8 Understanding Status as a Social Resource

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Within the framework of social resource theory (Foa 1971; Foa and Foa 1974; Foa et al. 1993), *status* is a symbolic, particularistic resource. That is, compared to currency or concrete goods, status is relatively intangible, as its possession is typically reflected symbolically (e.g., personal possessions, conversational norms, skin color) by the values a society assigns. Status is also particularistic: Whereas universalistic resources such as money hold the same objective value regardless of their source, receiving status from some people (e.g., a respected group member) carries different meanings than when it comes from others (e.g., a disrespected group member) (Huo and Tyler 2001; Tyler et al. 1998). These properties of status serve to make it a highly multifaceted, complex social resource. Status is both difficult to quantify and may be manifested in many forms, and yet such information is conveyed in specific, socially constructed ways.

Using the framework provided by social resource theory, this chapter aims to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of status as a social resource. To do so, we attempt to "zoom in" on status by examining it as a resource that, just like the six primary resources within social resource theory, varies along (1) symbolic versus concrete and (2) universalistic versus particularistic continuums. When viewed through this lens, status can be broken down into four subtypes (see Fig. 8.1) that shed light on how people within a given social context "use" status in their experience and what it means to allocate or withhold status from others. Status resources can be understood as ranging from symbolic, nonverbal behaviors (e.g., politeness, respect) to concrete, observable social markers (e.g., insignia on a uniform). At the same time, some forms of status can, at least in theory, be distributed universally (e.g., basic human dignity), whereas other forms of status are delivered with careful attention to who is receiving it (e.g., the treatment afforded to the president of a nation or to a prisoner on death row). When viewed together, these two continuums impart a coherent and testable theoretical framework for understanding status.

After describing each quadrant in the taxonomy in more detail, we turn our attention to what we term "status transactions" – that is, when one form of status is exchanged for another – and, based on the insights developed from the taxonomy, we offer some novel predictions about how people are likely to react to violations in status transactions. We do so by presenting an empirical example of the utility of using social resource theory to gain a deeper understanding of status as an exchangeable social resource. Finally, we discuss

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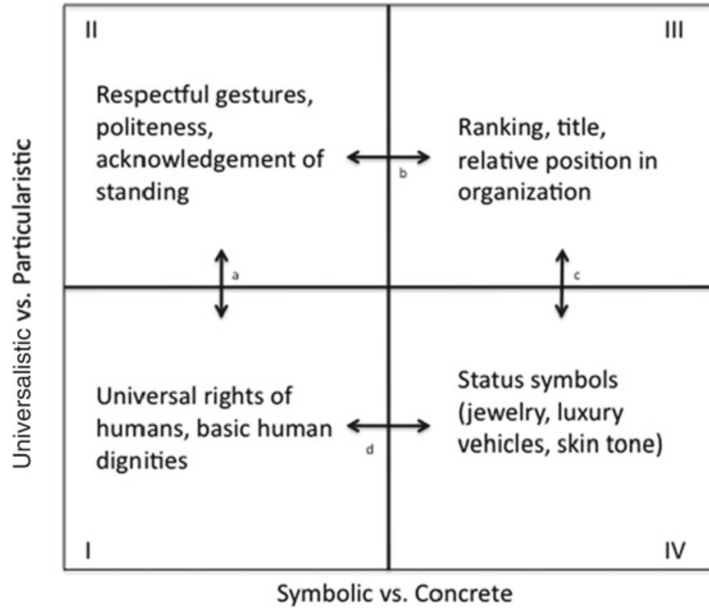

Fig. 8.1 An examination of status along dimensions within social resource theory

how conceptualizing status in this new fashion sheds light on social resource theory and its utility for understanding how the exchange of status as a resource affects social relations.

Part I. A Closer Look at Four Types of Status

Quadrant I: Universalistic, Symbolic Status

Universalistic, symbolic forms of status can be delivered by anyone with equal effect, are relatively intangible, and are difficult to quantify. This notion of status is evident in strains of Western social philosophy arguing that egalitarian norms should guide how respect and dignity are distributed in a society (Kant 1797/1996; Rawls 1971; Sen 2009). The moral grounding of this form of status can be derived from a thought experiment that considers what norms and behaviors people would agree to if, at the outset, they did not know where their position in life would be (in terms of natural abilities, inherited wealth, etc.). Behind this *veil of ignorance* as described by Rawls (1971), it would be impossible and impractical to distribute all resources equally, but certain resources, such as respect and dignity, would be mutually beneficial, practicable, and preferred by all. This reasoning is evident in formal documents meant to preserve and protect basic dignities to all people regardless of their origin or circumstances, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva conventions, and in political systems more generally (see Kymlicka 1991).

