

THE DEVIL DEMANDS PRADA: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENTITLEMENT AND
PERCEIVED STATUS IN WOMEN

by

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Abstract

Much research finds benefits associated with being perceived as being high in social status, particularly for men. Because of this, people often intentionally present themselves in ways that will lead others to perceive them as being high in status. The present research examined whether displays of entitlement—where one behaves in a way that indicates that they have a right to special treatment—impacts others' perceptions of women's status. Study 1 demonstrated that entitled behavior did not impact others' perceptions of women's access to various types of capital (social, financial) and—contrary to expectations—led people to perceive these targets as being lower in social status than non-entitled targets. Study 2 extended these results by manipulating the physical attractiveness of the entitled/non-entitled female targets and examined whether the pattern observed in Study 1 held when controlling for entitled targets' reduced likeability. Study 2 replicated the findings that entitlement did not have any impact on women's perceived access to capital, even when controlling for entitled women's lower likeability. However, attractive entitled women were perceived as higher in social status than unattractive un-entitled women. Together, these results suggest that attractiveness and entitled behavior—when they occur together—may impact others' perceptions of a female target's social status but not access to capital.

The Devil Demands Prada: The Relationship Between Entitlement & Perceived Status in Women

The major blockbuster film, *The Devil Wears Prada* (Frankel, 2006) features Miranda Priestly, who is the editor-in-chief of a high fashion magazine. Throughout the film, Priestly demands a lot of work from her assistants and employees in addition to their normal work duties. She expects them to go to great lengths to meet her personal demands. In turn, they always comply with Priestly's orders and spend a great deal of their own time, energy, and resources to fulfill her requests. Priestly is able to impose these demands without so much as a "thank you," because her high status, wealth, and influence make her entitled to hold the highest standards in others.

Entitled individuals view themselves as more important than others and inflate their own self-worth. Entitlement is characterized by the expectation that others should incur costs of time, energy, and resources for the entitled person's benefit, without reciprocation (Grubbs & Exline, 2016). This kind of behavior has notable social costs. For example, greater entitlement is associated with having a less agreeable personality (Campbell et al., 2004). Disagreeable people are seen as uncooperative, inconsiderate, and less likely to get along with others (Kochanska & Kim, 2020). These perceptions may make entitled people particularly vulnerable to negative consequences such as rejection, increased aggression, and adjustment difficulties (Wang et al., 2016; Meier & Robinson, 2004; Ode & Robinson, 2007).

Yet people still act entitled despite the social costs, indicating there may be some benefits to displaying entitlement. Previous research finds that greater entitlement is associated with various dimensions of financial and social status, including higher social power (Anicich et al., 2021), prestige and social dominance (Lange et al., 2018), and socioeconomic status (Côté et al., 2020). Therefore, displaying entitlement may lead other people to perceive that one is high in

status (e.g., Lange et al., 2018), resulting in an entitled person receiving the benefits that those high in status typically receive.

Appearing to have high status has clear benefits for men, because status is closely tied to men's reproductive success (Hopcroft, 2006; von Reuden & Jaeggi, 2016). In fact, although people pay equal attention to physically attractive men and women, people pay more attention to high status men than high status women, indicating that high status is particularly important and beneficial for men (DeWall et al., 2008). This is in line with previous research which finds that men receive social benefits from signaling their high status. For example, men who signal high status through frivolous spending on luxury goods are perceived as more desirable short-term mates than men who don't signal their status (Kruger & Kruger, 2018; Sundie et al., 2011). These social and reproductive benefits that high status men enjoy may explain why one meta-analysis of over 44,000 participants in 44 studies found that men, on average, express a greater sense of entitlement than women (Grijalva et al., 2015).

However, the benefits of displaying entitlement and appearing high status are less clear for women. For example – rather than experiencing the same reproductive benefits from high status – well educated, high-income men have more offspring than do well-educated, high-income women (Hopcroft, 2006). In addition to being less of an advantage for women's reproductive success, appearing high status may have uniquely negative social consequences for women. For instance, one study found that women actually make efforts to downplay their signals of status when receiving compliments, in order to avoid interpersonal aggression (Perilloux & Cloud, 2022). This may suggest that women make more strategic decisions in their social interactions when it comes to signaling status through entitlement. Although research finds that men tend to be more entitled on average than women (Grijalva et al., 2015), other research

finds that this gender difference is relatively small (Campbell et al., 2004), indicating that a significant proportion of women do exhibit entitlement, and may be receiving benefits from doing so.

