Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes 144 (2018) 25–43

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/obhdp

When sharing hurts: How and why self-disclosing weakness undermines the task-oriented relationships of higher status disclosers☆

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Self-disclosure
Status
Workplace relationships
Influence
Vulnerability

ABSTRACT

It is generally believed that self-disclosure has positive effects, particularly for relationships; however, we predict and find negative effects in the context of task-oriented relationships. Across three laboratory experiments, we find that both task-relevant (Study 1) and task-irrelevant (Studies 2 and 3) weakness disclosures, made by a higher (versus peer) status coworker during an interdependent task, negatively affected the receiver's perception of the discloser's status and consequently undermined the discloser's influence, encouraged task conflict, and led to lower relationship quality with the discloser. Peer status disclosers did not trigger these negative responses. We find support for perceived vulnerability as the proposed psychological process (Study 3). Specifically, higher (but not peer) status disclosers experience a status penalty after weakness disclosures because these disclosures signal vulnerability, which violates the expectations people have for higher (but not peer) status coworkers. These findings provide insight into the effects of self-disclosing weakness at work and the ways in which high status employees may inadvertently trigger their own status loss.

1. Introduction

Self-disclosure is becoming an increasingly relevant phenomenon in the workplace. As the line between work and personal life blurs (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000) and coworkers communicate more with each other using social media, the possibility for self-disclosure of meaningful personal information among coworkers increases (Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013). Compounding this is a generational shift in disclosure such that younger workers view it as more appropriate and acceptable to discuss personal matters with coworkers (Klaus, 2012). Indeed, a recent survey conducted by LinkedIn and CensusWide asked 11,500 full-time professionals around the world about their views on relationships at work, and found that 67% of millennials are willing to share once-taboo personal details including salary, relationships, and family issues with their coworkers (Fisher, 2014).

Findings from the self-disclosure literature suggest that this increase in self-disclosure may have some positive consequences for people's work relationships. Indeed, recent theorizing highlights that self-disclosure can be a key determinant of high quality relationships at work (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Phillips, Rothbard, & Dumas, 2009). This is because decades of research on self-disclosure suggest that the act of making oneself vulnerable by sharing personal information about the self typically promotes liking and feelings of closeness (Collins & Miller, 1994; Cozby, 1972; Jourard, 1959; Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969). In the organizational context, this is important because the quality of coworker relationships has consequences for organizational outcomes such as team performance (Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002; Jehn & Shah, 1997), organizational citizenship behaviors (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000), and turnover (Iverson & Roy, 1994).

However, the vast majority of empirical research on self-disclosure has been conducted outside the work domain, and self-disclosure at work creates specific challenges not present in non-work relationships. Although self-disclosure has been found to increase relationship quality in friendships or intimate relationships (Collins & Miller, 1994), self-disclosure can also change the nature of relationships (Phillips et al., 2009), which may not always be beneficial in the work environment. For example, in task-oriented relationships, individuals benefit from and may actually desire hierarchical differentiation (Tiedens,

☆ We would like to acknowledge helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper from Rellie Derfler-Rozin, Crystal Farh, Daniel Feiler, Laura Huang, Michael Parke, David Sluss, Elad Sherf, Brian Swider, and Stefan Thau, and research assistance from Cameron Smith and Sydney Webb.

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2017.09.001
Received 18 November 2015; Received in revised form 6 August 2017; Accepted 5 September 2017

Unzueta, & Young, 2007), because it facilitates coordination (de Kwaadsteniet & van Dijk, 2010), and it is possible for self-disclosure to disrupt these status-differentiated relationships (Phillips et al., 2009). Therefore, it is important to understand how self-disclosures that have the potential to alter status dynamics shape the effectiveness and quality of relationships at work.

In this article we address this question by examining how and why a higher status versus peer status coworker self-disclosing weakness (i.e., sharing meaningful personal information that makes salient a potential shortcoming) affects both the effectiveness and the quality of the relationship in task-oriented partnerships. We draw on theories of self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Kelly & McKillop, 1996) and expectation states (Berger, Conner, & Fisek, 1974; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986) to suggest that because self-disclosing a weakness signals vulnerability, it will prompt different reactions from the recipient depending on the discloser's status. We present three laboratory studies showing that when higher status coworkers self-disclose weakness it diminishes the receiver's perception of the discloser's status, which ultimately undermines both the discloser's effectiveness in influencing the recipient without conflict and the quality of the discloser's relationship with the recipient in task-oriented relationships. However, when peer status coworkers self-disclose weakness, influence, conflict, and relationship quality are unaffected because their perceived status remains the same.

By examining the consequences of self-disclosure in task-oriented coworker relationships, we aim to contribute to organizational research in several ways. First, while the majority of empirical research on self-disclosure has been conducted outside the domain of workplace relationships, our research builds on recent theorizing (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013; Phillips et al., 2009) and empirically examines the consequences of self-disclosing weakness in task-oriented work relationships. Because disclosing potentially negative information about the self is becoming more commonplace in workplace relationships, understanding how the context of workplace relationships may impact the effects of self-disclosure represents an important gap in the research for scholars and practitioners alike. Second, we diverge from recent research that has focused on self-disclosure from the discloser's perspective (e.g., the decision to disclose, the discloser's perception of their relationships; Dumas, Phillips, & Rothbard, 2013; Phillips et al., 2009; Ragins, 2008), and instead use a controlled laboratory setting to examine how the individual who receives the disclosure ("the receiver") reacts to the discloser's decision to share. This contributes to organizational research because it highlights how the behavior (i.e., self-disclosing weakness) has immediate consequences for the receiver, which ultimately impacts the workplace relationship and the organization in which the relationship is embedded. Third, we challenge the entrenched assumption currently held in the literature that self-disclosure will necessarily foster liking in relationships by presenting one type of workplace relationship (task-oriented partnerships) where self-disclosures that attenuate the status of the discloser may harm rather than help relationship quality. Finally, building on the nascent literature on status loss (Marr & Thau, 2014; Neeley, 2013), our research highlights one way that high status individuals might trigger their own status loss at work (i.e., through self-disclosing weakness).

1.1. Why self-disclose weakness?

Our focus in this article is on the consequences of *self-disclosing weakness*, which we define as sharing meaningful personal information with a coworker that makes salient a potential shortcoming. By potential shortcoming, we refer to personal information that, in a particular organizational context, could be construed as a shortcoming, or could lead to attributions or assumptions about the discloser being flawed in some way. As such, the content of the disclosure may be negative (e.g., "I didn't do well on my last performance review"), but the content could also be neutral (or positive), and yet it has the potential to trigger weakness attributions or assumptions about the discloser. For example, if a woman discloses to her coworker that she is pregnant, this disclosure could lead to attributions of weakness such that the woman may be less committed or available to work, even though the content of the disclosure itself is not negative.

If a self-disclosure has the potential to be construed as a weakness or lead to attributions or assumptions of deficiency about the discloser, one may question why some people would willingly reveal that information about themselves. The discloser may not realize that the disclosure will be perceived as a weakness, or the discloser might inadvertently self-disclose to a coworker by sharing information in non-work spaces (e.g., over social media) where a coworker is in the "invisible audience" (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). However, many individuals will intentionally self-disclose weakness to coworkers because they *want* to share it. They may share it strategically because they believe it will help them affiliate with or indirectly influence the receiver (Dingler-Duhon & Brown, 1987) by eliciting sympathy or concern (Sinaceur, Kopelman, Vasiljevic, & Haag, 2015). They may also self-disclose weakness because they want their coworkers to know them 'as they really are' (cf. self-verification theory Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992).

Self-disclosing weakness may also have a variety of positively anticipated benefits for the discloser. Presenting a 'better' or more positive version of oneself to one's coworkers can be emotionally exhausting (Grandey, 2003). When individuals self-disclose weakness to a coworker, they liberate the cognitive resources they would otherwise expend trying to conceal that information, and are likely to experience a sense of relief and renewed energy (Ragins, 2008). This can translate into greater job satisfaction (Griffith & Hebl, 2002) and even job performance (Cable & Kay, 2012). For example, in a field study of self-verification in the organizational entry process, Cable and Kay (2012) found that individuals who were high self-verifiers (i.e., individuals who are more likely to disclose personal information about themselves, even if it is negative) were evaluated by their supervisors nine months later as better performers in terms of both role performance and citizenship behaviors. Therefore, to the extent that an employee might anticipate these benefits, this could motivate workers to pre-emptively self-disclose weakness to a coworker.

Despite the potential benefits for disclosers, however, it is important to understand how receivers are affected by and react to self-disclosing weakness, as this will have implications for the discloser and his/her working relationship with the receiver. Few empirical studies have examined specifically how receivers react to weakness self-disclosures, and the studies examining related phenomenon present mixed findings. For example, one study showed that people who are willing to express more negative emotions have more intimate relationships than people who are less willing to do so (Graham, Huang, Clark, & Helgeson, 2008), perhaps suggesting that weakness self-disclosures would trigger feelings of closeness or liking in the receiver. Conversely, however, a recent study of disclosures on Facebook highlighted that individuals with low self-esteem are liked less for their online posts (i.e., disclosures) because these disclosures are perceived to be negative (Forest & Wood, 2012). Moreover, these studies focused on the interpersonal (e.g., liking) consequences of self-disclosure, and to our knowledge, no empirical studies have examined the task-related (e.g., task influence, task conflict) consequences of self-disclosing weakness.

Therefore, in the section below, we draw on theories of expectation states and status distance to make predictions about why the status of the discloser will critically affect how self-disclosing weakness to a coworker in a task-oriented relationship affects that relationship in terms of both the effectiveness of the working relationship (e.g., influence, conflict) and the quality of the relationship (e.g., liking, desire for future contact).

1.2. Self-disclosing weakness and perceptions of status

In the work environment, status hierarchies – rank orderings of prestige or worth (Benoit-Smullyan, 1944) – fundamentally affect how people behave toward one another (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972). Because status is determined by the perceived and expected contributions of each group member (Ridgeway, 1978), members with higher status receive more respect, admiration, and regard from their group members (Anderson, Srivastava, Beer, Spataro, & Chatman, 2006). Consequently, whether their status is based on formal (e.g., organizational rank) or informal (e.g., expertise) status characteristics, high status individuals end up being listened to and deferred to more by their coworkers and, as a result, they have greater influence over their group's decisions (Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). This influence is important because it helps facilitate effective coordination in task-oriented groups; status expectations create norms for how group members interact with each other such that lower status group members defer to the advice and direction of higher status group members (Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). The pattern of influence and deferral allows the group to coordinate easily (de Kwaadsteniet & van Dijk, 2010) and with little conflict (Bales, 1950).

It is, therefore, important to consider status dynamics in the context of self-disclosing weakness because the relative status of the discloser is likely to influence how the receiver reacts to the disclosure. Earlier theorizing by Phillips et al. (2009) brought attention to the challenges demographically diverse individuals face when engaging in self-disclosure, by developing propositions for how self-disclosures might influence status distance between the discloser and recipient. Building on this theoretical work, we develop and empirically test the prediction that the initial status of the discloser critically affects whether and how a self-disclosure alters the perceived status of the discloser. We suggest that compared to coworkers who initially share 'peer status' (i.e., have similar status), when higher status coworkers self-disclose weakness it will have a greater negative effect on the receiver's perception of the discloser's status.

