

# Power, Influence, and Diversity in Organizations

By  
JEFFREY W. LUCAS  
and  
AMY R. BAXTER

This article summarizes literatures on power, status, and influence in sociology's group processes tradition and applies them to issues of diversity in organizations. Power—defined as the ability to impose one's will even against resistance from others—results primarily from position in a social structure. Influence—defined as compelling behavior change without threat of punishment or promise of reward—results largely from the respect and esteem in which one is held by others. Research identifies status as a foundation of influence differences in groups and indicates that members of disadvantaged status groups, such as women and minorities, will have decreased influence and face challenges in acquiring and using power. The literature also suggests solutions to these challenges, including self-presentation strategies of group motivation and institutional arrangements that support women and minority group members in powerful leadership positions.

*Keywords:* power; status; influence; leadership; management; diversity

Reflecting the changing demographics of American society, organizations in the United States are becoming increasingly diverse places to work. Women, for the first time in history, make up half of the U.S. workforce, up from about 35 percent of the workforce 40 years ago (U.S. Department of Labor 2009). If demographic trends continue, nonwhites will make up half the U.S. workforce by 2050 (Toossi 2006). At the same time, this increasing diversity is not extending to high-level management positions. In fact, women and minority group members lost ground overall in representation in Fortune 500 corporate boards between 2004

*Jeffrey W. Lucas is an associate professor of sociology at the University of Maryland. He carries out basic experimental research on group processes, particularly status, power, and leadership.*

*Amy R. Baxter is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Maryland. Her current research is experimental work focusing on factors that contribute to the wage and promotion gap between women and men.*

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and 2010 (Lang et al. 2011). Despite composing only about one-third of the U.S. workforce, white men hold more than 75 percent of board seats and 95 percent of board chair positions in Fortune 500 corporations (Lang et al. 2011).

A consequence of inequalities in access to corporate leadership positions is that it is harder for persons in certain social groups to exercise their will in organizations. In this way, the experiences of women, persons of color, and members of other disadvantaged groups in organizations are shaped in significant ways by processes of power and influence. This article summarizes bodies of theory and research on power, status, and influence—particularly as the concepts are treated in sociology's group processes tradition—and discusses their relevance to issues of management and diversity in organizations.

Power, status, and influence are concepts with multiple treatments, both colloquially and in academic literatures. Meanings and uses of the concept *power*, for example, vary considerably across academic disciplines and subdisciplines. The philosopher Bertrand Russell identified power as the most important element in the development of any society and its study as the central aim of all social sciences (Russell 1938). Summarizing the literature on a concept of such breadth presents obvious challenges. The concepts of *status* and *influence* have similarly varied meanings and treatments. It would be impossible to survey the full range of treatments of power, status, and influence, and we make no effort to do so. Rather, we draw from basic research that has defined the concepts in narrow and consistent ways.

In colloquial language, power and influence are often viewed as more or less the same thing: the ability to affect the behavior of others in some intended way. Alternatively, power and influence are sometimes seen as two parts of the same process—power as a *capacity* to change behavior and influence as the *practice* of using power to effect behavior change (French and Raven 1959). According to Wrong (1979), *power* and *influence* are used synonymously because of the absence of a verb form for the term *power*. We do not argue that these treatments of the concepts are incorrect. Rather, we focus on research that identifies the concepts more narrowly and as clearly distinct. Power, as defined in the group processes perspective, is the ability to get what one wants even in the face of resistance (Markovsky, Willer, and Patton 1987; Weber 1978). Influence is the ability to get what one wants even in the absence of fear of punishment or promise of reward (Rashotte and Webster 2005). The theory and research we review is consistent with these treatments of the concepts. For other treatments, see Kelly (1994) on power and Manz (1986) on influence.

We first define and discuss the concept of influence. Group processes treatments of influence address it primarily as an outcome of status, another concept narrowly defined in the tradition. We discuss theory and research on status in groups, work that has clear relevance to issues of diversity in organizations. We then discuss theory and research on power in networks. We close with a discussion of how the concepts relate to each other and what the power and influence literatures together can tell us about managing diversity in work organizations.

## Influence in Groups

Power, as typically conceived, is a capacity (Salancik and Pfeffer 1977). It is the ability to get things done if one chooses. When power is used to get people to do things, power is often defined as influence (Dahl 1957). Group processes research, in contrast, treats influence as clearly distinct from power use. Influence occurs when people perform actions because they have been convinced they are the right actions to take, not because someone with power told them to do them (Sell et al. 2004). Consider a supervisor who directs subordinates to fill boxes in a factory. The subordinates do what the supervisor says because she has power over them. In contrast, consider a minister who asks members of her congregation to volunteer to fill boxes for a charity drive. If the members of the congregation volunteer to fill the boxes, they have been influenced. The minister has little or no power to direct the behavior of the members of the congregation, but they do what she wants without promise of reward or fear of punishment. They have been convinced that the activity is the right thing to do.

