

# To Lead or to Be Liked: When Prestige-Oriented Leaders Prioritize Popularity Over Performance

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Leaders often are faced with making difficult decisions for their group, such as when a course of action preferred by group members conflicts with one that is likely to optimize group success. Across 5 experiments ( $N = 1110$ ), we provide evidence that a psychological orientation toward prestige (but not dominance) causes leaders to adhere publicly to group members' desires at the expense of group task outcomes—to prioritize popularity over performance. Experiments 1–3 demonstrated that, in private, prestige-oriented leaders chose what they saw as best for group performance but that, in public, they chose whichever option was preferred by members of their group. In private, prestige-oriented leaders' tendency to choose the performance-enhancing option was mediated by group performance motives; in public, their adherence to group preferences was mediated by social approval motives. Experiments 4 and 5 advanced the investigation by using experimental manipulations to prime an orientation toward prestige. Findings replicated those from the earlier studies: participants primed with a prestige orientation prioritized popularity over performance. Results illuminate the conditions under which “good” leaders might make poor decisions.

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In August of 1856, a group of poor, westward-bound pioneers reached what is now Omaha, Nebraska, towing rickety handcars supplied with minimal provisions. They were part of the Willie handcart company, a group of devoted immigrants making their way to Utah. Levi Savage Jr.—a subcaptain of the company—addressed his fellow company leaders and the band they were guiding. Savage told his compatriots that he firmly believed that heading further west so late in the year, and with so many children and elderly adults, would mean almost certain death for many of them, as well as undue suffering for many more. The other company leaders, however, echoed the majority opinion: they wanted to press onward rather than take up stead in Nebraska. The pioneers had already traveled a great distance and were optimistic about the road ahead. Against his better judgment, Savage ultimately chose to help guide the earnest pioneers westward. A few

days later, the Willie handcart company commenced their perilous voyage, and at great cost. By the time the rescue crews reached them, the company had lost nearly a quarter of their band to cold, starvation, and dysentery.

Leaders like Levi Savage Jr. regularly make difficult decisions that affect their group in profoundly important ways. Although sometimes the right decisions are clear, leaders often must make decisions under uncertainty and, in so doing, must follow their own judgment and choose what they see as the best path forward. Indeed, making tough decisions is one of the fundamental functions served by leaders, and leadership positions typically are granted to individuals whom the group believes will use their judgment to make decisions that benefit the group (Boehm, 1999; Van Vugt, 2006). Nevertheless, even the most well-intentioned leaders can find that making group decisions is challenging when their own judgments conflict with the opinions held by other members of the group. This was the dilemma faced by Savage in 1856 and, unfortunately for him and his company, Savage's own good judgment failed to inoculate him against the ill-considered opinions of his group.

When faced with critical decisions, why might some leaders ignore their own judgment—and in many cases sacrifice the collective goals or welfare of their group—in favor of supporting the majority opinion? We propose that sometimes the desire to please their group looms large in the minds of leaders, and that this desire can drive them to make poor decisions that undermine group goals. More specifically, the current research aims to (a) test the hypothesis that some leaders abandon what they see as the best route to group success in favor of following

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popular opinion, (b) determine which types of leaders are most likely to sacrifice group performance in favor of popular opinion, (c) specify the social motives that cause leaders to prioritize popular opinion over group performance, and (d) determine the specific situations in which leaders prioritize popular opinion over group performance.

### Two Routes to the Top: Dominance and Prestige

Dual strategies theory proposes that there are two broad strategies people use to navigate social hierarchies. Those strategies—dominance and prestige—reflect two distinct suites of motivations, cognitions, emotions, and behaviors aimed at helping people secure positions of high social rank (Cheng, Tracy, Foulsham, Kingstone, & Henrich, 2013; Halevy, Chou, Cohen, & Livingston, 2012; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001; Maner, 2017; Maner & Case, 2016; see also Magee & Langner, 2008). The dominance strategy is one humans share with many other species including nonhuman primates (e.g., de Waal, 1982). It is marked by the use of force, coercion, and the selfish manipulation of group resources as a means to obtain and maintain elevated social rank (Cheng et al., 2013; Maner & Mead, 2010). Leaders who adopt a dominance strategy tend to command others via fear, rather than respect (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2014). As such, leaders employing a dominance-oriented strategy demand deference from others; that deference is not freely conferred.

In contrast to dominance, prestige is a strategy marked by the display of knowledge, traits, and skills that are highly valued by the group. Because the success of any group depends on the sharing of such knowledge and skills, people who possess them and use them to promote group well-being are granted positions of influence and prestige (Henrich, Chudek, & Boyd, 2015; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Because prestigious people serve as role models for others, prestige operates as a primary means through which important cultural knowledge and skills are transmitted through groups (e.g., Chudek, Heller, Birch, & Henrich, 2012; Henrich et al., 2015; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Because the acquisition of prestige is based on the freely conferred deference of group members, people employing this strategy should be especially motivated to maintain positive social relationships with other group members. Because of the importance of being viewed favorably by others, people using a prestige strategy to maintain high social rank often contribute to their group's shared goals and serve as positive role models for other group members.

### Individual Differences in Dominance and Prestige

Although both dominance- and prestige-oriented strategies serve as viable routes to acquiring high social rank (Cheng et al., 2013), there is variability across people in the degree to which they employ one versus the other. One area of research has focused on individual differences in the extent to which people generally seek to acquire and maintain social rank through dominance versus prestige. Such research has shown that the two orientations are associated with distinct hierarchy-related goals and patterns of group-directed behavior (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Maner & Case, 2016).

An orientation toward dominance is linked to strong desires for power, authority, and control over others (Maner & Mead, 2010).

Power, authority, and control allow dominance-oriented leaders to achieve and protect their high social rank without having to worry as much as prestige-oriented leaders do about earning respect or deference from members of their group. Indeed, an orientation toward dominance is associated with a tendency to selfishly wield power as a means to safeguard their high-ranking position when that position is jeopardized. For instance, although dominant nonhuman primates sometimes engage in group-benefitting behavior (e.g., policing intragroup conflict; Flack, de Waal, & Krakauer, 2005; Flack, Girvan, de Waal, & Krakauer, 2006), the anxiety associated with potentially losing their high-ranking position (Sapolsky, 2005) can cause them to undermine the positive relationships among their subordinates (e.g., via separating interventions; de Waal, 1982; Nishida, 1983; Nishida & Hosaka, 1996). Similarly, several studies demonstrate that, within humans, dominance-oriented leaders are willing to sacrifice the good of their group to protect their high-ranking position in the hierarchy. For instance, when dominance-oriented leaders feel that their position is threatened, they withhold valuable information from their group (Maner & Mead, 2010) and, like nonhuman primates, prevent the formation of positive bonds among group members (Case & Maner, 2014). Because one of the fundamental functions served by leaders is to facilitate group coordination and cooperation (van Vugt, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2008), such tactics are at odds with constructive leadership behavior.

Thus, a growing body of research has identified dominance-based strategies leaders sometimes use to acquire and maintain power (see Williams, 2014, for a review). Far less social psychological research, however, has focused on the strategies prestige-oriented people use to navigate social hierarchies. Because prestige is granted to people deemed to be good role models and valuable group contributors, highly prestige-oriented people—those who lead by amassing the respect and admiration of their group—should be inherently motivated to help their group succeed. If one wants to gain prestige as a hockey player, for example, it behooves one to play hard and help one's team succeed on the ice. Indeed, studies showing that dominance-oriented leaders are primarily motivated to protect their power have, at the same time, hinted at the possibility that prestige-oriented leaders might be relatively more inclined to behave in ways that benefit the group. For instance, in one set of studies, dominance-oriented leaders prevented their subordinates from banding together, whereas prestige-oriented leaders instead fostered cooperation among their subordinates (Case & Maner, 2014). This is consistent with a growing anthropological literature demonstrating that prestige-oriented leaders tend to behave in prosocial ways that facilitate group cooperation and success (Henrich et al., 2015; von Rueden, Gurven, & Kaplan, 2010). In sum, whereas dominance-oriented leaders often wield their power selfishly, prestige-oriented leaders tend to be relatively more constructive and prosocial.

### The Tension Between Leading and Being Liked

Although prestige-oriented leaders might generally behave in ways that promote group success, there are factors that could undermine this tendency. Because prestige must be freely conferred by the group, the primary way in which prestige-oriented people secure positions of influence is by gaining the support and approval of their group.

Indeed, behaviors that bring prestige also bring increased liking and social acceptance (Cheng et al., 2013; Hardy & van Vugt, 2006). The importance of earning the support of group members should thus drive prestige-oriented people to behave in ways that help them earn social approval. Earning social approval (and, conversely, avoiding disapproval or social exclusion) might therefore be a key underlying goal that guides the behavior of highly prestige-oriented people. That is, a key part of the prestige-based strategy involves building positive relationships with group members, avoiding forms of social disapproval, and behaving in ways that elicit not just admiration and respect, but also liking and social acceptance.

One straightforward way to gain social approval is to facilitate the group's success. The desire for social approval and the desire to help one's group succeed often are in line; by facilitating positive group outcomes, leaders can secure social approval while also advancing the goals of their group. However, what happens when the desire to promote group success comes into conflict with the desire for social approval? This is a dilemma often faced by leaders. For instance, although requiring employees to come into work on the weekend could help a company meet a critical deadline, such managerial mandates often are unpopular with employees. Similarly, although it might be prudent for a basketball coach to push her athletes hard leading up to an important game, they might instead prefer to have an easy practice session. In these types of situations, leaders experience a tension between doing what their group members desire—and what is likely to bring liking and social approval for the leader—versus doing what they feel is best for group performance.

Because prestige-oriented leaders are theorized to strongly value social approval, they should be especially sensitive to situations in which their actions could undermine their positive relationships with group members. Thus, when doing what they judge to be best for the group conflicts with what group members desire, the tension prestige-oriented leaders experience might cause them to make choices that undermine their group's performance in favor of gaining social approval.

We did not advance the same hypothesis for dominance-oriented leaders. For prestige-oriented leaders, social approval and admiration are the *principal* mechanisms that afford social influence. Although coalition-building is an important component of the dominance strategy (e.g., de Waal, 1982), dominance-oriented leaders are principally motivated to lead through coercion and intimidation. Thus, compared with prestige-oriented leaders, dominance-oriented leaders should be relatively less interested in social approval.

The primary hypothesis guiding the current investigation was that, when confronted with making an unpopular decision, prestige-oriented leaders would be inclined to prioritize their own social approval (i.e., by going along with the preferences of their group) at the potential cost of group performance. However, when given the opportunity to do what they judge as best for group performance without undermining their social approval (e.g., when decisions are made in private or with anonymity), we expected prestige-oriented leaders to prioritize their default strategy of facilitating group performance. Moreover, we predicted that prestige-oriented leaders' tendency to go along with their group would be driven primarily by social approval motives, whereas their tendency to promote group success would be driven by group performance motives.

## Manipulating Dominance Versus Prestige Orientations

Much of the existing work delineating prestige versus dominance strategies has focused on the role of individual differences, that is, stable variability across people in their tendency to pursue high social rank via prestige versus dominance. Much less work has sought to use experimental methods to prime prestige-oriented versus dominance-oriented mindsets in participants. Nevertheless, we expected situations that prime such mindsets to produce patterns of behavior that mirror those associated with individual differences in prestige versus dominance.

