

TO DISCLOSE OR NOT TO DISCLOSE? STATUS DISTANCE AND SELF-DISCLOSURE IN DIVERSE ENVIRONMENTS

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People who are demographically different from one another face a fundamental challenge in developing high-quality relationships in organizations. We build theory about how the status differences that often accompany demographic characteristics can hinder this development through their influence on disclosure of personal information. We theorize about the construct of status distance and how, ironically, disclosure of personal information may increase status distance instead of bringing individuals closer together. Beyond status distance, we also discuss how status characteristics and identification with one's characteristics influence disclosure of status-relevant information.

Getting to know you, getting to know all about you.
Getting to like you, getting to hope you like me.
(Oscar Hammerstein II, *The King and I*)

Disclosure of personal information that allows individuals to get to know one another better (Allport, 1954; Collins & Miller, 1994; Ensari & Miller, 2002; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Polzer, Milton, & Swann, 2002) is a commonly proposed solution for the fundamental challenge of forming high-quality relationships in demographically diverse environments (e.g., Brickson & Brewer, 2001; Mannix & Neale, 2005; O'Reilly, Caldwell, & Barnett, 1989; Riordan & Shore, 1997; Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). High-quality relationships in the workplace are important because they are associated with trust, respect, and a willingness to share information, resources, and perspectives (e.g., Blatt & Camden, 2006; Brass, 1984; Gabarro, 1987; Heimer, 1992; Hodson, 2001; Krackhardt,

1992; Labianca, Brass, & Gray, 1998; Lincoln & Miller, 1979; Ragins & Dutton, 2006; Simons & Peterson, 2000), as well as performance (Gruenfeld, Mannix, Williams, & Neale, 1996; Jehn & Shah, 1997). Yet it is not clear that disclosure of personal information will lead to high-quality relationships in diverse environments where status differences abound.

We propose that the status associated with demographic characteristics such as race and gender (e.g., Cancio, Evans, & Maume, 1996; Cianni & Romberger, 1995; Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1993; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990; Ridgeway, 1987; Roberson & Block, 2001) complicates the decision to disclose personal information and influences whether and what type of information individuals choose to disclose to demographically dissimilar others. Moreover, understanding the dynamics of status and disclosure is a critical first step for discovering solutions that truly address the challenges of developing high-quality relationships in diverse environments. Our approach is consistent with a recent call by diversity researchers for more robust theorizing that includes status (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Vashdi, 2005; Chatman & O'Reilly, 2004; Chattopadhyay, 1999; Chattopadhyay, Tluchowska, & George, 2004), and it is consistent with

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research on homophily that suggests status is an important determinant of the development and quality of relationships (Blau, 1977; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987).

Prior research has established that both status distance (i.e., the degree of status difference between individuals; Blau, 1977; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987) and disclosure (Collins & Miller, 1994; Cozby, 1972, 1973; Jourard, 1959; Wortman, Adesman, & Herman, 1976) are associated with the quality of relationships; thus, we do not formally propose these direct effects here. However, the existing literature on disclosure currently offers very little insight about how status influences the dynamics of disclosure. Even the limited research examining disclosure between demographically dissimilar individuals (e.g., Ensari & Miller, 2002) has not considered status. Therefore, we contribute by unpacking the dynamics between status and disclosure that have not yet been fully explicated. Specifically, we contribute to the diversity literature and the disclosure literature by introducing a status-conscious approach that further develops the concept of status distance (Blau, 1977; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). We use status distance to help explain, first, why individuals in diverse environments often have difficulty disclosing personal information and, second, how the type of disclosure that does occur affects subsequent status distance. Thus, we focus on the relationship between status and the choice to disclose personal information strategically in demographically diverse environments.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON SELF-DISCLOSURE AT WORK

Disclosure is a fundamental mechanism by which people manage their relationships with others in the workplace, and it is central in our theorizing (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Omarzu, 2000). In several related research areas, such as research on impression management (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992; Wayne & Ferris, 1990; Wayne, Liden, Graf, & Ferris, 1997) and image construction (Roberts, 2005), scholars have argued that people disclose positive information about themselves strategically to enhance their professional image in the eyes of others. These research areas emphasize that people are motivated to perform such impres-

sion management and image construction to promote their ability to perform in a professional capacity. Although our arguments are related to impression management and image construction, which have self-promotion at their core (Roberts, 2005; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992), we focus on a different motive for selective disclosure of personal information—the desire to reduce status distance, which is an obstacle for developing higher-quality relationships (Blau, 1977; Kalmijn, 1991; Lincoln & Miller, 1979; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987; Wuthnow, 2003). Further, we differ by focusing primarily on non-task-related yet status-relevant personal information that might affect perceptions of status distance and relationships at work.

Disclosing Personal Information

Disclosure of personal information has long been studied in psychology, where researchers have determined that such disclosure may be an important means by which relationships are built and maintained. Several classic studies of self-disclosure (e.g., Jourard, 1959; Jourard & Lasakow, 1958; Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969) show that people feel closer to those who disclose personal information to them (e.g., values and beliefs, leisure activities, and personal concerns and fears, as well as likes and dislikes; Cozby, 1972; Ensari & Miller, 2002). Moreover, there is a strong empirical relationship between self-disclosure and liking (Cozby, 1973; see Collins & Miller, 1994, for a review and meta-analysis). This relationship is driven both by the fact that self-disclosure leads others to like us more and by the fact that we disclose more to people we like (Collins & Miller, 1994). Moreover, the self-disclosure literature shows that greater disclosure of more intimate information (e.g., deeply held values and beliefs) has a stronger effect on interpersonal relationships than greater disclosure of more generic, less intimate information (e.g., where one vacations; Collins & Miller, 1994; Levesque, Steciuk, & Ledley, 2002). In recent research scholars have used disclosure as a way to induce close relationships experimentally in the lab (Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliott, 1998).

Although the disclosure of personal information may be an important way to achieve higher-quality relationships, such disclosure may be more complicated in diverse settings than it is

in more homogeneous ones. In demographically diverse settings (in comparison to homogeneous ones), individuals face a myriad of relational challenges, including less interpersonal communication (Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, & Neale, 1997; Hoffman, 1985; Ibarra, 1992, 1995; Katz, Goldston, & Benjamin, 1958; Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998), greater interpersonal tension (e.g., Alagna, Reddy, & Collins, 1982; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999), and lower social integration and cohesion (Good & Nelson, 1971; Holahan, 1979; Kirchmeyer, 1995; Tsui et al., 1992). These challenges typically have been interpreted as stemming from social withdrawal or a lack of attraction to others (for reviews see Mannix & Neale, 2005; Milliken & Martins, 1996; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). However, we posit that attempts to manage status distance may explain disclosure decisions and provide an additional interpretation of the relational challenges faced by individuals in diverse settings. We next draw on recent research on boundary theory and classic work on stigma to shed light on the question of why some individuals might choose to withhold rather than disclose personal information in diverse organizational settings.

