

**SOCIAL HIERARCHY:
THE SELF-REINFORCING NATURE OF POWER AND STATUS**

JOE C. MAGEE

New York University

ADAM D. GALINSKY

Northwestern University

In preparation for Academy of Management Annals, vol. 2, 2008.

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ABSTRACT

Hierarchy is such a defining and pervasive feature of organizations that its forms and basic functions are often taken for granted in organizational research. In this chapter, we revisit some basic psychological and sociological elements of hierarchy and argue that status and power are two important and distinct bases of hierarchical differentiation. We define power and status and distinguish them from previous conceptualizations and integrate a number of different literatures to explain why status and power hierarchies tend to be self-reinforcing. Power, related to one's control over valued resources, transforms individual psychology such that the powerful think and act in ways that lead to the retention and acquisition of power. Status, related to the respect one has in the eyes of others, generates expectations for behavior and opportunities for advancement that favor those with a prior status advantage. We also explore the role that hierarchy-enhancing belief systems play in stabilizing hierarchy from the top down and from the bottom up. Finally, we address a number of factors that we think are instrumental in explaining the conditions under which hierarchies change. Our framework suggests a number of avenues for future work on the bases, causes, and consequences of hierarchy in groups and organizations.

Hierarchy, in its various forms, is prevalent in so many groups and organizations that it appears to be one of the most fundamental features of social relations. Leaders of groups naturally emerge from interactions, a few central individuals gather the majority of status in groups, resources are unequally distributed across individuals and groups, and positions and roles are granted different amounts or sources of power, which are conferred upon the individuals who occupy them. Like both human and non-human primate societies more generally, most, if not all, organizations have a stratified structure, a pyramid shape with fewer people at the top than at the bottom. Even when one considers the heterogeneity of organizational forms (Carroll & Hannan, 2000; Powell, 1990) and organizational practices and cultures that are intended to dodge or suppress hierarchy (Morand, 2001; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979), what is most noticeable is that hierarchy relentlessly rises up against these pressures (Leavitt, 2005; Tannenbaum, Kavčič, Rosner, Vianello, & Wieser, 1974). Most striking, in other words, is that hierarchy is present across all the diverse forms that populate the world of organizations. Even when hierarchy is minimized by different models of organizing (A. P. Fiske, 1992), it is never absent, inevitably emerging both between and within groups (Leavitt, 2005; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

The pervasiveness of hierarchy suggests that there are a number of individual, group, and organizational factors that create, shape, and support it across myriad domains. Yet, when we set out to search for research on hierarchy in the field of management, we were surprised by the paucity of recent work on the topic. Hierarchy, it seemed, had faded to the background, so much so that one might think that the field no longer considered it a topic of great import. Perhaps organizational structure was too stiff of a topic; a set of interconnected boxes too boring to even look at it. But we increased our aperture and explored an interdisciplinary collection of literature from organizations, psychology, sociology, and other disciplines that we thought might have

insights about hierarchical life in organizations. What we saw was a vast field of research on *social hierarchy*, with a great many lessons for researchers of and managers in organizations. This chapter is our attempt to frame just a piece of what those before us have found and to offer our own empirical and theoretical contributions to the discussion. We focus on the individual as the unit of analysis within group and organizational hierarchies, but our framework is designed to apply to research investigating hierarchical differentiation between social groups, departments within organizations, and organizations within industries, fields, or sectors.

The chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section, we define social hierarchy, discuss how it is formally instituted in organizations as well as how it informally develops in groups and organizations, and then describe its functions. We next turn to what we argue are the two foundational bases of hierarchy in organizations: status and power. We define these terms, distinguish our definitions from previous conceptualizations and place them in the context of extant research. In the third section, the heart of the chapter, we explore the self-reinforcing nature of social hierarchies, focusing on the consequences of high rank and low rank as mechanisms of hierarchy reinforcement; here we describe a number of findings that demonstrate the effects that power and status can have on psychological and interpersonal processes that serve to maintain hierarchies. We then acknowledge that there are countervailing forces and conditions under which hierarchies can become unstable and eventually undergo change. In the fifth and final section, we conclude by encouraging scholars of management and organizations to pursue answers to some important, though complicated, research questions.

THE TYPES AND FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL HIERARCHY

We begin this section by providing a definition of social hierarchy to lay the theoretical groundwork for the remainder of the chapter. We then discuss the types of hierarchy, formal and

informal, that are typically found in organizations. As one way of explaining the prevalence of hierarchy, we then outline two functions that hierarchy serves: establishing order and facilitating coordination, and motivating individuals.

In constructing our definition of social hierarchy, we reviewed research on power (e.g., Emerson, 1962; Pfeffer, 1992), status (e.g., Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980; Podolny, 2005), inequality (e.g., Baron & Pfeffer, 1994; Marx, 1844/1964), stratification (e.g., Baron, 1984; Stinchcombe, 1986), social structure (e.g., Burt, 1992; Weber, 1946), social exchange (e.g., Blau, 1964; Flynn, 2005), influence (e.g., Brass, 1984; Cialdini, 1993), authority (e.g., Etzioni, 1959; Weber, 1946), and hierarchy (e.g., Laumann, Siegel, & Hodge, 1970; Tannenbaum et al., 1974); research on human groups, organizations, and societies as well as non-human primate groups (e.g., Sapolsky, 2005). We were surprised by how many of these works took the meaning of hierarchy as given and how few of them explicitly defined hierarchy or even directly addressed it. Across these varied research enterprises, however, we inferred widespread agreement about the necessary and sufficient components of social hierarchy.

Definition of Social Hierarchy

Social hierarchy is an implicit or explicit rank order of individuals or groups with respect to a valued social dimension. We use the words *implicit* and *explicit* to capture the range of awareness that people have of the hierarchies in which they are embedded. Hierarchies can be delineated by rules and consensually agreed upon, or they can be subjectively understood and taken for granted. We use the phrase *rank order* to indicate that at least one individual or group must be subordinate to at least one other individual or group (Blau & Scott, 1962). We use the phrase *valued social dimension* because there must be some specification and understanding of the dimension along which people are rank ordered, that dimension must have subjective value

to the individuals or groups, and higher rank possesses more of the valued dimension than lower rank. One important implication of this definition is that there could be multiple valued dimensions in play at any one time, and context will determine which dimension is most relevant for hierarchical differentiation in any given moment.

To arrive at a hierarchical form of social relations, members of social groups must either engage in creating a formal system with rank-ordered roles or take part in a process of informal interaction where rank ordering of individuals or groups organically develops on at least one valued social dimension. Regardless of how it takes shape, we call this process *hierarchical differentiation*, and next we articulate how it results in formal and informal hierarchies in groups and organizations.

Formal hierarchy. As groups and organizations grow, and their work becomes more complex, they tend to increase the formalization of their hierarchies. The signs of hierarchy formalization include job titles, reporting structures, and organization charts. The organization chart, for example, is simply a visual representation of the hierarchically differentiated structure of roles; it typically depicts a relatively small top management team, at least one layer of middle management, and a large number of lower level employees responsible either for day-to-day operations or for the support of management (Mintzberg, 1979). Within the boundaries of the organization, greater value inheres in positions of higher formal rank. Although the sources of value that increase from low to high rank are not always explicit, they include control over resources and deference from subordinates. There is also a presumption that, if effective human resource procedures are in place, individuals of higher rank possess a greater combination of skills, ability, and motivation to accomplish the work of the organization than do lower-ranking individuals, giving the formal hierarchy a high degree of legitimacy to its members. The sorting

of individuals into appropriate roles and ranks, however, is a dynamic problem. As individuals gain experience, the allocation and matching of people to positions needs to be adjusted. Despite this fluid nature, with some people entering and some departing the organization, some moving laterally, and others being promoted to higher ranks, the hierarchically differentiated structure itself outlasts these changes. This is one sense in which we argue that hierarchy is stable. Once set up, formal hierarchies tend to be relatively inert because it is costly to change their structure.

Informal hierarchy. Hierarchy is not only established formally but also develops informally in groups (Blau & Scott, 1962). Indeed, a large body of research studying small groups demonstrates that informal hierarchical differentiation within groups tends to develop spontaneously and rapidly (e.g., Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001; Bales, Strodtbeck, Mills, & Roseborough, 1951; Berger et al., 1980; Eagly & Karau, 1991; Hollander, 1985; Schmid Mast, 2002). One reason for this incipient hierarchical differentiation is that individuals form inferences and make judgments of others' competence and power based on only seconds of observation (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993; Magee, 2007; Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Hall, 2005). Therefore, differences in task participation, which emerge within minutes of interaction (Fiske & Ofshe, 1970), can produce hierarchical differentiation that shapes the entire group experience. There also tends to be high agreement between group members about the rank of each individual (e.g., Schmid Mast & Hall, 2004), suggesting that the process of hierarchical differentiation is meaningful to group members, even when the rank ordering is based on a feature as subtle as nonverbal behavior (for a review, see Hall, Coats, & LeBeau, 2005).

Although hierarchy tends to develop across individuals in social groups and organizations, the basis for informal hierarchical differentiation varies widely. As soon as one dimension—a characteristic or a resource—is judged more important in a group or organization,

individuals will naturally and spontaneously differentiate hierarchically along that dimension. Hogg (2001) describes this process as one in which individuals achieve higher rank in a group to the extent that they represent the defining (i.e., prototypical) features of that group. Numerous examples highlight how the particular dimension of differentiation varies by group or organization. For example, conscientiousness predicts hierarchical rank better than extraversion in task-oriented organizations, such as an engineering firm, but extraversion predicts rank in more socially-oriented organizations, such as a consulting firm (Anderson, Spataro, & Flynn, in press). Similarly, in groups that require little coordination amongst their members, individuals with assertive speaking styles are conferred more status than individuals with tentative speaking styles, but the opposite is true for high-coordination groups (Fragale, 2006). Informal hierarchy also emerges from stereotype-based expectations that individuals have of others before they have had a chance to meet (Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). Race, ethnicity, gender, and class, for example, have widespread value connotations, which permeate social interactions among group members and emerge as significant dimensions of within-group hierarchical differentiation (Berger et al., 1977; Berger & Zelditch 1985; Ridgeway, 1991; Ridgeway, Boyle, Kuipers, & Robinson, 1998).