We suggest that the attenuating effect of self-disclosing weakness on perceived status will be greater for high status disclosers for two main reasons. First, there is a greater likelihood that the *content* of the self-disclosure will be inconsistent with the higher status discloser. For example, if a higher status discloser reveals personal information to a coworker that is not consistent with the coworker's expectations for high status people (e.g., coming from a low socioeconomic status background, poor performance in the past), this 'status-disconfirming' disclosure is likely to negatively affect the receiver's perception of the discloser's status (Phillips et al., 2009). Therefore, the content of a weakness disclosure may prompt a recipient to adjust the discloser's status downward.

However, even if the content of the self-disclosed weakness is not obviously inconsistent with the discloser's status (e.g., disclosing poor health), we suggest that the act of self-disclosing a weakness is likely to be viewed as inconsistent with a high status individual. Disclosing information about the self that makes salient a potential weakness is an act of vulnerability, in that it reveals one's concerns or insecurities (Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Moon, 2000) and may communicate a desire to be supported. The difficulty for high status people is that signaling vulnerability, insecurity, and the desire to be supported is inconsistent with the behavioral expectations of high status people (Ridgeway, 1978).

An expectation states theory of legitimation (Ridgeway & Berger, 1986) suggests that in a legitimate status order, the behaviors that initially serve solely as signals of performance relevant information to establish the status ordering within the group later become *status markers*. Once a status order has been established, group members are expected to engage in behaviors that support and justify their status position in the group (i.e., status markers) because these behaviors reaffirm the legitimacy of the status order. Accordingly, high status people are expected to be confident, assertive, and directive (Ridgeway & Berger, 1986) because these behaviors are consistent with the high status position they were granted by the group.

When a group member behaves in ways that are inconsistent with their legitimated status position, such behaviors constitute *status violations*. Because status violations implicitly or explicitly challenge the legitimacy of the status order, other group members typically sanction them. For example, a high status individual who displays vulnerability – a direct contrast to the confidence and assertiveness expected of them – behaves in a way that violates the expectations of their status position and does so at the risk of having their status "taken away" (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001). Thus, we build on this theory to predict that because weakness disclosures signal vulnerability – which constitutes a status violation for higher status disclosers – weakness self-disclosures result in a status penalty for higher status disclosers. However, because vulnerability does not constitute a status violation for peer status disclosers, weakness self-disclosures should not negatively affect their status.

Hypothesis 1. The negative effect of self-disclosing weakness on the receiver's perception of the discloser's status will be stronger for higher (versus peer) status disclosers.

1.3. The effect of self-disclosing weakness on influence, conflict, and relationship quality

As previously mentioned, one of the functional benefits of status hierarchies is that they facilitate coordination (Bales, 1950; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Specifically, social norms dictate that a higher status individual gives advice and direction, and a lower-status individual accepts that influence. This makes decision-making more efficient. Members do not have to discuss and debate every small issue with each other; they can simply use status cues to determine who should defer to whom. This influence process, based on differences in status between group members, makes decision-making less cognitively taxing and less conflictual even in situations where communication is limited (de Kwaadsteniet & van Dijk, 2010). Therefore, holding constant the status of the receiver, we predict that when a discloser is perceived to have higher status, the discloser will have greater influence over the recipient and the recipient will perceive less conflict in working with the discloser.

Moreover, we suggest that in task-oriented partnerships, people may also view the relationship more positively – like and want to work again with their partner – when their partner has a higher status. This novel prediction may seem to be at odds with past findings that people are more likely to develop friendships with coworkers of similar status (Lincoln & Miller, 1979; McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). The logic behind these previous findings has been that although employees may value knowing coworkers with higher status, they are more likely to develop high quality relationships with status peers because people tend to be attracted to similar others (i.e., similarity–attraction theory Byrne, 1971). We agree that in general, people are likely to have more friendships at work with those with similar status. However, people also receive benefits from being affiliated with high status others (Benjamin & Podolny, 1999). Therefore, we suggest that, particularly in task-oriented contexts, people will place greater value on working with higher status others.

This prediction is consistent with past research on "dominance complementarity," which suggests that people have an unconscious tendency to perceive others as hierarchically differentiated from themselves in order to facilitate a smoother (and more positive) interaction (Tiedens et al., 2007). For example, someone who views themselves as more dominant will view their interaction partner as less dominant and vice versa. Having a higher status partner clarifies task roles and makes it easier to accept the advice and direction of that partner (de Kwaadsteniet & van Dijk, 2010; Leavitt, 2005). This fosters

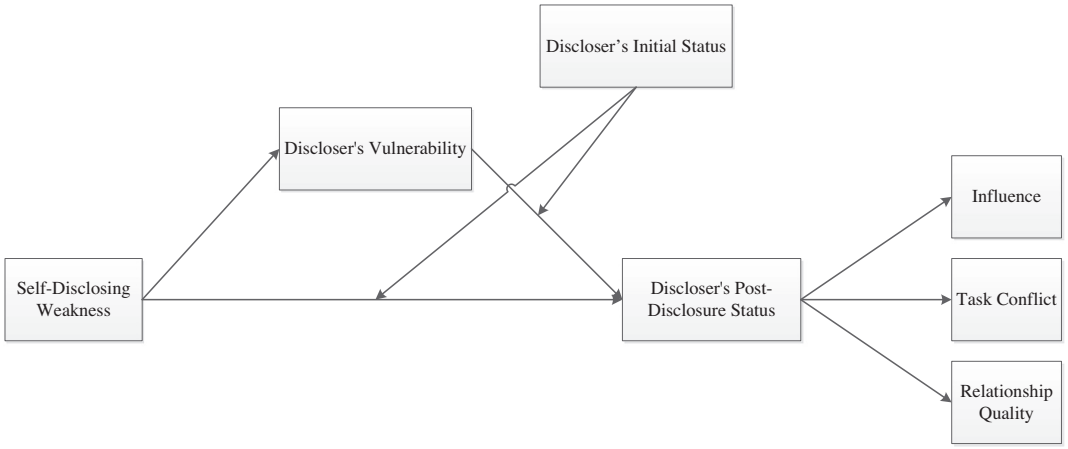


Fig. 1. Theoretical model.

a sense of understanding, cooperation and liking between the interaction partners (Tiedens et al., 2007). Therefore, we predict that in the context of task-oriented relationships, the perceived status of the discloser will be positively related to the receiver's perception of both the effectiveness and quality of the relationship. Taken together, the above arguments lead to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. Higher post-disclosure status of the discloser will be (a) positively related to discloser influence, (b) negatively related to task conflict, and (c) positively related to relationship quality.

In sum, in task-oriented partnerships, when a discloser is perceived to have higher status relative to the receiver, it will be associated with greater influence, less conflict, and higher relationship quality. The corollary of these two hypotheses together is that in situations where self-disclosing weakness attenuates the discloser's status (i.e. higher status disclosers), this self-disclosure will undermine the discloser's influence, encourage conflict, and weaken relationship quality. However, in situations where self-disclosing weakness does not affect perceptions of the discloser's status (i.e. peer status disclosers), self-disclosure should not significantly affect influence dynamics, conflict, or relationship quality. Thus, we predict (see theoretical model in Fig. 1):

Hypothesis 3. The indirect effects of self-disclosing weakness on (a) discloser influence, (b) task conflict, and (c) relationship quality (through the discloser's post-disclosure status) will be moderated by the discloser's initial status (higher versus peer). That is, we expect to find the indirect effects for higher, but not peer status disclosers.

2. Overview of the current research

We conducted three laboratory studies to test our hypotheses. In Studies 1 and 2, we examined whether and how self-disclosing a task-relevant (Study 1) and task-irrelevant (Study 2) weakness by a higher (versus peer) status coworker during an interdependent task affected the discloser's post-disclosure status and consequently affected the extent to which the receiving coworker was influenced by the discloser, perceived task conflict with the discloser, and perceived higher relationship quality with the discloser. In Study 3, we examined perceived vulnerability as the proposed psychological process explaining why the post-disclosure status of higher (but not peer) status disclosers is attenuated by weakness disclosure. Data and syntax for all studies conducted to test our theory are available online at: https://osf.io/b529u/?view_only=fb8eb2434c174a5f89d91d642fb528fd.

3. Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to provide an initial test of our hypotheses and examine how self-disclosing weakness affects influence, conflict, and relationship quality in task-oriented partnerships, depending on the status of the discloser. We tested our hypotheses in a controlled laboratory environment in order to isolate the effects of higher versus peer status coworkers' self-disclosing weakness on receivers. We examined participants' behavior in terms of the extent to which they were influenced by their partner (i.e., the discloser) by accepting and following their advice during the interdependent work task, and participants also reported their perception of task conflict and relationship quality with their partner.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants and design

To test our hypotheses, we used a 2 (status: higher status vs. peer status) × 2 (self-disclosure: weakness disclosure vs. no disclosure) between-subjects design. One hundred and eighty-eight undergraduate university students participated in the experiment for course credit. Participants who reported suspicion about their partner's identity (46 participants; 24.5% of full sample) were excluded from our analyses, leaving 142 participants (49.3% male with an average age of 20.54 years (SD = 1.82)) in our final sample.[2] This sample of participants was 57.7% Caucasian, 28.2% Asian, 6.3% African American, 2.1% Hispanic, and 5.6% self-identified as "other". To incentivize participants to take the research activity seriously, participants were informed that the best performing team would win a $20 Starbucks gift card.

3.2. Procedure

Participants arrived at the laboratory and were seated in separate cubicles in front of a computer. Once all participants had arrived, it was announced that the research project was a joint collaboration between the researcher in the lab and two of the researcher's friends, one of whom worked at a *peer institution* (i.e., similar prestige as the university at which the research was conducted) and the other at a *higher status institution*. The students were advised that the purpose of the joint study was, in part, to give the students an opportunity to collaborate with students at other universities.

To reinforce the believability of the cover story, the experimenter

[2] Including the suspicious participants did not change the pattern or significance of the results. All significant comparisons and indirect effects presented in the results section remained significant ($ps < 0.05$).

informed the participants that one of the research sites was experiencing technical difficulties. The participants were asked to be patient for a few minutes while the technical issues were resolved. During this time, the experimenter was seen to be communicating with the researchers at the other locations (audibly received and sent a series of text messages) and then announced when each of the other two research sites were online. Once all the research sites were ostensibly "up and running", participants were allowed to log on to their computers and begin the study, which involved completing a work task with a virtual partner from one of the partner institutions. In reality, there were no other institutions involved in the study and participants' virtual partner was a confederate such that all communication from the partner was preprogrammed.

Before starting the work task, participants read that each partner should answer some informational questions to get-to-know each other (e.g., "What is your name? Briefly describe where you go to school and what you are studying.", "Where do you live?", "What do you do for fun?", "What are your typical study habits?"). The questions were adapted from Ensari and Miller's (2002) self-disclosure manipulation to encourage initial self-disclosure, and help participants establish a relationship with their partner. After participants submitted their responses, they waited briefly on a holding page and then received responses from their partner.

3.2.1. Manipulation of discloser's initial status

Based on their random assignment to a discloser-status condition (higher status vs. peer status), participants received get-to-know-you responses from one of two profiles. In the higher status discloser condition, the profile revealed that their partner, "John Greene", was an MBA student completing a finance concentration at a higher status institution, who founded and sold his own start-up company and liked to vacation in Fiji. In the peer status discloser condition, the profile revealed that their partner, "John Greene" was an undergraduate student completing a marketing concentration from a peer institution, who worked at a start-up company and liked to vacation in Miami.

