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## **The Relationship Between Status Motives and Social Activism**

Olajuwon Olagbegi

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The Relationship Between Status Motives and Social Activism

by

Olajuwon Olagbegi

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Honors College of  
The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of Honors Requirements

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Approved by:



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## ABSTRACT

Numerous social and cultural events have resulted in increased interest and participation in social activism in the United States, stemming from mounting dissatisfaction with social inequality. Though explanations have previously included increased issue exposure and awareness due to the proliferation of digital media and increases in progressive ideology amongst the nation's younger generation, the current study tests the hypothesis that social activism may in part be motivated by interest in status acquisition, given the evolutionary value of status for securing access to resources and mates. To test this hypothesis, participants were randomly assigned to a status versus control priming condition on a between participant basis and reported interest in participation in low (e.g., signing an online petition) versus high-cost social activism (e.g., attending a rally). Results supported our hypothesis that individuals would be more likely to engage in low-cost activism, an effect that was magnitudinally larger for women. Given human sexual dimorphism, women may prefer safer forms of activism. Contrary to hypotheses, status priming did not influence men's and women's interest in either form of activism. Exploratory analyses indicated that men higher in political conservatism reported greater interest in social activism, and that independent of participant sex, higher conservatism was associated with more interest in high-cost activism. These latter findings are consistent with past work finding that conservatism is associated with status seeking more generally. Collectively, these findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the factors that underlie participation in social activism.

**Keywords: Status motives, social activism, costly signaling theory**

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this research project to my best friend, Aria. Her encouragement and support alongside this project allowed me to embrace the challenges that I encountered and to continuously persevere. I would also like to extend this dedication to my family. As a young child, they taught me to be intentional with my passions, purposeful in my work ethic and to strive for success. These lessons have guided me along the way.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

First and foremost, I extend my sincerest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Donald Sacco. Without his extended knowledge, expertise in psychology, and his support throughout this journey, I would not have been able to complete this project. In addition, I would like to offer a huge thanks to my lab partner, Kelsey Drea, for her timely guidance and support when needed. Next, I would like to thank my honors teacher, Dr. Thomas O'Brien, for his understanding during the challenging times of COVID and his engaging introductory lectures about this project. Lastly, I would like to offer a wholehearted thanks to my parents for embracing my aspirations and offering aid when needed. This is only the beginning.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Social activism serves to bring awareness and incite change to suitable social issues. Traditionally, socially active behavior brings people together physically, such as through protests and sit-ins. However, the age of digital and social media has expanded social activism to include a proliferation of online activity due to easier access and acquired second generation internet applications (Valtenbergs & Aizstrauta, 2008). The adoption of Web 2.0 increased online activity, social media usage and expression through digital means. The onset of significant digital activism was spurred by the 2008 Arab Spring and the Occupy Movement, the former inspired by political unrest in Egypt and the latter by a domestic financial crisis in the United States. From that occurrence, unruly protests in Spain, Greece, Ukraine, and Iran erupted to acknowledge and chaotically combat elections and political policies.

Today, social issues have become popular hashtags on social media to aid in social justice. The most common hashtags have been #BlackLivesMatter and #LGBTQ, designed to increase awareness and compassion for issues faced by these groups, as well as to organize activities to combat unequal treatment of individuals in these marginalized communities (Cooper, 2009). Media has been used to bring awareness to these groups and the inequality that exists within while simultaneously allowing for organized events in support of these minority groups. Thus, digital activism can serve as an independent means of social activism as well as a precursor of in-person activism through efficient communication, organization, and mobilization. Given that social activism is a critical component of social change, researchers have been interested in both individual difference variables (e.g., Big Five Personality Traits) and underlying motivations (e.g.,

moral imperative) that predict greater interest and participation in socially active behavior (Omoto et al., 2010) For example, research has linked personality dimensions (e.g., Big Five Personality Traits), specifically higher self-reported agreeableness to increased prosocial behaviors. (Habashi & Graziano, 2016).

The current research, operating from evolutionary and social psychological lens, tests the hypothesis that one motivation that may enhance interest in social activism is status motivation, given past work finding that higher status is associated with greater access to mates and resources, thus historically predicting greater survival and reproductive success. Thus, social activism motivation may be a contemporary manifestation of an evolutionarily hard-wired drive for status enhancement. Below we outline specific theory and research to support these predictions.

