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How power affects postdecisional attitude change: reducing dissonance when decisions do not match with own or others' preferences

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ABSTRACT

Decisions with consequences for self and/or others do not always match the respective preferences. Following cognitive dissonance theory, one option to deal with such mismatches is to change one's attitudes post-decision. Inducing a different focus on self or others, perceived power may moderate how and when this happens. We indeed found that high power induced more attitude change after mismatches with one's own preferences, whereas low power led to more attitude change after mismatches with others' preferences. Study 1 (N = 129) showed this effect in an interpersonal setting; Study 2 (N = 127) revealed a similar pattern in a group context. Study 3 (N = 184) offered an explanation by including self-affirmation of either warmth or competence values.

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Power; cognitive dissonance; inconsistency; self-affirmation; attitude change

People are social beings. One of the implications is that their decisions not only impact their own, but also others' outcomes (see, e.g., interdependence theory; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Van Lange & Balliet, 2014). Some decisions affect one's own outcomes more, whereas other decisions primarily affect the others' outcomes. For example, managers in an organization can make decisions that primarily impact their own outcomes and/or careers, but they also make decisions that mostly impact the outcomes or careers of their subordinates. Ideally, people make decisions that match their own and/or others' preferences. Decisions and preferences do not always perfectly align, however. Mismatches between decisions and preferences are key in theorizing and research on cognitive dissonance (e.g., Cooper, 2019; Festinger, 1957).

The study of cognitive dissonance demonstrates that when decisions do not match preferences – in more general terms, when behaviors do not match attitudes – people may reduce any resulting dissonance by either changing their behavior or their attitudes. Attitude change is a viable strategy when decisions cannot be altered, leading to post-decisional justification (e.g., Knox & Inkster, 1968). Here, we examine postdecisional attitude change by studying how power, defined as one's impact on own versus others'

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outcomes (e.g., Dépret & Fiske, 1993), moderates attitude change after mismatches with own or others' preferences.

Power, mismatches, and attitude change

Given that it is hard to please everyone, it is rather common to make decisions that do not perfectly line up with one's own and/or others' preferences. Years of research have shown that such settings may induce cognitive dissonance (e.g., Festinger, 1957; for a recent review, see Cooper, 2019). An important way to reduce postdecisional dissonance is to change one's attitudes (e.g., McGrath, 2017). For example, a decision to buy a fossil fuel vehicle may provide a mismatch with one's preference to help mitigate climate change when possible. The dissonance resulting from this decision may be resolved by changing one's attitude toward climate change.

The motivation or inclination to reduce the cognitive conflict by changing one's attitudes may be different for mismatches with one's own preferences than for mismatches with others' preferences. This was first demonstrated by Hoshino-Browne et al. (2005), who showed that people with an independent self-construal changed their attitudes when their decisions provided a mismatch with their own preferences, whereas people with an interdependent self-construal changed their attitudes when their decisions provided a mismatch with the preferences of others. Given that power shapes self-construal (Chen, 2020; Chen & Welland, 2002), we investigate whether similar moderating effects may be observed for power: Are high-power individuals more likely to change their attitudes when their decisions do not match their own preferences (showing self-orientation), and are low-power individuals more likely to change attitudes after mismatches with other people's preferences (showing other-orientation)?

Previous research did not yet address this question. Galinsky et al. (2008) did study a potential connection between power and mismatches with one's own preference. They argued that, comparatively, high-power individuals may more strongly than low-power individuals feel that they control their own decisions, and as a result, experience more dissonance when their decisions do not match their own preference. They did not, however, study how low versus high power might impact attitudes after mismatches with other people's preferences, i.e., how power would impact postdecisional change in an interpersonal context.

Several converging findings and insights support the notion that the process might differ for low- and high-power people, and that it might be related to their differential focus on the self versus others. Prior research has shown that high-power people perceive greater social distance between themselves and others (Magee & Smith, 2013) and focus more on themselves (Lammers et al., 2015). Moreover, high power has been found to be associated with a more independent (i.e., self-oriented) self-construal, and low power with a more interdependent (i.e., other-oriented) self-construal and orientation toward others (Carey & Markus, 2017; Caza et al., 2011; Chen, 2020; Chen & Welland, 2002; Locke & Heller, 2017).

In a similar vein, power has been related to the distinction between agentic orientation and communal orientation. Resembling the distinction between independent and interdependent self-construals, the concepts of agency versus communion point to a principal distinction between self-perspective and other-perspective,

respectively (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007, 2014; Paulhus & John, 1998; Rucker et al., 2018). Agency refers to emphasizing one's own goals and the ability to independently achieve those; communion refers to connecting the self with others, emphasizing social connection and cooperation. High power has been found to induce an agentic orientation, and low power a more communal orientation (e.g., Dubois et al., 2015; Righetti et al., 2015; Rus et al., 2010).

It may be noted that many of these effects have been documented in research using situational and temporary inductions of low versus high power – for example, by temporarily assigning people to a low- or high-power position, inducing them to recall situations in which they had low or high power, or presenting them with scenarios in which they had to imagine occupying a leader or subordinate role. These inductions and effects fit with what Chen (2020) recently described as a 'situational, in-the-moment perspective on the self' and the 'working self-concept' (see also Marcus & Wurf, 1987). Central in this view is that people's self-concept is not stable, but dynamic and sensitive to situational cues. Contextual cues – including power – may activate specific aspects of one's self-knowledge which may subsequently impact one's thoughts, feeling and behaviors. In agreement with this framework, we studied – using scenarios and temporary inductions – how power would impact postdecisional change.

