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Examining the Connection Between Position-Based Power and Social Status across Seventy Cultures

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Abstract

Even in the most egalitarian societies, hierarchies of power and status shape social life. However, power and received status are not synonymous—individuals in positions of power may or may not be accorded the respect corresponding to their role. Using a cooperatively collected dataset from 18,096 participants across seventy cultures, we investigate, through survey-based correlational design, when perceived position-based power (operationalized as influence and control) of various powerholders is associated with their elevated social status (operationalized as perceived respect and instrumental social value). We document that the positive link between power and status characterizes most cultural regions, except for WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) and Post-Soviet regions. The strength of this association depends on individual and cultural factors. Firstly, the perceived other-orientation of powerholders amplifies the positive link between perceived power and status. The perceived self-orientation of powerholders weakens this relationship. Secondly, among cultures characterized by low Self-Expression vs. Harmony (e.g., South Korea, Taiwan) high Embeddedness (e.g.. Senegal), and high Cultural Tightness (e.g., Malaysia), the association between power and status tends to be particularly strong. The results underline the importance of both individual perceptions and societal values in how position-based power relates to social status.

Keywords: Power, Social Status, Culture, Self-Orientation, Other-Orientation

Examining the Connection Between Position-Based Power and Social Status across Seventy Cultures

Do you respect your current boss? Did you respect the previous one? What determines whether people holding power over us are respected or not? Human societies are organized within hierarchical structures. Even among the most egalitarian cultures, such as Scandinavian societies, some individuals occupy higher positions in the hierarchy and wield more power than those lower in the hierarchy, consequently exerting a stronger impact on others (Bruun et al., 2011; Selling & Svallfors, 2019). However, does such position-based power also command respect?

The link of position-based power to social status is intriguing from a psychological perspective: while the power of powerholders is exercised on subordinates, social status is inherently subjective and voluntarily granted (Blader & Chen, 2014; Van Vugt et al., 2008). Psychology has examined the relationship between power and status almost exclusively within WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic; Heinrich, 2020) and Confucian contexts (see Torelli et al, 2020; Imada et al., 2023). As a result, this relationship remains largely understudied in the remaining majority of world cultures (e.g., Post-Soviet cultures, Sub-Saharan African, Latin American, and Middle Eastern and North African cultures). Here, we address this gap by exploring how position-based power links to status across cultures, including both individual and cultural-level explanations. This paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of hierarchy and may ultimately aid academics and practitioners in integrating knowledge of the consequences of power in a culturally sensitive way (Krys et al., 2023).

Power and Status

Our central aim is to examine the link between position-based power and social status. We define power as the ability to control resources and outcomes for other people (Magee &

Galinsky, 2008), and status as the prominence and respect received by a person (Anderson et al., 2001; Blader & Chen, 2012). The relation between power and status is particularly intriguing because, unlike power, which can be wielded unilaterally, social status is inherently subjective and always lies in the eyes of beholders (Blader & Chen, 2014; Van Vugt et al., 2008). Consequently, while possibly somewhat related, hierarchies of power and status do not always overlap (Blader & Chen, 2014). For example, while an unpopular manager may still possess the authority to dismiss subordinates easily, an esteemed professor may wield less direct power over their students despite their high social status. These differences likely influence the behaviours of people lower in the hierarchy, leading them to vary their actions depending on whether they are dealing with powerful or respected individuals (Fousiani & van Prooijen, 2022).

Previous research has demonstrated the consequences of the discrepancy between the obtained power and status. Power without status has various negative outcomes, including interpersonal conflict (Anicich et al., 2016), demeaning tendencies of powerholders (Fast et al., 2012), unethical decision-making (Liu et al., 2019), corruption (Gu et al., 2020), and increased power struggles, opposition, and anxious concerns among subordinates (Wang et al., 2021). However, much of this cited empirical research has been conducted using data from a single cultural context, overlooking the significant role of culture in shaping individual, interpersonal, and collective processes surrounding position-based power and social status (see Gobel & Miyamoto, 2024). For example, To et al. (2015) demonstrated that the connection between perceiving someone as powerful and high in status is greater among individuals who endorse horizontal-collectivism (cultural orientation that values equality and shared goals within the group) and vertical-collectivism (emphasizing hierarchy and respect for authority within the group, see Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Li et al. (2017) provided another example, showing that the congruency between power and status for high-ranking

managers correlates with Power Distance – the cultural endorsement of hierarchy (see House et al., 2002). Given that most psychological research has been limited to WEIRD (Western Europe, US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) and Confucian (e.g., China, Japan, and Korea) samples (Krys et al., 2024), our aim here is to broaden the understanding of how position-based power predicts the conferment of social status across more diverse range of cultures.

Self- and Other-Oriented Use of Position-Based Power May Shape Its Relation to Social Status

Powerholders may utilize their influence and control for personal gain or for the benefit of the group they oversee (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010). Such self- and other-oriented usage of power is likely relevant for the attained social status. Functional theories of status conferral (see Berger et al., 1974) indicate that being perceived as able to contribute to the group's overall success and proper functioning is the main source of a powerholder's social status.

The perceived usefulness of high-status individuals for the group has two components: competence (Ridgeway, 1987) and benevolence, which is an inclination to benefit the collective good (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). Previous research has highlighted the importance of altruism, generosity, cooperativeness, helpfulness, ethicality, and morality in attaining social status (Cheng et al., 2010; DesJardins et al., 2015; Spark et al., 2018). These other-oriented dispositions can become entangled with status in a positive feedback loop, as individuals high in social status may increase their generosity towards the group after achieving higher positions (Willer, 2009) and may be motivated to engage in further prosocial behaviours to maintain their status (Kafashan et al., 2014). Anthropological evidence indicates that the cultural phenomenon of status plays an important role in fostering group cooperation beyond coercive means (Henrich et al., 2015). For example, among Kalahari, a

hunter who successfully provides food often acts as an informal leader in hunting groups (Marshall, 1976). Similarly, chiefs of Kwakiutl on Vancouver Island signal their status by hosting feasts, during which they donate items to other tribes (Piddocke, 1965). In general, position-based power is likely to strongly translate into social status, if that power is exercised for the benefit of others. At the same time, a limitation of the psychological research discussed is the predominant focus on WEIRD or Confucian societies, which warrants the empirical investigation of the generalizability of these findings to other cultural regions.

Comparative multicultural investigations demonstrating that the other-orientation of powerholders builds status are scarce. Buss et al. (2020) compared fourteen cultures from several cultural regions, e.g., WEIRD (e.g., US, Germany), Confucian (e.g., China, Japan), Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Zimbabwe, Eritrea), Latin America (e.g., Brazil, Colombia) in terms of behaviours perceived as status-enhancing. Sacrificing for others, sharing resources, and social connectedness all positively impacted social status in every studied culture. Taking this result into account, it is crucial to move beyond specific behaviours and examine the underlying psychological processes driving this effect, such as generalized perceptions of certain individuals as other-oriented. Moreover, understanding the role of powerholders in these processes is essential, as influence and control should ideally come with heightened responsibilities towards others. The other-orientation of powerholders is a key factor in understanding social hierarchy (see Gobel & Miyamoto, 2024). Thus, the current study further replicates the relationship between other-orientation and social status attainment, with a particular focus on individuals whose other-orientation, or lack thereof, may carry significant societal implications.

Can self-orientation also serve as the basis of social status, or does it always undermine it? Although self- and other-orientations are not necessarily in opposition (see Miyamoto et al., 2018), from a group perspective, the perceived prioritization of one's own

goals may be perceived as contradictory to generosity and cooperativeness. Thus, when power is perceived to be exercised in a self-oriented way, it may undermine a powerholder's social status.

Understanding the Role of Cultural Context

Cultures vary in terms of the hierarchical structures they have adopted, thereby influencing the conferral of status to powerholders. The dynamics of hierarchies of power and status constitute the important differences between societies (Hofstede, 2001) and are a critical issue in discussing societal development and social change (Krys et al., 2023; Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004). Below, we introduce four dimensions of cultural environments that may shape the link of position-based power and social status.

