ARE THEY HIGH STATUS OR JUST ASSERTIVE? RESPONSE LATENCY IN TASK GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *Because past research has investigated nonverbal behaviors in clusters, it is unclear what status value is ascribed to individual nonverbal behaviors. I test status cues theory to investigate whether response latency functions as a status cue. I explore whether it affects behavioral influence or if it only signals assertiveness and does not have status value. I also explore how one's interpretation of response latency impacts behavioral influence.*

Methodology: *In a two-condition laboratory experiment, I isolate response latency and test its strength independently, and then I measure behavioral influence, participants' response latency, and perceptions of assertiveness. I also conduct interviews to investigate how participants interpret their partner's response latency to understand how people ascribe different meanings to the same nonverbal behavior.*

Findings: *I find that response latency alone does not affect behavioral influence, in part because how people interpret it varies. However, response latency does significantly impact participants' own response latency and their perceptions of their partner's assertiveness.*

Practical Implications: *This research demonstrates the intricacies of nonverbal behavior and status. More specifically, this work underscores important conceptual differences between assertiveness and status, and demonstrates how the interpretation of nonverbal behavior can impact behavioral influence.*

Keywords: Status; nonverbal behavior; expectation states theory; response latency; assertiveness; status cues theory

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INTRODUCTION

A new committee is formed, and one member is always the first to respond when new tasks are assigned to the group. Will the other committee members infer that the quick member is high status or merely assertive? Will the members who lag behind be ascribed low status or will they increase their own swiftness? The answers to these questions are important – not just for newly formed committees – but also for all collectively oriented task groups. This is because status predicts who becomes influential in future decisions while assertiveness alone does not (Ridgeway, 1987).

I investigate whether response latency, which is the delay between a response opportunity and a response, functions as a status cue. Status cues signal the status of a person to others (Berger, Webster, Ridgeway, & Rosenholtz, 1986; Carney, 2020; Fişek, Berger, & Norman, 2005; Hall, Coats, & LeBeau, 2005), and status in a group matters because high status people are more influential in group decisions (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; Berger & Webster, 2018). Status cues can be possessions, like a designer watch, or direct verbal claims like, "I'm very good at problem-solving." However, they often include subtle behaviors such as body posture, speed of speech, speech volume, vocal pitch, spatial location, eye gaze patterns, and laughter (Berger et al., 1986; Carney, 2020; Cheng, Tracy, Ho, & Henrich, 2016; Fişek et al., 2005; Oveis, Spectre, Smith, Liu, & Keltner, 2016; Rashotte & Smith-Lovin, 1997; Ridgeway, 1987).

Previous research that investigates how status cues impact behavioral influence usually examines several nonverbal behaviors together as a cluster. In these studies, quick responses have been associated with being high status, and slow responses have been associated with being low status (Rashotte & Smith-Lovin, 1997; Ridgeway, 1987; Ridgeway, Berger, & Smith, 1985). However, when response latency has been studied as an independent variable, it has only been investigated in status cue clusters, so it is unclear whether it functions as a status cue when unaccompanied by other nonverbal behaviors. In contrast to previous research, I isolate response latency and experimentally test whether it functions as a status cue independently.

Response latency is important because it exists in all synchronous task groups, whether they are face-to-face or computer-mediated. Computer-mediation strips away many other nonverbal behaviors, and due to an increase in computer-mediated and text-based interaction (Driskell, Radtke, & Salas, 2003; Schulze & Krumm, 2017), it is possible that new teams working remotely and synchronously online depend more on response latency than other nonverbal behaviors to make inferences about their partners (Burgoon, Dunbar, & Segrin, 2002; Wadsworth & Blanchard, 2015).

Understanding whether response latency has status value is also important because, when isolated, response latency could signal assertiveness but not status. Not all assertive nonverbal behaviors have status value and impact behavioral influence (Carney, 2020; Hall et al., 2005; Ridgeway, 1987). In order to disentangle these relationships, I conduct a two-condition experiment that manipulates response latency in a group of status equals and investigates whether it impacts

behavioral influence (which indicates status), perceptions of assertiveness, and participants' own response times. Then, I analyze exit interviews to understand how participants' interpretation of their partner's timing impacts the relationship between response latency and behavioral influence.

I find that response latency does not function as a status cue by impacting behavioral influence; however, behavioral influence is impacted by recipients' *interpretation* of response latency. People within the same experimental condition interpreted response latency differently. When partners' response times – whether fast or slow – were interpreted as a sign of competence, participants deferred to their partner. Furthermore, compared to slow partners, quick partners were perceived as more assertive. When participants interacted with a quick partner, they also significantly sped up their own response times.

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows. I first review expectation states theory (EST) and discuss relevant research on response latency and assertiveness. Using status cues theory, I generate hypotheses and give an overview of my experimental design and procedures. I discuss the findings and flesh out quantitative analysis with a qualitative investigation of exit interviews, demonstrating how behavioral influence is impacted by participants' interpretation of their partner's response latency. In the discussion, I explain the implications of understanding the status value assigned to specific status cues and how this research contributes to our understanding of response latency, status, and nonverbal behaviors more generally. I close with limitations and directions for future research.

