Low-Status Compensation:

A Theory for Understanding the Roots and Trajectory of Violence

P.J. Henry

DePaul University and the University of Bielefeld

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An African-American youth in an inner city stabs a rival gang member to death. An Al Qaeda operative in Afghanistan organizes and carries out a terrorist attack against a Western target. A white male in the American South strikes another after being insulted. A postal worker murders several fellow employees in a shooting spree in the workplace. A South American gang attacks a government installation. On the surface each of these acts of violence is completely different from the next, and each appears to involve different causes for explaining that particular violent act. However, each of these acts of violence is committed by someone with lower status in some context, and that person's low status may play an important role in driving the violent act. Each of these examples theoretically share similar mechanisms that may form an important root cause for the violent act, and may share the same theoretical solution for preventing that act of violence. This chapter is designed to present a new psychologically based theory called *low-status compensation* that was created in part to bring an understanding of shared causal mechanisms behind diverse and seemingly unrelated acts of violence.

The theory of low-status compensation is broad, designed to explain a wide range of behavioral outcomes. However, here I will focus specifically on its relevance to understanding violence through the lens of control mechanisms. The basic thesis of this chapter is that *some violence can be explained as an effort on the part of lower-status individuals to regain some control over their worth as individuals.*

The chapter is organized as follows. To begin, I will situate my epistemological position within a psychological approach to science, which is unique compared to the other contributors to this text. Next, I will lay out the claims I make concerning the theory of low-status

compensation and its relationship to violence. I conclude by suggesting that some violence in society may be prevented by recognizing these psychological needs and attending to them in an individual or group before the act of violence occurs.

<u>Control and Violence from a Psychological Perspective</u>

This work is contextualized within my particular scientific perspective. As a psychologist, I come from a unique approach compared to the other contributors of this text in that my focus is on the emotional and motivational effects on individual behavior. My goal is to present a single set of psychological mechanisms as they may play a role in many forms and instances of violence. Conversely, my goal is *not* to examine a single form or instance of violence in order to explore the several mechanisms involved in it.

Put concretely, I make a case for how psychological mechanisms involved in low-status compensation theory may explain some of the variability in gang violence, prison violence, bar fights, school and workplace shootings, some forms of terrorism, and even political rebellions. That objective may sound excessively ambitious, but it is not when considering that my goal is not to explain all the reasons for these forms of violence. Violence is determined by innumerable multiple causes, including socialization, exposure to violent media, psychopathology, heat, and the presence of guns, to name just a few of the psychologically proposed influences (see Anderson & Bushman, 2002, for a review of other psychological mechanisms). I focus on just one potential influence, which is not meant to be incompatible with any of these other influences. I do not suggest that my theoretical perspective explains most forms of violence, or even most of a particular type of violence. In this way, I position myself within a different scientific approach compared to some of my colleagues here who focus on

multiple causes as they relate to a particular form of violence, such as school shootings, *or* terrorism, *or* violence triggered by state-failures, etc.

What I do share with most of my colleagues is our definition of violence: behavior that is "aimed at inflicting damage, injury, or death," upon another human being or several human beings, and "which is thus exercised openly and in most cases deliberately" (Haupt, Heitmeyer, Kaletta, & Kirschner, p. xx, this text). This definition of violence is useful from a psychological perspective because it shares some of the key components of social-psychological definitions of violence and aggression: behavior that has the immediate intention to cause extreme harm against another (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). Consequently, I examine causal explanations that concern the same outcomes defined in the same way as most of the contributors to this text.

However, my approach to the causal explanations and their relationship to control is where I may depart somewhat because of my interest in psychological and individual-motivational factors. In particular my approach is unique because it concerns not control of some individuals over other individuals, but of control of individuals over self-regulation processes within themselves. One core assumption of this approach is that individuals fundamentally wish to see themselves as meaningful and worthy people, and that threats to that view of the self need to be effectively managed and controlled. Violence against those who threaten one's sense of worth may be one such means some people (here, people who have lower status) may use to help regain control over their self-worth. Of course, violence may not be an especially wise strategy for regaining control over one's self-worth, but these processes are not thought to be especially logical.