Power Distance

Power Distance represents a fundamental cultural difference in desired (in)equalities in social life (Hofstede, 2001). Cultures high in Power Distance (e.g., Malaysia, China, and Russia) tend to accept disparities in power more readily. In contrast, cultures low in Power Distance (e.g., Norway, United Kingdom, and Netherlands) advocate for egalitarian relations and are less accepting of differential treatment based on individual's position within the social hierarchy.

Some empirical evidence suggest that Power Distance is an important dimension in position-based power and social status. For instance, in cultures with high Power Distance, top ranking managers are less likely to be dismissed, which likely reflects a stronger acceptance of social hierarchy and the powerholder's status (Li et al., 2017). Additionally, in these cultures, there is a bigger congruency of power and social status among those in high-ranking positions. In high Power Distance cultures, such connection is especially important – top managers are more likely to lose their position if their power does not align with their status. Such an effect is not present in egalitarian cultures (Li et al., 2017).

Self-Expressive vs Harmonious Models of Selfhood

The second important factor is the cultural emphasis on Self-Expression or Harmony (see Vignoles et al., 2016). In cultures that value self-expression (e.g., WEIRD or Latin American cultures), people tend to communicate openly, often disregarding potential conflicts. In such environments, the effect of position-based power on social status may be less stable, due to a lack of cultural norms that maintain the status quo. Power itself may be seen as an unwanted infringement on others' capacity for self-expression, diminishing the social status accorded to powerholders. Redhead et al. (2019) found that in the United States, imposing power through dominant behaviours is ineffective in maintaining long-term status, as it often results in a loss of position. Therefore the link between power and status may be weaker and more context-dependent in self-expressive cultures.

Conversely, members of harmonious cultures (e.g., those in the Middle East, North Africa, or Southeast Asia) tend to preserve social relationships and maintain balance within the group. Powerholders in such cultures have a responsibility to uphold harmony, often through administering punishment in cases of subordinate transgression. Ito et al. (2024) found that dominating leaders increase social assurance (i.e., the belief that engaging in selfish behaviours will not be tolerated) in Japan (a harmonious culture) but decrease social assurance in the United States (a self-expressive culture). In China, perceived power is positively related to perceived warmth (Li et al., 2022), which reflects the dominating yet caring nature of paternalistic leadership popular in Confucian Asia (Cheng et al., 2014). Although the cultures mentioned above differ in many aspects beyond Self-Expression vs. Harmony, this initial evidence suggests the potential usefulness of dominating power in contexts that prioritize harmony, where powerful individuals may enjoy higher status compared to their counterparts from self-expressive cultures.

Embeddedness

Embeddedness (Schwartz, 2009) describes viewing people as parts of a broader social framework rather than autonomous entities. Within cultures that endorse Embeddedness (e.g., Egypt, Pakistan, and Ghana) the affiliation with the collective holds much significance, alongside striving toward shared goals, the preservation of the established order, social harmony, and adherence to traditional practices. People in embedded cultures value security, obedience, and wisdom. Such characteristics constitute a foundation for higher respect granted to powerful individuals, who may not rely solely on personal qualities for legitimization. Status may be granted in conjunction with a high position, since it is supported by the prevailing norms, obedience, and in certain contexts, adherence to tradition. Those lower in the hierarchy would less likely withdraw respect from the powerholder to avoid violating the cherished social order within a group. Conversely, powerholders from cultures that do not foster Embeddedness (e.g., Germany, Sweden, and Denmark) would be deprived of such a foundation of status. Although powerful, they may need to rely on different strategies to maintain respect and prominence, making the relationship between power and social status weaker.

Cultural Tightness

Cultural Tightness describes the strength of norms and low tolerance for deviant behaviours (Gelfand et al., 2011). In tight cultures (e.g., Pakistan, Malaysia, and South Korea), people are supposed to abide by social norms, and there is strong moral outrage directed towards rule violators. For such cultures, power may come with an elevated social status, especially when supported by a formal role within institutions or organizations, as the social status of powerholders can be magnified by rules and regulations mandating appropriate behaviour for people lower in the hierarchy. Additionally, members of tight cultures expect strong, capable leadership (Aktas et al., 2015), therefore persons with a high capacity for influence and control may be granted greater respect.

On the other hand, loose cultures (e.g., Brazil, US, and Venezuela) exhibit weak norms and a higher tolerance for deviant behaviour. We suspect that in such cultural environments, the power of an individual is somewhat independent of their social status. Respect conferred to powerholders may depend less on formal titles and positions. People lower in the hierarchy may evaluate powerholders in line with their own personal values and opinions and rely less on social convention. Therefore, while power can still relate to social status, this relation may be weaker among loose cultures.

The Present Study

This study examines the individual and cultural factors that predict the attribution of social status to powerholders. To address these questions comprehensively, we present hypotheses at both the individual and cultural levels.

First, we investigate whether being perceived as powerful—defined as the ability to control resources and outcomes for others based on one's position—associates with elevated social status, or respect. We propose that this relationship may depend on how powerholders are perceived to employ their control and influence: whether for self-oriented goals or for the benefit of others. Thus, we consider the self-orientation and other-orientation of powerholders as individual-level moderators of the power-status relationship.

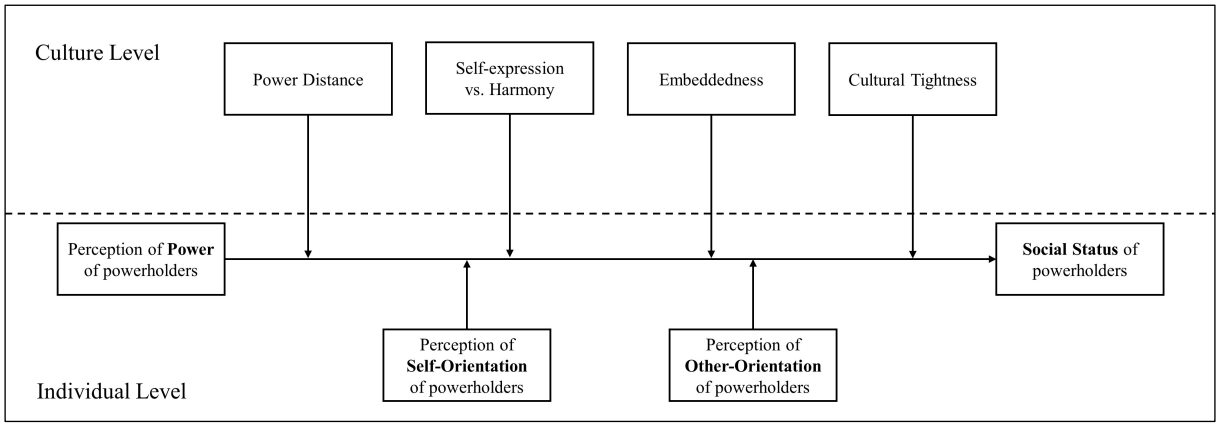
Second, we hypothesize that the processes of conferring status upon powerholders vary across cultures. We initially examine two cultural characteristics: Power Distance (Hofstede, 2001) and the distinction between Self-Expressive versus Harmonious models of selfhood (Vignoles et al., 2016). Subsequently, we conduct exploratory analyses incorporating two additional cultural characteristics: Embeddedness (Schwartz, 2009) and Cultural Tightness (Gelfand et al., 2011).

While research on power and status is not scarce, it has predominantly focused on WEIRD and Confucian cultural circles. Our aim is to broaden the understanding of these

phenomena by analysing how power and status intersect across seventy cultures from all major cultural regions. For an illustration of the conceptual framework, see Figure 1.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Method

The current study is part of a broader cross-cultural investigation that aims to explore the cultural factors associated with the endorsement of societal development goals, well-being, and perceptions of powerholders. Within the scope of the present paper our focus centres on examining perceived power, social status, and self- and other-orientation of powerholders, as well as cultural dimensions of Power Distance, Self-Expression vs. Harmony, Embeddedness, and Cultural Tightness.

Participants and Cultures

The data for this study were collected from a diverse range of 70 cultures. The required minimal sample in each culture was set at n=200, but in several cultures, a smaller sample was collected. After excluding participants who failed more than 1 (out of 12) attention checks and those with any missing data for the variables of interest, the final sample

size for analysis was n = 18,096. Further details regarding the breakdown of the samples can be found in Table 1.

