STATUS: A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING INTRA-FAMILIAL CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

Status, defined as the perceived importance of persons relative to others, is manifested by intentional expressive behaviors, termed status maneuvers, which aim to alter or maintain the status of self relative to others. Families are social systems in which status hierarchies are realized through recurrent status maneuvers. A Discrepancy Hypothesis is proposed to account for intrafamilial conflict. Analysis of family status maneuvering can be used to deduce each member's cognitive map and the degree of intrafamilial conflict. Information about the aggregate family status hierarchies is presented in the form of an underlying status matrix. This paper first illustrates status maneuvers by examples encountered in everyday life; next explains the correspondence between the dynamics of family cooperation or conflict and its underlying status matrix; and finally presents data, obtained from a detailed analysis of status maneuvers in a single family therapy session, supporting the Discrepancy Hypothesis.

Keywords: status; family; conflict; power; hierarchy; maneuver

1. INTRODUCTION

A construct of value to the study of interpersonal conflict is *status,* which has been defined as: "…the importance a person is perceived as having in relation to someone …else" (Wiener, 1994, p. 111). This definition follows Johnstone (1981), who likens status acts to the displays of dominance and submission among social animals and differs from using the term "status" to describe anything (e.g., intelligence, ability, taste, strength, habits, wealth, or social position) used to make a person inferior or superior to others (James & Williams, 1984).

1.1 Interfamilial Conflict and Status

An extensive literature in sociology and social psychology examines status behaviors as they relate to power, face/esteem, decision-making, and interpersonal conflict. (Hocker & Burton, 1985; Balkwell, 1994; Stolte, 1994). French & Raven (1959) studied social influence among individuals in groups and classified their communications as derived from five types of power. Skill & Wallace (1990) used French & Raven's power typology to analyze scripted, televised family interactions; Olsen & Cromwell (1975) used the same typology to study actual family decision-making and the relative degree of influence members exerted on outcomes. Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain (1974) recorded and coded the improvised responses of newly-married couples during their enactment of conflict-inducing scenarios in order to study communication processes and styles of dealing with interpersonal conflict. Two of the aims of their investigation were to identify what escalates or attenuates conflict and to study the tactics of negotiation and power as expressed in marital relationships.

These authors compiled a typology consisted of 54 types of communications, organized into six groups, finding that partners co-created distinctive, recurrent styles of dealing with conflict, "… making the attribution of individual causality within the ongoing interaction arbitrary" (pp. 201-202). Other status-relevant findings were that conflict escalates when the issues involve power or self-esteem and that couples who coped with conflict by avoidance had equivalently stable and compatible marriages with those who used confrontation. Most sociological and social psychological research and theorizing about status has focused on small group dynamics.

Family interaction differs from generic group dynamics in that families are social systems in which members intensely influence one another's identities; more is at stake regarding status in families than in most social groups, which likely sets family conflict apart from that observed in other groups in both quality and intensity. Conjoint marital and family therapy is widely-practiced modality of mental health treatment in which conflict is expressed and enacted frequently among family members and occasionally between the therapist and family members. While a considerable literature exists on the pragmatics of handling such conflict within couples and family therapy treatment there has been little attempt to study the role of status in the conflictual process itself. Family therapy sessions, termed "treatment systems," are still more complex, as they involve a therapist who interacts as another status player with family members but whose interpersonal connections to them are more peripheral emotionally. It cannot be assumed that the therapist is merely an audience member whose own status is unaffected by the ongoing status maneuvers.

1.2 Terms and Definitions

While all human communication has status implications, a *status act* is "a behavior which communicates to an observer the importance of the act's doer, relative to that of other persons, called 'targets'." The observer's evaluation of status acts rests upon both their correspondence with culturally accepted signifiers of importance (elaborated further below) and an understanding of the social context in which they occur. S*tatus transactions* are sequences of status acts in which the status acts are reciprocated by the target person(s). For example, a status transaction occurs in a dyad when the status acts of person A, which is directed toward person B, is followed by a status act of B toward A. Status transactions need not result in a change of status (perceived importance) of any of the persons involved, though they frequently do. Those status acts in which the doer intends to produce status transactions are termed *status maneuvers.* Status maneuvers, then, are conscious attempts either to maintain or alter the *status hierarchy,* the pre-existing ranking of importance of each person within a social group. A *status matrix* is a tool (usually in grid form) for organizing and representing the inferred, observed or reported status hierarchy of each person within a social group. These definitions are summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

1.3 Status and Sociobiology

Our observations and conceptualizing of status behavior are consistent with those of many sociobiologists (Wilson, 1975) who study *agonistic* (i.e. any activity related to fighting, whether aggression or conciliation and retreat) behavior in social animals. As do sociobiologists, we conceptualize "dominance" as always relative: it applies only to an individual *relative to one or more other individuals*. Note also that an individual may be dominant in one context and subordinate in another.

