



Manipulations of power and status for laboratory experiments

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Abstract

Previous research has primarily focused on the effect of either power or status as isolated variables despite many empirical evidences supporting their opposite effects on various psychological variables. In our studies, we invented an approach of manipulating power and status simultaneously. Based on the definition of power and status, participants were assigned randomly in a position in which they had control or no control over valuable resources as well as having high or low acceptance, admiration, and respect. In Study 1, participants were randomly assigned into a 2 (high power vs. low power) \times 2 (high status vs. low status) design, where their senses of power and status were manipulated via resource allocation task. Next, in Study 2, we created a resume review task, new status manipulation approach, in order to eliminate possible order effects and elicit more intense status-priming effect. Our results showed a promising manipulation method for future studies on the interaction effect of power and status.

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Introduction

Power and status are two different dimensions of social hierarchy that have been studied in psychology. In previous research, power and status were not clearly defined as separate constructs and their definitions were intertwined as “Power” (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; French & Raven, 1960; Hsee, Hatfield, Carlson, & Chemtob, 1990). Later, a number of empirical researches differentiated status from power. To clarify, power represents the control over valuable resources, such as money or the right to decide important matters (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). In contrast, status refers to perceived respect, esteem, prestige, or admiration, which result from status conferral process based on others’ appraisals (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Blader & Chen, 2014; Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008).

Prior studies have focused particularly on the effect of either power or status as an isolated variable. However, there are few studies exploring a possibility of interactive nature between power and status due to lack of manipulation method to do so. This puzzle motivated further exploration on how to

combine both power and status manipulations in one setting. For instance, power and status manipulations might combine to influence empathy since there were a few studies that indicated that a dictator, who has high power but low status, might be the worst at empathizing with others (Fast, Halevy, & Galinsky, 2012; Fragale, Overbeck, & Neale, 2011). Furthermore, recent research findings have indicated that power and status had opposite impacts on some variables, in which power would decrease justice toward others but status would increase it (Blader & Chen, 2012). The negativity of power and the positivity of status also have been observed with perspective taking (Blader, Shirako, & Chen, 2016) and interpersonal constructs, such as self-other orientation (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Flynn, Reagans, Amanatullah, & Ames, 2006), empathic accuracy and concern for others (Fast et al., 2012; Galinsky et al., 2006), evaluation of others’ thoughts and feelings (Galinsky et al., 2008; Tost, Gino, & Larrick, 2012) and dependence (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2012; Magee & Smith, 2013). These results confirm the importance of treating power and status as a separated construct in research and experiment design. Due to growing attention to cultural differences on the linkages among antecedents, power and status (Torelli, Leslie, To, & Kim, 2019) and little research on the simultaneous manipulation of power and status outside Western cultures, our studies will examine whether the power-status priming methods derived from the Western conceptual definitions will be generalize to the Oriental culture like Thailand.

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Literature Review

Research on developing manipulation methods of both power and status altogether is limited. One of the conservative methods is writing-task recall paradigm (Galinsky et al., 2006) by asking participants to recall and write about their experience when they were in high or low power/status position. However, writing-task recall paradigm has been designed to manipulate power or status separately. It seems to be impractical asking participants to recall certain situations such as imagining they are in high status but low power. Another method is role-playing; participants are assigned to a role with some privileges or characteristics. Role-playing approach is more plausible by giving certain roles with two attributes, each of which is responsible for power or status independently. Fast et al. (2012) examined the effect of power and status on demeaning behaviors between idea producer (high status) and worker (low status) with or without a privilege to control over access to \$50 bonus prize. Nevertheless, the job description of the idea worker about working with ideas was unnecessary and could be considered, in some ways, as power—controlling over important matters. Additionally, using a real career, idea producer or worker can invoke a stereotype related to the role which may be unpredictable. Depending on each participant, some might have a bad impression toward idea creator due to cognitive-based work, while some might feel neutral to labor worker. Lastly, the status-priming effect might not be enough to test an impact on dependent variables due to weak stimulus. Participant might not immerse in a prestigious role because praise and admiration are fictional.

