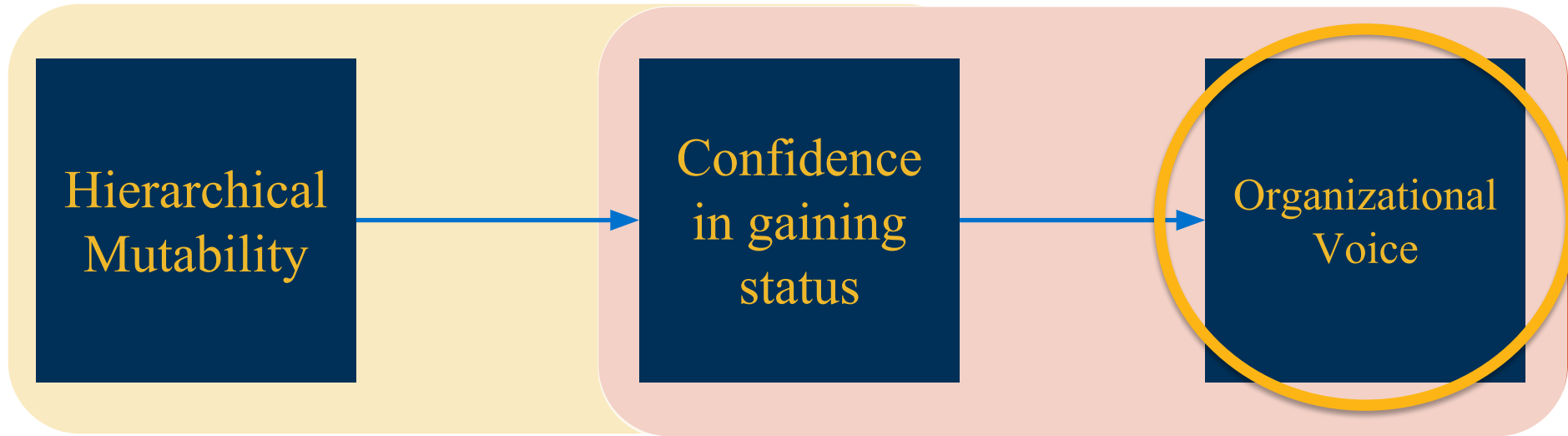# Motivated by Mutability

Merrick Osborne

Motivating research question

How does our confidence in gaining status shape our propensity to express organizational voice?

Hierarchical Mutability → Confidence in gaining status → Organizational Voice

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Organizational Voice:

Offering ideas, perspectives, or insights

What are the benefits of speaking up?
- Reduce errors *Mackenzie et al., 2011*
- Increased worker safety *Detert et al., 2013*
- Job retention *Burris et al., 2013*
- Different perspectives *Farh et al. 2020*
- Gaining status *Bain et al., 2021*

How do we get people to speak up?
- Providing the opportunity to do so *Detert et al. 200*
- Feelings of psychological safety *Morrison, 2023*
- Not getting backlash *Detert & Burris, 2010*
- Voice will be heeded *Weiss & Morrison, 2019*

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Organizational Status :

The amount of respect or admiration someone holds in an organization.

What are the benefits of having status?
- Positive evaluations *Berger, 1984*
- Self-esteem *Barkow, 1978*
- Health *Ellis, 1994*

How can people gain or lose status?
- Demonstrating instrumental social value
  - *amount or extent someone contributes to the group*
  Anderson et al., 2015; Leary et al., 2014

"People engage in a wide range of goal-directed activities to manage their status, aided by myriad cognitive, behavioral, and affective processes; for example, they vigilantly monitor the status dynamics in their social environment" – Anderson et al., 2015

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What prevents status pursuits?

Confidence in ability to successfully compete for status *Anderson et al., 2021*
- "Disengage from status competition" because they don't think that competing for status will be successful.

Similar arguments elsewhere in psychology
- When achieving high status is extremely unlikely, individuals might, out of self-defense, begin to desire status less *Anderson, Willer, et al., 2012*
- Social class research shows that people with more money and education pursue status more strongly *Belmi et al., 2019; see also: Laurin et al., 2019*
- Low status people's past "failure" leads them to disengage from status competition *Carver & Scheier, 1990; 1998; Deci et al., 1973, 1991*

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What prevents voice expression?

- Risky voice; *Detert & Edmondson, 2005; Liu et al., 2020*
- Voice will not be heeded; *Detert & Burris, 2007*
- Input is not invited; *Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012*
- Reduced confidence in gaining status

"Voice calculus";
Detert & Burris, 2007

| Hierarchical Mutability | → | Confidence in Gaining Status Through Voice | → | Organizational Voice |
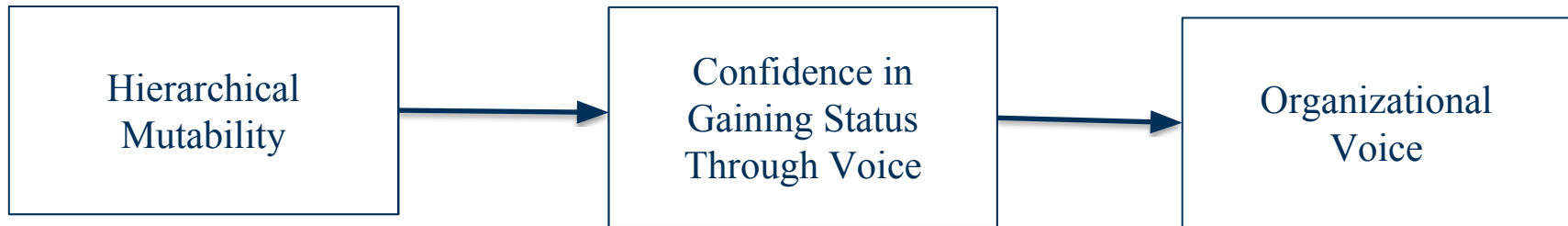
Mutability: *Opportunities for upward mobility in the status hierarchy*

Mutable

What we know about mutability:

- Status hierarchies are more mutable than power hierarchies *Hays & Bendersky, 2015*
- Mutability increases status competition *Pai & Bendersky, 2020*
- Mutable hierarchies can provide a path upward for low-status people *Perry, 2021*
- Low-status people may pursue status more in mutable hierarchies *Anderson et al., 2020*

Immutable

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Predictions

Predictions:

H1: **Increased mutability in the status hierarchy leads to more organizational voice**

H2: **…because people in more mutable hierarchies feel more confident that expressing voice will grant them status.**