To generate methods for priming dominance-versus prestige-oriented mindsets, we leveraged the social psychological literature on power and status (Anicich, Fast, Halevy, & Galinsky, 2016; Blader, Shirako, & Chen, 2016; Fast, Halevy, & Galinsky, 2012; Hays & Bendersky, 2015; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). That literature focuses in part on structural components of groups that differentiate hierarchies based on the accumulation and use of respect and admiration (status hierarchy) versus the accumulation and use of tangible resources (power hierarchy). Whereas theories of prestige and dominance pertain to the psychological and behavioral strategies people use to attain and maintain social rank within a hierarchy, theories of status and power pertain to the structural elements that determine the type of hierarchy a given group has.

Despite their difference in focus, the two types of theories share elements in common. Power hierarchies are defined by asymmetric access to and control over important group resources. Because having power elicits a focus on one's own goals and reduces situational constraints on behavior, it tends to elicit a variety of forms of selfish behavior (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Georgesen & Harris, 1998, 2000; Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Overbeck & Park, 2001; van Kleef, et al., 2008; Williams, 2014; cf. Côté et al., 2011; Hays & Bendersky, 2015; Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010; Schmid Mast, Jonas, & Hall, 2009). Having power should elicit a dominance-oriented leadership strategy, because power allows people to coerce others through the hope of reward or the threat of punishment, and because power allows people to demand deference from others. Moreover, being in a power hierarchy should activate a set of normative expectations and psychological standards for behavior that revolve around intimidation and the manipulation of resources as a way of influencing others. Thus, placing people into a power hierarchy (as compared with a status hierarchy) should prime in people an orientation toward adopting a dominance-oriented (as opposed to prestige-oriented) leadership strategy.

In contrast, status hierarchies are governed by the level of respect and admiration received by the individual members of the hierarchy (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Anderson, Srivastava, Beer, Spataro, & Chatman, 2006; Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; Hardy & van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009). In status hierarchies, high social rank is freely conferred. Such hierarchies fit well with a prestige-oriented strategy, which also focuses on amassing respect, admiration, and freely conferred deference. Being in a status hierarchy should thus activate a set of normative expectations and psychological standards for behavior that revolve around influencing others through the use of respect and admiration. That is, placing people into a status hierarchy (as compared with a power hierarchy) should prime in people an orientation toward adopting



a prestige-oriented (as opposed to dominance-oriented) leadership strategy.

In sum, one contribution of the current research involved our use of experimental manipulations from the social psychological literature on hierarchy to prime prestige-versus dominance-oriented strategies. (And in doing so, we help bridge the heretofore disparate evolutionary and social psychological literatures on social hierarchy, an issue to which we return in the General Discussion). We expected that placing people into a power hierarchy would cause them to adopt a dominance-oriented strategy, whereas placing people into a status hierarchy would cause them to pursue a prestige-oriented strategy. Whereas Studies 1–3 of the current investigation focused on individual differences in people's orientation toward dominance versus prestige, Studies 4 and 5 manipulated the type of hierarchy (power or status) to provide causal tests. Whether an orientation toward prestige or dominance is a function of the person or of the situation, each strategy should produce similar patterns of motivation, cognition, emotion, and behavior. Thus, we predicted that being placed into a position of leadership within a status hierarchy (relative to a power hierarchy or a neutral control hierarchy) would cause people to prioritize their own popularity over group performance.

### Overview of Experiments

Across five experiments, we examine the role prestige plays in causing leaders to prioritize their own popularity over group performance. In the first three experiments (Experiments 1–3) we focused on individual differences in people's orientation toward prestige (vs. dominance) and predicted that a prestige orientation (but not a dominance orientation) would be associated with leaders sacrificing what they saw as best for group performance in favor of pursuing actions designed to gain social approval. In addition, to provide evidence for the hypothesized mechanism underlying that behavior (i.e., the desire for social approval), each of the first three experiments manipulated whether leadership decisions were made in public or in private. We predicted that, in private, a prestige orientation would be associated with a tendency to act on what leaders judged to be the best strategy for ensuring group success. In contrast, we predicted that, in public, a prestige orientation would be associated with a tendency to act on whichever strategy seemed most popular among the other group members. That is, when social approval was at stake (i.e., in the public condition), we expected prestige-oriented leaders to prioritize popularity over performance. In contrast, when social approval was not at stake (i.e., in the private condition), there would be no reason to sacrifice group performance, and we expected prestige-oriented leaders to prioritize performance. Finally, we predicted that the behavior of prestige-oriented leaders in private would be mediated by group performance motives, whereas the behavior of prestige-oriented leaders acting in public would be mediated by social approval motives.

In Experiments 4 and 5, we experimentally manipulated the type of hierarchy to prime in participants an orientation toward prestige (status hierarchy) versus dominance (power hierarchy). We predicted that placing leaders atop a status hierarchy (vs. a power hierarchy in Study 4 and vs. both a power hierarchy and a neutral control hierarchy in Experiment 5) would cause them to prioritize popularity over performance by designing a task for their subor-

dinates that emphasized enjoyment rather than objective group performance.

### Experiments 1–3

Experiments 1–3 examined mixed-motive situations in which prestige-oriented leaders' desire to enhance group performance conflicts with their desire to maintain social approval. Leaders were faced with choosing between two courses of action: to do what they judged would promote group success or to do what was likely to bring social acceptance and approval from the group. In Experiment 1, leaders were tasked with choosing between a known best strategy for solving a group puzzle and a different strategy preferred by the other group members. In Experiments 2 and 3, leaders had to choose between a task they themselves had judged to be the best option for bringing about group success and a different task that was preferred by their group members.

To provide compelling evidence that the decisions of prestige-oriented leaders are guided by a desire for social approval, we integrated into the design of these studies a public-versus-private manipulation. When leaders' decisions were made in private, we predicted that a prestige orientation would be positively associated with making choices aligned with what the leaders had judged to be best for their group. In contrast, we predicted that, to gain social approval, prestige-oriented leaders would make choices aligned with the preferences of their group when their decisions were public.

Experiments 1–3 also directly assessed the specific goals underlying leaders' decisions. We predicted that, when decisions were private (and thus could not be judged unfavorably by group members), the decisions of leaders with a strong prestige orientation would be driven by group performance motives. When making decisions in public, however, we expected the decisions of leaders with a strong prestige orientation to be driven by social approval motives.

### Method

**Participants.** Undergraduate students and university staff members were recruited to complete a group performance study for Experiment 1 ( $N = 124$ ) and Experiment 2 ( $N = 87$ ). Those participants were compensated \$15. For Experiment 3, participants ( $N = 257$ ) were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk to complete an online group performance study and were compensated \$1.00.

For Experiment 1, data from four participants (3.2%) were excluded prior to conducting analyses because of experimenter error and eight (6.4%) were excluded for voicing substantial suspicion about being part of an actual group. Of the remaining 112 participants, whose age ranged from 18 to 33 ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.4$  years), 69 were women and 43 were men.

For Experiment 2, data from seven participants (8%) were omitted prior to conducting analyses because of voicing substantial suspicion about their group existing. Of the remaining 80 participants, whose age ranged from 18 to 29 ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.3$ ), 51 were women and 29 were men.

For Experiment 3, prior to analyses, data from 15 participants (5.8%) were excluded for voicing substantial suspicion about their group existing, 10 (3.9%) were excluded for failing to notice the

experimental manipulation, and five (1.9%) were omitted for completing the experiment exceptionally quickly (<10 min). Of the remaining 227 participants, whose age ranged from 18 to 65 ( $M_{\text{age}} = 33.6$ ), 147 were women and 76 were men (four participants did not disclose their gender). Thus, the total effective sample across the three studies was comprised of 419 participants.

**Design and procedure.** For all three studies, upon beginning the experiment, participants were informed that they would be performing group tasks with two (Experiment 3) or three (Experiments 1 and 2) other group members. For the in-lab experiments (Experiments 1 and 2), the group members ostensibly were in different lab rooms. For the online experiment (Experiment 3), participants were told that the computer had remotely connected them to two other group members via a person-to-person program. For all studies, the instructions explained that participants had the potential to earn cash prizes in a raffle drawing, and that raffle tickets would be earned based on their group's performance on a series of group tasks. We deemed it necessary to incorporate elements of deception in the design of Experiments 1–3 (as well as Experiments 4 and 5) because participants in these studies were tasked with making decisions that pitted their group's performance against the participants' own social approval. If participants did not believe that they were interacting with other people on a task for which their performance had real consequences, they would not have experienced the key psychological tension under investigation.

Next, all participants completed items from the Achievement Motivation Scale (AMS; Cassidy & Lynn, 1989) and a five-item multiple choice version of the Remote Associates Task, which purportedly assessed verbal ability (RAT; Mednick, 1968). The AMS served two functions in these studies. First, along with the RAT, it provided justification for assigning the participants to the role of group leader. Because feelings of role illegitimacy can undermine leaders' identification with their leadership role (e.g., Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008), all participants were told that their assignment to the leadership role was determined in part by responses on this "Leadership Assessment Scale." Second, the AMS provided individual difference measures of participants' orientation toward dominance and prestige.<sup>1</sup> Prestige orientation was measured with seven items assessing participants' desire for respect and admiration (e.g., "I would like an important job where people look up to me," "I like to be admired for my achievements"; Experiment 1,  $\alpha = .65$ ,  $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = .44$ ; Experiment 2,  $\alpha = .64$ ,  $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = .47$ ; Experiment 3,  $\alpha = .77$ ,  $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = .62$ ). The dominance subscale consisted of seven items assessing a person's desire for power and authority (e.g., "I enjoy planning things and deciding what other people should do," "I think I would enjoy having authority over other people"; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*; Experiment 1,  $\alpha = .76$ ,  $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = .58$ ; Experiment 2,  $\alpha = .82$ ,  $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = .59$ ; Experiment 3,  $\alpha = .84$ ,  $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = .69$ ). Measures of prestige and dominance orientations were positively correlated (Experiment 1,  $r = .51$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Experiment 2,  $r = .60$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Experiment 3,  $r = .65$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Correlations of this magnitude have been observed in previous research and reflect the fact that both orientations share in common a desire for high social rank (e.g., Maner & Mead, 2010). Nevertheless, these measures also have been shown to be psychometrically distinct (Cassidy & Lynn, 1989) and to predict different behaviors and psychological outcomes among leaders (e.g., Case & Maner, 2014; Mead & Maner, 2012). It should be noted that to account for their shared

variance, all regression analyses include both measures simultaneously.

The RAT required participants to select one word (from a list of four) that tied together a set of three other words. For clarification, the following example was provided: if the word set consisted of *flying*, *monkey*, and *nut*, the fourth word would be *squirrel*. Once participants completed both the AMS and RAT, the computer ostensibly scored both measures.

All participants were informed that they had performed the best on the leadership assessment and had demonstrated superior verbal ability on the word task and, as such, would be the group leader, tasked with making decisions for their group. Participants were told that their role as leader came with respect and admiration, and that they would serve as a role model for the other group members. Thus, the leadership roles in Experiments 1–3 slanted toward describing the hierarchy as a status hierarchy as opposed to a power hierarchy (cf. Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010).

After the leadership assignment, participants read instructions regarding their first task as leader. This portion of the procedure introduced the tension between choosing what was likely to help the group perform well and choosing what was likely to win the participant social approval. Because instructions differed in important ways across the experiments, they are discussed separately, below.