1.4 Understanding Status Transactions

In an example of the simplest case, dyadic interaction between persons A and B, person A might engage in high-status behavior, signifying "I'm important." Interpreted in a relational context, A's high-status act may signal either, "I'm more important than you" (raising one's own status) or "You're less important than me" (lowering the other's status). In the ensuing status transaction B might respond with a low-status act, signifying agreement with A ("Yes, you're more important than me" or "Yes, I'm less important than you.") Such agreement co-creates a *complementary* transaction, devoid of overt conflict. Were B to respond with a high-status act, ("No, I'm more important than you") or equal- ("No, I'm just as important as you") signifying disagreement, the dyad would be co-creating a *conflictual* transaction. As status is relative, increasing one's status over another's may be accomplished equally by raising one's own status or lowering the status of the other. However, there is a palpable difference between a competitive high-status maneuver (putting down, or lowering another's status) and non-competitively raising one's own. The former is nearly always resented since people usually resist having their status involuntarily lowered by others; even when they are assuming low status, they prefer to do it themselves. Note that the dyad's status transaction can result in an increase, a decrease, or no change in the status difference between A and B. Status only changes when all parties agree to a change.

Similarly, a status hierarchy can be *complementary,* when each player acts in conformity to the status expectations of all the others, or *conflictual,* when a player's actions give or take status that is unacceptable to any or all of the others. It may be observed that people maneuver to get others to assume (mostly) complementary status, thereby both "giving" the desired status to, and "receiving" the desired status from others. It is necessary for an observer to be fully aware of the players' social context in order to evaluate status transactions correctly. For example, conflictual status maneuvers can be played by tacit agreement, which marks them as playfully intended, such as when friends display familiarity by insulting one another.

Another example is that of two or more players playing high status in a complementary fashion where all agree on their mutual worthiness; it may not be readily apparent that others (whether actually present or referred to) are being assigned "unworthy" status to deflect any overt competition between the "Worthies," a triangulation pattern that systemic family therapists will have no difficulty recognizing.

1.5 Status and Self-Esteem: Playing and Having Status

Human interaction is never status-neutral; many social behaviors are status maneuvers designed to obtain desired outcomes between self and others. Moreover, it appears that people both have status (corresponding to their opinion of themselves or self-esteem, which may be ascribed, relatively fixed, and not within a person's control) and playing status (representing their fluid, adaptive choices to their current social situation). Not infrequently, status acts are inferred to arise from a discrepancy between these two aspects, such as when a person responds to a social compliment with false modesty (High self-esteem paired with Low-status maneuver), or when a sinful person hypocritically preaches virtue to others (Low self-esteem paired with high-status maneuver). Being socially skilled requires people to behave at times at variance to their self-esteem (e.g., displaying politely respectful equal-status to someone you feel superior to in order to avoid hurting his feelings; acting low-status toward a boss who is unfairly reprimanding you). Such discrepancies arise from the interplay of status maneuvering and congruence between one's displayed status and self-status. When status acts are unintended (i.e., not conscious) they reflect the person's self-status in that context accurately. However, these acts cannot be interpreted reliably by an outside observer, since that observer's own frame of cultural reference, self-interest or judgment regarding the target person's self-awareness may be inaccurate. A boasting person may actually believe in his virtue; the sinning minister who preaches against sin may do so out of duty and in a spirit of remorse. Goffman (1959) gives numerous detailed examples of the intricacies of misleading status performances.

1.6 Triadic Status Behavior

A useful perspective to cultivate when observing status transactions is seeing triadic patterns, rather than viewing status behavior as derived from a trait possessed by individuals or as occurring only dyadically as the outcome of complementary role enactment. In one form of triadic interaction, the presence of a third player mediates the interaction between two status players. For example, when player A attacks the high-status of player B in order to get the support of player C for A's own high-status, a coalition may develop between A and C against B, or between B and C against A. In another form, A may refrain from challenging B's lowering of A's status in order to win C's support for his own high-status by appearing mature, long-suffering, or victimized. In yet another form, A views B as highest in the status hierarchy, C as intermediate, and himself as lowest, which would suggest he defers to both B and C. But were C to competitively attack B's status, A might attack C for violating A's status hierarchy, which places B higher than C. Thus, in real life, status transactions are often the result of complex, shifting factors.