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Study Overview

Study	Design	Hypotheses	Additional goals
1	Archival – Cross-sectional	H1	Initial hypothesis test
2	Recall – Correlational	H1	Mutability across different contexts
3	Vignette Study	H1 & H2	Replicate archival analyses
S1	Recall – Status Loss vs. Status Gain	H1 & H2	Specify direction of mutability

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Study 1 Dataset Description

Location: Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey

- 13 waves of annual data (2010-2023; 6,616,573 observations)
  - Note: observations are not linked across time*.
- Multi-level linear regression with robust standard errors clustered on year and agency
  - *Cross-lagged panel model at the agency-level

Items: 84 in total. Process

1. Theoretically guided
2. Separate pre-registere
   - Correlation, and

Mutability *(r = .65):*
"In my work unit, difference
"How satisfied are you with

Voice (α = .80):
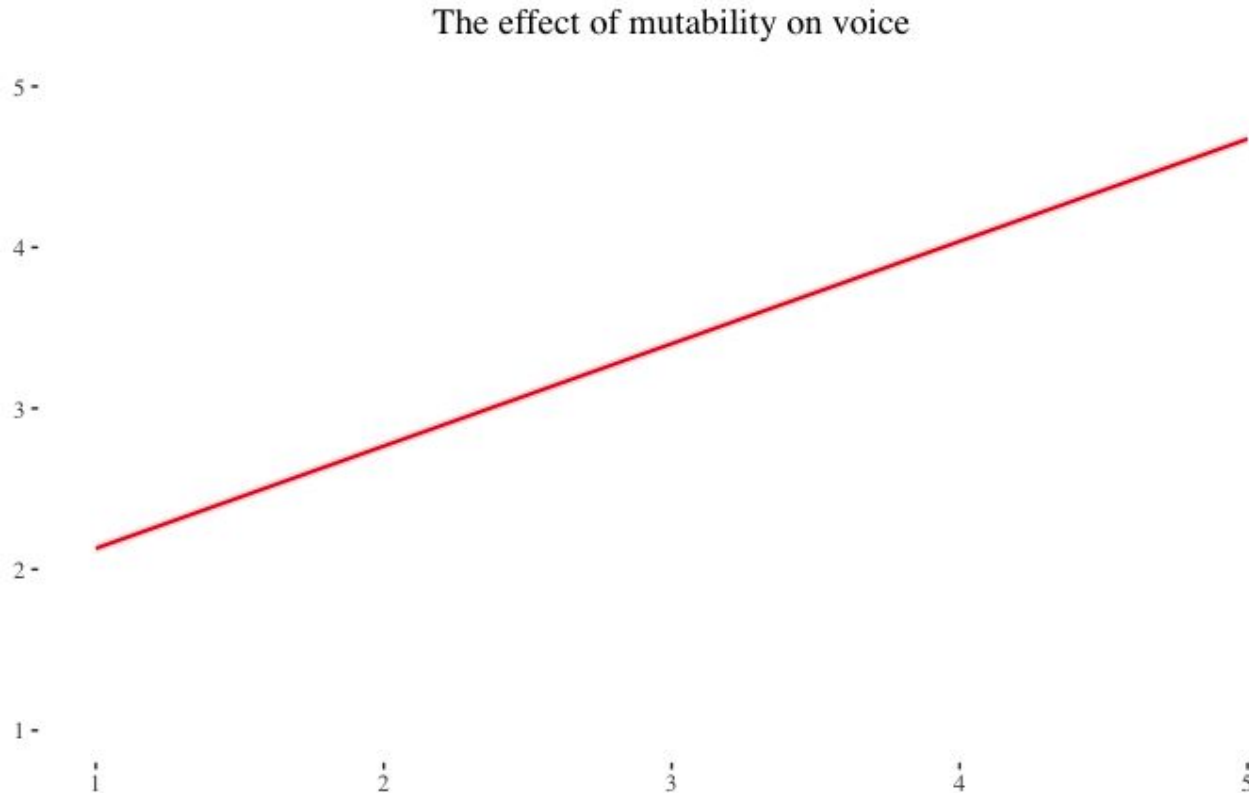"I can disclose a suspected v   reprisal,"
"I feel encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things"
"How satisfied are you with your involvement in decisions that affect your work?"

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Study 1 Results

The effect of mutability on voice
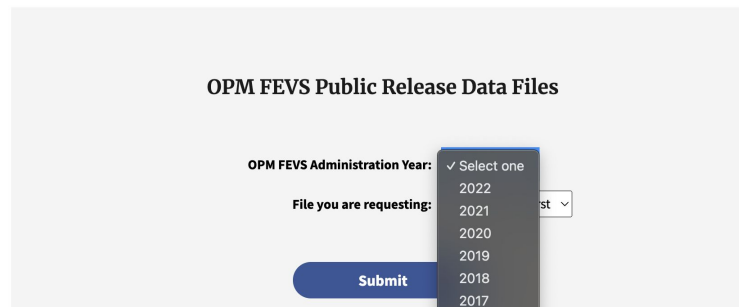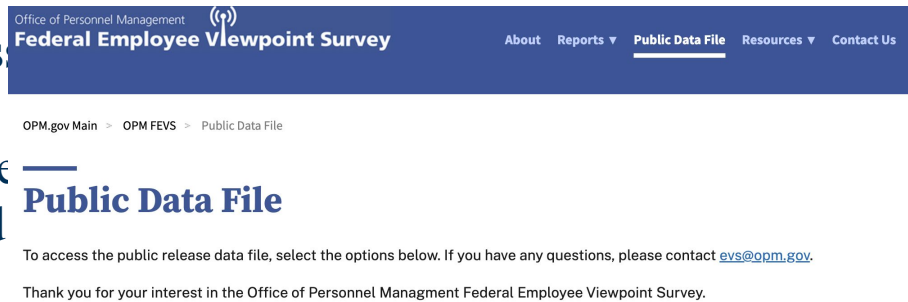
$B = 0.61$, $SE = 0.0002$, $p < .001$ robust standard errors clustered on year and agency.

Controlling for: The participant's sex, ethnicity, tenure in the federal government, supervisory status and intentions of leaving the agency. We also included the weights provided by the OPM

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Study 2 Intro

N = 350 (44.7% women, 1.1% nonbinary)

Goals:
- Determine how perceptions of mutability vary across teams
- See if mutability within a team predicts voicing within a team

Procedure
- Time 1: Recruited 1,000 participants
  Have you been a part of at least three different work teams in the past five years?
- Time 2:
  - Randomly selected 350 participants from Time 1
  - Asked them to rate 3-6 teams on mutability, confidence in gaining status, and voice

Study 2 Measures

Mutability

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the status hierarchy in this team?