### **Evolutionary and Social Benefits of Status Acquisition**

Hierarchy is the primary organizational structure for social groups in primates, including humans. It is theorized that hierarchy is such a prevalent form of social organization because it enhances a group's chances of survival and success by creating a psychologically rewarding environment, motivating performance through hierarchy-related incentives, capitalizing on the complementary needs of having versus lacking power, supporting a division of labor, and reducing conflict and enhancing voluntary cooperation (Halevy et al., 2011).

Although hierarchical group arrangement enhances group survival and reproductive outcomes compared to non-hierarchically-arranged groups or solitary living, it nonetheless results in status competition because 1) not all individuals can simultaneously possess high status and 2) having high status is of greater survival and

reproductive benefit than low status. Specifically, research demonstrates that in both hunter-gatherer societies and contemporary industrial societies, higher status facilitates increased access to contested resources and successful mate acquisition (Blake, 2021). Given the inherent benefits of obtaining high status, humans would have benefited from the evolution of strategies to both obtain and retain high status as a means of facilitating survival and reproduction in the context of group living.

### **Strategies for Securing High Status**

Humans have evolved several strategies for ascending status hierarchies that range from aggressive to prosocial. In terms of aggressive behavior, research demonstrates that at the group level, human warfare has historically been linked to justifications that include protecting national honor, status, and respect, along with self-protection. (Dafoe et al., 2014). At the individual level, priming status motives increases men's interest in direct aggression (e.g., face-to-face confrontation), whereas status motives increase women's interest in indirect aggression, such as socially excluding a perpetrator (Griskevicius et al., 2009). Thus, both men and women use specific aggressive behavior toward same-sex conspecifics to attain higher status in group settings.

As human societies have developed greater social and institutional complexity, aggressive tactics for status acquisition have become less socially acceptable, and consequently contemporary humans are more prone to enact various prosocial behaviors as a means of status acquisition, as it is more feasible insofar as it does not inflict costs on an outside party. Indeed, laboratory and field research demonstrate that prosocial behavior is an effective means of achieving, maintaining and elevating status, and thus

accessing accompanying material and social rewards (Kafashan et al., 2014). Prosocial behavior's effect on status increases as the cost to the prosocial actor on behalf of the recipient increases, consistent with competitive altruism and costly signaling theory (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006). Specifically, when placed in a reputational environment, people were more altruistic when contributions were public (Study 1), and the most altruistic members were granted the highest status in the group and most frequently preferred as cooperative interaction partners (Study 2). It was demonstrated that as the cost of altruism increased, the social status rewards increase (Study 3). Collectively, these findings support the notion of competitive altruism, in that individuals may behave prosocially for reputational reasons, since selective status benefits accrue to those who behave more generously.

Most germane to the current study, subsequent research has demonstrated that when individuals are primed to be motivated by status, they display a greater willingness to buy environmentally friendly products, but only when those products are 1) more expensive and less effective than their non-environmentally friendly counterparts and 2) only when such green purchases can be seen by others. Thus, individuals may be particularly motivated to behave prosocially when others can view them engaging in a behavior that is personally costly but beneficial to others, consistent with altruism as a costly signal to attain greater status (Griskevicius, Tyber, & Van den Bergh, 2010).

The use of prosocial behavior as a means of status acquisition is further sustained by the general emotional benefits of prosocial behavior, prosocial spending. Studies have shown that when we spend money on others, we experience the emotion of happiness (Aknin, Broesch, Hamlin, & Van Vondervoort, 2015). Additionally, happiness is

obtained when donors believe that they have full autonomy in the decision to donate, believe that their donation is impactful, or have a perceived social connection with the recipient. (Lok et al, 2020). In one study, researchers assessed this phenomenon by analyzing coded facial expressions after a charitable deed was completed. Findings indicated that giving treats to puppies produced high levels of happiness when the donors had full autonomy to decide if they wanted to be charitable and proceeded. However, the highest levels of happiness were expressed when donors participated in more costly giving from their own stashes. These results suggest that donors are recipients of the positive emotions that accompany prosocial spending. (Dunn, Aknin and Norton, 2014). As such, prosocial behavior may have evolved to reap the short-term benefit of “feeling good” thus creating motivation to potentially incur long term benefits as well, such as enhanced status.

