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The Status Importance Scale: Development and validation of a self-report questionnaire for measuring how much people care about status

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Abstract

Although substantial research indicates that considerations about status can lead to anxiety and other negative outcomes, a valid measure of the importance individuals attribute to status is lacking. This paper introduces the Status Importance Scale (SIS), a mono-factorial 10-item self-report questionnaire that quantifies how important a person deems status to be. Five studies validate the scale showing that it has excellent internal reliability and acceptable test–retest reliability, it correlates with several related measures (supporting convergent validity), it shows little correlation with theoretically unrelated constructs (supporting discriminant validity), it is the best predictor of conspicuous consumption compared with other potential candidates (supporting concurrent validity), and it can help predicting which activities one gives importance to (further supporting concurrent validity). Finally, as hypothesized by previous literature, the last study reveals that the SIS can predict status anxiety. The SIS can contribute to research regarding important phenomena such as the detrimental psychological effects of income inequality.

KEYWORDS
development, income inequality, questionnaire, social status, status anxiety, status importance, validation

Francesco Rigoli and Marco Mirolli contributed equally to this paper.

BACKGROUND

While income inequality has been rising worldwide within countries (Alvaredo et al., 2018), a large body of epidemiological research has shown that, at least in rich countries, higher income differences increase various mental and physical health problems (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). A possible explanation of this phenomenon is that economic inequality boosts the importance people give to social status, in turn producing status-related anxiety and chronic stress (Marmot, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018). This explanation has received substantial support from a number of sociological studies that have analysed data from large multi-national surveys (Delhey & Dragolov, 2014; Layte & Whelan, 2014; Paskov et al., 2013) as well as from research exploring the psychological mechanisms mediating the link between inequality and its problematic consequences (Blake & Brooks, 2019; Buttrick & Oishi, 2017; Keshabyan & Day, 2020; Melita et al., 2021; Peters & Jetten, 2023; Schmalor & Heine, 2022; Walasek & Brown, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017; Willis et al., 2022).

However, research in this field has two main limitations. First, in both the epidemiological and the social psychology literature, there is a tendency to conflate two concepts which, despite obvious relations, are nonetheless separate: *Status Importance*[1] and *status anxiety*. Status Importance reflects how much people are interested in issues concerning status, an aspect related to values and motivations. By contrast, status anxiety reflects the preoccupations about status-related matters, a concept connected with a specific affective and emotional state, that of anxiety. Although people attributing high importance to status should, on average, experience higher status anxiety, it is nonetheless possible that a substantial number of people may care greatly about status and still perceive that they are in control thereof, thus experiencing little to no anxiety – they may even be greatly satisfied about their current stand on the social ladder. When looking at the aforementioned research, some studies have investigated Status Importance (while using the similar concept of 'status seeking'; e.g., Paskov et al., 2013; Walasek & Brown, 2015), others have investigated status anxiety (Delhey & Dragolov, 2014; Keshabyan & Day, 2020; Layte & Whelan, 2014; Melita et al., 2021; Schmalor & Heine, 2022), and other studies have conflated the two constructs. An example of the latter is the article of Blake and Brooks (2019) who, although stating 'we operationalized status anxiety by measuring an individual's preoccupation with status seeking' (p. 25030), in fact employed items referring exclusively to Status Importance and not to status anxiety ('We averaged responses for how important it was for participants that […] they were respected by others, admired for what they did, successful, recognized for their achievements, and able to show their abilities, and that people did what they said, with high scores reflecting greater status anxiety').

A second limitation is that the above studies have rarely used validated questionnaires to measure the status-related constructs described above. Adopting general surveys that were not conceived for addressing questions about status, epidemiological studies had to identify, among the surveys' items, the one (or the few) that best resembled the status-related concept they sought to measure. Moreover, different studies have operationalized the same concept (e.g., status anxiety) employing different items from the same survey. For example, among the studies employing the same 2007 European Quality of Life Survey for measuring 'status anxiety', Layte (2012) and Layte and Whelan (2014) used only the item 'Some people look down on me because of my job situation or income', while Delhey and Dragolov (2014) combined that item with another one (i.e., 'I don't feel the value of what I do is recognized by others'). Even the vast majority of psychological research has been conducted without employing a valid questionnaire. One study has used the same items from the European Quality of Life survey considered in Layte's (Schmalor & Heine, 2022), one has used a set of ad-hoc questions confounding status anxiety and Status Importance (Blake & Brooks, 2019), and one has used Google searches related to status-signalling goods as a proxy for 'status seeking' (Walasek & Brown, 2015). Another research investigating the relation between subjective income inequality and the desire for wealth and status has used two ad-hoc questions (Wang et al., 2023). We are aware of one single study that has validated a

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[1]Some studies (Paskov et al., 2013; Walasek & Brown, 2015) have employed another related construct, that of *status seeking*. We believe that this construct is better understood as one of the facets of the more general notion of Status Importance, as we explain in section 'Status Importance' below.

questionnaire for assessing status anxiety (Day & Fiske, 2016; Melita et al., 2020; see also Keshabyan & Day, 2020; Melita et al., 2021), while no validated measure of Status Importance is at present available in the literature.

In light of the limitations discussed above, here we develop and validate a self-report scale that measures individual differences concerning people's judgements about the importance of social status. We focus on Status Importance, rather than status anxiety, for two reasons.

First, on theoretical grounds, the notion of Status Importance appears to be more appropriate to investigate the mechanisms underlying the potential deleterious effects of income inequality. In fact, the hypothesis advanced by the above literature asserts that, first and foremost, income inequality can affect the *importance* people give to status: for example, 'the status anxiety perspective [...] argues that *inequality raises people's concerns about their social status*' (Wang et al., 2019: p. 292); 'According to the status anxiety hypothesis, *inequality increases the attention people pay to social comparison and social status* (Walasek & Brown, 2019: p. 236)'. In this narrative, it is the importance attributed to status that triggers anxiety and, in turn, other deleterious outcomes: 'in more unequal societies, status becomes more important, status anxiety increases and self-serving individualism and self-aggrandisement increase' (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017: p. 139). Moreover, a validated scale is already available in the literature for measuring status anxiety (Day & Fiske, 2016; Melita et al., 2020). By contrast, a valid measure of Status Importance is unavailable at present. Thus, developing a scale for measuring the latter construct should be a priority for investigating the psychological factors linking inequality to health and social problems.

The second reason for focusing on Status Importance is that this construct is relevant for research on other important topics. For example, employment of a scale measuring Status Importance may contribute to elucidate why people engage in conspicuous consumption (Roy Chaudhuri et al., 2011): As previously hypothesized (Walasek & Brown, 2015), it is possible that people buy goods that signal status because they give high importance to status.

In the following section, we propose a theoretical definition of the construct of Status Importance and pinpoint the specific features of this vis-à-vis contiguous notions. Next, the paper presents the results of five studies describing how the Status Importance Scale (SIS) was built and validated empirically. Finally, the last section discusses the results of the present studies and possible uses of the SIS in future research.

STATUS IMPORTANCE

The notion of Status Importance indicates to what degree an individual cares about her own status and, in general, about matters involving status. To illustrate the precise meaning of this construct, it is instructive to look at Figure 1. This describes a scenario where society is arranged over five ranks (e.g., think to the different orders in ancient India, ancient Rome or in the European medieval society) reported on the horizontal axis. The vertical axis maps objective rank to subjective value, which captures the affective state associated with occupying a specific rank. We assume that the intermediate rank (i.e., the third) is linked with a value of zero, while upper (lower) ranks are liked with positive (negative) value. The left (right) side of the figure depicts a condition characterized by low (high) Status Importance. The key difference between the two conditions is that the *distance* between ranks is magnified for high versus low Status Importance. In other words, Status Importance can be interpreted as a psychological tendency to amplify status differences. According to this perspective, viewing status differences as large (i.e., high Status Importance) entails a set of psychological characteristics. First, since gaining status is viewed as highly valuable and losing status as highly disgraceful, people will put a lot of effort in the attempt to improve or maintain status (behavioural facet). Second, people will react strongly to changes in status, being greatly upset when status is lost while being elated when status is gained (emotional facet). Third, they will pay much attention to cues signalling status and will spend much time thinking about status (cognitive facet).