- People's relative positions in the hierarchy can be altered.
- The hierarchy can be changed if team members desire.
- Moving up in the team's hierarchy is possible for those who try.
- People in the team can move up and down in the hierarchy if they want.
- The hierarchy is flexible and people can move up or down based on how hard they work.
- The hierarchy is fixed and would be extremely difficult or impossible to change. (R)

Confidence in gaining status

Generally, on this team...

- I am confident that I will achieve high status
- I believe I will be held in high esteem in this context
- I doubt that I will gain people's respect (R)

Voice (1 (Never) --> 4 (Sometimes) --> 7 (Very frequently))

- I give suggestions about how to make this work unit better, even if others disagree.
- I challenge this team to deal with problems
- I speak up with ideas to address employees' needs and concerns.
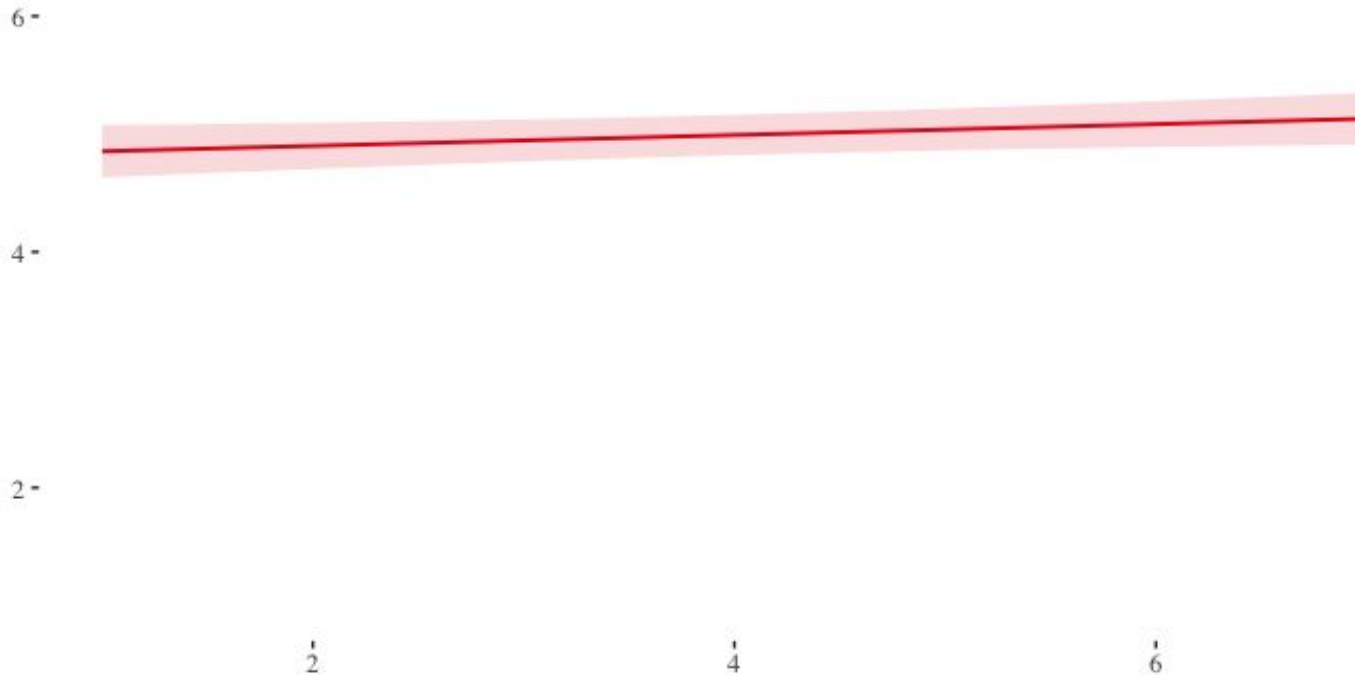
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Study 2 Results

Hierarchical Mutability on Confidence in Gaining Status
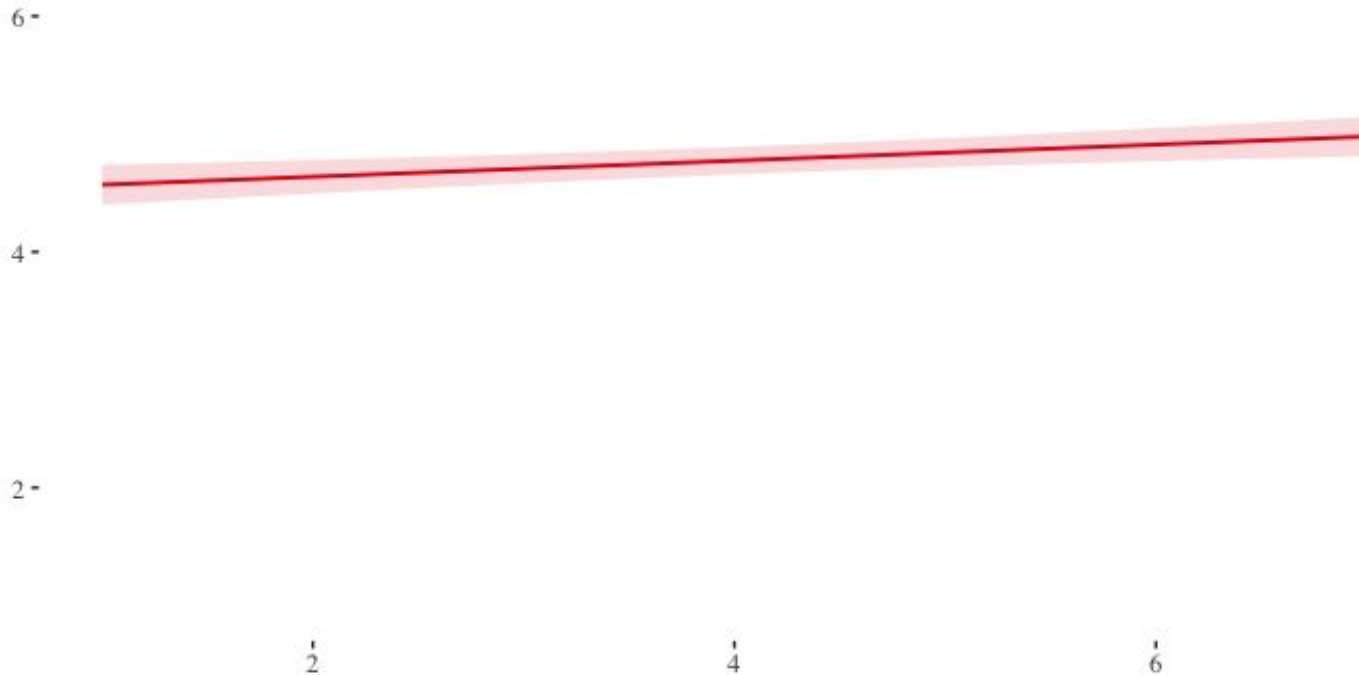
$B = .06$, $SE = .002$, $p < .001$, standard errors clustered on participant and team
Controlling for: gender, age, tenure in org