As we discuss, power is principally the result of a position in a social structure (Emerson 1972). The factory supervisor has power because her position gives her the ability to discipline subordinates who do not comply and reward subordinates who are especially compliant. Influence results less from social structure than from status (the respect and esteem in which a person is held by others) (Wagner and Berger 1993). Below we discuss the most well-developed and widely studied theoretical account of status processes in groups.

### *Expectation states and status characteristics theories*

Status is a position in a group based on esteem or respect (Berger, Cohen, and Zelditch 1972; Berger et al. 1977). Although status has a number of outcomes, influence is perhaps its most fundamental. Those with higher status in groups have more influence over group decisions than do those with lower status. Expectation states and status characteristics theory, which resides in sociology's group processes tradition, explains the processes by which groups set up and maintain status hierarchies (Berger, Wagner, and Zelditch 1985; Berger and Webster 2006).

Dating to the 1950s, research currently finds that, initially, status-undifferentiated task groups organize themselves into hierarchies of prestige (Bales 1950). The most complete theoretical account of these processes is the expectation states program of Berger and colleagues. Status characteristics theory (SCT) (Berger et al. 1977; Berger, Wagner, and Zelditch 1985) links characteristics of an individual such as gender and race to that person's rank in a status hierarchy based on the esteem in which the person is held by self and others. The theory proposes that members of a task group form expectations about each other's competence to contribute to group goals based on each person's status characteristics. Individuals expected to contribute more are more highly valued by the group and held in higher esteem (Webster and Driskell 1978).

Two scope conditions limit the domain of SCT—task orientation and collective orientation (Berger et al. 1977). Task orientation means that the group is formed for the purpose of solving some problem. Collective orientation means that group members consider it necessary to take into account the input of every group member in solving the problem or performing the task. For all groups that meet its scope conditions, the theory makes predictions about the process through which observable status characteristics lead to behavioral inequalities. Many groups in organizational settings satisfy these scope conditions—a group choosing which candidate to hire for an open position, a committee determining an incentive system, a team deciding which direction to go on a project, and so on. Additionally, research has extended the scope of the theory to include individual performances when individuals anticipate that those performances will have implications for future group interaction (Lovaglia et al. 1998).

Research on status processes in groups has produced several consistent findings. According to SCT, group members (often outside their conscious awareness) develop expectations for their own performances and those of other group members. In the theory, these expectations develop based on status characteristics, which are characteristics around which expectations and beliefs come to be organized (Berger et al. 1977). Examples of status characteristics include race, gender, education, and task expertise (Webster and Hysom 1998). Individuals in categories of status characteristics that produce higher expectations for performance than those of other group members are held in higher esteem and have higher positions in the group's status order (Bienenstock and Bianchi 2004). One consequence of the status order is that high-status group members are expected to make more competent contributions to the group. In this way, the status order of the group becomes self-fulfilling, with the contributions of high-status members evaluated as more competent regardless of their objective merit (Walker and Simpson 2000).

SCT specifies two types of status characteristics. For both, one category is considered to be more socially desirable and highly valued than another (Simpson and Walker 2002). A status characteristic is specific if it carries expectations for competence in a narrow range of situations. Computer programming skills is a specific characteristic because it leads to expectations for competence only in limited settings. A characteristic is diffuse if it carries with it expectations for competence in a wide variety of situations. Age, gender, race, and social class are examples of diffuse characteristics. In the theory, both types of status characteristics contribute to determining group members' relative status by altering expectations for competence that members hold for one another (Berger et al. 1977). Diffuse status characteristics, however, have a distinct moral component, with high status on the characteristics being viewed as broadly superior to low status on the characteristics (Berger, Rosenholtz, and Zelditch 1980).

In SCT, status characteristics produce rank in a status hierarchy through a chain of four logically connected assumptions (Webster and Foschi 1988). First, the theory assumes that any characteristic will become salient (i.e., stand out) to

group members if it is known or believed to be related to the task or if it differentiates among the members of the group. Second, the burden-of-proof assumption states that all salient characteristics will be treated as relevant (i.e., used to develop performance expectations) by group members unless specifically disassociated from the task. Therefore, in a mixed-sex group in which gender operates as a status characteristic, the theory assumes that gender will be treated as relevant by group members unless it is specifically demonstrated that gender is not indicative of ability to perform the group's task. In other words, the burden of proof lies with showing group members that a characteristic is *not* relevant to the group's task (Berger et al. 1977).

The theory's third assumption is the formation of aggregated expectation states. In simple terms, this assumption holds that when group members are confronted with more than one relevant characteristic, they act as if they combine the expectations associated with each characteristic in developing an overall performance expectation. The fourth assumption in the link between status characteristics and a group's status order is the basic expectation assumption. According to this assumption, a member's rank in the group's status hierarchy will be a direct function of the group's expectations for that member's performance. With this assumption, the status order of the group will be determined by the aggregated expectation states that each group member has for herself and other group members.