The distinction between formal and informal hierarchy provides the backdrop for an important way in which individuals work within multiple, simultaneous hierarchies. We will revisit the notion that individuals typically belong to multiple hierarchies in the final section of the chapter, but until then our framework is designed to apply primarily to informal hierarchy and its interrelationship with formal hierarchy in organizations.

The Functions of Social Hierarchy in Organizations

The pervasiveness of hierarchy suggests that it serves important social and organizational

functions. Although a functional account is not necessary to explain some aspects of hierarchy, we argue that, by identifying the functions that hierarchy serves, one may be able to explain not only a wide-ranging number of features of hierarchy but also the genesis of those features and the many forces that sustain them. Further, a functional account explains why hierarchy exists not only when collectives encourage differentiation but also when they explicitly believe in trying to suppress it. In articulating functions of hierarchy, we note that hierarchies also can and do have unintended and dysfunctional consequences (Leavitt, 2005). For example, hierarchy creates conditions of compliance that can institutionalize amoral reasoning and corruption (Brief, Buttram, & Dukerich, 2001; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). We also do not mean to suggest that theories of hierarchy focusing on domination, conflict, or identity, in contrast to our functional account, are not helpful in explaining many phenomena in groups and organizations, such as whose interests have priority and when the hierarchical order is challenged (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Gaventa, 1980; Hardy & Clegg, 1999; Lukes, 1974; Marx, 1844/1964; Simon & Oakes, 2006; Weber, 1946). Rather, we find that the functions that we discuss are broadly appealing, especially for task-oriented groups and organizations, in trying to explain why hierarchy exists regardless of whose interests dominate and why the status quo order is not challenged more often.

We discuss two functions of social hierarchy in organizations for which we found evidence across a range of literatures related to organizations. We imagine that there are other functions in addition to the ones that we describe, but those that we describe are particularly important within groups and organizations. First, hierarchy establishes social order and facilitates social coordination. Hierarchical order is appealing psychologically because it helps resolve individual needs for stability, and organizationally because it is effective for the coordination of

activity. Second, hierarchy provides incentives for individuals in groups and organizations.

Individuals are motivated to obtain higher rank to satisfy material self-interest and their need for control, and, in turn, this serves the organization's interests as long as rank is determined by a dimension that is related to organizational or group performance.

Social order and coordination. Hierarchical arrangements provide solutions to problems inherent in organizing collections of people working toward a common goal. As a mechanism of social governance, hierarchy provides a powerful antidote to uncertainty and chaos (Durkheim 1893/1997; Hogg, 2001; Marx, 1844/1964; Parsons, 1961). By providing social order, hierarchy helps fulfill an important cluster of human needs characterized by the desire for order, structure, and stability (e.g., Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949; Neuberg & Newsom, 1993; Sorrentino & Roney, 1986). Although hierarchy is psychologically appealing because it establishes order, this does not explain why hierarchy is *more* appealing than other forms of social relations. After all, egalitarian, balanced social structures can provide order as well (Heider, 1958; Krackhardt & Kilduff, 1999). The reason that people prefer hierarchical order, as opposed to other types of order, is that hierarchy is particularly effective at facilitating coordination within social groups.

As a mechanism of coordination, hierarchy provides clear lines of direction and deference that maximize the coordination of action for many kinds of tasks, especially in comparison to more egalitarian structures. Weber's (1946) description of bureaucracy suggests that hierarchy is a functional response to work in the modern world. Bureaucracies divide labor amongst employees (Stinchcombe, 1974), with each specialized role in the division of labor connected through hierarchical relations. These hierarchically differentiated roles prescribe behavior both for superiors and subordinates (Biggart & Hamilton, 1984; Dornbusch & Scott, 1975), and these roles facilitate coordinated action. When roles and hierarchical relations are not

clear, work tends to become confusing, inefficient, and frustrating, and, thus, coordination suffers (Greer & Caruso, 2007; Overbeck, Correll, & Park, 2005). In fact, even when the average task-related ability is high, but clear differentiation is absent (i.e., when a group is composed of many stars), the coordination aspect of hierarchy is disrupted, making groups less effective and efficient (Groysberg, Polzer, & Elfenbein, 2007).

Not only does some degree of hierarchy increase group performance but also hierarchical differentiation between people fosters more satisfying working relationships. Research on the dominance-submissiveness (i.e., control/agency) dimension of social relationships (Wiggins, Trapnell, & Phillips, 1988) illustrates that in task-related contexts individuals prefer to coordinate with each other when one individual is dominant and the other is submissive (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003; Tiedens, Unzueta, & Young, 2007). Dominance and submissiveness are complementary in that dominant behavior reciprocated by submissive behavior facilitates social coordination (Tiedens, Chow, & Unzueta, 2007). It is perhaps surprising that submissive individuals actually prefer dominant work partners to similarly submissive partners, but consider how dominant and submissive interpersonal behavior might begin to clarify roles and facilitate coordination in task contexts. A dominant individual directs submissive individuals, helping crystallize who does what and assisting in the group's progress toward its goal.

Individual incentives. Hierarchy also serves a motivational function, providing incentives for individuals to try to ascend to higher positions in their groups and organizations because higher rank affords greater material and psychological rewards and comfort (Tannenbaum et al., 1974). Not only does hierarchy provide order and stability, but also achieving high rank brings greater opportunity than low rank to satisfy another set of desires that could be described as control-related needs—autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1987; Porter, 1962),

internal control (Rotter, 1966), and power (McClelland, 1975; Winter, 1973).

The motivational function of hierarchy generally benefits organizations. Weber (1946) discussed how bureaucratic organizations provide career ladders to their employees by offering opportunities for promotion to successive formal hierarchical levels over time. Research on these career ladders, or internal labor markets, highlights that the prospect of achieving higher rank provides an incentive for people of lower rank to increase their effort toward accomplishing organizational goals (e.g., Baron, Davis-Blake, & Bielby, 1986; Pfeffer & Cohen, 1984). Thus, when the rationale for promoting people from lower rank to higher rank is closely coupled with organizational goals, individual self-interest is aligned with organizational interest, and the motivational effects of formal hierarchy benefit the organization.

Summary

The above review demonstrates that social hierarchy is prevalent and serves two basic functions. Hierarchy provides a psychologically appealing kind of order that clarifies roles and facilitates coordination. The structure of hierarchy also provides opportunities for individuals to achieve higher rank, which is more rewarding than lower rank for most people. Thus, hierarchy offers individual incentives, and if these incentives are aligned with the goals of the organization, the organization realizes benefits from this motivational function. By understanding these functions of hierarchy, it becomes clear that hierarchy has emerged as a dominant mode of social relations because it helps groups and organizations survive and prosper.

THE BASES OF SOCIAL HIERARCHY: STATUS AND POWER

In this section, we define status and power as the two most important bases of social hierarchy (Blau, 1964; Mannix & Sauer, 2006; Thye, 2000) and discuss the conceptual roots of our definitions by connecting them to previous definitions and theory. A status hierarchy is

characterized by a rank ordering of individuals or groups according to the amount of respect accorded by others. In a power hierarchy, individuals are rank ordered with respect to the amount of resources each controls. Our definitions of power and status are designed to be sweeping in their coverage of hierarchical relations so that they can be used to investigate hierarchical dynamics of all kinds. We intentionally leave out of these definitions a number of variables that have sometimes been conflated in previous conceptualizations of status and power (e.g., influence), and we discuss each of these variables in detail. We do not mean to suggest that these variables are not related to social hierarchy or that they are not of substantive interest, rather that they must be treated separately to understand the true, and potentially most interesting, effects of status and power.

Definition of Social Status

We define *social status* as the extent to which an individual or group is respected or admired by others (e.g., Ridgeway & Walker, 1995). Like all bases of hierarchy, status can be either an intragroup or an intergroup phenomenon. Individuals within a social group can be arrayed according to the amount of respect they receive from other group members, and social groups can be arrayed according to the respect that members of other social groups have for them. It is important to note that status hierarchies are primarily subjective (Blau, 1964; Foa, 1971; Goldhamer & Shils, 1939; Hollander, 1958; Podolny, 1993); however, there tends to be a high degree of consensus about individuals' and groups' positions in status hierarchies (Anderson, Srivastava, Beer, Spataro, & Chatman, 2006; Devine, 1989).

Although this definition of status is consistent with research on hierarchical differentiation in many kinds of groups, it is particularly useful for understanding the development of hierarchy in task-oriented groups and organizations, where the ranking of respect

and admiration forms around judgments of expertise and competence among its members. Information about an individual's expertise or competence can come from direct or observed interpersonal interaction (Berger et al. 1977; Berger & Zelditch 1985; Blau, 1964; Ridgeway, 1991; Ridgeway et al., 1998), from a stereotype (e.g., Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, in press), or from reputation (Anderson & Shirako, 2008; Gould, 2002). Status hierarchies change only as people's respect for target individuals or groups changes. An individual or group might achieve an important accomplishment, but if nobody notices or updates their level of respect for the target individual or group, then the status hierarchy will not be altered. Put another way, objective accomplishments are translated into status only through subjective interpretations.