### ***Gender Differences in Status Motivation***

Differences in evolutionary biology have shaped human cognition and motivation in different ways for men and women. According to Parental Investment Theory (Trivers, 1972), women’s mandatory minimum invest in offspring (pregnancy, lactation) is greater than men’s (sperm provisioning) and consequently, women tend to be more selective when choosing a mate to offset their greater reproductive costs. Thus, men historically would have had to compete intrasexually to communicate the possession of traits deemed valuable to women when selecting a mate. Given these greater costs of reproduction, women have evolved a preference for men with greater access to status and resources (Buss, 1989). This preference has impacted mate preference across genders because women generally look for monetary attributes (i.e. financial stability, increased income,

resources) whereas men seek partners who have desirable reproductive characteristics. (Buss 1989, de Sousa Campos et al., 2002).

Because women have a mating preference of men with resources, gender differences in status motivation occur. Studies have shown that dominance and prestige are characteristics of men who are able to successfully navigate social systems thus attaining status. (Maner and Case, 2016). Men seek status more than women because there are greater reproductive benefits associated with high status for men, driven by intrasexual competition. High status men, characterized by dominance and prestige, have heightened fertility, more attractive wives, increased allies, intra-village kin and are generally more respected (Van Rueden et al., 2011). High status, married men, have a greater chance of producing offspring with higher survival rates (Van Rueden et al., 2011). The acquisition of resources is an essential component of successful offspring.

In a study conducted by Buss (1989) it was concluded that women ranked earning capacity and ambition as the most favorable traits in males. Furthermore, altruistic males are viewed as more compatible long-term mates (Barclay, 2010). As such, men may be especially motivated by status goals, and thus demonstrate an even stronger proclivity to engage in costly prosocial behavior when status motives are active.

### **Activism as Communication of Prosocial Intentions**

According to social rewards theories of helping (Cialdini, Baumann, & Kenrick, 1981) individuals may be motivated to help others by through prosocial behavior because it can reinforce a positive reputation and social standing within a group (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003; Griskevicius, Tybur & Van den Bergh, 2010). Thus, individuals may be motivated to engage in social activism behaviors by donating money to a specific

cause, signing a petition to support a particular social activism group, or attending a protest to bolster a positive reputation amongst their peers. Further, evidence shows that there are certain traits that humans encompass that predispose them to helping behaviors and volunteerism. One study analyzed the link between childhood personality and volunteerism. Results indicated that there is a correlation and unveiled traits that aid in volunteerism: empathy, emotional regulation, and positive emotionality. Given the relation between volunteerism and social activism (Wilson, 2000), these traits serve as adaptive personality components to helping behaviors that precede engagement in these events.

Although activists view non-activists in a more negative manner (Kutlaca et al., 2020) perceptions of activists are essentially positive. Research indicates that an urge to participate in collective action serves as the motivation behind positive perception. (Kutlaca et al., 2020) Survey shows that not only do personality traits allow activists to be viewed in a positive manner, but so does personality type. In an assessment of the link between personality traits, AIDS activism and civic engagement, extraversion was positively correlated (Lawrence et al., 2010). Perceptions of extroverts are overwhelmingly positive because they fulfill more positive roles and are characterized by positive attributes. Extroverts are more cognitively efficient (Furnham and Allass, 1999), more relaxed, consume less alcohol (Brown and Munson, 1987) garner more social capital (Moshkvitz and Hayat, 2021). Moreover, extroverts are perceived as happier (Myers, 1992), better leaders (Bartone et al, 2009), more sociable (Rathore, 2019), and are more likely to participate in collective action, activism, and risky situations (Tassone & Foster, 2021).



## **Current Study**

Given that humans are motivated by status due to its association with greater access to resources and mating opportunities, given that costly prosocial behavior is a means of attaining greater status, and because contemporary forms of social activism are consistent with costly prosocial activities, the current study explores the relationship between acutely activated status motives and interest in engaging in social activism. Participants were randomly assigned to either a status motivation or a control condition. Next, participants indicated their interest in engaging in a series of low-cost virtual social activism behaviors (e.g., signing an online petition) or high-cost social activism behaviors (attending an in-person protest). The following hypotheses were tested.

Hypothesis 1: Participants will be more interested in low versus high-cost social activism to conserve personal resources (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006).

Hypothesis 2: Individuals primed with status motives will be more interested in both forms of social activism compared to control participants (Griskevicius, Tyber, & Van den Bergh, 2010).