The data were collected between late 2022 and early 2024. The last author has prepared all study materials, which were then applied by all other authors in their respective cultures. A template version of the questionnaire in English was prepared in Qualtrics and Google Forms for online administration, and in a separate document for paper-pencil administration. Collaborators across cultures were then instructed to translate the questionnaire using the back-translation method. Next, they administered the questionnaire to samples of their convenience. This involved university students, participants from research panels, snowball samples, convenience samples, and more, including 66 online samples, 7 paper-pencil samples, and 4 mixed samples. In all versions, an informed consent was obtained from the participants. In some cultures, more than one sample was collected, specifically three in Algeria and two in Australia, Russia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the US. In such cases, collaborators worked together on the adaptation of the questionnaire but collected their data independently. In such cases the samples were aggregated within a culture and treated as a single sample.

We grouped the cultures into seven cultural regions proposed by Krys et al. (2024). Regions for all studied cultures are listed in Table 1. We used the Under/Over-Representation Index (UORI; Krys et al., 2024) to assess how accurately different cultural regions are represented in the current study. This index compares the number of cultural samples from a given region in a study to the total number of cultures in that study (e.g., in our study, 34% of cultural samples originate in WEIRD cultures) and divides it by the proportion that the region occupies on the current geopolitical map (e.g., on the contemporary political map, WEIRD cultures constitute 19% of cultures). In essence, the UORI helps reveal sampling biases by showing whether certain cultural regions are overrepresented (UORI>1.0) or

underrepresented (UORI<1.0) in data collection. To make robust claims about psychological findings, it is important to include cultural data from cultures of the majority world (Uskul et al., 2024). Overall, our sample improves representativeness in cross-cultural psychology studies. We achieved lower over-representation of WEIRD (UORI=1.78) and Confucian (UORI=1.99) cultural regions compared to average sampling bias in large-scale, cross-cultural research (2.69 and 2.41 respectively; see Krys et al., 2024). We also obtained a smaller under-representation of the Sub-Saharan Africa (UORI=.60), which means that our study involved more Sub-Saharan cultures than the average for large-scale, cross-cultural research (UORI = .29; Krys et al., 2024). Additionally, the MENA (Middle-East and North Africa; UORI=1.38) and Post-Soviet (non-EU former Soviet states; UORI=1.59) regions were overrepresented, in contrast to their typical under-representation (UORIs = .85 and .80 respectively; Krys et al., 2024). However, the Latin American/Caribbean (UORI=.77) and Non-Confucian Asia/Oceania (UORI=.55) regions remained similarly underrepresented compared to other large-scale, cross-cultural studies (UORI = .86 and .57 respectively; Krys et al., 2024).

Individual-Level Measures

Perception of Power

We used a perception of power scale developed specifically for this study. The scale aimed to measure the extent to which powerholders from various domains of social life (e.g., managers, teachers, judges, professors, policemen, etc.) were perceived to have control over people's everyday lives. In the study, we defined power as an outcome control (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Depret & Fiske, 1993) and influence (Dahl, 1957). The initial phrasing was proposed by the lead author. However, all contributors were able to suggest alternative items and impact the final version of the scale. Participants were provided with the following instruction: "*We would like to understand the role of people who are higher in the hierarchy*

in almost every society, e.g., managers, judges, professors, policemen or teachers. According to your own experience, to what extent do the following statements describe your society?". The scale consisted of three items: 1. "In [culture name], people higher in the hierarchy have more power than an average person"; 2. "In [culture name], people higher in the hierarchy have firm control over citizens' lives"; 3. "In [culture name], people higher in the hierarchy have a strong influence on citizens' lives". Participants were asked to rate each item on a five-point Likert-type scale, with the following response options: 0 (*doesn't describe my society at all*); 1 (*describes my society a little*); 2 (*describes my society moderately*); 3 (*describes my society well*); 4 (*describes my society exactly*). The outcome variable was computed as the mean score of the three items, representing participants' overall belief of power among certain powerholders in their society. The strategy of creating items was informed by the intersubjective approach (Chiu et al., 2010). The questions, therefore, probe beyond the personal experience of a certain individual to allow for more broad societal contextual beliefs and perceptions, which can in turn shape individual behaviours and interactions (Smith & Bond, 2019). The internal reliability for the whole sample was acceptable (Cronbach's α = .68). Reliabilities for all cultures separately are presented in Table S2 in the Supplementary Online Material.

Social Status

We created a social status scale specifically for this study. Social status is a heterogenous phenomenon and requires diligent recognition of the context where it is measured (see Xu et al., 2024). Although there are several instruments designed to capture social status, most of them refer to interpersonal aspects of social status (see Anderson et al., 2012; Bitterly et al, 2017). In this study, we focus instead on a generalized social status conferred to powerholders in a society. The scale aimed to assess social status based on components of general admiration (Fiske, 2010), trustworthiness, and competence (Chen,

2012). The instruction provided to the participants was the same as in the perception of the power scale. The scale consisted of the following items: 1. “In [culture name], citizens admire those higher in hierarchy”; 2. “In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy do their job well”; 3. “In [culture name], each citizen can rely on people higher in hierarchy”. Participants were instructed to assess each item using the same 5-point Likert-type scale employed for the perception of power scale. The mean score of the three items was computed to indicate the overall social status attributed to powerholders in the respective culture. A higher mean score indicated a higher perceived social status of powerholders. The internal reliability for the whole sample was not high (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .54$). However, given the conceptual breadth of the scale and the limited number of items to ensure plausibility for cross-cultural administration, we propose that this is sufficient to proceed with further analyses. In support of this argument, we refer to research (Clark & Watson, 1995) that suggests Cronbach’s α values may vary depending on the diversity of the constructs being measured. Furthermore, because the scale is short, a lower α value is not uncommon and does not necessarily indicate poor reliability (e.g., Sijtsma, 2009). Short scales are often more prone to lower alpha coefficients, and the trade-off between brevity and reliability is a recognized issue in scale development.

Perceived Self-/Other-Orientation

We used the shortened version of the scale developed by Wasiel et al. (2024). The scale consisted of three items for both self- and other-orientation. The instruction and response scales provided to participants were the same as in the previous two scales. The items for self-orientation were: 1. “In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy use power to increase their wealth”; 2. “In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy are concerned primarily with their own interests”; 3. “In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy use power to increase their own privileges”. The items for other-orientation were: 1. “In [culture

name], people higher in hierarchy act in the interest of citizens"; 2. "In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy take responsibility for well-being of citizens"; 3. "In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy take responsibility for the good of their communities". Participants were instructed to assess each item using the same 5-point Likert-type scale employed for the perception of power scale. The mean score of the items was computed to indicate the overall perceived self-orientation and other-orientation of powerholders in the respective culture. A higher mean score for self-orientation indicated a perception of powerholders as being focused on their own interests, while a higher mean score for other-orientation indicated a perception of powerholders as acting in the best interest of citizens and their communities. The internal reliability for the whole sample was good for perceived self-orientation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$) and for perceived other-orientation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$).

Individual-level control variables

In the study, we also considered several individual-level control variables. These variables include gender, age, and subjective SES, which was measured using the McArthur Ladder (Adler et al., 2000).

Invariance of the Individual-level Measures Across Cultural Regions

To examine whether the individual-level scales we used were invariant across the studied cultures, we conducted a series of multigroup confirmatory factor analyses (van de Schoot et al., 2012). First, we tested the characteristics of our scales among 70 cultures and found that they did not reach metric invariance based on the conventionally used threshold. Given the rarity of finding invariance across a large number of groups, we instead compared 7 cultural regions rather than 70 cultures (Welzel et al., 2023). We have established metric invariance at the regional level. Detailed information about invariance testing is available in the Supplementary Online Material.

