

Article

Status Hoarding: How Higher Status Actors Steal Credit for Others' Work

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Abstract

We examine factors that allow higher status people to steal credit from lower status people. Drawing on opportunity hoarding research and status characteristics and expectation states theory, we develop the concept of status hoarding: the use of one's status position to accumulate more status through illegitimate means. Compared to similar concepts such as the Matthew Effect, which do not offer a mechanism by which benefits disproportionately accumulate, status hoarding explains how group structures give rise to perceptions of competence and reward deservingness among group members, which facilitate higher status actors' ability to steal credit and thus increase their status. We use two survey experiments to test our arguments on the role of expectations and referential structures in both assigning credit to higher status actors and inhibiting lower status actors from reporting theft of their ideas. In study one, we find that participants were more likely to assign credit for a valued task contribution to a higher status actor, and these effects were mediated by expectations for reward and competence. In study two, we find that people perceive higher status actors as more likely to report credit stealing to their supervisors, but these effects were not mediated by expectations in the way that we predicted. We conclude with a general discussion of the broader implications of status hoarding and directions for future research.

Keywords: status; expectation states theory; reward expectations; credit stealing; survey experiment



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1. Introduction

The rumor mills of academia are rife with allegations (many of which have been substantiated) of faculty members taking credit for work completed by their graduate students or junior colleagues, or demanding publication credit for work that they did not produce. A recent internet search for the phrase “professor steals ideas” returned over 410 million results, lending some credence to the idea that this is a widespread problem, or at least that people perceive that it is. The problem of “ghost authorship” in academia, which occurs when an author contributes significantly to a publication but does not receive credit, is another form that idea and credit theft can take, which has led many academic journals and universities to implement guidelines regarding authorship credit. Additionally, the phenomenon of taking unearned credit for others' work is not unique to academia and has been documented in a variety of organizational contexts. For example,

Zweig et al. (2025) conducted a survey on perceptions of knowledge theft in the workplace and found that over half of their sample reported having credit stolen from them at work, while an additional 25 percent reported witnessing such an event. Such results suggest the possibility that credit theft is a widespread phenomenon.

Discussions regarding idea stealing and credit theft within academia often focus on unequal power dynamics. For example, students can feel unable to speak up because they are vulnerable to those who evaluate them or to people whose recommendations could make the difference between landing a career in the academy or not (Martin 1992). Likewise, research on idea theft in the workplace often focuses on the ways that structural dynamics favor powerful actors through a process of moral credentialing (see, e.g., Ploeger-Lyons and Bisel 2023). The overall narrative, then, tends to focus on the exploitation of less powerful members of an organization by those higher up in the organizational power hierarchy.

Acknowledging the importance of power dynamics in shaping who steals credit from whom—and who gets away with it—we suggest that there is another relevant social dimension at play in such interactions, namely status. We argue that status enters the equation in four ways. First, those who steal credit for work to which they did not contribute or ideas that are not theirs ostensibly do so for some benefit, which we argue is to raise or maintain their own status. Second, unethical actors often steal ideas from people who differ from them not just in terms of lower relative power, but also in terms of lower relative status. Third, cultural status beliefs influence what types of people we perceive as more likely to offer valuable task contributions, as well as who we perceive as deserving of reward (Berger et al. 1977), and these beliefs affect who we see as deserving of credit. And fourth, even when power is the primary factor that facilitates this type of exploitation, power use itself can function as a mechanism to raise one's status within a group (Willer et al. 2012). Given that a person's ideas and work represent pathways to attaining status and that higher status people are more able to steal others' ideas and work, these unethical actors are, for all practical purposes, stealing potential status from those below them (Reh et al. 2018).

There is ample research within the organizations, management, and leadership literature that focuses on who tends to steal ideas and the characteristics of ethical and unethical group members. There is less attention, however, to the structures and processes that enable some actors to successfully claim credit for others' work and that inhibit other actors from speaking up when their work is stolen. In this paper, we develop a theoretical argument linking credit stealing to group members' status characteristics and expectations for competence. We argue that reward expectations tied to categorical and ability referential structures affect both who people see as deserving of credit for valued task contributions, and that third-order expectations for competence (i.e., a person's perceptions of what most people think; see, e.g., Correll et al. 2017) affect whether a person reports or otherwise challenges others' claims when their work is co-opted without their consent. In outlining our theoretical argument, we introduce the concept of status hoarding, which we define as the use of one's status position to accumulate more status through illegitimate means. We test our arguments regarding the role of expectations and referential structures in assigning credit and in perceptions of inhibiting reporting using two survey experiments.

1.1. Theoretical Overview

The argument that idea theft is an illegitimate means to accumulate status is based on the assumption that status is a valued resource that people are motivated to acquire (Huberman et al. 2004). For example, we do not argue that a manager would take credit for their employee's idea because of the inherent value of the idea, but rather because credit for the idea can be translated into additional status within or outside of the organization (Shaw

and Olson 2015). Indeed, the desire to accumulate status is a fundamental motive in human behavior (Anderson et al. 2015). More importantly to our argument, there is evidence that people in higher status positions report a greater desire to accumulate even more status, compared to those lower in the social hierarchy (Delhey et al. 2022; Wang et al. 2020).

As noted above, we employ the term status hoarding to refer to situations in which people who occupy relatively higher status positions use the advantages associated with those positions to acquire more status through illegitimate means, and often at the expense of others. The concept of status hoarding is akin to, but distinct from, the “Matthew Effect.” According to research on the Matthew Effect, possession of status leads to the accumulation of advantage through others’ deferential behavior (Bothner et al. 2011; Merton 1968). For example, in considering the Matthew Effect, Kim and King (2014) demonstrate that in American Major League Baseball, umpires adjust their evaluations of balls and strikes based on the status of the pitcher. In this way, higher status pitchers get more favorable calls on borderline pitches (i.e., umpires “expand the strike zone” for higher status pitchers), allowing for more called strikes, and consequently, better outcomes for the pitcher. Importantly, this process occurs without any direct action on the pitchers’ part. They do not need to ask the umpire for favorable calls or to claim that any particular pitch should be called a strike (and in fact, arguing balls and strikes is explicitly against the rules, though recent rule changes allow for a limited number of challenges to umpire calls). Accordingly, the Matthew Effect operates without any direct intention of the higher status actor. Conversely, status hoarding involves situations in which those who possess status use their position to take more status than they are due. Status hoarding is different from the Matthew Effect in that it involves a higher status actor taking specific action to claim a benefit to which they are not entitled.

Status hoarding is also related to the concept of opportunity hoarding (see, e.g., Hansen and Toft 2021; Tilly 2003), in which people use their advantaged positions to “box out” others. To this end, Hansen and Toft (2021, p. 604) define opportunity hoarding as a process in which “access to economic opportunities is limited by exclusionary devices that regulate who can enjoy such privileges and who are excluded from economic opportunities.” Much like those who hoard opportunities, status hoarders use the advantages of status to protect their valued position, to acquire greater prestige, and to deny others of opportunities to increase their status. Status hoarding is distinct from opportunity hoarding, though, in that opportunity hoarding involves a process of gatekeeping to protect one’s position through exclusion while status hoarding involves using intentionally deceptive tactics to increase one’s standing. Additionally, status hoarding reflects one potential behavioral mechanism through which opportunity hoarding might be accomplished.

