



Why is the Pack Persuasive? The Effect of Choice Status on Perceptions of Quality

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Abstract: The logic of social proof and related arguments posits that decision makers interpret an actor's sociometric position (such as popularity) as a signal for quality, especially when quality itself is difficult to ascertain. Although prior work shows that market-level behavioral patterns are consistent with this micro-level account, we seek to explicitly examine the extent to which (and the conditions under which) sociometric status information actually triggers assumptions about an actor's underlying quality. We introduce two new web-based experiments to investigate how popularity impacts the selection of teammates. We find that the presence of popularity information creates a surprisingly robust quality halo around candidates in some situations but has no effect at all in others. Namely, consistent with Strang and Macy's (2001) theory of adaptive emulation, choice status appears to affect quality perceptions as part of the rationalization for making attachments, but the halo disappears post-adoption. The implications of these results are discussed in the conclusion.

Keywords: status; quality; social influence; signaling; cumulative advantage; indegree

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A burst of recent research on the success-breeds-success phenomenon has significantly improved our understanding of socially influenced behavior (e.g., Muchnik, Aral, and Taylor 2013; van de Rijt et al. 2014; Salganik, Dodds, and Watts 2006).¹ Across a diverse array of research areas, social scientists have long theorized that an individual's response to something — a person, a product, a practice — is positively affected by whether that something is sought after or already adopted by others (see Young 2009 for a review). We now have broad and compelling illustrations of how the presence or absence of followers can independently shape an object or actor's likelihood of future success (Muchnik et al. 2013; van de Rijt et al. 2014; Salganik et al. 2006). In particular, the novel "multiple worlds" design employed by Salganik and colleagues (2006, 2008) generated a clear empirical demonstration of the decoupling of popularity from underlying quality: the same songs that were very popular in some worlds had only moderate success in others. Such evidence definitively shows that having many followers is not an epiphenomenon of being "good."

Despite these advancements, the social psychology that underlies *why* individuals defer to the crowd has been largely ignored as a subject of direct empirical investigation, though a variety of micro-level theories have been repeatedly discussed. For example, according to status signaling accounts, decision makers are attracted to "what everyone else is doing" because they interpret popularity as a signal for quality (Gould 2002; Podolny 1993, 2005; see also Cialdini 1984, 1993). It could also be that decision makers pursue popular options in order to establish compatibility with peers (Clark, Clark, and Polborn 2006; see also Chwe 1998) or

because popular options are interpreted as conventional options that are “appropriate,” non-controversial, and hence legitimizing (Correll et al. 2012; DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Gilbert 1977). Herding may also arise because an object’s popularity typically enhances its visibility, making it more likely to show up on a decision maker’s “radar” (Salganik et al. 2006); this type of structural advantage in accessibility can then boost the likelihood that decision makers will invest their time and attention in learning about those offerings (Merton 1968).

Our objective here is to move beyond theoretical speculation by bringing experimental evidence to bear on one of these major explanations for why individuals defer to the crowd. Specifically, we subject status signaling accounts to a new type of experimental test in which we directly measure how decision makers respond to choice status information related to a pair of candidates. A core assumption in theories of status signaling (Gould 2002; Podolny 1993, 2005) is that an actor who is already “in demand” is perceived to be of greater quality (e.g., more competent, functional, talented).² And yet the empirical evidence linking sociometric cues to perceptions of quality is not only thin but suggests that the relationship is perhaps more complex than originally assumed.

First, it remains unclear if sociometric cues actually trigger assumptions about an actor’s quality in a causal sense. For example, observational research on school children and their perceptions of popular and unpopular children (LaFontana and Cillessen 1998, 2002; Rodkin et al. 2000) suggests that popular children are viewed with mixed reactions; they are evaluated as more competent but less likeable and more likely to harbor hostile intentions compared to children who are neither popular nor unpopular. It is difficult, however, to draw broad conclusions from these observational studies since it is unclear if popular children are rated as being more competent or hostile because they truly are more competent or hostile or because their popularity makes them appear so. Moreover, these studies provide no guidance as to the relative impact of sociometric cues with respect to theoretically important benchmarks such as other status characteristics like gender, race, or education. If sociometric cues can alter perceptions of quality, how persuasive are these cues in terms of magnitude and persistence?

Second, the existing research on popularity and quality evaluations strongly suggests that sociometric cues do not uniformly boost perceptions of quality. Using observational data on book ratings, Kovács and Sharkey (2014) for example, find that an uptick in a book’s popularity actually results in more negative quality evaluations (see also Berger and Le Mens 2009, Lieberman and Lynn 2003). In the marketing and advertising literature, researchers report mixed results regarding the effect of market share and product scarcity information (both of which are proxies for popularity) on quality inferences for consumer products such as wines and televisions. Parker and Lehman (2011), for example, find that popularity has a direct effect on perceptions of quality, but Dean (1999) does not (see also Hellofs and Jacobson 1999). What remains unclear is whether there are systematic reasons behind this pattern of mixed results.

Thus, to lay a better foundation for understanding the extent to and manner in which choice status information “moves the needle” on perceptions of quality, we conduct a pair of experiments to test whether the presence of choice status

information directly affects perceptions of various quality-related attributes (e.g., competence, likeability). We focus specifically on a decision-making context in which actors evaluate and form attachments to other actors. The experiments, both of which involve participants selecting teammates in competitive, task-oriented environments, are based on well-developed techniques that social psychologists have used to study bias associated with attribute-based status cues (see Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Foschi, Lai, and Sigerson 1994; Moss-Rascusin et al. 2012).

Importantly, by using experimental methods we are able to address the key counterfactual associated with sociometric status on quality perceptions: how are candidates of fixed quality evaluated in the presence versus absence of sociometric information? We can also contextualize the impact of choice status on quality perceptions with regard to other types of differentiating characteristics. For example, how robust is the quality halo that is generated by choice status relative to “objective” indicators of skill or attribute-based status characteristics? Although an individual’s relational position among peers is widely recognized as a foundational dimension of social status (Anderson et al. 2012; Freeman 1978; Gould 2002; Moreno 1934), traditional social psychological studies of status bias have focused mainly on the impact of attribute-based characteristics such as gender (Foschi 1996), skin tone (Biagas and Bianchi 2016), and educational credentials (Markovsky, Smith, and Berger 1984). Thus comparing the dynamics of choice status cues to attribute-based cues allows us to incorporate sociometric cues into the broader stratification literature on status, value, and the creation of inequality (Ridgeway 2014; see also Sauder, Lynn, and Podolny 2012).

Finally, one of our experiments is designed to explore the durability of sociometric signals by measuring the extent to which sociometric status affects judgments of quality at two critical junctions of the decision-making process: (1) when decision makers are in the process of vetting candidates (pre-selection quality evaluations); and (2) when decision makers are evaluating an adoptee’s performance (post-selection quality evaluations). As explained below, previous studies on adoption and abandonment (see Rao, Greve, and Davis 2001; Strang and Macy 2001) strongly suggest that choice status will affect quality perceptions as part of the rationalization for making attachments but that the halo (quickly) disappears when there is no longer a need to differentiate candidates. But to our knowledge, there is no direct empirical evidence of this pattern in terms of micro-level decision making.