Withholding Personal Information

Recent research on boundary theory (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Kossek, Noe, & DeMarr, 1999; Nippert-Eng, 1995) provides an important theoretical perspective for understanding the dynamics of self-disclosure in the workplace. This research suggests that not all employees see the benefits of disclosing personal information in work settings (Ashforth et al., 2000; Kossek et al., 1999; Nippert-Eng, 1995; Rau & Hyland, 2002; Rothbard, 2001; Rothbard, Phillips, & Dumas, 2005). For example, Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2006) found that Episcopal priests engaged in extensive boundary work to keep personal information from compromising their professional role. One priest, who collected comic books, went to great lengths to hide this interest from his parishioners, whereas another priest relished participating in a soccer league in an adjoining town where no one knew him. Kreiner et al. (2006) explain that one of the reasons that people fail to disclose personal information at work is to prevent such information from ruining

others' perceptions of their competence or suitability for their professional role.

When applied to demographically diverse settings, research on boundary theory helps us understand that an individual's choice to conceal personal information might reflect a strategic attempt to manage the transfer of personal information across the boundary between work and nonwork roles (Ashforth et al., 2000; Rothbard et al., 2005). Importantly, this choice is not about presenting a false image; rather, it is simply choosing to enact different aspects of one's true self in separate domains (cf. Hewlin, 2003, 2009). Thus, choosing to conceal personal information means that the individual presents a more limited version of the self, but one that is still authentic in a given context.

Relatedly, concealing personal information that could highlight one's demographic characteristics (e.g., race or gender), or that could invoke negative stereotypes associated with those characteristics, would be a good example of what Goffman (1963) calls "covering" in his classic work on stigma. Covering by concealing such personal information may diminish the salience of visible characteristics, such as race or gender, whereas revealing such information may increase the salience of those characteristics. Although we focus on visible characteristics, related research has also argued that people conceal personal information, such as sexual orientation or mixed-race marriages, to avoid stigmatization and discrimination (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007).¹ Goffman's model primarily focuses on low-status individuals with stigmatized characteristics (such as being black, being a woman, being obese, or being visibly disabled). We build on these ideas; however, we suggest that both high- and low-status individuals may be motivated to manage the disclosure of status-relevant personal information. In sum, we posit that in demographically diverse settings this strategic boundary management and covering behavior may be part of an effort to manage the perceptions of status distance between oneself and demographically dissimilar others.

¹ Once a less visible characteristic such as sexual orientation becomes known to others and is used as a means of categorizing individuals, the processes that we describe in our framework may become more applicable.

STATUS AND STATUS DISTANCE

Status is important to consider in work settings because people who share the same level of status encounter fewer barriers to communication and interaction and, thus, should have higher-quality relationships on average (Blau, 1977; Byrne, 1971; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). Status is an element of social structure that ranks groups according to their social position, prestige, or worth and serves as a signal of whether an individual deserves to be treated with greater respect, deference, or honor (Bourdieu, 1985; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2008; Fiske, 1993; Ridgeway, 1991; Weber, 1978). Status powerfully shapes interpersonal interactions (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; Ridgeway & Walker, 1995). For example, it affects participation rates during discussions, the evaluation of one's comments, and the degree of influence one has over group decisions (Meeker & Weitzel-O'Neil, 1985; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986; Ridgeway, Berger, & Smith, 1985; Ridgeway & Diekema, 1989).

Sociologists have categorized status into two primary types: ascribed status and achieved status (Merton, 1968; Parsons, 1951). Ascribed status reflects one's social position that is determined by demographic characteristics that are established at birth, such as gender, race, country of origin, and/or ethnicity (Johnson, 1995). These are the same demographic characteristics that diversity researchers have often found to be barriers to building high-quality relationships in the workplace (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). In contrast, achieved status derives from attainments, such as one's education or occupation.

Status Distance

Status distance as a concept has been discussed by researchers such as Blau (1977) and McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1987) and captures the level of difference between individuals with respect to the status they hold. Two individuals who are exactly the same in status have zero status distance. Thus, status distance is an interpersonal dyadic construct that is determined by the perceived differences in status between a focal person and another individual (Blau, 1977; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). Status distance has a significant effect on the formation and

quality of relationships (Blau, 1977; Kalmijn, 1991; Lincoln & Miller, 1979; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987; Wuthnow, 2003). For example, within work organizations Lincoln and Miller (1979) found that informal relationships were more likely to develop among coworkers of similar status. Likewise, in voluntary organizations McPherson and Smith-Lovin (1987) found that people were also more likely to form relationships with those who were more similar in status to them (i.e., dyads that were lower in status distance).

Status distance as a construct has heretofore been relatively ignored by diversity researchers and is an omitted variable that may help explain some of the behaviors we see in demographically diverse environments. Status distance is different from diversity. When comparing two dyads composed of demographically dissimilar individuals, there may be an equal level of diversity within the dyads, but the status distance may be different. For example, in a diverse dyad with a white and an Asian, the status distance based on ascribed status is likely to be lower than the status distance found in an equally diverse dyad with a white and a black. This is because there is a societally endorsed status hierarchy of racial groups in American society, with whites and Asians (although different from each other) having relatively higher status than Hispanics and blacks (Fong, 1998; Ho & Jackson, 2001; Lee, 1996; Leslie, 2008; Maddux, Galinsky, Cuddy, & Polifroni, 2008; Ridgeway, 1991; Tuan, 1998).

Not only is status distance affected by the societally endorsed status hierarchy associated with demographic categories, but it is also influenced by the value that the local context places on the attributes associated with the category (Berger et al., 1972; Berger, Conner, & Fisek, 1974; Ridgeway, 1991). Perceptions of status are influenced, in part, by competence expectations regarding whether a person can contribute to valued goals in a particular context (Cuddy et al., 2008; Ridgeway, 1991). Therefore, in any local context the status distance found in a demographically diverse dyad can be affected by the historical and current numerical representation of different categories (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987), as well as the stereotypes associated with the categories themselves (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007, 2008; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). For example, the status dis-

tance based on ascribed status between a man and a woman may be different across contexts. In the context of nursing, where female qualities like nurturing are highly valued, the status distance between a man and woman may be lower than it is in the banking industry, where male qualities like competitiveness are valued more than female qualities.

Despite these complexities and the impact of context, ascribed status is considered to exert an important influence on people's expectations of an individual's overall status (Hollingshead & Fraidin, 2003; Johnson, 1995; Pugh & Wahrman, 1983; Ridgeway, 1982) because it is so deeply institutionalized and embedded within a rich history of status distinctions that lead to systematic discrimination and undesirable outcomes for some groups—for instance, African Americans and women within the United States (e.g., Cancio et al., 1996; Ridgeway, 1987; Roberson & Block, 2001). Indeed, societal expectations provide a cognitive frame through which people interpret characteristics and behaviors of others (Berger et al., 1974; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Because ascribed status characteristics are so salient in demographically diverse environments, they are important determinants of overall perceived status, which drives the initial status distance (i.e., perceived status distance on first encounter) between two individuals.