BACKGROUND

Expectation States Theory

EST is a research program whose interrelated theories predict and explain the emergence of inequalities in task groups (Berger, Wagner, & Webster, 2014; Berger & Webster, 2018). Theories within EST apply to situations in which group members are task focused and collectively oriented. People are task focused when they are motivated to solve a problem, and they are collectively oriented when they deem it legitimate and necessary to consider the opinions of others in the group. Committees, juries, and work groups usually meet these conditions. Because each member cares about the outcome of the task, he or she will anticipate the quality of each member's contribution, including his or her own. These anticipations are called *performance expectations* (Correll & Ridgeway, 2006; Ridgeway & Walker, 1995). People with high performance expectations are given more opportunities to make contributions to the task, and their contributions are more highly evaluated. They are also less likely to change their position during disagreements. In contrast, people with low performance expectations are thought to be less competent, are given fewer opportunities to contribute, are evaluated more poorly, and are more likely to accept influence from others in the group (Biagas & Bianchi, 2016; Webster & Rashotte, 2010; Webster & Walker, 2017). Once performance expectations are established, they are usually stable for

the duration of the interaction. Performance expectations are often inferred through *status characteristics*, which are attributes for which there is cultural value attached to one state that is higher (man, white, attractive) than another state (woman, black, unattractive) (Wagner & Berger, 2002; Webster & Driskell, 1983). The cumulative, empirically driven theories in EST have been used to develop interventions to reduce inequalities in work groups (Manago, Sell, & Goar, 2019; Walker, Doerer, & Webster, 2014) and in schools (Cohen, 1982). Despite the theoretical progress,[1] our understanding of status characteristics has outpaced that of status cues, which I turn to next.

Status Cues Theory

How nonverbal behaviors map onto the dimensions of power, dominance, and status have long been an interest of social psychologists (Burgoon et al., 2002; Carney, 2020; Hall et al., 2005; Plusquellec & Denault, 2018). Focusing explicitly on how nonverbal behaviors relate to status, Berger et al. (1986) developed status cues theory, which formally integrates status cues into EST. They created two categories of status cues – categorical cues and task cues. Categorical cues give information about who a person is or to what social category they belong. For example, ethnic accent is a categorical status cue that suggests a person belongs to a certain ethnicity. In contrast, task cues give information about a person's performance and allow inferences about problem-solving abilities, which could impact the collective task. Speed of speech, voice volume, eye contact, head tilt, and confident posture are examples of task cues (Berger et al., 1986; Ridgeway, 1987; Sanchez-Cortes, Aran, Mast, & Gatica-Perez, 2011). The propositions for status cue theory are as follows:

P1. In a group of status equals, status cue differences will generate correspondingly different performance expectations.
P2. In a group with a status hierarchy, differentiated performance expectations will produce corresponding status cues.

There is empirical support for both propositions. Research has shown that voice volume, voice pitch, speech rate, number of hesitations, eye gaze, posture, gestures, and laughter are status cues that impact status outcomes (Cheng et al., 2016; Rashotte & Smith-Lovin, 1997; Zhang, Reid, Gasiorek, & Palomares, 2019), including performance expectations (Oveis et al., 2016; Ridgeway, 1987), supporting proposition 1. There is also support for proposition 2. Research confirms that people emit nonverbal behaviors according to their relative status in a group (Carney, 2020; Cheng et al., 2016; Dovidio, Ellyson, Keating, Heltman, & Brown, 1988; Exline, Ellyson, & Long, 1975; Zhang et al., 2019). For example, Kimble, Yoshikawa, and Zehr (1981) found that women adjusted the volume of their speech according to the status of the people in the group; they spoke louder when interacting with other women (status equals) than they did with men (status superiors). Thus, status characteristics, in this case gender, produced corresponding status cues, supporting proposition 2. Similarly, Ridgeway et al. (1985)

found that people's response latency, along with their initial eye gaze, varied according to their status position in the task group, with high status people responding quicker than low status people, and nonverbal behaviors adjust as the status structure of the group changes (Leffler, Gillespie, & Conaty, 1982). However, can response latency alone create a status hierarchy in a group of status equals?

