

# Chapter 5

## Personality and Status Attainment: A Micropolitics Perspective

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Status hierarchies, a ubiquitous and fundamental feature of social life, have profound implications for individual welfare. Individuals with higher status are accorded more respect and influence, enjoy more influence and control in their social environment, more freedom and autonomy in determining their own behavior, higher subjective well-being, better health, and longer lifespans (for a review, see Anderson et al. 2013). Individuals with lower status, in contrast, are given less respect and social attention, have less control, face more constraints on their behavior, experience lower self-esteem and happiness, and suffer more from mental and physical illness.

Given the importance of status, it is critical to understand how status differences develop. That is, why are some people accorded higher status whereas others are relegated to the bottom of the social order? Are there certain personal characteristics that make some people more likely to rise in status and others fall? Research on these questions has traditionally focused on demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and age (e.g., Berger et al. 1972). More recently, however, scholars have begun to examine the role of personality. This recent work has shown that status-organizing processes are multifaceted and complex, and that diverse kinds of individual differences play an important role in determining status hierarchies in groups and face-to-face interactions.

The current chapter has two primary aims. *First*, we review studies of the effects of personality on status attainment. We specifically focus our attention on the personality dimensions that have been most consistently examined in studies of status—namely, the Big Five personality dimensions, trait dominance, self-monitoring, and narcissism. *Second*, we seek to help explain the findings that emerge from the literature, or why some personality traits facilitate status attainment whereas others do not. To do so we use a recently proposed *Micropolitics* theory of status-organizing processes (Anderson and Kennedy 2012). As we describe in the following section, the Micropolitics theory argues that an individual's status is a

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product of both a group's judgments of which individuals deserve higher status, and of the individual's motivation and ability to seek higher status.

At the core of status is the respect and admiration individuals achieve in the eyes of others (Anderson et al. 2001; Magee and Galinsky 2008). Individuals with higher status tend to be more socially prominent and receive more attention from others (Chance 1967), and to be given more influence and control (Willer 2009).

## Micropolitics Theory of Status

### *The Role of the Group in Determining Status*

In line with functionalist views of status, the Micropolitics theory proposes that status is ultimately a function of the group's collective judgments and decisions about which individuals deserve social status (Bales et al. 1951; Berger et al. 1972; Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1989; Emerson 1962; Goldhamer and Shils 1939). That is, groups develop an implicit consensus as to which individual characteristics are valuable to the collective, and allocate high- and low-status positions according to whether the individual possesses relatively more of those characteristics. Individuals who possess characteristics that allow them to make important contributions to the group are afforded high-status positions, whereas individuals who possess fewer characteristics that would provide social value are allocated low-status positions.

The characteristics viewed as socially valuable can vary from group to group (Anderson et al. 2008b); but in general, two kinds of attributes are important. *First*, individuals must appear to possess *competencies* central to the group's primary goals and challenges (Driskell and Mullen 1990; Ridgeway 1987). For example, superior athletic abilities will help an individual attain higher status on a soccer team because such abilities help the team win games; superior leadership skills will help an individual attain higher status on a work project team because such skills will help him or her manage the team's process and coordinate members' activities.

*Second*, individuals must also appear to be *collectively minded*, or willing to use their competences to benefit others and contribute to the group's success as a whole (Ridgeway 1982; Willer 2009). As Blau (1964) explained, "To earn the deference as well as the respect of others, it is not enough for an individual to impress them with his outstanding qualities; he must use these abilities for their benefit" (p. 162). Indeed, accumulating evidence suggests individuals who appear collectively minded are given higher status than those who seem solely self-interested (Griskevicius et al. 2010; Hardy and Van Vugt 2006; Ridgeway 1982; Willer 2009).

It is important to note that status is given to individuals who are *perceived* to provide value to the group—not necessarily those who actually provide social value. For example, much research has shown that groups can mistakenly perceive members with certain demographic characteristics as more competent and, as a result, accord those individuals higher status, even when those members are actually

no more competent than others (for a review, see Berger et al. 1980). In short, perceptions of social value, not actual value, drive status conferral.

### *The Role of Individual Pursuit of Status*

While groups might ultimately decide who is afforded high or low status, the Micropolitics theory also argues that individuals proactively pursue higher status. Individuals are not mere passive recipients of status, but instead behave in ways to increase or maintain their current level of status. Specifically, because status is afforded to individuals who are perceived to provide value, individuals jockey for status by striving to enhance their value to the group in the eyes of others—for instance by highlighting their competencies or their collective-mindedness to others, or by establishing important relationships and alliances. For example, individuals work to improve their abilities in socially valuable domains (Sutton and Hargadon 1996), engage in self-presentational strategies to portray their abilities in the best possible light (see Leary et al. in this volume, Chap. 8), or make more public contributions to the collective to convey their generosity and commitment to the group's success (e.g., Hardy and Van Vugt 2006).

