


SHORT NOTE

Does power boost happiness? The relative importance of personal versus social power in two cultures

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Researchers have revealed that power has both independent and interdependent aspects, and how the two dimensions are activated depends on contextual goals and values. In the present study, we tested the differential effects of power on happiness in two cultures that differ in their relative emphasis of social relations. We hypothesized that in an interdependent culture (South Korea), power based on interpersonal connectedness (i.e., social power) would enhance happiness more than would power that stems from independence from others (i.e., personal power). In contrast, in an independent culture (America), we examined whether personal power would bring more happiness than would social power. Findings showed that social power increased life satisfaction but personal power decreased affective well-being among Korean participants. In contrast, American participants' personal power enhanced their subjective well-being, but their well-being did not differ by levels of social power. Implications of these findings for types of power, happiness, and culture are discussed.

Keywords: culture, personal power, social power, subjective well-being

Although power resides in social relations (Emerson, 1962), possessing power also creates a sense of separation and independence from others (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008). Due to the independent and interdependent features of power (Lee & Tiedens, 2001), conflicting results on the effects of power have been found in the interpersonal domain. Beneficial effects of power in social relations have been revealed. For instance, power promotes connection with others following social exclusion (Narayanan, Tai, & Kinias, 2013), facilitates the effects of prosocial orientation on empathic accuracy in interpersonal interaction (Côté et al., 2011), and promotes self-regulatory resources (DeWall, Baumeister, Mead, & Vohs, 2011). On the contrary, power leads people to experience more subjective distance from others (Magee & Smith, 2013) and yields deleterious effects in the interpersonal domain, such as stereotypical judgements (Fiske, 1993) and devaluation of people (Kipnis, 1976).

The differential consequences largely rely on how interpersonal relations are defined in acquiring and retaining power (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Overbeck & Park, 2001). Power activates dominant goals in a

given situation (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003), and the extent to which the context prioritizes social obligations and group harmony affects powerholders' cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns in interpersonal domains (Chen et al., 2001; Keltner et al., 2003). Power associated with social responsibility and obligation increases interdependence whereas agentic power reduces interdependence with others (Emerson, 1962; Overbeck & Park, 2001). Referring to the former as social power and the latter as personal power, Lammers, Stoker, and Stapel (2009) asserted that the distinction between the two types of power is particularly useful in understanding the contrasting effects of power in interpersonal relations. Studies comparing social power and personal power have demonstrated that social power facilitates more prosocial behavior and less stereotyping whereas personal power leads to stereotypical thinking and more self-interest (Chen et al., 2001; Lammers et al., 2009; Overbeck & Park, 2001).

Social power is defined as an ability to influence and exercise control over others (Overbeck & Park, 2001). It can be best described as a relational dynamic among individuals rather than as a resource held by an individual (Emerson, 1962). People with high social power feel more responsible and interconnected with others because social power originates from social relations (Lammers et al., 2009; Overbeck & Park, 2001). The fact that social responsibility is a central element in conceptualizing social power (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003;

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Overbeck & Park, 2001) distinguishes it from mere influence (Anderson & Brion, 2014), which primarily aims to increase one's efficacy (Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002). Although people with high social power often have an increased capacity to influence others (Keltner et al., 2003), they do not exercise this capacity on all occasions. Rather, social power leads to more influence only when influencing others is instrumental to maintaining social power (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008).

Unlike social power that focuses on interpersonal connections, personal power refers to the ability to act for oneself (Overbeck & Park, 2001) that protects people from being overly influenced by others (Galinsky et al., 2008). Valuable resources such as competence and money possessed by powerful people enable them to be independent of others (Lee & Tiedens, 2002). Those with high personal power prefer independent and solitary activities that create social distance from people with low power (Lammers et al., 2012). Personal power is obtained through agentic actions (Overbeck & Park, 2001), and conceptually overlaps with a sense of control (Fiske, 1993) and autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When personal power is low, competence drops, which in turn leads people to become more dependent on others (Lee & Tiedens, 2002; Overbeck & Park, 2001).