In order to eliminate the possibility of impression coming with the given role or its job description, our research focused on power manipulation by giving a privilege, rather than giving a role. The power we assigned to subjects was solely based on its definition, which involved having control over resource. The effect of status was, also, induced by having participants receive actual praise or admiration, instead of using fictitious status role, so that the participant would experience real status-inducing situation. By combining these two characteristics, laboratory setting would be suitable for the simultaneous power-status priming.

Therefore, this research aim was to create a method to manipulate power and status simultaneously. In Study 1, money allocation task was used to manipulate sense of power and accordingly receiving feedback about the task allocation to induce status in a laboratory setting. Due to interference of order effect, in Study 2 we used money allocation along with resume review task to activate senses of power and status in a more independent way.

Methodology

Study 1

We created a 2×2 (high/low power and high/low status) experiment design in order to manipulate power and status. Participants were randomly assigned on money allocation task with four anonymous members followed by their feedback to the participant's decision.

Money allocation task has been proven successful in inducing high sense of power on those in charge. (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Fast et al., 2012; Keltner et al., 2003). The total amount of money in this task was 1087฿ (\$34.22 as it seemed

to be harder to divide equally with all members. Thus, their decision should resemble a decision made in real organizational settings. Participants in both high and low power conditions would have the same task. However, only the decisions of those in the high-power condition would be accounted as an actual prize for every member at the end of the experiment.

For manipulation of status, participants would receive feedback from the other four members on the money allocation they gave each member. No matter in which power condition they were, participants would get either approval (High-status condition) or denial (Low-status condition) from all members. This method was designed to give a sense of status in a real-life situation. Therefore, we expected that, by receiving direct responses, participants would gain a strong sense of status in both high and low status conditions.

Participants

100 undergraduates (65% Female) were recruited from psychology courses at Chulalongkorn university. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 25 years ($M = 19.25$, $SD = 3.76$). One was excluded due to unfinished survey completion.

Data collection

Participants were escorted to separate lab rooms with a computer. They were asked to participate in an online group work experiment through a computer simulation program with four other participants 'who, actually, did not exist'. The program was set as if participants were working with real people. At the beginning, participants were randomly informed of their role. In high-power condition, participants were assigned as a leader and received 1087฿ (\$34.22) for allocating to other people in the group including themselves, and their decision would be accounted for how much each member would obtain at the end of the experiment. In the low-power condition, participants had no control over the money but were asked if they were a leader, how they would distribute it, but their decision in the money allocation would not be accounted. After submitting their decision, the program showed a waiting screen as if other participants had not finished yet. Then, it proceeded to the next phase.

In this phase, the program began the status manipulation. Participants were notified that they would receive feedback on their money allocation decision from other team members. Those in high-status condition would get accepted from all of four group members, while those in low-status condition would get not accepted. Afterward, the computer program concluded a summary of money allocated for each member along with the feedback from each member. The summary showed the same amount of money that they had allocated for a leader. In contrast, the money was apportioned equally for a member.

Finally, for the manipulation checks, participants completed the 10-item sense of power and status scale, which was adjusted from the prior scale (Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2015) to be applicable to the experiment setting. The scale contained three items ($\alpha = .805$) measuring a sense of power, such as "My wishes didn't carry much weight in the group experiment." and seven items ($\alpha = .915$) measuring status, such as "I feel prominent in the group experiment". The scale assesses the extent to which participants experience power and status on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "Not at all" to 7 = "Very much".

Data analysis

Independent *t*-test was used to analyse data supported by SPSS Ver. 24 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA)

Study 2

To extend the findings from Study 1, we revised and modified both power and status manipulation to be independent and suitable for counterbalancing but, still, stuck with the key concepts of power—controlling over resources, and status—perceived admiration and respect.

