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BRIDGING THE GAP: THE ROLE OF SHARED GROUP MEMBERSHIP IN STATUS GENERALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper extends earlier work examining the relationship between status and group membership as sources of influence. It is argued that shared group membership facilitates status generalization, the carrying over of status in one domain to influence in another unrelated domain. In the first experiment, where interaction partners were differentiated by a highly relevant task ability, the partners' group membership (same or different) had no effects on influence. In the second experiment, partners with a high level of relevant task ability were equally influential regardless of group membership, but partners with high ability on an irrelevant task were more influential if they were ingroup members than if they were not. Findings are discussed in relation to status characteristics theory and the concept of social status.

INTRODUCTION

> "The consequences of high status are pleasant. They include resources, freedom, space, comfort, time and, as importantly perhaps, a sense of being cared for and thought valuable – conveyed through invitations, flattery, laughter (*even when the joke lacks bite*), deference and attention." (de Botton 2004:3, emphasis added)

As the above quote points out, social status has the distinctive characteristic of affording individuals a wide range of advantages, and wide ranging influence, even when such advantages and influence do not seem warranted or deserved. This phenomenon, referred to as *status generalization*, has been studied extensively by researchers working from the perspective of status characteristics theory (Berger, Fisek, Norman, and Zelditch 1977). According to this theory, individuals with high social status are able to influence others in a wide range of domains because status characteristics, like gender, race, and formal rank, are associated with expectations about competence that generalise to a wide range of tasks. Although the theory specifically addresses social influence within task groups, it makes no explicit claims about the functional role of social groups in the status generalization process. Recent research, however, suggests that group processes of self-categorization and social identification may play an important role in status generalization, by creating the psychological conditions necessary for social influence, and defining the dimensions upon which status is based (Oldmeadow, 2007; Oldmeadow, Platow, and Foddy 2005).

Recognising a certain overlap in their explanatory domains, several researchers have attempted to examine the role of social identity processes (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner 1985; Turner and Oakes 1989) in status generalization, incorporating some of the consequences of shared group membership into status characteristics theory (e.g. Kalkhoff and Barnum 2000; Oldmeadow, Platow, Foddy, and Anderson 2003). However, as we will outline here, these attempts have tended to think about group membership information as a heuristic cue to influence, much like status characteristics, and have attempted to incorporate its effects into additive models of the status generalization process.

In this paper, we offer a different way to think about the role of group membership in status generalization based on the self-categorization theory of social influence (Turner 1991). Rather than think about group membership as a characteristic of individuals that has additive effects on their perceived task competence, we propose an interactive model of the role of shared social identity in status generalization. The general argument is that psychological group formation, in terms of self-categorization and social identification with others, facilitates status generalization by 'bridging the gap' between status or expertise in one domain and influence in another unrelated domain. It is argued that status generalization is fundamentally a group-based process, contained within and constrained by group boundaries.

Status Characteristics Theory

Status characteristics theory (Berger, Fisek, Norman, and Zelditch 1977) is a theory about the relationship between social status and influence in task-oriented settings. Early observations revealed that inequalities in social influence readily emerged within task-oriented groups (Bales

1950), and that these inequalities were associated with group members' external social status (Berger and Conner 1969). That is, individuals with relatively high social status, in terms of military rank (Berger, Cohen, and Zelditch 1972) or education level (Moore 1968) for example, had more influence over decisions than those with relatively lower social status, even when the status dimension had nothing to do with the task. To explain this relationship, it was argued that status is associated with expectations about competence, so that those with relatively higher social status are expected to be more competent than those with lower social status, and thus have more influence over decisions. It was further argued that these expectations can be quite general and apply to a wide range of tasks, so that the status dimension does not need to be relevant to the task to afford higher status actors an influence advantage over lower status actors.

The process through which social status affects influence rates in task groups is called status generalization, because social status in one domain generalizes to influence in other unrelated domains. The theory has developed to predict influence rates from a range of status characteristics that vary in their relevance to the task, from previously demonstrated task ability (e.g. Foddy and Smithson 1996) to irrelevant status characteristics like gender and race (e.g. Hopcroft 2002). The more relevant a status characteristic is to the task, the fewer inferential steps are involved in linking it to expected task ability, and the stronger impact it has on influence levels. Importantly, though, even status characteristics that have no prior association with the task have some impact on influence levels.

According to the theory, status generalization occurs within situations defined by specific scope conditions. These include that there be at least two actors collectively engaged in completing a task believed to have a correct or best solution, where those actors are motivated to achieve the best possible outcome (Berger, Rosenholtz, and Zelditch 1980; Foschi 1997). Most experiments in this area are configured so that the actors' goals and outcomes (in terms of payment for performance) are shared, so that participants have not only a common goal, but a common fate as well. Under these conditions, it is argued, the actor with the highest social status will be the most influential. Although not explicitly stated as such, these scope conditions are in line with traditional conceptualizations of groups as collections of individuals who are positively interdependent for the attainment of a valued goal (e.g. Festinger 1950; Rabbie 1991). We will return to this issue shortly, after a brief discussion of existing research on the role of group membership in status generalization.