Connections to previous theory. Our conception of status as a basis for hierarchy is consistent with a number of theoretical definitions and empirical operationalizations of status among individuals in social groups (e.g., Anderson et al., 2001; Gould, 2002) and organizations in industries (e.g., Podolny, 1993). In understanding status as a basis of hierarchical differentiation, we are particularly influenced by the expectation states program of research (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; Berger & Zelditch 1985) and status characteristics theory (Berger et al., 1977), which have contributed immensely to the articulation of how status develops in small groups. These connected areas of research have found that status emerges from expectations that individuals have for their own and each others' performance. These performance expectations can be based on past task performance, or on various professional and demographic qualities, so-called "status characteristics," which exist prior to any interaction. Individuals' status characteristics may bear some relationship with their ability to make valuable contributions to a group's tasks (e.g., education, functional background), or they may be only loosely related at best to their ability to contribute effectively (e.g., race, gender). Crucial to

understanding the self-reinforcing nature of status hierarchies, all of these characteristics contribute to the status conferral process in organizations (Bunderson, 2003).

Differences from previous definitions and theory. Although there is rather widespread agreement across fields about the meaning of social status, we think that some previous definitions have been unnecessarily complicated by two related concepts: attention and influence. Anderson et al. (2001) argue that status is multi-dimensional and that one important dimension is differential *attention* (or prominence), with low-status individuals paying more attention to high-status individuals than vice versa. *Influence* has also been described as a dimension of status (Anderson et al., 2001; Berger et al., 1977; Ridgeway & Correll, 2006). For example, in their study of the personality predictors of social status, Anderson et al. (2001) asked group members to rate each other on their visibility and influence in the group, and Ridgeway and Correll (2006) measured perceptions of influence as well as whether individuals' choices conformed to the opinions expressed by another group member. Although attention and influence are certainly related to status, we think it is worth treating them separately. Under some circumstances, such as when they are solo or token minorities in organizations, low-status actors receive an abundance of attention (Kanter, 1977). Furthermore, attention and the related process of person perception are more basic phenomena than status, and influence is a downstream effect of status. Particularly in trying to pin down the origins and reinforcement processes of status hierarchies—two historic and contemporary burning issues in the field of sociology—separating these concepts offers an opportunity to achieve conceptual clarity. Are some actors accorded more respect in part because they have received more attention? Or do actors with more status receive more attention, and does this attention, in turn, open the door for them to exert more influence? These are just two important questions that are difficult to answer with

conceptualizations that conflate attention and influence with status.

We turn next to a more contested basis of hierarchy, social power. As we have done for status, we will define power and then disentangle related definitions and theories to help provide conceptual and operational clarity. Along the way, we will attempt to deal with the distinction between status and power, pointing out where we think past research might have confused the two.

Definition of Social Power

We define *social power* as asymmetric control over valued resources in social relations (Blau, 1964, 1977; Dépret & Fiske, 1993; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). We use the word *asymmetric* and define power as existing in *social relations* because those features capture the relative state of dependence between two or more parties (individuals or groups) (Emerson, 1962). The low-power party is dependent upon the high-power party to obtain rewards and avoid punishments (Emerson, 1962). The high-power party, in contrast, is less dependent on the low-power party. However, to the extent that the low-power party can access the resources in an alternative relationship (i.e., the high-power party is substitutable), the high-power party has less power (Blau, 1964). We use the term *valued* because the resource must be important or consequential to at least one of the two parties. As in our definition of social hierarchy, value is subjectively determined. For example, in organizations, a manager who has discretion to assign employees to a high-profile project only has power over those employees who want to be on that project. These *resources* also can have a positive or negative value. Positively valued resources include rewards and any resource that one would want more of. Negatively valued resources include punishments and any resource that one would want less of. Thus, an individual may have power because he or she possesses or has

access to a positively valued resource and/or the capacity to distribute a negatively valued resource, such as undesirable tasks or hazardous waste, to others. Similarly, the powerful may be able to withhold or provide positive resources to others (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), or they may be able to take away or administer negative resources. In our framework of social hierarchy, we define power as more objective than status. Once one understands the sources of value for each party—the resources that are experienced as benefits and burdens—one can measure each party's power.

A number of examples illustrate that parties' relative position of power depends critically on the specific resource. A government institution can have control over whether legitimacy (a valued resource) is conferred upon a financial company, but, over time, the financial company can also have power over the government via lobbying. A manufacturing company can have power over its suppliers, but that same company can become dependent on the supplier if that supplier develops a monopoly. A community organization can have power over a real estate developer and vice versa. And some sources of power are only loosely correlated with, independent of, or in conflict with the formal hierarchy, leading formally low-ranking members to hold more power than their position would suggest (Mechanic, 1962). A supervisor can control a subordinate's career advancement, but a subordinate can have technical expertise on which her supervisor depends. Employees that are responsible for critical and non-substitutable core procedures can hold power over middle managers, whose performance depends on the successful completion of various procedures by their employees (Kotter, 1977).

Connections to previous theory. Our definition of power fits neatly into the lineage of research on power. Some of French and Raven's (1959) bases of power—reward, coercive, information, and expert power—relate directly to control over valued resources. Two exceptions,

legitimate power and referent power, are worth discussing in more detail. In our framework, we conceptualize the legitimacy of one's power as a separate variable, independent of actual power; however, we agree with French and Raven (1959) that in organizations, position in the formal hierarchy is a standard source of legitimacy. Formal position can be a source of not only power but also status. To the extent that one's formal position provides control over resources that others care about, one has power. To the extent that one's formal position garners respect in the eyes of others, one has status. Referent power, or the extent to which others want to associate with an individual, overlaps more with our definition of status than with our definition of power.

Resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), which emerged from insights on power by Emerson (1962) and Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, and Pennings (1971), is also consistent with our definition of power. This theory states that power resides among a set of interdependent subunits or organizations that exchange resources with each other. The value of the resources that a subunit/organization controls and the extent to which those resources can be obtained elsewhere (i.e., the subunit/organization's substitutability in the exchange relationship) determine the terms of exchange, and thus the power in relation to other subunits/organizations. If the value that a subunit/organization provides can be replaced (i.e., substituted), then there is little dependence on that subunit/organization, which consequently has little power.

Differences from previous definitions and theory. Our definition of power, though consistent with many, does not include three concepts that have been layered on other definitions and operationalizations: influence, resistance, and conflict (for similar distinctions, see Fiske & Berdahl, 2007). These concepts are just as important as power, but they tend to be downstream consequences of power and should be treated as such in causal models. For empirical and theoretical reasons, power should not be equated to the *capacity to influence*, as power has been

defined before (Cartwright, 1965; French & Raven, 1959). Empirically, measuring “capacity to influence” appears intractable because one cannot measure “capacity” without actually measuring the outcome (in this case, influence), and, even if it were measurable, we would still be interested in knowing what moderates the relationship between power and the capacity to influence others, under what conditions power is not accompanied by a capacity to influence.

Power does not require behavior of any kind by either party as has been required by some previous definitions (Dahl, 1957; Russell, 1938; Weber, 1914/1978): the high-power party does not need to *influence* the low-power party, and the low-power party does not need to *resist* the high-power party for power to operate in social relations. Defining power as influence conflates the independent with the dependent variable and amounts to tautology (Simon, 1953). We agree that power, influence, and resistance are related in that power is a social force (Lewin, 1951/1997) that can bring about acts of influence and corresponding resistance; however, we think there are two important conceptual and theoretical reasons to separate these constructs. Power, influence, and resistance are conceptually distinct and potentially, but not necessarily, related through a causal path. For one, the direction of this causal path is not even clear. Power can lead to influence attempts, which can meet resistance; alternatively, influence attempts that overcome resistance can lead to resource acquisition and thus increase power. The same cause for concern in defining power as “capacity to influence” arises here: interesting issues are the conditions under which power does not lead to successful influence and the conditions under which resistance by the low-power party is effective. Research that conflates power and influence cannot analyze these conditions.

If influence and resistance are not necessary components of the definition of power, then *conflict* cannot be a requirement either (Brass, 2005). Although power has typically been studied

in competitive environments where parties have conflicting interests, power as we define it does not necessarily produce conflict (see Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Lukes, 1974). Theoretically, resources can be exchanged or provided free of conflict, and, in this way, power can facilitate coordination and task performance as well as cooperation and charitable behavior. Once again, our theoretical interest is in simplifying the definition of power, which will be crucial to uncover moderators of the downstream effects of power. The conditions under which power does not produce and even reduces conflict are surely of interest to scholars of conflict and power alike.

The Differences and Relationships between Power and Status

Power and status are related but distinct constructs. They are related in that both are relational variables that are bases of hierarchical differentiation. They are distinct in that power is based in resources, which belong to an actor, whereas status exists entirely in the eyes of others, conferred by them. Power, more than status, then is a property of the actor. Status, more than power, is a property of co-actors and observers. Powerful individuals also have high status if and only if respect is conferred on them for having asymmetric control over valued resources, and high-status individuals also have power if the respect others have for them increases the perceived value of their resources (Thye, 2000).

Thus, power and status can be causally related and mutually reinforcing: power can lead to status, and status can lead to power. Going from power to status, actors can be respected and admired because of their control over resources, their formal position, their knowledge, or because others think that power-holders are more competent than powerless individuals. These sources of power that inspire respect can then translate to the granting of status outside the province of the specific resource or context. Status can also lead to the acquisition of power via two routes. First, individuals who are respected are often entrusted with valued resources. For

example, an employee who is perceived as competent could be given control over a budget.

