Charisma, Status, and Gender in Groups With and Without Gurus

JOHN LEVI MARTIN  
Department of Sociology  
University of Chicago

TOD VAN GUNTEN  
Department of Sociology  
University of Wisconsin

BENJAMIN D. ZABLOCKI  
Department of Sociology  
Rutgers University

A number of studies have noted that small religious groups with charismatic leaders seem to have different gender dynamics than do groups without. We argue that the presence of such a leader changes what charisma “means” in such a group. Without such a leader, strong personalities may appear charismatic and lead to positions of high status—and such dynamics historically have tended to be associated with a positional advantage to males. With such a leader, however, charisma is more likely to be compatible with receptivity and decoupled from gender characteristics that tend to disadvantage women, leading charismatic women to have greater status than they would otherwise have.

Keywords: charisma, gurus, leadership, gender.

INTRODUCTION

We begin from three puzzles. The first is that new religious movements with charismatic leaders often seem to have a disproportionate appeal to women, though they may have strong male leaders and patriarchal ideology. The second is that in groups in which authority is legitimated by charisma, members seen as charismatic by their fellows tend to be of lower status than others. The third is that religious groups with patriarchal gender ideologies often tend to empower female members in comparison to groups with egalitarian ideologies. We argue that there is a single answer to these three puzzles: in short, that the presence of an inspired and inspiring male charismatic leader alters the interpersonal dynamics of a face-to-face group in such a way as to, on the margins, empower women.

We review these puzzles and then what is known about the operations of charisma and gender in relatively small groups. We introduce a data set with which these issues can be examined, and a method whereby network data can be used to study the interrelation of attributed charisma and position in a hierarchy. The results shed considerable light on some of the processes whereby
CHARISMA, STATUS, AND GENDER IN GROUPS WITH AND WITHOUT GURUS

groups form around charismatic leaders, one of the most interesting ways in which new religious (and quasi-religious) groups develop.

CHARISMA AND GENDER

Three Puzzles

1. Why do women like charismatic male leaders, even when these head groups with patriarchal ideologies? Of course, not all charismatic leaders are disproportionately approved of by women, but a number of researchers have proposed that charismatic religious leaders may have a special appeal to women (e.g., Stark and Bainbridge 1985:413; Wright 1992). The easiest explanation is that the women are literally “falling in love” with charismatic male leaders, an explanation supported by a fair amount of research, but one that does not explain the gender difference because male followers also seem to describe the process of becoming affiliated (and disaffiliated) with such a leader in terms of falling in (and out of) love (Jacobs 1987). Although women’s greater participation in religious groups may in many cases be explained according to ideas of deprivation—that women are, in Haywood’s (1983:163) apt phrase, “seekers and sufferers”—groups led by charismatic leaders do not necessarily recruit from the deprived, though they may still be disproportionately attractive to women (Stark 1996:43, 128).1

2. Why doesn’t the charismatic legitimation of the authority of a leader imply that the more charismatic followers will attain high status? Martin and van Gunten (2007) found in a comparison of groups that there was no evidence that members who were charismatic were of higher status than other members, especially when they were in groups that explicitly legitimated the position of the leader on the basis of charisma.

3. Finally, why are groups with patriarchal ideologies often better for women in terms of giving women more day-to-day interpersonal power (Aidala 1985; Fuller and Martin 2003)? That is, it is not simply that women in such groups are less structurally disadvantaged than one might think given the official ideology, nor even that there are forms of countervailing power that are open to those who buy into an ideology of male dominance. It is that women actually seem to have more interpersonal power in such groups than they do in other groups.

To begin to answer these puzzles, we first look at three pieces of an answer—what is already known from small group research about gender, about charisma, and about charismatic leaders.

Some Partial Solutions

1. What do we know about gender in small groups? Both a great deal and perhaps very little. A wealth of data on experimental groups, especially task-oriented groups, finds men tending to assume greater control over group processes and to be accorded higher status. The most common explanation (e.g., Ridgeway 1988) refers to a snowballing process—given unacquainted persons without any knowledge of one another’s actual strengths in handling any task, group members assume that a diffuse status characteristic such as gender should be as good a guess as any as to who will, in fact, be of higher skill (so long as the task is not one that is culturally coded as feminine). This prophecy becomes self-fulfilling as men take on more control, succeed, become more confident, and are deferred to more, take on more control, and so on.

We know a great deal in that these findings are quite robust, but we also know little in that such studies have also demonstrated that these processes are variable (e.g., Collier and Rosaldo

---

1 It is important to distinguish this from the question of women’s styles of leadership. We can easily imagine women being more likely to use one style of leadership but no more likely than men to have this type of leadership appeal to them.
and we only have a limited sense of the nature of this variability. Further, we also know that experimental studies often find stronger gender patterns than do observational studies, as experimental subjects lack firsthand knowledge that could cut against stereotypes (Eagly and Johnson 1990:246; Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt 2001; also Aries 1996:14, 54, 64; Stewart 1988:85). But overall, these studies suggest that in some circumstances, gender dynamics develop that tend to promote at least some men to positions of dominance. Further, as such dominance is seen as a “gender appropriate” form of public behavior (Megargee 1969; Nyquist and Spence 1986), men who act this way may be positively valued. Contrarily, when women take on dominant ways of acting, they are seen as less pleasant than men doing the same thing (Sev’er 1991). Thus, it seems that at least under some conditions, men may tend to adopt behavior profiles that involve a confident form of interpersonal dominance that is valued by other members—behavior that might be associated with “charisma.”

2. What do we know about charisma? It certainly depends on what we mean by the word. When Rudolf Sohm (1892:26–28) introduced the concept in his analysis of the early Christian church, he saw it as an attribute of a collective entity. All members of such a group have charisma to a greater or lesser extent—for such charisma is equivalent to the “gift of grace” coming with the formation of the ecclesia as the body of Christ. As individual Christians receive somewhat different gifts of grace, charisma leads to a division of qualifications and assignments for service (diakonia). Thus, the subordination that comes in the ecclesia is one stemming from the particular distribution of love-ordained obligations among a group, whose members are united through charisma.

When Weber (1978:215, 241–45) adopted and secularized the term “charisma,” considering it a potential basis for the legitimation of rule, he guided much of sociological thinking to assume that charisma was a feature that was a characteristic of individuals (even if attributed to them by others), and to specifically outstanding individuals (also Weber [1915]1946:295f). It was this secularized version that then entered popular discourse to denote some sort of extraordinarily interpersonally compelling qualities of a person.