Status hoarding behaviors can take at least two different forms: (1) exaggerating one’s performance to create the appearance of greater accomplishment (Dippong and Jillani 2025; Pettit et al. 2016); and (2) directly appropriating credit for someone else’s accomplishments with the aim of increasing one’s standing (Shaw and Olson 2014). In this paper, we focus on the latter form of status hoarding. In order to count as theft, an act of claiming credit for others’ work must meet two criteria. First, the act must be deliberate, and second, it must involve “claiming unjustified ownership of the work contributions of another” (Zweig et al. 2025, p. 1837). Accordingly, we refer to idea theft as an illegitimate means to acquire status when it meets the conditions of being intentional and unjustified, and when it is done to maintain or improve one’s standing within a group.

In developing our explanation for status hoarding and idea theft, we draw on the theory of status characteristics and expectation states (SCES). In doing so, we explain how the expectations for competence and perceptions of who is deserving of rewards in small group hierarchies of power and prestige create contexts that enable credit stealing by

insulating higher status individuals from consequences and by undermining the credibility of lower status actors. Thus, status hoarding is a collective outcome: it is initiated by higher status actors and facilitated by other group members who act (or do not act) on the basis of status-based perceptions of each other. In the remainder of this section, we outline basic elements of SCES, discuss the concept of status deviance, connect perceptions of competence to perceptions of credibility, and present our research hypotheses.

1.1.1. Status Characteristics and Expectations

SCES explains behavioral inequality in task-oriented, collectively oriented groups—groups that have come together to solve a collective problem to which every actor is expected to contribute (Webster 1969). Actors form performance expectations for one another based on the aggregate status value of each group member's status characteristics. Based on these characteristics, actors are either higher or lower status compared to other members of the group. Status, then, is comparative prestige that produces observable inequality.

The primary argument of SCES is that group members expect higher status people to be more competent at the group's task. Consequently, group members evaluate higher status actors more positively, higher status actors are given more opportunities to contribute, they contribute more, and they exert greater influence over group decisions. Thus, possession of the positively valued state of a status characteristic prescribes a pattern of behavior that includes greater output and higher quality output compared to a lower status counterpart, and failure to uphold this behavioral prescription constitutes a form of deviance (Wagner 1988). We return to the idea of status violations later.

The status characteristics that produce performance expectations can be either specific or diffuse. Specific status characteristics have two or more differentially evaluated states (e.g., high or low ability) and carry expectations for competence only in situations to which the ability is perceived to apply. Diffuse status characteristics have two or more differentially evaluated states and carry both specific and general expectations: actors who possess the positively valued state of a diffuse characteristic are expected to be more competent at tasks in general with no explicit boundaries on the range of tasks to which the expectations apply. The general model of SCES states that status characteristics are associated with performance expectations, and performance expectations predict behavior. See Figure 1 below for a graphical depiction of the model.

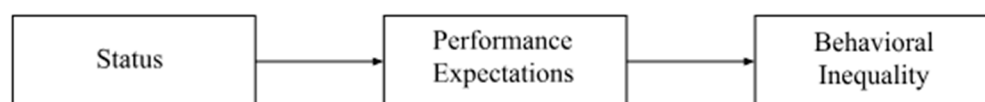


Figure 1. How Status Shapes Behavior in Collective Task Groups.

Types of expectations. Theory and research within SCES has delineated several levels at which performance expectations arise, and these different levels of expectations affect behavior differently based on the informational structure of the interaction. First-order expectations refer to the expectations that a person holds for themselves, relative to other group members. Second-order expectations refer to the expectations that one believes that others hold for them—that is, what person P thinks other O believes (Troyer and Younts 1997). Lastly, third-order expectations refer to expectations for what people in general think, or “what everyone knows that everyone knows” (Correll et al. 2017, p. 301). Overall, a person with high first-order expectations holds non-conscious beliefs that “I am more competent than my task partner.” A person with high second-order expectations holds beliefs that “my task partner thinks that I am more competent than they are.” And a person with high third-order expectations holds beliefs that “people in general think that people like me are more competent than people like my task partner.”

Referential structures. Referential structures, while distinct from third-order expectations, represent another element of the status and expectations structure that represent what “everyone knows to be true” (Ridgeway and Berger 1986). Whereas performance expectations connect status positions to anticipations of competence, referential structures connect status positions to expected levels of reward. Categorical referential structures are related to expected levels of reward based on nominal characteristics such as race, gender, or other diffuse characteristics that represent what kind of person someone is (Ridgeway and Berger 1986). Ability referential structures, on the other hand, connect positions to levels of reward based on specific abilities that indicate what a person is capable of (Ridgeway and Berger 1986). Although expectation states researchers often apply the concept of referential structures to expected levels of material rewards, the theory also applies to social rewards, including status, esteem, and prestige (Berger et al. 1998). To the extent that credit for good work (and the status associated with recognition) represents a reward, the referential structure should lead to expectations of greater credit and more merit for higher status actors.

1.1.2. Status and Credibility

Aside from connecting people to perceptions of competence and expected levels of reward, evidence indicates that people draw inferences regarding the credibility of a source based on their status characteristics. Illustrating this connection, Blue et al. (2020) demonstrate that people trust promises more when they come from a higher status actor than when coming from a lower status actor. People expect higher status people to behave more honestly and ethically, likely due—at least in part—to anticipation of competence (Blue et al. 2020; Ploeger-Lyons and Bisel 2023). That is, higher status actors are likely more capable of delivering on a promise based on their overall competence. The cultural beliefs connecting status and credibility are so strong and pervasive that courts of law essentially treat status characteristics as proxies for credibility (Simon-Kerr 2017).

Regarding status deviance and credibility, Wagner (1988) outlines the framework for a theory of status violations and status deviance, arguing that the behaviors associated with high and low performance expectations are in some form prescriptive. That is, not only are higher status people expected to contribute more to the group, but failure to contribute at expected levels constitutes a form of behavioral deviance. Not only are lower status group members expected to exert less influence on decisions, but they are also acting deviantly when they insist on having greater influence than their position assigns to them. When group members habitually engage in status deviant ways, the group can use control tactics to push the transgressor back in line or remove them from the interaction (Wagner 1988).

The prescriptive nature of expectations creates an interesting paradox when applied to the concept of credit theft. Specifically, claiming credit for a good idea is a behavior that we would expect of a higher status actor and would therefore be unlikely to raise any questions of credibility. Conversely, group members would likely view claims of credit by a lower status group member for work that has already been claimed by a higher status actor as a transgression, making the lower status person vulnerable to sanctions. In this situation, the lower status actor whose work has been unfairly appropriated is in a considerable bind: they lack the social position to resist the theft of their work, and they open themselves up to negative consequences (up to and including expulsion from the group) if they assert their case since doing so would violate the normative order. Again, we see that credit theft and status hoarding are collective outcomes that require the participation or passive consent of the group.