Thus, status can lead to the explicit granting of power. Second, whatever resources a high-status individual possesses often take on greater value through their simple association with a highly respected individual. Because demand increases for the resources that a high-status individual brings to the table, her power increases not because of an increase in the accumulation of resources but rather because of an increase in the value of the resources over which she already has control (Thye, 2000).

Although power often begets status, and status can turn into power, there are times when one has status without power or power in the absence of status. In organizations, we expect that the former case is more difficult for actors to cope with, and the latter case is more distressing for observers. Individuals with a great deal of status but little power are likely to run into some difficulty in exchange-oriented contexts (e.g., negotiations) in which the value of one's resources are more important than the extent to which one is respected. In contrast, those with high power but low status might be seen as undeserving of their power and judged harshly because their position in the hierarchy appears illegitimate. The relationship between status and power can be understood not just through analysis of ascendance to high status rank or the acquisition of resources but also through thinking about how status and power are lost (which we describe in more detail in the fourth section of the chapter). The implications for actors with high status and high power are clear: if they abuse their power, their respect will decrease as will the trust others have in those individuals controlling important group resources. Similarly, when one loses access to or control over important resources, respect for the person might diminish.

Summary

Social hierarchy exists as long as there is differentiation across individuals or groups on

any valued dimension. In sorting through the history of research on hierarchy, our analysis revealed a focus on status and power as the primary dimensions of hierarchical differentiation, even if those terms were not always used. We hope that our framework is useful for people and that our definitions orient future research at any level of analysis. Although we have explicitly laid out where our definitions of power and status diverge from previous conceptualizations, we have tried to be theoretically consistent with a large body of prior work conducted at multiple levels of analysis. In comparing our definitions with this prior research, we found remarkable consistency in the research on status and a relative lack of consensus around the meaning of power and how it is measured. This lack of clarity might have prevented some researchers in each area, including us, from seeing the connections between each others' work and how their work fits into a broader story about social hierarchy.

THE SELF-REINFORCING NATURE OF POWER AND STATUS

Organizational researchers have cast a wide net in their work on how hierarchical rank predicts cognitive, motivational, and behavioral variables at the individual level, such as the job satisfaction (Porter, 1962), support for the organization (Tannenbaum et al., 1974), goal setting (Mintzberg, 1983), and the use of influence strategies in relationships (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Kotter, 1977). A review of this vast literature is outside the scope of this chapter. Instead, we put the spotlight on mechanisms of hierarchy maintenance; in particular, we focus on the processes emerging from power and status that are self-reinforcing. Does the way that power-holders process information, approach goals, and make decisions help them to maintain or even increase their control over resources? How does the experience of power color social perception? Once status has been conferred upon certain people or groups and not on others, how does this status differentiation affect both task performance itself and evaluations of

the work that high and low status individuals subsequently produce? And how does status affect who is selected for opportunities for advancement in organizations?

As our review will show, once a hierarchy gets established, a number of organizational and psychological processes conspire to create different degrees of opportunity to acquire and maintain power and status for individuals and groups at different levels of hierarchies. We argue that these processes affect all members of a given hierarchy in ways that perpetuate the established order. Although low-ranking members are disadvantaged relative to high-ranking members, many of the functions of hierarchy that we have described provide motivation for even low-ranking members to invest in its continuation. The tendency for hierarchy to satisfy individual needs for order and stability, for example, provide some justification for all members of the hierarchy, regardless of rank within it, to reinforce and increase the stability of a hierarchy. We are neither the first to make such a claim (see, for example, Marx, 1844/1964; Jost & Banaji, 1994) nor trying to suggest that low-ranking individuals always conspire to reinforce hierarchy. We are simply highlighting an interesting facet of hierarchy: even those individuals and groups who stand the most to gain by disrupting hierarchy have some reason to forego any attempt to change the existing rank order.

We have organized this section around three mechanisms that help reinforce hierarchical arrangements: the effects of power on psychological processes, the role of expectations in reinforcing status hierarchies, and hierarchy-enhancing belief systems. Each of these forces support hierarchical differentiation and make it difficult for people to challenge the status quo once hierarchy has been established.

How the Psychology of Power Reinforces Hierarchies

Power has long been suspected of transforming how people act and live their lives

(Russell, 1938). Indeed, an exploding body of recent research has confirmed that power, as one of the two most important bases of hierarchy, fundamentally transforms how an individual construes and approaches the world. The notion that power originates and is defined in social relations but that it transforms basic psychological processes is crucial to understanding the implications of rank shaping social life and the role it plays in the reinforcement of hierarchy. Kipnis (1976; see also Kipnis, Castell, Gergen, & Mauch, 1976) was one of the first to argue that power has metamorphic consequences, leading those with high power to roam in a very different psychological space than those with low power. In an organizational simulation, for example, Kipnis (1972) found that most high-power supervisors wanted to maintain psychological distance from their subordinates, whereas low-power supervisors typically wanted to create a social bond with their subordinates. Keltner et al. (2003) reviewed the vast literature on power and came to the same conclusion that Kipnis reached: possessing or lacking power fundamentally transforms individuals' psychological states. They argued that possessing power affects the relative activation of two complementary neurobiological systems—the behavioral approach and inhibition systems—which combine to drive behavior and cognition. In particular, their Power-Approach Theory (Keltner et al., 2003) claims that possessing power increases the tendency to focus on and approach attractive aspects of situations. This theory is based on two features of power dynamics. First, elevated power is associated with increased access to rewards. Second, power-holders encounter less interference from others when pursuing those rewards. For complementary reasons, low-power individuals are subject to more social and material threats, especially the threat of losing favor among higher-ranking individuals, and they are acutely aware of the constraints that these threats place upon their behavior (Keltner et al., 2003). These opposing reward/threat asymmetries for individuals in power relations lead high-power

individuals to possess a dominant “approach” response and low-power individuals to have a dominant “inhibit” response in their cognition and behavior. Whereas the powerful see mostly opportunity dancing in front of them, the powerless are more likely to see potential hazards lurking about.

This power-induced transformation of psychological processes partially occurs because rank in a power hierarchy determines the type and strength of pressures that some individuals impose and others face. Social psychological studies on obedience to authority and conformity (Guinote, Judd, & Brauer, 2002; Hollander, 1958; Jetten, Hornsey, & Adarves-Yorno, 2006; Milgram, 1974; Zimbardo, Haney, Banks, & Jaffe, 1975) set the stage for how different positions in social hierarchies create different situational pressures on behavior. People in positions of power are able to set agendas, norms for discussion, rules for behavior, and standards for thought and opinion, all of which constrain the psychological freedom experienced by individuals lower in the hierarchy and help maintain the current power hierarchy. Low-power individuals obey the explicit demands of high-power individuals (Milgram, 1974) and are also easily influenced by their more subtle attempts at persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In contrast, high-power individuals are free to engage in a wide range of behaviors and display greater interpersonal variability than those in positions of low power (Guinote et al., 2002). The world of those who have little power is filled with real and psychological shackles, whereas possessing power is often equated with freedom (Hollander, 1958).

We next turn our attention to empirical research on how power transforms psychological states and behavior. Before beginning that review, it is important to note the methods that have been used to study the psychological effects of power. Numerous studies have measured power using hierarchical rank in an organization (e.g., Hambrick, 1981; Finkelstein, 1992), resource

control (e.g., Burt, 1992; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), or asking people to report how much power they subjectively feel (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002). These studies have gone a long way toward demonstrating the relationships between power and variety of important variables; however, because they are often correlational in nature, the causal role of power has been unclear. To pinpoint this causal role more effectively, some research on power in the last decade has relied on experimental paradigms conducted predominantly in laboratory settings. These studies have used a variety of methods to manipulate power. One manipulation involves giving participants differential control over important resources or allows some participants to direct and evaluate other participants during a group task (e.g., Anderson & Berdahl, 2002). This type of manipulation attempts to approximate the experience of power in the real world. A second manipulation, created by Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee (2003), asks participants to recall a situation in which they either possessed power over someone else or someone else possessed power over them. This experiential priming procedure—remembering a personally relevant experience with power—allows researchers to prime power in a way that is meaningful to participants. Because power is such a central feature of social life, people are able to describe themselves in terms of power relations very easily (Galinsky et al., 2003). A third manipulation is designed to simply activate power at a conceptual level in participants' minds and typically involves asking participants to fill out incomplete words related to power (e.g., "P O W _ _" is completed as "P O W E R") (e.g., Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001). This priming task activates the concept of power non-consciously and removes participants' idiosyncratic personal experiences with power from the equation.

What is remarkable about these different methods is that, regardless of the manipulation of power, the same basic effects of power tend to emerge. Ultimately, this research suggests that

power not only resides within social relationships, as a basis of hierarchy, but also that the concept of power is embedded within individuals' minds (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995; Chen et al., 2001; Galinsky et al., 2003). As a result, the tendencies associated with different levels of power are stored in memory, available for activation whenever one's power is made salient in a given situation. The following review relies heavily on the assumption that empirical evidence using these methods reflects the way that power operates in organizations.

Group participation and influence. One way to demonstrate how different levels of power affect behavior is by looking at group participation and attitude expression. Power is positively associated with speaking time and speaking out of turn (Brown & Levinson, 1987; DePaulo & Friedman, 1998). Similarly, those with greater power are more likely to express their private opinions and true attitudes (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Briñol, Petty, Valle, Rucker, & Becerra, 2007; Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2007). For example, high-power individuals are more likely than those without power to openly express their opinions during a group discussion (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Berdahl & Martorana, 2006), and they are unfazed by the expressed attitudes or persuasion attempts of others (Briñol et al., 2007; Galinsky et al., 2007). In contrast, low-power individuals' own attitudes and opinions are shaped by their high-power counterparts. Even when subordinates try to engage in overt acts of upward influence to improve their own situation and thus reduce the gap in power, they are likely to feel that their voice has fallen on deaf ears. This research makes clear that, in terms of understanding whose thinking sets the tone in organizations and whose interests rule the day, the notion of hierarchical organizations as directed from the "top down" (Leavitt, 2005) is accurate.

