2.360	(3.108)	−2.609	(2.407)

NOTE.—Results are averaged over subjects' response group (S2 or Q2). SDs are given in parentheses.

* Confederate influence data are given as percentages.

† Confederate behavior (deferential or nondeferential) significant at $P < .000$ in analyses of variance.

‡ Perceived self minus perceived partner influence.

§ Sex of dyad significant at $P < .05$ in analyses of variance.

negative, indicating that subjects acknowledged the confederates' superior influence over them (table 1). These differences in perceived influence were also highly significant (round 1: $F = 107.225$, $P < .000$; $F = 47.960$, $P < .000$).[9] Thus, as a test of the hypotheses requires, subjects in nondeferential conditions experienced influence hierarchies that cast them in a low-influence position, while those in deferential conditions experienced the high-influence position in the hierarchies.

Status Beliefs and Other Measures

Status beliefs about the nominal distinction were measured by seven-point semantic differential items on the postexperiment questionnaire. Subjects indicated how they thought *most people* would rate S2s and, on another page, Q2s, on status and power items (respected/not respected, powerful/powerless, low status/high status, leader/follower) and competence items (competent/incompetent, knowledgeable/unknowledgeable, incapable/capable). Scores were summed and averaged to create scales of the perceived status and competence characterizing S2s and Q2s and recoded to represent perceived assessments of the subjects' own group and their partners' group. These scales are our primary measure of status beliefs.

Two additional measures tapped perceptions related to status beliefs. Subjects used the same semantic differential items to rate how they *personally* view the status and competence of S2s and Q2s. After both interaction rounds, subjects also indicated who would be more likely to be in a position of greater responsibility in the university, give the keynote address at a professional conference, receive early promotion by a major corporation, and be chosen foreman of a jury, for a set of choice categories including S2 and Q2. Answers were coded as the percentage of questions on which subjects chose someone from their own response-style group as more likely to be in the high-status position, providing a measure of evaluative in-group bias. Additional semantic differential items (inconsiderate/considerate, unlikable/likable, pleasant/unpleasant, cooperative/uncooperative), also summed and averaged in a scale, measured how subjects thought most people and they, personally, would rate S2s and Q2s in terms of social considerateness.

Final items measured subjects' perceptions of their own and their partners' task skill. After each interaction round, subjects placed both themselves and their partner on nine-point scales asking how useful each's

[9] On round 1 (but not round 2), a main effect for sex of dyad ($F = 4.237$, $P < .05$) indicated that subjects in female dyads perceived their own influence to be lower relative to the confederate than did subjects in male dyads.

ideas were, how much each contributed to a high-quality decision, and how skilled each was at the task. Scores for partner were subtracted from those for self, and the differences were summed and averaged to create a measure of the perceived task skill of self relative to partner on each round.

Results

According to the hypotheses, subjects that were advantaged in influence hierarchies with their nominally different partners (deferential conditions) should acquire status beliefs favoring their own response-style group. Those that were disadvantaged in influence (nondeferential conditions) should form beliefs favoring the other response group. We tested these hypotheses with $2 \times 2 \times 2$ analyses of variance on data from subjects in the main design only. Subjects in the two extra conditions were excluded for the moment.

Since a mere difference, such as that we created between response-style groups, normally creates in-group bias, subjects in nondeferential conditions must actually overcome their in-group preferences to form status beliefs, as hypothesized. Was the experience of being cast into a low-influence position by a resource-equal sufficient to do this? Our data on the percentages with which subjects preferred their own group for a high-status position shows that it was (see top part of table 2). In deferential conditions where they were influence advantaged, subjects showed strong in-group favoritism (75.3%). In nondeferential conditions, preference for their own group was less than 50%, indicating that they preferred the other group more often than their own. The differences between these conditions were highly significant ($F = 36.028$; $P < .000$).

The principal tests of our hypotheses turn on how subjects felt "most people" view the status and competence of the two response-style groups. As the means in table 3 show, the confederates' treatment of the subjects and the influence hierarchies that resulted had a powerful effect on subjects' estimates of how most people see the status and competence of both their own response-style group and the other group. Subjects cast into a low-influence position by nondeferential treatment thought that most people attribute substantially *less* status ($M = 4.022$ vs. $M = 5.417$; $F = 49.783$, $P < .000$) and *less* competence ($M = 4.769$ vs. $M = 5.556$; $F = 13.066$, $P < .001$) to those in their *own* response-style group than did subjects who were influential and deferred to (deferential conditions). Subjects in nondeferential conditions also thought that substantially *greater* status ($M = 5.822$ vs. $M = 3.837$; $F = 104.664$, $P < .000$) and *greater* competence ($M = 5.622$ vs. $M = 4.380$; $F = 32.479$, $P < .000$)

TABLE 2
PREFERENCES FOR OWN GROUP

	CONDITION MEANS			
	Male Dyads		Female Dyads	
Experiment 1:				
Confederate behavior:*				
Deferential:				
Round 1†	82.5	(.171)	64.5	(.240)
Round 2	78.8	(.292)	75.0	(.224)
Nondeferential:				
Round 1	46.4	(.333)	32.0	(.280)
Round 2	44.0	(.318)	30.4	(.273)
Referential information-nondeferential:				
Round 1	. . .	. . .	29.4	(.222)
Round 2	. . .	. . .	32.6	(.219)
Experiment 2:				
Confederate behavior:*				
Deferential:				
Round 1	76.2	(.283)	86.3	(.194)
Round 2	85.7	(.202)	83.8	(.205)
Nondeferential:				
Round 1	37.5	(.369)	37.0	(.327)
Round 2	23.8	(.251)	18.8	(.215)

NOTE.—Results averaged over subjects' response group (S2 or Q2). SDs are given in parentheses. Data are given as percentages.