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Study 2 Results

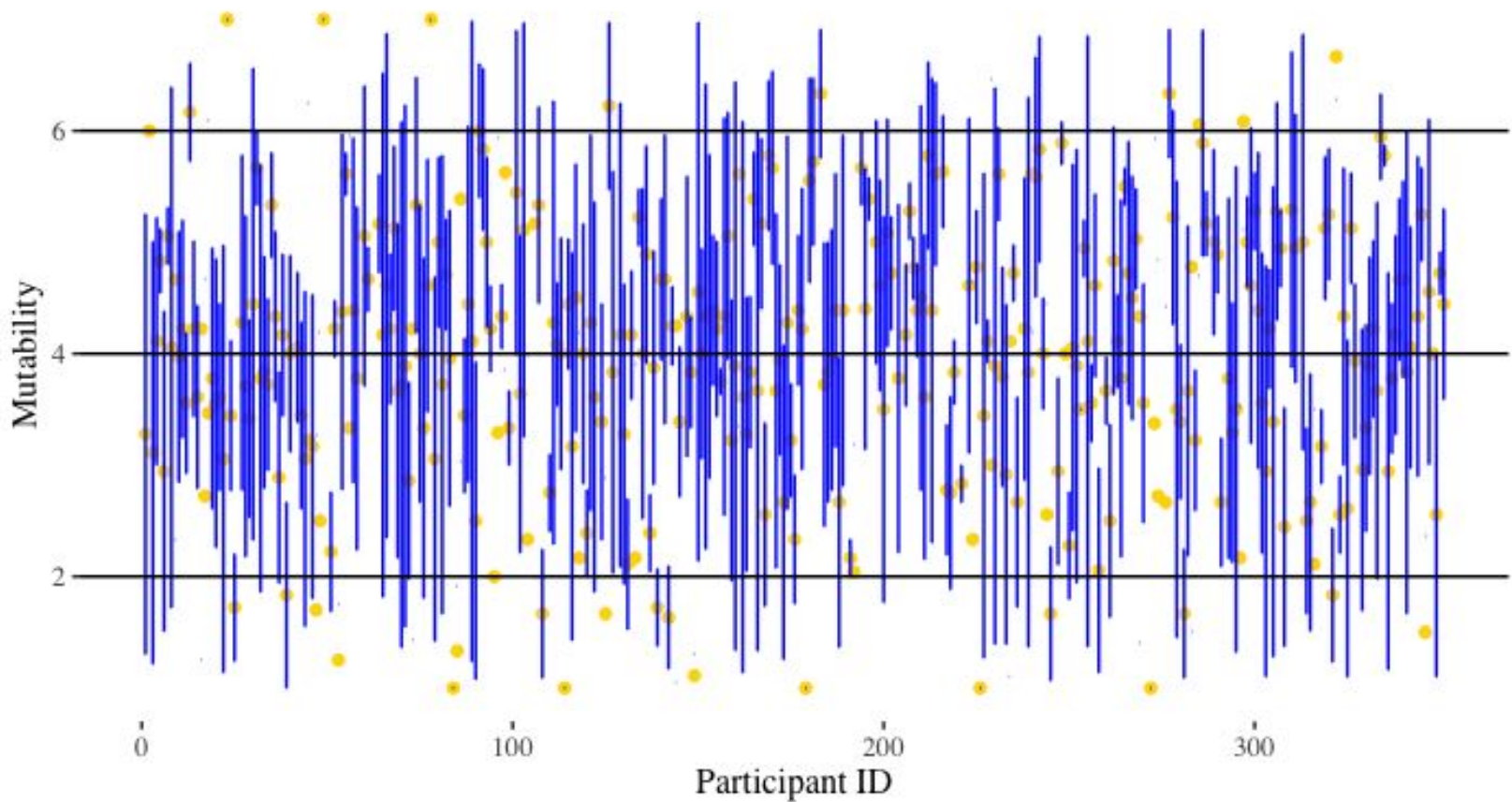Hierarchical Mutability on Organizational Voice

$B = .05$, $SE = .002$, $p < .001$, standard errors clustered on participant
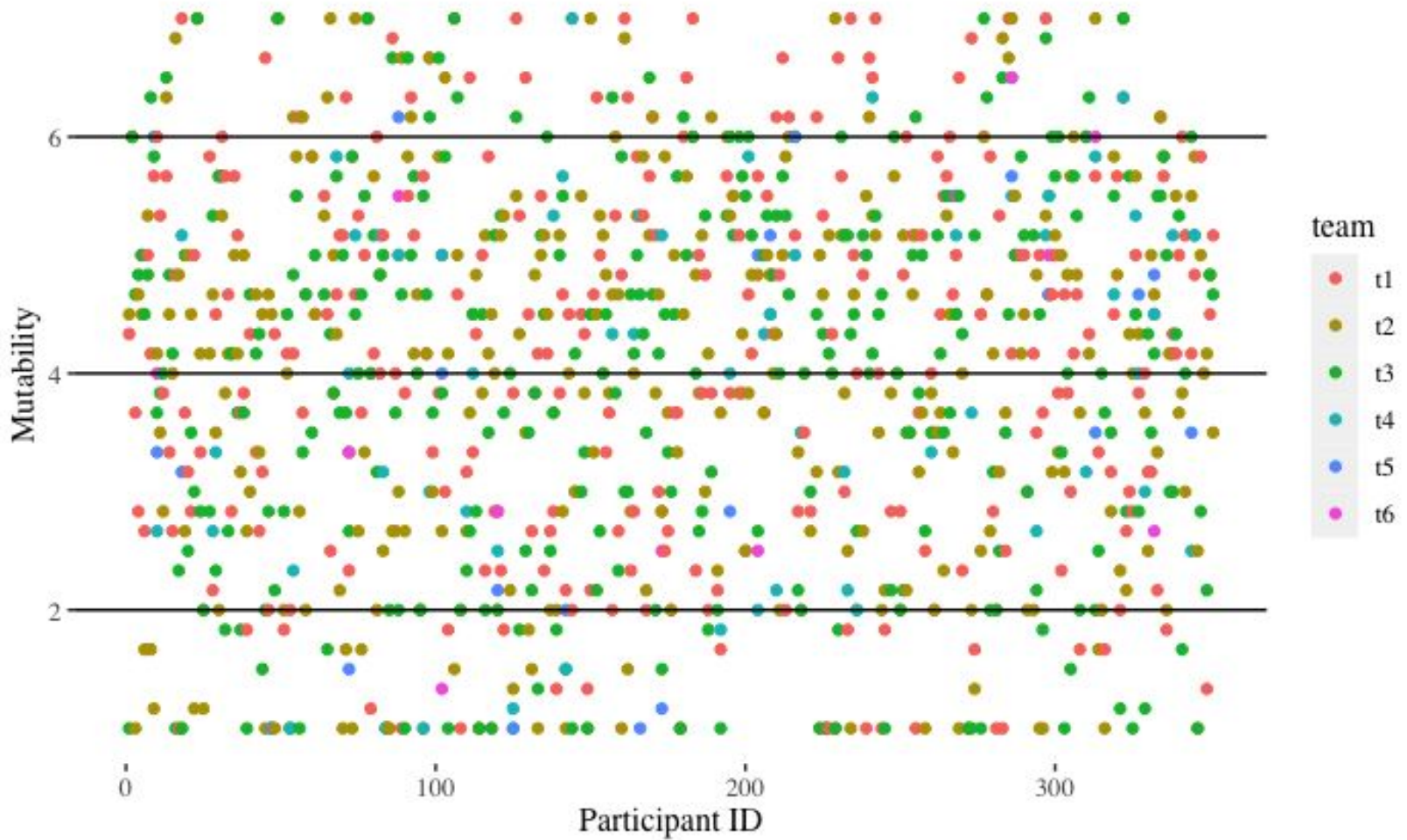Controlling for: gender, age, tenure in org

