Research Statement

Social relationships are organized along two primary dimensions: "communion," which reflects how cohesive and close individuals are with each other, and "power," which reflects the degree to which individuals are hierarchically differentiated. My research examines how both of these primary dimensions can affect cognition, behavior, and performance at the individual and group levels. For example, in my dissertation research I consider how **loyalty** to groups affects ethical decision-making. Although conventional wisdom suggests loyalty to one's group or organization is a common cause of unethical and illegal acts, I found that loyalty can foster both more *and less* cheating behavior, depending on the context and the expectations communicated by the group. Second, in my research on **power**, I study how the power that leaders possess contributes to their failure when working with other leaders in teams. In multiple domains, I find that groups of high power individuals perform worse than other groups, and did so because they compete over status, share information less effectively and are less focused on the task at hand. In the related domain of status, I examine the effects of status on individual wellbeing and group functioning and argue that status is a fundamental human motive.

I employ a broad range of designs and methods in my research, conducting studies in the laboratory as well as in the field. I use a variety of analytical approaches such as ANOVA, regression, Hierarchical Linear Modelling, Structural Equation Modelling and the Social Relations Model with self-rated, peer-rated and observer-rated codes of behavior. I adapt and enhance traditional data collection methods using a variety of programs and resources such as javascript, html, github and firebase. My work is theoretically driven and grounded in rigorous social psychological methodology. At the same time, it is strongly biased towards measuring actual rather than hypothetical behavior and strives to be relevant, i.e., directly related to organizational contexts with important practical implications.

Loyalty

The moral psychology of loyalty

Loyalty, the ultimate virtue to some and the most dangerous vice to others, has motivated people to action and shaped social relations throughout the ages. Yet loyalty as a psychological construct has been relatively ignored in the social sciences. In my dissertation I aim to show that of all the variables related to interpersonal connectedness, loyalty is unique in that it acts as a moral principle in human psychology, and thus is an especially powerful driver of human behavior.

I define loyalty as the principle of partiality that gives rise to expectations for behavior on behalf of the object of one's loyalty including self-sacrifice, trustworthiness and pro-sociality. Loyalty is different than traditionally studied collectivistic motivations such as liking, group identification and altruism because of its moral implications. That is, the loyal are motivated to act on behalf of their groups not just because they want to or need to but because they feel morally compelled to do so.

If loyalty is inherently moral then, according to research on morality, it should be used as a guide for behavior, in judgements of right from wrong, and as a basis to violate other moral principles. It should compel action and elicit moral indignation when violated. To test these assertions, my dissertation draws on moral psychology to develop hypotheses about when loyalty will increase or decrease the willingness to act unethically on behalf of the group, i.e., when the loyal will violate other virtues and moral principles such as honesty, fairness, and harm.

I assert that in contexts where loyalty is salient and the expectations of loyalty are explicit - demanding that the loyal act in the best interests of the group - then the loyal are more likely to act unethically, disregarding social mores. In contrast, in contexts where loyalty is salient but the expectations of loyalty are less clear the loyal may actually act more ethically because loyalty prompts people to consider the ethics of their actions. Moreover, I argue that the loyal will judge their actions as ethical regardless of whether or not those actions violate other moral principles and would be judged unethical by outsiders.

To test my hypotheses, I consider contexts in which loyalty comes into conflict with other moral concerns such as fairness and honesty. In research with Cameron Anderson, we manipulated expectations of loyalty directly and found that loyalty is unique among ethical principles in having a dual nature: fostering corruption or ethicality depending on whether expectations are clear and conflict with other moral concerns.

In research with my collaborators Max Bazerman and Francesca Gino we consider contexts in which loyalty comes into conflict with honesty, a virtue that underpins many moral principles, societal mores and religious values. (Hildreth, Bazerman & Gino, revised manuscript under review *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*). We manipulated expectations of loyalty by varying the level of competition groups faced over finite resources. Across eight studies, we found that when expectations of loyalty were unclear individuals more loyal to their groups acted more ethically (i.e. cheated less) than those who were less loyal, even when cheating would have helped the group. In contrast, when the expectations of loyalty were clear, i.e., competition with other groups over finite resources demanded the loyal cheat, the loyal did just that. We replicated the findings of lab studies in which loyalty was manipulated in extant groups including study groups and fraternities.