Dozens of studies over the past four decades have supported the principles of SCT (for a review, see Kalkhoff and Thye 2006). Research in the theory is primarily carried out in a standard experimental setting. The setting involves participants at computer terminals being told information about partners on computers in different rooms. The participants and partners then complete a task together in which the partner has opportunities to influence the participant. Partners in these studies are often fictitious, with experimental conditions determining the partner's characteristics. Partner influence is treated as an indicator of status. If, for example, participants with male partners were influenced more than participants with female partners, it would provide evidence that gender acts as a status characteristic that advantages men.

Status orders in groups, then, reflect status characteristics of group members, such as gender and race. Research has identified a number of outcomes of status processes, including that high-status group members perform more in the group (e.g., talk more during group interactions), have more opportunities to perform (e.g., have their opinions solicited more often), and have their performances evaluated more highly (e.g., get more positive feedback on their suggestions) than low-status group members (Berger, Rosenholtz, and Zelditch 1980). The principal behavioral outcome of status is influence; those of higher status play a bigger role in determining decisions in the group and its members than do those of lower status (Berger et al. 1977).

A key element of status is that it is relative. Corporate CEOs, for example, do not have high status in and of themselves, but only in relation to persons in other,

less prestigious positions. It is this relational aspect of status that makes it a group process. Furthermore, the processes by which individuals set up and maintain status hierarchies in groups are largely nonconscious (Berger, Wagner, and Zelditch 1985). Individuals tend not to consciously choose to defer to men more than women, for example, but they do so in a large number of settings (Ridgeway 1993). And status orders tend to be self-reinforcing; high-status group members are evaluated more highly because they are high-status. The self-reinforcing nature of status orders, combined with the fact that status processes tend to operate below conscious awareness, makes status hierarchies very resistant to change. For example, research has found that status orders in an organization's work groups tend to match the status characteristics of group members even when those groups have been in place for extended periods of time (B. Cohen and Zhou 1991).

### *Gender, race, and status*

Substantial evidence indicates that gender and race operate as status characteristics in American society. Despite our society becoming increasingly diverse by race and ethnicity, contributions from European Americans are still valued more highly than those from members of other racial and ethnic groups (Lovaglia et al. 1998). And despite girls and women now outperforming boys and men on nearly all indicators at every level of education (Freeman 2004), men remain higher status than women (Ridgeway and Correll 2000). Based on the indicators of status discussed above—opportunities to perform, performances, performance evaluations, and influence—the contributions of men and European Americans are overvalued, whereas contributions from women and minority group members tend to be devalued or ignored.

Gender is a diffuse characteristic because it carries expectations for performance in a wide range of situations (Ridgeway 2004; Wagner and Berger 1997). Studies repeatedly indicate that gender acts as a status characteristic in the United States, with men expected to perform better than women on many important tasks (Berger, Rosenholtz, and Zelditch 1980; Carli 1991; Pugh and Wahrman 1983). Research shows that men have more influence than women on tasks that would appear to be gender-neutral and that men tend to receive higher evaluations for their performances than do women, despite the objective merit of those performances (Eagley, Makhijani, and Klonsky 1992).

Status research additionally finds that women tend to resist taking leadership positions and that when women do attain leadership based on their own merits, their positions are often not seen as legitimate (Ridgeway and Berger 1986). For example, in an experimental study in which a confederate took leadership of a group by acting in a competent and assertive manner, group members responded more negatively to female than to male leaders (Butler and Geis 1990). This study and others indicate that women are not viewed as legitimate occupants of leadership positions (Johnson, Clay-Warner, and Funk 1996; Lucas 2003). Reflecting these differences—although more women graduate from college now



than men, and although women make up roughly half of the U.S. workforce—only about 3 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are women (CNN Money 2010).

Similar to gender, race is a diffuse status characteristic. In the United States, contributions from European Americans are valued more highly than those from members of other racial (and ethnic) groups (Berger, Rosenholtz, and Zelditch 1980; Webster and Driskell 1978). For example, employers often rate black workers and applicants lower than white workers and applicants in various ways (Bobo and Fox 2003). In one experimental study, members of racial minorities, in comparison to whites, had to demonstrate higher levels of competence before participants deemed them to have the ability to successfully carry out a task (Biernat and Kobrynowicz 1997). And survey research finds that, controlling for factors other than race, people of color receive lower ratings as leaders than whites (Knight et al. 2003). In organizational hiring, perceptions of qualifications interact with race in ways that disadvantage applicants of color (Moss and Tilly 1996). In all of these ways, race/ethnicity is a status characteristic that advantages European Americans relative to persons in other racial and ethnic groups.