* For both round 1 and round 2, confederate behavior (deferential or nondeferential) significant at $P < .000$ in analyses of variance.

† Sex of dyad significant at $P = .006$ for experiment 1, round 1.

was attributed to the *other* group than did subjects who were influential and deferred to.

The striking confirmation of the hypotheses offered by these results is clearest when we examine the difference between how subjects thought most people rated the status and competence of their own group and the other group (see status and competence difference scores in table 3). As the first hypothesis predicts, for influence-advantaged subjects (deferential conditions), these difference scores are always positive, indicating that subjects believed that their own group was seen as higher status and more competent than the other group. But for those who were cast as less influential by their nondeferential partners, the same scores are consistently negative. Their experience in interactional hierarchies that repeatedly cast them as less valued forced them to concede that most people consider their own nominal group to be less respected and competent than the other group, confirming the second hypothesis. The contrast between positive difference scores in deferential conditions and negative differences scores in nondeferential conditions was highly significant (for status dif-

TABLE 3

EXPERIMENT 1: MOST PEOPLE'S EVALUATIONS OF OWN AND OTHERS' RESPONSE-STYLE GROUP

	CONDITION MEANS									
	Male Dyads				Female Dyads					
CONFEDERATE BEHAVIOR*	Deferential		Nondeferential		Deferential		Nondeferential		Referential-Nondeferential	
Status:										
Own group	5.338	(.812)	3.926	(1.076)	5.489	(.766)	4.100	(1.056)	4.167	(.995)
Other group	3.663	(.816)	5.600	(.821)	3.989	(1.091)	6.000	(.866)	6.207	(.786)
Difference	1.675	(1.389)	−1.763	(1.563)	1.477	(1.649)	−1.900	(1.460)	−2.000	(1.093)
Competence:										
Own group	5.317	(.761)	4.714	(1.208)	5.773	(.629)	4.813	(1.337)	4.873	(.980)
Other group†	4.067	(.971)	5.333	(.845)	4.652	(1.233)	5.853	(.888)	6.000	(.779)
Difference	1.250	(1.478)	−0.683	(1.759)	1.136	(1.525)	−1.040	(1.640)	−1.064	(1.068)
Considerate:										
Own group	4.488	(1.131)	6.071	(.495)	4.977	(1.175)	6.030	(.719)	6.024	(.925)
Other group†	5.488	(.883)	2.950	(1.129)	6.011	(.664)	3.940	(1.066)	3.804	(1.168)
Difference	−1.000	(1.614)	3.138	(1.385)	−1.011	(1.381)	2.090	(1.365)	2.191	(1.481)

NOTE.—Results are averaged over subjects' response group (S2 or Q2). SDs are given in parentheses.

* Confederate behavior (deferential or nondeferential) significant at $P < .001$ in analyses of variance.

† Sex of dyad significant at $P < .02$ in analyses of variance.

ference, $F = 112.571$, $P < .000$; for competence difference, $F = 36.242$, $P < .000$) In further support of the hypotheses, there were strong negative correlations between these difference scores and the confederates' exact degree of influence over the subject, averaged over both rounds, which is a sensitive measure of the precise influence hierarchies each subject experienced (for status difference, $r = -.663$, $P < .000$; for competence difference, $r = -.616$, $P < .000$).

It is clear from these results that both influence-advantaged and, crucially, influence-disadvantaged subjects developed status beliefs favoring the advantaged nominal group from the repeated experience of being treated by a resource equal in a status-evaluated way that created a corresponding influence hierarchy. These results suggest that people who hold status beliefs can indeed spread them to nominally different others by treating those others according to the beliefs. The results also support Webster and Hysom's (1998) prediction that people will develop status beliefs even without supporting resource differences just from the association of a nominal difference with influence in encounters.

Perceptions of most people's evaluations are the primary indicator of status beliefs, but it is interesting to examine as well the subjects' own views of the status and competence of the two response-style groups (table 4). Personal views were similar to those imputed to most people. Compared to subjects who were influential and deferred to, subjects in nondeferential conditions personally judged their own group to be lower in status ($F = 28.509$, $P < .000$) and the other group to be higher in status ($F = 74.718$, $P < .000$) and judged the other group to be higher in competence as well ($F = 8.269$, $P = .005$). There was one intriguing exception to the pattern of similarity, however. Subjects refused to allow their influence positions to affect their personal estimates of the competence typical of those in their own (but not the other) response-style group (for confederate behavior, $F = 1.063$, NS). As a comparison of the own group competence means in tables 3 and 4 show, this occurred because subjects in nondeferential conditions resisted personally devaluing their own groups' competence, even though they thought most people would.

