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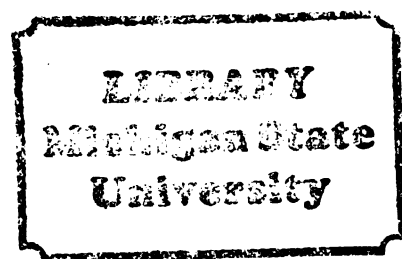
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ABSTRACT

SEATING POSITION AS GOAL-OBJECT: A STATUS CHARACTERISTICS EXTENSION

By

Christopher R. Corey

This study attempts to explain the frequently observed correlations between seating position, frequency of interaction and the attribution of leadership. The study tests the hypothesis that people at the head of a table emerge to be leaders due to that seat's symbolic value to group members. By applying status characteristics theory and arguing that the seat at the head of a table is a positively valued goal-object the hypothesis is tested experimentally. The results show no effect due to seating position. It is concluded that goal-objects that have no referential structures are distinctly different from status characteristics in the manner in which individuals use them to develop performance expectations.

The research described here is the result of an extension of status characteristics theory which treats seating position as a goal-object. The aim of this research is to extend the theory so as to provide information that will help explain the frequently observed correlation between seating position and the frequency of interaction in small groups. In a recent technical report (Berger et al, 1981) the development of reward expectations on the basis of the certain status characteristics is described. The work here expands upon this and predicts performance expectations on the basis of the distribution of goal-objects (rewards). In this case, seats at the head of the table at which subjects (S's) are seated serve as those rewards. A brief summary of the status characteristics theory and the recent extension will be described. Results of an experiment are presented also.

Status characteristics theory explains the observable differences in power and prestige in task oriented groups as a function of the relative standing of each group member in a relevant status structure. A relevant status structure is the set of characteristics that group members possess that differentiate them and which they take as relevant to the completion of the task by the group members (Berger et al, 1977).

The observable differences in power and prestige are, chances to talk (action opportunities), actually saying something when one has the chance (performance outputs), evaluating others or their performance outputs (reward actions), and being able to maintain one's opinion in the face of other's reward actions (resistance to influence) (Berger et al, 1977). It is important to note that

nowhere does the theory consider the group member's subjective evaluations of these four dependent variables. Rather, the theory is concerned with these as they occur in interaction and not as attributions or recollections of the interaction. Further, the theory is concerned with behaviors that are task oriented; in particular. behaviors that might be called 'socio-emotional' are not among the dependent variables (Berger et al, 1974; pg 86).

These observable differences in power and prestige are explained by the status characteristics group members possess. A status characteristic is "a characteristic around which differences in cognitions and evaluations of individuals or social types of them come to be organized (Berger et al, 1977; pg 5)." Status characteristics may be "diffuse" characteristics that are broad, culturally defined categories such as race, sex, age etc. There are also "specific" status characteristics which are narrowly defined abilities or skills that one may possess, e.g. artistic ability, mathematical skill etc. An additional factor that explains the power and prestige order of the group is the possession of goal-objects. "Goal-objects are the specific privileges, responsibilities and 'rewards' (in the narrow sense of that term) that in a particular situation are invested with either high or low status value (Berger et al, 1981)." Goal-objects, diffuse and specific status characteristics are considered as dichotomies by the theory. That is. an actor may have a positively or negatively evaluated state of any status characteristic or goal-object. For specific status characteristics these evaluations refer to performance expectations that are associated with each of the states of the status

characteristic. Diffuse status characteristics have associated with them general performance expectations. In the case of goal-objects, the evaluations associated with each state refer only to the perceived relative value of the two states. There is no mechanism in the theory that deals with the degree or absolute amount of difference between actors in terms of their ability or levels of reward.

This definition of goal-objects limits them to those things that may be thought of as distributed among group members and their significance as a function of group standards. If one group member finds working on the task a "rewarding" experience, for example, such a factor would not contribute to the development of the power and prestige order.

