

How Do the Powerful Attain Status? The Roots of Legitimate Power Inequalities

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Power inequalities are coercive, based on relative control over resources, whereas status hierarchies are based on collectively endorsed conceptions of merit. How then do the powerful achieve status? We argue that using power for personal gain can lead to perceptions of the powerful as competent—enhancing status—but also selfish—diminishing status. Consequently, power users will be most likely to attain status when they successfully avoid perceptions of selfishness. Two experiments support this view, finding that power users achieve greater status when moderating their power use, forgoing maximal profits in exchange, or using philanthropic gestures to counteract perceptions of greed. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Power and status inequalities are both fundamental, in that they are critical to the architecture of groups and societies, and ubiquitous, as their effects are felt continually in the course of everyday life (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1974). As a result, explaining the relationship between power and status hierarchies is critical to understanding the dynamics of organizations as well as the larger society (Bendix and Lipset, 1966). Where individuals stand with regard to each form of hierarchy shapes their material, social, psychological, and even physical well-being (Pfeffer, 1981; Frank, 2004; Marmot, 2004), and workplace outcomes are heavily impacted by the structure and perception of organizational hierarchies based on power and status (Barnard, 1938; Halevy *et al.*, 2011).

But a full understanding of the functioning of power and status hierarchies in the workplace and beyond requires conceptually distinguishing these

two bases of inequality as they function in critically different ways. To that end, recent research has sought to clarify causal linkages between power and status (Willer *et al.*, 1997; Thye, 2000; Willer *et al.*, 2005; Magee and Galinsky, 2008; Fast *et al.*, 2011). Here we extend this line of inquiry, drawing upon recent work on from sociology, psychology, and organizational behavior in developing a theoretical explanation of when and how power leads to status.

Status refers to an individual's relative standing in a group hierarchy based on prestige and respect (Berger *et al.*, 1977; Ridgeway and Walker, 1995). Because relative status standing is based on legitimate, widely agreed upon characteristics that are believed to reflect competence and ability, status hierarchies typically are privately endorsed and viewed as legitimate by group members. Power inequalities, on the other hand, derive from control over valued resources and lead more powerful individuals to be able to exercise their will over others even in the face of resistance (Blau, 1964; Magee and Galinsky, 2008). As such, power inequalities do not require private endorsement as the

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powerful are capable of exercising power over their less powerful counterparts. Thus, when an individual follows the directives of someone higher in power, he or she does so because the promise of valued rewards or the threat of sanctions compels him or her to do so. On the other hand, when an individual follows the directives of someone of higher status, he or she does so because he or she is convinced it is the right course of action, viewing the directives as correct, appropriate, or both.

Although power advantages are by definition coercive and can exist in spite of the dissent of the powerless, this is not to say that they are necessarily stable and enduring. Power inequalities can be successfully opposed, resulting in the erosion or even reversal of the power user's structural advantage (Lovaglia *et al.*, 2003). As a result, it serves the interests of powerful individuals to pursue high status in an effort to legitimize their standing (Bell *et al.*, 2000). Where powerful individuals are also high in status, it is likely that their power use, and resulting advantage in accumulating valued resources, will be perceived as fair because high status individuals are seen as more deserving of resources than lower status individuals (Berger *et al.*, 1985).

Although an apparent correlation exists between power and status in society—with many CEOs, judges, and politicians enjoying high levels of both—there is no necessary relationship. For example, prison guards, nightclub doormen, and in recent years, investment bankers all derive power from their control of valued resources, yet may struggle to achieve respect in the eyes of others (Fast *et al.*, 2011). Those who possess power but lack respect may find themselves in a tenuous position, vulnerable to opposition from low power actors who have an incentive to organize collective action to oppose them (Lovaglia *et al.*, 2003). How then do the powerful attain status?

We draw upon recent research on the link between perceived generosity and status (e.g., Hardy and van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009a) in developing and testing a theoretical explanation of when and how individuals with high structural power will also achieve high standing in status hierarchies. Those who possess high structural power might be expected to readily achieve high status, as their power gives them an advantage in negotiations and exchange, leading them to appear highly competent and acquire superior resources (Lovaglia, 1995). Indeed, some research shows that the powerful do attain higher status, as reflected in greater levels of influence (Willer *et al.*, 2005). At the same time, past research also suggests that using

power to maximize one's own profits can limit or undermine status attainment by signaling that the power user is selfish and greedy (Lovaglia, 1994; Willer *et al.*, 1997), characteristics that tend to undermine status standing (Ridgeway, 1982; Willer, 2009a).

Here we extend this past research by empirically exploring two possible paths—the moderation of power use and philanthropy—through which the powerful may attain status by avoiding or counteracting the tendency for power use to create perceptions of selfishness and greed. First, we argue that powerful actors who moderate their power use, limiting themselves to less than the maximum advantages they could achieve in exchange settings, will still be viewed as relatively more competent than those they interact with, while avoiding the impression that they are highly self-interested. Secondly, actors who have used power will subsequently be able to counteract negative reactions to their power use through philanthropic contributions to group efforts. Such gestures can temper negative reactions, leading them to attain status from their power use. In the sections that follow, we unpack the theoretical reasoning driving our research, present the results of two experimental tests of these proposed paths from power to status, and conclude with a discussion of implications for both micro-level and macro-level dynamics.