In this way, status-organizing processes in social groups can be seen as a “micro” analogue of electoral politics. Just as in political elections, group members are chosen by the collective to occupy high status, influential positions. Individual members, just like political candidates, are selected according to whether they exhibit the right characteristics—competencies such as decision-making skills, leadership abilities, etc.—as well as whether they exhibit a commitment to others' welfare. Further, individual group members, just like political candidates, “win” high-status positions if they are more skilled at enhancing their general reputation of providing social value (regardless of whether they actually provide social value).

In many ways, the Micropolitics theory of status builds from research on self-presentation (see Leary et al., in this volume, Chap. 8). Similar to self-presentational accounts, the Micropolitics theory argues that people pursue higher status in part by managing their impression and social image. However, the Micropolitics theory also goes a bit further in incorporating behaviors unrelated to self-presentation, such as the development of friendships and alliances throughout a social network and the derogation of status competitors that diminishes their value in the eyes of others.

The Micropolitics theory also avoids the controversy surrounding dominance theories of rank. That is, some theorists have proposed that individuals can attain higher rank in groups through a “dominance” path, which involves coercing others to defer based on intimidation and fear (e.g., Cheng and Tracy, this volume, Chap. 1; Lee and Ofshe 1981; Mazur 1985). Although this account has received empirical support (Cheng et al. 2013, 2010), several researchers have raised questions regarding whether dominance promotes influence solely by virtue of fear induction (see commentaries following Lee and Ofshe 1981; also Anderson and Kilduff 2009; Ridgeway 1987; Ridgeway and Diekema 1989). The Micropolitics theory does not

propose that individuals pursue higher status through coercion and inducing fear in others alone; rather, it proposes that individuals pursue higher status by conveying to others that they provide social value.

### ***The Role of Personality in Status Attainment***

Through this Micropolitics lens, personality traits can contribute to status attainment for a number of reasons. *First*, personality traits might involve skills or abilities that are important to the group's success. Individuals with particular traits might tend to possess superior social and leadership skills, for example, and thus be more likely to attain higher status. *Second*, personality traits might correlate with a stronger desire to pursue status. Prior research has shown that individuals who are more motivated to attain higher status are in fact more likely to attain it, suggesting they engage in a variety of "micropolitical" behaviors that help them ascend the social order (Anderson and Kilduff 2009). *Third*, personality traits might correlate with the ability to signal one's value to the group more effectively. For example, some traits might allow people to engage in the right self-presentational strategies or to draw more attention to their important competences. It is important to note that these behaviors are not necessarily consciously enacted (e.g., Schlenker 2012). For example, individuals might draw attention to their expertise in a given area without any conscious intent to attain higher status among peers.

### **Research Review**

The current review focuses on the personality traits that have been most consistently studied as predictors of status. This includes the Big Five personality dimensions—extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience. It also includes trait dominance, which is viewed as part of the broader extraversion factor in the Big Five framework; but that has been examined separately from extraversion in a multitude of studies and therefore warrants its own discussion. Finally, the review includes studies of self-monitoring and narcissism, two personality traits that have been increasingly linked to status in recent years.

The review includes studies of ad hoc groups—that is, individuals experimentally assigned to groups that exist only for short periods of time and that work together on a specific task—as well as studies of more typical groups, or groups that exist for extended periods of time, in which members spend a good deal of time together, and have a wide range of interactions. It includes studies of status differences per se as well as studies of emergent leadership structures and of emergent differences in influence within groups. Status can be conceptually distinguished from constructs such as leadership and influence (Magee and Galinsky 2008), within the context of task groups the three constructs correlate so strongly as to be virtually

indistinguishable (e.g., Bales et al. 1951). Therefore, we felt it appropriate to include studies of emergent leadership and of differences in influence.