Of course, simply because ideals of universal dignity and respect are adopted in the abstract does not guarantee that they are enacted in practice. Experimental tests simulating the Rawlsian original position indicate that actual preferences deviate from normative ideals (Frohlich et al. 1987). Many societal institutions have historically proclaimed to treat all people equally while, in practice, systematically treating segments of its population unequally (see Fredrickson 1999). Nevertheless, perhaps the most basic and fundamental form of status is to acknowledge a person's standing as human and their entitlement to dignity and respect (see Lalljee et al. 2007). In this sense, the question of basic dignity and respect ("Is this person to be treated like a human or not?") is not a quantitative resource but a qualitative one. As such, the basic dignities prescribed for humanity

also describe the implications of particular practices: Treatment that fails to acknowledge people's basic standing as humans, such as a violation of civil rights, is qualitatively different than treatment that simply fails to acknowledge a relative rank or position (e.g., failing to address a judge as "Your honor"). To be denied basic human rights and dignities is to be denied standing as a human being. In contrast, degrees of rank imply status differences within a human community.

Conceptualizing status in this stripped down, universalistic form provides grounding for status as a social resource in the sections that follow. In fact, when asked, most people subscribe to this universalistic ideal of status and endorse the notion that all people are entitled to respect and dignity (see Kluegel and Smith 1986). Because of this fact, the perceived denial or withholding of this form of status, more so than other forms of status, can elicit civil unrest and anger (see Sears and McConahay 1973).

Quadrant II: Symbolic, Particularistic Status

Everyday social discourse is characterized by systematic variations in politeness and other respectful gestures (Brown and Levinson 1987). That is, although proclamations of equality are endorsed in an idealistic sense, this is generally not possible on more micro levels. Whereas one schoolteacher might receive the attention and respect of their students, another teacher with an equivalent title, training, and experience might not. A teacher may, in turn, treat their individual students with differing levels of admiration and respect. In this way, and in contrast to the universal conception of respect in the preceding section, status is particularistic. Its distribution depends not on simple humanity but on *whom* individuals are (e.g., police officer, favorite student, coworker) and by the psychological functions (e.g., maintaining valued relationships) that treating people in particular ways serves for the individual.

Although people are not always consciously aware of the inequalities in the treatment they distribute and receive, when they do become aware of these inequalities and there is no clear or morally justifiable rationale for them, they frequently see such disparities unfair. That is, absent a legitimate basis for the differential treatment, people's explicit evaluation of the treatment they receive often reflects the conception of status seen in Quadrant I (universalistic, symbolic status). They evaluate this particularistic resource as if it should be universalistic. To understand this point, it is helpful to consider when unequal distributions of status *are* deemed acceptable or fair. For instance, Americans generally are not offended if a president or CEO receives more deferential (favorable) treatment than they do, presumably because such treatment can be attributed to legitimate hierarchal norms and customs. Similarly, people are generally not offended when a child gets treated more leniently than an adult (see Deutsch 1975). However, people are often taken aback when similar others receive better or worse treatment than they do. For instance, if a White customer receives more attentive restaurant service than an otherwise similar Black customer does, such treatment is seen as unfair because "race" and ethnicity are not justifiable grounds for differential treatment.

Unlike concrete resources such as money and job promotions, people generally do not perceive objective limits on symbolic interpersonal treatment. When deciding between which of two workers to promote, a manager who distributes the promotion – a more concrete form of status – no longer has a promotion to give. In this case, the inequality in status allocation is externally constrained because the promotion is as a zero-sum resource. Respectful treatment (a more symbolic form of status), by contrast, is also something that people may decide to distribute or withhold, but its delivery is not necessarily or logically limited by organizational structure (e.g., Sennett 2003). From an observer's perspective, to be fair a waitress can be more attentive to the Black customer, less attentive to the White customer, or both. When treatment is unequal, and people cannot ascribe the unequal outcomes to legitimate structural considerations ("Somebody had to get it") and/or explicit qualifications for the status ("I lack the requisite experience or

qualifications"), they are likely to infer that the behavior was simply a choice of the individual (see Ross 1977). Furthermore, when people perceive negative outcomes are intentionally chosen rather than situationally constrained, they are more likely to experience anger about the outcomes (see Schwarz et al. 2007).

For these reasons, failure to deliver symbolic, particularistic status can have serious consequences for group and psychological functioning. The group value model (Lind and Tyler 1988) and the relational model of authority (Tyler and Lind 1992) suggest that when other group members behave in a rude, disrespectful, or biased fashion, it communicates a devaluing of the individual by the group. In turn, perceiving that the group does not value the self can reduce identification with the group and lower the individual's self-esteem (Smith et al. 2003), psychological well-being, and engagement with the group (Huo et al. 2010a, b).

Indeed, epidemiological studies suggest that the distribution of respectful treatment in organizations may have very general and far-reaching health implications. In one survey consisting of over 30,000 Finnish public sector employees, perceptions of unfair and disrespectful treatment by work supervisors were correlated with increased length of sickness-related absenteeism (Elovainio et al. 2005). A survey of German factory workers found that experiences of unfair and disrespectful treatment were associated with more reported sick days and higher frequency of feeling sick at work (Schmitt and Dörfel 1999). And a field experiment on nurses who received an involuntary salary reduction found that nurses with supervisors who were not trained to be respectful and fair suffered more sleep problems such as insomnia (Greenberg 2006). Such psychosomatic evidence provides backing for the notion that denial of symbolic status is an affront to individuals' physical and mental health.

