

THE TWO TOWERS (OR SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN): THE BEHAVIORAL CONSEQUENCES OF POSITIONAL INCONSISTENCY ACROSS STATUS HIERARCHIES

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We examine how actors react to status inconsistencies across multiple status hierarchies. We argue that pluralistic value systems create multiple status conferral mechanisms, and that hierarchies' prestige varies as a function of the values they represent. While status inconsistency, in general, increases the likelihood that actors will pursue opportunities that can boost their lagging status, their status hierarchies' unequal prestige influences the magnitude and direction of actors' responses to their status inconsistency. Further, their ability to respond is constrained by their relative standing in their primary status hierarchy and the extent to which they are embedded in particular professional networks. Using the artistic and commercial status of Hollywood performers, we found that status-inconsistent performers were more likely to appear in films that could boost their lagging status in the commercial hierarchy when they possessed relatively higher artistic than commercial status. Moreover, being high-status decreased the likelihood a performer would pursue opportunities that could improve their lagging status only when they were high status in the artistic status hierarchy, while embeddedness only decreased the likelihood when their primary status hierarchy was commercial.

I think the film [*Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)*] dealt with that a lot—what is art and what is commerciality, and when you're an artist and when you're a whore. . . . That's the tragedy of film, which is an industry and an art and a tool of personal expression, and at the same time a way to entertain the masses. That's a very difficult kind of balance to navigate, especially today, with the rules of the game.

—Alejandro G. Iñárritu, Oscar-winning director and screenwriter (Mears, 2015)

It was a very conscious decision on my part to try and climb my way out of the arthouse ghetto, which can be as much of a trap as making blockbuster films. And I was very aware that at that point in my career, half the business was off limits to me.

—Steven Soderbergh, Oscar-winning director (Andrew, 2003)

Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance) (2014) portrays actor Riggan Thomson's struggle for artistic recognition. Thomson is tormented by his early fame playing a superhero in the blockbuster "Birdman" franchise, and believes the only way he will be recognized as a "true actor" is to successfully stage a Broadway play that he wrote, directed, and stars in. However, his co-star Mike, a highly regarded Broadway actor, constantly questions his sincerity; Tabitha, a *New York Times* critic, threatens to sabotage his play because of his impudence in thinking he deserves to be on Broadway; and he hallucinates that Birdman is trying to lure him to abandon the effort. Thomson's quest reflects a fundamental question about status: What leads actors who are already high status in one hierarchy to try and increase their status

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in a different hierarchy, particularly when it could result in potentially risky identity changes (Hsu & Hannan, 2005; Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014)?

The idea that multiple status hierarchies exist and can affect behavior is not new (Benoit-Smullyan, 1944; Lenski, 1954). However, the flurry of early studies exploring multiple status hierarchies (see Stryker & Macke, 1978, for a review) trailed off, and research since the 1980s has focused primarily on single hierarchies (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Sauder, Lynn, & Podolny, 2012). This change in focus is problematic, as it inevitably yields unrealistic portrayals of how actors actually pursue, maintain, and negotiate their status, because actors have multiple social standings across different hierarchies that create sometimes-conflicting expectations (Sauder et al., 2012).

A few pioneering studies have examined the consequences of status multiplicity, arguing that multiple hierarchies' origins lie in different types of external constituents (D'Aveni, 1996), dominance in primary or complementary roles in social interactions (Bothner, Kim, & Lee, 2015), different types of status signals attached to a product (Zhao & Zhou, 2011), and membership in different horizontal market categories (Jensen, Kim, & Kim, 2011; Wang & Jensen, 2019). Despite these insights, the sources of status multiplicity identified are all idiosyncratic to their respective contexts. Still missing is a generalizable theoretical explanation.

We argue that value systems underlie all status hierarchies (Pollock, Lashley, Rindova, & Han, 2019; Sauder et al., 2012), and that identifying shared beliefs about the value of the characteristics underlying different status hierarchies provides a generalizable conceptual framework for understanding the sources of status hierarchy multiplicity. Further, by shifting the focus from audiences' perceptions to the perceptions of the social actors holding the inconsistent positions (Wang & Jensen, 2019), we examine how actors perceive and react to their status inconsistencies differently as a function of whether the hierarchy in which they are higher status is more or less prestigious than the hierarchy in which their status is lower—that is, across the different status hierarchies, the hierarchy itself is higher or lower status than other hierarchies. Consistent with the view that status systems themselves can have unequal prestige (Jasso, 2001; Rao, Monin, & Durand, 2005; Sharkey, 2014), our theory delineates how actors' standings in multiple status hierarchies, and the prestige of their “primary” status hierarchy (i.e., the hierarchy wherein they possess higher relative

status), affects the magnitude of the discomfort caused by their status inconsistency and influences their perceptions of, and the impediments to, enhancing their “secondary” status (i.e., their lagging status in another hierarchy).

We also aim to bridge the decades-long gap between the current status literature and earlier research on status inconsistency (Lenski, 1954; Stryker & Macke, 1978). Given that status inconsistencies may create cognitive dissonance and stress (Festinger, 1957) that lead actors to employ dissonance-reducing response mechanisms (Lenski, 1954), we examine the extent to which status-inconsistent actors try to improve their lagging status and resolve the inconsistency. We theorize that the likelihood an actor will attempt to enhance their lagging status depends on the magnitude of the cognitive dissonance and stress caused by the status inconsistency, and the perceived feasibility of succeeding. As long as actors can—or think they can—raise their lagging status, they are more likely to try and do so; however, if their motivations are influenced by other factors, or they deem the social impediments too great, they are less likely to act. We consider two constraining factors that can affect status-inconsistent actors' motivation and perceptions: (1) whether the actor is high status in their primary hierarchy (Bothner, Kim, & Smith, 2012; Magee & Galinsky, 2008); and (2) the extent to which their social interactions are embedded within a specific group (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993).

We test our arguments in the context of the Hollywood film industry, which has clearly distinguished value systems (i.e., artistic vs. commercial values) that are imprinted in various features of the industry, including performance rubrics, targeted audiences, film professionals' career trajectories, and even the industry's structure (Rossman & Schilke, 2014; Zuckerman & Kim, 2003). We view actors and actresses (hereafter “performers,” to avoid confusion with the general term “social actors”) as being positioned in both the artistic and commercial status hierarchies, and we explore how status inconsistency across these hierarchies affects the likelihood that they will pursue films that can potentially boost either their box office success or critical acclaim, depending on the hierarchy in which their status lags. We find support for our arguments that status hierarchy prestige influences how actors respond to status inconsistencies and shape how actors' high status and embeddedness influence their behaviors.

Our study contributes to the status literature by answering the question of how social actors perceive

and react to inconsistencies across status hierarchies (Lenski, 1954; Sauder et al., 2012). We demonstrate that multiple status hierarchies can be conceptualized based on their underlying value systems (Sauder et al., 2012), and that the relative status of the hierarchies can affect actors' status-pursuing behaviors. We also contribute by contextualizing status inconsistency research (Meyer & Hammond, 1971; Stryker & Macke, 1978), and theorizing how actors' respective status positions within the hierarchies and their embeddedness create boundary conditions that alter the perceived feasibility of attempting to resolve their status inconsistency.

MULTIPLE STATUS HIERARCHIES

In his seminal article on status crystallization, Lenski (1954: 405) argued it was necessary to complicate the assumption of single status hierarchies, stating:

From Aristotle to Marx to Warner, most social philosophers and social scientists have described the vertical structure of human groups in terms of a single hierarchy in which each member occupies a single position. . . . Since Max Weber's day, however, this traditional approach has come to be criticized . . . the structure of human groups normally involves the coexistence of a number of parallel vertical hierarchies which usually are imperfectly correlated with one another.

"Status inconsistency" occurs "when an individual's ranks on two or more status hierarchies are inconsistent with one another" (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Mundell, 1993: 22). The central theoretical premise underlying status inconsistency research is that social actors, in general, favor consistency across their status positions (Benoit-Smullyan, 1944); thus, status inconsistency can cause cognitive stress that leads social actors to adopt attitudes and take actions that alter the status quo (Stryker & Macke, 1978).

However, scholars have generally failed to find the expected influence of status inconsistency on actors' behaviors (Blalock, 1966; Stryker & Macke, 1978). Explanations for the non-findings have included the need to identify contextual factors that affect the salience of status inconsistency (Galtung, 1966) and methodological refinements to capture the pure effect of status inconsistency while controlling for the main effects of status (Blalock, 1966).

Decades later, concerns about assuming single status hierarchies have reemerged (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Sauder et al., 2012), with Sauder and colleagues (2012: 277) stating:

The terrain that status actors negotiate is more complex than is often recognized; rather than simply trying to find ways to rise within a single status hierarchy, actors must negotiate crosscutting and competing hierarchies, each with its own demands about what is deserving of recognition and how this is best achieved.

Indeed, only a handful of studies have attempted to incorporate the concept of status multiplicity. D'Aveni (1996) argued that business schools' abilities to attract quality inputs (i.e., students and faculty members) and produce successful outputs (i.e., students' job placements) depend on their perceived rankings (i.e., status) by the business community, academic community, and MBA students. Focusing on the implications of different types of social roles, Bothner and colleagues (2015) argued that venture capitalists accumulate primary and complementary statuses depending on whether they specialized in leading or supporting roles in syndication activities, and that excessive accumulation of the latter diminished the positive effect of the former on their survival. Building on status's use as a signal of quality (Podolny, 2005), Zhao and Zhou (2011) argued that status inconsistency across a variety of characteristics, including wine and winery-level tasting scores and various geographic designations, limits wineries' abilities to charge higher prices. Most recently, Jensen and Wang (2018; Wang & Jensen, 2019) focused on the horizontal market categories organizations simultaneously operate in to define multiple status hierarchies, and studied the effects of status inconsistency across subunits or subsidiaries on organization-level performance and divestiture decisions.

We argue that a more fruitful, and generalizable, approach would be to identify the fundamental values underlying the status hierarchies and to treat contextual characteristics as reflective of these fundamental values. We consider how multiple status hierarchies and positional inconsistencies across the hierarchies are perceived by the actors themselves, and how they behave in response. We start by conceptualizing multiple status hierarchies and actors' positions within them based on their underlying values.

Value Systems as the Origin of Status Hierarchies

To conceptualize multiple status hierarchies, it is useful to return to the definition of "status" as "a socially constructed, *intersubjectively agreed-upon and accepted* ordering or ranking of individuals,

groups, organizations, or activities in a social system” (Washington & Zajac, 2005: 284, emphasis added). That is, for status orderings to be established, actors and audiences must first have a shared belief about the characteristics that form the basis of an actor’s relative standing in the hierarchy (Anderson, Hildreth, & Howland, 2015; Sauder et al., 2012). Status hierarchies and distinctions among actors within them reflect how the underlying value systems are structured, and the status ordering based on the extent to which an actor possesses the valued attributes is granted a rule-like status that governs the actor’s behavior and their peers’ and external audiences’ evaluations (Pollock et al., 2019).

Extending this logic, we argue that underlying belief systems involving pluralistic values give rise to multiple value-laden status hierarchies. For example, Rao and colleagues (2005) argued that the changing value systems in French gastronomy regarding the distinction between and blending of classical and nouvelle cuisines were closely related to the reformation of the field’s status-ordering scheme. Because the logic underpinning a status ordering reflects agreement on what is and is not valued, the co-existence of multiple values allows multiple status hierarchies to emerge that are subject to distinctive codes, practices, and—most importantly—definitions of being high status that are shared by the field’s participants and audiences.