Hypothesis 3: Individuals primed with high status will be especially interested in high-cost social activism compared to control participants given high-cost prosocial behavior's ability to act as a costly signal (e.g., competitive altruism, Griskevicius, Tyber, & Van den Bergh, 2010).

Hypothesis 4: Given women's greater valuation of men's status, men's interest in high-cost altruism when status is primed will be more pronounced than women (Barclay, 2010).

## CHAPTER II: METHODS

### Participants

We recruited 203 Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workers for participation in this study. A small-medium effect-size power analysis using G\*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, & Lang, 2007) indicated this number of participants would adequately detect effects (Cohen's  $f = 0.15$ ,  $1 - \beta = 0.80$ ). Participants were compensated \$0.30 (USD), based on normed duration of the study that was commensurate to federal minimum wage ( $n=203$ ; 143 men, 60 women,  $MAge = 34.96$ ,  $SD = 9.737$ ; 73.4% White, 10.8% Hispanic, 8.4% Black, 5.9% Asian, and 1.5% "Other"). The study was administered via Qualtrics and was pretested to take on average no longer than 3 minutes.

### Materials and Procedure

Interested participants clicked on a survey link in MTurk that redirected them to the consent form page in Qualtrics (see Appendix A for consent document). Participants who consent to the study were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions (status vs. control) on a between-participants basis. Participants in the status condition were instructed to imagine graduating from college, looking for a job, and deciding to go work for a large company because it offers the greatest chance of moving up. The story describes the person's first day on the job, focusing on the high-status features of the workplace such as the upscale lobby and nice furniture. Readers eventually learn that they will have an opportunity to receive a desirable promotion. Control condition participants will read story of similar length designed to elicit similar levels of affect as the status story.

Specifically, participants read about losing a ticket to an upcoming concert and searching for the ticket throughout the house. After the person finds the ticket, he or she heads off to the concert with a same-sex peer (see Griskevicius, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 2006; Griskevicius, Goldstein, Mortensen, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 2006). Past research using this manipulation (reported in Griskevicius, Tybur, et al., 2009) demonstrates that the status story elicits a “desire for social status” and a “desire for prestige” more so than the control condition story. Compared to the control story, the status story also elicited relatively similar levels of negative affect and positive affect (see Appendix B for full status and control condition stories). To ensure the status story elicited the desired level of positive affect, we measured the participants feelings in relevant dimensions (e.g., competitiveness, motivation, arousal, frustration, Appendix C).

Following the priming procedure, participants viewed a series of low (signing an online petition) and high-cost social activism behaviors (participating in an in-person rally; see Appendix D for full list of low and high-cost activism behaviors). There are six high cost and six low-cost activism behaviors and participants viewed in a randomized order and indicated their interest in participating in each, by using a 9-point Likert scale (1=not all; 9=very much). After providing their interest assessments, participants completed a demographics section (Appendix E) to provide their age, race and ethnicity, and gender; we also included a measure of conservatism, as social activism behavior is often motivated by political beliefs. Finally, participants were thanked for their participation, redirected to an online debriefing page (Appendix F), and were provided their MTurk code.

## CHAPTER III: RESULTS

### Manipulation Check

First, we conducted independent samples *t*-tests with condition as the independent variable on our manipulation check questions to ensure that our status vignette effectively heightened individuals' competitiveness for status, and that it did not interfere with other domains closely related (e.g., sexual arousal, affect). We compared results from the four status manipulation domain (i.e., "Do you feel competitive?", "Are you motivated to compete?", "Do you desire to have a higher social status?", "Are you motivated to have higher prestige?"  $\alpha=0.92$ ) to both sexual arousal domain (i.e., "Do you feel romantically aroused?", "Do you feel motivated to attract a romantic partner  $\alpha=0.81$ ) and affect domains were analyzed separately (i.e., "Do you feel enthusiastic?", "Do you feel excited?", "Do you feel frustrated?", "Do you feel angry?"). There was a significant difference between conditions in status manipulation  $t(1,201)=5.12, p<.001, d=0.72$  in that individuals in the status condition scored higher ( $M=6.91, SD=1.77$ ) than those in the control condition ( $M=5.45, SD=2.26$ ). There was also a significant difference between conditions for the affect domain of "frustrated"  $t(1,201)=-2.43, p=.016 d=-0.34$  in that those in the control condition ( $M=5.45, SD=2.35$ ) reported being more frustrated than those in the status condition ( $M=4.59, SD=2.66$ ). Participants in the two conditions did not differ on the other manipulation check assessments ( $p>.147$ ). Thus, the manipulation had the intended effect of activating status motives exclusively, and not motives unrelated to status. However, because individuals in the control condition reported greater frustration, this variable was included as a covariate in all analyses reported below.