The beliefs subjects' formed about the social considerateness of each nominal group suggest an interesting compensatory relationship to status attributions (see considerateness data in tables 3 and 4). As the means for own group and other group show, subjects who were influential and deferred to (deferential conditions) thought their own group was higher status but that the other group was more considerate and "nice" in both most people's and their own eyes. On the other hand, influence-disadvantaged subjects (nondeferential conditions) considered their own group to be nicer than the other group, if lower status. These differences between deferential and nondeferential conditions in the ratings of groups'

TABLE 4

EXPERIMENT 1: PERSONAL EVALUATIONS OF OWN AND OTHERS' RESPONSE-STYLE GROUP

	CONDITION MEANS									
	Male Dyads				Female Dyads					
CONFEDERATE BEHAVIOR	Deferential		Nondeferential		Deferential		Nondeferential		Referential-Nondeferential	
Status:*										
Own group	5.325	(.936)	4.286	(1.417)	5.500	(.690)	4.010	(1.234)	4.310	(1.312)
Other group†	3.363	(1.031)	5.000	(.679)	4.011	(1.176)	5.850	(.804)	5.576	(.774)
Difference†	1.963	(1.554)	−.778	(1.889)	1.511	(1.523)	−1.840	(1.711)	−1.286	(1.300)
Competence:										
Own group	5.433	(.693)	5.444	(.991)	5.485	(.907)	5.053	(1.311)	5.492	(1.068)
Other group†‡	4.167	(1.331)	4.817	(1.067)	4.971	(1.077)	5.733	(1.122)	5.246	(1.276)
Difference†‡	1.267	(1.678)	.600	(1.766)	.515	(1.375)	−.680	(1.731)	.191	(1.702)
Considerate:*										
Own group	5.013	(1.119)	6.333	(.572)	5.591	(.815)	6.140	(.677)	6.333	(.668)
Other group†	5.738	(.809)	2.763	(1.358)	5.967	(1.091)	4.240	(1.533)	3.641	(1.412)
Difference†	−.725	(1.428)	3.550	(1.679)	−.330	(.769)	1.900	(1.641)	2.691	(1.477)

NOTE.—Results averaged over subjects' response group (S2 or Q2). SDs are given in parentheses.

* Confederate behavior (deferential or nondeferential) significant at $P < .000$ in analyses of variance.

† Sex of dyad significant at $P < .05$.

‡ Confederate behavior (deferential or nondeferential) significant at $P < .01$.

social considerateness were highly significant (for most people's evaluations of own group, $F = 47.169$, $P < .000$; other group, $F = 124.928$, $P < .000$; and difference, $F = 135.340$, $P < .000$; for personal evaluations of own group, $F = 28.876$, $P < .000$; other group; $F = 72.601$, $P < .000$; and difference, $F = 107.032$, $P < .000$).

An earlier study on the development of status beliefs in doubly dissimilar encounters found a similar compensatory relationship between the status evaluation of a nominal group and the "niceness" attributed to those in it (Ridgeway et al. 1998). Research shows that such compensatory elements are typical of existing status beliefs such as those associated with gender and occupation (Conway, Pizzamiglio, and Mount 1996). That we see them here is further evidence that subjects in these experiments did indeed form status beliefs about the nominal distinction from their interactional experiences with those from the other nominal group.

None of the analyses of own-group favoritism, most people's or personal status evaluations, or ratings of considerateness showed any consistent effects of response-style group (i.e., whether the subject was an S2 or Q2). Sex composition of the dyad produced only minor effects, none of which suggested that the formation of status beliefs from behavioral influence hierarchies varied for males and females.[10]

It is clear from these results that subjects formed distinct beliefs about the nominal groups to which they and their partners belonged based on the behavioral influence hierarchies that emerged between them. Not surprisingly, these generalizations to nominal categories were backed by assessments of their partners as individuals. When influential and deferred to, subjects assessed their partners as less task skilled ($F = 27.98$ for round 1, $F = 22.85$ for round 2, $P < .000$) than themselves, as indicated by positive relative skill scores (round 1: $M = .310$ for males, $M = .162$ for females; round 2: $M = .883$ for males, $M = .768$ for females). Those cast into the low-influence position saw themselves as less skilled than their nondeferential partners as shown by negative relative skill scores

[10] In regard to status, competence, and considerateness, women in female dyads personally evaluated (table 4) the other group (but not their own) more highly than men in male dyads did (for status: $F = 13.545$, $P < .000$; competence, $F = 11.887$, $P = .001$; considerateness, $F = 10.368$, $P = .002$). Women tended to assume that most people (table 3) would similarly rate the other group more positively than men assumed they would. Also, women's personal evaluations of each group's considerateness (table 4) were less strongly affected by the confederates' behavior (particularly nondeferential behavior) than were men's, resulting in significant sex by behavior interactions (for own group, $F = 5.321$, $P = .024$; for other group, $F = 5.266$, $P = .024$). The female confederates' behavior was coded as slightly less extreme in nondeferential conditions, and they were a bit less influential in those conditions compared to male confederates. It is possible that less extreme treatment by nondeferential female confederates moderated female subjects' compensatory attributions of considerateness.