Status is an important dimension of social actors’ identities (Jensen et al., 2011), and actors’ positions across different hierarchies jointly determine who they are (Stryker & Macke, 1978). Specifically, given social actors’ tendencies to focus on the categories in which their status is higher (hereafter, their “primary” status hierarchy) (Lenski, 1954), actors are likely to identify with and adopt the values and characteristics associated with their primary status hierarchy, and eventually develop a sense of category membership (Hsu & Hannan, 2005). Conversely, actors’ relative lack of status in a hierarchy that values different characteristics is likely to result in dis-identifying with this “secondary” status hierarchy.

Conceptualizing status hierarchies as social categories based on different value systems integrates the divergent sources of multiple status hierarchies suggested previously. For instance, audience types capture actors’ statuses in multiple hierarchies only to the extent that they value different characteristics. That is, the relevant distinction is whether the different audiences reflect different values, such as ranking business schools based on teaching and job placements versus research quality and

productivity (Rindova, Williamson, Petkova, & Sever, 2005). Similar restrictions would apply to other factors, such as social role specialization (Bothner et al., 2015) or evaluations using different quality indicators (Zhao & Zhou, 2011), where their adequacy as sources of status multiplicity depends on whether they reflect different underlying value systems.

Hierarchy of hierarchies. Values can be prioritized based on their relative importance, forming a “value” hierarchy within a given social system (Phillips, Turco, & Zuckerman, 2013; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Thus, if the belief system acknowledges two overarching values exist but treats one value as superior to the other, two status hierarchies emerge wherein the actors are ordered within each hierarchy according to its underlying values, and the hierarchies themselves are ordered according to the values’ relative importance in the broader social system.

While different actors of similar standing in the two hierarchies will be perceived as similarly high status within their respective hierarchies, they will be viewed unequally when they are directly compared due to differences in the relative status, or prestige,¹ of their hierarchies, thereby creating differences in their “global status” (Acharya & Pollock, 2013) in the larger social system. To the extent that the relative deprivation caused by status inconsistency drives actors’ behaviors (Stryker & Macke, 1978), the hierarchies’ unequal prestige suggests that the same absolute level of status inconsistency will vary in the stress it causes, and the likelihood that actors will take actions to reduce it. Further, given differences in the role expectations associated with the different status positions (Jensen et al., 2011), the hierarchies’ unequal prestige will pose differing levels of (perceived) social impediments when trying to enhance secondary status.

Artistic and commercial status hierarchies in Hollywood. Individuals often construct their identities by negotiating between pure, or lofty, motives—sometimes referred to as “callings”—and more secular rewards, such as financial remuneration (Bunderson & Thompson, 2009), with the purer motivation accorded higher social value, or prestige (Ertug, Yogev, Lee, & Hedström, 2016; Kovács & Sharkey, 2014; Wry, Lounsbury, & Jennings, 2014). Contrasting underlying

¹In order to avoid using the word “status” too frequently—for example, in discussing status inconsistencies across status hierarchies of different status—we use “prestige” to refer to the relative status of different hierarchies.

values are present in such diverse spheres of the business world as editorial commitment versus commercial viability in publishing (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999), professionalism versus lucre in law (Phillips et al., 2013), and basic science versus commercialization in high-tech industries (Wry et al., 2014). Cultural industries, in particular, are characterized by strongly defined value systems involving artistic and commercial values, which often translate into long-standing distinctions such as aesthetics versus entertainment or niche versus mass appeal (Becker, 1982; Ertug et al., 2016; Lampel, Lant, & Shamsie, 2000).

Beginning in the 1950s, motion pictures were recognized as both an art form (Mukerji, 1978) and a major source of revenues and profits (Zuckerman & Kim, 2003). The blockbuster era emerged in the 1970s, with films such as *The Godfather* (1972) and *Jaws* (1975) reshaping the production system as films' financial potential became even more apparent (Baker & Faulkner, 1991). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the industry went through another significant change with the rise of the Sundance Film Festival and the commercial and critical success of arthouse films such as *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994). Since then, the industry has evolved, with both values imprinted in different performance assessments by different audiences (e.g., critics' awards and box office receipts; Holbrook & Addis, 2007), different organization types (i.e., independent and major studios; Zuckerman & Kim, 2003), and film professionals' career paths (Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Levy, 2001).

The artistic value of a work, which is assessed by critics and the field's elite members, is typically accorded higher status than its commercial value, reflecting consumers' tastes and the revenues they generate (Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Cattani, Ferriani, & Allison, 2014; Ertug et al., 2016). Further, works judged to be of high artistic value and status often specifically lack mass-market appeal (Kovács & Sharkey, 2014). For example, in an article discussing the pushback regarding a potential new Oscar for "best popular film," Barnes (2018) noted:

Last year's best picture winner, *The Shape of Water*, had sold about \$60 million in tickets at the time after playing in theaters for 14 weeks. *Black Panther*, by comparison, took in \$202 million over its first three days in North American theaters alone.

The prevalence of these competing values makes the Hollywood film industry useful for exploring the dynamics of status inconsistency.

The art-commerce distinction has led to two clear status hierarchies in Hollywood. Each year, various organizations hold award ceremonies to recognize artistic achievements, such as the Oscars, given by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science, and the Golden Globes, awarded by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association (Cattani et al., 2014; Rossman, Esparza, & Bonacich, 2010). Similarly, films' commercial successes have symbolic meaning beyond their economic returns, forming a performer ranking celebrated by media outlets such as the *Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*, and through labels such as "bankable star" and "blockbuster star" (Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Eliashberg, Elberse, & Leenders, 2006). Few performers achieve "blockbuster star" status; thus, being considered one leads to disproportionate rewards and opportunities (Frank & Cook, 1995). However, as Levy (1989: 30–31) noted:

Not every film player is or becomes a movie star, and not every movie star is necessarily a gifted player, respected by his or her peers . . . for players who don't aspire to be and do not become box office stars, peer recognition and critics' esteem are far more important.

Thus, in performers' eyes, the artistic status hierarchy is more prestigious than the commercial status hierarchy. Indeed, the tensions between commercial stars' pursuit of credibility as "serious" performers and acclaimed performers' desires to cash in on commercially successful films are often featured in Hollywood films themselves, such as the *Birdman* example we used in our introduction, and in industry parodies such as the comedy *Tropic Thunder* (2008). In the next section, we consider how inconsistencies in performers' relative standings across these status hierarchies affect the types of film projects they pursue.

BEHAVIORAL CONSEQUENCES OF STATUS INCONSISTENCY

Status Hierarchy Prestige and the Pursuit of Status Consistency

Early studies on the relationship between status inconsistency and political attitudes and behaviors have argued that, regardless of individuals' standings in different hierarchies, the cognitive dissonance caused by status inconsistencies across hierarchies leads to "status equilibration tendencies," or taking actions aimed at enhancing actors' status in their secondary hierarchy (Benoit-Smullyan,

1944; Lenski, 1954).² Status-inconsistent actors (and outside observers) are likely well aware of their inconsistencies, because, as noted, status hierarchies are rooted in intersubjectively agreed value systems (Washington & Zajac, 2005). Further, social actors vigilantly monitor status distinctions, and are sensitive to how these distinctions affect the ways that they, and others, are treated (Anderson et al., 2015). Thus, since status positions embody social role expectations (Jensen et al., 2011), status inconsistency can create stressful conditions in which actors face diverging or even incompatible expectations from others (Kovács & Sharkey, 2014). Moreover, the pain caused by being treated as high status by some and as low status by others may be more acute than being consistently treated as low status (Anderson et al., 2015; Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001).

Thus, all else equal, we argue that status-inconsistent actors will actively attempt to enhance their secondary status to resolve status inconsistencies—which, if successful, will not only resolve the inconsistency but also increase their overall, or global, status (Acharya & Pollock, 2013). In our research context, this suggests that, when Hollywood performers experience status inconsistency, they are more likely to pursue roles in projects that could potentially raise their status in their secondary hierarchy.³

Hypothesis 1a. Status inconsistency increases the likelihood an actor will try to enhance their status in their secondary status hierarchy.

However, not all status inconsistencies will lead actors to try and enhance their secondary status (Stryker & Macke, 1978). Cognitive dissonance can also be resolved through purely cognitive processes of readjustment (Festinger, 1957). Actors can also

cognitively adjust to status inconsistency by focusing on their primary status hierarchy, or by altering their perceptions so that the inconsistency matters less to them (Berger, Norman, Balkwell, & Smith, 1992; Lenski, 1966). If this occurs, actors may not pursue secondary status enhancement.

We argue that whether status-inconsistent actors actively try to enhance their secondary status is a function of the magnitude of the stress caused by the inconsistency and the feasibility of resolving it. One contextual factor that can influence these perceptions is the prestige accorded the actors' primary and secondary status hierarchies (Jasso, 2001; Rao et al., 2005). Since current status to some extent reflects past behaviors and performance (Pollock, Lee, Jin, & Lashley, 2015), actors whose primary status hierarchy is more prestigious are likely to regard the deference associated with their primary status as something they have "earned" (Gould, 2002; Rao et al., 2005). Thus, the relative deprivation they experience as a result of their status inconsistency will be particularly distressing (Runciman & Bagley, 1969; Stryker & Macke, 1978), even if the actor's absolute standing in their secondary hierarchy is not particularly low. This is because their status in the more prestigious hierarchy makes them feel entitled to greater deference in the less prestigious hierarchy than they are receiving (Jensen & Kim, 2015). In contrast, if their secondary status hierarchy is more prestigious, they may experience less stress from the same inconsistency and feel less compelled to take action, because they perceive their lower standing in the more prestigious hierarchy as less inconsistent (Meyer & Hammond, 1971). We therefore expect actors whose primary status is in the more prestigious hierarchy will be more motivated to try to increase their secondary status, regardless of their actual standings in each hierarchy.

The hierarchies' relative prestige also influences the perceived feasibility of enhancing actors' secondary status. Incumbents for whom it is their primary status hierarchy may resist others' attempts to enhance their secondary status (Jensen, 2008). When an actor's secondary status hierarchy is more prestigious than their primary hierarchy, they may be perceived as failing to "know their place" and thus invite incumbent backlash (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Whyte, 1943). In contrast, when their secondary status hierarchy is less prestigious, they may face weaker resistance from incumbents because they have higher global status (Acharya & Pollock, 2013), as deferring to those with higher global status may be less discomforting for the incumbents (Gould, 2002; Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

² Although prior research (Wang & Jensen, 2019) found that firms could divest low-status subsidiaries to resolve status inconsistency, their conceptualization of status hierarchies was based on firms' elective membership in market categories that they could enter or exit. Because we focus on underlying value systems as the source of status multiplicity, we do not assume that actors can revoke their memberships in the status hierarchies.

³ Because we do not know what parts performers pursue but do not get, or what parts they are offered but turn down, we cannot directly measure or assess their pursuit of or access to status-enhancing films in their secondary status hierarchy. However, to the extent that they pursue such films, we expect that the likelihood they will appear in them will also increase, and this is what we hypothesize and assess.

As noted earlier, the literature on cultural industries in general (e.g., Becker, 1982; Ertug et al., 2016), and the film industry in particular (e.g., Levy, 1989, 2001; Rossman & Schilke, 2014), highlights that performers accord higher status to artistic values than commercial values. Thus, our arguments suggest that, in the Hollywood context, performers whose artistic status is greater than their commercial status will be more likely to pursue commercial status than performers whose commercial status exceeds their artistic status are to pursue artistic status.