In summary, even though it does not always occur in practice, it is theoretically possible to distribute symbolic status in a relatively egalitarian fashion. Although status is often delivered in a particularistic fashion, people tend to care a great deal when they are denied symbolic status without a legitimate justification. They may construe such treatment as a choice on behalf of the distributor to deny their entitlement to basic human dignity. People interpret unfair and disrespectful treatment as signifying exclusion from the broader social context, and this information informs how they feel about their group and about their self (Smith et al. 2003, Tyler, Degoey, et al. 1996; Tyler, Smith, et al. 1996).

Quadrant III: Concrete, Particularistic Status

Most if not all human organizations possess status hierarchies (e.g., Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Tannenbaum et al. 1977). In contrast to more symbolic forms of status, status of this form is often considered a zero-sum resource. If one person or group has high status ranking, it typically necessitates that another has lower status ranking. Unlike symbolic status, which is theoretically unlimited (i.e., nonzero sum) and without structural constraints, concrete status inequality is sometimes necessitated by the situation. Hierarchies often function to coordinate the efforts of many people engaged in a variety of tasks and can be seen as a necessary means to regulate the behavior of group members during the distribution of scare resources (Fiske 1992).

The manner in which most societies distribute concrete status – that is, status that exists as a rank or relative position in the hierarchy – is often explicitly unequal and undemocratic. There can be only one number one draft pick, one valedictorian, and one president. Of course, there is no uniform code of distribution that exists across circumstances, as the manner in which concrete status is distributed depends on the nature of the group. Some status hierarchies are tall (with many levels) and others are relatively flat; some have a clear command structure and clearly defined ranks, while others have ambiguous lines of authority and no clear chain of command (Fiske 1992; Tannenbaum et al.

1977). Steiner (2001) suggests that in highly individualistic, masculine, and work-oriented cultures, equity considerations (the belief that people's outcomes should be proportional to their inputs) tend to predominate expectations on who will receive promotions and higher status. In other settings, such as more communal or family-oriented relationships, norms of equality and need are given more importance (see Deutsch 1975; Mannix et al. 1995; Törnblom and Foa 1983).

In line with this reasoning, empirical research by Huo (2002) provides support for the idea that individuals abide by different social norms when asked to distribute symbolic and concrete status resources. Participants in two studies were asked to make allocation decisions, and among the goods they could distribute or withhold were high quality of treatment (e.g., dignity and respect) and positive concrete status (i.e., wealth). Across the two studies, the key finding was that participants were much more likely to withhold concrete status (resources) from their peers than they were to withhold symbolic status (dignified, respectful treatment). This was true even when, in Study 2, the targets of the allocation decisions were members of a marginalized social group (i.e., racists). Participants seemed to adhere to beliefs that all people deserved to be treated in a respectful, dignified manner, but not everyone deserved equal access to concrete status.

Similarly, studies examining Americans' views about social equality show that there is far greater support for policies designed to ensure equal distribution of symbolic status (i.e., equality of opportunity) than for policies that directly intervene to redistribute concrete status (cited in Lane 1988). Social justice research has suggested that the norms guiding the distribution of social goods are such that inequality of process (e.g., fair, respectful treatment) is typically seen as less tolerable than inequality of concrete outcomes (e.g., income) (Brockner and Wiesenfeld 1996; Okun 1975). Taken together, these lines of research depict a high level of societal consensus that concrete status and rankings need not be distributed as evenly as symbolic status.

Interestingly, although people are generally accepting of unequal distributions of concrete status, social-epidemiological science has linked status, defined in terms of rank or positional standing in a community, to broad patterns of social health and longevity. Marmot (2004) reports that after controlling for several obvious predictors of health and longevity, such as income and lifestyle, positional status independently predicted health outcomes. The lower one's social position in their community, the higher their risk of heart, lung, and kidney diseases, HIV-related disease, tuberculosis, suicide, diseases of the digestive tract, and other forms of sudden, accidental death (Marmot 2004). One study found that actors and actresses who had won Academy Awards lived nearly 4 years longer than their nominated peers who had not won (Redelmeier and Singh 2001).

Although the precise mechanisms through which such effects occur are not well understood, a variety of research has ruled out obvious factors such as different lifestyle habits that may be associated with lower status (e.g., smoking, physical fitness). One viable hypothesis is that these effects occur because lower status is associated with less control over one's life and fewer opportunities for full social participation (Marmot 2004). In a study of the effects of draft status on the careers of National Basketball Association (NBA) players, for example, evidence was found that relative draft status (e.g., being 2nd overall pick in the draft vs. 7th overall pick), net of objective performance indicators such as scoring, rebounds, and assists, *independently* predicted who received the most minutes of play and how long players stayed in the league (Staw and Hoang 1995). Likewise, winners of Academy Awards may have had more resources at their disposal, more opportunity, and more admirers. Perhaps the acclaim, praise, and relative scrutiny paid to high concrete status individuals facilitate neuroendocrine states that help stave off illness (see Creswell et al. 2005). What is clear is that one's position in social hierarchies can have significant consequences for well-being and longevity.