To clarify the definition of Status Importance, it is instructive to compare this concept against contiguous constructs developed within the psychological literature. We start by considering status anxiety
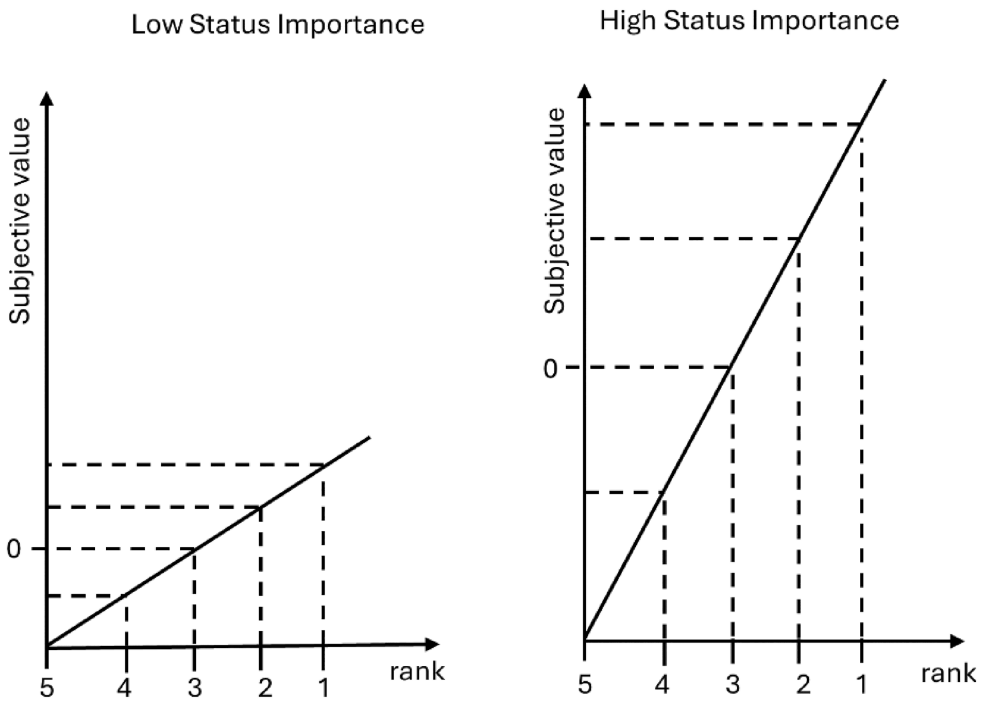
Low Status Importance   High Status Importance

FIGURE 1   Schematic illustration of the construct of status importance.

(De Botton, 2008; Scheepers et al., 1992). This can be defined as an affective state of anxiety triggered by the expectation that one's status is under threat, accompanied by the enactment of coping strategies aimed at protecting one's status. From this definition, it is evident that, at the theoretical level, status anxiety and Status Importance are two distinct constructs. A person characterized by high Status Importance may be confident that her status can be maintained, thus experiencing no status anxiety. Another person characterized by the same level of Status Importance may instead perceive her status to be in jeopardy, thus experiencing high status anxiety. Based on these considerations, the paper tests the hypothesis that Status Importance and status anxiety can be separated not only at the theoretical level, but also at the empirical level. In other words, the prediction is that the SIS has discriminant validity with respect to measures of status anxiety. Still, theoretically, Status Importance may predispose people to experience status anxiety: when one's status is under threat, people who care a lot about status (scoring high on Status Importance) may experience enhanced status anxiety. On this basis, we predicted a positive correlation between Status Importance and status anxiety.

The literature has introduced another important concept related to status, that of status seeking (Paskov et al., 2013; Walasek & Brown, 2015). This is defined as the tendency to behave in a way that promotes one's social position. We argue that, theoretically, the concept of status seeking should be considered as one of the facets of the more general concept of Status Importance. According to this view, high importance attributed to status can be expressed across multiple domains including the emotional (being happy when status improves), behavioural (making choices that are expected to boost status) and cognitive sphere (thinking often about status). In this perspective, status seeking corresponds to Status Importance as expressed at the behavioural level. Based on this reasoning, we ensured that the SIS included items related to status seeking together with items unrelated to the behavioural domain, with the prediction that these items reflected one single factor.

It is paramount to evaluate the concept of Status Importance also regarding constructs indirectly linked with status. One of such constructs is Social Comparison Orientation (Baldwin & Mussweiler, 2018;

Gibbons & Buunk, 1999), reflecting one's propensity to compare oneself with others. This construct focuses on a propensity to enact a certain behaviour, that is, to enact social comparison, independent of the factors motivating such behaviour. In principle, not only motivations related to status may drive social comparison: other motivations, such as to connect with other people, or to know oneself, may be at play. On this basis, two fundamental aspects distinguish Social Comparison Orientation from Status Importance. First, the former refers to a behavioural propensity, while the latter reflects an affective disposition. Second, the former encompasses various underlying motivations, while the latter focuses specifically on status-related motivations.

Other contiguous constructs are the notion of Power and Achievement as conceptualized within the Theory of Basic Human values (Schwartz, 1992). Power reflects a motivation to attain wealth, social influence and domination, while Achievement captures a motivation to gain competence, social admiration and prestige. The focus of Power and Achievement, as that of Status Importance, is on motivational and affective aspects. However, the latter construct is more specific as it is restricted to the issue of status, that is, to the issue of one's rank within the social ladder. By contrast, Power and Achievement have a more general scope as they involve aspects such as wealth, domination and competence which, notwithstanding their relevance for social status, are nonetheless different domains.

Other concepts worth to be considered here are the notion of Social Dominance Orientation (Pratto et al., 1994), Competition Orientation (Houston et al., 2002) and Entitlement (Campbell et al., 2004). Social Dominance Orientation reflects to what extent one believes that society should be organized hierarchically (Pratto et al., 1994). This construct appears to be rather distinct from Status Importance: A person may care a lot about status (which has to do with Status Importance) independent of whether she believes that a hierarchical organization is to be cherished or not (which has to do with Social Dominance Orientation). Competition Orientation describes one's attitude towards competition (Houston et al., 2002). Although, on average, one may predict that competitive individuals tend to care more about status, it is nevertheless possible to envisage a substantial number of people who, despite attributing high importance to status, dislike competition (because, e.g., they predict to lose in competitions, thus undermining their status). Finally, Entitlement indicates to what extent a person believes that she deserves special treatment and privilege compared with others (Campbell et al., 2004). Once again, although people who feel more entitled may, on average, care more about status, there may be a substantial number of people who do not expect any special treatment and yet care a lot about status (e.g., ostracized people who strive to be treated as anyone else).

Finally, it is important to consider individual differences concerning which attributes are considered by people to infer status. For instance, when inferring one's own status or the status of another person, some people may weight wealth more than education, while other people may do the opposite. Likewise, some may estimate status based on assessing a person's rank in one domain (e.g., professional attainments) while others may focus on a different domain (e.g., family lineage). Individual differences concerning how status is estimated are not investigated here. Rather, the paper focuses on individual differences concerning how important status is deemed to be, independent of individual differences concerning how status is inferred.

From the comparison between Status Importance and the contiguous dimensions examined in this section, it seems appropriate to conclude that, at a theoretical level, Status Importance represents a coherent construct which is distinct from other constructs examined in the literature. Based on this conclusion, the remainder of the paper aims at building and validating a self-report scale for assessing Status Importance.