1.7 Interpreting Status Acts: Status Cues

Persons lacking experience with status maneuvers not infrequently assume that high status is always a position of advantage and power, and that there is something inferior, disadvantageous, or degrading about assuming a low-status position. In actuality, low-status is advantageous in lowering expectations, deflating competition and evading responsibility. Equal status, or maneuvering to lessen status inequality, permits a fuller admixture of intimacy and respect and appears necessary for friendship and cooperative partnership.

As there are significant cultural and historical differences in the ways that status is and has been conveyed, the following descriptions [of status cues] are offered as generalizations that are valid only within contemporary Western societies. Status acts are territorial, involving the use of space, gesture, posture, vocal inflection, as well as verbal content. Status-relevant behavior may be observed on three dimensions:

(a) The Verbal Dimension, which concerns the content, the specific "what" of information offered. Verbal cues are written and spoken words. Low-status is communicated by speakers qualifying their assertions frequently, apologizing, and referring to their own incapacity or incompetence. High-status players make unqualified declarative statements, issue orders or commands, and refer to themselves as powerful, knowledgeable and in control.

(b) The Emotional Dimension, which concerns the "how" of communication offered. Through tone, inflection, pacing, and emphasis of the voice, cues on the Emotional Dimension reflect the communicator's "attitude toward" or "feelings about" one or both of the following: verbal content; the relationship between speaker and listener. Low-status cues include: speaking in a hesitant, tentative way; forced or rushed speech; taking frequent short breaths; making little, ineffectual noises; ending sentences with a rising (questioning) inflection; signaling stress in intonation. High-status players speak calmly, deliberately, with conviction and finality.

(c) The Movement Dimension, which, like the Emotional Dimension, conveys information about the manner in which a communication is made, reflecting the communicator's "attitude toward" or "feelings about" both the content offered and the relationship between self and others. Like the Verbal Dimension, the Movement Dimension has a "what," or content component, since many movements have culturally specific meanings.

Movement Dimension status acts involve the use of space, posture and gesture. Eye-contact is a significant element; Low-status players frequently look away from others, giving them a "shifty-eyed" appearance, while High-status ones hold steady, "unworried" and direct contact. The body language of Low-status players signals taking up as little space as possible by crouching, slouching and holding their limbs tightly in toward their bodies; they make frequent, rapid "nervous" gestures, such as putting their hands to their mouths, pulling or twisting their hair, rubbing their faces, fidgeting with their fingers, constantly "fixing themselves up" and speaking with a "small mouth." High-status players by contrast, take up a maximum amount of space, moving close, even into, the space of others, opening wide their mouths and gesturing expansively with their limbs; they have erect but not stiff postures with heads held high and steady, moving in an unhurried, fluid way yet remaining relatively inactive.

1.14 The Discrepancy Hypothesis

Assuming a social group with the characteristics enumerated by Balkwell (1994), namely: (1) small enough for face-to-face interaction to occur among all its members (2) gathered for the purpose of accomplishing well-defined and shared goals (3) sharing the same understanding of success or failure, and (4) in agreement that each person's contribution is taken into consideration, *we hypothesize that each person in a social group attempts to bring about a correspondence between the status behavior observed within that group and his/her internal representation ("cognitive map") of the group's status hierarchy*. All Status Acts within such groups are thus viewed as Status Maneuvers, i.e., as intended to alter relative status. These status maneuvers are intended either to increase this correspondence or to prevent it from decreasing. Conflict arises when these attempts are unsuccessful, implying that the cognitive maps of group members are different. The observed group dynamics is a result of the aggregate attempt of all members to actualize their own status maps. The Discrepancy Hypothesis is summarized below:

1. Each member of a social group is aware of his/her own preferred status hierarchy for that group (their "cognitive map" of status hierarchy).
2. Each member of a social group infers the current status hierarchy from observed intra-group behavior (their "territory" of status hierarchy).
3. On many (though not all) occasions, each member will engage in status maneuvers to eliminate, reduce, or prevent the increase of any perceived discrepancy between his/her "cognitive map" and the "territory".
4. Differences between group members' cognitive maps results in conflicting status maneuvers ("intra-group conflict").
5. Observed group dynamics result from the aggregate attempts by all members to make the territory conform to their own cognitive maps.