## Primary Analysis

We conducted 2 (Participant Sex: Male vs. Female)  $\times$  2 (Condition: Status vs. Control)  $\times$  2 (Activism Type: Low vs. High) mixed model ANCOVA with the latter factor as a repeated factor and frustration as a covariate. The most superordinate interaction was Activism Type  $\times$  Participant Sex,  $F(1,201)=9.48$ ,  $p=.002$ ,  $\eta p^2=.05$ . We decomposed the interaction by running an independent samples  $t$ -test looking at level of activism type separately for male and female participants. There was a significance in the low cost activism type,  $t(1,201)=-2.15$ ,  $p=.033$   $d=-.33$  in that female participants ( $M=6.49$ ,  $SD=2.01$ ) were more interesting in low-cost activism behaviors when compared to male participants ( $M=5.80$ ,  $SD=2.11$ ). There was no difference in the high cost activism behavior group,  $t(1,201)=-1.38$ ,  $p=.890$   $d=-.02$ . Additionally, we ran a paired samples  $t$ -test to further compare activism type and level of interest separately for male and female participants. Both men,  $t(1,142)=5.80$ ,  $p<.001$   $d=.49$ , and women,  $t(1,59)=6.20$   $p<.001$   $d=.80$ , reported greater interest in low cost relative to high cost activism activities, though this preference was nearly twice as large for women. Taken together, this provides evidence for our first hypothesis in that individuals would be more likely to engage in low-cost activism behavior types regardless of participant sex or condition. However, no other primary hypotheses were supported.

## Exploratory Analysis

Given that a core facet underlying social activism is motivation for social change, and given political conservatism emphasizes support for the status quo in society, we predicted that those reporting greater politically liberal ideology might report greater interest in engaging in social activism. We remained agnostic as to whether the status

manipulation utilized in the current study would interact with political ideology to influence participants' interest in social activism behaviors. We first averaged participants' levels of fiscal and social conservatism ( $r = 0.854$ ) into the model as a moderator. We used a  $2 \times (\text{Participant sex: male vs. female}) \times 2 (\text{Condition: status vs. control}) \times 2 (\text{Type of activism: low vs. high cost})$  custom ANCOVA with the latter a repeated factor and both conservatism and frustration covariates; such custom models allow for the control of contaminating continuous variables (frustration) while allowing for tests of interactions between continuous variables (conservatism) and categorical variables (e.g., condition, gender). This analysis revealed a significant Participant Sex  $\times$  Conservatism interaction  $F(1,195)=7.60, p=.01, \eta p^2 =.04$ . To decompose, we correlated participants' conservatism and overall interest in activism separately for men and women, finding that male participants with higher levels of conservatism were more interested in engaging in activism ( $r=.310, p<.001$ ) while female participants showed no relationship between conservatism and activism interest ( $r= -0.08, p=.54$ ). Additionally, there was a significant Activism type  $\times$  Conservatism,  $F(1,195)=59.23, p<.001, \eta p^2 =.23$ . To decompose, we correlated participants' conservatism with their interest in low-cost and high-cost activism separately, finding that conservatism predicted greater interest in high-cost activism ( $r=.289, p<.001$ ), but not low-cost activism ( $r=.015, p=.837$ ).

## CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION

The current study sought to determine how acute activation of status motives may influence individuals' interest in engaging in socially active behaviors. Given previous work finding that social activism elicits perceptions of positivity and prosociality (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003; Griskevicius, Tybur & Van den Bergh, 2010) and that status motives increase individuals' interest in using costly prosocial behavior to attain status (Griskevicius et al., 2010), we test several predictions linking status motives to social activism interest. Men and women reported greater interest in low-cost relative to high cost activism, albeit female participants at a much greater magnitude. These findings support our hypothesis that individuals would be more interested in low vs. high-cost social activism, and are consistent with Conservation of Resources Theory, which posits that humans are motivated to protect personal resources (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014), and research further suggests that such resource conservation algorithms extend to the realm of prosocial behavioral decisions.