(round 1: $M = -.895$ for males, $M = -2.293$ for females; round 2: $M = -1.636$ for males, $M = -1.053$ for females). It is interesting that subjects in nondeferential conditions refused to personally attribute lower competence to their own nominal group, even though they judged themselves as personally less skilled than their partners.

Clearly, people can be "taught" status beliefs about a nominal distinction by being cast into high- or low-influence positions by the status-evaluated treatment of resource peers who differ from them on the distinction. But is this "status-casting" process also sufficient to inculcate self-disadvantaging status beliefs in those who are "exceptions" in that they are resource peers of the other even though those in their nominal group usually are not? We explored this question in separate 2 × 2 analyses of variance (with or without referential information by S2/Q2 or Q2/S2) comparing our exploratory conditions with the other female-nondeferential conditions. The results showed that subjects in these "off diagonal" circumstances acquired status beliefs favoring the other nominal group just as subjects in other female nondeferential conditions did, as an inspection of the comparative means in tables 2–4 show (see means in female-nondeferential and referential-nondeferential conditions). There were no significant differences between female-nondeferential conditions with or without the added referential information. These data suggest that status construction theory may be correct in assuming that "off diagonal" individuals can acquire dominant status beliefs from being treated according to them by resource peers. This conclusion, however, is limited by the fact that we have not examined male dyads or the acquisition of beliefs favorable, rather than unfavorable, to one's own group.

EXPERIMENT 2

Overview

Can third-party participants of goal-oriented encounters also be "taught" status beliefs by repeatedly observing the enactment of an influence hierarchy between a person of their own nominal group and someone from another nominal group? If so, then those who repeatedly witness persons of their own group cast as low influence by individuals of the other group will form beliefs that greater esteem and competence are attributed to the other nominal group than to their own. Those who witness people of their own group repeatedly become influential over persons of the other group will develop beliefs that greater esteem and competence are attributed to their own nominal group than the other. To investigate these hypotheses, we conducted a second experiment in which subjects participated in three-person, same-sex teams on two rounds of a decision-making task, each

time with different teammates who were supposedly live, but actually taped. During each round, the subject heard a nominally different teammate treat a teammate of the subject's own nominal category in a consistently deferential or nondeferential manner, resulting in a clear influence hierarchy between the two teammates.

The $2 \times 2 \times 2$ design crossed the nominal distinction within the team with the deferential or nondeferential behavior and influence of the "status-casting" teammate and the male or female sex composition of the team. Eighty-two subjects (41 males and 41 females) were randomly assigned to condition within sex, resulting in 10–11 subjects in each condition. In all conditions, subjects and teammates were assigned the same pay level, but the subject differed from the status-casting teammate on the nominal distinction and was like the second teammate on that distinction.

Procedures and Measures

As in the first experiment, subjects completed a background information sheet and the personal response-style test. Subjects were then informed that they and their teammates had been assigned an \$11 pay level and that they were either an S2 or Q2, one teammate (the status-caster) was the opposite (a Q2 or an S2), and the other teammate was the same as the subject in response style.

Subjects were again told that they would work as a team on one 10-trial round of the "meaning insight" task and then work on a second 10-trial round of the same task as part of a different team. To study diversity and decision making under different technical procedures, subjects were told, team members had been randomly assigned different duties in the group. All three team members would make an initial choice on each trial. But then the subjects' teammates would publicly discuss their initial choices over the shared audio link (subjects were in separate rooms) before making a final choice on each trial. The subjects themselves would listen to this discussion without joining it, but they would take it into account in making their own final choices. Performance would be scored as a team, earning credit if all members agreed on the correct final choice. The best team earned a \$100 bonus.

Subjects' two teammates were actually audiotapes of confederate-subject interactions from the first experiment, although several steps were taken to make them appear as live performances by other subjects.[11] Eight

[11] All 82 subjects included in the analyses accepted the taped performances as live. Only 7 of 89 subjects were excluded from the data because of suspicions about their teammates, indicating that the procedures were successfully credible.

audiotapes were selected for error-free confederate performances and excellent sound quality. There were two tapes, one for each round, for each combination of sex and confederates' deferential or nondeferential behavior. The resulting tapes enacted slightly more extreme influence hierarchies between confederates and partners than average in the first experiment but were adequate to provide a strong test of the hypotheses here. The confederates' influence with the partner over both rounds was 93% of disagreement trials on the male-nondeferential tapes and 87% on the female-nondeferential tapes. Confederate influence was 33% on both the male- and female-deferential tapes. In this experiment, subjects in a given sex by confederate behavior condition all heard the same two tapes in the same order for round 1 and round 2. Tapes did not differ by whether the subject, taped confederate, and taped teammate were identified as S2-Q2-S2 or Q2-S2-Q2.

At the end of round 1, subjects, as in the first experiment, completed a brief questionnaire and received information on their two new teammates for round 2. Again, they all would be paid the same; again, one teammate, the status-casting confederate, differed from the subject in response style, while the other teammate was like the subject. Thus, round 2 replicated round 1 with different teammates.

