Vertical and horizontal inequality are status and power differences: applications to stereotyping by competence and warmth

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Status (respect, prestige) and power (resource control) arguably form two kinds of inequality. Status differences appear culturally reasonable as vertical inequality—with a common rationale: meritocracy (deservingness). High-status individuals and groups are accorded competence. Status differences divide people by inequality, but so do differences in power (sharing resource control). Power-sharing (or not) can be cooperative, peer interdependence, tending toward equality, or competitive rivalry, negative interdependence, tending toward inequality. This kind of (in)equality—power-sharing (or not)— theoretically differs from vertical status differences. Orientation to power-sharing thus is horizontal (in)equality. One end creates competitive friction among the distrusted and dissimilar. At the other end, horizontal equality creates mutual cooperation of the warm, similar, and familiar. Distinguishing status and power differences broadens inequality's scope.

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Introduction: vertical inequality as status and horizontal inequality as power

London's Savoy Hotel used to have dozens of titles one could claim on a reservation (lord, lady, baron, princess, marquis, barrister, doctor, professor); for an American, the fine-grained claiming of rank seemed a fascinating expression of the phenomena addressed here: inequality in status (social class, prestige), power (resource distribution), and stereotypes (traditional British culture isn't the only one to prioritize ranks, merely a prime exemplar).

This review focuses on the psychology of status, power, and inequality through stereotypes at both macro and micro levels, emphasizing articles published in 2018–2019 (a few older or forthcoming, if they fill a gap). Given the required brevity and distinguished company of this special issue, this review will not offer redundant coverage of work by other authors already represented in the issue. Drawing on our lab's latest collaborations provides a framework: Status and power can reconcile competing models of social evaluation, by reframing them as distinct kinds of inequality. Defining inequality as uneven distribution in a society, two aspects emerge.

Status-keeping is well-studied as vertical inequality. In social cognitions about individuals and groups [1,2,3], the clearest consensus describes, first, a vertical dimension of status, competence, agency. Facets (subsets) of verticality include both capability and assertiveness [4]. In one model, perceived status predicts perceived competence [5]. In another, status-competence together make up agency [6]. Relative vertical position enables status-keeping or its alternative (status-seeking). Status-competence answers the question of whether individuals are able to act on their intentions.

The second dimension reflects those intentions, for good or ill. Most models identify the second dimension as warmth, communion, trustworthiness, sociability, morality. This dimension, usually orthogonal to the vertical first dimension, therefore seems statistically horizontal. What's more, we propose, this dimension also operates as horizontal because it implies degrees of reciprocity and power-sharing between peers. Full reciprocity is cooperative and supports horizontal equality among the like-minded at any shared level of status. Thinking of cooperation as equality emphasizes its mutual interdependence for shared goals—positively correlated outcomes anchor one end of the horizontal. Negatively correlated goals are its opposite; disputing resource control, zero-sum competition promotes inequality, winners and losers. Positive interdependence—having cooperative goals—predicts that the other will be warm, with friendly, trustworthy intentions; negative interdependence— having competitive goals—predicts that the other will be cold, unfriendly and untrustworthy, with self-serving intent.

Because interdependence controls outcomes, it entails mutual power over valued resources. Relative status is

conceptually separate. By this logic—and the to-be-reviewed evidence—interdependence and status can operate independently. Most lay people and many experts elide the distinction between power and status, so the argument needs defending ([7•,8•]; for differentiating status, celebrity, reputation, stigma in firms [9•]).