**Experiment 1: Puzzle strategy decision.** Participants in Experiment 1 were told that they would be putting together a puzzle of a sunset with their group and that their group would earn rewards based on the extent to which the puzzle was completed by the end of the study session (a more complete puzzle would earn a greater number of raffle tickets). Participants were told that there were two strategies the group could take to complete the puzzle: (a) each group member could focus on completing one corner of the puzzle or (b) each group member could focus on one of the four main colors of the puzzle. Importantly, participants were informed that, so far, groups that had taken the corner approach had performed about 20% better than those that had taken the color approach. This was done to make it clear to participants that one approach—the corner approach—was known to be the better strategy.

Next, Experiment 1 participants were told that their group members had already cast their votes for which strategy they would like the group to take. Nevertheless, it was emphasized that they, as leader, had the final say. It was at this point that the decision transparency (public vs. private) manipulation was introduced. Leaders in the private decision condition were told that even though they would be making the decision for their group, their group members would not know that it was them who made the decision but would instead be told that the experimenter made the decision. Conversely, leaders in the public decision condition were informed that once they had made their decision, their group members would be told which decision they had made.

After the decision transparency manipulation, participants were given the envelope containing their group members' votes. Both group members chose the color approach—the suboptimal ap-

<sup>1</sup> The prestige subscale originally was labeled "status-aspiration" in Cassidy and Lynn's (1989) paper.

proach. Thus, participants in Experiment 1 were faced with a dilemma: they could either choose to go along with their group members' preferences to the likely detriment of group performance, or they could prioritize the performance of their group at the expense of not doing what their group members preferred. Participants then indicated their choice on a 4-point scale (1 = *certainly take the corner approach*, 4 = *certainly take the color approach*). Higher values thus represented the decision that was more popular with group members.

**Experiment 2: Puzzle scene decision.** Participants in Experiment 2 were told that their group would either put together a puzzle of a cityscape scene or a countryside scene and that their group would earn raffle tickets based on puzzle completion. Experimenters explained to participants that the entire group would hold an anonymous vote for which puzzle they would like to complete, but that the participant, as leader, would get to make the ultimate decision. Before participants cast their initial vote for either the cityscape scene or the countryside scene, it was further explained that although one puzzle scene might be easier to complete than the other, the research team did not yet know which one would be easier for participants to complete. Participants were tasked with selecting the puzzle scene that they, as leader, thought would be best for their group's performance. They were told that their group members were instructed to evaluate the puzzle scenes based on how enjoyable they seemed (and thus were not evaluating the tasks based on their own anticipated performance).

Experiment 2 participants cast their initial votes by writing down on a slip of paper the puzzle scene they thought would maximize performance and placing their voting slip into a manila envelope. The experimenter collected the envelope and then, unbeknownst to the participant, placed two handwritten voting slips in the envelope that were in favor of the opposite scene. The envelope was then returned to the participant. This was done so that participants would be faced with a dilemma: leaders could choose the puzzle scene that they had indicated would be best for group performance, or they could "flip-flop" on their decision, to go along with the preferences of their group.

The decision transparency manipulation was then delivered as it was in Experiment 1. After the decision transparency manipulation, the experimenter left the room so that the participants could tally their group members' votes and make the ultimate decision for the group. Participants indicated their choice on a 4-point scale (1 = *certainly choose the countryside scene*, 4 = *certainly choose the cityscape scene*). Scores on this measure were later recoded so that, as in Experiment 1, higher values reflected the decision that was more popular with group members.

**Experiment 3: Verbal task decision.** Participants in Experiment 3 were informed that their group would either perform a word generation task or an anagram task, and were provided detailed information about what each task would entail and how each task would be scored. After reading through each of the task descriptions, participants were told that they and their group members would cast a vote for which task their group should do. As in Experiment 2, it was emphasized to participants that they, as leaders, should vote for the task that they believed would be best for their group's performance and that their group members would not know which task they had voted for. Moreover, as in the previous experiment, participants were told that their group mem-

bers would be evaluating the tasks based on how enjoyable they seemed rather than on their own anticipated performance.

After assessing each of the word tasks, participants selected which task they thought was best for their group by selecting either "Anagram Task" or "Word Generation Task" on their computer. Then, participants viewed a bogus loading screen as their group members' votes were ostensibly recorded. The experiment program was rigged such that, whichever task the participant initially selected, both group members indicated a preference for the opposite task.

The decision transparency manipulation for Experiment 3 was slightly different than in Experiments 1 and 2 because of the online nature of the experiment. In addition to emphasizing the public-versus-private nature of the leaders' decision (as in Experiments 1 and 2), we included a subtle priming technique to boost the power of the manipulation. Participants in the public condition saw a logo for the person-to-person program, "Digitizeez," that ostensibly was connecting them to their other group members (see Figure 1). This logo, which was designed to include an image of a pair of eyes, was employed to activate cognitions associated with public scrutiny. Because people feel watched when in the presence of an image of eyes (e.g., Burnham & Hare, 2007; Haley & Fessler, 2005; Oda, Niwa, Honma, & Hiraishi, 2011), the Digitizeez logo was employed in conjunction with the public manipulation to override participants' presumed online anonymity. Participants in the private condition saw a logo for the program "Digitize" that did not include an image of a pair of eyes.

Below the Digitizeez (Digitize) logo, participants in Experiment 3 saw their group's votes summarized in a table on the screen: participants saw their own vote, as well as the votes of their group members (which always were in opposition to the participants' selection). It was at this time that all participants were informed that, because they were the group leader, they would make the ultimate decision for their group. As in Experiment 2, participants faced choosing between the task they thought would maximize performance and the task their group members thought would be more enjoyable. Participants indicated their ultimate group task choice on a 4-point scale (1 = *certainly the anagram task*, 4 = *certainly the word generation task*). As in Experiments 1 and 2, scores on this measure were recoded so that higher values reflected the decision that was more popular with group members.

**Experiments 1-3: Participant motives.** After making their decision regarding the upcoming group task, participants in each experiment indicated the extent to which their decision was influenced by several goals. In particular, participants indicated the extent to which their choice was motivated by (a) group perfor-



Figure 1. Experiment 3: Participants in the public condition saw a logo for the person-to-person program "Digitizeez," (left panel). This logo was employed to activate cognitions associated with public scrutiny. Participants in the private condition saw a logo for the program "Digitize" (right panel) that did not include an image of a pair of eyes. See the online article for the color version of this figure.



mance goals (i.e., “enhancing group performance”) and (b) social approval goals (i.e., “being liked by my group members,” “making my group members happy”). The two items used to assess social approval motives were combined to create a composite measure (Experiment 1,  $\alpha = .71$ ,  $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ; Experiment 2,  $\alpha = .58$ ,  $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ , Experiment 3,  $\alpha = .54$ ,  $M = 2.27$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ).

Participants in Experiments 1–3 also indicated the extent to which their decision was motivated by (a) interpersonal power motives (i.e., “maintaining my control and authority over the group”), (b) interpersonal status motives (i.e., “maintaining my group members’ respect”), and (c) personal financial motives (i.e., “earning greater monetary rewards”). Participants then completed a demographics questionnaire. Finally, participants were probed for suspicion, compensated for their time, and debriefed.

## Results

For each experiment, multiple regression was used to evaluate the effects of participants’ level of prestige orientation and the decision transparency manipulation on participants’ tendency to align their decisions with the preferences of their group (i.e., by choosing the option preferred by group members in lieu of the option judged to be best for the group). In line with previous research examining differential effects of dominance and prestige (e.g., Case & Maner, 2014), dominance and prestige orientations were included simultaneously in all regression models, in addition to their centered interactions with experimental condition. Including both dominance and prestige in the regression models allowed us to account for their shared variance which, as noted earlier, reflects people’s desire for high social rank. We predicted that a high orientation toward prestige (but not dominance) would be associated with being influenced by decision transparency (public-vs.-private) such that participants would be more inclined to adhere to their group members’ preferences when their decision was public than when it was private. All results for leaders’ decisions can be found in Table 1.

We also used multiple regression to assess the extent to which participants’ ultimate task decision was influenced by group performance motives and social approval motives. Results for leaders’ motives for each, individual experiment can be found in Table 2. All ancillary analyses for leaders’ interpersonal power motives, interpersonal status motives, and personal financial motives can be found in the online supplemental materials. For these experiments

and for all experiments in the paper, all measured variables are reported.

**Experiment 1: Puzzle strategy decision.** In Experiment 1, leaders had to decide between choosing the puzzle strategy that was described as best for promoting group performance or the strategy preferred by their group members. Although the pattern of results was consistent with our theoretical framework, the interaction between decision transparency and prestige orientation did not reach statistical significance (see Figure 2). When permitted to make their decisions in private, leaders with a higher (relative to lower) prestige orientation went against the desires of their group, choosing instead the strategy they knew would maximize group performance. However, when leaders’ decisions were publicly viewable, that tendency was eliminated. The interaction between dominance orientation and decision transparency on leaders’ strategy choice did not approach significance.

**Experiment 2: Puzzle scene decision.** In Experiment 2, leaders were tasked with choosing between the puzzle scene that they had previously judged to be the best for enhancing group performance or the puzzle scene that their group members preferred. Consistent with our hypotheses, we observed a significant interaction between prestige orientation and decision transparency (see Figure 3). We interpreted the interaction by assessing the simple effects of prestige orientation within each of the decision-making conditions. As in Experiment 1, when free to make their decision in private, leaders with a higher (relative to lower) orientation toward prestige went against the desires of their group—they chose the task they had previously judged to be best for group success instead of the task their group members preferred. However, when they faced public scrutiny for their decision (in the public condition), that tendency was again eliminated. The interaction between dominance orientation and decision transparency on leaders’ puzzle choice did not approach significance.

Thus, the decisions of prestige-oriented leaders in Experiment 2 were influenced by whether their decision was publicly viewable to their subordinates. When free from the potentially negative evaluations of their group members, highly prestige-oriented leaders selected the option they had judged as being best for enhancing their group’s success. However, that tendency did not emerge when they were forced to make their decision in public.

**Experiment 3: Verbal task decision.** In Experiment 3, leaders were tasked with choosing between the verbal task that they had previously judged to be the best for enhancing group perfor-

Table 1  
Leader Decision: Experiments 1–3

Outcome variable	Experiment 1 Puzzle strategy selection				Experiment 2 Puzzle scene selection				Experiment 3 Verbal task selection			
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$sr$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$sr$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$sr$
Condition	.17	1.80	.08	.17	.44	4.02	<.001	.40	.02	.25	.80	.02
Dominance orientation	.06	.53	.60	.05	.21	1.59	.12	.16	-.17	-2.02	.05	-.13
Prestige orientation	-.22	-2.02	.05	-.19	-.24	-1.84	.07	-.18	.17	1.98	.05	.13
Condition $\times$ Dominance	-.07	-.61	.55	-.06	-.14	-1.07	.29	-.11	-.06	-.71	.48	-.05
Condition $\times$ Prestige	.14	1.24	.22	.11	.28	2.00	.05	.20	.23	2.67	.008	.18
Prestige effect within private	-.35	-2.43	.02	-.22	-.50	-2.81	.006	-.28	-.06	-.52	.60	-.03
Prestige effect within public	-.09	-.53	.60	-.05	.02	.11	.92	.01	.40	3.09	.002	.20

