

Do Status Incentives Undermine Morality-based Status Attainment? Investigating the Mediating Role of Perceived Authenticity

Abstract

We propose that status incentives weaken the relationship between moral behaviors and status conferral by undermining perceptions of authenticity. Across two experiments among diverse samples of participants, evidence indicates that observers question the authenticity of moral actors who are pursuing status incentives. Perceptions of authenticity mediate the interaction of moral behaviors and status incentives on status conferral. A third two-wave online survey replicates the experimental findings and reveals that observers' moral identity further strengthens the interaction of moral behaviors and status incentives in shaping perceptions of authenticity and subsequent status conferral.

Keywords: authenticity; moral identity; status attainment; status incentives; virtue.

Introduction

Recent years have seen a resurgence of research interest in understanding the relationship between morality and status (Bai, 2017; Flynn, 2003; Frimer, Aquino, Gebauer, Zhu, & Oakes, 2015; Grant, 2013; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Milinski, Semmann, & Krambeck, 2002a; Torelli, Leslie, Stoner, & Puente, 2014; Willer, 2009). On one hand, evidence is accumulating that demonstrating moral characteristics, such as generosity and altruism, can lead to status conferral toward a moral actor across a variety of contexts (e.g., Flynn, 2003; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; McClean, Martin, Emich, & Woodruff, 2017; Willer, 2009). On the other hand, extant research has also shown that status incentives, such as reputation and career opportunities, can activate the desire for status and bring about elevated levels of moral behaviors (e.g., Barclay & Willer, 2007; Griskevicius, Tybur, & Van den Bergh, 2010; Hui, Lam, & Law, 2000).

Taken together, these lines of work remain ambiguous with regard to the potential role of status incentives in the status attainment process based on morality. Some scholars (e.g., Barclay & Willer, 2007; Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014) have suggested that despite elevating levels of moral behaviors, status incentives may have a dark side, too. Specifically, observers appear to suspect or question the true intent of a moral actor, at least when reputational benefits for acting morally are high (Barclay & Willer, 2007). Yet, there is little, if any, research exploring the potential downside of status incentives in the context of status attainment, and many questions remain. Most importantly, could status incentives interfere with morality-based status conferral processes? If so, how and when do status incentives undermine the morality–status link?

In this article, we draw on the literatures on authenticity (e.g., Gino, Kouchaki, & Galinsky, 2015; Kernis & Goldman, 2006), attribution theory (e.g., Heider, 1958; Jones, 1990), and status attainment (e.g., Bai, 2017; Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014) to propose that status

incentives interfere with morality-based status conferral processes by undermining perceptions of authenticity. Individuals show authenticity when they seem to adhere to their “true- or core-self” in their daily actions (Kernis & Goldman, 2006, p. 294). When observers are highly aware of incentives to pursue status, they are likely to view actors who demonstrate moral characteristics as *inauthentic* and undeserving of status conferral. Furthermore, building on the literatures on behavioral ethics (e.g., Bazerman & Sezer, 2016; Sezer, Gino, & Bazerman, 2015) and moral character (e.g., Aquino & Reed, 2002; Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse, & Kim, 2014), we theorize that observers’ moral identity affects the degree to which they attend to and interpret status incentives as morally relevant information to be incorporated for forming perceptions of authenticity and subsequent status conferral. To test our predictions, we conducted a laboratory experiment (Study 1), an online experiment (Study 2), and a two-wave online survey (Study 3).

Our studies make three theoretical contributions. First, we identify the factors causing observers to perceive moral actors to be authentic or inauthentic. Authenticity has been studied for its effects on various workplace consequences such as leader effectiveness (Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011), but we explore antecedents of authenticity perceptions. In particular, we identify status incentives and observers’ moral identity as jointly affecting the positive effect of moral behaviors on perceptions of authenticity. Second, we highlight perceived authenticity as playing the key mediating role in morality-based status attainment (e.g., Bai, 2017; Willer, 2009). High status is thought to lead to suspicions of moral intent as a side effect (e.g., Barclay & Willer, 2007; Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014). We draw on the theoretical framework of morality and status attainment (Bai, 2017) to predict that observers will be reluctant to convey status to actors they perceive as inauthentic. Third, we contribute to a contextualized view of status attainment (Bai, 2017; Li, Chen, & Blader, 2016) by investigating status incentives as

having a dark side in interfering with status conferral. Status research has explored novel antecedents of status such as humor (Bitterly, Brooks, & Schweitzer, 2017) and voice (McClean et al., 2017), but has paid relatively little attention to social and interpersonal contexts underlying status attainment processes (see Torelli et al., 2014 for an exception). We advance the literature by theorizing and examining how status incentives, a contextual factor prevalent in the workplace, undermine the well-documented positive relationship between outstanding moral behaviors and status attainment (e.g., Flynn, 2003; Hui et al., 2000; Willer, 2009).

Status

Individuals who have high *status* enjoy relative prominence, deference, or influence in their groups or organizations (Anderson, Willer, Kilduff, & Brown, 2012; Bai, 2017; Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980; Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Levine & Moreland, 1990). Status is a *sociometric* construct that emerges from human interactions within specific contexts and is socially conferred by others (Cashdan, 1998; Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983; Tushman & Romanelli, 1983). Although interrelated, status is distinct from other important hierarchical constructs such as *socioeconomic* status (SES) or social class (e.g., Anderson, Kraus, Galinsky, & Keltner, 2012), power (e.g., Fiske & Berdahl, 2007), and leadership (e.g., Hogan & Kaiser, 2005), which scholars have thoroughly discussed (see reviews by Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001; Bai, 2017).

Across time and situations, human groups have tended to form social orders based on status (Barkow, 1975; Fiske, 2010; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Status hierarchies have a core function in fundamentally motivating humans to strive for status (Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015; Neel, Kenrick, White, & Neuberg, 2016). Indeed, status is associated with various desirable intrapersonal and social outcomes such as subjective well-being and

reproductive success (e.g., Anderson, Kraus, et al., 2012; von Rueden & Jaeggi, 2016). Higher status employees have been shown to enjoy interpersonal influence, higher performance, fairer supervisory treatment, and job satisfaction (Djurdjevic et al., 2017). Furthermore, initial status benefits or advantages may be self-reinforcing and enhance future careers over the long term (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Merton, 1968).

Because high status is so desirable, individuals do “many things” (Barkow, 1975) to fulfill their fundamental motive to attain status in various contexts (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Kyl-Heku & Buss, 1996; Yukl & Falbe, 1990). For example, twenty-six distinct tactics for maintaining or advancing status have been identified, such as “aggress,” “display knowledge,” and “help others” (Kyl-Heku & Buss, 1996). Among these status tactics, past research has focused on dominance through intimidation and coercion to induce fear and competence through exhibiting task skills or expertise to earn respect as the two major routes to status (Cheng, Tracy, Foulsham, Kingstone, & Henrich, 2013; Levine & Moreland, 1990).

Morality and status attainment

More relevant here are studies of how morality relates to status attainment (Bai, 2017; Flynn, 2003; Frimer et al., 2015; Grant, 2013; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Milinski et al., 2002a; Torelli et al., 2014; Willer, 2009). Morality is defined as a system of “interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate self-interest and make cooperative societies possible” (Haidt, 2012, p. 27). People are *moral* insofar as they overcome self-interests to “conform to the established practices and customs” of their groups (Weiss, 1942, p. 381). Conceptualized broadly, moral behaviors can manifest in various forms such as generosity and altruism (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009), humility (Tangney, 2000), purity (Zhong & Liljenquist, 2006), and support of righteous causes (Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Rather than

culturally specific forms of moral behaviors such as purity and chastity (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Shweder, Much, Mahapatra, & Park, 1997), the literature has mostly studied moral behaviors of *generosity*—defined as giving more to others than one has taken from them (Flynn, 2003; Klapwijk & Van Lange, 2009), and *altruism*—defined as helping others with the ultimate goal of increasing their welfare (Batson & Shaw, 1991; Smith, Organ, & Near, 1983).