The theory also restricts the type of task to which it applies. First, the task must have outcomes that the group members will consider as success or failure. Second, group members must try to achieve an outcome that they value, and, if they are able, they will avoid the failure outcome. Third, the group members must believe that there does exist some characteristic the possession of which will lead to the valued outcome. Fourth, the task is said to be 'unitary.' This means that if the task is composed of smaller subtasks, then the characteristic that leads to the successful outcome of the task as a whole will also lead to the successful outcome of each subtask. A final property of the task is that group members must take into account the behavior of the other group members in obtaining the outcome (Berger et al, 1977, pg 95): the task must be a group task in that no one person can work alone or

implement a decision without considering the others first.

Actors confronted with such a task are engaged in processes to determine who in the group is most likely to give contributions that will lead to the successful task outcome. They make such a determination on the basis of the states of the characteristics and goal-objects they and other actors possess. This process produces in each actor a hierarchy of performance expectations. The observable power and prestige order is systematically related to the ranking of actors in terms of the performance expectation hierarchy. This expectation hierarchy is shared by all members of the group. For an actor *p* who has greater performance expectations (is expected to be better at the task) than *o*, the following observable power and prestige order will exist: 1) *p* is more likely to initiate a performance output than *o*; 2) *p* is more likely than *o* to receive a positive reward action; 3) *p* is more likely than *o* to receive an action opportunity; 4) *p* is more likely to accept an action opportunity and; 5) *p* is less likely than *o* to be influenced by others (Berger et al, 1974; pg 101).

For simple task situations the theory assumes two basic processes. The first of these describes which bits of status information will be used in determining the power and prestige order. This may occur in either of two ways; a) status characteristics which connect an actor to either the success or the failure outcomes of the task will be usable bits of information, and b) status characteristics that provide a basis of discrimination between actors will be usable. Status characteristics which provide a basis of discrimination are those where two actors are known to

possess different levels of any particular characteristic (i.e. one possesses the positively valued element while the other possesses the negatively valued element). This process that makes particular status characteristics usable for actors is known as the "salience" process or assumption in the theory (Berger et al, 1981; pg 14).

The second assumption concerns the "burden of proof" process which describes how status characteristics become relevant in a task situation. Relevance is a relationship between two characteristics such that possession of one characteristic by one actor leads other actors (as well as the first actor) to believe that the other characteristic will be, or already is, possessed by the first actor. Burden of proof means that a salient status element will become relevant to the characteristic that leads to an outcome state of the task. This process gets its name from the assertion that it will occur unless specifically dissociated from the task's outcome. If any characteristic is to be definitely disregarded the burden of proof is upon the definition of the situation to make such information explicit (Berger et al, 1977).

The burden of proof process makes connections with the characteristic that leads to the task outcome in a manner that is evaluatively consistent with other status elements the actor possesses. For example, if actors possess a single differentially valued, characteristic, the actor with the positively evaluated state of that characteristic will be believed to possess the element of the task characteristic that leads to the successful outcome of the task (i.e. the positively valued task characteristic). The actor with the negatively evaluated element of the characteristic

will, of course, also be expected to possess the negatively valued task characteristic (Berger et al, 1974).

This. briefly. describes the well established sections of status characteristics theory that are pertinent to the research presented here. The recent extension describing the development of reward expectations has a similar formulation with one important difference.

In this extension Berger and his associates (1981) consider cases where specific goal-objects are defined to be associated with a like-valued state of a status characteristic. An additional process is assumed to occur in such cases. Through the "activation of referential structures" goal-objects that are associated with states of salient status characteristics will become relevant to other similarly valued states of characteristics that are salient in the situation. For example, if a task's success outcome is dependent upon high educational achievement and high educational achievement is 'known' to be associated with a goal-object (e.g. income). then any characteristic that establishes a relevance relationship with educational achievement will also establish a relevance relationship with the goal-object. The relevance relationship between a characteristic an actor possesses and a goal-object is, essentially. the expectation of a reward given the possession of the status characteristic.