3.2.2. Experimental task

After the get-to-know-you exercise, participants began the work task. Following previous research, we used a contrast sensitivity task (Kalkhoff, 2005; Moore, 1969; Willer, 2009) which included three rounds: a practice round, a first round, and a second (final) round. Each round included 5 unique images (see Appendix A for sample images), and participants had 25 s to look at the image. The images consisted of black and white squares and participants were asked to indicate the percentage of the image that consisted of white squares versus black squares. In reality, every image was 50% white squares and 50% black squares. However, previous studies have found that the complexity of the images makes it difficult for people to accurately assess the percentage of black versus white squares, permitting the experimenter to manipulate feedback about task performance (Kalkhoff, 2005; Moore, 1969; Willer, 2009).

Following the practice round, participants were told that to complete the task together, one partner would be the "feedback-giver" and the other would be the "feedback-taker". All participants were told they had been assigned to the role of "feedback-taker" and their partner had been assigned to the role of "feedback-giver". To make their partner's feedback credible, participants read that their score on the practice round was 2/5 whereas their partner's score was 4/5.

Participants read that the "feedback-giver" would have the opportunity to provide the "feedback-taker" with feedback at several points during the task, which they could then use to amend their responses—with emphasis that only their final answer would count towards their team's score. This enabled us to examine a behavioral manifestation of influence – the extent to which participants accepted and acted in accordance with their partner's direction (described in detail below). The feedback that participants received was directional but did not specify a numerical value for the change (e.g., "I see more black than you do. Will you look again?"). All participants received the exact same feedback messages from their partner during each of the first and second rounds. The only difference in feedback between conditions was a feedback message that participants received at the end of the first round, which constituted the self-disclosing weakness manipulation.

3.2.3. Self-disclosing weakness manipulation

After participants completed the first round of the task, participants in the *weakness disclosure* condition received the message below from their partner, which was pretested using a separate sample.[3] Participants assigned to the no disclosure condition received the same message only without the italicized self-disclosure.

> Round one went great. You did a good job of picking between white and black. You managed your time well. I didn't keep up with how often our answers were different. *I should be more detail-oriented. Not a lot of people know, but I'm on academic probation. I don't graduate if I don't earn a 3.0 this semester, but I guess that doesn't matter for this…* Keep up the good work. I think we can win the Starbucks gift card!

After reading the above feedback message, participants answered questions about their perception of their partner's status, completed the final round of the task, and then answered a number of questions about their experience in the study including task conflict and relationship quality. The study measures are described below.

3.3. Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

3.3.1. Post-disclosure status

We assessed the receivers' perception of the discloser's status after the disclosure using an adapted version of the ladder measure of subjective social status (Singh-Manoux, Adler, & Marmot, 2003). Participants were asked to "Think of this scale as representing where people stand in a group. At the right of the scale (10) are the people who are most respected, admired, and held in highest regard. At the left of the scale (0) are the people who are the least respected, admired, and held in lowest regard…" and to indicate where on the scale they thought their partner would stand. Thus, higher scores indicate that the receiver perceived the discloser to have a higher status.

3.3.2. Influence

We conceptualize influence as the extent to which the discloser is able to modify the recipient's behavior during the task (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). Accordingly, we operationalized influence as how much the recipient changed their answers in response to feedback from the discloser during the task.

Specifically, during the task, the discloser had four opportunities to influence the answer of the participant by giving the receiver (i.e., the

[3] The self-disclosure manipulation was pretested using a separate sample of 101 participants (61.4% male, M_{age} = 32.72 years (SD_{age} = 8.63)) recruited online via Mechanical Turk. Participants imagined completing a virtual task with a partner and were randomly assigned to read the weakness disclosure or no disclosure version of the partner's feedback. Participants assessed the extent to which (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*) the partner shared personal information ("…meaningful personal information") or a weakness ("…shortcoming/weakness/imperfection"; α = 0.92) about themselves. We found that participants in the weakness disclosure condition viewed the feedback as significantly more personal (M = 5.29, SD = 1.29), and more of a weakness (M = 5.31, SD = 1.61), than those in the no disclosure condition (M = 3.26, SD = 1.48), $F(1, 99) = 54.37$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.355$, and (M = 4.39, SD = 1.42), $F(1, 99) = 9.39$, $p = 0.003$, $\eta^2 = 0.087$, respectively. These results confirm the effectiveness of the weakness self-disclosure manipulation.

participant) feedback that the initial answer was either too high or too low. The participant then had the opportunity to reconsider and re-submit the answer based on the discloser's feedback. We assessed the discloser's influence over the recipient by calculating how much participants changed their answer based on the discloser's feedback. For example, if a participant's initial answer about the percentage of black in the image was 35, and the discloser suggested that "I see more black than you do. Will you look again?", a participant who took the discloser's advice and changed their answer to 60 received an influence score of +25 for that question. If that same participant did not agree with the discloser and instead changed the answer to 30, their influence score would be −5 for that question. Because the discloser provided feedback on four questions, we summed the changes participants made across all four questions as a measure of the discloser's total influence (M = 22.60, SD = 16.44, Min = −30.00, Max = 80.00) during the task.

3.3.3. Task conflict

We assessed receivers' perceptions of task conflict by asking participants to respond to Jehn's (1995) four task conflict items adapted for this setting (e.g., "There was conflict between me and my partner about the work we did"; α = 0.87).

3.3.4. Liking

We assessed receivers' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with the discloser by asking participants to respond to four items adapted from Hamstra and colleagues' (Hamstra, Van Yperen, Wisse, & Sassenberg, 2013) liking scale including "My partner seems like a pleasant person to me", and "I would like to work with my partner again" (α = 0.92).

3.3.5. Manipulation and suspicion checks

To determine the effectiveness of the status manipulation, participants responded to three items adapted from Anderson et al. (2001) on the extent to which at the beginning of the exercise they perceived their partner was "In a position of high status?", "Had considerable influence?", and "Was prestigious?" (α = 0.95). To assess whether participants believed their partner was real, we asked the open-ended question: "Was there anything about this research study that seemed unusual?" Responses that indicated suspicion about their partner's identity were coded as "1"; participants who did not indicate suspicion were coded as "0".

3.4. Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables are provided in Table 1.

3.4.1. Discloser status manipulation check

An ANOVA revealed that in the higher status condition, participants perceived their partner to have higher status (M = 5.40, SD = 1.19) than in the peer status condition (M = 5.02, SD = 1.14), F(1, 140) = 3.77, p = 0.054, η^2 = 0.026. It is worth noting that there was no significant (ps > 0.23) main effect or interaction of the weakness disclosure on perceptions of the discloser's initial status.

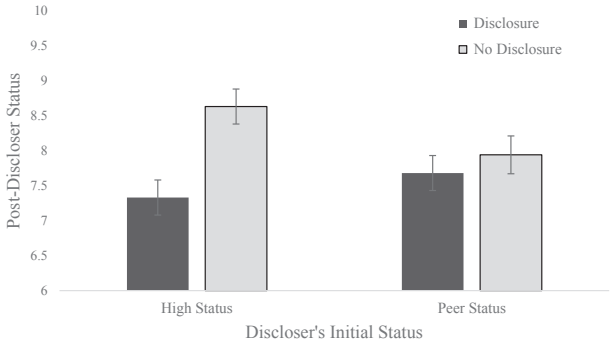


Fig. 2. The effect of self-disclosing weakness on the discloser's post-disclosure status by the discloser's initial status (Study 1).

3.4.2. Post-disclosure status

To test Hypothesis 1, that the effect of self-disclosing weakness on the discloser's post-disclosure status will depend on the discloser's initial status, we conducted a 2 × 2 univariate ANOVA. Results showed a main effect of self-disclosing weakness, F(1, 138) = 9.21, p = 0.003, η^2 = 0.063, no main effect of initial discloser status, F(1, 138) = 0.48, p = 0.492, on the receiver's perception of the discloser's status post-disclosure, and also the predicted significant interaction between self-disclosing weakness and initial discloser status, F(1, 138) = 4.09, p = 0.045, η^2 = 0.029.

Examining the pattern of the interaction (Fig. 2), we found that when the discloser had higher status initially, self-disclosing weakness negatively affected the receiver's perception of the discloser's post-disclosure status (disclosure: M = 7.33, SD = 1.77, vs. no disclosure: M = 8.63, SD = 0.97), t(1 3 8) = 3.66, p < 0.001, η^2 = 0.089). However, when the discloser initially had peer status, self-disclosing weakness did not significantly affect the receiver's perception of the discloser's post-disclosure status (disclosure: M = 7.68, SD = 1.63, vs. no disclosure: M = 7.94, SD = 1.77), t(1 3 8) = 0.70, p = 0.485, η^2 = 0.004). These findings provide support for Hypothesis 1 and show that self-disclosing weakness had a greater negative effect on the receiver's perception of the discloser's status when the initial status of the discloser was higher.

3.4.3. Influence, task conflict and relationship quality

We further predicted that by attenuating the discloser's post-disclosure status, self-disclosing weakness would affect (a) the discloser's influence, (b) task conflict, and (c) relationship quality when the discloser initially had higher status. Providing support for Hypotheses 2a–c, results revealed significant effects of the discloser's post-disclosure status on influence, B = 1.83, SE = 0.90, p = 0.043 (95% CI [0.06, 3.60]), task conflict, B = −0.16, SE = 0.06, p = 0.011 (95% CI

Table 1
Means, standards deviations, and correlations among Study 1 variables.

Variable		M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Disclosure	0.51	0.50					
2.	Discloser's Initial Status	0.52	0.50	−0.06				
3.	Discloser's Post-Disclosure Status	7.90	1.59	−0.26**	0.07			
4.	Influence	22.60	16.45	−0.04	−0.02	0.18*		
5.	Task Conflict	2.46	1.12	0.10	0.04	−0.23**	−0.25**	
6.	Liking	5.88	0.94	−0.18*	0.17*	0.60**	0.21*	−0.34**

Note. Initial status was coded 1 = high status, 0 = peer status.
* $p \leq 0.05$.
** $p \leq 0.01$.

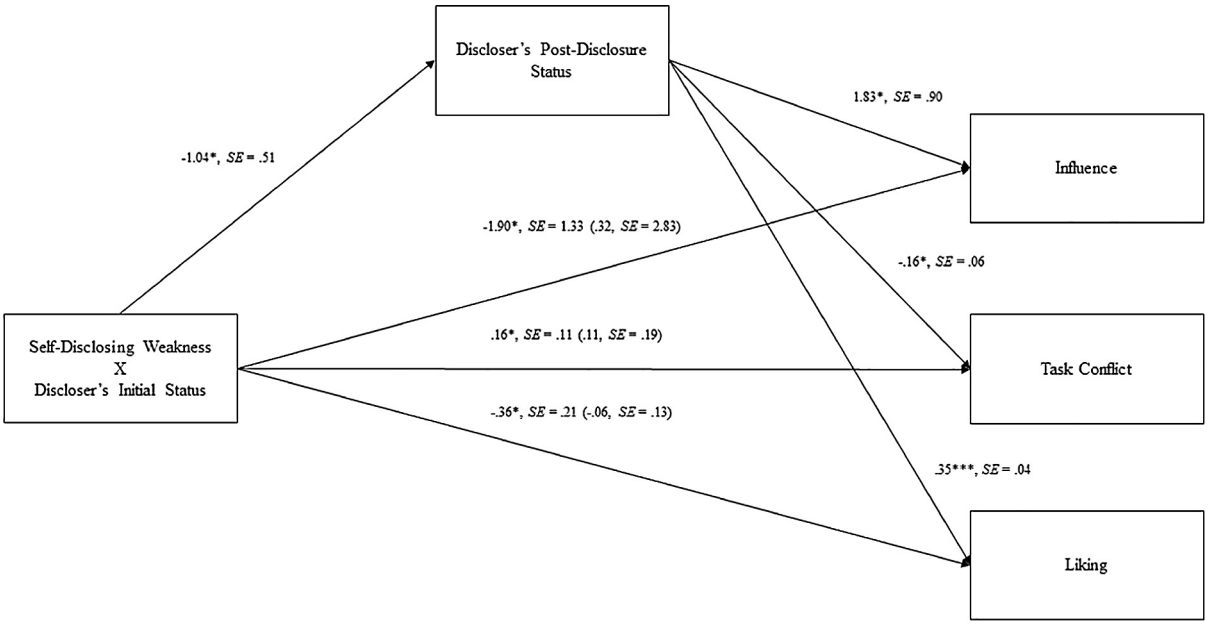


Fig. 3. The indirect effect of self-disclosing weakness on influence, task conflict, and liking through the discloser's post-disclosure status, conditional on the discloser's initial status (Study 1). Note: Unstandardized coefficients are reported (the coefficient in parenthesis indicates the direct effect of self-disclosing weakness on the respective outcome prior to controlling for the discloser's post-disclosure status). The model was tested in separate analyses in SPSS. $^{***}p \leq 0.001$, $^{**}p \leq 0.01$, $^{*}p \leq 0.05$.