Choice Status

The observation that some actors receive more attention than others has a long history in network research. As early as Moreno (1934), network analysts have used sociometric prominence to quantify an actor’s centrality or importance in a collective (see Everett and Borgatti 2005; Freeman 1978). “Local ladders” (Anderson et al. 2012) emerge to the extent that some members of a group are chosen or nominated more often than others; sociometric stars are simply those who have attracted the most attention and thus have the highest choice status in the group. In contrast to other types of status differentiating characteristics (e.g., educational credentials), actors cannot by themselves “achieve” a high indegree but rather must be accorded

such a position through the actions of others (see Ridgeway 1984). Thus a relational approach to measuring an actor's status position, which includes indegree as well as any other network conceptualization of centrality or importance (e.g., eigenvector centrality, betweenness centrality), gives rise to a socially endogenous indicator of status that is anchored to the members of the collective from which the nominations originate. A sociometric measure of status, however, does not reveal why actors nominate whomever they do but rather provides only a summary index of how much attention has been received locally; an actor who is highly sought after in one setting could be virtually unknown in another.

Of particular interest here is how decision makers, in the context of a local setting, respond to actors that have been previously chosen by anonymous others (see Muchnik et al. 2013; van de Rijt et al. 2014; Salganik et al. 2006). For example, when patients are "shopping" for a new doctor, they might rely on personal recommendations ("my friend Jane recommends Dr. Smith") but they might also rely on websites that provide aggregated opinions from others with whom they have no personal connection. Anonymous others are often construed as "others like me" or "peers" in the generalized sense ("all those like me who need a doctor, who are they choosing?"). Overall, understanding the social psychology around sociometric cues grows more important as information on what "everybody else" is doing, thinking, and adopting become more ubiquitous.³

Measuring the Impact of Choice Status on Quality Perceptions

Network cues have been broadly assumed to play an important role in the search for quality (Banerjee 1992; Bikhchandani, Hirshleifer, and Welch 1992; Hedström 1998). The basic notion, which is consistent with Deutsch and Gerard's (1955) notion of informational influence, is that actors seek to attach themselves to high quality goods (or actors) and rely on social endorsements as a way of efficiently identifying options of superior value, a process Correll et al. (2012) refer to as *socially endogenous inference*. The reliance on social endorsements to gauge quality is a unifying theme across various accounts of socially influenced behavior, including theories of observational learning (Banerjee 1992), rational imitation (Hedström 1998), social proof (Cialdini 1984, 1993), and status signaling (Podolny 1993, 2005). In the first three accounts, decision makers infer quality from the endorsement of generalized others — not necessarily prestigious others — and preferably many others; in contrast Podolny (1993, 2005) emphasizes the importance of endorsements from others who themselves are prestigious or well connected. In all accounts however, the core assumption is that social attachments serve as a certification of quality (Accominotti 2014).

We thus expect that when decision makers are vetting candidates and in the process of forming attachments, a given candidate will be viewed more positively in terms of quality if associated with high choice status (*hypothesis 1*). For example, with respect to employers in search of qualified employees, the status signaling argument would suggest that an employer's perception of a candidate's quality (e.g., her talent, her skillfulness) becomes more favorable when the employer discovers that she is highly sought after in the market. We test this hypothesis in a series of

experiments outlined below that allow us to compare the effects of choice status to several theoretically important benchmarks, including objective quality (study 1) and a diffuse status characteristic (study 2). Given our research question, the outcome of explicit interest is perceptions of quality and not adoption behavior, although when possible we also test whether perceptions of quality explicitly mediate the link between popularity and adoption behavior.

As noted earlier, we also address whether quality halos persist post-adoption. The existing literature on status signaling focuses almost entirely on the formation of attachments. However, research that considers both the formation and dissolution of ties (i.e., adoption versus abandonment) suggests that the link between choice status and quality perceptions may be contingent upon the timing of the decision (see Hellefs and Jacobson 1999; Rao et al. 2001; Strang and Macy 2001).⁴ When decision makers are in the process of vetting a set of (legitimate) candidates, *differentiating among alternatives* is the primary goal (see Zuckerman 1999; Jensen and Roy 2008). Prior to selecting a “winner,” perceptions related to a candidate’s quality are prospective judgments (expectations for quality) that help the decision maker rationalize the selection of one option over another. In contrast, once a candidate has been adopted, decision makers then move to *evaluating the effectiveness of their partnership* (Burns and Wholey 1993; Rao et al. 2001).

We suspect that choice status will quickly lose its signaling power because: (1) quality can often be directly experienced once a candidate is adopted; as well as because (2) the need to differentiate is no longer immediate. As Strang and Macy (2001:156) note, network influences are expected to be “strong when considering novel alternatives but weak when more immediate, vivid, and relevant evidence is available from personal experience.” Thus, though the first goal of our second experimental study is to replicate study 1 with respect to pre-selection perceptions of quality, our second goal is to explore the extent to which choice status information affects post-adoption evaluations of performances. In sum, we expect that choice status will have a stronger effect on pre-selection quality evaluation than on post-selection evaluations of effectiveness (*hypothesis 2*).

Teammate Selection in Task-Oriented Contexts

Both studies are based on situations in which actors select other actors in collectively oriented task environments. As detailed below, study 1 tests whether choice status significantly impacts pre-adoption perceptions, even when actors can be easily differentiated on the basis of objective skill levels. This constitutes a strong test of the effect of choice status given that there is little ambiguity in study 1 regarding the optimal candidate. Because we find that choice status can boost perceptions of quality in study 1, we conduct a follow-up study (study 2) that is designed to further contextualize the potency of choice status information.

Study 2 is set up to first test whether choice status has a robust effect on pre-adoption projections of quality and then, moments later in the experiment, test whether choice status *continues* to affect post-adoption evaluations of quality. Study 2 is also designed such that we can compare the effects of choice status cues to the effects of important benchmarks that are of interest to stratification scholars.

For example, in the context of task-oriented individuals who seek high quality partners, to what extent is being highly sought after more or less powerful in shaping projections and evaluations of quality compared to an educational degree?⁵

Study 1: Online Teammate Selection in a Skill-Based Task-Oriented Setting

Study 1 is an online experimental study of teammate selection behavior in a task-oriented context. The procedure is intended to create a situation in which the research participant is driven by self-interest (i.e., monetary gain) to identify an optimal teammate, much like the decision-making process that employers undergo when evaluating a set of candidates for hire. The study is based on a word game that is unambiguously tied to verbal aptitude. In a non-ambiguous skill setting, a skillful applicant is relatively well defined, and thus (fictitious) candidates can be distinguished relatively easily by objective indicators of quality. We are thus able to address the potency of choice status in the context of higher and lower skill levels.

All participants ($n = 103$) were recruited and compensated by Qualtrics and their panel partners. Participants either signed up directly with one of Qualtrics' online vendors or they responded to an advertisement posted on select websites, such as airline company websites for VIP members. Participants completed the experiment online and were compensated with cash-equivalent rewards, including airline miles, magazine subscriptions, and gift cards.