THEORY

Power and status are fundamental to both micro and macrosociological theories of hierarchy (Mills, 1956; Blau, 1964). Here we propose and test a theoretical explanation of links between power use and status acquisition employing social psychological conceptions of these two concepts. Where power refers to an individual's relative control over resources, the status of an individual is her relative standing in a group in terms of respect, honor, and prestige. Power and status hierarchies have quite different properties. Where power inequalities can lead to exploitation and coercion, status hierarchies are associated with influence and respect (Magee and Galinsky, 2008). Although power involves control of others' exchange outcomes even in the face of resistance (Willer *et al.*, 1997), conceptions of a group's status hierarchy are typically privately endorsed and shared among group members (Berger *et al.*, 1977; Podolny, 1993).

A substantial body of theory has sought to relate power and status. Social status, based on the esteem and honor in which a person is held, emerges as a

fundamental social dimension alongside power in Weber's (1921) analysis. For Weber, economic power as represented by property is not always a status qualification but in the long run regularly becomes one (Gerth and Mills, 1958). For Homans (1974) also, power consistently used over time produces higher status. Emerson (1962) proposed a causal link in that those low in power 'give status' to those high in power to discourage additional power use.¹ Overt power use, however, may be perceived as an attempt to limit the freedom of those on whom power is used and thus resisted, *decreasing* the prestige of the powerful (Brehm, 1966). Here we extend this past theorizing by proposing a social psychological explanation of how and when the powerful come to be held in higher esteem.

The Effects of Power on Status Standing

It is often observed in classical sociology that the same individuals tend to occupy positions of high power and status (Mills, 1956). Indeed, this correlation is sufficiently strong that the terms are often conflated in both academic and popular discourse (Magee and Galinsky, 2008). Despite this, there is also good reason to expect that power and status might often be negatively correlated. Those exploited by power use are unlikely to hold the power user in high regard, and third parties may agree. Weber saw power regularly increasing status but noted an example of economic power damaging a power user's prestige: 'The typical American Boss, as well as the big speculator, deliberately relinquishes social honor' (Gerth and Mills, 1958, p. 180).

The mechanisms by which the use of power might give rise to high status standing are intuitive. The structural advantage of those high in power allows them to achieve success in exchange and amass resources. By so doing, the power users signal their superior competence and wealth, both traits that are viewed as status worthy (Berger *et al.*, 1972; Berger *et al.*, 1985). But despite the high apparent correlation between power and status in society, showing that power use increases status has proven remarkably difficult to demonstrate under controlled conditions (Lovaglia, 1995). This is perhaps because of negative emotional reactions to power use (Lovaglia, 1994; Willer *et al.*, 1997) driven by perceptions of power users as selfish and exploitative (Willer *et al.*, 2005). Research shows that negative affective responses to an apparently selfish group member can undermine that individual's status and influence (Lovaglia and Houser, 1996).

Building on past theory and research, we argue that the use of power affects perceptions of powerful actors in two ways, as come to be perceived as more competent (Lovaglia, 1995) but also as more selfish (Willer *et al.*, 2005) than lower power individuals. The resulting effects on power users' status standings are thus ambivalent, because perceived competence is positively related with an individual's status (Berger *et al.*, 1977), but perceived selfishness tends to diminish status standing (Ridgeway, 1982; Willer, 2009a). Figure 1 graphically depicts this theoretical dynamic. Taken together, the mixed effects can cancel one another out, leading power users to achieve no gain in prestige relative to their lower

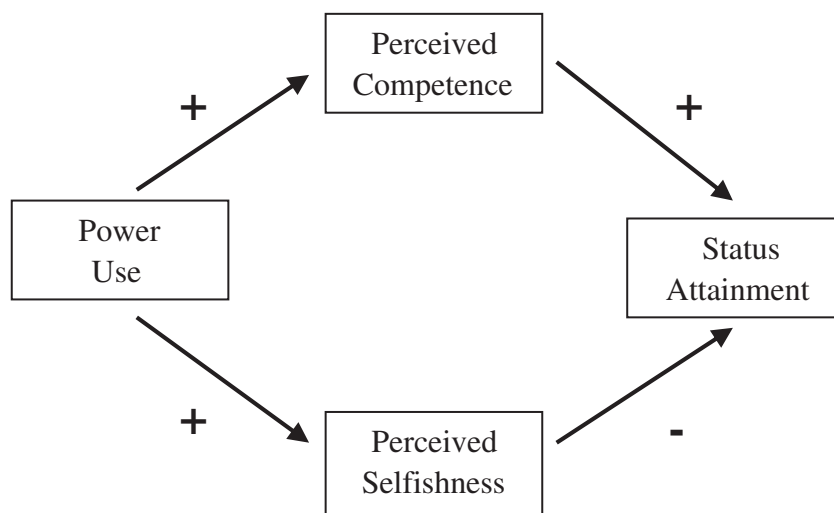


Figure 1. Causal diagram of ambivalent effects of power on status.

power counterparts (Lovaglia, 1995; but see also Willer *et al.*, 2005). Thus, the powerful are likely to gain status to the extent that they can avoid or counteract others' perceptions of them as self-interested (Lovaglia *et al.*, 2003).

