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Self-conscious emotions and social status

-Thesis booklet-

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Aims of the thesis

The aim of the current thesis is to investigate the nature of social status and its effect on self-conscious emotions. More precisely, we studied whether material or social aspects of high status have a greater effect on what makes people proud or envious. Six studies using different methodology gave empirical evidence for the prominent role of social factors over material goods in the generation of these emotions. Furthermore, our results verified, that in a material society like ours, individuals tend to exaggerate the importance of tangible resources when they think about what would make them proud. Although previous research on self-conscious emotion neglected the investigation of subjective social factors this thesis and our publications shed light to their importance and opens new areas of research.

The structure of the thesis is the following: In the first part, I introduce the reader the psychology of social status. Although social status is a multi-faceted construct, here I present the evolutionary approach of why status hierarchies are beneficial for group welfare and how emotions contribute to social status in general. Afterwards, I define self-conscious emotions and their development and then present the two main emotions of the thesis: the definition and social function of pride and envy. At the end of the introduction I outline the research questions and hypotheses. In the Methods and Results section I present six studies: Study 1-4 are related to pride research and Study 5-6 are related to envy. Although each study is followed by a brief discussion, in the next big section, the General discussion I summarize the findings, their significance and contribution to existing knowledge and of course the limitations of the studies.

Introduction

Over the past several decades, researchers have come to recognize the complexity, and ubiquity of *individual differences* in social status. Social hierarchies projected to the individual level can be detected by the individuals' own social status. By definition, "social status might be defined as hierarchical position in relation to that of others in a society *or* social context" (Åslund, Leppert, Starrin, & Nilsson, 2009, pp. 55).

From an evolutionary perspective individual's social status can be defined as the extent of the access to resources, where these resources mean food or mating and directly serves survival goals. In evolutionary terms, high-rank means privileged access to valued resources and low-rank means less access (Homans, 2017; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Mazur, 1973; Zitek & Tiedens, 2012).

In the modern world social status is related to more symbolic factors and serve survival goals in a more indirect way. Ideally, if a hierarchy is mutually accepted by its' members, it can minimize costly agonistic conflicts, establish order and help coordination within the social group (Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch Jr, 1980). The *Dominance-Prestige Model* (Cheng, Tracy, Foulsham, Kingstone, & Henrich, 2013; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001) is based on evolutionary approach and states that social hierarchies arise from two main systems of rank allocation. *Dominance* entails intimidating subordinates by threatening them with retaining resources and it is positively related to narcissistic self-aggrandizement, aggression, and negatively related to agreeableness (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). However, individuals using *prestige* to attain their status are not feared but respected by group members because they possess cultural knowledge and skills and they are open to share these resources (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Group members respect and seek out the opinion of prestigious others.

As individuals are motivated to reach and attain high social status, it is important to make clear what constitutes social status. Previous research provided empirical evidence, that the differentiation between the objective and subjective side of social status is fundamental regarding many psychological constructs, such as negative affectivity, pessimism, stress, control over life, active and passive coping (Adler, Epel, Castelazzo, & Ickovics, 2000), mental health (Franzini & Fernandez-Esquer, 2006), well-being (Howell & Howell, 2008), depressive symptoms (Hoebel et al., 2017).

Subjective social status refers to "a person's belief about his location in a status order'' (Davis, 1956), referring to an individual's perception of his/her place in the socioeconomic

structure. Theoretically, the concept of subjective social status is wider than that of "relative social standing" (Jackman & Jackman, 1979) which is more a by-product of income inequality research. Contrasting to SSS, *objective social status* (OSS) consists of measures of such status indicators as education, income, occupation, financial wealth, household goods, type of habitation, and type of car, etc. (Adler, Stewart, & others, 2007). Therefore, perceived objective status is based on material possessions, tangible resources and educational background which do not necessarily involve perceived respect, admiration and influence.

Regarding the relationship between OSS and SSS, Centers (1949) emphasized that individuals who were classified as belonging to poorer socioeconomic groups, did not have to think about themselves as inferior to others. In relevant social groups (e.g., family, friends), these individuals may experience admiration or respect as a result of skills or knowledge, leading to higher levels of SSS. In line with this, those with the highest OSS may feel unappreciated and disrespected (low SSS) by their significant others. Moreover, SSS may reflect not only the current social circumstances of an individual but also incorporates with the individual's past or future prospects (Singh-Manoux, Marmot, & Adler, 2005). It can explain that someone can have a high SSS without actually high OSS or vice versa.