Cultural-Level Indexes Measured in the Study

Power Distance

We used four items to assess the prevalence of social hierarchy in each society. Two of the items were introduced first in our study: 1. “In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy must be addressed using formal titles”; 2. “In [culture name], people higher in hierarchy can be addressed by their first (i.e., given) name” (reversed). Another two items were adapted from Kim & Zhang (2014) and slightly rephrased to ensure consistency with other items: 3. “In [culture name], citizens think that social hierarchy is important”; 4. “In [culture name] citizens think that social equality is important” (reversed). The instruction and response format were the same as in the previous scales. The mean score of the four items was computed to obtain the power distance score, representing the perceived level of social hierarchy in each society. According to the original concept (see Hofstede, 2001), Power Distance is considered a characteristic of societies rather than of individuals. Therefore, this study followed this theoretical framework and aggregated the Power Distance scores at the culture level rather than analysing them at the individual level. The items showed good reliability at the cultural level (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .74$)

Self-Expression vs. Harmony Cultural Model of Selfhood

We used the Culture and Identity Research Network Self-Construal Scale Version 3 (CIRN-SCS-3, Krys et al., 2020; Uskul et al., 2023; Yang, 2018) to capture the Self-Expression vs. Harmony dimension to provide insights into individuals’ tendencies toward expressing themselves or prioritizing harmonious relationships. For this study, four items were selected from CIRN-SCS-3, with two representing the self-expression pole and two representing the harmony pole. Participants were instructed as follows: “*We would like to ask some questions about you. To what extent the below statements describe you?*”. Participants then responded to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with response options ranging from 0 (*doesn’t describe me at all*), to 4 (*describes me exactly*). An example of an item is,

"*You prefer to express your thoughts and feelings openly, even if it may sometimes cause conflict*".

The Self-Expression vs. Harmony dimension can be employed as both an individual-level and societal-level measure. In this study, the focus was on using it as a measure of societal-level context. By examining individuals' responses and aggregating them at the societal level, the study aimed to understand the prevalence of self-expression or harmony orientations within a given society. Items showed good reliability at the cultural level (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$).

Cultural-Level Indexes Measured in Other Studies

Embeddedness

We retrieved the culture scores from Schwartz (2008). The score is based on the average values of schoolteachers among 80 cultures, specifically: respect for tradition, social order, forgiving, obedience, politeness, being clean, national security, being devout, reciprocation of favours, being moderate, self-discipline, honouring elders, protecting one's public image, and wisdom. Embeddedness values have been established using the multidimensional scaling method (see Schwartz, 2009).

Cultural Tightness

We obtained the scores from Gelfand et al. (2011). The scores are available for 33 cultures. The index is based on questions regarding the strength of the norms and tolerance (or lack thereof) of deviant behaviour. A sample item is: "*People in this country have a great deal of freedom in deciding how they want to behave in most situations*".

Table 1

Demographic Information and Descriptive Statistics for the Cultural Dimensions

Culture	Language of the Questionnaire	*n*	Age (*SD*)	% female	% student	Cultural Tightness	Embeddedness	Self-Expression vs. Harmony	Power Distance
Confucianism-influenced									
China	Chinese	235	26.51 (6.77)	49.79	60.00	7.90	3.74	1.90	2.00
Hong Kong	English	136	22.36 (3.20)	67.67	96.99	6.30	3.76	1.71	1.98
Japan	Japanese	133	21.72 (1.27)	73.64	100.00	8.60	3.49	1.73	2.08
South Korea	Korean	201	22.44 (2.12)	59.70	100.00	10.00	3.68	1.58	2.47
Taiwan	Chinese	204	27.36 (6.78)	74.02	55.39	-	3.82	1.53	2.11
Latin America/Carribean									
Brazil	Portuguese	96	30.36 (9.66)	54.88%	93.90	3.50	3.62	1.92	2.28
Chile	Spanish	170	29.15 (9.88)	70.63%	95.80	-	3.64	2.29	2.41
Colombia	Spanish	252	29.30 (11.00)	48.41%	58.73	-	3.86	2.04	2.17
Ecuador	Spanish	246	28.22 (9.00)	46.67	46.19	-	-	1.97	2.31
Mexico	Spanish	154	34.17 (15.14)	74.19	50.40	7.20	3.90	2.22	2.41
Peru	Spanish	195	30.68 (13.98)	55.97	54.09	-	3.92	2.13	2.21
Suriname	Dutch	140	31.42 (11.54)	51.43	39.29	-	-	1.93	2.17
Trinidad and Tobago	English	179	28.34 (9.46)	70.86	99,34	-	-	1.98	2.31
Venezuela	Spanish	307	37.10 (12.04)	48.00	26,55	3.70	3.74	2.00	2.19
MENA (Middle East and North Africa)									
Algeria	Arabic	981	35.55 (12.61)	52.40%	46.38	-	-	2.12	2.07

Egypt	Arabic	70	28.04 (7.74)	36.76	45.59	-	4.45	1.89	2.44
Jordan	Arabic	242	34.33 (12.02)	65.15	40.50	-	4.20	2.05	2.26
Morocco	Arabic	150	29.35 (7.90)	36.00	30.67	-	-	1.91	2.23
Pakistan	English	50	30.78 (8.38)	56.00	50.00	12.30	4.31	1.88	2.29
Palestine	Arabic	187	40.52 (11.54)	61.29	31.88	-	4.09	1.96	2.32
Saudi Arabia	Arabic	131	26.15 (9.50)	64.12	70.23	-	-	1.75	2.36
Turkey	Turkish	1278	31.02 (11.85)	57.36	48,36	9.20	3.77	2.24	2.67
United Arab Emirates	English	97	21.96 (6.39)	82.47	94,85	-	-	1.80	2.21
Non-Confucian Asia/Oceania									
Bangladesh	English	96	27.76 (6.43)	59.38%	80.21	-	-	1.75	2.28
India	English	87	23.83 (3.66)	70.11	94.25	11.00	3.97	1.96	2.47
Indonesia	Bahasa Indonesia	236	20.58 (2.75)	77.13	98.65	-	4.27	1.53	2.35
Malaysia	English	1903	29.13 (6.62)	69.75	31.78	11.80	4.35	1.60	2.50
Philippines	English, Filipino	238	26.31 (8.26)	59.72	74.54	-	4.03	1.82	2.74
Vietnam	Vietnamese	198	24.92 (6.70)	62.12	59,09	-	-	2.02	1.67
Post-Soviet (outside EU)									
Azerbaijan	Azerbaijani	173	25.44 (9.96)	17.52%	72.99	-	-	2.34	2.22
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian	356	30.80 (12.70)	76.12%	67.70	-	4.01	2.09	2.25
Georgia	Georgian	170	35.06 (15.17)	75.88	48.82	-	4.12	2.06	2.32
Kazakhstan	Russian	205	28.16 (11.64)	71.71	68.29	-	-	2.08	2.31

North Macedonia	Macedonian	97	32.51 (12.55)	69.07	50.52	-	3.91	1.89	2.35
Russia	Russian	414	23.20 (3.63)	60.39	98.07	-	3.81	2.12	2.20
Serbia	Serbian	193	24.11 (3.49)	69.43	100.00	-	3.57	2.15	2.59
Ukraine	Ukrainian	167	31.23 (11.99)	73.65	73,05	1.60	3.93	2.45	2.39
Sub-Saharan Africa									
Angola	Portuguese	83	24.62 (6.95)	56.63%	100.00	-	-	2.02	2.58
Burkina Faso	French	28	23.64 (1.99)	21.43%	96.43	-	-	1.63	2.29
Ghana	English	179	24.70 (3.51)	56.42	92.86	-	4.27	1.61	2.61
Kenya	English	177	28.75 (6.19)	43.50	30.51	-	-	2.04	2.25
Madagascar	French	244	29.30 (7.59)	50.00	35.92	-	-	1.89	2.51
Nigeria	English	279	24.48 (8.00)	66.40	75.10	-	4.41	1.74	2.75
Senegal	French	176	24.62 (4.82)	37.50	99.43	-	4.45	2.00	2.39
South Africa	English	475	31.70 (11.12)	49.68	41.19	-	4.03	1.93	2.11
Uganda	English	123	29.13 (5.75)	52.94	41,18	-	4.23	1.84	2.21
WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic)									
Australia	English	631	52.21 (19.34)	50.53%	12.85	4.40	3.59	1.74	1.60
Austria	German	250	27.13 (8.87)	74.49%	93.83	6.80	3.11	1.80	2.51
Bulgaria	Bulgarian	204	33.27 (10.75)	49.02%	100.00	-	3.87	2.15	2.31
Canada	English	276	21.62 (3.35)	77.41%	100.00	-	3.31	1.80	1.98
Croatia	Croatian	203	36.05 (13.68)	84.73%	44.33	-	4.00	2.13	2.32
Czechia	Czech	285	34.51 (13.97)	76.80%	52.51	-	3.59	2.11	2.49
Denmark	Danish	86	26.02 (3.77)	60.78	92.16	-	3.19	1.88	0.87