From this and other propositions Berger et al formulate six theorems. only the last of which is of interest here. Theorem 6 predicts that possession of a goal-object that is associated with the characteristic that leads to the outcome of a task will cause

performance expectations to be formed (Berger et al, 1981; pg 38). This situation is depicted in Figure 1a where p and o represent 'person' and 'other' respectively. The actors possess differentially valued states of a goal-object which is, by definition, associated with the characteristic that leads to the task outcome. The positively evaluated state of the goal-object is associated with the success outcome and the negatively valued state of the goal-object is associated with failure outcome of the task. In such a case there is nothing that either actor must infer or process in order to form different performance expectations for each other. The question this paper is concerned with is whether or not the burden of proof process will allow for the connection between the goal-object and the task characteristic if it were not established by the definition of the situation. This situation is described by Figure 1b.

Figure 1 About Here

To investigate this situation, where there is a known distribution of goal-objects and an unknown distribution of status characteristics, the theory's scope conditions must be extended. Goal-objects are considered only if defined to be relevant to characteristics that are directly relevant to the task outcome as the theory is currently used (Berger et al, 1977; pg 68). It does not seem unreasonable to believe that individuals make inferences

Figure 1a

p — GO(+) — C(+) — T(+)

Figure 1b

p — GO(+) C(+) — T(+)

Where p is the actor, GO(+) is the positively evaluated goal-object, C(+) is the task characteristic that leads to the positively evaluated task outcome state, T(+). The first line represents a possession relation, the remaining lines indicate relevance.

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about others' status characteristics on the basis of goal-objects that are not defined to be relevant to task characteristics. Della Fave (1980) suggests a similar process occurs when the populace of a society perceive the wealthy and powerful people to be the people that make the most valuable "contributions" to their society. His eclectic formulation argues that if a system that distributes rewards does so consistently, then those possessing rewards will be perceived as making more valuable contributions while those without are perceived to make less valuable contributions. In face-to-face settings where the braggart establishes, or attempts to establish, his status through claims of what he has, as opposed to what he can do, it is up to the less fortunate, or more modest, actor to prove to himself that such claims are unfounded. With no other information and the belief that the world distributes rewards justly (see Lerner, 1980), it is difficult to refute the braggart's claim. Consider this situation; if p and o are working on a task, and all either of them know is that p is being paid \$25.00 (the positively evaluated goal-object) and o, \$5.00 (the negatively evaluated goal-object), then which actor will hold the expectation advantage, if any? If goal-objects that differentiate actors become salient, and if the burden of proof process applies to solitary goal-objects, then p will hold the expectation advantage.

Here, it is argued that the seat at the head of a table is a positively evaluated goal-object relative to seats at the side of a table (which are negatively evaluated goal-objects). Seating has been found to correlate with frequency of interaction (Hare and Bales, 1963; Steinzor, 1950) and high status individuals choose the

head seat more often than others (Sommer, 1961; Strodbeck and Hook, 1961). Also, speaking most often has been found to lead to the attribution of leadership by other group members (Howells and Becker, 1962; Ward, 1968; and Stang, 1973). The effect of seating position on interaction is explained by the fact that communication is simply easier with people whom one is facing. Those seated facing more people will be able to speak, and be spoken to, more often than others. Also, the distance across a table is proxemically comfortable for North Americans, whereas people seated side-by-side are too close to interact comfortably in many instances (Silverstein and Stang, 1973). The fact that high status people choose head seats is interesting in that the head seat places one at an interaction disadvantage. The head seat at a rectangular table faces fewer people (provided all seats are taken) than any side seat. Why would high status individuals choose seats that place them at an interaction disadvantage? The most obvious answer is that the head seat is a symbol of prestige, it is a "specific privilege" awarded to those of high status. The head seat at a rectangular table is a positively evaluated goal-object. This fact allows group members to infer higher status to the holder of this seat and allow him to speak more often (more performance opportunities) than others.

One may test the assertion that head seats are positively evaluated solitary goal-objects by constructing a situation where the seats actors possess and the task characteristic are the only salient elements. If the head seat is, in fact, a positively evaluated goal-object, then one would expect the same power and

prestige advantage the person paid \$20.00 in the above example receives.