Quadrant IV: Concrete, Universalistic Status

Finally, concrete, universalistic forms of status are readily observable and do not attach significant meaning to who allocates them. Although it may be indicative of higher symbolic status to buy a luxury vehicle from a reputed dealer than from a used sales lot, the status contained in the vehicle, all else being equal, is indicative of the type of status described in this section (whereas the status derived from the dealer is more symbolic and particularistic). More broadly, this category consists of status markers. These include objects such as rings and designer clothing and physical characteristics such as "race" and ethnicity. In a given society, the same people, all else being equal, might hold higher status if they are well-dressed than if they are dressed in rags, if they are considered "White" than if they are not, if they are tall than if they are short, and so on. To a certain extent, it does not matter where these features come from; within a specific culture, what is important is the features themselves.

Whereas a title or rank only means something insofar as there is a sponsoring organization that recognizes it, concrete universalistic status generally has broader, more globally recognized significance. For example, all else being equal, two bars on a sleeve for a naval lieutenant carry the same meaning regardless of who physically delivers or possesses these bars. Yet outside the military, where people might be unfamiliar with the meanings assigned to bars on the uniform, the insignia do not convey meaningful information. Concrete status that transcends particular contexts, including very general, but observable categories like ethnic group membership, gold, and wealth, are closer to being universalistic. However, even these forms of status, while being more general and far reaching than a simple organizational rank, are not universalistic per se. The United States' system of racial classification (e.g., in which a person who is half black and half white is considered "Black"), for instance, is not used universally or even throughout North America (see Sidanius et al. 2001). Thus, in terms of concrete status or ranking, the distinction between the particular and universalistic is better thought of as quantitative difference, based on a continuum, rather than a qualitative difference.

As discussed under Quadrant III, status hierarchies are a seemingly inevitable feature of human organization. But hierarchies take on special meaning when they are based on more universalistic status and can therefore cut across life domains. In describing a theory of social dominance, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) illustrate some of the potentially insidious aspects of creating social hierarchies on the basis of possession of concrete, universalistic status. The authors' approach begins with an observation that, without known exception, societies around the world are arranged such that one or more dominant groups (e.g., Whites, men) enjoy a disproportionate share of positive social value (e.g., wealth, power) at the expense of one or more subordinate groups (e.g., Blacks, women). When these dimensions of social differentiation are based on concrete physical or observable features, they take on a universalistic flavor that transcends social contexts in the course of everyday experience. Through a review of literatures on housing and retail markets, the labor market, the health and education systems, and the criminal justice system, the authors present evidence that individual members of low status groups, particularly low status ethnic and religious groups, face routine and systematic forms of discrimination at the hands of high status group members that, when considered together across contexts, serve to maintain and reinforce existing status differences among groups.

The ideologies that support, reinforce, and legitimize the differential distribution of this form of status take on unique characteristics not seen in the ideologies that support more particularistic status distributions. For instance, particularistic forms of status are often predicated on the ideology of meritocracy, where one's organizational rank is determined by one's relevant skills, talents, and abilities. The

most skilled, hardest working people are promoted, and we can infer, at least to some extent, that these promotions are predicated on requisite qualifications. But when it comes to very general, near universalistic forms of concrete status, inferences can begin to work in the opposite way. Unlike a rank in a business firm, people do not generally obtain White skin, height, or inherited wealth through hard work or talent, although these things nonetheless influence people's current and future social outcomes. Instead of people working hard to get where they are, the likelihood increases that they will observe where they are and infer they must have worked hard to get there (and are therefore entitled to what they have; see Major 1994; O'Brien and Major 2009; Ridgeway 2001). Scholars argue that beliefs such as these serve fundamental system-justifying functions that help maintain the continuity of societal status hierarchies (Jost and Banaji 1994; Sidanius and Pratto 1999).

Coming full circle, it is possible to see the proximity of concrete, universalistic status to the more symbolic features of status seen in Quadrant I (symbolic, universalistic status). That is, it seems that holding high concrete, universalistic status can be easily conflated with higher standing as a "human." A poignant example of this conflation was seen in American slavery, where an individual's concrete status as an African automatically identified them as somehow less than human and excluded from the purview of proclamations that all are "created equal." Less extreme, though highly consequential forms of this valuing system remain visible across contemporary human social systems.

Part II. Exchanges Between Quadrants: Understanding Status Transactions

While the preceding sections sought to clarify and conceptualize the different types of status, one of the central purposes of viewing status in this schematic fashion suggested by social resource theory is to generate testable hypotheses about the consequences of exchanging different types of status. We argue, just as resource theory does, that the present conceptualization of status is useful because it suggests which types of resources are most likely to be exchanged with others. We further argue that each adjacent resource can be and is exchanged with its neighboring resource. Resources that are diagonal from one another, by contrast, are not directly exchanged but are exchanged via status resources in one or both of the adjacent quadrants.

Although the most common connotation of *exchange* is when one party exchanges with another party concrete services, goods, or money, when the resources are more symbolic, the physical exchange of resources is not the correct analogy. Status exchanges regularly occur without anything concrete changing hands. A person wearing a fancy, expensive suit (Quadrant IV) might receive a high level of polite and respectful treatment (Quadrant II) because they are assumed to have higher social rank or stature (Quadrant III). However, this person does not physically hand over the suit for such treatment. Similarly, although a person with a high rank or powerful title in an organization (Quadrant III) is more likely to be treated with deference and respect (Quadrant II) they do not physically hand over their rank to receive this treatment. As such, status exchanges are often behavioral responses that follow from a *presentation* or *display* of status (e.g., Foa 1971).