Table 2  
Motives: Experiments 1–3

Motives	Experiment 1				Experiment 2				Experiment 3			
	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$sr$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$sr$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$sr$
Group performance motives												
Condition	-.08	-.88	.38	-.08	-.17	-1.38	.17	-.15	-.02	-.22	.83	-.01
Dominance orientation	-.16	-1.47	.15	-.13	-.12	-.80	.43	-.09	-.23	-2.67	.008	-.18
Prestige orientation	.33	3.07	.003	.28	.12	.80	.43	.09	.14	1.57	.12	.10
Condition $\times$ Dominance	.03	.28	.78	.03	.20	1.37	.18	.15	.06	.74	.46	.05
Condition $\times$ Prestige	.20	1.87	.07	.17	-.28	-1.84	.07	-.21	-.10	-1.09	.28	-.07
Prestige effect within Private	.13	.89	.37	.08	.39	1.93	.06	.21	.23	2.04	.04	.14
Prestige effect within Public	.53	3.32	.001	.30	-.15	-.72	.48	-.08	.04	.31	.76	.02
Social approval motives												
Condition	.20	2.08	.04	.20	.34	3.09	.003	.32	.07	.80	.43	.05
Dominance orientation	.02	.14	.89	.01	-.01	-.04	.97	<.01	-.23	-2.74	.007	-.18
Prestige orientation	.14	1.26	.21	.12	-.19	-1.41	.16	-.14	.07	.80	.43	.05
Condition $\times$ Dominance	-.04	-.36	.72	-.03	-.11	-.81	.42	-.08	-.13	-1.57	.12	-.10
Condition $\times$ Prestige	.23	2.15	.03	.20	.24	1.69	.09	.17	.14	1.62	.11	.11
Prestige effect within private	-.10	-.66	.51	-.06	-.42	-2.26	.03	-.23	-.07	-.62	.53	-.04
Prestige effect within public	.37	2.29	.02	.21	.04	.20	.85	.02	.21	1.61	.11	.11

mance and the verbal task that their group members preferred. Consistent with our hypotheses, we observed a significant interaction between prestige orientation and decision transparency (see Figure 4). We decomposed the interaction by assessing the simple effects of prestige orientation within each of the decision-making conditions. When faced with making the unpopular decision in public, leaders with a higher (relative to a lower) prestige orientation chose to ignore their own judgments in favor of adhering to the idiosyncratic preferences of their group members. In contrast, when leaders were free to make their decision in private, their prestige orientation was not significantly associated with task choice. The interaction between dominance orientation and decision transparency on leaders' task choice did not approach significance.

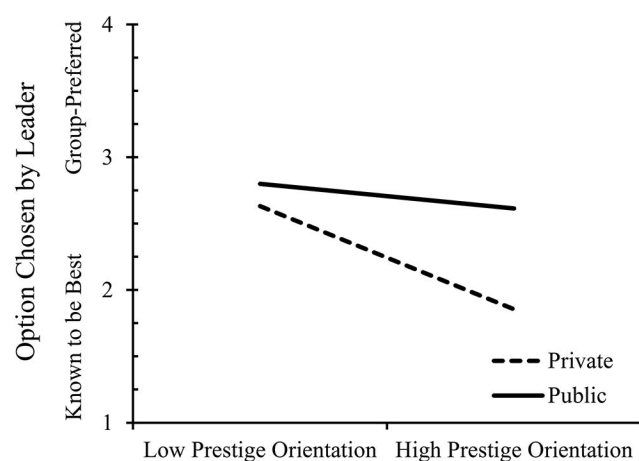


Figure 2. Experiment 1: Within the private condition, leaders with a higher (relative to lower) orientation toward prestige tended to choose the strategy that was known to enhance group performance. When leaders' choices were subject to public scrutiny, however, that tendency was eliminated. For ease of explication, high and low prestige orientation are delineated at  $\pm 1$  SD.

Thus, as in Experiment 2, the decisions of prestige-oriented leaders in Experiment 3 were influenced by whether their decision was made in public versus in private. In this experiment, highly prestige-oriented leaders responded to the potential for public scrutiny by adhering to their group members' preferences instead of sticking with the course of action they had previously judged to be best for their group. When free from group members' evaluations, however, highly prestige-oriented leaders were relatively more inclined to choose the option they had previously judged to be best for their group.

### Meta-Analysis: Experiments 1–3

Because the experimental designs of Experiments 1–3 were identical, we conducted an internal meta-analysis to assess the

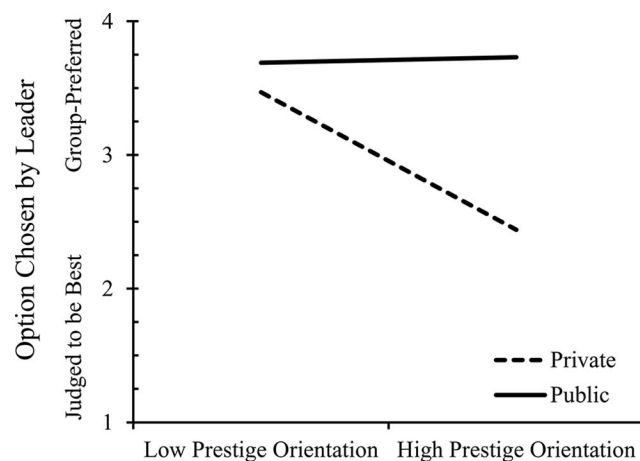


Figure 3. Experiment 2: Within the private condition, leaders with a higher (relative to lower) orientation toward prestige chose the task that they had previously judged as being best for group performance. When leaders' choices were subject to group member scrutiny, however, that tendency was eliminated. In the public condition, even highly prestige-oriented leaders tended to go along with the desires of their group. For ease of explication, high and low prestige orientation are delineated at  $\pm 1$  SD.



robustness of the observed effects and to evaluate the role of putative mediators. After computing z-scores for each dependent variable, we combined the data from the three studies. As in each individual experiment, multiple regression was used to assess the role of prestige orientation in the public and private decision-making conditions.

**Leaders' decisions.** Because only leaders facing public scrutiny encountered the dilemma of potentially being judged unfavorably for choosing the strategy that they thought was best for their group's success, it was only in the public decision-making condition that we expected a prestige orientation to be associated with a tendency to align one's decisions with the group's preferences. Highly prestige-oriented leaders free to make their decision in private were instead expected to choose the course of action they thought would promote group performance. Results of the meta-analysis were consistent with these predictions. Analyses revealed an interaction between prestige orientation and decision transparency,  $\beta = .36$ ,  $t = 3.83$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $sr = .18$  (see Figure 5).

Within the public decision-making condition, leaders with a higher (relative to a lower) prestige orientation tended to align their decisions with popular opinion,  $\beta = .25$ ,  $t = 2.75$ ,  $p = .006$ ,  $sr = .13$ . Within the private decision-making condition, leaders with a higher (relative to a lower) prestige orientation tended to choose the option they had judged as best for maximizing group performance,  $\beta = -.22$ ,  $t = -2.68$ ,  $p = .008$ ,  $sr = -.13$ . The interaction between dominance orientation and decision transparency on leaders' task decision did not approach statistical significance when meta-analyzed across Experiments 1–3,  $\beta = -.10$ ,  $t = -1.20$ ,  $p = .23$ ,  $sr = -.06$ .

**Social approval motives.** Because leaders making public decisions faced a tension between maintaining social approval and doing what they thought would enhance group performance, we expected participants' prestige orientation to be positively associated with social approval motives in the public decision-making

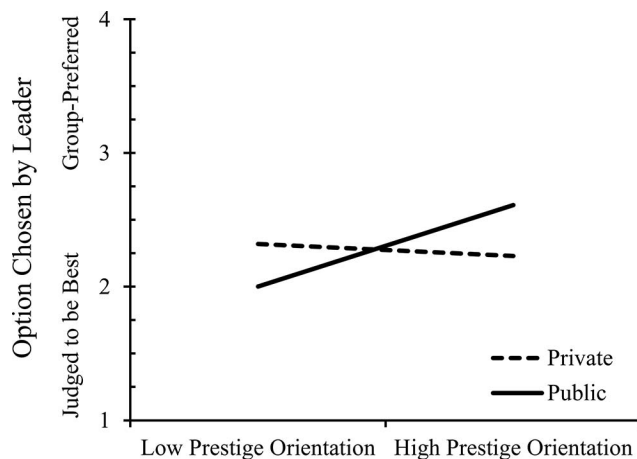


Figure 4. Experiment 3: Within the private condition, leaders with a high (relative to low) orientation toward prestige did not differ in their decisions. However, when their decisions were under public scrutiny, leaders higher (relative to lower) in prestige orientation showed a greater tendency to forgo the task they had previously judged to be best; instead, they tended to go along with the preferences of their group. For ease of explication, high and low prestige orientation are delineated at  $\pm 1$  SD.

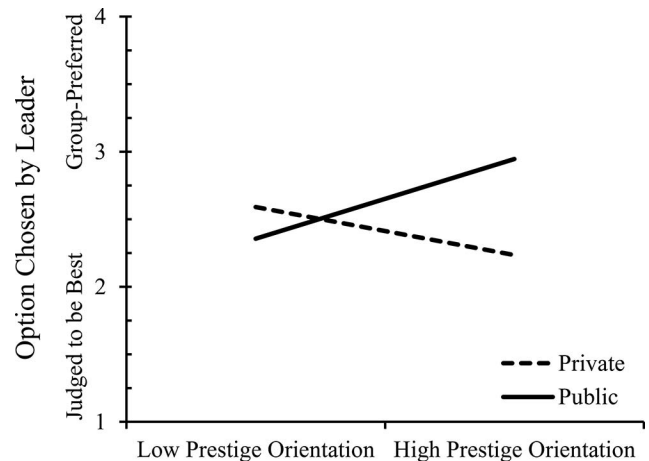


Figure 5. Experiments 1–3: Within the private condition, leaders with a higher (relative to lower) orientation toward prestige tended to choose the option that they had judged as best for group performance. In the public condition, however, leaders higher (relative to lower) in prestige motivation tended to go along with the preferences of their group. For ease of explication, high and low prestige orientation are delineated at  $\pm 1$  SD.

condition, but not in the private decision-making condition. In addition to a significant interaction between prestige orientation and decision transparency ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $t = -3.11$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $sr = .15$ ), the meta-analysis revealed simple effects of prestige orientation within each decision-making condition that were in line with our hypotheses. Within the public decision-making condition, participants' prestige orientation was positively associated with social approval motives,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $t = 2.49$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $sr = .12$ . Moreover, within the private decision-making condition, we observed a marginally significant effect such that prestige orientation was negatively associated with social approval motives,  $\beta = -.15$ ,  $t = -1.87$ ,  $p = .06$ ,  $sr = -.09$ . No significant effects associated with participants' dominance orientation were observed.

**Group performance motives.** Our theoretical framework suggests that, when social disapproval is not a concern (i.e., when making decisions in private), prestige-oriented leaders should prioritize promoting group success. As such, prestige orientation was expected to be positively associated with group performance motives in the private decision-making condition, but not in the public decision-making condition. Although the interaction between decision transparency and prestige orientation did not reach statistical significance across Experiments 1–3 ( $\beta = -.07$ ,  $t = -1.05$ ,  $p = .29$ ,  $sr = -.05$ ), the predicted simple effects emerged. Within the private decision-making condition, prestige orientation was positively associated with group performance motives,  $\beta = .23$ ,  $t = 2.81$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $sr = .14$ . Prestige orientation was not associated with group performance motives within the public decision-making condition,  $\beta = .10$ ,  $t = 1.06$ ,  $p = .29$ ,  $sr = .05$ . No significant effects associated with participants' dominance orientation were observed.

### Mediation Analyses: Experiments 1–3

We conducted analyses of mediation to assess the extent to which social approval motives and group performance motives

influenced prestige-oriented leaders' decisions in the public and private decision-making conditions, respectively.<sup>2</sup> To account for their shared variance, all analyses included participants' dominance orientation in the model. No other covariates were included in the models.