Some researchers have argued that moral characteristics are a *component* or *modifier* of the competence route to status (e.g., Berger, Balkwell, Norman, & Smith, 1992; Ridgeway, 1982), but moral characteristics may actually play *independent* roles (Frimer et al., 2015; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; McClean et al., 2017; Willer, 2009). For example, a workplace study showed that men who use a promotive voice are more likely to attain status and emerge as leaders (McClean et al., 2017). Laboratory experiments, furthermore, have indicated that generosity and altruism tend to generate status conferral (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009).

To better integrate new evidence into theories of morality and status attainment, Bai (2017) recently developed the novel conceptual framework called the moral virtue theory of status attainment (MVT), which posits that individuals can enhance status by demonstrating *virtue*, or outstanding morally praiseworthy characteristics (Haidt & Joseph, 2004), independent of dominance and competence. Accordingly, the virtue route to status indicates that observers will form a *unique* pattern of cognitive and affective responses that lead them to confer status toward virtuous actors (Bai, 2017). Specifically, observers have pleasant feelings in admiring virtuous actors (Algoe & Haidt, 2009), perceiving that they would willingly sacrifice their self-interests to uphold moral ideals. Consequently, observers will confer high status to virtuous actors, expecting them to advance group interests despite any personal expense. In sum, research

on the morality–status link has provided considerable support indicating that moral characteristics are a distinct source of status attainment, beyond dominance and competence.

Incentives to pursue status

Beyond moral characteristics, however, individuals may show generosity or altruism because they are motivated by desires to obtain benefits or rewards associated with high status, or *status incentives* (Barclay & Willer, 2007; Bolino, 1999; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Hui et al., 2000). Laboratory studies featuring economic games have shown that individuals escalate their levels of generosity and collaboration (Barclay & Willer, 2007; Willer, 2009) and express a greater preference for “green” or pro-environmental products (Griskevicius et al., 2010) if such actions offer salient opportunities for gaining reputation. Desires for favorable images tend to directly increase organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), such as helping and showing courtesy, and strengthen the positive relationship between prosocial motives and OCBs (Bolino, 1999; Grant & Mayer, 2009). Perhaps most relevant is a quasi-experiment at a multinational bank showing that tellers who believed OCB to be *instrumental* for obtaining promotions escalated their OCB three months before a promotion and ceased OCB three months after the promotion (Hui et al., 2000).

Unlike organizational incentives based on specific performance standards or reference points, status incentives are primarily based on ranks or standings in groups or organizations (e.g., Dohmen & Falk, 2011; Lazear, 2000). For example, “employee of the month” awards can be considered status incentives because they are usually tied to relative group or organizational standings (e.g., Wu, Loch, & Ahmad, 2011); whereas variable pay plans based on piece rates (e.g., Li et al., 2016) are not. Most groups and organizations have prevalent status hierarchies (Anderson & Brown, 2010; Fiske, 2010; Magee & Galinsky, 2008) and status incentives of

various types such as financial awards, reputation, or dating opportunities (e.g., Besley & Ghatak, 2008; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014; Lazear & Rosen, 1981). The intended targets are incentivized only when status incentives are salient rather than ambiguous or unknown. For example, employees tend to be more motivated when performance rankings are made public and thus enhance reputations and self-esteem (Blanes i Vidal & Nossol, 2011; Kuhnen & Tymula, 2011).

Status incentives appear to serve as a *catalyst* for moral behaviors, at least in morally relevant contexts.¹ Yet, it remains unclear whether observers will convey status to actors who escalate moral behaviors because they are fueled by status incentives. Although status incentives can elevate overall levels of morality, Barclay and Willer (2007) found preliminary evidence that observers tended to be skeptical about moral intentions when generosity carries high reputational benefits. Thus we need to know more about the potential drawbacks associated with pursuing status incentives. Our core interest goes beyond status incentives *per se* but is focused on how observers perceive the motives of moral actors. Could their perceptions interfere with status conferral processes? If so, *how* and *when*?

Perceptions of authenticity: An interaction of morality and status incentives

We draw on authenticity research (e.g., Gino et al., 2015; Kernis & Goldman, 2006), attribution theory (e.g., Heider, 1958; Jones, 1990), and MVT (Bai, 2017) to propose that perceptions of authenticity play a key role in mediating the interaction of moral behaviors and status incentives on status conferral. Conceptualized as an individual difference construct

¹ We do not claim that increased moral behaviors are the only outcome of status incentives, but a comprehensive study of other consequences are beyond our scope here. Indeed, status incentives may also lead to increased task performance (e.g., Blanes i Vidal & Nossol, 2011) and dominance struggles (e.g., Griskevicius et al., 2009).

(Kernis, 2003), authenticity has been associated with various positive *intrapersonal* outcomes such as self-esteem (Kernis, 2003), subjective and psychological well-being (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008), and job satisfaction (Martinez, Sawyer, Thoroughgood, Ruggs, & Smith, 2017). Moreover, authenticity is considered a *moralized* construct, perhaps a form of virtue on its own, because it indicates that individuals are behaving “truly” according to their values, preferences, and needs rather than acting “falsely” to avoid punishments or attain rewards (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). For example, in five studies, participants who had experimentally induced experiences of inauthenticity reported feeling immoral and impure, so they were drawn to cleansing, compensatory moral behaviors such as helping and donating to charity (Gino et al., 2015).

Perceived authenticity has crucial *interpersonal* consequences in the workplace. Much leadership research has focused on authenticity in leaders (Gardner et al., 2011) to show that interpersonal dynamics (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) and follower satisfaction, commitment, and task performance (e.g., Leroy, Palanski, & Simons, 2012; Peus, Wesche, Streicher, Braun, & Frey, 2012) are enhanced when subordinates perceive that leaders are authentically aware of their values, knowledge, and strengths and have high moral character (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004). In customer service interactions, customers report greater satisfaction and trust when they perceive service providers as showing authenticity (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013; Cheshin, Amit, & van Kleef, 2018; Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005). Although research on moral behaviors (e.g., OCB) in the workplace has not directly studied perceptions of authenticity, it has shown that managers and coworkers respond more positively to employees’ good deeds that are attributed to altruistic rather than instrumental

motives (e.g., Allen & Rush, 1998; Eastman, 1994; Halbesleben, Bowler, Bolino, & Turnley, 2010; Johnson, Erez, Kiker, & Motowidlo, 2002; Long, 2017).

Beyond acknowledging the importance of perceived authenticity in the workplace, relatively little attention has been devoted to understanding antecedents of perceived authenticity (e.g., Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014; Peus et al., 2012; Vonk, 1998), except for one study showing that when status is based on task performance or contributions alone, observers will doubt the high-status actor's authenticity and suspect that the moral actions can be attributed to inherent benefits associated with attaining high status (Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014).

Extending that work, we draw on attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Jones, 1990) to show how moral behaviors and pursuit of status incentives jointly determine perceptions or attributions of authenticity. Attribution researchers basically assume that people strive to explain behaviors that deviate from normative standards (e.g., Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009; Heider, 1958; Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1981). As *outstanding* moral behaviors often manifest in various forms (Haidt & Joseph, 2004) and go beyond conformity to norms, they represent positive deviations from normative expectations.

