

Running Head: Task-Based Jolt and Status Conferral

Jolted: How Task-Based Jolts Disrupt Status Conferral by
Impacting Higher- and Lower-Status Individuals' Generosity

Elijah X. M. Wee

University of Washington

Rellie Derfler-Rozin

University of Maryland

Jennifer Carson Marr

University of Maryland

*All authors contributed equally to the manuscript

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Abstract

Despite growing evidence that the status conferred to individuals in organizations can change, few theoretical accounts explain when and how established patterns of status conferral are disrupted. We develop a theory of “task-based jolts” – organizational-level events that alter group tasks and goals in a way that requires employees to adjust the way they work – as a significant catalyst to disrupt status conferral in an existing hierarchy. We employed a multi-method design across two empirical studies (Study 1 - quasi-field experiment; Study 2 – yoked experiment) and found that jolts are appraised differently by higher- and lower-status individuals, and as such the jolt has contrasting implications for their generosity towards their coworkers and ultimately the status conferred to them. When employees’ initial status is higher, they appraise a task-based jolt as self-threatening, undermining their concern for others and their generosity, which ultimately causes them to lose status in the immediate aftermath of the jolt. Conversely, when employees’ initial status is lower, they appraise a task-based jolt as more of an opportunity, increasing their belief that they can contribute and their generosity, which ultimately causes them to gain status in the immediate aftermath of the jolt. Our findings offer valuable insights into how and why organizational-level change can indirectly influence micro-level interpersonal behaviors (generosity) that, in turn, affect status hierarchies within the organization.

Status hierarchies – a rank ordering of employees according to the relative amount of respect, admiration, and regard each individual is conferred by others (Blader & Chen, 2014; Magee & Galinsky, 2008) – are a ubiquitous feature of organizational life (Podolny, 2005; Ridgeway et al., 2009). Once a hierarchy is established, people behave in a status-consistent manner (e.g., higher status individuals assert themselves and lower status individuals defer; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986), and thus, conferred status within the hierarchy tends to be stable and reinforcing. Still, emerging research highlights that there are circumstances when the status conferred to individuals can change (e.g., Chizhik et al., 2003; Pettit, Yong, & Spataro, 2010), and these changes in status may have profound effects on employee outcomes (e.g., performance, influence, well-being – Bendersky & Shah, 2012; Fernandes et al., 2021; Marr & Thau, 2014; Neeley, 2013). Yet, we know little about the events that disrupt existing patterns of status conferral in organizations (Magee & Galinsky, 2008).

Past research alludes to the potential impact of organizational change on employees' conferred status when employees are required to adopt practices that diverge from the status quo (Battilana, 2011). Individuals' status in organizational contexts is usually determined by their perceived contribution to the group (Bunderson, 2003; Flynn, 2003; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006), and therefore, we propose that organizational events that alter group tasks or goals have the most potential to disrupt existing patterns of status conferral within a hierarchy (Berger et al., 1998; Goar & Sell, 2005). We introduce *task-based jolts* – defined as highly disruptive organizational events (i.e., jolts – Meyer, 1982; Meyer et al., 1990; Tost, 2011) that alter work groups' tasks or goals in a way that necessitates employees to invest additional personal resources (e.g., time, energy, behavioral adaptations) to adjust to the new organizational reality – as an event that has the potential to disrupt existing patterns of status conferral (cf. Crawford, Thompson, &

Ashforth, 2019). These events require employees to come together to help and support each other (i.e., show generosity; Collet & Morrissey, 2009) so that they can overcome initial glitches and problems caused by change. Hence, task-based jolts create new opportunities to contribute to the group and influence status conferral (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Bunderson, 2003; Flynn, 2003; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006).

Although prior work has noted that task-based jolts can impact status conferral (Barley, 1986; Neeley, 2013), it has focused on the *direct impact* of jolts on status change. That is, research has suggested that jolts can alter the task-based contributions employees can make and thus, the status they are conferred by others. However, we take a *psychology of status perspective* (Anderson, Kraus, Galinsky, & Keltner, 2012; Hays & Blader, 2016; Marr & Thau, 2014; Pettit & Sivanathan, 2012) to posit that task-based jolts can provide opportunities for all employees to show generosity and gain or maintain high status in the group, but that some employees (ironically, those with higher status) are psychologically less prepared than others (those with lower status) to show such generosity and thus fail to gain or maintain their status. We predict that when employees' initial status (i.e., respect, admiration, and regard by their coworkers *before* the jolt) is higher, they appraise the task-based jolt as more self-threatening, which distracts them from the concerns of others (Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005; Sherman & Cohen, 2006), and undermines their generosity towards their coworkers after a jolt, ultimately causing them to lose status in the immediate aftermath of the jolt. By contrast, when employees' initial status is lower, they appraise the task-based jolt as more of an opportunity, which bolsters their confidence that they can be a more valued member of the group, and motivates greater generosity towards their coworkers after a jolt (Gardner, Van Dyne & Pierce,

2004; Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Sleebos et al., 2006), ultimately leading them to gain status in the immediate aftermath of the jolt.

Through our research, we make two main contributions to the status literature. First, we expand on a dynamic view of status in organizations (e.g., Bendersky & Pai, 2018; Chizhik et al., 2003) by investigating task-based jolts as an important catalyst that may “upend current hierarchical arrangements” (Magee & Galinsky, 2008, p. 379). Prior research has alluded to the role of organization-level events in disrupting status hierarchies. For example, Neeley and colleagues found that when companies instituted language mandates changing the official business language to English, less fluent English speakers felt diminished and devalued (perceived “status loss”; Neeley, 2013), whereas fluent English speakers experienced a bolstered sense of value and worth (perceived “unearned status gain”; Neeley & Dumas, 2016). Further, Barley (1986) illustrated that the adoption of new technology can change employees’ roles and interactions (e.g., questioning, autonomy) in ways that may have implications for status conferral (Battilana, 2011). By bringing together research on status and organizational change, we propose task-based jolts as an important catalyst that may disrupt status conferral. Importantly, whereas past work emphasizes the role of structural or policy changes that *directly impact* status (e.g., an acquisition that diminishes the role of the CEO of the acquired company), our theory highlights that the effect of task-based jolts on status conferral may also occur indirectly, driven by employees’ *own volitional behavior* (i.e., generosity) after the jolt.

Second, by examining how employees’ initial status influences their appraisals of the task-based jolt (as self-threatening, or as an opportunity) we gain greater insight into the *psychology of status*. Past research on the psychological effect of status suggests that having status orients people outwardly to their social relationships (Hays & Blader, 2017) and to take

advantage of opportunities in their environment (Hinds, Carley, Krackhardt, & Wholey, 2000; Sutton & Hargadon, 1996). Our research suggests that task-based jolts may reverse the outward orientation of higher-status individuals found in past research. When employees have higher initial status, a task-based jolt orients them inwardly, and rather than focusing on social relationships and opportunities, they focus on potential threats to the self. By contrast, when employees have lower initial status, a task-based jolt orients them outwardly to their social relationships and potential opportunities in their environment. Thus, our research extends research on the psychology of status by highlighting that the orientation of higher- and lower-status individuals may be reversed during times of organizational change.

Theory and Hypothesis Development

Employees' expected contribution to the group is a powerful basis for determining status conferral in an organizational setting (Bunderson, 2003; Flynn, 2003; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009). Individuals' initial status also leads to others' expectations about their future contributions, which reinforces the stability of the status hierarchy (Kilduff & Galinsky, 2013; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). Once a status hierarchy is established, employees rely on the agreed-upon expectations of each other's contribution to the group (Johnson et al., 2006). Individuals' behaviors are evaluated in a status-consistent manner (e.g., higher status individuals' ideas are regarded as more insightful – Bunderson, 2003; Howell, Harrison, Burris, & Detert, 2015), and status-inconsistent behaviors (e.g., lower status individuals taking initiative, or promoting their ideas) are typically sanctioned (e.g., the violator is ignored, talked over, or glared at – Ridgeway & Berger, 1986). Therefore, the relative amount of status conferred to individuals within the hierarchy is typically viewed as stable and reinforcing.

Despite these stabilizing forces, some research advocates for a more dynamic view of individuals' status in organizations (Bendersky & Pai, 2018; Chizhik et al., 2003). Changes in status conferral may occur when there is a significant disruption to employees' existing tasks or goals, which can raise questions about whether the expectations of employees' task contributions are inconsistent with expectations based on the established status hierarchy (Berger et al., 1998; Goar & Sell, 2005). Recognizing that employees are not sheltered from disruptive events at the organizational level (Hitt et al., 2007), we develop a theory of *task-based jolts* – organization-level events that alter group tasks and goals in a way that requires employees to adjust the way they work – as a significant catalyst to disrupt status conferral in an existing hierarchy.

Our conceptualization of task-based jolts is distinguished from other forms of organizational change that do not fundamentally change the way employees do their work such as when firms choose to build on their existing strategy in response to environmental changes (Smith & Grimm, 1987). We address calls to be more specific about the nature of organizational change events and their impact on organizational life (Stouten, Rousseau, & De Cremer, 2018), such as employees' generosity and status conferral. The central idea is that because a task-based jolt alters group tasks and goals requiring employees to adjust the way they do their work, this significant change may lead individuals to question whether their current evaluation of each other's task contributions to the group is still reliable or valid (Tost, 2011). In other words, the jolt creates a window where performance expectations and norms are called into question. We posit that individuals within the organization are likely to appraise this situation differently, and how they appraise the situation (as self-threatening or as an opportunity) affects their reactions (generosity), and consequently the status conferred to them by others, after the jolt.

Appraisals of the Jolt Depend on Group Members' Status in the Group

Drawing on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) appraisal framework, we suggest that task-based jolts can elicit both opportunity and threat appraisals. Disruptive events can be threatening (Ford et al., 2008), but disruption also creates opportunities (Anderson & Lewis, 2014; Stuart, 2017). Understanding which appraisal is most salient involves determining whether the jolt facilitates (opportunity appraisal) or thwarts (self-threat appraisal) the focal person's primary goals (Lassetter, Hehman, & Neel, 2021). We propose that an employee's initial status, defined as the degree to which the employee is respected and admired by their coworkers *before* a task-based jolt (Anderson et al., 2006; Magee & Galinsky, 2008), determines when the appraisal of a task-based jolt as more self-threatening, or as an opportunity is salient. This is because the goals that are most relevant to higher- versus lower-status individuals are distinct. Although a task-based jolt may be appraised as thwarting the goals of higher-status individuals, the same jolt may be perceived as facilitating the goals of lower-status individuals. We explain our logic below.

For higher-status individuals, the goal of maintaining their high standing is particularly relevant (Anderson et al., 2020). This is because higher-status individuals tend to make domains in which they are successful as more central part of their self (Sedikides & Strube, 1997), which leads them to depend on their superior competence, performance, and status to maintain a positive self-view at work (Marr & Thau, 2014). A task-based jolt is appraised as more self-threatening for higher-status individuals because it raises the possibility, however unlikely, that they might not have the same competence or performance advantage in the post-jolt environment, which puts their goal of maintaining their high standing in jeopardy (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005). We note the word 'unlikely' here as the jolt requires *all* individuals to adjust their work, and higher-status individuals are arguably in the best position to adjust to task-based

change. Despite that, the *mere possibility* of underperforming and not being able to maintain their status is particularly self-threatening to individuals with higher status.

For lower-status individuals, the goal of being a valued member of the group is particularly relevant (Sleeboos, Ellemers, & de Gilder, 2006). This is because lower-status individuals are often devalued – they are less likely to be listened to (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001), their contributions are evaluated more negatively (Ridgeway & Johnson, 1990), and they can be socially punished if they are perceived to overestimate their value to the group (Anderson, Ames, & Gosling, 2008). A task-based jolt disrupts the group’s processes and procedures, including their status-based norms (Tost, 2011). This frees lower-status individuals from the normative constraints on their ability to contribute (Johnson et al., 2006), and therefore, it is appraised as an opportunity for lower-status individuals, facilitating their goal of becoming a valued member of the group.

These different appraisals of the task-based jolt are important because they lead to diverging behavioral responses. The general idea that appraisals of events can critically impact behavioral reactions has been demonstrated in past research (Oreg et al., 2011; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Notably, Stamkou, Homan, and van Kleef (2020) showed that when norms are violated, the same violation can be appraised either as an opportunity (e.g., prosocial acts that serve the group interest) or as threatening (e.g., potentially harming the group interest), which then critically influences whether the violator is punished or rewarded.