In recent years, the name “Karen” has become synonymous with being the type of woman who acts entitled (Nagesh, 2020). The fact that there is a specific word for entitled women but not entitled men (Lowell, 2021) suggests that entitlement in women is associated with specific perceptions. Thus, it is important to characterize what these perceptions are. Specifically, I am to study whether entitled women are perceived as having higher financial and social status than non-entitled women, in order to better understand the interpersonal outcomes associated with women’s entitlement.

The current research aims to understand social perceptions of women displaying entitlement. In Study 1, we manipulated female targets’ entitlement and measured perceptions of various dimensions of financial and social status of entitled versus non-entitled control targets. In Study 2, we manipulated female targets’ entitlement and attractiveness and measured perceptions of various dimensions of financial and social status. There are no previous studies that have manipulated entitlement, but driven by past entitlement and status research, I propose that more entitled and attractive women will be perceived as possessing high access to social and financial capital.

Study 1

The current study was designed to examine the impact of women’s entitled behavior on perceptions of status. I manipulated entitlement and measured perceptions of various forms of status including access to capital (social capital, social standing, and socioeconomic status) and social status (attractiveness, social circle size, and prestige). I hypothesized that women

displaying entitlement would be viewed as higher status than women not displaying entitlement (control).

Participants

Undergraduate students ($N = 248$) from Texas Christian University participated in exchange for psychology course extra credit. Prior to data analysis, 34 participants were excluded for failing attention checks, leaving a final sample of 214 (Women = 107, $M_{\text{age}} = 24.15$, $SD = 5.77$).

Materials and Procedure

Participants completed the study online using a link through SONA. The informed consent explained the cover story that the study's purpose was to examine perceptions of people's personality. After agreeing to participate, participants were randomly assigned to read four vignettes depicting female targets exhibiting either entitled or non-entitled (control) behavior. For each target, participants completed several measures assessing their perceptions of the targets' social and access to capital (described in detail below). After completing these measures, participants provided standard demographic information, were debriefed, and dismissed.

Entitled and Control Targets. Ten short vignettes depicting scenarios in which a woman exhibits entitlement by expecting others to incur costs of energy, time, or resources were initially developed. 10 additional control vignettes were constructed by rewriting the behavior of the target in each corresponding entitlement scenario to be non-entitled. A pilot study was conducted to select 4 entitled vignettes and the accompanying 4 control vignettes for use in this study. Pilot participants ($N = 115$) evaluated the entitlement of the targets in 10 vignettes, randomly selected from each entitled-control pair. All 10 entitled targets were rated as significantly more entitled

than their corresponding control targets ($ps \leq .001$). Thus, the four entitled-control vignette pairs yielding the highest F values were selected for use in Study 1.

Entitled Vignettes: 1a) Kate calls her dentist to set up an appointment but finds out from the receptionist that the time she wanted has already been booked. She tells the receptionist to just reschedule the other patient, so she can have that time instead. 2a) Anna finishes shopping and sees a long line to check out. Since she doesn't want to wait, she decides to cut in the front of the line. 3a) Heather goes to a local business to buy some supplies for her house. She notices one of the products she wanted is out of stock. When she goes to check out, she tells the business owner that he needs to give her a discount for the inconvenience. 4a) Isabelle boards her flight but isn't happy with her seat. She decides to take a better seat by the window in business class. When the correct ticketholder informs her that she is sitting in his seat, she tells him to leave her alone.

Control Vignettes: 1b) Kate calls her dentist to set up an appointment but finds out from the receptionist that the time she wanted has already been booked. She asks the receptionist what other times are available and books her appointment for a different day. 2b) Anna finishes shopping and sees a long line to check out. She gets in the back of the line to wait for her turn to check out. 3b) Heather goes to a local business to buy some supplies for her house. She notices one of the products she wanted is out of stock. When she goes to check out, she asks the business owner when it might be back in stock. 4b) Isabelle boards her flight but isn't happy with her seat. She decides to buy her ticket earlier next time so she can get a better seat.