Firstly, Anderson and Berdahl (2002)'s study was conducted with an additional resource, which was extra credit. Since their sample was all undergraduates participating solely to earn extra credit with some money as a bonus, the point became more valuable resource than the money in terms of power manipulation. Moreover, our Study 1 had low-power participants make pointless decisions in order to receive feedback. This might give an illusory sense of power due to the act of making a decision itself, which might elicit the feeling of being in control and might give those with less power high sense of power. Thus, in Study 2, participants with high power would gain control over money and extra points and those with less power would not be assigned any task relevant to the activation of sense of power.

Similarly, results from Study 1 indicated the possibility of low status-priming effect due to participants' refusal to believe in feedback coming from real people, so we developed a more convincing procedure to boost sense of status via resume review task. In this task, subjects in this experiment would submit their resume and went through self-peer assessment to anonymously evaluate other's resumes as well as being evaluated by others. A resume was comprised of personal information such as education, achievement, or future aims reflecting the owner's self. Therefore, we expected that the evaluation results would considerably affect one's sense of status due to resembling authentic situation of personnel selection. Furthermore, instead of emphasis on only one aspect of status—acceptance (e.g. approval or disapproval) like Study 1, we manipulated three aspects of status including perceived respect, esteem and admiration, proposed by Anderson and Berdahl (2002), in Study 2. In sum, we expected that this power and status manipulation in the same context would solely activate sense of power and status without any possible order effect.

Participants

47 undergraduates (80% Female) were recruited from Introduction to Industrial and Organizational Psychology class at Chulalongkorn University. Participants were in the age range of 19–22 years ($M = 20.38$, $SD = 0.73$). Most participants were from the Faculty of Psychology (76%). All participants were preassigned in 1 to 8 conditions: high/low power then high/low status (4 cases) and the reverse-ordered conditions (4 cases).

Data collection

Two weeks before the experiment, all students in Introduction to IO Psychology class were assigned a resume review task as a class activity. They had to submit their blind resume (excluding personal information such as name, photo, or email, which could be used to identify the owner) to an online platform of the course. One week later, every

participant had to judge one's own resume along with other five resumes which were systematically randomized. The evaluation process was comprised of four standard criteria and, additionally, three status-related criteria: respect, esteem and admiration, were included. Participants were asked to rate to what extent the owner of certain resumes should be their supervisor and the degree to which respect/esteem/admiration he or she was to them on the response scale ranging from 0 (None) to 5 (Highest). This procedure took two weeks including one-week submission period and one-week evaluation period. After that, we proceed to the experiment procedure.

In the experiment, 4 (up to 6) participants were escorted to lab rooms with computers. First, the instruction appeared on the screen to remind participants that they could win up to 250฿ (\$8.00) as well as 20 extra credits. This process had 2 phases which included power manipulation and status manipulation. Depending on the condition they were in, participants would go through different orders of both power/status and high/low condition.

For power manipulation, subjects were informed that this experiment was conducted for the purpose of studying leadership and resource allocation. In high-power condition, participants were assigned as a leader and were informed that they would evaluate blind resumes from 6 individuals (including their own resume). This task was a cover story for resource allocation and those resumes were crafted by researcher with random personal information. Participants' task was to distribute 250฿ (\$8.00) as well as 20 extra credits to themselves and the others using resumes as indicator and their judgement would be secret and accountable for the money and extra points they would receive at the end. On the other hand, low-power participants, who were assigned as member, had to wait for 1 minute while they believed that their blind resume was evaluated by their leader. Later, the screen stated that their resume evaluation was done and that they would receive their money and extra credit according to the leader's decision.

As for status manipulation, participants were instructed that, due to their participation in resume review task, to please check their scores on the online platform of the course from these three categories: respect, esteem, and admiration. The participants were asked to insert their scores in a horizontal bar graph rated from 0 (None) to 5 (Highest). The respect, esteem and admiration scores, inserted beforehand and shown in the online platform, were 4.84, 5.00 and 4.68 for high-status condition, and, 1.84, 2.14 and 1.68 for low-status condition.