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Study 2 Results

Plot of means + standard deviations for hierarchical mutability
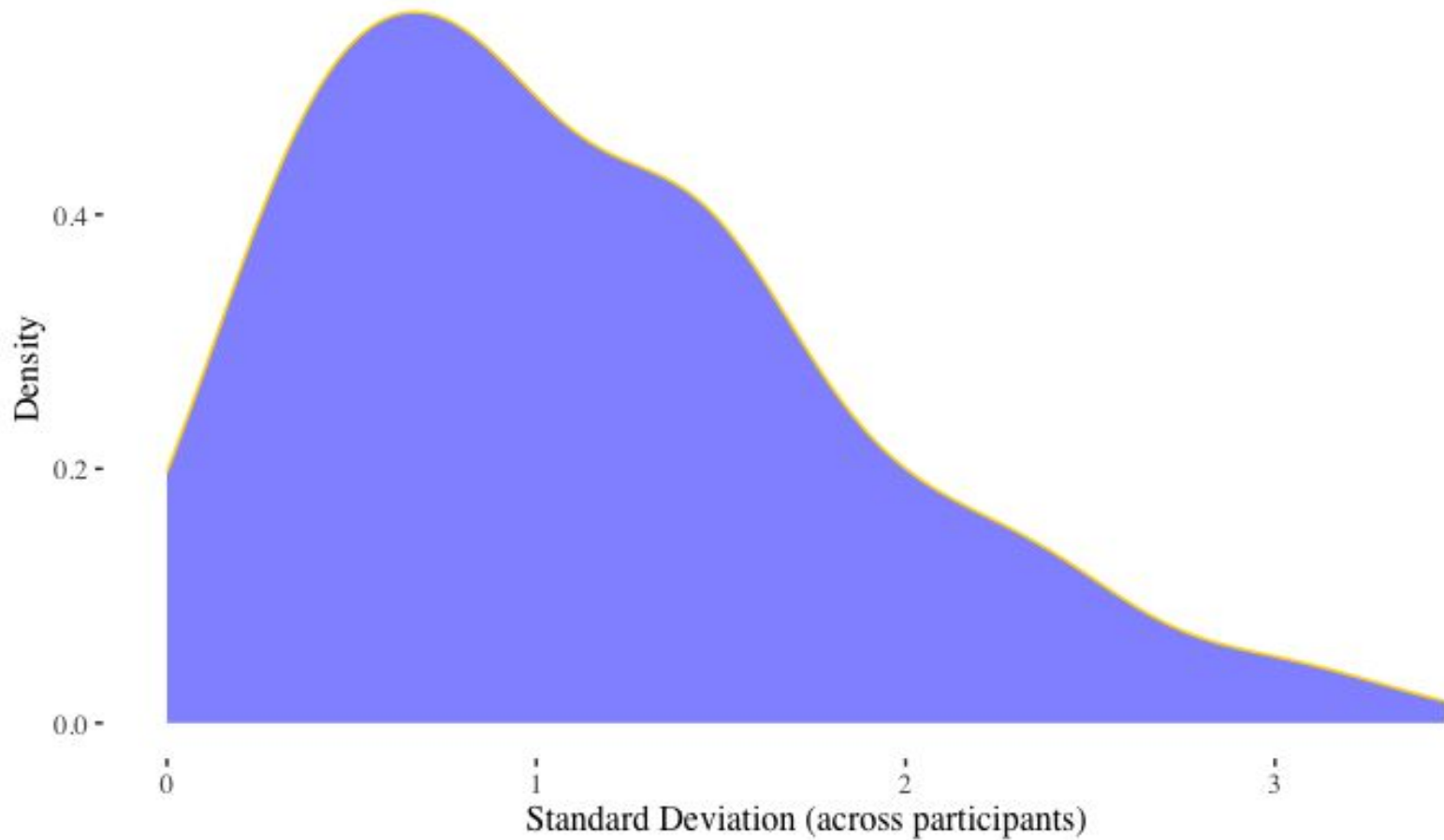Gold points = Mean, Blue lines = SDs

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Study 2 Results

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Study 2 Results

Density plot of within-participant SDs of mutability perceptions

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Study 3 Intro

N = 670 (52.6% women, 1.3% nonbinary)

Goals:
- Test mediation hypotheses
- Compare mutability for *high* vs. *low* status people

Anderson et al., 2021

Study 3 Procedure

High mutability
The amount of respect and admiration people have can be changed if they try, so people in the work group can move up and down the status hierarchy if they want.