Though we did not explicitly predict that men would report less interest in engaging in low-cost activism behaviors relative to women, this finding is generally consistent with predictions derived from a costly signaling framework (Zahavi & Zahavi, 1975). Specifically, prosocial behavior primarily facilitates status goals when the prosocial behavior is visible to others and costly (Griskevicius et al., 2010). Thus, low cost activism lacks the dimension of costliness necessary to facilitate status acquisition, and given that intrasexual competition has led to stronger status motives in men relative to women, it is sensible that men in our sample were less interested in low-cost activism. Finally, there was no support for our hypothesis that participants, specifically male

participants, primed with status motivation would be more likely to engage in social activism behavior. Explanations for this unexpected null result are addressed in our limitations and future directions below.

We included one additional set of exploratory analyses in which we included participants' self-reported level of political conservatism as a moderator variable in our model. We posited that because social activism involves disruption of the status quo, conservative individuals may be less interested in social activism that would disrupt the preservation of social institutions. Thus, we posited that more liberal individuals might be more likely to report interest in social activism when status motives are acutely activated. This analysis yielded two findings. First greater conservatism in men was associated with greater interest in activism, independent of cost; no such relation emerged for women. Second, independent of participant gender, higher conservatism was associated with greater interest in high cost activism relative to low cost. Conservative men's greater interest in activism, though inconsistent with our own predictions, is nonetheless consistent with other work finding that individuals higher in conservatism are more interested in acquiring and maintaining status than more liberal individuals (Dubois, Jung, & Ordabayeva, 2012), and given the greater value men have historically placed on pursuing status to enhance their mate value, the fact that this relationship emerged in men is theoretically sensible. Additionally, because prosocial behavior must be costly to signal status, it is sensible that greater conservatism was associated with greater interest high cost activism. However, because these analyses were exploratory and the explanations post hoc, future pre-registered research would need to be conducted to



determine the robustness of this relationship between conservatism, gender, and interest in engaging in high-cost activism.

### **Limitations and Future Direction**

Although findings aligned with previous research, our status prime did not have the intended effect of interest in social activism. Though it may be the case that acute status motives are not related to social activism interest, the current study may have been limited by its online implementation. A growing body of research suggests that many previously reported findings are weaker in online samples. Indeed, research has demonstrated that online studies result in less attention to study materials, particularly when utilizing Amazon's Mechanical Turk survey platform, which reduces statistical power to detect effects (Goodman, Cryder, & Cheema, 2013). Because social priming methods such as the status manipulation utilized in the current study require significant participant attention, our study may have been particularly underpowered to detect effects and thus future research should utilize a larger sample to overcome potential issues with statistical power. More concerning, however, is the growing body of research demonstrating that existing methods of social motive priming are disconcertingly unreliable and as such, better methodologies need to be developed to create a more robust literature in this area (e.g., Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996; Harris, Coburn, Rohrer, & Pashler, 2013; Shanks et al., 2013). Though not significant, however, descriptively the pattern of our results was consistent with our study hypotheses suggesting statistical power in the current study was indeed too low to detect effects.

Additionally, the data were collected during the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has drastically changed willingness to engage in helping

behaviors because of social distancing measures. It could be that participants rated the social activism behaviors that involved face-to-face contact with others lower due to fear of contracting the virus. Many of the high-cost behaviors involved in person attendance (e.g., “I would attend an in-person rally”, “I would volunteer for a panel to discuss a social justice cause”, “I would go door-to-door to ask for signatures on a petition for a social justice cause”) while many of the low-cost behaviors involved online participation (e.g., “I would use a social justice hashtag in a social media post”, “I would share a social media post about a social justice cause”, “I would join a social activism group on social media”). Thus, the study was limited in that within the categories of low-cost and high-cost behaviors, there were not an equivalent number of behaviors that would require face-to-face versus online engagement, which should be addressed in future iterations of this work.

Finally, exploring specifically how disease avoidance impacts individuals’ interest in engaging in different types of activism behaviors may help to explain why status motivation was unrelated to activism interest in the current study. It could be that when primed with a threat of disease, individuals are less likely to engage in high-cost social activism behaviors to protect themselves against the threat of disease. Further, the study could include more high-cost activism behaviors that do not include face-to-face interactions to determine whether the disinterest in engaging in high-cost behaviors is due to disease avoidance or to conserve personal resources.