As SSS and OSS are imponderable, affective components play a key role both in status display and status perception processes. A certain subgroup of emotions, called the self-conscious emotions are critically involved in status dynamics. These socially complex emotions include pride, shame, envy, contempt and admiration (Steckler & Tracy, 2014). In the current thesis we focus on pride and envy as these two emotions are interrelated (Lange & Crusius, 2015b).

Among self-conscious emotions, pride is the most fundamental affective background of high social status. Based on evolutionary theory and supported by empirical research, Tracy et al. (2010) established the Two-facet Model of pride. They differentiated authentic and hubristic pride which have evolved to maintain status in different ways (Tracy & Robins, 2007b, 2007a).

Authentic pride is experienced when the attribution of success is internal, unstable and controllable (Lewis, 2007; Tracy, Cheng, Robins, & Trzesniewski, 2009). In other words, according to the terminology of attribution theory (Weiner, 1985; Weiner et al., 1987), authentic pride is experienced, when success is attributed to effort. For e.g. the individual might think that "I win because I practiced a lot." Individuals high in genuine self-esteem tend to experience the more "authentic" pride, marked by confidence, productivity, and self-worth (Tracy & Robins, 2007b). Furthermore, authentic pride is associated with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, satisfying social relationships, high self-esteem, prosocial behaviors,

achievement-orientation and mental health (Cheng et al., 2010; Tracy et al., 2009; Tracy & Robins, 2007b, 2007a).

Hubristic pride is experienced if the attribution of success is internal, stable and uncontrollable (Lewis, 2007; Tracy et al., 2009). According to the terminology of attribution theory (Weiner, 1985; Weiner et al., 1987), hubristic pride is experienced when success is attributed to abilities. For e.g. the person might think that 'I win because I am the most talented.". In contrast to authentic pride, it is related to more antisocial and aggressive behaviors (Tracy & Robins, 2007b). It is associated with disagreeableness, neuroticism, lack of conscientiousness, narcissism, problematic relationships, and poor mental health outcomes (Cheng et al., 2010; Tracy et al., 2009; Tracy & Robins, 2007b, 2007a).

Pride is crucial for status seeking and attainment, envy is the negative emotion experienced in response to another person's higher status. By definition, envy is the painful emotion that arises when an individual lacks another person's superior quality, achievement or possession and either desires the advantage or wishes that the envied person would lack it (Parrott & Smith, 1993; Smith & Kim, 2007). As envy is a social emotion it has a function to regulate social hierarchies by leveling the difference between the self and the other. The functional goal of envy is to regulate social status by leveling the difference between the self and the superior other (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2009). Similarly to pride, envy also has two facets. Malicious envy drives people to lower the status of a superior other, while benign envy motivates individuals to increase their own status, often by increasing personal effort (Lange & Crusius, 2015a; Salovey & Rodin, 1984). According to some scholars (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2007; Schoeck, 1969) only *malicious envy* should be considered as envy proper, because this facet is associated with hostility, destructive social consequences and resentful thoughts towards the other person (Salovey & Rodin, 1984). Malicious envy entails more negative thoughts about the envied other (Van de Ven et al., 2009). Furthermore, in case of malicious envy, the focus of attention is rather the envied person than the envy object (Crusius & Lange, 2014; Hill, DelPriore, & Vaughan, 2011).

On the other hand, beside the lack of hostile thoughts and behavior, *benign envy* can be considered as envy proper as well, because it also contains the frustration caused by the comparison with a similar superior other (Lange & Crusius, 2015a, 2015b; Neu, 1980). In contrast to malicious envy, benign envy entails more positive thoughts toward the envied person (Van de Ven et al., 2009) and is associated with increased effort (Lange & Crusius, 2015a). Benign envy is characterized by a desire to get the envied person's advantage, thus the attention focuses on the means to attain the upward goal (Crusius & Lange, 2014).

Methods

We conducted six studies to investigate the relationship pattern of pride, envy and social status. See Table 1 for a review. All data and materials are available at https://osf.io/ebg8a/ and https://osf.io/7u3y4/.