Current research

We hypothesized that high-power individuals would be more likely to change their attitudes after learning that their decisions did not match their own preferences, whereas low-power individuals would be more likely to change their attitudes after learning that their decisions did not match the preferences of others. We tested this in Study 1 and Study 2. In Study 3, we connected our reasoning to the observation that affirming one's primary values may reduce cognitive dissonance (Steele & Liu, 1983; Townsend & Sood, 2012) by examining if affirming self-relevant values could reduce attitude change for high-power individuals, versus affirming other-orientated values for low-power individuals.

Each of the experiments was conducted in the laboratory, and data collection per study was finished in about 3 weeks. The separate studies used different samples, without overlap in Study 2 and 3; participants did not know each other and performed the experiments in separate rooms; interactions were online. All three studies were completed in 3 months. We did not perform a-priori power calculations, but post-hoc sensitivity analyses using G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) showed that all three samples provided 80% power ($\alpha = .05$) to detect medium effects ($f = 0.25$). Anonymized data of each study are available at https://osf.io/2cx9y/. All studies were approved by the local ethics committee.

Study 1

To assess postdecisional attitude change after mismatches between decisions and preferences, we adapted the free-choice paradigm used by Hoshino-Browne et al. (2005) (see also Brehm, 1956; Kimel et al., 2012). Participants were presented with a scenario in which they were asked to make a decision for themselves or for another

person, after which they learned that the outcome of their decision did not match their own or the other's preference, respectively. The main dependent measure was the extent to which participants changed their attitudes to be more in line with the decision they made.

Method

Participants and design

One hundred and twenty-nine undergraduate students from Jiangxi Normal University (M_{age} = 20.22 years, SD_{age} = 1.90 years; 34.1% male) participated for payment (12 yuan, approximately $2). All participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (Power: Low, high) × 2 (Mismatch: Self, other) between-subjects design. No data were excluded from analyses.

Procedure

Given that imagined role manipulation is one of the four standard approaches in power research (Galinsky et al., 2015), participants were asked to write an essay to induce a high versus low sense of power (see Dubois et al., 2010, for a similar induction). To align with the study population (university context), the topic was that an undergraduate student did not do very well in an exam. The decision to pass or fail depended on the professor, and the student was begging the professor's mercy for passing. Participants in the low-power condition were asked to take the perspective of the undergraduate student in their essay; participants in the high-power condition were asked to take the perspective of the professor. To provide more context, all participants were provided with the first and the last sentence of their essay. The first sentence was 'A student is knocking on the door,' and the final sentence was 'The professor would consider it carefully in the evening and would answer tomorrow.' In this procedure, power was manipulated in two different ways: Hierarchical power ('you are the student vs. the professor'; cf. 'the leader vs. the follower'; Dubois et al., 2010) and power to reward or to punish (the student will or will not pass the exam).

After completing the essay, participants engaged in a free-choice paradigm adapted from Hoshino-Browne et al. (2005). Referring to the essay, all participants read that, on the same day of the event they just wrote about, the student came across the professor in a restaurant known for its well-evaluated dishes. Participants were presented with a list of ten dishes, and asked to evaluate each dish on a 9-point scale (1 = *definitely not desirable*, 9 = *extremely desirable*). In the Mismatch-with-self condition, participants evaluated the dishes based on their own preference. In the Mismatch-with-other condition, they evaluated these based on the assumed other's preference: The professor's preference in the low-power position, and the student's preference in the high-power position. To provide the participants with some basis to rate the dishes from the other's perspective, they read that the other preferred spicy food. The evaluations provided the Time 1 (T_1) evaluations.

The computer subsequently rank-ordered the participant's T_1 evaluations, from the highest evaluation (rank 1) to the lowest evaluation (rank 10). All participants were subsequently presented with the dishes that were ranked fifth and sixth and asked to choose one of the two. This ensured that participants made a decision that did not

provide an optimal match with the evaluations they had provided. Participants were asked to choose the dish for themselves (Mismatch-with-self condition) or for the other (Mismatch-with-other condition).

After having chosen, participants read a brief description of all ten dishes and were told that experimenters were interested in whether the ratings were different after reading the brief description. It was emphasized that this was not a memory test; participants then evaluated each of the ten dishes again according to their own preferences (Mismatch-with-self condition) or other's preferences (Mismatch-with-other condition) on a 7-point scale. These measures constituted the Time 2 (T_2) ratings. The slight change of the rating scales from a 7-point (T_1) to a 9-point scale (T_2) was intended to prevent participants from simply remembering their ratings at T_1 and using them at T_2 to be consistent between the two measures.

This procedure ensured that for both the dish that the participants had chosen and the dish they had not chosen, we had the participant's evaluation before (T_1) and after having made their decision (T_2). Like Hoshino-Browne et al. (2005), postdecisional attitude change was calculated as the sum of (a) the increase in attractiveness rating for the chosen dish (C) from T_1 to T_2 plus (b) the decrease in attractiveness of the nonchosen dish (NC) from T_1 to T_2 (i.e., $[C_{\{T2\text{-}T1\}}] + [NC_{\{T1\text{-}T2\}}]$). Positive values on this summed measure indicated postdecisional attitude change in the direction of the chosen alternative, in which higher values indicate more change.

As a manipulation check, we assessed perceived power using five items: 'In control', 'in charge,' 'powerful,' 'dominant,' and 'submissive' (reverse coded). Ratings were made on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*); Cronbach's α = .81 (Schmid et al., 2015). After completing a demographics questionnaire, participants were probed for suspicion by asking them what they thought the purpose of the study had been. No participant correctly reported the purpose of the study. Subsequently, participants were debriefed, thanked and paid for their participation.

Results

Manipulation check

Confirming a successful manipulation, participants in the high-power condition felt significantly more powerful ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 0.56$, 95% CI [4.69, 5.01]) than participants in the low-power condition ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.73$, 95% CI [3.25, 3.57]), $F(1, 127) = 157.73$, $p < .001$, η2 p = 0.55.