After round 2, subjects completed a postexperiment questionnaire containing the same measures of status beliefs as in the first experiment. Items measuring perceptions of teammates differed slightly. Instead of placing self and other on nine-point scales measuring perceived task skill and influence, subjects placed their two taped teammates on these scales after each round. The difference between scale points assigned to the taped teammate and the taped confederate provided measures of the teammate's perceived task skill and influence relative to that of the confederate for each round.

Results

We first examined whether repeatedly witnessing someone of their own group emerge as high or low influence with people of the other group was sufficient to affect subjects' evaluative in-group bias. It clearly was, as shown by subjects' preferences for their own group for a high-status position (bottom part of table 2). Subjects on teams where one of their own group was deferred to and influential showed a strong evaluative bias for their group. But when one of their group was repeatedly treated nondeferentially and was low in the influence hierarchy, subjects' preferences for their group were well below 50% ($M = 37.5\%$ for round 1 and $M = 21.3\%$ for round 2), indicating that they actually favored the other group for a high-status position. These differences, which were

TABLE 5
EXPERIMENT 2: MOST PEOPLE'S EVALUATIONS OF OWN AND OTHER'S RESPONSE GROUP

CONFEDERATE BEHAVIOR*	CONDITION MEANS							
	Male Teams				Female Teams			
	Deferential		Nondeferential		Deferential		Nondeferential	
Status:								
Own group	6.083	(.550)	3.879	(1.090)	6.225	(.653)	3.679	(.874)
Other group† ...	3.000	(.671)	5.438	(.892)	3.650	(.958)	5.821	(.708)
Difference	3.083	(1.119)	−1.558	(1.507)	2.575	(1.308)	−2.143	(1.239)
Competence:								
Own group	5.921	(.682)	4.800	(.888)	5.917	(.801)	4.444	(1.190)
Other group† ...	3.429	(.938)	5.000	(.979)	4.417	(1.092)	5.794	(1.157)
Difference†	2.492	(1.246)	−.200	(1.432)	1.500	(1.453)	−1.349	(1.436)
Considerate:								
Own group†	4.250	(.894)	5.475	(.786)	4.875	(.920)	5.964	(.717)
Other group	5.619	(.883)	3.738	(.985)	6.250	(.550)	3.191	(.965)
Difference	−1.369	(1.493)	1.738	(1.490)	−1.375	(.958)	2.774	(1.403)

NOTE.—Results averaged over subjects' response group (S2 or Q2). SDs are given in parentheses.
* Confederate behavior (deferential or nondeferential) significant at $P < .000$ in analyses of variance.
† Sex composition of team significant at $P < .005$.

highly significant in analyses of variance (round 1: $F = 41.798$, $P < .000$; round 2: $F = 162.459$, $P < .000$), were actually slightly more extreme for these third-party observer subjects than for the subjects in the first experiment. Recall, however, that the taped influence hierarchies third-party subjects experienced were also slightly more extreme than the average for subjects in the first experiment.

The central test of whether third-party subjects formed status beliefs, however, is their assessment of how "most people" view the status and competence of the two response-style groups (table 5). Compared to observing deferential treatment and high influence, repeatedly witnessing one of their own cast as having less to offer forced subjects to admit that most people see their group as lower status ($M = 3.776$ vs. $M = 6.152$, $F = 168.757$, $P < .000$) and less competent ($M = 4.618$ vs. $M = 5.919$, $F = 41.232$, $P < .000$). Compared to those in deferential conditions, third-party subjects in nondeferential conditions also believed that the other group is seen by most as higher in status ($M = 5.634$ vs. $M = 3.317$, $F = 166.719$, $P < .000$) and more competent ($M = 5.407$ vs. $M = 3.911$, $F = 41.882$, $P < .000$). As a result, the status and competence difference scores (table 5) showed that subjects in deferential conditions believed that most people attribute higher status and more competence to their own group than to the other group (positive scores). Those in nondeferential conditions thought people attribute lower status and less compe-

TABLE 6
EXPERIMENT 2: PERSONAL EVALUATIONS OF OWN AND OTHER'S RESPONSE STYLE/GROUP

CONFEDERATE BEHAVIOR	CONDITION MEANS							
	Male Teams				Female Teams			
	Deferential		Nondeferential		Deferential		Nondeferential	
Status:*								
Own group	5.750	(.754)	3.888	(1.361)	6.000	(.702)	3.786	(1.050)
Other group†	2.988	(1.103)	5.475	(.798)	3.738	(1.151)	5.619	(.683)
Difference	2.762	(1.661)	−1.588	(1.702)	2.263	(1.445)	−1.833	(1.359)
Competence:								
Own group‡	5.556	(1.092)	5.017	(1.126)	5.833	(.952)	4.952	(1.217)
Other group†‡ ...	3.397	(1.493)	4.633	(1.129)	4.633	(1.293)	5.016	(1.635)
Difference*	2.159	(2.046)	.383	(1.948)	1.200	(1.824)	−.064	(1.508)
Considerate:*								
Own group†	4.750	(1.292)	5.563	(.769)	5.413	(.908)	6.179	(.712)
Other group	5.607	(1.056)	3.288	(1.207)	6.167	(.805)	2.964	(.899)
Difference	−.857	(1.584)	2.275	(1.793)	−.754	(1.381)	3.214	(1.246)