Table 1. Review of the six studies

Pride

		Social Status	Status maintenance	Pride	Method	N	Statistics
	Study 1	Own OSS and SSS	Dom-prest.	Aut-Hub.	Questionnaire	552	Corr+SEM
	Study 2	Own OSS and SSS	Dom-prest.	Aut-Hub.	Questionnaire	509	Corr+SEM
	Study 3	Own OSS and SSS	Dom-prest.	Aut-Hub.	Vignette	345	Anova+SEM
	Study 4	Other OSS and SSS	Dom-prest.	Aut-Hub.	Vignette	497	Anova+SEM

Envy

		Social Status	Deservingness	Envy	Method	N	Statistics
	Study 5	Own OSS and SSS	Yes/No	Mal-Ben.	Critical incident	399	GLMM
	Study 6	Other OSS and SSS	Yes/No	Mal-Ben.	Vignette	389	GLMM

Measures

Study 1 & 2

Pride was measured by the Hubristic and Authentic Pride Scale (Tracy and Robbins, 2007). Status maintenance was measured by the Dominance and Prestige Scale (Cheng et al 2010). SSS was measured by the MacArthur ladder (Adler et al., 2000; Ostrove et al., 2000). OSS was measured by educational level and average monthly income in Study 1 and these were completed in Study 2 with financial wealth, occupation. Moreover, respondents were asked about such status related possessions as mobile phone, car and house in Study 2 and respondents were asked about if they live in their own house or not.

Study 3 & 4

In Study 3 and 4 SSS and OSS were manipulated (high or low) in a 2×2 design across the vignettes. In Study 3 respondents were asked to imagine that they are in the situation characterized by the vignette. They were instructed to imagine that they hold a presentation at a company and report their success which was 20% higher than the expected key performance indicators. Objective social status was manipulated along level of education, financial situation, phone, type of home, and clothes. High objective social status was characterized by a degree

from a university with high reputation, having the latest iPhone, fashionable clothes, an own flat and living without financial problems. Low objective social status was characterized by having vocational school degree, low-end cellphone, non-fashionable clothes, renting a small flat with acquaintances, and having some financial problems. In high subjective social status conditions, the respondents had to imagine that they were admired and respected by colleagues and in low subjective social status conditions they were not admired and respected by colleagues. Afterwards participants were asked to answer a three-item version of the the Dominance and Prestige Scale (Cheng et al., 2010) and a shortened version of the Hubristic and Authentic Pride Scale (Tracy & Robbins, 2007.

In Study 4 the storyline was the same as in Study 3, but here participants were requested to evaluate someone else's emotions and supposed behavior. Respondents read a short story about "Gabi" and evaluate his/her status maintenance and pride.

Study 5

Applying critical incident technique participants were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions, OSS or SSS. In the OSS condition participants were asked to think of a friend, colleague or acquaintance who has better material circumstances than they do. In the SSS condition participants were asked to think of a friend, colleague or acquaintance who they deem to have more respect, admiration and influence in the eyes of others. They were then asked to write a few sentences about this friend. Participants were asked to describe their envious feelings with the Benign and Malicious Envy Scale (Lange & Crusius, 2015a). Furthermore, participants were asked if they see their friends advantage as deserved or undeserved.

Study 6

A 2×2 vignette study was carried out in which participants were asked to imagine a scenario in which their OSS and SSS were average. Gabi was superior either in terms of OSS or SSS and the status was either deserved or undeserved. OSS was characterized by financial situation, education, phone, type of home, and clothes. SSS was characterized by the level of respect, admiration and influence among colleagues. Participants were then asked to complete the BeMaS Scale (Lange & Crusius, 2015a).

Results

Pride and social status

Figure 1 presents a review of the results of Study 1-4 investigating the relationship pattern of social status, status maintenance strategies and facets of pride.