1.15.1 Status Matrices

As noted above, a status matrix is a static "snapshot" of status rankings at a moment in time for a group of interacting persons. In the tables of status matrices which follow, persons are represented by capital letters; the rows represent the persons doing the status ranking/attribution, while the columns represent the persons to whom status rankings are given/attributed. The numbers in the cells are status rankings: "1" represents the highest status, "2" the second-highest, etc. Tied rankings are also possible; for example, in a three-person matrix, person A could consider himself a "1" while assigning equal, lower status to both B and to C (each of whom would be ranked "2.5"). Status rankings are scaled ordinally with no differences in status magnitude between successive ranks. The following two-person status matrices illustrate the possible complementary and conflictual positions:

Insert Tables 2a, 2b, and 2c. about here

In Table 2a, both A and B agree that A is of higher status than B; in Table 2b, A and B each regard self as higher in status than the other; while in Table 2c, A and B each regard self as lower in status than the other. The degree of conflict among three or more persons is proportional to the extent of disagreement regarding status ranking among all persons. Table 3a is representative of a low-conflict-, and Table 3b of a high-conflict three-person matrix:

Insert Tables 3a and 3b. about here

1.15.2 Estimation of Conflict in Status Matrices

An examination of the above matrices offers a rough estimate of the degree of status conflict, based upon the extent of disagreement of status rankings among the players.

In order to standardize the comparison of conflict across matrices of the same size, we devised the following formula:

$$\text{Coefficient of Conflict} = \frac{\text{Weighted Sum of the differences between all pairs of status rankings within each Column, Summed across all Columns}}{\text{Number of Cells}}$$

The weighting used arises from the consideration that status conflict over the higher ranks (highest, or "1" and next-highest, or "2") is more intense and more likely to result in competitive status maneuvers than conflict over the lower ranks. Accordingly, the following weighting multipliers are proposed: 3 with a "1" ranking present, 2.5 with a "1.5" present, 2 with a "2" present, and no weighting multiplier for lower rankings. This formula and these weightings are impressionistic but not entirely arbitrary, awaiting empirical evidence of the correspondence between the coefficient of conflict and other, independent measures of conflict.

Then, the Coefficient of Conflict for the Status matrix in Table 3a becomes: {[3(0 = 0 = 0)] + [2(1) + 2(1) + 2(0)] + [2(1) + 2(1) + (0)]}/9 = 8/9 = 0.89, while the Coefficient of Conflict for Table 3b is: {[3(2) + 3(2) + 3(0)] + [3(1) + 2(1) + 3(2)] + [2(1) +2(1) + 2(0)]} / 9 = 27/9, or 3.00.

The number of possible status matrices for a group increases geometrically with the number of players. For two persons there are 4 untied matrices, 9 if tied (equal status) rankings are used. For three persons, there are 216 untied and 2197 tied-ranking matrices, while for four players the numbers jump to 331,776 untied and 6,765,201 tied-ranking matrices.

2. METHOD

We undertook the task of applying our understanding of status conflict and its impact on family dynamics through a preliminary investigation consisting of an intensive analysis of the videotape of a single family therapy session.

2.1 Description of the "Z" Family

The "Z's", a working class urban family consisting of Father, 55, Mother, 56, and Son, 27, entered therapy to address tensions arising from the Son's living at home. An older Son, in the Merchant Marine, had not lived at home for the past eight years and was never part of the treatment. The Son, a high-school dropout, had been through an inpatient detox program a year earlier for heroin addiction and was currently in an outpatient Methadone Maintenance program. The Father appeared to have an unacknowledged alcohol dependency. Intrafamilial conflict readily surfaced around their many interlocking issues: Son's lack of a job; parents' suspicions that he had returned to using heroin; Mother's enabling his irresponsibility; Father's drinking and his fitness to serve as a role model to Son; parental differences over consequences to be imposed for Son's lying.Our own clinical summary of the therapy session process, informed by the constructs set forth in this paper, follows. While the content occasionally varied, these patterns recurred throughout the session.

The Son attempted to present himself as self-assured, sincere and non-defensive in admitting his past misdeeds (*raising self-status)* while justifying his current inaction in seeking employment. He would entice Father to criticize him (*temporarily inviting Father to lower Son's status*) in a characteristically vehement manner, resulting in Mother attacking Father for Father's own drinking excesses and evasiveness (*raising self and lowering Father*). The Father would defend himself (*attempting to raise self, but lowering self in the eyes of the others*), usually changing the subject to Mother's financially enabling the Son's irresponsibility (*lowering Mother*). Mother would quietly admit that she had been doing this, sorrowing at the state of affairs the family had come to (*lowering everyone*). Then Son would "nobly" insist that the fault lay with himself, not her (*lowering self and raising Mother*) and criticizing Father for setting a bad example (*lowering Father*). At this point the cycle had returned to the initial point.

The senior author was the therapist of this family and participated in this, the ninth family session, four months from the date of intake. The choice was based on the following factors: the family's then familiarity with family therapy sessions; a high degree of vocal contentiousness exhibited by all family members; the lack of stable coalitions between pairs of family members; and the relative inactivity of the therapist. While the analysis focused primarily upon the status transactions among family members the therapist was also regarded as a status player whose maneuvers were coded.