Distinct cultural goals and values lead to different perceptions of power and to different consequences of possessing power (Miyamoto & Wilken, 2010; Mondillon et al., 2005; Zhong, Magee, Maddux, & Galinsky, 2006). Members of collectivistic cultures define power in a more relational perspective (e.g., social power), and they believe power stems from social responsibility and obligations (Mondillon et al., 2005; Zhong et al., 2006). Individualistic cultural members hold a power concept that is more consistent with personal power, as they think competency and freedom from the influence of others are the basis of power (Mondillon et al., 2005). Culture moderates cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns associated with power. In American cultures, influencing others requires an analytic perceptual style that allows focusing on individuals' own goals whereas it requires a holistic perceptual style that attends to the demands of others in Japanese cultures (Miyamoto & Wilken, 2010). Judgments of the emotional expression of those with power also vary across cultures. For instance, Americans believe that powerholders should explicitly express positive feelings such as joy and pride whereas the Japanese think that powerful people should tone down their expressions of positive emotions (Mondillon et al., 2005). With respect to behavioral patterns, the positive relationship between power and approach behavior typically found among Westerners is not found among East Asians because power heightens a sense of responsibility and

intragroup harmony among East Asians (Zhong et al., 2006).

In the present study, we aimed to compare the effects of personal power and social power on happiness across cultures. Personal characteristics that align with cultural values affect individuals' happiness (Diener, 2012; Nezlek, Kafetsios, & Smith, 2008). Hence, we hypothesized that the type of power (personal vs. social) that affects individual's happiness may differ between cultures. Research has shown that factors that promote and maintain one's independence and autonomy are critical to Westerners' happiness whereas social components such as interpersonal connectedness and fulfillment of social responsibilities are decisive predictors of East Asians' happiness (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). In light of such cultural differences, some have speculated that power and happiness may not be associated strongly in East Asian cultures because power tends to desensitize one's awareness of the social context (Kraus, Chen, & Keltner, 2011). In fact, although power predicts subjective well-being in the West (Kifer, Heller, Perunovic, & Galinsky, 2013), inconsistent findings on the relation between power and happiness in Asian cultural group members have been found (Datu & Reyes, 2015; Wang, 2015). For instance, a sense of power was positively related to satisfaction via increased authenticity in a sample of Chinese working adults (Wang, 2015), but a negative relation between power and happiness was observed in college students in the Philippines (Datu & Reyes, 2015). Power and happiness may have different associations that are contingent on the prevalent values and norms of the culture, and a more nuanced approach to untangle the effects of power on happiness is needed.

To examine our hypotheses, we used a sample of working adults in two cultures. One important property of power is that it is defined with reference to a particular relationship or group (Emerson, 1962). In organizational settings, where power differences are ubiquitous (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), working adults are likely to have varying levels of experiences of power (Anderson & Brion, 2014). Because power is a central feature of social and organizational life with direct influence on employees' job security and financial rewards (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), understanding working adults' psychological experiences of power is important (Anderson & Brion, 2014). Using working adult samples, we conducted a rare cross-cultural experimental study on the effects of power on happiness.

The present study was driven by the idea that a distinction between social versus personal power may clarify our understanding of the effects of power on happiness across cultures. We hypothesized that in interdependent cultures such as South Korea, happiness would associate more with social than personal power.

In contrast, possessing a sense of personal power might be more important than social power to Americans' happiness. We examined how the two dimensions of power relate with the affective and cognitive (i.e., life satisfaction) components of subjective well-being in the United States and in Korea.

Method

Participants were 170 Koreans (male: 46.4%; female: 53.6%) and 164 Americans (in the U.S.) (male: 60.6%; female: 39.4%). Both samples were collected from paid online survey Web sites, and participation was restricted to those who self-identified as working adults aged 25 to 35 years. The average age of the Korean participants was 32.04 years ($SD = 3.21$) and that of the American participants was 28.70 years ($SD = 4.91$). The ethnic composition of the American sample was 80.0% European American, 15.2% African American, and 4.3% Latin American.