Given our discussion of status and status distance, a natural question that arises is whether status is solely determined by one's ascribed characteristics. Although we believe that ascribed status will have an important influence on perceptions of overall status and status distance in demographically diverse settings, achieved status may also have an effect (Adams, 1953; Brandon, 1965; Lenski, 1956). Achieved status, which is associated with such characteristics as educational attainment and occupation, is a reflection of the respect and deference one might be able to achieve. In the context of the workplace, when achieved status characteristics become salient, they act as status markers that may help determine an individual's initial status and influence the status distance between that individual and another.

Moreover, we propose that in addition to the additive influence of ascribed and achieved status characteristics on overall perceptions of status and status distance, there will also be an interaction between ascribed and achieved sta-

tus. Specifically, consistent with recent research on status characteristics theory, we propose that ascribed status will provide a backdrop against which one's achieved status will be interpreted (Simpson & Walker, 2002). Indeed, researchers have shown that an individual's ascribed status can frame the way that other characteristics are perceived and may have a dominant effect in determining overall perceptions of status, even when the individual has high achieved status (Phinney, 1996; Ridgeway, 1993; Simpson & Walker, 2002). Thus, an individual's ability to garner status through achievement may be limited by the ascribed status characteristics (i.e., gender, race) that he or she possesses (Hollingshead & Fraidin, 2003; Johnson, 1995; Pugh & Wahrman, 1983; Ridgeway, 1982). Furthermore, a growing body of empirical research suggests that even when individuals are aware of one's achieved characteristics (e.g., rank, education level), they still overutilize ascribed characteristics (e.g., gender, race) to determine status (e.g., Hollingshead & Fraidin, 2003; Phinney, 1996; Pugh & Wahrman, 1983; Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008). Therefore, we propose the following.

Proposition 1: Ascribed and achieved status will each influence overall perceptions of status and, thus, initial status distance between demographically dissimilar individuals. Moreover, ascribed and achieved status will interact with one another to affect perceptions of overall status and initial status distance between demographically dissimilar individuals.

Status Distance and Disclosure

Initial status distance plays an important role in whether individuals disclose personal information. People have a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and because status differences affect relationships and shape perceptions of who "belongs" in any given setting, people's concerns over initial status distance may at least partially explain decisions to reveal or conceal personal information. More specifically, two coworkers who are peers but of different race may like each other interpersonally and share work-related stories and anecdotes in an effort to bond, but they may still fail to disclose personal information out of

fear that it will be misinterpreted and negatively impact their relationship. For example, employees may refrain from sharing information about their family origins, leisure activities, hobbies, and nonwork affiliations because of uncertainty as to how this information will be interpreted by a status-dissimilar other. In such a situation an individual's failure to disclose personal information may actually represent an attempt to preserve working relationships by concealing information that could potentially impact those relationships in a detrimental manner.

Individuals may be more hesitant to disclose personal information about themselves to dissimilar others because they fear that others simply will not understand (Hewlett, Luce, & West, 2005) or because asymmetric status relationships often undermine a sense of trustworthiness (Sheppard & Sherman, 1998). Indeed, disclosure of personal information requires trust that others will use one's information benevo-

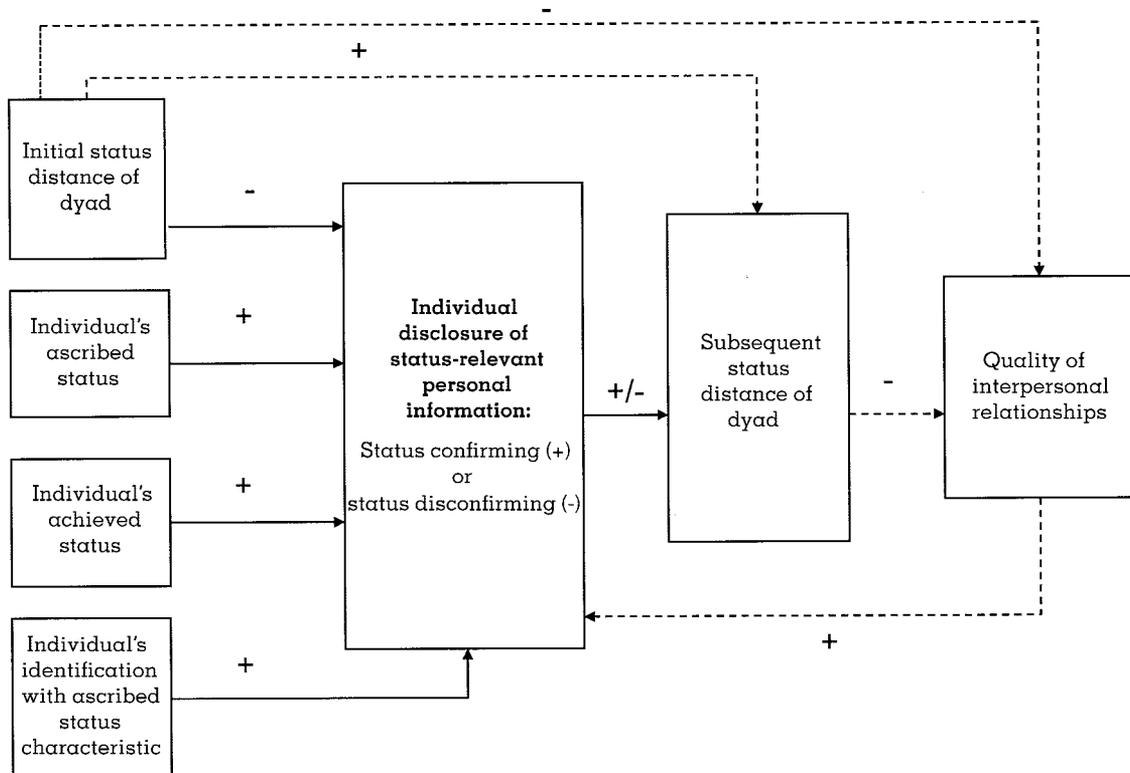
lently and with integrity (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007; Sheppard & Sherman, 1998; Williams, 2001, 2007). In sum, when initial status distance is greater, individuals may feel less comfortable sharing status-relevant personal information given the important assumption discussed above that individuals want to reduce status distance. Thus, we offer the following (as Figure 1 illustrates).

Proposition 2: Initial status distance will be negatively associated with disclosure of status-relevant personal information.