Consequently, the perspective here is about the causes of violence that are ultimately rooted in loss of control, but critically, control as conceptualized independently of violence.

Here I do not refer to loss of control over violence, control as a means to contain violence, control as a trigger of violence, nor violence as a cause of losing control. Control here is specifically concerned with control over conceptualizing oneself as a worthy and meaningful person, which may trigger violence, particularly toward targets who hinder or threaten low-status individuals from regaining control over their sense of worth.

<div align="center">The General Theory of Low-Status Compensation</div>

The focus here concerns the relationship between control and violence through the lens of low-status compensation theory. The basic tenets of the theory are briefly as follows: Social relationships put many people in low-status social positions that threaten their sense of worth as human beings. That threat must be managed, controlled, or compensated for in some fashion, including the vigilant defense of one's existing sense of personal worth. Specific to this chapter, this vigilant defense is likely to trigger violent reactions particularly against those who threaten that worth. These ideas are elaborated in detail next.

Low-Status Individuals Receive Social Information that Damages Their Worth

The fact that we get information about who we are from others in society is an old sociological idea that has its roots in the "looking glass self" (Cooley, 1902), reflected appraisals (Mead, 1934), and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). The basic idea is that we form the core of who we are as well as our sense of overall worth based on our perception of how others in the world react to us, or what they directly tell us about ourselves. This perception of others' reactions is not loosely interpreted as others' subjective take on our particular value, but as what appears to be an objective reality that we adhere to with seriousness (Hardin & Higgins, 1996).

Importantly, some of this information about our worth in society comes from references to our social status in society. Sources of status can come from a wide range of social

arrangements, including interpersonal relationships, intragroup relationships, and intergroup

relationships (cf. Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003).   Many interpersonal relationships are

hierarchically ordered (boss to employee, society president to society member, breadwinner

partner to housekeeper partner, etc.) and contain information about our expected roles based on

that hierarchical relationship (see, e.g., Eagly, 1987). A homemaker who does not earn money or

make important decisions in a traditional marriage may internalize her relatively low status or

value in that relationship into her overall sense of personal worth. Likewise, someone who

cleans the bathroom at a corporation may internalize the relatively low value that is given such

roles.

Additionally, information about our personal worth might come from the hierarchical

arrangement of groups in society. Some groups in society have higher, more dominant status and

others have lower status (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The lower status of a group is thought to be

directly related to its value in a society (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006), which is why the term

"devalued" is often used to describe stigmatized groups in society (e.g., Major & O'Brien, 2005;

Miller & Kaiser, 2001). In American society, for example, men as a group are valued more than

women, whites more than blacks, longstanding citizens more than recent immigrants, Christians

more than atheists or Muslims, higher class people more than lower class people, etc.

Because a great deal of our sense of self comes from our social identities, the value of the

groups to which we belong is integrated into our value as a person based on the hierarchical

ordering of the groups we belong to. There has been a great deal of thought and study to the toll

that being a member of a low-status group can have on peoples' sense of their social value

(Allport, 1954; Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Rosenberg & Pearlin, 1978).[1] If the somewhat

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[1] The toll here is thought to be toward a person's sense of worth, not to their self-esteem. Concerning self-esteem, the evidence suggests the opposite pattern, that low-status group members often express quite high self-esteem (Crocker & Major, 1989), a point clarified later.

controversial implicit associations test (IAT, in common use in psychology research) tells us anything, it is that culture provides us information about the relative evaluations of groups in a society as "good" or "bad," such that the positive associations toward high-status groups in society and negative associations toward lower-status groups in society may indicate those groups' relative value in society (Karpinski & Hilton, 2001; Uhlmann, Brescol, & Paluck, 2006).