Estonia	Estonian	238	37.33 (13.72)	72.65	69.96	2.60	3.81	1.97	2.14
France	French	164	36.38 (14.50)	79.27	74.39	6.30	3.20	2.21	2.52
Germany	German	305	29.06 (10.26)	59.34	82.78	7.00	3.10	1.89	2.25
Hungary	Hungarian	529	24.19 (6.56)	72.97	98.11	2.90	3.60	2.06	2.48
Iceland	Icelandic	372	29.41 (9.04)	69.43	98.12	6.40	-	1.83	0.89
Ireland	English	262	25.54 (7.60)	60.69	98.47	-	3.41	1.78	1.82
Italy	Italian	136	33.07 (12.86)	57.35	55.88	6.80	3.46	2.29	2.54
Luxembourg	German	162	39.04 (19.58)	70.92	50.35	-	-	1.99	2.22
Malta	English	66	42.11 (15.16)	69.70	22.73	-	-	2.09	2.31
Norway	Norwegian	79	38.27 (15.34)	61.02	50.85	9.50	3.45	1.86	1.00
Poland	Polish	227	28.81 (7.94)	49.34	43.61	6.00	3.86	2.05	2.44
Portugal	Portuguese	176	36.89 (15.85)	73.30	46.02	7.80	3.43	1.92	2.37
Romania	Romanian	225	26.22 (8.85)	62.67	79.56	-	3.78	2.03	2.54
Slovakia	Slovak	272	39.43 (13.08)	85.29	50.74	-	3.82	2.20	2.49
Spain	Spanish	261	25.63 (7.23)	68.85	86.54	5.40	3.31	2.11	2.10
United Kingdom	English	193	29.38 (12.35)	73.02	69,84	6.90	3.34	1.71	1.86
United States of America	English	363	30.92 (12.03)	66.18	64,16	5.10	3.67	1.96	2.19

Analysis Strategy

Cross-cultural psychology often examines data that are hierarchically structured, with individuals nested within a cultural or national groups (Cheung et al., 2006). Multilevel Modelling (MLM) allows for examination of both individual-level and culture-level effects. To this aim, we first examined the regional variability of the relation between perceived power and status by fitting a random-slope multi-level model with a cross-level interaction. Here, the perceived social status of powerholders was predicted by perceived power, with the Level-1 effect moderated by a categorical Level-2 moderator that grouped the 70 countries into seven cultural regions.

Next, we tested the individual and cultural moderators of the relationship between perceived power and social status using an MLM approach, following the stepwise model-building procedure proposed by Aguinis et al. (2013). Individual-level predictors were centered clusterwise to properly estimate within-group effects, while culture-level predictors were grand-mean centered. We included the Perceived Self/Other-orientations of powerholders as individual-level moderators, and Power Distance along with the Self-expressive vs. Harmonious cultural model of selfhood as culture-level moderators.

As an additional analysis, we explored two other cultural moderators important for understanding the status attribution to powerholders: Embeddedness and Cultural Tightness. We did not measure the latter two constructs in this study, instead, we imported pre-existing scores, which is a common practice in cross-cultural psychology, for both Cultural Tightness (see Gelfand et al. 2021) and Embeddedness (see Davidov et al., 2014). The lack of a national score for a certain culture led to its exclusion from the analysis. To minimize the information loss, we therefore computed separate models for Embeddedness and Cultural Tightness.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

We computed zero-order correlations between the variables of interest at their respective levels (individual and cultural). Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations. At the individual level, for the whole sample, social status showed a positive correlation with the perception of power and perceived other-orientation of powerholders and a negative correlation with the perceived self-orientation of powerholders. Perception of power was positively correlated with perceived self-orientation, and weakly negatively correlated with perceived other-orientation. Perceived self-orientation and other-orientation were negatively linked. At the culture level, Power Distance showed a positive correlation with Embeddedness. Self-Expression vs. Harmony cultural model of selfhood was negatively correlated with Cultural Tightness.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations (*SD*), and Correlations of the Studied Variables

Variable	Mean	*SD*	1	2	3
Individual level					
1. Social Status	1.75	.79	-		
2. Perceived Power	2.66	.82	.13***	-	
3. Perceived Self-orientation	2.94	.98	-.24***	.48***	-
4. Perceived Other-orientation	1.53	.90	.58***	-.09***	-.46***
Culture level					
1. Power Distance	2.21	.37	-		
2. Self-Expression vs. Harmony	1.94	.20	.19	-	
3. Embeddedness	3.78	.35	.40**	-.10	-
4. Cultural Tightness	6.66	2.84	.03	-.41*	.29

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

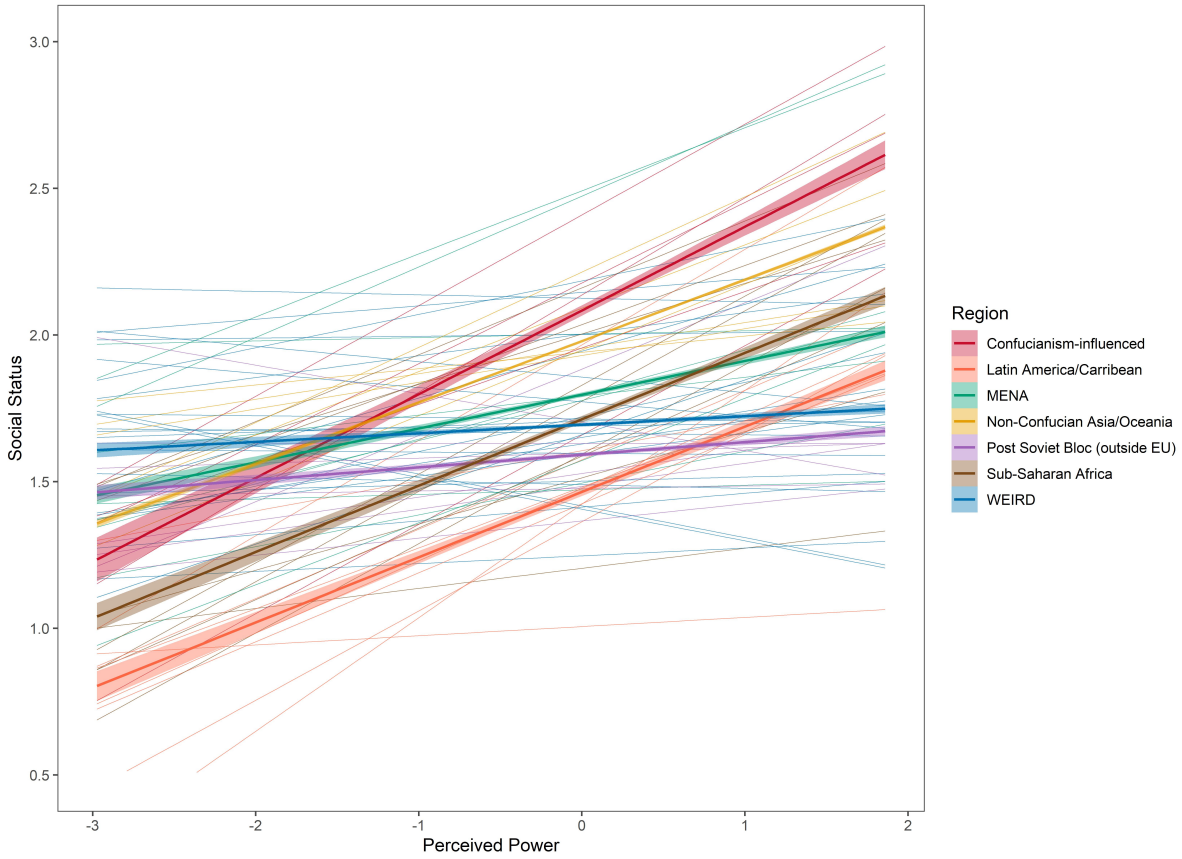
Regional Variability of the Effect of Perceived Power on Social Status

As an initial analysis, we examined the regional variability of the effect of perceived power on social status, for which we found substantial cultural differences. The relation

between perceived power and social status was significantly positive on average for the whole sample, however, we did not find such an effect in the WEIRD and Post-Soviet cultural regions. We found the strongest effect in Confucian Asia, *Estimate*=.28, *SE*=.057, *p*<.001, and a similar one in the Latin American/Caribbean cultural region, *Estimate*=.23, *SE*=.040, *p*<.001 as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa, *Estimate*=.22, *SE*=.042, *p*<.001. We found a smaller effect in Non-Confucian Asia/Oceania, *Estimate*=.16, *SE*=.046, *p*=.002, and Middle-East and North Africa (MENA), *Estimate*=.13, *SE*=.040, *p*=.002. In the Post-Soviet cultural region the effect was non-significant, *Estimate*=.05, *SE*=.042, *p*=.278, which was the same as in WEIRD cultures, *Estimate*=.03, *SE*=.025, *p*=.238. The slopes for each culture, as well as the average slopes within all major cultural regions are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

The link between Perceived Power and Social Status Across Cultures and Cultural Regions.