Although some decry the bastardization of a sociological concept into something that can be used to increase sales (Riesebrodt 1999; Wasielewski 1985), other sociological theorists have approved the idea of treating charisma as a general analytic dimension characterizing persons or groups, one that supports continuous degrees of variation as opposed to an “all or nothing” ideal type (Collins 2004:126; Eisenstadt 1968:xxii; Lindholm 1990:6; Stark and Bainbridge 1985:356). This sort of relaxation makes a great deal of sense; if charisma is a form of “emotional faith” (Weber 1978:1122), there is no reason to imagine that the phenomenon only occurs at one particular scale (e.g., the national level), or only occurs with the most extreme degrees of intensity. Indeed, Weber’s own examples suggest the opposite—that the charisma of a political leader followed by millions is fundamentally the same as the charisma of a religious teacher followed, at least initially, by only a dozen.

Charisma in this secularized sense, often studied (e.g., Pastor, Meindl, and Mayo 2002) or discussed (e.g., Bly 2006) in terms of the qualities leading to business success, seems to have an ambiguous relation to gender.2 On the one hand, studies have found that female leaders are more likely to use the transformational (as opposed to transactional) style that is associated with charismatic leadership (Burns 1978)—even in religious bodies (Druskat 1994). But, on the other hand, as discussed above, men are more likely to display behavior patterns of outgoing confidence

---

2 The ease with which one makes the transition from profit to prophet has often been remarked upon, and there are a number of charismatic religious leaders who began in sales (for examples, W. D. Fard, founder of the Nation of Islam, Werner Erhardt, founder of est [Oakes 1997:51, 87ff]). Indeed, one of the charismatic leaders in the data we shall analyze also began in sales. Of the 20 charismatic leaders studied by Oakes, four had previously been in sales.
often associated with charisma. Thus, the gendering of charisma may depend on whether we are speaking of leaders or of followers. Thinking through the puzzles associated with the secularized charisma of group members then suggests that such charisma may vary greatly depending on whether or not the group has a charismatic leader, bringing us to our third question.

3. What do we know about charismatic leaders? For one, that they generally do not like serving under other charismatic leaders, which means that although members of a group with a charismatic leader may well be charismatic, there may be a ceiling to the charisma permitted them. Further, historical accounts suggest two different relations between members’ charisma and leaders’ charisma. In the first, there is some continuity between the type of charisma between leader and that of the members because the process of ascension to a position of leadership is tied to processes of the generation of charisma that are largely in individuals’ hands. In such cases, a charismatic leader often attains his or her position by beginning as a member of a retinue following another charismatic leader, and slowly eclipsing his or her former master in charisma. (This may have been true for Jesus, who seems to have started as a follower of the very charismatic John the Baptist.)

In the second type, members have charisma because it is transmitted to them from the charismatic leader; if she or he turns off the tap to any member, this unfortunate’s charisma necessarily begins to plummet, as there is no possibility of independent generation of charisma. This seems to be especially likely with religious charismatic leaders. In such cases, leaders and members may be locked into escalating cycles of joint charisma production (cf. Zablocki 1999). But even where things do not come to such an extreme pass, we see cases (e.g., Latkin 1989:634, 642, 644f; Palmer 1994:52, 97; Puttick 1997:75f) in which the presence of a charismatic religious leader is associated with the valorization of passivity on the part of disciples as a means to spiritual growth. Thus, the relationship between the charisma of the leader (on the one hand) and the charisma and status of rank-and-file members (on the other hand) does not come because the leader pursues a monopolization of charisma, but because the leader monopolizes the provision of charisma.

Further, we also know that charismatic leaders tend to take over a great deal of control of members’ everyday lives (Wright 1992:S45). In contrast, groups without any leadership at all often produce an anarchic environment that favors the strong, usually a subset of men in mixed-sex groups (Zablocki 1980:294). Perhaps for this reason there is evidence based on the same data set we will use that gender differences in power to vary with the presence of charismatic leaders: Carlton-Ford (1992:377f) found that the tendency of females to have less power than men was halved in groups with charismatic leaders. Fuller and Martin (2003) showed that this was explained by the tendency of the leaders to increase the control over members’ interpersonal relations, effectively putting a brake on the gendered status processes discussed above.

Our suggestion then is that these three puzzles have a common answer, one pertaining to how the presence of male charismatic leaders shapes the processes whereby members interact and evaluate one another. We attempt to investigate these issues using data on a fairly large number of groups, both with and without charismatic leaders. Sorting out these possibilities requires us to investigate what makes persons charismatic. Of course, the things that make one charismatic in one context (such as sales) are not necessarily the same that make one charismatic in another

---

3 We thank a reviewer for emphasizing the importance of this dynamic.

4 We began this line of investigation inspired by the notion of “spiritual capital” (e.g., Woodberry 2005), which we took in the sense of a form of “human capital” (Becker 1964)—for individuals may devote considerable efforts and resources to boosting their degree of spiritual perfection. Indeed, many of the groups in our data set are devoted precisely to this capitalization effort. We thought that “charisma” might be a reasonably good measure of others’ assessment of any member’s amount of accumulated spiritual capital. The question then would be whether this sort of capital could be translated into other “forms of capital,” such as social status.
(for example, as a warrior). What makes matters even more confusing is that “charisma” is in some ways necessarily inexplicable—it is what attracts us to someone after we have accounted for all his or her other qualities. When we find some person compelling despite being no more interesting, kinder, physically attractive, or intelligent than others, we must fall back on the idea of charisma. Thus, it may not be immediately apparent what makes people charismatic in different contexts. But if we have data from group members on whom they see as charismatic, we can use these reports to determine an individual-level quality that might at first seem unmeasurable. Having such data at hand, we can investigate how the presence of charismatic leadership affects the relation between charisma and status for nonleaders. We introduce the data set, then the measures used, and then our analytic strategy.

**Method**

**Sampling**

To conduct such an investigation, we would want comparable data from some groups that had, and others that did not have, charismatic leaders. We would also need detailed data that would allow us to determine the degree of charisma, and the overall status, of every member. There is one such set of data in the public domain. We analyze the first major wave of Benjamin Zablocki’s Urban Commune Project. This data set contains a wealth of information about the members of 60 different intentional communities (for more information, see Zablocki 1980; we describe the data set only in so far as it is relevant for our purposes). A commune was defined as a household in which five or more largely unrelated adults voluntarily decided to live together with a collective identity so as to reach some ideological goal having to do with the achievement of community.

To maximize geographical diversity, six large Standard Metropolitan Sampling Areas (SMSAs) from different regions across the United States were chosen for analysis. Fieldworkers in each city first compiled a comprehensive census of communes within the SMSA. Ten communes in each SMSA were then selected on the basis of certain key variables such as ideological type, population size, number of children, type of neighborhood, and year founded. Thus, the sample is multistage and weighted (Zablocki 1980:14, 69–74, 373), but as the true population distributions are unknown, we treat the sample as if it were a random one. Communes ranged from 5 to around 40 members, with 10 around average. The groups varied in ideology, sexual norms, and social structure.