Higher- and Lower- Status Employees’ Appraisals of the Jolt Affect their Generosity

We focus on how employees’ appraisals of the task-based jolt affect an important volitional behavior, namely generosity. Employee generosity reflects individuals’ willingness to invest time, effort, and resources to provide this support to their coworkers (Collet & Morrissey,

2009). Task-based jolts require employees to come together to help and support each other (i.e., enact generosity) to resolve issues or challenges created by change, for example helping each other learn new tasks, sharing resources to develop new expertise, and giving advice about how to navigate new procedures. Indeed, extant literature highlights that employee generosity is a critical factor in helping employees successfully adjust to organizational change (e.g., coworker support increases readiness, reduces role ambiguity, and increases commitment; Cunningham et al., 2002; Hart et al., 2003).

Hence, task-based jolts create new opportunities for all employees to make valuable contributions to the group through their generosity, and this may have implications for status conferral (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). Employees who demonstrate generosity tend to be rewarded with higher status (Flynn et al., 2006; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009), and those who fail to show generosity can receive a status penalty (Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014). Yet, we also know that employees are not always more generous (Shapiro & Kirkman, 1999), and are sometimes less generous (Woodward et al., 1999) toward their coworkers in the aftermath of organizational change. Therefore, we examine how higher- and lower-status employees' appraisals influence their generosity because it has important implications for employee adjustment as well as status conferral after a jolt.

Building on our arguments above that employees' appraisal of the jolt depends on their initial status in the organization, we develop predictions for how higher- and lower-status individuals' generosity is affected by the jolt. When individuals are initially higher-status, they appraise the task-based jolt as more self-threatening. Given that self-threat focuses attention and resources on protecting the self, which reduces the attention that can be dedicated to the needs of others (Mikulincer et al., 2005; Sherman & Cohen, 2006), we predict that for higher-status

individuals, the jolt undermines their generosity towards others. In contrast, when individuals are initially lower-status, they appraise the task-based jolt as an opportunity to contribute. This bolsters their confidence that they can be a valuable member of the group, which increases their propensity to invest in their group and engage in more citizenship behavior (Gardner et al., 2004; Pierce & Gardner, 2004; Sleebos et al., 2006). Therefore, we predict that for lower-status individuals, the jolt bolsters their generosity towards others.

Hypothesis 1: The effect of a task-based jolt (compared to the status quo) on generosity is moderated by an individual's initial status, such that a task-based jolt is more likely to lead to generosity when the individual's initial status is lower rather than higher.

Hypothesis 2: The conditional indirect effect of task-based jolt (compared to status quo) on generosity is explained by the appraisals of the jolt as self-threatening or as an opportunity, such that (a) the negative indirect effect of a task-based jolt on generosity is explained by the appraisals of the jolt as self-threatening when individuals' initial status is higher, and (b) the positive indirect effect of a task-based jolt on generosity is explained by the appraisals of the jolt as more of an opportunity when individuals' initial status is lower.

The arguments underlying Hypotheses 1 and 2, highlight two critical micro-mediators – namely *other-concern* and *group-based self-esteem* – that explain why task-based jolts impact generosity differently depending on higher- and lower-status individuals' appraisals of the jolt (as self-threatening or as an opportunity). We explain each micro-mediation below.

First, when individuals are initially higher in status, we propose that their appraisal of the task-based jolt as more self-threatening reduces their *other-concern* and consequently they are less generous towards others. When people experience self-threat, their immediate priority after a

jolt is to channel their attention and resources towards protecting their self (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Given that higher-status individuals are primarily concerned with maintaining their high status, they are likely to invest their resources in protecting their current and future standing (Freedy, Shaw, Jarrel, & Masters, 1992; Hobfoll, 2001), for example, to strengthen their contribution by developing skills and expertise in a new area (e.g., individual learning).

However, the consequence of dedicating their resources to protecting the self, is that it takes their attention away from being concerned about the well-being of others, or their *other-concern* (Mikulincer et al., 2005), and other-concern is positively associated with generosity behaviors (e.g., OCBs; Korsgaard, Meglino, Lester & Jeong, 2010; McNeely & Meglino, 1994). Thus, we predict that the negative effect of task-based jolts on generosity for higher-status individuals is explained by their appraisal of the jolt as self-threatening, which in turn, undermines their concern for others.

Hypothesis 3a: The negative indirect effect of a task-based jolt on generosity when individuals have higher status is explained by their appraisals of the jolt as more self-threatening and consequent lower other-concern.

Second, when individuals are initially lower in status, our theory proposes that their appraisal of the task-based jolt as an opportunity enhances their *group-based self-esteem* and consequently they are more generous towards others. Specifically, lower-status individuals appraise the task-based jolt as an opportunity to contribute more effectively, which facilitates their highly relevant goal of becoming a valued member of the group. In other words, this opportunity enhances their group-based self-esteem, or their confidence that they can be an effectual, significant, and worthy member of the group (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Past research highlights that having higher group-based self-esteem encourages behaviors related to generosity

towards others including altruism (Chattopadhyay & George, 2001) and citizenship behavior (Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004). Thus, we predict that the positive effect of task-based jolts on generosity for lower-status individuals is explained by their appraisal of the jolt as an opportunity, which in turn, bolsters their group-based self-esteem.

Hypothesis 3b: The positive indirect effect of a task-based jolt on generosity when individuals have lower status is explained by appraisals of the jolt as more of an opportunity and consequent higher group-based self-esteem.

In sum, our appraisal framing implies that individuals' psychological reactions and behaviors after the jolt are determined by the extent to which their most relevant goals are thwarted (self-threat appraisal) or facilitated (opportunity appraisal) by the jolt. Therefore, we theorize that higher-status individuals' lower generosity after the jolt, and lower-status individuals' higher generosity after the jolt are explained by two different psychological pathways (self-threat → lower other-concern, and opportunity → higher group-based self-esteem, respectively).¹

How Task-Based Jolts Influence Status Conferral

In the previous section, we argued that a task-based jolt undermines higher-status generosity. This reaction – which ironically may occur in part through these employees' efforts to maintain their high standing after a task-based jolt – may be counterproductive, leading to the unintended consequences of status loss. In contrast, lower-status employees, who show more generosity towards others after a task-based jolt, may gain status in a post-jolt environment.

¹ We acknowledge that alternate psychological pathways are also possible. For example, it is plausible that the appraisal of the jolt as self-threatening reduces group-based self-esteem and that the appraisal of the jolt as an opportunity increases other-concern. Although we do not develop formal hypotheses for these alternate pathways, we test them empirically (see additional analyses in Online Supplement 2)

Status is socially determined, such that people only have status if others bestow it upon them (Blau, 1964) and as we note above, such status conferral (i.e., the act of granting respect, admiration, and regard to a focal individual) is largely dependent on how others evaluate the focal individual's contribution. One way that employees demonstrate their contribution is through signaling their commitment to the group (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Willer, 2009). For example, individuals are conferred greater status when they effectively convey an impression of being concerned with others' welfare (Ridgeway, 1978, 1982), and when they take actions that benefit others at a cost to the self (Halevy, Chou, Cohen, & Livingston, 2012). In fact, high-status individuals who do not signal a prosocial motivation may be penalized (Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014). Thus, in line with established research, we propose that generosity towards others – which conveys a concern for the group's success and demonstrates personal sacrifice for the good of the group (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Flynn et al., 2006) – leads to greater status conferral.

Because our theoretical model proposes that the indirect effect of task-based jolts on employees' generosity is dependent on their initial status, this leads to our final prediction that the jolt will ultimately disrupt existing patterns of status conferral in the immediate² aftermath of the jolt through generosity. For individuals with higher initial status, the task-based jolt – which is self-threatening and undermines their generosity – will lead to a loss of status; whereas, for individuals who have lower initial status, the task-based jolt – which is viewed as an opportunity and encourages their generosity – will lead to a status gain.

² Prior research on status highlights that generosity tends to be positively associated with status conferral (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Willer, 2009). Given the value of coworker generosity in times of organizational change (Seo et al., 2012), we expect that in the immediate aftermath of a task-based jolt, employees will be attuned to the generosity of their colleagues and willing to reward that generosity with status conferral. However, we recognize that it is possible that once enough time has passed that adjustment to the jolt is no longer the critical concern, employees may become relatively less concerned with a coworker's generosity and more concerned with their coworkers' competence and performance (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Eagly & Crowley, 1986). We return to this possibility in our general discussion.

Hypothesis 4: The indirect effect of a task-based jolt on status conferral through appraisals of the jolt (as self-threatening or as an opportunity) and subsequent generosity is conditional on individuals' initial status. Specifically, when initial status is higher (lower), the appraisal of task-based jolt is likely to be more self-threatening (of an opportunity), which negatively (positively) affects generosity toward others, and ultimately leads to lower (higher) status conferral.

Overview of Studies

To test our predictions, we employed a multi-method design across two empirical studies. In Study 1, we begin by examining a real-world task-based jolt (in the form of an organizational strategy change) in a pretest-posttest quasi-experimental field study (Campbell, Stanley, & Gage, 1963) at a real estate company. We examine how a task-based jolt (compared to the status quo, or business as usual) affects real estate agents' generosity, and consequently, the status conferred to them by those group members, depending on their initial status (Hypotheses 1, 2, and 4). Study 2 employed a yoked scenario-based experimental design (Anicich, Fast, Halevy, & Galinsky, 2016). The purpose of this pre-registered study was to strengthen the internal validity of our findings by constructively replicating Study 1 in an experiment, and to extend these findings by testing the proposed micro-mechanisms (other-concern and group-based self-esteem) for the differential status-linked effects of the task-based jolt on generosity (Hypotheses 1 to 4). We also explored whether higher-status individuals – who withdrew their generosity – were diverting their efforts to focus on their own individual learning.

Transparency and Openness

We describe our sampling plans, data exclusions, manipulations, and measures in all studies, and we adhere to the Journal of Applied Psychology methodological checklist. All

syntax and pre-registration information, along with Study 2 data and syntax, are available in our online supplement.³ We did not include the data for the field study because of a non-disclosure agreement with the firm.

Study 1: A Quasi-Experiment in the Field

Study 1 Research Setting

The purpose of this study was to test whether a real task-based jolt acts as a catalyst for disruption to an existing hierarchy by influencing higher- and lower-status employees' generosity behavior. We designed a quasi-experimental study by taking advantage of a naturally occurring task-based jolt (a strategic change) in a large real estate firm based in Southeast Asia, hereafter known as "The Firm."

The Firm is in one of the most expensive housing markets in the world, in a country where the real estate market, particularly in the residential sector, is vibrant and dynamic, characterized by intense competition among the leading firms. The residential market is divided between two distinct sectors: public housing, which constitutes around 80% of the housing stock, and the private sector, which makes up the remaining 20%. It is useful to note that the public housing sector in this country is unique, in that unlike in most countries, public developments are up-market and often enjoy high resale values (e.g., in the fourth quarter of 2020, the median resale value for a three-bedroom public housing apartment in a central location was around USD \$684,000). The public housing market receives a government subsidy to support homeownership, which translates to certain restrictions (e.g., minimal occupancy period before

³ The Open Science Framework link for the Online Supplement 1 and 2 is <https://tinyurl.com/4h9nmubm>. The syntax for Study 1 is posted online as well as the data and syntax for Study 2. For Study 2, the links for the pre-registration are as follows: Part 1, <https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=28bh94>; Part 2, <https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=tn9k2u>.

the owners could sell it on the open market). However, the resale value of the public housing is determined by the market (e.g., demand, location, interest rate).

For many years, The Firm focused on the private sector, and this strategy was successful. However, recent national housing policies – which can have a significant impact on both public and private housing price dynamics – encouraged The Firm to consider shifting attention to the public residential resale market. This organizational change would trigger changes to work group tasks and goals, requiring all The Firm’s agents to adjust how they worked, including developing new client lists and new marketing strategies. The agents would also need to understand the housing regulations in the public residential resale market. All of this would require a substantial investment of personal resources.