Note. The plot represents the simple slopes for cultures and cultural regions of the effect of perceived power on social status based on the multilevel model with random intercept and random slopes.

Individual and Cultural Moderators of the Effect of Perceived Power on Social Status

To test the individual and cultural aspects important for the perceived power and social status relationship, in the first step, we computed a null model (Step 1) to estimate the variance explained by culture (intra-class correlation, ICC). The results indicated that culture accounted for 14.8% of the variance of social status conferred to powerholders. Then, in Step 2, we included fixed effects at both the individual and culture levels. In Step 3, we allowed the slopes to vary between cultures. In Step 4, we introduced the individual-level interaction between the perceived power and perceived self- and other-orientation. Finally, in Step 5, we included the cross-level interaction between perceived power, and our initial set of two cultural-level moderators: Power Distance and Self-Expressive vs Harmonious Culture. The parameter estimates of the models are presented in Table 3. The results with individual-level control variables of age, gender, and subjective SES are presented in Tables S5-S7 in the Supplementary Online Material. The social status of powerholders was positively predicted by respondents' age and negatively predicted by their subjective SES. The main results remained largely the same after the inclusion of these three control variables.

The results of the analysis revealed several findings. Higher perceived power was positively connected to an elevated social status in all of the models we tested. We also observed a negative main effect of the perceived self-orientation of powerholders on their social status, which means that powerholders perceived as guided by personal gain tend to be conferred lower social status. Conversely, we found a main positive effect of other-orientation on status: those who perceive powerholders to be primarily concerned about others' welfare perceive them as higher in social status. We also found significant interactions between perceived power and perceived self/other-orientations. Perceived power was related to social

status at weaker levels, when powerholders were perceived as more self-oriented. On the other hand, perceived power and social status were linked at stronger levels when powerholders were perceived as more other-oriented. For the Johnson-Neyman plot, see Figure 3.

There was a significant negative effect of Self-Expression vs. Harmony on the social status of powerholders, suggesting that, in cultures that prioritize self-expressive behaviours, individuals tend to assign lower social status to powerholders compared to cultures that prioritize harmony. There was also a significant cross-level interaction between perceived power and Self-Expression vs. Harmony on the social status of powerholders: in cultures that foster self-expressive behaviour and openness, the link between perceived power and social status is weaker than in cultures that tend to preserve harmony, The Johnson-Neyman plot is depicted in Figure 4. Contrary to our expectations, in model step 3, 4, and 5 we found a significant negative main effect of Power Distance on the social status of powerholders. There was no significant cross-level interaction between perceived power and Power Distance.

Table 3

MLM Predicting Social Status of Powerholders with Power Distance and Self-Expression as Cultural Moderators

	Null Model (Step 1)		Random intercept and fixed slope (Step 2)		Random intercept and random slope (Step 3)		Level 1 interaction (Step 4)		Cross-level interaction (Step 5)	
Fixed effects	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE	Estimate	SE
Individual-level										
Intercept	1.74***	0.038	1.74***	0.033	1.74***	0.033	1.75***	0.033	1.75***	0.033
Perceived Power (PP)			0.20***	0.007	0.19***	0.012	0.19***	0.012	0.20***	0.012
Self-orientation (SO)			-0.07***	0.006	-0.07***	0.012	-0.08***	0.012	-0.08***	0.012
Other-orientation (OO)			0.46***	0.006	0.45***	0.010	0.44***	0.010	0.44***	0.010
Culture-level										
Power Distance (PD)			-0.13	0.010	-0.18*	0.089	-0.18*	0.088	-0.18*	0.089
Self-Expression vs. Harmony (SEH)			-0.70***	0.174	-0.68***	0.161	-0.66***	0.160	-0.67***	0.160
Level-1 interaction										
PP x SO							-0.03***	0.006	-0.03***	0.006
PP x OO							0.02***	0.006	0.02***	0.006
Cross-level interaction										
PP x PD									0.03	0.033
PP x SEH									-0.14**	0.059
Random effects										
Within-culture variance	0.55		0.37		0.36		0.36		0.36	
Intercept variance	0.10		0.08		0.075		0.075		0.075	
Slope variance (Perceived Power)					0.006		0.006		0.006	
Slope variance (Self-orientation)					0.007		0.006		0.006	
Slope variance (Other-orientation)					0.004		0.004		0.004	
Log Likelihood	-20347		-16733		-16597		-16566		-16563	

Note. ***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05. Estimator = Restricted Maximum Likelihood. Culture-level predictors are grand-mean centered. Individual-level predictors of interest are centered culture-wise.

Figure 3

Johnson-Neyman Plot for the Effect of Perceived Power on Social Status on Different Levels of Perceived Self/Other-Orientation of Powerholders.