NOTE.—Results averaged over subjects' response group (S2 or Q2). SDs are given in parentheses.
* Confederate behavior (deferential or nondeferential) significant at $P < .000$ in analyses of variance.
† Sex composition of team significant at $P < .05$.
‡ Confederate behavior (deferential or nondeferential) significant at $P < .01$.

tence to their own group than to the other group (negative difference scores), producing powerfully significant effects in analyses of variance (for status difference, $F = 261.532$, $P < .000$; for competence difference, $F = 83.351$, $P < .000$). Clearly, subjects in nondeferential conditions not only overcame evaluative bias for their own group, but conceded the actual evaluative superiority of the other group. These results clearly show that third-party participants acquired status beliefs even when the beliefs disadvantaged their own group, offering strong confirmation of our hypotheses.

Subjects' personal evaluations of people in the two response-style groups generally corresponded to their ratings of what most people think of them (table 6). Those who participated in local realities where influence was asserted over those like themselves attributed less status and competence to their own group, and more to the other group, than did those who observed their group treated deferentially, producing highly significant differences (for own group status, $F = 82.903$, $P < .000$; own group competence, $F = 8.529$, $P < .005$; for other group status, $F = 113.020$, $P < .000$; other group competence, $F = 7.117$, $P < .009$). As with most people's opinions, this yielded differences between perceptions of their own and the other groups' status that were actually negative for subjects in nondeferential conditions (see status difference scores in table 6; $F =$

150.359, $P < .000$, for deferential vs. nondeferential conditions). Once again, however, subjects resisted personally evaluating their own group as actually less competent than the other group, even though they thought most people would. Only one of the two competence difference scores in nondeferential conditions was actually negative, and it is very close to zero (table 6). It is interesting that such resistance occurred even in the face of the relatively extreme influence hierarchies that developed between the status-casting confederates and taped teammates. Because subjects in deferential conditions personally evaluated their own group as considerably more competent than the other group (large positive difference scores), while those in nondeferential conditions saw few differences between the groups in competence, the contrast between conditions for these scores was nevertheless significant ($F = 13.883$, $P < .000$).

Subjects' ratings of the social considerateness of both their own and the other group showed the compensatory effects that we found in experiment 1 as well (see considerateness means in tables 5 and 6). When either their own or the other group was deferred to and influential, subjects' rated it, both in terms of most people's views (table 5) and their personal evaluations (table 6), as less considerate than when that group was low in influence and treated assertively. As a result, there were highly significant differences between deferential and nondeferential conditions in the considerateness attributed to subjects' own group (for "most people," $F = 40.687$, $P < .000$; for personal views, $F = 14.403$, $P < .000$), to the other group (for "most people," $F = 166.258$, $P < .000$; for personal views, $F = 153.316$, $P < .000$), and for the difference between their own and the other group (for "most people," $F = 145.156$, $P < .000$; for personal views, $F = 110.847$, $P < .000$). While the compensatory pattern of considerateness ratings was significant across the board, the effect was noticeably stronger for evaluations of the other group. As in the first experiment, subjects seem to moderate their stereotyping of their own group compared to the other group.

As expected, whether subjects were labeled S2s or Q2s had no consistent effect on the status beliefs they formed. There were a small number differences between subjects in female and male teams, but as in the first experiment, there were none that suggested that the formation of status beliefs differed by gender (tables 5 and 6).[12] Finally, as the relative influ-

[12] Similar to the first experiment, females compared to males rated the other group, but not their own group, as higher status and more competent across the board (see significant sex of team effects for the status and competence of the other group in tables 5 and 6). On the other hand, unlike the first study, female third-party participants rated their own group but not the other as more considerate (see considerateness of own group in tables 5 and 6). An interaction between sex and confederate behavior indicated that females personally (table 6, $F = 4.098$, $P = .047$) made more extreme

TABLE 7
EXPERIMENT 2: PERCEPTIONS OF TAPED CONFEDERATE AND TEAM MEMBER

CONFEDERATE BEHAVIOR*	CONDITION MEANS							
	Male Teams				Female Teams			
	Deferential		Nondeferential		Deferential		Nondeferential	
Relative task skill:								
Round 1	1.978	(1.612)	−.668	(1.816)	1.533	(1.742)	−.508	(1.695)
Round 2	1.476	(1.937)	−.383	(2.139)	.750	(1.607)	−1.143	(1.993)
Relative influence:								
Round 1	3.191	(2.581)	−2.900	(3.059	2.650	(2.641)	−.191	(2.657)
Round 2	3.124	(2.822)	−4.450	(3.832)	1.750	(2.074)	−3.952	(2.819)

NOTE.—Results averaged over subjects' response group (S2 or Q2). SDs are given in parentheses.
* Confederate behavior (deferential or nondeferential) significant at $P < .000$ in analyses of variance.