STUDY 1

The purpose of Study 1 was twofold. First, we aimed to create a set of items to be included in the SIS. Second, by administering the scale to a sample of participants, we aimed (i) to assess whether any of the items should be removed, (ii) to obtain an initial estimate of the scale's internal reliability and (iii) to explore the factorial structure of the scale.

Participants

The online platform Prolific was employed to recruit 130 participants residents in the United Kingdom (age: mean = 38, SD = 14; 31 females) (no data were excluded from the analysis). The sample size was established based on Kennedy ([2022](#)), who suggests recruiting a minimum sample size of 100 participants for quantifying internal reliability – this number was increased to 130 participants. This sample size is also adequate for exploratory factor analysis in circumstances where a mono-factorial structure with high communalities is hypothesized (MacCallum et al., [1999](#)), as it is the case here. The pre-screening procedure employed by Prolific ensured that all participants were from the United Kingdom. All the studies presented in this paper were approved by the Research Ethics Committee of City, University of London (UK).

Materials and procedures

To create the items of the SIS, we consulted various theoretical sources examining the psychology of social status (Cheng et al., [2014](#); De Botton, [2008](#); Wilkinson & Pickett, [2018](#)). When looking at these, we isolated content examining the issue of how important status is deemed to be by people. From this analysis, we identified four facets subsumed by this issue: (i) to what extent one cares about matters of status (general facet), (ii) how strong the emotional reactions elicited by changes in status are (emotional facet),[2] (iii) how much effort is put to improve or maintain status (effort facet) (this facet captures the behavioural domain, linked with the concept of status seeking) and (iv) how often one thinks about status (cognitive facet). When creating the items of the SIS, we ensured that all these facets were covered.

When developing the SIS, we aimed at creating a short self-report scale, and thus, we started with 10 items. For each, such as 'I care a lot about social status', participants were asked to indicate a response ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). To avoid response biases, five items were framed in a positive direction (with high scores reflecting high Status Importance), and five items were framed in a negative direction (with high scores reflecting low Status Importance; the score for these items was reversed before the analysis). The full list of items is reported in Table 1. Items were selected in such a way as to cover the four facets highlighted above, that is, the extent to which one cares about status (Items 1, 2, 5, 9), how strongly one reacts to status changes (Items 3 and 4), the level of effort put to maintain or improve status (Items 6 and 8) and how often one thinks about status (Items 7 and 10).

Data collection was carried out online using the Qualtrics software. After reporting their age and gender, participants filled the SIS. Completing the study took less than 1 minute and was remunerated with £0.10.

Results

To quantify the internal reliability of the scale, we estimated the McDonald's Omega and Cronbach's Alpha for all items. The former was equal to 0.929 (95% CI [0.900, 0.948]), the latter to 0.928 (95% CI [0.902, 0.947]). This is considered by the literature to reflect an excellent internal reliability (Patten, [2016](#)). To establish whether any item should be removed, we looked at the item-total correlation for each item. Following the literature (Patten, [2016](#)), we established to discard any item exhibiting an item-total

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[2]This facet includes two items: 'I feel very stressed when my social status is threatened' and 'I feel very happy when my social status has improved'. The participant has to indicate whether she agrees or not with each sentence. We included one positive and one negative item for completeness. A negative item appears to be linked with status anxiety. Yet, we emphasize that the item is not equivalent to status anxiety. Status anxiety occurs when a person is *currently* perceiving a threat to her status. The item, by contrast, is asking about whether stress arises when one's social status is threatened. Even if a person generally feels very stressed when her social status is threatened, she may not perceive any threat right now, and thus report no status anxiety. By contrast, the item appears to be appropriate to assess Status Importance based on the definition of the construct proposed above, according to which high Status Importance corresponds to a tendency to amplify status differences. According to this definition, indeed, for a person characterized by high Status Importance stress arises when one's status is threatened.

TABLE 1 Items of the Status Importance Scale (SIS).

	Item	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis	Loading
1[a]	I care a lot about social status	2.32	0.988	0.489	−0.434	0.850
2[a]	I am rather indifferent to my social status[b]	3.64	0.942	−0.604	−0.178	0.749
3[c]	I feel very stressed when my social status is threatened	2.13	0.918	0.653	0.071	0.624
4[c]	I feel very happy when my social status has improved	3.21	0.785	−0.479	0.756	0.602
5[a]	I do not care much about social status[b]	3.73	1.004	−0.647	−0.178	0.879
6[d]	I put a lot of effort in improving or maintaining my social status	2.09	0.914	0.965	1.121	0.692
7[e]	Social status is one of my major concerns	1.73	0.765	1.132	1.919	0.738
8[d]	I do not put much effort in improving or maintaining my social status[b]	3.85	0.895	−0.89	0.711	0.666
9[a]	I find issues of social status irrelevant[b]	3.5	1.007	−0.228	−0.758	0.721
10[e]	I do not think much about matters of social status[b]	3.74	0.921	−0.676	0.015	0.816
Total score	–	23.03	7.02	0.504	0.380	–

[a]General facet.

[b]Reversed-score items. Statistics are based on Study 2.

[c]Emotional facet.

[d]Effort facet.

[e]Cognitive facet.

correlation <.5. For all items, the item-total correlation was >.5. Moreover, we looked at Cronbach's Alpha score in case any item was deleted. Deletion of no item resulted in a larger Alpha. Both these results indicate that no item should be discarded.

Next, we ran an exploratory factor analysis based on maximum-likelihood estimation. We obtained a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) score equal to 0.933 and a significant Bertlett's test of sphericity, $\chi^2(45) = 827$, $p < .001$, both indicating that a factor analysis is appropriate for the dataset (Tabachnick et al., 2013). All considered criteria, including the Kaiser criterion, the point of inflexion criterion and parallel analysis, converged in indicating that a single factor should be extracted, explaining 57% of variance (Figure 2). No factor loading was smaller than 0.5.

In short, Study 1 indicates that all items initially created contributed to the internal reliability of the scale. Moreover, the study shows that the SIS has excellent internal reliability, and it confirms that the scale has a mono-factorial structure.

STUDY 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate the results obtained in Study 1 with a new sample. Moreover, Study 2 aimed at assessing whether the mono-factorial structure emerged in Study 1 could be corroborated by confirmatory factor analysis. Finally, by testing a subgroup of participants twice, Study 2 aimed also at quantifying the test–retest reliability of the SIS.
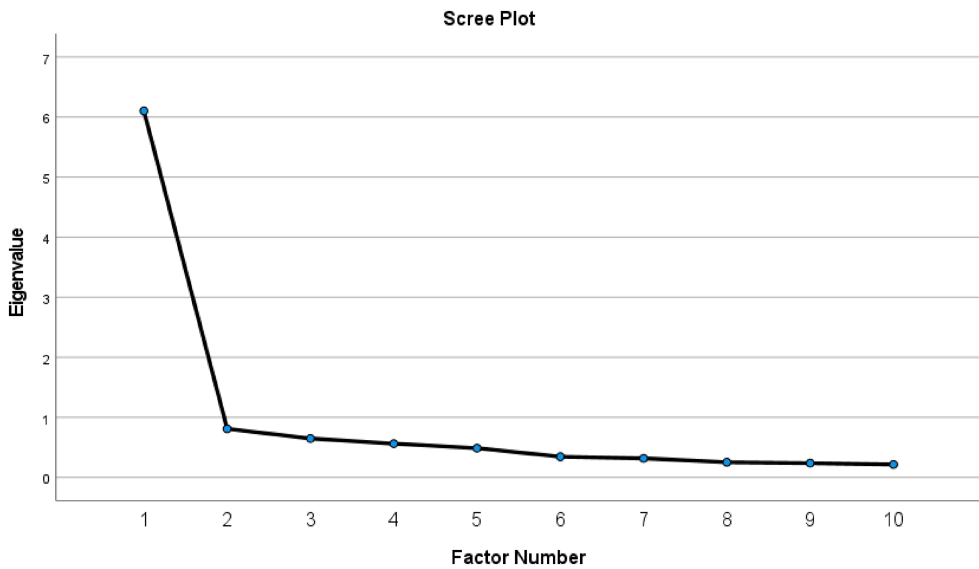
FIGURE 2   Scree plot relative to Study 1.