Much of the research in the status characteristics and expectation states tradition has attended to issues of overcoming status disadvantages. The goal of this work is to identify how to create situations in which the contributions of all group members, irrespective of standing on status characteristics, receive proper recognition. We discuss this work below.

### *Overcoming status disadvantage*

As can be seen from the discussion on status processes above, women and minority group members (as well as others in low-status categories of status characteristics) face disadvantages that can limit advancement in organizations. Even in the presence of efforts to avoid discrimination in selections for management positions, for example, status processes can lead to candidates from majority groups being more qualified for promotions (Lovaglia et al. 2006). Because of the self-reinforcing nature of status processes, we should expect men and European Americans, when being considered for promotions, to have higher performance evaluations from supervisors, higher ratings from coworkers, and histories of more influence in comparison to otherwise similarly qualified women and non-European Americans. Status research has indicated strategies, resulting both from efforts of a person in a disadvantaged social category and from more structural approaches, that can successfully overcome status inequality.

According to the principle of aggregated expectations in SCT, individuals act as though they combine the expectations associated with all of each person's status characteristics when developing performance expectations for self and others (Berger, Rosenholtz, and Zelditch 1980). Note that some status characteristics are largely or wholly out of a person's control, whereas others can be changed. To gain status, individuals can change their standings on status characteristics within their control. Increasing educational credentials, for example, typically leads to

influence beyond any directly job-related benefits of the acquired knowledge. The career value of an MBA degree over that of a bachelor's degree far exceeds the two-year investment required to complete it. In 2001, after accounting for tuition and lost compensation while a student, the cash-in-hand value of an MBA was \$550,000 (Davies and Cline 2005). Appearance is another important status characteristic, with more attractive people accorded higher status than less attractive people (Umberson and Hughes 1987). How people dress also alters expectations for their performance in groups, ultimately affecting how much influence they have (Bunderson 2003).

Research has identified one self-presentation strategy that is particularly effective for increasing influence in groups, a strategy especially useful for women and minority group members (Ridgeway 1982). Individuals typically assume that high-status group members are more oriented toward the interests of the group than are low-status group members, whom people are more likely to assume are more selfishly motivated (Wagner and Berger 1997). This is one reason why high-status persons tend to be leaders in groups; people assume that high-status persons have the interests of the group in mind (Lucas and Lovaglia 2006). Research shows that presenting one's contributions as motivated by the interests of the group works to increase status for persons in disadvantaged status categories (Ridgeway 1982; Shackelford, Wood, and Worchel 1996). In other words, women and minority group members can increase their standing in groups by making it clear that their recommendations and performances are carried out with the best interests of the group in mind.

There are additional structural changes that can counteract status processes that disadvantage women and minority group members. Cohen and colleagues, in a series of studies in educational settings, found that racial and ethnic minorities attained status as high as majority group members when all group members were trained to recognize the expertise and contributions of minority group members (e.g., E. Cohen and Lotan 1995). This research suggests that fostering an environment in which individuals are encouraged to give proper recognition to performances from all group members can work toward reducing status inequalities.

Other research shows that changing institutional arrangements in an organization can successfully alter influence patterns that disadvantage individuals with low states of diffuse status characteristics. Institutional theory proposes that legitimacy concerns drive much organizational action and that organizations adopt practices that are taken for granted or institutionalized in their environments (Troyer and Silver 1999). Lucas (2003) found that when a group structure with women in leadership positions was institutionalized, women as leaders were as influential as men as leaders. This indicates that strong institutional support for arrangements in which women and minority group members hold leadership positions can go a long way toward reducing the resistance they face when in such positions.

Theory and research on status in groups demonstrate how status processes work to disadvantage persons in social categories accorded low status. In particular, men and European Americans are more influential in U.S. culture and have their



contributions valued more highly than women and minority group members. One consequence of these differences is inequality in access to powerful positions.

## Power and Social Structure

As discussed above, influence stems largely from the respect and esteem in which a person is held by others. Power, in contrast, results primarily from a position in a social structure (D. Willer, Lovaglia, and Markovsky 1997). In theory and research in the group processes tradition, power is treated principally as a feature of social networks (Cook et al. 1983). Like status, power is relative in that one can have it only in relation to others. For this reason, power is treated as a feature of an interconnected group of people, typically a group in which resources are contested (D. Willer 1999).

### *Power in networks*

In traditional treatments of the term, power was studied as an attribute of individual people (Gibb 1969). In particular, the goal of research on power was to determine what traits, resources, or attributes confer power (Wolfinger 1960). An early insight in group processes approaches to power was the understanding that power rests in relationships between people, not in people themselves (Emerson 1962). For this reason, power is treated as a feature of network organization.