Fig 1. Significant results in Studies 1, 2, 3 and 4
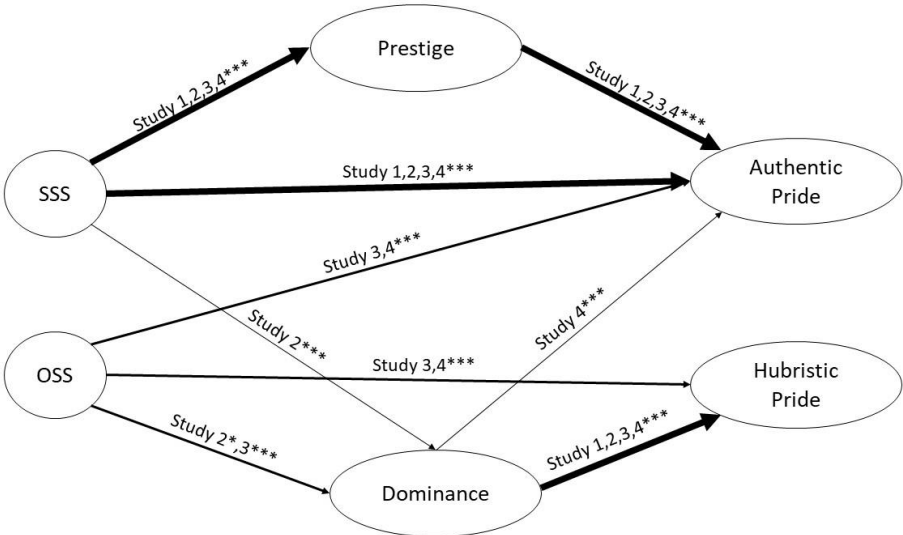
Note. All four studies were analyzed using SEM.

Envy and social status

The GLMM analysis showed that status had a significant main effect on envy in both studies, indicating higher envy ratings for SSS than OSS. Furthermore, there was significant interaction between deservingness and type of envy in both studies. Pairwise comparison revealed that benign envy was more likely if the superior other was perceived to have a deserved advantage (than if it was deemed to be undeserved), and malicious envy was more likely if the superior other was perceived to have an undeserved advantage (than if it was deemed to be deserved).

Discussion

The aim of the present research was to investigate the dynamics behind social status and self-conscious emotions. Although emotions have a fundamental role in status seeking, attainment and navigating in the social hierarchy (Griskevicius, Tybur, & den Bergh, 2010), little is known about the characteristics of status itself which can influence the experience of status-related emotions. Therefore, in the present research we took a step back and investigated the nature of social status considering its objective and subjective aspect. We focused on pride, as the fundamental affective mechanism of high status and envy, as a response to high status. Although it is important to mention that these two emotions are not the opposite of each other because pride is rather reflecting on the self whereas envy is a socially more embedded disposition. We found that subjective social status has a prominent role in the generation of pride and envy. Furthermore, we also found that in case of pride, people tend to exaggerate the importance of material goods in hypothetical situations, although it is not the case in self-report studies.

Pride and social status

In the present research project, four studies provided evidence for the differentiated role of SSS and OSS in status maintenance strategies and pride. Our main result was that SSS—in contrast to OSS—was more strongly related to authentic pride via prestige. Regarding the role of OSS in status maintenance strategies and pride it had different effects depending on the design of the study. In the questionnaire studies (Study 1 and 2) OSS was unrelated to both status maintenance and facets of pride. However, in the vignette studies (Study 3 and 4) when participants had to evaluate a stereotypical situation OSS played a more significant role. The four studies could provide a more differentiated picture about the relationship pattern between social status, status maintenance strategies and facets of pride and emphasize that pride cannot be dealt as a homogenous construct in emotion research.

Envy and social status

Our findings suggest that SSS intensifies feelings of envy more than OSS and that deservingness helps differentiate between benign and malicious envy. A potential explanation for the prominent role of SSS in envy is that social factors are more related to our identity and cause more frustration which can result in envy (DeSteno & Salovey, 1996; Salovey & Rodin, 1984). Furthermore, the present research replicated previous findings about the role of

deservingness in envy (Crusius & Lange, 2017; Lange & Crusius, 2015a; Smith, Parrott, Ozer, & Moniz, 1994). Benign envy was more likely to be expressed when the superior other's outcome was deserved and malicious envy was more likely when it was seen to be (Study 1) or characterized as (Study2) undeserved.

In summary, the findings indicate that SSS and OSS play different roles in the generation of envy. SSS is more relevant in upward social comparisons leading to benign and malicious envy, and material possessions do not motivate people to move up the social hierarchy to the same extent.

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