Social Capital. Assessments of the target's social capital (i.e., the access to capital and influence of the target's social circle) were measured with an adapted version of The Personal

Social Capital Scale (Wang et al., 2014). The current study utilized 6 of the most relevant questions from the scale, adapted to refer to the target rather than the self. Participants were asked: “When her social circle is considered, how many of [the target]’s friends/colleagues possess the following assets/resources?”. Example items include: “certain political power”; “wealth or owners of an enterprise or company”; and “broad connections with others,” rated on a 7-point scale (1: None; 7: All).

Social Standing. Evaluations of targets’ social standing were measured using the MacArthur Ladder (Adler et al., 2000). Participants were shown an image of a ladder with 10 rungs, which explained that the top of the ladder represented the people who were best off with respect to money, education, and respected jobs and the bottom included those who were worst off in those same categories. The participants were asked: “Where on this ladder is [the target] currently?”

Socioeconomic Status. Assessments of the target’s SES were measured with a modified form of the 3-item SES scale in which measures perceived resource availability (Griskevicius et al., 2011). The items were modified to refer to the target rather than the self. Participants evaluated targets on a 7-point scale (1: Strongly disagree; 7: Strongly agree): “She has enough money to buy the things she wants”; “She doesn’t need to worry too much about paying her bills”; “Her family has more money compared to most of the people she knows”.

Physical Attractiveness. Perceptions of the target’s attractiveness were assessed using the following item: How physically attractive is [the target]?” This item was measured on a 7-point scale (1: far below average; 7: far above average).

Social Circle. Perceptions of the target’s social circle were assessed using the following three questions, which were all measured on a 7-point scale (1: None; 7: A lot): “How large do

you think [the target]'s social circle is?" (1: Extremely small; 7: Extremely large), "How many casual friends do you think [the target] has?", and "How many close friends do you think [the target] has?"

Prestige. Evaluations of the target's prestige was measured with an adapted form of the Dominance-Prestige Scale (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich 2010). Three items from the prestige subscale were used in the current study and were modified to refer to the target rather than the self. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with the following statements on a 7-point scale (1: Strongly disagree; 7: Strongly agree): "Members of her group always expect her to be successful"; "Her unique talents and abilities are recognized by other in the group"; "She is held in high esteem by members of her group."

Demographic Information. Participants were asked about their age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and employment status.

Manipulation Checks. Manipulation checks were included at the end of each target evaluation, to check that the targets depicted in the experimental condition were perceived as more entitled than the targets in the control condition. Participants rated the targets on a 7-point scale on the following statements: "She expects others to spend money on her"; "She expects others to give their time to her"; "She expects others to put in effort for her"; and "She is entitled."

Results and Discussion

Manipulation check. To examine whether the targets in the entitlement condition were perceived as more entitled than the targets in the control condition, I conducted an independent samples t-test with target entitlement (vs. control) as the predictor. The results revealed that entitled targets were perceived as significantly more entitled than the control targets, $t(212) = -$

27.51, $p \leq .00$, $d = .93$. This indicates that the vignettes were highly effective in manipulating perceived entitlement.

Target access to status. To test my prediction that entitled targets would be viewed as having higher financial status than the control targets, I conducted a series of independent sample t-tests, with target entitlement (vs. control) as the predictor. The results revealed that entitlement did not impact the perceived social capital ($t[212] = -1.50$, $p = .136$, $d = .20$), social standing ($t[212] = -.17$, $p = .864$, $d = .02$), or socioeconomic status of the targets ($t[212] = .23$, $p = .819$, $d = .03$).

Target social status. To test my prediction that entitled targets would be viewed as having higher social status than the control targets, I conducted a series of independent samples t-tests, with target entitlement (vs. control) as the predictor. Contrary to the hypothesis, entitled targets were rated as being less attractive ($t[212] = 4.97$, $p \leq .001$, $d = .68$), having a smaller social circle ($t[212] = 5.37$, $p \leq .001$, $d = .73$), and being less prestigious ($t[212] = 6.17$, $p \leq .001$, $d = .84$) than control targets.