In particular, there was a deliberate attempt to allow for a comparison of religious and nonreligious groups, including religious groups of different traditions. Further, because of the historical importance of “New Religious Movements” (NRMs) led by “gurus” (charismatic teachers who did not reside in any of the household groups in the sample, but were universally acknowledged as the ultimate source of authority and motivation for group members), a number of such groups, both religious and secular, were included in the sample. All of the charismatic leaders in this sample were male; none are actually included in the sample as none resided in the groups surveyed.

Most of the 25 groups with charismatic leaders were religious groups—11 were part of a national federation of a Hinduism-based NRM; with another four coming from other Eastern

---

5 Zablocki’s (1980) main theoretical focus was charisma, which led him to gather data on attributions of charisma that can be used for our purposes. Bradley (1987) continued this investigation of the ways in which charismatic leadership was related to the network structure of different groups.

6 We note that these data have been made public; see http://sociology.rutgers.edu/UCDS/UCDS.htm for more information.
traditions. As a result, over two-thirds of the individuals with valid data who come from groups with charismatic leaders were in groups that were Eastern religious in orientation. However, seven were part of a psychological movement headed by single charismatic leader (another psychological commune also had a different charismatic leader). Although the ideology of this federation was secular, and oriented to personal growth, the charismatic leader was held with a degree of awe that observers would generally hold as “religious,” and, indeed, many of the dynamics were indistinguishable from those of the Eastern groups. (Of course, it is also true that redemptory religious groups based on Eastern traditions may themselves have emphases more akin to what Westerners would consider “psychological” in contrast to a reliance on intervention by supernatural powers.) Finally, two groups were part of a political federation with a charismatic leader; in this case, the dynamics were different as it was not the leader’s arcane teachings that were so prized by disciples but his vision and inspiration; however, these groups only contributed 3 percent of the total members with valid data from groups with charismatic leaders.

The data collection occurred in three large periods, separated by intervals of around 12 years. Within the first of these periods, the first wave of data collection was conducted in 1974, when 60 communes were brought into the sample. One group was later excluded because it turned out that participation was not strictly voluntary. (This was a rehabilitational group to which persons convicted of drug offenses could be remanded in lieu of other punishment.) We here include this group for our 1974 analyses; the members were not surveyed after this point. Some other groups lacked valid data for our investigation, so we end up analyzing data from the members of 56 groups. It is also important to note that because our measures for any person come from the pooled reports of all other members, we do not have missing data for persons who happened not to respond to the survey. As a result, we have an effective N of 584 for this year.

A second wave took place in 1975, collecting data from groups that were still in existence. An additional 191 newly joined members were brought into the sampling frame at this time. When we compute our measures for the persons in this subwave, we have 172 persons for whom we have valid data for 1974 and 1975. A smaller wave took place in 1976, only collecting certain data among a minority of the remaining groups, and adding 59 new members. We have 50 persons for whom data are available for all three years. Because of this multiwave data structure, we have the capacity to replicate key cross-sectional models for two years (1974 and 1975), as well as to make change score models. These complementary analytic methods are used below.

Data and Measures

Despite its theoretic importance, charisma is less often measured in surveys than many other traits; as charisma is inherently about attributions made by others (Lindholm 1990:7), it cannot be accurately assessed with conventional pen-and-paper tests. Yet, these attributions are not necessarily independent of one another, which means that when we study naturally occurring groups, we can use the subjects as co-researchers: their reports can be used to measure personality characteristics that cannot be measured in other ways. This means that social network data can shed considerable light on aspects of personality and religious influence that have previously been understudied (also see Sosik 2001; Pastor, Meindl, and Mayo 2002).

The Urban Communes Data Set included extensive network data collected by a special instrument consisting of two parts. In the first, respondents were asked to volunteer the names of persons that they thought had particular characteristics. Characteristics asked include “supportive,” “decisive,” “influential,” “loving,” “interested in fixing up the house,” “interested in kids,” “strong,” “sexy,” “dominant,” “intuitive,” “passive,” “dependent,” “narcissistic,” and, most importantly for us, “charismatic.” With these data, we can construct each group member a profile of how her compatriots saw her. It is thus important to bear in mind that no matter how we define charisma, we are studying charisma not as Weber defined it, but as our subjects defined it.
Let us parsimoniously represent the data that we are using as observations \( x_{ijgk} = 1 \) if person \( i \) says person \( j \) is characteristic \( k \) (e.g., charismatic), where \( i \) and \( j \) are in group \( g \), and 0 if person \( i \) does not say this about person \( j \). Let \( N_g \) be the number of persons with valid data in the group \( g \), and \( K \) the number of characteristics. We seek to measure individuals’ personality characteristics using the compiled reports of their fellow members. However, it may be the case that the density of attributions of characteristic \( k \) is higher in some groups than in others. In some cases, this may be due to a lower threshold at which members decide to consider others to have this characteristic, perhaps because the group ideology requires that all persons strive to possess this characteristic. In such a case, we would want to control for the “inflation” of this characteristic. A person who gets all four attributions of characteristic \( k \) in one group should then be seen as receiving a stronger endorsement from his compatriots to the extent that he is “\( k \)” than a person who gets six attributions of characteristic \( k \) in an identically sized group in which there are 40 such attributions. Hence, following Yeung and Martin (2003), we propose

\[
Q^*_{jgk} = \left[ \frac{\sum_{i \neq j} X_{ijgk}}{\sum_{i,j} X_{ijgk}} \right],
\]

as a reasonable measure.\(^7\)

The second part of the network data comes from a page-long relationship census that each respondent was asked to fill out for each other person in the group. This included a question in which each respondent (ego) was asked to say whether for each other member (alter) who held the balance of power, or whether they were equal. From these reports, we can retrieve an estimate of each person’s overall “status” in the group from the model applied to the data on interpersonal power relations by Martin (1998). This model begins by assuming that every person possesses an unobserved (latent) status that can be placed on an interval-level scale. It then assumes that the observed responses to the question “who has more power, you or alter” come from a stochastic process whereby ego compares his status to that of alter, and tends to report having more power if his status is greater than that of alter, or less power if his status is less than that of alter.\(^8\) Each person is then assigned that value for her unobserved status that best explains all the observations; each person’s status then comes not from her self-reports only, but from the pooled reports of all persons in the group. It is important to emphasize that this measure of power does not tap esteem, but rather position in a vertical hierarchy of power.