The hypothesis to be tested here is that:

If p possesses the head seat at a rectangular table, and o possesses a side seat, then p will be less susceptible to influence than o.

Susceptability to influence is used as a substitute for frequency of interaction. This is methodologically convenient and poses no problem conceptually as performance outputs, action opportunities and susceptibility to influence all indicate the level of performance expectation held by group members.

Methods

Subjects (S's) were recruited from undergraduate French and sociology classes at a large mid-western university. S's were told that the experimenter (E) was working on a study in group processes for his master's thesis. They were offered \$2.25 for participating and told that the study required an hour of their time. Interested individuals filled out 3 x 5 cards with their names, phone numbers, sociology and psychology classes they had completed and times they were available. Once cards were collected, only white females with fewer than ten sociology and psychology classes became eligible to be S's. This was done to eliminate potentially suspicious S's from the study. Thirty-eight S's completed the study.

To test the hypothesis S's were made aware only of their seat

at a table, the seat some other person had and the task characteristic. This was most easily accomplished by running only one S at a time. The S was led to believe that the other was a member of a group that had met in that same room at an earlier time. A name tag on the table indicated the other group member's seat. The S was seated at the table and also given a name tag. It was clear that the S would have that seat when the other (fictional) subject returned.

The supposed purpose of the study was to determine how different types of information about the group affected new members. The S's were told that they were replacing a member of the group and that the study S's were in was designed to test whether or not cooperating with one group member would affect their integration into the group. Cooperation was simulated by having S's work on a dichotomous choice task. After making an initial choice the S's were informed of the choice one other had made on that same set of choices. S's were then asked to make a final choice. In reality the choice of the other group member was manipulated by the E so that in twenty-seven of the thirty total trials the other person disagreed with the S's initial choice. The dependent variable was the proportion of trials the S's refused to change their mind (to be called a 'stay response' henceforward), when making a final choice.

S's were told that the group they were joining had four other women in it. All of those were to join the S after she had finished the task. There were no other people, in reality.

To help insure that S's would consider the other's responses and take the task seriously they were told that they and the other

would be paid two and-a-half cents for each final choice they got right. S's were also told that the other would see their choices later. 'so that she'd know how much money she would get.'

After the task was completed the S's were given a post-test interview. The interview items were designed to determine which S's had become suspicious or violated scope conditions of the study. One item attempted to establish whether or not the S's actually valued head seats more than side seats.

After the post-test interview S's were informed of the study's true nature. The E explained the necessity for the deception and paid the S's the additional money for working the task (as explained below, no correct answers were possible so S's were paid as though they had gotten them all correct). At this point S's were thanked and excused.

Experimental conditions. In order to vary seating position, S's were randomly assigned to either the "head seat" condition or a "side seat" condition. In the head seat condition S's were seated at the head of a table opposite a viewing screen for slides. The person whose choices the S's were shown was always indicated to be in the first seat to the left of S's in this condition. The side seat condition was achieved by turning the table so that the S's were still facing the screen, but the other person was at the head of the table to their right. S's participated in one condition only to insure independent samples. In each condition the E placed name tags around the table at five of the six possible seats (only one person could have a head seat as the opposite end of the table had no chair). The other was always a person named Teresa. The other

fictional group members occupied the same seats in each condition. Only the stimulus other, Teresa varied between conditions.

To further make certain that S's were aware of where the other, Teresa, was seated the instructions to S's contained the following passage:

The study you've agreed to participate in concerns group processes. Specifically, I'm interested in what happens when someone joins a group that has only been together a short time. (The E looks away from prepared text and continues) You see what happens when people first meet can affect what the group is like from then on. Sometimes people do interesting things when first meeting. For example, this group sort of milled around a bit before sitting down. TERESA GOT THE HEAD SEAT (in the head seat condition the capitalized portion read: THE PERSON YOU'RE REPLACING GOT THE HEAD SEAT) and the others filled in. That's the kind of thing I'm interested in. (E continues with prepared text).