Measures

Social power and personal power. We manipulated two types of power (social and personal) using an essay task adapted from previous research (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Lammers et al., 2009). Participants in the high social power condition were instructed to recall an experience "in which you had power over others and you were in charge of others. This means that you led others and were responsible for them." In the low social power condition, participants were asked to write about an event "in which someone else had power over you. This means that you were led by others and therefore they were responsible for you." To prime personal power, participants in the high personal power condition were asked to think of an incident "in which you personally had power, where you were independent from the influence of others." Participants in the low personal power condition were instructed to recall an event "in which someone else personally had power over you. That is an event in which someone else controlled you and you were not free to determine what you want to do. In the situation, you had to be dependent on the powerholders because you lacked the ability and resources to do what you wanted to do." For manipulation checks, participants completed an 8-item social and personal power measure on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*) (Lammers et al., 2009). Sample items include "I felt in charge of others" for social power (Koreans: $\alpha = .67$, Americans: $\alpha = .93$) and "I felt independent" for personal power (Koreans: $\alpha = .93$, Americans: $\alpha = .94$).

Life satisfaction. We measured life satisfaction with the five items on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to

7 (*strongly agree*) from the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) Alpha coefficients for this scale were .90 for the Koreans and .91 for the Americans.

Affective well-being. Affective well-being was assessed with the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The PANAS includes 10 positive emotion items and 10 negative emotion items, all measured on a Likert scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). An overall affective well-being measure was obtained by subtracting the average of the negative emotion items from the average of the positive emotion items. Alpha coefficients for the PANAS were .81 for the Koreans and .83 for the Americans.

Results

Sample Characteristics and Manipulation Checks

Korean participants ($M = 32.04$, $SD = 3.21$) were older than the American participants ($M = 28.70$, $SD = 4.91$), $F(1, 332) = 54.33$, $p < .001$, and the gender proportion of the two samples was comparable, $\chi^2(1, N = 334) = 2.86$, $p = .091$. The manipulation check items confirmed that the power priming was effective. Participants in the high social power condition ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.12$) reported a higher sense of social power than did those in the low social power condition ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.39$), $F(1, 171) = 93.55$, $p < .001$. Participants in the high personal power condition ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.18$), likewise, reported a stronger sense of personal power than did those in the low personal power condition ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.35$), $F(1, 159) = 185.98$, $p < .001$. A main effect of culture was not found on either social power, $F(1, 171) = 0.02$, $p = .891$, or personal power, $F(1, 159) = 0.25$, $p = .620$. Overall, the current power priming manipulations seemed successful in creating the desired effects in both cultural groups.

Life Satisfaction

We performed a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Power Level: high, low \times Power Type: social, personal \times Culture: Korean, American) between-person analysis of variance (ANOVA) on respondents' life satisfaction judgement. The means are presented in Table 1. There was a marginally significant difference in levels of life satisfaction between those with high power ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.38$) and those with low power ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.41$), $F(1, 332) = 2.93$, $p = .088$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, and Americans were more satisfied with their life ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.44$) than were Koreans ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 1.15$), $F(1, 332) = 56.59$, $p < .001$,

$\eta_p^2 = .15$. The main effect of power type was not significant, $F(1, 332) = 0.59, p = .218$.

Most central to the current interest, the expected three-way interaction emerged, $F(1, 326) = 10.35, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Among Koreans, the Power Level \times Power Type interaction was marginally significant, $F(1, 166) = 2.43, p = .067, \eta_p^2 = .04$, such that Koreans with high social power reported higher life satisfaction ($M = 4.00, SD = 1.12$) than did those with low social power ($M = 3.40, SD = 1.06$), $t(84) = 2.51, p = .014, d = 0.55$. Level of personal power did not relate with Koreans' life satisfaction, $t(82) = 1.15, p = .254$. In contrast, the Power Level \times Power Type interaction was not significant in the American sample, $F(1, 158) = 0.76, p = .385$. There was a marginally significant trend in which personal power increased Americans' life satisfaction, $t(75) = 1.80, p = .075, d = 0.41$, but social power did not, $t(85) = 0.69, p = .490$.

Additional analyses of the other interactive effects showed that the Power Type \times Culture interaction was significant in high power conditions, $F(1, 171) = 6.89, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = .04$, but not in low power conditions, $F(1, 155) = 0.76, p = .385$. Koreans' life satisfaction was marginally more influenced by their social power than by their personal power, $t(89) = 1.91, p = .059$, but Americans' life satisfaction was marginally more affected by personal power than by social power, $t(82) = 1.80, p = .075$. We also found a significant Power Level \times Culture interaction in the personal power conditions, $F(1, 157) = 4.59, p = .034, \eta_p^2 = .03$, but not in the social power conditions. $F(1, 169) = 1.53, p = .218$. Although Americans' life satisfaction was marginally increased by personal power, $t(75) = 1.80, p = .076$, Koreans' life satisfaction was not affected by personal power, $t(82) = 1.15, p = .254$.