Claiming status or a reward that “belongs to” a higher status actor seems clearly out of line with normative prescriptions for lower status behavior. Additionally, even if the

lower status person were to make the claim, higher status actors, by virtue of their position, are often able to resist sanctions associated with their transgressions (Wagner 1988). Such behavioral prescriptions are further compounded by double standards that lead to more lenient evaluations based on status and that give higher status actors the “benefit of the doubt” (Foschi 2000). And because deferential lower status actors are often “rewarded” with perceptions of reasonableness, failing to appear appropriately deferential could lead to perceptions that a lower status actor is behaving unreasonably (Ridgeway and Nakagawa 2017). Thus, expectations for competence and rewards undermine the credibility of a lower status actor to make claims against higher status others, prescribe deferential behavior as a means to appear reasonable, and consequently minimize lower status group members’ potential to seek redress from the group when credit for their contributions is stolen.

1.1.3. Expectations, Credibility, and the Informational Structure of Status Hoarding

Thus far, we have described the essential elements of SCES that link possession of specific and diffuse characteristics to expectations for competence, and we have outlined a conceptual connection between performance expectations and credibility. At this point, we aim to integrate these ideas into a theoretical framework for predicting to whom group members are more likely to assign credit for an idea whose ownership is contested, and for predicting responses to having one’s work stolen by a higher status other.

Our intention with this theoretical argument is not to put the onus for addressing credit theft onto victims. Rather, our purpose is to highlight structural mechanisms that facilitate offenses by higher status and that undermine the ability of lower status actors to succeed in challenging these offenses. Also note that when we write below on people’s expectations or the questions that they ask and inferences they draw, we are not suggesting that these processes are conscious or that people are aware that they are occurring. Rather, following from the expectation states theoretical framework, we assume that these processes occur largely outside of actors’ awareness or control. Any language that suggests a conscious process is strictly for illustrative purposes and not an indication that people act on the basis of status differences with any specific intention.

Perpetrators, victims and expectations. In the process of stealing credit for the purpose of gaining status, those who commit the offense and those who are victimized are required to assess their relative status at multiple levels of comparison as it pertains to how other group members are likely to perceive them. Although our study focuses on responses to status theft and not on how the offense initially occurs, it is worth considering, for the purposes of comparison, how expectations and referential structures shape both who is selected as a target (which is beyond the scope of the present study) and who feels confident that other group members will support them in their attempts to refute illegitimate claims (which is the focus of the current study).

In choosing a victim to steal potential status from, the perpetrator must ask two questions prior to the offense: (1) can this person stop me; and (2) will anyone else step in? On this point, we expect that motivated offenders consider both the presence of a suitable target and the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen and Felson 1979). The first question above (can this person stop me?) invokes first-order expectations of whether the intended target is capable of resisting the offense. Given the structure of expectations for competence, a lower status other represents a suitable target. The second question (will anyone else step in?) invokes third-order expectations of whether people in general will see the lower status actor as credible, given expectations for competence and relevant referential structures. To the extent that people generally expect good ideas and more accomplishments from higher status actors, this reduces the likelihood of a sanction from the group in response to a claim by a lower status other.

The victim of the offense must ask similar questions, but at different times. When confronted by a higher status other, the lower status actor must assess whether they are capable of resisting the offense—can they stop it before it occurs? This question invokes first-order expectations for competence, as the target must determine their competence in succeeding against a more capable other (Savage et al. 2020). If the target fails in stopping the offense, the question arises as to whether or not a lower status actor can convince the group that they deserve credit. This matter involves the implicit questions: “Will people in general believe that someone like me was capable of generating this idea/product?” and “Will people in general believe that I deserve rewards in the form of credit for this work?” The former question draws on issues of third-order expectations and the latter on issues of referential beliefs about who is deserving of reward. To the extent that a lower status target holds disadvantaging third-order expectations for themselves, they should expect to be seen as less credible and be deterred from resisting or reporting. Figures 2 and 3 depict the conceptual models linking status to behavioral outcomes.

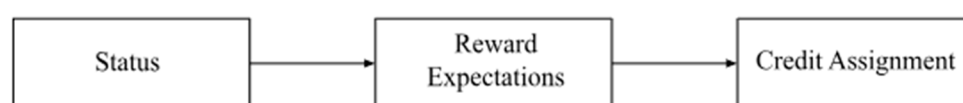


Figure 2. How Status Shapes Assignment of Credit.

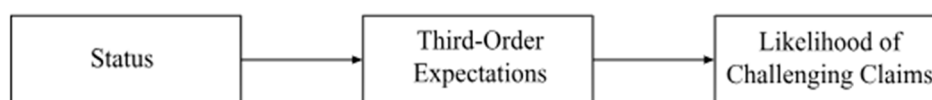


Figure 3. How Status Shapes Willingness to Challenge Illegitimate Claims of Credit.

As can be seen in the figures, both of our models are fundamentally derived from the logic of expectation states theory. While prior work has shown a relationship between status, power, and credit stealing, our primary contribution here is to specify the social psychological mechanisms—i.e., different types of expectations—that connect structural positions to behavioral outcomes. Status positions are associated with a variety of different types of expectations, and these expectations enable and constrain behaviors in unique ways. While expectations all arise through roughly the same process, each type of expectation exerts its influence in distinct ways. Research has shown that reward expectations shape the allocation of benefits within the group (Fisek and Hysom 2008), and we examine how those expectations affect previously untheorized processes related to appropriating credit for others’ work. Likewise, research on third-order expectations has shown that beliefs regarding “what everybody knows” produce status advantages in decision-making processes even when the status beliefs themselves are illegitimate (Correll et al. 2017). We extend this concept by examining how third-order expectations constrain people’s willingness to challenge claims from higher status actors even when failing to do so comes at a personal cost. It is well known how status-based expectations create power and prestige orders in groups, and the novel contribution of the current study is to show how those same processes allow certain actors to accumulate advantages beyond what they are “due”.

It is important to note that our argument does not assume that all higher status actors will engage in status hoarding behaviors when presented with the opportunity. As we note above, evidence suggests that higher status actors tend to be more motivated to acquire greater status than their lower status counterparts (Delhey et al. 2022; Wang et al. 2020). However, the current studies do not address the structural underpinnings of that motivation. In other words, we do not seek to explain why someone engages in status hoarding, but rather, we outline the social psychological processes that facilitate

credit stealing among those who are so motivated. In our model, group structures (status hierarchies) give rise to cognitive states (expectations) that facilitate credit stealing.