Finally, participants completed the 11-item sense of power and status scale. Four sense of power items ($\alpha = .897$) and seven sense of status items ($\alpha = .944$) were adjusted and added from the original scale (Dubois et al., 2015) to be applicable to the context in the current study. The example of power item was "I got to decide the amount of money and extra point in the group task" and, for status item, "In resume review task, people generally admired me". The response choices were presented in a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very much).

Data analysis

Independent *t*-test was used to analyse data supported by SPSS Ver. 24 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA)

Result and Discussion

Study 1

The manipulation of power was successful in prompting sense of power on participants. Participants in the high-power condition ($M = 5.340, SD = 1.228$) reported significantly higher scores on sense of power than those in the low-power condition ($M = 3.160, SD = 1.506, t(96) = 7.868, p < .001, d = 1.586$). This result supports the effectiveness of money allocation task based on the concept of control over resources. We assumed that the method, distributing money with four anonymous members, had the same effect comparing to prior research, pairing participants together (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Blader & Chen, 2012) since the real source of power appeared to be derived from an ability to control and distribute money. Additionally, the leader role might have a slight benefit as legitimate power, though it should not interfere with the high-power participants whom we tried to prime to feel powerful.

The status manipulation, also, successfully primed participants in sense of status. Those in a condition of high status ($M = 5.737, SD = .818$) had significantly higher scores on sense of status than those in a condition of low status ($M = 3.375, SD = 1.205, t(96) = 11.392, p < .001, d = 2.294$). As predicted, receiving acceptance or denial from all members granted status upon participants resulting from status conferral process (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; Galinsky et al., 2008). The effect could be diminished in those participants who were not convinced that the member were real people. Still, having consistency in feedback was enough to invoke a sense of status in all conditions significantly.

The main problem of this manipulation was order effect. Although power manipulation did not affect sense of status ($t(96) = 1.294, p = .199, d = .261$), the effect of status manipulation affected sense of power—High-status participants ($M = 4.800, SD = 1.656$) felt higher sense of power than low-status participants ($M = 3.722, SD = 1.689, t(96) = 3.189, p < .01, d = 0.644$) (See Table 1). The result from additional correlation analysis also supports that there was an interference between sense of power and status ($r = .456, p < .001$). This was due to pairing power and status manipulation in a specific manner,

in which assigning participants a leader role or member role (had power/no power to control resources) was designed to precede the status priming (their decision making on money allocation would be accepted or denied by their members). The feedback participants received was relevant to the decision made in money allocation task. Although their decision would not affect the outcome at the end, participants might believe that, by getting approval, their decision would be more authoritative than those who got denial. Therefore, high-status participants felt more sense of power than low-status participants. Moreover, across-subjects counterbalancing would not be possible in this experiment setting in which it required making decision first before getting feedback.

In conclusion, in order to explore the pure effect of power and status simultaneously, it is crucial to separate the effects power and status by inventing distinct priming method. Manipulating power and status based on the concepts of control over resources and perceiving others' acceptance were a promising start for further studies. The resource distribution had proved its efficiency in priming power but, perhaps, the feedback given to participants could be a direct compliment or rejection irrelevant to the previous task.

Study 2

First, we compared original power and status conditions with the reverse order conditions. There was no difference in sense of power and sense of status between the original conditions and the reverse conditions in all cases ($p > .05$ for all). Therefore, it was safe to assume that counterbalancing was effective. Then, it was checked whether there would be order effect occurring in Study 2 or not, the results showing that there was no correlation between sense of power and sense of status ($r = -.063, p = .672$). Furthermore, status manipulation did not influence sense of power ($t(45) = 0.312, p = .757, d = 0.091$) as well as power manipulation on sense of status ($t(45) = -.375, p = .710, d = -.109$). In sum, no order effect occurring in both power and status manipulations was found (See Table 2).