2.2 Coding of Status Transactions

The family shown on the videotape had previously signed a release authorizing its use for training and research purposes. A written transcript with numbered lines was prepared of the entire session. A coding system for scoring status maneuvers was devised to code the following seven items: (1) the dimensions (Verbal, Emotional, and Movement) of the Status act (used to effect the maneuver); (2) the maneuver's duration;

(3) the person performing the maneuver; (4) the ostensible target (person) of the maneuver; (5) the inferred initial status rank/position of the person performing the Status Act (the maneuverer); (6) the inferred initial status rank/position of the target; (7) the Status Maneuver, classified as the inferred intent of the maneuver (e.g. to raise own status in relation to target other; to minimize status differences between self and target other). Raters also located the place in the transcript where the maneuver occurred. Although the coders primarily punctuated status maneuvers according to speech turns, there were also a small number of nonverbal gestures which were scored as constituting or modifying verbally-conveyed status maneuvers.

2.3 Expertise Required to Code of Status Transactions Reliably

At the onset of this research it was unclear how extensive the training in conceptual and perceptual skills would need to be to produce acceptably reliable coding. Thirty-seven volunteer graduate students enrolled in a Marriage and Family Therapy program participated as raters (Group A). Group A raters were first given two written pages of status definition, description and examples to study for ten minutes. They then viewed two different two-minute segments of the "Z" Family to observe without coding. Following this, they were given written coding definitions and instructions to study for five minutes and, finally, were shown each of the two-minute segments three times successively with 90 seconds between viewings, during which they were instructed to code the observed interaction for status maneuvers. Four other graduate MFT students with more extensive coding experience (Group B) coded the entire "Z" family session for status maneuvers without time limits and with complete access to the videotape, being able to repeat segments at will and to access any part of the tape freely. Following their coding of the entire session, Group B raters filled out a blank status matrix with their own estimates of the "Z" family's underlying status matrix. A fifth graduate MFT student viewed the entire "Z" Family session with the sound off and with instructions to describe the visually observable behavior in status terms. These observations were fragmentary and were dropped from further analysis, which was coded according to "speech turn" units.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Inter-rater Reliability

Inspection of the data revealed that two of the thirty-seven Group A raters appeared to have no consistent idea of coding status maneuvers; their data were discarded. Initial analysis of the coding of status transactions of the remaining thirty-five Group A raters revealed that they agreed at least 83% of the time on six of the seven items. Inter-rater agreement was weakest (54% agreement) for scoring the inferred intent of the maneuver, where the same maneuver was scored by some raters as "raising own status in relation to target other" and by other raters as "lowering target other's status in relation to one's own." Although there is a conceptual difference between these (analogous to the difference between winning a foot-race by running faster than one's opponent versus by tripping him up), the raters were not readily capable of making this distinction during the performance of this task. Accordingly, when the scores for both of these maneuvers were treated as equivalent, agreement on this item rose to 94%.

Another difference emerged concerning Group A's ratings of the maneuver's duration, with some raters perceiving as many as seven maneuvers and others perceiving only two within the same two-minute segment. That is, some raters coded one maneuver per minute while others coded the same maneuver as repeated two, three or four times per minute. As there was no relationship between rating agreement and number of maneuvers scored, we believe these inter-rater differences reflect individual differences in perceptual style with some raters coding more atomistically ("particularizers") and others more holistically ("generalizers"). Together, these results confirm that the training given thirty-five of the thirty-seven Group A raters was adequate to achieve sufficiently reliable coding. Initial analysis of the coding of status transactions of the four Group B raters who rated the entire 56-minute session revealed inter-rater agreement of 62%. However, one rater never coded "equalize" and had significantly fewer ratings (56, compared with 128, 141 and 146 for the others). When that one rater's scores were dropped, agreement rose to79%, comparable to Group A. The remaining three Group B raters tended to particularize somewhat more than the Group A raters, particularly in the first half of the session (possibly because they repeatedly viewed and coded the entire session); overall, they coded 2.47 status maneuvers per minute, compared with 1.56 per minute for Group A raters.

3.2 Analysis of Status Maneuvers

The data from the three Group B raters were analyzed intensively. Table 4 shows each speaker's number (N) of Status Acts (chiefly utterances), the self-status of the speaker (in percentages, within cells) and each speaker's mean self-status.

Insert Table 4 about here

The Father had the most utterances (more than Mother and Son combined), and the greatest proportion of low-status utterances. The Mother had the greatest proportion of high-status utterances among family members.

Table 5 shows the distribution of Status Acts by Speaker and Target.