Although past research has mostly investigated status cues in clusters (Carli, Lafleur, & Loeber, 1995; Hart & Morry, 1996; Lee & Ofshe, 1981; Rashotte & Smith-Lovin, 1997; Ridgeway, 1987), there is value in isolating status cues from one another, so that their effects can be understood independently. According to Ridgeway et al. (1985), understanding how status cues produce a status hierarchy is complex because it assumes that prior value has been attached to specific status cues. This prior value can only be evaluated if each status cue is studied in isolation. Riches and Foddy (1989) are the only researchers to isolate one status cue and measure behavioral influence. They investigated whether status could be inferred by ethnic accent alone. In their Australian context, Anglo-Austrians were the high status majority group, and Greek-Australians were immigrants who occupied a lower status. They found that whether a person had an Anglo-Australian accent or a Greek-Australian accent significantly impacted the performance expectations others had for them, such that those with a Greek-Australian accent were less influential in decision-making. Their findings support status cues theory's claim that status cues alone can create a status hierarchy.[2]

Response Latency

Work groups encounter response latency all the time because response latency can follow a question, a command, or a break in interaction. Response latency can include a host of behaviors, both verbal and nonverbal. For example, if a group of employees is given a problem to solve collectively, the employees have a response opportunity with several response options. One employee could respond by dispersing materials, generating a web search, or writing possible solutions on a nearby board. All of these behaviors are important, and none of them are verbal. A newly assembled team of firefighters provides another example. A burning house presents a response opportunity for all of the firefighters. The firefighter that enters the house first displays low response latency. The timing of the act is what matters.

In several studies, quick responses have been associated with being high status, and slow responses have been associated with being low status. For example, Conner (1977) found that high status people respond quicker than low status people, but in his work response latency was the dependent variable. Willard and Strodtbeck (1972) demonstrated that quick responses are associated with greater participation, and high participant rates have long been linked to being high status (e.g. Bass, 1949; Borgatta & Bales, 1956; Strodtbeck, 1951). Yet the relationship between response latency and behavioral influence is unclear because past studies investigating response latency have either investigated perceptions

of status without using behavioral measures (Carney, Hall, & LeBeau, 2005; Willard & Strodtbeck, 1972) or they included response latency in a cluster with other nonverbal behaviors (Rashotte & Smith-Lovin, 1997; Ridgeway, 1987; Ridgeway et al., 1985). In contrast, I isolate response latency and measure status using behavioral influence. Following Ridgeway et al. (1985), Ridgeway (1987), I expect a slow response (high response latency) to function as a low status cue, and a quick response (low response latency) to function as a high status cue.

H1. Participants with slow partners (high response latency) will be more likely to reject influence than participants with quick partners (low response latency).
H2. Participants with quick partners (low response latency) will be less likely to reject influence than participants with slow partners (high response latency).

Assertiveness

Response latency may function as a status cue in isolation like it does when it is clustered with other nonverbal behaviors; however, it is also possible that without other status cues, it is interpreted as assertiveness rather than status. Although popular psychology frequently ties assertiveness to leadership, not all assertive behaviors have status value (Ridgeway, 1987). Assertiveness can be conceptualized on a continuum ranging from passivity and avoidance to aggression and coercion (Ames, Lee, & Wazlawek, 2017). If a person errs too much on the latter end of that continuum, others will likely reject their influence (Ridgeway, 1987). Research shows that the relationship between assertiveness and leadership approval is curvilinear; leaders are seen as most effective when they are perceived to be moderately assertive (Ames & Flynn, 2007). When they are not assertive, leaders are thought to be instrumentally impotent, but when they are too assertive, they are deemed socially insufferable (Ames & Flynn, 2007; Santora, 2007). In newly created task groups, group members might resist influence from partners who are perceived as too assertive and perhaps self-oriented. In other words, if a person is high status, others will defer to them; however, if a person is assertive but not high status, then others will reject their influence.

THE CURRENT STUDY

This research tests the first proposition of status cues theory. Therefore, the independent variable is response latency, and the key dependent variable is behavioral influence. I operationalize behavioral influence as the proportion of disagreements resolved in favor of self, or $P(s)$. This $P(s)$, which varies from 0 to 1, captures both deference and the rejection of influence in one variable. It is the probability of staying with one's initial choice. According to EST, if participants have high performance expectations for their partner, they will defer to this partner during disagreements. In contrast, participants with low performance expectations for their partner will reject influence. Therefore, the higher a person's performance expectations are for herself relative to her partner, the higher

her $P(s)$ will be. To account for the possibility of latency being seen as assertiveness rather than status, I measure perceptions of assertiveness. I also measure participants' response latency. In phase 1, participants work with a (computer simulated) partner on a task, which exposes them to their partner's response latency. In phase 2, they work with this partner again on a second task, which assesses performance expectations by measuring $P(s)$.

PRETEST OF RESPONSE LATENCY MANIPULATION

To manipulate response latency, I pretested to determine how long, on average, it took undergraduates to complete the task when they had an 8-second timer. I used the meaning insight (MI) task, which is a fictitious word association task that is designed to be difficult and ambiguous (Berger, 2014; Correll & Ridgeway, 2006). It has been used for several decades by EST researchers (Ridgeway, 1982; Webster, 1977), and it is still frequently used in research (Dippong, Kalkhoff, & Johnsen, 2017; Harkness, 2017, 2020; Ridgeway & Nakagawa, 2017; Savage, Dippong, & Melamed, 2020; Thye & Harrell, 2017). After reading the standard instructions for the task, I asked participants to complete 12 trials. It took participants 4.4 seconds on average to complete each trial. I used this average response time to develop the response times for the simulated partner in each condition (on average, slow partners responded in 7 seconds and quick partners responded in 2.5 seconds). I recruited 23 participants for the pretest, all of whom were paid $5.00.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Participants

I recruited participants from introductory classes at a large southern university in the United States, all of whom were between 18 and 21 years old and identified as female.