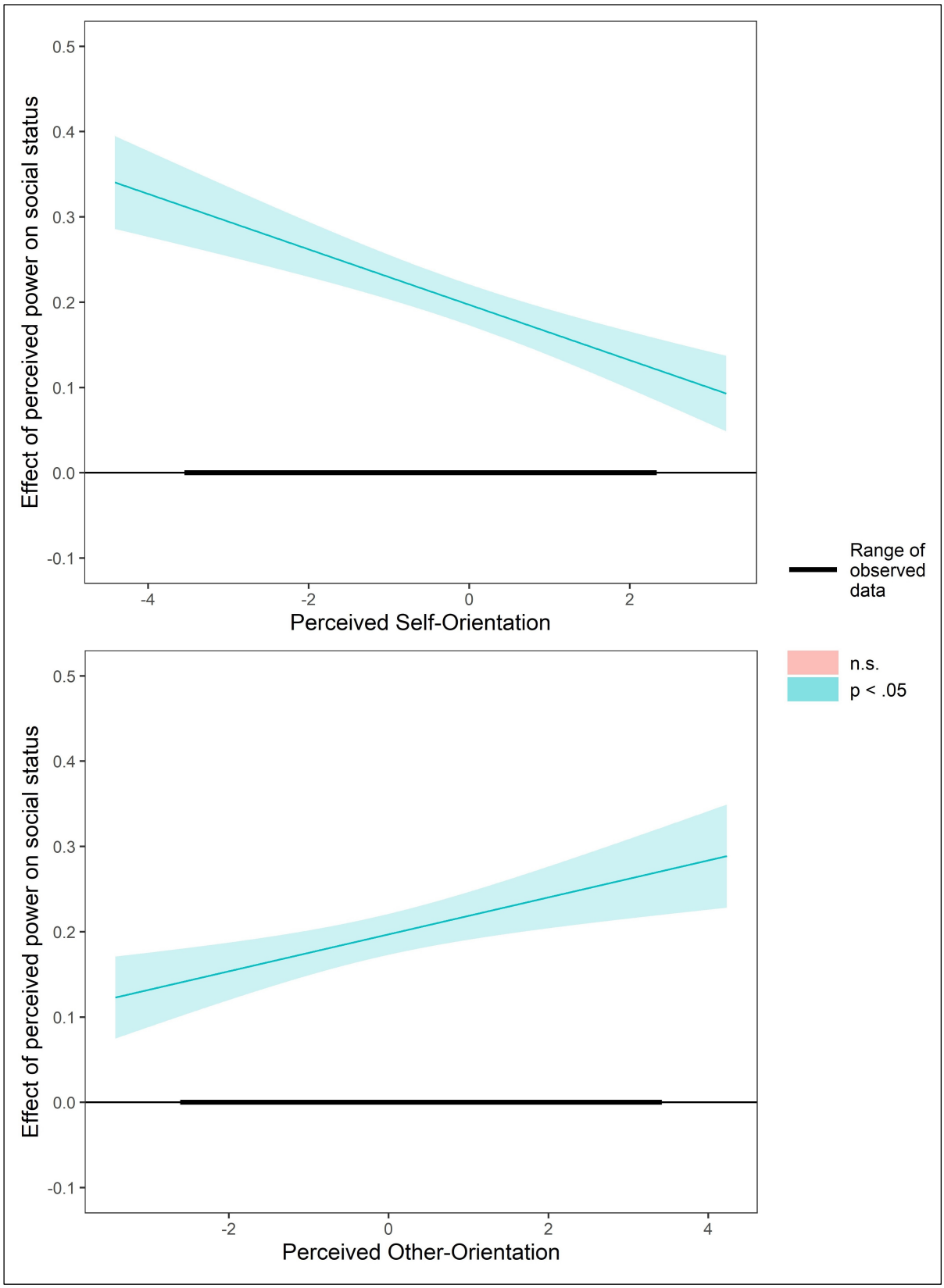
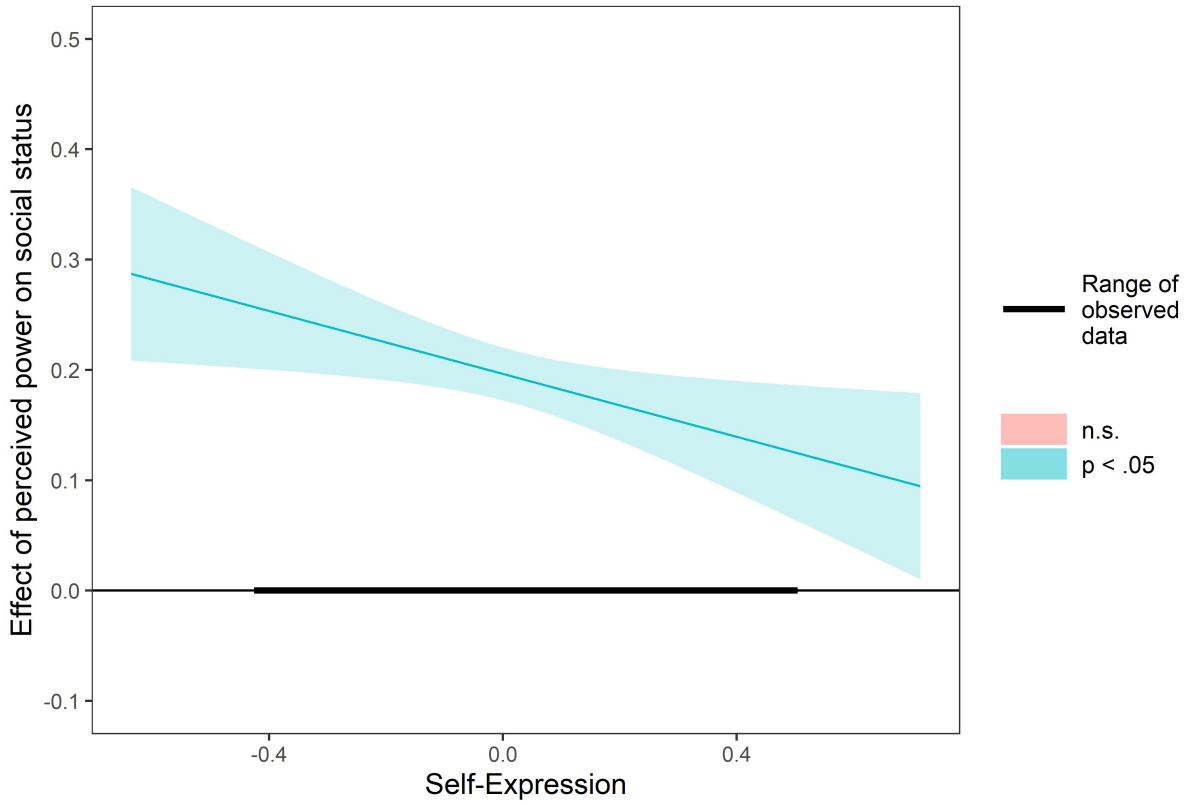


Figure 4

Johnson-Neyman Plot for the Effect of Perceived Power on Social Status on Different Levels of Self-Expression vs. Harmony on the Culture Level.



Power and Status: Additional Cultural Moderators

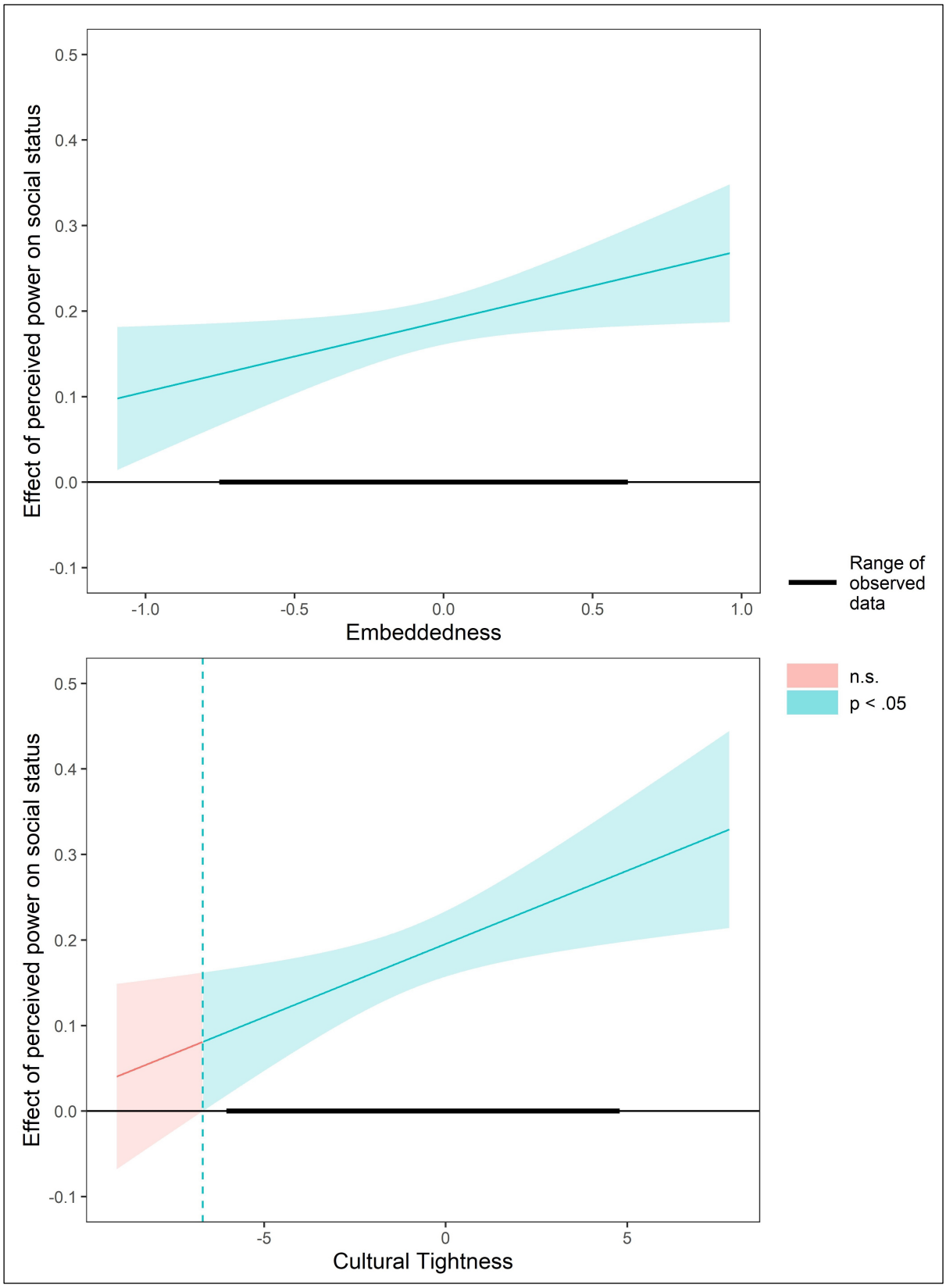
The effect of Embeddedness is based on the data of *n*=14 398 participants from 52 cultures. We computed a model including perceived power and self/other-orientations, level-1 interactions, Embeddedness and its interaction with perceived power. Embeddedness had no main effect on the conferral of social status upon powerholders, *Estimate*=-.06, *SE*=.105, *p*=.571. However, it significantly moderated the relation between the perceived power of powerholders, and their social status, *Estimate*=.08, *SE*=.038, *p*=.036. For the full model breakdown, see Table S3 in the Supplementary Online Material. The effects of perceived power on social status depending on culture's Embeddedness are presented in the upper part

of Figure 5. In cultures scoring high on Embeddedness, the relation between the perceived magnitude of power and social status was stronger than in cultures that do not foster Embeddedness.