We approached a senior vice-president at The Firm and the senior management agreed to support this field experiment as part of its organizational change. Real estate agents at The Firm are organized into divisions, each headed by a director. Within each division, agents are further organized into work groups of four to five. Although sales commissions for each agent are determined individually, agents are expected to work together within their respective groups to generate higher sales performance by sharing resources for marketing campaigns, information, and client contacts. In addition, although there are no differences in the organizational rank of the agents in each group (e.g., titles). However, there are differences in status, which may result in important advantages for higher-status agents; for instance, higher-status agents are regarded as valued exchange partners in co-brokerage situations (Podolny, 2005), such that an agent with higher status is more likely to be selected for co-brokerage when such opportunities arise. Together, these organizational characteristics make this a meaningful context in which to examine coworker generosity and status conferral.

The senior management wished to assess agents' responses before rolling this change in the entire organization. This provided an opportunity to conduct our quasi-experiment with one division assigned to the experimental condition (meaning it would experience the jolt) and another to a control condition (no-jolt). The Firm would then roll out the change to all divisions upon completion of the study.

Study 1 Method

Participants. We randomly selected two divisions from a larger pool of 11 divisions that met two criteria: (1) the divisions must have focused exclusively on the private residential market, such that all agents would have had little or no experience in the public market; and (2) the divisions must be housed in different geographical locations, to minimize potential contamination or treatment diffusion (Schwab, 1999). The two divisions selected did not differ significantly in terms of key demographics (e.g., age, $F [1,98] = 2.42, p = .12, \eta^2 = .02$; experience in the public housing market, $F [1,98] = .21, p = .65, \eta^2 = .002$), and there were no significant differences in the characteristics of the locations (e.g., population) of the two divisions that might impact the results of the research. We then randomly assigned "Division A" to the task-based jolt condition and "Division B" to the no-jolt condition.

Agents from these two divisions were recruited for the study via email. To protect participants' anonymity, the recruitment email emphasized that participants would use identifiers that would only be known to the researchers and two interns that were recruited by The Firm to help with the data collection process. Participants' individual identified responses were not revealed to anyone in The Firm. The Firm's human resources department then identified those who agreed to participate in the study. We secured participation from all 109 agents within the two selected divisions (50 and 59 agents from Division A and Division B, respectively) thanks to

support from the senior management, who strongly encouraged all agents to participate. Nine agents from Division B were dropped from the analyses because of incomplete data across the three phases of the study (before, during, and after). The final sample was thus 100 participants (10 groups of 5 members each in the task-based jolt condition, 10 groups of 5 members each in the no-jolt condition), with a response rate of 92%. We did not find any significant attrition effect of demographic differences in the final usable sample (Beintein et al., 2005). Participants were on average 33.9 ($SD = 7.8$) years old, with 3.46 ($SD = 3.6$) years at The Firm; all had worked at The Firm for at least one year. With respect to other demographics, 41% were female, 57% were college-educated, 97% were East Asian, and 3% were Eurasians.

Design. We employed a pretest-posttest quasi-experimental design with a control condition (Campbell et al., 1963), capturing attitudes and behaviors before (phase one), during (phase two), and after (phase three) the task-based jolt. Before the start of the study, we worked closely with senior management to develop a clear understanding of the organizational-level change (i.e., the task-based jolt manipulation). In phase one (the pretest), all participants completed an initial survey. Phase two (the task-based jolt manipulation, explained in detail below) occurred two weeks later, coinciding with each division's (separate) monthly check-in at their respective headquarters. These monthly check-in meetings run by the marketing department were part of the divisions' existing routine and were aimed at keeping agents abreast of new trends in the housing market and the senior management's sentiments about the market. The check-in sessions were not scheduled on the same day or location, minimizing the potential for participants from the two divisions to interact with each other. In the task-based jolt condition, the VP of the marketing department delivered the task-based jolt manipulation in the form of an announcement to the division during its check-in session. Participants completed a second survey

at the end of the check-in sessions. The phase three (posttest) survey was administered two weeks after each division's check-in session, after each group had met two to six times ($M = 3.64$; $SD = 1.06$; see Online Supplement 1 for more details). The two-week interval between each phase provided sufficient time to capture the effect of the jolt on individuals' generosity following the manipulation, and to provide opportunities for group members to observe each other's behaviors before and after the jolt. The two-week intervals reflect the time-separated measurement of status behaviors as practiced in other studies (e.g., Bendersky & Shah, 2013).

Task-based jolt manipulation. The task-based jolt was operationalized as an announcement by the VP of the marketing department during the check-in meeting (phase two of the study) that the strategic focus of The Firm was to shift from the private to the public residential market. This task-based jolt was highly disruptive, in that it significantly changed the main tasks and goals of the agents, and because all of the agents had worked in the private residential market for at least one year, their future work in the public market would be different from their past work, (i.e., their prior work routines would not be applicable in the new market), and the change required agents to invest personal resources to adapt to new ways of conducting their business (e.g., securing new clients and developing new marketing strategies).

The common points of the VP's announcements to the two Divisions were that changes in national housing policies had reshaped the property market, and although The Firm had traditionally focused on the private residential market, these new policies would constrain the growth of the private market. For those in the task-based jolt condition (*no-jolt condition*), the VP added that that (1) therefore, management was exploring the possibility of shifting The Firm's focus from the private to the public residential market, and Division A had been chosen to be the pilot division to focus on this new residential market (*management decided to continue*

The Firm's focus on the private residential market), and (2) this change meant that agents would need (*would not need*) to develop a new clientele list and new marketing strategies to tap into this new (*existing*) market, and (3) because of differences (*there is no difference*) in the market mechanisms and policies governing the two residential markets (*private market*), management would not expect (*would expect*) agents' existing performance in the private market to predict their future performance in the public (*private*) market. It is not uncommon for some firms to retain their existing strategy despite changes in the environment (Smith & Grimm, 1987). Therefore, it was unlikely that participants from Division B would be overly suspicious of the no-jolt condition.

In any field experiment, there is a possibility of contamination between the experimental and control conditions (e.g., Slade Shantz, Kistruck, Pacheco, & Webb, 2020). Although we cannot completely rule out such concerns, we note that agents of The Firm interact more frequently with members of their own divisions, and typically only reach out to agents from other divisions in the case of possible co-brokerage deals. Since our task-based jolt manipulation required the experimental and control divisions to work in different housing markets, there were minimal opportunities for co-brokerage deals between the two and thus, the likelihood of interactions between agents from these two divisions was very small.

Study 1 Measures

Of the main measures, generosity and status conferral were assessed in phases one and three, and were peer-rated by the focal participant's group members. The third main measure, appraisal of the task-based jolt, was assessed in phase two and was self-reported by the focal participant. Except where noted, participants indicated their responses on 7-point scales from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). All surveys and instructions were in English (the working language

in the country where the study was conducted). We included full scales in the Online Supplement 1.

Generosity. Peers in each group rated the generosity of the focal participant in phase one (pretest) and phase three (posttest) using a 6-item measure. In keeping with the definition of generosity, we adopted three items from Flynn et al. (2006) relating to helpfulness and sensitivity to others' needs, and developed three additional items relating to the sharing of resources.⁴ Sample items: "This person tried to accommodate other members' perspectives in discussions"; "This person was willing to sacrifice his/her self-interest for the good of the group" (phase one: $\alpha = .92$; phase three: $\alpha = .92$).

Status conferral. Status scholars have operationalized status conferral in terms of others' perception of the focal person's respect and deference. Peers in each group rated the status conferred to the focal participant in phase one and phase three using a 4-item measure (Anderson et al., 2008; Bendersky & Shah, 2012; Flynn, 2003), including "This person influenced group decisions"; "This person was respected by the group", "This person was an asset to the group", and "This person was looked up to by the other group members" (phase one: $\alpha = .94$; phase three: $\alpha = .88$).⁵ Again, participants responded separately for each member of the group.

Appraisals of the jolt. Participants self-reported their appraisals of the jolt in phase two of the study. Based on theory (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Pettit & Sivanathan, 2012), we developed a 4-item measure of threat/opportunity with a focus on status-striving. Two items assessed self-threat: "I feel like my position in the group is in jeopardy" and "I feel like the amount of influence I have in my group may decrease" (following Eisinga et al. 2013, the

⁴ We dropped one item from the generosity measure as it confounded the behavior measured (generosity) with the outcome (status). The results using the revised 6-item measure were consistent with those using the 7-item measure (see Online Supplement 1).

⁵ One item was removed from the status measure as it represented an antecedent of status more than status conferral. The results with the 4-item measure were consistent with those with the 5-item measure (see Online Supplement 1).

Spearman-Brown = .96). The other two items assessed opportunity: “I feel like I have an opportunity to prove my value to my group” and “I feel like I may be able to increase my level of influence in the group” (Spearman-Brown = .86).

Jolt manipulation check.⁶ In phase two, participants reported the extent to which they perceived a task-based jolt, by responding to a 3-item measure designed to confirm the disruption to the work group. Sample items: “I can predict how each of my group members will contribute to the group effort in sales and marketing” (reverse-coded); “I am not sure how I will contribute to my group in sales and marketing” ($\alpha = .90$).

Control variables. We controlled for participants’ previous work experience in the public residential market because past success in the public market might explain employees’ status conferral in a post-jolt environment (Kakkar, Sivanathan, & Gobel, 2020). We used archival records (maintained in a national database) to obtain the number of successful transactions made in the public residential market for all participants in the past two years before the study. We also controlled for gender of the agent, which might affect assessments of both generosity (Hays & Blader, 2017) and status conferral (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). Finally, we controlled for peer-rated generosity in phase one when predicting generosity in phase three.⁷

Jolt manipulation check. Participants in the task-based jolt condition reported significantly greater disruption to their work contribution ($M = 5.57, SD = .95$) compared to those in the no-jolt condition ($M = 2.04, SD = .93$), $F(1, 98) = 351.7, p = .001, \eta^2 = .78$. This

⁶ The original jolt manipulation consisted of 7 items, of which, 4 items reflected uncertainty rather than an appraisal of the task-based jolt itself. We found that results reported using the 3-item were consistent with those using the 7-item measure. In addition, we also conducted a separate study (see Online Supplement 1) to confirm that our jolt manipulation was consistent with our definition of task-based jolt (see Study 2).

⁷ We measured other control variables, such as tenure in the industry. These variables did not correlate with status at either phase one or three, and the results using them were consistent with those in which these variables were dropped from the analyses. We also collected data on individuals’ dominance behavior as an exploratory variable. We reran the model controlling for this variable and the results remained the same (see Online Supplement 1). In addition, our results were consistent even when we excluded the control variables listed above.

result supports the effectiveness of our task-based jolt manipulation. Status was measured rather than manipulated in this study, but we note that status in phase one was not different between the task-based jolt ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.90$) and no-jolt conditions ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 0.83$); $F(1, 98) = .82$, $p = .37$, $\eta^2 = .08$, showing that the independent variable (task-based jolt) and the moderator (status- phase one) are indeed orthogonal. We also ran a regression analysis with the interaction term (task-based jolt and initial status) on the jolt manipulation check. The result was not significant, $b = 0.07$, $s.e. = 0.22$, $p = .76$. This suggests that the effect of the jolt condition was not influenced by participants' initial status.

Confirmatory factor analyses. Our measurement model showed acceptable fit with the data (i.e., self-threat, opportunity, generosity–phase three, status–phase one, and status–phase three), with $\chi^2 = 364.8$, $df = 237$, $SRMR = .05$, $RMSEA = .07$, $CFI = .94$, $TLI = .93$. The measurement model showed significant improvement over alternative models, including (1) a model with the correlation between generosity–phase three and status–phase three set to 1, $\Delta\chi^2 = 386.5$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .01$, $SRMR = .18$, $RMSEA = .15$, $CFI = .75$, $TLI = .72$; and (2) a model with the correlation between opportunity and threat set to 1, $\Delta\chi^2 = 83.4$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .01$, $SRMR = .09$, $RMSEA = .09$, $CFI = .90$, $TLI = .88$.⁸

Aggregation statistics. To assess whether it was statistically appropriate to aggregate the peer-rated variables in our analyses, we first assessed $r_{wg}(j)$ and the interclass correlations, ICC(1) and ICC(2). The average $r_{wg}(j)$ was .89 for generosity, and .90 for status conferral. The average ICC(1) was .50 for generosity and .45 for status (e.g., average F statistics was 13.36, $p < .001$ for generosity and 22.52, $p < .001$ for status), and the average ICC(2) was .70 for generosity

⁸ Because of the small sample size, we also tested this in a separate, independent sample of 802 participants. Findings from this sample confirmed the distinctiveness of the multi-item variables in our study (see Online Supplement 1).

and .76 for status. These results showed sufficient agreement among members to justify the aggregation of these peer-rated responses (LeBreton & Senter, 2007).