Task. The dichotomous choice task was identified as a test of one's "spatial judgment ability." This task was developed for earlier work in expectation states theory (Moore, 1965). The S's were presented with a slide projection of two rectangles that are partially white and partially black. S's were also instructed to choose the rectangle which had the largest white area. Additionally, they were told that there is a specific ability required in order to successfully choose the correct rectangle with reliability (the task characteristic). Furthermore, this ability was unrelated to other abilities such as mathematics or art. This prevented the S's from having expectations about their ability to get correct answers relative to other people in general. In reality, each rectangle was exactly half white and half black. The configuration of the colored portions within the rectangles makes it

difficult to perceive this equality. It was important that the task be as ambiguous as possible to insure that the differences between S's was due to the experimental treatments and not any actual ability that individuals might possess.

Each S was given thirty trials. Of those, twenty-seven were critical trials where the other disagreed with the S's initial choice. Agree trials occurred on the third, eleventh, and twenty-first slide for each S. These trials were included to reduce the probability of S's becoming suspicious about the experimental procedure. The ordering of the slides or the agree trials remained constant throughout the study.

Apparatus. An Interaction Control Machine (ICOM). model 2B, was used to communicate S's initial choice, the other's choice, and the S's final choice. With this machine the E manipulated the other's choices to either agree or disagree with the S's initial choices. As S's pushed the button that indicated their initial choice, a light on their panel indicated the choice of the other. S's were told that this happened instantaneously because the other's choices were "already programmed into the machine."

The E operated the ICOM from an adjoining room. The slides were cued to the screen by the E from the same room. Each slide was shown for three seconds and advanced by hand.

Results

Of the thirty-eight S's that completed the study five were eliminated from the final analysis. In one case the E erred in the

administration of the study by giving three consecutive agree trials. Three additional S's were eliminated as they believed that Teresa's choices were actually manipulated by the E. The fifth S also believed the responses were manipulated and additionally believed that the study was concerned with "tolerance" and, therefore, refused to consider Teresa's answers or change her mind.

Manipulation checks. The experimental situation required a task that was ambiguous in its solution. If the choice between the top and bottom rectangle is not ambiguous, the effects of the experimental manipulation may be muted. When the choices are not ambiguous, the number of stay responses for S's should increase. The S's will feel as though they are able to arrive at a correct answer even though the white areas on each rectangle may in fact be equal. This reduces the chance that the other's choice will be used in making a final choice.

To test if the series of thirty slides actually was ambiguous, the initial choice of each S was recorded. To find if the choices had an equal probability of selection two probability distributions were computed. With that information a comparison between the observed distribution of choices can be made with a theoretical sampling distribution.

To simplify the comparisons, a frequency distribution was constructed with intervals of three "Top" choices in each -zero Top choices was computed separately as there were 3^4 possible numbers of Top choices per slide and groups of three left an odd category. The observed frequency of slides in each interval was compared to the number of slides expected in that interval according to a binomial

sampling distribution. The expected frequencies were obtained by using the mid-point of the interval as a point estimate. The squared differences between the observed and expected values were summed and a chi-square test of significance with 30 degrees of freedom was performed. No significant difference was found ($\chi^2=6.28$, $p>.995$).

Value of seats. To determine if S's placed higher value upon the head seat, a magnitude estimation question was asked during the post-test interview. Each S was asked:

I'd like to ask you a different kind of question now. Let's say we can assign values to anything. Big numbers would indicate something having lots of value, small numbers indicate very little value. Further, let's assume that there is no upper bound - you can assign values as high as you can count. Also, there's no lower bound - you can name negative values if you like. Zero indicates something no value at all. If a pen, for example, has a value of twenty, then something that's twice as valuable would have a value of forty. O.K. if the seat I have right now has a value of 100, what value would you assign, April's seat?, Sarah's seat?, Teresa's seat?. Your seat?

Only fifteen of the thirty-three viable S's gave the person in the head seat (either the S or Teresa, dependent upon the condition) a higher value than the side seat person. The values given to Sarah and April's seats relative to any other was judged to be extraneous to the study's findings.