Insert Table 5 about here

Self-referential Status Acts (e.g., Father as both Speaker and Target) are entered in **bold** cell entries. The percentage of all Status Acts by each person is given in the last column; the Father accounted for approximately two-fifths, with one-fifth for each of the others. Both Mother and Son spoke most often to the Father, while the Father spoke most often to the Son.The status differences between Speaker and Target (not included in this paper) were more often positive than negative, an indication that Speaker status was perceived as higher than Target status on average, across all subjects and raters. The majority of negative status difference utterances belonged to the Father.Scatter-plots of Speaker status and Target status (not included in this paper) showed a mild correlation between general maneuver and status difference. On the less-frequent occasions when the target status was higher than the speaker status the predominant maneuver was "Lowering Self / Raising Other." These plots also show that the Mother predominantly chose the "Raising Self / Lowering Other" maneuver when speaking to the Father; she was almost always rated as higher status than the Father.

3.3 Pattern Analysis of Status Maneuvers

In order to uncover patterns of status maneuvering in the data set, a *K*-means Cluster Analysis (MacQueen, 1967) was conducted. Here we have three variables (Speaker, Target, and general maneuver), which describe a three-dimensional space. K-means cluster analysis seeks to uncover whether natural groupings of these variables occur in the data set. [in the algorithm used by this analysis, centroids of each group are calculated, group membership is assigned based on the nearest centroid, new centroids are calculated, etc, until convergence is achieved.] Table 6 shows the results of this cluster analysis using the *Clementine* data mining software:

Insert Table 6. about here

Three clusters were uncovered. Cluster One correlates with the Father's attempts to raise his own status in relation to the Son and the Mother. In Cluster Two, the Mother and Son attempt to raise their status in relation to the Father. Cluster Three, the smallest cluster, is less finely defined, but largely represents attempts by the Father to lower his own status in relation to the Son and Mother. Clusters One and Two indicate a family relationship of at least moderate conflict, a finding which is supported by further evidence later on.

3.4 Inference of Underlying Status Matrix

Insofar as the Therapist was neither a Speaker nor a Target in any of the uncovered clusters, he was excluded from further analyses. The following statistical analysis was undertaken to characterize the three-person relationship of the "Z" family members using the conflict matrix notation, where each subject attributes a status rank to each participant. Observed status differences (Speaker status minus Target status) were compiled for each combination of Mother, Father, and Son in Table 7. To illustrate, when the Mother spoke to the Father, there were 0 recorded instances that the Mother's status was deemed as three levels below that of the Father (the 0 below the –3 category), 1 instance where the Mother's status was two levels below (the 1 below the –2 category), 5 instances where the Mother's status was one level below, 19 instances where their statuses were equal, and so forth (The status categories were: Very High, Medium High, Medium, Medium Low, and Low). The mean and standard deviation of each row in Table 7 were calculated and t-tests of the null hypothesis for each pair of family members' status differences (e.g., that the Mother's status when speaking is higher than the Father's due only to chance) were then performed. The results appear in Table 8.

Insert Table 8. about here

The emergence of highly significant t-statistics is noteworthy, since it supports the conceptual frame of the Discrepancy Hypothesis. Noting the direction of the differences, the conflict matrix for this data set was next constructed and is shown in Table 9.

Status rankings in **bold** are statistically derived from the data; rankings in parentheses() are estimates by the three Group B raters. Regarding the statistically derived rankings, the following points may be noted*:*

- The Mother's status when speaking is (statistically) significantly higher than the Father's, but only moderately significantly higher than the Son's. The ranking in the first row of the conflict matrix reflects this.
- When speaking, the Father has no difference in status with the Mother, but is statistically significantly higher than the Son. This is reflected in the second row of the matrix.
- The Son's situation is a mirror image of the Father's. When speaking, the Son's status is equal to the Mother, but is statistically significantly higher than the Father's. This is reflected in the last row of the matrix.

Regarding the raters' estimates, there was general agreement among them, except for Mother's ranking of the Son (which ranged from 1.5 (tied with her for first) to 2.5 (tied with Father for last).

Each rater reached her conclusion by describing, accurately, a status transaction that supported her conclusion. However, each rater selected different transactions to typify the rankings given. This tallies with the first point above, that the significance of Mother's greater status than Son's is only moderate.

3.5 Coefficient of Conflict

The Coefficient of Conflict was calculated for the matrix in Table 9 using the weighted formula described on p. 9:
[3(0.5) + 3(0.5) + 2.5(0)] + [2.5(1.5) + 2.5(1.5) +0] + [2.5(0.5) + 2.5(1.5) + 2(1)] / 9
= 17.5 / 9 = **1.94.**

This result lies between the coefficients of the low-conflict matrix (0.89) and high-conflict matrix (3.00) given above (see Tables 3a and 3b). The "Z" family matrix thus seems reflective of a moderate level of conflict.