We accounted for the nested nature of the data (groups) using cluster-robust standard errors in STATA 17 for our analyses. Table 1 displays descriptive statistics, internal consistency reliabilities, and correlations for all key variables. Table 2 summarizes the coefficients of the regression models.

Generosity. We regressed generosity in phase three on task-based jolt and employees' initial status in phase one and the interaction between them, including the control variables. We found a significant interaction between status–phase one and task-based jolt on generosity, $b = -0.69$, $s.e. = 0.08$, $p < .001$. A simple slopes analysis (see Figure 2) showed that the task-based jolt (compared to no-jolt) was associated with lower generosity for employees with higher (+1 SD) initial status, $b = -1.00$, $s.e. = 0.09$, $p < .001$, whereas the task-based jolt was associated (a marginally significant effect) with higher generosity for employees with lower (-1 SD) initial status, $b = 0.20$, $s.e. = 0.11$, $p = .08$. Hypothesis 1 was therefore largely supported.⁹

Appraisals of the jolt (self-threat and opportunity). We found a significant interaction between jolt and employees' initial status on appraisals of task-based jolt as *self-threatening*, $b = 1.67$, $s.e. = 0.15$, $p < .001$. A simple slopes analysis (see Figure 3) showed that for higher-status (+1SD) employees, task-based jolt (compared to no-jolt) was associated with higher self-threat, $b = 3.72$, $s.e. = .0.23$, $p < .001$. For lower-status employees (-1SD), task-based jolt was also associated with higher levels of self-threat, $b = 0.82$, $s.e. = 0.18$, $p < .001$, but significantly less so compared to higher-status individuals (difference: $b = 2.89$, $s.e. = 0.27$, $p < .001$).

⁹ One alternative explanation for reduced generosity of individuals with higher initial status is that there were fewer resources to share in the post-jolt environment. We reran our analyses using three items of the generosity scale (i.e., without the items concerning sharing of resources) and found consistent results (see Online Supplement 1).

We also found a significant interaction between the jolt and employees' initial status on appraisals of the jolt as an *opportunity*, $b = -1.23$, $s.e. = 0.25$, $p < .001$. A simple slopes analysis (see Figure 4) showed that the jolt (compared to no-jolt) was associated with higher appraisals of opportunity for lower-status employees, $b = 2.23$, $s.e. = 0.26$, $p < .001$, but not for higher-status employees, $b = 0.10$, $s.e. = 0.32$, $p = .767$.

Mediating effect of self-threat and opportunity. We looked at how appraisals of the task-based jolt affected generosity in phase three while controlling for peer-rated generosity in phase one, jolt, status in phase one, and the other controls. Appraisals of the task-based jolt as more self-threatening were negatively related to generosity, $b = -0.13$, $s.e. = 0.06$, $p = .033$, while appraisals of the task-based jolt as more of an opportunity were positively related to generosity, $b = 0.19$, $s.e. = 0.04$, $p < .001$. We proceeded to test the conditional indirect effects of task-based jolt on generosity through employees' appraisals of self-threat and opportunity depending on initial status. By constructing bias-corrected confidence intervals (Bauer et al., 2006), we found that for employees with higher initial status, task-based jolt had a significant negative indirect effect on generosity through increased appraisals of self-threat, $b = -0.48$, $s.e. = 0.18$, 95% CI = [-0.84, -0.14], but its indirect effect on generosity through opportunity was not significant ($b = 0.02$, $s.e. = 0.06$, 95% CI = [-0.09, 0.12]). For employees with lower initial status, we also found a significant negative effect of task-based jolt on generosity through increased appraisals of self-threat ($b = -0.10$, $s.e. = 0.05$, 95% CI = [-0.22, -0.02]). However, for lower-status employees this was accompanied by a significant positive indirect effect on generosity through increased opportunity ($b = 0.43$, $s.e. = 0.11$, 95% CI = [0.22, 0.64]), and this positive effect through opportunity was significantly stronger than the negative effect through self-threat (difference: $b = -0.54$, $s.e. = 0.10$, 95% CI = [-0.73, -0.35]). This pattern of results explains the overall positive

effect of the task-based jolt on generosity for lower-status employees through a more salient appraisal of opportunity. These results largely support Hypothesis 2.

Status conferral. Finally, we found that generosity positively related to status conferral in phase three, $b = 0.30$, $s.e. = 0.07$, $p < .001$. We proceeded to test the conditional indirect effects of task-based jolt on status conferral through self-threat/opportunity and generosity for lower- and higher-status employees. As predicted, for employees with higher initial status, the task-based jolt had a significant negative indirect effect on status conferral through increased threat and reduced generosity ($b = -.14$, $s.e. = .06$, 95% CI = $[-.29, -.05]$), and its effect on status conferral through opportunity and generosity was not significant ($b = .01$, $s.e. = .02$, 95% CI = $[-.02, .05]$). For employees with lower initial status, there was an unpredicted significant negative indirect effect on status conferral through increased threat and reduced generosity ($b = -.03$, $s.e. = .02$, 95% CI = $[-.09, -.01]$), and as predicted a significant positive indirect effect on status conferral through increased opportunity and increased generosity ($b = .13$, $s.e. = .05$, 95% CI = $[.05, .24]$), and this effect was significantly stronger than the negative effect through self-threat (difference: $b = -.16$, $s.e. = .05$, 95% CI = $[-.28, -.07]$). This pattern of results explains the overall positive (negative) effect of the task-based jolt on status conferral for lower-status (higher-status) employees through more (less) generosity because of opportunity (threat) appraisal. The results support Hypothesis 4.

Study 1 Discussion

Consistent with our theory, the results of Study 1 suggest that a task-based jolt influences status conferral in an existing hierarchy by triggering changes in higher- and lower-status employees' generosity towards their coworkers. For employees with higher initial status, the task-based jolt was appraised as more self-threatening, which negatively affected their generosity

towards others, and ultimately led to lower status conferral. For employees with lower initial status, the task-based jolt was appraised as more of an opportunity, which positively affected their generosity, and ultimately led to higher status conferral.

Importantly, in Study 1, we observed how a task-based jolt affected generosity and status conferral in a field setting with a naturally occurring jolt, which strengthens the external validity of our findings. The task-based jolt in this study represented an exogenous event affecting employees' environment, and a quasi-experimental design allowed us to capture pre- and post-jolt responses (Grant & Wall, 2009).

Despite its methodological strengths, Study 1 has certain limitations. First, we recognized the relatively small sample, which is a limitation in most quasi-experimental studies (Grant & Wall, 2009). Second, status was measured rather than manipulated (a necessary consequence of using a field study), leaving open the possibility that another factor accounted for the conditional results obtained, and not allowing us to make causal inferences. Third, our measures for appraisals of the task-based jolt focused on threats and opportunities to status-striving, but our theoretical arguments imply that people may appraise threats and opportunities following a jolt more broadly. Finally, the design of Study 1 did not enable us to test our proposed micro-mechanisms of other-concern and group-based self-esteem. We designed Study 2 to address these limitations.

Study 2: Yoked Scenario-Based Experimental Study

The aim of Study 2 was first, to constructively replicate Study 1 in an experiment where we orthogonally manipulate the task-based jolt and individuals' initial status, and randomly assign participants to the conditions, to enable causal inference. Second, we assessed appraisals of the task-based jolt in terms of self-threat and opportunity with respect to general affect, to

decouple these appraisals from explicit status-striving appraisals, making it a more conservative test of the phenomenon. Third, Study 2 was also designed to test the micro-mediators (other-concern and group-based self-esteem; see Figure 1) to provide greater insight into the motivations of higher- and lower-status individuals.

Finally, the findings of Study 1 also raise another question that the study was not equipped to answer. Our results showed that a task-based jolt negatively affects status conferred to higher-status individuals because they invest less effort and fewer resources to help others (i.e., withdraw generosity). Where, then, are these individuals likely to invest their effort and resources following a task-based jolt? Our theory suggests that higher-status individuals appraise the task-based jolt as self-threatening because it can thwart their goal of maintaining their high status by undermining their competence or performance advantage in the post-jolt environment. Self-threat enhances self-concern, focusing individuals on their own needs and goals (Mikulincer et al., 2005; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Thus, higher-status individuals may channel attention toward their goals by developing new skills and improving their competence in the new work context (e.g., individual learning - Vandewalle, 1997). Thus, in Study 2 we included individual learning as an additional outcome variable. Formally, we predict that higher-status individuals will be more likely than those of lower initial status to dedicate their attention to their own learning after a jolt because of their greater self-concern.

Hypothesis 5: For higher-status (but not lower-status) individuals, a task-based jolt will have a positive indirect effect on individual learning. This effect will be mediated by self-threat and, in turn, by amplified self-concern.

To achieve these aims, we designed a pre-registered yoked scenario-based experiment (see Anicich et al., 2016). A scenario-based experimental design ensures a high degree of

internal validity by manipulating key variables, while also retaining more realism than is often possible in laboratory experiments by including real-life contextual details that are critical for organizational-level phenomena in the workplace (Devos, Buelens, & Bouckennooghe, 2007). The novel “yoked” component of the design allows for the assessment of a focal participant’s behavioral responses to experimental stimuli, as well as, others’ independent evaluations of the focal participant’s behavior, within the same study. There are thus two parts to a yoked design. In the first part, we experimentally manipulated jolt and initial status, and then assessed target participants’ individual responses (appraisals of the jolt, self/other-concern, group-based self-esteem, generosity intentions, and individual learning). In the second part, using an independent sample, we “yoked” each new participant (“group member”) to exactly one target participant’s behavioral responses (generosity intentions and individual learning) from Part 1, and examined the extent to which a group member (from Part 2) would confer status to the target participant (from Part 1) based on the target’s behavioral responses.

Study 2 Sample

A power analysis using GPower 3.1 showed that we needed at least 200 participants to achieve an effect size of .30. In Part 1, the sample comprised 269 undergraduate students from a large public university in the northwestern United States who completed a pre-registered study on “group dynamics” online, as part of a business course requirement for course credit. We excluded 40 participants who failed one or both of two attention check questions. In Part 2, the sample comprised 229 working adults from the United States and the UK recruited through Prolific, an online research panel, to complete a pre-registered study and we paid Prolific USD\$2.38 for each completed survey. We excluded 15 participants who failed one or both of

two attention check questions and 29 participants who were not employed full-time.¹⁰ This data collection strategy resulted in a final sample of 185 “yoked” cases with matched responses from Part 1 and Part 2 (Part 1: 41.1% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 20.5$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 2.34$, $M_{\text{work experience}} = 2.41$, $SD_{\text{work experience}} = 2.27$; Part 2: 49.7% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 29.9$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 9.03$, $M_{\text{work experience}} = 8.63$, $SD_{\text{work experience}} = 8.06$). Including the participants who failed the attention checks did not change our reported results.

Part 1 Method

Design and procedure. In Part 1, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions in a 2 (task-based jolt: jolt vs. no-jolt) X 2 (initial status: higher vs. lower) between-subjects factorial design. Participants were asked to imagine that they were employed as an instructor for a community college in May 2018,¹¹ and were given background information about their purported job. This information included the following: (1) they were part of a five-member teaching group at the college; (2) they and their group focused on in-person teaching; (3) although teaching effectiveness and performance were assessed individually, members of the teaching group interacted frequently with each other, coordinating and sharing resources in order to be more successful in their content delivery and teaching effectiveness; and (4) members of the teaching group benefited from sharing teaching resources and information on class management. Next, depending on the randomly assigned condition, participants read about their

¹⁰ Despite our clear criteria of full-time employment in the description of our study on Prolific, we found 29 participants who were not employed full-time in our filtering question in the Qualtrics survey. Therefore, we excluded these participants from the final sample, which we did not originally include in our pre-registration. We note that adding these participants did not change our reported results.

¹¹ Because our data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, we chose a date for the scenario that was clearly prior to the start of the pandemic since we did not want to evoke any effects related to the pandemic more generally. We chose an undergraduate sample because undergraduate students are arguably more exposed to the teaching profession and therefore, more suited to put themselves in a scenario that involved teaching faculty (Clayson, 2009).

status in the group and about a strategic decision made by the head of the college (task-based jolt manipulation).