Participants

Prolific was employed to recruit a new sample of 300 participants resident in the United Kingdom (age: mean $= 43$, $SD = 13$; 149 females[3]) (no data were excluded from the analysis). The sample size was established a priori following Tabachnick et al. (2013), who recommend 300 participants as appropriate for confirmatory factor analysis. The pre-screening procedure employed by Prolific ensured that all participants were from the United Kingdom.

Materials and procedures

We employed the same materials and procedures as in Study 1. In this case, though, out of the 300 participants tested in Study 2, 100 completed the SIS a second time after 2 months (the remuneration was £0.10 for each session).

Results

The descriptive statistics for each item are reported in Table 1. As in Study 1, we calculated the McDonald's Omega and Cronbach's Alpha, which were equal to 0.923 (95% CI [0.906, 0.937]) and 0.921 (95% CI [0.906, 0.935]), respectively. Replicating Study 1, all items displayed an item-total correlation >.5, and removal of no item improved Cronbach's Alpha.

Building on the exploratory factor analysis presented in Study 1, here we used confirmatory factor analysis (Finch & French, 2015) to fit a model where all items were generated by one single factor (the mean-and-variance-adjusted diagonally weighted least squares (WLSMV) method was employed for

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[3]For this and for the following studies, we used the pre-screening system offered by Prolific which ensures that roughly the same number of males and females is recruited.

estimation[4]). The results revealed that the single-factor model fitted the data accurately (Robust RMSEA = .043, Robust CFI = 1; Robust TLI = 1; SRMR = .053).

Finally, by looking at the relationship between the SIS collected at time one and the SIS collected at time two for 100 participants, we assessed the test–retest reliability. The Pearson correlation between the two time points was $r(98) = .778$ ($p < .001$), which in the literature is deemed to indicate an acceptable test–retest reliability (Patten, 2016).

In short, replicating Study 1, Study 2 shows that the SIS has an excellent internal reliability and a mono-factorial structure. Moreover, Study 2 indicates that the scale has acceptable test–retest reliability.

STUDY 3

Study 3 aimed to examine the validity of the SIS. Specifically, the study assessed convergent, discriminant and concurrent validity. These were evaluated by looking at the relationship between the SIS and (i) a subset of questionnaires which, at a theoretical level, were predicted to be linked with Status Importance (for convergent validity), (ii) another subset of questionnaires which were predicted not to be linked with Status Importance (for discriminant validity) and (iii) one construct that was predicted to be an outcome of Status Importance (for concurrent validity). Note that here we did not examine any measure of status anxiety. Given the relevance of the latter for assessing the validity of the Status Importance construct, we dedicated an entire subsequent study to explore the link between the two constructs (Study 5).

Participants

Prolific was employed to recruit a new sample of 150 participants residents in the United Kingdom (age: mean = 41, SD = 14; 75 females) (no data were excluded from the analysis). The sample size was established a priori employing the G-Power software and assuming a multiple linear regression with seven predictors (see below) having effect size equal to $f^2 = 0.2$, statistical power equal to $\beta - 1 = 0.95$ and probability of Type-I error equal to $\alpha = .05$. This requires a minimum of 117 participants, which was rounded up to 150. The pre-screening procedure employed by Prolific ensured that all participants were from the United Kingdom.

Materials and procedures

Participants began by reporting their gender and age and by filling the SIS. Next, they were asked to complete the following questionnaires:

1. The SDO scale (Ho et al., 2012), employed to measure *Social Dominance Orientation* (Pratto et al., 1994). This reflects one's propensity to cherish a hierarchical organization of society and to oppose egalitarianism. People who believe that a hierarchical organization is desirable may also believe that status differences are highly important, thus caring more about the status they occupy within the hierarchy. By contrast, people who believe that society should be organized in an egalitarian way may believe that status differences are of little importance, thus caring less about their status. On this basis, a positive correlation between Social Dominance Orientation and the SIS can be predicted.

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[4]When a confirmatory factor analysis involves Likert-scale items as those employed by the SIS, the literature considers the WLSMV to be one of the best estimation methods (Li, 2016). Contrary to other approaches like maximum likelihood, the WLSMV does not require that the observed variables are normally distributed nor that they vary on a continuous scale, and therefore, it is appropriate when observed variables are ordinal as they are in the SIS.

2. The Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure, employed to assess *Social Comparison Orientation* (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999). This captures one's tendency to compare oneself with others. The literature has highlighted three distinct drives underlying social comparison: self-knowledge, self-enhancement and self-improvement (Gerber et al., 2018). On this basis, it is possible that people who attribute high importance to status, thus scoring high on the SIS, are predisposed to compare themselves against others in order to gauge their status (a form of self-knowledge), to inflate their status (a form of self-enhancement) and to improve their status (a form of self-improvement). This possibility predicts a positive correlation between the SIS and Social Comparison Orientation.

3. The revised Competitiveness Index, used to quantify *Competition Orientation* (Houston et al., 2002). This reflects one's attitude towards competition with others. A person who cares deeply about status, thus scoring high on the SIS, may express a positive attitude to competition as a means to boost her status, predicting a positive correlation between the SIS and Competition Orientation.

4. The psychological Entitlement Scale, employed to measure *Entitlement* (Campbell et al., 2004). This indicates to what extent one believes she deserves privileges and special treatments compared with other people. A person reporting high levels of entitlement may believe that it is of vital importance that her perceived status is maintained or improved, predicting a positive correlation between the SIS and Entitlement.

5. The Twenty Item Value Inventory (Sandy et al., 2017). This is composed of 10 different scales, each measuring one of the 10 basic values envisaged by the Theory of Basic Human Values (Schwartz, 1992). The 10 basic values are *Self-direction* (valuing independent thought and action, autonomy, freedom and creativity), *Stimulation* (seeking novel experience, arousal, variety and challenge in life), *Hedonism* (valuing enjoyment and pleasure), *Achievement* (reflecting a drive for acquiring competence in fulfilling socially defined goals), *Power* (valuing attainment and preservation of dominant positions in the social system), *Security* (seeking harmony, safety, and stability of society and relationships), *Conformity* (restraining from actions, inclinations and impulses that violate social norms), *Tradition* (valuing acceptance and respect for the norms, rituals and ideas of one's own culture), *Benevolence* (seeking the well-being of close others in everyday interactions) and *Universalism* (seeking understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the well-being of all people and nature). We predicted the SIS to be positively correlated with Achievement and Power, the two basic values that partially overlap with the notion of Status Importance. We considered the other eight scales to assess the discriminant validity of the SIS.

6. *The Big Five Inventory-10* (Rammstedt & John, 2007). This questionnaire quantifies the dimensions which, according to one of the prevailing theories in the literature, capture the fundamental traits of personality. These are *Openness to experience* (identifying someone who is inventive/curious vs. consistent/cautious) *Conscientiousness* (identifying someone who is efficient/organized vs. extravagant/careless), *Extraversion* (identifying someone who is outgoing/energetic vs. solitary/reserved), *Agreeableness* (identifying someone who is friendly/compassionate vs. critical/rational) and *Neuroticism* (identifying someone who is sensitive/nervous vs. resilient/confident). We did not predict any link between the SIS and the Big-Five traits. The purpose of including these traits in our analysis was to assess the discriminant validity of the SIS.