Attribution research, furthermore, finds that people tend to make *correspondent inferences* in assuming that personal characteristics and stable traits motivate observed behaviors (Jones, 1990), while ignoring external pressures or incentives (Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Malle, 2006). Correspondence bias (Gilbert & Malone, 1995) may lead observers to perceive that a moral actor who demonstrates outstanding moral behaviors is authentic, whereas the moral actor may be actually pursuing status incentives such as reputation and promotion. Correspondence bias is less likely in *unambiguous* situations when observers can fully recognize external forces behind outstanding moral behaviors. Thus we argue that status incentives are an important

external or contextual factor, among others (e.g., power; Fein, 1996; Vonk, 1998), that shape attributions of moral behaviors. When observers are aware that a moral actor is pursuing status incentives, they are likely to engage in more deliberate and thoughtful analysis of the role of status incentives in producing the behaviors. Hence, we argue that unless observers know that a moral actor is pursuing status incentives, they are likely to perceive authenticity and genuineness, but if they perceive that the moral actor is pursuing status incentives, they may overcome correspondence bias and ascribe *ulterior* motives. Thus, we propose:

Hypothesis 1. Moral behaviors will affect perceived authenticity depending on how observers perceive a moral actor's pursuit of status incentives. When observers perceive that status incentives motivate the moral actor, moral behaviors will have a less positive effect on perceived authenticity.

Perceived authenticity in status conferral

We have argued that a moral actor's pursuit of status incentives may lead observers to question the moral actor's authenticity, but the role of perceived authenticity in status conferral remains ambiguous. Inauthenticity might simply be a *side effect* of attaining high status, without interfering in the status conferral process itself (Barclay & Willer, 2007; Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014). For example, observers have been shown to confer significantly higher status to high performers despite perceptions of inauthenticity (Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014). The functionalistic perspective of social hierarchy argues that groups confer status based on perceived instrumentality or usefulness vis-à-vis group task performance and success (e.g., Halevy, Chou, & Galinsky, 2011; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). Thus competence is thought to be the major route to status, overlooking other paths for attaining status (Li et al.,

2016). As an alternative, we turn to MVT (Bai, 2017) to highlight perceived authenticity as playing a more central role in status conferral.

Authenticity is a moralized construct and perhaps a form of virtue (Gino et al., 2015). Authentic people appear to be aware of their moral values and to act accordingly. We therefore argue that perceptions of authenticity serve as a key mediating mechanism through which moral behaviors and status incentives interact to affect status conferral. According to MVT (Bai, 2017), confidence in a moral actor's authenticity bolsters the beliefs that the moral actor is *purely* pursuing moral ideals; in contrast, perceived inauthenticity evokes beliefs that the moral actor is covertly pursuing high status, as well as benefits and rewards typically associated with high status. Consequently, inauthentic actors will fail to earn status despite elevated levels of moral behaviors, because observers will expect inauthentic actors to *prioritize* their personal interests over the good of others, and will probably cease their moral actions. In sum, the pursuit of status incentives leads observers to perceive outstanding moral behaviors to be inauthentic, which in turn undermines the morality-based status conferral process. We hence propose:

Hypothesis 2. Perceived authenticity mediates the interaction of moral behaviors and status incentives on status conferral, such that moral behaviors will have a less positive indirect effect on status conferral via perceived authenticity when observers perceive that the moral actor is pursuing status incentives.

Overview of Studies

To examine our first two hypotheses, we conducted a laboratory experiment (Study 1) and an online experiment (Study 2) with a 2 (generosity/altruism vs. control) \times 2 (status incentives vs. control) between-subject design. We also conducted an additional two-wave online

survey (Study 3) to further investigate the external validity of our experimental findings and the moderating role of observers' moral identity.

Study 1: Laboratory experiment

In Study 1, we manipulated levels of generosity and pursuit of status incentives to examine their causal effects on perceived authenticity and subsequent status conferral in a laboratory setting.

Participants and procedures

We recruited a large sample of undergraduate students from the paid participant pool at a large public university in Hong Kong, China. The assignment was to complete a “group interaction game.” After 11 participants who failed attention checks were excluded, the final sample included 185 participants (140 women, 45 men; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.84$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.12$).

When participants arrived at the laboratory, they were seated in separate cubicles and given instructions about the study procedure. After giving consent, they went through four phases of the study on laptops. In phase 1, participants were first introduced to the “group interaction game,” which in essence is a three-person “public goods” game (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Milinski, Semmann, & Krambeck, 2002b; Willer, 2009). The “public goods” game paradigm allows observers to evaluate players' levels of generosity based on the amount of donations they make to a public fund. Specifically, the game includes three rounds. At the beginning of each round, each player in a three-person group is electronically endowed with HK \$10 and chooses how much to keep and how much to contribute to the public fund, which is then *doubled and divided equally* among the three players as their returns from each round. For example, if a player contributes HK \$10 and the other two players each contribute HK \$4 to the public fund,

then everyone will receive HK \$12 ($\$10 + 2 \times \$4 = \$18, \times 2 = \$36, /3 = \12). Consequently, more generous players who contribute all of their HK \$10 endowment to the public fund will have a total of HK \$12 ($\$10 - \$10 = \$0, + \$12 = \12) as their personal earnings from that round; whereas selfish players will have greater personal earnings of HK \$18 ($\$10 - \$4 = \$6, + \$12 = \18). Hence, players presumably have incentives to keep their endowments and free-ride on others' contributions. To ensure participants thoroughly understood the instructions before phase 2 started, we had them participate in a practice round in which they calculated their returns and personal earnings.

In phase 2, all participants were assigned the role of “observers” to observe preprogrammed contributions by three fictitious “active participants” over three rounds. Immediately after the practice round, participants were told that the study sessions lacked enough registered participants, so the computer system would randomly assign some of them to be “active participants” making monetary allocation decisions for three rounds. The others would be “observers” who would carefully monitor contributions and earnings from each round supposedly played by the three active participants in their groups. In reality, all participants were assigned as “observers,” ruling out the possibility of a direct reciprocal exchange of resources for higher status (Willer, 2009).

In phase 3, we used a between-subject design to manipulate status incentives and generosity. To manipulate the *pursuit* of status incentives, we told participants that after the game was completed, the active participants in their groups would vote for a “Best Team Player Award.” The winner would receive a HK \$30 cash bonus. In the *status incentives* condition, we told participants that the active participants in their groups knew about the award before they started the game; in the *control* condition, we told participants that the active participants did not

know about the award until the game ended. The experimental manipulation was adapted from Hahl and Zuckerman (2014). By manipulating whether active participants were supposedly informed or uninformed about the award, we made the expected benefits and rewards from attaining high status salient or not salient.

To manipulate generosity levels, we randomly assigned participants to evaluate one of the two active participants after they observed the preprogrammed results from all three rounds. In the *generosity* condition, participants evaluated “participant B” who contributed the most to the group over the three rounds, an average of HK \$9.33 of HK \$10 in each round. Participants in the *control* condition evaluated “participant C” who contributed a moderate amount to the group, an average of HK \$5.67 of HK \$10 in each round. The manipulated contribution levels (i.e., HK \$9.33 vs. HK \$5.67) were based on the observed contribution levels from past research following the “public goods” game paradigm (e.g., Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009).

In phase 4, participants evaluated their randomly assigned targets (i.e., participant B vs. participant C) on interpersonal dimensions (e.g., authenticity) and indicated how extensively they were willing to confer status to the targets. Finally, participants were debriefed, compensated, and thanked for their participation.