[−0.27, −0.04]), and liking, $B = 0.35$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < 0.0001$ (95% CI [0.27, 0.43]).

To test our moderated mediation hypotheses, we conducted bootstrapped moderated mediation analyses for each of the three dependent variables by constructing the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable through the mediator using PROCESS in SPSS 21 (Hayes, 2013) (model 7 with 10,000 resamples). Thus in each model, self-disclosing weakness was entered as the independent variable, the discloser's initial status was the proposed moderator, the discloser's post-disclosure status was entered as the proposed mediator, and the dependent (outcome) variables were (a) task influence, (b) task conflict and (c) liking. Fig. 3 displays our results.

In the model with task influence entered as the dependent variable, we found a significant negative indirect effect (−1.90) of self-disclosing weakness on influence through the discloser's post-disclosure status, conditional on the discloser's initial status (95% CI [−5.57, −0.12]). Specifically, self-disclosing weakness had a negative indirect effect (−2.38) on influence through the discloser's post-disclosure status when the discloser's initial status was higher (95% CI [−5.35, −0.48]), but did not have a significant indirect effect on influence (−0.48) when the discloser initially had peer status (95% CI [−2.63, 0.77]). Consistent with Hypothesis 3a, these findings indicate that self-disclosing weakness had a negative effect on the discloser's influence through lowered perceptions of the discloser's status, but only when the discloser initially had higher status than the receiver.

Next, in the model with task conflict as the dependent variable, we found a positive and significant indirect effect (0.16) of self-disclosing weakness on task conflict through the discloser's post-disclosure status, conditional on the discloser's initial status (95% CI [0.02, 0.46]), such that self-disclosing weakness had a positive indirect effect (0.20) on task conflict through the discloser's post-disclosure status when the discloser's initial status was high (95% CI [0.06, 0.41]), but the indirect effect (0.04) was not significant when the discloser initially had peer status (95% CI [−0.07, 0.20]). Consistent with Hypothesis 3b, these findings show that self-disclosing weakness resulted in greater task conflict because of lowered perceptions of the discloser's status, but only when the discloser initially had higher status than the receiver.

Finally, in the model with liking as the dependent variable, results revealed a significant negative indirect effect (−0.36) of self-disclosing weakness on liking through the discloser's post-disclosure status, conditional on the discloser's initial status (95% CI [−0.86, −0.03]). That is, self-disclosing weakness undermined the relationship quality in the partnership by lowering the discloser's status following the disclosure, but only when discloser's initial status was higher (Indirect effect = −0.45; 95% CI [−0.79, −0.22]); when the discloser initially had peer status, relationship quality was unaffected by self-disclosing weakness (Indirect effect = −0.09; 95% CI [−0.35, 0.20]). These findings provide support for Hypothesis 3c, and show that self-disclosing weakness undermines relationship quality (through lowered perceptions of the discloser's status), but only when the discloser's initial status is higher relative to the receiver.

3.5. Discussion

In the context of task-oriented partnerships, we found that for higher status individuals, self-disclosing weakness to a coworker negatively affected the coworker's perception of the discloser's status and, as a result, undermined the discloser's influence during the task, encouraged task conflict, and diminished liking. Importantly, peer status disclosers did not experience any of these negative repercussions from self-disclosing weakness to their coworker.

These findings are particularly notable because in organizations, higher status individuals may be motivated to disclose information about their weaknesses to a coworker in order to reduce the status distance between them in the hopes of developing a closer relationship and working better together as a result. Our findings imply that although the disclosure *may be* effective in reducing status distance (by attenuating the status of the discloser), this "status loss" (Marr & Thau, 2014) may actually lead to outcomes opposite to those intended by the discloser – less influence, more conflict, and less liking.

However, there are several limitations of this study that need to be addressed. First, the self-disclosed weakness used in this study (i.e., being on academic probation) could have been viewed by participants as containing information directly relevant to the discloser's ability to effectively perform in the study's task. Therefore, it is possible that it was negative task-relevant information driving our findings rather than the act of self-disclosing weakness per se. This possibility is mitigated somewhat by the fact that both the peer and higher status discloser

shared the same task-relevant information, such that if this was driving the results we would expect the perceived status and influence of the peer discloser to have been negatively affected by the self-disclosure as well (we did not find any such effects). However, we further address this limitation in Study 2. Finally, the name of the discloser in this study, "John Greene", implies that the discloser is male and therefore it is possible that participants' reactions were specific to a high status male self-disclosing weakness. We designed Study 2 to address these limitations.

4. Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to strengthen the internal validity of our findings by constructively replicating and extending the results of Study 1, using a task-irrelevant manipulation of self-disclosing weakness, initials for the discloser to address possible gender effects, and a different task. Finally, in addition to our behavioral measure of influence, we included a behavioral measure of relationship quality.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants and design

As in Study 1, we used a 2 (status: higher status vs. peer status) × 2 (self-disclosure: disclosure vs. no disclosure) between-subjects design. Two hundred and seventy-eight undergraduate university students participated in the experiment for course credit. Thirty-two participants (11.5% of the full sample) who indicated suspicion about their partner's identity were removed[4] from the sample. Our final sample consisted 245 participants (49.8% male with an average age of 20.49 (SD = 1.60)). This sample was 65.3% Caucasian, 19.2% Asian, 6.1% African American, 4.9% Hispanic, and 4.5% self-identified as "other". As in Study 1, we incentivized participants by indicating that the best performing team would win a $20 Starbucks gift card.

4.2. Procedure

Participants received an e-mail the night before the study and were told which laboratory (one of three possible laboratories in the building) they should go to the following day to complete the study on feedback and performance in virtual teams. In reality, all participants completed the study in the same laboratory, but the e-mail was intended to bolster the cover story that their partner would be participating in the study from a different lab in the building.

Once participants arrived at the laboratory to complete the study, the procedure was the same as Study 1 with several key changes. First, to manipulate the status of the discloser, "the partner" was either a fellow undergraduate (peer status) or an MBA student (higher status) at the same university, and the name of the partner was changed from "John Greene" to the username "JMG" to reduce the potential impact of the discloser's gender. Next, in Study 2 we used images from a different spatial judgment task and allowed participants 15 s to view each image (see Appendix B for sample images). Finally, the self-disclosure was selected to be a task-irrelevant self-disclosed weakness (i.e., a disclosure about the participant's health).

4.2.1. Manipulation of discloser's initial status

As in Study 1, the partners' responses to the "get-to-know-you" exercise contained the initial status manipulation. Participants either read about a higher status partner – MBA student, who interned at a consulting firm, likes to play golf, and vacations in Hawaii – or peer status partner – an undergraduate student who interned at a fast-food chain company, likes to play basketball, and drives to the beach for a vacation.

4.2.2. Experimental task

As in the first study, the task was composed of three rounds (a practice round, first round, and final round) and each round included 5 unique images (see Appendix B for sample images). For this study, the images used in the task were taken from research on visual judgment and graphical perception (Cleveland & McGill, 1984; Heer & Bostock, 2010; Hullman, Adar, & Shah, 2011). The images shown to the participants were composed of rectangles, and each image always had a smaller rectangle labeled "A" and a larger rectangle labeled "B". Participants had 15 s to look at the image and "estimate the percentage A (the smaller rectangle) is of B (the larger rectangle)". This task was chosen because previous research has shown that it is difficult to make an accurate visual judgment, making the interpretation of the image subject to social influence (Cleveland & McGill, 1984; Hullman et al., 2011). Participants were shown an example before the practice round.

All participants read that they had been randomly assigned to the role of "feedback-taker", and that the "feedback-giver" would provide feedback at a number of points during the task which they could use to alter their response to the question. In reality all messages from their "partner" (i.e., the "feedback-giver") were preprogrammed. As in Study 1, the only difference in feedback between conditions was the message they received at the end of the first round, which constituted the self-disclosing weakness manipulation (described below).

4.2.3. Self-disclosing weakness manipulation

After the first round of the task, participants received the message below from their partner.[5] Participants in the no disclosure condition received the same message only without the italicized self-disclosed weakness.

> Round one went great. You did a good job of deciding what percentage of the small shapes fits into the bigger shape. You managed your time well. I'm not exactly sure how different each of our answers were in the end. Which is weird because I tend to remember small details like that. *Maybe it is because I had a doctor's appointment today. He told me that I am overweight and that I need to lose 20–30 lb*. Anyway, I guess that doesn't matter for this … Keep up the good work. I think we can win the Starbucks gift card!

After reading the above feedback message, participants answered several questions about their partner, completed the final round, and responded to a number of final questions about their experience in the study, including measures of task conflict and relationship quality. The measures are described below.

4.3. Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

[4] Including these participants did not change the pattern of the results, and all significant comparisons and indirect effects remained significant ($ps < 0.05$), with the exception of three effects that became marginally significant ($ps < 0.10$), including: (1) the interaction between self-disclosing weakness and discloser's initial status, $F(1, 275) = 2.99$, $p = 0.085$, $\eta^2 = 0.011$, (2) the indirect effect of self-disclosing weakness on task conflict, 90% CI [0.02, 0.43], and (3) the indirect effect of self-disclosing weakness on the desire for a future relationship, 90% CI [−0.38, −0.15]).

[5] As in Study 1, we conducted a pretest (100 participants; 65% male, M_{age} = 34.65 years (SD_{age} = 10.63)) to verify that the self-disclosing weakness manipulation involved sharing meaningful personal and weakness ($\alpha = 0.94$) information. We found that participants in the weakness disclosure condition viewed the feedback as more personal ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.60$) and more of a weakness ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 1.44$) than did those in the no disclosure condition ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.43$), $F(1, 98) = 24.78$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.202$, and ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.41$), $F(1, 98) = 26.55$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.213$, respectively.

4.3.1. Post-disclosure status

We assessed the receiver's perception of the discloser's status after the self-disclosure manipulation with four items adapted from Pettit, Sivanathan, Gladstone, and Marr (2013) including, "Respect your partner", "Admire your partner", "Hold your partner in high regard", and "Feel like your partner had a great deal of status" ($\alpha = 0.90$).