4 DISCUSSION

The data, analyzed by K-Means Cluster Analysis and t-tests of significance, showed empirical support for the existence of an underlying status matrix and for the Discrepancy Hypothesis, namely, that differences between group members' cognitive maps resulted in conflicting status maneuvers ("intra-group conflict"). Using the derived Status Matrix in Table 9, we can specifically deconstruct the cognitive maps in the "Z" family session, as follows:

The Father-Son dyad had a High-High status conflict in which Mother was appealed to by both for support (Father saw Mother and himself as equally higher in status, with Son lower than them both; symmetrically, Son saw Mother and himself as equally higher in status, with Father lower than them both). Mother and Father were in partial status conflict, since she saw Father as lower than her, while he saw them as equal. Moreover, Mother's siding with Son (whom she saw as higher than Father) distressed Father, who expected her to side with himself as the higher-status of the two males. [A closer examination of the raw data showed that Father's attempts to raise his own status when speaking to Mother did not, for the most part, appear to constitute a lowering of Mother's status, and occurred predominantly as a direct response to Mother's defense of Son]. Son's provoking Father to attack him in order to get Mother's support might well have been an intentional manipulation of his parents' partial status conflict; such provocation fits the description of "triangulation" as understood in systemic family therapy.

However, in order to support the mediating effect of these cognitive maps, it is necessary to assume that the status maneuvers scored by the raters were, in fact, attempts by each member to actualize his or her own status hierarchy. Other explanations might also account for these data (e.g., that the patterns of conflict displayed were merely habitual ones, unrelated to conscious striving for change). Unfortunately, no interviews were conducted with the "Z" family members to ascertain their awareness of intentionality in self or others' utterances, rendering the key construct of cognitive maps, though plausible, undecidable at the present.

4.1 Status implications for family therapy

Since the investigation was conducted using a family therapy session, rather than by naturalistic observation of family process, the role of the therapist in mediating that process remains unclear in some important respects. As noted earlier, during family therapy sessions the therapist interacts as a more emotionally peripheral status player with family members. The skillful use of status maneuvers by the therapist can be central in shaping the course and outcome of therapy; in Structural Family Therapy, for example, one standard maneuver, called "unbalancing," has the therapist deliberately treat family members at variance with their expected status (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). Even though family therapists are targets of clients' Status Maneuvers, frequently being "played up to" by clients (having their status elevated), and not infrequently being confronted (having their status lowered), clinical experience points to the far greater importance of clients' seeking status validation by other family members rather than the by the therapist, echoing an old aphorism of family therapy, 'blood is thicker than therapy.' Throughout the session with the "Z" family, the therapist attempted, none too successfully, two types of status maneuvers: (1) to equalize status between self and other family members; and, (2) to raise the status of those family members who had just been lowered in status by others. It appeared that the "Z" family members were too intent on their collective struggle to pay much heed to the therapist.

4.2 Limitations of the Present Investigation

It is obvious that the results of this preliminary investigation, though suggestive, cannot be generalized, based as they are upon a single session with a single family and single therapist. To generalize soundly, it would be necessary to expand the heterogeneity of the sample of family therapy sessions coded and analyzed with respect to such variables as: numbers of family members; external stressors impinging on individual members or on the family-as-a-whole; apparent severity of conflict; person of the therapist; and family ethnicity. In addition, it would be helpful to interview families selected for inclusion via a protocol to explore members' awareness of status hierarchies and maneuvers occurring both during therapy sessions and in life outside of therapy.

The therapists of these sessions would also be interviewed retrospectively on their own awareness of maneuvers occurring during the session. In these ways comparisons between the calculated Coefficient of Conflict of the family status matrices and family members' reported experiences of intrafamilial conflict could be compared.

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6 TABLES

Table 1: Status Terms and Definitions

TERM	DEFINITION
Status	The importance a person is perceived as having, on at least one specified dimension, relative to another person or group of persons.
Status Act	Behavior, the performance of which communicates to an observer the status of its performer, relative to that of certain other persons, called 'targets.'
Target	An observer of a status act whose own status may be altered relative to that status act's performer.
Audience	An observer of a status act whose own status is unaffected by that status act.
Status Transaction	A reciprocating sequence of status acts by two or more persons who alternate in taking the roles of 'status act performer' and 'target'.
Status Maneuver	A status act in which its performer intends to alter the status of self in relation to a target.
Status Hierarchy	A ranking of the perceived or actual status of each member of a defined social group.
Status Matrix	A representation of the perceived of the actual status hierarchy from the perspective of each member of a social group. (Usually presented in tabular form.)
Complementary Status Matrix	A status matrix in which all members stand in agreement regarding their group's status hierarchy.
Conflictual Status Matrix	A status matrix in which not all members stand in agreement regarding their group's status hierarchy. Status matrices may be conflictual to varying degrees.