We first assessed the extent to which social approval motives accounted for prestige-oriented leaders' decision to align their decisions with the preferences of their group within the public decision-making condition. Within the public decision-making condition, prestige orientation significantly predicted the dependent measure (leaders' decisions) and the putative mediator (social approval motives). When included in the original simple effect model as a predictor, the putative mediator significantly predicted the leaders' decision to prioritize their group's preferences,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $t = 3.64$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $sr = .17$ . The association between participants' prestige orientation and the dependent measure (leaders' decisions) remained significant, suggesting partial mediation,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $t = 2.33$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $sr = .11$ . We then conducted a bootstrapping mediation test with 1000 samples to test whether, within the public decision-making condition, the simple effect of prestige orientation was statistically mediated by leaders' social approval motives. The bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence interval indicated that the indirect effect mediated through leaders' social approval motives was statistically significant,  $\beta = .07$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI [.02, .16] (See Figure 6).

We then assessed the extent to which, within the private decision-making condition, group performance motives accounted for prestige-oriented leaders' decision to do what they judged to be best for their group. Within the private decision-making condition, prestige orientation significantly predicted the dependent measure (leaders' decisions) and the putative mediator (group performance motives). When included in the original simple effect model as a predictor, the putative mediator significantly predicted the leaders' decision to do what was judged to be best for their group,  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $t = -2.47$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $sr = -.12$ . The association between prestige orientation and the dependent measure (leaders' decisions) remained significant, suggesting partial mediation,  $\beta = -.19$ ,  $t = -2.34$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $sr = .11$ . We then conducted a bootstrapping mediation test with 1000 samples to test whether, within the private decision-making condition, the simple effect of prestige orientation was statistically mediated by leaders' group performance motives. The bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence interval indicated that the indirect effect mediated through leaders' social approval motives was statistically significant,  $\beta = -.05$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI [-.11, -.01] (See Figure 6).

## Discussion of Experiments 1–3

Making decisions that maximize the group's collective success is a critical function served by leaders. Indeed, leaders generally are expected to use their position of influence to pursue actions that benefit the group (Boehm, 1999; Glowacki & von Rueden, 2015; Price & van Vugt, 2014; Van Vugt, 2006). Nevertheless, we found that in mixed-motive situations—when leaders' social approval desires and group performance desires were in conflict—prestige-oriented leaders prioritized their own social approval over their group's success. When their decisions were made in public, and thus social approval was at stake, highly prestige-oriented leaders tended to pander to the desires of their group members

rather than doing what they thought was best for their group's success.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, this tendency was partially mediated by their desire for social approval. In contrast, when making decisions in private, social approval was not at stake, and thus highly prestige-oriented leaders made decisions that prioritized group performance. Notably, in none of these studies did an orientation toward dominance produce similar results. In each case, dominance was unassociated with a tendency to prioritize popularity. In sum, Experiments 1–3 highlight key circumstances in which leaders' orientation toward prestige might go awry, causing leaders to make decisions that could undermine the success of their group.

## Experiments 4 and 5

Whereas Experiments 1–3 highlighted the role individual differences in people's orientation toward prestige play in guiding the decisions of leaders, Experiments 4 and 5 extended the investigation by using experimental manipulations to provide causal tests of our hypotheses. We placed participants into positions of leadership within a status hierarchy or a power hierarchy (or a neutral control hierarchy in Experiment 5) to experimentally prime participants' orientation toward prestige versus dominance, respectively. The status hierarchy was modeled after that used in prior research (Hays & Bendersky, 2015) and was designed to make salient to participants the fact that their role as leader was dependent on the freely conferred deference and social approval of their followers.

Leaders in Experiments 4 and 5 were faced with making a public decision (similar to the public condition of Experiments 1–3), in which the choice options consisted of a popular choice likely to undermine group performance and an unpopular choice likely to enhance group performance. Regardless of whether the comparison condition consisted of a power hierarchy or an unspecified control hierarchy, the status hierarchy was expected to cause leaders to prioritize popularity over performance to a greater extent (i.e., greater tendency to choose the popular option).

Another important design feature of Experiments 4 and 5 is that, rather than pitting the popular choice against leaders' personal judgment about what was best for their group (as was the case in Experiments 2 and 3), leaders in Experiments 4 and 5 had to decide between the popular choice and one supported by objective performance information. Thus, leaders who prioritized their group

<sup>2</sup> As reported previously, the effects of prestige orientation within the public and private decision-making conditions were somewhat inconsistent across Experiments 1–3. This may have been attributable to inadequate statistical power to detect those effects when each experiment was considered in isolation. Analyses of mediation for the individual experiments can be found in the [Online Supplemental Materials](#).

<sup>3</sup> In line with recent recommendations (Braver, Thoemmes, & Rosenthal, 2014; Maner, 2014), we based our interpretations of the Experiments 1–3 on the meta-analytic findings. However, it is important to note that although the pattern of results from Studies 1 and 2 suggests that highly prestige-oriented leaders responded to public scrutiny by undermining their default tendency to support group performance, leaders lower in prestige orientation were less inclined to support group performance, even in private, instead simply going with the grain to conform to the group's majority preference. Thus, in public, participants both high and low in prestige orientation went along with their group's preference, whereas only those high in prestige prioritized group performance in private. This pattern results in a null effect of prestige within the public condition (Studies 1 and 2). In Study 3, prestige-oriented participants went a step further, responding to public scrutiny (versus privacy) by significantly increasing their tendency to support the majority preference.

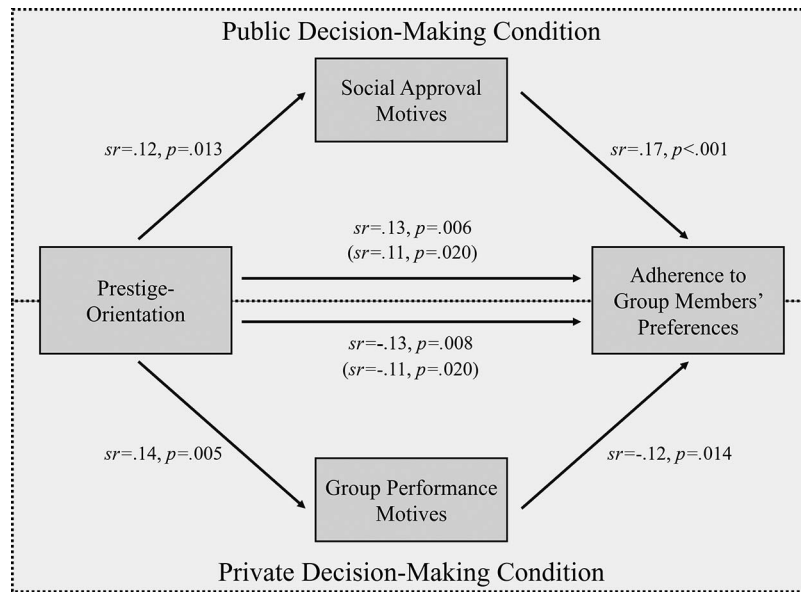


Figure 6. Experiments 1–3: Within the public decision-making condition, highly prestige-oriented leaders' tendency to adhere to the preferences of their group was partially mediated by social approval motives. Within the private decision-making condition, highly prestige-oriented leaders' tendency to go against their group members' preferences (in favor of promoting group performance) was partially mediated by group performance motives.

members' preferences in Experiments 4 and 5 did so at the explicit expense of their group's performance. Because the design of Experiments 4 and 5 are virtually identical—with the exception that Experiment 5 had an additional (neutral control) condition—the methods for the two studies are presented in tandem.

## Method

**Participants.** Participants in Experiments 4 and 5 were recruited to complete a group performance study through Amazon Mechanical Turk and were compensated \$1.00 for their time. For Experiment 4 ( $N = 262$ ), data from nine participants (3.45%) were excluded prior to conducting analyses because of voicing suspicion about their group existing. Of the remaining 253 participants for Experiment 4, whose age ranged from 18 to 68 ( $M_{age} = 32.9$  years), 168 were women and 78 were men (7 did not disclose their gender). For Experiment 5 ( $N = 380$ ) data from 12 participants (3.16%) were omitted prior to conducting analyses because of voicing suspicion about their group existing. Of the remaining 368 participants, whose age ranged from 18 to 66 ( $M_{age} = 32.0$ ), 231 were women and 128 were men (9 did not disclose their gender).

**Design and procedure.** After providing informed consent, participants in both experiments were informed that they would be performing group tasks with two other group members with whom they would be remotely connected via a person-to-person program. The instructions explained that participants had the potential to earn cash prizes based on their group's performance on some word tasks. Before participants joined the queue that would connect them with their ostensible group members, participants indicated their initials and wrote a short greeting for their group members. After a brief loading screen connected the participants to their group members—identified by the initials cjw and K.H.—participants saw their own

greeting and the greetings of their group members in a chat-like format (i.e., “is this real?? If it is, hey ppl !” and “Hi.”).

Next, participants were told that before their group began the task for which their team could receive rewards, they and their group members would each perform two six-item practice word tasks. One was a multiple-choice version of the RAT (Mednick, 1968), described above in Experiment 1, which required participants to select one word (from a list of four) that tied together a set of three other words. The second word task was an anagram task in which participants were required to unscramble five letters to form an English word. Participants were provided with the example *USTYD*, which could be unscrambled to form the word *STUDY*. After each of the word tasks, the computer purportedly analyzed the participant's score.

Once participants completed both practice tasks, they were asked to indicate a brief (fewer than 25 characters) opinion on each of the tasks. This element of the experiment served to enhance the believability of the opinions participants later would receive from each of their group members concerning the RAT and the anagram task.

Upon submitting their own opinions on each of the tasks, participants saw a loading screen as the person-to-person program ostensibly combined and compared their scores with the scores of their other group members. This is when the hierarchy manipulation was introduced. Participants in all conditions were informed by the loading screen that they had received the highest score on the task (e.g., “PJO has been identified as the top performer . . .”). The screen advanced again, indicating that group roles were being assigned based on everyone's individual scores and that the participant had been assigned to the role of leader. Participants in the status hierarchy condition saw an additional loading screen that



indicated that their assignment to the leader role was being confirmed with each of their group members. This facet of the status hierarchy condition was implemented to underscore the freely conferred nature of prestige.

Once the loading screen had finished assigning group members to their leadership role, participants were given additional information about their role as leader. Those in the power hierarchy condition received instructions that emphasized the power, authority, and control they had over their subordinates, who would fulfill the roles of Worker 1 and Worker 2. They were told that they would have the opportunity to evaluate their group members' performance and would be able to decide how the bonus money their group earned would be allocated to themselves and each of their subordinates. In contrast to participants in the power hierarchy condition, participants in the status hierarchy condition received instructions that underscored the status and admiration that came with their role; they were told that people in the leader role generally are looked up to and admired by the workers and serve as role models for their team. In Experiment 5, participants in the neutral control condition were told that they had received the highest score on the task and were assigned the role of leader, but no further information about the nature of the hierarchy was provided.

Following the hierarchy manipulation, participants were informed that, as leader, they alone would have the opportunity to see how their group members performed on the practice word tasks and also would get to look over their group members' opinions on each of the tasks (This information was provided in tabular format). In all cases, the workers had indicated that they preferred doing the task on which they performed the worst and did not enjoy the task on which they performed the best. This element of the design was counterbalanced. Half of all participants saw that the workers scored 7/12 on the anagram task (58.3% correct) and 10/12 on the remote associates task (83.3% correct) and half saw the reverse breakdown of scores. The task on which the workers performed the best was associated with negative opinions from the workers (i.e., "sucks. easy tho," "Meh, not my favorite."). In contrast, the task on which the workers performed the worst was regarded favorably by the workers (i.e., "def more fun but not easy," "I actually liked it."). Thus, the workers personally preferred the task on which their performance was 25% worse.