Discussion. The results of Study 1 revealed that entitlement does not impact perceptions of women's access to capital. However, entitled women were viewed as having lower social status than non-entitled women, contrary to the hypothesis. Because the targets in the manipulated condition behaved abrasively, and entitlement is associated with decreased agreeableness (Campbell et al., 2004), it is possible that the expected results were not found because participants disliked the entitled targets. This reduced likability may have led to a negative halo effect (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2019) in which entitled targets were perceived as being less physically attractive and lower in other desirable traits associated with social status.

Study 2

The current study was designed to extend the findings of Study 1 by examining whether target attractiveness and perceived likeability impact the evaluations of entitled (vs. control) women. Accordingly, the design of Study 2 is similar to Study 1, with a few alterations. First, participants read only one of two scenarios used in Study 1: “Anna finishes shopping and sees a long line to check out. Since she doesn’t want to wait, she decides to cut in the front of the line” (entitled); “Anna finishes shopping and sees a long line to check out. She gets in the back of the line to wait for her turn to check out” (control). Second, in addition to manipulating targets’ entitlement, I also manipulated targets’ attractiveness to examine whether higher status is perceived in attractive, but not unattractive, entitled women. Finally, in addition to the target evaluations measured in Study 1, participants also rated how likeable the targets were (described below), in order to control for any effects that reduced likeability of entitled women may have on other evaluations. I predict that when controlling for likeability, entitled women will be perceived as higher in financial and social status, particularly if they are attractive.

Participants

Undergraduate students ($N = 245$) from Texas Christian University participated in exchange for psychology course extra credit. Prior to data analysis, 11 participants were excluded for failing attention checks, leaving a final sample of 234 (Women = 128, $M_{\text{age}} = 23.83$, $SD = 2.40$).

Materials and Procedure

Participants completed the study online using a link through SONA. The informed consent explained the cover story that the study’s purpose was to examine perceptions of people’s personality. After agreeing to participate, participants were randomly assigned to read

one vignette depicting a female target exhibiting either entitled or non-entitled (control) behavior accompanied by a photo of an attractive or unattractive woman said to be the target. Participants completed several measures assessing their perceptions of the targets' social and access to capital (described in Study 1). After completing these measures, participants responded to standard demographic information, were debriefed, and dismissed.

Target photos. Photos of an attractive and unattractive woman accompanied each vignette to examine differences in perceptions of attractive and unattractive entitled women. The photos were used in previous research and were created by digitally altering the image of a "typical" female face, which was created by digitally averaging the faces of 92 women (Tiddeman, Burt, & Perrett, 2001). This typical composite face was then digitally morphed with the 5 least attractive faces from the original 92 photos to create the unattractive face, and digitally morphed with the 5 most attractive faces to create the attractive face (Sofer et al., 2015).

Likeability. Perceptions of the targets' likeability were measured using the Interpersonal Liking-6 Scale (Veksler & Eden, 2017). One question referring to a previous interaction with the target was not included in this study, as this was the participants' first encounter with the targets. Participants answered the remaining 5 questions about their first impressions of the target on a 7-point scale (1: Not true at all; 7: Definitely true): "I think that this person and I may have a lot in common," "There are aspects of this person's personality that I admire," "I think that this person exhibits good judgement," "I think that future interactions with this person would be pleasurable," and "I would like to get to know this person better".

Results

Manipulation checks. To examine whether the targets in the entitlement condition were perceived as more entitled than the targets in the control condition, I conducted an independent

samples t-test with target entitlement (vs. control) as the predictor. As in Study 1, the results revealed that entitled targets were perceived as significantly more entitled than the control targets, $t(232) = -16.06, p \leq .001, d = 1.15$. To examine whether the attractive target photos were perceived as more attractive than the unattractive target photos, I conducted an independent samples t-test with target attractiveness (attractive vs. unattractive) as the predictor. The results revealed that the attractive targets were perceived as more attractive than the unattractive targets, $t(232) = -9.30, p \leq .001, d = 1.12$. These results indicate that both independent variables were effective manipulations.