Cover Story. Participants were invited (via a survey link) to participate in a study about team behavior in competitive situations. They were told that they would be introduced to a simple word formation game and then given a chance to select a teammate. The survey then explained that their team would have a chance to play in an online tournament to pretest a version of the same word game designed by a popular game developer. To increase participants' investment in their team's performance, participants were told that their team would be playing for Amazon gift certificates.

Procedure. After agreeing to participate in the study, participants were asked a number of questions about their experience playing word games as well as their perceived verbal ability. They were then introduced to the rules and objectives of a word game (similar to Boggle) and given the opportunity to play two practice rounds with live scoring.⁶ The purpose of the practice round is to encourage engagement in the task and to help ensure that participants acquired some basic understanding of the task itself.

After the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the word game, participants were instructed to select a teammate under the guise that together they would compete against other two-person teams for prizes in an online version of the word game. Respondents were first asked to study the profile of candidate 1, which was followed by a question regarding the pros and cons of candidate 1 (see Correll et al. 2007:1311); this free response task was intended to encourage participants to consider seriously the candidates' "qualifications." Participants were instructed to evaluate candidate 1 with respect to a host of measures (see below). Participants then repeated the "study and evaluate" process with candidate 2 (candidate order

Table 1: Summary of Conditions in Study 1

Condition	Candidate 1	Candidate 2
Baseline: Past Performance (n = 51)	[Higher Performer] Total Words: 17 5+ Letter Words: 3 Longest Word: TODDLES	[Lower Performer] Total Words: 15 5+ Letter Words: 4 Longest Word: WIELD
Past Performance × Choice Status (Consistent) (n = 27)	[Higher Performer in High Demand] Total Words: 17 5+ Letter Words: 3 Longest Word: TODDLES Percent who wanted this candidate as a partner: 85% of previous players	[Lower Performer in Moderate Demand] Total Words: 15 5+ Letter Words: 4 Longest Word: WIELD Percent who wanted this candidate as a partner: 50% of previous players
Past Performance × Choice Status (Inconsistent) (n = 25)	[Higher Performer in Moderate Demand] Total Words: 17 5+ Letter Words: 3 Longest Word: TODDLES Percent who wanted this candidate as a partner: 50% of previous players	[Lower Performer in High Demand] Total Words: 15 5+ Letter Words: 4 Longest Word: WIELD Percent who wanted this candidate as a partner: 85% of previous players

is randomized in each condition). Finally, participants were prompted to select one candidate for a teammate. We forced respondents to select one given that the selection process forces respondents to prioritize their choices (Salganik and Levy 2015). Shortly thereafter, respondents were thanked for their participation and told that their team was not selected to participate in the online tournament.

Candidate Profiles. The three conditions in this study correspond to the amount and type of candidate information made available to participants (see Table 1). In condition 1, participants see a baseline profile for each candidate, which includes favorite ice cream flavor (mint or chocolate chip), previous word game experience (which was held constant at “play occasionally” for every candidate,⁷ and past performance information. Past performance consists of a practice round score that is associated with the same practice round (practice grid 2) that participants themselves played. Similar to the live feedback that was given to the respondent during his or her own practice round, the practice score for the candidate includes the number of valid words, the number of 5+ letter words, and the longest word entered. The higher performing candidate had a total of 17 words, of which three were “long” words, with “toddles” as the longest word. The lower performing candidate had a total of 15 words, with four “long” words and “wield” as the longest word. As expected, we found that 76 percent in the baseline condition preferred the former candidate (17-3-toddles) to the latter (15-4-wield). Thus, participants clearly detected a difference in skill level based on this configuration of practice scores.

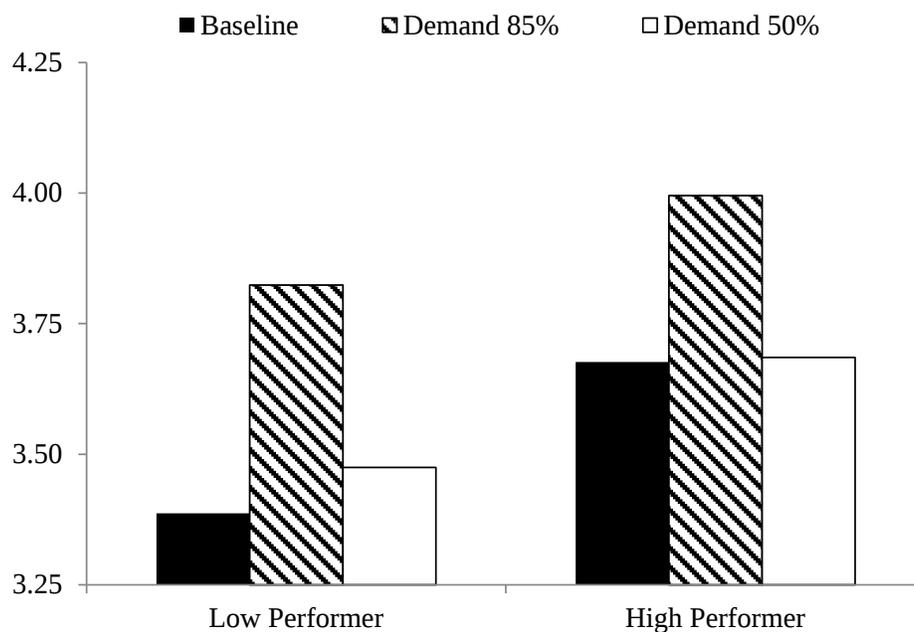
In conditions 2 and 3, participants were given network cues in addition to the baseline profile (past performance, “plays occasionally,” and ice cream preference).

Condition 2 features popularity information (“percent who wanted this candidate as a partner”) that *aligns* with skill level. The higher-skill candidate was in higher demand (“85 percent of previous players wanted this candidate”) while the lower-skill candidate was in lower demand (“50 percent of previous players wanted this candidate”).⁸ In other words, we exaggerate the baseline pairing of a higher-skill versus lower-skill candidate to become a pairing of “higher skill in high demand” versus “lower skill in moderate demand.” In condition 3, the choice status information *contradicts* skill level: the popular candidate was less skilled, whereas the more skilled candidate was less sought after. Finally, popularity information and ice cream preference were counterbalanced in both popularity conditions.

Dependent Measures. Participants were asked to rate each candidate on a five-point scale (not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely) with respect to eight items (see Correll et al. 2007; Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick 2004): capable, efficient, skilled, intelligent, independent, self-confident, aggressive, and organized. We create a composite competence measure by taking the mean of these eight items (mean = 3.6, sd = 0.59, $\alpha = 0.91$).