In focusing on the structural and social psychological factors that allow credit stealing to occur, we are primarily interested in status hoarding as a collective outcome, not as an individual behavior. Although the theoretical outline we describe above incorporates the cognitions and perceptions of credit stealers and their intended targets, the cognitions and perceptions we describe are explicitly focused on how the group is likely to perceive the focal actors with the situation. Individuals make claims of credit deservingness (both legitimate and illegitimate) and groups decide—consciously or otherwise—to accept or reject such claims. As such, group members’ perceptions of those who make claims are one of the most critical determinants of whether a claim to credit is rewarded or sanctioned. Accordingly, our focus is not on the behaviors of actors claiming undue credit, but on their own and others’ perceptions and expectations. The hypotheses we outline below seek to examine how people perceive and respond to others who claim credit and how they assess their deservingness on the basis of status and expectations.

1.1.4. Hypotheses

Taken together, our argument suggests that group members will perceive claims for credit from higher status actors as more credible than those from a lower status actor, and that status-based expectations for who is more deserving of rewards lead people to assign credit to higher status actors. Thus, when a dispute arises, group members are more likely to assign credit to the higher status actor when they do not know which actor made the actual contribution. Stated differently, the group status structure activates reward expectations, and on the basis of those expectations, people are more likely to assign credit consistent with the status structure. We offer two hypotheses related to who will receive credit for an idea whose ownership is disputed (study 1):

H1. *When presented with an idea that is claimed by both a higher and lower status actor, respondents will assign ownership of the idea to the higher status actor.*

H2. *Reward expectations (i.e., perceptions of what type of people are more deserving of rewards) will mediate the relationship between status and assignment of credit for an idea.*

We also argue that when a group member appropriates credit for work that belongs to another, higher status actors are more likely to challenge these claims than lower status others. We further argue that, in deciding whether to challenge a fraudulent claim, people assess their own potential credibility in terms of third-order expectations for competence and who “people in general” will perceive as more credible. This process should lead to clear differences in behavior in status differentiated groups. The process should also affect behavior in equal-status groups in that equally high status actors are associated with positive third-order expectations even when interacting with an equally high status partner. As such, the status structure activates third-order expectations consistent with the group status order, and these expectations lead to differences in behavior. Although our design does not allow us to test this claim directly, we can assess perceptions of this likelihood. We offer three hypotheses related to who participants perceive will challenge claims when a group member attempts to appropriate the work of another (study 2):

H3. *When presented with a status-different teammate who claims undeserved credit for a task contribution, respondents will perceive that higher status actors are more likely to challenge the fraudulent claim.*

H4. *When presented with a status-equal teammate who claims undeserved credit for a task contribution, respondents will perceive that equally high status actors are more likely to challenge the fraudulent claim than equally low status actors.*

H5. *Third-order expectations will mediate the relationship between status and perceptions of likelihood of challenging fraudulent claims.*

To test our hypotheses regarding the ways that status characteristics and expectations for competence affect perceptions of likely responses to illegitimate claims for credit, we conducted two vignette survey experiments. We designed the two studies to assess perceptions related to: (1) whether status and expectations affect the attribution of credit by other group members when a dispute arises; and (2) whether status and expectations affect perceptions of who is most likely to challenge an illegitimate claim for credit that negatively affects them. Together, the two studies examine related but distinct mechanisms through which higher status individuals can accumulate even more status.

Because the vignette studies that we employ assess respondents' perceptions of fictional characters, along with self-reports of how participants would behave in a hypothetical situation, our studies cannot establish how people would actually behave in a given situation or clearly determine causality. Recognizing that limitation, the usefulness of vignette studies for assessing perceptions of status and expectations for competence is well-established (Webster and Dippong 2022). As such, we intend our studies to serve as initial tests of our arguments and for our findings to highlight and clarify structural and social psychological factors that can be more directly tested in future research. We describe our two survey experiments in the following sections.

2. Study One Materials and Methods

Our first study examines whether arbiters are more likely to assign credit to higher status actors when presented with a dispute regarding who deserves credit for a task contribution. We used a vignette study in which participants were assigned to one of two conditions in which we manipulated the relative status of two fictional employees tasked with working together. We used questionnaire items that asked respondents to assign credit to one of the two employees based only on the information provided in the vignette. For our mediation analyses questions, we include additional measures assessing the role of referential structures for rewards. We also measured participants' general performance expectations of the vignette actors and their perceptions of third-order expectations for both employees.

2.1. Participants

We recruited 308 participants from Prolific using quotas to create a sample that was representative of the U.S. population in terms of age, racial identity, gender identity, and political ideology.¹ Participants received \$1.75 for completing the survey, which we estimated would take approximately seven minutes. For any respondents who failed either one of the two attention checks at the beginning of the study (described below), the survey immediately concluded, and they were not counted as part of our sample.

2.2. Procedures

At the outset of the study, after providing informed consent, participants read instructions informing them that the study would require them to read a story, correctly recall relevant aspects of the story, and evaluate various aspects of the story's characters. The study proceeded in four phases: (1) an initial vignette that provided background information and manipulated the relative status of two fictional employees, along with an

attention check in which participants were required to correctly report information about the employees as presented in phase one; (2) a brief questionnaire assessing respondents' perceptions of the fictional employees' relative status, as well as questions assessing various forms of status-related expectations; (3) a second vignette presenting participants with a scenario in which both employees claimed credit for an idea that had earned special recognition within the organization; and (4) a second questionnaire asking respondents to assume the role of arbiter and to assign credit for the idea to one of the employees.

In the first phase of the study, participants read a description of two employees, Peter and Jim, who work at an organization together. We vary education level and organizational tenure as status indicators (Kim 2018; Webster and Driskell 1978). The vignette described higher status employees as having an MBA degree and 12 years of work experience, and it described lower status employees as having a bachelor's degree in management with five years of experience. We pretested several versions of the vignette with a small sample ($n = 54$) that varied the magnitude of differences between employees. From this pretest, we selected the combination of characteristics that demonstrated the highest level of participant recall and the largest perceived status differentiation. Participants also completed two attention check items asking them to correctly recall the education level and organizational tenure of the employees. Respondents who answered either attention check item incorrectly were presented with the vignette a second time and given another chance to answer correctly. Failing either attention check twice terminated a respondent's participation in the study and they did not receive a financial incentive.

In the second phase, participants reported their expectations for each of the two actors described in the vignettes. The questionnaire included measures of general expectations for competence (as a proxy for first-order expectations, as participants are not themselves actual group members), third-order expectations for competence, and a measure of reward expectations that reflects referential structures related to the types of people who are more worthy of reward. In the third stage, participants read a second vignette describing a situation in which the two employees worked together to solve a problem. The vignette further informed participants that during a meeting with the team's supervisor, both employees claim credit for an idea that the supervisor deemed worthy of special public recognition. We included special recognition for the idea to ensure that the employees' behavior was tied to a clear status outcome. We also counterbalanced whether the lower or higher status actor made the initial claim for credit to assess whether credit was assigned based on status or based on which employee claimed credit first. This produced two conditions: (1) higher status employee claims credit first, followed by the lower status coworker; and (2) lower status employee claims credit first, followed by the higher status coworker. We provide examples of the two vignettes below:

Vignette Part One: Peter and Jim work in the marketing department of a major US corporation. Peter has a Master's degree in business administration and has 12 years of work experience at the company. Jim has a Bachelor's degree in management and has 5 years of work experience at the company. Their director has given them the job of working together to brainstorm ideas about how to market a new line of services that the organization will be offering. To encourage Peter and Jim to do their best, the director will include recognition for the best idea at the next department meeting.