Power and Status

Power and top team performance

Power is defined as the ability to influence others through the control over resources or capacity to punish them. Individuals in positions of leadership are given inordinate power. But, what happens when leaders have to interact and work with other leaders? How does the power they are accustomed to possessing shape their effectiveness when working with others who also hold power? This question is critical because important decisions and problems are often addressed not by individual leaders but by groups of leaders - in government legislatures, boards of directors, or meetings between heads of state, for example.

While there has been a substantial body of research that has examined how the possession of power affects people in individual tasks or making individual decisions, relatively little research has examined the effects of power in interactive or group contexts, let alone examined contexts in which powerholders interact and work with each other. With Cameron Anderson, we sought to fill this lacuna in the research literature (Hildreth & Anderson, under third round review at the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*).

Across multiple studies in the laboratory and in the field with groups of executives from an extant organization we found that groups of high power individuals performed worse than other groups in generating creative ideas or reaching agreement on a difficult decision. We found that groups comprised of high power individuals performed worse on tasks that required high-levels of coordination because

they fought over status more, were less focused on the task and shared less information with each other. However, the possession of power did not appear to damage individuals' creativity when they worked alone or on group tasks that required less coordination.

Taken together, our findings suggest that groups of high power individuals will tend perform worse when a high level of coordination is required, but will perform better when a low level of coordination is required. In two further projects I am examining how respect and dominance – two other forms of social hierarchy – affect group functioning and team performance.

Power also affects leaders' influence on their organizational contexts more broadly. In research with my collaborators Jennifer Chatman and Cameron Anderson (Chatman, Hildreth & Anderson, in preparation) we consider how a leader's power and her/his interpersonal behavior affects organizational culture. Drawing on theories of interpersonal behavior in psychology we propose that leaders' behavior may systematically evoke reciprocal rather than complementary responses from members, and in a field study comprising executives from more than 100 organizations we found that the interaction of power and dominant interpersonal behaviors significantly predicted more innovative cultures while communal behaviors did not. Further, there appears to be an optimal amount of dominance evidenced by a significant curvilinear (inverted U) effect on culture consensus.

The desire for status

Status is defined as the respect, admiration, and voluntary deference individuals are afforded by others and it is distinct from related constructs such as power. While people defer to powerful individuals because they have to, they defer to high-status individuals because they want to. In another stream of research related to social hierarchy, I consider the fundamental nature of status and its effect on individual wellbeing and group functioning. In a recent paper, my co-authors Cameron Anderson and Laura Howland and I evaluate the status hypothesis – the claim that that the desire for status is a fundamental motive (Anderson, Hildreth & Howland, 2015, *Psychological Bulletin*). We reviewed a wide range of studies across social scientific disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, public health, and organizational behavior and found support for the status hypothesis. That is, people's subjective well-being, self-esteem, and mental and physical health appear to depend on the level of status they are accorded by others. People engage in a wide range of goal-directed activities to manage their status, aided by myriad cognitive, behavioral, and affective processes. Moreover, the desire for status also does not appear to be a mere derivative of the need to belong, as some theorists have speculated. Taken as a whole, the evidence suggested that the desire for status is indeed fundamental.

One of the key issues highlighted in our review pertained to the nature of status: it is unclear from the review and from prior studies exactly what people desire – do they desire high status on an absolute level (i.e., a high level of respect, admiration, and deference from others), or do they desire to have higher status than others (i.e., to have a higher rank in status in their social groups)? In subsequent research with Cameron Anderson we have conducted research that is examining this question empirically, i.e., whether status on absolute, relative, or rank-ordered levels affects psychological adjustment and health. To date we have found that people care about both their absolute level and their relative levels of status.