Confidence and action. High-power individuals' immunity to external pressures on their

attitudes is only one factor in hierarchy maintenance. Arguably more important is evidence that high-power individuals tend to be more optimistic, more confident about their choices, and more action-oriented (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Briñol et al., 2007; Galinsky et al., 2003). When there are inhibiting forces in the environment, power-holders act as if those forces were invisible (Galinsky et al., 2007) and take more goal-directed action (Galinsky et al., 2003). In the upper echelons of organizations, this plays out with more powerful CEOs leading their organizations through more strategic change than less powerful CEOs (Greve & Mitsuhashi, 2007). In bargaining contexts, those higher in power are also more likely to initiate a negotiation and to make the first offer (Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007). Negotiating and making first offers have both been shown to lead reliably to the accumulation of more resources and thus more power (e.g., Galinsky & Mussweiler, 2001). For example, Babcock and Laschever (2003) found that undergraduates who negotiated their starting salaries earned, on average, an additional \$5,000 in their first year on the job. Although a \$5,000 difference may not seem like a huge sum, given a conservative rate of 3% in both raises and interest, by age 60 those who chose to negotiate would have \$568,834 more! Magee et al. (2007) found that high-power negotiators were more than twice as likely to make a first offer as were their low-power counterparts and that making the first offer led to a distinct advantage. We believe this is a broader phenomenon in organizations: the powerful often appropriate more resources for themselves thereby reinforcing their hold on power. In other words, power begets more power because the powerful directly capture additional resources for themselves.

High-power individuals are also more optimistic and confident than low-power individuals (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Briñol et al., 2007). For example, the powerful feel more optimistic about possibilities for career advancement than do individuals without power

(Anderson & Galinsky, 2006). These effects of power are important mechanisms of hierarchy maintenance because confidence and optimism are predictive of achievement and success across a range of tasks (Bandura, 1977; Taylor and Brown, 1988). This increase in optimism also affects attraction to risk, with high-power individuals showing greater risk preferences and making riskier choices than low-power individuals (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Maner, Gailliot, Butz, & Peruche, 2007).

Information processing and social perception. Scholars of communication in organization have repeatedly found that information tends to become distorted as it travels from low-power employees up to senior managers (Lee, 1993; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). This research argues that these distortions are due to characteristics of the low-power senders of communication (Athanassiades, 1971). However, research on power and the construal of information suggests a different explanation. Managers may process information at a different level than their employees, extracting the gist and abstracting away from the specific details (Trope and Liberman, 2003; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). In fact, laboratory experiments have established a causal connection between power and abstract construal, with high-power individuals generating more abstract representations of stimuli than low-power individuals (Smith & Trope, 2006). As a result, the powerful focus less on the details and more on the “big picture” and gist of the information (Smith & Trope, 2006; see also Guinote, 2007). These effects on information processing have been replicated in the field as well. In an analysis of quotations appearing in the media during the days after Hurricane Katrina hit land, Milliken, Magee, Lam, & Menezes (2007) showed that high-power individuals in the federal, state, and local governments described the events in the Gulf Coast region of the U.S. in more abstract terms than did the less powerful first responders or powerless victims. These differences in

construal and communication, Milliken et al. (2007) argue, might have contributed to what appeared to be an ineffective and inefficient response to a devastating disaster. Extrapolating from this research, power-holders' high-level, abstract construal of the world around them likely obscures the specific interests of subordinates, which helps perpetuate the status quo hierarchical arrangements. This power-induced abstraction can also be a mechanism of hierarchy maintenance because people have a sense of heightened power when they think abstractly (Smith, Wigboldus, & Dijksterhuis, in press).

Beyond the processing of information, power can also have dramatic effects on social perception. Generally, power tends to reduce awareness of others and their individuating features, unless those features are instrumental for power-holders to accomplish their goals. In negotiations, high-power parties typically respond less to their counterpart's emotional displays than do low-power parties (Van Kleef, De Dreu, Pietroni, & Manstead, 2006). In another type of conflict, a debate over which books should be included in the canon of English literature, tenured professors were less accurate in interpreting the views of their untenured opponents, but untenured professors did not suffer the same deficits in accurately representing the views of the professors with tenure (Keltner & Robinson, 1997). In an experimental context, Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, and Gruenfeld (2006) found that high-power individuals are less likely to spontaneously adopt another's visual perspective, less likely to take another person's background knowledge, and less accurate in judging others' facial expressions of emotion. That is, power affects the tendency to appreciate what others see, think, and feel. Overbeck & Park (2006) found that the powerful recalled less correct information about their subordinates and were less able to distinguish their unique characteristics when they were assigned goals related to achieving an efficient workplace. These negative effects of power on perspective-taking and

individuation are important because perspective-taking reduces stereotyping and derogation (Batson et al., 1997; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000), and the possession of power has been associated with an increased reliance on stereotypes and the derogation of subordinates (S. T. Fiske, 1993; Georgesen & Harris, 1998, 2000; Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000; but see Overbeck & Park, 2001). As we detail below, these processes of stereotyping and derogation by high-ranking individuals are instrumental in keeping subordinates in their place and reinforcing the hierarchical order.

Despite these apparent deficits in social perception, high-power individuals are especially attentive to those features of others that are instrumental for accomplishing the power-holders' goals. In particular, power-holders show remarkable focus when attending to individuals who possess characteristics that would be useful for the power-holder (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, *in press*). Gruenfeld and colleagues (*in press*) describe this phenomenon as an association between power and objectification—the tendency to view others through an instrumental lens, as a means to an end. As a result, the powerful attend to and approach others only to the extent that they are useful, regardless of their other human qualities (Gruenfeld et al., *in press*). For example, when the powerful are armed with achievement goals they focus on colleagues' competence, but when they have sex on their mind they are more likely to seek attractive colleagues, even if those colleagues are only moderately competent (Bargh et al., 1995; Gruenfeld et al., *in press*).

The organizational consequences of this instrumental attention depend partly on whether the power-holder is pursuing personal or organizational goals. When the powerful are working to further the organization's goals, they are more effective at focusing on aspects of individuals that would help accomplish those goals relative to individuals without power (Gruenfeld et al., *in*

press, Experiment 2). In organizations, superiors are expected to use subordinates to complete important tasks, and therefore the relationship between power and instrumental focus can improve efficiency. When the powerful are focused on their own personal goals, however, the organization's interests can be compromised. Regardless of whether the powerful are focused on their personal goals or those of the organization, the relationship between power and objectification can reinforce hierarchy. By increasing efficiency, the powerful likely will be given disproportionate credit for the organization's success and thus granted more power. When they use others to achieve their personal ambitions, they can also increase access to important resources as well.

In this section we have articulated how possessing or lacking power fundamentally alters psychological processes. Through these processes, power begets more power as individuals accumulate more valued resources. Status also tends to beget more status but through different mechanisms, which we describe next.

How Expectations Reinforce Status Hierarchies

In defining status as respect and admiration accorded by others to a target individual, we have suggested that the basis of respect in organizations is competence, or more precisely, judgments about a target individual's competence. To the extent that judgments of competence, and thus status, are positively related to individuals' actual contributions to the goals of the organization, an organization's status hierarchy will be reinforced in a way that is beneficial for the success of the organization. In brainstorming groups at the design firm IDEO, for example, Sutton and Hargadon (1996) found that employees who demonstrated the most technical competence were conferred status by their peers for their contributions over time. As a result, these high-performers were asked to contribute to, and helped IDEO successfully complete,

future projects. An issue for organizations, however, is that employees' status can be inflated or deflated by factors that are not necessarily indicative of true performance.

For a wide variety of reasons, people develop expectations of each others' task performance, and these expectations have direct and indirect effects on the amount of status they confer to colleagues. Performance expectations can derive from an employee's job title or position in the formal organizational hierarchy, or from past task contributions. For example, there are expectations for the tasks that individuals in different roles should accomplish (Sande, Ellard, & Ross, 1986) and for the types of emotions that people are expected to express at different levels of the formal hierarchy (Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000). But expectations can also emerge from stereotypes about demographic characteristics that are not predictive, in and of themselves, of performance on the job (Berger et al., 1977; Lee & Fiske, in press; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). These stereotype-based performance expectations make it clear that, although hierarchical rank can be determined in part by objective task performance, it is also biased against members of demographic groups who are stereotyped as incompetent in the domain in which they work (Cohen & Zhou, 1991).

Regardless of where these expectations emerge from, they drive a number of important interpersonal processes including how high- versus low-status individuals are evaluated on their performance (expectancy confirmation), how others' expectations can constrain and even determine the behavior of high- and low-status individuals (behavioral confirmation), how individuals whose behavior is inconsistent with expectations for someone of their status are confronted with negative reactions (backlash), and how high-status individuals accrue more and better opportunities than low-status individuals (opportunity accumulation). As we detail below, these four processes contribute to reinforcing status hierarchies in organizations.

Expectancy confirmation. Status hierarchies are self-reinforcing in part because the status of an individual determines how others evaluate his or her behavior. In a direct test of the effects of expectations on evaluations within a formal hierarchy, Humphrey (1985) assigned participants to manager and clerk roles in an organizational simulation and found that clerks rated managers as more competent than fellow clerks even though they knew the roles were randomly assigned. Even without actually watching task interaction between supervisor and subordinate, observers tend to presume that supervisors are more competent than subordinates (Sande et al., 1986).