TYPE OF STATUS-RELEVANT PERSONAL INFORMATION DISCLOSED AND SUBSEQUENT STATUS DISTANCE

Overall, Proposition 2 suggests that individuals initially choose to disclose less status-

FIGURE 1
Status and Disclosure in Asymmetric Status Dyads from the Perspective of the Focal Individual^a



^aFor simplicity we have included status-confirming information and status-disconfirming information in one box in the figure. The propositions represent the more nuanced relationships among these constructs. The dotted lines indicate that past research has examined the depicted relationships and that although they are an important part of our model, we do not include a separate formal proposition about them in the paper.

relevant personal information to people of different status from themselves. However, this can be problematic in organizational settings, because individuals who fail to self-disclose may be perceived as aloof or antisocial by others in the organization (Chrobot-Mason, Button, & DiClementi, 2001). This situation creates a double bind that is seemingly impossible to overcome. Individuals are less likely to disclose personal information, but lack of disclosure is not necessarily helpful for decreasing subsequent status distance and proactively developing higher-quality relationships with those of different status in the workplace. We propose that, recognizing this, individuals may strategically choose the type of personal information that they share with others of different status (an asymmetric status relationship) in order to manage subsequent status distance and, ultimately, to improve relationships (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Derlega et al., 1993; Omarzu, 2000).

It is important to recognize that status distance is a dynamic construct. Perceptions of initial status distance on first encounter may be changed through the type of personal information that one subsequently chooses to disclose. Thus, the type of information disclosed may determine subsequent perceptions of status distance. An individual who seeks to manage the status distance between him or herself and a demographically dissimilar individual might conceal or reveal information that either confirms or disconfirms initial status expectations. Status-confirming information is information that is consistent with initial status expectations and stereotypes, and it may reinforce these existing status hierarchies and stereotypes (both positive and negative). Status-disconfirming information is information that is contrary to initial status expectations and stereotypes and will counter such existing status hierarchies and stereotypes.

Implicit in our logic of the mechanism by which status-confirming and status-disconfirming information may influence the perceived status distance between individuals is the notion of stereotypes. Individuals can invoke stereotypes by disclosing information that is consistent with the stereotypes. Conversely, individuals can suppress the application of the stereotypes in a particular situation using information that is inconsistent with the stereotypes (Blair & Banaji, 1986). Indeed, research suggests

that individuating information can cause people to rely less on their heuristic stereotypes (Heilman, 1984). Ultimately, when disconfirming information is shared, individuals may not necessarily discard their stereotypes about a particular demographic group; instead, they may see the person with whom they are interacting as an exception to those stereotypes (Blair & Banaji, 1986; Sinclair & Kunda, 1999). Therefore, we argue that perceived status distance in a particular dyad may be influenced through disclosure choices that highlight the salience of an ascribed characteristic and its associated status, or the stereotypes associated with that characteristic.

In our framework the type of information disclosed—and whether it reinforces or counters stereotypes—has an important effect on the relative status between individuals. Although the content of specific stereotypes may also have an independent influence on the quality of interpersonal relationships (e.g., Correll, Park, Judd, & Wittenbrink, 2002), our focus here is on status and status distance and how stereotypes might influence perceptions of these constructs.² Specifically, we focus on the generalized status distance between demographic categories and how the perceptions of that status distance can be changed through the disclosure of status-relevant information, which is often related to stereotypes.

Disclosure of Status-Confirming Information

Concealing status-confirming information from an individual who is of different status

² It is important to note that status and stereotypes, while related, are distinct constructs (Cuddy et al., 2008; DiTomaso, Post, & Parks-Yancy, 2007; Mendoza-Denton, Downey, Purdie, Davis, & Pietrzak, 2002; Ridgeway, 1991). Cuddy et al. (2008) explain that a given group's perceived status in society is not solely determined by stereotypes. Indeed, the stereotype content model establishes that despite the variety of specific attributes that may be included in a given stereotype, each demographic category carries with it a general level of status relative to other categories (Fiske et al., 2002). For example, despite the different attributes that make up the Asian stereotype, some of which are positive and some of which are negative, the category of Asian is generally considered to be higher status relative to the category of African American or Latino (Maddux et al., 2008). Thus, ascribed status associated with a demographic category reflects broader societal views of that category and perceptions of its position in the hierarchy.

than the focal individual might prevent status distance from increasing (see Figure 2). Individuals may be motivated to conceal status-confirming information as a means of managing the status distance between themselves and others. For example, a woman may refrain from discussing her children with a male colleague or from displaying their pictures in a gender-diverse setting, fearing that this information might make her low ascribed status characteristics more salient and, thus, might subsequently decrease her status in the eyes of others (e.g., Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Indeed, research on the motherhood penalty suggests that whenever a woman reveals personal information about being a mother of dependent children (e.g., becoming visibly pregnant, leaving a meeting to pick up children, calling in sick to take care of a sick child), it will have status and competence implications, because she will be seen as a primary caretaker whose motherhood might influence her work performance and commitment negatively (e.g., Crittenden, 2001; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Concealing overt references to motherhood might be a strategic way for a woman to cover or minimize the salience of her ascribed characteristic, thus preserving her status in a diverse setting.

Importantly, concealing status-confirming information is a strategy that may be employed by both low- and high-status individuals. Research on the tall poppy syndrome suggests that people downplay their accomplishments and privileges in order to avoid inspiring envy and jealousy in others (Feather, 1989, 1991; Mouly & Sankaran, 2002). Moreover, research on social dominance orientation shows that not all high-status people are concerned with maintaining the status hierarchy (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle,

1994), and, thus, some high-status individuals may be motivated to reduce the status distance between themselves and others. For example, a white man might conceal status-confirming personal information, such as his weekend golf outings, which could serve to reinforce stereotypes about the "old boy's network" and to further increase the status distance between him and his female or minority coworkers.

Conversely, revealing status-confirming information to an individual who is of different status than the focal individual may increase status distance (see Figure 2). Such status-confirming information may reinforce and make status characteristics more salient. There is evidence that high-status individuals treat low-status individuals differently when their low status is made salient (e.g., Chattopadhyay, 1999; Konrad, Winter, & Gutek, 1992), which is why people are often motivated to downplay their ascribed status characteristics. Indeed, the low-status individuals in Steele and Aronson's (1995) study—African American college students—feared that revealing status-confirming information (i.e., that they liked rap music and basketball) would confirm negative stereotypes and the low status associated with their ascribed status characteristic.

When individuals with low ascribed status characteristics disclose personal information, they run the risk of highlighting their membership in a low-status group, which has the dual effect of increasing status distance and lowering their own status in the setting. Likewise, when individuals with high ascribed status characteristics disclose status-confirming personal information to others of dissimilar ascribed status, they may also increase status distance because this highlights membership in a high-status group. In contrast to low-status indi-

FIGURE 2
Managing Status Distance in Asymmetric Status Interactions

		Type of status-relevant information	
		Confirming information	Disconfirming information
Decision to disclose	Conceal	Prevent perceived status distance from increasing	Prevent perceived status distance from decreasing
	Reveal	Increase perceived status distance	Decrease perceived status distance

viduals, however, when high-status individuals reveal such status-confirming information, they may enhance their own status further (Huberman, Loch, & Onculer, 2004). Thus, although high-status individuals may wish to reveal status-confirming information in an effort to further increase their status, when they are motivated to reduce status distance and develop high-quality relationships with others, they will be more likely to conceal status-confirming information. Concealing such status-confirming information is one way to manage status distance in a diverse setting and to keep subsequent status distance from increasing.