For example, the Marvel Cinematic Universe pantheon of movies—one of the most profitable blockbuster franchises ever—is crowded with Oscar winners: Cate Blanchett, Jeff Bridges, Benicio del Toro, Michael Douglas, Anthony Hopkins, Tommy Lee Jones, Ben Kingsley, Brie Larson, Lupita Nyong'o, Gwyneth Paltrow, Natalie Portman, Robert Redford, Sam Rockwell, Tilda Swinton, Marisa Tomei, Rachel Weisz, and Forest Whitaker. However, blockbuster stars' appearances in artistic films are rarer. When Sylvester Stallone received an Oscar nomination for his role in *Creed* (2015) after almost four decades since being nominated for acting and screenwriting Oscars for *Rocky* (1976), he commented:

How many peaks and valleys and how difficult it is to maintain any sense of longevity, and then to be brought back into drama from basically spending so much time in another genre, that to me is extraordinary to have bridged that gap back to where I started in drama. It is really amazing to me. (King, 2016)

Taken together, while status inconsistency may be stressful to performers with higher standing in both hierarchies, the motivation to pursue films that can potentially enhance their secondary status should be stronger for those higher in artistic status because they are the most sensitive to status differences and are likely to face less resistance than those higher in the commercial status hierarchy. We therefore posit:

Hypothesis 1b. The positive effect of status inconsistency on the likelihood an actor will try to enhance their secondary status (Hypothesis 1a) will be greater when the actor's primary status hierarchy is more prestigious than their secondary status hierarchy.

Constraining and Enabling Effects of High Status within a Hierarchy

Hypotheses 1a and 1b present baseline expectations regardless of an actor's absolute standing

within the hierarchies. However, one of the major reasons cited for the decline in early status inconsistency research was the failure to control for the effects of absolute status positions (Blalock, 1966; Stryker & Macke, 1978). Given that status is a fundamental driver of behavior (Anderson et al., 2015), we argue that what is even more problematic is failing to theorize about the role primary status plays in shaping how actors respond to status inconsistency.

High status presents a paradox in how it can influence efforts to enhance secondary status in the face of status inconsistency. On the one hand, high status provides numerous advantages (Piazza & Castellucci, 2014; Sauder et al., 2012), as high-status actors receive preferential treatment (Gould, 2002; Merton, 1968) and are viewed as exemplars of the hierarchy's underlying values (Pollock et al., 2019; Rao, Davis, & Ward, 2000). As such, it can make high-status actors complacent (Bothner et al., 2012), decreasing their motivation to behaviorally resolve status inconsistencies while also sharpening their concerns about maintaining their high status (Anderson et al., 2015; Blader & Chen, 2012). At the same time, high status also provides actors with a substantial degree of freedom in determining their own courses of action, and allows them to violate norms without facing the sanctions that would be levied on others lower in the status hierarchy (Castellucci & Ertug, 2010; Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001; Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014). Thus, it also increases their ability to enhance their secondary status.

Considering the prestige of high-status actors' primary status hierarchies resolves this paradox. Since high-status actors are considered exemplars of the values underlying the status hierarchies they sit atop (Pollock et al., 2019; Rao et al., 2000), they are more likely to strongly identify with their primary status hierarchy. Combined with the benefits of maintaining their status, all else equal, the highest-status actors in a hierarchy may be less likely than lower-status actors to try and enhance their secondary status.

However, the constraining effects of high status are also likely to be stronger for those in the more prestigious hierarchy, because they already have higher global status. Whereas globally high-status actors have less to gain from enhancing their secondary status, high-status actors in the less prestigious hierarchy can still enhance their global status by increasing their standing in the more prestigious hierarchy. Their awareness of their lower global standing, combined with the cognitive dissonance of their status inconsistency and their greater ability to violate their primary hierarchy's norms (Phillips

& Zuckerman, 2001; Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014), may thus make them more motivated and more able than the globally highest-status actors to try and enhance their secondary status.

In Hollywood, while both artistic merit and commercial appeal lead to stardom (Levy, 1989, 2001), those with high commercial status often enjoy less prestige than those with high artistic status (Jensen & Kim, 2015; Levy, 1989, 2001). Therefore, although both performers with high artistic and commercial status may enjoy substantial advantages in their primary status hierarchies, those high in artistic status will be less compelled to pursue greater commercial status because they already possess the highest status in the more prestigious status hierarchy. Levy (2001: 245, cited in Jensen & Kim, 2015) illustrated this dynamic by recounting the reaction of John Wayne—arguably one of the highest-commercial-status performers of his time—after he had won an Oscar for *True Grit* (1979): “The Oscar is a beautiful thing to have. It symbolizes appreciation of yourself by your peers. The Oscar means a lot to me, even if it took the industry 40 years to get around to it.” Thus:

Hypothesis 2a. Being high status in the primary status hierarchy will weaken the positive effect of status inconsistency on the likelihood an actor will attempt to increase their status in their secondary status hierarchy.

Hypothesis 2b. The negative interaction effect hypothesized in Hypothesis 2a will be greater when the actor's primary status hierarchy is more prestigious than their secondary status hierarchy.

Constraining Effect of Embeddedness

One of the key lessons from the early studies on status inconsistency is that “the behavioral consequences of inconsistent statuses . . . must be tied to situations of interaction” (Stryker & Macke, 1978: 83). Indeed, just as social interactions provide actors with ways to accumulate status (Sauder et al., 2012), they also create a dilemma for status-inconsistent actors: the very relationships that conferred their current status also generated their status inconsistency. Solving this dilemma by pursuing different kinds of status-enhancing opportunities inevitably involves changing one's social network, and the consequences are highly uncertain (Ibarra, Kilduff, & Tsai, 2005). Best case, the actor successfully increases their lagging status by forming new ties or activating weak ties and receiving status spillovers from higher-status actors in their secondary hierarchy (Podolny, 2005). However, status leakage across hierarchies involves more complicated dynamics

than within a single hierarchy, which can involve resistance within the primary or secondary status hierarchies, as elaborated above (Jensen, 2008; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Thus, in the worst-case scenario, trying to enhance secondary status could result in both the actor's failure to increase their status in the secondary hierarchy and losing status in their primary hierarchy.

Whether an actor has achieved their current status by collaborating with a diverse set of partners or through repeated collaborations with a limited number of partners—in other words, through embedded ties (Baker, 1990; Uzzi, 1996)—influences the feasibility of taking actions to enhance secondary status. Embeddedness guarantees stable relationships at the cost of forgoing a certain amount of freedom (Marsden, 1981). What social actors gain from these constraining relationships are enhanced trust, suppression of opportunistic behavior, preferential access to information and opportunities (Uzzi, 1996), and a sense of social identity (Rao et al., 2000).

The flipside of these advantages is that embeddedness ensures its members' loyalty to the collective's norms and values by rewarding the compliant and punishing the deviant (Granovetter, 1985; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993). Therefore, to the degree that actors formed their current status positions, however inconsistent these are, through embedded relationships, they may fear those they are embedded with will see pursuing alternative opportunities as a betrayal. In contrast, actors who have more diversified relationships will enjoy greater latitude because no one will restrict their choice of activities and relationships, and they will experience less social identity loss. Thus, status-inconsistent actors with embedded relationships may perceive greater risks from trying to enhance their secondary status.

However, we expect the constraining effects of embeddedness will differ depending on the status of the actor's primary hierarchy. Specifically, the constraints will be stronger for those attempting to enhance their standing in the more prestigious hierarchy. Embedded actors in the more prestigious hierarchy will be less concerned about damaging their embedded relationships because they may believe they can leverage their relatively higher global status (Acharya & Pollock, 2013) to rebuild their relationship base, if necessary (Podolny, 2005). Further, as discussed earlier, high-status actors have more freedom to violate norms without sanction (Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001) and less fear of status leakage (Castellucci & Ertug, 2010). Thus, embedded actors in the more prestigious hierarchy may be

granted more leeway by those with whom they are embedded (Rao et al., 2000). In contrast, embedded actors in the less prestigious hierarchy may be at greater risk of sanctioning (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Phillips et al., 2013). Actors in the more prestigious hierarchy may be more likely to sanction them for trying to improve their position (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Whyte, 1943), and the actors in the less prestigious hierarchy with whom they are embedded may also be more likely to sanction them for trying to “better” themselves (Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

In Hollywood, network ties are critical for various outcomes, ranging from continuing one’s career (Faulkner & Anderson, 1987) to winning awards (Cattani et al., 2014; Rossman et al., 2010). Thus, success can lead to repeated collaborations and greater embeddedness with a specific group of performers, writers, or directors (Sorenson & Waguespack, 2006). Coupled with the unequal status accorded to artistic and commercial values in Hollywood (Levy, 1989, 2001), our theory suggests that those with higher commercial status will be more constrained by their embedded relationships in pursuing artistic status than those who are higher in artistic status will be in pursuing commercial status. Thus:

Hypothesis 3a. Embeddedness in social interactions will weaken the positive effect of status inconsistency on the likelihood an actor will attempt to increase their status in their secondary status hierarchy.

Hypothesis 3b. The negative interaction effect hypothesized in Hypothesis 3a will be greater when the actor’s primary status hierarchy is less prestigious than their secondary status hierarchy.

METHODS

Data and Sample

We used the *Internet Movie Database* (IMDb) to collect data on films released in the United States during the period 1990–2015, including the films’ genres and the characteristics of their performers, directors, and writers. U.S. box office performance data were obtained from Box Office Mojo (www.boxofficemojo.com), an IMDb company. Since this database only goes back to 1980, we obtained 1970s’ box office data from WorldwideBoxoffice (worldwideboxoffice.com), a less comprehensive but still widely used database (e.g., Holbrook & Addis, 2007). Data on awards were obtained from the award-granting institutions’ websites. The institutions were selected based on their use in prior research

(Cattani et al., 2014), and we added the “Big Three” film festivals.⁴

We focused on U.S. films only because the United States is a major film producer—providing a sufficiently large pool of individuals and events—and we needed to bound our data collection so that it was tractable. Even within these boundaries, without proper screening criteria, sample size can easily become unmanageable and irrelevant observations can dilute the theoretical mechanisms at work. This is because the databases are comprehensive enough to include any individual who self-identifies as a performer—even aspiring performers who registered with the database to get their first casting (Jensen & Kim, 2015). Furthermore, even when using the list of released films to identify “real” screen performers, much of the growth in film releases is due to the increase in obscure films (Rossman et al., 2010). This is problematic because our hypotheses require performers be established enough that they may be invited to audition for certain films, which is a luxury for many of the performers in the population (Zuckerman, Kim, Ukanwa, & von Rittmann, 2003). We therefore used the following procedure.