Experimental Design

I used a variant of the standard experimental situation developed for EST research (Berger, 2014). This design controls for extraneous variables and helps to create the theory's scope conditions. The participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. I told participants they were working with a partner via computer and that their partner was located in the next room. The partner's answers were actually computer generated.

Response Latency Manipulation

In phase 1, I asked participants to complete 12 MI trials, with 8 seconds to respond each time. In each trial, participants had the opportunity to earn two points – one point for selecting the correct answer, and one bonus point for

selecting the correct answer before their partner. During every trial, participants were informed when their partner responded (and correspondingly, of their partner's response latency) with a check mark and the sound of a bell. Therefore, participants knew when their partner responded, although they did not know which answer their partner selected. The response times varied slightly in each trial. However, in condition 1, partners were slow and responded in an average of 7 seconds, and in condition 2, partners were quick and responded in an average of 2.5 seconds. After every trial, the response times of both the participant and the partner were displayed briefly on the screen.

Key Measures

In phase 2, I measured behavioral influence using a different variation of the MI task designed specifically for this purpose. In the second task, participants exchanged initial choices with their partner before making a final decision. By allowing participants to exchange initial choices with their partner, I created disagreements and measured whether participants were influenced by their partner. Following Webster and Walker (2017), Walker and Rashotte (2010), there were 23 trials, and 20 of them were disagreement trials. The disagreement trials allowed me to measure a $P(s)$. A high $P(s)$ indicates that a participant is resistant to influence, and a low $P(s)$ indicates that the participant is easily influenced by their partner. In phase 2, there was no update on their partner's timing or bonus points, and participants were told when to respond.

After participants completed phases 1 and 2, I measured assertiveness by asking participants to rate their partner's assertiveness on a seven-point scale ranging from extremely unassertive (=1) to extremely assertive (=7). If response latency is interpreted as a sign of assertiveness, participants with quick partners (condition 2) would report greater partner assertiveness than those with slow partners (condition 1).

The post-experimental questionnaire also measured participants' performance expectations for their partners, as performance expectations can be captured behaviorally through $P(s)$ and cognitively through questionnaires (Walker & Gur, 2017). After the postexperimental questionnaire, participants were interviewed to ensure the scope conditions of the theory were met, which are task focus and collective orientation. In these interviews, I also asked participants who they thought responded quicker, them or their partner, as a manipulation check. Then, they were debriefed and compensated.

Data Inclusion

I recruited 10 participants for the pilot test and 77 participants for the final study, all of whom were compensated $12.00. I excluded 10 participants from the final study for a 12% exclusion rate. Seven participants did not meet the scope conditions (5 lacked collective orientation, which means they were not paying attention to what their partner was doing; two were not task focused). Additionally, two misunderstood the instructions, and 1 was suspicious, stating she

suspected her partner was artificial. Data from condition 1 of the pilot test were included in the final analysis, as they were not significantly different from that of the final study ($t(31) = 0.1664$, p-value $= 0.8689$) (See Appendix 1).[3,4] Thus, the final analysis reflects an N of 72 (5 from condition 1 of the pilot test and 67 from the final study).

RESULTS

Behavioral Influence

Although past research has included quick response times in high status cue gestalts and slow response times in low status cue gestalts (Berger et al., 1986; Rainwater, 1987; Rashotte & Smith-Lovin, 1997; Ridgeway, 1987; Ridgeway et al., 1985), my results suggest that when response latency is isolated, it does not function as a status cue. An independent samples t-test indicates that there is no significant difference in the behavioral influence, measured by the $P(s)$, between the two conditions ($t(70) = 0.2678$, p-value $= 0.789$) (see Table 1). Therefore, this experiment failed to reject the null for hypotheses 1 and 2. In addition, the postexperimental questionnaire measures designed to capture participants' attitudes concerning their performance expectations relative to their partner, did not reveal significant differences between conditions (see Appendix 2). This is unsurprising, since research has shown that these measures capture the same underlying construct captured by behavioral influence – performance expectations (Walker & Gur, 2017).

When I analyzed the exit interviews, I discovered that another variable, *respondents' interpretation of response latency*, impacts the effect of response latency on behavioral influence. During data collection, it became apparent that participants within the same condition had different interpretations of their partner's response latency, and these interpretations impacted their $P(s)$ values. When participants' partners responded slowly (condition 1), some participants interpreted their partner's slow response to mean that their partner was especially thorough or thoughtful and was, therefore, competent.

Table 1. Probability of Staying by Condition.

