**Those who differentiate by skin tones are at the top: status attributions and skin
pigmentation in Chile**

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Abstract

A growing body of research has shown that skin pigmentation plays a fundamental role in stratification dynamics in Latin American countries. However, the relevance of skin color on status attribution for different status groups has been poorly studied in the region. This article seeks to broaden the research on phenotypic status cues using Chile as a context for analysis – a Latin American country with a narrow although continuous spectrum of skin tones, marked status differences, and a mostly white elite. We draw on status construction theory to hypothesize that skin pigmentation in Chile has become a status cue, although its heuristic relevance could differ across status groups. Using visual stimuli and a repeated measure design, we studied this relationship and tested whether the use of skin pigmentation as a status cue is conditional upon the status of those categorizing others. The results reveal that, although skin pigmentation has a negligible direct effect on status attribution, it does have a conditional effect on the social status of the rater: whereas skin pigmentation does not work as a status cue for lower status participants, it is an important status marker for the categorizations that high-status participants perform. The phenotypic composition of reference groups of low and high-status individuals and system justification are discussed as potential explanations for these results.

Keywords: Chile, inequality, skin pigmentation, status construction theory, whiteness

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Introduction

In interactions with strangers, individuals resort to available information that their culture and experiences indicate are relevant for assessing the person they are interacting with (Goffman, 1959). Appearance, and in particular facial appearance, is often marked in ways that reveal membership of different social categories, such as gender, race, or social class (Fişek, Berger, & Norman, 2005). These markers, or cues, help people form *first impressions* (Willis & Todorov, 2006): the process of categorizing others and inferring attributes relevant to the interaction. Status cues are indicators associated with actors that provide information to others about their social status. But the importance of specific status cues for social categorization depends not only on who possesses them; it also depends on the heuristic relevance they have for those who perform the categorization (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972). This means that social categorization may also *vary interpersonally*: certain visual markers can be relevant for some, but not for others – i.e. a status cue can be conditional upon the observers' characteristics. Empirical research has established that individuals categorize the status of others with great precision using visual cues (Mazur, 1993; Pape, Rössel, & Solga, 2012). In this article, we address the categorization process in the status hierarchy that individuals perform using facial appearance, as occurs in everyday life. Specifically, our objective is to understand the importance that skin pigmentation has for categorization on the status ladder, in a country with a continuous (although narrow) spectrum of skin pigmentation, profound status differences, and a mostly white elite, like Chile.

Status is a fundamental part of the inequality levels present in any society (Ridgeway, 2014). Hence, it is important to study the conditions of status attribution in the Chilean context. In Chile, inequality has been a structuring feature of the social order throughout history (PNUD, 2017). Chile is one of the most unequal countries in the world, with a Gini index of 47.7 points (The World Bank, 2015). There is currently an enormous concentration of wealth in the highest levels of Chilean social hierarchy (López, Figueroa, & Gutiérrez, 2013), a social mobility regime characterized by high elite closure (Torche, 2005), low intergenerational mobility (xxxx), and clear occupational barriers between social classes (xxxx).

Evidence suggests that a powerful status cue in Chile is ancestry, marked by surnames (xxxx). However, other and more obvious attributes for categorizing the status of others in daily life have been poorly studied. It is remarkable that, for instance, the significance of racial traits in social categorization have not been thoroughly studied in the local social sciences. Although this is a research bias for most Latin American countries (Telles & Flores, 2013), in Chile, this epistemological obstacle for racial research is largely explained by the historical presence of a *race-blind* ideology (Walsh, 2015), which has permeated the social sciences in the country (Barandiarán, 2012). According to this ideology, the intensive miscegenation, which has occurred since colonial times, dissolved most of the racial differences, bringing about “one of the most uniform races of the entire world” (Walsh,

2015). Only recently, empirical research has shown the importance of race, in general, and skin pigmentation in particular, for status attribution in Chile (Lizcano 2005; xxxx; Staab and Maher 2006).

Pronounced inequality, a narrow but continuous spectrum of skin pigmentation (CIIR, 2017) and limited knowledge on the subject, make Chile an interesting case study for social categorization attributes. Most studies have been conducted in developed societies with marked racial differences (e.g. Mazur, 1993; Pape et al., 2012). Also, current research has usually focused on analyzing status cues, without inquiring into whether or not their significance varies interpersonally. This article aims at filling this gap in the literature using Chile as the study context. To do so, we used a set of photographs of tertiary students, which were later categorized by three independent, non-overlapping samples of raters (all of them tertiary students) to finally, through a repeated measures design and a sampling procedure that maximized the heterogeneity of the status of participants, we requested an independent, non-overlapping sample of tertiary Chilean students to categorize the social status of the photographees.