Low mutability
the amount of respect and admiration people have CANNOT be changed if they try, people in the work group CANNOT move up and down the status hierarchy if they want.
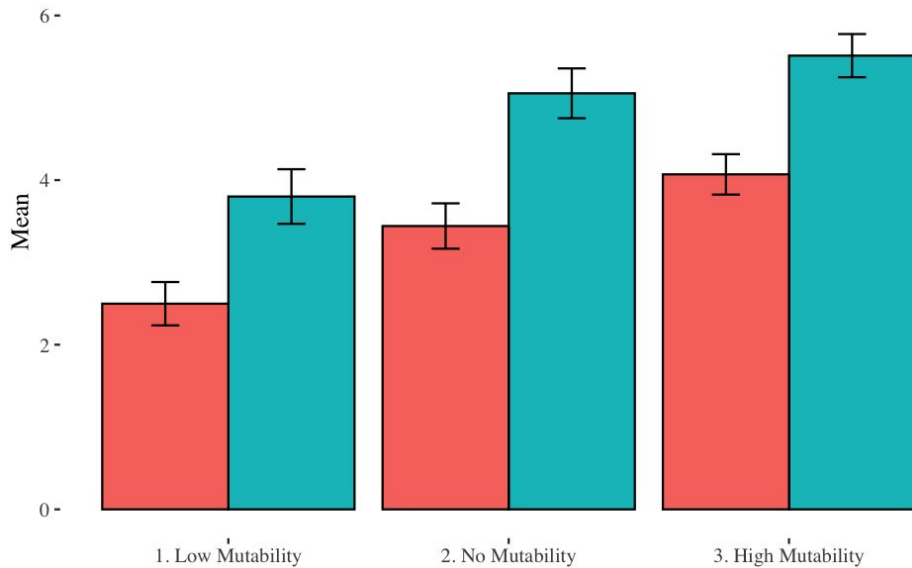
No Mutability

High status condition:
You were able to contribute quite a bit to the first meeting. So your status is high.
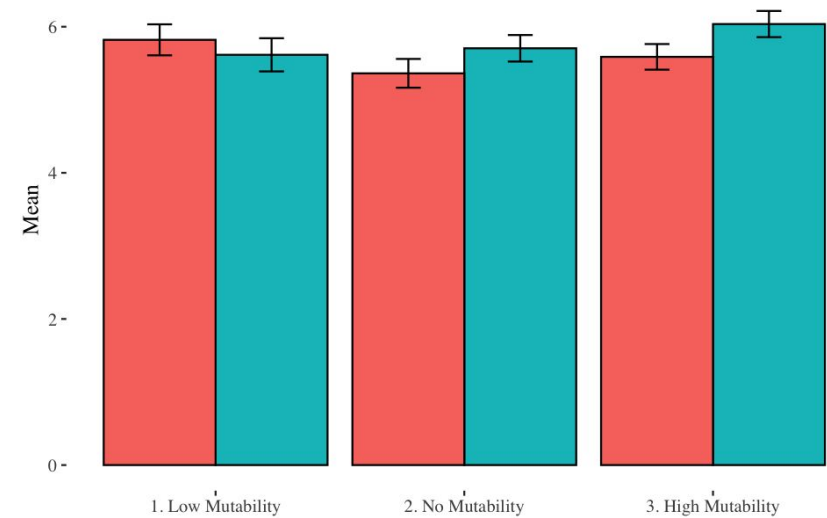
Low status condition:
You were NOT able to contribute much to the first meeting. So your status is low.
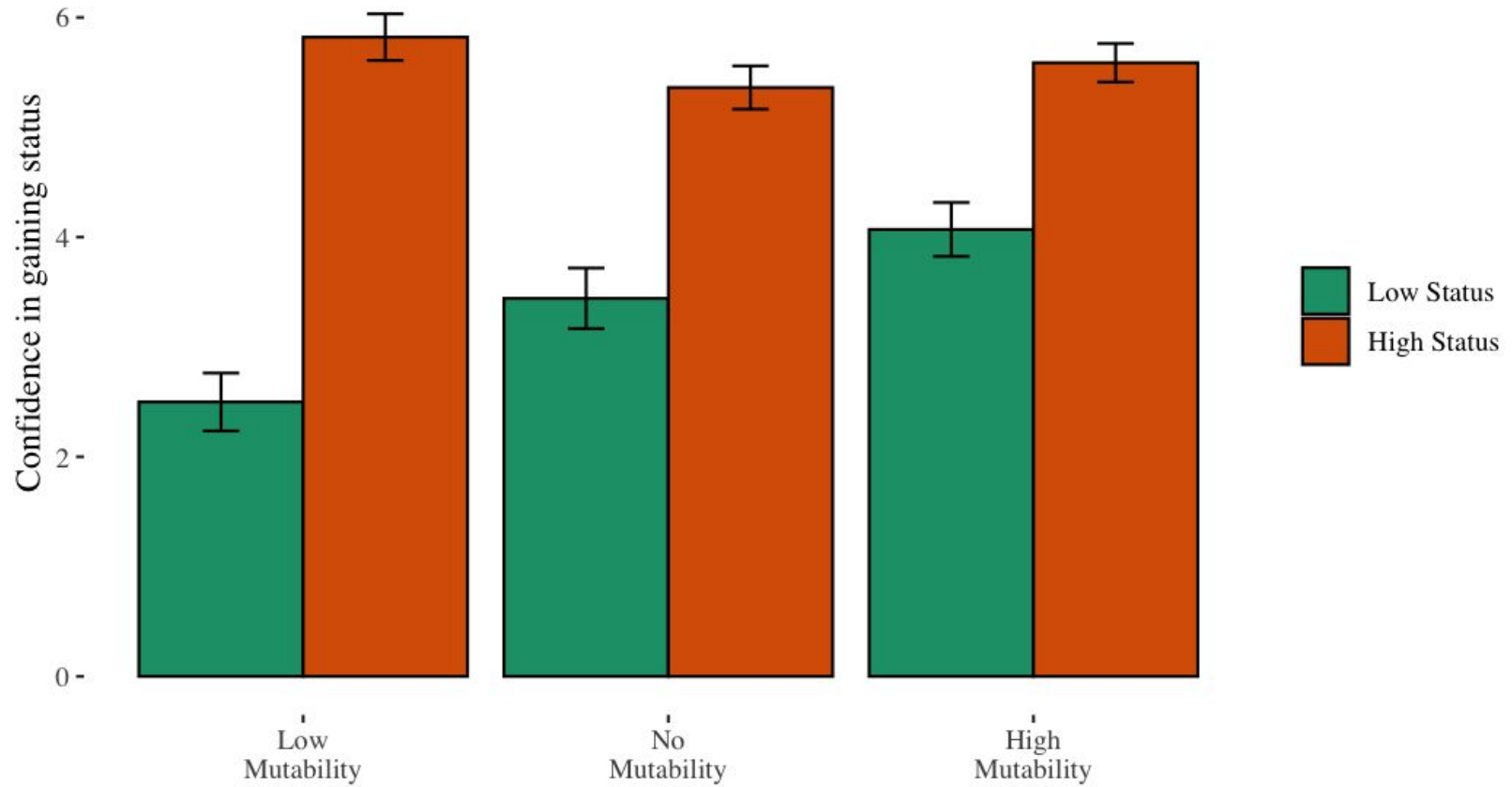
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Study 3 Results

