Lecture 24

Social Hierarchy

- Social Power
  - Inhibition vs. disinhibition
  - Determinants of power
  - Experimental evidence
- Power and Laughter
  - The social bonding hypothesis
  - Those without power laugh more

Social Power

An Introduction

From *Office Space*

Social Power

A Definition

We define power as an individual's relative capacity to modify others' states by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments. This capacity is the product of the actual resources and punishments the individual can deliver to others.

Resources and punishments can be material (food, money, economic opportunity, physical harm, or job termination) and social (knowledge, affection, friendship, decision-making opportunities, verbal abuse, or ostracism).

Keltner (2003)

Social Power

How does power affect cognition and behavior?

Reduced power, we propose, involves issues of threat, punishment, and social constraint. As a consequence, it triggers what we can call "inhibition-oriented" responses: things like negative affect, vigilance, and constrained behavior.

Elevated power, we propose, involves reward-rich environments and freedom As a consequence, it triggers what are called "approach-oriented" responses: things like positive affect, attention to rewards, and disinhibited behavior.

Keltner (2003)

Social Power

From *Office Space*

Social Power

What determines power?

Individual Variables

Personality traits, physical characteristics

Dyadic Variables

Interest in relationship, relative commitment

Within-Group Variables

Authority/position/role, status

Between-Group Variables

Ethnicity, gender, class, ideology, majority/minority

Keltner (2003)

Social Power

Two studies of power and disinhibited behavior

The Cookie Study

Four participants are put in a group situation, with one randomly chosen to be the group "leader." While the meet, they are given a small plate of cookies to share. Does the "leader" eat more?

The Flirting Study

Unfamiliar male-female pairs interacted as either equals or in a "power" condition where one of the pair had control over the extra credit points. Does power increase the amount of disinhibited flirting?

Keltner (2003)

Social Power

The Cookie Study

Plotted is the number of cookies eaten by participants, as a function of low (left two bars) vs. high power (right two bars), and women (shaded bars) vs. men (striped bars). In this case, power only increased cookie eating in the female participants.

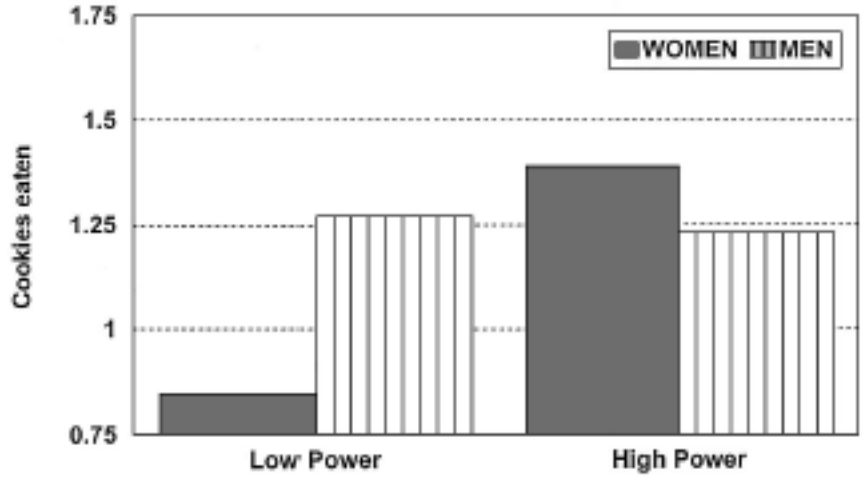


Figure 6. Influence of power on disinhibited eating.

Keltner (2003)

Social Power

How much did people flirt?!

Plotted is the number of disinhibited flirtations by participants, as a function of low (left two bars) vs. high power (right two bars), and women (shaded bars) vs. men (striped bars). In this case, power only increased disinhibited flirting in the male participants.