Measures

Two items were used as a manipulation check for the status incentives manipulation: “He/she was aware of the Best Team Player Award” and “His/her contributions were motivated by the Best Team Player Award and cash bonus” ($\alpha = .67$). Another two items were used as a manipulation check for the generosity manipulation: “He/she was a generous contributor in the game” and “He/she contributed a lot to the public fund of the group” ($\alpha = .80$). Perceived

authenticity was measured with a two-item scale adapted from Hahl and Zuckerman (2014): “Most people would consider him/her an authentic person” and “Most people would consider him/her a sincere person” ($\alpha = .65$). The items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Finally, four items adapted from previous status scales (Anderson, Brion, Moore, & Kennedy, 2012; Cheng et al., 2013) were used to measure status conferral, on a 7-point Likert scale (e.g., “He/she has high status” and “He/she is influential”; $\alpha = .82$). The supplementary materials include more details about the study design and measures.

Results

Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, and correlations.

 Insert Table 1 about here

Manipulation checks. Two-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) revealed that perceptions of generosity were affected only by the generosity manipulation ($F(1, 183) = 225.88, p < .001$), whereas perceived pursuit of status incentives was affected by both the status incentives manipulation ($F(1, 183) = 11.43, p < .001$) and the generosity manipulation ($F(1, 183) = 25.36, p < .001$), without a significant interaction ($F(1, 183) = .71, p > .250$), indicating that the experimental manipulations were effective.

Perceived authenticity. Another two-way ANOVA showed that generosity interacted with status incentives to affect perceived authenticity ($F(1, 183) = 3.66, p = .057$). In addition, generosity had a significant main effect on perceived authenticity ($F(1, 183) = 10.67, p = .001$). Planned comparisons further revealed that the generosity condition was perceived to be more authentic ($M = 3.87, SD = .61$) than the control condition ($M = 3.34, SD = .65$), $t(91) = 3.68, p < .001$), only when participants did not perceive that the generous actor was pursuing status

incentives. However, the difference in perceived authenticity became insignificant (generosity: $M = 3.61$, $SD = .77$; control: $M = 3.48$, $SD = .70$), $t(90) = .96$, $p > .250$, when participants perceived that the generous actor was pursuing status incentives. Figure 1 illustrates the results. Hypothesis 1 was supported.

 Insert Figure 1 about here

Status conferral. Moderated mediation analysis (Hayes, 2013) showed that generosity and status incentives significantly interacted to affect status conferral via perceived authenticity (index of moderated mediation = $-.23$, 95% confidence interval = $[-.529, -.016]$). Specifically, generosity had a significantly positive indirect effect on status conferral via perceived authenticity ($b = .32$, 95% confidence interval = $[.165, .531]$) only when the generous actor was not pursuing status incentives. Hypothesis 2 was also supported.

Discussion

Study 1 found that observers doubted the generous actor's authenticity when they perceived the generosity to be an effort to gain the status incentives of the Best Team Player Award. Perceived authenticity furthermore mediated the interaction of generosity and status incentives on status conferral. In particular, generosity failed to generate status attainment because the generous actors had *tainted* images in the eyes of others. Study 1 hence garnered initial evidence showing that status incentives can interfere with morality-based status conferral processes (Bai, 2017), while corroborating authenticity as a crucial form of status-conferring virtue (Gino et al., 2015). Study 1 is limited, however, in finding a marginally acceptable reliability score for the 2-item perceived authenticity scale ($\alpha = .65$). We address the issue in Study 2.

Study 2: Online experiment

In Study 2, we intended to replicate the results from Study 1 using a large sample of online participants responding to workplace relevant scenarios adapted from Hui et al. (2000). Moreover, we measured perceived authenticity with a more reliable and established instrument to overcome the low reliability issue of the two-item scale used in Study 1.

Participants and procedures

We used Prolific Academic (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017) to recruit employed adults working in the United Kingdom to complete a short study on “workplace interpersonal perceptions” for monetary rewards. After excluding 5 participants who failed an attention check, we recorded responses from 344 (207 women, 135 men, 2 transgender; $M_{\text{age}} = 35.28$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.21$).

After participants gave consent, they were randomly assigned to read one of four scenarios about a bank teller named “Mike.” The scenarios were created based on Hui et al.’s (2000) field quasi-experiment, which found that bank tellers increased their OCB 3 months before a promotion and subsequently declined their OCB after the promotion. The scenario with the *status incentives* and *altruism* manipulations reads as follows:

Mike has been working as a teller at a large international bank for a while. As a general HR rule, the bank considers all tellers for promotion to teller supervisor every 2 years. In three months, Mike will be eligible for promotion to teller supervisor for the first time, but only *one-fourth* of the eligible tellers will be promoted. **Mike is pursuing this opportunity.** Recently, Mike **frequently** volunteers for things that are not required and helps others who have heavy workloads, and Mike **oftentimes** makes suggestions to improve his unit.

Specifically, in the status incentives condition, we manipulated the pursuit of status incentives by indicating that “Mike is pursuing this opportunity.” In the control condition, we excluded the statement and added ambiguity to the awareness and pursuit of status incentives. We manipulated altruism by varying the frequencies of engaging in three moral behaviors corresponding to the *altruism* dimension of OCB (Smith et al., 1983). Specifically, in the altruism condition, Mike “frequently” and “oftentimes” shows OCB, whereas in the control condition, he “occasionally” and “sometimes” does so.

After participants read the randomly assigned scenario, they evaluated Mike on the same interpersonal dimensions (e.g., authenticity) as in Study 1 and indicated how extensively they would recommend Mike for promotion. Finally, they were debriefed, compensated, and thanked for their participation.

Measures

As a manipulation check for status incentives, we measured participants’ perceptions of the actor’s pursuit of status incentives with seven items (e.g., “...to get promoted” and “...because others will confer higher status to him”; $\alpha = .90$), adapted from the Workplace Motivation Scale (Gagne et al., 2015). We also measured perceived altruism with five items (e.g., “Mike volunteers for things that are not required” and “Mike is being a good organizational citizen”; $\alpha = .86$) as a manipulation check for the altruism manipulation. Perceived authenticity was measured with an eight-item scale (e.g., “Mike is probably faking how he behaves” [reverse coded] and “Most people would consider Mike an authentic person”; $\alpha = .96$) adapted from well-established perceived authenticity scales (Cheshin et al., 2018; Grandey et al., 2005; Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014; Kim et al., 2017), on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Finally, we assessed status conferral by asking participants to indicate whether

they would recommend Mike for promotion on a scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*. The supplementary materials provide more details.

Results

Table 2 shows means, standard deviations, and correlations.

 Insert Table 2 about here

Manipulation checks. Two-way ANOVAs revealed that perceived altruism was affected by both the altruism manipulation ($F(1, 342) = 135.11, p < .001$) and its interaction with the status incentives manipulation ($F(1, 342) = 9.96, p = .002$). Nevertheless, the altruism condition was perceived to be more altruistic than the control condition under both the high (altruism: $M = 5.13, SD = .86$; control: $M = 4.34, SD = .92$), $t(167) = 5.90, p < .001$ and the low status incentives conditions (altruism: $M = 5.33, SD = .86$; control: $M = 3.96, SD = .82$), $t(173) = 10.50, p < .001$. Perceived pursuit of status incentives was affected by both the status incentives manipulation ($F(1, 342) = 14.28, p < .001$) and the altruism manipulation ($F(1, 342) = 19.42, p < .001$), but not by their interaction ($F(1, 342) = .36, p > .250$). The experimental manipulations hence were effective.

Perceptions of authenticity. Altruism significantly interacted with status incentives on perceived authenticity ($F(1, 342) = 4.66, p = .032$). In addition, status incentives had a significant main effect on perceived authenticity ($F(1, 342) = 4.16, p = .042$). Moreover, planned comparisons revealed that the altruism condition ($M = 5.19, SD = 1.06$) was perceived to be more authentic than the control condition ($M = 4.85, SD = .97$), $t(173) = 2.09, p = .037$, when the actor (i.e., Mike) was not pursuing status incentives. The difference in perceived authenticity was not significant (altruism: $M = 4.70, SD = 1.18$; control: $M = 4.86, SD = 1.14$), $t(167) = -.97$,

$p > .250$, when Mike was pursuing status incentives. Figure 2 provides an illustration.