**Analytic Strategy**

To begin our examination, we can focus on the relation between charisma and status by asking whether charismatic people are more or less likely to be of high status than are others, and

\(^7\) We replicated all analyses using an alternate measure that simply divides the number of attributions by the total number of nonmissing observations for any ego. To control for differences in reporting threshold across group, we also entered fixed effects for each group. Our findings were unchanged.

\(^8\) This model can be expressed as log-linear for two sets of odds for an observation \( x_{ijg} \) giving any person \( i \)’s report regarding her relation with \( j \) in group \( g \) as follows: first, the odds that \( x_{ijg} \) is in state \( A \) (\( i \) claims to be more powerful than \( j \)) as opposed to state \( B \) (\( i \) reports equality with \( j \)), and second, the odds that \( x_{ijg} \) is in state \( C \) (\( i \) claims that \( j \) is more powerful) as opposed to state \( B \).

\[
\ln(\Pr[x_{ijg} = A]/\Pr[x_{ijg} = B]) = m_g (a_{ig} - a_{jg}) - b_g,
\]

\[
\ln(\Pr[x_{ijg} = C]/\Pr[x_{ijg} = B]) = m_g (a_{jg} - a_{ig}) - b_g,
\]

where \( a_{ig} \) is the latent status of person \( i \), \( a_{jg} \) is the latent status of person \( j \), \( b_g \) is a parameter that measures group \( g \)’s propensity to claim equality, and \( m_g \) the group’s overall degree of status differentiation.
whether this is true in groups with charismatic leaders but not others, and if the results differ by
gender. We can also see whether this relation is a dynamic one—whether those who increase in
charisma are likely to increase in status, which would suggest that increasing charisma is a valid
“recipe” for moving up in a group’s power structure.

Of course, neither charisma nor status was randomly allocated to our subjects. We do not
see this as correctable even in principle, for the ecological validity of any randomly allocated
charisma or status would be so low as to be unusable. But this nonrandomness plays havoc with
most understandings of what one means by “cause” (see, e.g., Holland 1986:954). Thus, we do
not ask whether charisma is a cause of status in the classic experimental sense, but whether there
is evidence of a reasonable recipe for status involving charisma—that is, whether those who (for
whatever reason) increase their charisma are likely to find their status also increase. Here, we use
fixed-effects change score models. In all cases, we fit ordinary least squares (OLS) regression
models that compute robust standard errors in the face of the nonindependence due to having
multiple persons drawn from the same groups.

**RESULTS**

**Descriptive Relation of Status and Charisma**

We begin by examining to what extent persons who are charismatic are disproportionately
of high status. Models 1 and 2, Table 1, present these results for the years 1974 and 1975,
respectively. (For Table 1, all odd numbered models are for 1974, and all even numbered models
for 1975.) We present unstandardized coefficients, robust standard errors below in parentheses,
and compute statistical significance using two-tailed tests. When we carry out a simple bivariate
regression, we see (in models 1 and 2) that it is indeed true that, in general, charismatic people
tend to be of high status. The correlation is far from overwhelming (on the order of \( r = .3 \)), but it is undeniable.\(^9\)

We have argued, however, that there may be a fundamental gendering to this charisma—that charisma might lead to status for men but not for women, if previous results are generalizable. Models 3 and 4 enter both a coefficient for female and an interaction between female and charisma. Although both of these coefficients are negative, suggesting that the boost in status for charismatic women is around half that received by charismatic men, neither is statistically significant.

But if the logic laid out above is correct, we might expect the gendering of these dynamics to depend on whether a group has or does not have a charismatic leader. Models 5 and 6 introduce variables for this and interactions with all previous variables, thus allowing for completely different structural relations in the two sorts of groups. We find that it is indeed the case that charisma increases status for men in groups without gurus (for this is what the charisma coefficient now indicates), and that in such groups, women have no significant gains in status for charisma \( (\beta_{1974} = .658 - .455 = .203; \beta_{1975} = .085) \). But the gendering is the reverse in groups with gurus—here, charisma increases women’s status \( (\beta_{1974} = .658 - .455 - .232 + .669 = .640; \beta_{1975} = .773) \) much more than it does men’s \( (\beta_{1974} = .658 - .232 = .426; \beta_{1975} = .358) \). These results are, it should be noted, substantively unchanged if we restrict our examination of groups with charismatic leaders to specifically religious groups.

Other Traits

We have proposed that the reason for this relation is that the presence of a guru leader changes the ways in which charisma and status are gendered. Since the guru-disciple relation is seen as one linking a giver of spiritual knowledge and a receiver, the ideal disciple’s psychology is gendered (traditionally) feminine, hence valorizing the position of female disciples. In the words of the guru Rajneesh, it is not only that “the woman proves to be the perfect disciple,” but “even the male disciple has to function almost in a feminine way” (Puttick 1997:76; cf. Palmer 1994:52). Thus, the more receptive person has the possibility of attaining charisma; the more active person who shuts out the possibility of reception can neither receive the guru’s charisma nor can he possibly produce his own charisma—it would be like lighting a candle in broad daylight.

The results have been consistent with this argument, but they have been in some ways a poor test. We can reject the null hypothesis that there are no gendered patterns of status in these groups, but this is only one possible explanation for these results. It is very difficult to tease apart the “effects” of personality characteristics, as they tend to appear in constellations (for example, charismatic people may also tend to be decisive, or eloquent), and it is hard to say that it is any one element of such a constellation that is theoretically privileged. We therefore replicated models 5 and 6 13 times, substituting for charisma every other characteristic on which we have information (those identified in the “Data and Measures” section above). (For purposes of brevity, we condense our results by averaging across the models for 1974 and 1975; this does not change our conclusions.) Figure 1 charts the results in an intuitively accessible form. The thick line indicates the three-way interaction effect between (a) the characteristic in question, (b) female, and (c) the presence of a guru in an equation predicting status. (It is equivalent to the difference, between groups with and without gurus, in the difference in the status returns to charisma between men and women.) The relations are arranged in order of the magnitude of this coefficient. Charisma is at the far right, as this coefficient is the largest for charisma. We also

\(^9\) We reran our 1974 models for only those members also in the data set in 1975 to make sure that our two years were roughly comparable. Doing so did not change our results—as far as we can tell, the members who stayed into 1975 were not different in terms of the dynamics examined here from those who exited.
CHARISMA, STATUS, AND GENDER IN GROUPS WITH AND WITHOUT GURUS

Figure 1
Replication for all characteristics

Figure 1 graph the predicted effect of the characteristic in question on status for the four categories of women in groups with gurus, men in groups with gurus, women in groups without gurus, and men in groups without gurus. Effects for men are always portrayed with triangles and those for women with circles; those in groups with gurus have solid markers and solid lines, while those in groups without gurus have open markers and dashed lines.