With this conception of status exchange in mind, it is possible to consider all adjacent quadrants as potential exchange partners. Figure 8.1 illustrates the potential exchanges via four different pathways. We treat people politely simply because they are people (Pathway A). We treat higher status people, like doctors and bosses, with more respect than lower status people, like nurses and janitors (Pathway B). We convey higher societal rank or standing to individuals possessing certain status markers (Pathway C). And we implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) assume that people displaying certain status markers qualify as

more human and those without them are considered subhuman (Pathway D). These are just a subset of the status transactions that are possible within the model. The exchanges can also flow in the other direction, as when people aim to attain high concrete status by seeking favor on a symbolic level (see Anderson and Kilduff 2009). Diagonal exchanges are also possible, but we suggest that diagonal status resources are less likely to be exchanged directly with one another and, instead, can be understood to "pass through" one or both adjacent forms of status. For example, people with high organizational ranking (QIII) might command recognition of their humanity (QI) by being afforded a relatively high level of respect (QII) and because they possess more universalistic, concrete status (QIV). In this way, the link between diagonal resources is mediated through adjacent status resources.

Moreover, because each type of status is capable of being exchanged with any other, the schematic model helps elucidate why people care about status. People care about symbolic, particularistic treatment because it both communicates recognition of one's humanity and conveys information about concrete standing in the group. People care about concrete, particularistic status because it ensures a certain quality of treatment and, more generally, a certain quality of life that transcends social contexts. For each type of status, the adjacent forms of status tell us something about why each type of status is important. That is, they tell us what each type of status "buys them" in terms of their ability to obtain neighboring status resources.

Exchanging Symbolic and Concrete Status: An Empirical Illustration

In this section, we focus on one portion of the model in more detail. Namely, we focus on the exchange of symbolic, particularistic status with more concrete, particularistic status (as discussed above under Quadrants II and III, respectively). In doing so, we focus not only on the outcomes of these exchanges but on the expectations for these resources that individuals carry around. We argue that one way to understand the norms that are operating in a society is to examine people's expectations for resources across a variety of circumstances. The asymmetries between these resources implied by the present model – with symbolic status being potentially limitless and nonzero sum and with concrete status being limited and zero sum – have important implications for the exchange of these two resources and the consequences of this exchange for the well-being of individuals and their social groups.

One potentially informative insight from the model is that different types of status, because of their unique characteristics, are associated with different norms and expectations about how they should be distributed. These norms and expectations, in turn, elicit differential psychological responses depending on whether they are met in social exchanges. Although people are often able to report their expectations, expectations need not be conscious or explicit in one's mind, but can also exist and affect perceptions at an implicit level, beneath the conscious threshold (Miller and Turnbull 1986). Following the logic we outlined, we suggest that individuals' expectations for symbolic versus concrete status are rooted in distinct sociocultural norms and should therefore produce differential but predictable effects on people's experiences. Specifically, because concrete status is relatively constrained by external factors (e.g., a boss can only deliver one promotion in some circumstances), people's expectations for this type of status should be relatively responsive to changes in social circumstances. For example, a person might expect a promotion at work when they perform well but not when they perform poorly, whereas across these two contexts, individuals will maintain relatively high expectations for symbolic status (e.g., respectful treatment).

To establish support for these ideas, we conducted a series of experiments in which we measured participants' expectations for fair, respectful treatment and for favorable concrete status (e.g., receiving a raise or high mark in class) across a variety of hypothetical scenarios

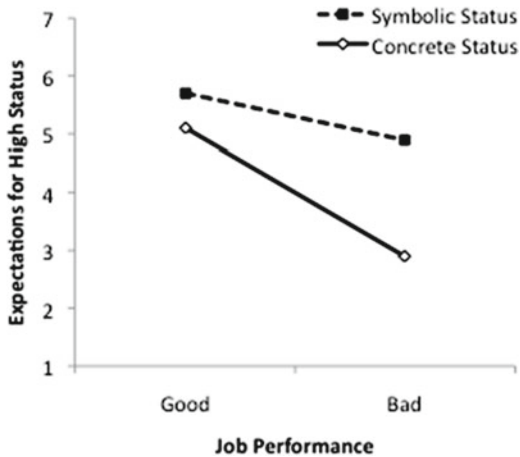

Fig. 8.2 Expectations for symbolic and concrete status as a function of job performance

that evoked different exchange rules (details reported in Binning and Huo 2006). Our aim was to manipulate the contextual information in the scenario and assess how the means of the two sets of expectations for different status resources changed across different contexts. Although we limited our investigation to educational and employment contexts, we believe that our predictions can be generalized to a wider range of social contexts. Our specific hypotheses were as follows:

1. When measured on the same scale, expectations for symbolic status resources would be higher than would be expectations for concrete status resources.
2. As a corollary, expectations for symbolic status resources would be less variable (reaching ceiling) than would be expectations for concrete status resources.