Hypothesis 1 was supported.

 Insert Figure 2 about here

Status conferral. Moderated mediation analysis (Hayes, 2013) again revealed that perceived authenticity mediated the interaction of altruism and status incentives on status conferral (index of moderated mediation = $-.23$, 95% confidence interval = $[-.453, -.020]$). Importantly, altruism had a positive indirect effect on status conferral via perceived authenticity ($b = .16$, 95% confidence interval = $[.019, .301]$) when the altruistic actor was not pursuing status incentives; but it was non-significantly negative ($b = -.07$, 95% confidence interval = $[-.237, .086]$) when Mike was pursuing status incentives. Hypothesis 2 was hence supported.

Discussion

In a sample of working adults in the United Kingdom, Study 2 found consolidating evidence that when observers perceive that an actor is pursuing status incentives (e.g., a promotion) in the workplace, they will be less likely to form perceptions of authenticity in response to moral behaviors. As a result, the pursuit of status incentives interferes with morality-based status conferral, or the virtue route to status. Some preliminary evidence indicates that when the pursuit of status incentives is explicit, altruism yields no benefits and also risks penalties in terms of lowered status because observers have elevated skepticism about authenticity. Ironically, to fully reap status rewards, moral actors seem to be under a burden of proof regarding their motivations.

Study 3: Two-wave online survey

Although the first two experiments initially supported our hypotheses, they did not involve actual face-to-face interactions or interpersonal dynamics needed to capture the richness and complexities inherent in the field. To address this limitation, we conducted an additional two-wave online survey to test the external validity of our experimental findings. Furthermore, the relatively small literature on contextual antecedents of perceived authenticity (e.g., Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014; Kim et al., 2017; Vonk, 1998) has paid little attention to individual differences that may shape attributional or perceptual processes (see Long, 2017 for an exception). We extended our experimental studies by further theorizing that observers' moral identity, a core self-concept indicating the centrality of morality to the sense of self (Aquino & Reed, 2002), plays a role in determining how moral behaviors and status incentives interact to evoke perceptions of authenticity.

Moral identity

The behavioral ethics literature has shown that people have limited and bounded ability to detect and recognize observable and relevant cues or information for making social judgments or evaluations (Bazerman & Sezer, 2016; Sezer, Zhang, Gino, & Bazerman, 2016; Zhang, Fletcher, Gino, & Bazerman, 2015). Moreover, people show substantial differences in attentiveness to and awareness of morally relevant issues or situations (Reynolds, 2006, 2008). Moral identity is an especially important determinant of moral awareness (e.g., DeCelles, DeRue, Margolis, & Ceranic, 2012) that substantially shapes how people attend to, interpret, and evaluate situations involving moral judgment (see review by Shao, Aquino, & Freeman, 2008). Moral identity is more chronically salient or active among some people, but it can be temporarily primed or enhanced by morally laden situations (e.g., Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009). Specifically, moral identity is associated with *hypersensitivity* to morally relevant

situations, issues, or behaviors, whether virtuous (e.g., Aquino, McFerran, & Laven, 2011) or vicious (e.g., O'Reilly, Aquino, & Skarlicki, 2016). For example, people who have high rather than low moral identity tend to be more aware of morally relevant issues (e.g., DeCelles et al., 2012) and have stronger emotional (i.e., moral anger) and behavioral (i.e., punishment) reactions toward violations of justice (O'Reilly et al., 2016).

We posit that observers with high rather than low moral identity are more likely to attend to and identify morally relevant external or contextual forces (e.g., status incentives) potentially leading to outstanding levels of moral behaviors. Consequently, the correspondence bias is alleviated due to deliberate and thoughtful considerations of the moral implication of contextual factors. In other words, observers with high moral identity are better able to recognize *ulterior* motives and incorporate the knowledge into more accurate perceptions of authenticity. Hence, our earlier hypothesis regarding the interaction of moral behaviors and status incentives on perceived authenticity may be especially pronounced among observers with high rather than low moral identity. The resulting perceptions of authenticity or inauthenticity will determine whether observers will confer status toward the moral actor. Figure 3 shows the overall conceptual model.

Hypothesis 3. Observers' moral identity moderates the interaction of moral behaviors and status incentives on perceptions of authenticity such that moral behaviors will interact more strongly with status incentives among observers with high rather than low moral identity. Perceptions of authenticity, in turn, mediate the three-way interaction of moral behaviors, status incentives, and observers' moral identity on status conferral.

 Insert Figure 3 about here

Participants and procedures

We used Prolific Academic to recruit a sample of fulltime employed workers in the United States (Peer et al., 2017) to complete a two-wave survey on “workplace interpersonal perceptions” for monetary rewards. After participants completed a consent form, they first gave the initials of a coworker they met within the past two years and with whom they must interact regularly at work. Participants then answered a short questionnaire about the coworker’s OCB, status incentives, age, gender, and acquaintanceship and then reported their personal moral identity. A week later, participants who completed the first study were invited to reevaluate the coworker in terms of perceptions of authenticity and status conferral. After excluding 15 participants who failed attention checks, we initially recorded responses from 238 participants. Then 191 participants (97 women, 91 men, 3 unidentified; $M_{\text{age}} = 32.08$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 8.23$, 4 unidentified) completed the follow-up survey one week later, a response rate of 80.25%.

Measures

To measure perceived pursuit of status incentives, we used a five-item scale (e.g., “...to get others’ approval” and “...because others will respect him/her more”; $\alpha = .88$) adapted from the Workplace Motivation Scale (Gagne et al., 2015). We measured moral behaviors at work with another five-item scale (Marinova, Moon, & Van Dyne, 2010) that specifically captures the altruism dimension of OCB (e.g., “He/she is always ready to help those around”; $\alpha = .94$). Participants also reported their moral identity with the five-item internalization subscale (e.g., “It would make me feel good to be a person who has these characteristics [e.g., compassion, honesty, fairness]” and “I strongly desire to have these characteristics [e.g., compassion, honesty, fairness]”; $\alpha = .74$) from the Moral Identity Scale (Aquino & Reed, 2002). Rather than use the symbolization subscale (Aquino & Reed, 2002), we focused on the internalization subscale because it is more associated with chronic sensitivity to morally relevant information or cues

(e.g., O'Reilly et al., 2016). Perceived authenticity and status conferral were measured with the same two-item scale (e.g., “Most people would consider him/her an authentic person; $\alpha = .92$) and a similar four-item scale (e.g., “He/she has high status” and “He/she is influential”; $\alpha = .92$) used in Study 1.

We also controlled for coworker age and gender (i.e., *male* = 1, *female* = 2). To ensure that participant/coworker acquaintanceships did not affect our findings, we controlled for relationship length, measured by how many years participants had known the coworker, and relationship quality, measured by participants' ratings of the relationship from 1 = *very poor* to 5 = *very good*. The supplementary materials provide more details.

Results

Table 3 shows means, standard deviations, and correlations.

 Insert Table 3 about here

Confirmatory factor analysis. We conducted confirmatory factor analysis on the study variables of altruism, status incentives, moral identity, authenticity, and status conferral to ensure that our participants viewed our IVs (i.e., altruism, status incentives, and moral identity) as distinct, and that the mediating variable (i.e., authenticity) was also distinct from the dependent variable (i.e., status conferral). Table 4 shows full results from this analysis. The model representing the five factors as distinct had a satisfactory level of fit and fit the data better than the alternative 4-factor models: $\chi^2(179, N = 191) = 374.77, p < .001$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .93, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .076, standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) = .073 (e.g., Dunn, Ruedy, & Schweitzer, 2012; Neel et al., 2016).