Results. Study 1 addresses specifically whether choice status can affect perceptions of competence for candidates associated with distinguishable levels of higher and lower skill. For example, can being in demand compensate for lower skill levels? Conversely, can moderate choice status detract from demonstrations of higher skill? Participants’ candidate evaluations strongly suggest that choice status has a notable impact on perceptions of competence, even in the face of disconfirming evidence regarding objective skill levels. First, being in demand can clearly enhance perceptions of competence even for the lower-skill candidate. As shown in Figure 1 (black versus white bars), the perceived competence of the higher-skill candidate is significantly higher (3.68 versus 4.00, $p = 0.0305$) if that candidate is listed as being in demand (while the lower-skill candidate is simultaneously listed as being in moderate demand). Similarly, the perceived competence of the lower-skill candidate is significantly higher (3.38 versus 3.82, $p = 0.0006$) when billed as being in demand (while the higher-skill candidate is simultaneously listed as being in only moderate demand). In contrast, being in moderate demand does not appear to seriously detract from perceptions of competence (black versus blue striped bars). The higher-skill candidate is judged the same even when associated with lower choice status (3.68 versus 3.68, $p = 0.951$); the same pattern holds for the lower-skill candidate (3.39 versus 3.48, $p = 0.5149$).⁹ In sum, popularity can significantly impact perceptions of competence even when skill differentiation is clear (i.e., when there is little uncertainty regarding which candidate is optimal based on skill alone).

Choice status also significantly impacts the tendency to select the high- versus low-skill candidate as a partner, up to a point. When the lower-skill candidate is listed as in demand (and the higher-skill candidate is listed as being in only moderate demand), the selection percentage for the lower-skill candidate increases from 24 percent to 37 percent — a 13 percentage-point gain in advantage (one-sided binomial test: $p = 0.09$). Interestingly however, listing the higher-skill candidate as being highly sought after does not appear to create a superstar candidate; the higher-skill candidate (versus the lower-skill candidate) and the higher-skill candidate *in demand* (versus the low-skill candidate in moderate demand) are both



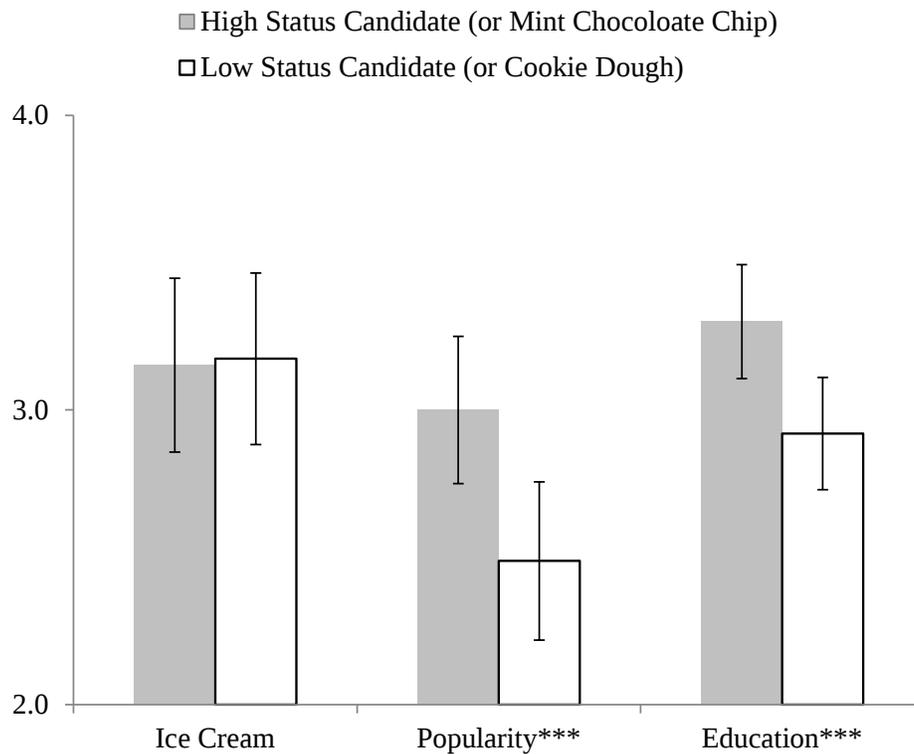
Note: The baseline candidates (black bars) correspond to a pair of candidates distinguished only by their past performance (17-3-toddles [higher skill] versus 15-4-wield [lower skill]).

Figure 1: Summary of competence evaluations, study 1.

selected by 76 percent of respondents.¹⁰ Thus while popularity information clearly affects perceptions of competence in this word game (see Figure 2), choice status overall is not persuasive enough to drastically overturn selection decisions for this configuration of skill levels. Overall, these findings are consistent with the notion that choice status cues can play a significant role in shaping perceptions of a candidate's quality during the vetting process but that the construction of value is limited by objective constraints such as differences in actual skill level (see Zuckerman 2012).

Study 2: Teammate Selection in a Skill-Neutral Setting

Consistent with hypothesis 1, study 1 showed that popularity information had a significant effect on perceptions of candidate quality. Yet these quality evaluations were elicited from the respondent only prior to the selection of the teammate (pre-adoption). As described earlier, there are good reasons to suspect that the effects of choice status will be far weaker post-adoption (hypothesis 2). Study 2 is thus designed to address both pre- and post-selection quality evaluations under the umbrella of a single decision-making context. Specifically, we elicit from respondents: (1) perceptions of quality about potential teammates prior to the selection of a partner; and (2) perceptions of the selected partner's quality post-adoption, after the participant has had the opportunity to directly observe the partner's performance during a team exercise.



Note: Perceptions of giftedness are measured on a five-point scale (1 = Not at all gifted, 2 = Slightly, 3 = Moderately, 4 = Very, 5 = Extremely). Error bars correspond to 95 percent confidence intervals for the mean. *** Indicates that the difference in means is significant at the 0.001 level for a one-tailed test.

Figure 2: Perceptions of “gifted with respect to contrast sensitivity,” study 2.

Study 2 also allows us to assess the robustness of the pre-selection quality halo that was documented in study 1. First, we sought to establish the robustness of the effects by changing the nature of the game: study 2 is based on a visual game (“black-white” game) as opposed to the word game used in study 1. Second, we sought to deepen our assessment of the quality halo by testing for a broader array of audience reactions as well as how strong those audience reactions are relative to other types of status cues.

In the “black-white” game, participants see two black and white grid patterns shown side-by-side. Ostensibly, the point of the game is to identify the pattern with the highest percentage of black area in the shortest amount of time. Respondents are told that cognition researchers have identified variation in “contrast sensitivity” and that its origins are not fully known, but that this skill is not related to mathematical or artistic ability; in reality there is no such skill (see, Foschi 1996; Moore 1968; Troyer and Younts 1997). Because the game is based on fictional skill, no characteristic can be argued to be *intrinsically* more or less task-relevant, and thus study 2 presents a suitable context from which to test the relative impact of each status cue. Specifically, we compare the effects of choice status to education, a diffuse status characteristic

that has well established effects on perceptions of competence and quality in task-focused contexts (Markovsky, Smith, and Berger 1984; Thye 2000).

Cover Story. All participants ($n = 200$) were recruited and compensated \$1.00 through Amazon Mechanical Turk (AMT). Participants were invited (via a survey link posted on AMT) to participate in a 10-minute study about team formation in competitive situations. Participants were told that they would be introduced to a simple visual game (the “black-white game”) and that players of all levels of gaming experience were being recruited through AMT. The survey then explained that the participant would be playing in an online tournament based on the black-white game and that a tournament consists of five two-person teams. To increase participants’ investment in their team’s performance, they were told that tournament-winning teams would be entered into a raffle for a \$10 bonus to their AMT account.