Vignette Part 2: After about two hours of brainstorming, Peter and Jim's director calls a meeting with them. Looking over the list of ideas, the supervisor points to one of the ideas and says, "I think this is the best idea. Which one of you thought of it?" Peter says, "That was my idea." Jim responds, "No, it was my idea!"

In the fourth stage, participants were asked to imagine that they were called on to resolve the dispute and to assign credit for the idea to one of the two employees. Lastly, participants provided demographic information and were redirected back to Prolific to receive their incentive.

2.3. Variables

Our focal dependent variable is a measure of participants' assignment of credit for the idea whose ownership was contested. To measure credit assignment, we presented participants with a binary choice question asking them to select one of the two employees to receive credit. As an exploratory question, we also asked participants to report how confident they were in their decision on a scale of 1 to 5, (1 = very unconfident; 5 = very confident).

2.3.1. Independent Variable

Our focal independent variable is the employees' manipulated status position. As noted above, we manipulated status using education level (MBA or bachelor's degree in management) and organizational tenure (12 years or 5 years with the organization). The higher status actor was described as having more education and organizational tenure than the lower status actor. We created a dichotomous variable to indicate relative status (1 = higher status).

2.3.2. Mediating Variables

To examine the extent to which expectations mediate the relationship between status and credit assignment, we collected data on three different forms of status-based expectations. Although we predict that reward expectations will significantly mediate the relationship, we also examine the effects of performance expectations to assess competing or complementary processes. We measure general expectations using three items from Zeller and Warnecke's (1973) index of performance expectations. For both employees, we asked respondents to report their own assessment of the person's intelligence, ability in situations in general, and ability in terms of "other things that count in this world" (Zeller and Warnecke 1973). We measured all items on a seven-point scale ranging from (1 = very low ability) to (7 = very high ability). Our measure of general expectations reflects the average of the three items in the index.

Additionally, we measured third-order expectations using a modified version of the Zeller and Warnecke index. Rather than asking respondents to report their own assessments of the employees, we asked them to report how they think most people would rate them on the three items. Again we measured expectations on a seven-point scale and created our variable by taking the average of the items. And lastly, we measured reward expectations based on status referential structures by asking participants to report which employee they think most people would say is more deserving of rewards. This was reported on a five-point scale ranging from (1 = Peter is much more deserving) to (5 = Jim is much more deserving), with (3 = They are equally deserving). Our single item measure of reward expectations is consistent with the ways that previous scholars have assessed them (see, e.g., Fisek and Hysom 2008).

2.3.3. Control Variables

Although we employed random assignment, we also included several demographic control variables to increase confidence in our findings. Specifically, we estimate models that control for participants' age in years, their race (1 = white), their gender identity (1 = cisgender woman), their education (1 = less than a bachelor's degree), and their self-identified social class (1 = middle class).

2.4. Study One Analysis Plan

Because our dependent variable is dichotomous, we use a combination of proportions tests and logistic regression models. Hypothesis 1 will be supported if the relationship between status and credit assignment is positive and significant, such that participants are significantly more likely to assign credit to the higher status employee. To test for mediation effects, we employ the KHB approach (Karlson et al. 2012), which is suitable for estimating direct and indirect effects in models with dichotomous outcomes.

3. Study One Results

The primary goal of study one is to assess the relationship between status and who receives credit for an idea that both parties claim. In addressing these goals, we analyzed data from 308 participants who were randomly assigned to either condition 1 ($n = 155$) or condition 2 ($n = 153$). The median time to complete the survey was 3.633 min. Survey diagnostics revealed that we had no missing data, zero percent survey straight-lining, and no significantly short survey times. Furthermore, participants who failed the attention checks were screened out prior to completing the survey. As such, our analyses do not exclude data from any participants.

Table 1 presents participant characteristics, as well as descriptive statistics for our analytical variables. In terms of sample characteristics, participants reported an average age of 45 years.² Regarding demographics, the majority of our participants identified as white (76 percent). In terms of other characteristics, 46.4 percent of the participants identified as cisgender females, and 63 percent had equal to or greater than a bachelor's degree in education. Lastly, in terms of social class, 52.3 percent identified as middle class. Participant characteristics were evenly distributed among conditions via randomization.

Table 1. Study One Descriptive Statistics and Participant Characteristics ($N = 308$).

Variable	Mean/Proportion
Assigned credit to higher status person	0.584 ^a
More deserving of rewards (1 = higher status person, 5 = lower status person)	1.851 ^a (0.868)
Age	44.977 (15.020)
Cisgender Woman	0.464
Race White	0.760
Less than bachelor's degree	0.370
Middle Class	0.523

^a Denotes significant difference between status conditions. Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

3.1. Manipulation Check

To evaluate the efficacy of our status manipulation, we included a question directly asking the respondents to report which employee had more status between the two described in the vignette. We then compared the results using a two-sample t -test with equal variances, which showed a significant difference between the conditions in the expected directions ($t = 30.16$; $p < 0.001$): respondents rated the employee who was depicted as having been at the company longer and having a higher education as the higher status actor in both conditions. Accordingly, we have confidence that the manipulation created the intended differentiation.

3.2. Analysis

As an initial test of our hypothesis that people are more likely to assign credit for an idea to a higher status actor, we used a two-sample test of proportions. We find that

just over 61 percent of participants assigned credit to the higher status actor, a statistically significant difference ($z = 2.96$; $p = 0.003$). This provides initial support for Hypothesis 1.

Turning next to our binary logistic regression analysis, Table 2 presents odds ratios for models predicting credit assignment from status (model 1) and from status and participant demographics (model 2). As seen in Table 2, higher status actors have 97.91 percent greater odds of being chosen to receive credit compared to lower status actors ($OR = 1.979$; $z = 2.95$; $p = 0.003$). As such, Hypothesis 1 is supported. Introducing control variables into the model does not substantively change the relationship between status and credit assignment: when accounting for participant characteristics, the odds ratio for assigning credit based on status increases slightly ($OR = 2.213$; $z = 3.29$; $p = 0.001$). It is also worth noting that respondent age was a significant predictor of who was chosen for credit ($OR = 1.020$; $z = 2.43$; $p = 0.015$).³

Table 2. Study One Logistic Regression Predicting Credit Assignment from Manipulated Status Position and Expectations for Reward ($N = 308$).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Constant</i>	0.800 ** (0.130)	0.278 ** (0.133)	0.162 *** (0.073)	0.055 *** (0.036)
<i>Status (1 = higher)</i>	1.979 ** (0.458)	2.213 *** (0.534)	0.876 (0.270)	0.964 (0.307)
<i>Reward</i>			1.938 *** (0.331)	1.964 *** (0.344)
<i>Age</i>		1.020 * (0.008)		1.019 * (0.009)
<i>White</i>		0.900 (0.252)		0.911 (0.262)
<i>Cisgender woman</i>		0.963 (0.228)		0.871 (0.212)
<i>Less than BA</i>		1.108 (0.284)		1.238 (0.329)
<i>Middle Class</i>		1.394 (0.343)		1.432 (0.363)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Note: Models present odds ratios. Numbers in parentheses are standard errors.