We see, first, that this interaction is much higher for charisma than for any of the other attributes. Indeed, it is only for charisma that we find this interaction statistically significant in both years. The next largest effect is less than half the magnitude of the charisma effect, and it follows a different pattern; while for the effects of charisma on status that are highest for women in guru groups and men in other groups, for intuitive, there is a very strong effect for men in charismatic groups (and not only women). But more important, we get a sense of the overall logic of status in the different groups. First, there are some characteristics that never predict high status (being loving, being narcissistic), and others that always do (being dominant, being decisive). Second, this figure demonstrates that there are some attributes that better predict status for women than for men (being influential, being strong), and some that better predict status for men than women (being supportive, sexy, and interested in kids). And third, there is no attribute other than charisma that has a pattern whereby women in guru-led groups and men in nonguru-led groups (and only these) are similar in getting a status boost. Finally, if we enter any of these other characteristics in our models for status along with charisma, their effects no longer vary predictably by gender and the presence of a guru (results available from the authors). Thus, there seems to be something distinctive to charisma when it comes to this combination of gendering and type of legitimacy.

It is important to bear in mind that our measure of status is position in a vertical ordering of power relations (and not, say, “esteem”). Thus, our argument turns on the finding that in groups without charismatic leaders, men who have outgoing, strong, and winsome personalities appear “charismatic” and tend to attain high status—women in such groups who are seen as charismatic...
do not achieve such status. Their status “returns” to charisma are near zero. But in groups with charismatic (male) leaders, men who are seen as charismatic do not achieve as high a status. Certainly, they do not have larger status returns to charisma than do women. And this is, we suggest, because the paradigmatically masculine form of charisma has an ambiguous meaning—it seems incompatible with the receptive charisma that is fostered by the teacher. Thus, a man who is, receptively, charismatic is perhaps unlikely to be disproportionately powerful, due to the emasculated nature of his charisma, while a man who is actively charismatic may implicitly be challenging the leader’s monopoly on the provision of charisma. In contrast, women in such groups can be charismatic and of high status—indeed, they have the same returns to charisma as do men in groups that lack a “guru.”

Of course, we cannot immediately conclude that those who become more charismatic have their status altered in the ways compatible with the recipe implicit in the regression equation. For one thing, it might be that rather than charismatic people gaining status, higher status people have a tendency to appear charismatic. For another, it might be that these results really come from pooling groups of very different natures. Both of these concerns can, to some extent, be pursued by examining changes in status and charisma.

**Changes in Status and Charisma**

Models for change scores may be interpreted in three different ways. First, they may be used to produce estimates of the causal effect of some variables upon others; second, they may be understood as models for change in the dependent variable; third, they may be understood as a convenient way of removing certain kinds of unobserved heterogeneity. Although most analysts assume that all three of these are fused in one’s interpretation of the results, this is not necessarily the case. It is the third issue that is most important to us; we begin by deriving the change score model for such purposes. Our agnosticism regarding a causal interpretation then leads us to point to a divergence between the first and second interpretations for these data.

Let us assume for the moment that the degree of status of person $i$ at any time $t$ (denoted as $S_{i,t}$) is a linear function of her charisma at that time (denoted as $C_{i,t}$) and a set of $J$ other time-invariant variables $Y$ and $K$, and other time-variant variables $X$. That is,

$$S_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_C C_{i,t} + \sum_j \beta_j^A Y_{j,i} + \sum_k \beta_k^B X_{j,i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t},$$

where

$$\varepsilon_{i,t} = \delta_i + \varepsilon^*_{i,t},$$

with $\delta_i$ a time-invariant disturbance for the $i$th person associated with unmeasured variables, so

$$S_{i,t+1} - S_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_C C_{i,t+1} + \sum_j \beta_j^A Y_{j,i} + \sum_k \beta_k^B X_{j,i,t+1} + \delta_i + \varepsilon^*_{i,t+1} - \beta_0 - \beta_C C_{i,t} - \sum_j \beta_j^A Y_{j,i} - \sum_k \beta_k^B X_{j,i,t} - \delta_i - \varepsilon^*_{i,t}$$

$$= \beta_0 - \beta_0 + \beta_C (C_{i,t+1} - C_{i,t}) + \sum_j \beta_j^A Y_{j,i} - \sum_j \beta_j^A Y_{j,i}$$

$$+ \sum_k \beta_k^B X_{j,i,t+1} - \sum_k \beta_k^B X_{j,i,t} + \delta_i - \delta_i + \varepsilon^*_{i,t+1} - \varepsilon^*_{i,t}$$

$$= \beta_C (C_{i,t+1} - C_{i,t}) + \sum_k \beta_k^B (X_{j,i,t+1} - X_{j,i,t}) + (\varepsilon^*_{i,t+1} - \varepsilon^*_{i,t}).$$
If we assume that the errors are of constant variance and serially uncorrelated, this leads to

$$\Delta S_i = \beta_C \Delta C_i + \sum_k \beta_B^k \Delta X_{j,i} + \epsilon^{**},$$

(5)

where this new error satisfies OLS conditions, and thus we can get efficient and unbiased estimates of our betas of interest. Thus, our estimates are unbiased even if persons differ in fundamental aspects of their personality, aspects that might be correlated with both status and charisma, so long as these aspects of personality are stable over time.

Our sample necessarily changes, as we can only examine those who were present in both waves. There are 172 persons with valid data (for our purposes) in both waves. Although we thus lose some power of estimation, we can, according to this logic, get better estimates of the key parameters that should apply in the sample as a whole. It is important to emphasize that our most crucial assumptions do not involve Equation (2) having a causal interpretation (as opposed to a descriptive one); it is, however, important that we assume stationarity, that is, that the parameters linking our variables to one another do not change over the two years. Our previous results suggest that this assumption is a reasonably safe one: although parameters do change, these seem generally within what might be expected given two random samples from the same population (even though this is not actually the case).

A second important assumption is simply that there is enough temporal variance in our key predictors and our dependent variable. If no one changes in status and charisma, then despite the iron-clad logic of Equation (5), we will reach no useful conclusions. And it might be imagined that over one year, no one really would change appreciably in status or charisma. However, this is not at all the case. There are serious changes in both, and previous investigations (Yeung and Martin 2003) have found the internal validity of such changes quite high—that is, the changes do not seem to be the result of random reporting error.