<u>Compensation for Threats to Self-Worth</u>

To this point, it has been proposed that people who are lower in status based on their interpersonal relationships, their position in organizations, or their position as a member of low-status group in society, will suffer threats to their personal worth based on their lower status. What is proposed next is that this threat to personal worth needs to be controlled or compensated for in some fashion for healthy mental functioning. Although a great deal of research in the stigma literature in social psychology focuses on direct coping with consciously appraised, acute hits to the self (e.g., Major & O'Brien, 2005; Miller & Kaiser, 2001), the theory of low-status compensation suggests that indirect strategies are sometimes used to compensate for long-term derogation of the self. Compensation here is defined as "action that aims to make amends for some lack or loss in personal characteristics or status; or action that achieves partial satisfaction when direct satisfaction is blocked" (English & English, 1958, cited in Bäckman & Dixon, 1992, p. 259). This definition directly and precisely invokes the idea of a threat or loss that is indirectly repaired in some fashion.

The idea of compensating for blows to the self has also had a long history in the social sciences. Early clinical and personality psychologists theorized about compensations that take place for insufficiencies to the self, when the self-actualization or personal growth process is disrupted (Adler, 1917; Rogers, 1980) or when one faces an "existential vacuum" (Frankl, 1963).

Later social psychologists theorized that in the face of failures or threats to self-integrity, people will be motivated either to directly tackle a threat or indirectly repair the self through means like self-affirmation (Sherman & Cohen 2006; Steele, 1988). Not doing so can lead to negative emotional consequences for anyone (Higgins, 1987), but managing threats to the self becomes a task of special importance for those who already are in a state of threatened self-worth (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997; Simon et al., 1998).

An individual can control threats to personal value that accompany lower status using a widely diverse set of strategies. For example, one does not have to try to increase one's status in some fashion. Rather, other abstract resources can serve to replace status for reestablishing personal worth. Social exchange theories, and in particular resource exchange theory, can be particularly helpful for understanding the flexibility involved in self-repair.

Resource exchange theory established that various resources that were ostensibly quite different could be exchanged with a sense of equality (Foa, 1971; Foa, Converse, Tarnblom, & Foa, 1992; Foa & Foa, 1974). The theory stipulates, for example, that in interpersonal relationships love, information, money, goods, and services can be exchanged for status, with varying values placed upon each of these resources depending on a variety of factors (scarcity of the resource, the immediacy of the payoff, etc.; Brinberg & Wood, 1983; Foa, 1971; Turner, Foa, & Foa, 1971). Similarly, equity theorists have capitalized on the flexibility of what consistutes rewards in interpersonal relationships (Walster, Berschied, & Walster, 1973). The relevance here is that multiple abstract resources can serve the same function in an interpersonal exchange, and that multiple abstract sources of personal value can serve to compensate for threats to worth that accompany being a low-status individual.

This theoretical idea, that one's sense of worth and value can come from a variety of abstract sources that can serve the same function, leads to a wide range of strategies that those who are lower in status can use to compensate for their lower status. These strategies might include having closer family relationships, having higher levels of religiosity, or other such strategies that aim to restore personal value and worth (or remove threats against them). In each of these strategies is an empirically testable hypothesis about differences between high- and low-status individuals in these compensation strategies that serve to protect self-worth. Put simply, lower-status individuals are expected to engage in these strategies more than higher-status individuals. The compensation strategy that is particularly relevant to violence concerns a special vigilance toward self-protection that is expected of lower-status individuals.

<u>Low-Status Vigilance Toward Self-Protection</u>

The stigma literature in social psychology shows that those who are members of lower-status groups are vigilant to varying degrees about threats to the self that may come from their low status (Kaiser, Vick, & Major, 2006; Mendoza-Denton et al., 2002). Consequently, those who are lower in status may be particularly invested in defending themselves against such threats.