Models 3 and 4 in Table 2 include the effects of reward expectations. When reward expectations are included in the model, the effects of status are reduced to nonsignificance ($z = -0.43$; $p = 0.668$). Reward expectations significantly predict credit assignment, with participants having 93.8 percent greater odds of choosing the actor whom they believe most people would say deserves rewards. This relationship holds up with the addition of control variables.

Given that the inclusion of reward expectations in the model reduced the effects of status to nonsignificance, we conducted further tests to examine the possibility of mediation. Table 3 presents results of the KHB mediation analysis. Model 1 represents the total effect of status without mediating effects, and model 2 presents the reduction in the effects of status with the inclusion of reward expectations. The difference in the models is significant ($z = 3.76$; $p < 0.001$), providing clear evidence that the effects of status are mediated through reward expectations that reflect cultural referential structures.

Table 3. Study One KHB Test for Mediation.

	Model 1	Model 2	Change in β
Status	0.731 ** (0.240)	-0.132 (0.309)	0.863 ***

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

As competing explanations, we also estimated KHB models examining the potential mediating effects of general performance expectations and third-order expectations.⁴ Results showed no significant effects of third-order expectations ($z = 0.084$; $p = 0.399$) but revealed a significant mediating effect of general expectations ($z = 3.57$; $p < 0.001$). We estimated another model that included both mediators. Disentangling the effects of the two mediators demonstrates that reward expectations account for 79.89 percent of the total mediating effects. Thus, although first-order expectations for competence significantly impact allocation of credit, reward expectations account for a substantially greater proportion of the relationship between status and credit. Hypothesis two is supported.

3.3. Study One Summary

In study one, we examined whether participants were more likely to assign credit for a good idea to a higher status actor when ownership of the idea was contested by a lower status coworker. Results show that higher status actors received credit for the idea even though the vignette provided no information to indicate which employee actually produced the idea. Additionally, the relationship between status and credit allocation is largely mediated by reward expectations tied to referential structures that reflect cultural beliefs regarding what kinds of people are deserving of rewards. Although study one measures self-reports of how they would behave in a fictional situation rather than directly test how they would actually behave, results provide initial support for the argument that higher status actors tend to receive the benefit of the doubt when claiming credit for a valued performance output. In turn, this may allow them to illegitimately claim credit for others' work.

4. Study Two Materials and Methods

Our second study assesses perceptions of how status affects who is more likely to "speak up" when another employee attempts to claim undue credit for their work based on how they perceive their place within the group structure. As in study one, we employ a vignette design. We expect that participants will perceive higher status actors as more likely to challenge a fraudulent claim if a lower status coworker claims undeserved credit for a task contribution. Additionally, we predict that participants will perceive equally high status actors as more likely to challenge a fraudulent claim compared to equally-low status actors when a status-equal teammate claims undeserved credit for a task contribution.

4.1. Participants

We recruited 300 participants from Prolific using quota representative sampling, as we did in study one. Participants who failed attention checks were removed prior to completing the study, so we did not make any exclusions based on lack of attention. Participants in study two received \$1.75 for completing the survey, which we estimated would take just over seven minutes to complete.

4.2. Procedures

The first two phases of study two are identical to those we employed in study one. That is, respondents read the first vignette that included our status manipulation based on the fictional employees' education and organizational tenure, answered attention check items, and provided responses to questions about general expectations and third-order performance expectations, along with measures of reward expectations. The language of the status manipulation vignette is identical to the manipulation from study one. In the third phase, rather than presenting participants with a scenario in which credit is contested and ownership of the idea is unknown, we examine how status affects the perceived likelihood of challenging fraudulent claims. In the scenario, participants were

made aware of which employee made the contribution but were informed that the other person intentionally claimed credit for the other's work. Below we provide an example of the study two incident vignette.

Study two vignette part two. After about two hours of brainstorming, Peter and Jim's director calls a meeting with them. Looking over the list of ideas, the supervisor points to one of the ideas and says, "I think this is the best idea. Which one of you thought of it?" In response, Peter says, "That was my idea." In fact, the idea was Jim's. Jim does not believe that Peter is taking credit accidentally, but rather, Jim believes that Peter wants to appear more impressive to their director.

In the fourth phase, participants responded to questions in which we assess perceptions of the likelihood that the employee whose ideas were stolen will challenge the claim. Lastly, they provided demographic information and were redirected back to Prolific to receive their incentive.

4.3. Variables

Our dependent variable is a single-item measure of participants' perceptions of the likelihood that the employee whose idea was appropriated will immediately challenge the illegitimate claim to the supervisor. We measured likelihood of reporting the incident using a seven-point Likert-type question ranging from (1 = extremely unlikely) to (7 = extremely likely).

4.3.1. Independent Variable

As stated above, we employed the same status manipulation as in study one, using education level (bachelor's degree in business versus MBA) and organizational tenure (five years versus twelve years). Unlike study 1, we also included two status-equal conditions in which the actors in the vignettes were equally high or equally low status. The higher status actor was higher on both education and organizational tenure, the lower status actor was lower on both education and organizational tenure, and status-equals were either matched as equally high or equally low on education and organizational tenure.

4.3.2. Mediating and Control Variables

Study two uses the same measures as study one, including our measures of general expectations, third-order expectations derived from the Zeller and Warnecke (1973) index, as well as our measure of reward expectations. We measured participants' age, race, gender identity, education level, and social class in the same way as described in study one.

4.4. Study Two Analysis Plan

Study two involves two sets of analyses. First, we estimate ordinal logistic regression models predicting perceived likelihood of immediately reporting the incident to the supervisor in status-differentiated groups. Second, we estimate models of the perceived likelihood of reporting the incident to a supervisor in status-equal groups. Lastly, we examine potential mediating effects of third-order expectations.

5. Study Two Results

The primary goal of study two is to evaluate the relationship between status and perceptions that an actor will report a coworker's attempt to take credit for their work to a supervisor. In addressing these goals, we analyzed data from 300 participants who were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: high status actor with low status partner ($n = 77$), low status actor with high status partner ($n = 71$), equally high status employees ($n = 75$), or equally low status employees ($n = 77$). The median time to complete the study

was 4.08 min, and survey diagnostics revealed no missing data, straight-lining, or unusually short response times.

Table 4 presents participant characteristics, as well as descriptive statistics for our analytical variables for study two. In terms of sample characteristics, participants reported an average age of 44.5 years. Approximately 69 percent of participants identified as White, 52 percent of the participants identified as cisgender females, and 54 percent had greater than or equal to a bachelor's degree in education. Lastly, in terms of social class, 52 percent identified as middle class.

