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2 **Service-for-Prestige Theory**
 3 **of Leader-Follower Relations**

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[Au2] 6 **Definition**

7 An evolutionary theory of leader-follower rela-
 8 tions that aims to explain why these relations can
 9 range from being “bad” (i.e., based on coercion)
 10 to “good” (i.e., based on mutually beneficial
 11 exchange).

12 **Introduction**

13 The service-for-prestige theory (Price and Van
 14 Vugt 2014, 2015) takes an evolutionary perspec-
 15 tive on leader-follower relations in order to
 16 accomplish two main aims. The first aim is to
 17 explain why these relations can range from being
 18 “bad” and coercive (i.e., based on a leader’s abil-
 19 ity to harm followers) to “good” and voluntary
 20 (i.e., based on a leader’s ability to benefit fol-
 21 lowers). The second aim is to propose that
 22 “good” leadership is governed by the logic of
 23 reciprocity, whereby leaders deliver public goods
 24 to followers in exchange for elevated social pres-
 25 tige. Both of these aspects of leader-follower rela-
 26 tions are examined in more detail below.

What Are the Characteristics of “Bad” 27
Versus “Good” Leadership, and Why 28
Does Leadership Quality Vary So 29
Widely? 30

31 People from a diverse variety of cultures tend to
 32 agree about what constitutes good leadership. The
 33 GLOBE survey (Den Hartog et al. 1999) mea-
 34 sured preferences for leader traits across 61 cul-
 35 tures. The most consistently valued leader
 36 attributes were those which allow a leader to ben-
 37 efit followers via prosociality (e.g., trustworthi-
 38 ness, fairness) and ability (e.g., intelligence,
 39 competence). Similar findings are reported in a
 40 review of characteristics of successful leaders
 41 (Hogan and Kaiser 2005). These sources both
 42 suggest that followers prefer leaders who would
 43 make good exchange partners: people who have
 44 the skills that would enable them to benefit fol-
 45 lowers and who can be trusted to not be deceptive
 46 or exploitative. By the same token, these sources
 47 also suggest universal aversion to traits indicating
 48 that a leader would be a poor exchange partner
 49 (e.g., dominance, selfishness); leaders are gener-
 50 ally reviled if they exploit their positions for their
 51 own benefit and at the expense of their followers
 52 (Tooby et al. 2006).

53 This spectrum of leadership styles, from bad
 54 (self-serving and exploitative) to good
 55 (trustworthy and productive of group benefits),
 56 can be observed in modern environments. These
 57 leadership styles map on fairly well to the two
 58 kinds of social status that are commonly

distinguished in behavioral science: dominance and prestige (Henrich and Gil-White 2001). The high status of bad leaders constitutes dominance, and leaders extract this status coercively, via their ability to harm followers. In contrast, the high status of good leaders constitutes prestige and is conferred voluntarily on leaders by followers, in exchange for the benefits that the leader provides. Humans obviously possess the psychological machinery necessary for engaging in both dominance-based and prestige-based leader-follower relations in modern environments, and service-for-prestige (Price and Van Vugt 2014, 2015) describes the kinds of hunter-gatherer environments of the evolutionary past that could have selected for this machinery.

Prestige-based leadership is common in the kinds of societies that were probably most typical of our evolutionary past: small (25–50 members) bands of nomadic hunter-gatherers. In contemporary examples of such societies, good leaders are described as skilled individuals who are voluntarily appreciated, respected, and followed by others, whereas bad leaders are group members who attempt to become too pushy, dominant, and coercive (Price and Van Vugt 2014, 2015). It's difficult to be a bad leader for very long among nomadic foragers because people will be both eager to get away from you and also relatively able to do so; in the fission-fusion societies of nomadic hunter-gatherers, it's relatively easy to leave one band and join another, and bands commonly break apart due to social conflict (Kelly 1995). Moreover, because these groups tend to be so small, organizing group members for collective action tends to be a relatively simple undertaking, and there is no great need for strong leadership in order to solve problems related to group coordination and free rider punishment. These two aspects of typical nomadic hunter-gatherer societies – the relative ease with which members can escape bad leaders and the reduced need for leaders to solve collective action problems – combine to create an environment in which follower dependence on leaders is relatively low.

In other kinds of hunter-gatherer environments, however, the dependence of followers on

leaders – and thus the power of leaders – can become much stronger. Indigenous peoples of the North American northwest coast lacked agriculture, but were nevertheless able to live in sedentary villages, because they settled close to rivers which allowed their main protein source – salmon – to deliver itself directly to them. These villages could grow to include hundreds of residents, much larger than nomadic hunter-gatherer bands, and so their collective action problems were more challenging to solve without strong leadership. Moreover, the sedentary nature of these settlements made fission-fusion social organization less feasible, and it therefore became harder to simply pack up and leave a leader who became too dominant. Increased dependence on leaders along the northwest coast created a niche for the emergence of leadership that was significantly more dominant than that seen among nomadic foragers; for example, although slavery is unknown among nomadic hunter-gatherers, it was common along the northwest coast (Kelly 1995).