Two Paths from Power to Status

A growing body of research finds that generous acts improve individuals' reputations (Willer *et al.*, 2010), leading them to gain status relative to their more selfish counterparts by signaling their motivation to benefit others (Ridgeway, 1982; Willer, 2009a). We build on Ridgeway's (1978, 1982) research on perceived group motivation and status attainment in elaborating this relationship. Status in the group depends on expectations that group members form regarding how much each will likely contribute to the group's success (Ridgeway, 1982). A status hierarchy emerges as people defer more to those they think will contribute more to successful completion of group tasks. Critically, assessments of status standing depend not only on whether a group member is able to contribute—that is, is able, skilled, or knowledgeable—but also on whether the group member is motivated to help the group (Ridgeway, 1982). People attain high status to the extent that they are seen as possessing high ability and believed to be likely to dedicate effort towards group goals, rather than egoistic ones. We theorize that power use leads individuals to be seen as competent but also selfish. As a result, they may often fail to gain status.

We propose two possible ways by which the powerful may strategically avoid or counteract perceptions as selfish and greedy, allowing them to achieve improved status through power use. First, we argue that powerful actors who *moderate their power use* can avoid the impression that they are highly self-interested. By limiting themselves to less than the maximal power use their structural advantage would allow, high power individuals will be viewed as relatively more competent than those lower in power, but avoid the extreme exploitation that would generate perceptions of selfishness. Second, actors who have used power will be able to counteract negative reactions to their power use through *philanthropy*. Philanthropic gestures should serve to counteract or mollify negative reactions to their earlier power use, serving as a costly signal that the power user values others. By neutralizing such reactions, those engaging in philanthropy should attain status proportional to their power use.

EMPIRICAL OVERVIEW

To test these two paths by which powerful individuals might achieve status, we conducted a pair of laboratory experiments. In the first experiment, participants observed the negotiation activities of three simulated confederates programmed to exemplify either extreme or moderate power use. We then investigated (i) participants' perceptions of confederates placed in either high or low power positions and (ii) the rate at which the confederates influenced the participants in a subsequent group task. This setting allowed us to study whether individuals who use their power moderately might achieve greater influence than more extreme power users; influence in group task settings is often used to assess relative status standing (Berger *et al.*, 1977). For the second study, all participants again observed simulated negotiation activities of three confederates, but this time exchanges always reflected moderate power use. The high power confederate was then given an opportunity to make a philanthropic contribution in the context of a subsequent group task, allowing us to manipulate the level of philanthropy. We measured participants' views of the confederates' status, competence, and selfishness. We then explored whether philanthropy increased the power user's status and if it did so by reducing perceptions that the power user was selfish. Together these studies allow us to test whether moderate power use and philanthropy lead power users to achieve status by avoiding or counteracting perceptions of selfishness.

STUDY 1: MODERATING POWER USE

We designed a laboratory experiment to test our claim that more moderate power use leads power users to achieve higher levels of status than more extreme power use. We reasoned that using power to either an extreme or moderate extent would communicate that a high power individual possessed high competence, higher than those with whom the power user negotiated. We further reasoned that more moderate power use would create perceptions of high competence while avoiding the impression that the power user was highly selfish. To test these ideas, we asked participants to observe a simulated exchange network featuring a 'strong power' network (Lovaglia *et al.*, 1995), an exchange structure in which a central, high power actor negotiates with two low power actors. Because the high power actor had more exchange alternatives than the low power actors, the high power

actor in this structure enjoys an extreme power advantage and exchanges maximally benefitting the high power actor are typical in such structures. However, we created two different simulated sequences of negotiations in this exchange structure. In one, the high power actor enjoyed near maximal exchange benefits typical of such structures, and the low power actors earned minimal benefits. In the other, power use was more moderate. In this latter simulation, exchange outcomes, while still favoring the high power actor, were closer to equal.

After observing the exchanges of the simulated participants who ostensibly were also taking part in the study, participants were randomly assigned either a high or low power simulated other to work with on a team exercise. The exercise was a 'contrast sensitivity task', a standard task often used to measure rates of interpersonal influence (Wagner, *et al.*, 1986). In the task, we measured the rate at which the assigned partner influenced the participants' sense of what were the right answers on the group task. Rates of influence in group tasks are frequently used as a behavioral measure of an individual's relative status standing (Berger *et al.*, 1977). Following the task, we also asked participants to rate their partner on a series of dimensions designed to tap perceptions of the partner's competence and selfishness. By measuring participants' tendency to be influenced by their assigned partners, this design allowed us to test our prediction that moderate power users would achieve greater influence than would more extreme power users. By measuring participants' perceptions of their assigned partners, we were also able to track the perceived selfishness and competence of moderate and extreme powers users.

METHOD

Design and Participants

The study featured a 2 (partner was high/low power) \times 2 (power use was extreme/moderate), between-subjects design. One hundred and thirteen female, undergraduate students at a large, public university in the Midwest took part in the study in return for pay.