**Task composition dependent variable.** After reviewing their workers' scores and opinions, all participants were instructed that their next task as leader was to construct a 50-item word task for the workers to complete, selecting from a combination of anagram and remote associates questions. To highlight the importance of performing well on that task, it was emphasized to all participants that the workers' scores on the 50-item task would determine the amount of money their group earned during the online session. Thus, by selecting a greater number of the items on which the workers performed best—but disliked—the leader could ensure their group would perform well and receive the maximum amount of money.

Participants also were told that, after the workers completed the task that the leader created, the workers would have the opportunity to express their opinions of the task and could also voice their opinions of the leader's decisions up to that point. This element of the design was implemented to highlight that the workers would have the opportunity to express their approval or disapproval of the leader—judgments which serve as the basis for conferral of status. Thus, by selecting a greater number of items the workers enjoyed more—but on which they performed poorly—leaders could max-

imize their social approval in the eyes of their group members. As such, when deciding how many anagrams and remote associates items to include on the workers' task, leaders were confronted with a tension between maximizing their group's performance and maximizing their own social approval.

Participants then constructed the group task. While the next screen loaded, all participants were presented with the DigitEyz logo used in Experiment 3. As in Experiment 3, that logo was used to enhance the public nature the participants' decision. After participants submitted their selections for how many anagrams and how many remote associates items to include on the task, they were asked to decide between a task composed of 100% anagrams or 100% remote associates items for their group members to perform. This dichotomous item was included to uncover the dominant preferences of leaders who may have chosen to split the task down the middle such that their group members received 25 items of each question type.

Following the dependent measures, participants completed the AMS as in Experiments 1–3.<sup>4</sup> Similar to those studies, measures of prestige orientation (Experiment 4,  $\alpha = .79$ ,  $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = .65$ ; Experiment 5,  $\alpha = .80$ ,  $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = .67$ ) and dominance orientation (Experiment 4,  $\alpha = .84$ ,  $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = .69$ ; Experiment 5,  $\alpha = .83$ ,  $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = .68$ ) were positively correlated (Experiment 4,  $r = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ ; Experiment 5,  $r = .68$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These measures were included for the purpose of conducting exploratory analyses. No a priori predictions were made concerning individual differences in dominance and prestige orientation for Experiments 4 and 5. One possibility was that any effect of individual differences would be obscured by the experimental manipulations. Another possibility is that individual differences might interact with their manipulations. A possible interaction pattern would be one in which effects of priming are greatest among people who naturally adopt that strategy (e.g., greater effects of the status manipulation among people high in prestige). This would be consistent with the idea that priming effects are greatest in those for whom the relevant strategy is already chronically active and thus more easily activated experimentally. A second possible interaction pattern is one in which effects of priming are greatest among people who tend not to adopt that strategy on a default basis (e.g., greater effects of the status manipulation among people low in prestige). Such a pattern would suggest that priming brings those people up to the already high levels observed in those for whom the strategy is chronically active. Exploratory analyses allowed us to conduct initial, nonconfirmatory tests of these various possibilities.

After completing the AMS, participants then completed a demographics questionnaire and were probed for suspicion. Finally, participants were debriefed and compensated for their time.

<sup>4</sup> We chose to administer measures of dominance and prestige orientation at the end of Experiments 4 and 5 because the focus of those studies was on the experimental manipulations. The benefit of placing the dominance and prestige measures at the end of those studies was that we could be certain that those measures did not taint participants' responses to the manipulations. The cost of such placement, of course, was that they may have been influenced by any of the study's procedures (including the manipulations or the dependent variables), thus precluding strong tests of potential interaction effects. Results pertaining to those measures should be interpreted with caution.



## Results for Experiment 4 and 5

To maintain analytic consistency with Experiments 1–3, we analyzed the results of Experiments 4 and 5 using regression. Because Experiment 4 only had two conditions (status hierarchy and power hierarchy), the only variable in the primary model was the centered condition variable. Experiment 5 had three conditions (status hierarchy, power hierarchy, and neutral control) and, as such, required dummy-coding to assess leaders' question selection in each of the three conditions. We first dummy-coded the hierarchy conditions centered on the status hierarchy condition so that the status hierarchy condition could be compared with the power hierarchy condition (status-vs.-power) and the neutral control condition (status-vs.-control) within the same model. We then created dummy variables centered on the power hierarchy condition, allowing us to compare the power condition to the neutral control condition (power-vs.-control).

### Leaders' question selection.

#### Experiment 4.

**Primary analyses.** For our primary analyses, experimental condition served as the sole predictor. We predicted that, compared with leaders in a power hierarchy, leaders in a status hierarchy would design their workers' task such that it would comprise a greater number of questions that the workers preferred (and a lower number of questions on which the workers performed better). In line with our hypothesis, leaders assigned to the status hierarchy condition selected a greater number of the group-preferred questions ( $M = 24.68$ ,  $SE = 1.00$ ) than did leaders assigned to the power hierarchy condition ( $M = 20.77$ ,  $SE = 1.05$ ),  $\beta = .17$ ,  $t = 2.70$ ,  $p = .007$ ,  $sr = .17$  (see Figure 7).

**Ancillary analyses.** We then examined whether participants' dispositional orientations toward either prestige or dominance interacted with the type of hierarchy to influence leaders' selection of questions. For those analyses, measures of dominance orientation and prestige orientation were included simultaneously in all regression models, in addition to their centered interactions with experimental condition. Analyses revealed no interaction between the type of hierarchy and leaders' prestige orientation ( $\beta = -.06$ ,  $t = -.78$ ,  $p = .43$ ,  $sr = -.05$ ) or dominance orientation ( $\beta = .07$ ,  $t = .875$ ,  $p = .38$ ,  $sr = .06$ ). Nor did we observe main effects of prestige orientation ( $\beta = -.01$ ,  $t = -.06$ ,  $p = .95$ ,  $sr = -.004$ ) or dominance orientation ( $\beta = -.05$ ,  $t = -.56$ ,  $p = .58$ ,  $sr = -.04$ ).

#### Experiment 5.

**Primary analyses.** Multiple regression was used to test whether being in the status-based hierarchy (vs. power-based hierarchy and vs. neutral control) caused leaders to select a greater number of group-preferred questions for the group task. In line with our predictions, leaders assigned to the status hierarchy condition selected a greater number of group-preferred questions ( $M = 27.48$ ,  $SE = 1.04$ ) than did leaders assigned to the power hierarchy condition ( $M = 20.85$ ,  $SE = 1.05$ ),  $\beta = .26$ ,  $t = 4.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $sr = .22$ , and the neutral control condition ( $M = 19.10$ ,  $SE = 1.03$ ),  $\beta = .33$ ,  $t = 5.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $sr = .29$ . There was no difference between the choices of leaders assigned to the power hierarchy versus neutral control condition,  $\beta = .07$ ,  $t = 1.19$ ,  $p = .23$ ,  $sr = .06$  (see Figure 8).

**Ancillary analyses.** As in Experiment 4, we conducted exploratory analyses to assess whether participants' dispositional orienta-

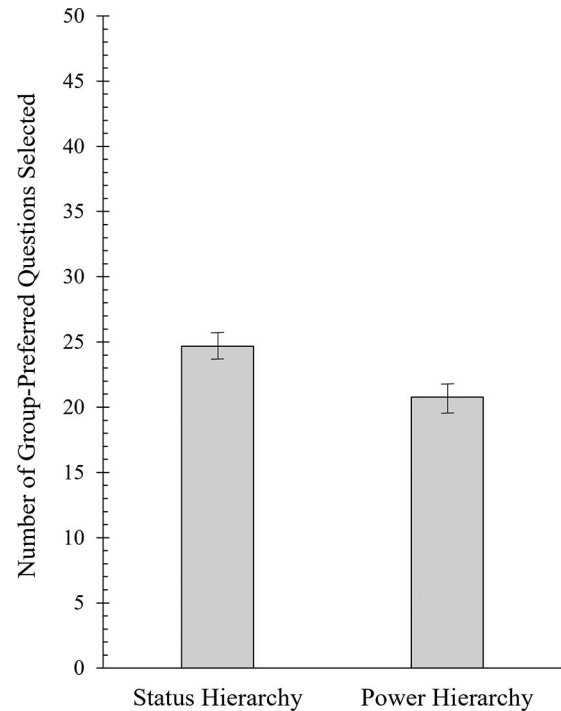


Figure 7. Experiment 4: Compared with leaders in the power hierarchy, leaders in the status hierarchy designed their group members' task such that it contained a greater number of questions that their group members preferred (but on which they had performed poorly). Error bars represent standard error.

tions toward prestige and dominance may have interacted with the type of hierarchy. As in the previous experiment, measures of dominance orientation and prestige orientation were included simultaneously in all regression models, in addition to their centered interactions with the dummy-coded conditions.

When comparing the status condition to the power condition, we observed a significant interaction between type of hierarchy and leaders' prestige orientation,  $\beta = -1.12$ ,  $t = -2.40$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $sr = -.12$ . A similar (marginally significant) interaction was observed when comparing the status condition to the neutral control condition,  $\beta = -.85$ ,  $t = -1.81$ ,  $p = .07$ ,  $sr = -.09$ . When comparing the power condition to the neutral control condition, no interaction with participants' dispositional prestige orientation was observed,  $\beta = .26$ ,  $t = .57$ ,  $p = .57$ ,  $sr = .03$ .

Within the status hierarchy condition, leaders' dispositional prestige orientation was associated with selecting significantly more group-preferred questions,  $\beta = .30$ ,  $t = 2.43$ ,  $p = .02$ ,  $sr = .12$ . Within the power hierarchy condition, however, leaders' prestige orientation was not associated with question selection,  $\beta = -.10$ ,  $t = -.88$ ,  $p = .38$ ,  $sr = -.04$ . Similarly, we observed no association between leaders' prestige orientation and question selection within the control condition,  $\beta = -.01$ ,  $t = -.06$ ,  $p = .95$ ,  $sr < -.01$ . Thus, participants' dispositional prestige orientation was associated with designing a more group-preferred task only in the status condition.