Postdecisional attitude change

The measure of postdecisional attitude change was submitted to a 2 (Power: Low, high) × 2 (Mismatch: Self, other) ANOVA to test our prediction for the interaction. There was no significant main effect for Power, $F(1, 125) = 0.15$, $p = .697$, or for Mismatch, $F(1, 125) = 0.16$, $p = .688$. As predicted, however, the two-way interaction was significant, $F(1, 125) = 8.28$, $p = .005$, η2 p = 0.06; see Figure 1 for an illustration. In line with our predictions, low-power participants changed their attitude more in the direction of the chosen alternative in the Mismatch-with-other condition ($M = 1.08$, $SD = 1.44$, 95% CI [0.62, 1.54]) than in the Mismatch-with-self condition ($M = 0.30$, $SD = 1.08$, 95% CI [−0.16, 0.76]), $F(1, 125) = 5.43$, $p = .021$, η2 p = 0.04. Among

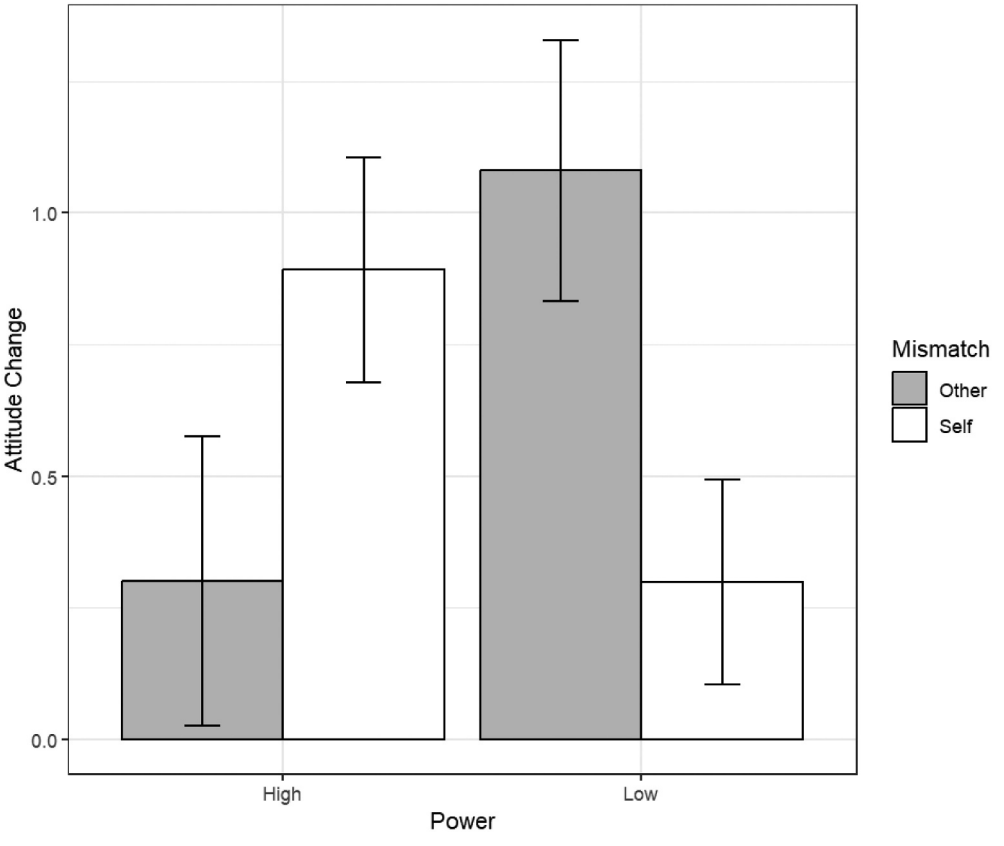

Figure 1. Postdecisional attitude change as a function of power and mismatch in Study 1. Error bars represent Standard Error.

high-power participants, the means indicated more postdecisional attitude change in the direction of the chosen alternative in the Mismatch-with-self condition ($M = 0.89$, $SD = 1.17$, 95% CI [0.40, 1.38]) than in the Mismatch-with-other condition ($M = 0.30$, $SD = 1.60$, 95% CI [−0.18, 0.78]). While this pattern among high-power participants also fitted our predictions, this difference was only marginally significant, $F(1, 125) = 3.03$, $p = .084$, $\eta 2\ p = 0.024$.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 fit with our hypothesis that power moderates postdecisional attitude change. Low-power individuals changed their postdecisional attitude more in the direction of the alternative option they had advocated when this option had been inconsistent with the preference of others (vs. inconsistent with their own preference). High-power individuals showed more postdecisional attitude change in the direction of the option they had advocated when this option had been inconsistent with their own preference (vs. inconsistent with the preference of others).

We obtained these findings with a paradigm that had been developed by Hoshino-Browne et al. (2005) to study cultural effects in cognitive dissonance. It may be relevant to note a limitation of the paradigm in that it required participants to put themselves in the shoes of the professor or the student in a hypothetical scenario. Moreover, it described an interpersonal setting with only one other person to consider. One might wonder whether similar effects would also be obtained in other paradigms and settings. We therefore investigated whether findings would replicate in a non-hypothetical group setting where people are informed about the preferences of their fellow group members (Matz & Wood, 2005). In Study 2, participants engaged in a group discussion setting in which they were actually assigned a high-power position (i.e., the leader of their group) or a low-power position (i.e., a regular member of the group).

Study 2

People can experience cognitive dissonance when fellow group members make decisions or hold opinions that run counter to their own beliefs (Matz & Wood, 2005; see also Glasford et al., 2008). As people's group membership may be part of their self-concept (see, e.g., social identity theory; Ellemers et al., 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), disagreement with other members of the group can result in cognitive dissonance and therefore stimulate postdecisional attitude change (Matz & Wood, 2005).