Table 4. Study Two Descriptive Statistics and Participant Characteristics (N = 300).

Variable	Mean/Proportion
<i>Likelihood of reporting incident to supervisor</i>	3.240 ^a (1.201)
<i>Likelihood of reporting incident to someone other than supervisor</i>	4.084 ^a (0.767)
<i>Age</i>	44.550 (14.574)
<i>Cisgender Woman</i>	0.520
<i>Race White</i>	0.687
<i>Less than bachelor's degree</i>	0.463
<i>Middle Class</i>	0.520

^a Denotes significant difference between status conditions. Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

5.1. Manipulation Check

To evaluate the efficacy of the status manipulation in the survey, we employed a direct question asking participants to rate who had more status between the two fictitious employees. We collected responses on a five-point scale ranging from (1 = Peter had much higher status) to (5 = Jim had much higher status) with a midpoint of (3 = they had equal status). We conducted a series of one-sample *t*-tests with a hypothesized mean of 3 (no difference), repeating across all four conditions. For conditions in which the employees were presented as possessing different levels of education and tenure, the means were significantly different than the hypothesized mean and in the intended directions. For the condition in which Peter was portrayed as higher status, the mean status rating was 1.636 ($t = -14.219$; $p < 0.001$) and in the condition where Jim was portrayed as higher status, the mean status rating was 4.070 ($t = 10.819$; $p < 0.001$). Status ratings for both of the equal status conditions were not significantly different from the hypothesized mean. These results indicate that our manipulation had the intended effect.

5.2. Analysis

Looking at how status affects perceptions of the likelihood of reporting an incident of stolen credit to a supervisor, we used an ordered-logit regression model with robust standard errors. We present the results in Table 5. In models 1 and 2 in Table 5, we examine status-differentiated groups and find that respondents perceived that higher status actors had over 112 percent higher odds of reporting the incident to a supervisor in the moment compared to lower status actors ($z = -2.50$; $p = 0.012$). The effect of status was virtually unchanged when controlling for participant characteristics in model 2. This shows that respondents perceived that a higher status actor was significantly more likely to address credit stealing from a high status coworker. In models 3 and 4, we include the effects of third-order expectations and find no significant effect. Based on these results, Hypothesis 3 is supported, and Hypothesis 5 is not supported.

Table 5. Study Two Ordinal Logistic Regression Predicting Perceived Likelihood of Reporting Incident to Supervisor in Status-Differentiated Groups ($N = 150$).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Status (1 = lower)</i>	0.471 * (0.142)	0.445 * (0.147)	0.516 * (0.153)	0.495 * (0.170)
<i>Third-order</i>			0.827 (0.145)	0.839 (0.165)
<i>Age</i>		1.009 (0.011)		1.010 (0.011)
<i>White</i>		0.923 (0.282)		0.940 (0.298)
<i>Cisgender woman</i>		0.857 (0.264)		0.867 (0.271)
<i>Less than BA</i>		0.841 (0.284)		0.930 (0.333)
<i>Middle Class</i>		0.757 (0.240)		0.779 (0.247)

* $p < 0.05$. Note: Models present odds ratios. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors.

Looking next at the perceived likelihood of reporting in status-equal groups in Table 6, we present results from an ordered-logit model that compares perceptions of equally high status groups and equally low status groups. We find no significant difference between respondents' perception of the likelihood of reporting to a supervisor ($z = 0.39$ $p = 0.700$). Therefore, data fail to support Hypothesis 4. Based on the lack of direct effects of status, we did not conduct any mediation analyses for status-equal groups.

Table 6. Study Two Ordinal Logistic Regression Predicting Perceived Likelihood of Reporting Incident to Someone Other than Supervisor in Status-Differentiated Groups ($N = 150$).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Status (1 = lower)</i>	3.189 *** (0.978)	3.709 *** (1.135)	2.470 ** (0.827)	2.967 ** (1.022)
<i>Third-order</i>			1.501 (0.313)	1.378 (0.296)
<i>Age</i>		1.017 (0.010)		1.018 (0.010)
<i>White</i>		1.224 (0.392)		1.185 (0.377)
<i>Cisgender woman</i>		1.430 (0.417)		1.393 (0.271)
<i>Less than BA</i>		1.695 (0.500)		1.501 (0.443)
<i>Middle Class</i>		1.427 (0.411)		1.370 (0.393)

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Note: Models present odds ratios. Numbers in parentheses are robust standard errors.

5.3. Study Two Summary

In study two, we examine whether status differences affect perceptions of the likelihood that a person will report an incident in which someone else falsely claims credit for their work. Results show that participants perceived that higher status employees were more likely to report the incident to their supervisor immediately after it occurred. This relationship, however, was not mediated by performance expectations in the way that we theorized, suggesting that other mechanisms are at play. In equal status groups, participants perceived no difference in likelihood of reporting the incident when the group was

equally high status or equally low status employees. Again, although study two reflects perceptions and not behaviors, results provide initial support for the idea that occupying a lower status position hinders people from seeking redress for stolen contributions. The lack of willingness to report credit theft provides higher status actors with another avenue to accumulate status through illegitimate means.

6. Discussion

The vast majority of research on credit and idea stealing focuses on organizational and group-level dynamics of unequal power. Nonetheless, results from the two studies that we present show that status processes, along with expectations for competence and perceptions of reward deservingness, play a role in creating structures that allow such offenses to occur and to go unaddressed. That is, people see higher status group members as the kind of people that are more deserving of rewards, and because such group members receive the benefit of the doubt, people are more likely to assign credit to them for a good idea.

As we have argued, cultural status beliefs inform who people see as competent and how they evaluate others' contributions. Producing high-quality contributions is consistent with normative prescriptions for how a higher status person should behave (and inconsistent with expectations for lower status group members). Accordingly, the self-fulfilling prophecy of status organizing processes creates conditions in which group members unknowingly allow higher status people to exploit their perceived competence and deservingness to enhance their own status. Results from study one provide support for the claim that people are more likely to assign credit to a higher status person for an idea whose ownership is disputed. These effects are mediated primarily by perceptions about who is deserving of rewards, and secondarily by expectations for competence. This is consistent with the SCES theoretical framework that links status to behavior through expectations.

The same status organizing processes that lead people to view higher status group members as more deserving of credit also create a bind for lower status group members that inhibits their ability to resist efforts to steal their work. Because status is embedded in cultural beliefs, both higher and lower status actors know how others perceive them based on their relative positions. To the extent that lower status people recognize their disadvantage among their fellow group members, speaking up against a higher status other not only runs the risk of not being believed, but also of being sanctioned for acting in a manner inconsistent with the expectations of their position (Wagner 1988). Furthermore, they run the risk of losing the modicum of respect that they receive for acting deferent (Ridgeway and Nakagawa 2017).