In one experiment with 34 working adults, participants were asked to imagine that they had performed their job well (in a competent manner). In a second scenario, participants were asked to imagine that they had performed their job poorly (in an incompetent manner). The results, depicted in Fig. 8.2, revealed that participants expected to receive fair treatment (operationalization of symbolic status as it communicates information about one's standing in the eyes of others) *and* a raise in income (operationalization of concrete status) when they had performed well. However, in the scenario where they performed poorly, individuals still expected to receive fair treatment, but they no longer expected to receive a raise (Binning and Huo 2006).

In a second experiment, we sought to replicate the above effects and extend them to contexts in which the quality of relationship with the person distributing the resources was manipulated. In particular, because the first experiment dealt solely with situations in which the target either performed their job either well or poorly, in the second experiment, we sought to examine whether similar effects would also emerge if participants had either a warm relationship versus a cold relationship with the person distributing resources (the distributor). To this end, we asked 19 college students to imagine four situations, all of which pertained to an end-of-the-year meeting with their faculty research advisor with whom they had worked as a research assistant for course credit. Mirroring the first experiment, in one scenario, participants were asked to imagine they had performed their research duties well and, in another scenario, poorly. In addition, participants were also asked to imagine that they either had a cordial, friendly relationship with the advisor or a negative, cold relationship with the advisor. The findings are depicted in Fig. 8.3.

Most importantly, the results showed that while a poor relationship with the advisor diminished expectations for both receiving a good grade (concrete status) and for fair treatment (symbolic status), the effect was not equal across these two forms of status. When the target was described as having a negative relationship with their advisor, this diminished their expectation for receiving concrete status more than did their expectations for symbolic status. These findings are consistent with the idea that even when people do things that damage their interpersonal relationships, they may still expect to receive symbolic status while believing that the damage to the relationship would negatively affect their prospects for concrete status. As such, an asymmetry between symbolic and concrete status is evident in that concrete status is more sensitive to variations in social context than is symbolic status.

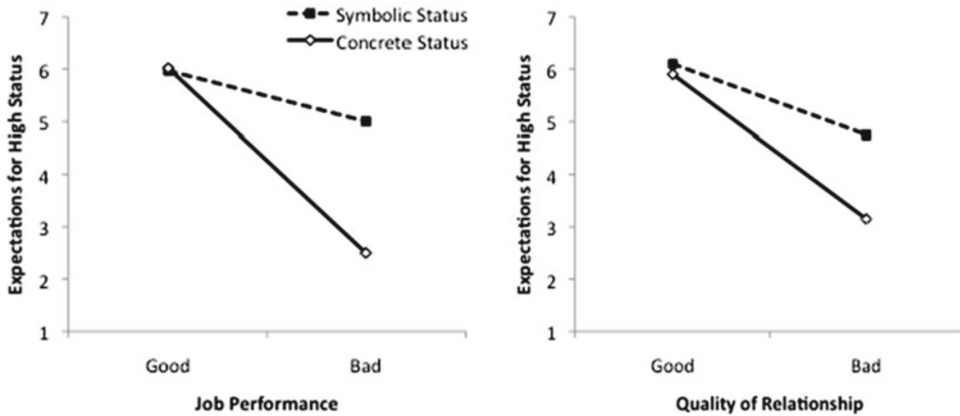

Fig. 8.3 Symbolic and concrete status expectations as functions of advisor's performance evaluations and student-advisor relationship (Study 2)

Social Consequences of Violating Resource Expectations

Based on evidence that expectations for symbolic status (e.g., fair treatment) are stronger and less variable than those for concrete status (raise at work or academic grade) in particularistic exchanges, it follows that the withholding of symbolic status should be especially attention-grabbing and more likely to evoke strong reactions relative to the withholding of concrete status. Compared with expected events (e.g., receiving fair, respectful treatment), unexpected events (e.g., receiving unfair, disrespectful treatment) tend to elicit higher degrees of arousal (Markovsky 1988), deeper cognitive processing (provided the appropriate cognitive resources are available; see Macrae et al. 1999), and hence are easier to recall. In fact, research has demonstrated that people tend to recall instances of unjust interpersonal treatment more frequently than instances of economic or material injustice (Lupfer et al. 2000; Messick et al. 1985; Messick and Cook 1983; Mikula et al. 1990). Thus, as a corollary to the hypothesis that symbolic status expectations should be relatively high and relatively stable across contexts, violating these expectations should have particularly profound consequences, both for the individuals in the immediate situation and their social organizations. To frame this latter idea in statistical terms, when entered in the same equation to predict reactions such as overall satisfaction with the decision, evaluations of the decision-maker, and the organization in general, *the effect size for meeting* versus *violating symbolic status expectations should be greater than the effect size for meeting* versus *violating expectations for concrete status.*

We tested the above hypotheses with data from a large field study (details reported in Binning and Huo 2006). An ethnically diverse sample of 454 college students provided their specific expectations and reactions in a retrospective report of an actual encounter with a university campus decision-maker (e.g., faculty, administrators, campus law enforcement). To assess violations of expectations, participants reported on four-point scales what they were expecting in terms of symbolic status (e.g., to be treated fairly, respectfully) and what they were expecting in terms of concrete status (e.g., to receive a concrete outcome that benefitted them such as a successful grade appeal). They were then asked what they had actually received (e.g., treated fairly, an outcome that benefitted them). Based on simple difference scores, participants were classified in terms of whether their treatment fell short of expectations, met expectations, or exceeded expectations. A similar classification was created for whether their concrete outcomes fell short of, met, or exceeded expectations. Thus, in total, there were nine possible combinations of treatment and concrete expectancy violations.