Building on this notion, we adapted the paradigm of Matz and Wood (2005) to study the effect of power on postdecisional attitude change in a group setting. The setting involved a group discussion on a certain topic where one could choose between two options: A and B. After having indicated their own preference, participants learned the (alleged) preference of their fellow group members. This information was manipulated such that participants either learned that the others preferred the same option as the participant, or that they preferred the other option. To create the mismatch conditions, we followed the procedure of Matz and Wood (2005) and instructed participants to send a message to the other group members. In their message, participants had to advocate either for option A or B, depending on what the other group members were (allegedly) preferring. This setup resulted in two conditions: In the Mismatch-with-others condition, the advocated position mismatched only with the preferences of the others, whereas in the Mismatch-with-self condition, the advocated position mismatched not only with the preferences of the others, but crucially also with the participants' own preferences.

To study the effect of power, participants were either assigned to a high-power position in their group (leader) or a low-power position (regular group member). Participants in the high-power condition learned that – after the discussion would be ended – they could decide whether a group member would have to leave the group: a form of power that was not offered to participants in the low-power condition. Our main interest was in whether power would moderate postdecisional change.

Similar to our reasoning for Study 1, we expected high-power participants, compared to low-power participants, to show more postdecisional attitude change if the position they had advocated did not match their own preference (i.e., in case of mismatch with own and others' preference) than if they had advocated a position that only did not match the preference of the others (i.e., in case of mismatch with only the others' preference).

Method

Participants and design

One hundred twenty-seven undergraduate students from Jiangxi Normal University (M_{age} = 18.98 years, SD_{age} = 1.18 years; 26.8% male) participated for payment (12 yuan, approximately $2). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (Power: Low, high) × 2 (Mismatch: Self, others) between-subjects design. No data were excluded from analyses.

Procedure

Participants were informed that they were a member of a 4-person group, whose members would be referred to as Member A, B, C, and D. The group would engage in an online discussion. One member would be the leader, and the three others would be regular group members. Participants always learned that they were member D. In reality, the other three members did not exist, but answers were generated by the experimenters; following Matz and Wood (2005), Study 3), this setup was used to provide participants with (manipulated) feedback about the preferences of the other members.

In the high-power condition, participants learned that member D would be the group's leader, meaning that the participant would be the leader. In the low-power condition, participants learned that member C would be the group's leader, meaning that the participant was a regular group member. In all conditions, participants learned that the leader would have the power to dismiss one group member of the panel after the discussion. The dismissed member would then receive less money than the others; the three remaining members (including the leader) would all obtain an equally high payment.

The online discussion would be about two topics that each included a choice between two options (A or B). The discussion topics were:

[1] Your friend R is facing a dilemma. R must choose between one of two employees (N or K) to negotiate an important contract. The delegate should be good at both communication and technology. N is only good at communication, and K is only good at technology. Because N and K have personality clashes and no other employee can be assigned, R must appoint one of them to negotiate. To aggravate the dilemma R is facing, if the delegate wins the contract, the other person R hasn't appointed will be fired; if the delegate loses the contract, the delegate will be fired. Your friend R wants to ask for your advice on who should be assigned. Option A is to appoint N; option B is to appoint K.

[2] Your child is running a fever, and you are urgently driving your child to a hospital. There are two roads. The main road takes an average of 20 min to get to the hospital, and there is no traffic jam. The shortcut takes an average of 10 min, and there is a 50% chance of traffic jam. Driving in the traffic jam would take 30 min. Hence, the average expected time on either way is 20 min. Because your child has a very high fever, you cannot run to the hospital halfway, and can only drive to get there. You need to make a choice about which way to go. Option A is to take the main road; option B is to take the shortcut.

Participants were told at the start of the experiment that there would be two topics to discuss, to avoid the expectation that the experiment would end soon after the first topic, and to install the idea that there might be another exchange of information within the group. However, each participant was randomly assigned to read only one of the

scenarios. After reading one topic, participants reported their attitudinal preference (from 0 = *I absolutely support option A* to 100 = *I absolutely support option B*; the neutral midpoint 50 could not be selected). This provided the Time 1 (T_1) ratings. Participants were also asked to write a rationale in one sentence.

Subsequently, participants received (pre-programmed) feedback on the preferences of the others in their group. We manipulated decision mismatch by varying the alleged initial preference of the other group members. In the Mismatch-with-others condition, participants learned that the others had selected the option that was different from their own. Thus, if the participants leaned toward option A, they learned that the others preferred option B, and vice versa. Participants were then asked to persuade the others to change their position (i.e., the position that participants advocated did not match the initial preference of the others). In the Mismatch-with-self condition, participants were informed that the other group members had selected the same option as the participant had (e.g., if participants preferred option A, they learned that the others did too).

In both conditions, participants were thus asked to convince the other group members to change sides by choosing a different option. In the Mismatch-with-others condition, this meant that they were requested to advocate a position that only did not match the others' own preference; in the Mismatch-with-self condition, there was not only a mismatch with the preferences of others in the group, but ALSO with the self (see Table 1). No further rationale was provided for these instructions. The procedure was also designed to prevent any suggestions that might give the impression that the others would be aware of the instruction; so, we did not provide any cues that might suggest that to be the case.

The online exchange of opinions was set up such that each group member would provide a brief statement via the computer. The order ran from A to D; this ensured that the participants would always be the last to provide their statement. Participants in each condition received identical pre-programmed statements of A, B, and C; the sequence of the statements was random. After the participants had written their statement, they were informed that the experimenter was interested in their current attitudes on the two topics. Therefore, they were again asked to indicate their preference; it was stressed that the others would not be informed about these ratings. This constituted our T_2 ratings. Staying close to the paradigm of Matz and Wood (2005), and in contrast to Study 1, the scale for the T2 rating was identical to that of T1 (i.e., a 100-point rating scale).