## ***Extraversion***

**Summary of Findings** Extraversion implies an “energetic approach to the social and material world and includes traits such as sociability, activity, assertiveness, and positive emotionality” (John and Srivastava 1999, p. 121). An abundance of research has shown a strong and consistent relation between extraversion and status. Multiple reviews of the emergent leadership literature have shown that extraverts tend to emerge as leaders in groups more than introverts (Bass 2008; Judge et al. 2002; Mann 1959; Stogdill 1948). Recent research has continued to observe similar effects: Deuling et al. (2011) found that extraversion predicted peer-rated influence in project teams of psychology freshman. Colbert et al. (2012) found that self- and peer-rated extraversion predicted emergent leadership in teams comprised of undergraduate and Master of Business Administration (MBA) students. Bendersky and Shah (2013) similarly found that extraversion predicted status in the early stages of student project teams.

Moreover, the status benefits of extraversion extend beyond teams to larger groups. Anderson et al. (2001) found extraversion predicted peer-rated status in college fraternities, sororities, and dormitories. Indeed in the dormitories, extraversion measured at the beginning of the academic year predicted status attainment 9 months later. Similarly, Harms et al. (2007) also found that extraverts were rated by their peers in fraternities and sororities as having more influence. Anderson et al. (2008) found that extraversion predicted peer-rated influence in a consulting firm. Finally, Ames et al. (2012) found that MBA students higher in extraversion were rated by former coworkers as having more influence in their prior job.

Even longitudinal studies that assess the attainment of status over long periods of time have found similar results. George et al. (2011) found in sample of women who graduated from Mills College that extraversion measured at age 21 predicted status of job they attained at age 52. Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2012) also found that self- and peer-rated extraversion predicted participants’ occupational prestige in a longitudinal study that spanned several decades.

**Why Do Extraverts Attain Status?** Building from the Micropolitics theory of status, there are several possible reasons why extraverts attain higher status so consistently. *First*, extraversion is associated with the actual possession of social and leadership skills that are useful in almost all group settings (Akert and Panter 1988; Riggio 1986). For example, extraverts are more verbally expressive (Ames et al. 2012) and tend to use a “transformational” leadership style (Judge and Bono 2000), which is highly effective in leading groups (Bass 2008).

*Second*, extraverts are often perceived by others as being highly task competent. For example, Paulhus and Morgan (1997) found individuals who were less shy (i.e., more extraverted) were perceived as more intelligent. In the aforementioned study

by Anderson et al. (2008), extraverts attained higher status in a consulting firm but not in an engineering department of a telecommunications firm, presumably because extraverts were viewed as more competent in the team-focused culture of the consulting firm, but not in the engineering department where individuals worked alone on technical problems.

*Third*, some evidence suggests extraverts desire status more strongly than introverts (Brunell et al. 2008; Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller 2012; Olson and Weber 2004). Consistent with this notion, extraverts tend to engage in more “micropolitical” behaviors. For example, they signal their value to the group by drawing attention to themselves and to their positive attributes, such as their skills and abilities (Kyl-Heku and Buss 1996), and their valued resources (Buss 1996). They also develop a wider set of relationships, which is particularly important in larger social groups where it is easy for individuals to get “lost in the crowd” (Anderson and Shirako 2008).

Of course, extraverts do not always attain higher status. For example, extraversion can of course be independent from competences important to the group; when this is the case, extraversion does not predict status (Anderson et al. 2008). Some work suggests extraverts who appear competent at first can be “found out” by peers over time as having unimpressive task abilities. For example, in the study by Paulhus and Morgan (1997), the link between extraversion and peer-perceived intelligence diminished over time as group members became more familiar with each other. Similarly, in Bendersky and Shah (2013), extraverts’ status decreased in work teams over time because the team viewed their contributions as being less than what was expected of them initially.

## ***Trait Dominance***

**Summary of Findings** The personality trait dominance involves the tendency to behave in assertive, forceful, and self-assured ways (Buss and Craik 1980; Gough 1987; Wiggins 1979). It is important to note that trait dominance is distinct from the “dominance” construct articulated by Cheng, Tracy, and Henrich (e.g., Cheng et al. 2010; Cheng and Tracy, this volume, Chap. 1), which they define as entailing the induction of fear through intimidation and coercion to attain higher influence and rank in a social hierarchy. *First*, trait dominance is a personality trait, whereas Cheng and Tracy’s dominance construct is an evolutionary strategy for attaining or maintaining influence. *Second*, trait dominance does not necessarily include inducing fear or intimidating others (Gough 1987), but instead centers on assertive and self-assured behavior.

Similar to extraversion, vast evidence links trait dominance to the attainment of status in groups. Large-scale reviews have shown that dominant individuals emerge as leaders more than timid or meek individuals (Bass 2008; Judge et al. 2002; Mann 1959; Stogdill 1948). One meta-analysis of 85 years of research found trait dominance to predict who emerges as the leader in groups more consistently than any

other individual difference dimension examined, including intelligence (Lord et al. 1986).