To assess the relative influence of these two types of violation in shaping reactions to the particular experience, as well as to test for potential interactions between treatment and outcome expectancy violations, we conducted two 3 (treatment expectations: violated vs. met vs. exceeded) ×3 (outcome expectations: violated vs. met vs. exceeded) ANOVAS, one on participants' evaluations of the resource distributor and one on participants' overall levels of satisfaction. These analyses largely supported our predictions. First, for both dependent variables, the size of the main effects for symbolic status violations was significantly larger than the comparable effect sizes for concrete status violations. This is consistent with the idea that violated treatment expectations were more meaningful to participants than violated outcome expectations.

However, both ANOVAS also revealed the presence of two-way interactions, which are depicted in Fig. 8.4. The two-way interactions suggested several noteworthy effects. First, it appeared that when treatment expectations were

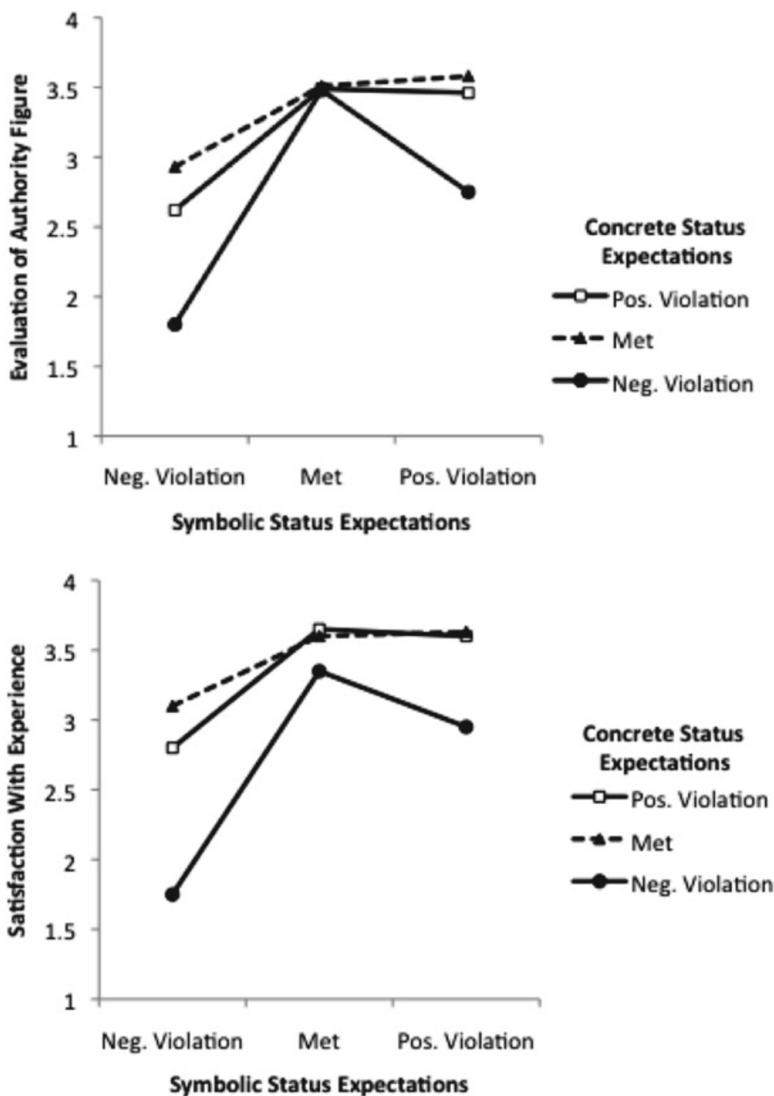

Fig. 8.4 Authority evaluation and overall satisfaction as a function of violated symbolic and concrete status expectations

met, it mattered very little whether outcome expectations were violated, met, or exceeded. That is, if participants were treated how they expected to be treated, it did not matter what they actually received. They tended to be satisfied and evaluated the decision-maker favorably. Although meeting treatment expectations was always important, it was especially important when outcomes fell short of expectations. This is consistent with previous research that suggests how one is treated is particularly meaningful when outcomes are negative (cf. Brockner and Wiesenfeld 1996). On the whole, then, the field data supported the idea that symbolic status violations, relative to concrete status violations, were especially critical in shaping reactions to experiences.