7. *Conspicuous Consumption*, assessed with the Conspicuous Consumption Orientation scale (Roy Chaudhuri et al., 2011). First documented by the economist Thorstein Veblen (1899), conspicuous consumption is widely considered to be a key phenomenon in societies characterized by a mature capitalist system. Conspicuous consumption occurs when a person engages in buying expensive items in order to signal high status to others. We hypothesized that people who care greatly about status, thus scoring high on the SIS, will manifest a tendency to engage in conspicuous consumption as a strategy to boost their status. Because of the tight conceptual link between the notion of Status Importance and Conspicuous Consumption, we deemed the latter to be adequate to assess the concurrent validity of Status Importance. Based on this reasoning, we estimated a multiple regression model having Conspicuous Consumption as a dependent variable and having SIS, Social Dominance Orientation, Social Comparison Orientation, Competition Orientation, Entitlement, Power and Achievement as

predictors. Note that, together with the SIS, we included all the predictors which, as spelled out above, were hypothesized to be correlated with the SIS. This allowed us to test whether, as one would expect if the SIS is an independent factor determining one's propensity for Conspicuous Consumption, SIS explained a unique portion of variance of Conspicuous Consumption, above and beyond other constructs.

Results

Tables 2–4 report the Pearson correlation between the SIS and the other constructs. Supporting the convergent validity of the SIS, the scale was positively related to Social Comparison Orientation, $r(148) = .231$, $p = .004$, Entitlement, $r(148) = .250$, $p = .002$, Achievement, $r(148) = .333$, $p < .001$ and Conspicuous Consumption, $r(148) = .446$, $p < .001$.

Contrary to predictions, the SIS was not related to Social Dominance Orientation, $r(148) = .116$, $p = .158$. This indicates that people's level of care about status is independent of whether people are more or less egalitarian. Also against predictions, the SIS and Competitive Orientation were unrelated, $r(148) = -.019$, $p = .816$, showing that attributing high importance to status does not result in a more competitive attitude. Finally, the SIS and Power were not related either, $r(148) = .130$, $p = .114$. In the context of the Theory of Basic Human Values, this result indicates that the SIS partially overlaps with Achievement but not with Power.

Furthermore, Tables 3 and 4 show that the SIS exhibits no correlation with some personality and value dimensions, supporting the discriminant validity of the scale.

The results of the regression analysis, reported in Table 5, reveal that, among all the candidate predictors, the SIS was the one with the strongest impact on Conspicuous Consumption, $t(142) = 4.21$, $p > .001$, corroborating the hypothesis that the SIS has a primary role in shaping Conspicuous Consumption, above and beyond competing variables – thus supporting the concurrent validity of the SIS.

In sum, by revealing a correlation with constructs such as Social Comparison Orientation, Entitlement and Achievement, Study 3 supports the convergent validity of the SIS. Moreover, by showing that the scale does not correlate (or correlates little) with unrelated dimensions in the value and personality domain, the study supports the discriminant validity of the SIS. Finally, by showing that, among the variables considered, the SIS has the strongest impact on Conspicuous consumption, Study 3 supports the concurrent validity of the scale.

TABLE 2 Relationship between the Status Importance Scale (SIS) and other possibly related constructs.

Variable	Statistics	2	3	4	5	6
1. SIS	r	.446**	.116	.231**	−.019	.250**
	p	.000	.158	.004	.816	.002
2. Conspicuous Consumption	r	–	.118	.335**	.084	.331**
	p	–	.151	.000	.307	.000
3. Social Dominance Orientation	r	–	–	−.039	.207*	.224**
	p	–	–	.638	.011	.006
4. Social Comparison Orientation	r	–	–	–	−.097	.119
	p	–	–	–	.237	.145
5. Competition Orientation	r	–	–	–	–	.057
	p	–	–	–	–	.489
6. Entitlement	r	–	–	–	–	–
	p	–	–	–	–	–

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 3 Relationship between the Status Importance Scale (SIS) and the Big-Five dimensions.

Variable	Statistics	2	3	4	5	6
1. SIS	r	.032	.182*	.018	−.182*	−.163*
	p	.701	.026	.824	.026	.046
2. Extroversion	r	−	−.439**	.052	.132	.312**
	p	−	.000	.531	.107	.000
3. Neuroticism	r	−	−	.016	−.161*	−.225**
	p	−	−	.846	.049	.006
4. Openness to experience	r	−	−	−	.032	.104
	p	−	−	−	.696	.206
5. Agreeableness	r	−	−	−	−	.279**
	p	−	−	−	−	.001
6. Conscientiousness	r	−	−	−	−	−
	p	−	−	−	−	−

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 4 Relationship between the SIS and the 10 values assumed by the Theory of Basic Human Values.

Variable	Statistics	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. SIS	r	−.055	.126	−.203*	−.080	−.142	−.047	.034	.333**	.130	−.043
	p	.500	.125	.013	.328	.083	.571	.683	.000	.114	.605
2. Conformity	r	−	.349**	.181*	.079	−.173*	−.599**	−.394**	−.286**	−.265**	.285**
	p	−	.000	.027	.339	.034	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000
3. Tradition	r	−	−	.030	−.146	−.159	−.458**	−.366**	−.137	−.133	.071
	p	−	−	.715	.074	.052	.000	.000	.095	.105	.390
4. Benevolence	r	−	−	−	.114	.054	−.190*	−.257**	−.485**	−.423**	.052
	p	−	−	−	.164	.513	.020	.002	.000	.000	.530
5. Universalism	r	−	−	−	−	.152	−.155	−.212**	−.099	−.254**	−.019
	p	−	−	−	−	.063	.059	.009	.228	.002	.821
6. Self-direction	r	−	−	−	−	−	.065	−.016	−.016	−.079	−.040
	p	−	−	−	−	−	.426	.850	.847	.335	.629
7. Stimulation	r	−	−	−	−	−	−	.420**	.159	.141	−.377**
	p	−	−	−	−	−	−	.000	.052	.086	.000
8. Hedonism	r	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	.052	−.086	−.218**
	p	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	.530	.295	.007
9. Achievement	r	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	.379**	−.182*
	p	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	.000	.026
10. Power	r	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−.231**
	p	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	.004
11. Security	r	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−
	p	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−	−

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). *Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

STUDY 4

To further assess concurrent validity, Study 4 asked whether the scale could predict people's level of interest in certain behavioural activities. The SIS reflects a motivational construct which, theoretically, should influence people's propensity to engage in particular behaviours or activities.

TABLE 5 Regression model of conspicuous consumption.

Variable	*B*	Std. error	*β*	*t*	*p*	95% CI	
SIS	0.404	0.096	.319	4.211	.000**	0.214	0.594
Achievement	0.339	0.368	.079	0.923	.358	−0.387	1.066
Power	0.115	0.385	.025	0.300	.765	−0.646	0.876
Social dominance orientation	0.003	0.074	.003	0.036	.971	−0.143	0.148
Social comparison orientation	0.257	0.087	.221	2.944	.004**	0.085	0.430
Competition orientation	0.073	0.079	.071	0.922	.358	−0.083	0.229
Entitlement	0.205	0.085	.188	2.420	.017*	0.038	0.373

Note: $R^2 = .32$, $F(7, 142) = 9.37$, $p < .001$.

**t is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed). *t is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Specifically, people reporting high SIS scores are predicted to be more interested in activities related to status, that is, in activities that boost, gauge or signal status. Based on this reasoning, Study 4 asked participants to fill the SIS and to report the importance they attributed to various everyday activities such as working, shopping and using social media. The data were analysed with a multivariate regression model where the SIS was included as predictor and where the different activities were included as dependent variables. A significant effect of the SIS was predicted to emerge only regarding activities related to status.