More recent evidence also provides similar results. Foti and Hauenstein (2007) found that in freshman corps of cadets in the military, trait dominance predicted emergent leadership in group tasks. Anderson and Kilduff (2009) found trait dominance to strongly predict emergent influence in task-focused groups. And these effects also extend beyond teams as well: Harms et al. (2007) found trait dominance to predict peer-rated influence and the attainment of leader positions in fraternities and sororities. Ames and Flynn (2007) found that peer-rated assertiveness predicted peer-rated leadership abilities. Interestingly, however, they also found a curvilinear relation: while being too low in assertiveness led to lower leadership ratings, so did being too high in assertiveness. Presumably, individuals too high in dominance provide less social value because they impose their own will on others too much.

**Why Do Individuals Higher in Trait Dominance Attain Status?** The personality trait dominance involves, almost by definition, a preference for higher-status positions (Gough 1987). Therefore, one reason why individuals higher in dominance tend to attain high status is that they are more likely to pursue it than others.

Yet trait dominance is also related to being perceived by others as more competent socially and technically, and therefore as contributing more value to the group. For example, Anderson and Kilduff (2009) found that individuals higher in trait dominance were viewed by other group members as more verbally skilled and more competent at the group task. Strikingly, this occurred even though dominant individuals were actually no more competent than others. For example, among teams working on math problems, dominant individuals did not have higher scores on standardized math tests, nor did they provide more accurate answers during the group task. Yet they were still perceived as more quantitatively skilled by teammates.

To examine how individuals higher in trait dominance conveyed superior competence even when they lacked it, Anderson and Kilduff (2009) examined videotape of the group sessions and analyzed each person's behavior. They discovered two things. *First*, individuals higher in trait dominance were more engaged in the group tasks, spoke more, and displayed more of a commitment to the group's success. *Second*, they exhibited more outward signals of competence, such as volunteering answers and providing problem-relevant information. Therefore, although dominant individuals were not actually any more competent than others in their group, they came across as more competent because they took initiative and conveyed confidence in their abilities.

Trait dominance not only leads individuals to be mistakenly perceived as more competent, it also allows the competences and talents that individuals do actually possess to be noticed by others. Because individuals' abilities are typically hidden from others, sometimes highly competent and talented individuals fail to be seen as such by others (e.g., Berger et al. 1972; Driskell and Mullen 1990; Lord 1985). Trait dominance increases the chances that an individual's abilities will shine through. For example, a meta-analysis by Judge et al. (2004) found that for more "directive"

individuals (who are more dominant), intelligence predicted emergent leadership, yet for less directive individuals, their intelligence had no impact on the leadership role they attained. These findings suggest that for more dominant individuals, their skills and abilities are more likely to become known by others. For individuals who are more timid and meek in contrast, their competence might remain hidden and undetected by the group.

## *Agreeableness*

**Summary of Findings** The relationship between agreeableness and status presents a puzzle. Agreeableness involves altruism, trust, modesty, and a tender-minded concern for others (Graziano and Eisenberg 1997; Hampson et al. 1987). Therefore, theoretically one would expect agreeable individuals to attain higher status because they tend to be more collectively minded; they care more about others' welfare and are more selfless and generous with others (Graziano and Eisenberg 1997; Hampson et al. 1987), traits that should lead to status attainment (e.g., Blau 1964). However, the empirical evidence suggests agreeableness is typically unrelated or even negatively related to status attainment.

For example, agreeableness and traits related to agreeableness do not emerge as predictors of emergent leadership (for reviews, see Bass 2008; Judge et al. 2002; Mann 1959; Stogdill 1948). In fact, Judge et al. (2002) found that agreeableness was the only Big Five dimension that did not predict emergent leadership. Similarly, in the aforementioned study by Anderson et al. (2001), agreeableness did not predict status in college social-living groups of any kind or at any time in the group's development. In the study by Colbert et al. (2012) agreeableness did not predict emergent leadership in MBA and undergraduate student task groups when taking into account other personality traits. Brunell et al. (2008) found that agreeableness did not predict emergent leadership in task groups after controlling for other personality dimensions. Anderson et al. (2008) study found no link between agreeableness and peer-rated influence in a consulting firm or an engineering department. One study did find a positive effect: Ames et al. (2012) found that individuals viewed by their former coworkers' as being agreeable were also viewed by them as being influential. However, it is difficult to know whether this effect was due to shared method variance.