We also observed an interaction between leaders' dispositional dominance orientation and assignment to the status hierarchy condition (relative to the power hierarchy condition),  $\beta = .99$ ,  $t = 2.28$ ,

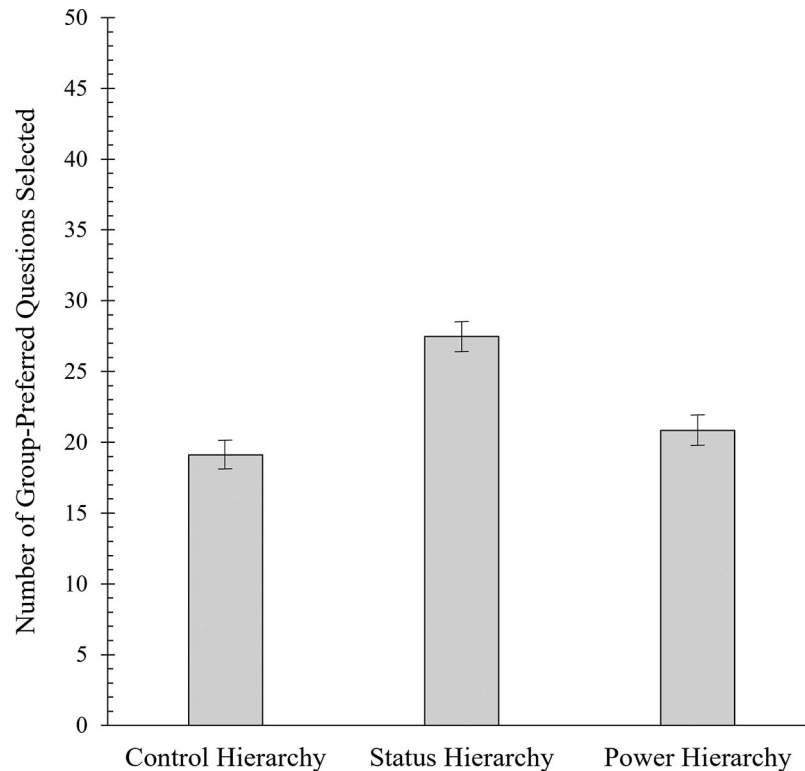


Figure 8. Experiment 4: Compared with leaders in the power hierarchy and the control conditions, leaders in the status hierarchy condition designed their group members' task such that it contained a greater number of questions that the group members preferred (but on which they had performed poorly). No difference was observed between the power hierarchy condition and the control condition. Error bars represent standard error.

$p = .02$ ,  $sr = .13$ . However, no interaction was observed between leaders' dominance orientation and assignment to the status hierarchy condition (relative to the control condition),  $\beta = .52$ ,  $t = 1.19$ ,  $p = .23$ ,  $sr = .06$ . We also observed no interaction between leaders' dominance orientation and assignment to the power hierarchy condition (relative to control),  $\beta = -.47$ ,  $t = -1.07$ ,  $p = .28$ ,  $sr = -.05$ .

Within the power hierarchy condition, leaders' dispositional dominance orientation was associated with selecting significantly more group-preferred questions,  $\beta = .26$ ,  $t = 2.21$ ,  $p = .03$ ,  $sr = .11$ . Within the status hierarchy condition, however, leaders' dominance orientation was not associated with question selection,  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $t = -1.02$ ,  $p = .31$ ,  $sr = -.05$ . Similarly, we observed no association between leaders' dominance orientation and question selection within the control condition,  $\beta = .08$ ,  $t = .67$ ,  $p = .51$ ,  $sr = .03$ .

#### Dichotomous task selection.

##### Experiment 4.

**Primary analyses.** Logistic regression was used to examine leaders' task selection—their tendency to choose either a task comprised entirely of the group-preferred questions or a task comprised entirely of the performance-enhancing questions. As with question selection analyses, experimental condition served as the sole predictor.

We predicted that, compared with leaders in a power hierarchy, leaders in a status hierarchy would be more inclined to choose the task comprised entirely of the group-preferred questions. In line with this hypothesis, leaders assigned to the status hierarchy con-

dition (51.1%) were significantly more likely to select the task comprised entirely of the group-preferred questions than were leaders assigned to the power hierarchy condition (31.7%),  $\beta = .81$ ,  $Wald = 9.67$ ,  $p = .002$ .

**Ancillary analyses.** Exploratory analyses examined whether participants' dispositional orientations may have interacted with the type of hierarchy to influence leaders' task selection. Analyses revealed no interaction between leaders' dispositional prestige orientation and hierarchy condition ( $\beta = -.56$ ,  $Wald = 1.17$ ,  $p = .28$ ), nor did we observe an interaction between leaders' dispositional dominance orientation and hierarchy condition ( $\beta = .59$ ,  $Wald = 1.45$ ,  $p = .23$ ). No main effects of dispositional dominance ( $\beta = -.07$ ,  $Wald = .09$ ,  $p = .77$ ) or prestige ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $Wald = .85$ ,  $p = .36$ ) were observed.

##### Experiment 5.

**Primary analyses.** Multiple logistic regression was used to examine whether leaders in the status-based hierarchy (vs. power-based hierarchy and vs. neutral control) were more likely to select a group-preferred task. In line with our predictions, leaders assigned to the status hierarchy condition (68.9%) were more likely to select the group-preferred task than were leaders assigned to the power hierarchy condition (22.3%),  $\beta = -2.04$ ,  $Wald = 48.48$ ,  $p < .001$ , and leaders in the control condition (23.2%),  $\beta = -1.99$ ,  $Wald = 47.66$ ,  $p < .001$ . No difference in task selection was observed between leaders in the power hierarchy condition and the control condition,  $\beta = .05$ ,  $Wald = .03$ ,  $p = .87$ .

*Ancillary analyses.* Exploratory analyses examined whether participants' dispositional orientations may have interacted with type of hierarchy to influence leaders' task selection. Analyses revealed no interaction between leaders' prestige orientation and the status-versus-power hierarchy variable ( $\beta = -.08$ ,  $Wald = .02$ ,  $p = .90$ ), the status-versus-control hierarchy variable ( $\beta = -.01$ ,  $Wald < .001$ ,  $p = .99$ ), or the power-versus-control hierarchy variable ( $\beta = .07$ ,  $Wald = .01$ ,  $p = .91$ ). Similarly, no interaction was observed between leaders' dominance orientation and the status-versus-power hierarchy variable ( $\beta = .40$ ,  $Wald = .42$ ,  $p = .52$ ), the status-versus-control hierarchy variable ( $\beta = -.22$ ,  $Wald = .13$ ,  $p = .72$ ), or the power-versus-control hierarchy variable ( $\beta = -.61$ ,  $Wald = .89$ ,  $p = .35$ ).

## Discussion for Experiments 4 and 5

Experiments 4 and 5 provide causal evidence that an orientation toward using prestige to navigate social hierarchies is associated with prioritizing one's own popularity over group performance. When faced with creating tasks likely to maximize group performance versus tasks that were subjectively preferred by other group members, leaders atop status hierarchies tended to generate tasks biased toward the preferences of their group members. In doing so, they sacrificed what was likely to be the best option for ensuring optimal group performance. No such tendency was observed in power hierarchies or neutral control hierarchies, thus pointing to the important role of conferred deference and social approval—the key elements that distinguished status hierarchies from the other types of hierarchies.

Exploratory analyses hinted at the possibility that, within status hierarchies, people with dispositionally high orientations toward prestige were especially likely to pander to the preferences of their group. However, because that finding was not predicted *a priori*, because it was observed only in one of the two experiments, and because Experiments 4 and 5 were not designed to provide confirmatory evidence for person-by-situation interactions, we caution against drawing strong conclusions from the observed pattern of results. The possibility of such person-by-situation interactions is one we reflect on further in the General Discussion.

## General Discussion

One of the key functions served by leaders is to foster group performance. Indeed, leaders typically are granted heightened influence over critical group decisions under the (often implicit) social contract that they will make choices that benefit the group's collective goals (Boehm, 1999; Van Vugt, 2006). For instance, athletic coaches are expected to prioritize their team's success when deciding which players to start and how to structure team training sessions. A coach who instead prioritized his or her own popularity with players over helping the team perform well and win matches would be acting against the best interests of the team.

Despite the fact that leaders typically are expected to make decisions that enhance their group's success, when leaders face a tension between doing what will help their group perform well and doing what is popular with their group members, they sometimes are tempted to make the more popular decision as a means of safeguarding their social approval. In the current studies, leaders faced such a tension: they were tasked with deciding between an

option favored by their group members and an option that was likely to yield higher group performance and greater rewards. Leaders with a prestige-oriented approach to leadership tended to prioritize popularity over performance as a means to protect their own social approval.

## A Downside to Prestige: Prioritizing Popularity Over Performance

Leaders with a mindset focused on prestige—whether that mindset was dispositional or experimentally primed—made decisions that prioritized their own popularity over the successful performance of the group. When faced with the potential for being judged unfavorably by their group, prestige-oriented leaders made choices aimed at maintaining social approval rather than choices likely to bring about group success. In doing so, those leaders appeared willing to sacrifice not only the group's performance goals, but also the monetary rewards associated with good performance. These findings highlight key circumstances in which leaders' desire for prestige might go awry, causing them to make decisions that could undermine the success of their group. Indeed, although an orientation toward prestige has been portrayed in the recent literature as a relatively magnanimous leadership trait (Case & Maner, 2014; Henrich et al., 2015; von Rueden et al., 2010), the current research illuminates an important dark side to prestige.

Our interpretation that the behavior of prestige-oriented leaders was driven by social approval concerns is strengthened by the public-private manipulations used in the first three experiments. In the public conditions, leaders were faced with a dilemma: pursuing actions they viewed to be the best for their group could undermine their social approval. Under those circumstances, prestige-oriented leaders were willing to forsake group performance in favor of social approval. When making decisions in private, however, no such dilemma existed, and prestige-oriented leaders instead made decisions in line with achieving the group's performance goals. Those findings highlight the value prestige-oriented leaders place on social approval. They also help identify specific situations (i.e., conditions involving a high degree of public scrutiny) likely to cause prestige-oriented leaders to make poor decisions.

The findings involving the public-private manipulations also help rule out the alternative explanation that prestige-oriented leaders merely doubted their own initial decisions when faced with disagreement from their group. If prestige-oriented leaders chose the group-preferred option merely because they doubted their own decisions, they would have been expected to select the group-preferred option in both the public condition and the private condition. However, it was only when leaders' decisions were made in public that prestige-oriented leaders adhered to the preferences of their group.

Our interpretation of the data is also supported by mediational analyses from those studies. When in public, decisions made by prestige-oriented leaders were statistically mediated by their desire for social approval. The behavior of prestige-oriented leaders is thus not unlike politicians who, when faced with the possibility of losing support from their constituents, pander to their base by making decisions they think will win them support and praise. This can be contrasted with decisions made by prestige-oriented leaders in private. Under those circumstances their decisions were mediated by a desire to help the group perform well. Taken together, the

moderating effects of decision transparency (public-vs.-private) and the mediation by social approval concerns pinpoint the role social approval motives play in guiding the decisions of prestige-oriented leaders.

Unlike the behavior of prestige-oriented leaders, we saw no evidence in any of these studies that dominance-oriented leaders were motivated by a desire for popularity or social approval. For example, the decisions of dominance-oriented leaders were unaffected by the decision transparency manipulation and, unlike prestige-oriented leaders, they did not report a heightened desire for social approval. This fits with current theories that highlight the very different strategies adopted by dominance-versus prestige-oriented leaders. Whereas prestige relies on the freely conferred deference of subordinates and thus causes people to care deeply about maintaining positive relationships with others, an orientation toward dominance is relatively less focused on social approval or liking. Rather, dominance-oriented leaders tend to seek power and authority, because power allows them to lead and to make decisions without relying on freely conferred deference (cf., [Magee & Smith, 2013](#)). Whereas much of the literature distinguishing dominance from prestige has focused on the selfish behavior of dominance-oriented leaders (e.g., [Case & Maner, 2014](#)), the current research advances the literature in part by showing that, like an orientation toward dominance, an orientation toward prestige can undermine effective leadership behavior.