Group Membership in Status Generalization

In addition to status characteristics, a number of studies have examined the role of group membership information as a status organizing process (Kalkhoff and Barnum 2000; Oldmeadow, Platow, Foddy, and Anderson 2003). The idea is that the generally more positive evaluations of ingroup members over outgroup members (see Brewer 1979) might give rise to different expectations of competence for ingroup and outgroup members, which in turn lead ingroup members to be more influential. Indeed, there is some support for this hypothesis. Kalkhoff and Barnum (2000) examined the relative influence of ingroup and outgroup sources who were also either higher or lower in status than the participants in terms of education level. Using computer-simulated three-person interactions, the researchers examined the influence levels of ingroup and outgroup partners and higher and lower status partners separately, and

compared them with the influence levels of partners whose group membership and relative status were known. They found that ingroup membership increased the influence of both higher and lower status partners, but that outgroup membership neither increased nor decreased the effect of status. Hence these authors concluded that "status-organizing and social identity processes operated concurrently" (p. 111), and that they had additive effects on influence. A similar pattern of results was found in a study by Oldmeadow, Platow, Foddy, and Anderson (2003, Experiment 1).

In line with a number of studies in social identity theory (e.g. Abrams, Wetherell, Cochrane, Hogg, and Turner 1990; McGarty, Haslam, Hutchinson, and Turner 1994), then, ingroup members are generally more influential than outgroup members, even in task-oriented settings. Thus, one way in which group membership may affect status generalization is by functioning as a type of heuristic cue, generating higher expectations or more positive sentiments for ingroup than outgroup members. Such effects can be conceptualised and incorporated into the additive expectancy models common to status characteristics theory (e.g. Balkwell, Berger, Webster, Nelson-Kilger, and Cashen 1992), so that group membership adds to other characteristics to determine the expected competence of self and others. This is the type of model proposed by Kalkhoff and Barnum (2000), for example.

However, close inspection of the available data suggests an interactive model may be more appropriate. In Kalkhoff and Barnum (2000) the difference in influence between higher status ingroup and outgroup partners was highly significant, while the difference between lower status ingroup and outgroup partners was only marginally significant. In Oldmeadow et al. (2003) the higher status ingroup target was more influential than the lower status ingroup target, whereas higher and lower status outgroup targets were equally influential. Hence, the available data seems more in line with an interactive model in which shared group membership augments the effects of status characteristics on influence levels. Such an interactive model is in fact consistent with status characteristics theory insofar as the scope conditions of the theory create the conditions for psychological group formation. In order to understand how shared group membership might augment status generalization, we need to turn to self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell 1987).

Self-Categorization Theory and Social Influence

According to self-categorization theory (Turner 1984; Turner et al. 1987) group behaviour, including cooperation, cohesion, and social influence, is not ultimately based on interdependence between individual group members for the satisfaction of individual needs (Turner and Bourhis 1996), but is made possible through the dual processes of self-categorization and social identification with others. Like status characteristics theory, early social psychological approaches to social influence (Deutsch and Gerard 1955; Festinger 1954) assumed that stimulus ambiguity led to uncertainty and dependence on others to provide valid information. However, Turner (1991) argued that uncertainty was a function of actual or anticipated disagreement from others with whom we expect to agree, not stimulus ambiguity per se. Since we do not have direct access to the validity of any perception, opinion, or belief, subjective validity can only come from agreement with relevant others. Conversely, disagreement from relevant others creates uncertainty and openness to influence.

Self-categorization and social identification are central in this process because they contribute to the definition of those with whom we expect to agree. Self-categorization refers to the cognitive process of perceiving self and others in terms of situationally relevant group memberships, and social identification refers to the emotional and evaluative significance of those group memberships (Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel and Turner 1986). The cognitive process of self-categorization gives rise to an expectation that members of the self-category ought to agree with each other, and agreement creates a social unit with which one can identify and derive validation. Hence, these processes of psychological group formation, more than stimulus ambiguity per se, create the conditions in which people are motivated to reach agreement, and in which it is considered important and legitimate to consider each other's views and to influence and be influenced by them.

Implications for Status Generalization

One implication of this theory for status generalization is that a sense of shared group membership between the target and source of influence may be necessary for status generalization. As outlined above, the scope conditions of status characteristics theory resonate with traditional conceptualizations of groups and may well operate to create a group in a psychological sense. In particular, the scope condition of collective orientation requires that participants consider it important and necessary to take into consideration the opinions of others in order to succeed at the task, and this is considered a criterial dimension of psychological group formation in self-categorization theory—self-categorization leads people to consider the opinions of others (Turner, 1991). Thus, psychological group formation may give rise to or satisfy the scope conditions of status characteristics theory. Support for this was found in a study in which psychological group formation, in terms of self-categorization and social identification with others, increased the extent to which participants reported being collectively oriented (Oldmeadow, Platow, and Foddy 2005). In contrast, categorising an interaction partner as an outgroup member reduced attention to the partner and their level of influence. This study suggests that psychological group formation may at least partly satisfy the scope conditions of status characteristics theory, setting the conditions for the operation of status generalization processes.