Power is the ability to get what one wants even when others resist (Lovaglia 1999). Treatments of power in disciplines other than group processes often focus on typologies of power. For example, social psychologists often draw from French and Raven's (1959) classic five bases of power: expert power, legitimate power, referent power, coercive power, and reward power. Group processes work focuses more narrowly on the capacity to get what one wants; in French and Raven's parlance, power in the group processes perspective is a capacity to engage in coercive power. This narrow treatment of power has facilitated research on the concept and led to a number of insights, most important of which is that power results from a position in a social structure. Unlike status, which is grounded in feelings of respect (and is very similar to French and Raven's referent power), power is a result of one's structural position. Typically, formal rules, such as those that give authority to supervisors in an organization, grant power to control the behavior of others.

There are a number of features of social structure that might confer power, and much of the group processes research has focused on identifying what characteristics of networks give power to some positions versus others. A line of research in this tradition involves studies that connect experimental participants in networks in which they compete for resources (Markovsky, Willer, and Patton 1987; Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2008; Molm, Collett, and Schaefer 2007). Some

argue that central locations in networks are an important basis of power; from this perspective, positions acquire power when others must go through them to acquire resources (e.g., Pfeffer 1992). Ultimately, experimental research on power in networks has identified that it is the ability to exclude actors from resources they desire, as opposed to centrality or some other feature of network organization, that primarily confers power in networks (Markovsky, Willer, and Patton 1987). If a person controls access to resources, that person will have power. Such power can be seen in human resources departments that have power beyond what their positions in the organizational structure alone indicate. They control resources that are valuable to persons in the organization.

Research over the past few decades has produced several important insights on power. One such insight is that to have power is to use power (Emerson 1972). Even if those with power would choose not to use it, they sometimes must. Organizational structures, for example, grant managers power to determine bonus distributions to subordinates, and the managers must use the power in determining allocations. In the same way, supervisors must submit performance evaluations of subordinates, discipline subordinates who underperform, and so on. Additionally, those with power need not intend to use that power for it nevertheless to have dramatic effects (Bonacich 2002). For example, consider a manager who intends to foster a collaborative atmosphere by giving equal bonuses to subordinates. Despite the manager's intentions, subordinates might well undermine the collaborative environment by undercutting each other to win favor with the manager.

Power and influence, then, are distinct in group processes approaches. One way the distinction is discussed is that power changes behavior without changing attitudes, whereas influence is a change in attitudes that produces a change in behavior. According to Zelditch (1992), the distinction between power and influence is that power involves sanctions, whereas influence persuades an actor to carry out actions because she believes such actions are in her own best interests. Similarly, Parsons (1963) sees power as involving positive and negative sanctions in contrast to influence, which has an effect on the attitudes and opinions of others. In this way, influence has advantages that power use does not. Also, whereas group members, at a minimum, act as though they agree on the status order (which leads to influence) in a group (Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1989), positions of power are usually highly contested. An outcome that power and influence share is getting what one wants. Power leads to other outcomes as well, and we discuss these below.

### *Outcomes of power*

The use of power has two primary outcomes. One is that those with power get their way, typically including the accumulation of valued resources. The second is that those without power come to resent those who use power (Walker et al. 2000). This resentment occurs whether people are threatened with punishment for

undesirable behavior or promised rewards for desirable behavior (D. Willer, Lovaglia, and Markovsky 1997). Both rewards and punishments compel people to do things they would not do if the rewards or punishments were not in place. Using power to compel action is also inefficient, requiring a great deal of energy on the part of the power holder to always have rewards and punishments in place to gain compliance. From a leadership perspective, if leaders initiate action only through the use of power, then followers will stop carrying out actions that the leader desires as soon as the incentives are removed. A consequence of creating resentment is that it leads to a loss of status (D. Willer, Lovaglia, and Markovsky 1997).

Power also has a number of effects on those who hold it. One is that the more powerful are more likely to take action than the less powerful (Guinote 2007). One experimental study had participants first write about an experience in which they felt powerful or powerless (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee 2003). This activity had the effect of “priming” power for those who wrote about experiences of being powerful. When participants subsequently started a study task, they discovered that they were very close to an annoying tabletop fan. The research found that twice as many participants in the high-power group moved the fan compared to participants in the low-power group (about 80 percent compared to about 40 percent). Individuals with more power are also more likely to take risks (Anderson and Galinsky 2006). Another “priming” study, for example, found that participants in the high-power group were about three times as likely as those in the low-power group to be the first to offer help to a stranger in distress (Galinsky, Jordan, and Sivanathan 2008).

Power, then, tends to lead to an orientation toward action, including risky action. It also appears to lead persons to be less likely to consider the nuances of situations. For example, the more powerful are less likely to consider the perspectives of others (Galinsky et al. 2006). Power also makes individuals more likely to objectify others (Georges and Harris 2000). And power tends to make people greedier and less likely to distribute rewards to others (Anderson and Berdahl 2002).