Procedure. After agreeing to participate in the study, participants were asked a number of questions about their experience playing spatial games as well as their educational background. They were then introduced to the rules and objectives of the black-white game and given the opportunity to play five practice rounds with live scoring.¹¹ Participants were then instructed to select a teammate under the guise that together they would compete against four other two-person teams for a chance to win a \$10 AMT bonus raffle. The teammate selection process largely follows that of study 1. Respondents were asked to study the profile of candidate 1, comment on the pros and cons of the candidate, and then finally evaluate the candidate with respect to various items related to competence. The process is then repeated for the second candidate (candidate order is randomized). Finally, participants were prompted to select one candidate for a teammate. Following the selection of a teammate, participants were given a countdown to the tournament. The tournament game was structured exactly like the practice game (five slides with two patterns each). The respondent’s teammate was programmed to perform at roughly the same level as the respondent (see below for details). After the scores were revealed, respondents were asked to rate the skill level of their partner and to report on their satisfaction with their partner.

Candidate Profiles. The four conditions of this study correspond to the amount and type of candidate information made available to participants (see Table 2). In condition 1, participants see only a baseline profile for each candidate, which includes favorite ice cream flavor (mint chocolate chip or cookie dough) and previous spatial game experience (which was held constant at “play occasionally” for every candidate). Once again, since ice cream is theoretically irrelevant to the black-white Game and is not tied to larger status processes, there is no reason to expect that one candidate will be preferred over the other in the baseline condition.

In conditions 2 and 3, participants were given a third piece of information. In condition 2, a choice status cue (“percent who wanted this candidate as a partner”) was given in addition to the baseline profile. Popularity was assigned to be either 86 percent or 49 percent of “previous players.” In condition 3, participants were provided with the baseline profile plus information about the candidate’s educational background (“highest level of education”). One candidate had completed “a master’s degree or higher,” and the lower status option was described as having a

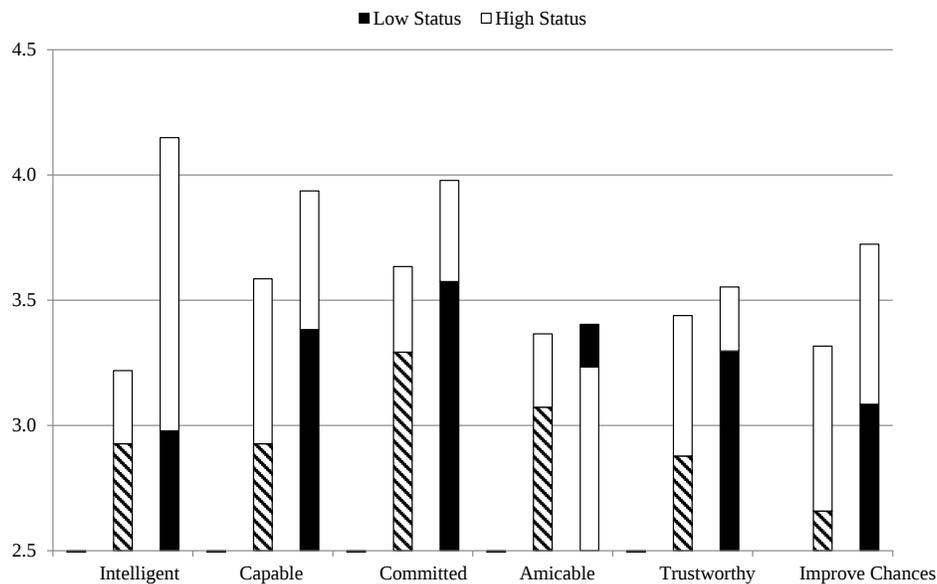
Table 2: Summary of Conditions in Study 2

Condition	Candidate 1	Candidate 2
Ice-Cream Only (n=24)	Favorite Ice-Cream: Mint Chocolate Chip	Favorite Ice-Cream: Cookie Dough
Choice Status (n=25)	HIGH STATUS <i>Percent who wanted this candidate as a partner: 86% of previous players</i>	LOW STATUS <i>Percent who wanted this candidate as a partner: 49% of previous players</i>
Education (n=26)	HIGH STATUS <i>Highest Level of Education: Master's Degree or Higher</i>	LOW STATUS <i>Highest Level of Education: High School Diploma or Equivalent</i>
Choice Status × Education (n=60)	HIGH CHOICE STATUS AND LOW EDUCATION <i>Percent who wanted this candidate as a partner: 86% of previous players</i> <i>Highest Level of Education: High School Diploma or Equivalent</i>	LOW CHOICE STATUS AND HIGH EDUCATION <i>Percent who wanted this candidate as a partner: 49% of previous players</i> <i>Highest Level of Education: Master's Degree or Higher</i>

“high school diploma or equivalent.” As a precautionary measure, candidates’ ice cream preferences (mint chocolate chip versus cookie dough) were counterbalanced with each status cue even though there is no reason to expect teammate selection to be dependent on ice cream preference.

Finally, in condition 4 [choice status × education], participants are given the baseline profile plus two additional pieces of information: choice status *and* educational background. Participants in this condition see one candidate who is in high demand (i.e., wanted by “86 percent of previous players”) but with relatively modest educational credentials (i.e., “high school diploma or equivalent”), and a second candidate who is well educated (“master’s degree or higher”) but less popular than the first candidate (i.e., wanted by “49 percent of previous players”). The order in which these two status cues are presented on the profile cards is randomized, as is the order of the candidates.

Dependent Measures. There are three main outcomes of interest: pre-game projections of quality; adoption choice; and post-game evaluations of quality. Pre-game projections are measured using the type of competence and commitment items employed in study 1 as well as additional measures of generalized value. After seeing each candidate’s profile, participants were asked to rate the candidate on a five-point scale (not at all, slightly, moderately, very, extremely) with respect to following nine items: gifted with respect to contrast sensitivity, likelihood of improving winning chances, capable, intelligent, efficient, trustworthy, easy to get along with, committed to winning, and influential. We also measured three broad sentiments in conditions 1–3 using questions from social psychological research on how affective meanings are attributed to various social objects, including the identities of others (Heise 2007). Specifically, we asked respondents to evaluate candidates’



Note: The striped bars correspond to the mean for the low-status candidates in the choice status condition. The black bars refer to the low-status candidate in the education condition. The end of the white bar denotes the mean of the high-status candidate in each condition. All differences between the high and low candidate are significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed tests) with the exception of the difference in amicability in the education condition. Here, the low-status candidate (high school diploma) is viewed as being more amicable than the high status candidate (MA) on average.

Figure 3: Summary of perceptions of quality, study 2.

“goodness” (i.e., good/nice versus bad/awful) and “potency” (powerful/big or powerless/little) on a nine-point bipolar scale.