Another way in which psychological group formation may be important for status generalization is in shaping the status-value of characteristics in a group. Oldmeadow (2007) demonstrated that the effects of a status characteristic on the relative influence of two targets differed in different group contexts, even when the task was held constant. That is, in the context of a university group, participants were more influenced by an older than a younger target, but in the context of an undergraduate student group, where the younger target was more prototypical, participants were more influenced by a younger than an older target. These findings suggest that groups may also play a role in status generalization by moderating the status meaning of characteristics like age.

Theoretical Integration

The above theory and research suggests that psychological group formation, in terms of self-categorization and social identification with others, plays an important role in status generalization. However, this role is in creating the conditions in which status generalization can operate, rather than as a heuristic cue to influence operating through ingroup favouritism or sentiments. Self-categorization and social identification create the psychological conditions in which group members are motivated to reach agreement to establish a sense of subjective validity, and in which their interactions become structured around status characteristics to achieve this goal.

There is an important limitation on this process. That is, the facilitative effect of shared group membership is limited to status characteristics that are not directly associated with the task. It is important to distinguish between status generalization, as the carrying over of status or expertise in one domain to influence in another unrelated domain, from influence that derives from a strong association between the characteristic and task ability. It is one thing to be influenced by an expert in the field, and quite another to be influenced by an expert in an unrelated field. Shared group membership is not necessary for the former but, we argue, is necessary for the latter. In other words, shared group membership should only augment the impact of status characteristics when there are significant inferential steps required to link the status characteristic to expected task ability.

In the following we report two experiments designed to test this integration. The first experiment demonstrates that group membership does not have additive effects on, nor facilitate, the effects of a highly task-relevant status characteristic. The second experiment confirms the first, and extends it by showing that shared group membership does augment the effect of an irrelevant status characteristic. Thus, shared group membership 'bridges the gap' between expertise in one domain and influence in another unrelated domain.

EXPERIMENT 1

Experiment 1 sought to test the above hypothesis by examining the relative influence of others who were higher or lower in task-relevant expertise, and who were either ingroup or outgroup members in terms of a salient group membership. In line with our theoretical framework, when the status characteristic differentiating actors is highly relevant to the task, group membership should have no effect on influence patterns, because no generalization from the status characteristic to the task is required. This contrasts with the view of group membership as a heuristic cue, which would imply an additive effect over and above the impact of the status characteristic.

Method

Participants

Forty-seven female and thirteen male ($N = 60$) university students took part in this study. Participants were between 18 and 39 years old ($M = 21$ years). Approximately one-third of the

participants were first-year psychology students participating for course credit. The remaining subjects were general university students who responded to advertisements placed around campus or who were contacted by email. These participants were paid for their participation. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions in a 2 (task ability: high vs. low) by 2 (group membership: ingroup vs. outgroup) independent groups design.

Materials and Procedure

Participants attended the laboratory at a prearranged time and were seated alone in a small room. The experimenter explained that the study was investigating Judgment Extremity, an important ability that enables people to estimate the likelihood of various events occurring in the world. Participants were told that some people have high Judgment Extremity ability and make very accurate estimates on the Judgment Extremity task, while others have low Judgment Extremity ability and make less accurate estimates. The experimenter went on to explain that this study was specifically investigating whether collective decision-making produces better or worse estimates than individual decision-making, and that the participant would be asked to complete the Judgment Extremity questionnaire twice, first on their own and then again while having the responses of another participant to look at. It was explained that the second part was designed to simulate collective decision-making and that while they would be the only one making the final decisions, they would have the responses of another participant to help them.

The experimenter then presented the participant with the Judgment Extremity questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of twenty items in which the participant was asked to estimate the likelihood out of 100 that a specific event occurs. All items related to people, things, and events in Great Britain, and were ambiguous enough to be likely to create some uncertainty about the correct answer. Examples of these items include: "The chances that a novel published in Great Britain will sell more than 5000 copies are ____ in 100", and "The chances that a high school graduate will read at least one book per year are about ____ in 100". The experimenter asked the participant to try to be as accurate as possible and not to skip any questions. Participants were then left alone to complete the questionnaire.

When finished, the experimenter returned and said that he was going to mark the participant's responses to find out how accurate they were and asked the participant to complete a filler task in the meantime. The filler task was designed to manipulate self-categorization with the influencing source in terms of whether he or she was a smoker or a non-smoker. The smoker/non-smoker group distinction was used because it has been shown to be a powerful basis for differentiation with strong associated stereotypes. If group membership functions as a heuristic cue to influence, the smoker/non-smoker distinction should be fairly strong. Participants were asked to write a paragraph on their opinion about whether or not smoking should be banned in pubs in Great Britain. The experimenter explained that this was being done as an ongoing discussion from participant to participant, and gave the participant two identical sheets, one a blank form and another that had already been completed, ostensibly by a previous participant. Each sheet began with a short statement explaining that smoking had recently been banned in pubs in Ireland, and that there was now an increased likelihood that smoking will also be banned in pubs in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Participants were first asked to tick whether they were a smoker or a non-smoker, then to rate how much they agreed with the previous participant's opinion using a 7-point scale, and finally to write their own opinion. There were two versions of the completed opinion sheet, both hand written. One was ostensibly written by a non-smoker who indicated (both on the seven-point scale and in the text) that he or she strongly disagreed with the previous participant's opinion and argued strongly in favour of banning smoking in pubs. The other was ostensibly written by a smoker who also indicated that they strongly disagreed with the previous participant and who argued strongly against banning smoking in pubs. These sheets were used to create both normative and comparative fit with a categorization into smokers and non-smokers, and thus to make the categorization highly salient. Participants were asked to first read through the previous participant's opinion and then to write their own opinion while the experimenter marked their Judgment Extremity questionnaire.