	Predicted $P(s)$	Observed $P(s)$	S.d.	Difference (Obs-pred.)	N	t	df
Condition 1 (slow partner)	0.59	0.57	0.13	−0.02	33		
Condition 2 (quick partner)	0.53	0.56	0.18	0.03	39		
Condition 1 ≠ Condition 2[a]						0.2678	70
Condition 1: Predicted $P(s)$ ≠ Observed $P(s)$[b]						0.8838	32
Condition 2: Predicted $P(s)$ ≠ Observed $P(s)$[b]						1.0408	38

[a]Denotes an independent samples t-test.

[b]Denotes one sample t-tests.

Note: All t-tests are two-tailed; none were significant at 0.05 p-value. Predicted $P(s)$ values were generated using the theoretical model adapted for a single weak task cue gestalt (Fişek et al., 2005) and the following empirical parameters: m = 0.565 and q = 0.111.

For example, one participant said, "It was something I was paying attention to the whole time, was seeing, you know, like time comparison. Like are they doing better than me because they're taking longer?" ($P(s) = 0.35$). Similarly another participant said,

> I tended to hit it [my choice] pretty quick, so I was like, maybe, they're like putting more thought in. Like I wonder if I should be putting a little more thought in before I hit the answer ($P(s) = 0.45$).

In contrast, others interpreted their partner's slow response as a sign that they were less certain and were less competent, as predicted. These participants said things like, "Maybe she was hesitating and was like 'oh, I don't know'…and just like picking something before the time runs out" ($P(s) = 0.68$).[5]

In condition 2, some participants interpreted their partner's quick response as a sign of competence, as predicted. These participants made statements like, "Her response times were faster than me…maybe she's smarter than me, maybe she picked up on stuff that I didn't" ($P(s) = 0.40$), or "They were going like so super duper fast…I felt like it's the confidence…she knows what she's doing" ($P(s) = 0.45$). However, others interpreted their partner's quick response time as a sign that their partner was not paying attention or just guessing. For example, one participant said,

> I honestly thought my partner was guessing at some points…I almost like drew the line, like okay, I don't know if this person is doing [it] right….I just had this sense that they were just guessing ($P(s) = 0.65$).

This admission is notable considering that participants are generally hesitant to speak negatively about their partners. The variance of interpretations could be the reason the average $P(s)$ for each condition does not differ significantly.

As data collection progressed, I asked more pointed questions about participants' interpretations of their partner's response latency, but some participants did not articulate how they interpreted their partners speed, or lack thereof, and simply gave ambiguous answers. These participants responded by saying things like, "The bell made me feel rushed," or "It kept me focused."

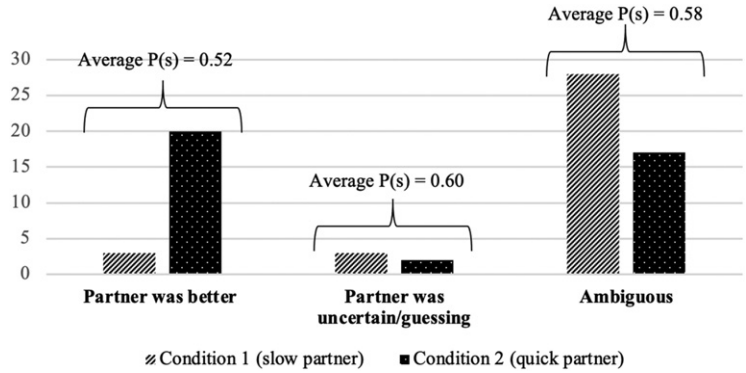
As illustrated in Table 2, interesting patterns emerge when the $P(s)$ results are sorted by interpretation of response latency. When participants interpreted their partner's response latency – be it fast or slow – as a sign that their partner was better at the task, they were more likely to defer to their partner (average $P(s) = 0.53$; $N = 23$), suggesting that interpretation impacted the relationship between response latency and behavioral influence. In contrast, participants who acknowledged their partner's presumed incompetence were more likely to reject influence (average $P(s) = 0.60$; $N = 5$). Only five participants admitted that they thought their partner was just guessing or less certain. However, social desirability bias likely made some respondents reluctant to acknowledge their partner's perceived incompetence, so it is likely that this measure underestimates the total number of participants who felt this way. The group with ambiguous answers fell in the middle of the distribution (average $P(s) = 0.58$; $N = 44$). This group also includes participants who participated earlier in data collection before

Table 2. Probability of Staying by Interpretation of Response Latency.

Qualitative Response to "How Did You Interpret the Bell?"			
Partner was better at task	*P*(*s*)	S.d.	*N*
Condition 1 (slow partner)	0.46	0.12	3
Condition 2 (quick partner)	0.55	0.16	20
Both conditions	0.53	0.16	23
Partner was uncertain or guessing			
Condition 1 (slow partner)	0.61	0.07	3
Condition 2 (quick partner)	0.58	0.11	2
Both conditions	0.60	0.07	5
Ambiguous interpretation			
Condition 1 (slow partner)	0.58	0.14	27
Condition 2 (quick partner)	0.58	0.20	17
Both conditions	0.58	0.17	44

I asked questions about interpretations. The *P*(*s*) differences for these three groups (partner was better, partner was uncertain/guessing, and ambiguous) are not significantly different ($F(2, 69) = 0.60$, p-value $= 0.5528$); however, they are telling of the underlying theme of interpretation. The distribution of response latency interpretations by condition can be found in Graph 1.