Main findings. The basic data is presented in Table 1. The difference between means is nearly zero. This alone does not yet constitute a failure of the hypothesis. The hypothesis investigated here is predicated upon head seats having more value to S's than

side seats. The post-test interview item that asks for S's evaluation of seat values actually identifies that group of S's to which the hypothesis applies. S's that value the head seat more than the side will conform to the hypothesis as stated above. Those S's that value the side seat more will behave in manner opposite to the hypothesis' prediction. Such S's will, when seated at the head of the table, be more susceptible to influence than S's in the side who also value the side seat more. Furthermore, those who do not value the seats differentially will show no difference in their susceptibility to influence. The seats themselves do not cause the predicted effect, rather, it is the differential value assigned to objects possessed by actors in the situation, if any.

Tables 1 And 2 About Here

Table 2 presents the mean stay responses for each of the cases discussed above. The theory predicts that (in the first column) the Head Seat condition will be greater than the Side Seat condition. The second column, Equal Value, no difference is predicted. The final column, the Side Seat condition, will be greater than the Head Seat condition as the S's believe the side seat is the more valuable. Comparisons across the columns, within conditions is not as straightforward. The theory provides no basis for predictions between situations where status equals (the center column) are compared to differentiated situations (either of the end columns).

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of
Stay Responses by Seating Position

Seat	\bar{X}	s	n
Head	19.33	2.43	18
Side	19.00	3.64	15

$t=.303$, d.f.=25*, $p .25$ for the difference
between means

* (corrected for unequal sample sizes where
variances may not be equal, see Hays, 1973,
pg. 410.

Table 2

Mean Stay Responses by
Seat and Value of Seats

Seat	Most Valued Seat		
	Head	Equal	Side
Head	18.90 ₍₁₀₎	19.86 ₍₇₎	20.00 ₍₁₎
Side	18.00 ₍₆₎	20.17 ₍₆₎	18.67 ₍₃₎

The remaining cells follow the same logic as presented above. S's in the Head Seat condition that value the head seat more are in a high status position. Those S's in the Head Seat condition but value the side more are in a low status position. Therefore, the former group will have a greater mean stay response rate than those in the Head Seat and value the side seat. In the Side Seat row the S's who value the head seat more are in a low status position and will have lower mean stay responses than S's who are in the seats they value.

Figure 2 About Here

Using Figure 2 as a key for the cells of Table 2, the predictions made above may be summarized as follows: $a > d$, $b = e$, $c < f$, $a > c$, $d < f$. Of these predictions only $b = e$ is supported statistically ($t = .123$, $d.f. = 12$, $p > .8$, two-tailed test). Only two of the four directional predictions are even in the correct direction.

Discussion

Failure of the hypothesis may be due to operationalization, the applicability of either the salience process or burden of proof process. or the omission of conceptual considerations that concern the uniqueness of individuals processing reward information.

Figure 2
Most Values Seat

Seat	Head	Equal	Side
Head	a	b	c
Side	d	e	f

Identifying which of these four is the crucial factor is difficult given the study's design.

In terms of theory testing, the selection of seating position as the operationalization of goal-object possession is less than adequate. Because of the ways in which the physical arrangement of people affects their ability to interact face-to-face, the study was conducted with one S at a time. It may well be that the seat possessed by an unseen stranger is simply not important to someone faced with a difficult task to consider. This issue is entirely different from the possibility that the S's did not value the head seat. Once they had learned the true nature of the study, many S's reported that they had not, consciously at least, considered where Teresa was sitting. A better operationalization would be the amount of money the S's are paid. This would allow the application of the more standard Berger setting and would be a more prominent feature of the situation for most people.

By definition, a goal-object must be something whose states are given higher or lower status value. There is no reason to expect the S's that do not value the head seat more than the side seat to behave in manner consistent with the hypothesis. The results show that the portion of the sample that do value head seats more than side seats are considerably closer to achieving some significant difference between the conditions. This finding is based on so few S's it is difficult to be encouraged about this finding. The fact that this sub-sample did not produce significant differences leads one to suspect the theoretical construction as being the source of the problem.