After about ten minutes the experimenter re-entered the room and showed the participant their marked Judgment Extremity questionnaire. Across the top of the sheet in red ink was the score of 72 percent. The experimenter then asked the participant to complete the questionnaire again, this time with the responses of the previous participant to look at. The participant was given a blank Judgment Extremity questionnaire and a completed questionnaire that had ostensibly been completed by the previous participant whose opinion the participant had just read. Across the top of the previous participant's sheet was written the score of either 81 percent or 63 percent. This served as the task ability manipulation. The experimenter then left the room, taking the participant's first Judgment Extremity questionnaire with him.

Once the participant had completed the second Judgment Extremity questionnaire he or she was given a post-test questionnaire containing manipulation checks and other dependent measures including beliefs about his or her relative competence, identification with the previous participant, and self-reported influence. When finished they were debriefed, thanked, and paid (if appropriate).

Results

Manipulation Checks

Three participants were excluded from analyses for failing to accurately identify the influencing source as a smoker or a non-smoker. All of the following analyses were performed using the remaining 57 cases.

In the post-test questionnaire all participants were asked to indicate whether the influencing source had a higher or lower judgment extremity score than themselves. All participants answered this question correctly. In addition, participants in the high ability source condition rated themselves as having significantly less ability than the influencing source, $M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.20$, $t\ (25) = -4.50$, $p < .001$ (one-sample t-test against the midpoint of the scale), while those in the low ability source condition rated themselves as having significantly more ability than the influencing source, $M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.02$, $t\ (30) = 6.15$, $p < .001$. Therefore, the ability manipulation appeared to be successful.

To check that the statements provided by the influencing source were group normative, participants' agreement with the statements were compared between ingroup and outgroup participants. A 2 (ingroup versus outgroup) by 2 (influencing source smoker or non-smoker) ANOVA was run on agreement scores to examine whether agreement was a function of the statements themselves or of group membership per se. There was a significant main effect of group membership only, F (1, 53) = 16.83, $p < .001$, Eta squared = .24. Ingroup members agreed significantly more with the influencing target, $M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.30$, than did outgroup members, $M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.40$, regardless of which version they read.

As a final check of the grouping manipulation, participants rated how similar they were to the influencing target, how much they thought they would like them, and how well they would get along with them. These items were collapsed into a single identification measure (alpha = .81). Participants in the ingroup condition identified more strongly with the influencing target ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .84$) than those in the outgroup condition ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.05$), F (1, 53) = 5.58, $p = .022$, Eta squared = .10. There was no effect of status and no interaction, Fs < 1. Therefore, the manipulation of group membership appeared to be successful.

Main Analyses

The main dependent variable in this study was the degree to which the participants' second set of responses shifted towards those of the influencing target. To calculate this, an initial difference score for each item was obtained by subtracting the participants' initial estimates from that of the influencing target and transforming all scores to positive values. Next, a second difference score was obtained between the participants' second estimates and those of the influencing target. Smaller differences in the second estimates indicate a shift towards the influencing target's estimates, while larger differences indicate a shift away from the influencing target. Proportionate shifts were calculated by subtracting the second difference score from the first difference score and then dividing by the sum of the first and second difference scores. This formula produced scores ranging from -1 to 1, with positive values indicating shifts towards, and negative values indicating shifts away from the influencing target. A total influence score was calculated as the average proportionate shift across the twenty items.

A 2 (partner's task ability: high versus low) by 2 (group: ingroup versus outgroup) ANOVA on influence scores revealed a significant main effect of ability only, F (1, 53) = 20.04, $p < .001$, Eta squared = .27. Lower ability participants were significantly more influenced, $M = .33$, $SD = .12$, than higher ability targets, $M = .19$, $SD = .12$. The main effect of group was not significant, F (1, 52) = 1.40, $p = .24$, Eta squared = .02, and there was no interaction, $F < 1$.

In addition to the shift scores, a self-reported influence score was calculated from participants responses to the following four post-test items (alpha = .88): "How much did the other participant's responses help you to make your final choices?", "How much did you consider the other participant's responses before making your final choices?", "How influenced were you by the other participant's responses?", and "How much do you think the other participant's responses helped you to improve your judgment extremity score?". All items were answered on 7-point scales anchored with 'not at all' and 'very much'. A 2 (partner's task ability: high versus low) by 2 (group: ingroup versus outgroup) ANOVA on this self-reported influence measure

revealed a significant main effect of ability, F (1, 53) = 17.51, $p < .001$, Eta squared = .25, no main effect of group, F (1, 53) = 1.98, $p = .17$, Eta squared = .04, and no interaction between ability and group membership, $F < 1$. Lower ability participants reported being more influenced by the source ($M = 4.73$, $SD = .87$) than higher ability participants ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.17$).