Some studies have even found a negative relation between agreeableness and status attainment. Neubert and Taggar (2004) examined intact manufacturing teams that had worked together for an extended period of time and found agreeable individuals were less likely to be nominated by coworkers as a leader. Cheng et al. (2010) found that agreeableness negatively predicted peer-rated "dominance" in college athletic teams. Bendersky and Shah (2013) found that agreeableness negatively predicted status in the early stages of student project teams.

**Why Would Agreeable Individuals Fail to Attain Higher Status?** We propose agreeable individuals refrain from engaging in the "micropolitical" behaviors that



would signal their social value to the group. Therefore, while agreeable individuals might *actually* possess socially valued characteristics and engage in more cooperative behavior, they do not develop a *reputation* as such because they do not behave in ways that draws attention to those characteristics or behaviors. Indeed, Anderson and Shirako (2008) found that many individuals who consistently behaved cooperatively and selflessly in their interactions with others still did not gain a reputation for being cooperative; their behavioral pattern needed to be visible to others for others to develop positive perceptions of the individual.

In support of this argument, some evidence suggests agreeable individuals desire higher status less than others (Olson and Weber 2004). Moreover, while extraverts and dominant individuals are willing to engage in a wide range of behaviors to attain higher status, agreeable individuals are not (Kyl-Heku and Buss 1996). For example, while extraverts are willing to boast about their accomplishments, work hard to impress others, display their knowledge to others, and engage in social situations to attain higher status, agreeable individuals are unwilling to do so; in fact, the average correlation between extraversion and status-pursuing behaviors was  $r=0.36$ , whereas the average correlation between agreeableness and those same behaviors was  $r=0.00$  (Kyl-Heku and Buss 1996). In short, therefore, the evidence suggests that status attainment requires engaging in micropolitical behaviors, and that agreeable individuals are unwilling to do so.

Why would agreeableness predict the attainment of *lower* status? Otherwise stated, why would disagreeable individuals sometimes attain high status if they are colder, more aloof, and less concerned about others' welfare? One possibility is that disagreeable individuals are more willing to engage in some of the more deceptive and manipulative tactics to get ahead, such as derogating others, boasting, and aggression (Kyl-Heku and Buss 1996). Similarly, disagreeable individuals are more willing to engage in conflict with others (Graziano et al. 1996), a willingness that can be important to status in some contexts (Cohen et al. 1996). It is also possible that agreeable people are simply more willing to conform and submit more to others' concerns and wishes.

## *Conscientiousness*

**Summary of Findings** Conscientiousness refers to “socially prescribed impulse control that facilitates task- and goal-directed behavior” (John and Srivastava 1999, p. 121); thus, conscientious individuals are dutiful, hardworking, and organized. The research literature that has examined conscientiousness and status has found that conscientious individuals attain higher status in task-focused contexts such as project teams or workplaces, but not necessarily in other contexts.

In the aforementioned review by Judge et al. (2002), conscientiousness predicts emergent leadership in task groups. Neubert and Taggar (2004) found that conscientiousness predicted peer-nominated leadership in intact manufacturing teams (though the finding was marginally significant). Anderson et al. (2008) found con-

scientiousness to predict peer-rated influence in an engineering department of a telecommunications firm. Cheng et al. (2010) found that conscientious members of college athletic teams were rated by teammates as higher on the “prestige” component of status. Ames et al. (2012) found coworker-rated conscientiousness predicted peer-rated influence in the workplace. And Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2012) found that conscientiousness predicted occupational prestige in a longitudinal study of careers.

However, in social-living groups such as fraternities, sororities, and dormitories, conscientiousness did not predict status attainment (Anderson et al. 2001). Moreover, while conscientiousness predicted peer-rated influence in an engineering department it did not predict peer-rated influence in a consulting firm, where teamwork was viewed as contributing to performance relatively more than technical skills (Anderson et al. 2008).

**Why Do Conscientious Individuals Attain Status in Some Contexts but Not Others?** As mentioned above, the Micropolitics theory argues that groups develop an implicit consensus as to which individual characteristics are valuable to the collective, and allocate high- and low-status positions according to whether the individual possesses relatively more of those characteristics. In many project teams and workplaces, conscientiousness is valuable to the group because conscientious individuals work hard and focus their energies on task accomplishment. Therefore, in those contexts conscientious individuals are given higher status.