Consistent with prior research, we excluded all documentaries, animated films, short films, and re-released classics from our sample (Cattani et al., 2014; Rossman & Schilke, 2014). Foreign language films were only included if they were produced in the United States, because this increased the likelihood that the performers, directors, and writers participating in the films would be involved in other U.S. films. This resulted in a list of 5,434 films. We then identified the top 10-billed cast members from these films, assuming that credit order reflects who played major roles. In prior studies, the number of performers chosen has varied from two (Jensen & Kim, 2015), to ten (Rossman et al., 2010), to the entire

⁴ In addition to the Oscars and the Golden Globes, we included the awards given by the professional guilds (i.e., the Screen Actors, Directors, and Writers Guilds of America) and the critics’ associations (i.e., National Society of Film Critics, New York Film Critics Circle, Los Angeles Film Critics Association, and Boston Society of Film Critics), because they affect the professionals’ standings in their communities. We also included Festival de Cannes (Cannes Film Festival), and the Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin (Berlin International Film Festival), and Mostra Internazionale d’Arte Cinematografica della Biennale di Venezia (Venice Film Festival)—which are widely accepted as the “Big Three” film festivals (Gaydos, 1998)—because their awards also confer considerable artistic status.

credited cast (Zuckerman et al., 2003). Choosing all performers was unnecessary, and would have resulted in the vast majority of the sample failing to reappear during our observation period.⁵

To further ensure that the performers in our sample regularly appeared on screen and could make choices about their career, we only included performers who appeared in at least one film every five years. To prevent mistakenly dropping influential performers, we included all performers who had appeared in more than 10 films throughout the 20-year observation period (i.e., 1996–2015) or more than five films during the first or second decades. Newly debuted performers who satisfied the above criteria were added to the sample throughout the observation period as soon as they made it into the top 10-credited roles for the first time, resulting in unbalanced panels. For example, Jennifer Lawrence debuted in *Garden Party* (2008) (credited 21st), but did not appear in her first top 10-credited role until 2011, when she appeared in *Winter's Bone*. She also appeared in her first top 10 box office movie, *X-Men: First Class*, in 2011, and won an Oscar for her role in *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012). We ultimately retained 1,191 out of the 19,639 performers who appeared in our sampled films.

Finally, we dropped performers whose status scores were zero or nearly zero, because, for the status-inconsistency mechanisms to trigger behavioral responses, actors must first have enough status to potentially experience status inconsistency. Thus, we ordered all the performers yearly based on their artistic and commercial status scores—computed through the method described in the next section—and dropped those who ranked below the median in both the artistic and commercial hierarchies. Those below median in only one of the hierarchies were retained. The criterion for dropping the performers ranged from the 263rd to 300th ranked performers (including ties) across the observation years for the artistic status hierarchy, and from the 280th to 336th ranked performers for the commercial status hierarchy. This yielded 1,081 performers and 13,793

performer–film observations from 1996 to 2015. After correcting for selection bias (discussed below), our final sample included 1,012 performers and 9,229 performer–film observations.

Determining Artistic and Commercial Status

Calculating performers' statuses, which we then used to develop our independent and dependent variables, involved several theoretical and empirical considerations. Thus, in this section, we describe how we measured artistic and commercial status, and, in the subsequent section, how these status measures were used to create our independent and dependent variables.

Research on status has theorized two major status-conferring mechanisms: certification and affiliation (Sauder et al., 2012). That is, an actor can accumulate status through directly achieving recognition from others—often manifested through winning certifications, awards, and elite designations (Merton, 1968; Jensen & Kim, 2015)—or by forming relationships with higher-status actors and benefiting from the affiliations (Pollock et al., 2015). Incorporating both mechanisms, we operationalized artistic and commercial status based on the collaboration ties among film professionals (performers, directors, and writers) during the previous five years, and the status-conferring events they experienced throughout their careers. We included directors and writers because affiliating with them can also confer status on performers, and their involvement was critical to creating our dependent variable. Thus, our status measures reflect performers' centrality in the film production network of directors, writers, and performers, weighted by individual- and film-level artistic and commercial achievements. Although we consider a variety of awards when assessing artistic status, performers only receive direct credit for best actor or actress and best supporting actor or actress awards. Similarly, directors receive direct credit for best director awards, and writers receive direct credit for the best original and adapted screenplay awards. Thus, non-acting awards only indirectly influence a performer's status via their affiliations with award-winning directors and writers. We used best picture awards to weight all types of professionals involved with the awarded film; however, if the same set of professionals collaborated on multiple films, we only used the award to weight their ties through the awarded film, and not their other collaborations.

We constructed two-mode networks wherein performers, directors, and writers are connected through

⁵ Occasionally, credits are presented in order of appearance or alphabetically. To rule out potential problems in our sampling caused by these exceptions, we randomly sampled 200 films and counted those in which performers with anonymous roles (e.g., Nurse #1) were included in the "top 10" credits. We found 12 films listing cast members by order of appearance, and none using alphabetical order. Further, in only three of the 12 films were the main characters listed beyond the first 10 credited roles.

the films they participated in during the five years prior to the focal year, with the nodes weighted by their commercial and artistic achievements. We transformed the two-mode networks into one-mode networks, which we used to compute degree centralities for all actors. To incorporate the long-lasting effect of status-enhancing events (Merton, 1968), we collected data about artistic and commercial achievements from 1970 onward and introduced yearly discounts to address the possibility that past achievements are less important than recent ones. For the artistic weights, we took both award nominations and wins into account, because several of the most prominent awards (e.g., Oscars, Golden Globes, and the Big Three festivals) announce nominations or runner-up awards that can be equivalent to winning other, less prominent awards. Thus, we assigned winning “Best Motion Picture,” “Best Leading or Supporting Actor or Actress,” “Best Director,” and “Best Original or Adapted Screenplay” or equivalent awards a value of “2,” and nominations and runner-up awards a value of “1.”

For the commercial weights, we used each film’s U.S. box office performance. Because some years have more and larger box office hits than others, we divided each film’s box office receipts by the yearly average, excluding their own score. This way, the weights capture how much better the films performed relative to others that year, thereby taking yearly film market differences into account. For instance, the top box office film in 1995 was *Batman Forever*, which performed around eight times better than the yearly average, while *Titanic* (1997) and *Avatar* (2009) generated box office receipts 24 and 23 times larger than their respective yearly averages. To avoid using redundant weights for the films and the professionals involved in them, we used box office receipts during the network-defining five-year window at the film level—similar to what we did with the best picture awards for the artistic weights—and used the box office receipts prior to the window at the individual level.

We normalized the weights among different types of nodes (i.e., performers, directors, writers, and films) by converting them to z scores. The resulting z scores were rounded to the nearest integer and added to the tie values to make the weighting mechanism more intuitive. Thus, ties to unweighted nodes equal the number of collaborations, while ties to weighted nodes have stronger effects on the performer’s status. For instance, if a performer had a single tie to someone with a weight of 4, the tie equals 5, whereas a tie to an unweighted node would equal 1. To ensure

that film-level weights were accounted for even in the one-mode networks, we tracked and added the weights of the films through which the collaboration occurred to the ties. Thus, even two collaborations between the same individuals will have differing weights, depending on the performance of the films that generated the collaborations.

Figure 1 provides an example. Figure 1a illustrates the two-mode networks, and Figure 1b presents the equivalent one-mode network. In our example, performer A’s artistic status is a function of *Film 1*’s Best Motion Picture Award or nomination and their collaborations with B, G, and W1, who have won awards or nominations in the past. The commercial status of A will be influenced by *Film 2*’s box office hit that year and a relationship with D, who appeared in a box office hit in the past. Thus, having ties with high-status others can boost a performer’s status, but not as much as experiencing status-increasing events oneself. That is, although A benefits from the artistic status of B and of W1, B and W1 will have higher artistic statuses than A because they are the award winners.

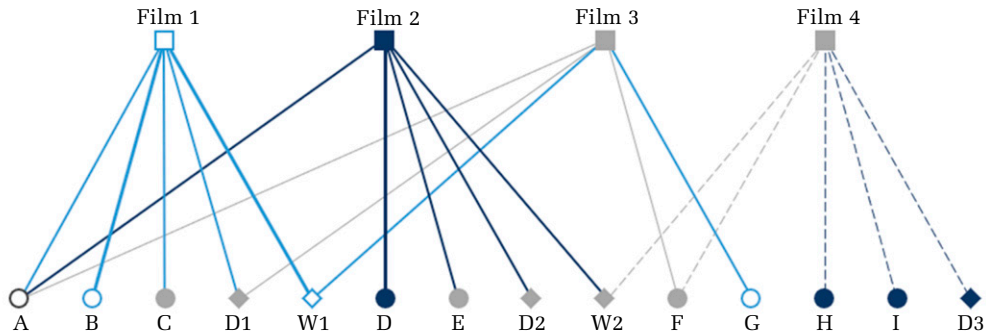
Finally, we used five-year rolling periods lagged by one year to construct performers’ status measures. For instance, we used the films that a performer appeared in and that were released during the 1990–1994 period to predict outcomes in 1996.⁶ For easier interpretation, and in order to make relative comparisons across years, we divided the status scores by the highest score in each status hierarchy every year (Jensen, 2008). Thus, a performer’s artistic and commercial status scores reflect how close or far their status was from the highest-status performer in the respective status hierarchies.

The five-year rolling period and weighting mechanism acknowledge the differing durabilities of certification-based and affiliation-based status. Status-increasing certification events have lasting effects, although discounted in the long run, on status. In contrast, the status boost from affiliating with high-status others diminishes more quickly as the collaborative experiences recede in time and the networks are redefined. If performers succeeded in leveraging their affiliative status to further increase their status directly—for instance, by securing better opportunities—they can maintain or even increase their status. Otherwise, the halo effect wanes. Finally, the amount of status leakage from high-status actors

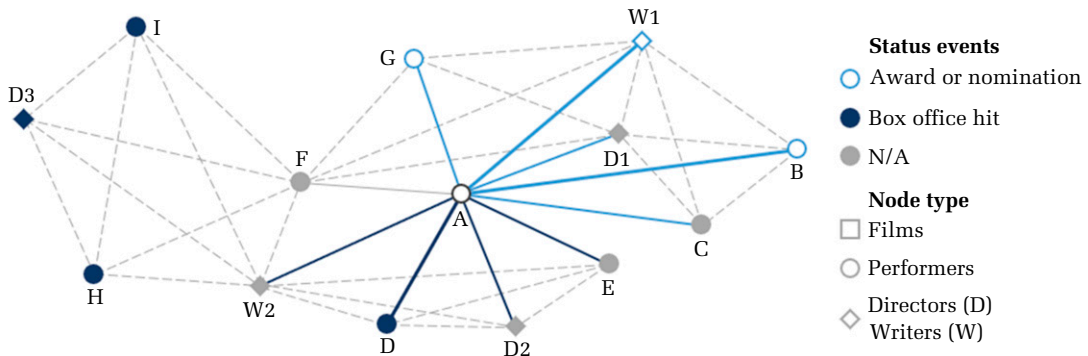
⁶ Examples of the highest-status Hollywood professionals in artistic and commercial hierarchies are presented in the online supplementary content (Appendix B), available here: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.11662743.v1>.

FIGURE 1
One-Mode Projection of a Two-Mode Film-By-Professional Network: (a) a Two-Mode Network of Films and Professionals; (b) a One-Mode Network among Film Professionals

a



b



Note: Dotted lines (- - -) represent ties not involving Performer A, thicker lines (-) represent ties weighted either by the professionals' achievements or by film performances, and the thickest lines (≡) represent ties weighted by both the professionals' and the film's records.

differs according to the outcome of the collaborative effort. In our example (see Figure 1), status leakage from B will be greater than that from G because *Film 1* ended up winning an award while *Film 3* did not. In a sense, the contributors' status matters to the degree that it enhances the quality of collaborative outcomes.

Dependent Variable

Secondary status enhancement. All films have the potential to affect both a performer's commercial

and artistic status. Since our focus is on whether a performer is more likely to appear in films that can enhance their status in their secondary hierarchy, we created a binary variable coded "1" when performers appeared in a film that could enhance their secondary status based on the status of the crew involved, and "0" otherwise.