Discussion

The aim of Experiment 1 was to examine whether categorising an influencing source as an ingroup or outgroup member would add to the effect of the source's task ability on his or her influence. It was hypothesised that group membership would have no impact on influence patterns because there was no inference to be made in generalizing from the status characteristic to task ability. As expected, the results show clearly that the source's performance on the task was the only factor determining their influence levels. There was no effect of group membership either alone or in combination with the source's task performance. This finding is inconsistent with the view of group membership as a heuristic cue to influence.

A foreseeable criticism is that the absence of effects of group membership in this study could be due to the (ir)relevance of the group membership to the task. The group membership manipulation (smokers vs. non-smokers) was not relevant to the task and there was no intuitive reason to expect ingroup members to be better at the task, or to provide more subjectively valid responses, than outgroup members. We specifically chose a group membership in which there is clear ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation but no relevance to the task, so that any effects of group membership as a heuristic cue operating through ingroup favouritism or sentiments should be apparent. Indeed, if the group membership was relevant to the task in the sense that members of one group were expected to be more competent than members of the other, then that group membership fits the definition of a status characteristic and there would be no need to theorize a separate influence process.

Another criticism may be that because of the relevance of task performance information, there was a ceiling effect on influence levels that obscured any additional effect of group membership. However, the mean shift scores suggest that participants did not simply copy the responses of the higher scoring partner (which would have produced shift scores of 1, or close to 1). As it was, participants in the higher scoring partner condition had a mean shift score of .33. Thus, there was considerable room for participants to be more influenced than they were by the other's responses. In addition, even those in the lower scoring partner condition were somewhat influenced by their responses. The argument of a ceiling effect would seem difficult to sustain.

While this experiment suggests that group membership did not act as a heuristic cue to influence, we specifically restricted the study to a context where the status characteristic was highly relevant to the task. Indeed, participants were given a sheet of paper that contained, ostensibly, either more or less accurate responses than their own. Hence there was no inference to make in assuming the higher scoring source had more, and lower scoring source less task ability than themselves. Participants could reasonable treat such an assumption as fact. According to our theoretical framework, group membership could not augment the effect of this information because there were no inferential steps involved in linking the status characteristic to task performance. In effect, no status generalization was required. From our perspective, shared group

membership plays an important role specifically in status generalization, in 'bridging the gap' between a status characteristic and expected task ability where that gap involves significant inferential steps.

To examine whether group membership plays a role specifically in the process of generalising from a status characteristic to influence in another unrelated domain, a second study was conducted. In this study, participants interacted with an ingroup or an outgroup partner they believed was superior to them on either a relevant or an irrelevant task. It was hypothesised that ingroup and outgroup partners with relevant task ability would be equally influential, but that an ingroup partner with irrelevant task ability would be more influential than an outgroup partner with irrelevant task ability.

EXPERIMENT 2

Method

Participants and Design

Twenty-one male and 39 female ($N = 60$) undergraduate students from various faculties at the University of Exeter took part in the study. The mean age of the sample was 21 years ($SD = 3.9$). Participants were randomly allocated to conditions in a 2 (identity condition: shared vs. non-shared) by 2 (task ability: relevant vs. irrelevant) independent groups design (15 participants per condition).

Materials and Procedure

Upon arrival, participants were met near the entrance to the building by two female researchers, who explained that they were waiting for one other participant to arrive. One of the researchers then escorted the participant to a testing room on the first floor, while the other remained behind ostensibly to wait for the other participant. In the testing room participants were asked to read and sign a consent form, and to complete a short questionnaire while they waited for the other participant to arrive. The questionnaire was adapted from Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, and Turner's (1999) 'three things' manipulation of social and personal identity salience. Participants in the shared identity (SI) condition were asked to list up to three things that they and most other members of their study program did well, badly, rarely and often. Those in the non-shared identity (NI) condition were asked to list up to three things that they personally did well, badly, rarely and often. This was designed to augment the manipulation of shared identity by making participants' social identity salient in the SI condition, while making their personal identity salient in the NI condition.

After leaving the participant for a few minutes, the researcher returned and informed him or her that the other participant had arrived and that they could now begin the experiment. The participant was told that they would be asked to complete a series of tasks on the computer, one on their own and another with the other participant as a team. It was stated that the aim of the study was to examine team performance on 'contrast sensitivity', ostensibly an ability to perceive contrasts in patterns and shapes. Only general information was given by the researcher,

because more specific and detailed information about the task was presented to participants on the computer as they went through the program. Once participants were ready to begin, the researcher clicked a button on the computer screen that read "connect to network". While the computer was apparently connecting to the network, the researcher left the room to leave the participant to complete the task.