However, in other contexts that value task performance less, conscientiousness will have little to no impact on status attainment. For example, in many college fraternities, hard work, diligence, and good grades are likely irrelevant to the group’s function and success and therefore irrelevant to status attainment as well. Therefore, conscientiousness would seem less central and valued in these groups, suggesting that it will not predict status attainment. (It is interesting to note that Harms et al. [2007] found conscientiousness to predict peer-rated influence in fraternities and sororities; perhaps these organizations put more emphasis on good grades). Similarly, in the consulting firm studied by Anderson et al. (2008), conscientious individuals’ task focus was viewed as less important than the ability to work together with colleagues in a team-oriented culture. As conscientious individuals were seen as providing less important characteristics, they were not afforded higher status.

## *Neuroticism*

**Summary of Findings** The neuroticism dimension of the Big Five reflects individual differences in negative emotionality, including vulnerability to stress, anxiety, depression, and negative self-conscious emotions, such as guilt, shame, and embarrassment (Costa and McCrae 1992). Research has consistently shown neuroticism relates to lower status.

As with many other personality traits mentioned above, neuroticism consistently emerges as a predictor of emergent leadership in large-scale reviews—except in this

case, it predicts a lower likelihood of emerging as a leader (Judge et al. 2002; Stogdill 1948). Similarly, Deuling et al. (2011) found that in project teams of psychology freshman, neuroticism predicted lower peer-rated influence a full 8 months after the teams had been working together. Judge and Kammeyer-Mueller (2012) found that self- and peer-rated neuroticism predicted lower occupational prestige in a longitudinal study. Further, Bendersky and Shah (2013) found neuroticism to predict lower status in the beginning stages of student project teams.

There have been a number of nuances found in the link between neuroticism and status, however. Anderson et al. (2008) did not find any relation between neuroticism and peer-rated influence in two organizations, for example, suggesting it might not always predict lower status. It is possible these null effects were due to strong display rules in both organizations that prevented the expression of negative emotion. In that case, coworkers would have a more difficult time detecting neuroticism in others. Two studies have also found that neuroticism is far more damaging to men's than women's status: Anderson et al. (2001) found this in college social-living groups, and Neubert and Taggar (2004) found this in the leadership nominations within intact manufacturing teams. In Bendersky and Shah's (2013) study, while individuals higher in neuroticism began low in status, they rose in status over time. However, the bulk of studies have typically found a simple main (negative) effect of neuroticism on status.

**Why Do Individuals High in Neuroticism Attain Lower Status?** On the surface, it is not entirely clear why neuroticism is such a consistent predictor of lower status in groups. Negative emotionality would not seem to harm group performance or success in any direct way, as long as the person was still competent on important tasks and was willing to contribute his or her abilities for the collective. We believe neuroticism leads to lower status because it leads to the *perception* of lower social value, however. Specifically, individuals high in neuroticism are viewed by others as being less able to make important contributions to the collective, regardless of whether they actually are less capable of doing so.

For example, in Bendersky and Shah's (2013) study, the student project teams expected individuals high in neuroticism originally to contribute less to the team. Over time however, these expectations rose as the group members got to know each other better, presumably because they relied less on negative emotionality as an indicator of individual contribution. Accordingly, those high in neuroticism rose in status over time as well. Similarly, men high in neuroticism are likely viewed as providing less social value because negative emotionality is viewed more negatively in men than in women (Brody 2000), which is likely why men consistently score lower on neuroticism measures (Benet-Martinez and John 1998), and men express these emotions much less than women even in controlled laboratory settings (e.g., Kring and Gordon 1998). Therefore, men in particular might be perceived as providing less social value when they exhibit negative emotionality.

In sum, these findings suggest that neuroticism, perhaps particularly in men, might signal to others one's inability to provide social value. Regardless of whether the experience of emotions like stress, anxiety, and depression indicate any actual

inability to contribute to the group, people might *believe* that it does, and accordingly give individuals high in neuroticism lower status.

## *Openness to Experience*

**Summary of Findings** Openness describes “the breadth, depth, originality, and complexity of an individual’s mental and experiential life” (John and Srivastava 1999, p. 121). This final dimension of the Big Five taxonomy has been linked to status attainment, though the evidence is weaker and less abundant than for other personality traits.

In a review by Judge et al. (2002), openness predicted emergent leadership although it was the second-weakest predictor, behind only agreeableness, which had a null effect on leadership. Colbert et al. (2012) presented evidence for relatively strong relationships between openness and emergent leadership in student laboratory task groups. Bendersky and Shah (2013) also found openness to predict status in student teams at the beginning and 10 weeks into the group’s development. George et al. (2011) found that openness measured at age 21 predicted the status of the job women attained at age 52.