We operationalized performers' appearances in films that could enhance their secondary status using the status profiles of the directors and writers (which we labeled the films' "crews") involved in the films. Due to the highly uncertain nature of films' artistic

and commercial performance prior to their release (Eliashberg et al., 2006), performers are not likely to know *ex ante* how artistically or commercially successful a particular film will be. Since status embodies expectations about an actor's *ex post* outcomes (Podolny, 2005), performers are thus likely to assess the artistic or commercial status of the films' crews when determining whether joining a film will enhance their primary or secondary status. This is because the crews are in charge of the creative aspects of film-making (Baker & Faulkner, 1991) and are involved in the film production process from its earliest stages (Eliashberg et al., 2006), sometimes even before the projects secure investments and receive "green lights." On the other hand, performers are typically cast later in the process, where casting directors play a significant role in finding performers that fit the director's criteria (Zuckerman et al., 2003).⁷

Specifically, in a given film in which the focal performer had appeared, we identified the crew member or members with the highest artistic and commercial status and compared their status with the focal performer's secondary status. If a crew member possessed higher status than the focal performer in their secondary status hierarchy, the film was treated as contributing to the performer's secondary status. Thus, the same film enhances the artistic status of some performers and the commercial status of others, depending on their respective status positions. However, in cases in which the focal performer was of lower status than the crew in both the artistic and commercial hierarchies, it is hard to discern whether the performer was responding to status inconsistency or enhancing their primary status. To address this issue, films were only coded "1" when the crew member's highest status was in the performer's secondary hierarchy. This made our measure a conservative test of our hypotheses.

For example, the film *Ali* (2001) was directed by Michael Mann (artistic status = 0.08; commercial status = 0.06) and based on the script by Eric Roth (artistic status = 0.13; commercial status = 0.30) and three other writers. We used Roth as the comparative

referent because he had the highest status in both hierarchies among the crew. We considered Jamie Foxx's (artistic status = 0.10; commercial status = 0.08) appearance in the film an attempt to enhance his commercial status because Roth's commercial status was higher than Foxx's, and was also higher than Roth's own artistic status. In contrast, we did not consider Will Smith's (artistic status = 0.05; commercial status = 0.20) participation in the movie an attempt to boost his lagging artistic status, because, even though Roth had higher artistic status than Smith, he had even higher commercial status, making it hard to rule out the possibility that Smith was actually attracted to Roth's commercial status.

Independent Variables

Status inconsistency. We measured status inconsistency as the difference between a performer's artistic and commercial status each year. To test our hypotheses that the effects would differ depending on the direction of the status inconsistency (i.e., whether a performer's artistic status exceeded their commercial status or vice versa), we constructed two spline variables: (1) *artistic status > commercial status*, capturing the extent to which a performer's artistic (primary) status exceeded their commercial (secondary) status; and (2) *commercial status > artistic status*, capturing the extent to which a performer's commercial (primary) status exceeded their artistic (secondary) status. All observations take non-zero values for only one of the two variables, since status inconsistency can exist in only one direction. To make our results easier to interpret, we multiplied the variables by 100.⁸

High artistic or commercial status. Consistent with status's categorical nature (Acharya & Pollock, 2013; Jensen & Kim, 2015), we created two dummy variables that indicated whether a performer had high artistic or commercial status. We ordered performers each year based on their artistic and commercial status scores and coded the top 50 performers as "high status," which roughly corresponded to the top 10th to 25th percentiles, depending on the year and hierarchy. We examine the impact of different cutoff points on the sensitivity of our findings in the

⁷ It is possible that peer performers' status could also affect the focal performer's decision to appear in a film. However, the casting of performers unfolds over time, and it is impossible for us to know which performers were cast when, so it is difficult to know whether and how the casting of one performer influenced the casting of other performers. While there are a very small number of influential performers who are involved early in the process or from the beginning, this is exceedingly rare (Eliashberg et al., 2006).

⁸ In analyses included in the online supplement (Appendix A, available here: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.11662743.v1>), we also tested our directional status inconsistency hypotheses using polynomial regression (Edwards & Parry, 1993). The results were consistent with those reported here.

Robustness Tests section below. Using the continuous status scores was not feasible because of the collinearity caused by including the status variables and the differences between them in the models simultaneously (Belsley, Kuh, & Welsch, 2005).

Embeddedness. We measured embeddedness using a Herfindahl index of the unweighted version of the one-mode networks (Baker, 1990; Fischer & Pollock, 2004; Uzzi, 1996). This measure captured how concentrated a performer's collaboration network was. For example, if a performer collaborated five times with one partner, two times with another partner, and had three additional one-time collaborations within a given five-year period, their embeddedness in the network was $(0.5)^2 + (0.2)^2 + (0.1)^2 + (0.1)^2 + (0.1)^2 = 0.32$. A score of 1 meant that a performer collaborated with only one partner on all of their projects.⁹

Control Variables

We controlled for a variety of performer characteristics. Because establishing a foothold in the industry and regularly appearing in films is notable (Zuckerman et al., 2003), we controlled for *screen acting tenure* and *number of past film appearances* in the previous five years. Performers' specializations in certain genres also inform their industry identities, and typecasting is a common practice (Zuckerman et al., 2003). Thus, following Jensen and Kim (2015), we included *action* and *comedy* specializations in the model, because more films are produced in these genres. In addition, we also included a specialization in *dramas*, which tend to win more awards than comedies and action films (Rossman & Schilke, 2014). We computed the specialization scores based on *IMDb's* genre assignments for the films a performer appeared in during the five-year window. We aggregated the number of *IMDb's* genre assignments of the films a performer appeared in under action (action, adventure, crime, fantasy, sci-fi, and war), comedy (comedy, musical, and romance) and drama (dramas and biographies), respectively,¹⁰ and divided them by the total number of genres assigned to the films the performer

appeared in (Jensen & Kim, 2015). We also collected data on the performers' *gender*, to account for potential differences in role availability (Levy, 1989). But, as we will discuss, we employed it in the first-stage analysis predicting the likelihood of appearing in any film, since it did not significantly predict film choices aimed at enhancing secondary status.

We also included controls for the characteristics of films the performers had appeared in. These included the movies' average *past box office receipts* and *past ratings* of the movies performers appeared in during the prior five years. We included a performer's *prior ties with the crew* (i.e., directors and writers), because repeated collaborations are common in Hollywood (Faulkner & Anderson, 1987; Sorenson & Waguespack, 2006) and can affect the type of films pursued. Finally, a crew's absolute status can attract performers regardless of their concerns about their status inconsistencies. Consistent with our measure of *high artistic* or *commercial status*, we controlled for this possibility by including dummy variables coded "1" if crew members were among the top 50 high-status artistic or commercial film professionals in a given year (*high artistic-status* and *high commercial-status crews*) and "0" otherwise.

Analytic Strategy

Although our sampling procedures ensured some level of regularity in performers' film appearances, not all performers appeared every year. We allowed performers to stay in the observation set for up to five years after their last film appearance, even if they had no film appearances in a given year. Those who have more than a five-year gap between film appearances were dropped until they reappeared in a film. Including only those who appear every year would be misleading, because it disregards the unobserved factors that affect performers' abilities to appear in films, or the availability of opportunities. Yet, because we are only interested in performers who appear in films, we face potential issues of selection bias. Thus, we used two-stage models that predicted whether a performer was likely to appear in any film in the first stage, and then predicted their appearance in secondary status-enhancing films in the second stage.

Because our dependent variable was binary, we used the *heckprob* command in STATA 15, which generates a Heckman correction for probit models in which both stages predict binary outcomes. To account for multiple film appearances by the same performers in a year, we clustered the standard errors

⁹ We also tried ego network density and constraint as alternative operationalizations of embeddedness (Burt, 1992). They were correlated at .98 and .96 with our measure, and the results using the alternative measures were almost identical with those reported here.

¹⁰ We treated all other genres (e.g., westerns, horror, family, etc.) as the excluded category.

by performer. The first-stage model included all second-stage variables except for status inconsistency, their interaction terms, and crew-related variables. We used gender as the exclusion restriction, because it significantly affects opportunity availability (Levy, 1989) but not the likelihood of appearing in films that can enhance secondary status.¹¹ Being male, scoring high ratings in previous films, having appeared in many films, specializing in comedy, and possessing high artistic and commercial status have significant positive effects on the likelihood of appearing in a film, while tenure and embeddedness have significant negative effects.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for the variables. While most of the variables show low correlations, *embeddedness* and *past film appearances* are highly correlated at $-.76$. Thus, we regressed past film appearances on embeddedness and used the residuals from this regression as an instrument in our analyses. The correlations between *high artistic status* and *artistic status > commercial status* and between *high commercial status* and *commercial status > artistic status* are $.62$.¹² Nonetheless, mean variance inflation factors were below the threshold of 10 across all models, and individual variance inflation factors were also below 10, except for *artistic status > commercial status* and its interaction term with *high artistic status* in Models 3, 5, and 9. However, Allison

(2012) noted that multicollinearity can be “safely ignored” when “high [variance inflation factors] are caused by the inclusion of powers or products of other variables.” Further, the condition numbers of all models were below the threshold of 30 (Belsley et al., 2005). Thus, multicollinearity is not likely to be an issue in this study.

Table 2 presents the second-stage probit model results. Model 1 includes the control variables and Model 2 adds the main effects of the status inconsistency splines, which we used to test Hypotheses 1a and 1b that status inconsistency will increase the likelihood of appearing in a secondary status enhancing film, and that the positive effects of status inconsistency will be greater when the actor’s primary status is in the more prestigious hierarchy. As expected, when artistic status is higher than commercial status, status inconsistency significantly increases the likelihood of appearing in films that can enhance their secondary, commercial status ($p = .000$). However, status inconsistency significantly *decreases* the likelihood performers with higher commercial than artistic status will appear in films that can enhance their secondary, artistic status ($p = .013$). Thus, Hypothesis 1a is partially supported.

To test Hypothesis 1b, we compared the splines for *artistic status > commercial status* and *commercial status > artistic status*. Figure 2 illustrates the differences in the main effects of status inconsistency.¹³ The average marginal effects of status inconsistency—which ranged from 0 to 90.98 and 90.73, respectively, for *artistic status > commercial status* and *commercial status > artistic status*—associated with a one-unit increase is approximately 0.35% ($p = .000$) for the performers with higher artistic status, and -0.17% ($p = .012$) for performers with higher commercial status. The difference between the two average marginal effects is significant ($p = .000$), indicating that the effect of *artistic status > commercial status* is significantly more positive than the effect of *commercial*

¹¹ Following Certo, Busenbark, Woo, and Semadeni’s (2016) recommendations, we examined the strength of gender as the exclusion restriction. First, the correlations between the error terms of the first- and second-stage equations (ρ) and their alternates using Fisher’s Z transformation were all significantly negative ($p < .001$), suggesting that we correctly modeled the incompatible possibilities of failure to appear in any film and status-based choices of films. Second, the inverse Mills ratios computed from the models were weakly correlated with the independent variables not included in the first-stage models, where the highest correlation was $-.24$ with *artistic status > commercial status* in Model 1 of Table 2. Thus, we concluded that gender adequately serves as the exclusion restriction.

¹² In an unreported analysis, we used the residualized versions of *artistic status > commercial status* and *commercial status > artistic status* after regressing the former on *high artistic status* and the latter on *high commercial status*. The results remained the same as those reported here.