The sequence of the program was as follows. First participants completed a 25-trial task on their own. The task was either relevant or irrelevant to the team-task. In the relevant condition the initial task was a 'one-pattern contrast sensitivity task' in which participants had to decide whether a rectangle shown on the screen had more white or black squares in it. In the irrelevant condition they had to decide which of two words, ostensibly from an ancient foreign language, had the same meaning as a target English word. This task was described as a 'meaning insight task' and it had no apparent relevance to the contrast sensitivity task performed in jointly.

Following the initial task participants exchanged information about themselves with the fictitious partner via the computer. In the NI condition they entered and sent only their first name and degree program. Since the researchers had previously established the participants' gender and degree program at the sign-up stage, the program was set up to show that the partner had a name typical of the participant's gender [1] and that they were studying a different degree program. In the SI condition participants entered and sent information about their degree program, as well as their favourite band, food, and movie. The information participants received about the partner indicated that they were of the same gender, studied the same degree program, and that their favourite band, food, and movie were quite typical for undergraduate students. By providing this extra information it was reasoned that participants would be able to form a stronger sense of shared identity with their partner (see Tanis and Postmes 2003). Participants in all conditions were prompted to write their partner's information on a sheet provided next to the computer.

Next participants were given feedback about their score and their partner's score on the initial 25-trial task. In all conditions, participants learnt that they had scored 6 out of 25, while their partner had scored 22 out of 25. Hence, it appeared that the partner had made substantially more correct choices than the participant. At this point, participants were again prompted to write down their's and their partner's scores on the sheet provided.

The program then went on to the main team-work task, explaining the procedure by which participants and the partner would exchange their initial choices and then make a final choice on each trial. Participants were also given a practice task so that it was clear how the procedure operated. Essentially, the task was very similar to the one-pattern contrast sensitivity task used in the relevant condition, in that for each of 25 trials, participants were presented with rectangles containing black and white squares and had to make a decision about the proportions of black and white squares. However, in this task they were presented with two rectangles at each trial and had to decide which had the greater proportion of white. For each trial participants made an initial choice by clicking one of two buttons on the screen. After a short pause the computer displayed the choice apparently made by the partner, which was either the same or different to the participant's initial choice. The program was designed to match the partner's initial choice with that of the participant on 5 of the 25 trials. On all other trials, the partner's initial choice differed from the participant's, thus creating a potential influence situation. After another short

pause the participant was prompted to make a final choice. Participants did not see the final choice that the partner had ostensibly made. This sequence was repeated 25 times.

Finally, at the end of the task, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions displayed one at a time on the screen. These questions were designed to assess the success of the manipulations, and various impressions about how influenced they were by the partner and how much ability they thought they and the partner had. All questions were answered by sliding a marker along bipolar scales anchored with appropriate labels (e.g. 'not at all' and 'extremely'). In order to move forward in the questions, participants had to move the slider either left or right of its initial position in the center of the scale. The computer stored participant's responses, which could range from 0 to 100, depending on where the slider was positioned. At the end of the questionnaire participants were prompted to rejoin the researchers in the next room, where they were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Results

Manipulation Checks

To check the success of the relevance manipulation participants were asked how relevant they thought the initial task was to the main task. Responses were analysed using a 2-way ANOVA to see whether they varied as a function of either relevance or identity condition. There was a significant main effect of relevance only, F (1, 55) = 45.95, $p < .001$, Eta squared = .46, with those in relevant condition rating the initial task as more relevant to the main task (M = 78.07, SD = 18.85) than those in the irrelevant condition (M = 37.48, SD = 26.63). There was no main effect of identity condition, $F < 1$, and no interaction between relevance and identity condition, F (1, 55) = 2.07, p = .16, Eta squared = .04. The manipulation of relevance appeared to be successful.

To check whether participants in the SI condition perceived a stronger sense of shared identity with the partner than those in the NI condition, participants were asked to rate how similar they felt to the partner, how much they liked him or her, and how much they would like to work with him or her again (alpha = .75). ANOVA revealed a main effect of identity condition only, F (1, 55) = 9.75, $p < .001$, Eta squared = .16, with those in the SI condition indicating a stronger sense of shared identity (M = 57.75, SD = 14.63) than those in the NI condition (M = 47.08, SD = 10.21). There was no main effect of relevance and no interaction, Fs < 1. The manipulation of shared identity appeared to be successful.

Finally, to ensure participants registered their's and their partner's scores on the initial task, participants were asked who had performed better on the initial task, with the response scale anchored with 'I performed better' (0) and 'my partner performed better' (100). Scores did not vary by either group or relevance conditions, Fs < 1, and a one-sample t-test indicated the mean response (M = 94.34, SD = 10.78) was significantly above the midpoint of the scale, t (57) = 31.60, $p < .001$.

Main Analyses

The main dependent variable was the amount of influence participants accepted from the partner. Throughout the main trial, the computer program stored participant's initial and final choices. If, on the 20 disagreement trials, the final choice was different to the initial choice the participant was assumed to have been influenced. Over the 20 trials in which disagreements occurred, the proportion of times when the participant changed their initial choice to agree with the partner was computer and used as a measure of influence. This proportion can range from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating the participant was influenced more often.