Following these ratings of candidates, respondents were asked to select just one of the two candidates for their teammate. Finally, after respondents had played the tournament game with their partner and the scores were revealed, they were asked to report on how satisfied they were with their partner (on a six-point scale with 1 = very dissatisfied and 6 = very satisfied). Respondents were also asked to rate the skill level of their partner with respect to the black-white game (on a five-point scale: 1 = far below average; 3 = average; 5 = far above average).

Results 1. Do choice status cues affect perceptions of teammate quality as well as the choice of teammate? Findings relevant to this question are given in Figures 2 and 3. The results strongly support the prediction that popular candidates are perceived as offering more quality compared to candidates who are not in demand, all else equal. Figure 2, for example, graphs the mean scores for “giftedness” per candidate in each condition. As expected, a candidate’s ice cream preference has no effect on perceptions of his or her giftedness (nor any other dimension of quality). In contrast, when candidates are distinguished either by choice status or education, the high-status candidate tends to be perceived as more competent and committed than the lower status candidate. Interestingly, Figure 2 suggests that high choice status level (86 percent of previous players) does not boost perceptions of giftedness so much as a moderate level of choice status (49 percent of previous players) hurts perceptions of giftedness.

Table 3: Partner Preferences in Study 2

Condition	n	P _{observed} :	
		% Selecting High Status Candidate	$Pr(k \geq p)$
Ice Cream	45	51%	0.500
Choice Status	41	71%	0.006
Education	47	74%	0.001

This pattern of results generally holds for every other characteristic evaluated. Figure 3 summarizes, by condition, the difference between the high- and low-status candidate for various dimensions of quality. Striped bars correspond to the mean for the low-status candidate in the popularity condition whereas the black bars correspond to the mean for low-status candidate in the education condition; the white bars delineate the means for the high status candidate in each condition. It is clear from Figure 3 that the high-status candidate in each condition is viewed as offering more quality than their lower status counterparts on nearly every dimension (two-tailed tests, $\alpha = 0.05$). The one anomaly involves perceptions of amicability: although the popular candidate was perceived as being easier to get along with than the less popular candidate ($p = 0.022$), the more highly educated candidate was not seen as statistically more amicable than the lesser educated candidate.¹² In fact, the evidence suggests that the more highly educated candidate was actually perceived as being harder to get along with compared to the candidate with no post-secondary degree ($p = 0.073$, one-tailed test in opposite direction). Finally, the *magnitude* of the halo created by popularity (i.e., the difference in means between the high and low candidate) is statistically the same for all dimensions of quality ($\alpha = 0.05$, two-tailed tests) except for intelligence.¹³ These results thus strongly suggest that, on balance, the perceived quality halo created by choice status (high demand versus moderate demand) is similar in breadth as well as in magnitude to that created by a large differential in educational credentials (MA versus high school).

In turn, the in-demand candidate was selected to be a team member more frequently than the candidate who was less sought after (see Table 3). Moreover, perceptions of quality fully mediated the effect of popularity on adoption.¹⁴ In the baseline condition, ice cream preference, as expected, has no effect on the likelihood of being selected as a partner: 51 percent chose the candidate preferring mint chocolate chip and 49 percent chose the candidate preferring cookie dough. However, in the two conditions where one piece of status-relevant information was present (education and popularity), the high-status candidate was chosen by 74 percent and 71 percent of respondents, respectively. Binomial tests (see Table 3) suggest that the likelihood of observing each of those counts is very low if in fact there was no advantage given to the high-status candidate (i.e., if the probability of being selected for high- and low-status candidates is 0.5).

The question then arises as to whether (and in what direction) decision makers assign priority to choice status versus education *if presented with both cues*. In condition 4, popularity and education are crossed such that respondents must evaluate a

highly sought after candidate with relatively modest educational credentials and a candidate with relatively high educational credentials who is only in moderate demand. Recall that when tested singularly (see Figure 3), these particular high and low levels of education and popularity give rise to quality halos that are similar in magnitude (the differences between the high- and low-status candidates are roughly the same). However, Figure 2 also suggests that the low- and high-status candidates in the education condition were generally seen as representing greater quality on average than the high- and low-status candidates, respectively, in the popularity condition; for example, the higher educated candidate was perceived as more capable, more committed, and more trustworthy than the higher choice status candidate. Surprisingly then, we find that in condition 4, popularity actually has a stronger effect than education on adoption choices: the highly sought after candidate (but lesser educated) was selected 1.72 times more often than the highly educated (but less popular) candidate. The binomial test suggests that this is not due to chance; the likelihood that 63 percent or more select the popular candidate over the educated candidate is small ($Pr(k \geq 38) = 0.026$), if indeed the true probability of that candidate being selected was 50 percent.

In sum, the evidence suggests that decision makers interpret popularity (in this game context) as indicative of direct performance capability as well as broader, socially desirable traits (trustworthiness, easy to get along with, good/nice). Tested alone, the “signaling power” of popularity information (high demand versus moderate demand) appears to rival that of education information (MA versus high school), given that the magnitude of the halo is roughly the same in each condition. Moreover, both education and choice status appear to have a global “reach” in terms of perceptions of quality, impacting perceptions of task-relevant abilities as well as broad sentiments about worth. But when forced to prioritize status information, decision makers, on average, assign more weight to popularity than education.

One possible explanation for decision makers’ tendency to prioritize popularity over education in condition 4 centers on perceptions of amicability. Consistent with Table 2, we find in condition 4 that the candidate with higher education (and lower choice status) was evaluated as being more intelligent ($p < 0.001$) but harder to get along with ($p < 0.001$) than the candidate with lower education (and higher choice status). For the remaining measures of value (perceived capability, trustworthiness, giftedness, commitment, efficiency, and the likelihood of improving winning chances), there were no statistical differences between candidates. Thus the popular candidate might have been chosen more often because decision makers ultimately prefer partners who they anticipate will be “easy to get along with,” even if they are not expected to be the most intelligent (see Casciaro and Lobo 2008).¹⁵

Results II. Do choice status cues continue to affect perceptions of quality once a candidate has become a partner? Recall that participants first selected a teammate and then played a five-round game ostensibly with that selected partner. The respondent is scored with respect to the number of correct answers and total response speed. All respondents were shown four easy grid comparisons (roughly 90 percent black and 10 percent white) and one “difficult” grid set (51 percent black versus 49 percent white). Regardless of whether the respondent answered the difficult question correctly, the response to this question was always scored as incorrect, which

means that 4/5 was the maximum score for respondents.¹⁶ The respondent's final scores (number correct and total response time) were presented to the respondent following the conclusion of all five grid comparisons. At this time, the teammate's score was also presented. The selected teammate was programmed to have one additional correct answer but a 20 percent slower response time. In other words, the teammate was programmed to perform at roughly the same level as the respondent in terms of objective characteristics.

How then is the partner's performance interpreted by the respondent? After both sets of scores were presented, the respondent was asked to rate his or her partner's skill level with respect to the black-white game (on a five-point scale where 1 = far below average, 3 = average and 5 = far above average). We find no difference ($p = 0.631$) in the perception of skill between those who selected the popular candidate (mean = 4.23) and those who selected the less popular candidate (mean = 4.31).¹⁷ In addition, the popular candidate was rated no differently than either of the "baseline" candidates in the ice cream condition. In sum, even though respondents initially perceived the higher choice status candidate to be higher quality (e.g., more gifted with respect to contrast sensitivity) than the lower choice status candidate and both baseline candidates, this boost did not carry over to perceptions of quality once the candidate became a partner.