It may be that people expect an acknowledgement of their symbolic status within their valued groups and organizations, regardless of other factors (e.g., performance, nature of interpersonal relationships). If so, then what may be most critical for group and individual functioning are the messages conveyed by unfair, disrespectful treatment rather than the messages conveyed by fair, respectful treatment. This line of reasoning is, of course, consistent with the research on the pervasive positive-negative asymmetries in human experiences (e.g., Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Prislin et al. 2000), which suggest that reactions to negative experiences (e.g., losing money) are generally more powerful than reactions to correspondingly positive experiences (e.g., winning money). Being treated poorly may hurt more than being treated well feels good.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of the present findings follow closely from the theoretical implications. From the perspective of decision-makers who are responsible for distributing valued resources among constituents unequally, the present argument makes clear the importance of always delivering symbolic status (e.g., respect, fairness) to those who are affected by the decisions. Results from the field study indicated that as long as peoples' expectations for symbolic treatment were met, they were satisfied with their outcomes and had favorable evaluations of decision-maker. In fact, this was true even for individuals who received worse-than-expected concrete status.

From the perspective of those who are affected by authority's decisions, the preceding argument highlights how favorable treatment can be used to distract or ameliorate people's reactions to unexpectedly poor decision-making outcomes. Put simply, fair treatment may enable certain groups and individuals to benefit some people at the cost of others without evoking unrest or dissatisfaction from those who are hurt by the decisions (see Jackman 1994). It could be, in other words, that individuals are treated unfairly in a concrete sense (e.g., getting systematically lower concrete outcomes than they deserve) but treated fairly in a symbolic, interpersonal sense (e.g., through apparently fair and neutral decision-making). Of course, whether high-quality treatment is viewed as a bona fide display of concern for the individual or a manipulative technique to get people to accept negative outcomes is often "in the eye of the beholder" and likely to depend on factors such as trust (versus distrust) in authority (Tyler and Huo 2002), in the ingroup, and in people in general (see Binning 2007). Because of the unique, egalitarian potential surrounding the distribution of symbolic status, people are likely to have particularly strong, negative reactions in response to violations of symbolic status expectations relative to violations of expectations for concrete status.

Part III: Implications for Social Resource Theory

In this final section, we discuss the implications of the present conceptualization for Foa and Foa's social resource theory. Resource theory begins with a distinction between economic (goods, services, money) and noneconomic resources (love, status, and information) and attempts to make sense of how these different goods are exchanged with one another. Status is just one of the six primary resources, and as such, the present approach raises questions about how this more

nuanced understanding of status fits within resource theory. We briefly consider one area of resource theory where the present model seems particularly relevant.

Understanding the Relationship Between Status and Love

In social resource theory, status is defined as "an expression of evaluative judgment which conveys high or low prestige, regard, or esteem," whereas love is defined as "an expression of affectionate regard, warmth, or comfort." Initial studies in the development of resource theory illustrated that love and status are exchanged with one another more often than each is exchanged with other resources (see Foa 1971). In response to an expression of warmth (e.g., a smile), a target is more likely to reciprocate with an expression of regard than with a monetary payment or the performance of some service, which helps explain the proximal positions afforded to status and love within resource theory.

As the brief definitions above illustrate, both status and love involve social regard and evaluations. Moreover, both resources are symbolic. However, a variety of researches in social psychology appear to affirm the distinction between these two dimensions. According to Fiske and her colleagues (e.g., Fiske et al. 2007), warmth (similar to love) and competence (similar to status) are among the most fundamental of evaluations people make of others. Illustrating the independence of the two dimensions, people who are judged to be high in warmth can also be judged to relatively low in competence (e.g., a class clown) and those high in competence can also be judged as low in warmth (e.g., an overachieving bookworm). In recent work by Huo et al. (2010a), perceptions that one is well-liked by others were found to be related to but empirically distinguishable from perceptions of one's status as a worthy group member, and each dimension predicted different social outcomes.

Given the distinctness of these two dimensions, part of the utility of the present model depends on its ability to present novel predictions about their exchange. When love is exchanged for status, which of the four types of status is being exchanged? When a person "gives" love to another, they may do so in the hopes of receiving concrete status, such as marriage (particularistic) and wealth (universalistic), and/or they may do it with hope of receiving acknowledgement (particularistic) and appreciation as a person (universalistic). When viewed in this light, it seems unlikely that only one of the dimensions is in play at any given time. As such, the question is not *which* of elements of status are exchanged but rather to what extent each element is emphasized by the context and by the individual. A person is pejoratively referred to as a "gold digger" when they are willing to give love to another solely in hopes of bettering their concrete position in life. But the act of giving love for concrete status does not always have this negative slant. For instance, people in more companionate love relationships may take solace and assurance in having someone there when they need them (see Hatfield 1988). By contrast, prototypical star-crossed lovers give love to others without any expectation of concrete status or benefit to material standing. Presumably, they do so with only the hope of being acknowledged and valued by the other person, regardless of the other's concrete standing or ability to improve a material position. This analysis highlights the possible development in resource theory, to be explored in future research, that particular types of love (e.g., companionate or passionate love) are systematically exchanged with particular forms of status (e.g., concrete or symbolic, respectively).

Conclusion

Social resource theory was developed according to how people naturalistically divided and organized different social resources. We applied core insights of social resource theory to an in-depth consideration of one particular resource, status. Future research might fruitfully apply the approach taken here to each of the five other major resources. Such efforts would not only help fill out the resource theory framework with more granular understanding of each resource, they may

also generate novel insights about how people assign value and discover meaning in their lives.

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