According to service-for-prestige, the kinds of hunter-gatherer environments that selected for dominance-based and prestige-based leader-follower relations in the ancestral past are both represented in the modern world. The theory expects that in modern environments, dominance-based leadership will emerge most often in social environments more similar to northwest coast, that is, environments in which followers have low ability to reject or escape leaders (due to, e.g., poor exit options) and/or in larger social organizations in which strong leadership is required to solve collective action problems. In contrast, prestige-based leadership should more likely emerge in environments more similar to those of nomadic foragers, that is, environments in which followers have greater freedom to desert or depose leaders, and/or in smaller organizations in which coordination problems are relatively easily solved at a local level.

150 **Leader-Follower Relations Are Perceived**
 151 **as Good When They Involve Voluntary,**
 152 **Mutually Beneficial, Service-for-Prestige**
 153 **Exchange**

154 It was noted above that according to surveys of
 155 leadership preferences such as the cross-cultural
 156 GLOBE study, followers prefer leaders who
 157 would make good exchange partners: leaders
 158 who are willing and able to produce benefits for
 159 followers and who can be trusted to not abuse
 160 their power for their own narrow self-interest.
 161 Service-for-prestige (Price and Van Vugt 2014,
 162 2015) suggests that people prefer leaders to be
 163 good exchange partners because in the evolution-
 164 ary past, this preference would have enabled fol-
 165 lowers to engage benefit-generating leaders in
 166 mutually advantageous and therefore sustainable
 167 relationships.

168 How would this mutually beneficial exchange
 169 have played out in the evolutionary past? In
 170 hunter-gatherer environments, competent leader-
 171 ship benefits follower fitness by facilitating coop-
 172 eration in activities such as warfare, big game
 173 hunting, forging political alliances, maintaining
 174 within-group order, and camp migrations. How-
 175 ever, leadership roles often involve substantial
 176 costs for leaders, such as time and energy invest-
 177 ments, stressful decision-making, and physical
 178 risk-taking. For these costs to pay off, and for
 179 leaders to be motivated to continue to lead, they
 180 must be compensated by some kinds of return
 181 benefits.

182 Accordingly, leaders do appear to be rewarded
 183 for the contributions they make. As high-prestige
 184 individuals, leaders are highly valued as friends,
 185 allies, and mates; and therefore social, material,
 186 and sexual resources tend to flow their way. Evi-
 187 dence that hunter-gatherer leaders receive rela-
 188 tively large shares of material and social
 189 resources can be challenging to collect, since this
 190 increased access may be observable only over the
 191 long term or under conditions of unusually great
 192 need such as sickness or sustained hunger. Nev-
 193 ertheless, respected leaders in small-scale socie-
 194 ties have been observed to be rewarded over the
 195 long term with social, political, and material sup-
 196 port (Bird and Bliege Bird 2010; Gurven

et al. 2000; Von Rueden et al. 2014). And when 197
 the focus is on reproductive rather than social and 198
 material resources, the rewards of leadership 199
 become relatively easy to observe. The high status 200
 of male leaders is attractive to women (Ellis 1992) 201
 as well as to parents who wish to form alliances 202
 with a leader by betrothing their daughter to him 203
 (Kelly 1995). In small-scale societies, higher sta- 204
 tus men are reported to have more wives and 205
 sexual partners, higher-fertility wives, and more 206
 surviving offspring (Chagnon 1979, 1988; Von 207
 Rueden et al. 2008, 2011). 208

Service-for-prestige suggests that just as lead- 209
 ership services were costly for leaders to provide, 210
 prestige allocations to leaders were costly for fol- 211
 lowers to make. Prestigious leaders have high 212
 power to benefit followers, so followers will 213
 invest time and resources to remain in good stand- 214
 ing with them. Such investments may take the 215
 form of, for example, deferring to leader interests, 216
 sharing resources with the leader, taking pains to 217
 avoid harming the leader, and cooperating with a 218
 leader's directions instead of pursuing one's nar- 219
 row self-interest (Price and Van Vugt 2014, 2015). 220

Prestige-based leader-follower relations consti- 221
 tute reciprocal exchange (Price 2003), then, 222
 because just as leaders voluntarily pay costs to 223
 deliver leadership services in exchange for pres- 224
 tige, followers voluntarily pay costs to deliver 225
 prestige in exchange for leadership services. 226
 However, because this prestige must often be 227
 allocated to the leader by a whole group of fol- 228
 lowers, it's a more complicated form of reciproc- 229
 ity than the dyadic reciprocal altruism first 230
 described by Trivers (1971). Although leader- 231
 follower reciprocity has aspects in common with 232
 dyadic reciprocal altruism, it also shares charac- 233
 teristics with n -person reciprocity (Tooby 234
 et al. 2006) and can be considered a form of 235
 collective action. And as in any collective action, 236
 a free rider's advantage (Olson 1965) will accrue 237
 to group members who accept the benefits of 238
 cooperation (in this case, a share of the services 239
 that the leader is motivated to provide, by virtue of 240
 being compensated with prestige) but who do not 241
 pay contribution costs (in this case, the cost of 242
 allocating prestige to the leader). Service-for- 243
 prestige predicts that in order to neutralize this 244