Moving beyond previous research that has relied on individual differences in people's orientation toward prestige and dominance, the current research included experimental methods aimed at manipulating those orientations. Studies 4 and 5 manipulated the nature of the social hierarchy—whether it was based on power or status—and findings converged with those from the studies relying on individual differences (Studies 1–3). In addition to providing causal evidence for the role of prestige-oriented leadership, these studies help bridge the evolutionary psychological literature on dominance and prestige with the social psychological literature on power and status. Whereas prestige and dominance are conceptualized by evolutionary psychologists as strategies people use to navigate social hierarchies (e.g., [Cheng et al., 2013](#); [Henrich & Gil-White, 2001](#); [Maner & Case, 2016](#)), status and power are conceptualized as structural elements of social hierarchies ([Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003](#); [Magee & Galinsky, 2008](#)). The current research suggests that hierarchies characterized by status can elicit in their leaders a psychological orientation toward prestige; leaders atop status hierarchies behaved similarly to leaders with a dispositional proclivity to use a prestige-oriented strategy. Although the current research was not focused on the role of power, and the power hierarchy conditions served primarily as control conditions in the current studies, we suspect that being atop a power hierarchy may elicit a psychological orientation toward dominance, as dominance-oriented leaders tend to desire power as a means of influencing others. Thus, the current research provides important conceptual bridges between evolutionary and social psychological theories of social hierarchy (cf. [Van Vugt, 2006](#); [von Rueden & van Vugt, 2015](#)). Indeed, the two types of theories complement each other in important ways. For example, whereas the social psychological literature on status acknowledges that some people receive more respect than others and that some hierarchies are defined primarily in terms of respect ([Blader et al., 2016](#); [Magee & Galinsky, 2008](#)), the evolutionary literature on

prestige specifies the qualities (specific types of knowledge, skill) that typically determine one's level of respect, as well as the psychological and cultural mechanisms through which that respect is translated into social influence ([Henrich & Gil-White, 2001](#)).

Despite their similarities, it is important not to conflate theories of prestige and dominance with those focused on status and power. For example, whereas power implies the institutionalized control of resources (e.g., a CEO who controls a company's budget), dominance often involves informal use of intimidation and coercion (e.g., a schoolyard bully; see [Cheng et al., 2014](#)). Also, whereas theories of status and power focus on structural elements of social hierarchies, theories of prestige and dominance help explain the role dispositional traits play in leadership strategies (e.g., [Lukaszewski, Simmons, Anderson, & Roney, 2016](#)). At a broader level of analysis, whereas theories of power and status focus on effects particular types of hierarchies have on social psychological processes, evolutionary theories of dominance and prestige help tie those effects to the conditions under which human social groups have operated throughout history (e.g., [Price & van Vugt, 2014](#); [van Vugt & Tybur, 2015](#)).

## Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations of the current studies provide valuable opportunities for future research. For example, a limitation of the first three studies is that they relied on a single self-report method of assessing people's orientation toward dominance and prestige. Moreover, the observed reliability for the prestige orientation subscale of the AMS in Experiments 1 and 2 was suboptimal ( $\alpha = .64$  and  $\alpha = .65$ , respectively). Other self-report measures are available ([Cheng et al., 2013](#)) and research would also benefit from measuring people's orientation toward dominance and prestige with direct behavioral or physiological assessments (e.g., testosterone; [Johnson, Burk, & Kirkpatrick, 2007](#)). Ultimately this area of research would be advanced by studies that employ multiple measures to assess dispositional tendencies toward dominance versus prestige.

A second limitation pertains to the downstream consequences of leaders' decisions. Although the current research has implications for group performance, it fell short of directly examining the effects leaders' decisions might have on the way groups function and perform. Future studies would profit from examining the circumstances in which leaders' decisions to conform to their group's preferences hinders group performance and success. One intriguing possibility is that, if leaders' decisions do indeed cause performance to suffer, leaders who prioritize social approval over group performance might eventually face the disapproval of the group. Another possibility is that, to the extent that a leader has already earned the group's respect, that leader can make some number of unfavorable decisions before his or her followers begin to withdraw their social approval (e.g., idiosyncrasy credit; [Hollander, 2013](#)).

A third limitation is that these studies were conducted online or within the confines of our laboratory. Our goal was to provide adequately powered, rigorous, and highly controlled tests of our hypotheses and to pinpoint the motivational factors that guide the decisions of prestige-oriented leaders. Nevertheless, the extent to which the current findings would generalize straightforwardly to leadership behavior in extant groups is unknown. For example,



participants in our studies were unacquainted with their (ostensible) group members. The extent to which leaders are swayed by the opinions of their subordinates might be moderated by whether they possess close interpersonal relationships with their group members. If prestige-oriented leaders see those relationships as fragile, they might be especially inclined to prioritize social approval when making decisions. In contrast, if leaders view those relationships as strong and enduring, they might be more willing to risk some degree of disapproval if it means making decisions likely to benefit the group. Relatedly, it is possible that, with increased leader–follower interaction, prestige-oriented leaders may be able to shift group members' opinions to match their own. In so doing, prestige-oriented leaders might thus be able to mitigate threats to their social approval.

It is possible that, because these studies were not conducted in face-to-face groups, an orientation toward dominance was the default mindset of participants. For instance, in Experiment 5, participants in the control condition behaved similarly to those in the power hierarchy. This might suggest that, even in the absence of explicit references to power, participants who took on the role of leader in that study adopted a dominance-oriented mindset. Another possibility, however, is that in the absence of strong social approval motives—which were activated only in the status hierarchy condition—people's natural desire to behave in a way that is consistent with their previously expressed opinions was responsible for participants' choices. The power hierarchy manipulation, in our view, would have done little to mitigate that desire. Future research should examine whether leaders' inclinations toward a dominance-versus prestige-oriented mindset varies as a function of whether they interact with their subordinates via computer or via face-to-face interactions.

Another factor worth investigating in future research involves the role of intergroup competition. When faced with intergroup competition, dominance-oriented leaders have been shown to reduce their exploitation of the group, instead prioritizing behaviors that optimize group performance (Maner & Mead, 2010; Mead & Maner, 2012; cf. van Vugt, de Cremer, & Janssen, 2007). It also seems possible that prestige-oriented leaders would respond to intergroup competition by making decisions that prioritize their own group's performance success over their own popularity. This would help the group compete successfully over outgroup rivals. Our studies provide a valuable springboard for undertaking such investigations.

Fourth, although the mediation analyses from Experiments 1–3 highlight the role of social approval motives within public settings, that model still contains a fair amount of unexplained variance. Thus, although the current research highlights one reason highly prestige-oriented leaders abandon their own judgment in favor of conforming to the preferences of their group, there might be other mechanisms that contribute to that tendency. For example, some prestige-oriented leaders might experience anxiety or feel uncertain about their ability to make good judgments. Under such circumstances, they might be driven to side with the majority opinion because they view that opinion as a valuable source of information (Cialdini, 1987). Another possibility is that, in addition to conscious motives, more implicit desires may help explain leaders' decisions. For example, in addition to a conscious desire for social approval, prestige-oriented leaders may experience im-

plicit desires for similarity or social closeness with their group, and such desires could cause them to conform to majority opinions.

Another situation in which leaders might be more inclined to side with the majority opinion is when they and their group members have similar access to information. The current findings apply most directly to instances in which leaders have greater access to information than do followers. Differential access to information is likely to occur in some, but not all, leadership situations. When information is distributed more equally across group members, leaders may face fewer trade-offs when it comes to adhering to the preferences of other group members, as those group members would be capable of providing opinions that are (presumably) just as informed as those of the leader. Future research should continue to explore the reasons highly prestige-oriented leaders might choose to side with the majority opinion of their group members.

Fifth, although the results of Study 5 hint at the possibility of person-by-situation interactions, the current studies were not designed to fully explore that possibility. Study 5 provided some evidence that effects of being in a status hierarchy were greatest among those with a dispositional orientation toward prestige. This suggests that leadership behavior may be influenced by the level of fit between a person's default orientation toward dominance or prestige and the type of hierarchy in which they reside. That is, being in a status hierarchy could amplify preexisting tendencies to prioritize prestige and, in contrast, being in a power hierarchy could activate dispositional tendencies to emphasize dominance. Although future research is needed to more adequately investigate this possibility, such a hypothesis is consistent with theories of trait activation (Tett & Burnett, 2003; Tett & Guterman, 2000). Trait activation refers to the process by which situations that are relevant to a given personality trait can cause that underlying trait to be expressed or activated (e.g., Castille, Kuyumcu, & Bennett, 2017; Kim, Van Dyne, Kamdar, & Johnson, 2013; Lievens, Chasteen, Day, & Christiansen, 2006). Testing this hypothesis could have important implications for theories that emphasize the level of fit between group members and their organizational culture (see Kristof, 1996, for a review).

Finally, the current studies were designed to examine a key strategy prestige-oriented leaders might employ to maintain their social approval and, thus, their high status role within the group. However, dominance and prestige are dynamically related such that attributes that facilitate the acquisition of one can also facilitate the acquisition of the other (e.g., Lukaszewski et al., 2016). Thus, future research would benefit from examining more closely situations in which pandering behavior is exhibited by dominance-oriented leaders as a means to hold onto positions of power. For example, results of Experiment 5 suggest that, among leaders whose structural power is emphasized, a dispositional orientation toward dominance was associated with adhering to group preferences. When doing so could help them further their own goals, dominance-oriented people might respond to positions of power with greater social sensitivity, such that they selectively attend to and respond to their subordinates' desires (e.g., Keltner, van Kleef, Chen, & Kraus, 2008; Overbeck & Park, 2001, 2006). For instance, when power-holders have people-centered (vs. task-centered) goals, they tend to be better at attending to and individuating social targets (Overbeck & Park, 2006). Moreover, prior research has demonstrated that people who feel powerful tend to

exercise social instrumentality as a means to further their own goals (Gruenfeld et al., 2008). Thus, to the extent that dominance-oriented leaders want to avoid having their structural power called into question by their group, they might seek to curry favor with subordinates in an instrumental fashion. Another possibility is that, when dominance-oriented people are placed in situations that are defined by power and formal authority, their dispositions and personality are validated. Such validation might counter some of the defensive, agonistic tendencies observed among dominance-oriented people who feel threatened (e.g., Case & Maner, 2014) and instead prime in them a tendency to build coalitions or seek approval from other group members. Future research is needed to directly examine whether and how dominance-oriented leaders might become particularly responsive to the preferences of their group.

## Conclusion

The current findings provide the first rigorous empirical investigation into how, when, and why prestige-oriented leaders make suboptimal decisions. Highly prestige-oriented leaders sometimes face a strong tension between wanting to promote positive group outcomes and wanting to receive the approval of their group members. Our studies demonstrate that, sometimes, that tension causes “good” leaders to make not-so-good decisions that have the potential to undermine their group’s success. As such, these studies have important implications for understanding some of the fundamental motives that drive leadership behavior and that set the stage for poor decisions.

More broadly, the current research provides important evidence supporting dual strategies theory as a useful framework for understanding human social hierarchies. Both dominance and prestige serve as viable routes to attaining high social rank, though they differ from one another in profoundly important ways. Both dominance and prestige can lead to harmful leadership decisions, but the underlying causes are quite different. Dual strategies theory provides a valuable foundation for further investigating both the dangers of dominance and the pitfalls of prestige. This research joins forces with other recent work to highlight the important role motivation plays in the psychology of social hierarchy (cf., Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015).

In the opening to this article we cited a historical example in which Levi Savage went against his better judgment and instead catered to the desires of his group. We do not know how prestige-oriented Levi Savage was, but judging by his decision to conform to his group’s wishes, one might guess that he cared deeply about receiving the respect and approval of his group. Although many pioneers in Savage’s company would have pressed onward even without his assistance, had he followed his own judgment and stayed the winter, it is possible that many others would have stayed in Omaha, having had their health—and even their lives—spared.

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