Status categorizations based on visual information

The body is shaped by the social context. Actors use available cultural meanings to define their physical appearance (Le Breton, 2002). For Bourdieu (1984), the body is subject to objectification –it is a carrier and producer of signals, so it can be understood as a social product. According to Goffman (1959), when individuals present themselves, others resort to visual information to facilitate interaction. In encounters with strangers, individuals pay attention to markers that indicate socio-economic status (SES), competence, or moral integrity. Individuals thus build a personal *façade* with elements that can be intimately related to themselves. Facial appearance is particularly relevant in this process. Different studies have shown that a person's face is used to infer various characteristics, such as their physical attractiveness, amiability, competence, trustworthiness, and aggressiveness (Eckel & Petrie, 2011; Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008; Rivera, 2010). Studies have also shown that individuals are able to “see” – based solely on visual information – the status affiliation of others (Mazur, 1993; Pape et al., 2012).

Raters' social status

Status attribution, as well as being context specific, is *interpersonally variable*. The identities of the observers, or *raters*, influence their perception, and therefore, the social status they attribute to others (Rivera, 2010). According to Bourdieu (1984), class-specific *habitus* not only leaves its mark on the configuration of an individual's lifestyle and appearance, but also influences his/her perception and classification of the lifestyle and appearance of others. In

this way, the habitus organizes the practices and the perception of practices. The disposition of individuals, structured by the habitus, depends on their positions within the social hierarchy. Since Merton (1968), social scientists have known that social categorization depends on the reference group (i.e., family, friends, co-workers). Merton understood the reference group as “a context for evaluating the relative position of oneself and others” (Merton, 1968, p. 338). Thus, the reference group provides a structure for comparison by which individuals value themselves and others.

Although self-positioning in the status hierarchy (a subjective measure of status) tends to be biased towards the scale mean, it also depends on factors related to the individual's objective status, such as income, occupation or schooling (Castillo, Miranda, & Cabib, 2013; Evans & Kelley, 2004). High-status individuals tend to underestimate their own status, while low-status individuals tend to overestimate it, so on average the population places itself in the middle of the social hierarchy. This ‘centripetal’ force towards the mean value is brought about because self-positioning reflects the *subjective sampling* of individuals from their own reference group. Due to structural constraints or personal preferences, most people interact and cluster with people who are similar to themselves in significant ways (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). Thus, reference groups are fairly homogenous with respect to social status. This status homogeneity means that most individuals are objectively in the average of their reference group. This objective centrality, in turn, encourages people to see themselves as middle-status. According to Evans and Kelley (2004), subjective sampling is a special case of the ‘availability heuristics’ (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973), a systematic perceptual bias whereby individuals base their perceptions on their immediate social milieu. Social contexts where the elite is highly segregated from the rest of the population, as in the Chilean case, can strengthen this perceptual bias (Castillo et al., 2013).

Since the status categorization of others could also be biased considering its relational nature, it is necessary to empirically analyze whether personal status (either self-reported or objective) has an effect on status attribution. It is likely that as personal status increases, individuals attribute, on average, a higher status to others –and vice versa– because their status evaluations appear to be framed or anchored in their own status position (i.e., anchored in their own reference group). This led us to formulate the first research hypothesis:

H1: The higher the social status of the rater, the greater the social status attributed to others.

Skin pigmentation

Skin color is a status cue. Status cues can be classified according to two orthogonal dimensions: (1) indicative-expressive and (2) task-category (Fişek et al., 2005). The first dimension is concerned with *how* status information is communicated: indicative cues explicitly identify or label a person as possessing some status (e.g., a diploma); expressive cues are implicit, so they provide indirect status information (e.g., skin color). The second dimension considers *what* status information is communicated: task cues inform ‘what these people can do’; categorical cues communicate ‘who these people are’ (ethnicity, race, or class). Skin pigmentation may act as an expressive-categorical status cue.

In Latin America, Telles (2014) observed that skin pigmentation is a fundamental stratification variable; a source of social discrimination and inequality. People in Latin America usually attribute a higher social status to those who have lighter skin tones, an association that has developed historically in the continent. White pigmentation is thus an ascribed, inalienable symbolic capital, conceived as a legacy which gave high status groups the right to superiority (Telles & Flores, 2013; Telles & Paschel, 2014). The importance of whiteness in the continent is such that skin color conservation mechanisms have been put in practice, as in the marriage market, which refers to the preference for marrying people with white skin pigmentation (Collier & Sater, 2004; Telles & Flores, 2013). In Chile, white people also tend to enjoy formal and informal privileges, social deference and attribution of socially valued properties. This cognitive bias manifests in strong preferences for light-skinned Chileans, even among those who self-identify as dark-skinned (Uhlmann, Dasgupta, Elgueta, Greenwald, & Swanson, 2002). Therefore, it is likely that dark-skinned individuals in Chile are categorized as lower status compared to light-skinned ones. Thus, our second hypothesis states that:

H2: The darker the skin pigmentation of others, the lower the social status attributed to them.