The dependent variable constituted a measure of position change, with larger values indicating greater change toward the alternative option (i.e., the one not chosen at T_1). To synchronize scores from weak to strong preferences, we calculated T_2-T_1 for scores from 0 to 49 at T_1 (i.e., strong to weak initial preferences for option A), and T_1-T_2 for scores from 51 to 100 at T_1 (i.e., weak to strong initial preferences for option B). This

Table 1. Study 2: potential distribution of option preference at T_1 and which option to advocate.

Mismatch-with-others			Mismatch-with-self		
Self	Others	Advocate	Self	Others	Advocate
A	B	A	A	A	B
B	A	B	B	B	A

procedure resulted in positive values (>0) for moving toward the alternative (initially non-chosen) option (from A to B, or from B to A) and negative values (<0) for moving away from this option, thus strengthening or confirming one's initial decision; a score of 0 represented no attitude change.

Because of the different kinds of mismatch (others and/or self), this had different implications per condition. In the Mismatch-with-others condition, greater values indicated a move toward the other group members' first position (the non-advocated option), whereas lower values indicated a confirmation/strengthening of the participants' first position. In the Mismatch-with-self condition, greater values indicated a move toward the advocated alternative option (away from one's own and others' first position), and lower values a confirmation/strengthening of the own *and* others' first position.

Finally, after completing a manipulation check (one item: 'I feel powerful'; 7-point scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) and a demographics questionnaire, participants were probed for suspicion by asking them what they thought the purpose of the study had been. No participants correctly reported the purpose of the study. Subsequently, participants were debriefed, thanked and paid for their participation.

Results

Manipulation check

As expected, participants in the high-power condition felt significantly more powerful ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.06$, 95% CI [4.26, 4.82]) than participants in the low-power condition ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.17$, 95% CI [3.36, 3.92]), $F(1, 125) = 20.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2$ p = 0.14.

Postdecisional attitude change

A 2(Power: High, low) × 2 (Mismatch: Self, others) ANOVA on the postdecisional attitude change measure showed a significant interaction, $F(1, 123) = 12.97$, $p < .001$, $\eta 2$ $p = 0.10$.[1] The main effect of the topics and its interaction effects with other variables are not significant; therefore, they are not included in the analysis. The patterns we observed were in line with our predictions. High-power participants changed their attitudes more in the direction of the position they had advocated to the other members in the Mismatch-with-self condition ($M = 11.72$, $SD = 17.20$, 95% CI [6.35, 17.08]) than in the Mismatch-with-others condition ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 11.48$, 95% CI [−2.74, 8.16]), $F(1, 123) = 5.44$, $p = .021$, $\eta 2$ $p = 0.04$. Low-power participants changed their attitudes more in the direction of the opposite position in the Mismatch-with-others condition ($M = 13.70$, $SD = 19.11$, 95% CI [8.16, 19.24]) than in the Mismatch-with-self condition ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 12.56$, 95% CI [−2.12, 8.29]), $F(1, 123) = 7.63$, $p = .007$, $\eta 2$ p = 0.06 (see Figure 2).

Discussion

The results of Study 2, obtained in a non-hypothetical group setting, are in line with the findings that were obtained in Study 1, which relied on a hypothetical scenario setting. High-power participants changed their attitude more when the position they had advocated had not matched their own and other's preference than if it only mismatched the preference of the others. This fits with the proposition that high-power people are more agentic and self-oriented (Dubois et al., 2015; Righetti et al.,

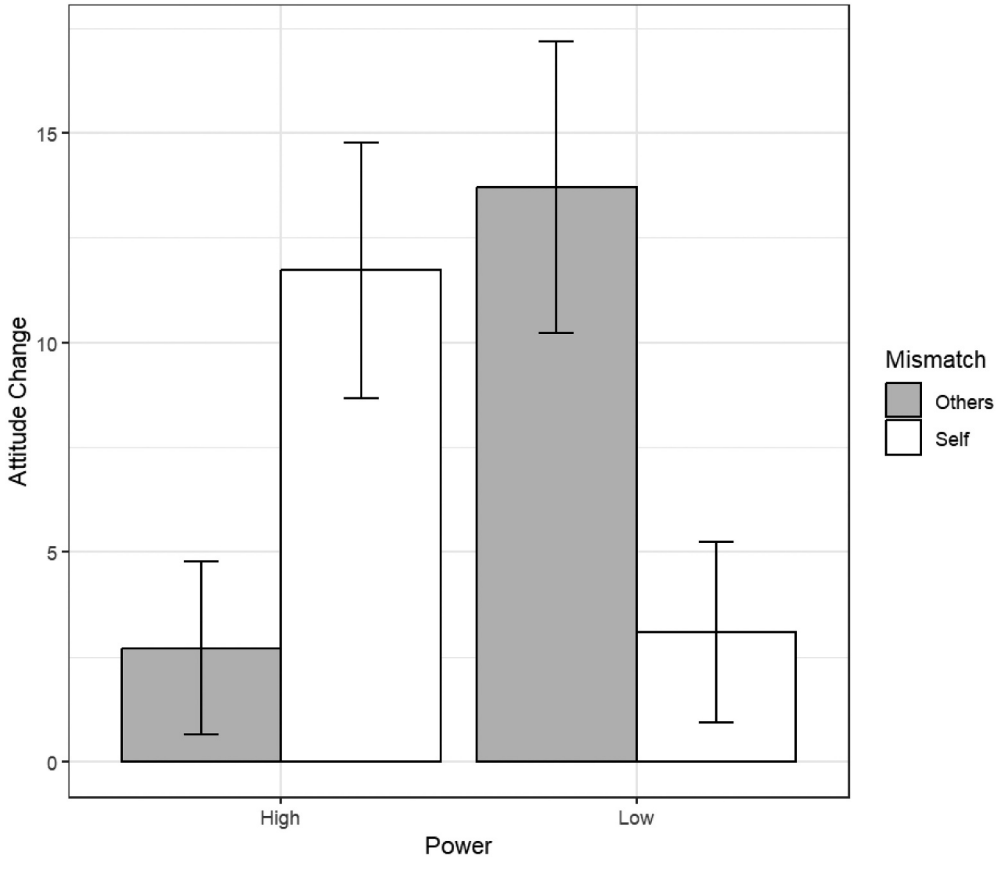

Figure 2. Postdecisional attitude change as a function of power and mismatch in Study 2. Error bars represent Standard Error.