ence means in table 7 show, subjects accurately perceived the influence hierarchies that developed between the status-casting confederates and other teammates except for one condition in round 1 that corrected itself by round 2. Subjects attributed greater influence to the teammate in deferential conditions (positive relative influence) and to the confederate in nondeferential conditions (negative relative influence). The difference in perceived relative influence in deferential and nondeferential conditions was highly significant (round 1: $F = 52.332$, $P < .000$; round 2: $F = 100.561$, $P < .000$). Perceptions of teammates' relative task skill followed suit (table 7), showing highly significant effects of the confederate's status-casting behavior (round 1: $F = 39.268$, $P < .000$; round 2: $F = 21.002$, $P < .000$).[13]

It is clear from the results of this experiment that the repeated treatment of another as high or low influence by someone who is nominally different

distinctions in the considerateness of the other group and thought most others would as well (table 5, $F = 9.669$, $P = .003$), based on how teammates belonging to that group (the confederates) treated those of their own group. This is interesting given that confederates in female teams, if anything, treated the other teammate in a less extreme manner than did those in male teams. Recall that in the first experiment, females personally made significantly *less* extreme distinctions in considerateness based on confederate behavior. Thus, women in the observer position tended to be more judgmental about the "niceness" of a group based on assertive or deferential behavior while women receiving such behavior were less judgmental in this way compared to similar men.

[13] There was a surprising main effect of response-style group (S2/Q2) on round 2 relative skill, indicating that subjects who were Q2s tended to rate their other teammate more highly relative to the confederate than did subjects who were S2s. This effect is difficult to interpret given that S2 and Q2 subjects heard tapes of the identical confederate-teammate interaction on each round. It is noteworthy that there are no corresponding effects of response-style group on perceived influence in round 2 or on status beliefs about S2s and Q2s.

can "teach" status beliefs about the nominal distinction to third parties who share the other's nominal category and participate in the local reality of the encounter. It is striking that the status beliefs formed by third-party participants were so similar to those formed by subjects in the first experiment who were personally cast as high or low influence. There are trade-offs between the position of the witness and that of the direct recipient of status-evaluated treatment. While the experience of direct treatment is surely more powerful, by the same token, it may engender more resistance than is evoked by observing another of one's group treated as high or low influence. When we put most peoples' and personal evaluations of response groups from both experiments into four-way analyses of variance (experiment × sex composition × confederate behavior × subject's response group), there were few significant effects of interest, with one set of exceptions. In nondeferential conditions, there were few differences between third-party and directly treated subjects in the status attributed to own and the other group, personally and by most people. In deferential conditions, however, third-party subjects attributed much greater status to their own group than did directly treated subjects. Doubts about deservingness and issues of modesty are less apparent and constraining for observers than for actors. Thus third-party observation of status-evaluated treatment and corresponding influence may be especially effective in spreading status beliefs that flatter one's own group.[14]

DISCUSSION

Status construction theory's account of how the conjunction of structural conditions and interactional processes create consensual status beliefs depends heavily on its claims about the power of interaction not only to create status beliefs, but also to "teach" them to others by treating those others in accord with the beliefs. Spreading beliefs by this means is essential to the diffusion process that allows status beliefs emerging from local encounters at the margins between social groups to become widely shared cultural schemas for organizing social relations between nominally distinct groups. The two experiments here offer strong evidence that interaction can indeed spread status beliefs as the theory claims. The first

[14] Interpretation of differences between the experiments are confounded by small differences in the extremity of the influence hierarchies typical in the first experiment compared to those presented on tapes in the second experiment. The taped hierarchies, however, were equally more extreme in nondeferential conditions (33% vs. 46% for experiment 1) as in deferential conditions (90% vs. 78%). Therefore, differences in the extremity of the hierarchies subjects were exposed to in the two experiments are unlikely to fully account for these results.

experiment also provides new evidence about the interactional contexts that create status beliefs by verifying a general mechanism by which interaction induces status beliefs.

In the first experiment, subjects formed status beliefs about the nominal distinction after experiencing two rounds of goal-oriented interaction, each time with a partner who was similar to them in resources but who differed from them on an unevaluated nominal distinction. The partners treated the subjects as though the nominal difference carried status value by either deferring to or asserting influence over the subjects, creating an influence hierarchy between them. Subjects who were repeatedly influential and deferred to formed beliefs that, in the eyes of "most people," persons in their own nominal group are typically more respected, higher status, more powerful, and more competent than those in the other nominal group. Subjects who were repeatedly cast as low influence by their nondeferential partners were forced to concede that most people rate those in their own nominal group as lower status and less competent than those in the other group. Thus, in this experiment, partners who acted as though they held status beliefs about the nominal distinction "taught" those beliefs to the subjects by creating influence hierarchies in the encounters that reflected the status beliefs. This experiment also shows that status beliefs develop from the behavioral enactment of influence hierarchies between nominally different people even without supporting resource differences between them, as Webster and Hysom (1998) predict.