Study 3 Results

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Study 3 Results

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Study 3 Results

Status (High/Low) → Confidence in gaining status: $a' = 0.35***$

Confidence in gaining status → Organizational Voice: $b' = 0.59***$

Hierarchical Mutability → Organizational Voice: $c' = 0.34***$, $c = 0.20***$

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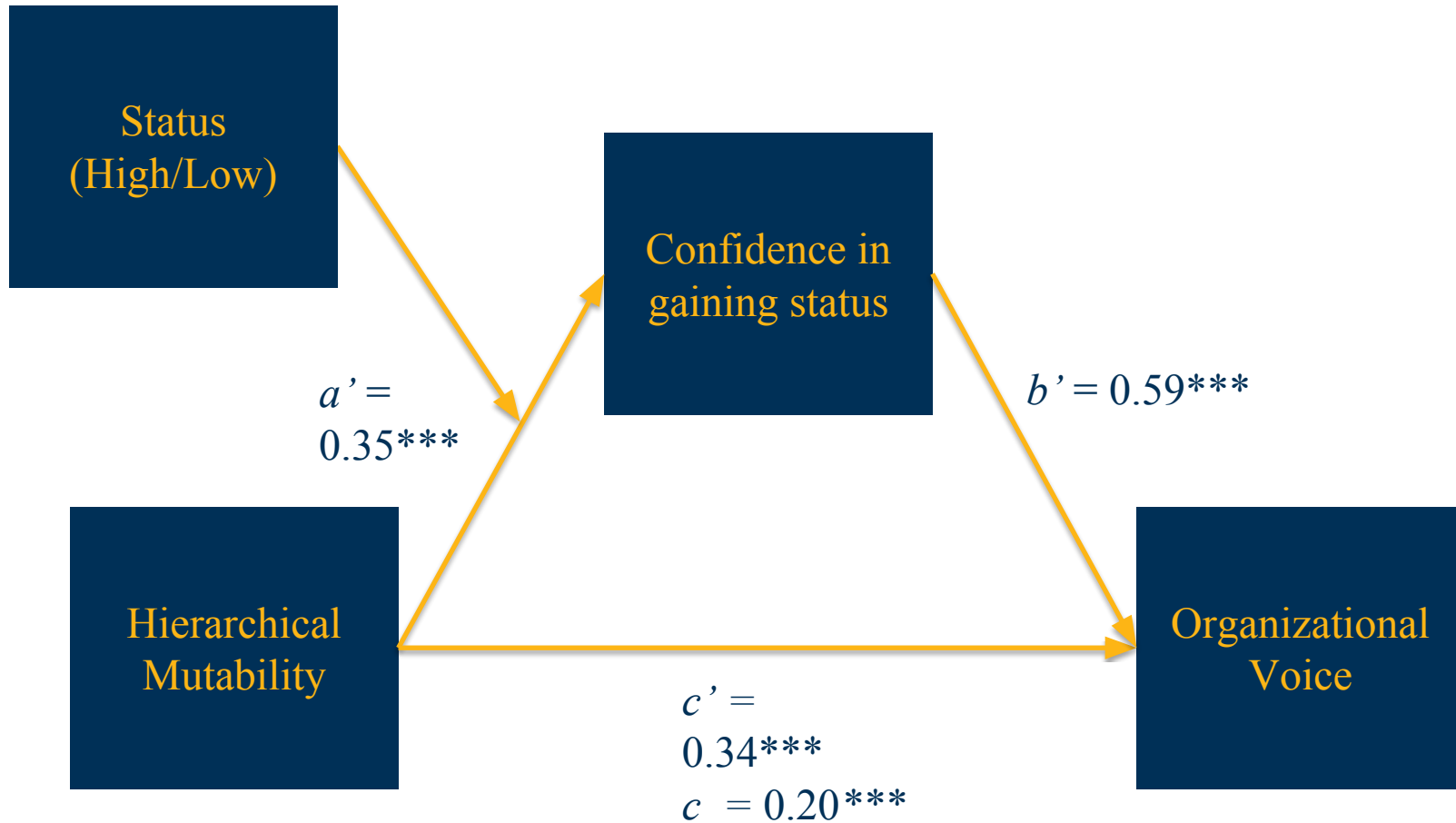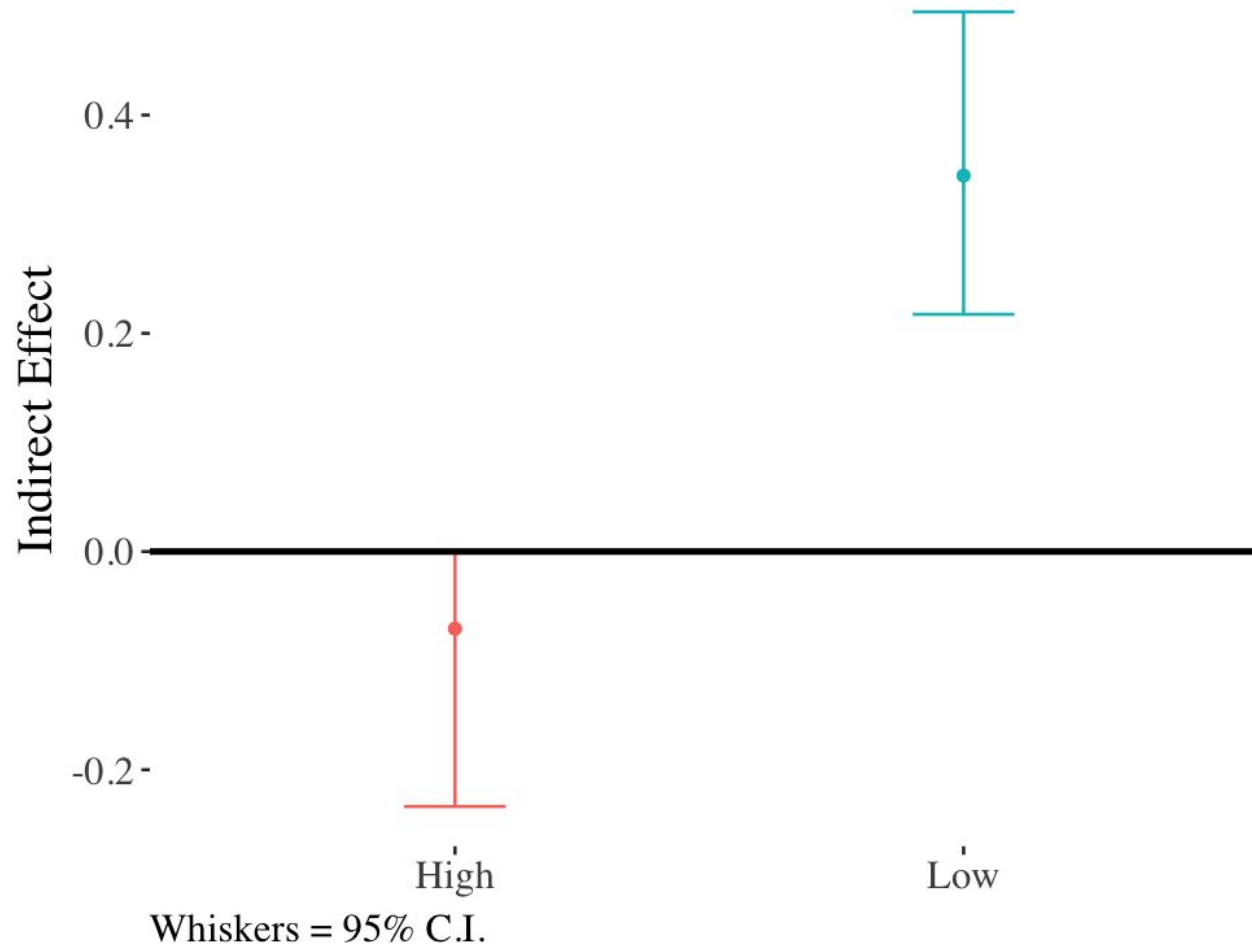
Study 3 Results