Ratings of a target's abilities and performance can also be affected by stereotypes (for a review, see Roese & Sherman, 2007). Darley and Gross (1983) found that observers who watched a young girl take a test thought that she was smarter and achieved a higher score when they believed she was from a higher socioeconomic background. In their study, observers interpreted different levels of performance because they held different performance expectations for people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. These studies demonstrate that expectancies, whether determined by role or by demographic background, provide observers with an interpretive frame through which to process subsequent information and form impressions. In work contexts, the most important stereotypes relate to competence, and if an individual's group is stereotyped as incompetent, her work will likely be evaluated less positively than equivalent work produced by a member of a group that is stereotyped as competent. Along with expectancy confirmation, the process of behavioral confirmation also contributes to the maintenance of hierarchies

Behavioral confirmation. Social interaction can shape individuals' behavior in a hierarchy-reinforcing manner by guiding behavior so that it conforms to and becomes consistent

with status-based expectations. Once expectancies are formed, people often treat targets in an expectancy-consistent manner and, as a result, elicit expectancy-consistent responses from these targets, leading to the unwitting fulfillment of those expectations. In the classic Pygmalion in the classroom study (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), teachers were led to believe that some students would show dramatic intellectual growth during the course of the year while others (who were equally capable) would not. By the end of the year, those students that teachers expected to improve did in fact improve: their average increase in IQ was twice as large as the increase in IQ for the control group of students. Rosenthal and Jacobson hypothesized that teachers' expectancies contributed significantly to this difference; teachers gave more attention and support to the students who they expected would blossom, and this encouragement helped them develop more rapidly than the control group. These Pygmalion effects translate to adults in organizations as well. In military training programs, Eden & Shani (1982) have demonstrated that instructors' expectancies can elicit expectancy-consistent performance in their trainees.

Similarly, demographic stereotypes lead to behavioral confirmation, with performance increments for groups that are stereotyped as competent and decrements for those stereotyped as incompetent. Word, Zanna, and Cooper (1974) found that White interviewers treated Black applicants with "colder" nonverbal behaviors (e.g. less eye contact, further interpersonal distance) and asked them fewer grammatically correct questions compared to White applicants. When White interviewers were trained to treat White applicants in the same manner in which the Black applicants had been treated, the performance of White applicants suffered. These White applicants responded less eloquently and confidently, making more grammatical errors themselves. In this case, White interviewers only noticed the poor interview performance of the Black applicants and inferred that they must be less competent than the White applicants,

without noticing that it was their own distancing behaviors and questions that contributed to the poor performance.

Not only do observers' expectancies color their interpretations of targets' performance and even shape their performance itself, but targets' awareness of observers' expectations also create self-expectations that drive behavior. Eden & Ravid (1982) demonstrated that supervisors' expectancies shaped subordinates' expectancies of their own performance, which turned out to be self-fulfilling (also see Eden, 1984; 1988). Similarly, targets of stereotyping are often aware of what others think of them, and this awareness of stereotypes about one's group can cause them to see themselves through the stigmatizing eyes of others (Ridgeway et al., 1998) and produce actual decrements in performance. This performance-reduction phenomenon, labeled stereotype threat by Steele and Aronson (1995), occurs when individuals are concerned with being judged in terms of a negative performance-based stereotype about their group in a particular context; the irony is that this concern with confirming a stereotype produces performance decrements, and, consequently, confirms the very stereotype they tried to avoid. The phenomenon of stereotype threat appears robust across a wide variety of demographic group and performance contexts, including African Americans in intellectual domains (Steele & Aronson, 1995), low-SES Caucasians in general intellectual domains (Croizet & Claire, 1998), women in math (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999), women in negotiations (Kray, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2002), and Caucasian and African-American athletes (Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999). The experiment by Stone and colleagues (1999) is particularly instructive for how status hierarchies are often domain specific. When performance on a golf task was framed as dependent on mental acuity, the performance of African Americans suffered. But when the golf task was framed as relevant to athletic ability, a domain in which Caucasians are stereotyped

negatively and African Americans positively, Caucasians performance on the task declined. Stereotype threat concerns also make it difficult to interpret and incorporate feedback in the workplace; a survey of African American managers found that those who experienced more stereotype threat in the workplace tended to discount supervisors' evaluations of their performance more than those who experienced less threat (Roberson, Deitch, Brief, & Block, 2003).

Backlash against individuals who disconfirm others' expectations. Expectations can take on a more prescriptive flavor as people not only expect that individuals *will* behave a certain way but also that they *should* or *should not* act in specific ways. Individuals whose behavior deviates from such prescriptive expectations are often evaluated negatively and even punished, a phenomenon described by Rudman (1998) as backlash against individuals who act “out of place.” This plays out in groups, where each member is expected to act in ways that are consistent with their status. Those who misperceive their own status and engage in actions that others deem inappropriate are rejected (Anderson et al., 2006; Anderson, Ames, & Gosling, 2008).

The consequences for violating expectancies are more severe for low-status individuals than for high-status individuals, especially when low-status people act above their rank. In general, high-status members appear to be afforded some protection from this type of backlash: they are allowed greater latitude in behavior that is less constrained by others' expectations (Brauer, 2005; Hollander, 1958). But even a prince who acts like a king suffers from acting above his station. A memorable instance of this phenomenon from 1981 demonstrates that even high-ranking individuals are constrained by the expectations that others have for what they can say and do. At a press conference after the shooting of President Reagan, Alexander Haig uttered

the famous phrase, “As of now, I am in control here in the White House.” It turns out that as Secretary of State Mr. Haig was only fourth in succession to take over executive authority. The press ridiculed him extensively, and some of his colleagues even excluded him from daily interactions (Anderson et al., 2007; Weisman, 1981).

Society also develops widely held prescriptive stereotypes for demographic groups, which limit the opportunity for men and women, whites and non-whites to express specific types of emotions, behave in certain ways, and to comfortably hold some types of jobs (Lee & Fiske, 2008). Men who engage in stereotypically female behavior or who work in stereotypically female professions, such as nursing (Heikes, 1991) can be the victims of bullying and ostracism (Erikson & Einarsen, 2004). Women who express anger are conferred less status than men who express anger because anger is a stereotypically masculine emotion (Brescoll and Uhlmann, in press). Similarly, in negotiations, women who act assertively (a counter-stereotypic trait) are treated less favorably than men who engage in the same behavior (Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007). The backlash against women for behaving assertively extends to a wide range of circumstances and appears to be a potent mechanism in limiting the hiring of women and in stifling their careers (for a review, see Rudman & Phelan, in press).

Overall, status-based expectations not only guide perceptions and shape behavior but also serve as limits on the range of acceptable behavior for individuals. The consequences of violating expectations are more severe for low-status individuals, and the backlash they experience serves to preserve hierarchical order. As we turn to next, individuals’ hierarchical rank not only sets expectations for their behavior but also determines their access to a range of desirable opportunities in organizations.

Opportunity accumulation. The ultimate result of the various expectation processes that

we have described is that individuals who are most respected—whether because of their demonstrated competence, their position, or because of stereotypes—are given higher quality opportunities than those who are less respected (Merton, 1968). Because people expect high-status individuals to do well, they facilitate high performance by creating conditions that enable success. In the research-oriented academic profession, for example, landing a position at a highly ranked school often translates into a lower teaching load with more teaching assistants, which, in turn, results in greater research productivity. Another example comes from the legal profession in which first associates from more prestigious schools may be given the opportunity to try more consequential cases than lawyers who graduate from low-status schools. Similar processes occur when managers compose teams for new projects. Individuals who are perceived to be more competent are more likely to be selected on teams tackling new, high-profile problems than are individuals perceived to be less competent (Hinds, Carley, Krackhardt, & Wholey, 2000; Sutton & Hargadon, 1996). Often, low-status members of organizations are mired in the tedium of undesirable jobs, sometimes under dangerous working conditions, making it difficult for them to rise in the ranks (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). These examples illustrate one sense in which high-status members have better opportunities than low-status members.

As with the expectations processes reviewed thus far, opportunities differ across demographic groups within organizational hierarchies; whites and men tend to have greater opportunity than non-whites and women. In one experimental field study, applicants with common White names received 50% more callbacks for interviews than applicants with common Black names, even though their qualifications were held constant with identical resumes (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Men compared to women are given responsibility for more complex tasks requiring firm-specific skills (Bielby & Baron, 1986), and this sorting of women

into jobs that are less valuable to the organization (England, 1992; Petersen & Morgan, 1995) appears to involve gendered job descriptions or the creation of different (and differently valued) job titles within the same occupation (Baron & Newman, 1990; Bielby & Baron, 1986). Not only do women have less opportunity than men to accomplish critical work for the organization, but research on internal labor markets also shows that they have limited opportunities for promotion: jobs with disproportionate numbers of women tend to exist on rungs of shorter promotion ladders than do male-dominated jobs (Baron, Davis-Blake, & Bielby, 1986; DiPrete & Soule, 1988). In addition, the performance appraisal process in many organizations is biased against women and non-whites (for a review, including bias based on age and disability, see Roberson, Galvin, & Charles, 2007); in-depth analyses of performance reviews demonstrating that, within work units in an organization, women and non-whites receive lower pay increases on average than equally performing men and whites (Castilla, *in press*). One reason is that women and non-whites are held to higher performance standards than men and whites (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997). In organizations, where the rational response would be to construct hierarchies and offer opportunity based on demonstrated performance, previously established demographic characteristics that are ascribed different value in the broader society continue to creep into determinations of who is given the most and best opportunities to advance.

This section has summarized one reason why low-ranking members rarely overtake high-ranking members in a hierarchy; they tend to have worse opportunities available to them. Despite these different opportunities, low-ranking individuals continue to be invested in current hierarchical arrangements (Ellemers & Barreto, *in press*). We turn next to the ideological forces—the hierarchy-enhancing belief systems—that reinforce hierarchy from both the bottom up and the top down.