Procedure

Participants were recruited to participate in the study via classroom announcements and then scheduled by phone for an in-person session. Upon arriving in the lab, a research assistant escorted participants to a computer station in one of several small participation

rooms. Research assistants explained to participants that the study would involve two phases. In the first phase, they would observe via their computer terminal the negotiation and exchange activities of three other participants in the study, after which participants would be asked to give their impressions of the exchange activities via a short survey. In the second phase of the study, participants were told that they would be randomly assigned one of the other participants as a partner in a joint 'contrast sensitivity' task. In fact, participants took part in the study alone, and the activities of the other participants were simulated by the computer for both phases of the study.

Phase 1: Observing Power Use

Participants were assigned the role of observing three simulated participants negotiating and completing exchanges in an exchange network. The specific exchange network was a '3-line' in which the central actor is connected to two peripheral actors who are not connected with one another. In any given round only one exchange could be completed. In 'strong power' networks of this sort, it is typical that the two peripheral actors will compete with one another to be included in exchanges with the central actor. Peripheral actors offer better and better deals until the central actor is able to complete exchanges that are maximally in his or her favor (Willer, 1999). In our simulation, actors negotiated over how to split a pool of 24 resource points which would later be exchanged for real money, constituting their study pay. The simulated participants in the exchange structure were identified by color-based pseudonyms ('Orange,' 'Green,' and 'Blue').

Participants were randomly assigned to observe one of two different simulated exchange networks. In one, the high power, central actor completed exchanges that were maximally favorable to him or her (resource divisions of 23/1 were typical).² In the other simulated exchange network, power use was more moderate (divisions of 14/10 and 15/9 were typical). After several rounds of negotiation and exchange were observed, participants were asked how 'successful' and 'effective' they thought the high power actor ('Orange') and one of the low power actors ('Green') were.

Phase 2: Measuring Social Influence

Following Phase 1, participants were randomly assigned a 'partner' they were told would work with them on a 'contrast sensitivity task' and then answer

several questions about. Participants were randomly assigned either the high power actor from Phase 1 or one of the two low power actors. During the task, participants and their (simulated) partners submitted initial answers regarding which of two checkerboard designs displayed on the screen contained more white area. After giving their initial answers, participants were shown the choice made by their partner and were given the opportunity to change their choices if they wished. Their partner's answers were simulated to disagree with their own on 20 of 25 trials. In fact, there were no correct answers on the task as the two designs used in each trial contained approximately equal amounts of white space.

We measured the extent of influence the assigned partner had over the participant as the proportion of trials in which participants decided to switch their initial decision to agree with that of their partner. After the task was completed, we asked participants how motivated they were to do well on the task and whether they took into account their partner's answers (each on 100-point scales). Finally, we asked participants to reflect back to their impressions of their assigned partner following Phase 1 and indicate how accurately a series of adjectives described the partner (again on 100-point scales): selfish, cooperative, greedy, generous, and competent. We summed the first four items (reverse-scaling 'cooperative' and 'generous') together into a composite measure of perceived selfishness (Cronbach's alpha = .85). Finally, participants were probed for suspicion regarding the simulated participants in the study using a funnel debriefing method, paid, and thanked for their participation.

RESULTS

We first tested whether our manipulation of the power of the simulated participants from Phase 1 was perceived by the participants in the study. We found that participants rated the high power participants as significantly more successful ($M = 84.15$) than the low power participant ($M = 39.12$), $t(112) = 14.77$, $p < .001$. Additionally, participants also rated the high power actor as more effective ($M = 81.01$) than the low power actor ($M = 40.42$), $t(112) = 11.47$, $p < .001$.

Next we looked at the possible effect of our manipulations of power level and extremity of power use on the influence that participants' assigned partners might have had over them.³ First, we conducted a regression analysis of the effects of power level (high = 1, low = 0), extremity of power use (extreme = 1, moderate = 0),

and their interaction on the influence of the partner. Table 1, Model 1 gives results of this analysis. Here we find that the coefficient for the assigned partner's power level is positive and significant, indicating that high power partners had more influence over participants than did low power partners. Neither extremity of power use nor the interaction of power level and extremity of power use had a significant effect on influence. These findings show that higher power actors in our study achieved higher levels of influence than lower power actors.

Next we looked at the effects of our manipulations on perceptions of the assigned partner's perceived competence and selfishness. Models 2 and 3 of Table 1 give results of these analyses. Higher power partners were seen as more competent than their lower power counterparts. Neither the main effect of extremity of power use nor the interaction significantly affected perceived competence. For perceived selfishness, higher power partners were seen as more selfish. Further, this main effect was qualified by a significant interaction of power level and extremity of power use. High power actors from structures exhibiting extreme power differences were seen as uniquely high in selfishness. There was no significant main effect of extremity of power use on perceived selfishness.