Affective Well-Being

We also conducted a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Power Level: high, low \times Power Type: social, personal \times Culture: Korean,

American) ANOVA on affective well-being. Results showed that the Americans felt higher levels of affective well-being ($M = 3.74, SD = 0.74$) than did the Koreans ($M = 2.74, SD = 0.60$), $F(1, 332) = 186.34, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .38$. No other main effects were observed.

Again, the expected three-way interaction emerged, $F(1, 326) = 30.95, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$. Decomposing the three-way interaction, we found that the two-way Power Level \times Type interaction was significant among Americans, $F(1, 160) = 5.24, p = .023, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Americans with high personal power ($M = 4.07, SD = 0.60$) reported higher affective well-being than did their counterparts ($M = 3.59, SD = 0.77$), $t(75) = 3.02, p = .004, d = 0.69$, but promoting or decreasing social power did not impact Americans' affective well-being, $t(85) = 0.28, p = .778$. The significant Power Level \times Type interaction on affective well-being also was observed among Koreans, $F(1, 166) = 3.85, p = .048, \eta_p^2 = .07$, but the direction was reversed. Interestingly, Koreans with high personal power ($M = 2.48, SD = 0.69$) were less happy than were those with low personal power ($M = 2.88, SD = 0.47$), $t(82) = 3.08, p = .003, d = 0.68$. Social power did not influence the levels of Koreans' affective well-being, $t(84) = 0.34, p = .737$.

The Power Type \times Culture interaction on affective well-being also was significant in high power conditions, $F(1, 171) = 13.02, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$, but not in the low power conditions, $F(1, 155) = 1.01, p = .316$. Koreans' social power affected their affective well-being more than did personal power, $t(89) = 2.39, p = .019$, whereas Americans' personal power influenced their affective well-being more than did social power, $t(82) = 2.68, p = .009$. In addition, there was a significant Power Level \times Culture interaction in the personal power conditions, $F(1, 157) = 18.61, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$, but not in the social power conditions, $F(1, 169) = 0.12, p = .730$. Americans' affective well-being was promoted by their personal power, $t(75) = 3.01, p = .004$, but Koreans' affective well-being was

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations (in parentheses) of Life Satisfaction and Affective Well-Being for Power Conditions

	Life satisfaction				Affective well-being			
	Social power		Personal power		Social power		Personal power	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Korean	3.40 (1.06)	4.00 (1.12)	3.82 (1.10)	3.53 (1.24)	2.81 (0.55)	2.77 (0.60)	2.88 (0.47)	2.48 (0.69)
American	4.49 (1.51)	4.70 (1.34)	4.64 (1.56)	5.22 (1.27)	3.69 (0.70)	3.65 (0.80)	3.59 (0.77)	4.07 (0.60)

decreased by their sense of personal power. $t(82) = 3.08$, $p = .003$.

Last, we examined the hypotheses with a sample of non-European Americans in the American participants. The proportion of European Americans ($n = 131$) and non-European American participants ($n = 33$) across four conditions (e.g., Power Type \times Level) was comparable, $\chi^2(3, n = 164) = 1.61$, $p = .657$. Results showed that non-European Americans were marginally more satisfied with their life when they perceive high social power ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.08$) than low social power ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.21$), $t(13) = 1.99$, $p = .071$, but their affective well-being did not differ between the low ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.92$) and the high social power conditions ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.71$), $t(13) = 0.47$, $p = .642$. Their personal power did not have a significant influence on their judgements on life satisfaction, $t(16) = 0.03$, $p = .974$, or affective well-being, $t(16) = 0.31$, $p = .763$. Overall, the findings are more in line with those of Korean participants rather than with those of European American participants. When non-European American participants were excluded from the American participants, the results more strongly supported the hypothesized relationships; European Americans' personal power increased both life satisfaction, $t(58) = 2.23$, $p = .029$, $d = 0.58$, and affective well-being, $t(58) = 3.48$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.91$, but their life satisfaction, $t(71) = 0.27$, $p = .785$, and affective well-being, $t(71) = 0.42$, $p = .677$, did not differ by their social power.