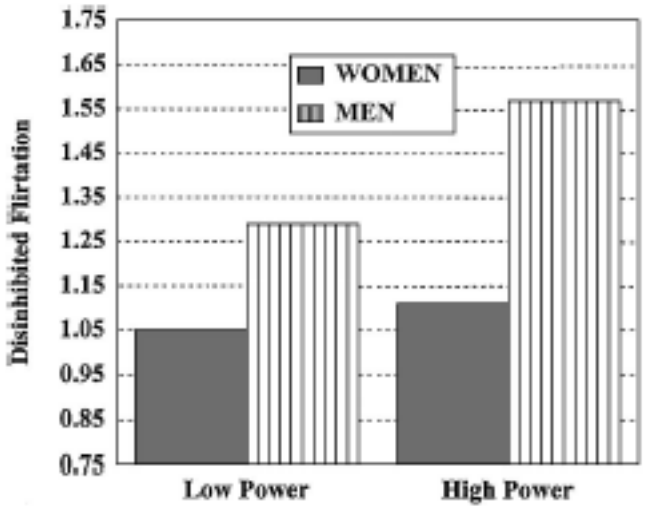


Figure 4. Influence of power on disinhibited flirtation.

Keltner (2003)

Power and Laughter

An Introduction

From *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*

Power and Laughter

The social bonding hypothesis

Laughter is partly a result of evaluating some stimulus as funny, but that explanation is at best incomplete. Some people laugh when things are not funny, and the amount of laughter can vary widely even in response to a funny stimulus. This research was based on the assumption that one function of laughter is to strengthen social bonds and elicit liking. In particular, we sought to study the possible links between laughter and power. The central hypothesis was that low power makes people inclined to laugh, possibly because laughter may generally serve to increase the chances of gaining social support and allies.

Stillman (2007)

Power and Laughter

The "Low Power" Study

Participants are brought into a room and individually interviewed. As part of the interview, jokes are told by the "interviewer"; some jokes are designed to be funny, some are designed not to be funny. In one condition, participants are told the the interviewer will award a cash prize to one of the days' many participants. This is considered the "low power" condition, in that the interviewer is in a position to confer money on the participant. In the control condition, participants are interviewed in exactly the same manner, and the same jokes are told, but the partcipants aren't told about the prize.

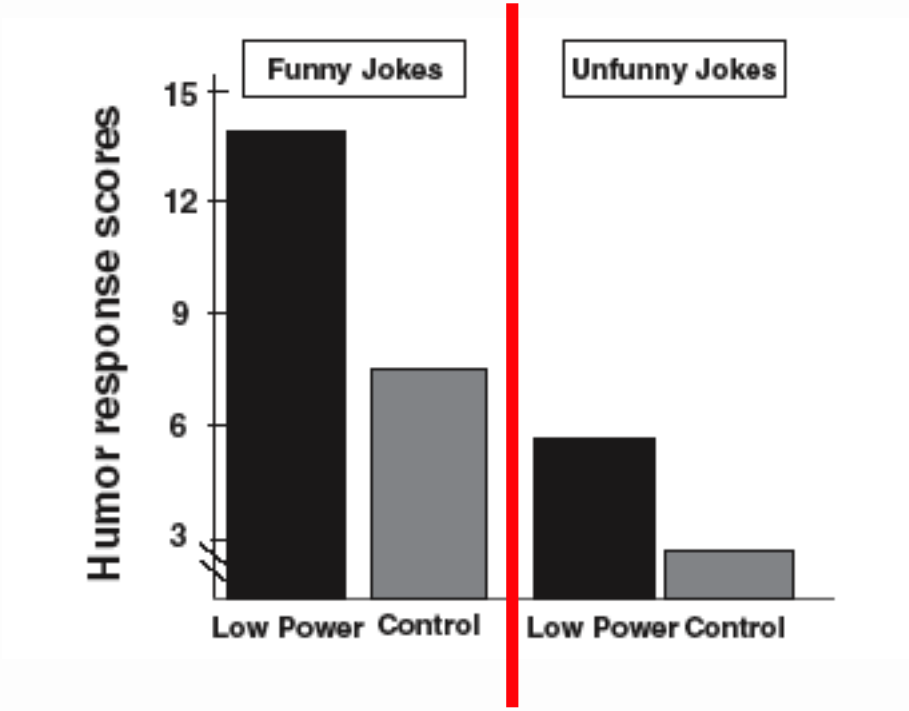
The big question: Does knowing about the prize affect how much people laugh during the interview?