However, the importance of skin pigmentation for social categorization could vary interpersonally: some people might use skin pigmentation as an expressive-categorical status cue, but others might not (Berger et al., 1972). Many factors can explain this variability, but there are structural and cultural reasons for predicting that the heuristic value of skin pigmentation can be conditional upon the social status of raters. As Telles (2014) pointed out, racial stratification in Latin America is far from that of the United States. Instead of well-defined racial clusters –straightforwardly associated with social status– present in the latter, the former has gone through an extensive miscegenation process that has created a racial gradient with subtle differences, except for the higher echelons of society, which tend to be white. In Chile, previous research suggests that status evaluations of wealth are highly correlated with whiteness (xxxx). Also, studies of skin pigmentation in the metropolitan

region (CIIR, 2017) have shown that skin color appears stratified in the Chilean capital: individuals from wealthier households tend to be whiter and have less diversity in skin color than other status groups. Since high-status individuals tend to be white in Chile, while lower status groups are more heterogeneous (although, on average, darker), we predict that skin color might be a relevant status cue only for high-status groups. Thus, we can expect that:

H3: The heuristic value of skin pigmentation is conditional upon the status of the individual performing the categorization.

Confounding factors

There are additional factors that can affect status attributions to others. In this research, we controlled for several confounding variables that the literature identifies as important in the status categorization of others. *Physical attractiveness* is also related to status categorization. Faces considered attractive are associated with the upper strata of society (Mazur, 1993; Webster & Driskell, 1983). Moreover, people considered physically attractive are assumed to excel in “objective” qualities unrelated to appearance (Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003; Langlois et al., 2000; Zebrowitz, Hall, Murphy, & Rhodes, 2002). *Perceived competence* is another relevant dimension for status categorization (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007). Pape et al. (2012) showed that status attribution depends to a great extent on the levels of intelligence (or competence) perceived by observers: those perceived as intelligent are attributed a higher social status. Besides, the observed stereotype that individuals in less prestigious roles do not have the level of intelligence of individuals in successful roles serves as an ideological justification for socio-economic differences (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), thus rationalizing and justifying social inequality (Jost, 2001). Finally, status construction theory also suggests that *compensatory characteristics* influence status beliefs: low-status groups are usually associated with less valued but positive qualities, such as *generosity* and *trustworthiness* (Ridgeway, Boyle, Kuipers, & Robinson, 1998; Ridgeway & Correll, 2006). This is also in line with the formation of stereotypes, which combine warmth and competence according to social status (Fiske et al., 2007, 2002). In this study we control for the effects of all these variables at the level of photographees.

Materials and Method

Data were collected in four stages, which are depicted in Figure 1. A total of 120 photographs of higher education students were obtained in Stage 1. The students voluntarily accepted their photographs being used in this study by signing an informed consent. The photographs were taken at four postsecondary education institutions in Santiago (Metropolitan Region), Chile: (i) a popular vocational training center, (ii) a technical training center, (iii) an unselective

university and (iv) a highly selective university. Considering the strong socio-economic stratification of the Chilean education system, these institutions were selected with the aim of maximizing the social heterogeneity among the photographees. Photographs were taken as participants were dressed that day, in order to portray them as they present themselves to others in everyday life. For this reason, photographs with facial alterations such as hats, glasses, make-up or jewelry were not excluded, considering that both phenotypic and intentional characteristics form the personal *façade* (Goffman, 1959)¹. Following photograph selection protocols from previous research (e.g., Rule & Ambady, 2008), the only requirements for compiling the set of photographs were (i) a balanced sample had to be obtained in terms of gender (50% of those photographed were women), (ii) the facial expression required of those photographed had to be neutral, and (iii) the face had to be looking directly at the camera. In addition, photographees answered a socio-economic characterization survey; thus, self-reported information was available to characterize the sample. The average age of the 120 students was 21 (SD = 2.42).