These analyses offer a picture of the overall effects of power use on the influence, perceived selfishness, and competence of high and low power actors in our

Table 1. Unstandardized Coefficients from Ordinary Least Squares Models Analyzing Effects of Power Level, Extent of Power Use, and Their Interaction on Influence, Perceived Competence, and Perceived Selfishness in Study 1

Independent variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	(Influence rate)	(Perceived competence)	(Perceived selfishness)
High power (0 = low power)	.078** (.029)	15.16*** (3.51)	18.80*** (2.92)
Extreme power use (0 = moderate power use)	-.043 (.029)	-2.59 (3.51)	2.10 (2.92)
High power x Extreme power use	-.013 (.014)	1.63 (1.75)	4.66** (1.46)
Constant	.421*** (.026)	54.93*** (3.12)	34.26*** (2.60)
R^2	.086	.168	.350
F	3.31*	7.07***	18.87***
N	108	108	108

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

study. Results show that power users generally had more influence, were seen as more competent but were also seen as more selfish. Further, high power users from exchange networks exhibiting extreme power use were seen as uniquely high in selfishness. Because our critical interest in Study 1 was to investigate the effects of extreme power use on the perceptions of high power actors, we now focus our analyses on the high power actors from the two exchange simulations.

Table 2 gives mean contrasts for rates of influence and perceptions of high power actors in Study 1. These results show that high power actors who used their power more moderately achieved higher levels of influence over participants in the study, although this effect was marginally significant ($p = .07$). Results for perceptions of high power users from exchange settings featuring moderate versus extreme power use offer some insight on why moderate power users achieved higher influence. These contrasts indicate that moderate power users were viewed to be as competent as more extreme power users but far less selfish.

DISCUSSION

Results of Study 1 are consistent with our claim that more moderate power use would lead individuals to attain higher status than would extreme power use, here using influence on a group task as a behavioral measure of relative status standing. Although we found a significant main effect of power level on the extent of the partner's interpersonal influence, partners who had been high power in a simulated exchange network featuring moderate exchange differences were significantly more influential over participants than partners who were high power in an exchange network featuring extreme power use. Further, we

anticipated that moderate and extreme power users would be seen as similarly competent, as both achieved favorable exchanges in negotiation, but that moderate power users would be seen as less selfish, a perception found to undermine status acquisition in past research (Ridgeway, 1982; Willer, 2009a). Both of these predictions were supported.

STUDY 2: PHILANTHROPY AND STATUS ATTAINMENT

We have argued that the status attained by power users is limited by the tendency for their power to create impressions of selfishness that can undermine their standing in the eyes of others. Where Study 1 investigated moderating power use as a way by which power users can attain status, in Study 2, we look at the possible role of philanthropic contributions as a way power users may attain status by counteracting perceptions of selfishness by appearing highly group motivated. Additionally, whereas status was measured indirectly via levels of influence in Study 1, we now measured it more directly by asking participants to report their perceptions of the other ostensible participants in the study.

To test this argument, we again conducted an experiment in which participants observed the negotiation activities of several other participants, although this time all participants observed the exchange network from Study 1 featuring moderate power use. After observing the simulation, participants rated both the high and a low power actor on their perceived status and competence. Then participants were told they would collaborate on a group task with the same high and low power actors they had just rated. Participants were told that the pay for the group exercise depended on the accuracy of their answers and also on how much study pay the group members invested in the group. We manipulated the amounts the previously high and low power actors contributed to the group at three levels of generosity. Participants then rated each of their partners again on several dimensions, and the study concluded with no group task actually occurring. We anticipated that higher levels of philanthropy would lead power users to be held in higher esteem, achieving greater status in the eyes of others because the philanthropic acts effectively communicated high group motivation, counteracting impressions of the power users as selfish.

Table 2. Means for Rates of Influence, Perceived Competence, and Perceived Selfishness among Moderate and Extreme Power Users in Study 1. Standard Deviations Are Given in Parentheses

	High power, moderate power use	High power, extreme power use	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Influence rate	.513 (.146)	.443 (.128)	1.84	.07
Perceived competence	68.5 (14.0)	69.1 (17.1)	.16	.87
Perceived selfishness	48.4 (14.8)	59.8 (18.9)	2.41	.02

METHOD

Design and Participants

The study featured a three-condition between-subjects design in which levels of philanthropy of the high and low power actors were systematically varied. One hundred and nine female, undergraduate students at a large, public university in the Midwest took part in the study in return for pay.

Procedure

The details of the study were the same as Study 1 with a few exceptions. First, all participants were shown the simulated exchange network from Study 1 featuring moderate power use. After observing the negotiation activities and answering the same manipulation check items, participants described how well a series of traits described the high power actor and one of the low power actors. The trait adjectives were selected to measure perceived status ('prestigious,' 'respectful,' and 'honorable') and competence ('capable,' 'knowledgeable,' and 'competent'). Reliability analyses justified creating composites for the perceived status and competence of the high power (Cronbach's alpha's = .83, .86, respectively) and low power (Cronbach's alpha's = .85, .92, respectively) actors.