First, status generally connotes respect, deference, and prestige voluntarily conferred by others [10•]. Status can be ascribed (e.g. by gender, race, age), and status can be achieved (i.e. the holder may earn it), but either way, societal norms define the criteria. For example, in some places and times, being a well-known actress has been shameful; in others, it may bring celebrity and status. Status is intangible, though people often signal status, especially those holding high status. Though status divides have much impact, according to the evidence, status does not entail people's contingency on each other for specific outcomes, just indicating social comparison on rank [11•]. Status seems 'objective' to people, being determined by societal norms about achieved or ascribed characteristics. Given a goal to analyze groups in society, people prioritize gathering information about status [12•], perhaps because status seems objective, and judged status elicits agreement among perceivers [13•]. Conventional status is typically settled and not particularly dynamic. That is, groups' positions are slow to change, and relative status comes from stable social norms. Those being ranked know where they stand in the eyes of others. People can compete over status, but society decides who has gained and lost. People recognize and enact status (deference and privilege), but they do not control status because it is ascribed by society.

Turning to power: Granted, if asymmetric, power does tend to overlap with prestige [14•]. Power, in contrast to status, controls valued resources, so it necessarily involves the parties' contingency on each other, which can shift, so power is potentially more dynamic than status. Reciprocal, symmetrical power is mutual interdependence, the unconfounded case, separate from status. Holding relative power equally, positive interdependence is symmetrical, cooperative coordination with trusted (warm) others, who tend to be viewed as familiar and similar, the evidence will suggest. This configuration supports communion and equality among peers.

Negative interdependence is competition, which divides people and pushes toward inequality. In society, competitors see differences among groups. Competition can be tangible (jobs) or symbolic (values) [15•]. Either way, groups are viewed as unequal. On one extreme are our side (us) and our allies, viewed as having warm intent. At the other extreme, all those different people are not on our side; they have cold intent. Other people's cooperative or competitive intent matters, so perceivers prioritize warmth [3•,16••,17••], especially when intending to

interact face-to-face [12•]; warmth is more personal [13•]. Because warmth signals cooperative intent, power-sharing (or not), and people are motivated by control over their outcomes, this dimension matters to them.

The main argument follows.

Vertical (in)equality is relative status; horizontal (in)equality is (a)symmetric interdependence

Each section addresses one form of inequality, vertical and horizontal, at macro and micro levels, expressed in stereotypes. Vertical inequality concerns getting ahead (status, competence, agency); this is the conventional meaning of inequality. We propose considering another form: Horizontal inequality concerns getting along (cooperation, warmth, communion). That is, a horizontal dimension of power-sharing ranges from cooperative peers to competitive rivals. Cooperation entails positive interdependence with trusted, familiar others, tending toward equality. Competition is negative interdependence between mistrusted, perhaps unfamiliar others, each motivated toward their own advantage, so tending toward inequality.

Vertical (in)equality: status presumes competence, agency

Macro. Status difference has a rationale: meritocracy (deservingness) implies competence

At a societal level, status differences have a straightforward consensus explanation. When two groups differ in status, they also differ in presumed competence, so much that perceived status and competence correlate on average $r = 0.90$ across countries [18•], and status-competence collapses into a single dimension in multidimensional scaling [6••]. Social class stereotypes everywhere view the rich as more competent than the working class and the poor [19•]. The meritocratic idea—people deserve their status because of their intrinsic competence—supports inequality. But the rationale does not preclude resentment [20•]. Stereotypes of the working-class as incompetent provoke their resentment of disrespectful, patronizing, arrogant elites [21•]. The societal context determines these status norms: Former communist countries instead admire workers, perhaps as an ideological legacy [22•]. Another communist legacy in eight nations is cynicism that competence undergirds status [22•]. But these are the exceptions across 50 countries.

Meritocracy endorses a shared sense that people can work their way up (or laze their way down). Meritocracy also presumes agency (choice), so the low-status are to blame for their unfortunate disadvantage (e.g. the gender gap in wages results from 'choices'; [23•]). Abstract belief in mobility predicts a generalized tolerance of inequality. Personal belief in one's own mobility predicts personal

well-being [24•]. Both societal and personal mobility beliefs underlie the status—competence logic.

