



Reconciling the Roles of Status and Behaviour in Group
Influence:
Towards a Status-Confirmation Model

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the task of reconciling two discrete bodies of evidence relating to the emergence of influence hierarchies in small groups. Reviews are presented of research (1) documenting the phenomenon of status generalisation, and (2) identifying individual differences in nonverbal behavioural style as the basis of group differentiation. It is argued that previous attempts to integrate the two fields are flawed on two counts: the failure to differentiate empirically between the effects of nonverbal signals and those of differential task performance, and the corresponding tendency to depict such behavioural signals as a sufficient determinant of group structure. Findings obtained with behaviour separated from performance support the view that effects previously attributed to behavioural stimuli derived, instead, from differential task performance.

A status-confirmation model of the interactive effects of status and behaviour is proposed and evaluated. The primary assumption - that behavioural confidence and the initiation of activity represent claims to situational status - was endorsed by undergraduate subjects' accounts of the likely behaviour of a group member who seeks to attain group leadership. That established, the status-confirmation model proposes behavioural status-claims to be subject to confirmation or denial on the basis of the external status or competence of the claimant. Results of a field study, using extraversion as an index of a status-claiming behavioural style, support this argument; extraversion differentiated observer-rated influence of group members ranked high on either diffuse or specific status, but not those ranked uniformly high or low on both. The latter case, in particular, is inconsistent with the

view that behavioural confidence plays an independent causal role, comparable to that of external status, in hierarchy formation.

Evidence, also noted, of the ability of external status to influence the perception of behaviour, permits reconciliation of the status-confirmation model with the research base of status characteristics theory. Indications that the effects of behaviour on hierarchy formation are due to the pre-emption of leadership rather than the communication of confidence are considered, and the implications for the direction and methodology of future research discussed.