As expected, participants in the high-power condition ($M = 4.979, SD = 1.534$) scored significantly higher on sense of power than those in the low-power condition ($M = 2.837,$

Table 1 Results of the manipulation method on senses of power and status

Manipulation	Variable	High condition (n = 50)				Low Condition (n = 49)		t	Cohen's d
		High condition (n = 50)		Low Condition (n = 49)					
		M	SD	M	SD				
Money allocation task	Sense of power	5.340	1.228	3.160	1.506	7.868***	1.586		
	Sense of status	4.780	1.500	4.372	1.620	1.294	0.261		
Receiving Feedback	Sense of power	4.800	1.656	3.722	1.689	3.189**	0.644		
	Sense of status	5.737	0.818	3.375	1.205	11.392***	2.294		

Note: ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2 Results of the manipulation method on senses of power and status.

Manipulation	Variable	High condition (n = 24)				Low Condition (n = 23)		t	Cohen's d
		High condition (n = 24)		Low Condition (n = 23)					
		M	SD	M	SD				
Money allocation task	Sense of power	4.979	1.534	2.837	1.083	5.508***	1.607		
	Sense of status	3.738	1.574	3.913	1.628	-0.375	-0.109		
Resume review task	Sense of power	4.011	1.832	3.854	1.612	0.312	0.091		
	Sense of status	5.267	0.760	2.440	0.629	13.916***	4.061		

Note: *** $p < .001$.

$SD = 1.083$), $t(45) = 5.508$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.607$. It was noticed that the amount of money in Study 2 (250฿ or \$8.00) was lower by more than half compared to Study 1 (1087฿ or \$34.22). However, the effect size of the current power manipulation, low prize with extra credit, ($d = 1.607$) was equivalent, or slightly higher, than the old one, high prize without extra credit ($d = 1.586$).

As for the status manipulation, high-status participants ($M = 5.267$, $SD = .760$) had significantly higher sense of status than those in low-status condition ($M = 2.440$, $SD = 0.629$), $t(45) = 13.916$, $p < .001$, $d = 4.061$. It was assumed that resume review task might activate a strong sense of status through having self-evaluation. Participants might have felt that their self was evaluated directly, which has more impact than evaluating their decision or performance. The resume review task had, despite having half sample size, twice the effect size ($d = 4.061$, 95% CI [3.060, 5.062]) comparing to the first study ($d = 2.294$, 95% CI [1.792, 2.814]). Since those confidence intervals do not overlap, it was concluded that resume review task in Study 2 has significantly higher effect size than the status manipulation in Study 1 (Cumming & Finch, 2005).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The results indicated the applicable manipulation method yielded a strong enough influence to explore the effect of power and status on various subjects. The noticeable practical implication is to utilize this method in work settings (money allocation and resume review tasks, which were similar to a real work context). With our manipulation approach, significant psychological outcomes in work settings, which could be influenced by power and status, such as teamwork collaboration, leadership and job performance, can be explored to the fullest extent.

For future study, our power manipulation can be used by pairing prize with extra credit or, perhaps, using extra credit alone in order to lower the research budget. Also, there was little feedback from participants which implied that sense of power might be diminished due to allocation from public pool of resources. So, using separate pool for each individual instead of common pool could potentially encourage the leaders to exercise their power to the fullest. More empirical evidences on such manipulation method are required in future studies. Additionally, though the resume review task required 2-weeks preparation in order to demonstrate its effect, the researcher can assign resume review task beforehand and wait for the right time to conduct the experiment since it will take a status-priming effect only when participant sees the result.

The aim of this manipulation approach was to create an effective method which was suitable for studying the effect of power and status at the same time on subjects across psychology field. It should be reminded that, considering the contradictory nature of power and status, examining only power or status independently can be insufficient to determine a clear result on dependent variables. With this developed power-status manipulation, it enables researchers to explore further whether the manipulations of power and status combine to affect relating dependent variables such as perspective taking and empathy.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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