Status manipulation. We manipulated participants' initial status in their group using an adapted version of the status manipulation from Anicich and colleagues (2016). In the *higher-status* condition participants received the following information:

You are one of the **higher** status members of your teaching group. You generally have higher teaching ratings than other members of your teaching group and you have won awards for your teaching effectiveness. **Therefore, you receive more respect, admiration, and regard than other members of the group.**

In the *lower-status* condition participants received the following information: You are one of the **lower** status members of your teaching group. You generally have lower teaching ratings than other members of your teaching group and you have not won awards for your teaching effectiveness. **Therefore, you receive less respect, admiration, and regard than other members of the group.**

Task-Based Jolt manipulation. After reading the status manipulation, participants read an announcement from the head of the college, supposedly sent two weeks before the start of the semester, which outlined the college's organizational response to new competitors in the local market and economic factors for the college. In the *jolt* condition, the head announced the decision to *move most classes online* for the coming school semester:

The Head of the college sees the continuation of in-person classes to be unsustainable and views a quick transition to online teaching as a critical change... when you compare the new requirements for online teaching to your previous in-person teaching experience, you realize that you will need to make significant adjustments to the way you teach.

In the *no-jolt* condition, the head announced the decision to *continue in-person classes* for the coming school semester:

The Head of the college sees the continuation of in-person classes to be sustainable and views a quick transition to online teaching as an unnecessary change... when you compare the current requirements for in-person teaching to your previous in-person

teaching experience, you realize that you will NOT need to make significant adjustments to the way you teach.

Consistent with our conceptualization of a task-based jolt, this organizational-level change is highly disruptive and alters the teaching groups' tasks and goals in ways that require teachers to invest additional personal resources (time, energy, adaptations) to adjust to the new organizational reality. Importantly, we chose this task-based jolt because the change is similarly disruptive for both lower- and higher-status individuals. In fact, because many competencies of in-person teaching would still apply in the online context (e.g., selecting content, organizing materials), higher-status individuals would likely retain some advantage, making this a conservative test of our predictions.

After reading the announcement, participants were given a summary of the decision and the implications for their teaching group. To reinforce the task-based jolt and status manipulations, participants were asked to describe what the new plan meant for them given their current position, and how the plan would affect the way they do their work.

Measures. We counterbalanced the order of the mediators as well as the order of the dependent variables to minimize order effects. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = “strongly disagree”/“not at all” and 7 = “strongly agree”/“very much.” The full scales are presented in the Online Supplement 2.

Appraisals of the jolt. We assessed participants' appraisals of the task-based jolt as *self-threatening* and as an *opportunity* using two 3-item scales from Kilduff, Galinsky, Gallo, and Reade (2016). To assess appraisals of self-threat, participants indicated the extent to which they would describe the head of the college's decision (or their feelings about it) as “frightening,” “threatening,” and “fearful” ($\alpha = .96$). To assess appraisals of opportunity participants indicated

the extent to which they would describe the decision as “exciting,” “challenging,” and “stimulating” ($\alpha = .85$).

Self-/other-concern. Participants’ self-concern and other-concern were assessed using separate 3-item scales from De Dreu and Nauta (2009). Sample items are: “I am concerned about my own needs and interests”; “My personal goals and aspirations are important to me” (self-concern; $\alpha = .82$); and “I am concerned about the needs and interests of the teaching group”; “The goals and aspirations of the teaching group are important to me” (other-concern; $\alpha = .95$).

Group-based self-esteem. Participants’ group-based self-esteem was assessed by using the 5-item organization-based self-esteem scale of Pierce, Gardner, Cummings, and Dunham (1989). We shifted the referent to the teaching group to reflect our context. Sample items: “I am certain that I will count more in this teaching group”; “I am certain that I will now be taken more seriously in this teaching group” ($\alpha = .96$).

Generosity intentions. Given the hypothetical nature of the study design, in the present study we assessed participants’ intentions to be generous towards others. Following the management literature, we used the concept of organizational citizenship behaviors directed towards individuals (OCB-I) to capture generosity in the workplace (Koopman, Lanaj, & Scott, 2016; Organ, Podsakoff, & Podsakoff, 2011). We adapted seven items from Lee and Allen’s (2002) original 8-item OCB-I scale.¹² Sample items included, “help others in the teaching group who have been absent”, and “give my time to help others in the teaching group who have work-related problems” ($\alpha = .97$).

Individual learning. We assessed participants’ state-based focus on their own learning by adapting three items from Vandewalle’s (1997) learning orientation scale. In line with our

¹² We did not include Lee and Allen’s item “adjust your work schedule to accommodate other employees’ requests for time off” because it is less relevant in a teaching group.

theorizing, we modified the items to reflect individuals' dedication to their own learning. Sample items: "I dedicate myself to develop new skills and knowledge"; "invest all of my time and energy to extend my range of abilities" ($\alpha = .83$).

Manipulation checks. A 3-item measure was used to assess the effectiveness of our jolt manipulation. Questions began "To what extent will the head of the college's decision..." Sample items: "...disrupt how you and your team do your work"; "... require you to invest more personal resources (e.g., time, energy) in how you do your work." ($\alpha = .96$). A 5-item measure was used to assess the effectiveness of our status manipulation. Sample items: "You were a high-status member of the group"; "You had high status in the group based on the respect you received from other group members" ($\alpha = .98$).¹³

Part 2 Method

As mentioned earlier, the hallmark of a yoked design is that each participant in Part 2 is randomly yoked to exactly one "target participant" from Part 1. In our study, each participant in Part 2 was first asked to read the same background information and the same announcement about the head of the college's decision as their target participant (participant from Part 1), based on the latter's assigned jolt condition (jolt versus no-jolt). Next, participants were given a description of "Bob Smith," a purported member of their teaching group. Information about Bob's initial status (before the announcement) was based on the assigned status condition (higher vs. lower) of the target participant. Participants were also told that four weeks after the announcement from the head of the college, a college-wide 360-degree feedback survey was

¹³ We do not report the results for exploratory variables (e.g., generosity, sharing scenario, and helping scenario) because some of them correlated strongly with our main variable of interest (i.e., OCB-I). In addition, we did not include the status threat measure (from Study 1) because we wanted to capture individuals' appraisal of threat and opportunity more broadly. For purpose of transparency, we report these results in the Online Supplement 2.

conducted. They were then given a summary report purportedly describing Bob's behavior after the announcement.

OCB-I and learning manipulation. We generated a 360-degree feedback report for "Bob Smith" for each of the 185 target participants based on their actual responses to three randomly chosen OCB-I items and three individual learning items. We also included the summary score for the target participant's OCB-I and dedication to individual learning (see sample report in Online Supplement 2). Each participant in Part 2 thus viewed a report reflecting their target participant's focus on helping others in the team (OCB-I) and dedication to their own learning.

Measures. All measures were assessed using the scale 1 = "not at all" to 7 = "very much."

Status conferral. Consistent with our status definition (i.e., the degree to which the employee is respected, admired, and regarded), we assessed status conferral with four items including, "I respect Bob as a group member", "I have high regard for Bob", "I look up to Bob", and "Bob is an asset to the group" (Bendersky & Shah, 2012; Flynn, 2003) ($\alpha = .93$).

Manipulation checks. We assessed the effectiveness of the jolt and initial status manipulation using the same items as in Part 1 ($\alpha = .98$ and $\alpha = .94$, respectively). We assessed the effectiveness of the OCB-I manipulation by using a three-item measure asking participants to what extent Bob was generous, helpful, and a good citizen ($\alpha = .89$). Finally, we assessed the effectiveness of the learning manipulation by using the same three-item measure from Part 1 (e.g., "Bob is dedicated to learning") ($\alpha = .93$).

Study 2 Results

Table 3 displays descriptive statistics, item reliabilities, and correlations among key variables. We used MPLUS v8 and SPSS v28 for our analyses.

Manipulation checks. For Part 1, there was a significant effect of the jolt condition, $F(1, 181) = 223.62, p < .001, \eta^2 = .55$, such that participants assigned to the jolt condition reported significantly greater disruption to their work and adjustment ($M = 6.22, s.e. = 0.15$) compared to those in the no-jolt condition ($M = 3.05, s.e. = 3.05$). There was no main effect of status condition, $F(1, 181) = .002, p = .97$, and no significant interaction between the jolt and status conditions on perceptions of the jolt, $F(1, 181) = 2.37, p = .13$. Similarly, there was a significant main effect of status condition on participants' perceived status in the group, $F(1, 181) = 604.00, p < .001, \eta^2 = .77$, such that participants assigned to the higher-status condition reported significantly higher initial status ($M = 6.18, s.e. = 0.12$) than those assigned to the lower-status condition ($M = 2.09, s.e. = 0.12$). There was no main effect of the jolt condition on status perceptions, $F(1, 181) = 0.60, p = .44$, and no significant interaction between the jolt and status conditions on reported status, $F(1, 181) = 0.48, p = .49$. These results confirm the jolt and status manipulations were effective and orthogonal for Part 1. For Part 2, a regression analysis confirmed that Part 2 participants assessed Part 1 participants with higher OCB-I as more generous, $b = 0.51, s.e. = .05, p < .001$. Similarly, Part 2 participants assessed Part 1 target participants with higher learning as more focused on learning, $b = .51, s.e. = .08, p < .001$. These results confirmed that our yoked participants accurately recognized their target's reported behavior. Our manipulations of generosity and learning were effective for Part 2.

In addition, we also tested the effectiveness of our status and jolt manipulation for Part 2.¹⁴ There was a significant effect of the jolt condition, $F(1, 179) = 266.59, p < .001, \eta^2 = 1.0$, such that participants assigned to the jolt condition reported significantly greater disruption to work and adjustment ($M = 5.98, s.e. = 0.97$) compared to those in the no-jolt condition ($M =$

¹⁴ We note that two participants did not complete the items for the two manipulation checks.

2.75, $s.e. = 1.64$). There was no main effect of status condition, $F(1, 179) = 0.19, p = .66, \eta^2 = .001$ and no significant interaction between the jolt and status conditions on perceptions of the jolt, $F(1, 179) = 1.49, p = .22, \eta^2 = .008$. Similarly, there was a significant main effect of status condition on participants' perceived status of "Bob Smith" $F(1, 179) = 517.52, p < .001, \eta^2 = 1.0$, such that participants assigned to the higher-status condition reported significantly higher initial status of "Bob Smith" ($M = 6.14, s.e. = 0.97$) compared to those in the lower-status condition ($M = 2.40, s.e. = 1.24$). There was no main effect of the jolt condition, $F(1, 179) = 0.15, p = .90, \eta^2 = .001$, but a significant interaction between the jolt and status conditions on "Bob Smith" initial status, $F(1, 179) = 4.11, p = .044, \eta^2 = .22$. Despite the significant interaction term, a closer look at the simple effects showed that within the no jolt condition there was a significant difference in participants' perceptions of "Bob" status between the high ($M = 5.95, s.e. = 0.17$) and low ($M = 2.56, s.e. = 0.17$) status conditions, $F(1, 179) = 204.78, p < .001, \eta^2 = .53$. This same effect emerged within the jolt condition: a significant difference in participants' perceptions of "Bob" status between the high ($M = 6.30, s.e. = 0.16$) and low ($M = 2.25, s.e. = 0.16$) status conditions, $F(1, 179) = 322.56, p < .001, \eta^2 = .64$. In contrast, within the low status condition there was a no difference in participants' perceptions of "Bob" status between the no-jolt ($M = 2.56, s.e. = 0.16$) and the jolt ($M = 2.25, s.e. = 0.16$) conditions, $F(1, 179) = 1.79, p = .182, \eta^2 = .01$. There was also no difference in participants' perceptions of "Bob" status between the no-jolt ($M = 5.95, s.e. = 0.17$) and the jolt ($M = 6.30, s.e. = 0.16$) conditions, $F(1, 179) = 2.34, p = .128, \eta^2 = .01$, within the high-status conditions. We therefore conclude that the status and jolt manipulations were orthogonal.

Generosity. A two-way ANOVA of OCB-I using jolt and status conditions as predictors found a significant interaction between jolt and initial status on OCB-I, $F(1, 181) = 28.18, p <$

.001, $\eta^2 = .14$. The simple effects comparisons (see Figure 5) revealed that for higher initial status participants, the jolt (compared to no-jolt) led to lower intentions to engage in OCB-I (jolt: $M = 4.35$, $s.e. = 0.20$; no-jolt: $M = 5.69$, $s.e. = 0.22$), $F(1, 181) = 20.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$. For those with lower initial status, the jolt led to higher intentions to engage in OCB-I (jolt: $M = 5.34$, $s.e. = 0.21$; no-jolt: $M = 4.45$, $s.e. = 0.21$), $F(1, 181) = 8.91$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .05$. These results support Hypothesis 1.