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Discussion

- Mutability:
  1. increases confidence in gaining status…which then increases organizational voice
  2. There is an important subplot at the status-level:
     - Our model is true for low-status people…
       - …but mutability doesn't make them as confident in their ability to gain status as high-status people.
       - …does not influence high-status people's confidence in gaining status

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Why is this theoretically important?

Organizational Voice

- Shows how status dynamics can precede voice expressions
- Highlights an undertheorized variable in voicing calculus

Organizational Status

- Taps into a way to activate status-enhancing behaviors.
- An implicit theme of previous work is that low-status people don't want to gain status because they aren't good at competing for it.
  - This perspective lays blame on low-status people without consideration of the context of their status pursuits.

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Why is this practically important?

Sheryl Sandberg > **Quotes** > **Quotable Quote** (?)

"We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in. We internalize the negative messages we get throughout our lives—the messages that say it's wrong to be outspoken, aggressive, more powerful than men."

— Sheryl Sandberg, Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead

Hard Work Doesn't Always Lead to Success

by Utkarsh Amitabh

September 12, 2023

NBC NEWS — Kim Kardashian told women to 'get ... up and work.' Some people are saying it's hypocritical.

CULTURE MATTERS

Kim Kardashian told women to 'get ... up and work.' Some people are saying it's hypocritical.

Social media users bristled at Kardashian's recent suggestion that women in business should hustle harder.

TIME — SIGN UP FOR OUR IDEAS NEWSLETTER — SUBSCR

IDEAS • CAREERS & WORKPLACE

Why Ambition Isn't Working for Women

BY **KRISTIN VAN OGTROP**   SEPTEMBER 17, 2015 5:52 AM EDT

Van Ogtrop is the author of *Just Let Me Lie Down: Necessary Terms for the Half-Insane Working Mom.*

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ECONOMIC POLICY

One in four Americans think poor people don't work hard enough

By Roberto A. Ferdman
October 9, 2014 at 2:42 p.m. EDT

Why hard work alone isn't enough to get ahead

27th September 2021, 06:19 PDT

Share

By Kate Morgan
Features correspondent

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Where do we go next?

Theoretically unresolved

1. How do people "detect" mutability?

    • Incivility, microaggressions, negative gossip

2. How do we get low-status people to pursue status as intently as high-status people?

3. Temporal dynamics:

    • Relationship between mutability's changes over time and voice's

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Thank you!

Andrew Choi
PhD Candidate
UC Berkeley Haas

Samantha Martinez
PhD Candidate
USC Marshall

Cameron Anderson
Faculty
UC Berkeley Haas

Supplemental Study 1 Intro

$N = 204$ (45.45% women, 2.59% non-binary)

Goal:

Compare the prospect of status *gains* to status *losses*

Procedure

Time 1:

Are you able to tell us about a time at work where you experienced low status **but there was an opportunity for you to gain more status?**

Are you able to tell us about a time at work where you experienced low status **and there was an opportunity for you to lose even more status?**

Are you able to tell us about a time at work where you experienced low status **and there was NOT an opportunity for your status to change?**

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Supplemental Study 1 Results

Perceptions of confidence across gaining, losing, or not changing status
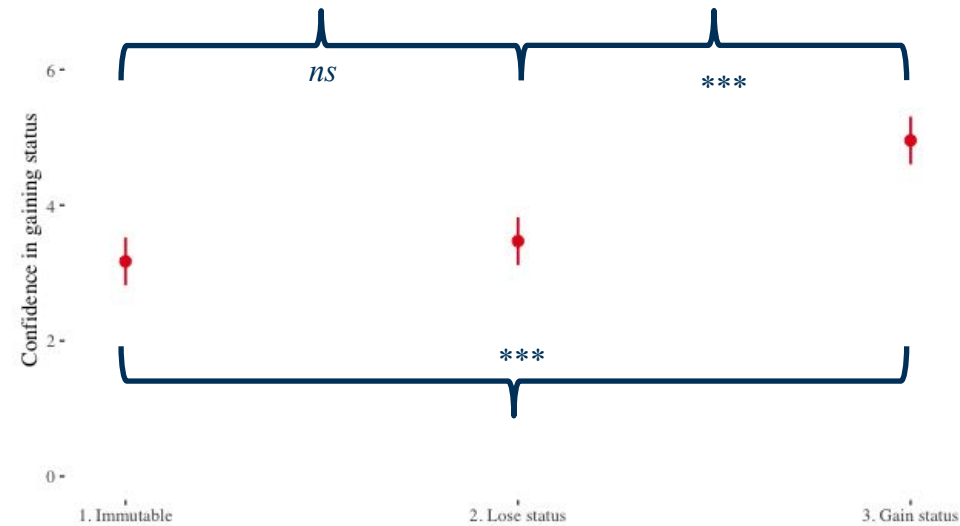
Perceptions of voice across gaining, losing, or not changing status

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