Although these interpretations undermined my original predictions, this qualitative analysis demonstrates that the null findings of this research support the foundational propositions of symbolic interactionism. Mead (1934) posits that meaning, or interpretation, mediates responses to any stimuli. Behavior depends on one's understanding of the stimuli, so when interpretations vary, we can expect divergent behavioral outcomes. It also suggests that other status cues and contextual information likely influences these meanings.



Graph 1. Frequency of Bell Interpretations by Condition.

Perceptions of Partner's Assertiveness

Quick partners were not afforded more status than slow partners, demonstrating that response latency did not have status value; however, compared to slow partners, participants reported that quick partners were more assertive. Although the magnitude of this effect is small, the difference is significant ($t(67) = -2.304$; p-value < 0.05; Table 3). Consistent with research by Ridgeway (1987), this work demonstrates that assertiveness is not a proxy for status. I find that participants with quick partners thought their partners were more assertive, but this swiftness and assertiveness did not translate into status value. While high status people can demonstrate assertiveness, being quick and assertive does not make one high status.

Nonverbal Mimicry

Although response latency did not impact behavioral influence as predicted, it did significantly impact participants' response times. To account for individual variance between participants, I averaged each participant's response latency across the 12 trials in the first MI task and then calculated the overall mean for each condition. Participants with quick partners (condition 2) responded about 2 seconds faster than participants with slow partners (condition 1), and the difference is significant ($t(70) = 12.23$, p-value < 0.000; Table 4). In other words, even though quick partners were not more influential in decisions, they did cause others to speed up their own response times. This is not only evidence that the manipulation was noticeable, but it also suggests that, on average, response

Table 3. Perceptions of Partner Assertiveness.

	Mean	S.d.	Min	Max	*T*	*df*
Condition 1 (slow partner)	3.969	1.28	1	6		
Condition 2 (quick partner)	4.703	1.35	2	7		
Independent Samples t-test						
Condition 1 ≠ Condition 2					−2.304*	67

Note: *T*-test is two-tailed. *p-value < 0.05.

Table 4. Mean Response Times in Task 1.

	Partner	Participant	S.d.	Min	Max	*t*	*df*
Condition 1 (slow partner)	7	4.879	0.703	3.47	6.10		
Condition 2 (quick partner)	2.5	2.799	0.732	1.83	4.85		
Independent Samples t-test							
Condition 1 ≠ Condition 2						12.23***	70

Note: *T*-test is two-tailed. ***p-value < 0.000.

latency was interpreted as status neutral, in part because it prompted mimicry instead of complementary nonverbal responses (Guéguen, 2012; Tiedens & Fragale, 2003).

DISCUSSION

Whether they are business executives gathered around a conference table or firefighters running toward a burning building, task groups impact everyday life. The decisions of these groups affect individuals and shape the course of world events. Understanding the processes through which certain people in these groups acquire status while others do not can help social scientists predict who becomes most influential in final decisions. My research adds to EST scholarship by investigating whether and how a particular nonverbal behavior – response latency – is contributing to this process.

I find that response latency alone is not enough to generate a status hierarchy, but it does significantly impact perceptions of assertiveness and other group members' response latency. In other words, if a group member responds quickly, they are not assumed to be higher status. They are, however, thought to be more assertive, and their swiftness causes others to pick up their pace. Understanding response latency is important because it permeates all synchronous task groups, whether they are face-to-face or online. Now more than ever, new task groups are working remotely online, making them more likely to infer group information from nonverbal behaviors like response latency instead of physical gestures (e.g. eye contact, body posture) (Berry, 2011) that are more commonly explored in the literature (Carney, 2020; Hall et al., 2005).

A body of research has investigated how status characteristics – which include qualities like race, gender, and beauty – impact status hierarchies, but there has been less research investigating status cues, especially in isolation. People have more agency over status cues than they do most status characteristics. For example, people are born with their skin tone and have no control over their facial symmetry. However, understanding status cues could make it possible to equip people with strategies for reducing inequality in their day-to-day interactions and buffer the negative effects of status characteristics (Cohen & Lotan, 1995; Manago et al., 2019; Sev'Er, 1989; Walker et al., 2014). However, before such interventions can be developed, these processes must be understood.

Status cues can be a powerful source of social information, and we know that at least one status cue, ethnic accent, can be as powerful as a status characteristic, even when it is isolated (Fişek et al., 2005; Riches & Foddy, 1989). While response latency has been investigated as a part of a nonverbal cluster (Carli et al., 1995; Rashotte & Smith-Lovin, 1997; Ridgeway et al., 1985), my research is the first to isolate response latency and measure its impact on behavioral influence. Status cues theory predicts that status cues can produce corresponding performance expectations in a group of status equals (Berger et al., 1986).