Appraisals of the jolt (self-threat and opportunity). We found a significant interaction between jolt and status on self-threat, $F(1, 181) = 36.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .17$. As predicted, the simple effects comparisons (see Figure 6) showed that for higher initial status participants, the jolt (compared to no-jolt) led to higher appraisals of self-threat (jolt: $M = 4.57$, $s.e. = 0.23$; no-jolt: $M = 2.01$, $s.e. = 0.25$), $F(1, 181) = 58.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .25$. For those in the lower initial status condition, there was no significant effect of the jolt on self-threat (jolt: $M = 3.24$, $s.e. = 0.24$; no-jolt: $M = 3.56$, $s.e. = 0.24$), $F(1, 181) = 0.91$, $p = .341$.

We also found a significant interaction between the jolt and initial status on appraisals of the jolt as an opportunity, $F(1, 181) = 13.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .07$. The simple effects comparisons (see Figure 7) showed that for lower initial status participants, the jolt (compared to no-jolt) led to higher appraisals of opportunity (jolt: $M = 5.51$, $s.e. = 0.22$; no-jolt: $M = 3.61$, $s.e. = 0.23$), $F(1, 181) = 35.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$; whereas, for higher initial status participants, there was no significant effect of the jolt on opportunity appraisals (jolt: $M = 3.99$, $s.e. = 0.21$; no-jolt: $M = 3.72$, $s.e. = 0.23$), $F(1, 181) = 0.72$, $p = .398$.

Mediating effect of self-threat and opportunity. We then conducted a moderated mediation analysis using 5,000 bias-corrected bootstraps in MPLUS 8.0 (see Table 4 for a summary of indirect effects). For those with higher initial status, the negative indirect effect of

the task-based jolt on OCB-I intentions was explained by self-threat ($b = -0.99$, $s.e. = 0.18$, 95% CI = [-1.34, -0.64]), and for lower status participants, the jolt also had an unpredicted positive indirect effect on OCB-I through reduced self-threat ($b = 1.26$, $s.e. = 0.35$, 95% CI = [0.58, 1.94]). The difference between the indirect effects was significant ($b = -2.25$, $s.e. = 0.47$, 95% CI = [-3.17, -1.32]). For those with lower initial status, the jolt had a positive indirect effect on OCB-I through opportunity ($b = 1.56$, $s.e. = 0.40$, 95% CI = [0.78, 2.35]), and there was no significant effect through opportunity for participants in the higher initial status condition ($b = 0.10$, $s.e. = 0.13$, 95% CI = [-0.16, 0.37]). The difference between the indirect effects was significant ($b = -1.46$, $s.e. = 0.48$, 95% CI = [-2.40, -0.41]). Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Status conferral. OCB-I was positively related to status conferral ($b = 0.49$, $s.e. = 0.06$, $p < .001$). We next tested the conditional indirect effects of the jolt on status conferral through (1) appraisals of self-threat and OCB-I, and (2) appraisals of opportunity and OCB-I. For those in the higher initial status condition, the jolt had a negative indirect effect on status conferral through increased threat and reduced generosity ($b = -0.53$, $s.e. = 0.12$, 95% CI = [-0.77, -0.29]), but no significant indirect effect on status conferral through opportunity and generosity ($b = 0.06$, $s.e. = 0.07$, 95% CI = [-0.09, 0.20]). For those in the lower initial status condition, there was a positive significant indirect effect of jolt on status conferral through increased opportunity and increased generosity ($b = 0.84$, $s.e. = 0.25$, 95% CI = [0.34, 1.33]), and through reduced threat and increased generosity ($b = 0.68$, $s.e. = 0.22$, 95% CI = [0.25, 1.10]). Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Put together, the results of Study 2 largely replicate the results of Study 1 and provide support for our theoretical model. We next examined our proposed micro-mediators and the individual learning dependent variable.

Micro-mediators. First, we tested whether the indirect effect of the jolt on OCB-I could be explained by self-threat appraisal and other-concern for those in the higher initial status condition.¹⁵ Consistent with Hypothesis 3a, we found that for higher-status individuals, the jolt was negatively related to OCB-I through greater self-threat and lower other-concern ($b = -0.63$, $s.e. = 0.15$, $CI\ 95\% = [-0.92, -0.35]$). For lower-status individuals, the jolt was positively related to OCB-I through lower self-threat and greater other-concern ($b = 0.81$, $s.e. = 0.24$, $95\% CI = [0.34, 1.28]$). We also modeled the conditional indirect effect of the jolt on status conferral (jolt→self-threat→other-concern→OCB-I→status conferral) and found that the indirect effect was significant and negative for higher-status individuals ($b = -0.37$, $s.e. = 0.12$, $95\% CI = [-0.60, -0.15]$), but significant and positive for lower-status individuals ($b = 0.48$, $s.e. = 0.18$, $95\% CI = [0.13, 0.82]$).

Second, we tested whether the indirect effect of the jolt on OCB-I could be explained by opportunity appraisal and group-based self-esteem for those in the lower initial status condition. Consistent with Hypothesis 3b, we found that for lower-status individuals, the jolt was positively related to OCB-I through greater opportunity appraisal and group-based self-esteem ($b = 0.45$, $s.e. = 0.16$, $95\% CI = [0.13, 0.76]$), and this path was not significant for higher-status individuals ($b = 0.03$, $s.e. = 0.04$, $95\% CI = [-0.05, 0.11]$). Finally, we also modeled the indirect path of the jolt on status conferral (jolt→opportunity→group-based self-esteem→OCB-I→status conferral) and found that the indirect effect was significant and positive for lower-status individuals ($b = 0.26$, $s.e. = 0.11$, $95\% CI = [0.05, 0.48]$) and non-significant for higher-status individuals ($b =$

¹⁵ We note a high correlation of .82 between OCB-I and other-concern. This finding is consistent with existing research (e.g., other-orientation and OCB are highly correlated at .91 – Lester et al., 2008). However, it is important to note that these constructs are conceptually distinct: other-concern relates to individuals' motivated information search and processing of others' goals (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009), which is a motive, whereas OCB-I reflects employees' behaviors that are relatively discretionary and beneficial to other organizational members, which is an associated action.

0.02, *s.e.* = 0.02, 95% CI = [-0.03, 0.07]). These results provide greater insight into *why* higher- and lower-status individuals' different appraisals of the jolt (as self-threatening or as an opportunity) lead to different behavior with respect to generosity, namely by influencing concern for others and group-based self-esteem.¹⁶

Individual learning. Finally, we explored the conditional indirect effect of the jolt on individual learning through appraisals of self-threat and self-concern. Consistent with Hypothesis 5, the results showed a positive indirect effect of the jolt on individual learning for those assigned higher initial status ($b = 0.11$, *s.e.* = 0.04, 95% CI = [0.03, 0.20]). We also found an unpredicted negative indirect effect of the jolt on individual learning for those in the lower initial status condition ($b = -0.15$, *s.e.* = 0.06, 95% CI = [-0.27, -0.02]), suggesting they were less likely to focus on individual learning after a jolt. Regressing status conferral on both OCB-I and individual learning showed that only OCB-I predicted status conferral ($b = 0.49$, *s.e.* = 0.06, $p < .001$), while individual learning did not ($b = 0.13$, *s.e.* = 0.09, $p = .14$). We, therefore, did not model an indirect path from the jolt to status conferral via individual learning.¹⁷

Study 2 Discussion

Using a yoked scenario-based experimental design, we constructively replicated and extended our results from Study 1 in a controlled setting. We showed how a task-based jolt affects individuals' appraisals and volitional behavioral intentions differently depending on their initial status (Part 1), and in turn how these behavioral intentions influence status conferral (Part

¹⁶We also tested alternative pathways for the micro-mediators (see Online Supplement 2 for details). We found empirical support for the alternative indirect pathway of a task-based jolt on generosity for both higher- and lower-status individuals. For higher-status individuals, the alternative pathway of a jolt on generosity via (1) self-threat → group-based self-esteem was significant ($b = -0.26$, *s.e.* = 0.08; 95% CI = [-0.42, -0.10]), and via (2) opportunity → other-concerned was not significant ($b = 0.06$, *s.e.* = 0.07; 95% CI = [-0.09, 0.20]). For lower-status individuals, the alternative pathway of a jolt on generosity via (1) self-threat → group-based self-esteem was significant ($b = 0.33$, *s.e.* = 0.14; 95% CI = [0.06, 0.60]), and via (2) opportunity → other-concern was significant ($b = 0.46$, *s.e.* = 0.11; 95% CI = [0.28, 0.65]). These empirical results suggest that in addition to our hypothesized pathways, these alternative pathways are also supported. We discuss these results in the discussion section

¹⁷In our pre-registration, we reflected the relationship between individual learning and status conferral as exploratory because we did not have an a-priori prediction of this relationship.

2). For participants with higher initial status, the task-based jolt (compared to no-jolt) was appraised as more self-threatening, and this self-threat was predictive of becoming (1) more self-concerned, leading to greater investment in individual learning; and (2) less other-concerned, leading to a withdrawal of generosity, which led to lower status conferral after the jolt. In contrast, for participants with lower initial status, the task-based jolt was appraised as an opportunity, and this opportunity was predictive of increased group-based self-esteem, leading to increased generosity, which was ultimately rewarded with more status conferral. These findings suggest that whereas individuals with lower initial status may prioritize being generous to others after a task-based jolt, which bolsters their status in the group, individuals with higher initial status may prioritize their goal to maintain their high status, which reduces their level of generosity, and ironically leads to status loss.

Despite its methodological strengths, including an experimental manipulation of the task-based jolt and initial status, and a larger sample size compared to Study 1, we acknowledge that the undergraduate sample in Part 1 of Study 2 may be a limitation of this study. Undergraduate students in this sample have experience observing instructors, and receiving both in-person and online instruction, however, they have limited working experience which may affect their ability to fully appreciate the work that goes into teaching, and the disruptiveness of the task-based jolt in a scenario-based research design.

General Discussion

In this research, we theorize about task-based jolts as an important catalyst to disrupt status conferral in an existing hierarchy. In a field experiment (Study 1) and yoked experiment (Study 2), we tested our hypotheses and found that task-based jolts trigger different appraisals and behavioral reactions in higher- and lower-status employees that ultimately affect the status

they are conferred by others. When employees have higher initial status, a task-based jolt is appraised as more self-threatening, which reduces their concern for others and undermines their generosity, ultimately leading them to lose status. Whereas, when employees have lower initial status, a task-based jolt is appraised as an opportunity, which bolsters their group-based self-esteem and increases their generosity, ultimately leading them to gain status.

It is worth noting that although we predicted that the task-based jolt (relative to the status quo) would be appraised as more self-threatening for higher-status individuals, and more of an opportunity for lower-status individuals, in Study 1, we found that employees with lower initial status also experienced more self-threat from the jolt than in the no-jolt condition. Critically, however, unlike for those with higher initial status, this effect did not diminish lower-status employees' perception of the jolt as an opportunity. This finding is consistent with recent research highlighting that people can have independent threat and opportunity appraisals of the same target (Lassetter et al., 2021), and as predicted, we found that lower-status employees in Study 1 were more generous after a task-based jolt. In Study 2, we did not observe that individuals with lower initial status experienced more self-threat in the jolt condition, compared to the no-jolt condition. A possible explanation is that a task-based jolt in a real-world setting where livelihoods are at stake (Study 1) involves some degree of threat for both employees with higher and lower initial status, even when it is also perceived as an opportunity for those with lower initial status. We also note that in Study 1, the effect of a task-based jolt was marginally significant on generosity for employees with lower initial status, which could be due to the relatively smaller sample size in a field experiment. Despite these minor discrepancies, the overall pattern of how lower- and higher-status individuals appraise the task-based jolt is consistent and robust across the two studies.

