Title of the Project: Deconstructing Status Characteristics

General Field of the Project: Sociology

Faculty Mentor of the Project (please include name, department and email): David Melamed, Sociology, melamed.9@osu.edu

Project Description: (1-2 paragraphs about the project; background, goals, etc.):

The cultural value associated with individual characteristics, such as race and sex, remain despite changes in rights, objective conditions, and efforts aimed at social justice. Within sociology, one theory explaining how women and minorities participate less often, are less influential, and are less likely to be rewarded is status characteristics theory. The theory argues that in groups differentiated by race or sex, for example, people evaluate the anticipated contributions of members on those characteristics. To the extent that the broader culture associates states of the characteristics with competence (e.g., whites and males) and other states with incompetence (e.g., minorities and women), individuals come to expect contributions commensurate with competence expectations. This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy whereby those less valued in the broader culture participate less, are less influential, and receive fewer rewards.

This project seeks to understand the mechanism whereby competence expectations are decoupled from individual characteristics. An experiment will be conducted with two phases. In the first, a status characteristic will be constructed. Participants will be randomly assigned to receive either the valued or devalued state of the characteristic. In the second phase, we will experimentally manipulate the resources associated with the characteristic and/or the hierarchy that emerges in interaction to examine how competency expectations are altered by what unfolds in the second phase. This project aims to understand how to reduce interactional inequalities faced by low status individuals on a daily basis.

Position Description (1-2 paragraphs about the potential tasks, responsibilities, etc. that the student will be a part of while conducting this research):

Research Assistants for this project will interact with naïve participants over Skype during the experiment on an ambiguous task. The task entails choosing which of three made-up words, supposedly from an extinct language, corresponds to an English word. The participant will make an initial choice, and then discuss their choice with the RA. Participants will be led to believe that they are interacting with other participants; in reality, Research Assistants will be their partners. Depending on the condition of the experiment, the Research Assistants will behave either assertively or passively. If the participant is supposed to be high status, the RA should behave passively. If the participant is supposed to be low status, the RA should behave assertively. RAs will be given training, and a script, but there is no way to control the actual conversation, so some “acting” is required.

Each experimental session entails 5 phases of interaction on the word task. For each phase, the participant will interact with a different RA. Accordingly, five RAs will be needed for each session, and in any given session will need to behave assertively with some participants and passively with others. This will be controlled by the design of the experiment. For every session, there will be a graduate student RA overseeing the session, and PI Melamed will be involved in training and executing the first few sessions. Results will be shared with the RAs at the conclusion of the study.
Please indicate if there is a target audience of applicants that you are searching for (ie. specific majors, specific ranks, minimum GPA, specific classes that have been completed, etc.):

A background in research methods would be nice, but is not required. Minimum GPA = 3.0.

Please indicate any required or desired skills or qualifications that may be needed:

What are the approximate number of hours per week that the student is expected to be participating in the research?
5-10 depending on whether they are getting credit or paid.

Which semester would the student begin their work?
Autumn 2018.

Approximately how many semesters or months do you predict this research position lasting?
2 semesters.

Which semesters is the student able to conduct their research (ie. can the student continue their work throughout the summer months)?
Autumn and Spring.

Will the student be working for academic credit, salary/stipend, work-study experience, or voluntary experience?
Academic credit or salary.

What is the application deadline?
August 15.

How/who should interested applicants contact? David Melamed (melamed.9@osu.edu)

What information should applicants provide? GPA, availability in the Autumn semester, major.

Is there any other additional information that you would like to provide?

THANK YOU FOR LISTING YOUR OPPORTUNITY WITH OUR OFFICE!