Thus, overall, we expect that disclosure of status-confirming information will increase subsequent status distance between individuals of differing status. Further, given the assumption that individuals want to reduce status distance, we expect that people will be motivated to conceal such status-confirming information strategically.

Proposition 3a: Revealing status-confirming information may increase subsequent status distance between individuals of differing status, whereas concealing such information may prevent subsequent status distance from increasing.

Proposition 3b: A focal individual will be more likely to conceal rather than reveal status-confirming information in order to prevent subsequent status distance from increasing between him or herself and a person of differing status.

Disclosure of Status-Disconfirming Information

Concealing status-disconfirming information from an individual who is of different status than the focal individual might prevent status distance from decreasing (Figure 2). Indeed, concealing disconfirming information may have consequences for subsequent status distance because it perpetuates a lack of individuating information that disconfirming information may provide. In the absence of individuating information, people are more likely to rely on stereotypes about a person's ascribed characteristics (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Heilman, 1984). In sum, individuals who conceal status-disconfirming

information from dissimilar others maintain the initial status distance between themselves and others.

Conversely, revealing status-disconfirming information to an individual who is of different status than the focal individual might decrease status distance. For example, a woman who reveals to her male colleague that she plays flag football, a male-dominated sport, is revealing information that disconfirms her female status characteristic. Such disconfirming information could challenge her colleague's stereotypes about women and individuate her, thus decreasing the status distance between herself and her male coworker. A vivid example of how the disclosure of status-disconfirming personal information can decrease status distance comes from the memoir of Jill Nelson, the first African American woman hired as a writer for the *Washington Post Magazine*. She describes her job interview with Ben Bradlee, the editor of the magazine, recounting the change in his demeanor when she revealed that her parents had a home on Martha's Vineyard:

The bond of the Vineyard makes me safe, a person like him. . . . Our eyes meet, our chuckle ends, and I know I'm over. The job is mine. Simply by evoking residence on Martha's Vineyard, I have separated wheat from chaff, belongs from aspirers, rebellious chip-on-the-shoulder Negroes from middle-class, responsible ones. . . . Gone are the fears he might have had about my fitting in after a life as a freelance writer, an advocacy journalist, a free black. By dint of summers spent on Martha's Vineyard, I am, in his eyes, safe. I may be the darker sister, but I'm still a sister. I will fit into the Washington Post family (Nelson, 1993: 6-7).

Shared or elite educational background, participation in high-culture activities (e.g., symphony, opera, theater, book clubs, golf), or participation in other activities that are typically associated with high-status others may be the types of status-disconfirming information that low-status individuals might reveal to help reduce status distance between themselves and high-status individuals. Likewise, high-status individuals may reveal disconfirming information. For example, a high-status white male, in an attempt to bridge the status distance between himself and a minority colleague, might

reveal that he grew up in a lower socioeconomic class family.³

It is important to acknowledge that individuals may be cautious about revealing status-disconfirming information because it constitutes an expectancy violation (Burgoon, 1993) that may threaten the status hierarchy, and there is a danger of a backlash when people behave in unexpected ways or have unexpected status (Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999). However, when individuals are motivated to reduce status distance and develop high-quality relationships with others, they will be more likely to reveal status-disconfirming information. Therefore, overall, we expect that disclosure of status-disconfirming information will decrease status distance between individuals of differing status. Moreover, given the assumption that individuals want to reduce status distance, we expect that people will be motivated to reveal such status-disconfirming information strategically.

Proposition 4a: Revealing status-disconfirming information may decrease subsequent status distance between individuals of differing status, whereas concealing such information may prevent subsequent status distance from decreasing.

Proposition 4b: A focal individual will be more likely to reveal rather than conceal status-disconfirming information in order to decrease subsequent status distance between him or herself and a person of differing status.

Summary

Taken together, Propositions 3a and 4a suggest that the type of personal information dis-

closed—either status confirming or disconfirming—may influence subsequent status distance (see Figure 1). Moreover, Propositions 3b and 4b suggest that individuals will be motivated to reduce the status distance between themselves and others in demographically diverse settings by concealing status-confirming information and by revealing status-disconfirming information strategically.

BEYOND STATUS DISTANCE: ADDITIONAL FACTORS BEHIND DISCLOSURE OF STATUS-CONFIRMING INFORMATION

Initial status distance plays an important role in influencing the type of information people are willing to disclose, in that people are generally motivated to conceal status-confirming information in order to reduce subsequent status distance. However, there are some factors that may promote the disclosure of status-confirming information, despite the fact that it may increase subsequent status distance. First, as we mentioned above, there may be differences between individuals who have high versus low ascribed status regarding how willing they are to disclose status-confirming information. Second, the relative importance of ascribed status to one's identity might influence disclosure of such information. Third, the level of security that individuals feel based on their overall achieved status may influence their disclosure of status-confirming information. We discuss each of these factors below.

Asymmetries in Disclosure Due to Ascribed Status

Although the motivation to reduce status distance may apply to individuals with both low and high ascribed status, it may be more powerful for low-status than for high-status individuals. Individuals with low ascribed status characteristics generally have more negative experiences in diverse settings than do those with high ascribed status characteristics (e.g., Chatman & O'Reilly, 2004; Chattopadhyay, 1999; Chattopadhyay et al., 2004; Cox, 1993; Cox & Blake, 1991; Ibarra, 1992, 1995; Konrad & Gutek, 1987; Mehra et al., 1998; O'Farrell & Harlan, 1982; Ridgeway, 1982; Riordan & Shore, 1997; Schreiber, 1979). Thus, for individuals with low ascribed status characteristics, minimizing or pre-

³ In all of these examples, the revealed personal information not only will reduce status distance but also may increase the perception of similarity between individuals. Although an increase in perceived similarity may play a role in the process of reducing status distance, we believe that the status-disconfirming information revealed can still reduce status distance even when it does not directly increase similarity with the other. For example, if the *Washington Post* editor had never spent time at the Vineyard himself, the information would still have reduced the status distance between himself and Jill Nelson because the information enhances her status in general and potentially increases feelings of trust and familiarity.

venting an increase in status distance may be a powerful motivator because these individuals often expect social rejection from those with high-status characteristics (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002; Pinel, 1999; Shelton & Richeson, 2005). As a result of these fears, individuals with low ascribed status might feel more constrained and more unwilling to reveal status-confirming information to dissimilar others than would someone with high ascribed status.