A two-way ANOVA on influence scores revealed a main effect of relevance, F (1, 55) = 9.45, p = .003, Eta squared = .14, and no main effect of identity condition, $F < 1$. Overall, participants in the relevant condition were more influenced by the partner (M = .59, SD = .19) than those in the irrelevant condition (M = .44, SD = .19). This main effect, however, was qualified by a significant interaction between relevance and identity condition, F (1, 55) = 6.65, p = .013, Eta squared = .10. Simple main effects analyses showed that there was no significant difference in influence from an SI (M = .54, SD = .19) and an NI (M = .63, SD = .18) partner who had relevant task ability, F (1, 55) = 1.69, p = .20, Eta squared = .03, but an SI partner with irrelevant task ability was more influential (M = .52, SD = .20) than an NI partner with irrelevant task ability (M = .36, SD = .15), F (1, 55) = 5.51, p = .02, Eta squared = .09. In addition, the relative influence of SI partners with relevant (M = .54, SD = .19) and irrelevant (M = .52, SD = .20) task ability was not significantly different, $F < 1$, while an NI partner with relevant task ability was significantly more influential (M = .63, SD = .18) than one with irrelevant task ability (M = .36, SD = .15), F (1, 55) = 15.97, $p < .001$, Eta squared = .22.

Self-Reported Influence

Participants were asked how influenced they were by their partner. There was a main effect of relevance only, F (1, 55) = 11.24, p = .001, Eta squared = .17. There was no main effect of identity condition and no interaction between identity condition and relevance, Fs < 1. Participants in the relevant condition indicated that they were more influenced by the partner (M = 75.93, SD = 21.42) than did those in the irrelevant condition (M = 56.52, SD = 22.20), but they did not perceive that they were influenced differentially by an SI partner and an NI partner in either condition.

Ability Ratings

Participants responded to two items asking how much contrast sensitivity ability they thought they had, and how much they thought their partner had. These responses were analysed with a 2 (own ability vs. partner's ability) by 2 (identity condition: shared vs. non-shared) by 2 (task ability: relevant vs. irrelevant) mixed ANOVA with repeated measures on the first factor. There was a significant main effect of self-other ability ratings, F (1, 55) = 116.98, $p < .001$, Eta squared = .68, with participants generally rating the partner higher in contrast sensitivity ability (M = 68.61, SD = 17.97) than themselves (M = 28.71, SD = 17.30). There also was a significant interaction between self-other ratings and initial task relevance, F (1, 55) = 15.99, $p < .001$, Eta squared = .23. Participants rated the partner's ability higher in the relevant condition (M = 76.53,

SD = 14.43) than the irrelevant condition (*M* = 60.41, *SD* = 17.79), and rated their own ability lower in the relevant condition (*M* = 22.07, *SD* = 17.31) than in the irrelevant condition (*M* = 35.59, *SD* = 19.12). All pairwise comparisons were significant.

Discussion

This study was designed to examine the role of shared group membership in generalizing from a relevant and an irrelevant status characteristic to expected task performance. As hypothesized, the relative influence of an SI and NI partner did not differ when the partner had outperformed the participant on a relevant task. However, when the partner had outperformed the participant on an irrelevant task, a partner with shared identity was more influential than a partner without. In addition, SI partners with relevant and irrelevant task ability were equally influential, whereas amongst NI members, the partner with relevant task ability was significantly more influential than the one with irrelevant task ability. Hence the data suggest that shared group membership augments the process of generalizing from expertise in one domain to influence in another unrelated domain.

It is worth noting that participants' self-reported influence did not follow the same pattern as the behavioural influence data. Participants reported being more influenced by a partner with a relevant superiority than one with an irrelevant superiority, but did not perceive that they were more influenced by an ingroup partner than an outgroup partner in either condition. This discrepancy may be due to social norms influencing participants' perceptions of or willingness to report being influenced by others, particularly on the basis of group membership per se. The clear discrepancy we find here between self-reported and behavioural influence data highlights the importance of using relatively implicit behavioural measures of influence rather than relying purely on more explicit measures.

Finally, the analysis of ratings of task ability showed no interaction between relevance and group membership. Participants indicated that the partner had more ability than themselves, and more so in the relevant condition than the irrelevant condition, but there was no effect of group membership. Again, we suggest that this explicit measure is unlikely to capture the non-obvious effect found in the behavioural influence data, and that ability ratings are likely to be based only on the manipulation of task ability.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The two studies reported here examined the role of group membership in the status generalization process, extending previous work on the intersection of status characteristics theory and self-categorization theory (Kalkhoff & Barnum, 2000; Oldmeadow, 2007; Oldmeadow, et al., 2003, 2005). At the heart of the investigation was the question of whether psychological group formation augments the effects of status differences on influence levels. The findings suggest that groups do augment status generalization, provided there is a significant inferential step to be made in linking status or ability in one domain with performance in another domain. This, we suggest, is a fundamental characteristic of social status, which distinguishes it from expertise: status affords individuals advantages and influence that extend beyond their specific competencies (see also Washington and Zajac 2005).