In addition to differences in how powerful people act toward others in varied situations, power also affects how people view themselves. Power makes people more confident and aware of their own points of view (Brinol et al. 2007; Weick and Guinote 2008). They become more focused on potential rewards, particularly for themselves, that situations might produce (Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson 2003). High-powered people also rely less on group norms and more on their individual motives to govern their behavior, and their actions tend to be more variable than those of low-power group members (Brauer 2005). Power is also found to make people more likely to engage in moral hypocrisy, applying strict moral standards to others but not practicing them themselves (Lammers and Stapel 2009).

In sum, those in power generally accumulate valued resources and gain compliance from others. However, leading with power breeds resentment and is inefficient. Powerful people are also more oriented toward taking action, particularly action that benefits them, and they are less likely to consider the perspectives of others.

Additionally, powerful people are in tune with their own perspectives but nevertheless more likely to engage in moral hypocrisy than are less powerful people.

### *Gender, race, and power*

Just as U.S. organizations exist in a culture in which women and minority group members are accorded lower status than others, persons in disadvantaged groups in our society face challenges in both reaching powerful positions and exercising power once in those positions. In particular, status processes influence who gets access to powerful positions and how the use of power is interpreted by others.

Selections and elections to powerful positions in the United States happen based on perceptions of competence. When making a promotion decision in a work organization, for example, the selection is made based on who will be most able to competently carry out the job. As can be seen from the discussion of status processes in groups, such competency expectations are developed largely based on status characteristics. Thus, those in disadvantaged status categories, such as women and minority group members, are less likely to have access to powerful positions than are those in advantaged status categories.

Once in positions of power, those with low states of diffuse status characteristics are often seen as illegitimate occupants of their positions. For example, people tend to resist directives from women and minority group members in positions of authority (Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky 1992). A consequence of this resistance is that their power comes into question. When power is viewed as legitimate, those with power need not carry out any actions to demonstrate that they are powerful (Brass and Burkhardt 1993). When power is viewed as illegitimate, however, those with power feel threatened (Rodríguez-Bailón, Moya, and Yzerbyt 2000). The result is often that women and minority group members in positions of authority feel that they must use their power to show that they have it (Bruins, Ellemers, and De Gilder 1999). Such behaviors likely gain compliance, but because power use creates resentment, they also pose problems. By using their power this way, women and minority group members likely lose further status.

## Power, Status, and Diversity

We have summarized the literature on the concepts of power, status, and influence as they are treated in sociology's group processes tradition. We now discuss how the concepts interrelate, paying particular attention to implications for diversity. Although the group processes tradition treats power and status as distinct, each can be used in strategic ways to increase the other.

### *Relationships between power and status*

Curiously, power and status tend to vary together. Positions high in power (corporate CEOs, for example) are also typically high in status, and positions low

in power (mailroom clerks, for example) are also typically low in status. This is counterintuitive when considering that the use of power, because of the resentment it produces, decreases status (Lovaglia et al. 2005). Why is it then that power and status tend to align? In part it is because power activity is often hidden, and people in organizations often do not understand well the power structures of those organizations (Walker et al. 2000). Additionally, those with power typically operate restraint when using that power. In a classic treatment, Emerson (1962) famously noted that to use power is to lose it. Although having power also sometimes requires its use, those with power can retain positions of high status if they use the power with restraint.

Warren Buffett has managed to maintain a position of extraordinarily high status while at the same time accumulating one of the largest fortunes in the world (Shell 2008). Buffett likely accomplished this in part through his reputation for using his power with restraint. Buffett is notorious for his resistance to marketing his name as a brand; he maintains a modest lifestyle and holds to a management principle that those under him should be allowed to operate with as much freedom as possible (Schroeder 2009). Donald Trump, in contrast, attaches his moniker to seemingly everything he can, makes ostentatious claims about his wealth, and is perhaps most closely associated with his trademark phrase “You’re fired!” Such strategies have almost certainly increased Trump’s power, but they seem to have cost him social status. Parodies of Trump abound, and many treated his entries into the national political scene as a joke (Hertzberg 2011). In addition to maintaining status through restraint in the use of power, there are a number of ways that power can be used to gain status.

The foundation of status differences is expectations that people have for competent contributions to social groups. The foundation of power differences, in contrast, is positions in social structures rather than respect or personal ability. Those with power accumulate resources, however, and if we consistently see one person accumulating more resources than others, we are likely to assume that that person is more competent than those others (Stewart and Moore 1992). Thus, one way power translates to status is that people assume those using power are competent because they see the powerful persons accumulating valued resources or otherwise getting their way.