2015; Rus et al., 2010), and therefore especially experience distress and dissonance when having made a decision that does not match their own preference. Changing their attitude (i.e., preference) toward the position they had just advocated, enabled them to reduce that dissonance.

The findings regarding the low-power position also fit our reasoning. Low-power participants changed their attitudes more when the position they had advocated had matched their own preference but not the preference of the others. In this case, it might feel as if they had just amplified the discord in the group. Changing their own attitude toward the preference of the others might be a way to reduce this disconnect and go for the more harmonious solution; a postdecisional change that would fit their communal and other-oriented perspective (Dubois et al., 2015; Righetti et al., 2015; Rus et al., 2010).

We follow up on these findings by exploring potential moderators in Study 3. For that purpose, we relied on the general idea that cognitive dissonance may be lower if people have affirmed their key values (Steele & Liu, 1983; Townsend & Sood, 2012).

Study 3

The findings we observed in Studies 1 and 2 fit with the idea that low-power individuals are more focused on how their decisions are (mis)matched with the preference of others, whereas high-power individuals are more focused on their own preferences. To further verify that such a self- versus other-focus indeed contributes to explaining postdecisional attitude change, we used an induction of self-affirmation in Study 3. Self-affirmations are acts that demonstrate one's adequacy and thereby allow people to maintain their self-integrity, consequently serving as buffers against threats (for an overview, see Cohen & Sherman, 2014).

Providing participants with a possibility to affirm their key values can serve to reduce experienced dissonance (Steele & Liu, 1983; Townsend & Sood, 2012). The idea is that inconsistency or disagreement is less likely to lead to dissonance and thus to lower levels of postdecisional attitude change if people actively affirm values that are important to them. Fitting the 'situational, in-the-moment perspective on the self' (Chen, 2020), research has shown that these values may be contingent on the situation, and different for low- and high-power individuals: High-power individuals are more likely to associate themselves with competence, whereas low-power individuals are more likely to associate themselves with warmth (e.g., Cuddy et al., 2008; Fiske, 2018, Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; Rucker et al., 2012). This suggestion also accords and complements prior research on persuasive communication showing that high-power individuals are persuaded more by competence information and low-power individuals by warmth information (Dubois et al., 2016).

Note that the competence-warmth distinction also maps onto the self-other distinction and the agency-communion dimension (see Fiske, 2018). Competence refers more to the self and agency, whereas warmth is connected to a focus on others, and a sense of communion. Given that people's self-concept is dynamic and sensitive to situational cues, it can be reasoned that affirming competence may be more effective for reducing dissonance within high-power individuals, whereas affirming warmth may be more effective for low-power individuals. We therefore let people affirm a value of competence or a value of warmth, with a control condition in which no affirmation took place – a procedure again adapted from Hoshino-Browne et al. (2005); for other studies on value affirmation see, e.g., Cohen and Sherman (2014). If high-power individuals indeed experience cognitive dissonance from actions that do not match their own preferences, their attitudes should change less after affirming the self-relevant value of competence. In a similar vein, affirming the other-relevant value of warmth should reduce postdecisional attitude change for low-power individuals.

Method

Participants and design

One hundred eighty-four undergraduate students from Jiangxi Normal University (M_{age} = 19.15 years, SD_{age} = 1.28 years; 27.2% male) participated for payment (12 yuan, approximately about $2). All participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions in a 2 (Power: High power, low power) × 3 (Affirmation: Competence, warmth, no affirmation) between-subjects design. No data were excluded from analyses.

Procedure

Experimental materials and procedures were the same as in Study 2, with a few important modifications. Based on the results of Study 2, and to run a more (cost-)efficient study, all high-power participants now advocated positions that did not match their own and others' preference, and all low-power participants advocated positions that did not match the other group members' positions. Before the second attitude rating, participants were asked to choose one of two values that fitted themselves and wrote a paragraph about why this value applied to them. In the competence affirmation condition, the two values were 'I am competent' and 'I am hopeless.' We included the 'I am hopeless' option to present the participants with an option to choose, but assumed and found that none of the participants would say that they are hopeless. In the warmth affirmation condition the two values were 'I am friendly' and 'I am hopeless.' Here too, none of the participants chose the latter value. In the no affirmation condition, no values were presented (see Study 2).

Results

Manipulation check

As expected, participants in the high-power condition felt significantly more powerful ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.04$, 95% CI [4.50, 4.99]) than participants in the low-power condition ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.29$, 95% CI [3.41, 3.89]), $F(1, 182) = 39.77$, $p < .001$, η2 p = 0.18.

Postdecisional attitude change

A 2(Power: Low, high) × 3 (Affirmation: Competence, warmth, no affirmation) ANOVA yielded a significant main effect of Affirmation, $F(2, 178) = 3.90$, $p = .022$, η2 p = 0.04. This main effect was qualified by a significant Power × Affirmation interaction, $F(2, 178) = 6.67$, $p = .002$, η2 p = 0.070 (see Figure 3). The main effect of Power was not significant, $F(2, 178) = 0.10$, $p = .748$. The main effect of the topics and its interaction effects with other variables were not statistically significant; therefore, they were not included in the analysis.