However, the theory does not claim that all nonverbal behaviors function as status cues nor does it assert that each status cue has the strength to create a status hierarchy by itself. For this reason, there is benefit in isolating nonverbal behaviors, determining whether they function as status cues, and identifying their impact on the creation of status hierarchies (Ridgeway et al., 1985). This study failed to reject the null for both my hypotheses, which is theoretically and empirically useful because, just as it is important to know the impact of each status cue in isolation, it is also important to know which nonverbal behaviors do not function as status cues when they are isolated. And response latency is a nonverbal behavior that is especially likely to operate in isolation due to more groups working synchronously online.

My interview data also suggest that one reason response latency does not function as a status cue is because it is ambiguous and produces a variety of interpretations. Within each condition, there was variation in the interpretation of response latency. Some participants interpreted slow responses as a sign of thoroughness while others interpreted the same slow response as uncertainty. Conversely, some participants interpreted quick responses as a sign of assuredness, while others interpreted the same quickness as a sign of guessing. Within each condition, when participants interpreted their partner's response time as a sign of competence, participants were less likely to reject influence. Although this difference was not statistically significant, the pattern does support the general predictions of EST and suggests a fruitful avenue for future research in this area.

My findings demonstrates that nonverbal behaviors are dynamic and are impacted by the nonverbal behaviors others emit. I find some evidence of mimicry, as participants with quick partners increased their speed. This generally suggests response latency in isolation is understood as a neutral cue. If response latency had been interpreted as a status cue, we would expect participants to respond with complimentary cues by slowing down in response to a fast partner or speeding up in response to a slow partner. Such complementary cues would have facilitated the emergence of a status hierarchy (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003). My findings suggest that this was not the case. Using the pretest responses as a baseline for response latency, I find that participants with quick partners increased their response times significantly ($t(45) = 5.8463$, p-value < 0.000). Thus, the quick response times, on average, may not have signaled status information, but were instead interpreted as being neutral, prompting mimicry, or in this case quicker response times. An alternative explanation is that participants with quick partners increased their speed because they were motivated to earn the bonus point, and to do that, they had to answer correctly and more quickly than their partner. This is also a reasonable response to the manipulation. However, participants with slow partners might also have been motivated to earn a bonus point, but there is no evidence that they increased their speed in order to compete for the extra point. For participants with slow partners, response latency was not significantly different from response times in the pretest ($t(39) = 1.7963$, p-value $= 0.0802$). While participants with slow partners did not increase their speed,

there is also no evidence that they slowed down their response times, but this could be partly due to the fact that slow responses are less potent, or that participants only had 8 seconds to respond.

My postexperimental interviews also reveal that response latency is noticeable, as it impacted perceptions of assertiveness. Participants rated quick partners as more assertive than slow partners, although the magnitude of this effect is modest. Differences in assertiveness did not translate into differences in status outcomes. In other words, participants could believe their partner was assertive but not defer to them, undermining an assumption that being assertive will increase influence. This research demonstrates the intricacies of nonverbal behavior and status and underscores important conceptual differences between assertiveness and status. Being assertive is not a substitute for being high status – the latter is much more advantageous when it comes to being influential.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In phase 1, I informed participants of their partners' response latency after every trial to reinforce the experimental manipulation. This feature of the design, along with the availability of a bonus point for responding correctly and quicker than the partner, allowed participants with quick partners to speed up their own responses. If participants with quick partners had not had the opportunity to close the gap between their response times and that of their partners', then the $P(s)$ in phase 2 might have been lower in condition 2. Future investigations of response latency should consider both the reward structure and the dynamic nature of response latency when creating experimental designs.

In the middle of data collection, it became apparent that participants within the same condition were interpreting their partner's response latency differently, which prompted coding of interview data. Because I did not discover these patterns until the middle of data collection, I had not explicitly asked about interpretations of response latency in earlier exit interviews. Therefore, many of the earlier interviews lacked explicit indications of interpretations and are included in the "ambiguous interpretation" category. Obtaining interpretation data earlier would have likely decreased the number of participants in the ambiguous category, potentially allowing more statistical power in comparisons. Future research can address interpretations of response latency more directly, as well as explore their possible moderating effects.

Although the isolation of response latency is a strength of the experimental design, nonverbal behaviors naturally occur in clusters, so it is reasonable that status cue effect sizes are cumulative to some degree. In other words, four nonverbal behaviors will likely be more powerful than two. Future research should also explore how status cues might have cumulative effects and how they might interact with status characteristics. Future research might also manipulate different nonverbal behaviors in mixed-sex groups, as relative status could moderate interpretations of status cues. For example, a slow response from a high status person

might be perceived differently than a slow response from a low status person. This too provides a new opportunity for research. My qualitative findings underscored that nonverbal behaviors impact how people are perceived, so it would be prudent for researchers to measure how participants rate their partners on dimensions like likeability, confidence, and carelessness after emitting specific nonverbal behaviors. Finally, I measured assertiveness using a one item measure, but assertiveness is a complex construct. Future research would benefit from a more thorough multi-item measure that captures the construct's complexity.