A growing literature is addressing this idea. For example, those who are lower in status may be particularly interested in receiving respect, recognition, and dignity from others as strategy for recouping losses to personal worth. One recent set of studies shows that for members of low-status groups in the United States (blacks, women, and lower-class people) measures of procedural justice (i.e., being treated properly) were related more strongly to job satisfaction than for members of low-status groups (Henry & Davis, 2008, Study 1). That is, being treated well in the workplace mattered more for job satisfaction among lower-status

individuals compared to their higher-status counterparts. Additionally, these lower-status group members showed a greater preference for procedural justice over distributive justice (e.g., receiving favorable monetary outcomes such as cash) compared to their higher-status counterparts (Henry & Davis, 2008, Study 2), showing a greater preference toward being treated with respect and dignity even when it might lead to a financial loss. These studies provide examples of the importance of protecting a valued sense of self among lower-status individuals, and may be seen as one means through which they may control for and manage threats to personal worth that accompanies their low status.

One current hypothesis relating to the motives of low-status individuals defending the self concerns the reaction to offensive words directed against them (Henry & Butler, 2008). It is expected that negative words directed toward low-status minority groups (e.g., "nigger" for blacks, "faggot" for gays) will be seen as particularly offensive compared to negative words directed against high-status majority groups (e.g., "honkey" for whites, "breeder" for heterosexuals). Because words that are derogatory send a message of low-value toward a group, lower status individuals will be particularly motivated to complain that the word is offensive. By doing so, low status group members are able to protect their integrity against such threats. Conversely, high status individuals will not have the same motivation to complain about slurs directed toward their high-status group, because their integrity is already bolstered by their higher social status. These motives are expected to translate into the perceived offensiveness of group-based slurs.

The sum of this research suggests that lower-status individuals may be particularly invested in the protections of the self, given chronic threats to their self-worth. This vigilance is expected to have potentially important consequences concerning violent behavior.

<u>Vigilance Toward Self-Protection and Violence</u>

The focus here is on the use of violence in the face of threats to self-worth that may disproportionately happen at the hands of lower-status individuals. If low-status individuals are especially sensitive to threats to the self, there may be important consequences concerning violence. Independently of a literature on status, a separate literature has examined the relationship between violence and threats to the self, including threats to inflated or unstable self-esteem, threats to honor, threats to autonomy, and threats to being excluded by others.

First, there is a literature founded on the counterintuitive notion (counterintuitive with respect to popular notions of the causes of violence) that the root of violence is not to be found in low self-esteem of the perpetrators, but inflated, narcissistic, or unstable high self-esteem (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). In particular, when those who have inflated, narcissistic, or unstable high-esteem face a threat to that self-esteem, they are more likely to respond with aggression against the threat compared to someone who does not have such an inflated self-esteem (Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989).

A second, related literature shows that individuals who are raised in what has been called a "culture of honor" will be especially prone to violence in the face of threats to their honor (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996). Honor is something that is tied integrally to the self and is particularly important in cultures that promote it. The original research program in psychology was conducted on Southerners of the United States, who are thought to come from a culture of honor and who are thought to be particularly prone to responding to threats to their honor with violence (Cohen et al., 1996; Nisbett, 1993). Parallel research in sociology has tied threats to honor or respect in general with violent consequences, as in research on gang violence (Horowitz & Schwartz, 1974), prison violence (Jenness et al., 2007), and murder (Katz, 1988). Where and

how this sense of the importance of honor is cultivated, or where a "culture of honor" comes from, is a matter of interesting potential debate relevant to the theory of low-status compensation and is addressed later.

A third emerging literature suggests that some violence, particularly terrorist violence, may be interpreted as a response to threats to autonomy. Research examining the roots of suicide terrorism shows that one common goal of suicide bombers is the removal of foreign military forces occupying their homeland (Pape, 2003). Support for terrorist groups and terrorist activities against Western targets has been tied to motives of counter-dominance (that is, motives to avoid being dominated rather than motives to dominate back) in a sample of Lebanese respondents (Henry et al., 2005). Tying the autonomy of one's homeland to one's personal sense of autonomy, these studies converge to suggest that terrorist violence may be a response, in part, to threats to one's autonomous self.