¹³ Interpreting marginal effects in nonlinear models requires selecting specific values because the effects differ at each data point. We held all other continuous variables at their means and discrete variables at their modes to plot our interactions. Because we have 19 dummy variables for 20 observation years, we created dummy variables for the periods 2001–2005, 2006–2010, and 2011–2015, treating 1996–2000 as the excluded category. The predicted probabilities were based on performers who are male appearing in films without high artistic- or commercial-status crews released in the 2011–2015 period. *High artistic status* and *High commercial status* were held at zero, except for the models testing their interaction effects.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Coefficients

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1 Secondary status enhancement	0.09	0.29															
2 Artistic status > Commercial status ^a	2.46	7.92	.04														
3 Commercial status > Artistic status ^a	7.65	10.55	-.09	-.22													
4 High artistic status	0.12	0.32	-.03	.62	-.10												
5 High commercial status	0.11	0.31	-.06	.01	.62	.27											
6 Embeddedness	0.02	0.01	.14	-.09	-.21	-.22	-.22										
7 Screen acting tenure	19.85	10.22	-.04	.01	.18	.09	.15	.05									
8 Past film appearances	5.41	2.28	-.11	.18	.27	.35	.36	-.76	-.05								
9 Action specialization	0.29	0.18	-.04	-.10	.21	-.04	.06	-.02	.04	.03							
10 Comedy specialization	0.27	0.19	-.03	-.05	-.02	-.08	-.03	-.04	-.13	.01	-.57						
11 Drama specialization	0.27	0.14	.11	.22	-.24	.17	-.03	.11	.03	-.04	-.45	-.24					
12 Past box office receipt	51.27	41.76	-.06	-.05	.24	.03	.13	.19	.01	-.08	.40	-.14	-.28				
13 Past ratings	6.50	0.53	.10	.20	-.15	.19	.02	.21	.03	-.07	.00	-.31	.44	.24			
14 Prior ties with crew	0.18	0.61	-.03	.00	.09	.02	.08	-.03	-.01	.07	.09	.03	-.12	.18	.03		
15 High-artistic-status crew	0.03	0.17	.26	.07	.00	.09	.05	-.02	.00	.04	-.01	-.02	.05	.00	.05	.03	
16 High-commercial-status crew	0.03	0.18	.07	.00	.06	.02	.08	-.02	.02	.01	.00	.01	.00	.01	.00	.08	.25

Note: Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients were computed based on the sample entering the second stage ($n = 9,229$).

^a Because these variables are splines, we reported the means and standard deviations while holding their counterparts at zero to better describe our data.

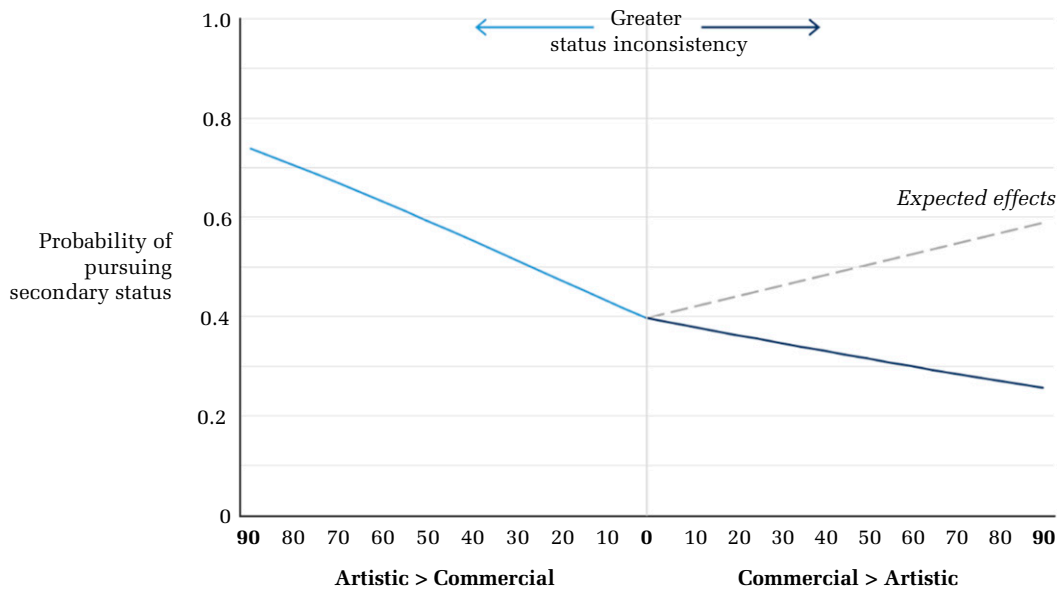
TABLE 2
Results of Second-Stage Heckman Models Predicting Behavioral Responses to Status Inconsistency

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Screen acting tenure	0.005*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)
Past film appearances	-0.062*** (0.011)	-0.062*** (0.011)	-0.063*** (0.011)	-0.059*** (0.011)	-0.061*** (0.011)	-0.062*** (0.011)	-0.071*** (0.011)	-0.067*** (0.011)	-0.064*** (0.011)
Action specialization	-0.222† (0.126)	-0.171 (0.124)	-0.142 (0.123)	-0.165 (0.128)	-0.139 (0.126)	-0.141 (0.124)	-0.176 (0.126)	-0.149 (0.125)	-0.134 (0.126)
Comedy specialization	-0.383*** (0.107)	-0.352*** (0.106)	-0.331** (0.104)	-0.337*** (0.109)	-0.332*** (0.107)	-0.327*** (0.105)	-0.336*** (0.108)	-0.333** (0.106)	-0.333** (0.107)
Drama specialization	0.344* (0.168)	0.296† (0.166)	0.243 (0.165)	0.269 (0.170)	0.228 (0.168)	0.272 (0.166)	0.276 (0.169)	0.264 (0.167)	0.222 (0.168)
Past box office receipts	-0.002*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001** (0.000)	-0.001** (0.000)	-0.001** (0.000)	-0.001** (0.000)	-0.001** (0.000)	-0.001** (0.000)	-0.001** (0.000)
Past ratings	-0.219*** (0.019)	-0.226*** (0.019)	-0.237*** (0.019)	-0.221*** (0.020)	-0.232*** (0.020)	-0.229*** (0.019)	-0.232*** (0.020)	-0.232*** (0.019)	-0.234*** (0.020)
Prior ties with crew	-0.028 (0.021)	-0.028 (0.020)	-0.025 (0.018)	-0.033 (0.021)	-0.030 (0.020)	-0.026 (0.018)	-0.029 (0.020)	-0.027 (0.019)	-0.029 (0.019)
High-status artistic crew	0.988*** (0.081)	0.995*** (0.079)	0.974*** (0.075)	1.040*** (0.085)	1.008*** (0.080)	0.976*** (0.077)	1.004*** (0.082)	0.984*** (0.079)	1.001*** (0.080)
High-status commercial crew	0.090† (0.054)	0.077 (0.051)	0.059 (0.047)	0.073 (0.055)	0.059 (0.050)	0.078 (0.048)	0.083 (0.053)	0.082 (0.050)	0.063 (0.050)
High artistic status	-0.245*** (0.053)	-0.473*** (0.072)	-0.318*** (0.067)	-0.464*** (0.073)	-0.322*** (0.069)	-0.463*** (0.068)	-0.462*** (0.072)	-0.458*** (0.069)	-0.336*** (0.069)
High commercial status	-0.248*** (0.064)	-0.107 (0.074)	-0.162* (0.071)	-0.404*** (0.097)	-0.379*** (0.090)	-0.114 (0.071)	-0.131† (0.076)	-0.126† (0.073)	-0.356*** (0.090)
Embeddedness	17.431*** (1.268)	16.740*** (1.267)	16.260*** (1.249)	16.305*** (1.282)	15.982*** (1.262)	14.753*** (1.302)	18.391*** (1.389)	16.114*** (1.469)	15.843*** (1.478)
Artistic status > commercial status		0.010*** (0.002)	0.036*** (0.005)	0.009*** (0.002)	0.033*** (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	0.010*** (0.002)	-0.001 (0.004)	0.025*** (0.007)
Commercial status > artistic status		-0.005* (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.014*** (0.003)	-0.009** (0.003)	-0.005* (0.002)	0.004 (0.003)	0.001 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.005)
Art. status ≥ com. status × high artistic status			-0.031*** (0.005)		-0.029*** (0.005)				-0.025*** (0.006)
Com. status > art. status × high commercial status				0.017*** (0.004)					0.011** (0.003)
Art. status > com. status × embeddedness						0.806*** (0.204)			0.668** (0.213)
Com. status > art. status × embeddedness									0.270 (0.220)
Log pseudolikelihood	-10584.20	-10562.28	-10541.00	-10547.63	-10531.67	-10552.16	-10555.53	-10549.54	-10529.85

Notes: $n = 9,229$ (1st stage = 13,793). Robust standard errors in parentheses (1,081 clusters).

† $p < .10$
 * $p < .05$
 ** $p < .01$
 *** $p < .001$

FIGURE 2
The Asymmetric Main Effects of Status Inconsistency: Greater Status Inconsistency



status > artistic status. Although we did not expect the negative coefficient for *commercial status > artistic status*, the results are consistent with our expectation that status inconsistency would have a greater positive effect on performers with higher status in the more prestigious hierarchy. Hypothesis 1b is therefore supported. We discuss the implications of the surprising finding for greater commercial status in the Discussion section.

Models 3 and 4 test Hypotheses 2a and 2b, which posited that high primary status would constrain the likelihood of behavioral responses to status inconsistency, and that the constraining effect would be greater for the more prestigious hierarchy. As expected, being high status in the artistic status hierarchy weakens the positive main effect of status inconsistency when *artistic status > commercial status* ($p = .000$). The left-side plot in Figure 3 illustrates this relationship. Non-high artistic status performers show a rapid increase in the likelihood of pursuing secondary status enhancement the greater their status inconsistency, while the likelihood for high artistic status performers is far more gradual. A one-unit increase in status inconsistency increases the likelihood by 1.3% on average for those without high artistic status ($p = .000$); for high-artistic-status performers, a one-unit increase in status inconsistency increases the likelihood by only 0.14% on average ($p = .009$). The difference between the two average marginal effects is

statistically significant ($p = .000$). These results support Hypothesis 2a.

However, Model 4 indicates that being high status in the commercial status hierarchy weakens the *negative* main effect of status inconsistency when *commercial status > artistic status* ($p = .000$). The right-side plot in Figure 3 illustrates this relationship. Non-high commercial status performers have a significant ($p = .000$) -0.47% decrease on average in the likelihood of appearing in artistic status-enhancing films for a one-unit increase in status inconsistency, and performers with high commercial status have a marginally significant ($p = .087$) 0.10% increase on average in the likelihood of secondary status enhancement. The difference between the two marginal effects is significant ($p = .000$). Although these results show that high commercial status weakens the negative main effect of status inconsistency on secondary status enhancement, we expected the effect to be negative rather than positive. These results do not support Hypothesis 2a, which is thus only partially supported.