Hierarchy-Enhancing Belief Systems

A number of ideological belief systems reinforce hierarchical arrangements. These belief systems both support the existence of hierarchy as a legitimate way of organizing social relations and serve to reinforce particular hierarchical arrangements once they have been established. We highlight two of these hierarchy-enhancing belief systems out of the panoply of non-egalitarian and anti-egalitarian attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies that have been discussed at length elsewhere (e.g., Ellemers & Barreto, in press; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). One is a theory of group-based power called social dominance theory (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). The other is the psychological tendency to rationalize the status-quo social structure, described in detail by system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

Building on the work of Marx and Engels (1846/1970), both social dominance theory and system justification theory discuss the attitudes and beliefs that purportedly play a major role in the process of hierarchy reinforcement. Because of the functions that hierarchy provides, there is a fundamental need, even among those disadvantaged by a hierarchy, to “imbue the status quo with legitimacy and to see it as good, fair, natural, desirable, and even inevitable” (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004, p. 887). People support the notion that they exist in a legitimate system by endorsing hierarchy as an appropriate method of social organization and rationalizing each individual’s or group’s position, including their own, in the hierarchy. The very existence of hierarchy is supported by an ideological acceptance of inequality—that differential levels of status and power across groups are legitimate—and a belief that people get what they deserve (Lerner & Miller, 1978), and both of these beliefs serve to justify individuals’ hierarchical positions. Even though members of high-ranking groups endorse inequality more than members

of low-ranking groups (Sidanius, Liu, Shaw, & Pratto, 1994), low-ranking groups generally show an internalization of inequality that depresses feelings of entitlement for more power and status (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). In addition, the pervasive assumption that individuals at the top of formal hierarchies are more competent than individuals at the bottom (Haines & Jost, 2000; Humphrey, 1985; Sande et al., 1986) helps to maintain perceptions that hierarchies are fair.

Although social dominance theory and system justification theory take distinct approaches with respect to their emphasis on high- versus low-ranking individuals in the maintenance of hierarchy, they make a number of the same basic predictions. With respect to the self-reinforcement of hierarchy, evidence from both programs of research has supported the contention that low-ranking individuals do not always show in-group favoritism, an otherwise robust phenomenon (Tajfel, 1982). Low-ranking individuals, especially those who strongly endorse the legitimacy of inequality across groups, show out-group favoritism (e.g., Umphress, Smith-Crowe, Brief, Dietz, & Watkins, 2007) and sometimes make decisions to serve the interests of high-ranking individuals at the expense of their own (Jost et al., 2004). Ultimately, these hierarchy-enhancing belief systems imbue higher groups with more respect, which allows them to institute hierarchy-reinforcing policies.

Summary

In this section, we have detailed some important ways in which the two primary bases of social hierarchy in organizations—power and status—are self-reinforcing. We reviewed research demonstrating that those who possess power experience a very different subjective reality than those who are powerless. High-power individuals process information more abstractly, perceive other people in more instrumental terms, and are more goal-focused, confident, and proactive

than low-power individuals. We argued that these metamorphic effects of power help power-holders maintain control over resources on which others depend. Next, we outlined how status, because of its connection to perceptions of competence in organizations, is intimately related to the expectations that people have for others' performance. These expectations can emerge from past performance, an employee's position in the formal organizational structure, or stereotypes related to demographic characteristics. The inter-related processes of expectancy confirmation, behavioral confirmation, backlash against individuals whose behavior disconfirms expectancies (especially for low-status individuals who act above their rank), and the accumulation of superior future opportunities by high-status individuals, all reinforce status hierarchies over time. Finally, we highlighted two hierarchy-enhancing belief systems that, together, help explain how both high-ranking and low-ranking individuals in power and status hierarchies legitimize hierarchical differentiation. The psychological processes of power, the interpersonal consequences of status, and the ideological beliefs all conspire to reinforce current hierarchical arrangements.

FORCES OF HIERARCHY ATTENUATION

In the previous sections we have documented how hierarchy develops easily and effortlessly and, once established, persists through various self-reinforcing psychological and interpersonal mechanisms. Taken to its logical extreme, the framework we have presented implies that all hierarchies would ultimately end in winner-take-all scenarios, with one person possessing all the power and status. If our proposed self-reinforcing mechanisms operated perfectly all the time, power would beget more power, status would beget more status, and eventually every hierarchy would have one absolute ruler. Yet, hierarchies rarely produce an all-encompassing winner. New leaders get elected to office, hiring and promotion decisions lead individuals to enter or rise in the ranks of organizations, and revolutions can completely upend

current hierarchical arrangements. Aside from structured, intentional changes in formal hierarchy, we also suspect that not all psychological and interpersonal processes lead to the retention and accumulation of power and status by high-ranking individuals. Indeed, some of the very psychological processes that we have claimed as mechanisms of hierarchy reinforcement, when taken too far, might make individuals vulnerable to loss of rank. For example, assertiveness and leadership share a curvilinear relationship; assertive individuals are seen as effective leaders up to a point, but when assertiveness gets too high, their behavior is seen as rash and domineering (Ames & Flynn, 2006). Similarly, power-holders whose confidence turns into overconfidence can take too great of risks that bring their organizations to the precipice. Disasters resulting from power-holders' overconfidence could force them to relinquish their control over important resources.

In this section we discuss a number of important countervailing forces that lead to hierarchical change. We call these "hierarchy attenuating forces" because they can reduce status and power differences in the short term, even though they may produce a new hierarchy, with different individuals or groups of high and low rank, in the long term. This discussion is a conceptual challenge to our thesis and to the field, which we hope will inspire future researchers to create more dynamic models of power and status hierarchies. Through theoretical refinement and empirical research, organizational scholars will be in a position to explain not only the persistence and amplification of hierarchies but also their attenuation and even reversal.

External Change

When groups or organizations experience a dynamic environment, or an external shock, hierarchies can change substantially. One straightforward example is when there is a reduction in demand for the resources controlled by high-power individuals. If low-power people cease to

value the resources in the possession of high-power individuals, then those high-power individuals will suddenly experience a dramatic drop in their power. For example, Burkhardt and Brass (1990) showed how a technological innovation in an organization altered power dynamics by shifting the most valuable knowledge to new individuals, rendering those with the devalued knowledge dispossessed of power.

Certain types of events can change not only the dynamics within a hierarchy but the structure of the hierarchy itself. One study by Hambrick and Cannella (1993) capitalized on an event that necessarily triggers reshuffling of status and power hierarchies: a merger between two organizations. By bringing two previously independent organizational hierarchies together, mergers and acquisitions typically force some individuals to lose power and status in the new organization relative to what they had before. These authors found that CEOs who lost status following their company's merger were more likely to leave the merged organization than were CEOs whose status was left intact (Hambrick and Cannella, 1993). We hope these studies, over 15 years old, will influence a new generation of research exploring the consequences for those who gain and those who lose status or power.

Fairness and Legitimacy of Hierarchical Differences

When rewards become too generous for the highest ranking members of a hierarchy, various corrective psychological forces come into play. One of the primary forces that constrain differences in power and status is the inclination toward fairness (Diekmann, Samuels, Ross, & Bazerman, 1997). Even when they possess system justifying beliefs, low-ranking members prefer constraining the dispersion in rewards between the top and bottom of hierarchies. For example, overpayment of top executives negatively affects employees in an organization: one study involving more than 120 firms over a five-year period found that when wage dispersion is

perceived to be too high, low-level employees are more likely to leave the organization (Wade, O'Reilly, & Pollock, 2006). Experimental data suggest that when low-ranking individuals in an organization feel their opportunities are unfairly limited and their rewards are unjust, they try to take corrective action (Greenberg, 1990; Martorana, Galinsky, & Rao, 2005).

Building on these ideas about fairness, perceptions of the hierarchy's legitimacy also affect the extent to which it is supported and perpetuated. Hierarchies are more stable when they are steeped in legitimacy (Tajfel, 1982), when individuals feel that their rank has been determined by appropriate, agreed-upon means (e.g., equitably, meritocratically) and high-ranking individuals are not abusing their position. Under conditions of legitimacy, low-ranking individuals defer to higher-ranking individuals and subordinate their own desires to promote order and stability. Illegitimate hierarchies, however, upset this stable state. Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, and Otten (in press) found that when individuals perceived that their hierarchy was illegitimate, low-power individuals became oriented toward taking action and risk. This action orientation, typically possessed by high-power rather than low-power individuals (Galinsky et al., 2003), appeared to be motivated by a desire to restore legitimacy.

One pressing question for future research is to try to identify the factors that cause members of hierarchies to sense that legitimacy has eroded in their social system. One possibility is the behavior of high-ranking members, particularly their treatment of low-ranking members. For power-holders, the process of objectifying others may be an efficient path toward goal completion (Gruenfeld et al., in press), but, from the perspective of the objectified, low-ranking members, it can inspire perceptions that power-holders are using their power illegitimately. Another possibility, potentially very important in organizations, involves the consistency between power and status hierarchies. For example, if the people who have employees' highest

respect (i.e., have high status) are not the same people who control important resources (i.e., have high power), employees might begin to wonder whether promotions are determined by meritocratic methods or by other illegitimate means.