However, classic reviews of leadership research did not find openness to be a consistent predictor of leader emergence (e.g., Mann 1959; Stogdill 1948). Anderson et al. (2001) did not find a single significant relationship between openness and status attainment in college social-living groups. Similarly, a study of organizations by Anderson et al. (2008) did not find any effect of openness on peer-rated influence either.

**Why Is Openness to Experience a Weaker and Less Consistent Predictor of Status?** Though it is difficult to discern from the existing studies exactly why openness to experience matters somewhat less to status attainment than other dimensions, and matters more in some groups than others, we believe the answer again lies in the social value open individuals are perceived by others to provide. Openness correlates with creativity and divergent thinking (McCrae 1987) as well as pursuing intellectual and artistic endeavors (Kyl-Heku and Buss 1996). These talents and tendencies are likely valued in some group contexts more than others, in particular those where the group needs to generate innovative solutions to problems. However, even in groups that value divergent thinking and openness to new ideas, it is possible that many groups fail to detect which of their members are actually higher in openness to experience. Clearly, more research is needed to address these possibilities.

## *Self-Monitoring*

**Summary of Findings** Snyder (1974) characterizes an individual high in self-monitoring as someone “who, out of a concern for social appropriateness, is particularly sensitive to the expression and self-presentation of others in social situations and uses these cues as guidelines for monitoring his own self-presentation” (p. 528).

Otherwise stated, self-monitors care a great deal about the social appropriateness of their behavior, are sensitive to social cues, and have the ability to control their behavior in response to what is seen as appropriate (Briggs et al. 1980).

Although the relation between self-monitoring and status has been examined relatively less frequently than the traits discussed above, studies suggest self-monitoring does play an important role in status attainment. *First*, self-monitors are more likely to emerge as leaders in task groups: Garland and Beard (1979) found self-monitors emerged as leaders more often in brainstorming teams. Ellis (1988) and also Ellis et al. (1988) examined MBA student groups and found self-monitoring predicted emergent leadership. Zacaro et al. (1991) used a round-robin design and found that self-monitors emerged as leaders in several laboratory task groups. Flynn and Ames (2006) found self-monitors were peer-rated as more influential in MBA project teams. Extending beyond leader emergence in teams, Flynn et al. (2006) found that self-monitors attained higher status in MBA cohorts. It is worth noting that studies have found gender differences in the effect of self-monitoring; however, these effects are inconsistent across studies, with some showing stronger effects for men (Ellis 1988) and some for women (Flynn and Ames 2006; Garland and Beard 1979).

**Why Do Self-Monitors Attain Higher Status?** Of all the personality traits reviewed in this chapter, self-monitoring is probably the most relevant to the Micropolitics theory of status. As argued earlier, the attainment of status stems from being perceived as socially valuable. Individuals thus engage in micropolitical behavior in part by proactively striving to signal their value to the group—either by conveying their competencies or their collective-mindedness to others. High self-monitors have the ability to ascertain which characteristics are socially valuable, and then modify their behavior to convey those characteristics.

Specifically, research has shown that self-monitors desire status a great deal (Flynn et al. 2006; Fuglestad and Snyder 2010). They pay more attention to their social environment and are more accurate at reading it (e.g., Costanzo and Archer 1989; Flynn et al. 2006; Funder and Harris 1986; Ickes et al. 1990). Their accuracy extends to characteristics that provide status; for example, Flynn et al. (2006) found that self-monitors understood the importance of generosity to status attainment. Furthermore, self-monitors are better able to modify their behavior to signal their social value to others (Lippa 1978; Snyder 1974). Flynn et al. (2006) also found that self-monitors establish a reputation of being generous by helping out others more and by refraining from requesting help from others.

In addition to managing their impressions in a way that enhances their apparent social value, research suggests that self-monitors also tend to occupy positions in a social network that provide them with higher visibility and control over resources such as information and access to others. For example, Mehra et al. (2001) found self-monitors were more central in the social network of a high-tech firm. Oh and Kilduff (2008) also found that among Korean expatriate entrepreneurs in a Canadian urban area, self-monitors tended to occupy positions of brokerage in their social network; that is, they had formed relationships with individuals who did not know each other. Much research has shown that occupying central, brokerage positions

enhances individuals' visibility (Anderson and Shirako 2008) and provides the individual with socially valuable information (Burt 1997).