Discussion

A longstanding assumption in the social sciences is that sociometric information, such as being highly sought after by others, is interpreted by the audience as a proxy for the candidate's underlying quality. Despite the widespread acceptance of this idea, the empirical evidence regarding the impact of sociometric cues on assessments of candidate quality is notably lacking. First, to what extent do sociometric cues actually have a *causal* impact on quality perceptions? Just because highly sought after items are more likely to be adopted in the future (success-breeds-success), observable adoption patterns alone give us no insight as to *why* the pack was persuasive. Moreover, assuming that sociometric cues do trigger assumptions about quality, prior studies give us no guidance as to the magnitude of their impact relative to other status characteristics such as gender, race, and education, which are already known to have major effects on perceptions of competence. Finally, how durable is the impact of these signals? For example, say an employer was persuaded to hire an applicant because of the quality halo that materialized when the employer found out that the applicant was highly sought after by competitors. Does that initial upward bias affect how the employer judges the applicant's future on-the-job performances?

The purpose of this article was to lay new groundwork from which to address these questions by experimentally testing how decision makers actually interpret choice status information related to a pair of candidates in the context of teammate selection. In studies 1 and 2, we examine the impact of an actor's relational position on assessments of quality as well as partner selection in a competitive task situation. Collectively, the results give us new insight into why the pack is persuasive and the extent to which it is persuasive, as well as the limits of its persuasiveness.

First, our findings concretely show that, at least in certain situations, choice status information is persuasive precisely because it creates a quality halo around those who are in demand. Such results are obviously consistent with a key assumption in the theory of status signaling, which is that actors turn to status cues to infer quality because “quality is unobservable [and hence uncertain] prior to consummation of a transaction” (Podolny 1993:835). Interestingly, our findings actually suggest that choice status can move the needle on quality perceptions even when decision makers face arguably little uncertainty regarding candidate quality. That is, at least when decision makers are in the process of differentiating options, the impact of choice status on quality perceptions appears to run deeper than we might have assumed.

In study 1, we found that billing candidates as being in high demand (versus only in moderate demand) could boost competence evaluations for the candidate linked with inferior skills as well as for the higher skilled candidate. Moreover, in study 2, popularity affected *both* narrow perceptions of task-oriented quality as well as broad perceptions of general worth, much to the same degree as an educational credential. Indeed, choice status turned out to be *even more* persuasive than an education credential when the two were presented together. Taken together, we now have a much better sense of the extent to which choice status cues can affect perceptions of value.

At the same time, however, we also found that the premium associated with choice status appears to evaporate immediately once the vetting process is over. In study 2, we found that when respondents evaluated the performances of an already selected partner, choice status cues had no effect on perceptions of candidate quality (controlling for actual quality). In other words, popularity affected perceptions of quality (e.g., skillfulness, intelligence) when respondents were choosing which candidate to select but then, moments later, the candidate’s popularity had no impact on perceptions of skill once the candidate became a partner.¹⁸

The “failure” of choice status information to alter quality perceptions at the post-adoption stage (study 2) is also striking given what we found in study 1. In study 1, when direct performance information (i.e., a score from a “practice” round) was given to respondents prior to selecting one of two candidates (a pre-adoption decision), choice status cues significantly altered perceptions of quality; in contrast, in study 2 when direct performance information (i.e., a score from a “live” round) was given to respondents after a partner had been selected (a post-adoption evaluation), choice status information had no impact on perceptions of quality. Put differently, what was essentially the same performance information had different effects on perceptions of quality depending on the decision stage, which leads us to speculate that the difference between pre- and post-adoption decisions is perhaps more about the mindset of the decision maker (vetting versus not) and less about the tangibility of performance information (indirect versus direct). In sum, popularity cues appear to be used “in search of excellence” (Strang and Macy 2001) but not when confirming whether a given performance is, in fact, excellent.

These findings thus raise new questions regarding the *ultimate* impact of choice status cues. In general, the fleeting nature of the halo suggests that the role of choice status on quality perceptions is more complex than what status signaling

theories suggest. If choice status cues *truly* affect quality perceptions, why would the quality halo evaporate so quickly once attachments are made? Moreover, while the quality halo can indeed explain why decision makers are initially more likely to form attachments to high choice status options, what does it mean that the halo itself is actually quite transient in nature?

The fact that the halo evaporates quickly post-adoption could be of very little consequence *in the long run* if decision makers are simply loathe to dissolve ties (and if they possibly escalate their commitment to chosen candidates as a way of justifying their initial choices). In other words, even though the quality halo technically only explains why a high choice status candidate was initially hired, inertia would lock in this advantage and the success-breeds-success phenomenon would boil down to getting the proverbial foot in the door. In this way, quality halos would have a major cumulative effect on reward inequality even though the halo itself is not sticky. In contrast, the fact that the halo evaporates quickly could have very different long-term consequences if decision makers are willing — and able — to reverse decisions quickly. This type of behavior, referred to as adaptive emulation (Strang and Macy 2001), would give rise to fads (cycles of boom and bust).

Study 2, of course, cannot shed light on these issues because we only measure one post-adoption outcome (evaluation of performance) and thus have no insight as to how these candidates would be treated in the long term. An important issue for future research is to examine the durability of choice status signals by looking far more closely at post-sampling decisions, such as the decision to reinforce or dissolve ties with already adopted partners. For example, at what rate do decision makers abandon items or people who were initially high in choice status when their post-adoption performances are judged to be average or even subpar? Without better empirical knowledge on how initial choice status cues affect post-adoption decisions, we are blind to the cumulative impact of what it means to rely on choice status cues when forming attachments. Future studies will be better positioned to address the issue of cumulative impact by taking a longitudinal view on adoption and abandonment as a sequence of decisions (see Rao et al. 2001).

Notes

- 1 For example, recent studies have shed much light on the *macro-level consequences* of socially influenced *micro*-decisions by drawing on innovative experimental designs (Salganik et al. 2006; Muchnik et al. 2013; van de Rijt et al. 2014), large-scale behavioral data (Berger and Le Mens and 2009, Kovács and Sharkey 2014), and simulations (Strang and Macy 2001; Lynn, Podolny, and Tao 2009; Manzo and Baldassarri 2014).
- 2 *Quality* refers to any attribute, performance, or service considered desirable by the group.
- 3 Consider, for example, the rise of popularity information with respect to the media (special designations for “most emailed” articles), science (databases that rank order publications by the number of times cited by others), consumer goods (advertisements that incorporate counts of Facebook “Likes”), cultural goods (government-provided reports on the most popular baby names), and individuals (standardized metrics for an individual’s influence on social media).