Table 2a. Complementary Two-Person Status Matrix (High-Low)

Rows = Attributing Person; Cols. = Status Attributed to	A	B
A	1	2
B	1	2

Table 2b. Conflictual Two-Person Status Matrix (High-High)

Rows = Attributing Person; Cols. = Status Attributed to	A	B
A	1	2
B	2	1

Table 2c. Conflictual Two-Person Status Matrix (Low-Low)

Rows = Person; Cols. = Attributed Status to	A	B
A	2	1
B	1	2

Table 3a. Low-Conflict Matrix (Three-Person)

Rows = Attributing Person; Cols. = Status Attributed to	A	B	C
A	1	3	2
B	1	2	3
C	1	2	3

Table 3b. High-Conflict Matrix (Three-Person)

Rows = Attributing Person; Cols. = Status Attributed to	A	B	C
A	1	2	3
B	3	1	2
C	1	3	2

Table 4. Speaker self –status percentages, means and total number of Status acts.

Speaker (N)	1 Low	2 Med-Low	3 Medium	4 Med-High	5 Very High	Mean Status
Father (169)	7.10	17.75	42.01	16.57	16.57	**3.178**
Mother (81)	2.47	4.94	35.80	39.51	17.28	**3.642**
Son (78)	2.56	15.38	42.31	30.77	8.97	**3.282**
Ther. (87)	**0**	**1.15**	**41.38**	**19.54**	**37.93**	**3.943**

Table 5. Distribution of Status Acts by Speaker and Target

	T A R G E T				
SPEAKER (N)	**Father**	**Mother**	**Son**	**Ther.**	**%Status Acts**
Father (169)	**12**	45	81	31	**40.72**
Mother (81)	57	**1**	15	8	**19.52**
Son (78)	57	13	**0**	8	**18.80**
Therapist (87)	**45**	**17**	**21**	**4**	**20.96**

Table 6. Clusters Uncovered by K-means Cluster Analysis

Cluster	Speaker	Target	General Maneuver	Count
1	Father (65%)	Son (54%) and Mother (33%)	Raise Self / Lower Other (57%)	166
2	Mother (40%) and Son(39%)	Father (97%)	Raise Self / Lower Other (65%)	153
3	Father (56%)	Son (31%) and Mother (24%)	Lower Self / Raise Other (25%)	96

Table 7. Frequencies of Speaker – Target Status Differences

Speaker	**Target**	**Status Difference (Speaker – Target)**							
		-3	**-2**	**-1**	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Mother	Father	0	1	5	19	15	13	4	1
Mother	Son	0	0	2	4	6	2	1	0
Father	Mother	3	3	10	11	10	4	1	1
Father	Son	3	1	14	18	15	11	11	9
Son	Mother	0	1	5	6	1	1	0	0
Son	Father	2	3	7	10	11	14	9	2

Table 8. Means, Standard Deviation and, t-statistics for Speaker – Target Status Differences

Speaker	Target	Status Difference Analysis (Speaker – Target)				
		Mean	S.D.	t-statistic	p-value	Conclusion
Mother	Father	0.8621	1.2204	5.3798	**0.0000015****	Positive
Mother	Son	0.7333	1.0998	2.5823	**0.0217***	Positive
Father	Mother	0.0000	1.5250	0.0000	**1.0000**	No Diff
Father	Son	0.9878	1.8155	4.9270	**0.0000043****	Positive
Son	Mother	-0.2857	0.9945	-1.0750	**0.3020**	No Diff
Son	Father	0.9483	1.7006	4.2468	**0.000081****	Positive

** = p<.01; * = p<.05

Table 9. Statistically-Derived and Subjectively-Estimated Status Conflict Matrix Values for "Z" Family therapy session.

Status Rank Attributed by Speaker to Target

Speaker	**Mother**	**Father**	**Son**
Mother	**1** (1, 1, 1.5)	**3** (3, 2.5, 3)	**2** (2, 2.5, 1.5)
Father	**1.5** (2, 1.5, 1.5)	**1.5** (1, 1.5, 1)	**3** (3, 3, 3)
Son	**1.5** (1.5, 2, 1.5)	**3** (3, 3, 3)	**1.5** (1.5, 1, 1.5)