Insert Table 4 about here

Perceptions of authenticity. Moderation analysis (Hayes, 2013) revealed a significant two-way interaction of perceived altruism and status incentives on perceived authenticity ($b = -.06, t = -2.43, p = .016$), replicating the findings in our first two experimental studies. Specifically, perceived altruism had a greater positive effect on perceived authenticity under low perceived pursuit of status incentives ($b = .55, t = 11.83, p < .001$) rather than under high perceived pursuit of status incentives ($b = .39, t = 6.67, p < .001$). Furthermore, altruism, status incentives, and participants' own moral identity also had a significant three-way interaction on perceived authenticity ($b = -.15, t = -2.66, p = .009$), such that the two-way interaction of perceived altruism and perceived pursuit of status incentives was especially pronounced among participants with high moral identity ($b = -.14, t = -3.48, p < .001$), but was insignificant among those with low moral identity ($b = .04, t = .87, p > .250$). Moreover, after entering the control variables, the significant two-way and three-way interactions remained.² Hypothesis 1 was hence supported. Table 5 shows all results from the regression analysis. Figure 4 is an illustration of the three-way interaction on perceived authenticity.

Insert Table 5 & Figure 4 about here

Status conferral. Moderated mediation analysis (Hayes, 2013) found that perceived authenticity indeed mediated the three-way interaction of perceived altruism, perceived pursuit

² To strengthen causal inferences, we conducted supplementary analysis controlling for perceived status when predicting perceived authenticity. If the causality runs from status to authenticity, controlling for status is likely to make the two-way and three-way interaction effects disappear, but we found no evidence for a reversed causal relationship. The two-way ($b = -.07, t = -2.76, p = .006$) and the three-way ($b = -.14, t = -2.56, p = .011$) interactions remained significant after controlling for perceived status. The supplementary materials provide details.

of status incentives, and participants' moral identity on status conferral (index of three-way moderated mediation = $-.07$, 95% confidence interval = $[-.154, -.018]$). Entering the control variables again did not change the pattern of results (index of three-way moderated mediation = $-.06$, 95% confidence interval = $[-.135, -.004]$). In particular, altruism had the strongest indirect effect on status conferral via perceived authenticity ($b = .19$, 95% confidence interval = $[.080, .346]$) under low perceived pursuit of status incentives and when participants had high moral identity. Hypotheses 2 and 3 were supported. Table 6 shows the full results.

 Insert Table 6 about here

Discussion

Study 3 replicated our experimental findings and provided initial evidence that moral behaviors, status incentives, and moral identity have a three-way interaction on perceptions of authenticity and status conferral. In particular, when audiences perceive that a moral actor is pursuing status incentives (e.g., social recognition and reputation) in the workplace, the positive effect of moral behaviors on perceptions of authenticity is undermined and the morality-based status conferral process is impeded. Furthermore, observers' moral identity was a key determinant of their attention to and incorporation of information regarding whether a moral actor was pursuing status incentives. In other words, the two-way interaction between moral behaviors and status incentives was more pronounced among audiences with high rather than low moral identity. Interestingly, observers with low moral identity seemed to consider the pursuit of status incentives to be irrelevant in forming perceptions of authenticity.

General Discussion

Across two experimental studies and one two-wave survey study among diverse participants (i.e., Hong Kong undergraduates, European and U.S. employed adults), we consistently find that outstanding levels of moral behaviors in pursuit of status incentives (i.e., reputation and promotion) cause observers to suspect and discount the authenticity of the behaviors. Instead, they perceive that moral actors who are seeking benefits or rewards are tainted and do not deserve the status associated with authentic moral behavior. Thus perceptions of authenticity play a crucial mediating role in the interaction of generosity or altruism and status incentives on status conferral. If observers perceive inauthenticity, a form of vice, generosity or altruism will fail to earn status and may even damage it. Finally, observers' moral identity affects how they process and interpret morally relevant information to form perceptions of authenticity. In particular, among observers with high moral identity, moral behaviors interact more strongly with status incentives to determine perceived authenticity and subsequent status conferral; among observers with low moral identity, the interaction is insignificant.

Theoretical implications

We contribute to the burgeoning research on perceptions of authenticity by identifying status incentives as a crucial contextual antecedent that interacts with observers' moral identity in forming perceptions of authenticity. Research has generally focused on intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences rather than antecedents of authenticity in the workplace (e.g., Gardner et al., 2011; Gino et al., 2015; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). We draw on attribution theory (Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Heider, 1958; Jones, 1990) to delineate how status incentives, a contextual factor prevalent in the workplace (e.g., Besley & Ghatak, 2008; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014; Lazear & Rosen, 1981), affect how individuals interpret and

perceive true intentions driving outstanding moral behaviors. Observers will see the moral actor who is pursuing status incentives as tainted simply because of the motivation, beyond whether the actor actually receives status benefits. Moreover, the few studies that investigated antecedents of perceptions of authenticity (e.g., Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014; Kim et al., 2017; Peus et al., 2012; Vonk, 1998) assumed that observers play a rather passive role in forming authenticity perceptions. Building on the behavioral ethics (Bazerman & Sezer, 2016; Sezer et al., 2016) and moral character literatures (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Cohen et al., 2014), we extend the research by indicating that observers' moral identity plays an *active* role in the attributional process. In particular, moral individuals are more likely to recognize the true intent driving the pursuit of status incentives, and incorporate the information to form accurate perceptions of authenticity, providing *indirect* evidence that authenticity is a moralized construct (Gino et al., 2015).

Second, we contribute to the research on the morality–status link by identifying perceived authenticity as a crucial mediator in the morality-based status attainment process (Bai, 2017; Flynn, 2003; Grant, 2013; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009). Some researchers have argued that suspicions about true moral intent are merely a side effect of status attainment, with negligible impact on status conferral—a minor *consequence* rather than an *antecedent* (Barclay & Willer, 2007; Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014). Drawing on MVT (Bai, 2017), we propose and reveal that perceived authenticity, conceptualized as a moralized construct, plays a more substantial role in determining whether a moral actor earns status (Gino et al., 2015). Insofar as we know, MVT is the only theoretical framework that links moral virtues (e.g., authenticity) *independently* to status conferral. Yet, MVT is a recently proposed social psychological theory that has not been systematically and rigorously tested, particularly in the workplace. Our paper,

hence, represents one of the first attempts to empirically examine the direct link between authenticity and status conferral as predicted by MVT. Rather than a mere side effect (e.g., Barclay & Willer, 2007; Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014), perceived inauthenticity indicates *vice* and thus interferes with efforts to attain status through outstanding moral behavior.

Third, our paper adds general insights to a contextualized view of status attainment (Bai, 2017; Li et al., 2016) by revealing that status incentives have a dark side in interfering with status conferral. Status researchers have explored novel antecedents of status such as humor (e.g., humor; Bitterly et al., 2017), but have paid relatively little attention to contextual factors of the status conferral process (see Torelli et al., 2014 for an exception). Although high status conveys various benefits and advantages (e.g., Magee & Galinsky, 2008), we know little about whether such status incentives could interfere with status conferral processes in the workplace. We thus provide a more contextualized perspective of status attainment (Bai, 2017; Li et al., 2016), positing that the specific local context (e.g., status incentives and observers' moral identity) determine the effectiveness of various routes to status attainment. In addition to revealing that the local context is a boundary condition in the virtue route to status, our paper opens new avenues for research on contextual factors that may affect the dominance and competence routes to status attainment.