Participants

Prolific was employed to recruit a new sample of 200 British participants (age: mean = 40.62, *SD* = 12.20; 102 females). The sample size was established a priori employing the G-power software (Faul et al., 2009) applied to a univariate regression analysis with 10 predictors, and assuming effect size $f^2 = 0.15$, statistical power $\beta - 1 = 0.95$, and probability of Type-I error $\alpha = .05$. This requires a sample of 172 participants, which was rounded to 200. The pre-screening procedure employed by Prolific ensured that all participants were from the United Kingdom.

Materials and procedures

Participants began by reporting their gender and age and by filling the SIS. Next, they were presented with the following text: 'Below, a list of common activities is presented. For each, please indicate to what extent the activity is important for you in your everyday life'. The list of activities is described in Table 6. For each, participants had to respond by choosing among 'Not at all important', 'Slightly important', 'Important', 'Fairly important' and 'Very important'. People scoring high on the SIS were predicted to attribute high importance to activities for which social status is relevant. Specifically, we predicted an effect regarding the following activities:

- 'Shopping'. As examined above, the notion of conspicuous consumption implies that shopping can be motivated by the desire to boost status (Roy Chaudhuri et al., 2011). In line with this, it has been found that people who report a higher desire for power express a more positive attitude towards shopping (Rigoli, 2021). On this basis, people scoring high on the SIS were predicted to attribute high importance to shopping.
- 'Working or Studying'. At least in modern societies, the social sciences consider job, income and education as major indicators of status. It is reasonable to expect that this view is shared by the general

TABLE 6   Study 4: Multivariate regression model.

Activity	Mean	SD	Skewness	b	Std error	t	p	b: 95% CI	
Shopping	2.37	1.082	0.531	0.022	0.01	2.119	.035*	0.002	0.043
Spending time with family	4.23	1.029	−1.162	−0.005	0.01	−0.534	.594	−0.025	0.014
Working or studying	3.56	1.155	−0.353	0.039	0.011	3.541	<.001**	0.017	0.06
Using social media	2.17	1.099	0.76	0.033	0.01	3.191	.002**	0.013	0.054
Socializing with friends and acquaintances	3.5	1.215	−0.294	0.03	0.012	2.567	.011*	0.007	0.053
Learning new things from books, newspapers, magazines, internet, etc.	3.59	1.09	−0.304	−0.004	0.011	−0.377	.707	−0.025	0.017
Doing sport	2.58	1.358	0.503	0.024	0.013	1.853	.065	−0.002	0.05
Taking care of my appearance	3.25	1.092	0.05	0.049	0.01	4.823	<.001**	0.029	0.068
Cooking and eating	4.01	0.943	−0.664	0.009	0.009	0.966	.335	−0.009	0.027
Pursuing my hobbies (e.g., videogames, playing music, art and crafts, card games, etc.)	3.75	0.962	−0.222	−0.005	0.009	−0.575	.566	−0.024	0.013

**t is significant at the .005 level (2-tailed). *t is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

public. The ensuing prediction is that people who care greatly about status attribute higher importance to working and studying.

- 'Using social media'. Research indicates that people reporting higher social comparison orientation use social media more (Verduyn et al., 2020; Vogel et al., 2015). It has been proposed that this partially occurs because social media are viewed as tools to gauge, signal, or boost status (Haidt, 2024; Verduyn et al., 2020). People who attribute higher importance to status, therefore, may attribute higher importance to using social media.
- 'Taking care of my appearance'. Various theories in evolutionary psychology have stressed the importance of enhancing one's physical appearance as a way to boost status (for review, see Kowal et al., 2022). A recent study carried out across 93 countries has found that activities aimed at improving one's look are virtually universal and occupy as much as 3.5 hours of the average person's day. This inspires the prediction that people who care more about status attribute higher importance to activities related to taking care of one's appearance.

Results

The data were analysed by fitting a multivariate regression model having the SIS as predictor and having the 10 activities presented in Table 6 as dependent variables. The model was overall significant (Wilks' $\lambda = .792$, $F(10, 189) = 4.97$, $p < .001$). Table 6 reports the statistical tests for the regression coefficients. Supporting our predictions, the table indicates that people reporting high SIS attributed higher importance to 'Shopping', 'Working or Studying', 'Using social media' and 'Taking care of my appearance'. A significant effect emerged also regarding 'Socialising with friends and acquaintances', something that was not predicted a priori. This suggests that people attributing high importance to status may interpret socialization as a context where matters of status are relevant. As predicted, the effects upon all other activities unrelated to status ('Spending time with

family', 'Learning new things', 'Cooking and eating', 'Doing sport' and 'Pursuing my hobbies') were non-significant.

All in all, these results further support the concurrent validity of the SIS: By measuring Status Importance through the SIS, one can predict the kind of activities a person gives importance to (i.e., those related to status).

STUDY 5

In the last study, we explored the relationship between the SIS and status anxiety (Buttrick & Oishi, 2017; De Botton, 2008; Marmot, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018), the latter being measured by employing a recently developed scale (Day & Fiske, 2016; Melita et al., 2020). One of the central arguments of the paper is that Status Importance and status anxiety are two distinct constructs. This implies that the correlation between the SIS and the status anxiety scale should be moderate, and not too high (an aspect supporting further the discriminant validity of the SIS). Moreover, it should be possible to separate the items of the SIS from the items of the status anxiety scale when running an exploratory factor analysis. These predictions were tested here.

We also probed the relationship between the SIS and the status anxiety scale including a third variable in the analysis: subjective social status, reflecting the status a person perceives to occupy within the social ladder. There is ample evidence showing that people who perceive having low status experience more physical and mental health problems (Hoebel & Lampert, 2020; Marmot, 2015), including exaggerated general anxiety (Scott et al., 2014) and status anxiety (Melita et al., 2020). This raises the hypothesis that the link between subjective social status and status anxiety is moderated by Status Importance. Specifically, the effect of subjective social status upon status anxiety may be boosted among people reporting high Status Importance. To spell out this prediction, consider first people who care little about status. For them, the thought of occupying low status may not be particularly distressing. This implies a diminished effect of subjective social status upon status anxiety among these people. Now consider people who care greatly about status. For them, the thought of occupying low status may be very distressing. This implies an enhanced effect of subjective social status upon status anxiety among people caring greatly about status. Study 5 aimed at investigating this hypothesis by fitting a regression model of status anxiety having subjective social status, the SIS and their interaction as predictors.

Participants

Prolific was employed to recruit a new sample of 200 British participants (age: mean = 42.44, SD = 12.84; 100 females). The sample size was established a priori employing the G-power software (Faul et al., 2009) applied to a univariate regression analysis with five predictors, and assuming effect size $f^2 = 0.12$, statistical power $\beta - 1 = 0.95$ and probability of Type-I error $\alpha = .05$. This requires a sample of 171 participants, which was rounded to 200. The pre-screening procedure employed by Prolific ensured that all participants were from the United Kingdom.

Materials and procedures

While the literature has used different approaches to operationalize status anxiety (Blake & Brooks, 2019; Delhey & Dragolov, 2014; Keshabyan & Day, 2020; Layte, 2012; Layte & Whelan, 2014; Schmalor & Heine, 2022), we used a recently introduced scale of this construct which is the only one that has received validation (Day & Fiske, 2016; Melita et al., 2020). Participants reported their gender and age and filled the SIS. Next, they were presented with the McArthur subjective social status scale (Adler

et al., 2000; Operario et al., 2004), which quantifies subjective social status on a scale ranging from zero to ten. Finally, participants filled the status anxiety scale (Day & Fiske, 2016; Melita et al., 2020).