A fourth literature concerns violence as a response to threats of being excluded by others, a process that invokes a "relational evaluation" that suggests the excluded person is not worthy of a particular interpersonal relationship (Leary, 2001, 2005; Leary, Twenge, & Quinlivan, 2006). Because relational evaluations are tied to self-esteem (Leary, 2005), social exclusion may be an important source of aggression along the lines of threatened narcissism or spurned honor. For example, the phenomenon of school shootings is thought to have important ties to social exclusion (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003), particularly for those perpetrators who are actively seeking social inclusion but are rejected (Newman et al., 2004). Indeed, the relationship between social exclusion and aggression is thought to be particularly high among those who have an inflated or narcissistic sense of self (Twenge & Campbell, 2003).

Taken together, these different lines of research converge to tell a similar story, that the roots of many types of violence can be interpreted as some form of self-protective strategy. However, these lines of research have not been developed to consider the role of status. The theory of low-status compensation may be one fruitful avenue for extending this research.

<center>Interpreting Violence through the Lens of Low-Status Compensation</center>

There may be a natural connection between these literatures isolating the roots of aggression in threats to the self and the literature described earlier concerning the vigilance to threats to the self among low-status individuals. One potential link is that violence that is committed by low-status individuals may be especially likely to be done in the service of self-protection. Consider the following causal sequence: Being a low status individual leads to increased vigilant self-protection, and vigilant self-protection leads to violence in the face of threat. The combination of these separate sequences might unveil possible mechanisms driving the link between lower-status and some forms of violence. Although these literatures lead to a number of possibly important connections between low status, protection of the self, and violence, to date very little research has been conducted concerning mechanisms of violence that depend upon status. However, several lines of research could be reinterpreted in light of connections that integrate these literatures.

Reinterpreting Inflated Self-Esteem as a Compensation Strategy

The theory of low-status compensation leads to predictions concerning self-esteem, threats to self-esteem, and violence committed by low-status group members. To be clear, however, the need to control and manage threats to self-worth that comes with being a low-status person is not the same as low-status individuals suffering from low-self esteem. Low-status individuals may need to do more to protect their self-worth, but they will not express feeling

worse about themselves compared to higher-status people. In fact, there is much evidence to suggest that members of low-status groups have rather high self-esteem and sometimes even higher self-esteem than their higher-status counterparts. For example, in the United States it is well-documented that self-esteem among ethnic minorities is as high or even higher than that of whites (Crocker & Major, 1989). Other research shows that individuals whose self-worth is threatened are also likely to shift their implicit views of the self to be more positive (Rudman, Dohn, & Fairchild, 2007).

According to the theory of low-status compensation, self-esteem on the part of lower-status individuals might be artificially inflated to compensate for messages from society concerning their lower social value. In other words, the inflation of self-esteem may be one compensatory strategy available to low-status individuals. One consequence of this strategy is that high self-esteem may have that inflated or unstable quality among lower-status individuals compared to their higher-status counterparts, and thus lead lower-status individuals to be more prone to violence in the face of threats to the self.

Reinterpreting the Roots of Violence in Cultures of Honor

The proposed roots of cultures of honor could be reinterpreted in light of the theory of low-status compensation. The current explanation for the roots of cultures of honor in the American South is in the culture's economic history of shepherding, compared to the North with its history in farming, in what I call the *husbandry thesis*. Animal husbandry, at least historically, involved practices that required active and aggressive protection of livestock from threats, from stealing by thieves to killings by wolves. This tradition of active aggressive responses to threats is thought to have seeped into the psyche of Southern culture, continuing today even in the absence of such direct, active, protective herding practices. The evidence

provided for this husbandry thesis comes from identifying that rural counties in the South with a dry climate or hilly terrain (conducive to herding) have higher murder rates than counties in the South with moist climates and flat terrain (conducive to farming), even when controlling for other potential cultural influencers of aggression such as hot temperatures or poverty.