Practical implications

Our paper has important practical implications. Organizations and managers should be cautious about using status incentives to increase moral behaviors and OCBs in the workplace (Hui et al., 2000), because employees who elevate their moral behaviors in response to salient status incentives are likely to be suspected of authenticity and unlikely to earn status. After moral actions fail to be appreciated or rewarded, employees suspected of inauthenticity may curb their

moral behaviors. Instead, we suggest that organizations design and use *long-term* rather than *short-term* status incentives to boost consistent moral conduct because “fakers” inevitably leak cues of selfishness over time (Bolino, 1999; Grant, 2013). Consistent demonstrations of moral conduct leaving little doubt about authenticity are considered to be the “hallmark” of virtue. Therefore, status incentives that aim to boost long-term moral behaviors may alleviate the downside of status incentives and help establish an ethical workplace. In addition, “getting the right people on the bus” (Collins, 2001) seems to be a necessary condition for applying status incentives. The “wrong” people of low moral character are unlikely to recognize, admire, or reward true moral intentions.

Limitations and future directions

This article has several limitations that point to avenues for future studies. First, our research design prevented a true causal test of the link between perceptions of authenticity and status conferral. Empirically, we cannot rule out the possibility of reversed causality in which status actually shapes perceptions of authenticity. Experimental studies could manipulate status to examine the reversed causal effect. In addition, future studies could make stronger causal inferences by manipulating the self-importance of moral identity (e.g., Aquino et al., 2009) and examine the impact on perception.

Second, we focused on universally valued forms of virtue, generosity and altruism, as the primary path to status, while experimentally holding dominance and competence constant. Nevertheless, other paths may work in tandem to shape social standings (e.g., Bai, 2017; Cheng et al., 2013). Generosity or altruism might interact with status incentives to affect perceptions of dominance or competence, leading to status conferral. Future studies should explore such interactions via the other paths. In addition, moral behaviors go beyond generosity and altruism

(Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009) and are seen in culturally specific behaviors such as loyalty, piety, and chastity (e.g., Haidt & Joseph, 2004). Future investigations might benefit by determining whether alternative forms of moral behaviors also interact with status incentives to affect perceptions of authenticity and subsequent status conferral.

Finally, we acknowledge that time may play an important role in interpersonal perceptions (e.g., Kalish & Luria, 2016), and the criteria (e.g., status incentives) used for forming perceptions of authenticity. Our finding that moral behaviors positively affect perceived authenticity even under salient status incentives in Study 3 may have occurred because the study had a relatively longer time frame of up to 2 years. We speculate that consistent moral behaviors over time are perhaps sufficient to evoke perceptions of authenticity, regardless of status incentives. Longitudinal studies in longer timeframes therefore are warranted to fully understand the interaction of moral behaviors and status incentives in affecting perceptions of authenticity and subsequent status conferral.

Conclusion

Although status incentives may increase moral behaviors, observers can suspect moral actors of showing good behavior to win status incentives and deem them undeserving of superior status. Thus, moral actors are hindered by the burden of proof to show that their moral actions are motivated by genuine virtue. Interestingly, highly moral observers will be best able to recognize and appreciate the virtue of authenticity.

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Table 1

Study 1 means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Status incentives	.50	.50					
2. Generosity	.50	.50	.04				
3. Perceived authenticity	3.57	.71	-.03	.23**			
4. Status conferral	4.43	1.02	-.03	.36**	.48**		
5. Gender	.76	.43	-.12	.09	.12	.13	
6. Age	20.84	2.12	.08	.02	-.001	.04	-.13

Note. $N = 185$.* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Study 2 means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Status incentives	.49	.50					
2. Altruism	.51	.50	-.01				
3. Perceived authenticity	4.90	1.10	-.11*	.04			
4. Promotion	3.60	.83	-.04	.25**	.61**		
5. Gender	.60	.49	.004	.004	.07	.03	
6. Age	35.28	11.21	-.07	.03	.12*	.08	-.05

Note. $N = 344$.* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 3

Study 3 means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Status incentives	4.08	1.25								
2. Altruism	5.15	1.38	.24**							
3. Moral identity	4.29	.59	.04	.18*						
4. Perceived authenticity	3.99	1.01	.09	.66**	.09					
5. Status conferral	4.42	1.51	.17*	.57**	.02	.56**				
6. Gender ¹	1.54	.50	-.01	.05	.13	.11	-.03			
7. Age	36.48	9.93	-.12	.02	-.03	.06	.04	.03		
8. Relationship length	1.29	.53	-.01	.02	.06	-.12	-.03	.02	.00	
9. Relationship quality	4.10	.91	.07	.76**	.15*	.71**	.49**	.06	.01	.04

Note. $N = 191$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

¹1 = Male, 2 = Female

Table 4

Study 3 confirmatory factor analysis of altruism, status incentives, moral identity, authenticity, and status conferral

	χ^2	df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
5-Factor model: altruism, status incentives, moral identity, authenticity, status conferral	375	179	.93	.08	.07
4-Factor model: altruism (with status incentives), moral identity, authenticity, status conferral	776	183	.79	.13	.13
4-Factor model: altruism, status incentives, moral identity, authenticity (with status conferral)	603	183	.85	.11	.09
3-Factor model: altruism (with status incentives and moral identity), authenticity, status conferral	1006	186	.70	.15	.15
2-Factor model: altruism (with status incentives and moral identity), authenticity (with status conferral)	1231	188	.62	.17	.16

Note. *CFI* = comparative fit index; *RMSEA* = root-mean-square-error of approximation; *SRMR* = standardized root-mean-square residual.

Table 5
Study 3 hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting perceived authenticity

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Intercept	.53	.53	-.20	.56	18.44**	5.92	14.23**	5.39
Status incentives	.26	.14	.23	.12	-3.48**	1.34	-2.65*	1.22
Altruism	.73**	.10	.39**	.11	-2.45*	1.10	-2.10*	.99
Altruism × status incentives	-.06*	.03	-.05*	.02	.59*	.24	.44†	.22
Moral identity ¹					-4.06**	1.34	-3.28**	1.22
Altruism × moral identity					.72**	.25	.57*	.23
Status incentives × moral identity					.85**	.31	.66*	.28
Altruism × status incentives × moral identity					-.15**	.06	-.11*	.05
<u>Controls:</u>								
Gender			.14	.10			.17†	.10
Age			.00	.01			.00	.00
Relationship length			-.26**	.09			-.24**	.09
Relationship quality			.54**	.08			.52**	.08
Δ R ² (two-way interaction)	.02*		.01*					
Δ R ² (three-way interaction)					.02**		.01*	

Note. $N = 191$.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

¹The internalization subscale was used for the variable moral identity.

Table 6
Study 3 direct, indirect, and conditional indirect effects on status conferral

Predictor	Mediator	Moderator: status incentives	Moderator: moral identity	Without control variables		With control variables	
				Effect	95% CIs	Effect	95% CIs
Altruism				.396*		.411*	
Altruism	Perceived authenticity			.211*	[.104, .331]	.093*	[.034, .196]
Altruism	Perceived authenticity						
		High	High	.164*	[.052, .323]	.065	[-.026, .208]
		High	Mean	.183*	[.085, .311]	.071*	[.004, .181]
		High	Low	.201*	[.093, .343]	.077*	[.0003, .194]
		Mean	High	.244*	[.117, .396]	.128*	[.050, .262]
		Mean	Low	.178*	[.086, .302]	.058	[-.012, .164]
		Low	High	.324*	[.152, .500]	.192*	[.080, .346]
		Low	Mean	.240*	[.115, .379]	.116*	[.045, .231]
		Low	Low	.155*	[.054, .310]	.039	[-.061, .168]

Note. $N = 191$. Indirect effect and conditional indirect effect CIs based on 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Control variables = gender, age, relationship length, and relationship quality. CI = confidence interval.

* $p < .05$.