## **Conclusion**

Individuals motivated by status goals report greater interest in costly prosocial behavior. Though our results did not support a relationship between acute status

activation and social activism interest, we did find that political conservatism was associated with greater interest in high-cost activism and that for men, higher conservatism was associated with greater social activism interest. Given past work finding that conservative individuals have stronger status motivations, these results provide partial support that social activism can serve a status-enhancing function albeit at the level of individual differences and not acutely activated motives.

## APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

### Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Project

#### Project Information

##### Project Title:

**Investigators:** Olajuwon Olagbegi, Kelsey Drea, & Don Sacco, PhD

**Contact Information:** Participants may contact Donald Sacco, PhD, in the School of Psychology at The University of Southern Mississippi (donald.sacco@usm.edu) or Kelsey Drea (kelsey.drea@usm.edu).

#### Research Description

You are invited to take part in a research study conducted by Olajuwon Olagbegi in the School of Psychology. Any questions or concerns regarding this research may be directed to Donald Sacco (donald.sacco@usm.edu) or Kelsey Drea (kelsey.drea@usm.edu).

This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human participants follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, Box 5125, Hattiesburg, MS 39406, (601) 266-5997

**Description of Study:** This study is interested in how you evaluate different types of social activism activities. You will view read a short story and then be asked to rate different activities and your willingness to participate in them. Finally, you will complete some basic demographic information. **Based on pre-testing, this study should take you no more than 15 minutes to complete if you complete this study undistracted.**

**Benefits:** Your participation in this study does not guarantee any beneficial results. However, it will aid in your understanding of how psychological research is conducted as well as contribute to the general knowledge in the field. **You will receive 0.5 SONA credit for your participation.**

**Risks:** The risks associated with participation in this study are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. In the unlikely event that you feel distressed at any time while participating in this research, you should notify the researcher immediately. Furthermore, for questions regarding topics of a sensitive nature, you can choose to skip those questions and it will not impact your compensation for participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** The responses that you provide today will be kept completely confidential. At no time will your name or any other identifying information be associated with any of the data you generate today. It will never be possible to identify you personally in any report of this research. Within these restrictions, results of the study will be made available to you upon request.

**Alternative Procedures:** You are free to discontinue your participation at any time

without penalty of loss of benefits. You may also freely decline to answer any of the questions asked of you.

**Participant's Assurance:** This project has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations.

Any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the IRB at (601) 266-5997. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits.

Any questions about the research should be directed to the Principal Investigator (Don Sacco) using the contact information provided in the Project Information Section above.

### **Consent to Participate in Research**

Consent is hereby given to participate in this research project. All procedures and/or investigations to be followed and their purposes, including any experimental procedures, were explained to me. Information was given about all benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that might be expected.

The opportunity to ask questions regarding the research and procedures was given. Participation in the project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. All personal information is strictly confidential, and no names will be disclosed. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided if that information may affect the willingness to continue participation in the project.

Questions concerning the research, at any time during or after the project, should be directed to the principal investigator (Dr. Don Sacco) with the contact information provided above. This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5125, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-5997.

If you consent to these procedures, please click the button labeled "**Consent**" below and click "**Continue**" to start. If you do not consent, please close the window now.

## **APPENDIX B: STATUS AND CONDITION STORIES**

### **Status Motivation Story**

Please carefully read the following story. As you read, try to imagine yourself in the scenario and try to feel the emotions and feelings that the person is experiencing.

Imagine recently graduating from college and coming to your first day of work at a high-status job. Impressed by the many prestigious features of the new work environment, you soon learn that you will be in competition with two other same sex individuals. Specifically, the boss informs you that whereas one of the three will be fired, one of you will not only be promoted to a luxurious corner office but will also get a large bonus and be put on the fast track to the top.

Please take the next couple minutes to imagine your feelings of enthusiasm and motivation to get the high-status promotion.

### **Control Story**

Please carefully read the following story. As you read, try to imagine yourself in the scenario and try to feel the emotions and feelings that the person is experiencing.

Imagine getting ready to go to a much-anticipated concert with a same-sex friend. During the night of the show, you discover that you have lost your concert tickets. You search all over your house for the tickets and attempt to retract your steps but are still unable to find the tickets. Later, your friend arrives and when you share with them that you have lost the tickets, they remind you they in fact had the tickets all along. You finish getting ready and head off to the concert with your friend.

Please take the next couple minutes to imagine your feelings of not being able to find the tickets, and realizing your friend had them safe and secure.