Theoretical Contributions

Our research makes two key theoretical contributions to the status literature. First, we expand on a dynamic view of status in organizations (see Bendersky & Pai, 2018 for a review), by theorizing a specific type of organizational change – task-based jolts – which functions as an important catalyst to disrupt existing status hierarchies. Past research highlights that status change occurs in established hierarchies (Marr & Thau, 2014; Pettit et al., 2010), but we know little about the events that disrupt existing patterns of status conferral in organizations. Earlier work has highlighted the direct impact of organizational-level events on status (e.g., structural, technological, or policy changes that *directly* change an employee’s role or ability to contribute in ways that may affect their status – Barley, 1986; Hambrick & Cannella, 1993; Neeley & Dumas, 2016). We extend this past work by elucidating how task-based jolts may instead interrupt established patterns of status conferral *indirectly* through their effect on employees’ volitional interpersonal behavior (i.e., generosity). Examining how and why task-based jolts may disrupt existing status conferral expands our understanding of the dynamic nature of status hierarchy (Magee & Galinsky, 2008), and our conceptualization of task-based jolts offers an important insight into the specific type of organizational change that may impact existing status hierarchies (Stouten et al., 2018).

Additionally, the status literature also calls for more insight into the contexts in which individuals, especially those with lower initial status, may overcome the reinforcing effects of status hierarchy that constrain and shape their behaviors (Blader & Chen, 2011; Fiske, 2010; Ridgeway & Berger, 1986), to increase their status (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Pettit et al., 2010). We take an important step to address this issue by examining the indirect effect of task-based jolts on status conferral through individuals’ appraisals and generosity. Our theory explains that

task-based jolts may offer lower-status individuals an opportunity to improve their standing indirectly, by increasing their confidence that they can also be valued members of the group, leading them to enact more generosity at a time when this generosity may be more likely to be recognized and valued, which ultimately increases their status.

Second, we provide greater insight into the psychology of status by examining higher- and lower-status individuals' reactions to organizational change. Past work highlights that higher-status individuals are oriented outwardly to their social relationships (Hays & Blader, 2016), and are thus, more likely to recognize opportunities in their environment (Hinds et al., 2000; Sutton & Hargadon, 1996). Yet, our research shows that because of their primary goal to maintain their standing (Anderson et al., 2020), when individuals have higher status, the task-based jolt reverses their inclination toward social relationships and taking advantage of opportunities, and instead, they focus inwardly and appraise the task-based jolt as more threatening to the self. By contrast, for those with lower initial status, the task-based jolt shifts their orientation outward, and they appraise the task-based jolt as more of an opportunity. Thus, our research offers an interesting extension of what we currently know about the psychological experience of status and suggests that the orientation of higher- and lower-status individuals may be reversed in the presence of a disruptive organizational event.

Managerial Implications

By demonstrating the disruptive impact of organizational-level events (e.g., task-based jolts) on employees' interpersonal behaviors and status conferral, our research presents several managerial implications. First, given the value of generosity during times of change, and our findings that generosity is driven by appraisals of the jolt as an opportunity, managers may consider how they can frame the task-based jolt as an opportunity for all employees (Ford et al.,

2018). Along these lines, minimizing the extent to which the event is appraised as self-threatening (e.g., by affirming members' value – Steele, 1998; Marr & Thau, 2014) could mitigate a potential decline in generosity, especially for employees with higher initial status.

Second, our results shed light on a way for lower-status individuals to successfully gain status following the aftermath of a task-based jolt. Ridgeway's (1982) findings suggested a potent intervention whereby group members with lower external status characteristics can overcome inequality by communicating a group-oriented motivation. Our findings build on this idea. Showing generosity (e.g., OCB) is a route to others' respect not only for new individuals with lower external status characteristics, but also for established individuals who have not been able to shine based on their task performance. Our findings show that periods of change that require employees to adjust their tasks or goals may present an opportune time for employees to improve their status by increasing their generosity behavior.

Limitations and Future Research

This research also has several limitations that suggest new avenues for future research. First, we designed the task-based jolts in our studies to reflect *appropriate* organizational responses to changes in the macro-environment (i.e., government regulations in Study 1, and new competitors in Study 2). However, organizations can also make strategic changes that are not viewed by their employees as appropriate, or design changes to rectify internal processes or procedures that are now viewed as illegitimate. Task-based jolts under these circumstances might lead to different reactions and behaviors. For example, a pharmaceutical company might decide to make a strategic change to how it markets and sells opioids due to past practices being deemed unethical. In such a case, those who had been conferred higher status before the jolt might become more generous following the change to atone for their previous unethical behavior. This

would be consistent with Hays and Blader's (2017) findings that when individuals view status allocation processes and outcomes as unfair and inequitable, those with higher status may increase their generosity to restore equity in the group.

Second, in addition to our hypothesized pathway for micro-mediators, we also found support for some alternative pathways. Specifically, not only did lower-status individuals appraise the jolt as an opportunity, which then enhanced their group-based self-esteem (as we hypothesized), but their appraisal of the jolt as an opportunity also enhanced their concern for others. We also found that lower-status individuals experienced lower self-threat, which contribute to their enhanced group-based self-esteem. In contrast, for higher-status individuals, we found that the indirect effect of a task-based jolt on generosity was explained solely through heightened self-threat (and not through reduced opportunity). Overall, these findings suggest that the psychological reaction of lower-status individuals may be more complex than our predictions – it is probably dualistic in nature. This could have implications for a broader range of behaviors that may be affected by task-based jolts. For example, if lower-status individuals experience less self-threat (in addition to greater opportunity) after a task-based jolt, this could strengthen their assertiveness and willingness to take risks, in addition to increasing their generosity. We encourage future research to consider other types of behavioral reactions higher- and lower-status individuals may experience in response to organizational change.

Third, there may be moderators that influence how a higher- or lower-status individual appraises and reacts to a task-based jolt. For example, if a higher-status individual had previous work experience that was irrelevant under the status quo, but which became relevant when a jolt occurred, that would weaken the effect of the jolt on their appraisal of the event as self-threatening and would strengthen the effect of the jolt on their appraisal of the event as an

opportunity. Similarly, the type of jolt may be an important moderator. We recognize that not all jolts are equal. For example, there are jolts that do not affect employees' tasks or goals, which may lead higher-status individuals to appraise the jolt as more of an opportunity (e.g., instituting English as the working language in the firm would be appraised as an opportunity for higher-status individuals who are also native speakers – Neeley, 2013), or may lead lower-status individuals to appraise the jolt as more of a threat (e.g., layoffs). Therefore, future research may examine the effects of other types of (non-task-based) jolts on interpersonal behaviors and status conferral, as well as consider other contextual moderators, including the nature of work (e.g., interdependent versus independent), and organizational culture (e.g., competitive versus collaborative).

Finally, we acknowledge that our empirical examination focused on status conferral in the immediate aftermath of the task-based jolt (i.e., two weeks in the field study [Study 1]) after the task-based jolt. This is important because although generosity may be particularly valuable to others in the short term because extra help and support are needed after a jolt, in the long term, a higher-status individual will also need to demonstrate competence to retain their high standing (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). Indeed, past status research highlights that helping behavior from individuals with lower competence is less likely to be well-received by the group (Eagly & Crowley, 1986). Likewise, individuals who lose status by becoming less generous following the immediate aftermath of the jolt may still be able to regain status in the longer term if they can develop superior competence (e.g., by investing in personal learning). In this sense, although we found that higher-status individuals' greater self-concern and dedication to learning after a task-based jolt was not rewarded with status in the immediate aftermath of the jolt (Study 2), *if* that dedication to learning leads to superior competence (Vandewalle, 1997), the status loss they

experienced after a jolt could be regained in the longer term. We encourage future research to focus on the longer-term effects of task-based jolts (e.g., six-months interval following the jolt) on status conferral.

Conclusion

Our research provides insight into the events that can disrupt status conferral in organizations. Our theory and findings explain how task-based jolts interrupt existing patterns of status conferral by differentially influencing higher- and lower-status individuals' generosity towards their coworkers after the jolt. We encourage future research to further strengthen this macro-micro bridge by examining how organizational-level phenomena may trickle down to affect individual-level reactions and behaviors in ways that impact status hierarchies.

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Table 1
Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Correlations Among Key Variables (Study 1)

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Task-based jolt (experimental condition = 1)	0.50	0.50									
2 Status, phase 1	3.54	0.87	-0.09	(.94)							
3 Generosity behaviors, phase 1	3.94	0.56	-0.05	0.65**	(.92)						
4 Status, phase 3	3.59	0.50	-0.11	0.61**	0.18	(.88)					
5 Generosity, phase 3	3.82	0.57	-0.35**	0.003	0.21*	0.26**	(.92)				
6 Self-threat	2.77	1.74	0.62**	0.34**	0.26*	-0.01	-0.51**	(.96)			
7 Opportunity	2.79	1.45	0.47**	-0.54**	-0.38**	-0.16	0.20*	-0.14	(.86)		
8 Sales experience in public housing market ^a	0.05	0.22	-0.05	0.03	-0.003	0.21*	0.04	-0.09	-0.03		
9 Gender (male = 1)	0.59	0.49	-0.02	-0.02	0.12	-0.13	0.10	-0.10	-0.02	0.10	
10 Task-based jolt X Status, phase 1	1.73	1.85	0.94**	0.17	0.11	-0.01	-0.46**	0.78**	0.21**	-0.05	-0.03

N = 100, Correlations above .2 are significant at the $p < .05$ level and correlations above .27 are significant at the $p < .01$ level. Reliabilities are reported in parentheses.

^aWe obtained archival data on each participant's sales transactions in the public housing market (new market) in the past two years

Table 2
 Unstandardized Coefficients for Regression Model^a (Study 1)

Variables	Model 1 Self-threat (phase 2)	Model 2 Self-threat (phase 2)	Model 3 Opportunity (phase 2)	Model 4 Opportunity (phase 2)	Model 5 Generosity (phase 3)	Model 6 Generosity (phase 3)	Model 7 Status (phase 3)	Model 8 Status (phase 3)
<i>Intercept</i>	2.81** (0.34)	1.68** (0.18)	2.83** (0.29)	2.20** (0.10)	2.96** (0.53)	2.17** (0.45)	2.74** (0.32)	4.06** (0.25)
<i>Controls</i>								
Gender ^b	-0.02 (0.34)	0.06 (0.23)	-0.05 (0.31)	-0.06 (0.16)	0.08 (0.12)	0.06 (0.07)	-0.16 (0.11)	-0.09 (0.07)
Public sales	-0.71* (0.35)	-0.33 (0.27)	-0.19 (0.69)	-0.14 (0.34)	0.13 (0.10)	0.04 (0.08)	0.46* (0.12)	0.34** (0.10)
Generosity (phase 1)					0.20 (0.15)	0.40** (0.13)	0.24* (0.09)	-0.40** (0.05)
<i>Predictors</i>								
Task-based jolt		2.28** (0.16)		1.16** (0.19)		-0.33 [†] (0.17)		0.16 (0.12)
Initial status		-0.09 (0.13)		-0.18 (0.18)		0.08 (0.07)		0.56** (0.04)
Task-based jolt ^c X Initial status		1.67** (0.15)		-1.23** (0.25)				
Self-threat						-0.13* (0.06)		-0.04 (0.03)
Opportunity						0.19** (0.04)		0.01 (0.04)
Generosity (phase 3)								0.30** (0.07)
<i>R-squared</i>	0.01	0.72**	0.001	0.58**	0.05	0.50**	0.14	0.62**

N = 100

^aCluster robust standard errors are reported in parentheses.

^bMale is coded as “1” and female is coded as “0”.

^cExperimental condition is coded as “1” and control condition is coded as “0”.

****p* < .001; ***p* < .01; **p* < .05; [†]*p* < .1

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics, Reliabilities, and Correlations Among Key Variables (Study 2)

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Task-based jolt ^a	0.52	0.50									
2 Initial status ^b	0.51	0.50	0.04								
3 Self-threat	3.40	1.85	0.31**	0.001	(.96)						
4 Opportunity	4.22	1.69	0.31**	-0.21**	-0.33**	(.85)					
5 Self-concern	5.63	0.99	-0.02	-0.13	0.29**	-0.33**	(.82)				
6 Other-concern	5.16	1.61	-0.07	0.01	-0.59**	0.56**	-0.21**	(.95)			
7 Group-based self-esteem	4.17	1.72	-0.04	0.09	-0.60**	0.53**	-0.27**	0.55**	(.96)		
8 OCB	4.93	1.53	-0.08	0.02	-0.65**	0.59**	-0.26**	0.82**	0.63**	(.97)	
9 Individual learning	5.56	0.95	0.29**	0.06	0.18*	0.004	0.28**	-0.12	-0.01	-0.03	
10 Task-based jolt X initial status	0.28	0.45	0.59**	0.61**	0.39**	-0.08	-0.08	-0.21**	-0.23**	-0.24**	0.25**

N = 185. Correlations above .2 are significant at the $p < .05$ level and correlations above .27 are significant at the $p < .01$ level. Reliabilities are reported in parentheses.