To interpret the interaction, we conducted two separate one-way ANOVAs for the high-power and the low-power conditions. Both analyses showed significant differences between affirmation conditions, $F(2, 87) = 4.63$, $p = .012$, η2 p = 0.10, and $F(2, 91) = 5.81$, $p = .004$, η2 p = 0.11, respectively. High-power participants showed less postdecisional attitude change in the competence affirmation condition ($M = 0.90$, $SD = 11.85$, 95% CI [−4.41, 6.20]) than in the warmth affirmation condition ($M = 10.70$, $SD = 13.60$, 95% CI [5.48, 15.92]) and the no affirmation condition ($M = 10.84$, $SD = 17.03$, 95% CI [5.71, 15.97]), $t(87) = 2.62$, $p = .031$, Cohen's $d = 0.68$, 95% CI [0.05, 1.32], and $t(87) = 2.68$, $p = .027$, Cohen's $d = 0.69$, 95% CI [0.06, 1.32], respectively. Low-power participants showed less postdecisional attitude change in the warmth affirmation condition ($M = 0.34$, $SD = 12.19$, 95% CI [−4.49, 5.18]) than in the competence affirmation condition ($M = 8.76$, $SD = 12.80$, 95% CI [4.22, 13.29]) and the no affirmation condition ($M = 11.38$, $SD = 14.21$, 95% CI [6.77, 15.98]), $t(91) = 2.52$, $p = .040$, Cohen's $d = 0.64$, 95% CI [0.02, 1.26], and $t(91) = 3.28$, $p = .004$, Cohen's $d = 0.84$, 95% CI [0.22, 1.47], respectively.

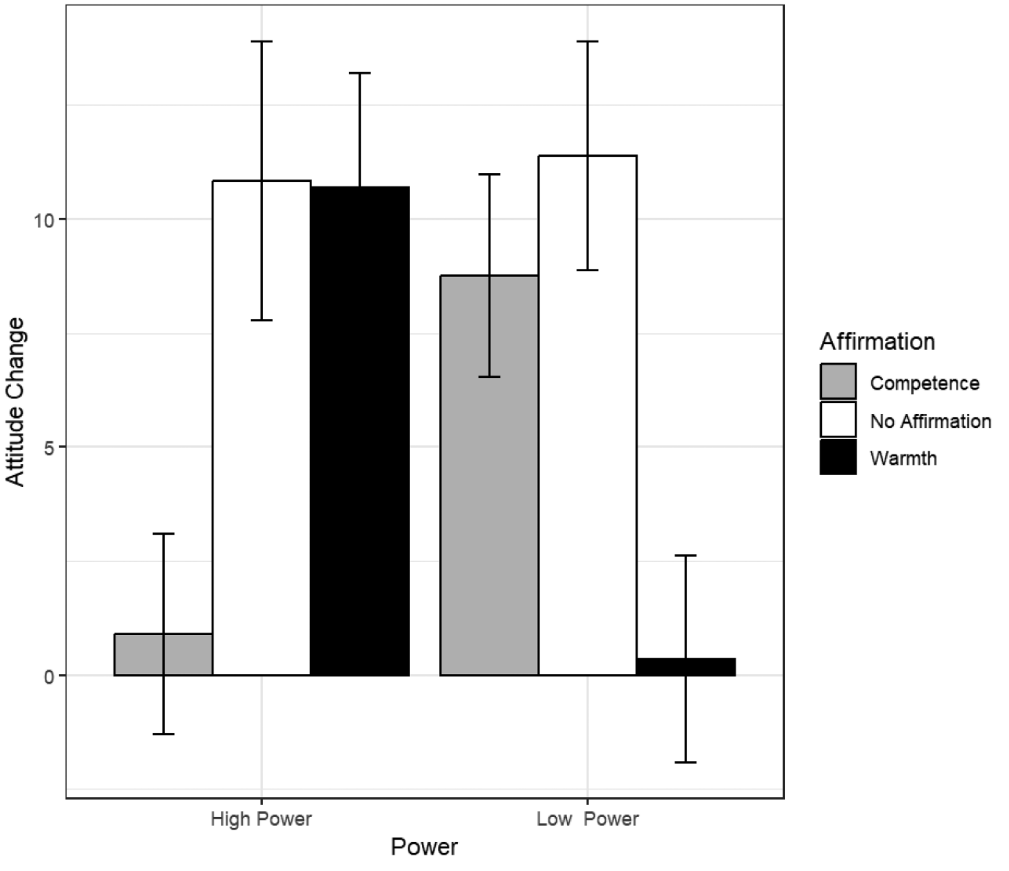

Figure 3. Postdecisional attitude change as a function of power and affirmation in Study 3. Error bars represent Standard Error.

Discussion

The results of Study 3 provide further support that the moderating effect of high versus low power on postdecisional attitude change after mismatches with own versus others' preferences can be explained by a differential focus on the self or on others (cf. Fast et al., 2012; Rucker et al., 2012; Tost et al., 2012). Facing a mismatch of their decision with their own and others' preference, high-power individuals showed less attitude change after affirming the self-related value of competence. Facing a mismatch of their decision with others' preference, low-power individuals showed less attitude change after affirming the other-related value of warmth.

General discussion

Across three studies, we found that people with different levels of power differed in terms of attitude change after making decisions when confronted with preference mismatches. Both high-power and low-power individuals engaged in justifying their decisions, but in their own distinct ways. Studies 1 and 2 consistently found that high-power individuals

showed more postdecisional attitude change when their actions did not match with their own preferences, whereas low-power individuals showed more attitude change when their actions did not only match the preference of others. When there is disagreement with oneself and other group members at the same time, external attribution may help low-power individuals reduce cognitive dissonance (Study 2). Using value affirmation, Study 3 underlined that this may be explained from a differentiated self-other focus as associated with feeling high or low in power.