Finally, it will be noted that there is no constant in Equation (5), which implies no change in the mean of the dependent variable over time. Because our measure of status has a constraint that the parameters sum to zero over every group at any time, this is not a substantively important restriction. If there were to be a change over time, it would simply be due to missing data in some observations leading to the exclusion of some cases. To avoid any bias associated with the exclusion of these cases, we add a constant. This has no effect on our conclusions.

We begin, as before, by examining predictors of status. Model 1 in Table 2 simply compares change in status between waves 1 and 2 with change in charisma over the same time. We see that there is no evidence of a general relation. Although mean levels of charisma and status are clearly correlated in the sample as a whole (see model 1, Table 1), this descriptive relation may be due to unobserved, temporally stable, heterogeneity in personality. For changes in charisma and status do not display this general relation. But what about when we take into account the difference between men and women, between groups with gurus and groups without?

Model 2 enters the interaction terms that we have seen important in Table 1. This model also enters terms for FEMALE, GURU-LED, and the interaction between these, even though these are not time varying, and according to the logic leading to Equation (5), would drop out. This is to allow for differential change in average status among women and men, those in GURU-led groups and those not. Replication that eliminated these time-invariant terms led to no differences in our conclusions (and, in fact, led to very minor changes in the other coefficients).

In this model, we see a familiar pattern. Figure 2 portrays this using a graph of the predicted change in status given a change in charisma for men and women in groups with, and without, gurus. Men who rise in charisma tend to go up in status, so long as they are not in guru-led groups. But the women in nonguru groups who rise in charisma are actually those who fall in status. Thus,
Table 2: Status change score models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main coefficients</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DV t2–t1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV t2–t1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ Charisma</td>
<td>-.046</td>
<td>.269*</td>
<td>-.064</td>
<td>-.144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.079)</td>
<td>(.105)</td>
<td>(.208)</td>
<td>(.333)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female × Δ Charisma</td>
<td>-.640*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.283)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guru led × Δ Charisma</td>
<td>-.504†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.293)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female × Guru × Δ Charisma</td>
<td>1.093*</td>
<td>13.438***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.433)</td>
<td>(.471)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-invariant coefficients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.256**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.153</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.058)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.156)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guru led</td>
<td>.209***</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.052)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.181)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female × Guru</td>
<td>-.351**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.471†</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.095)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.222)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guru led</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>-.113</td>
<td>.024</td>
<td>-.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.192</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses; two tailed tests; †p < .1; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

although there are some women who are reasonably charismatic and of reasonably high status in such groups, their status comes in spite of their charisma, not because of it. In groups with gurus, however, the gender patterns are precisely reversed. Here, men who increase in charisma actually decrease in status—their “way of being charismatic” seems to cut against their increasing their status. But for women, it is the opposite; if they increase in charisma, they are likely to increase in status. The pattern of coefficients is very close to that seen in Table 1 for the cross-sectional models, though more extreme. That is, once we take out the shared variance due to temporally stable personality characteristics, we find that the gendering of the status implications of charisma is even stronger than we originally believed.

It is important to emphasize that we can find these results persuasive without claiming that charisma “causes” status. We side with those who do not use the idea to apply outside of contexts in which one can imagine a treatment being independently applied (even if not randomly allocated). This does not mean we should strive for a study in which we can argue that charisma was allocated so that we may examine it as a cause of status. Self-selection may be at the heart of the phenomenon of charisma, especially in groups with gurus. Although we might be more familiar with the idea of a “status-seeker” than a “charisma-seeker,” many of the members of groups with charismatic gurus were joining precisely because they were trying to increase their own stock of “spiritual capital”—they hoped that over time, they would gain some of the sort of charismatic excellence characterizing the leader. Such charisma would be very different from an imaginary charisma that we are able to randomly distribute to members. Thus, we do not ask “does charisma cause status?,” which would imply that those not increasing in status and charisma could be induced to change in status if we were somehow to lead them to increase in charisma. Instead, we are interested in whether there is evidence that those who follow the implied recipes obtained from the cross-sectional data—those who may well be trying to increase
in status—meet with the success implied. Does a change in one thing predict a change in another?10

So far, our answer is that yes, it does. But does it predict a subsequent change? One of the interesting things about a three-wave panel structure is that it allows us to see which of two changes tends to precede the other. Such temporal ordering is often a reasonably good indication of processual priority. Unfortunately, there are many processes in which temporal ordering does not appear for the different parts are simultaneous. With a conventional yearly panel survey of Americans, we could not confirm that, say, humiliation causes anger because we would not find instances of humiliation but not anger and then, a year later, humiliation and anger. It may well be that the relation between status and charisma is of this order.

But it is also quite possible to imagine the role of a temporal lag. Our measure of charisma is the average degree to which group members saw another as charismatic; our measure of status pertains to this person’s position in the overall power structure. Some of the relations constituting charisma (say) may begin to change before the relations constituting status. For example, it might be that ego seeing alter as charismatic does not, by itself, lead ego to begin to defer to alter in terms of interpersonal power. It is only when ego realizes that many other people also see alter as charismatic that this translates to a change in alter’s status. This sort of dynamic might be compatible with a temporal lag. Although one year might be far too long a lag, as long as we caught some people who had changed in charisma, say, between wave 1 and wave 2, whose

---

10 Given this interest, there are a number of ways that we might proceed. We might use the cross-sectional data and an instrumental variable approach to disentangle mutual conditioning of status and charisma. However (and this holds for the use of instrumental variables for other analyses here), we were unable to find any clean instruments; further, because there is evidence of heterogeneity across groups in terms of effects, we would be unlikely to uncover anything that would serve as a convenient instrument without introducing bias. Second, we might fit a multiwave model in which one’s value on one wave would affect one’s value on the other as in a conventional LISREL analysis. Halaby (2004), however, has shown that such methods are not as robust as a simple difference of differences. This does not necessarily solve the problem of endogeneity whereby status may affect charisma and charisma status; we return to this shortly.
statuses had not yet “caught up” to their new position of charisma, a lagged change model might uncover this pattern.\textsuperscript{11}

In other words, we look at people who first went up in charisma (between waves 1 and 2), and see if they later went up in status (between waves 2 and 3). Because we now need three waves of data, our sample size is reduced to 50. However, 50 good cases with a strong model can be better than 500 with an ill-thought-out one. That is, now we assume that

\[ S_{i,t+1} = \beta_0 + \beta_C C_{i,t} + \sum_j \beta_j^A Y_{j,i} + \sum_k \beta_k^B X_{j,i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t+1}, \]  

and that

\[ \varepsilon_{i,t+1} = \delta_i + \varepsilon^*_i,t+1, \]

so

\[ S_{i,t+2} - S_{i,t+1} = \beta_C (C_{i,t+1} - C_{i,t}) + \sum_k \beta_k^B (X_{j,i,t+1} - X_{j,i,t}) + (\varepsilon^*_i,t+2 - \varepsilon^*_i,t+1). \]

and given the same assumptions regarding the errors, Equation (5) now holds for our new dependent variable for change between times \( t+1 \) and \( t+2 \).