Micro. High status disrespects down to the 'incompetent'; low status respects upwards

At an interpersonal level, people enact the societal status-competence stereotypes. Experimentally assigned to higher status, individuals talk down to experimentally assigned lower-status partners by choosing less competent topics [25•]. Race imitates status, as many Whites show a competence downshift when talking to Black partners [26•]. Spontaneous race-status associations guide Whites' status-keeping preferences for own and others' jobs [27••].

The status-competence dimension creates tradeoffs with warmth

Both micro and macro status-competence inferences lead to a Compensation Effect, especially in comparative contexts: The Dimensional Compensation Model posits that comparative contexts award one group the competence/status advantage, but the other wins the presumed warmth [28•]. High-status groups may be competent, but then they are not nice [29•]. Individual impression managers know this, and downplay their competence to gain warmth that they stereotypically lack [25•,26•].

In the aggregate, compensation effects predict the distribution of groups in warmth-by-competence space. Such tradeoffs thus operate at the macro level, in that many societal groups have ambivalent stereotypes, high on one dimension and low on the other [2••]. Building on the meritocratic rationale that competence earns status, people should accept the system. But the high-status, competent groups need not be warm to justify the meritocracy. Handing warmth to the low-status groups affords a positive identity that may compensate for the incompetence stereotype. The successful may be competent, but cold.

Hence, ambivalence further undermines resentments by separating the deserving from the undeserving at both ends of the hierarchy. At the low-status end: The well-intentioned poor (e.g. elders, disabled) deserve warm pity [30•], but the undeserving poor (homeless, undocumented) deserve cold contempt, as if they were vermin [31•]. Likewise, at the high-status end, the well-off with good intentions (doctors, middle-class) deserve warm admiration, but the exploitative well-off deserve resentful envy (CEOs, lawyers). These contrasting images explain inequality by allowing few groups to have both competence and warmth. This paves the way for polarized politics [32•]. And the more unequal the society, the more it expresses ambivalent stereotypes, perhaps because they explain the disparities [21•].

Horizontal equality: gaining warmth, communion, trust, morality—or not

Some social evaluation models posit that the other dimension—warmth, communion, trust, morality—has more priority than the status-competence dimension that occasions this volume. The Dual Perspectives Model holds that people care about others' communion because it affects their joint interactions (and they care about their own agency, which affects their own goals); this influential model focuses on individual person perception [16••]. The ingroup-focused Behavioral Regulation Model argues that people care most about groups' morality, a component of communion/warmth [17••]. Experiments show that a member's immorality threatens ingroup identity more than potential incompetence does [33•]. The Stereotype Content Model (SCM) likewise posits that warmth has priority, but has never tested it [2••].

Macro. Horizontal equality gathers the cooperative ingroup; Horizontal inequality is competitive friction among the distrusted and dissimilar

The horizontal (in)equality dimension reflects positive and negative interdependence (power-sharing or not). This warmth/communion/trust/morality dimension essentially runs from cooperative people-like-us, all equally ingroup peers, to competitive, fractionated not-our-kind rivals. In this sense, the cooperative-peers end tends toward horizontal, power-sharing equality, and the competitive-rivals end tends toward horizontal power-contesting inequality.

Defining diversity as a context comprising groups who seem to differ from each other (e.g. on religion, ethnicity, nationality, skills), diversity has some obvious and not-so-obvious roles in inequality. Going back to vertical status for a moment, diversity threatens majority groups, who fear losing rank in an unequal system, but positive contact can reassure them [34•].

In horizontal inequality, at one end, diversity affords competitive friction among those distrusted and dissimilar. In early stages of desegregation, diversity can create friction in a formerly homogeneous setting, as familiarity and similarity break down. The diverse context may seem like negative interdependence, a zero-sum rivalry tending toward inequality. But over a decade or so, majorities adjust to the diversity [35••].