Moreover, individuals with low ascribed status may feel less secure in their position than those with high ascribed status. As a result, they may not trust that the personal information they disclose will be used positively to promote their position in the organization. A recent study suggests that many women and nonwhites choose to conceal their personal lives at work (Hewlett et al., 2005). In addition to the above motives, the rationale for concealing such personal information may stem from a desire to avoid the frustration and disappointment that occur when one discloses personal experiences that are not understood by others. For example, a participant in the Hewlett et al. study explained, "When I do try to open up personally, people just don't get it . . . so you stop trying" (2005: 78).

In contrast, individuals with high ascribed status may be more motivated to reveal status-confirming information than those with low ascribed status. As mentioned in the prior section on disclosure of confirming information, when individuals with high ascribed status characteristics disclose status-confirming personal information to others of dissimilar ascribed status, they may further enhance their own status (Huberman et al., 2004). People might strive to enhance their own status because it provides resources to them (see Lin, 1999, for a review). Moreover, individuals with high ascribed status may feel more secure and less concerned about the implications of sharing status-confirming information because they are generally perceived to be more competent (e.g., Cuddy et al., 2007, 2008; Fiske et al., 2002; Ridgeway, 1991). For example, Sheldon, Thomas-Hunt, and Proell (2006) found that when high-status individuals (measured both in terms of achieved and ascribed status) were late in responding to another's email message, the delay was perceived as a sign of greater competence, perhaps signaling deliberation and wisdom, whereas a delay was perceived as a sign of greater incompetence for

low-status individuals. Consistent with these findings, individuals with high ascribed status receive more credit for success and less blame for failure than individuals with low ascribed status (Rosette et al., 2008). Thus, for the former, the decision to reveal status-confirming personal information may be a less intense dilemma than it is for the latter, given that the stakes are higher in terms of the tangible and intangible consequences for individuals with low ascribed status (Omarzu, 2000).

Proposition 5: Independent of status distance, an individual who has high ascribed status will be more likely to disclose status-confirming information than will an individual who has low ascribed status.

Relative Identification with Ascribed Status

Although people with low ascribed status should be less willing to reveal status-confirming information than those with high ascribed status, in general, people do have a need to express central aspects of their identities and to have those aspects of their identities acknowledged by relevant others (Callero, 1985; Gollwitzer, Wicklund, & Hilton, 1982; Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Social identity theory and social categorization research emphasize the idea that group membership and demographic categories (i.e., ascribed status characteristics) are important factors of individuals' identities (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, although people may be motivated to reduce status distance by concealing information relevant to their ascribed status characteristics, they must weigh the impact of disclosing such personal information against their need to express that aspect of their identity.

It is critical to note that identity is a multidimensional construct (Brewer & Gardner, 1996) and our social relationships, roles, and group memberships make up our sense of identity. Research on identity has traditionally taken the position that these multiple aspects of identity are differentially weighted, rendering some self-aspects more important than others (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Callero, 1985; Stryker, 1968; Stryker & Serpe, 1982). Several researchers have drawn a connection between the relative importance of self-aspects to an individ-

ual's identity and management of the boundary between those self-aspects (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Dumas, 2003; Thomas-Hunt & Gruenfeld, 1998). We build on the concept of relative identification with work and personal identities and apply it to individuals in diverse environments who must decide whether or not to disclose or allow aspects of their personal lives to transcend the work/nonwork boundary.

Keeping important aspects of one's identity out of the workplace may be difficult for an employee because it entails restricting self-expression. People experience frustration and dissatisfaction when they are not able to express important self-aspects (Gollwitzer et al., 1982). For example, in a study of undergraduate students with goals that represented their most important identities (e.g., artist, athlete, intellectual), Gollwitzer et al. (1982) found that the students experienced a state of internal tension when prevented from fully expressing these identities. Because ascribed characteristics are important aspects of individuals' identities (Ashmore et al., 2004; Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), status-confirming information related to one's ascribed characteristic may function in the same manner as the types of information described by Gollwitzer et al. (1982).

For some individuals the cost of restricting self-expression may be higher than the cost of disclosing status-confirming information (i.e., increasing status distance). For example, for an African American engineer whose identity as an African American is more important than any of his or her other identities, the inability to express that identity freely in the workplace is likely to produce internal tension. In fact, in a study of both black and white female executives, Bell and Nkomo (2001) found that many black women felt it was important to express and acknowledge their racial and cultural identity because it helped them maintain their sense of self-worth in the workplace. Bell and Nkomo explained that these women were "not interested in being 'incogNegro,' a Black person who attempts to disguise, hide, or deny their racial identity" (2001: 233). One of the women they interviewed stated, "I guess the notion of functioning in a White world becomes uncomfortable when you view yourself as having sort of given up [your identity as an African American] and you have cut away a piece of yourself in order to deal with White people. Now I am not saying

that I open my life like a book to White folks, but I am clear on who I am" (2001: 233). Therefore, for an employee whose ascribed status characteristic is most important to his or her identity, restricting expression of that identity in the workplace may be more detrimental to his or her psychological and emotional well-being than disclosing status-confirming personal information. This may be the case even though disclosing such status-confirming information might mean highlighting an ascribed characteristic that increases status distance between oneself and a dissimilar other. Therefore, as Figure 1 illustrates, we offer the following.

Proposition 6: Independent of status distance, an individual whose ascribed status characteristic is highly important to his or her overall identity will be more likely to disclose status-confirming information than will an individual whose ascribed status characteristic is less important to his or her overall identity.

Level of Achieved Status

An individual's achieved status may also affect disclosure of status-confirming personal information, independent of both ascribed status and status distance. Once an individual gains a relatively high level of achieved status, he or she may be buffered from status concerns and share information freely with others. For individuals with low ascribed status, higher achieved status may provide them with important credibility that may mitigate their concerns about revealing information that is status confirming. Thus, for individuals who have garnered higher achieved status, highlighting characteristics that are associated with low ascribed status categories may be less problematic. Likewise, for individuals with high ascribed status, higher achieved status should reinforce their high ascribed status and make them even more likely to disclose personal information.

There are different mechanisms through which achieved status might ameliorate people's concerns about sharing status-confirming information. First, achieved status is important because it is associated with the accumulation of positive individuating information about a person's ability, which diminishes the likeli-

hood that perceivers will rely on stereotypes about that person's ascribed characteristics (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). In addition, achieved status might influence an individual's willingness to share personal information because it is associated with the accumulation and expenditure of idiosyncrasy credits—defined as the accumulation of positive impressions of an individual acquired through achievements or past behavior, which are associated with greater ability to deviate from expectations without sanctions (Hollander, 1958). As an individual gains achieved status, he or she also gains idiosyncrasy credits, which may insulate him or her from negative attributions about the status-confirming information shared. Additionally, people who have gained high achieved status through their accomplishments may feel free to deviate from conventional behavior because they feel confident about their level of social acceptance (Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001). For example, a female lawyer, upon making partner in a prestigious law firm, might then feel more comfortable bringing her children to the office on occasion.