Stillman (2007)

Power and Laughter

Low power people laugh more

Plotted is how much participants laughed, as a function of low (black bars) vs. high power (grey bars), and funny jokes (left side of red line) vs. unfunny jokes (right side of red line). For both kinds of jokes, people laughed more in the low power condition



Stillman (2007)

Power and Laughter

The Boss Study

Participants were asked to watch a videotaped introduction of someone they were told they would later be working with. As part of the introduction, the introducer made jokes; like the "low power" study, some were designed to be funny and some were designed to not be funny. Prior to watching the introduction, participants were told either that they would be the boss of the person being introduced (the "high power" condition), the underlying of the person being introduced (the "low power" condition), or the co-worker of the person being introduced (the "equal power" condition).

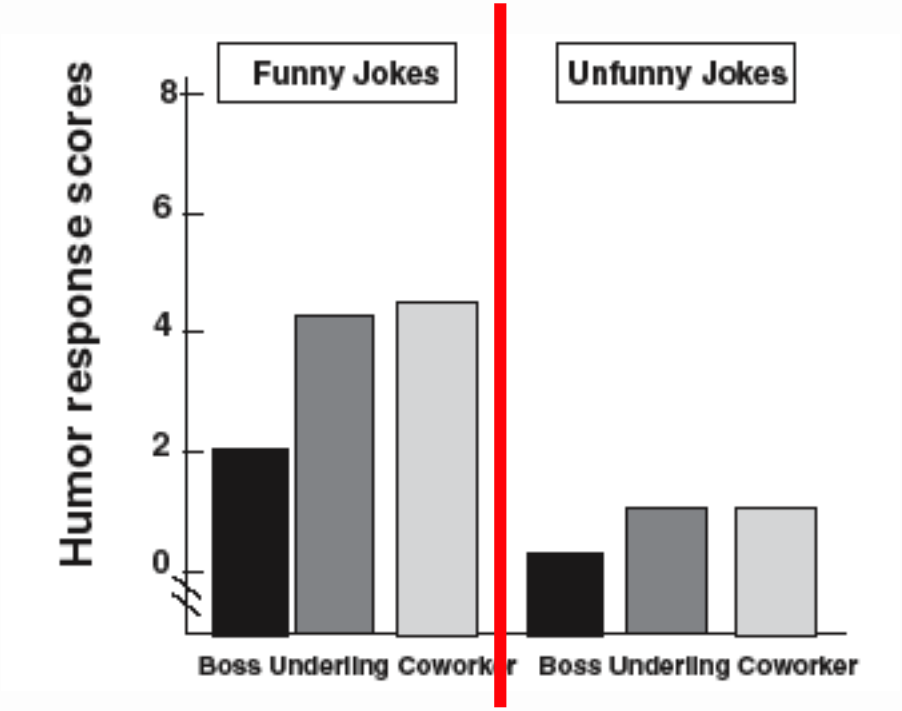
The big question: Does your power relationship to the person being introduced affect how much you laugh at the jokes?

Stillman (2007)

Power and Laughter

Bosses laugh less at jokes

Plotted is how much participants laughed, as a function of being a boss (black bars) vs. underling (dark grey bars) vs. co-worker (light grey bars), and funny jokes (left side of red line) vs. unfunny jokes (right side of red line). For both kinds of jokes, bosses laughed less.



Stillman (2007)