Likeability. To examine whether the entitled targets were perceived as less likeable than the control targets, I conducted an independent samples t-test with target entitlement (vs. control) as the predictor. The results revealed that entitled targets were significantly less likeable than the non-entitled control targets, $t(232) = 22.56, p \leq .001, d = .98$. This indicates that analyses of other target evaluations should control for likeability to examine the true effects of entitlement on perceptions of status, rather than overly negative ratings of unlikeable people.

Target access to capital. I conducted a series of analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) tests to examine the effects of entitlement (vs. control) and attractiveness (attractive vs. unattractive) on each perceived social capital, SES, and social standing, while controlling for likeability. The results revealed no significant main effects of entitlement or attractiveness, and no significant interaction between entitlement and attractiveness on either perceived social capital or SES ($ps > .126$).

However, there was a significant main effect of attractiveness on perceived social standing, $F(1, 229) = 25.28, p \leq .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$, where attractive targets ($M = 5.57, SD = 1.40$) were rated as having higher social standing than unattractive targets ($M = 4.64, SD = 1.51$), while

controlling for likeability. There was also a significant main effect of entitlement on perceived social standing, $F(1, 229) = 4.25, p = .040, \eta^2_p = .02$, where entitled targets ($M = 4.66, SD = 1.63$) were rated as having lower social standing than control targets ($M = 5.54, SD = 1.27$), while controlling for likeability.

Target social status. I conducted another series of ANCOVAs to test the effects of target entitlement (vs. control) and target attractiveness (attractive vs. unattractive) on each perceived social circle size and prestige, while controlling for target likeability. The results revealed a main effect of attractiveness on social circle size, $F(1, 229) = 17.19, p \leq .001, \eta^2_p = .07$, where attractive targets ($M = 4.16, SD = .96$) were rated as having a larger social circle than unattractive targets ($M = 3.65, SD = .86$). There was no main effect of entitlement ($p = .693$), and no significant interaction between entitlement and attractiveness on social circle size ($p = .468$), while controlling for likeability.

The results of the prestige analysis also found a significant main effect of attractiveness on perceived prestige, $F(1, 229) = 7.84, p = .006, \eta^2_p = .03$, where attractive targets ($M = 4.23, SD = 1.23$) were rated as more prestigious than unattractive targets ($M = 3.78, SD = 1.28$). There was no main effect of entitlement on perceived prestige, $p = .334$. However, this result was qualified by a significant interaction between entitlement and attractiveness, $F(1, 229) = 6.17, p = .014, \eta^2_p = .03$. Simple effects revealed that attractiveness was not significantly impact prestige in the control condition, $p = .813$, but was significant in the entitlement condition, $F(1, 229) = 14.14, p \leq .001, \eta^2_p = .06$. Although non-entitled control women were viewed as equally prestigious regardless of their attractiveness, entitled women were viewed as less prestigious if they were unattractive, and more prestigious if they were attractive.

Discussion. The results of Study 2 revealed that entitlement does not impact perceptions of women's social capital or SES, even when controlling for entitled women's lower likeability. However, entitled women were viewed as having lower social standing than non-entitled women, contrary to the hypothesis. The results of Study 2 also revealed that attractive women are perceived as having higher social standing, a larger social circle, and more prestige than unattractive women. Although attractiveness did not impact the perceived prestige of non-entitled women, attractive entitled women were perceived as more prestigious than unattractive entitled women.

Discussion

The study's purpose was to evaluate social perceptions of women displaying entitlement. Participants in Study 1 read vignettes of entitled vs. non-entitled targets and rated the targets on several measures related to financial and social status. In Study 2, participants also read vignettes of entitled vs. non-entitled targets who were attractive vs. unattractive females and reported their perceptions on the targets' financial and social status. I hypothesized that entitled and attractive women would be perceived as possessing high social and access to capital.