## *Narcissism*

**Summary of Findings** Narcissism is a complex of personality traits and processes that involve a grandiose yet fragile sense of self and entitlement as well as a preoccupation with success and demands for admiration (see Morf and Rhodewalt 2001 for a review). Studies that have begun investigating the effects of narcissism on status have found somewhat mixed results. On the one hand, some studies have suggested narcissists attain higher status than others: Paulhus (1998) examined student teams and found narcissism to predict peer-ratings of contributions to the group, performance, and effectiveness (all ratings highly associated with status) at the beginning of the group's formation. Similarly, Brunell et al. (2008) found narcissism to predict emergent leadership in a group task.

On the other hand, some studies have suggested narcissists do not attain higher status than others. In the aforementioned study by Paulhus (1998), narcissism did not predict those same peer-ratings 6 weeks later into the group's development. John and Robins (1994) found that narcissism was unrelated to peer-ratings of performance in a group task. Anderson et al. (2008) also found that in a group task, narcissists did not achieve higher peer-rated status.

**Why Is Narcissism an Inconsistent Predictor of Status?** As mentioned earlier, narcissism is not considered a single personality trait but rather a complex of personality traits. We believe narcissism has mixed effects on status attainment because some of the traits within the narcissism cluster help individuals attain higher status, while other traits hinder individuals' ability to attain status.

For example, narcissism involves a desire for status (Brunell et al. 2008), which drives many of the micropolitical behaviors that help achieve status (Anderson and Kilduff 2009). Perhaps more important, narcissism also involves a high degree of self-confidence (e.g., John and Robins 1994), and self-confidence has been consistently linked with emergent leadership (for reviews, see Bass 2008; Judge et al. 2002; Stogdill 1948). In fact, studies have shown that confident individuals attain higher status regardless of whether their confidence is justified (Anderson et al. 2012; Kennedy et al. 2013). Why would self-confidence play a key role in status attainment? Research has shown that confident individuals engage in one important type of micropolitical behavior: they display more of the behavioral cues that signal competence to others, for example they speak more, use a confident and factual vocal tone, exhibit a calm and relaxed demeanor, and jump into group discussions early (Anderson et al. 2012). As a result, they are seen as more intelligent and competent (Kennedy et al. 2013).

However, narcissism also involves behavioral habits that can harm status. As Paulhus (1998) notes, "narcissists have an interpersonal style characterized by a competitive and domineering social presence (Morf and Rhodewalt 1993), which may be increasingly offensive over time." Indeed, narcissists tend to be more self-

focused and less concerned about others' welfare. Because status is accorded to individuals who are more collectively oriented, narcissists' selfishness likely harms their status.

In support of this "mixed blessing" account of narcissism and its effects on status attainment, Paunonen et al. (2006) found that military cadets who possessed the "brighter" side of narcissism (i.e., self-confidence) were more often rated as leaders by peers. In contrast, cadets who possess more of the "darker" side of narcissism (e.g., manipulativeness) were not rated as leaders. Similarly, Cheng et al. (2010) found that narcissism predicted peer-rated dominance in college athletic teams, which involved a selfish, aggressive style of behavior aimed at furthering one's own goals. However, narcissism was unrelated to peer-rated prestige, which was focused on the respect and admiration individuals achieved in the eyes of peers based on their competence and value to the group (i.e., status).

## Summary and Conclusions

The findings reviewed in this chapter provide strong evidence that personality traits are an important determinant of status attainment. Specifically, extraversion, dominance, neuroticism, and self-monitoring appear to consistently predict status attainment across diverse social and group contexts. Conscientiousness and narcissism can also facilitate status attainment, but their effects appear to be context dependent. Some evidence suggested that openness to experience can sometimes be a determinant of status, though this evidence was somewhat weaker. Agreeableness, however, was not found to predict status attainment.

How can we make sense of these findings? Why do some personality traits predict status attainment whereas others do not, and yet others predict status inconsistently? We sought to shed light on this literature using a recently proposed Micropolitics theory of status (Anderson and Kennedy 2012). In short, the evidence suggests that the personality traits that more strongly and consistently predict status attainment do so because individuals with those traits possess characteristics that provide value to the group, or because they engage in the micropolitical behaviors that enhance their value to the group in the eyes of others. For example, individuals with some personality traits tend to have better social and leadership skills; they engage in social activities more and develop a wider range of relationships with others; or they engage in behaviors that make them appear more competent, even when they are not.

One broader take away from the current review is that personality should play a more critical role in theories of status. As was shown, personality traits—especially some traits—predict status attainment consistently and strongly. Alongside intelligence and demographic characteristics such as race and gender, personality appears to be a driving force behind status-organizing processes. We hope the current review sparks interest in this intersection between personality and status so that we can better understand their important relationship.

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