Competition

As two important social currencies, power and status encourage people to pay particular attention to their relative standing. Employees are motivated to focus on the self in comparison to others, in terms of their wages, their status, and their power (Baron & Pfeffer, 1994). Indeed, if such comparisons were not important, then there would be scant logic to support the existence of social hierarchies at all (Frank, 1985). When individuals or groups make comparisons upward in the hierarchy, toward more desirable positions of higher rank, they can react by competing for those positions, whether for status (Huberman, Loch, & Öncüler, 2004; Loch, Huberman, & Stout, 2000) or power (Pfeffer, 1992). This is essentially what we mean by the incentive function of hierarchy. Through increased effort and commitment on the one hand, or unethical behavior on the other hand, people hope their behavior will raise their ranking.

If people choose to compete by exerting extra effort on the job to try to display their expertise and gain status, then the organization can benefit. Sutton and Hargadon (1996) documented these “status contests” at IDEO, where respect is gained or lost based on jockeying to make sure that one’s technical contributions are implemented on key projects. Status contests such as these provide opportunity for low-status members to prove their worth to the organization and move up the hierarchical ranks. However, increased competition may not always bode so well for organizations. People sometimes resort to nefarious methods, such as sabotage and breaking rules, to climb the ranks of organizations, especially when the top rank gets a disproportionate share of the rewards (Sivanathan, 2008). And organizational hierarchies

in which control of resources is the predominant method of ranking individuals and groups may engender confrontational attempts by low-power parties to force a redistribution of those resources (Deutsch, 1973; Kabanoff, 1991). For example, a resource impoverished department in an organization can engage in a protracted battle with a resource rich department to try to claim a larger share of the organization's budget. Political battles along these lines in organizations often do not contribute to their welfare.

Status Constraints: Reciprocity and Leakage

Other aspects of social interaction that are less fraught with conflict can also serve as constraints on individuals' abilities to maintain or increase status. Gould (2002) has suggested that the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) is the main reason that "runaway status hierarchies" that produce a winner-take-all, are so rare. According to Gould's (2002) reasoning, people prefer to associate with higher-status individuals, but they also want these people to reciprocate their attention. These desires are at odds because high-status individuals do not have enough attention to give to the many lower-status individuals who crave their company. When low-status individuals fail to receive sufficient attention from higher-status others, they may stop admiring and respecting them. As a result, the status of those at the top of the hierarchy will stop rising and can even start to diminish.

A separate process called "status leakage" (Podolny, 2005), similar to Goffman's (1963) notion of "courtesy stigma," also can cause individuals and groups to lose status. Podolny (2005) has argued that observers who see a high-status party associate with low-status parties begin to wonder whether the high-status party is really worthy of the respect conferred to them. The empirical research by Podolny has focused exclusively on the firm level of analysis; thus, the process of status leakage may be a fruitful intra-organizational area of research in the future. The

process of status leakage focuses on how high-status actors suffer status decrements (Podolny, 2005), though it seems equally plausible that low-status actors can experience status increments from associating with high-status others. In fact, there may even be an asymmetry in status leakage: that is, perhaps high-status actors do not suffer from associating with low-status actors as much as low-status actors gain. Observers might think that a low-level employee who has a close bond with a senior manager is someone worthy of more respect than his or her position implies. Experimental studies and dynamic social network analyses over time might be especially effective at tackling the true direction of changes in status across individuals due to what could be called “mere association.”

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

In the previous section, we pointed out various forces that operate as exceptions to the rule that hierarchy is self-reinforcing. A number of these hierarchy-attenuating forces present opportunities for future research. In this final section, we extend our discussion of new directions for research by focusing on three topics that have received next to no attention but we think would be particularly rewarding for current and future scholars of social hierarchy.

The Relative Importance of Absolute Rank and Changes in Rank

In the section above, we highlighted a number of countervailing forces that can attenuate and alter, rather than reinforce, social hierarchies. The possibility of hierarchical changes raises the question of whether people are more sensitive to the absolute value of or relative changes to their power and status. If people are particularly sensitive to changes in their hierarchical standing, this would imply a reference point model of hierarchy in much the way that people are sensitive to other types of relative gains and losses (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Typically the self-reinforcing nature of social hierarchy would produce more gains for those already highly

ranked and losses for those of low rank. But, if people are sensitive to even subtle changes in rank, then a high-ranking person who suffers a small loss of power or status may act, think, and feel like a low-ranking individual. Similarly, individuals who make small steps up a hierarchy may be invigorated to make steeper climbs upward. Future research would do well to explore whether a reference point model of hierarchy offers increased value in explaining the consequences of power and status.

Status and Power Inconsistencies

Throughout our analysis, our claims have rested on the assumption that only one main hierarchy is in play at any one time. However, no hierarchy exists in isolation as groups and organizations have multiple valued dimensions on which people can be rank ordered, which raises the potential for contradictions or inconsistencies in their current hierarchical rank. Organizational settings, by extension, provide excellent opportunities to study “hierarchical rank inconsistencies,” with room to explore their causes as well as their consequences.

The concept of “status inconsistency,” whereby individuals have high status on one valued dimension or in one domain but low status on another dimension/domain (Lenski, 1954; Stryker & Macke, 1978), has been used to try to explain some variables (e.g., political preferences) but has had little impact on research in organizations. However, in a theoretical paper, Bacharach, Bamberger, and Mundell (1993) argue that an individual’s status inconsistencies lead others to hold conflicting expectations for the individual’s behavior, which causes stress for the status-inconsistent individual. Yet, an unanswered empirical question remains: Is it more challenging to have low status in two domains in an organization (i.e., high status consistency) or to have high status in one domain and low status in another (i.e., low status consistency)? We think that a notion of power inconsistency might be useful for future research

as well. This concept might capture the experience of frustrated managers who claim they have “power but no authority,” such as when they have subordinates who report to them but no control over the provision of rewards or punishments to those employees. In addition, as we acknowledged earlier, individuals can experience inconsistencies between their level of status and their level of power (i.e., high-status/low-power and low-status/high-power).

These status and power inconsistencies across hierarchical dimensions are further complicated by the fact that individuals are typically nested within multiple collectives—they exist within groups, which are nested within organizations, which are nested within industries or fields (see Blau’s [1964] distinction between microstructures and macrostructures). As a result, there can be inconsistencies between one’s rank in a local hierarchy (i.e., an organization) and in a more global hierarchy (i.e., a field). One form of “local/global status inconsistency” could occur in organizations in which someone has firm-specific skills that give him or her respect within an organization but that have little value within the organization’s industry. Alternatively, high global status and low local status could occur for someone who has gained broad respect over a lifetime of accomplishments but whose recent contributions at an organization have not met his or her colleagues’ expectations. It would take time for this information to leak out of the organization, so one’s global status might persist even as one’s local status has diminished. Thus, whether an individual’s status is local or global is important in thinking about how status affects his or her career opportunities and outcomes.

Related to the distinction between local and global status, Frank (1985) has argued that individuals actively choose whether to seek local or global status in considering their employment opportunities. In this decision, people face the following critical trade-off: whether to work for a higher-status organization where one’s individual status is low relative to other

employees, or a lower-status organization where one is accorded high local status. Because local comparisons (i.e., within an organization) are more psychologically potent than global comparisons (i.e., within a field), many people choose the opportunity to rise quickly through the ranks of low-status firms (Phillips, 2001). Little is known, however, about other factors, especially those outside of the individual's control, that influence this local versus global status trade-off.

The causes and consequences for both targets and perceivers of these inconsistencies—within power and status, across power and status, locally and globally—constitute an impoverished area of knowledge about social hierarchy. Although it would take some methodological sophistication, we would like to see the field shift its attention to understanding how these inconsistencies play out in dynamic ways to produce individual, group, and organizational behavior.

The Relationship between Hierarchy and Performance

We began this chapter by discussing the functions of hierarchy that make it such a pervasive feature of organizational and social life. We suggested that hierarchy offers social order, facilitates coordination, and provides an incentive function to motivate productive work. If this is true, it would suggest that groups and organizations that are structured with a greater degree of hierarchical differentiation should have an advantage relative to those groups and organizations with less hierarchical differentiation. One frontier that research could explore is whether the performance of work groups and departments depends in part on their levels of hierarchical differentiation (e.g., Groysberg et al., 2007). Hierarchy might also play a legitimizing role for organizations in strong institutional environments or nascent industries in which the measurement of performance is ambiguous (Baron & Bielby, 1986; DiMaggio &

Powell, 1983). For example, as start-up firms attempt to secure funding from venture capitalists, they tend to flesh out the hierarchical structure of their management teams, clarifying who is in charge of what (Baron, Burton, & Hannan, 1999). Future research could explore the following related question: In strong institutional environments, do organizations with greater hierarchical differentiation, particularly within their top management teams, have a competitive advantage relative to organizations with less differentiation?

CONCLUSION

Integrating research from psychology, sociology, and organizations, we have explored some fundamental aspects of social hierarchy. We started with the observation that hierarchies are both pervasive and a particularly effective means of organizing social relations. We then made the case that status and power are important, distinct bases of hierarchy and emphasized the need to isolate these concepts from related upstream and downstream variables. We hope that this conceptual clarification as well as our discussion of power and status inconsistencies will help guide research in the future. Our main focus was on various self-reinforcing aspects of hierarchy—the psychological effects of power, status-based expectations, and hierarchy-enhancing ideologies—though we also considered some countervailing forces that can attenuate these reinforcing processes. More work is needed from diverse perspectives to help understand the many forces involved in maintaining hierarchies as well as transforming them.

AUTHOR NOTE

We thank Cameron Anderson, Frank Flynn, and Jennifer Overbeck for their generosity in providing feedback on a previous draft of this manuscript. We also are indebted to the editors of this volume, Art Brief and Jim Walsh, for their patience, encouragement, and insight in the development of this chapter.

Correspondence concerning this manuscript should be addressed to Joe Magee, Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Business, New York University, 295 Lafayette St., 2nd Floor, New York, NY, 1001. Email: joe.magee@nyu.edu

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