The second experiment demonstrated that interaction can spread status beliefs not only to those who are directly cast into an influence hierarchy by a believer but also to bystanders who witness these influence hierarchies between people of different nominal groups. Subjects participated in two rounds of goal-oriented interaction where they witnessed a resource equal who was nominally different from them treat a teammate who was nominally like them in a way that resulted in an influence hierarchy between the two. When these third-party participants repeatedly experienced one of their own deferred to and influential, they formed beliefs that those in their own nominal group were higher status and more competent than those in the other group. When they experienced persons of the other nominal group consistently assert influence over those of their own group, subjects admitted that most people see their group as lower status and less competent than the other group.

The results of these experiments demonstrate that interaction has the capacity to spread status beliefs widely through behavioral enactments that create local realities for participants that appear to embody the beliefs. The capacity of interaction to spread status beliefs to bystanders as well as direct actors greatly enhances the power and reach of the diffusion process created by encounters between people from distinct nominal

groups. Simulations of the processes described by status construction theory show that encounters of three to six people will act as social dynamos that propagate status beliefs widely in society (Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997). Consequently, the processes demonstrated in these experiments offer important evidence for the plausibility of status construction theory's claim that interactional processes are sufficient to produce status beliefs that become widely shared and play a role in the structure of inequality for the society as a whole.

With the addition of these results, there is now good evidence for several of the processes implicated in status construction theory. The theory argues that when people must regularly interact across a social-difference boundary with regard to shared goals, the terms on which they interact, which are affected by structural conditions such as resource differences between them, affect the hierarchies of influence and esteem that emerge in the encounters. When people repeatedly experience a consistent association between the social-difference groups actors belong to and the actors' influence and esteem in encounters, people form shared status beliefs about the differences that favor the influence-advantaged group. In partial support of this argument, an earlier study of "doubly dissimilar" encounters demonstrated that when nominally different actors who differ in economic resources interact and develop corresponding influence hierarchies between them, both the advantaged and disadvantaged actors develop status beliefs that favor the advantaged nominal group (Ridgeway et al. 1998). Thus, if one group has a resource advantage over another and this biases the development of influence hierarchies in intergroup encounters (as other evidence suggests that it will), the results of this study suggest that intergroup encounters will foster a persistent surplus of status beliefs favoring the advantaged group.

The surplus of status beliefs favoring the advantaged group that are produced in local intergroup encounters has the potential to spread widely in the society because people carry status beliefs formed in one intergroup context to their next such encounter and act on them there. This part of the theory, while not yet directly tested, is supported by evidence that actors transfer their expectations about categories of actors formed in one situation to future interactions with actors of that category (Markovsky et al. 1984; Pugh and Wahrman 1983). The theory then argues that by acting on their new status beliefs in subsequent intergroup encounters, actors induce others to take on these beliefs. This creates a broad diffusion process that allows the surplus of status beliefs fostered in "doubly dissimilar" encounters to spread widely and gradually overcome the cacophany of conflicting beliefs among the population, resulting in near consensual status beliefs about the nominal distinction. The two experiments reported here support this part of the argument by showing that actors

do indeed spread status beliefs to others by acting on them. Furthermore, computer simulations indicate that given that interaction does foster and spread status beliefs as these studies show, the emergence of widely shared status beliefs is indeed a plausible outcome under many structural conditions (Ridgeway and Balkwell 1997).

Status construction theory implies a general mechanism by which interaction creates status beliefs that had not been directly demonstrated prior to the studies reported here. As Webster and Hysom (1998) have pointed out, the repeated association of a nominal difference with positions in an interactional influence hierarchy should be sufficient to create shared status beliefs favoring the influence-advantaged group even without supporting resource differences between the groups, according to the theory. Our first experiment has now confirmed that this is indeed the case. Now that there is evidence for this general mechanism of belief formation in interaction, Webster and Hysom's generalization of status construction theory to the development of status beliefs from factors other than just economic differences becomes plausible. They argue that *any* factor that systematically biases the development of influence hierarchies between nominally different actors will lead to widely shared status beliefs favoring the factor-advantaged nominal group. With this generalization of the theory, it becomes reasonable to consider, for instance, how the processes described by status construction theory might foster status beliefs about computer literacy from encounters among computer experienced and nonexperienced children in schools and adults in the workplace.

Status construction theory is addressed to the formation, maintenance, and change of status beliefs about social distinctions among people who must regularly interact with one another in regard to shared goals. Consequently, the processes it describes are most likely to be implicated in the maintenance or change of cultural status beliefs about groups with high rates of interaction under terms of mutual, if often unequal, interdependence such as men and women or interdependent racial or ethnic groups. When people of different categories must interact with regard to shared goals in the workplace, in the schools, or in the home, the hierarchies of influence and esteem that develop create powerful local realities for their participants. It is the apparent social "truths" enacted in these local realities that persuade people to take on, as a matter of practical realism, status beliefs that devalue their own groups. This is the means by which interaction transforms structural advantages between groups into shared cultural status beliefs.

Status construction theory does not claim that the processes that it describes are the only ones by which consensual status beliefs arise in society. Other theories, however, must also explicitly account for the means by which groups that are disadvantaged by a status belief are pressured

to overcome their preferences for their own group and concede that most people attribute less esteem and competence to their group than to other groups. It is this concession of the "reality" of status beliefs by those they disadvantage as well as those they advantage that makes status beliefs a force for inequality among both individuals and social groups.

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