The husbandry thesis that accompanies the culture of honor theory, however, stands on shaky ground when one considers the many examples in the world that appear to contradict its predictions. There are a multitude of cultures where honor is extremely important but which cannot be traced to herding practices, and there are cultures that can be traced directly to herding practices but which are generally peaceful. For example inner city gangs in the United States are thought to have a major component of honor associated with violence (Horowitz & Schwartz, 1974). Yet it is difficult to reasonably conclude that such cultures of honor, located in nearly all major urban environments in the United States, are related to vestiges of herding in metropolitan areas. Other parts of the world, such as the province of Sindh in Pakistan, are known to have major rates of violence associated with threats to one's honor, yet such places have a history of reliance on farming, not herding (Kahn, 2005). Conversely, many cultures with a long history of shepherding practices have very low murder rates, such ass New Zealand and Morocco.[2] Certainly all rules will have their exceptions; however, because of the widespread and mounting evidence of exceptions to the husbandry thesis, it should be reexamined especially in light of more plausible alternative theoretical explanations.

One such alternative is the idea that the roots of a culture of honor can be found within status differences across cultures. In the context of the data on the differences in violence between the American North and South, the status thesis provides a plausible alternative

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[2] Data on murder rates by country is available on the Internet from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: www.unodc.com.

hypothesis to the husbandry thesis. The most explicit factor that almost immediately created the

status differences between the North and the South we see even through today is the American

Civil War that swept through the 1860s and from which the North emerged victorious. The

defeat of the South is thought to have played a large role in the importance of honor there

(Wyatt-Brown, 2001), possibly due to efforts there to re-establish dignity in the face of

newfound lower status.

      The husbandry thesis currently held by culture of honor theorists, therefore, might be

confounded such that herding versus farming differences may instead reflect status differences.

That is, herding locations may coincide with locations of lower-status. Indeed, emerging

evidence shows that when you analyze the same economic data analyzed in the original culture

of honor reports (Nisbett, 1993), but control for indicators of status in the regions examined, the

effects of husbandry are essentially eliminated while the status measures remain significant

predictors (Henry, 2008). These findings do not question the importance of honor in determining

violence, but instead suggest that the roots of honor may be found in status and not historical

husbandry practices. That is, according to low-status compensation theory, cultures of honor

may be especially prevalent among lower-status cultures where the protections of the self against

threats will be especially important.

Reinterpreting Violence from Threats to Autonomy in Terms of Status

      The data reported earlier on support for terrorist groups and terrorist activity was

mentioned in the context of support for aggression in the service of reclaiming one's autonomy.

But it should be noted that in both studies mentioned (Henry et al., 2005; Pape, 2003), those who

were supporting terrorism were those who, in some fashion, were members of low-status groups.

Both the data concerning suicide bombers and the Lebanese respondents could be interpreted as data coming from people whose group-based affiliations are lower in status on the global scene.

Other evidence suggests that the origins of terrorism come from countries that suffer from political oppression and is directed against countries that bask in economic successes (Krueger & Laitin, in press). These acts of terrorism are not being directed against just any high-status country in the world (note, e.g., the lack of international terrorism directed against Scandinavia). Rather, the targets of terrorism (e.g., the USA) are countries of the world whose power is perceived to encroach the most in dominating poorer countries, who most saliently demonstrate the status differences to those in oppressed countries, and who most threaten the sense of value for the people who eventually become terrorists.

The aggression in each of these studies on terrorism is directed against those powers in society with higher global status that threaten the autonomy of those with lower global status. Terrorist activity could thus be interpreted partly in the service of regaining the sense of value and worth that is threatened in lower-status players on the global scene. Terrorism may not be a particularly logical strategy for self-protection, but these mechanisms do not rest in logical psychological processes.

One point of confusion surrounding this description of these processes is the fact that many actors and instigators of terrorist activity themselves are not poor or uneducated or lower in status. For example, Osama bin Laden could hardly be described as low status, yet he has led the world's currently most active terrorist organization. Other research shows that most people involved in terrorism are middle class and educated (e.g., Russell & Miller, 1983). These data show why it is extremely important to state that it is the lower status of the *constituencies* that matters, not the status of their representatives. Terrorist actors and instigators are thought to be

acting on behalf of their lower-status constituency, independently of their personal status within that constituency. The idea is that if the lower status of the constituency were to be removed, or if the personal worth of the constituency were to be collectively restored and threats to personal worth removed, then terrorists would no longer have a constituency to support them and the terror movement would dissolve.