Discussion

The present findings highlight the role of culture in how happiness is associated with feelings of power. As suggested by prior findings, a general sense of power alone did not guarantee positive feelings (Smith & Bargh, 2008); rather, cultural values seemed to moderate how the different aspects of power (personal vs. social) predict an individual's happiness (Fulmer et al., 2010).

The findings indicate that personal power was more influential in increasing the happiness of Western cultural group members than was social power. In past work on power and well-being, based mostly on Western samples, power has been implicitly assumed as a psychological experience residing essentially within the self. It is likely that this inner, agentic aspect of holding power, rather than exerting influence on others, promoted happiness in prior research. In fact, as suggested in the literature, personal power may be the ultimate goal in the West (Lammers, Stoker, Rink, & Galinsky, 2016; Van Dijke & Poppe, 2006), for which social power is sought as a means (Van Dijke & Poppe, 2006).

However, the picture might need some revisions in Eastern cultural contexts. Power based on social connections and responsibility increased Koreans' life satisfaction whereas feelings of power based on independence and separation from others decreased their affective well-being. These findings are consistent with the contention that feelings of interpersonal engagement are inextricable from the East Asian's sense of happiness (e.g., Kitayama et al., 2000; Suh & Koo, 2008). Although having power is generally considered as a desirable state (Zhong et al., 2006), the path from a sense of power to happiness seems to be shaped by the cultural terrain. It appears that a sense of power that may potentially jeopardize social functioning may lead to complicated and even negative outcomes in cultures in which happiness is centered heavily on relationships with others.

At a more nuanced level, the two power concepts seemed to differently predict the cognitive versus the affective aspects of happiness in the two cultures. Social power was more predictive of the cognitive, but not the affective, aspects of happiness in Korea. For Americans, personal power was relevant to the affective, but not the cognitive, facets of happiness. Past findings have shown that affective experiences are weighed more heavily in the global well-being judgements of individualist cultural members rather than in those of collectivist cultural members (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). Might it be that the sense of social power more likely activates the cognitive aspects rather than the affective aspects of self-experience, and vice versa, in cases of personal power? Another possibility is that personal power activates relatively socially disengaged emotions (e.g., pride), which more directly elevates the emotional happiness of Americans than that of Koreans (cf. Kitayama et al., 2000). Whether the personal versus social aspects of power contain different degrees of affective/cognitive elements is a novel question that seems worthy of future attention.

As for the future, it may be desirable to also consider the situation-specific effects on the power and happiness association. Goals in certain proximal contexts (e.g., workplace), for instance, may play a decisive role in the activation of personal or social power (Chen et al., 2001; Keltner et al., 2003). In past research, for instance, the magnitude between power and happiness has been found to vary across social roles (e.g., work vs. social settings), but the association has been robust within the workplace in both East Asian (Wang, 2015) and Western cultures (Kifer et al., 2013). Future research should examine how cultural values endorsed within specific social roles elicit personal or social power as well as how this synergy affects well-being.

In addition, a more fine-tuned conceptual distinction between social versus personal power should come from future research. Although the two types of power have been theorized and found to be distinct, they are positively correlated (Lammers et al., 2009), and underlying motives for the two are intertwined (Depret & Fiske, 1993; Van Dijke & Poppe, 2006). Our finding that social power did not impact Americans' happiness revealed discrepancies from past work showing positive effects of social power on Americans' happiness (Kifer et al., 2013). The discrepancies may be due in part to explicit manipulation of social responsibility in social power conditions. In this study, we described and manipulated social power as a position that requires social responsibility, which has not been specifically mentioned in past research (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Kifer et al., 2013). Based on the findings, we suggest that the distinction between responsibility and autonomy might exist within social power. Without explicit activation of responsibility, social power might facilitate autonomy to Westerners, leading to promoting their well-being, but the beneficial effects of social power on happiness might disappear when social power explicitly associates with responsibility. Future research should attend to the possibility that responsibility and autonomy co-exist within social power, and also uncover what features of personal power other than autonomy distinguish it from social power.

In sum, the current study contributes to understanding a more refined relationship between power and happiness. Breaking down the psychological experience of holding power—both personal and social—may help appreciate the cultural nuances that are in play in the link between power and happiness. Happiness seems linked more with a sense of inner agency and invincibility among Westerners whereas a sense of exerting control over one's social world seems to count more among East Asians.

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