In Stage 2, 32 students from two different universities in Santiago (a private and a public university) evaluated the 120 photographs using the PERLA color palette (Telles, 2013). This palette was designed to evaluate skin color specifically in Latin America. Students were invited to participate in a “classification of photographs” study in the computer laboratories at the two universities. Volunteers were introduced and trained in the PERLA color palette, and then evaluated the skin pigmentation of the photographees’. Hence, there were a total of 3,840 evaluations for the 120 photographs. The average age of the 32 participants was 20.6 (SD = 2.48) and 56% were female. In Stage 3 of data collection, a survey was sent via e-mail to students from a university with campuses in the three most populated Chilean regions (Valparaíso, Concepción and the Metropolitan Region) to evaluate ten randomly selected photographs from the 120 pictures. A total of 2,104 raters took part in this stage, so there were 180 evaluations per photograph, approximately. Evaluations consisted in attributing a certain level of physical attractiveness, competence, generosity and trustworthiness to the photographee. The average age of this sample of raters was 23.8 (SD = 6.55) and 62% of participants were female.

¹ A sample of photographs used in the study are available on the journal web page as Supplemental Material.

Figure 1: Data Collection Stages

In Stage 4, an independent sample of 271 higher education students, belonging to (i) a vocational training center and (ii) a highly selective university, categorized the status of the photographees. In this stage, the study followed a repeated measures design, in which each rater categorized the status of 30 random photographs on a MacArthur scale (Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, & Ickovics, 2000). Thus, each photograph was rated 70 times approximately, with 8,130 ratings in total. In this stage, participants were paid pocket money for turning up. Also, to elicit ‘true’ social categorization (i.e., status beliefs), we incentivized response-precision by giving a gift-card valued at \$30,000 pesos (around US\$ 47) to the top three raters whose assessments best coincided with the actual status of the photographees (based on the socio-economic characterization survey of Stage 1). Hence, raters had a financial stake in the status they were predicting. In addition, socio-demographic information was available to the 271 observers. To reduce carry over effects typical of repeated measures designs, participants rated stimuli presented in a random order. The average age of the 271 participants was 21 (SD = 2.65), similar to the photographed subjects. 36.9% of observers were female. The self-reported mean in the MacArthur subjective status scale was 5.48 (SD = 1.66).

The central argument in this study is that status attribution is not only determined by the characteristics of the raters (i.e., their own status) but also by cultural markers present in the facial appearance of the photographees (i.e., their skin pigmentation), and by the interaction between these two variables (i.e., the conditional effect on status attribution of skin pigmentation and the status of raters). Besides, being a repeated measures design, it may be possible that the status attributions of raters are related –responses come from the same

participants regarding the same stimuli–, which could bias standard errors in linear OLS models. Hence, in order to analyze the status attributions raters assigned to the photographs, we modeled the data using linear mixed-effect models –which account for the patterns of non-independence present in the data (Judd, Westfall, & Kenny, 2012). In the regression models, level 1 corresponds to the status categorizations of raters –the ratings of the 271 participants in Stage 4. Level 2 corresponds to the (attributed) characteristics of photographs, evaluated in Stages 2 and 3 of data collection (we used the average ratings for each photograph). Hence, status attributions are nested in the photographs, which are treated as random, and there are 8,130 cases at level 1 (categorizations or ratings) and 120 cases at level 2 (photographees’ attributes). Level 2 variables included the skin pigmentation of the photographees, (average) rating and all the covariates, namely: physical attractiveness, competence, generosity and trustworthiness. All these variables were treated as fixed characteristics of the photographs.

Dependent variable: Status attributions

We adapted the MacArthur scale of subjective social status (Adler et al., 2000) to categorize the status of others. Thus, each rater categorized the photographee, responding on a scale of 1 to 10, to the following question: “In terms of social status, there are groups of people in Chile that tend to be located at the highest levels of society, while others are located at the lowest levels. On a scale of 1 (lowest level) to 10 (highest level), where would you place the photographed subject?” Table 1 shows the main descriptive results of this variable.

Independent variables at level 1: Subjective and objective status of the observer

Literature distinguishes between objective and subjective SES measures. While objective SES corresponds to economic and social position in relation to others (usually measured by indicators of income, education, and occupation), subjective SES is the individual’s conception of a person’s position compared to the positions of others. Since the issue of which SES measure is more relevant for studying subjective experiences is contentious in the literature (Kraus & Stephens, 2012), in this study we have included both measures as independent variables. Thus, on the one hand, as a subjective status measure, individual observers had to position themselves on the social status ladder using the MacArthur scale, responding on a gradation of 1 to 10. On the other hand, as an objective measure of status, we carried out a principal component factorial analysis to construct the objective SES variable of observers, which comprises the father’s occupation, mother’s occupation (both occupations coded according to the *International Standard Classification of Occupations, ISCO-08*, see International Labour Organization, 2012), father’s education and mother’s

education². Thus, we will be able to test the effects of an individual's objective and subjective SES on status attributions to others. Table 1 shows the main descriptive results of this variable.