Second, individuals with high achieved status may be buffered from negative construals when disclosing information associated with low ascribed status because their achieved status may change the way others interpret information associated with their low status characteristics. Morrill, Snyderman, and Dawson (1997) found that when individuals had higher achieved status (e.g., rank and performance track record), their negative normative behaviors (e.g., borrowing a company car for personal use or exaggerating business expenses) were evaluated as less serious compared to individuals with lower achieved status. Sheldon et al.'s (2006) findings, discussed above, about the interpretation of delays in email responsiveness from high- and low-status individuals also support this claim. Likewise, in a study of feedback seeking, Ashford and Northcraft (1992) found that feedback-seeking behavior was viewed more positively for high performers than for low performers.

In sum, we expect that achieved status might lessen concerns about disclosing status-confirming information for an individual with low ascribed status because he or she might feel such disclosures would be interpreted less negatively. For example, if a woman with low achieved status brings her children to the office

during work hours, this might be interpreted as a sign that she is overwhelmed and doesn't have reliable child care, whereas if a woman who has been a star performer brings her children to the office, this might be interpreted as a sign that she is a woman who juggles work and family responsibilities well. Thus, for individuals with low ascribed status characteristics, sharing the same type of information may be interpreted differently depending on their track record (i.e., their current level of achieved status). For those with high achieved status, legitimacy and reduced status distance may make them less concerned about revealing personal information that confirms low ascribed status characteristics. Indeed, achieved status may bring a sense of security to individuals, and we believe that it is this sense of security that may help diminish the reluctance to share personal information.

We also expect high achieved status to lessen the concerns about revealing status-relevant information for individuals with high ascribed status. Indeed, related research shows that individuals who have high power (i.e., those who have high ascribed and high achieved status) tend to be less inhibited (see Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003, for a review) and, thus, should be willing to disclose even more personal information. All in all, once an individual garners a high level of achieved status that provides security and autonomy, he or she should be less concerned about the status implications of his or her disclosure behavior and should share information freely with others if he or she wishes to develop high-quality relationships with them. Thus, as Figure 1 illustrates, we propose the following.

Proposition 7: Independent of status distance, an individual whose achieved status generates security will be more likely to disclose status-confirming information than will an individual whose achieved status generates less security.

DISCUSSION

Disclosure of personal information is generally considered to be a means to get to know one another better and to improve the quality of relationships. However, in this paper we have highlighted how the disclosure of personal in-

formation can be problematized in situations where there are status asymmetries between individuals. Moreover, we have specifically discussed how disclosure of personal information is an important mechanism by which individuals manage the status distance between themselves and others in demographically diverse organizational settings. Clearly, demographically diverse settings abound with status distance, and it is well established that status distance has a negative impact on the quality of relationships (Blau, 1977; Lincoln & Miller, 1979; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). Yet little research has directly considered the role of status distance in such settings, and, in fact, status distance may be an important omitted variable in the theoretical and empirical study of demographically diverse environments. We have argued that it is critical to understand how status and status distance affect both the choice to disclose and the outcomes of such disclosure in demographically diverse environments.

Theoretically, we contribute to the diversity literature by theorizing about how status impacts the willingness to disclose personal information in demographically diverse settings, as well as how disclosure influences subsequent status distance and, ultimately, how disclosure affects the development of high-quality relationships through its impact on status distance. In traditional research on diversity, scholars have primarily used the similarity attraction paradigm (Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Byrne, 1971) and social categorization/identity theories (e.g., Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to explain the negative relationship between diversity and social relationships (i.e., cohesion, social integration; for a review see Mannix & Neale, 2005; Milliken & Martins, 1996; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), but they have devoted less attention to the status differences and status concerns that abound in diverse environments (for notable exceptions see Bacharach et al., 2005; Chatman & O'Reilly, 2004; Chattopadhyay, 1999; Chattopadhyay et al., 2004). Our discussion of the process by which people manage the disclosure of personal information and status distance suggests that the perception of status similarity or difference between individuals is an important dimension of similarity that needs to be further integrated into the diversity literature.

We suggest that examining status is important for understanding relationships in demo-

graphically diverse settings in three ways. First, we have articulated that initial status distance influences disclosure of personal information in demographically diverse settings. In particular, we have argued that initial status distance may inhibit the disclosure of personal information that is so important for the development of higher-quality relationships (Collins & Miller, 1994). Second, we have explicated that the type of information disclosed (i.e., status confirming or status disconfirming) may have an important effect on the subsequent status distance between individuals, which ultimately has implications for the quality of relationships. In particular, we have suggested that disclosing status-disconfirming information may reduce subsequent perceived status distance, whereas disclosing status-confirming information may increase subsequent perceived status distance between demographically dissimilar individuals. Thus, the content of what is disclosed may be important for determining whether contact between dissimilar individuals will overcome the lack of closeness between them (cf. Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Third, we have discussed both ascribed and achieved status and how they influence status distance. Fourth, we have considered how ascribed and achieved status affect disclosure behaviors independent of status distance. Moreover, we have explained that when an individual's ascribed status is most important to his or her self-concept, he or she will be more willing to disclose status-confirming information—even though doing so may increase status distance. Thus, we contribute to research on high-quality relationships in demographically diverse settings by articulating the microprocesses of the dynamics between status and disclosure and how these dynamics ultimately affect relationships.

We have focused on the implications of our theorizing for research on diversity in organizations. However, our model may also have implications for other types of interpersonal relationships in organizations. For instance, leader-member exchange theory focuses on the extent to which emotional support and other valued resources, such as information, are reciprocated between leaders and their subordinates (Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). The quality of leader-member relationships may be affected by the concerns we have raised in our model, given the status-laden nature of the superior-subordinate

relationship at the focus of the theory. Moreover, our theorizing may also have implications for research on social networks (e.g., Ibarra, 1992, 1995) and the nature of the socioemotional and advice-seeking/-giving relationships developed by individuals in organizational settings.

Our theorizing may have implications for boundary theory as well. Many organizations encourage workers to merge their personal and professional identities through self-disclosure and the formation of friendships with coworkers, with the expectation that this will increase employee loyalty and commitment (Fleming & Spicer, 2004; Pratt & Rosa, 2003). We assert that when organizations try to improve employee commitment and relationships by promoting integration of their employees' work and nonwork lives, they may not recognize the complexities involved. "Be yourself, bring your family, get to know each other"—these seem like simple, straightforward truisms that can have no ill effects. However, these prescriptions may overlook the possibility that allowing personal information to transcend the work/nonwork boundary through the process of self-disclosure may further widen the status distance between coworkers.