In the case of Cultural Tightness, the scores were available for 26 cultures sampled in our study. Therefore, the model is based on data from n=8 671 participants. Similar to Embeddedness, Cultural Tightness exhibited no significant main effect on the social status of powerholders, *Estimate*=.03, *SE*=.017, p=.116. At the same time, it significantly moderated the effect of perceived power on social status, *Estimate*=.02, *SE*=.006, p=.015. The full model is presented in Table S4 in the Supplementary Online Material. For the visualization of the effects of perceived power on social status on different levels of Cultural Tightness, see the bottom part of Figure 5. Members of tight cultures associate power with a higher social status more than members of loose cultures.

Figure 5

Johnson-Neyman Plot for the Effect of Perceived Power on Social Status on Different Levels of Embeddedness and Cultural Tightness on the Culture Level.



Discussion

The main aim of this study was to test the relationship between position-based power and social status among 70 cultures, and to understand the individual and cultural conditions that shape this relationship. These topics are essential to study, because powerholders, by virtue of their positions, significantly impact formal institutions, private companies, and informal groups, either leading them towards flourishing or contributing to their deterioration (Maskor et al., 2022). Social status plays a vital role in indicating the positive outcomes arising from the exercise of power. Our study builds on and verifies previous research while also advancing current knowledge in the field.

Is Being Perceived as Powerful Universally Connected to an Elevated Social Status?

While power and status are viewed as distinct forms of social hierarchy, our study shows that this separation is characteristic of WEIRD and Post Post-Soviet cultures, most of which showed no significant link between perceived power and social status. In WEIRD cultures, low conformity (Henrich, 2020) may lead individuals to challenge authority, while in the Post-Soviet context, the legacy of centralized control and authoritarian governance may foster scepticism toward powerholders, viewing them as corrupt and unworthy of respect (Sandholtz & Taagepera, 2005). In other regions, we observed a generally positive connection between power and status. This means that in the majority of cultures people who perceive powerholders as influential and having more control over others also believe they are more respected, competent and hold higher instrumental social value. In most cultural environments power and status not only serve as self-reinforcing foundations of social hierarchy (see Magee & Galinksy, 2008) but can also mutually reinforce each other. However, the *extent* to which position-based power and social status are interconnected varies depending on individual and cultural factors.

Prosocial Use of Power Is Important for Social Status

First, the level of attributed status depends on the way power is perceived to be exercised. Here, we find support for theories of status conferral (see Berger et al., 1974). Being perceived as using power to benefit others is linked to a higher conferral of status and this strengthens the connection between power and social status. High power, when paired with good intentions, can make an individual especially valuable to the group, and thus, highly respected.

The perception of powerholders as self-oriented lowers their status and weakens the relationship between power and social status. However, even for highly self-oriented powerholders, the perceived power is still a positive predictor of social status. Our results suggest that the sheer possession of power can still confer social status.

Cultural Emphasis on Status Quo Matters

Culture shapes the relation between position-based power and social status. In self-expressive cultures, powerholders have a lower status on average. This effect may come from the scrutiny powerholders face in cultures, where people are more likely to speak up against unsatisfactory conduct, thereby undermining authority and challenging the established status hierarchy. In such contexts, powerholders may also be seen as infringing on individual rights, leading to resentment. In contrast, in harmonious cultures, respect towards powerholders may be crucial for maintaining good relationships and avoiding conflict. Furthermore, being a powerholder in a harmonious culture may involve additional responsibilities to ensure social order and reassurance among subordinates (Ito et al., 2024). Engagement with subordinates by regulating their social life may make the position of a powerholder more salient, significant, and respected. In harmonious cultures people are socialized to avoid open disagreement, stabilizing the powerholder's role and ensuring their social status.

Depending on the culture, powerholders may rely on certain societal foundations to ensure their social status. Cultural dimensions that promote social rigidity, like valuing order

and strong norms (Embeddedness and Cultural Tightness), make power more likely to confer social status. Social conventions support formal positions, which can reduce challenges and dissent that may disrupt group order and threaten the status of powerholders. Conversely, in cultures without strong norms, with less emphasis on traditions, and a greater focus on self-expression, attaining social status through power becomes more challenging. Social status is less readily granted, as it lacks strong support from established conventions. As a result, powerholders may rely on personalized sources of status, such as charisma, a reputation based on past achievements, or the use of power for the benefit of others.

Contrary to expectations, we found that members of high Power Distance cultures tend to confer lower social status to powerholders compared to those in low Power Distance cultures. It is important to note that we measured Power Distance in our study using an intersubjective measure (see Chiu et al., 2010), assessing the degree to which people think their culture is either hierarchical or egalitarian. This perception may correlate with lower status conferred to powerholders due to factors like perceived corruption, misuse of power, or detachment from the needs of those lower in the hierarchy. All of these factors can be facilitated by the unequal distribution of power in society. Past research has demonstrated that Power Distance is linked to higher corruption (Park, 2010) and a greater number of human rights violations (Diener et al., 1995), which can undermine the social status of powerholders.

Limitations

Our study has several limitations. First, by assessing powerholders across various domains, we may have oversimplified our findings, as perceptions of power and self/other-orientations may differ by context. Future studies could explore specific domains of power to capture these nuances. Some of the cultural moderators we used were imported and constituted a data loss of excluded cultures. Thus, future replications should include those moderators within the same data collection. Another limitation of our study is the limited

reliability of the perceived power and social status measures. The scales employed in the current research had regional metric invariance but did not reach culture-wise invariance. While establishing measutement invariance with a large number of groups is rarely obtainable, this is a limitation of the presented findings. In the case of social status, we conceptualized the construct broadly, which in conjunction with a few items produced limited reliability. Moreover, we did not validate our short scales before launching the 70-culture study. Future research should aim to replicate our findings using well-established and ideally longer measures. Furthermore, it is important to note that our study was correlational, which limits drawing causal conclusions. For example, previous literature suggests a reciprocal relationship between other-orientation and social status (Lyle & Smith, 2014; Kafashan et al., 2014). To better understand these dynamics and establish causal relationships, further in-depth research is necessary. Future studies could investigate other foundations of social status across cultures, such as adherence to traditions, charisma, expert knowledge, ethical conduct or economic success.

Conclusion

Hierarchies of power and status are prevalent across human societies, even in those that strive for greater egalitarianism. The current study contributes to the understanding of these phenomena by highlighting the link between perceived power and elevated social status across different cultures. Our findings indicate that not all powerholders are equally respected. To gain social status, it is important that power is wielded in a way that benefits the local community and demonstrates a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others. The self-interested use of power, on the other hand, is detrimental to attaining respect and admiration. Beyond universal processes, our study reveals cultural differences in how powerholders are perceived. People in self-expressive cultures tend to confer less status upon powerholders

compared to people in harmonious cultures. Cultural characteristics that promote the status quo make power strongly linked to the higher social status of powerholders.

While position-based power and social status often overlap, individuals and cultures differ in how they navigate the dynamics of social hierarchy. Our most robust finding highlights the importance of perceived other-orientation in attaining high social status alongside power. Therefore, as hierarchies persist in the modern world, it is crucial to incentivize, encourage, and demand that powerholders prioritize the well-being of others, not only to benefit their own status but also for the flourishing of society as a whole.

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