Independent variables at level 2: Skin pigmentation

The PERLA color palette was used to measure skin pigmentation, with eleven skin tones (Telles, 2013). The number 1 corresponds to the lightest complexion and 11 to the darkest complexion. We also used the average skin pigmentation for each photograph obtained in the evaluations during Stage 3. Table 1 shows the main descriptive results.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for dependent and independent variables

Statistics	N	Average	S.D.	Min	Max
Dependent variables					
Attributed status	8,130	5.6	1.67	1	10
Level 1 independent variables					
Subjective status of raters	8,130	5.48	1.67	1	10
Objective status of raters	7,560	1.93	0.90	0	3.65
Age of raters	8,130	21.09	2.65	18	36
Level 2 independent variables					
Perceived skin pigmentation of photographees	120	2.83	1.02	1.156	5.59
Perceived physical attractiveness of photographees	120	4.14	0.90	2.454	6.74
Attributed competence of photographees	120	6.20	0.57	4.646	7.40
Attributed generosity of photographees	120	5.73	0.65	3.981	7.15

² In the questionnaire, parents' education had the alternative 'I do not know', which was excluded from the analyses. Therefore, the total number of ratings (i.e., attributions) in the regression models that include observer's objective status is different from the models that include the observer's subjective status. Details on the exploratory factor analysis are available on the journal web page as Supplemental Material.

Control variables

In Stage 2, a sample of evaluators judged perceived physical attractiveness, competence (i.e. intelligence), generosity, and trustworthiness on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 10 (extremely) for each attribute. Averages were used in the evaluations for each photographee according to these appraisals. Table 1 shows the main descriptive results of these variables.

Results

We fitted four mixed linear models, which randomize intercepts to allow variation between photographs in social status attribution³. To analyze the more relevant characteristics in status attribution, standardized coefficients were estimated as well, which make the variables comparable in their effect. Model results are shown in Table 2, including two additional covariates at the raters' level (gender and age) and one additional covariate at the photographees' level (gender). Table 2 also displays three goodness of fit statistics: the *log-likelihood*, the *Akaike's Information Criterion* (AIC) and the *Bayesian Information Criterion* (BIC) statistics. Lower AIC and BIC values across nested models indicate better fit. Finally, Table 2 also shows, as adjustment measures, the coefficient of determination for generalized linear models proposed by Nakagawa and colleagues (2017): the marginal and conditional R^2 values. The mixed models were fitted using the *lme4* statistical package (Bates, Mächler, Bolker, & Walker, 2015) in R. The p-values for the fixed effects were estimated using Satterthwaite's method.

Model 1 in Table 2 shows that the higher the subjective status of raters, the greater the status attributed to the photographee ($b = 0.17, p < 0.001$), controlling for the other variables in the model. Model 2 was adjusted with the same variables but using the objective (instead of subjective) status of raters as predictors. This model provides a robustness test for the findings. The relationship of the objective status of raters is equivalent to that found for the subjective status in Model 1: the greater the objective status of raters, the higher the status attributed to the pictured subject ($b = 0.05, p = 0.008$). These results support our first hypothesis, which predicted that the higher the status of the rater, the higher the status assigned to others, over and above other confounding factors at the level of raters and photographees. Hence, the results suggest that participants categorize the status of others from their own relative position in the socioeconomic ladder: they seem to compare and

³Furthermore, in terms of intra-class correlation, it seems pertinent to use this type of model since an Intra-class Correlation Coefficient (ICC) of 0.216 was obtained.

construct the status of others using their own reference groups, so their status attributions are anchored in their own status position. Besides, the positive relationship between the status of raters and status attributions to others is present whether the subjective or objective status of raters is considered. Nevertheless, the regression coefficient in Model 1 indicates that subjective status is a stronger predictor of status attributions, at the raters' level, compared to objective status in Model 2.

Table 2. Mixed regression models. Dependent variable: Social status attributed to the photographee

