Humans are fundamentally social beings. Collectively, we crave social interactions and actively seek them out whenever possible (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Our social group and its perceived social status strongly influence our self-esteem (e.g., Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, de Vries, & Wilke, 1988; Ellemers, Wilke, & Van Knippenberg, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Walsh & Banaji, 1997), mental well-being, and physical well-being (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Rubin & Mills, 1988). Therefore, it is not surprising that we try to preserve the integrity of our social group and its status when selecting new group members. However, in dynamic social situations, many of our social interactions are brief and provide limited information. Thus, we often rely on our first impressions to select new group members. Surprisingly, it remains largely unexplored whether we rely on different cues when selecting new group members for social groups that differ in their perceived social status. The present study examines this question.

Although first impressions are formed quickly and are based on limited information (Bar, Neta, & Linz, 2006; Todorov, Mandisodza, Goren, & Walsh, 2006; Walsh & Banaji, 1997), mental well-being, and physical well-being (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Rubin & Mills, 1988). Therefore, it is not surprising that we try to preserve the integrity of our social group and its status when selecting new group members. However, in dynamic social situations, many of our social interactions are brief and provide limited information. Thus, we often rely on our first impressions to select new group members. Surprisingly, it remains largely unexplored whether we rely on different cues when selecting new group members for social groups that differ in their perceived social status. The present study examines this question.

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Hall, 2005; Willis & Todorov, 2006), they have a lasting impact on people’s attitudes toward and evaluations of one another (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1993; Srull & Wyer, 1989; Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978). One reason for this is that first impressions appear to be both accurate and resilient (Berthoz, Armony, Blair, & Dolan, 2002; Feingold, 1990; Funder, 1995; Todorov et al., 2005). For example, Ambady and Rosenthal found that perceptions of college professors based on a 30-s silent video clip accurately predicted their end-of-term student evaluations. And in a recent study, Rule and Ambady (2008a) demonstrated that male sexual orientation can be accurately identified from just a very brief exposure to a male’s face.

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Together, these findings suggest that perceivers may focus on distinct cues when forming impressions of others to facilitate their achieving the desired outcome from the impression-formation task. In other words, if perceivers in a laboratory setting are asked to determine election outcomes based solely on viewing briefly presented images of candidates, they may focus on competence cues from the images to help them accomplish this goal. Given this assertion, perceivers should rely on distinct cues—even during an impression-formation task with only subtle differences in desired outcome—assuming the stakes are sufficiently high, such as deciding whom to include in one’s social group.

Specifically, we anticipate that when perceivers use first impressions to