Hypothesis 2b predicted that the negative moderating effect of high status in the primary status hierarchy would be greater for the more prestigious hierarchy. Since the moderating effect was negative for *artistic > commercial* and positive for *commercial > artistic*, our results support Hypothesis 2b. To assess whether the negative effect for artistic status was significantly greater, we compared

FIGURE 3
Interaction between Status Inconsistency and Artistic or Commercial Status; (a) Interaction Effect of Artistic Status; (b) Interaction Effect of Commercial Status

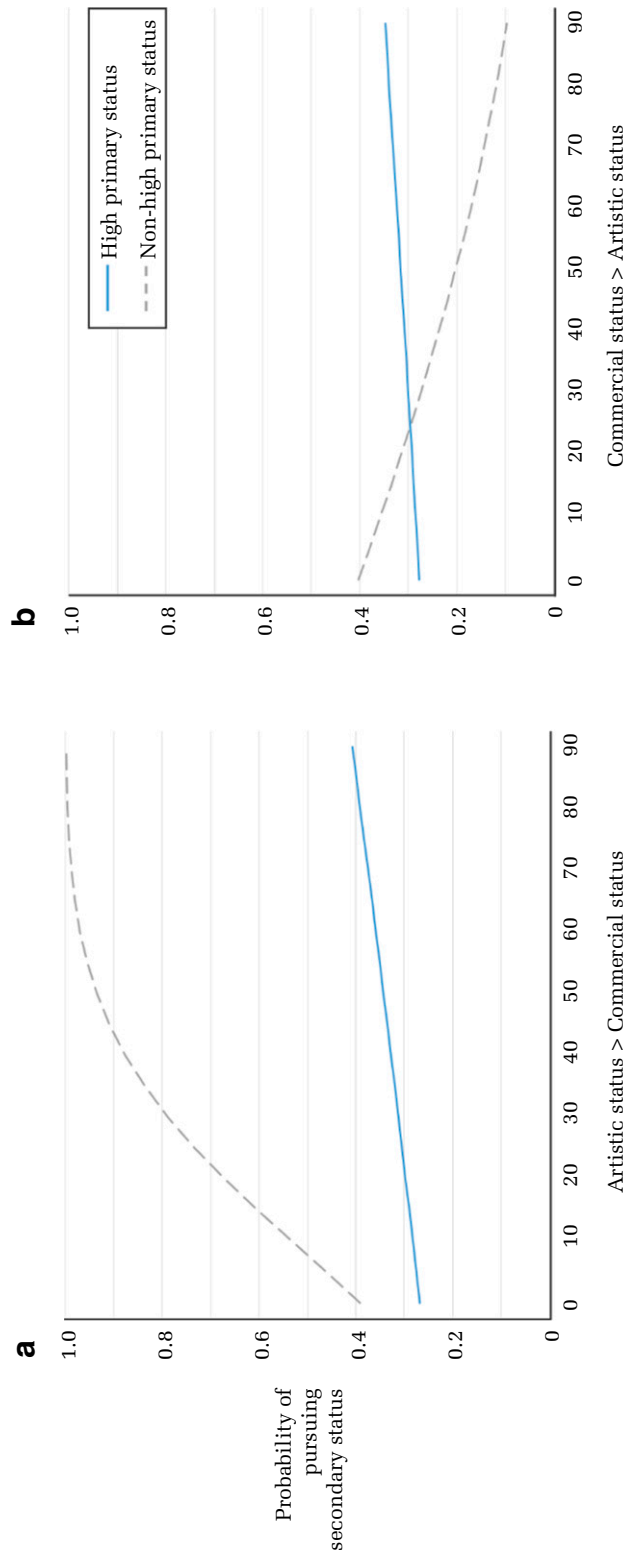
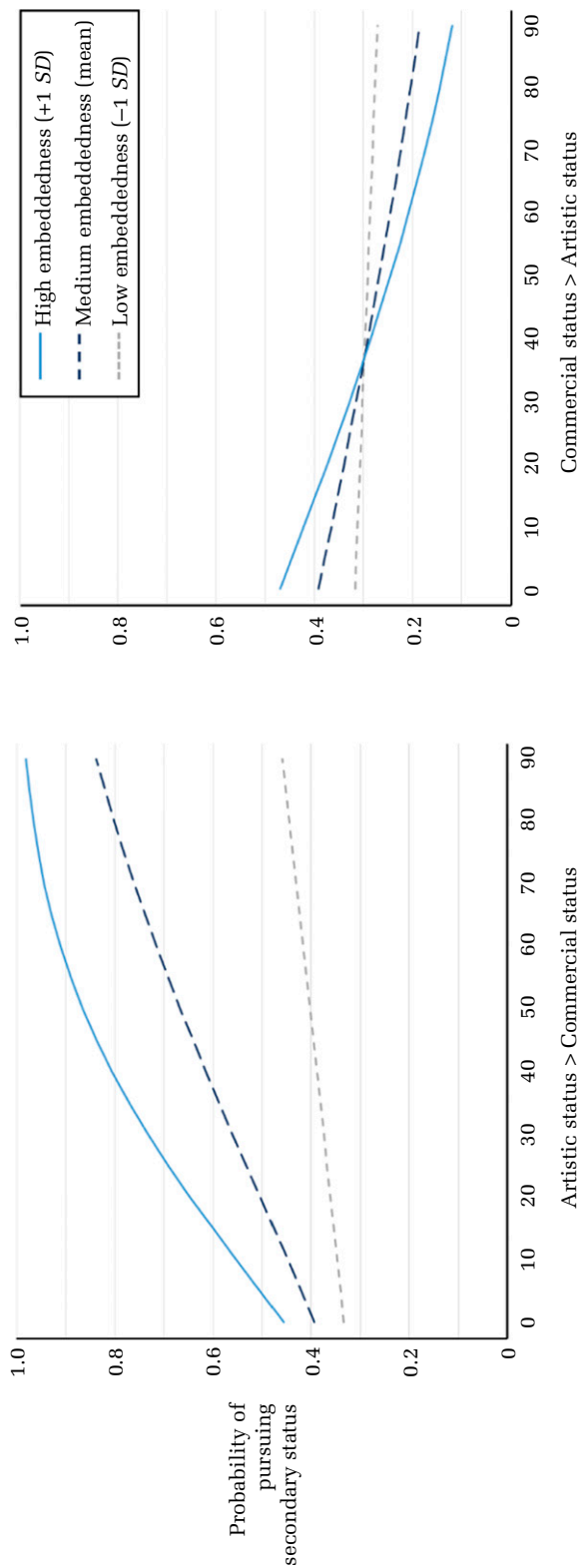


FIGURE 4
Interaction between Status Inconsistency and Embeddedness: Interaction Effects of Embeddedness



the marginal effects of the two interactions using the results in Model 5. High artistic status decreases the average marginal effect of *artistic status* > *commercial status* by -1.03% ($p = .000$) and high commercial status increases the average marginal effect of *commercial status* > *artistic status* by 0.43% ($p = .000$). The moderating effect of high artistic status is significantly more negative ($p = .000$). Thus, although the pattern of results was somewhat different than we expected, our findings nonetheless support Hypothesis 2b.

Models 6 and 7 test Hypotheses 3a and 3b that embeddedness weakens the relationship between status inconsistency and secondary status enhancement, and that the moderating effect would be greater when the actor's primary status was in the less prestigious status hierarchy. The results are again surprising. As Model 6 and the left plot of Figure 4 show, embeddedness *strengthens* the positive effect of status inconsistency on the likelihood of secondary status enhancement when *artistic status* > *commercial status* ($p = .000$). Thus, contrary to our expectations, performers with higher status in the more prestigious hierarchy have a higher likelihood of secondary status enhancement the more embedded they are. Status inconsistency increases the likelihood of appearing in a secondary status-enhancing film by approximately 0.89% per unit on average when embeddedness is high (one standard deviation above the mean) ($p = .000$) and by 0.15% on average when embeddedness is low (one standard deviation below the mean) ($p = .036$). These effects are significantly different from each other ($p = .000$).

However, Model 7 and the right plot of Figure 4 show that embeddedness amplifies the negative effect of status inconsistency when *commercial status* > *artistic status* ($p = .007$). Although the main effect is the opposite of what we expected, the negative interaction effect is consistent with our expectations. A one unit increase in status inconsistency reduces the likelihood of secondary status enhancement by -0.55% on average ($p = .001$) when embeddedness is high, but has a non-significant -0.03% ($p = .606$) average decrease in the likelihood of secondary status enhancement when embeddedness is low. Again, these marginal effects are significantly different ($p = .004$). Thus, Hypothesis 3a is partially supported.

Since the moderating effect was negative for *commercial* > *artistic* and positive for *artistic* > *commercial*, our results support Hypothesis 3b that embeddedness will have a greater dampening effect

when the primary status hierarchy is less prestigious. To assess whether the effect is significantly greater, we compared the marginal effects of the two interactions using the results in Model 8. The average marginal effect of *commercial status* > *artistic status* is -0.32% ($p = .056$), which is significantly more negative ($p = .000$) than the positive 0.61% ($p = .001$) average marginal effect when *artistic status* > *commercial status*. Thus, although the pattern of results was somewhat different than we expected, our findings nonetheless support Hypothesis 3b.

Robustness Tests

Sensitivity tests. One potential issue was our use of the top 50 performers in each status hierarchy to operationalize high status. To explore this further, we examined the impact of adopting the top 100, top 150, and top 200 as cutoff points, which resulted in 22.8%, 34.2%, and 48.1% of our observations having high artistic status, and 21.4%, 33.1%, and 46.2% of observations having high commercial status. While all the interaction coefficients were significant at $p < .01$ with the same signs as in our original analysis, the main effects of the status inconsistency variables remained significant only in the models using the top 100. In the models using the top 150, *commercial* > *artistic status* was not significant at the $p < .10$ level, but *artistic* > *commercial status* was significant ($p = .068$). In the models using the top 200, only the main effect of *commercial* > *artistic status* was significant ($p = .068$). The main effects of the status inconsistency variables recovered their statistical significance in the models using the top 200, but we do not believe treating almost half the observations as high status adequately reflects the construct.

We also examined the impact of treating status dichotomously (i.e., high status or not high status) by creating additional "middle status" dummy variables, coded "1" if a performer belonged to the status levels between the top 51 and top 200 each year in the two status hierarchies.¹⁴ The hypothesized effects were replicated for the high-status groups as well as the middle-status groups, with the coefficients for the former being larger than the latter. When we reran the models setting the middle-status categories

¹⁴ This resulted in 1,081 observations assigned to the high artistic status group, 3,356 to the medium artistic status group, and 4,792 to the low artistic status group. Similarly, 1,016, 3,244, and 4,969 observations were assigned to the high, middle, and low commercial status groups.

as the base groups, all the coefficients for the high-status groups were significant, except the interaction between *high commercial status* and *commercial > artistic status* ($p = .171$). That is, in most cases, the effects we hypothesized were significantly larger for the middle-status groups than for the low-status groups, and significantly larger for the high-status groups than for the middle-status groups. Overall, we conclude that our original specification properly captures the effect of high-status performers.

Endogeneity concerns. The largest endogeneity concern in our study was selection bias, which we addressed through our two-stage selection model. Another potential source of endogeneity was the extent to which increases in status in one hierarchy influenced changes in status in the other hierarchy. However, high artistic status and high commercial status were only correlated at .25, so just 6.5% of the variance in one measure can be explained by the other. Further, to the extent that status in one hierarchy affects status in the other hierarchy, it will only serve to decrease status inconsistency. Thus, endogeneity does not appear to be an issue in our study.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we considered how social actors respond to status inconsistencies across multiple hierarchies. We found that the prestige of the hierarchies in which the actors are higher and lower status affects the likelihood that they will attempt to enhance their secondary status. Actors whose primary status was in the more prestigious hierarchy were more likely to try and resolve their status inconsistency by enhancing their secondary status, while actors whose primary status was in the less prestigious hierarchy were less likely to pursue secondary status enhancement. We also found that being high status in the more prestigious hierarchy reduced the likelihood of trying to enhance secondary status in response to status inconsistency, while being high status in the less prestigious hierarchy attenuated the negative effects of status inconsistency on pursuing secondary status enhancement. Finally, embeddedness increased the likelihood of secondary status enhancement when an actor's primary status was in the more prestigious hierarchy and further decreased the likelihood when their primary status was in the less prestigious hierarchy.