From a cognitive process perspective, at first, diversity is coded as many stereotyped outgroups and a few ingroups that all appear to differ and compete. In the SCM warmth-by-competence space, the novel groups show dispersion [36•]. Indeed, places and people with the least experience of diversity distinguish among outgroups the most; the mostly White states of Wyoming and Vermont illustrate, showing complex maps of groups they never encounter in person. (Similarly, US prejudice

against Latinx immigrants is higher, the farther from the Southern border is the respondent. And in the UK, Brexit votes were highest in places with the least exposure to immigrants.)

With exposure to diversity, however, the cognitive map changes. Outgroups gravitate to a single ingroup cluster, so exposure to diversity reduces dispersion over time. Here, New York and Hawaii illustrate established multi-cultural diversity that gathers the ingroup [36•]. The same effects replicate in nations with more and less religious diversity and in colleges with more and less racial diversity. Diversity can form a positive interdependent identity: 'nation of immigrants,' 'neighborhood United Nations', and 'multi-cultural school' are examples.

Viewing a rich variety of groups as all 'us' ('We're all New Yorkers') could happen under other circumstances besides mere exposure over time. For example, homogeneous, peaceful, equal nations assimilate (almost) all groups to their citizens' shared social safety net; Switzerland and the Scandinavian countries illustrate [18•], probably as a legacy of government policy and shared values. But extreme conflict (being at war) also causes a nation to assimilate eligible groups (rally around-the-flag), creating equality under duress; middle-eastern countries illustrate.

These cases suggest three ways to create macro-equality: prolonged exposure to diversity; equality and peace; extreme threat from outside. Between these extreme cases are the more common case of intermediate inequality, moderate peace-conflict, and diversity at a distance; the U.S., Mexico, Germany, and England illustrate, with typical, dispersed SCM maps.

Micro. Horizontal equality is symmetric interdependence of the warm, similar, and familiar
The macro cases of equality—societal assimilation (one ingroup clump)—have certain parallels at the micro, interpersonal level. Consider here: prolonged exposure to diversity, and more active intergroup contact, which both encourage equality and peace.

Passive exposure to diversity consists of an ongoing, integrated environment. Exposure increases perceived familiarity and similarity of others in that diverse setting. The mechanisms seem reliable. For interpersonal encounters, familiarity and similarity are well-established, basic principles of affiliation. Indeed, they are so established that no new studies explore them anymore, except in social media [38•] or in social robots [39•]. Familiarity and similarity are related. Familiar others come to seem more similar to self, and people typically like themselves. So even passive mere exposure increases attraction by increasing familiarity. Scaling up from individuals to

groups, prolonged exposure to diverse individuals can build an attractive ingroup identity, a larger 'us.'

Active exposure to diversity is intergroup contact, which generally increases liking [37••], which is close to warmth. Thus, intergroup contact reflects the cooperative, warm, equality-oriented end of the horizontal dimension. Intergroup contact parallels the macro environment of equality and peace, leading to a superordinate ingroup. However, the contact hypothesis needs more research that fills gaps in the database [40•].

One classic ingredient for intergroup contact to create warmth, similarity, and familiarity is interdependence, cooperation for a shared goal. This is power-sharing. Perceivers' attention then focuses on individuating information and engages deeper impression formation processes [41•]. This also goes beyond categories.

Conclusions: inequality, vertical and horizontal
Vertical inequality differentiates individuals and groups by status; this robust dimension confers competence but not warmth. Orthogonally, horizontal (in)equality, we propose, reflects at one end the cooperative, familiar, similar others, interdependent peers, gathered into one ingroup; this end encourages power-sharing equality. At the far end are friction, competition among dissimilar groups; negative interdependence (a zero-sum outcome) encourages inequality among rivals. Power is not shared. The aversive dependence creates distance that reinforces inequality at the competitive end [42•]. Our takeaway: Power-sharing is a key mechanism for bringing others closer, and we know how to do it.

Authors' note

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Nothing declared.

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