Participants were then told they would work in Phase 2 of the study on a contrast sensitivity task, this time with the both of the other 'participants' they had just rated. They were told that the team's study pay for Phase 2 would be a combined function of (i) how well the team performed on the task and (ii) how much of their study pay earned to that point was invested in a 'bonus pool' for the team. Participants were told that the three group members would then split the pool equally at the end of the study. Because participants had simply observed in the first phase, they were not themselves asked to contribute. The investment decisions of the two simulated participants were preprogrammed. In one condition, the high power actor gave 50% of his or her endowment to that point, whereas the low power actor gave 0%. In another, the high power actor and the low power actor each gave 10%. In a final condition, the high power actor gave 0% of his or her earnings, whereas the low power actor gave 50%. Note that the total dollar value of the high power actor's contribution was higher than the low power actor's in the first two conditions because the high power actor had earned significantly more money in the negotiation exercise.

Participants were next asked to again indicate how well several traits applied to the high and low power actors. They gave their responses on a series of trait adjectives including the status items from after Phase 1 as well as adjectives designed to tap the perceived group motivation ('cooperative', 'generous', and 'a team player') of their two assigned partners. The measures tapping the group motivation of the high and low power actors were highly reliable, justifying the creation of composites (Cronbach's alphas = .93 and .90, respectively). In actuality, there was no group task in Phase 2. Participants were again probed for suspicion using a funnel debriefing method, paid, and thanked for their participation.

RESULTS

As in Study 1, we first tested that participants had perceived our manipulation of the power of the simulated participants from Phase 1. Participants viewed the high power actor as more successful ($M = 82.41$) than the low power actor ($M = 56.06$), $t(108) = 9.61$, $p < .001$. Participants also rated the high power actor as more effective ($M = 75.28$) than the low power actor ($M = 51.16$), $t(108) = 8.76$, $p < .001$.

Next, we investigated participants' perceptions of the high and low power actors they observed in Phase 1. Participants viewed the high power actor as higher status ($M = 69.20$) than the low power actor ($M = 55.63$), $t(108) = 6.68$, $p < .001$. These results show that high power users achieved higher status than did low power users in an exchange setting typified by moderate power use, a finding consistent with the influence findings from Study 1. Participants also viewed higher power actors as more competent ($M = 77.91$) than low power actors ($M = 57.45$), $t(108) = 10.19$, $p < .001$.

To this point, we have argued that the primary reason that power users gain status in the eyes of others is because their power advantage leads to success in negotiation and wealth accumulation, outcomes that communicate high competence. We tested this by conducting a mediation analysis involving a series of regression models (Baron and Kenny, 1986), the results of which are given in Figure 2. The data from this study involves data points nested within each individual, violating assumptions of statistical independence. To control for dependencies in the same person's reports across high and low power targets, we analyzed the data using multilevel modeling. Observational units are participants' perceptions, each from specific experimental conditions. The results conveyed in

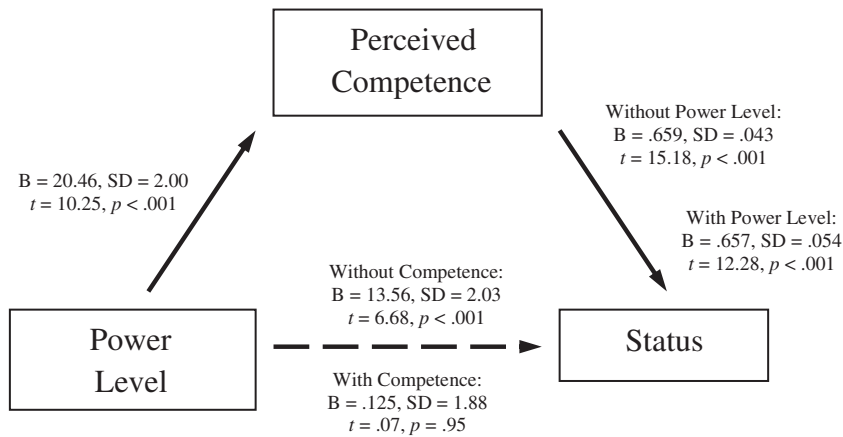


Figure 2. Results of a mediation analysis of the effects of power level on status, with perceived competence as the hypothesized mediator. A dotted arrow indicates that a relationship is statistically nonsignificant ($p > .05$) in the full model.

Figure 2 are from mixed effects models with power level as a fixed component.

First, we tested whether targets’ power level would have a significant effect on perceptions of the target’s status and competence. As mentioned previously, we found that higher power actors were perceived as both higher status and more competent. Additionally, perceived competence was positively related to perceived status. Finally, entering both power level and competence simultaneously in a single regression model revealed that perceived competence remained a significant predictor, whereas power level did not. This supports our claim that the effect of power level on perceived status operated through perceived competence. A Sobel test (1982) confirmed the mediating role of perceived competence, $z = 7.83, p < .001$, suggesting

that higher power actors achieved higher status because they were perceived as more competent.

Our primary interest in Study 2 was in the effects of philanthropy on the status attained by those high in power. To this end, we investigated whether high power actors who gave a higher percent of their endowments to the bonus pool in Phase 2 were seen as higher status. We also examined whether participants’ perceptions of the high power actor’s group motivation mediated this effect. To this end, we again conducted a mediation analysis, the results of which are given in Figure 3.