Model 3 in Table 2 replicates model 1 but using this lagged change measure. Again, there is no evidence of a general relation. Model 4 then replicates model 2. Now we find no strong evidence that there is any temporal ordering to the changes in charisma and status for those in nonguru-led groups. But for the women in guru-led groups, there is a very strong relation. Indeed, this relation is so strong that its magnitude is unbelievable in any literal sense. (Given that we have only 50 cases, any statistical significance indicates a very strong effect. But in this case, the parameter value itself is quite large.) The most important conclusion then is simply that the coefficient is in the same direction as all of our other explorations, and is statistically significant.

We have been assuming that in line with our interests, it makes sense to use charisma as an explanation for status, and not vice versa. Of course, it might be that the explanatory emphasis should run the other way. We therefore replicated all our analyses but reversing these variables as independent and dependent (results not shown but available online at http://home.uchicago.edu/~jlmartin/csg.pdf). When we do this for the change score models, our replications of model 2 in Table 2 are similar to the models with status as a dependent variable, but in our replication of model 4, every coefficient changes its sign from the replication of model 2. This suggests that we are simply measuring ceiling and floor effects, and not any patterning to change. We did not run into this sort of instability in our models for status. All our models for status suggest that charisma does predict status, that this relation is gendered, and this gendering depends on the presence or absence of a charismatic guru.

The Meaning of Attributes and the Gendering of Charisma

We have seen that the change models do not lead us to reject our conclusion that the link between status and charisma is fundamentally gendered, and it is gendered in different ways depending on whether or not the group has a charismatic leader. In brief, in groups without

\textsuperscript{11}This sort of test is also compatible with a causal interpretation in which we attempt to neutralize the difficulties arising from the endogenous position of our key independent variables. Another way of dealing with the endogeneity is to use the twice-lagged value of the endogenous independent variable as an instrument for the difference of the independent variable in a differences model (Halaby 2004:539). We attempted this but ran into difficulty with our interaction coefficients. We were able to fit such models for different groups separately, but then lost the capacity to constrain certain equations to be the same across groups. Accordingly, our coefficients, which were similar in magnitude and direction to those reported here, were not statistically significant.
gurus, charisma tends to be associated with status—but only for men. In such groups, we hazard, many of the self-fulfilling dynamics familiar to students of social psychology occur—those who are more outgoing or dominant, characteristics typically gendered masculine, assert control over decisions, and rise in general interpersonal power. Women are in a bind in which if they assert themselves equivalently, their nonconformance to gender stereotypes makes it difficult for them to be positively evaluated by others; lacking this positive evaluation, they are unlikely to be seen as charismatic.

But in groups with a guru, these gender dynamics are upset because, following the words of one informant in a study by Puttick (1997:86), the guru is to all other members as male is to female generally. Similarly, Sufi mystics connect the female position in intercourse with the proper attitude of receptivity of a disciple (Malamud 1996:101). All members, that is, must be receptive and passive; the sorts of behavior often understood as “feminine” are a requirement for everyone. Men who appear to lack these receptive qualities and are merely outgoing and assertive are unlikely to be seen as charismatic.

Can we find empirical support for this interpretation? One simple way is to look at the correlations of individuals’ charisma with other characteristics, looking separately at men and women in groups with and without gurus. We consider a characteristic to be “gendered” in some group if it is significantly associated with charisma for men but not for women (or vice versa). We here use the criteria of a correlation that is significant at \( p < .05 \) in both 1974 and 1975; because certain items were not asked in both years, we exclude these from current consideration. Given this gendering, we are interested in characteristics in which the gendering differs between groups with and without gurus.

So, for example, men (but not women) who are supportive, loving, and intuitive tend to be charismatic both in groups with gurus and in those without. Although interesting, this uniform gendering does not give us purchase on how the presence of a guru affects the relational logic of charisma. But the only people for whom being decisive, strong, influential, or dominant are not associated with charisma are women in groups without gurus. Thus, the presence of a guru tends to reverse this tendency for outgoing women not to be seen as charismatic. Also, the only subset for whom being interested in kids and, perhaps more significantly, being sexy are significantly associated with charisma are men in groups without gurus. For women, these characteristics may be understood as linked more with gender role stereotypy, and for men in groups with gurus, these also seem to interfere with the ascription of charisma. This suggests that the attribution of charisma means something different across these different types of groups (Yeung 2005).

We can attempt to get a more complete intuitive picture of the gendering in these different groups by examining the interrelations of all attributed characteristics simultaneously. This has the virtue of allowing us to visualize the full set of interrelations of characteristics, and not simply their association with charisma. Here, we carry out nonmetric multidimensional scaling for the 1974 data as a means of such an examination. We use the ALSCAL algorithm for the set of characteristics after creating proximities using Euclidian distance; we treat the data as if it were ordinal as this nonmetric algorithm led to a substantially better fit than did a metric solution. The solutions are based on 208 women and 258 men in groups without charismatic leaders, and 169 women and 256 men in groups with charismatic leaders. The stresses for a two-dimensional fit were .102 (men, nonguru groups), .090 (women, nonguru groups), .081 (men, groups with gurus), and .131 (women, groups with gurus); these are all acceptable values.

We present the results in as simple a form as possible by graphing the position of characteristics in a two dimensional space; as nonmetric multidimensional scaling lacks a true “0,”

---

12 At the same time, the relationship of transmission and reception may also be seen as one of mothering, which can change the implicit gendering of the charismatic leader, who feeds the disciples from his “breasts” (as in Malamud 1996:96).
the placement of the axes is not critical, nor is the orientation of the objects as only distances are meaningful. Accordingly, we reflect or rotate the figures such that “status” is always to the right, on the horizontal axis, to aid comparison. (To increase readability, we suppress printing axes.) Because of the need to make comparable figures for subsets of data with different average degrees of association, it is not the case that the same distance translates to the same magnitude of association across figures, but it is a good guide as to the relative degree of interlock between relations.

Figures 3a and 3b show the results for men in groups with and without gurus. For men in groups without gurus, we see that the overall arrangement can be understood in terms of two dimensions: a horizontal one going from weakness on the left to strength on the right, and a horizontal one going from unappealing selfishness on the bottom to appealing selflessness on the top. Charisma is part of this extremely appealing self-less personality vector, and is near sexy as well as intuitive. Finally, it is reasonably close to status, and the fact that the horizontal spine of the data running from passive to status and the vertical one running from narcissistic to charisma lean into each other suggests that the more appealingly selfless men appear, the greater their power in such groups.