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NOTES

1. Berger, Fisek, Norman, and Zelditch (1977) present status characteristics theory fully, and succinct presentations of the theory's core assumptions are abundant (Fişek et al., 2005; Shelly & Webster, 1997; Webster & Rashotte, 2010).

2. When it comes to the creation of status hierarchies, not all nonverbal behaviors have equal impact. Fişek et al. (2005) argue that there is a difference between a strong cue gestalt and a weak cue gestalt. They explain that a strong cue gestalt indicates that a person *is* high or low status, while a weak cue gestalt indicates that a person *is expected* to be high or low status. The difference is subtle but important.

3. During the pilot test, participants were not given any information about the gender of their partner. During the exit interviews, it became apparent that quick responses prompted gender assumptions, as three of the five participants with quick partners (condition 2) assumed their partner was male. This assumption demonstrates the power of response latency. It is possible that the participants (all female) interpreted the quick response of their partner as a signal that their partner was high status and, thus, male. However, if these all-female participants assumed that their partners were male, EST would predict their $P(s)$'s to be low because they would be occupying a low status position, based on their disadvantaged position as a female. Instead, participants who had quick partners in the pilot test had a relatively high $P(s)$ average of 0.65 (S.d. = 0.08, $N = 5$) (See Appendix 1). One possible explanation is that, because MI is a word association task, participants thought it was a more feminine task. Based on gender stereotypes, women are thought to be better at language tasks in contrast to men. If these female participants thought they possessed task expertise that their partner lacked, then they would have occupied the high status position, which is what the results of the pilot test imply. Interestingly, participants with slow partners (condition 1) did not reveal gender assumptions in the exit interviews. To reduce these unwanted gender assumptions, after the pilot test, I adjusted the procedures to ensure participants knew their partners were female. Future scholarship could more formally investigate whether the MI task evokes gender assumptions in mixed-sex groups.

4. After the pilot study, I made the decision to include the pilot data from condition 1 in the final analysis because these data were not significantly different from the predicted $P(s)$ for that condition ($t(4) = 0.4472$, p-value = 0.6779) (Predicted $P(s) = 0.59$; generated using the theoretical model adapted for a single weak task cue gestalt

(Fişek et al., 2005)). Omitting these cases from the final analysis does not alter the substantive findings of this work; however, it does decrease the statistical power necessary to demonstrate significance concerning assertiveness. For these reasons, I include these cases in the final analysis.

5. This participant failed to respond in time to one of the trials, so the denominator used to calculate her $P(s)$ was 19 instead of 20 (13 stay trails/19 total trials = $P(s)$ of 0.68).

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Results from Pilot Test.

	Predicted $P(s)$	Observed $P(s)$	S.d.	Difference (Obs-pred.)	N
Condition 1 (slow partner)	0.59	0.56	0.15	−0.03	5
Condition 2 (quick partner)	0.53	0.65	0.08	0.12	5

Note: Data from condition 1 of the pilot test were included in the final analysis. Predicted $P(s)$ values were generated using the theoretical model adapted for a single weak task cue gestalt (Fişek et al., 2005) and the following empirical parameters: m = 0.565 and q = 0.111.

APPENDIX 2

Performance Expectations Questionnaire Measures.

	N	Mean (S.d.)	t
1. Compared to you, how well would you estimate the other person did at these meaning Insight problems? (Extremely poor 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 Extremely well)			
Condition 1 (slow partner)	32	4.88 (0.907)	−0.168
Condition 2 (quick partner)	34	4.92 (1.211)	
2. How do you feel your own ability to solve Meaning Insight problems compares with that of your partner? (I have more ability 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 She has more ability)			
Condition 1 (slow partner)	32	4.13 (0.793)	−1.181
Condition 2 (quick partner)	34	4.35 (0.774)	
3. How would you *evaluate your own performance* on the Meaning insight tasks? (Extremely poor 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 Extremely good)			
Condition 1 (slow partner)	32	3.69 (1.256)	0.4195
Condition 2 (quick partner)	34	3.56 (1.236)	
4. How would you *evaluate your partner's* performance on the Meaning Insight tasks? (Extremely poor 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 Extremely good)			
Condition 1 (slow partner)	32	4.72 (0.773)	0.8791
Condition 2 (quick partner)	34	4.53 (0.961)	
5. Expectation advantage (e_p-e_o based on questions 3 and 4)			
Condition 1 (slow partner)	32	1.031(1.282)	0.1991
Condition 2 (quick partner)	34	0.971 (1.193)	

Note: All t-tests are two-tailed; none were significant at 0.05 p-value. All participants were asked to complete the questionnaire, but 6 declined, resulting in a lower N than previous tables.