First, note that we found a significant effect of philanthropy level on status, showing that high power actors who gave higher proportions of their earnings to the bonus pool in Phase 2 were viewed as higher

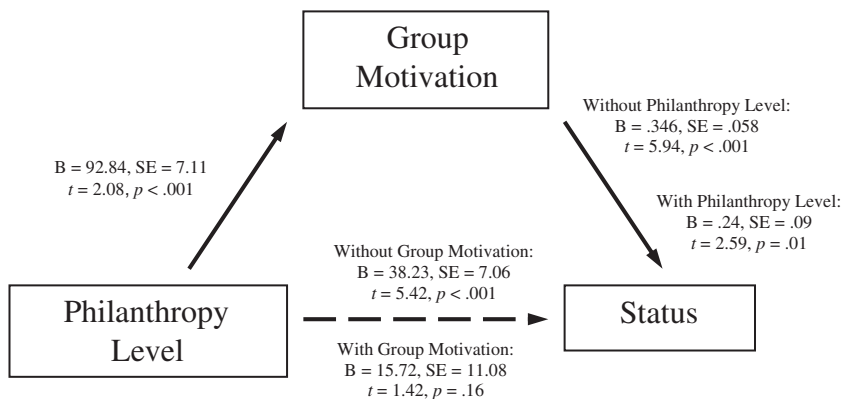


Figure 3. Results of a mediation analysis of the effects of philanthropy level of high power actors on status, with group motivation as the hypothesized mediator. A dotted arrow indicates that a relationship is statistically nonsignificant ($p > .05$) in the full model.

status. Further, we found that giving higher proportions also led to greater perceptions of the high power actor as group motivated. Perceptions of group motivation were also positively correlated with perceptions of status. Finally, we conducted a regression analysis including both philanthropy level and perceived group motivation as predictors of status. In this model, only perceived group motivation was significant, whereas the significance of philanthropy level was greatly reduced. A Sobel test confirmed that group motivation significantly mediated the effect of philanthropy level on status (Sobel $z=2.53$; $p=.01$). This finding suggests that the effect of philanthropy level on perceived status operated through perceived group motivation and is consistent with our claim that more philanthropic, high power actors achieved higher status because their philanthropy signaled that they were more group motivated. These results support our claims regarding philanthropy as we found that it successfully counteracted perceptions of the high power actor as selfish, allowing the power user to achieve higher levels of status than would otherwise have been the case.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Understanding how power and status hierarchies are linked is critical to understanding the dynamics of organizations and informal groups, as well as patterns of stratification in the larger society. Here, we have posited that power inequalities, and the wealth inequalities they are strongly associated with, may come to be viewed as legitimate and fair if those high in power are also highly respected and esteemed. Where status and power hierarchies are highly correlated, power advantages should be seen as fair and legitimate, because those high in status will be viewed as deserving the disproportionate resources they acquire. Understanding the causal relationships between power and prestige at the micro-level may be critical if we are to understand the emergence, legitimacy, and persistence of power and wealth inequality at the macro-level. In this vein, the present research complements other recent work on the social psychological bases of support for systems of inequality (e.g., Pratto *et al.*, 1994; Jost *et al.*, 2003a).

Our research extends past social psychological research on the causal links between power and status (Thye, 2000; Lovaglia *et al.*, 2003; Magee and Galinsky, 2008). Despite an apparently robust correlation between power use and status attainment in the

field, laboratory research has typically failed to demonstrate such a positive link because power users are often viewed as competent, yet also low in group motivation and concern for others. Here, we investigated two paths through which power users might achieve enhanced status standing by avoiding or counteracting the tendency of power use to make those high in power appear selfishly motivated. First, we explored the possibility that moderate power use might lead to greater status than extreme power use, because moderate power use signals high competence without also signaling extreme selfishness on the part of the power user. Second, we studied the effects of philanthropy on the status of power users, finding that philanthropy led power users to achieve higher status. Further, we found that the effects of moderate power use on status attainment operated through perceptions of high competence. We also found that the effect of philanthropy on the status standing of power users operated through perceptions that the power user was group motivated. These findings offer consistent support for our theoretical account of the causal dynamics driving these relationships and discerning evidence against possible alternative explanations.

This research extends recent work on the role of generosity and group motivation in status attainment. Past research suggests that the status individuals achieve in groups is not purely a function of how much they can contribute to group efforts but also the extent to which group members expect that they will also be motivated to contribute (Ridgeway, 1982; Willer, 2009a). Indeed, research even suggests that the relationship between group motivation and status attainment may be critical to the success of collective actions and the maintenance of social order, as individuals make costly contributions to group efforts in part out of concerns for their reputational standing in the eyes of others (Willer, 2009a; 2009b).

It is important to note that our research was conducted on a convenience sample of American college students and, as such, does not immediately generalize to other populations (Zelditch, 1980). We opted to test our claims with a controlled experiment because this method promises high internal validity, offering greater leverage for separating the effects of distinct concepts and establishing causal relationships, important features for the current investigation. Nonetheless, it is likely that in other settings individuals might respond differently. For example, depending on the cultural context, it is likely that the extreme use of power might engender more or less negative reactions than those observed here. Future research

should investigate how the dynamics we observed might vary by social context in order to develop a fuller, more general understanding of the nuanced relationship between power and status.