Figure 1. Effects of generosity and status incentives on perceived authenticity (Study 1)

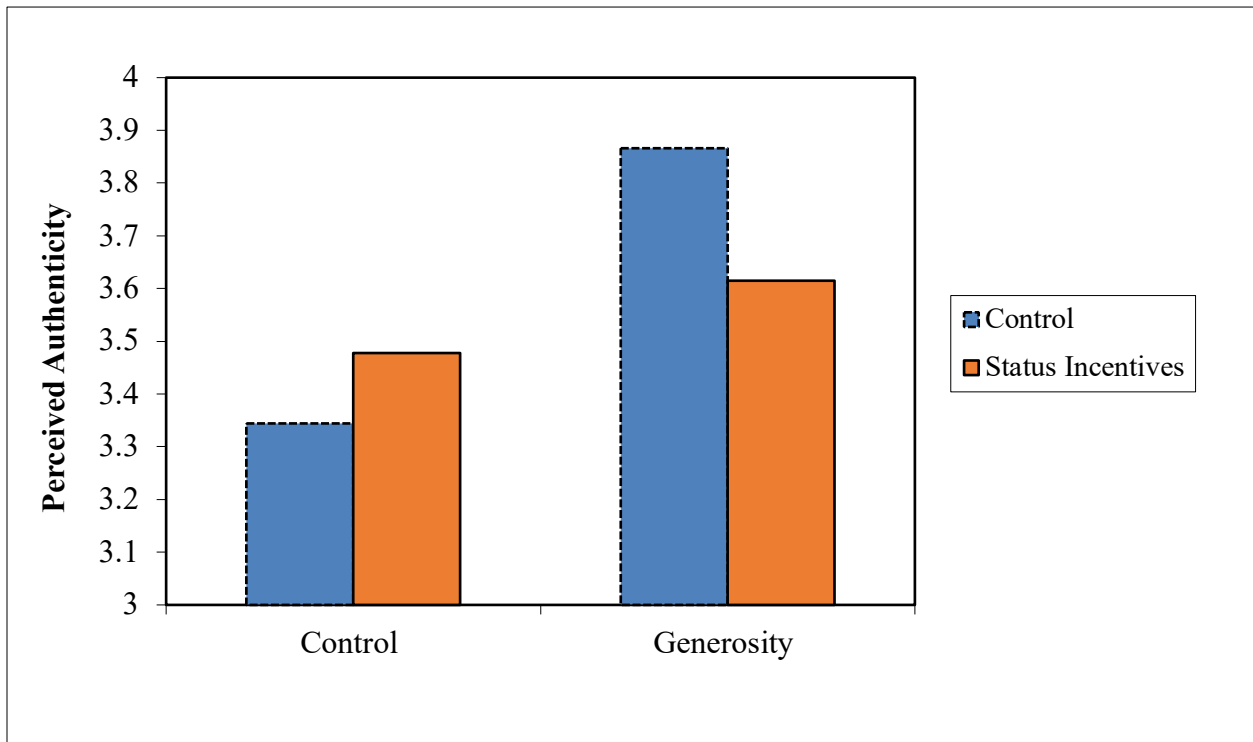


Figure 2. Effects of altruism and status incentives on perceived authenticity (Study 2)

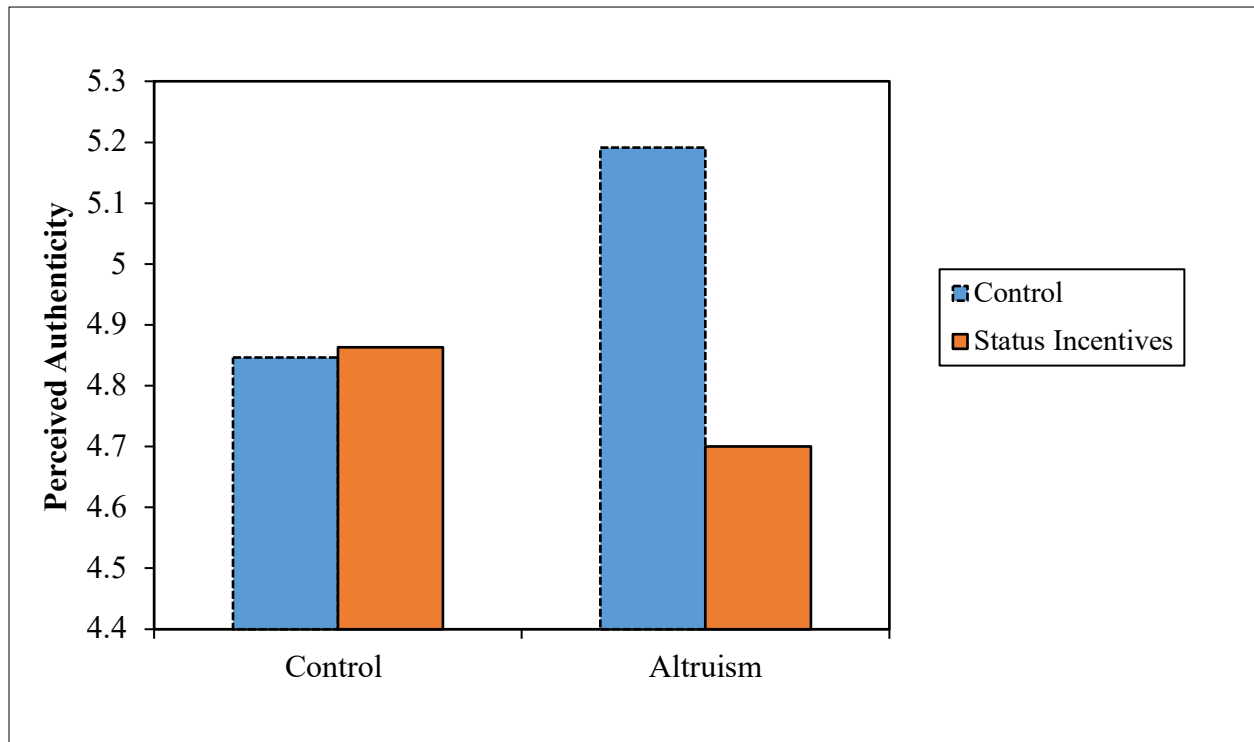


Figure 3. Overall conceptual model

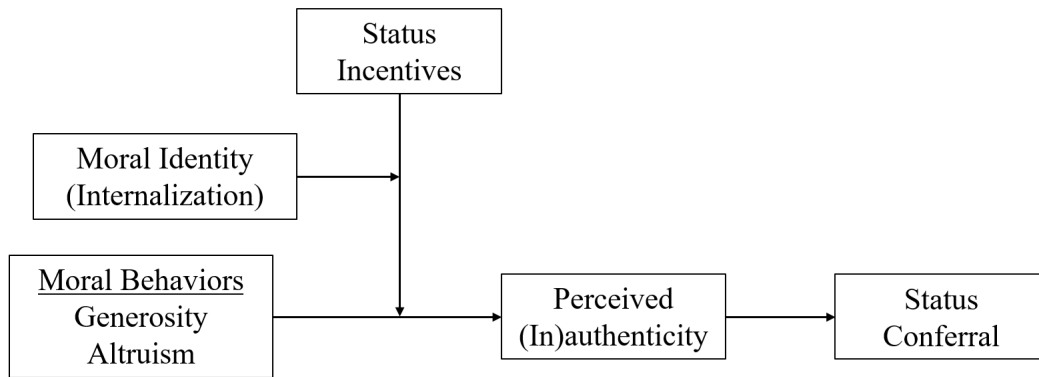


Figure 4: Effects of altruism, status incentives, and moral identity (internationalization) on perceived authenticity (Study 3)