4.3.2. Influence

The measure of influence was assessed in exactly the same way as in Study 1. The discloser provided feedback on four of the participant's responses (e.g., "…I think A is bigger than you think"), and we examined how much participants changed each of their answers in response to the discloser's feedback. We summed the changes that participants made in response to each instance of feedback to create a measure of the discloser's total influence during the task ($M = 26.30$, $SD = 17.35$, $Min = -49.00$, $Max = 99.00$).

4.3.3. Task conflict

The measure of task conflict was assessed using the same items as Study 1 ($\alpha = 0.88$).

4.3.4. Desire for future relationship

In this study we created a behavioral measure to assess the extent to which participants liked and potentially wanted to develop a future relationship with their partner (i.e., relationship quality). We asked participants to indicate whether they would be interested in staying in touch with the partner via e-mail, LinkedIn, and Facebook. Participants could check a box to indicate by which method(s) they would be willing to connect with their partner (0 = "No, I would not", 1 = "Yes, I would"). We summed participants' responses to create a composite measure of participants' desire to have a future relationship with their partner ($M = 1.24$, $SD = 1.13$, min = 0, max = 3).

4.3.5. Manipulation and suspicion checks

We used the same manipulation check described in Study 1 to verify the effectiveness of the discloser's initial status manipulation ($\alpha = 0.95$). To determine whether participants were suspicious about their virtual partner without triggering suspicion, we asked participants a more subtle open-ended question: "Do you have any final comments for us about your partner?". Participants who indicated suspicion about their partner's identity were coded as "1" and those who did not indicate suspicion were coded as "0".

4.4. Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables are provided in Table 2.

4.4.1. Manipulation checks

Confirming the effectiveness of the discloser status manipulation, an ANOVA showed that in the higher discloser status condition, participants perceived their partner to have higher status ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.22$) than the participants in the peer status condition ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.25$), $F(1, 243) = 55.31$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.185$.

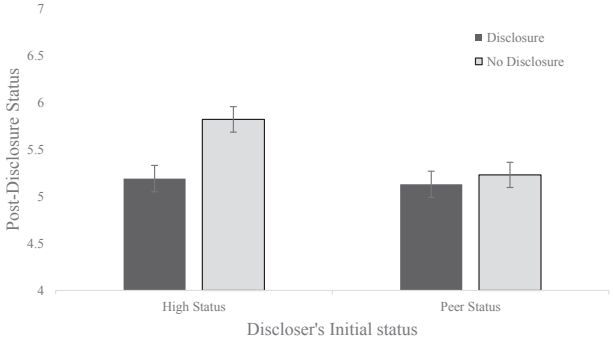


Fig. 4. The effect of self-disclosing weakness on the discloser's post-disclosure status by the discloser's initial status (Study 2).

4.4.2. Discloser's post-disclosure status

We conducted an ANOVA and found main effects of self-disclosing weakness, $F(1, 241) = 7.13$, $p = 0.008$, $\eta^2 = 0.029$ and discloser's initial status, $F(1, 241) = 5.52$, $p = 0.020$, $\eta^2 = 0.022$, as well as the predicted significant interaction between self-disclosing weakness and discloser's initial status, $F(1, 241) = 3.85$, $p = 0.051$, $\eta^2 = 0.016$ on participants' perception of the discloser's post-disclosure status.

Probing the interaction (Fig. 4), we found that when the discloser's initial status was higher, self-disclosing weakness negatively affected the receiver's perception of the discloser's post-disclosure status (disclosure: $M = 5.19$, $SD = 0.95$, vs. no disclosure: $M = 5.82$, $SD = 1.09$), $t(2\,4\,1) = 3.26$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.042$. However, when the discloser initially had peer status, self-disclosing weakness did not significantly affect the receiver's perception of the discloser's post-disclosure status (disclosure: $M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.01$, vs. no disclosure: $M = 5.23$, $SD = 1.22$), $t(2\,4\,1) = 0.50$, $p = 0.615$, $\eta^2 = 0.001$. These findings provide support for Hypothesis 1 and show that self-disclosing weakness had a greater negative effect on the receiver's perception of the discloser's post-disclosure status when the initial status of the discloser was higher.

4.4.3. Influence, task conflict and relationship quality

We predicted that by attenuating the discloser's post-disclosure status, self-disclosing weakness would undermine influence, bolster task conflict and diminish relationship quality when the discloser initially has higher status (Fig. 5). Consistent with Hypotheses 2a–c, we found a significant effect of the discloser's post-disclosure status on task influence, $B = 2.76$, $SE = 1.01$, $p = 0.007$ (95% CI [0.77, 4.74]), task conflict, $B = -0.46$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < 0.0001$ (95% CI [−0.59, −0.33]), and desire to stay connected, $B = 0.42$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.0001$ (95% CI [0.30, 0.54]).

Following the same bootstrapped moderated mediation procedures used in Study 1, we examined each of the three predicted moderated

Table 2
Means, standards deviations, and correlations among Study 2 variables.

Variable		M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.	Disclosure	0.49	0.50					
2.	Discloser's initial status	0.49	0.50	0.00				
3.	Discloser's post-disclosure status	5.35	1.10	−0.16**	0.15*			
4.	Influence	26.28	17.35	0.03	0.02	0.17**		
5.	Task conflict	2.75	1.22	0.04	−0.05	−0.41**	−0.15*	
6.	Desire for a future relationship	1.24	1.13	−0.05	0.06	0.41**	0.08	−0.17**

Note. Initial status was coded 1 = high status, 0 = peer status.
* $p \leq 0.05$.
** $p \leq 0.01$.

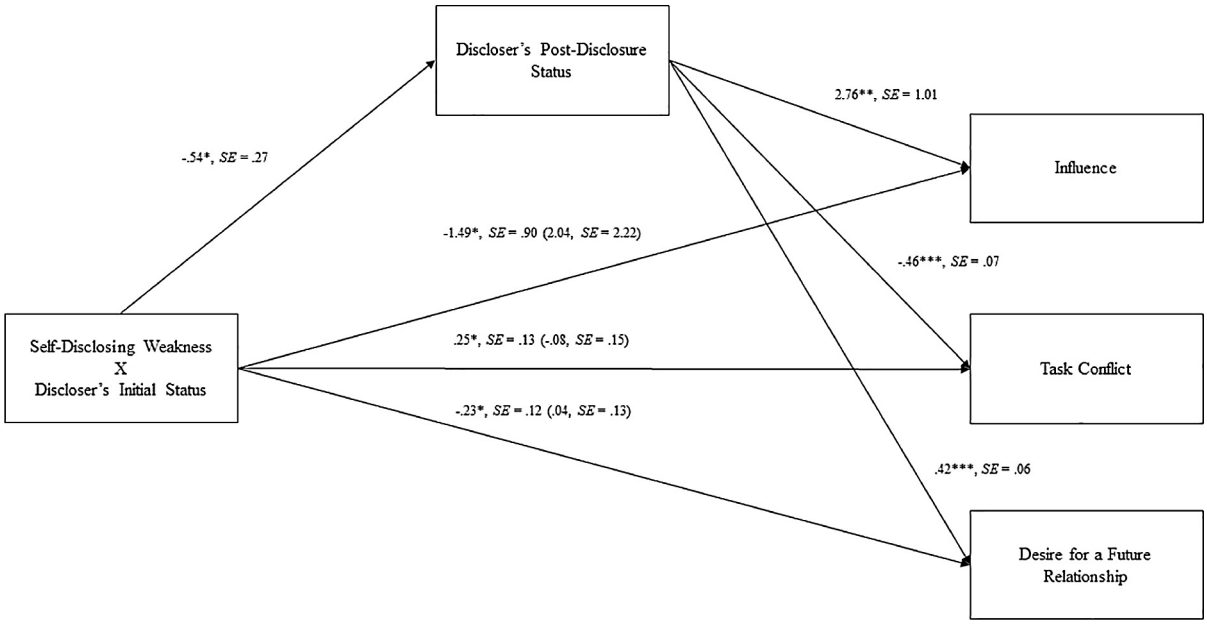


Fig. 5. The indirect effect of self-disclosing weakness on influence, task conflict, and liking through the discloser's post-disclosure status, conditional on the discloser's initial status (Study 2). *Note*: Unstandardized coefficients are reported (the coefficient in parenthesis indicates the direct effect of self-disclosing weakness on the respective outcome prior to controlling for the discloser's post-disclosure status). The model was tested in separate analyses in SPSS. $^{***}p \leq 0.001$, $^{**}p \leq 0.01$, $^{*}p \leq 0.05$.

mediation models (Fig. 5). In support of Hypothesis 3a, we found a negative and significant indirect effect (−1.49) of self-disclosing weakness on influence through the discloser's post-disclosure status, conditional on the discloser's initial status (95% CI [−3.85, −0.16]). There was a significant negative indirect effect (−1.75) of self-disclosing weakness on influence through the receiver's perception of the discloser's post-disclosure status when the discloser's initial status was higher (95% CI [−3.57, −0.63]), but no significant indirect effect (−0.27) when the discloser initially had peer status (95% CI [−1.59, 0.79]).

Next, consistent with Hypothesis 3b, our results showed a positive and significant indirect effect (0.25) of self-disclosing weakness on task conflict through the discloser's post-disclosure status, conditional upon the discloser's initial status (95% CI [0.02, 0.54]). Self-disclosing weakness positively affected task conflict through the receiver's perception of the discloser's post-disclosure status when the discloser's initial status was higher (Indirect effect = 0.29; 95% CI [0.13, 0.50]), but not when the discloser initially had peer status (Indirect effect = 0.04; 95% CI [−0.14, 0.22]).

Finally, as predicted by Hypothesis 3c, we found a significant indirect effect (−0.23) of self-disclosing weakness on the desire for a future relationship through the discloser's post-disclosure status, conditional on the discloser's initial status (95% CI [−0.49, −0.005]),[6] such that self-disclosing weakness negatively affected (−0.27) the desire for a future relationship with their partner through the receiver's perception of the discloser's post-disclosure status when the discloser's initial status was higher (95% CI [−0.46, −0.11]), but not when the discloser initially had peer status (Indirect effect = −0.04; 95% CI [−0.21, 0.13]).

4.5. Discussion

These results constructively replicate the results of Study 1 and show that for higher status individuals, self-disclosing weakness – even if the information disclosed is actually irrelevant to the task – attenuates their perceived status and, as a result, undermines their influence, increases task conflict, and harms the quality of the relationship.

However, there are three main limitations of this study that needed to be addressed in an additional experiment. First, the role of "feedback-giver" in the first two studies may have been interpreted by participants as a higher status role. Thus, even in the peer status condition, the participant may have viewed the discloser as being in a slightly higher status position.

Second, in the first two studies, we examined the effects of self-disclosing weakness relative to not disclosing. Recent research by Uhlmann and colleagues on cultural differences in norms of workplace professionalism (Uhlmann, Heaphy, Ashford, Zhu, & Sanchez-Burks, 2013; Uhlmann & Sanchez-Burks, 2014) suggests that any personal disclosure – even one that does not highlight a weakness – could potentially negatively affect the perceptions of a coworker's professionalism. Accordingly, it is possible that the effects we find are a consequence of a higher status individual disclosing personal information about themselves to their coworker, rather than a result of self-disclosing *weakness* per se.