Our findings regarding moderate power use pose an interesting question: might the greatest status be acquired by those who possess, but do not use, a power advantage? Whether this is true would likely depend a great deal on context. It may be that it is necessary to use power to some extent in order to acquire resources and signal superior competence. Further, if one's power advantage is not apparent, then refraining from using it would not communicate selflessness. On the other hand, there may be many settings where one need not use power to signal one has it, such as where one has used power extensively in the past, or when occupying a structural position widely known to be powerful. In such settings, it is possible that individuals would acquire the most status from not using power at all.

It is interesting to note that neither path from power to status examined here was costless to power users. In both cases, power users had to forgo or give away profits in order to achieve greater status. This fits well with costly signaling accounts of reputational dynamics (e.g., Smith and Bird, 2000). In order for individuals to reliably communicate that they are not in fact purely selfish, they must do so via costly (i.e., hard to fake) signals. Future research should investigate if it is only costly signals of one's generosity and group motivation that can positively influence the perceptions of power users' status.

Our research identifies two routes from power to status, both of which involve forgoing resources. But who might be more likely to engage in such tactics? Presumably individuals with greater desires for status (Flynn *et al.*, 2006; Willer *et al.*, 2012) would be more likely to pursue status, especially if it involved a loss of resources to acquire it. If individuals more concerned with acquiring status would be more likely to invest in its acquisition and subsequently achieve status standing corresponding with their power level, according to our theoretical reasoning, this would lead their power advantage to be perceived as more legitimate and would be more likely to persist as few are motivated to oppose it. If this reasoning is correct, then we might expect power advantages be more stable and endure longer when possessed by individuals with high desires for social status. On the other hand, highly strategic power users with little concern for status might nonetheless invest in status advantages, not for the sake of gaining status but for the

legitimacy such gains offer for their standing in the group's power hierarchy.

Paths from Power to Status

Here, we have focused on the roles of moderate power use and philanthropy as paths from power to status, but many others have been documented in past research and could be fruitfully explored in future studies. First, the results of Study 1 highlight that power can be used to gain resources from an isolated few, whereas others observe the results of the power use. Observers, because they are not directly disadvantaged, may have less negative reactions than those directly affected by the power use (Willer *et al.*, 2005).

In addition, other uses of power may sustain legitimacy without building status. For example, power can sometimes be exercised over another without their even being aware of it. Using power indirectly or in the context of a complex economy or government could elude direct observation. Relatedly, power can often be used within the normal workings of an organization or institution without any individual being identifiable as the power user.

Intergroup dynamics could moderate the status attainment processes we observed here in important ways. It may be that power use does not engender perceptions of selfishness and low group motivation when those low in power come from a disliked or stigmatized out-group. In such contexts, amassing resources at the expense of the members of a salient out-group would likely be seen as appropriate and just. Where strong social identity differences exist, exploiting the members of an out-group could even be viewed as a contribution to the welfare of the in group, leading power use to be a signal of both competence and group motivation. This reasoning suggests other important strategies by which power users may acquire status that could be investigated in future research, for example, using power over out-group members, stigmatizing or highlighting the differences of those low in power. Further, it is possible that such tactics would be quite likely to occur because they do not involve the power user forgoing profits to attain status.

Cultural factors might also work to legitimize power use, as those occupying high power positions may be seen as deserving their position, via hard work, talent, magnanimity, or a birthright perceived as legitimate (Jost *et al.*, 2003b). Certain forms of power use may become legitimate in a society, institution, or organization because they are seen as providing for

stockholders, employees, or society in general. Finally, cultural beliefs about the acceptability and functionality of inequality may emerge and legitimize stratification in groups or societies (Lipset, 1990; Pratto *et al.*, 1994).

CONCLUSION

The present research identified two paths through which power users may attain status by avoiding perceptions of selfishness. As a result of moderating their power use or making philanthropic contributions, power users were seen as less selfish and more group motivated. This, in addition to the competence their success in negotiation signaled, led them to be held in higher esteem. These findings fit well with recent research linking costly signals of group motivation with status standing (e.g., Willer, 2009a). These lines of research together may expose an intriguing irony: the same mechanism by which contributions to collective action are rewarded with enhanced prestige helps explain social processes that both stabilize the existing stratification system and enable social change. Philanthropists may legitimate their fortunes and high social standing, whereas those with low social status may rise by organizing social movements. In this way, the reputational gains resulting from costly contributions to others' welfare may be a dynamic fundamental to social stability and dynamism, differentiation and cohesion, inequality and its opposition.

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NOTES

1. The relationship between power and status is thought to be reciprocal; status may also produce power. Blau (1964) saw power developing from a person's high status when those of lower status become increasingly dependent on the contributions of the high status person. Thye (2000) demonstrated that resources controlled by high status people were worth more than comparable resources controlled by low-status people. Thus, high status produced a material advantage that is a basis of power.

2. Observed negotiations were based on actual data collected from social exchange experiments conducted at the University of South Carolina.
3. Four participants were discarded from analyses of influence levels because of reporting strong suspicions that their assigned partner was not real.

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