Interpreting Patterns of Political Assassinations

The theory of low-status compensation might also be usefully applied to explain other patterns of data concerning violence. One pattern worth understanding is assassinations of political leaders. Political figures are assassinated for a wide variety of reasons, but the question of interest here is why a leader would be assassinated by his own constituency. One pattern may be that leaders of lower-status groups may be especially prone to being a target when they make conciliatory gestures toward more powerful groups. Such peace gestures may flout the self-worth of the lower-status constituency as the constituency tries to establish a meaningful and worthy identity. Threats to establishing a worthy identity may be dealt with harshly even if it means killing their own leaders.

History is replete with such examples. In the Americas, Sitting Bull of the Sioux and Montezuma of the Aztecs were both killed by their own people presumably after appeasement gestures toward higher-power American and Spanish forces, respectively. In the Middle East, King Abdullah I of Jordan and Anwar Sadat of Egypt were both killed by their own constituencies after apparent gestures toward their higher-power counterparts of the Israelis. The Irish Catholic leader Michael Collins even accurately forecast his own assassination by his own people saying "I may have signed my actual death warrant" after completing a treaty with the British.

In each of these examples, the leader of a lower-status group was killed by his own people after making conciliatory gestures toward a higher-status or higher-power entity. Interpreted through the lens of low-status compensation theory, these assassinations were fueled by gestures from leaders that may have threatened the integrity and self-worth of their low-status constituencies. If there is such a pattern to these kinds of assassinations, it would seem clear that peace gestures by leaders of lower-status groups would need to account for such low-status compensatory needs to ensure the safety of those leaders. These assertions are speculative, but might be a fruitful avenue for future research.

<u>Low-Status Compensation Theory and the Prevention of Violence</u>

If the theory of low-status compensation is correct concerning the mechanisms involved in some forms of violence, then the prevention of some forms of violence may occur by addressing some of those mechanisms at their core. According to the theory, low-status individuals engage in a self-regulatory control process whereby they need to manage threats to self-worth that come from being a low-status individual. Some violence may be caused by directing aggression against those who threaten that self-worth. One means by which violence may be stemmed, then, is by restoring the self-worth among low-status individuals, or otherwise removing the threat to their self-worth.

For example, one approach to defusing potential violence at an interpersonal level from someone who is lower in status might involve protecting that individual's sense of self by showing that individual signs of respect, recognition, and dignity. Doing so may reassure them of their personal worth, and thus may potentially stem violence before it happens. The approach to defusing potential violence at an intergroup level would work in a similar fashion. Show a group, collectively, signs of respect, recognition, and dignity. Protect the integrity of the group,

and therefore the integrity of the group members. In doing so, individuals of that group may be less likely to lash out violently at the source of threats to their self-worth.

It is important to keep in mind that what is more relevant here is the status of the perpetrator of the violence, not the status of the victim. The status relationship between the perpetrators and victims of violence is less important than the idea that the perpetrators are lower in status in their most important context. It should not matter if the victim of this violence is low status, equal status, or high status, as long as they threaten the sense of self that the low-status perpetrator is so vigilantly protecting.

The theory of low-status compensation is not the first to recognize the importance of recognition and respect in conflict resolution processes. For example, the theory of social disintegration also proposes that issues of respect and recognition may be part of the core for preventing societal violence (Anhut & Heitmeyer, 2000; Heitmeyer, 1992). However, in the context of violence the theory of low-status compensation is the first to suggest that issues of respect and recognition will be especially important for stemming violence for lower-status people compared to higher status people. In fact, the theory of low-status compensation would say that showing respect and recognition toward high-status players in a conflict may not have much of a role at all in conflict resolution, given that high-status players are less in need of that kind of validation.

Importantly, investing low-status individuals or groups with respect and recognition is not the same thing as investing them with self-esteem. As mentioned earlier, high self-esteem, especially that which is artificially inflated or unstable, is thought to be an important *cause* of violence, not a suppressor of violence. It is expected that those who are lower in status will tend to artificially inflate their self-esteem independently as a compensation strategy. These ideas are

consistent with the proposition that the protection and defense of personal worth is a different process from increasing self-esteem.