The salience process and the burden of proof process, while essential to the reasoning that led to the hypothesis, are indiscernible in the design employed here. That is, there is no way of knowing if either, or both, have failed to apply to the solitary goal-objects. The failure of the hypothesis here, however, does not reflect upon the validity of these concepts as the status situation described here is clearly outside the scope conditions of status characteristics theory in its present form. Within the standard scope conditions these two processes are well established as useful constructs. The issue then is not whether they are themselves valid; rather, the issue is if similar processes operate that allow goal-objects, without clear referents in a specific situation, to become salient and contribute to the formation of performance expectations. The results show that a simple burden of proof process does not occur for such "solitary" goal-objects.

Given that it is untenable to reject either the salience or burden of proof processes, it becomes apparent that other conceptual issues need addressing. Two areas may be considered: the initial equation of leadership to high performance expectations and, secondly, the unique difference between goal-objects and status characteristics.

One conceptual problem may lie in the equation of the attribution of leadership and the actor with the highest performance expectations. As Slater (1955) has shown, the attribution of leadership frequently does not correlate with the attribution that someone has the "Best Ideas." Perhaps the individual who is seen as the group member with the best ideas is closer to the concept of an

actor with the highest performance expectation than is the notion of a group's leader. The 1981 extension of status characteristics theory considers situations where the referential structure defines, as a matter of social fact, how certain rewards are attached to certain values of particular status characteristics. This knowledge serves to inform certain actors in specific status situations (Berger et al. 1981; pg 6-13). Given this, the problem here concerns what the situation must be like before an actor will infer a referential structure where there is none.

A second conceptual issue concerns the fundamental differences between goal-objects and status characteristics. Solitary goal-objects are different from status characteristics in at least one major respect. A status characteristic is an individual trait that becomes salient in some status situation. It makes no difference how someone acquired the trait. If one is good at mathematics, it makes no difference if the skill was developed through hours of practice, or if one has a natural proclivity, or if he is a idiot savante. A solitary goal-object, however, requires a system of distribution to be salient. Individuals must believe that goal-objects are consistently distributed on the basis of status characteristics. If they are awarded capriciously, or inconsistently. they are dissociated from any status characteristic and are irrelevant to the formation of performance expectations.

If, however, goal-objects require the presence status characteristics to explain their distribution, are there not instances where the pressure to explain their distribution is much greater? In situations where the disparity is sufficiently great,

the actors would be more likely to infer a status characteristic and thereby create a referential structure, where none is present. Should this be true, one can explain the failure of the hypothesis in this study as being due to the fact that the difference in values of the seats is not large enough to pressure S's to infer a referential structure. The situation intentionally provided S's with no other differentiating characteristics to aid in this process. Anecdotally, it appears that some S's were able to do this anyway. Two S's admitted that they thought that Teresa was a black woman. Perhaps this impression was fostered by stereotypic notions about the names black parents give their children; this conclusion, nevertheless, made it easier for these S's to maintain their choice of rectangles. Together they had mean stay responses of 20.5, each had valued their seat as being 200 while attributing Teresa's seat a mean value of 50.

This suggests two considerations for future research. First, it is not sufficient to demonstrate that the operationalized goal-objects are differentially valued. One must also demonstrate the referential connection to the specific situation. Second, the absolute difference in value may be a factor in the inference of referential structures. This is clearly counter to the present formulation as states of goal-objects, like states of status characteristics, are considered as dichotomous elements in the theory.

The study described here does inform status characteristics theory despite the failure of the hypothesis. In the description of the type of task settings and status elements considered by the

theory, its authors have delineated a set of situations where the theory must hold true. Should the theory fail to provide accurate predictions in such settings would be a serious challenge to the theory's power. The theory does not claim that these settings are the only ones to which it applies. This extension tests the theory's applicability to settings where the only available elements are solitary goal-objects. As it is currently expressed, the theory does not apply to such situations given the findings of the study reported here.

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