Inconsistent with the hypotheses, both Studies 1 and 2 found that entitlement generally did not impact people's perceptions of women's access to capital. Although it was not predicted, this result is in line with past research which finds that access to capital is not closely tied to women's success (Hopcroft, 2006). Therefore, a signal of high status in women, such as entitled behavior, may not change beliefs about financial resources. Additionally, contrary to the hypothesis, Study 1 found that entitled women were generally perceived as having lower social status than non-entitled women. However, this effect went away when controlling for likeability in Study 2, suggesting that women who express entitlement are disliked to such a degree that it

they are viewed as especially low in social status. Because many of the vignettes involved public displays of entitlement, it may be that these outbursts were viewed as low-class rather than reflecting the targets' high status.

The results of the current research suggest that, for women, signaling status through entitlement may backfire. From a social perspective, acting entitled can have negative consequences for women. For example, research on assertiveness, a trait related to entitlement and status, finds that more assertive women were judged as low status by their peers (Cashdan, 1995). Another study found that women downplay their status around others to avoid being disliked or excluded by their peers (Perilloux & Cloud, 2022; Benenson, 2013). Whereas boys are encouraged to show off their superiority to diffuse conflict, girls are dissuaded from doing the same (Perilloux & Cloud, 2022; Maccoby, 1990; Maltz & Borker, 1982). Therefore, one explanation for the finding that entitled women were disliked and viewed as low in social status may be that acting submissive, meek, and obedient is more encouraged in females.

From an evolutionary perspective, since females and males faced different adaptive problems throughout history, routes to status for each sex differed as well. For men, status was earned through skills and physical competition (Benenson, 1990; Vigil, 2007), whereas women earned status through friendships and social competition (Benenson, 2013; Winstead, 2001). Male status signaling is usually rewarded because it increases access to physical resources and protection for the whole community, whereas female status signaling may harm their relationships. Thus, entitled women may be punished by others to prevent status-seeking women from obtaining more resources for themselves (Benenson, 2013).

Alternatively, it may be that women only receive benefits from expressing entitlement in specific contexts. For example, in Study 2, entitled women were seen as more prestigious if they

were attractive (vs. unattractive). Since prestigious individuals are looked up to by members of their group (Henrich & Gil-White 2001) and attractive individuals receive more positive and advantaged treatment (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Judge et al., 2009), people would likely perceive that prestige and attractiveness go hand in hand. As such, individuals may find entitled women's abrasive actions acceptable if they had resources like physical attractiveness and prestige.

Consistent with the study's hypothesis, attractive women are perceived as having higher social status, higher SES, and more prestige than unattractive women. Based on mate preference research, men have evolved to prefer youth and physically attractive women. These qualities are cues to current fertility and future reproductive value and fertility (Conroy-Beam et al., 2015; Buss, 1987; Symons, 1979; Williams, 1975; Cloud & Perilloux, 2022). Therefore, viewing physically attractive females activated mating motivation in heterosexual male participants and affected how they perceived them compared to unattractive females. Similarly, female participants also perceived attractive women to have higher social status because they would prefer them as friends over unattractive women. Having attractive friends offers benefits such as access to higher social status and desirable mates (Bleske-Rechek & Lighthall, 2010).

There were some strengths and limitations of the current research. First, a limitation to the study may be that the sample was not appropriate for the study's question. It is possible that a college age population may not have been around enough high status or entitled women at this age-range to make assumptions about status. Secondly, the results may have been clearer to interpret if participants were also asked to evaluate entitled and non-entitled male targets. One strength of study was the effectiveness of the manipulations, which ensured that entitled targets were perceived as significantly more entitled than the control targets. Additionally, participants'

likeability was controlled in study 2 so that participants' perceptions of entitled targets' status were examined, instead of overly negative and biased attitudes.

Previous research has found that aspects of social status can be judged solely by appearance. The results of this study bolster the perspective that people's perceptions of entitled women are negative, yet attractive entitled women are viewed more prestigious than unattractive entitled women. Therefore, physical attractiveness can positively influence individuals' judgements even when someone acts entitled. This finding suggests that although women express entitlement and other signals of status to a lesser extent than men, there may still be benefits for entitled women in specific situations. More research is needed to understand the contexts in which women may be motivated to express entitlement. While it seems difficult to make accurate and unbiased perceptions of people's social status, prestige, etc., understanding that these discernments exist may enable individuals to take a second pause when "judging a book by its cover."

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