For men in groups with gurus, the overall terrain is quite similar, but charisma here seems less associated with the prosocial characteristics of being intuitive and being interested in fixing up the house. Further, being sexy is now far from charisma and well on the way to narcissism. The
CHARISMA, STATUS, AND GENDER IN GROUPS WITH AND WITHOUT GURUS

Figure 4
(a) Women in groups without gurus (b) Women in groups with gurus

If we ignore the entire logic of relations and simply look at bivariate correlations, we find that in the groups without charismatic leaders, charisma among men is most correlated with being influential \((r = .45)\), intuitive \((r = .43)\), and dominant \((r = .40)\), while in the groups with gurus, it is most associated with being influential \((r = .45)\), strong \((r = .29)\), and intuitive \((r = .28)\).

13 If we ignore the entire logic of relations and simply look at bivariate correlations, we find that in the groups without charismatic leaders, charisma among men is most correlated with being influential \((r = .45)\), intuitive \((r = .43)\), and dominant \((r = .40)\), while in the groups with gurus, it is most associated with being influential \((r = .45)\), strong \((r = .29)\), and intuitive \((r = .28)\).
than are the more stereotypically feminine attributes of being *sexy, interested in kids*, and *loving*. Thus, for both men and women in groups without gurus, charisma is located relatively close to *sexy*. This suggests that seeing another person as charismatic in such groups is likely to at least be compatible with thinking of her or him as an object of sexual desire—something that might, given other patriarchal assumptions, tend to lead men to be relatively advantaged in status while leading women to be relatively disadvantaged.

But Figure 4b shows that in groups with gurus, there is a radically different structure for women. There is a single dimension running less to more powerful, with “sexy” far from this. Thus, for women, as for men, in groups with gurus, being seen as charismatic is less likely to involve an association with sexual desire. Further, being charismatic is centrally located in our map for women—indeed, the six characteristics in the circle were so close to one another that they had to be moved in order to make the figure readable. Here, being charismatic is connected with both dynamism and prosocial characteristics. These results support the interpretation made above—charisma leads to status for men (and not women) in groups without gurus but for women (and not men) in groups with gurus because the presence of the charismatic leader changes the *meaning* of these relations.

**Conclusions**

We have seen that the path to high status in our groups seems to be gendered, but this gendering depends on the presence or absence of a charismatic leader. We have argued that (in line with typical genderings of interpersonal dynamics), in groups without charismatic leaders, men who are dominant and charismatic can increase their position of power vis-à-vis other members. But where groups have gurus, this cycle is arrested. Philosophically, groups with gurus tend to stress the passivity of discipleship. This does not mean that there are no dynamic, aggressive, and powerful people in these groups. There are, and they tend to be of higher status. But here, status becomes relatively divorced from charisma—these forceful people may be accorded more power, but they are not seen as possessing that compelling quality of specialness that the other members termed “charisma.” Men who are dynamic may be seen as charismatic, yet not accorded status; men who are forceful may be accorded high status, but not seen as charismatic. And this opens up space for women to have a somewhat different type of charisma, one that is allowed to increase their status.

Could there be other explanations for our findings? For one thing, we have emphasized that the guru-led groups empower women despite their traditionalistic gender ideologies. But if gender ideology is crucial, it might be that members join the group with certain gender ideologies that are related to their willingness to accord status to other members, male and female, and that such self-selective processes account for what we have attributed to the nature of the charismatic leadership. Although we cannot completely dismiss such an alternative account given the fact that these groups are self-selected, we examined differences in individuals’ gender ideology across groups with and without gurus, and found that the differences, though interpretable, were quite mild. Members of groups with charismatic leaders do tend to have a more conservative gender ideology, but in the modal case, this involves respondents shifting from “strongly supporting” egalitarian ideals to only “somewhat supporting” them.

Could it be that what we ascribe to the importance of informal interpersonal interaction really has to do with women holding formal positions of leadership in groups with charismatic leaders? First, as Baer (1993:77) notes, there is not necessarily any clear relation between the personal empowerment of women in religious groups and their structural empowerment. Indeed, holding a “formal leadership position” in such groups may be an onerous chore, perhaps especially when the occupant is a woman (see, for example, the position of “house mother” as opposed to “house father” in a group with a charismatic leader discussed by Bradley [1987:39]). Even so, the ratio of
female to male leaders was lower in groups with gurus than in groups without. The empowerment of women here happens in spite of the gendered nature of formal positions, not because of it.

Thus, the weight of the evidence suggests that the relative empowerment of women in groups with charismatic leaders is indeed related to the reshaping of the meaning of charisma, itself an inherently gendered concept. This suggests that the type of leadership of a group can powerfully shape social psychological dynamics. To return to Weber (1978), there are different ways of legitimating an order of domination (and it is worth recalling that Weber meant to include small groups such as these and not only large governments when discussing such orders). But it also means that at least in small groups, the interpretation of critical aspects of religious belief and religious experience may be rooted in the pattern of interpersonal interaction.

Not all religious groups are born in small, face-to-face settings oriented around a charismatic leader. But many are. The survival rate of such groups tends to be low: even restricting attention to a sample of such groups successful enough to leave historical records, Zablocki (2000) found a half-life of 37 years. There is every reason to believe that the extinction rate of such groups is huge in the first years, when the group is still struggling to define itself and its form. Thus, any progress toward a natural history of religions requires that we understand regularities in the interpersonal dynamics that surround charismatic leaders. We have found that, paradoxically, charismatic leaders divorce charisma from status for other members, and reverse aspects of the gender dynamics commonly found in small groups. This may have two effects. First, it may allow capable women to occupy positions of power without them seeming either “masculine” or, contrarily, sexualized. This may be crucial for a group’s survival after initial formation, given that (with important exceptions such as Ann Lee) women are more often found occupying the critical role of the “second” leader who consolidates the group (Toth 1981; Zablocki 2000) than in the role of the “first” charismatic leader. (An example would be Sheela’s role in organizing Rajneesh’s following [Carter 1990].) More generally, the presence of a charismatic leader not only changes gender dynamics, but also can lead to a potential valorization of altruism and passivity. This may provide the phenomenological counterpart to the more prosaic ownership patterns identified by Kanter (1972)—a support for the selflessness and altruism that facilitate new forms of social and spiritual life.

REFERENCES


---

14 We do not deny that the way in which domination is legitimated may matter on the day-to-day level of lived experience. But we have found that it may be less the belief in the nature of legitimacy than the presence of a certain type of charismatic leader that shapes the relation between charisma and status for other members.