Our combined results corroborate the general assumption that high-power individuals are less dependent on others, are less affected by external influences, and usually pursue their own goals; low-power individuals usually maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships with others to obtain resources (Fiske, 1993; Keltner et al., 2003; Laurin et al., 2016). High-power individuals are thought to have more agentic orientations, separating themselves from others and emphasizing their own goals and abilities, whereas low-power individuals have more communal orientations and connect themselves to others, emphasizing social connection and cooperation (Dubois et al., 2016; Rucker & Galinsky, 2016). Here, we add that this extends to cognitive dissonance. Interpreting postdecisional attitude change as a strategy to deal with cognitive dissonance, our findings fit the idea that high-power individuals are more likely to experience cognitive dissonance when their decisions do not match their own preference, whereas low-power individuals are more likely to experience cognitive dissonance when their decisions do not match others' preferences.

The findings of Experiment 3 provided further support for this reasoning. Building on the idea that the self-related value of competence is more important to high-power individuals and the more socially related value of warmth is more important to low-power individuals (see, e.g., Dubois et al., 2016), we investigated the effect of affirming exactly these values on postdecisional change. That affirming competence reduced the postdecisional change of high-power individuals who realized that their decision had not matched their own preference suggested that they are primarily focused on the self. That affirming warmth reduced the postdecisional change of low-power individuals who realized that their decision had not matched the preference of others fits the idea that low-power individuals are more focused on others.

The current findings provide nuance to previous research suggesting that high-power individuals are reluctant to change their attitudes after receiving persuasive information or advice (e.g., Briñol et al., 2007; Tost et al., 2012). They may be reluctant to do so when believing others want to influence their attitudes – they are, however, willing to do so when their own decisions 'tell' them that it may be good to change their attitudes, namely when they can thereby reduce the cognitive dissonance between their decisions and their own attitudes.

Limitations and future research

Although the findings in the current research support our reasoning, it is also appropriate to identify some limitations in our approach that could be addressed in future research. First, we are confident that our small-to-medium effect sizes, sometimes bordering on large (Study 2), are comparable to similar studies in the field (e.g., Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005; Matz & Wood, 2005). However, given that our

sensitivity analyses indicated appropriate power for medium effects, larger sample sizes would certainly help to corroborate and strengthen our conclusions. Second, it is relevant to note that we drew our samples from undergraduate students who were put in low- versus high-power positions either by imagining themselves being in a situation (Study 1; taking the role of undergraduate or professor) or by participating in a discussion (as group member with or without power to dismiss other members). While our manipulation checks indicated that we successfully induced low and high power, it may be useful to also study power in different environments, for example in more professional or business settings where people actually occupy high- or low-power positions. Future research could examine if our findings can be generalized to such settings. Third, our studies were conducted in China. Given that self-construal and power perceptions can be culture-dependent (e.g., Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005; Torelli et al., 2020), it would be interesting for future research to assess to what extent our findings generalize to other countries and cultures.

Fourth, the fact that we obtained the findings of Study 2 with different manipulations of power and preference mismatch than in Study 1 is informative and may be considered a strength. At the same time, however, it may be good to discuss some methodological aspects that are unique to the paradigm for Study 2 compared to Study 1. Due to the use of a group setting in Study 2, in the Mismatch-with-self condition, participants had to advocate for a position that was not only inconsistent with their own preference, but also with the preference of others in their group. Thus, participants had to advocate for a position that nobody wanted, which is different from our manipulation in Study 1. The careful reader can wonder to what extent the reaction in the high-power condition can be explained by this particularity in our study design. Here, it is important to keep in mind that the instructions that we provided to participants prevented any suggestions that might give the impression to participants that the others in the group would be aware of the double inconsistency in the Mismatch-with-self condition. Moreover, we believe that it would be more difficult to attribute our findings to a higher susceptibility of high-power individuals to double inconsistencies than to our proposition – that high power makes individuals more sensitive to dissonance arising from acting against their own preferences. Nevertheless, future research should explore the possibility that in group settings high power may lead to a range of reactions when individuals are asked to advocate for a position they do not personally support (i.e., resistance, face-saving, maintaining authority) depending on the particularities of the group setting.

Future research could also put our findings in a broader perspective. In the current studies we focused on one strategy that people may use to deal with cognitive decisions: Postdecisional attitude change. Would the relations we found here also apply to other strategies to reduce cognitive dissonance? For example, how about the impact of power on adjusting behavior, trivialization, justifying one's behavior, ignoring information? Would, for example, high-power individuals also be tempted to engage more in trivialization when finding out that their decision did not match their own preference? And would low-power individuals be more likely to resort to such a strategy after a mismatch with the preferences of others? Studies like these may contribute to a better understanding of the pervasive impact of power; not only in terms of its effect on the decisions people make, but also regarding the different strategies people use after decisions have been made.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, our studies extend the findings of Hoshino-Browne et al. (2005) by investigating attitude change after a decision mismatch beyond the context of direct cultural comparisons, focusing on the attenuating influence of self-affirmation as a moderator. To this, we added the reasoning of Galinsky et al. (2008) who suggested that feeling high in power can lead to dissonance arising from the perception of having control over one's own decisions, which would be less for those feeling low in power. We took this one step further by examining attitude change in interpersonal and group settings. In this context too, we found that the self shapes the attitudes of the powerful, whereas others more strongly shape the attitudes of the less powerful.

Note

1. The difference between the two topics was not significant, and therefore not included in these analyses; we aggregated the mean score for the two topics.

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