If one solution for controlling violence is genuine displays of recognition and respect, why is it this strategy has not typically been used despite the fact it would incur little cost? Why are costly, but not necessarily effective, procedures for controlling violence instead put into place? I propose the explanation lies in two sources. The first source is that research on conflict resolution strategies was developed during the Cold War, and considered strategies for resolving conflict between parties that were already high in status (such as the US and the USSR who at the time both had great global influence). Consequently, conflict resolution strategies were developed to be very distribution focused, and perhaps rightly so as distributions may be the key commodity in managing conflicts between already powerful parties. However, when low-status parties are involved, other factors that are theoretically independent of distributions, like recognition and respect, may take precedence. Cold War era theories of conflict resolution were not able to test these propositions, and perhaps consequently strategies that are sensitive to status imbalances were not developed.

A second reason recognition and respect may not be a strategy used is that higher-status people in general are very poor at perspective taking and understanding the individual needs of low-status individuals (Fiske, 1993; Galinsky et al., 2006). Higher status people do not need to receive respect and recognition from others as much because they already receive those messages by virtue of having high status. That idea, combined with the difficulty in taking the perspective of lower-status people, would make it difficult for higher status people to even imagine that respect and recognition may be important factors to take into consideration when managing conflicts with lower status people.

The strategy that I am proposing for preventing some types of violence may be received with skepticism because of its simplicity. Nevertheless, such strategies have not been used in conflict situations where they could potentially be effective. These strategies are suggested as a means of helping defuse the aggression potential of low-status group members, and is based on the above theorizing that the motivation or source of aggression that is perpetrated by low-status people is likely to differ from aggression perpetrated by higher-status people.

<div align="center">Conclusion</div>

As a reminder, this theory is not intended to explain all violence, nor is the prediction of violence the only purpose of the theory (which goes beyond issues of just violence to consider multiple ways low-status individuals manage threats to their self-worth). There is an entire class of violence that cannot be explained by the theory of low-status compensation. For example, violence that is committed by high-status individuals, or violence committed by state actors, cannot be accounted for by this theory. These acts of violence are accounted for better by other theoretical perspectives, such as social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The focus of low-status compensation theory is to understand only aspects of violence happening on the part of low-status individuals. Additionally, I am not proposing that low-status people necessarily commit more violence than high-status people. I am saying, however, that the motivation for low-status perpetrated violence will tend to be different compared to the motivation for high-status perpetrated violence.

There are two clear further directions for the theory of low-status compensation and its relationship to explaining violence: One concerns clarifying the theoretical ideas and contrasting them with other similar theoretical ideas. Several conceptual issues need to be worked through, including the distinction between status and power, the distinction between self-worth and other

important self-related constructs in psychology (e.g., self-enhancement, self-integrity) and other important proposed motives in psychology (e.g., meaning, belongingness), the idea that people are involved in multiple status positions based on their multiple interpersonal relationships and intergroup identities, among other issues.

A second concern is the gathering of empirical evidence to support these propositions, which is expected to reveal important boundary conditions to the processes described here. Because of the overdetermined nature of violence, it will be important to determine those circumstances where the mechanisms of the theory of low-status compensation are thought to operate, and the circumstances where the theory is overshadowed by other processes. These questions are just beginning to be tested.

Nevertheless, at the root of this theoretical perspective, as with the other contributions to this text, are issues of control. I am proposing that some forms of violence as perpetrated by lower-status individuals may be in t he service of controlling or managing threats to self-worth, threats that will be more vigilantly guarded against given the perpetual damage to self-worth that accompanies lower status. Violence, then, can be interpreted as a form of control, but here as control over psychological, self-regulation processes. This perspective is meant to complement the other perspectives of control that contribute to this text. The study of control mechanisms, across multiple levels of analysis including psychology, seems crucial for a better understanding of the roots of violence and how to best prevent it.

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