Finally, the design of the first two studies did not enable us to examine the proposed psychological process (i.e., perceived vulnerability) that explains why self-disclosing weakness triggers status loss (and subsequent consequences) for higher, but not peer, status coworkers. This is particularly important because there are two reasonable alternatives, namely, that the weakness disclosures used in the first two studies (i.e., academic probation, overweight) may have negatively affected perceptions of the discloser's task competence or appropriateness.

One alternative is that because we have different standards for how high status individuals express themselves (Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000), the act of self-disclosing a weakness might make higher status disclosers appear less competent or more inappropriate, but not affect the perceived competence or appropriateness of the peer status discloser to the same extent. These more negative perceptions of a higher (but not peer) status discloser's competence or appropriateness would then lead to a status penalty for

[6] Because millennials may utilize social media platforms differently regarding their desire for a connection, we reanalyzed our data using only the email indicator as our dependent variable and the pattern and significance of the results stayed the same (Indirect effect = −0.42, 95% CI [−0.99, −0.02]).

higher (but not peer) status disclosers. A second alternative is that even if the weakness self-disclosure triggered similarly negative perceptions about both higher and peer status disclosers' competence and appropriateness, people may have loftier expectations for a high status individual's competence and appropriateness (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). Therefore, diminished perceptions of task competence or appropriateness might trigger a status violation for higher (but not peer) status disclosers. Study 3 was designed to address these issues.

5. Study 3

In Study 3, we extended the findings of Studies 1 and 2 in three main ways. First, we increased the internal validity of our findings by constructively replicating the results of the first two studies using a different task-irrelevant self-disclosure and a different task, to ensure that our findings were not related to the specific disclosures or tasks used in the previous studies. We also revised the nature of the "feedback-giver" role to strengthen and clarify the initial status manipulation. Second, to address the possibility that self-disclosing generally (rather than self-disclosing *weakness* specifically) drives the negative consequences for higher status disclosers, we included an additional condition – strength self-disclosure.

Finally, we examine our proposed psychological mechanism – perceived vulnerability – to explain why higher (but not peer) status disclosers experience status loss after disclosing weakness. Our theory suggests that self-disclosing a weakness is an act of vulnerability – revealing one's insecurities and communicating a desire to be supported (Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Moon, 2000) – and because signaling vulnerability constitutes a violation for higher (but not peer) status individuals, self-disclosing weakness will have a more negative effect on status perceptions for higher (versus peer) status disclosers. Thus, we predict the following second-stage moderated mediation:

Hypothesis 4. The negative indirect effect of self-disclosing weakness on the discloser's status through perceived vulnerability will be moderated by the discloser's initial status (higher versus peer). That is, we expect to find the indirect effect for higher, but not peer status disclosers.

Building on Hypothesis 4, Study 3 provides a test of our full theoretical model (see Fig. 1), and examines whether perceived vulnerability explains why higher (but not peer) status disclosers experience status loss after self-disclosing weakness, ultimately leading to negative consequences for higher status disclosers' influence, task conflict, and relationship quality with the receiver. Thus, we predict:

Hypothesis 5. The indirect effects of self-disclosing weakness on (a) the discloser's influence, (b) task conflict, and (c) relationship quality (through perceived vulnerability and the receiver's perception of the discloser's post-disclosure status), will be moderated by the discloser's initial status (higher versus peer). That is, we expect to find indirect effects for higher, but not peer status disclosers.

Given the plausible alternate explanations for our findings described in the discussion of Study 2, we also include supplementary analyses to test whether perceptions of competence or appropriateness could explain our findings.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants and design

We used a 2 (status: higher status vs. peer status) × 3 (self-disclosure: weakness disclosure vs. strength disclosure vs. no disclosure) between-subjects design. Two hundred and ninety-six undergraduate university students participated in the experiment for course credit. Sixteen participants (5.4% of the full sample) who indicated suspicion about their partner, and another two participants whose responses in the experimental task could not be interpreted were removed[7] from the sample. Our final sample consisted of 280 participants (46.4% male with an average age of 20.48 years (SD = 1.96)). The sample was 67.1% Caucasian, 18.9% Asian, 8.6% African American, 3.2% Hispanic, and 1.8% self-identified as "other". As in the first two studies, we incentivized participants by indicating that the best performing team would win a $20 Starbucks gift card.

5.2. Procedure

The study followed the same procedure as Study 2 with three exceptions. First, we adapted the initial status manipulation to clarify the role of the feedback-giver was not a higher status role in the peer status condition. Second, we selected a different weakness disclosure manipulation that was unrelated to task competence to ensure our effects were not driven by perceptions of competence. Third, we changed the task from a spatial reasoning to a trivia task.

5.2.1. Manipulation of discloser's initial status

After providing a username, participants completed the "get-to-know-you" exercise and read the same responses used to manipulate status as in Study 2. Next, to reinforce the status manipulation and ensure the feedback-giver role was not viewed as a higher status role in the peer status condition, we were also explicit about participants' hierarchical role for the task. We assigned all participants to the role of "Junior Consultant", and varied the role of the discloser by condition (peer status "Junior Consultant" versus higher status "Senior Consultant"). Further, in the peer status condition, participants read that the discloser had been randomly selected to practice giving feedback, whereas in the higher status condition, participants read that as a "Senior Consultant" it was part of the discloser's role to give feedback.

5.2.2. Experimental task

The trivia task was adapted from Pettit et al. (2013) and was composed of two rounds of three trivia questions (see Appendix C for sample questions). To allow for the manipulation of feedback, we used questions that did not have definitive answers and could not be looked up online (e.g., participants had to estimate the weight of a particular elephant based on its picture). As in Study 2, participants had 15 s to view the question before they were directed to the next page to provide their answer. Participants received feedback from their partner four times during the task and had an opportunity to revise and resubmit their answer each time. In reality, these feedback messages from their partner were preprogrammed and were exactly the same across conditions. The only difference between conditions was a message participants received at the end of the first round which constituted the self-disclosure manipulation (described below).

5.2.3. Self-disclosure manipulation

After participants completed the first round of the task, they received a message from their partner.[8] All participants received the first

[7] Including these participants did not change the pattern of the results. All significant comparisons and indirect effects presented in the results section remained significant ($ps < 0.05$) with one exception: the interaction of self-disclosing weakness and discloser's initial status on the discloser's post-disclosure status became marginally significant, $B = 0.67$, $SE = 0.40$, $p = 0.090$, (95% CI [−0.14, 1.42]).

[8] As in the previous studies, the self-disclosure manipulations were pretested (102 participants; 48% male, M_{age} = 34.51 years (SD_{age} = 10.55)). We used the same items as Studies 1 and 2 to assess the extent to which the partner shared personal information, as well as, weakness information ($\alpha = 0.96$), and we also included new items to assess the extent to which the partner shared information about a strength ("strength"/"talent"/"area of capability"; $\alpha = 0.93$), and the extent to which the disclosures affected perceptions of the partner's task competence ("To what extent do you perceive your partner to be…intelligent/competent/skilled"; $\alpha = 0.93$). Confirming the effectiveness of our manipulations, (1) participants in the weakness disclosure condition ($M = 5.60$, $SD = 1.40$) and strength disclosure condition ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.51$) viewed the feedback as significantly more personal ($ps < 0.001$) than those in the no disclosure condition

Table 3
Means, standards deviations, and correlations among Study 3 variables.

Variable		M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1.	Weakness disclosure	0.32	0.47										
2.	Strength disclosure	0.34	0.47	−0.49**									
3.	No disclosure	0.35	0.48	−0.50**	−0.52**								
4.	Vulnerability	2.41	1.45	0.51**	−0.19**	−0.32**							
5.	Competence	5.70	1.09	−0.06	0.06	−0.01	−0.22**						
6.	Appropriateness	6.06	1.18	−0.35**	0.10	0.24**	−0.37**	0.49**					
7.	Discloser's initial status	0.50	0.50	0.09	−0.05	−0.04	0.02	0.19**	0.01				
8.	Discloser's post-disclosure status	4.84	1.44	−0.05	−0.02	0.07	−0.19**	0.68**	0.42**	0.25**			
9.	Influence	0.02	2.12	−0.03	0.10	−0.06	−0.08	0.17**	0.17**	0.06	0.16**		
10.	Task conflict	3.08	1.35	0.02	0.02	−0.04	0.21**	−0.27*	−0.15*	−0.15*	−0.26**	−0.23**	
11.	Desire for a future relationship	1.20	1.05	−0.06	0.08	−0.01	−0.11	0.16**	0.15*	0.14*	0.25**	0.12*	−0.15**

Note. Initial status was coded 1 = high status, 0 = peer status.
* $p \leq 0.05$.
** $p \leq 0.01$.

part of the message: "Round one went great. You did a good job answering the trivia questions. You managed your time well. I like this activity. It is different than what I normally do at this time…" Participants in the **weakness disclosure/strength disclosure/no disclosure** conditions then read

> "…I see a therapist and this is usually the time I go each week. I've been seeing him for the past 6 months. Anyway, keep up the good work. I think we can win!" (**weakness self-disclosure**)
> "…I'm a runner, and now is usually when I train. I recently won a marathon, actually. Anyway, keep up the good work. I think we can win!" (**strength disclosure**)
> "…Anyway, keep up the good work. I think we can win!" (**no disclosure**)

After completing the first round of the task and reading the self-disclosure manipulation, participants responded to several questions about the extent to which their partner's feedback messages had signaled vulnerability, task competence, appropriateness, and status. Next, participants completed the second round of the task and then responded to a number of final questions about their experience in the study, including measures of task conflict, relationship quality, and the manipulation check measures. The measures are described below.

5.3. Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all items were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

5.3.1. Vulnerability

We assessed the extent to which the discloser was perceived to signal vulnerability with two items including the extent to which their partner: "Displayed insecurity," and "Seemed like they needed support" (from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much;* $\alpha = 0.84$).

5.3.2. Task competence

We assessed perceptions of the discloser's task competence by using a scale adapted from Leach, Ellemers, and Barreto (2007), asking participants to what extent they perceived their partner as "Intelligent," "Competent," and "Skilled" (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*; $\alpha = 0.95$).

5.3.3. Appropriateness

We assessed perceptions of the appropriateness of the discloser's message by asking participants to what extent they perceived the content of their partner's messages as "Acceptable" and "Professional" (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very much*; $\alpha = 0.79$).

5.3.4. Post-disclosure status

The discloser's post-disclosure status was assessed using the same four items as in Study 2 ($\alpha = 0.91$).

5.3.5. Influence

As in Studies 1 and 2, we assessed the extent to which the receiver was influenced by the discloser by calculating the amount that participants changed their answer in response to each of the four instances in which the partner provided feedback during the task, summing these changes to create a measure of the discloser's total influence during the task ($M = 0.03$, $SD = 2.12$, $Min = -7.28$, $Max = 14.64$). In this study, because the responses to the trivia questions used different scales (i.e., number of jelly beans, pounds of an elephant, etc.), we standardized the values before aggregation.

5.3.6. Task conflict

We measured task conflict using the same items as in Studies 1 and 2 ($\alpha = 0.88$).

5.3.7. Desire for future relationship

We assessed participants' desire for a future relationship with the discloser using the same summed items as Study 2 ($M = 1.17$, $SD = 1.05$, min = 0, max = 3).

5.3.8. Manipulation and suspicion checks

To verify the effectiveness of the manipulation of the discloser's initial status, participants indicated the extent to which at the beginning of the exercise they perceived their partner was "In a position of high status?" and "Was prestigious?" ($\alpha = 0.91$). To assess suspicion, we used the same open-ended suspicion check used in Study 2.