Another way that power can be used to gain status is to use the resources that come with power to “purchase” status. Adjusting for inflation, John D. Rockefeller is considered the wealthiest person in history (CNN Money 2006). Rockefeller used his power as head of Standard Oil to ruthless effect, gaining near complete control of the oil industry in the United States. Once he was powerful, however, Rockefeller cultivated a reputation for being generous with the proceeds of his activities. Late in life, Rockefeller was widely known to keep his pockets filled with coins, giving out dimes to adults and nickels to children he encountered in his daily life (Fox 2006). These gifts reflected a minuscule portion of his wealth, which was over \$1 billion at his death, but the activity seems to have worked to increase his status.

A third way that power can translate into status is through strategic image control. For example, one way to sidestep the resentment that the use of power produces is to use power on a marginalized out-group while maintaining or gaining influence over the majority in-group (R. Willer, Troyer, and Lovaglia 2005). Also, in contrast to those with high status, who are typically viewed as having the interests of the group in mind, those with power are often presumed by others to be self-interested and greedy (Lovaglia, Willer, and Troyer 2003). By engaging in strategic philanthropy, powerful persons can counter expectations of greed and in fact enhance their status with others who admire their perceived restraint and compassion. The status positions of Buffett and Rockefeller, for example, likely benefited from the substantial portions of their fortunes they gave away.

Power, then, can be used in various ways to gain status. It is easier, however, to use status to gain power. Power is a natural outgrowth of status. Status arises principally out of expectations for competence. The reason that status naturally leads to power is that selections or elections to powerful positions are typically made based on perceptions of competence. As mentioned above, persons who are perceived to be the most competent candidates hold leadership positions in organizations. Thus, those who are higher in status, persons who may or may not be the most competent candidates, are typically rewarded with powerful positions. In this way, status processes make it more difficult for persons in disadvantaged status groups to attain powerful positions in organizations.

Status also leads to power because we perceive resources held by high-status others to be more valuable than resources held by low-status others. In a series of experiments, Thye (2000) found that participants were willing to give more of their own resources in exchange for resources that high-status partners held than for resources held by low-status partners. At the time of this writing, a short social note handwritten by Albert Einstein, a person much higher in status than he was in power, is listed on eBay for a price of \$25,000. Einstein's status gives value to items he possessed. People will trade money for autographs from high-status individuals, giving a resource they value a great deal for a resource relatively insignificant to the high-status person. Status, then, naturally leads to power.

### *Power, influence, and leadership*

Leadership, like power, status, and influence, is a concept that has been subject to a limitless number of treatments. At its most basic level, however, we can say that leadership is about getting people to do things. If people are carrying out actions they would otherwise perform in any case, then there is no need for a leader. Because power and influence are fundamental ways to get people to do things, theory and research on the concepts have clear relevance to issues of leadership.

As discussed, a key feature of power is that it produces public compliance without private acceptance. In other words, power use changes behavior but not attitudes. Research finds that when leaders use power to reward and punish, it creates



both resentment and resistance to the leader's directives (D. Willer, Lovaglia, and Markovsky 1997). In contrast, people willingly follow high-status leaders out of respect and honor. They are influenced, changing both behavior and attitudes.

Unlike positions of power that are often fiercely contested, high status once attained is relatively easy to maintain. This is because of the self-fulfilling nature of status orders; high-status persons receive higher evaluations because they are high-status and in turn maintain their positions. The advantage of leaders compelling behavior with influence rather than power is that because it changes attitudes, influence aligns the personal goals of followers with organizational goals (Parsons 1963; Zelditch 1992). With power, a leader communicates which behaviors followers should carry out. With influence, in contrast, a leader can convey a vision of the group's mission and then encourage followers to use their abilities to further that mission.

Leadership research finds that effective leaders have power but use it sparingly (Rashotte 2006). Instead, they rely on the benefits of leading with influence. A limitation to this approach is that persons in groups accorded low social status do not have the reserves of influence from which to draw in compelling behavior. For this reason, we should expect persons in disadvantaged social groups to encounter difficulties when in leadership positions. Research supports this expectation. Despite typically utilizing leadership styles that can have advantages over those more characteristic of men, women often receive unfair evaluations of their leadership and are given less authority on the job (Eagly and Carli 2003). Other studies find that black leaders are rated more negatively than white leaders, suggesting that they are not seen as legitimate in their leadership positions (Knight et al. 2003). Research also indicates that women suffer a penalty from negative reactions to their success at stereotypically male tasks (Heilman et al. 2004).

Research does indicate methods whereby persons in low-status social categories can increase their influence. We have discussed two, presenting contributions as group motivated and increasing standing on other status characteristics, such as education. Additionally, those who build consistent records of success gain status and influence. And being assertive increases status and influence (Lee and Ofshe 1981). Assertiveness may backfire (see, for example, Butler and Geis 1990), but when the alternative is having contributions ignored, as is often the case for women and minority group members, being assertive will tend to result in higher influence than will a more passive approach.