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
<i>Level 1: Raters</i>	Coef.	EE	Z	Coef.	EE	Z	Coef.	EE	Z	Coef.	EE	Z
Subjective status	0.17***	(0.01)	0.17				0.28***	(0.04)	0.28			
Objective status				0.05**	(0.02)	0.03				0.27***	(0.07)	0.14
Age	-0.04***	(0.01)	-0.06	-0.03*	(0.02)	-0.05	-0.04***	(0.01)	-0.06	-0.04***	(0.01)	-0.06
Gender (ref: male)	-0.31***	(0.03)	-0.09	-0.31**	(0.09)	-0.09	-0.31***	(0.03)	-0.09	-0.30***	(0.03)	-0.09
<i>Level 2: Photographees</i>												
Skin pigmentation	-0.09	(0.05)	-0.05	-0.09	(0.05)	-0.06	0.10	(0.06)	0.06	0.02	(0.05)	0.02
Physical attractiveness	0.49***	(0.08)	0.26	0.49***	(0.08)	0.26	0.44***	(0.06)	0.24	0.43***	(0.07)	0.23
Competence	0.43*	(0.17)	0.15	0.44**	(0.17)	0.15	0.37**	(0.13)	0.13	0.33*	(0.15)	0.11
Generosity	-1.12***	(0.22)	-0.43	-1.13***	(0.23)	-0.43	-0.95***	(0.18)	-0.36	-0.96***	(0.20)	-0.37
Trustworthiness	0.96**	(0.30)	0.38	0.97**	(0.31)	0.38	0.80***	(0.24)	0.31	0.83**	(0.28)	0.32
Gender (ref: male)	-0.71***	(0.12)	-0.21	-0.72***	(0.12)	-0.21	-0.63***	(0.09)	-0.19	-0.59***	(0.11)	-0.18
<i>Interaction Effects</i>												
Subjective status x Skin pigmentation							-0.04**	(0.01)	-0.18			
Objective status x Skin pigmentation										-0.08**	(0.02)	-0.15
<i>Variance components</i>												
Level 2 Variance (Intercept)		0.23			0.24			0.00			0.11	
Residual variance		1.96			2.03			1.95			2.00	
Marginal R ² / Conditional R ²		0.22 / 0.31			0.19 / 0.28			0.19 / 0.28			0.16 / 0.26	
Log Likelihood		-14,417.70			-13,540.60			-14,402.96			-13,509.29	
AIC		28,859.41			27,105.19			28,835.91			27,048.58	
BIC		28,943.45			27,188.36			28,940.96			27,152.54	
Number of photographees		120			120			120			120	
Number of raters' responses		8,130			7,560			8,130			7,560	
Number of raters		271			252			271			252	

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05. Standard errors are in parentheses. Z statistics correspond to standardized regression coefficients.

Our second hypothesis stated that the darker the skin pigmentation of photographees, the lower the social status attributed to them. To test this hypothesis, Model 1 and Model 2 also include, as a fixed effect of the photographees, their average skin pigmentation. The results are inconclusive. Both models show that, although the skin pigmentation of photographees is negatively related with the status attributions of raters, the coefficients were in both models small, imprecisely estimated, and thus insignificant at conventional levels (Model 1: $b = -0.09, p = 0.08$; Model 2: $b = -0.09, p = 0.08$). This could suggest, *prima facie* that, on average, the skin pigmentation of others in Chile is unimportant in the process of categorizing their status. This would contradict the extant evidence in Latin America and in Chile, where dark skin is associated to lower-status positions (Telles 2014; xxxx; Uhlmann et al. 2002).

However, the above result does not mean that status attributions of individuals are not affected by the skin pigmentation of others. Instead, it could be that skin pigmentation, as a status cue, is conditional upon the characteristics of the individual performing the categorization. Surveyed research in Chile that includes skin color (CIIR, 2017; LAPOP, 2014) suggests that lighter pigmentation is associated with higher status. As such, skin pigmentation could act as a status cue for the wealthiest raters only. For this reason, our third hypothesis stated this relationship, and we tested it in Model 3 and Model 4 as an interaction (i.e., multiplicative) effect: while Model 3 includes the statistical interaction between the subjective status of raters and the skin pigmentation of photographees, Model 4 evaluates the same interaction effect, but using the objective status of raters⁴. Through this effect, we evaluated whether the status categorizations are interpersonally variable; that is, whether they depend on the attributor's identity (Rivera, 2010). Table 2 indicates that these interaction effects, both in Model 3 ($b = -0.04, p = 0.001$) and Model 4 ($b = -0.08, p = 0.002$), are statistically significant. Besides, the difference between Model 3 and Model 1 in AIC is $\Delta AIC = -23.5$ and in BIC is $\Delta BIC = -2.49$, while the difference between Model 4 and Model 2 in AIC is $\Delta AIC = -56.61$ and in BIC is $\Delta BIC = -35.82$, which suggest that the inclusion of the interaction effects improves the model's fit. To analyze these results, we post-estimated the average marginal effects in Stata 15 using the command *margins*. Figure 2 depicts the results of this analysis.

⁴ We also fitted a linear mixed model in which both subjective and objective status were included as predictors, and the multiplicative term was estimated using photographees' skin pigmentation and raters' subjective status. The results are similar to those reported in Table 2.