In our interpretation, the data suggest that groups play a critical role in status generalization, by 'bridging the gap' between status or expertise in one domain and influence in another unrelated domain. This is implicit in status characteristics theory insofar as the scope conditions for status generalization are consistent with traditional conceptualizations of the group (Oldmeadow et al., 2005). But the theory never makes explicit that status generalization is an intragroup process. Most research on social status, including status characteristics theory, conceptualizes status as a distinct aspect of social relations, conceptually distinct from and functionally independent of social groups. It is acknowledged that status relations often form between and within groups but it is conceivable, and often implied, that status relations could form purely between individuals. However, we suggest that social status is inherently tied to social groups and that status relations are always contained within psychological group boundaries. Psychological group formation, in terms of self-categorization and social identification with others, provides the psychological antecedents necessary for the development of status relations, because groups provide the basis for social comparison and influence, and define the dimensions upon which relative value or 'correctness' is judged (Oldmeadow 2007; Turner 1991).

In relation to status characteristics theory we argue that status generalization, as the carrying over of status or expertise in one domain to influence in another unrelated domain, is a function of a status relationship between group members, not a function of any inherent meaning contained within the actors' characteristics, and that this status relationship requires self-categorization and social identification with the source of influence at some level. This is not to say that psychological group formation is necessary for all social influence. Clearly it is not. Others with relevant abilities or knowledge can be influential in their respective domains of expertise regardless of their group membership. But we suggest that this is not an effect of status as such, and that a clear distinction needs to be maintained between those characteristics that have an almost tautological relationship with expected task ability, and those that require a significant inference to be related to the domain of influence. Too often, in our view, status is equated with expertise or competence, so that no qualitative distinction is made between the process underlying diffuse status characteristics like gender and race, and that underlying specific task-relevant abilities. Maintaining such a distinction may prove theoretically problematic, but the data suggest that it can at least be made empirically.

As the opening quote taken from Alain de Botton's (2004) *status anxiety* suggests, status has the peculiar and powerful tendency to afford individuals advantages and influence that extend beyond their specific competencies. We laugh at the jokes of high status others even when the joke "lacks bite", and we defer to their opinions even when they have no valid basis for claiming to know better than us. Of course, it is not only status that makes us laugh or defer – we will laugh at the jokes of a good comedian, and we will listen to and follow the advice of an expert. But without status, the effects of a comedian and the influence of an expert are limited to their specific domains of comedy and expertise respectively. What status does is afford individuals advantages and influence that extend *beyond* their specific competencies. Hence, with status, a comedian may be influential as well as funny, and an expert may be funny as well as influential. However, status itself is a social-relational process that is constrained within and defined by group boundaries, and so the effects of social status depend upon a sense of shared identity at some level.

Limitations and Further Research

The current research provides strong evidence for a role of shared identity in the status generalization process, but the particular nature of the shared identity that produced the effect in Experiment 2 is unclear because the manipulation was comprised of several procedures. Not only were participants told that their partner was studying the same or different degree program to themselves, but they were also asked to complete the three-things questionnaire, and participants in the ingroup and outgroup conditions were given different amounts of information about each other. We used all these procedures in an attempt to maximise the likelihood that participants would form a sense of shared identity with the partner in the abstract, not necessarily in terms of any particular identity, and the manipulation check suggested that we achieved this. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether the critical component was a sense of shared identity in the abstract, a particular social identity (degree program, university student), or perception of the other in terms of personal identity. Further research may wish to clarify this.

It may also be useful in further research to examine whether group membership moderates the influence of others with inferior ability on relevant and irrelevant tasks. While the influence of a partner who underperforms on a relevant pre-test task should be minimal regardless of group membership, it is unclear how participants would respond to ingroup and outgroup partners who underperform on an irrelevant task. Clearly there is scope for further research on the intersection of status and group membership in the influence process.

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ENDNOTES

[1] The partner was always given a name typical of the participants' gender, in both the ingroup and outgroup conditions, in order to ensure that gender was not a salient status characteristic in the setting.

APPENDIX

Table 1. Correlations between IVs and DVs, Experiment 1.

	Cat Cond.	Rel ability	Ident.	Influence	SR inf
Status	-.016	.744**	.081	-.511**	-.493**
Cat Cond		-.014	-.306*	.020	.172
Rel ability			.054	-.282*	-.340**
Identificatn				-.018	.096
influence					.407**

* p < .05 ** p < .01

Table 2. Correlations between IVs and DVs, Experiment 2.

	Relevnce	Relative ability	Identific-ation	Influence	SR infl	o's ability	p's ability
Ident. cond	.000	-.016	-.394**	-.087	-.034	.001	.173
Relevance		.485**	-.010	-.361**	-.412**	-.452**	.353**
Rel ability			-.129	-.599**	-.647**	-.666**	.687**
Identif				.070	.149	.295*	-.022
Influence					.778**	.597**	-.494**
SR inf						.764**	-.407**
O's ability							-.441**

* p < .05 ** p < .01
"o" = other; "p" = participant

AUTHORS' NOTE

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