5.4. Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations among the study variables are provided in Table 3.

(*footnote continued*)
($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.35$). (2) Participants in the weakness disclosure condition perceived the feedback as more of a weakness ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.71$) than did participants in the no disclosure ($M = 2.24$, $SD = 1.26$), and the strength disclosure conditions ($M = 1.66$, $SD = 1.15$) ($ps < 0.001$). (3) Participants in the strength disclosure condition perceived the feedback as more of a strength ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.39$) than did participants in the no disclosure ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.52$), and weakness disclosure conditions ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.83$) ($ps < 0.001$). (4) Finally, participants did not perceive their partner to be significantly more or less competent in the weakness disclosure condition ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.35$) or the strength condition ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.21$) than in the no disclosure condition ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.15$), ($p = 0.671$, and $p = 0.132$, respectively). These results confirm the effectiveness of the self-disclosure manipulations.

5.4.1. Manipulation checks

Confirming the effectiveness of the status manipulation, we found that participants in the higher status condition perceived their partner to have higher status ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.33$) than participants in the peer status condition ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.34$), $F(1, 276) = 81.11$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.227$.

5.4.2. Vulnerability

We first test our assumption that self-disclosing weakness signals vulnerability. We conducted a 2 × 3 ANOVA to examine the effects of discloser's initial status and type of self-disclosure on perceptions of the discloser's vulnerability. There was no main effect of the discloser's initial status, ($p = 0.667$), and no interaction between discloser's initial status and type of self-disclosure on vulnerability ($p = 0.964$), but as expected, we found a main effect of self-disclosure on vulnerability, $F(2, 272) = 49.90$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.269$. Examining the pairwise comparisons showed that weakness self-disclosers signaled more vulnerability ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.53$) than did those who disclosed a strength ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 1.20$), $t(272) = 5.69$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.106$, or did not disclose at all ($M = 1.78$, $SD = 0.96$), $t(272) = -6.88$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.148$. We did not find a significant difference in the perceived vulnerability between those who disclosed a strength or did not disclose at all, $t(272) = -1.08$, $p = 0.280$, $\eta^2 = 0.004$, suggesting that our effects are not the consequence of self-disclosure generally, but weakness self-disclosures, specifically.

5.4.3. Discloser's post-disclosure status

Given that weakness self-disclosures were found to signal greater vulnerability in the discloser, we next sought to test our second-stage moderated mediation hypothesis (Hypothesis 4) that signaling vulnerability would be a status violation for higher (but not peer) status disclosers. Accordingly, we conducted bootstrapped-moderated mediation analysis by constructing the indirect effect of self-disclosed weakness on the discloser's post-disclosure status through vulnerability for higher and peer status disclosers (i.e., second-stage moderated mediation). We included strength self-disclosure as a covariate to allow for a direct comparison between the weakness self-disclosure and the no disclosure conditions (Hayes & Preacher, 2014).

Results revealed a main effect of disclosers' initial status on post-disclosure status, $B = 1.31$, $SE = 0.32$, $p < 0.001$, (95% CI [0.68, 1.94]), and no main effect of vulnerability or self-disclosed weakness on the post-disclosure status of the discloser ($ps > 0.49$). However, as predicted, we found a significant interaction between the discloser's initial status and vulnerability on the post-disclosure status of the discloser, $B = -0.25$, $SE = 0.11$, $p = 0.031$, (95% CI [−0.47, −0.02]). Consistent with Hypothesis 4, there was a significant conditional negative indirect effect (−0.42) of self-disclosing weakness on post-disclosure status through vulnerability (95% CI [−0.83, −0.04]), such that when the discloser's initial status was higher, there was a negative indirect effect (−0.54) of self-disclosing weakness on post-disclosure status through the receiver's perception of the discloser's vulnerability (95% CI [−0.85, −0.26]), but no significant indirect effect on post-disclosure status (−0.11) when the discloser initially had peer status (95% CI [−0.47, 0.19]). These results provide support for our theory that self-disclosing weakness signals vulnerability, which more negatively affects higher status disclosers.

5.4.4. Influence, conflict, and desire for a future relationship

Next, to test our full theoretical model (Hypothesis 5), we used structural equation modeling in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017), which allowed us to assess (1) the moderated mediation with two sequential mediators, and (2) the concurrent effects on our three outcomes of interest (i.e., influence, conflict, and desire for a future relationship). In the model, we allowed the dependent variables to be correlated with each other, and included the strength condition as a control. As in Studies 1 and 2, we used bootstrapping resamples of 10,000. The results of the paths of the model are depicted in Table 4.

We examined the conditional indirect effects of self-disclosing weakness on our dependent variables (Hypothesis 5) through vulnerability and then on discloser's post-disclosure status. We found that for higher status disclosers, there was a negative and significant indirect effect (−0.14) of self-disclosing weakness on influence (95% CI [−0.37, −0.01]), a positive and significant indirect effect (0.12) of self-disclosing weakness on task conflict (95% CI [0.04, 0.25]), and a negative and significant indirect effect (−0.10) of self-disclosing weakness on participants' desire for a future relationship with the discloser (95% CI [−0.20, −0.04]),[9] through vulnerability and post-disclosure status. By contrast, for peer status disclosers, there were no significant indirect effects of self-disclosing weakness on influence (Indirect effect = 0.01; 95% CI [−0.07, 0.11]), task conflict (Indirect effect = −0.01; 95% CI [−0.08, 0.06]), or desire for a future relationship (Indirect effect = 0.00; 95% CI [−0.05, 0.06]), through vulnerability and post-disclosure status. The differences between the indirect effects for higher and peer status disclosers were also significant as the 95% confidence intervals did not include zero. These results provide support for perceived vulnerability as the psychological process explaining why higher (but not peer) status disclosers experience a status penalty, and subsequently less influence, more conflict, and lower relationship quality, after self-disclosing weakness.

5.5. Supplementary analyses

We next addressed two alternative explanations in supplementary analyses. We first examined whether weakness self-disclosure differentially influenced perceptions of the discloser's competence or appropriateness based on their status. We conducted two ANOVAs and did not find a significant interaction between initial status and type of disclosure on either task competence, $F(1, 272) = 0.67$, $p = 0.511$, or appropriateness, $F(1, 272) = 0.08$, $p = 0.920$. Accordingly, we examined the second possibility, that lowered perceptions of the discloser's task competence or appropriateness triggered by self-disclosing weakness might be viewed as a violation for higher (but not peer) status disclosers. We ran two separate second-stage moderated mediation analyses with (1) task competence, and then (2) appropriateness entered as the first mediator (rather than vulnerability, as in our main analysis). In the first model, there was no main effect of weakness self-disclosure on perceived task competence (p = 0.602), and although there was a main effect of task competence on post-disclosure status, $B = 0.96$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < 0.001$, we did not find a significant interaction between the discloser's initial status and task competence on the discloser's post-disclosure status, $B = -0.17$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = 0.310$. In the second model, although we did find a significant main effect of weakness self-disclosure on appropriateness, $B = -0.98$, $SE = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$, and of appropriateness on post-disclosure status, $B = 0.50$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < 0.001$, we did not find a significant interaction between the discloser's initial status and appropriateness on the discloser's post-disclosure status, $B = 0.10$, $SE = 0.14$, $p = 0.480$. These results suggest that any difference in the effect of self-disclosing weakness on a discloser's post-disclosure status, and subsequent influence, conflict, and relationship quality cannot be explained by perceptions of task competence or appropriateness.

Overall, the results of this study provide strong support for our theory that for higher (but not peer) status disclosers, self-disclosing weakness negatively affects perceived status and then undermines influence, encourages conflict, and diminishes relationship quality because self-disclosing weakness signals vulnerability which constitutes a violation for higher (but not peer) status disclosers.

[9] As in Study 2, we reanalyzed our data using only the email indicator as our dependent variable. The pattern remained the same and the indirect effect was significant (Indirect effect = −0.05, 95% CI [−0.10, −0.02]).

Table 4
Unstandardized coefficients for SEM model, Study 3.

Variables	Vulnerability	Discloser's post-disclosure status	Influence	Task conflict	Desire for a future relationship
Predicted paths					
Weakness self-disclosure	1.72*** (0.19)	−0.42 (0.31)	0.74 (0.49)	−0.63* (0.31)	0.13 (0.25)
Discloser's initial status		1.38*** (0.33)	0.55 (0.55)	−0.75* (0.32)	0.48† (0.26)
Vulnerability		0.02 (0.10)	−0.05 (0.13)	0.15 (0.11)	0.01 (0.09)
Vulnerability × Discloser's initial status		−0.39** (0.14)	−0.07 (0.20)	0.10 (0.13)	−0.09 (0.11)
Weakness self-disclosure × Discloser's initial status		0.83* (0.40)	−0.89 (0.63)	0.74† (0.40)	−0.22 (0.32)
Discloser's post-disclosure status			0.22† (0.12)	−0.18** (0.07)	0.15*** (0.05)
Influence			–	−0.46** (0.18)	0.14 (0.10)
Task conflict				–	−0.08 (0.08)
Desire for a future relationship					–
Control variable					
Strength self-disclosure	0.25 (0.16)	−0.13 (0.20)	0.53† (0.32)	0.03 (0.19)	0.17 (0.15)

Note: Dashes indicate data are not applicable. Standard errors are reported in parenthesis. Initial status is coded as "1" for high status and "0" for peer status. Weakness self-disclosure is coded as "1" for weakness and "0" for no weakness disclosure (no disclosure or strength disclosure, strength disclosure condition is included as a control variable).

† $p \leq 0.1$.

* $p \leq 0.05$.

** $p \leq 0.01$.

*** $p \leq 0.001$.

6. General discussion

This article investigated how self-disclosing weakness in task-oriented partnerships affects task and relationship outcomes for higher and peer status disclosers. Whereas much of the literature on self-disclosure touts the benefits of disclosure for social relationships (Collins & Miller, 1994; Cozby, 1972; Jourard, 1959; Worthy et al., 1969), we suggest that in the context of task-oriented relationships, some self-disclosures made by higher status coworkers may do more to harm rather than help the relationship. We thus highlight an irony of self-disclosure: although higher status individuals may disclose information about their weaknesses to a coworker in order to reduce the social distance between them and foster a better working relationship, their disclosure may have exactly the opposite effect.

In three laboratory experiments, we found that when higher status individuals self-disclosed a weakness, it led to lower influence (Studies 1, 2 and 3), greater perceived conflict (Studies 1, 2 and 3), less liking (Study 1), and less desire for a future relationship (Studies 2 and 3) by attenuating the status of the discloser. By contrast, peer status disclosers did not experience any of these negative consequences. We argued and found support for perceived vulnerability as the psychological process that drives these differential effects for higher and peer status disclosers (Study 3) such that although self-disclosing weakness signaled vulnerability for all disclosers, only higher status disclosers incurred a status penalty as a result.

By adopting the perspective of the receiver (i.e., the individual receiving the disclosure) and testing our hypotheses in a controlled setting, we were able to examine when and why self-disclosing weakness might have negative consequences for the discloser and his or her relationships. Past research on self-disclosure in the work context has typically taken the perspective of the discloser (Dumas et al., 2013; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Phillips et al., 2009). This past research suggests that disclosers may experience real benefits from disclosing (rather than concealing) potentially negative information about themselves in terms of their job attitudes and well-being (Grandey, 2003; Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins, 2008). They may even perceive an increase in closeness in their relationships (Dumas et al., 2013). However, our research suggests that in the context of task-oriented relationships, the positive consequences perceived by the discloser may not always reflect the experience of the receiver. These research findings are consistent with earlier findings showing that individuals in high power positions have more difficulty adopting the perspective of others (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006), suggesting that higher status disclosers may feel closer to their coworkers after disclosing information about 'who they are', but not realize that the receiver does not reciprocate those feelings.