(a)

(b)

Figure 2: Average marginal effects of the skin pigmentation of photographees on status categorization according to subjective (Fig. 2a) and objective status (Fig. 2b) of the rater. Bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2a presents the average marginal effect of skin pigmentation on attributed status, according to the subjective status of raters. First, it can be seen that the effects of skin pigmentation on status attribution are statistically insignificant when the status of the raters is low. Statistically significant interaction effects appear for raters who self-positioned greater than or equal to 6 on the social status ladder. As the status of the raters increases, the

effects of skin pigmentation on social status intensify –i.e., skin pigmentation becomes more relevant to status attribution. Additionally, the marginal effect becomes more negative as the subjective status increases, which indicates that a darker complexion in the photographs leads to lower status categorization for those raters with higher subjective status. Figure 2b shows the interaction effects between the objective SES of raters and the skin pigmentation of photographees on status attribution. The conclusion is the same: regardless of whether we analyze subjective or objective SES, skin pigmentation becomes negatively related to status attributions as the status of raters increases. Thus, it seems that skin pigmentation has been constituted in Chile as an element of distinction for high status groups: only for them, this skin tone functions as a status cue.

The estimated relationships (see Table 2) of the control variables at the stimuli level are also worth mentioning. In line with previous research, the physical attractiveness of photographees was positively related (and significantly at conventional levels) to the status attributions of raters across models. Previous research on status attribution has found that people considered physically attractive are assumed to excel in qualities unrelated to appearance (Hosoda et al., 2003; Langlois et al., 2000). Our results also show that, across models, the more competence perceived in the photograph, the greater the status attribution. This finding is also in line with previous research on status attribution, which has documented that those perceived as intelligent are attributed a higher social status (Pape et al., 2012). Finally, regarding the compensatory characteristics in status beliefs (Ridgeway & Erickson, 2000), photographs categorized as low-status are those with greater perceived generosity across models. This is also in line with previous research indicating that those who have less resources tend to give more (Piff, Kraus, Côté, Cheng, & Keltner, 2010). However, faces perceived as more trustworthy were attributed *higher* social status, across all models, a result that contradicts extant evidence regarding compensatory characteristics. Previous research has shown that trustworthiness is related to the dimension of *warmth*, which is generally attributed to people with lower social status as opposed to characteristics related to competence, which, as mentioned above, are associated with higher-status individuals (Fiske et al., 2007). Interestingly, compensatory characteristics (i.e. generosity and trustworthiness) had the greatest influence in either diminishing or increasing the social status attributions to photographees across models, as assessed by the standardized regression coefficients. Finally, the gender of photographees also had an influence on the status attributions of raters across models: being a female led to lower status categorization than males. This result is also in line with previous research suggesting that gender is a *diffuse status cue* (Auspurg, Hinz, & Sauer, 2017): gender creates (and activates) cultural beliefs in men's higher competence and status worthiness, thus entitling them to higher rewards.

Discussion

In this paper, we have studied the status attributions individuals assign in Chile, a country with a continuous (although narrow) spectrum of skin pigmentation, profound status differences, and a mostly white elite. We have focused our analysis on two factors that, our results suggest, are interwoven in status categorization: the (subjective and objective) status of individuals, and the skin pigmentation of others. Using visual stimuli (120 photographs of Chilean tertiary-education students) and a repeated measure design, we tested three hypotheses: whether higher-status individuals assign higher status to others; whether skin pigmentation acts as a status cue; and whether the heuristic value of the skin pigmentation of others in status categorization is conditional upon the social position of raters in the status hierarchy. Our results could be summarized as follows: First, we found a positive relationship between the status of individuals and the status they attribute to others. Thus, the process of status attributions seems to be anchored in the personal status: individuals evaluate others from their own reference group, so higher-status individuals tend to attribute higher status to others, while lower-status individuals assign, on average, lower status to others. Second, the direct relationship between the skin pigmentation of others and status attribution was inconclusive; rather, given the small regression coefficients and low effect sizes, we did not find evidence for a direct relationship between these two variables. Third, skin pigmentation does interact with the status position of those categorizing others, over and above other confounding factors that are relevant in status categorization. That is, the heuristic value of skin pigmentation as a status cue is conditional upon the status of those categorizing others. Our results show that, whereas skin pigmentation does not work as a status cue for lower status individuals, it is an important status marker for the categorizations that high-status individuals perform. Indeed, in our study, high-status individuals tended to attribute lower status to those with darker skin, and higher status to those who had lighter skin.

The finding that skin pigmentation is used exclusively by high-status individuals to categorize the status of others has profound implications. Some potential and complementary explanatory mechanisms are evaluated below.