Results

Supporting the discriminant validity of the SIS, the Pearson correlation between the status anxiety scale and the SIS appeared to be moderate (Schober et al., 2018), $r(198) = .546$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.441, 0.636]. To ensure that the items of the two scales could be separated factorially, we ran an exploratory factor analysis (based on maximum-likelihood estimation) of all items of the two scales combined. We obtained a KMO score equal to .915 and a significant Bertlett's test of sphericity, $\chi^2(105) = 2028$, $p < .001$. All considered criteria, including the Kaiser criterion, the point of inflexion criterion and parallel analysis, converged in indicating that two factors should be extracted, jointly explaining 60% of variance. Table 7 reports the factor loadings after Varimax rotation. This indicates that all items of the SIS loaded heavily on factor one (range: [0.603, −0.828]) but not on factor two (range: [−0.104, 0.356]), while all items of the status anxiety scale loaded heavily on factor two (range: [0.742, 0.812]) but not on factor one (range: [0.117, 0.325]). Altogether, these findings support the discriminant validity of the SIS vis-à-vis the status anxiety scale.

Next, we fitted a multiple regression model having the status anxiety score as a dependent variable and having the SIS, subjective social status and their interaction as predictors (to ensure that any effect occurred above and beyond that of demographic variables, the model included also gender and age as covariates of no interest). Overall, the model explained a substantial portion of variance, $R^2 = .389$, $F(194, 5) = 24.69$, $p < .001$. A significant effect was exerted by subjective social status, $b = -1.777$, $t(194) = -4.30$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.592, −0.962] and by the SIS, $b = 3.745$, $t(194) = 8.81$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [2.907, 4.583]. However, the interaction term was non-significant, $b = -0.476$, $t(194) = -1.32$, $p = .186$, 95% CI [−1.183, 0.231]. These findings indicate that higher status anxiety was reported by people who

TABLE 7 Factor loadings relative to the exploratory factor analysis of the Status Importance Scale (SIS) and status anxiety scale combined.

Questionnaire	Item	Factor	
		1	**2**
SIS	I care a lot about social status	0.811	0.255
	I am rather indifferent to my social status	−0.642	−0.187
	I feel very stressed when my social status is threatened	0.616	0.356
	I feel very happy when my social status has improved	0.603	0.346
	I do not care much about social status	−0.828	−0.199
	I put a lot of effort in improving or maintaining my social status	0.706	0.283
	Social status is one of my major concerns	0.764	0.203
	I do not put much effort in improving or maintaining my social status	−0.690	−0.104
	I find issues of social status irrelevant	−0.626	−0.260
	I do not think much about matters of social status	−0.670	−0.172
Status anxiety scale	I feel anxious that I will be stuck in my position for life	0.117	0.812
	I am very concerned that I won't be able to achieve my career goals	0.160	0.785
	I worry that I might become lower in social standing	0.356	0.742
	I am concerned that my current position in life is too low	0.320	0.803
	I worry that my social status will not change	0.325	0.772

perceive occupying a lower status (main effect of subjective social status) and by people who care greatly about status (main effect of the SIS), with no interaction between the SIS and subjective social status.

Given that we measured both subjective social status and the SIS, we looked also at the correlation between the two variables, which turned out to be non-significant, $r(198) = .001$, $p = .991$, 95% CI [−0.138, 0.139]. In other words, people appeared to attribute higher or lower importance to status independent of their perceived status.

We concluded our investigation by assessing the measurement invariance of the SIS for the two demographic variables recorded, namely, gender and age. After combining the samples for all studies ($n = 980$), we ran a confirmatory factor analysis including all items under a single factor (using WLSMV as estimator). When loadings and intercepts were assumed to be constant across genders, the model fitted the data well (Robust RMSEA = .048, Robust CFI = .995; Robust TLI = .995; SRMR = .054), demonstrating that the SIS has scalar invariance for gender. For age, we formed two groups, one including people who were 40 or younger ($n = 533$), the other including the rest ($n = 447$). When loadings and intercepts were assumed to be constant across age groups, the model fitted the data well (Robust RMSEA = .053, Robust CFI = .953; Robust TLI = .952; SRMR = .051), demonstrating that the SIS has scalar invariance for age too.

In summary, these findings support the discriminant validity of the SIS vis-à-vis the status anxiety scale, in line with the notion that these reflect two distinct constructs. Moreover, the data reveal that both subjective social status and Status Importance independently predict people's status anxiety and that they are unrelated to each other.

DISCUSSION

Based on the five studies presented above, the paper introduces the SIS as a valid self-report questionnaire that can be employed to quantify how important a person deems status to be. The SIS appears to have excellent internal reliability and acceptable test–retest reliability. Supporting convergent validity, the scale correlates with measures such as social comparison orientation, entitlement and achievement while, supporting discriminant validity, it shows no or little correlation with unrelated constructs. When compared to other potential candidates, the SIS emerged as being the best predictor of conspicuous consumption, a finding that supports the scale's concurrent validity. Furthermore, the scale can predict the importance people attribute to everyday activities related to status. Finally, the last study showed that the SIS has discriminant validity with respect to status anxiety. Moreover, it reveals that the SIS predicts status anxiety independent of subjective social status, indicating that attributing an excessive importance to status predisposes people to anxiety independent of the rank one occupies.

When probing the convergent validity of the SIS, not all dimensions we hypothesized to be linked with the scale were so. One construct that was uncorrelated with the SIS is social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994). This observation indicates that to what extent one cares about status is independent of whether one manifests a positive attitude towards social hierarchies and inequalities. In other words, the data reveal that high importance can be attributed to status by people who cherish social hierarchies as much as by people who are critical thereof. As a possible explanation of this finding, many people reporting high Status Importance may desire to be less concerned about status, and hence may long for a more equal society where status is less consequential.

The second dimension which, unexpectedly, was unrelated to the SIS was competition orientation (Houston et al., 2002). As a possible explanation of this finding, high importance to status may be attributed not only by highly competitive people, but also by those who believe that competition endangers their status. Following this reasoning, one could predict that the relationship between Status Importance and Competition Orientation is moderated by self-esteem: people who give high importance to status and have high self-esteem may report high competition orientation, while people who give high importance to status but have low self-esteem may report low competition orientation. This prediction should be tested by future research.

In the context of the Theory of Basic human values (Schwartz, 1992), the SIS was related to achievement but not to power. A possible explanation of this finding may be that the kind of status people desire corresponds to the notion of achievement, that is, to the notion of being competent and admired, and not to the notion of power, that is, the notion of being dominant, strong and wealthy. This explanation fits with a distinction proposed by some scholars (Cheng et al., 2010) between the concept of prestige and the concept of dominance, which, according to this view, refer to two different forms of status that can be found in human communities. People endowed with prestige, the reasoning goes, receive special treatment because they have performed remarkable deeds, are sought for their skills and wisdom, and are admired by others. By contrast, dominant individuals receive special treatment because they have the power of coercion, have an aggressive stance, and elicit fear and submission. The distinction between prestige and domination runs parallel to the distinction between achievement and power. On this basis, the finding that Status Importance is related to achievement but not to power raises the hypothesis that Status Importance may indicate how much a person cares about prestige, but not how much the person cares about occupying a dominant position.

Regarding basic personality traits, the SIS exhibits a significant negative correlation with conscientiousness and agreeableness together with a significant positive correlation with neuroticism. Intriguingly, evidence indicates that people living in more unequal states of the US manifest diminished levels of agreeableness (De Vries et al., 2011). On this basis, the relation between the SIS and agreeableness may be explained by the impact of income inequality, though this possibility remains to be tested empirically. The relationship between the SIS and neuroticism may also not be as surprising after all. Study 5 demonstrates that the SIS is related to status anxiety, and, though this remains to be verified empirically, status anxiety may be related to neuroticism. It is thus possible that the link between the SIS and neuroticism can be explained by the link between the SIS and status anxiety, though, once again, this hypothesis remains to be tested.