## **APPENDIX C: MANIPULATION CHECK QUESTIONNAIRE**

Participants will be asked to indicate their feelings on the below dimensions using a 9-point Likert-type scale (0=not at all; 8=very much)

- 1a. Do you feel competitive?
- 1b. Are you motivated to compete?
- 2a. Do you desire to have higher social status?
- 2b. Are you motivated to have higher prestige?
- 3a. Do you feel romantically aroused?
- 3b. Are you motivated to attract a romantic partner?
- 4a. Do you feel enthusiastic?
- 4b. Do you feel excited?
- 5a. Do you feel frustrated?
- 5b. Do you feel angry?

## APPENDIX D: ACTIVISM BEHAVIORS

Participants will be asked to which extent they would be willing to engage in each of the following social activism behaviors. Answers will be recorded on a 9-point Likert-type scale; (0=not at all; 8=very much)

### Low-cost

- signing an online petition
- joining a social activism group on social media (e.g., Facebook)
- donating \$5 to a social justice cause
- sharing a post on social media related to a social justice cause
- using a hashtag relating to a social justice cause (e.g., #BLM)
- using your favorite source of media (e.g., reading a book, listening to a podcast, watching a documentary) to educate yourself more on a social justice issue of your interest.

### High-cost

- attending an in-person rally relating to social activism
- joining a group on your college campus relating to social justice
- enrolling in a college course related to social justice causes
- writing a letter to your state representative (local government) to petition for social justice issues
- volunteering for a panel to discuss a social justice issue on your campus
- donating \$100 to a cause of your choice
- volunteering to ask for signatures on a petition for social justice cause



## APPENDIX E: DEMOGRAPHICS

### What is your sex?

Male

Female

Other

### What is your age (in years)?

---

### What is your ethnicity?

African-American/Black

Asian/Asian-American

Caucasian/White

Hispanic/Latino

Other

### What is your sexual orientation?

Bisexual

Heterosexual

Homosexual

Other

### What is your relationship status?

Single

In a relationship\

Married

Divorced

### How often have you engaged in social activism efforts in the past?

1=Rarely, 7=Very Often

Specifically with regard to **economic issues**, and setting social issues aside, how would you describe your political orientation?

1= Very Liberal, 7=Very Conservative

Specifically with regard to **social** issues, and setting economic issues aside, how would you describe your political orientation?

1= Very Liberal, 7=Very Conservative

## APPENDIX F: DEBRIEFING

Thank you for participating in today's study. We hope you found your experience interesting and enjoyable. In this study, we were interested in how willingness to get involved with various social activism behaviors (low vs. high cost) would differ when presented with a status motivation/control task. Presenting the reading activity of the status motivation/control task before the questionnaire was used to obtain a genuine response of how one's willingness to participate in high vs. low-cost social activism behaviors would differ in each situation. In this study, we thought that people would be more likely to engage in high-cost behaviors when status motives are activated. For today's experiment, we ask that you not discuss what you did today with anyone. If someone asks about this experiment, simply say that this study was about social activism. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

If you have further questions, please contact the experimenter listed on your consent form (Kelsey Drea, [kelsey.drea@usm.edu](mailto:kelsey.drea@usm.edu)). Should you be interested in reading more research related to this work, you can get more information from:

Hardy, C. L., & Van Vugt, M. (2006). Nice guys finish first: The competitive altruism hypothesis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32(10), 1402-1413.

Griskevicius, V., Tybur, J. M., & Van den Bergh, B. (2010). Going green to be seen: status, reputation, and conspicuous conservation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98(3), 392.

Von Rueden, C., Gurven, M., & Kaplan, H. (2008). The multiple dimensions of male social status in an Amazonian society. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 29(6), 402-415.

# APPENDIX G: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office of  
Research Integrity



THE COLLEGE DRIVE #0025 • HATTIESBURG, MS 39406-0025 | LIS@USM.EDU/ORI

## Modification Institutional Review Board Approval

The University of Southern Mississippi's Office of Research Integrity has received the notice of your modification for your submission Status Motives Enhance Interest in Social Activism (IRB #: IRB-21-304).

Your modification has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on [Canvas IRB](#).
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-21-304

PROJECT TITLE: Status Motives Enhance Interest in Social Activism

SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of Psychology, Psychology

RESEARCHER(S): Olajuwon Olayegbeji, Donald Sacco, Kelsey Drea

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: August 12, 2021

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.  
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

[Reply](#) | [Reply all](#) | [Forward](#)

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