While the logic underlying our hypotheses was generally supported, the actual patterns of relationships were somewhat surprising. Therefore, after

discussing the more general theoretical implications of our study, we explore the implications of our unexpected findings further.

Theoretical Implications

Our study makes several theoretical contributions to the status literature. First, our findings speak to an important question that has remained unanswered for several decades concerning whether and how positional inconsistencies across multiple status hierarchies affect social actors' behaviors (Lenski, 1954; Stryker & Macke, 1978). Although status has generated a prolific research stream in management since the 1990s (Piazza & Castellucci, 2014; Pollock et al., 2019), the assumption of single status hierarchies is rarely questioned. We contribute to recent research on multiple status hierarchies (e.g., Jensen & Wang, 2018; Phillips et al., 2013; Wang & Jensen, 2019) by arguing that the hierarchies themselves can be arranged hierarchically, based on their underlying values. Doing so provides a generalizable basis for determining whether a hierarchy of status hierarchies exists within a broader social system, providing insights into why social actors may behave differently in the face of the same absolute level of status inconsistency—a conundrum that derailed earlier research on multiple status hierarchies.

Recent work also suggests that status inconsistency can exist across voluntarily entered horizontal market categories with unique status systems (Sharkey, 2014)—such as industries (Jensen et al., 2011; Jensen & Wang, 2018; Wang & Jensen, 2019)—that can put corporate-level status at risk. Our theoretical explanation addresses this situation, as well. By focusing on the values underlying the status hierarchies, our theory can be used to explain behaviors in situations such as this, where exit is an option for resolving status inconsistencies, and in situations such as ours, where exit is not an option. The theoretical mechanisms driving behavior are the same; the only things that differ are the options available to actors for resolving the inconsistency.

Further, how actors negotiate their status in accordance with the value system underlying their social context need not govern all aspects of their behavior. Early studies in sociology acknowledged this distinction; while multiple status indicators (e.g., income, occupation, education, ethnicity, etc.) may be inconsistent, the sense of status inconsistency may only be activated in contexts in which these indicators collide, similar to a “switch—dead or alive depending on whether or not there is

something behind it to give it a role to play” (Stryker & Macke, 1978: 67). Thus, inconsistent rankings across different status hierarchies may or may not create pressure to resolve the inconsistency, depending on whether the hierarchies are based on different values.

A second theoretical contribution is that we showed being high status in the actor’s primary status hierarchy affects how they respond to status inconsistency, and, in doing so, we addressed the paradox that high status can be both liberating and constraining (Bothner et al., 2012; Castellucci & Ertug, 2010; Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001; Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014). By considering how a hierarchy’s prestige affects an actor’s global status (Acharya & Pollock, 2013), we argued that high status would limit the pursuit of secondary status when it makes the actor globally high status, but it both motivates and enables them to act when they are high status in a less prestigious hierarchy, and thus have the potential to gain in global status.

This finding speaks to the confusing effects of status on latitude of action. While prior research has focused on low-status actors’ constraints and the ways they attempt to overcome them (e.g., Castellucci & Ertug, 2010; Pollock et al., 2015), much weaker consensus exists on what determines constraints on high-status actors’ latitude to act (Gould, 2002). Adding to recent findings showing that heightened visibility can trap high-status actors (Graffin, Bundy, Porac, Wade, & Quinn, 2013; Kovács & Sharkey, 2014), we argued that high-status actors’ fundamental motives to maintain and enhance their status (Anderson et al., 2015) not only makes them complacent (Bothner et al., 2012), it also makes them wary of acting to enhance their secondary status if doing so threatens their primary status.

Finally, prior research has also suggested that contextual factors might affect actors’ responses to status inconsistency (Galtung, 1966; Meyer & Hammond, 1971). We proposed that an actor’s social embeddedness is an important contextual factor that can influence efforts to enhance secondary status. Moving beyond the paradoxical feature of embeddedness, that it engenders trust at the cost of constraining freedom to act (Granovetter, 1985; Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993), we argued that embeddedness could alter an actor’s perceptions of their status inconsistency and the perceived difficulties in resolving it by enhancing their secondary status. Our finding that embeddedness facilitates pursuing secondary status enhancement by those in

the more prestigious hierarchy while deterring it by those in the less prestigious hierarchy suggests that the role of embeddedness as an enabler of or a constraint on actors’ behavior depends on the broader social context within which embeddedness occurs.

Possible Explanations of the Surprising Findings

Our unexpected findings primarily stem from the fact that the main effect of status inconsistency is positive when artistic status exceeds commercial status, but negative when commercial status exceeds artistic status. This suggests the effect of hierarchy-level prestige is even more substantial than we theorized and predicted—actors whose primary status is in the less prestigious hierarchy are not just less positively inclined to attempt to reduce their status inconsistency, they are actually inhibited from doing so. This finding is consistent with our theory that internalizing the socially accepted superiority of their secondary status hierarchy may either reduce feelings of relative deprivation, because they do not “deserve” higher status in the more prestigious hierarchy (Meyer & Hammond, 1971), or increase the perceived threat of resistance from actors in the more prestigious hierarchy who see them as undeserving (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Whyte, 1943). However, it also hints at an alternative response mechanism: cognitive adjustment to status inconsistency.

Cognitive dissonance can be resolved through purely cognitive processes of readjustment (Festinger, 1957). Thus, status-inconsistent actors can also “cognitively adjust” to their status inconsistency by focusing solely on their primary status hierarchy and reducing the importance—in their minds—of their standing in the secondary hierarchy (Berger et al., 1992; Lenski, 1966). In doing so, they reduce the dissonance they experience, and thus their motivation to address their status inconsistency. Those whose primary status is in the more prestigious hierarchy, in contrast, may be less likely to cognitively adjust for the reasons discussed above, and instead be more likely to take actions that enhance their secondary status. This process does not require conscious decision-making, and can occur without the actor even realizing it.

Our findings regarding the moderating effects of high primary status provide some further support for this notion. As shown in Figure 3b, the negative relationship between status inconsistency and attempting to improve secondary status is attenuated when the actor’s primary status is in the less prestigious

hierarchy. This finding is consistent with our theory that high-status actors, even in less prestigious hierarchies, may believe they deserve higher status in the other hierarchy, or see attaining it as more feasible; thus, they may be less likely to cognitively adjust.

Because we cannot measure cognitive adjustment with our data, we cannot determine whether non-action is because an actor does not experience dissonance, experiences it and cognitively adjusts, or experiences dissonance and continues to suffer without acting. Indeed, it is likely that all three explanations can be at work at the same time across different actors. However, if actors simply do not experience dissonance, then there would be no main effect—positive or negative—for the different kinds of status inconsistency. Our findings suggest actors are experiencing dissonance; but we do not know if they are cognitively adjusting or continuing to suffer. Future research should continue to explore these relationships and the cognitive mechanisms at work.

Another surprising result is that embeddedness strengthens the positive effect of status inconsistency on enhancing secondary status when primary status is in the more prestigious hierarchy. We can think of two possible explanations. First, members of higher-status social categories can be more tolerant of deviant behaviors among their own (Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001), and embedded ties among elite actors may make them even more reluctant to sanction each other for fear of sowing discord in the group (Kish-Gephart & Campbell, 2015). If so, embeddedness among those whose primary status is in the more prestigious hierarchy may function as social capital that they can leverage in pursuing behaviors that violate accepted norms.

Second, we argued that the sense of relative deprivation is greater for those with higher artistic status and lower commercial status because they are likely to think they deserve the latter, given their higher global status (Jensen & Kim, 2015). Given that status positions are the outcomes of prior relationships (Pollock et al., 2015; Sauder et al., 2012), performers with relatively higher artistic status may decide their relative deprivation is the result of their embedded ties. If this is the case, they may be motivated to sever existing ties and reduce their embeddedness in order to resolve their status inconsistency.

Practical Implications

While managers recognize and deploy status as a social approval asset (Pollock et al., 2019), our findings suggest that they need to consider their standing

in a variety of different status hierarchies that value different characteristics (Jensen et al., 2011). These different values may be reflected in different stakeholder audiences, or in the firm's relative standing in different industries or markets (Podolny, 2005). At the corporate level, firms can seek to enhance their global status by withdrawing from status hierarchies in which they rank low, as previously suggested (Durand & Vergne, 2015; Wang & Jensen, 2019). In contexts where different values accord them different statuses, firms may face greater pressure in managing their statuses when the prestige of their primary hierarchy determines the available options. Awareness of the conflicting pressures their relative statuses put on them, and how their primary status and embedded ties can enable or inhibit the options available, can influence their strategic initiatives and assessments of whether it is more productive to invest in enhancing their secondary status, or to focus on enhancing or maintaining their primary status.

Boundary Conditions, Generalizability, and Limitations

As is the case with all studies, ours has limitations. The first limitation is the generalizability of our context. We have shown our theory is generalizable to contexts in which multiple values underlie different status hierarchies, but our context may still be somewhat idiosyncratic. However, management research has long benefited from studying unconventional contexts (e.g., Bothner et al., 2012; Jensen & Kim, 2015; Kovács & Sharkey, 2014; Zhao & Zhou, 2011). Our setting also has the unique advantage that competing values that create multiple status hierarchies are manifested in the industry's structure, performance criteria, and career paths (Baker & Faulkner, 1991; Holbrook & Addis, 2007; Levy, 2001; Rossman & Schilke, 2014; Zuckerman & Kim, 2003). Further, the significance of the status-conferring events and social networks enabled us to capture how status is constructed in Hollywood (Sauder et al., 2012). However, future research should be conducted in contexts wherein status orderings are not as stark, or are based on different values.

Another limitation is that we cannot know what opportunities the performers were offered, which roles they turned down, and which they actively pursued but did not get. We can only observe the films they appeared in. However, the status of the directors and writers involved in a film are an important factor influencing performers' decisions,

and, because we structured the dependent variable to reflect whether the film would enhance the actor's status in their secondary status hierarchy, the outcome we theorize about is clear, even if we cannot observe all the factors that can influence it. Further, although other performers might also affect a performer's status, the significance of directors' and writers' roles in determining films' natures and content and the temporal precedence of their involvement make focusing on their status a reasonable approach. Future research in contexts where individual-level factors and decision processes can be observed, and where dynamic research designs (e.g., Elberse, 2007) that can capture the sequence in which relationships form can be employed, would be valuable. Finally, future research can also explore other questions, such as the relative value of status-consistent and status-inconsistent actors or whether status increases in one hierarchy affect status in other hierarchies.

CONCLUSION

Focusing on multiple status hierarchies and status inconsistency across hierarchies can provide valuable insights for the status literature, and we hope our study attracts more attention to the topic. Alain de Botton (2004: 7) claimed, in his book *Status Anxiety*, that:

People who hold important positions in society are commonly labelled "somebodies," and their inverse "nobodies"—both of which are, of course, nonsensical descriptors, for we are all, by necessity, individuals with distinct identities and comparable claims on existence . . . Those without status are all but invisible . . . their complexities trampled upon and their singularities ignored.

In this study, we highlight the fallacy of treating actors as "nobodies" who are actually "somebodies" in other communities. Ignoring the existence of multiple status hierarchies may result in failing to recognize how individuals' relative standing in different hierarchies affects whether and how they pursue, negotiate, and maintain status in their lives.

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