We also found that people scoring high on the SIS attribute higher importance to status-related activities such as shopping, working, taking care of one's appearance and using social media. As the popularity of social media is growing globally, the finding that people scoring high on the SIS attribute higher importance to using social media is particularly interesting. Related to this, previous research has documented a more frequent use of social media in people characterized by elevated social comparison orientation (Verduyn et al., 2020; Vogel et al., 2015). Moreover, these data suggest that, because upward social comparisons are often elicited during social media use, the latter tends to be more distressing for people scoring high on social comparison orientation. Given our finding that Status Importance is the best predictor of conspicuous consumption, even better than social comparison orientation, it is conceivable that similar results may emerge also in the context of social media use. A promising research avenue is therefore to assess social comparison orientation and Status Importance jointly to investigate social media use.

The finding that Status Importance is a predictor of status anxiety encourages future research to employ the SIS to probe the detrimental consequences of income inequality. As we have seen, an influential hypothesis posits that inequality enhances Status Importance, thus leading to anxiety and to impaired physical and mental well-being (Marmot, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018). Research investigating this hypothesis has primarily relied on items taken from large cross-national surveys (Delhey & Dragolov, 2014; Layte & Whelan, 2014; Paskov et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2023). This approach has several advantages, but an important limitation is that it is unsuitable to separate different constructs such as status anxiety, Status Importance and even subjective social status – this is because the precise constructs underlying the items remain unclear. One way to contribute to this research is to develop scales that isolate the specific constructs at play. Complementing a previous scale assessing status anxiety (Day & Fiske, 2016; Melita et al., 2020), the SIS does just that, with a focus on Status Importance. Future research can therefore use the SIS to isolate the specific contribution of Status Importance to the detrimental effects of income inequality. Study 5 speaks to this question by shedding light on the link between Status Importance and status anxiety. First, the study reveals that this link exists. Second, it shows that the effect of Status Importance does not interact with the effect of subjective social status.

Interestingly, these results are broadly in line with the findings of Layte and Whelan (2014) based on the 2007 European Quality of Life Survey. The authors found that status anxiety depended both on income rank (people with lower income reported higher status anxiety) and on inequality (more unequal countries showed higher status anxiety at all levels of income rank), with no interaction between the two factors. If one draws a parallel between subjective social status and income rank (in fact, subjective status is an even better predictor of health than objective status: Singh-Manoux et al., 2005), and assumes a correlation between Status Importance and income inequality (following the literature: Paskov et al., 2013; Walasek & Brown, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2017), then Study 5 converges with the observations reported by Layte and Whelan (2014). When predicting status anxiety, both studies find a main effect of social status (either subjectively or objectively assessed), a main effect of income inequality or of Status Importance, and no interaction. Future research may use the SIS to probe the issue further and establish whether, as the hypothesis inspiring this research field maintains (Marmot, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018), income inequality produces anxiety via the mediating role of Status Importance – possibly through experimental paradigms that directly manipulate income inequality (Blake & Brooks, 2019; Melita et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2023).

More generally, it is important to assess the SIS in the context of the various theories concerning the effects of income inequality upon perception of status. A recent paper (Wang et al., 2023) has identified three groups of such theories. Inspired by the social categorization perspective, the first group asserts that inequality leads people to rely on wealth as the key dimension to categorize people in different groups (Jetten et al., 2017; Peters & Jetten, 2023; Peters et al., 2022; Tanjitpiyanond et al., 2022). The second group of theories suggests that, since income inequality implies that signals about wealth become more informative to infer status, acquiring wealth becomes more important in more unequal societies (Walasek & Brown, 2015, 2019). The third group of theories, finally, maintains that inequality boosts people's desire for social status in general, independent of which dimensions (wealth, education, family lineage) are used to infer status (Marmot, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018). The three groups of theories have much in common and are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Wang et al., 2023). Yet, their emphasis is different. The first two groups focus on the wealth dimension: They predict that inequality boosts specifically the importance of wealth. They are silent regarding other dimensions potentially relevant for shaping status (e.g., wealth, education and family lineage), and regarding the importance of status in general. By contrast, the third group of theories (Marmot, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2018) claims that inequality boosts the importance attributed to status in general, independent of which dimensions (wealth, education and family lineage) are used to infer status. The SIS is inspired specifically by the last group of theories. It does not focus on the question of which dimension (e.g., wealth vs. education) is used to infer status, and it is therefore unsuitable to address the question of whether inequality impacts specific dimensions (e.g., wealth) but not others. The scale can be used to assess whether inequality changes the importance of status broadly defined, independent of which dimension is used to infer status.

Finally, the SIS may also be used for investigating which characteristics of a society foster Status Importance among its members. For instance, research in cultural psychology has highlighted a key distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Oyserman et al., 2002). Is Status Importance higher in individualistic or collectivistic cultures? Relevant to this question is evidence showing that social comparison orientation, which is a measure related to Status Importance, is higher in tighter cultures, a concept akin to the notion of collectivistic cultures (Baldwin & Mussweiler, 2018). Yet, the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption, a construct with an even stronger link with Status Importance, appears to be more prevalent in individualistic societies (Souiden et al., 2011). Thus, different lines of evidence point to divergent predictions regarding whether Status Importance is higher in collectivistic or individualistic societies. The SIS can be employed by research to arbitrate between these divergent predictions. A related question pertains to the role of modernization. There is compelling evidence indicating that, broadly speaking, modernization has had a dramatic impact upon people's values (Inglehart, 2020; Welzel, 2013). Has modernization affected Status Importance too? In other words,

in comparison with modern societies, are traditional societies characterized by higher or lower Status Importance? Employment of the SIS may contribute to address this question.

The research presented in the paper has some limitations. First, the sample employed was taken from an online database and, thus, was not representative of the country's population: future research should aim at assessing Status Importance in a more representative sample. Relatedly, regarding demographic variables, we measured gender and age only. We found that the SIS has scalar invariance for both these variables, but whether this applies also to other demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, income or region remains to be investigated. It is especially important to ensure that the SIS remains valid among people living in areas of deprivation, in light of evidence indicating that these people sometimes are resistant to answer questions about their status (Moss, Kelly, Bird, Nutting, & Pickett, 2023; Moss, Kelly, Bird, & Pickett, 2023).

The second limitation is that the studies were conducted on one single country, the United Kingdom: Future research should assess Status Importance in other countries and investigate whether different populations differ in this respect and why. Third, the measures involved were all questionnaires: assessing whether the SIS can predict any aspect of overt behaviour is another important aspect to be investigated in the future. Fourth, it remains to be assessed whether the SIS is subject to any social desirability bias. In other words, people may believe that attributing great importance to status is more desirable than attributing little importance (or vice versa) and tune their answers accordingly. Establishing whether this is the case is particularly important if the SIS is to be used to investigate the impact of inequality, given evidence showing that people living in unequal countries are more prone to self-enhancement tendencies (Loughnan et al., 2011), which can be interpreted as a form of social desirability bias. One last point pertains the role played by the context. Does the importance attributed to status vary when comparing one context (e.g., when thinking about the whole nation) against another (e.g., when thinking about one's village)? The paper speaks to this question by showing that the SIS has substantial test–retest reliability and thus reflects an individual tendency which is not entirely context-dependent. Still, whether the context plays any role, and how important this may be, remains an open question. Assessing it requires to investigate to what extent people's judgements about Status Importance vary when the context is manipulated.

In conclusion, the present paper offers the SIS as a valid self-report questionnaire that measures the construct of Status Importance. As argued above, this instrument can contribute to research investigating various important social and psychological phenomena such as the impact of economic inequality in wealthy countries, the motivation underlying social media use, the characteristics that make social status more or less important in a society, and the detrimental implications of status-related issues upon mental and physical health.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Francesco Rigoli: Conceptualization; funding acquisition; writing – original draft; methodology; validation; writing – review and editing; formal analysis; data curation; investigation. **Marco Mirolli:** Conceptualization; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing; investigation.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All data and research materials are available at https://osf.io/6wvdz/.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The studies were approved by the Research Ethics Committee of City, University of London (the United Kingdom).

INFORMED CONSENT

All participants gave written informed consent to participate in the studies.

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