245 free rider's advantage, high contributors – that is,
 246 high allocators of prestige – will experience puni-
 247 tive sentiment towards those who fail to “pay
 248 respect” to leaders (Price et al. 2002). This phe-
 249 nomenon could be observed repeatedly in the
 250 notoriously violent rallies that occurred during
 251 Donald Trump's campaign to become the US
 252 Presidential nominee for the Republican Party,
 253 beginning in the latter months of 2015. A pattern
 254 developed at these rallies in which attendees who
 255 were perceived as not being sufficiently support-
 256 ive of Trump would be humiliated and forced to
 257 leave, or even physically attacked, by other
 258 attendees who apparently considered themselves
 259 vociferous Trump supporters (Jacobs 2016).

260 Finally, it should be noted that the free rider
 261 problem described above applies only to prestige-
 262 based leadership scenarios, in which leaders are
 263 perceived by the group as being valued providers
 264 of public goods. In dominance-based leadership
 265 scenarios, in which the power of leaders is based
 266 on their ability to harm and intimidate followers,
 267 the logic of this collective action should essen-
 268 tially flip. If a leader is perceived as exploitative
 269 and parasitic rather than benefit-producing, then
 270 the collective action should focus not on
 271 maintaining leader motivation to lead but on
 272 removing the leader from power. In this flipped
 273 context, the role of selfless contributor would now
 274 be played by the member who undermines the
 275 leader's authority by rebelling against it and who
 276 thus risks attracting the leader's wrath. The free
 277 rider, meanwhile, would now be the member who
 278 continues to allocate status and thus lend support
 279 to the harmful leader. A real-world example of this
 280 sort of collective action would be Boston's
 281 famous 1773 “tea party,” initiated by rebellious
 282 colonists to outrageously undermine the authority
 283 of what they perceived to be an exploitative royal
 284 regime. From the perspective of tea party sup-
 285 porters, the rebels were heroic risk-takers,
 286 whereas the King's supporters were traitors who
 287 deserved to be publically humiliated (tarred and
 288 feathered).

Conclusion

289

Leadership is not unique to humans and indeed is 290
 a feature of a vast variety of species, from bees to 291
 ravens to nonhuman primates (King et al. 2009). 292
 But whereas leader-follower interactions enable 293
 many species to solve coordination problems 294
 and share information, it is apparently only in 295
 humans that these interactions occur as reciprocal 296
 interactions, in which followers reward high- 297
 contributing leaders with allocations of social sta- 298
 tus. This context of reciprocity would have 299
 enabled human followers to allocate relatively 300
 large incentives (in the form of prestige) to their 301
 leaders and to thus embolden their leaders to make 302
 relatively costly and substantial leadership contri- 303
 butions. Thus, because they occurred as reciprocal 304
 exchanges, human leader-follower relations may 305
 have enabled the emergence of a kind of leader- 306
 ship that was more risk-seeking and self- 307
 sacrificial, more creative and committed, and gen- 308
 erally higher quality than leadership in other spe- 309
 cies. Even if reciprocity-based leadership is 310
 indeed higher quality, however, this was appar- 311
 ently not enough to permit its evolution in 312
 nonhuman species. It seems that leader-follower 313
 reciprocity, like other forms of complex coopera- 314
 tion that can occur among nonkin (Tooby 315
 et al. 2006), is a behavior that the human brain is 316
 especially well adapted to achieve. 317

Cross-References

318

- ▶ Adaptations for Reciprocal Altruism 319
- ▶ Altruistic Punishment 320
- ▶ Altruistic Punishment and Strong Reciprocity 321
- ▶ Benefits Exchanged 322
- ▶ Benefits Reciprocated 323
- ▶ Coalition Leaders 324
- ▶ Contingent Reciprocity 325
- ▶ Cooperative Coalitions 326
- ▶ Emotional Solution to Free Riding 327
- ▶ Evolution of Punishment 328
- ▶ Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism 329
- ▶ Evolution of Reciprocal Exchange 330
- ▶ Free-Riding 331
- ▶ Human Reciprocal Altruism 332

- 333 ▶ Masculinity and Height Valued in War Leaders
 334 ▶ Non-Human Leadership
 335 ▶ Psychology of Reciprocal Altruism
 336 ▶ Punishment to Solve Adaptive Problems
 337 ▶ Punitive Sentiment
 338 ▶ Reciprocal Altruism and Cooperation for
 339 Mutual Benefit
 340 ▶ Theory of Reciprocal Altruism

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