Methodological Implications

We have conceptualized status distance at the dyadic level of analysis. It is at this dyadic level that relationships are built through the disclosure of personal information. High-quality relationships among multiple dyads in a group may then be aggregated to form an overall high level of group cohesion and a sense of community (Blatt & Camden, 2006). In recent research on the social relations model, scholars have recognized the importance of dyadic relationships as a building block to group-level and organization-level constructs (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006; Snijders & Kenny, 1999). Likewise, in an organizational setting the overall status distance an individual experiences may be a function of the multiple dyadic relationships of which that individual is a part. Aggregation of status distance into group-level or organization-level constructs may be an important consideration for future research on this topic.

The relationships articulated here may also develop in a nonlinear way. It is possible that disclosure of personal information, whether con-

firming or disconfirming, may follow a curvilinear form. Although disclosing some status-disconfirming information may be helpful in reducing status distance between oneself and others, disclosing too much status-disconfirming information may lead to expectancy violations, which may then lead to a backlash in status distance and to difficulty in developing high-quality relationships (Burgoon, 1993; Rudman, 1998; Rudman & Glick, 1999). Conversely, failing to disclose any status-confirming information might create a sense of inauthenticity or aloofness (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001), which might hinder development of high-quality relationships, whereas disclosing too much status-confirming information, as we discussed in the propositions, is likely to reinforce and widen the perceived status distance between individuals in asymmetric status dyads.

We have articulated several processes that have implications for interpersonal outcomes, and future research should explore these mechanisms. Importantly, measures should be designed to disentangle both the desire to be liked and similarity attraction from the motivation to minimize status distance. Moreover, research should examine the kinds of personal information that people are willing to disclose in diverse as opposed to homogeneous settings (Phillips, Northcraft, & Neale, 2006). Examining how high- versus low-status individuals enact these processes is also important. Experimental studies could test the proposed processes by manipulating diversity and status to determine how both dissimilarity and status distance in the dyad influence the information individuals are willing to share with others and the effect that information has on interpersonal closeness. Further, manipulating whether individuals believe that information is status confirming or disconfirming would help to identify the underlying mechanisms. Moreover, field studies might help to clarify the temporal effects, as well as organizational factors such as culture and task interdependence, that might influence these relationships (e.g., Harrison, Price, & Bell 1998).

Practical Implications

We have introduced a status-conscious perspective for understanding why individuals in demographically diverse settings often fail to disclose the type of personal information that

may affect status distance, as well as how status distance often shapes relationships in diverse environments. Our approach makes the point that status distance must be reduced for people to form positive relationships in the workplace. Indeed, our framework highlights the fact that simply providing people with an opportunity to get to know one another is not enough in diverse environments, where initial status distance is likely to be high. Organizations that seek to improve employee relationships in diverse environments first need to acknowledge the preexisting perceptions of status distance and then work proactively to establish structures, practices, and an organizational culture that lower the barrier of status distance. An important way that organizations can reduce perceptions of status distance is to ensure that all employees feel equally respected and valued, since status concerns often arise because people don't feel fully valued by their coworkers.

Our status-conscious approach highlights the importance of treating people with respect and worth in the work environment. Organizations can address the status differences between people and the status concerns they might have by developing a culture of respect (Hodson, 2001; Margolis, 2001; Ramarajan, Barsade, & Burack, 2008; Tyler & Blader, 2000), which is important for several reasons. First, receiving respect affirms an individual's worth (Cronin, 2004; Margolis, 2001). Second, status distinctions may become less important when individuals know that they are valued and respected in the workplace, regardless of status differences (Tyler & Blader, 2000). Third, a culture of respect may foster feelings of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999) and may further buffer individuals from status concerns.

Although difficult, organizations can successfully create a culture where employees feel more respected. For example, in their field experiment Ramarajan et al. (2008) found that, compared to control units, those units that implemented structural changes to the hierarchy, increased employee involvement in problem solving, and placed greater value on actively listening to different cultural perspectives had an increased culture of respect. Experimental research on inclusion in decision making also shows that people feel more respected in conditions where it is clear that all individuals' contributions are valued (De Cremer, 2002; Simon & Stürmer, 2003). Other research suggests that

leadership behavior and composition (Hodson, 2002), fairness norms (Tyler & Blader, 2000), and development of a community orientation (Blatt & Camden, 2006) can contribute to a culture of respect for all employees. Dutton (2003) highlights the importance of respectful engagement with others for forming high-quality relationships at work and articulates numerous ways to foster such respect, including affirming others (e.g., recognizing and understanding another's situation, giving others the benefit of the doubt, expressing recognition of others for a contribution), listening effectively (i.e., being empathetic and active), and communicating in a supportive way (e.g., making requests rather than demands, being specific, remaining descriptive rather than evaluative).

Perceptions of being treated fairly and with respect may have positive implications for individuals' status evaluations, directly minimizing status distance between individuals in groups (Tyler & Blader, 2000, 2003). Moreover, a culture of respect can influence status distance indirectly in that it can help foster greater disclosure of personal information by making people feel more psychologically safe, and it can potentially create a virtuous cycle where status distance is reduced because people feel safer disclosing personal information that is status disconfirming. In addition, a culture of respect might change the way status-confirming disclosures are viewed by others such that these disclosures could function in the way they do in homogeneous settings—bringing people closer together.

Creating a culture of respect, while possible as we have articulated above, is difficult and must entail intentional and active practices that go far beyond giving people opportunities to socialize at company mixers and events. A culture of respect pervades the very fabric of the workplace at every level, from top to bottom, and is enacted in the everyday exchanges between individuals. Such an approach parallels the literature on groups that suggests that occasional off-site team building retreats do not have lasting effects on teams (Salas, Rozell, Mullen, & Driskell, 1999); rather, the everyday interactions of team members form the bedrock of the team identity. In just this way, respectful engagement both in informal and formal interactions becomes a critical way to minimize status concerns in organizations.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have questioned the efficacy of self-disclosure for improving the quality of relationships among demographically dissimilar individuals. Encouraging coworkers to "get to know" one another as a solution to diversity challenges may be problematic because of the status distance inherent in demographically dissimilar dyads. People in diverse environments are motivated to manage status distance, and it is this motivation that may drive many of the outcomes observed in diverse settings, including disclosure, which is a critical aspect of relationship formation. Ironically, when some individuals appear to withdraw from dissimilar others by failing to reveal personal information, they may actually be concerned with managing the status distance so they can better preserve the relationship. We believe that addressing individuals' status concerns may be a critical missing component in addressing the challenges in diverse environments.

Ultimately, in this paper we reexamined current explanations and interpretations of behaviors in demographically diverse settings, and we provided a status-conscious view that suggests a different approach to managing diversity that includes directly minimizing status concerns. Understanding status differences is a critical step in discovering interventions that go beneath the surface to truly help dissimilar people work well together.

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