- 4 Note that the distinction here between pre- and post-selection quality evaluations is different from the distinction between the first and second stages of decision making in the classic two-stage framework (Gensch 1987; Hauser and Wernerfelt 1990). The central theme of two-stage decision models is that decision makers first reduce a large set of alternatives to a more manageable set of viable candidates using simple decision-making rules; from this limited choice set (the consideration set), a “final” selection is then made based on a more complex assessment of options in the choice set. In contrast, our distinction calls attention to how decision makers perceive candidates when they are “at risk” of being adopted versus after they become “at-risk” of being abandoned (see Rao et al. 2001; Strang and Macy 2001; Strang and Still 2004).
- 5 The literatures on choice status and attribute-based status characteristics have developed independently. As a consequence, prior work offers limited guidance as to which type of cue, if either, will be stronger. On one hand, the inherent localness of a network cue could make it more primary than a “diffuse” status characteristic such as education. Even if decision makers do not know why an actor is sought after, the cue may be interpreted as a catch-all proxy for worth. If so, popularity may be more persuasive than a more globally recognizable characteristic. On the other hand, sociometric cues do not invoke the same type of deep cognitive bias that is associated with diffuse status characteristics such as race, gender, and education. Theorists working in the group processes tradition suggest that status characteristics organize interaction because cues activate non-conscious cognitive biases rooted in deeply held cultural stereotypes (see Correll and Benard 2006). These characteristics often become associated with master identities or statuses given that such cues are salient and activated across many different types of contexts (Ridgeway 2011). But choice status is a structural concept that must be interpreted with regard to the meaning of ties (Bonacich 1987), which may prevent the formation of a singular set of beliefs around the value of highly sought after individuals. For example, child development scholars (Rodkin et al. 2000) note that measures of social network centrality among elementary and middle school aged boys reveal two distinct types: the “model” boys (cool, competent and cooperative) and the “tough” boys (cool, not academically oriented, aggressive, and antisocial).
- 6 In the first practice round, participants were given five separate opportunities to form a single word associated with practice grid 1. After each opportunity, respondents were told if the word they entered was valid or invalid based on a true answer key. If participants did not enter a word, they were encouraged to do so in the next round. At the conclusion of the five opportunities, respondents were given a summary of their performance, including the number of valid words and the number of 5+ letter words. The second practice round (based on practice grid 2) was styled as a “real” game where respondents were given 20 text boxes and told to enter in as many words as quickly as possible. Similar to the first practice round, respondents were given a summary of their performance upon submitting their entries.
- 7 Both ice cream flavor and previous word game experience were questions asked of the respondents themselves at the start of the survey to give the impression that players like them are entered into pool from which teammate candidates are drawn.
- 8 Note that we chose to operationalize lower choice status as “50 percent of previous players,” which could be characterized as “moderate” demand as opposed to “low” demand. We operationalized the lower-skilled and lower choice status actors using moderate — versus low — scores because it would be unsurprising (and uninformative) to find that participants largely resist working with very unpopular or very incompetent partners. Thus, having respondents differentiate between a “high” versus “moderate”

pair of actors provides a more meaningful test of our hypotheses. At the same time, we recognize that this test cannot establish the boundary conditions of these effects.

- 9 On the flip side, however, being in moderate demand does not appear to seriously detract from perceptions of competence; the high-skill candidate is judged the same even when associated with low choice status (3.68 versus 3.68, $p = 0.951$); the same pattern holds for the low-skill candidate (3.39 versus 3.48, $p = 0.5149$). The fact that lower choice status does not detract from perceptions of quality could be because “50 percent of previous players” is a high enough prior adoption rate (in the absolute sense) that it does not trigger doubts about competence.
- 10 This could be due to a ceiling effect: across all of our studies, none of the high status candidates were chosen as partners more than roughly 75 percent of the time. Thus it is possible that being in demand had no effect because this candidate was already at the natural limit for this market. That said, it appears that the underlying *strength of the preference* for the high-skill candidate is significantly higher ($p = 0.0496$, two-tailed test) when that candidate is billed as being in demand versus being presented with no choice status information. When choice status information is not presented (baseline condition, past performance only), the competence scores for the higher-skill candidate are, on average, 1.09 times higher than the competence scores for the lower-skill candidate. In condition 2 (past performance with consistent choice status cues), the competence scores for the higher-skill candidate in high demand are 1.16 times higher on average than those for the lower-skill candidate in only moderate demand.
- 11 After each round, respondents were told: (1) whether or not they selected the correct grid; and (2) the number of seconds it took them to submit each answer (if indeed the correct grid was selected). The purpose of having five practice rounds was to encourage engagement in the task and to help ensure that participants acquired some basic understanding of the task itself. Importantly, the patterns used in the practice rounds were based on high levels of contrast (roughly 90 percent black versus 10 percent black) and thus correct answers were unambiguous.
- 12 The same patterns arise for perceptions of “powerful-powerless” and “nice-awful,” both of which are measured on nine-point bipolar scales. The high-status candidates in the education and popularity conditions were seen as significantly more powerful than their low-status counterparts within each condition (popularity: $d = 1.10$, $p < 0.000$; education: $d = 1.62$, $p < 0.000$). In addition, the high-status candidate in the popularity condition was viewed as significantly nicer than the less popular candidate ($d = 0.88$, $p < 0.000$). However, the effect of status on perceptions of “goodness” was significantly weaker in the education condition ($d = 0.43$, $p = 0.065$).
- 13 The MA candidate is perceived as being an entire point (on a five-point scale) more intelligent on average than the high school educated candidate, whereas the popular candidate is seen as less than one third of a point more intelligent compared to the less popular candidate.
- 14 Specifically, in predicting the unadjusted likelihood of choosing the high-status candidate over the low-status candidate, the odds ratio is positive and statistically significant ($OR = 2.41$, $p = 0.010$). The odds ratio, however, is close to one and statistically insignificant ($OR = 0.967$, $p = 0.939$) after adjusting for perceptions of competence. For this mediation analysis, perceptions of quality refer to an aggregate measure based on four items: capable, efficient, intelligent, and influential ($\alpha = 0.88$ for the high-status candidate; $\alpha = 0.89$ for the low-status candidate).
- 15 Participants were told that they needed to select a teammate because they would be playing a game together as a team. Even though respondents were never led to believe

that they had to closely interact with their selected partners, perhaps the notion of team formation was enough to trigger broad concerns regarding ease of interaction.

- 16 The majority of respondents scored a 4/5; only three respondents scored lower than a 4/5. The results of the analysis are robust to whether these respondents are included in or excluded from the analysis.
- 17 Evidence from a pilot study suggests that there are no differences in post-game perceptions of value even when teammates are programmed to do systematically *better* than respondents (one additional correct answer and a 20 percent faster response time). In other words, we do not think the absence of post-game differences in perceptions of candidate value is due to floor or ceiling effects related to the partner's performance level.
- 18 One question that arises is whether the lack of durability in the effect is simply a result of elapsed time. For example, in study 2, pre-game perceptions of quality occur closer to the time when the popularity cues were introduced than post-game perceptions of performance. We suspect that time lapse itself is not the reason why choice status has no effect on post-game evaluations of candidate quality. Note the apparent speed in a given sequence of decisions at which choice status loses its signaling power within a given decision-making sequence. In study 2, the decline in its power to shape quality perceptions took place literally over a matter of minutes, if not seconds.

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