### *Power, status, and social identity*

Power and status are fundamental ways by which people organize themselves in groups. Dividing into groups is perhaps the most fundamental organizing feature of people. Research finds that people tend to view themselves and others in terms of group memberships and that such categorizations have powerful effects on impressions we develop (Tajfel 1981).

According to social identity theory, we have as many social identities as groups to which we see ourselves belonging. When social identities become salient, they tell us who we are, how we should behave, and how we should treat others. We perceive members of our in-groups in in-group stereotypical ways and as similar to ourselves. We perceive members of out-groups in out-group stereotypical and discriminatory ways. Furthermore, we are motivated to view members of our in-groups in favorable ways. As a result, we engage in strategies to protect our in-groups (Tajfel 1986).

Work on social identities has implications for issues of diversity in organizations. One implication is that in-group membership confers influence much like status does. Research finds that persons perceived to be in-group members have more influence than persons perceived to be out-group members and also that group membership combines with status characteristics in affecting performance expectations (Kalkhoff and Barnum 2000).

A key to understanding social identity processes is understanding which memberships are most salient to people when they are evaluating themselves and others. If membership in categories of diffuse status characteristics such as gender and race are most salient, we would expect these characteristics to powerfully drive evaluations and behavior. If membership in the organization is the most salient identity, we might expect it to have the effect of lessening impacts of diffuse status characteristics. Research on social identities indicates that this is likely not the case.

When the salience of a group membership is high, members of the group become especially socially attracted to other members whom they see as prototypical representations of the group (Hogg and Terry 2000). By this process, members least resembling the prototype become marginalized. Like status processes, these stereotype-producing processes emerge without conscious thought but nevertheless become embedded over time (Bargh and Chartrand 1999). They result in minority group members facing devaluation and discrimination because they are not seen as prototypical group members. Additionally, groups favor as leaders individuals whom they see as best representing prototypes of their groups (Hogg 2001).

In-group membership, like high status in groups, brings with it substantial benefits. According to social identity theory, group members look more favorably upon and distribute more rewards to those whom they perceive to be in-group members. Additionally, prototypical group members have more opportunities to perform and tend to receive higher performance evaluations from superiors (Rowe 1981). And in-group members gain status as other group members defer to them at higher rates (DiTomaso, Post, and Parks-Yancy 2007).

Research on social identities indicates that these processes of identification and categorization interact in important ways with processes of power and status, although these connections are little researched. In particular, prototypical or majority group members are advantaged in ways similar to high-status members in groups, receiving higher evaluations for their performances,

gaining higher rates of deference, and being more likely to be selected to leadership positions than individuals not viewed as prototypical representations of the group.

## Conclusion

Diverse workforces provide substantial benefits to organizations. Studies generally find that increased diversity on any number of dimensions, including race and gender, is associated with innovation, creativity, and performance in organizations (Horwitz and Horwitz 2007; Somech and Drach-Zahavy 2011). For these reasons and others, the effective management of organizations requires efforts to increase diversity. At the same time, processes of influence and power pose challenges for managing a diverse workplace.

Research on status processes in groups shows them to be a major determining factor in access to powerful positions, and the same research shows how status characteristics shape expectations of people in various social groups, albeit in often nonconscious ways. We focused primarily on gender and race as status characteristics, but status research has identified others as well, including age, height, beauty, wealth, education, and occupation. Different status characteristics lead to different performance expectations, which in turn lead to differences in influence.

Organizations in the United States are becoming more diverse. Major efforts are of course in place to manage diversity in organizations, but they may not adequately account for processes that make status orders so stable and resistant to change. For example, efforts to increase diverse representation in powerful leadership positions will be limited in their effectiveness if status processes that disadvantage members of certain social groups remain. Persons in low-status social groups are evaluated as less effective when in powerful positions, have their power viewed as illegitimate, have to use their power more to show that they have it, and suffer status loss from the use of power.

Power, the ability to exercise one's will even against resistance from others, derives from a position in a social structure. In particular, it rests on the ability to exclude others from resources they desire. Research indicates a number of outcomes of power, including being more likely to take action, being more self-interested, being more risky, and being less likely to take others' perspectives. The use of power also leads to resentment among those who have had power used against them. As a result, there are significant advantages to using influence rather than power to compel behavior. As discussed, however, members of some groups are more likely to have influence from which to draw.

The group processes literature, particularly research on status in groups, indicates viable solutions to these challenges of diversity. Members of disadvantaged status groups can increase their influence by moving to more highly valued categories on status characteristics within their control, acting assertively, and

presenting their contributions as motivated by the best interests of the group. Management in organizations can also adopt strategies to train group members to value contributions from all group members and institutionalize environments in which members of status-disadvantaged groups hold leadership positions. Additionally, research on power, status, and influence in groups, which to date has been primarily concerned with understanding the formation and consequences of hierarchy processes in groups, would benefit from greater attention to applying knowledge gained on the processes to the challenges of managing diversity in organizations.

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