6.1. Theoretical implications

Our research makes several theoretical contributions to the self-disclosure and status literatures. First, to our knowledge the present studies are the first to offer insight into how self-disclosure impacts task-related outcomes such as influence and task conflict. Earlier self-disclosure research has focused on interpersonal constructs such as liking and willingness to trust in the future (Collins & Miller, 1994). By examining how self-disclosure affects task-related constructs (i.e., influence and task conflict), we provide additional insight into organizationally-relevant consequences of self-disclosure in the workplace. Specifically, expanding the nomological net of dependent variables affected by self-disclosure enables us to broaden the scope of the self-disclosure literature beyond the dyadic relationship in which the self-disclosure occurs to include impacts upon broader organizational processes in which the dyadic relationship is embedded. Given the recent social media trends that increase the volume of self-disclosure occurring in workplaces today, deepening our understanding of the ramifications to both the dyad in which the self-disclosure occurs as well as to organizationally-relevant outcomes such as influence and task conflict is a critical link in understanding how self-disclosure functions as a relationship development mechanism within workplace hierarchies.

Second, our research contributes to the literature on self-disclosure by uncovering boundaries for the commonly held belief that self-disclosure is beneficial for relationships. In fact, our research highlights that the positive benefits of self-disclosure may depend upon the status of the discloser relative to the receiver due to expectations that receivers have of individuals with higher status. We found that when disclosers revealed weakness to a peer, the coworkers were able to maintain their working relationship in terms of influence, conflict, and relationship quality; however, when the discloser had higher status than the receiver, the working relationship was disrupted, undermining influence, encouraging conflict, and diminishing relationship quality. Prior research has treated self-disclosure as a positive mechanism for relationship development (Collins & Miller, 1994). Our findings highlight boundary conditions wherein self-disclosure can harm relationship development.

Third, by empirically examining the impact of self-disclosing weakness on task and relational outcomes within task-oriented relationships, we highlight how self-disclosure may unfold differently within workplace relationships as opposed to social relationships or

friendships outside of work. Indeed, our findings suggest that self-disclosure, which has previously been shown to promote relationship development, in some cases may actually impede relationship development. Specifically, in task-oriented relationships, people may actually prefer clear status roles and thus disclosures that reduce status may not increase feelings of closeness and liking as they do in personal relationships. These findings are particularly salient for management scholars who may erroneously assume that relationship development principles hold without consideration of the larger organization in which the relationships are embedded.

Finally, our research also contributes to the burgeoning research on status loss. Recently, scholars have begun to examine the consequences of status loss for individuals in groups (Marr & Thau, 2014; Neeley, 2013). This research highlights the important negative outcomes that individuals experience when they lose status (e.g., threat, psychological distress, performance deficits). However, less attention has been devoted to what causes high status individuals to lose status. By examining the impact of self-disclosing weakness, our research highlights one way that higher status individuals may trigger their own status loss within organizations. Furthermore, if a higher status individual's disclosure reduces the extent to which they can influence others (as we find in our studies), this may limit the disclosers' ability to be effective in their role and may trigger additional status loss. In other words, self-disclosing weakness could actually trigger a status loss spiral for higher status individuals.

6.2. Limitations and directions for future research

Research suggests that one of the ways through which self-disclosure increases liking is by eliciting self-disclosure from the recipient (Cozby, 1972). Although all participants engaged in initial self-disclosure with their partner at the beginning of the study (through the "get-to-know-you" task), our experimental context did not give participants an opportunity to reciprocate the self-disclosed weakness they received. It is possible that if participants had been given the opportunity to respond, they may have chosen to reciprocate the self-disclosure, which may have led to more positive evaluations of the discloser, potentially for both peer and higher status disclosers. As such, future research would benefit from examining how self-disclosing weakness by higher status coworkers influences receivers in situations where the receiver reciprocates the disclosure.

Additionally, the present research investigated the consequences of weakness self-disclosure in a specific context (i.e., early in the life of the task-oriented relationship, and during the task). Although it is possible for someone to intentionally or inadvertently self-disclose a weakness in such a context, it is also reasonable to expect that the nature of the existing relationship (new versus more established coworker relationships) and the timing of the self-disclosure (during versus after the task, or during a lunch break) may have an impact on how the receiver responds. Understanding how the context of an existing coworker relationship, and the timing of the self-disclosed weakness in the task context interact with the status of the discloser to affect task-related and relational outcomes offers a fruitful avenue for future research.

Finally, in our studies, the gender of the discloser was either male (e.g., "John Greene"; Study 1), or not explicitly specified (e.g., initials; Studies 2 and 3). Accordingly, it is not possible to determine from our findings whether the gender of the discloser might affect the extent to which higher status disclosers experience a status penalty after self-disclosing weakness. Our theory suggests that because of the expectations people hold for high status individuals (e.g., confidence, assertiveness; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986), self-disclosing weakness – which signals vulnerability – constitutes a violation for higher (but not peer) status individuals. However, people often have different role expectations for women than men (Eagly, 1987). A meta-analysis by Collins and Miller (1994) found that the link between disclosure and liking was stronger for women than for men and suggested that this was because self-disclosure is seen to be more appropriate for women (Chelune, 1976). Therefore, it could be that signaling vulnerability constitutes less of a violation for higher status women than higher status men, weakening the negative effect of self-disclosing weakness on post-disclosure status for women. Conversely, it is also possible that there is a double standard for higher status women (cf. Kelly & Hutson-Comeaux, 2000; Ragins & Winkel, 2011), such that by violating the expectations of their status role, higher status women would be penalized more severely than men, leading to a stronger negative effect of self-disclosing weakness on post-disclosure status for women. Future research examining the potential moderating effects of gender would provide a more complete picture of this phenomenon.

6.3. Practical implications

Our research offers practical insights for self-disclosure within workplace relationships. Self-disclosure is becoming more commonplace in organizations through both the prevalence of contact with coworkers through social media and the injection of younger workers in the workplace who are more open about sharing their personal information with colleagues (Klaus, 2012; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2013). Following from this, coworkers are more likely than ever before to disclose information about 'who they are' and, therefore, may purposefully or inadvertently share information that may be perceived as a weakness. Because our findings suggest these disclosures can (for higher status individuals) trigger negative consequences, employees with formal or informal status should be mindful of what and to whom they share.

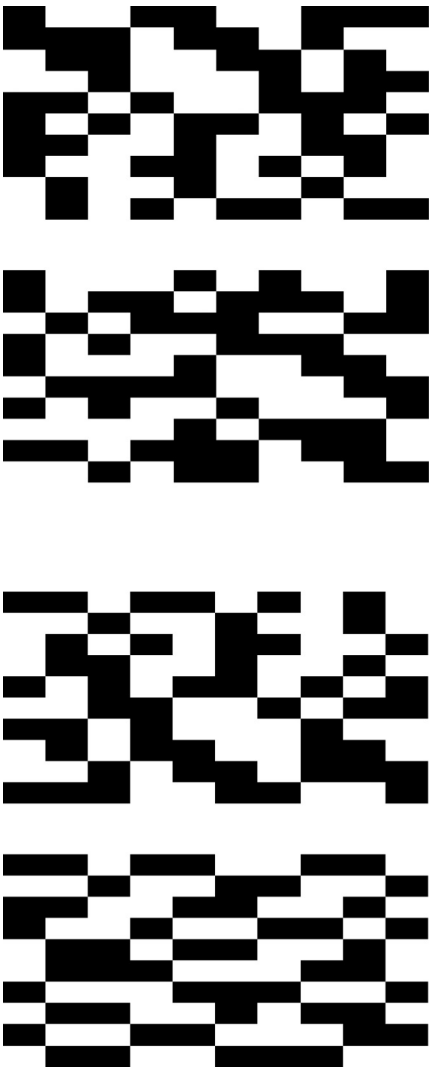
Finally, although in our studies the goal of the discloser is to influence the receiver, and therefore we describe less influence and greater conflict as negative consequences for the discloser, there may be situations in which increased task conflict and reduced discloser influence actually results in more positive outcomes for the dyad or team (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). For example, a team leader might strategically choose to self-disclose a weakness as a way to increase involvement from lower status group members who may be intimidated by the status differences between members of the team.

7. Conclusions

In sum, whereas past research has highlighted the benefits of self-disclosure, our research suggests that in the context of task-oriented relationships, self-disclosing weaknesses may have negative consequences for some coworkers. We found that because self-disclosing weakness signaled vulnerability, when a higher status coworker self-disclosed weakness, it resulted in diminished perceived status and consequently less influence, greater perceived conflict, less liking, and less desire for a future relationship. However, these negative consequences did not occur when peer status coworkers self-disclosed weakness. Our findings show that self-disclosure in workplace relationships is complicated by the status hierarchies that are ubiquitous in organizational environments. This work begins to shed light on the differences between workplace relationships and the social relationships we have outside of the office.

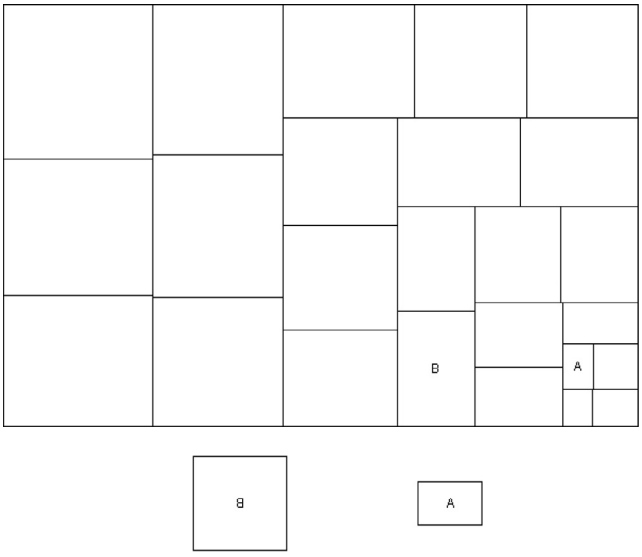
Appendix A

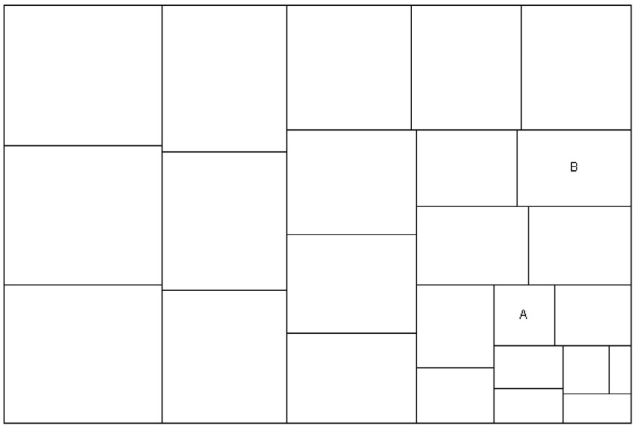
Examples of the images used in Study 1.



Appendix B

Examples of the images used in Study 2.





Appendix C

Examples of the trivia questions used in Study 3.

1. A grown-up elephant weighs approximately 8800–15,400 lb. How much do you think this elephant weighs?

2. How many jelly beans are in this jar?

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