Although study two found support for the claim that people perceive higher status actors as more likely to push back against an attempt by a lower status actor to steal their work, we did not find evidence that expectations for competence or rewards mediate that relationship. While we do not have data to directly test why expectations did not operate as we anticipated, we speculate that there are at least two possible reasons for the lack of mediating effects. First, it may be that the observed relationship between status and likelihood of reporting offenses is spurious, and that status only appears to be predicting perceptions because it is highly correlated with power. If that is the case, we would expect the effects of status to disappear if we added power perceptions to the model. Second, it is possible that perceptions of power differences are suppressing the relationship between expectations and perceived likelihood of reporting, and that controlling for power in our models would reveal a significant mediating effect. We designed our vignette to isolate status effects by placing the employees in equal roles within the organization, while manipulating only status differences, but it is possible that respondents inferred power

differences. Future research is needed to disentangle the effects of status and power in the types of situations we examined.

While this study examines perceptions of status hoarding rather than status hoarding behaviors, we argue that the high likelihood of people assigning credit to higher status actors, and of giving higher status people the benefit of the doubt, creates an organizational structure that permits status hoarding to occur: if people presuppose that others will support higher status actors over lower status actors—which our results suggest—it creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that prevents lower status people from reporting or resisting intellectual theft. Since we did not collect behavioral data, we view our findings as suggestive of a relationship and not as conclusive support. Rather, a series of follow-up studies collecting behavioral data in a controlled laboratory setting are warranted to offer further evidence of the theoretical processes we present here. Such studies would provide a stronger test of our theoretical model and allow for further examination of the interplay between status perceptions and power perceptions in shaping responses to credit theft.

The argument we have developed and the results we report extend the literature on status and on credit stealing in two ways. First, as it relates to status organizing processes, the paper extends the explanatory ability of expectation states theories by applying the foundational theoretical model (status–expectations–behavior) to a novel problem. Expectation states theories have typically focused on how status characteristics affect decision-making processes. Our studies demonstrate the utility of the theory to explaining not just how group members use status information to complete their collective task, but also how higher status group members use their positions to extend their advantages in ways that inhibit lower status actors from demonstrating competence—which can be detrimental towards the group’s goal. Second, we extend the literature on idea theft by specifying the social psychological processes that allow people to appropriate others’ work. Importantly, our model extends discussions of the role of status dynamics in idea theft beyond simply acknowledging that higher status actors use their advantages for personal gain. That is, the process that we describe moves the discussion beyond the immediate interpersonal dynamics. We incorporate the notion that idea theft is fundamentally a collective process that relies on support from other group members and on broadly held cultural beliefs of deservingness and competence. In other words, idea theft is not just an illicit act of a single nefarious actor, but is in fact contingent on the expectations and behaviors of the group as a whole. Thus, those who face a situation in which their work is appropriated must contend not only with a single higher status other, but with the beliefs of those outside of the focal interaction.

We acknowledge that certain limitations can affect every survey-based study, such as demand characteristics and social desirability bias. It is possible that participants responded in a way that they expected the experimenters would prefer. However, because this study largely focuses on measuring what people think others think, we expect that this limitation had minimal effect on the data: we are interested in how people’s expressions of their perceptions are constrained by social expectations. As such, social desirability is, in many ways, part of the phenomenon that we investigated and would be present in “real-world” situations in which even higher levels of social desirability would likely occur. As such, the current test is likely conservative in regard to social desirability.

The present study is useful for understanding how organizational structures permit the reproduction of inequality. Higher status actors are well-positioned to take credit for others’ work based on the perception that higher status actors are more deserving, and the presupposition that others believe that higher status actors are more deserving prevents lower status actors from acquiring status even if they fairly earn it. This suggests one of several mechanisms by which those who enter organizations with lower status personal and

social characteristics are prevented from climbing the corporate ladder: not only are they provided fewer opportunities to contribute, but they may not receive credit for high performance when they do find themselves with an opportunity to contribute. In other words, not only are lower status people frequently denied opportunities to demonstrate skill, but they can also experience a second form of disadvantage when they do demonstrate skill.

It is also worth noting that we have tested our arguments entirely within the context of a sample based in the United States. While the use of a US-based sample potentially limits the cross-cultural generalizability of our findings, our goal here was not to estimate population parameters either for the US or for other cultural contexts, and we do not draw any inferences in this regard. Rather, our goal here is to test our theoretical model (and as we note, this is an initial test of our model). As an initial test, we do not assume that using a US-based sample poses any specific problems for establishing the initial viability of our model, but we do agree that in order to make strong claims about status hoarding as a general social process and to more firmly establish the role of expectation processes in explaining status hoarding cross-culturally, we would need to test the theory in a variety of cultural contexts to see if and how the process might differ.

While we caution the use of a survey experiment to inform organizational policy, one can consider some pathways for addressing status hoarding using broader expectation states research and organizational best practices. The status structure in which actors are embedded encourages inequality reproduction, so providing employees with avenues by which they can report grievances outside of the group of actors directly involved can be useful. For example, faculty can often report incidents to a grievance committee of their peers or discuss concerns with an ombudsperson. Providing access to an objective third party is a potential starting point for lower status people to address their concerns. Future research is ongoing to investigate the role of how third parties affect the processes that we describe here. Relatedly, encouraging actors to justify their decision-making requires them to consciously consider their choices—recall that the processes we describe here are assumed to be based on nonconscious rationale so can be disrupted by bringing them to the forefront. Organizational leaders can consider implementing policies that require reports to adhere to objective criteria to determine rewards (e.g., a pay raise), which decreases the likelihood that recommendations are based on general perception and instead require evidence of high performance.

7. Conclusions

The relationship between power and idea theft is well-documented within the organizations and management literature. Here we have offered an initial examination of the role that status plays in the process as well. Undoubtedly, status and power both account for different aspects of how ideas stealers get credit for others' work, and how these efforts often go unchallenged. Our focus here has been to highlight structural factors that facilitate credit theft by higher status people and inhibit lower status people from resisting theft of their ideas. In doing so, we have also introduced the concept of status hoarding, in which higher status individuals use the advantages of their position to accumulate more advantage through illegitimate means and to prevent others from moving up within the group hierarchy. These ideas offer the potential to expand the explanatory scope of SCES to encompass behaviors beyond those that facilitate decision-making processes in small groups.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

SCES The theory of status characteristics and expectation states

Notes

- ¹ Expectation states theory does not provide a theoretical reason for which the processes that we examine might differ based on culture, but rather that the characteristics that produce status inequality might be culturally bound. As such, the characteristics that we include here may or may not produce differences in other countries.
- ² Recall that we recruited participants using quotas to approximate a representative sample of American adults.
- ³ We also conducted exploratory analyses examining if people who assigned credit to higher status actors were more confident in their allocation of credit. We did not find evidence that an employee's status had any significant effect on confidence in decisions about who deserved credit (analyses available from first author).
- ⁴ Not surprisingly, first- and third-order expectations were highly correlated ($r = 0.698$; $p < 0.001$).

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