Firstly, we conjecture that given its relational nature, the disposition of Chileans (i.e., their *habitus*) for using skin pigmentation as a status cue vary according to their positions in the status hierarchy. In other words, the way in which individuals reproduce their status beliefs could be explained in terms of their reference group composition (Merton, 1968). Among the Chilean elite, whiteness could be a distinction marker because this is a phenotypic trait present in most of their peers. There are historical and sociological reasons for the formation of a light-skinned elite in Chile. For instance, although this country experienced more than three centuries of racial miscegenation, members of the elite self-excluded themselves from

this process during the 19th century. For over a century, the Chilean ‘aristocracy’ had an implicit rule: they were open to marriage with non-elites who had not participated in *mestizaje*; those who, even if poor, had just arrived from Europe (Collier & Sater, 2004). Thus, in choosing a marriage partner, whiteness mattered more than status to Chilean elites. Nowadays, Chile is quite exceptional in the Latin American context: according to the America’s Barometer data, Chile is both the whitest and least diverse among the 26 countries measured (LAPOP, 2014). And the same survey data also show that Chile has the whitest and least diverse elites in the sub-continent –tied in homogeneity with the much darker skinned Nicaragua. Also, studies of skin pigmentation in Santiago, the Chilean capital (CIIR, 2017), have shown that skin color appears highly stratified: individuals from richer households tend to be whiter and have smaller variance in skin pigmentation than other status groups. The fact that Chile has this particularly white and uniform elite might explain our findings that skin color *has become* a status cue for individuals of higher status only: because their peers are mostly white, they distinguish themselves from the rest by this marker.

Secondly, since the reference groups of non-elite individuals are more varied in terms of skin tone, this attribute cannot function as a status cue for them. Again, historical and sociological reasons might help to explain the conformation of this racial heterogeneity. For instance, since colonial times, there has been certain social mobility for blacks, mulattos and indigenous people, who have achieved middle-class positions –through employment in the army during the 18th and 19th century (Contreras, 2011) or through the school system during the 20th century (xxxx)–, sharing the same social space with light-skinned or white-looking Chileans. The higher phenotypic variance in middle and lower status groups might provide the subjective experience that weakens the link between skin pigmentation and social status.

Thirdly, it is also possible that lower-status individuals do not use skin pigmentation as a status cue because they believe this ascribed trait cannot affect the social position of a person in a meritocratic society. Consistent with *system justification theory* (Jost, 2001), for Chilean students, neglecting the value of skin pigmentation as a status cue may help them to defend the ideological integrity of the social system in which they live, even at the expense of personal and group interests. In this way, low-status individuals (tertiary students in this research) may reduce the cognitive dissonance of living in a country in which, the dominant ideology claims, the social status of any person depends only on their effort and decisions– an ideology that stresses the achieved dimension of status (Araujo & Martuccelli, 2014)–, while experiencing the symbolic advantage of ascribed, inherited traits that only the Chilean elites possess, such as their ancestry and, as the results presented here indicate, their skin pigmentation. On the other hand, there would be no corresponding ambivalence among high-status individuals, because their status position and group composition (mostly white peers) can coexist unproblematically with a meritocratic ideology. Previous research has shown that

young people from indigenous and low-income backgrounds in Latin America are more likely than their white and privileged peers to endorse meritocratic beliefs; for instance, that the poor can change their circumstances through their own determination and hard work (Henry & Saul, 2006).

For the low-status participants in this study –who do suffer the consequences of an unequal country in which whiteness is an ascribed symbolic capital–, not using skin pigmentation as a status cue might be an expression of their endorsement of the meritocratic ideology that has dominated the public sphere in Chile during the last 40 years; a way of reestablishing a sense of confidence in the promise of upper mobility. Indeed, national surveys show high conformity with current life conditions in Chile, and endorsement of the meritocratic discourse among young people (between 15 to 29 years of age): most Chilean youths are highly satisfied with their lives (88%), and most of them believe that dispositional factors (e.g., hard work) are more important than contextual factors (e.g., having good contacts) for success in life (INJUV, 2015). Based on this data, some authors have concluded that Chilean youth culture is characterized by a *conformist majority* –who are culturally integrated to the Chilean variety of capitalism (Brunner, 2017).

All in all, our results are silent to these potential explanations. However, we believe these explanations (group reference composition and system justification theory) provide indications for further research in this area. What precise mechanism explains the reported statistical interaction between the social status of raters and the skin pigmentation of photographees in status categorizations remains obscure, because the analyzed data is observational in nature. Additional experimental and cross-cultural research (for instance, using implicit rather than explicit predictors of status attribution) is needed to test the proposed explanatory mechanisms, or alternative ones. However, given the implemented research design, the chosen analytical strategy, and the cultural characteristics of the context in which we carried out our research, we are confident that the main results presented here are robust. The findings offered here are a starting point for additional research on skin pigmentation and status beliefs in the region.

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