^aTask-based jolt condition is coded as “1” and no-jolt condition is coded as “0”.

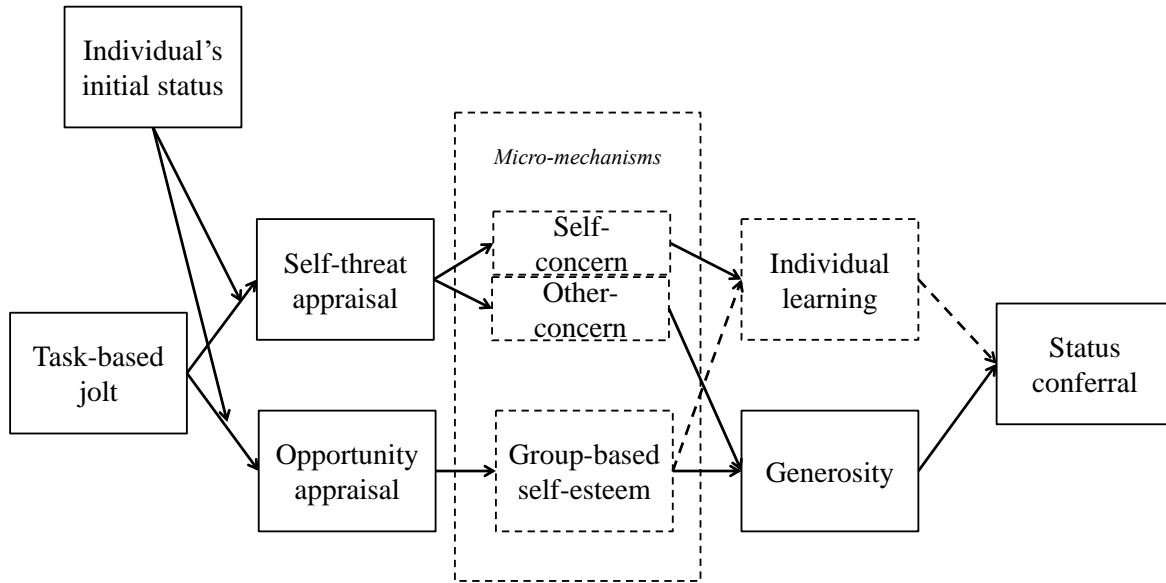
^bHigher initial status condition is coded as “1” and lower initial status condition is coded as “0”.

Table 4
Summary of Indirect Effects on OCB, Individual Learning, and Status Conferral (Study 2)

Indirect effect	OCB (Generosity)			Status conferral			Individual learning		
	Estimate	95% CI		Estimate	95% CI		Estimate	95% CI	
		Lower	Higher		Lower	Higher		Lower	Higher
Task-Based Jolt → self-threat → OCB									
Higher status	-0.99 (0.18)	-1.34	-0.64						
Lower status	1.26 (0.35)	0.58	1.94						
Task-Based Jolt → opportunity → OCB									
Higher status	0.10 (0.13)	-0.16	0.37						
Lower status	1.56 (0.40)	0.78	2.35						
Task-Based Jolt → self-threat → OCB → status conferral									
Higher status				-0.53 (0.12)	-0.77	-0.29			
Lower status				0.68 (0.22)	0.25	1.10			
Task-Based Jolt → opportunity → OCB → status conferral									
Higher status				0.06 (0.07)	-0.09	0.20			
Lower status				0.84 (0.25)	0.34	1.33			
Task-Based Jolt → self-threat → other-concern → OCB									
Higher status	-0.63 (0.15)	-0.92	-0.35						
Lower status	0.81 (0.24)	0.34	1.28						
Task-Based Jolt → self-threat → other-concern → OCB → status conferral									
Higher status				-0.37 (0.12)	-0.60	-0.15			
Lower status				0.48 (0.18)	0.13	0.82			
Task-Based Jolt → opportunity → group-based self-esteem → OCB									
Higher status	0.03 (0.04)	-0.05	0.11						
Lower status	0.45 (0.16)	0.13	0.76						
Task-Based Jolt → opportunity → group-based self-esteem → OCB → status conferral									
Higher status				0.02 (0.02)	-0.03	0.07			
Lower status				0.26 (0.11)	0.05	0.48			
Task-Based Jolt → self-threat → self-concern → individual learning									
Higher status							0.11 (0.04)	0.05	0.20
Lower status							-0.15 (0.06)	-0.27	-0.02

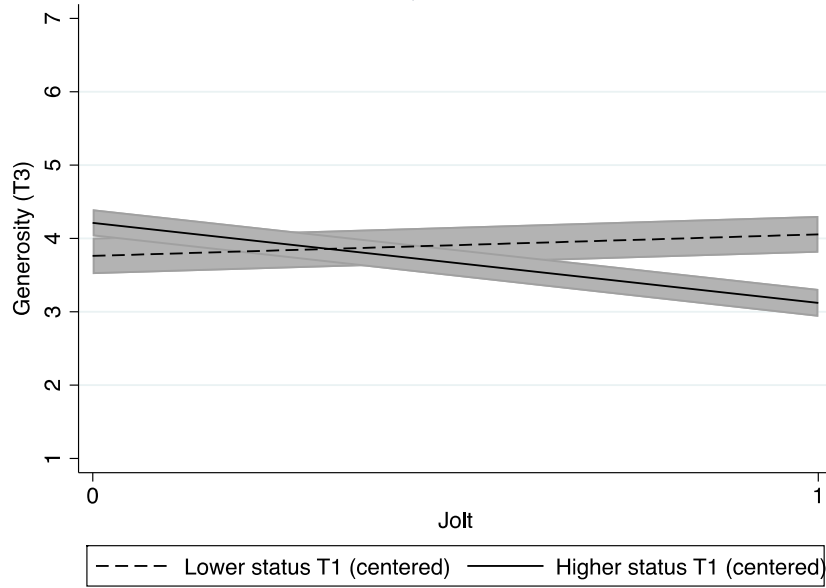
N = 185.

Figure 1
Proposed Theoretical Model



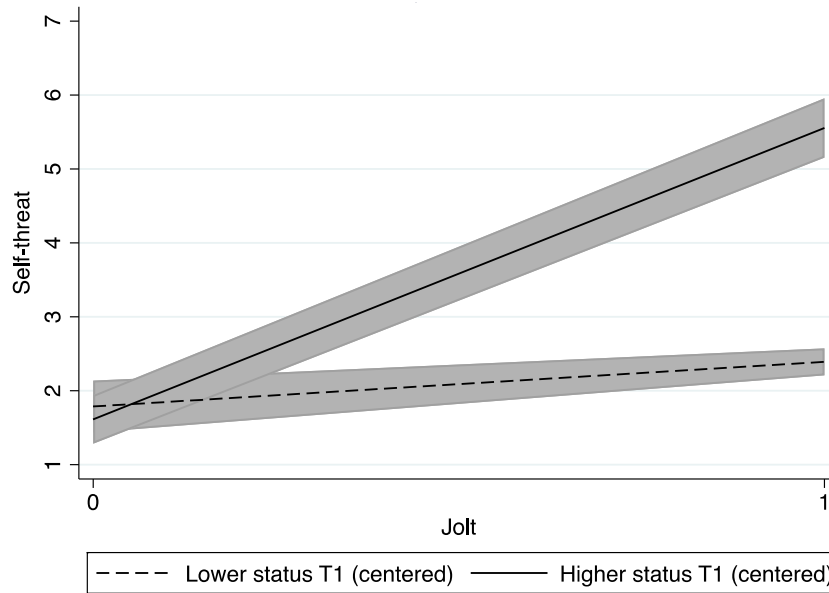
*Dotted boxes (self-/other-concern, group-based self-esteem, and individual learning) are tested in Study 2

Figure 2
Moderating Effect of Initial Status on the Relationship between Task-Based Jolt and Generosity (Study 1)



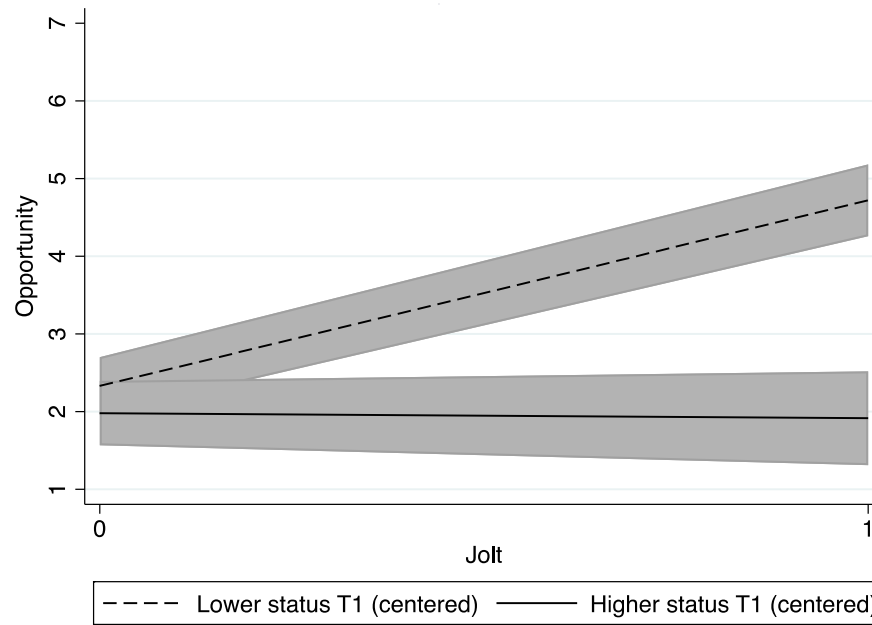
*Shaded bands represent the 95% confidence interval.

Figure 3
Moderating Effect of Initial Status on the Relationship between Task-Based Jolt and Self-Threat (Study 1)



*Shaded bands represent the 95% confidence interval.

Figure 4
Moderating Effect of Initial Status on the Relationship between Task-Based Jolt and Opportunity (Study 1)



*Shaded bands represent the 95% confidence interval.

Figure 5
Moderating Effect of Initial Status on the Relationship between Task-Based Jolt and OCB-I (Study 2)

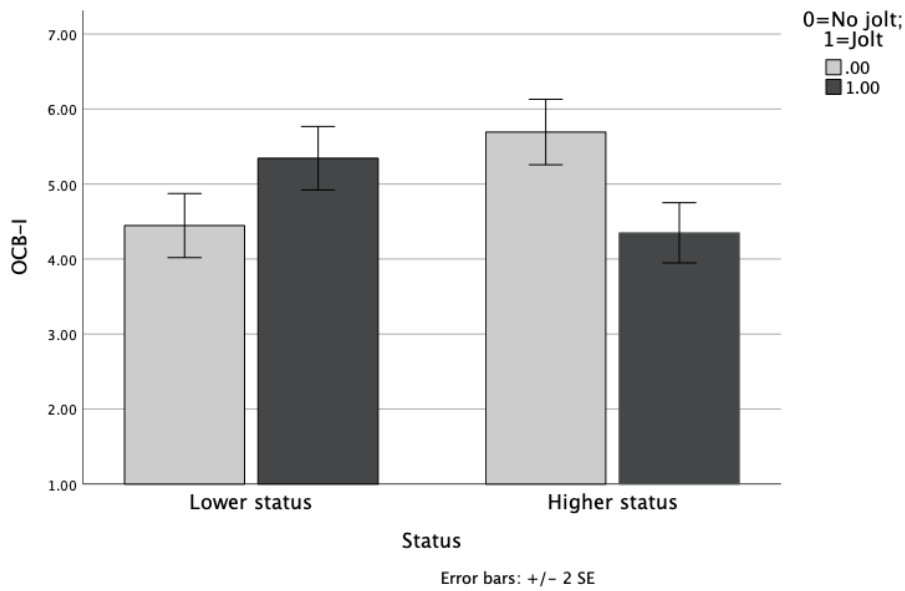


Figure 6:
Moderating Effect of Initial Status on the Relationship between Task-Based Jolt and Self-Threat (Study 2)

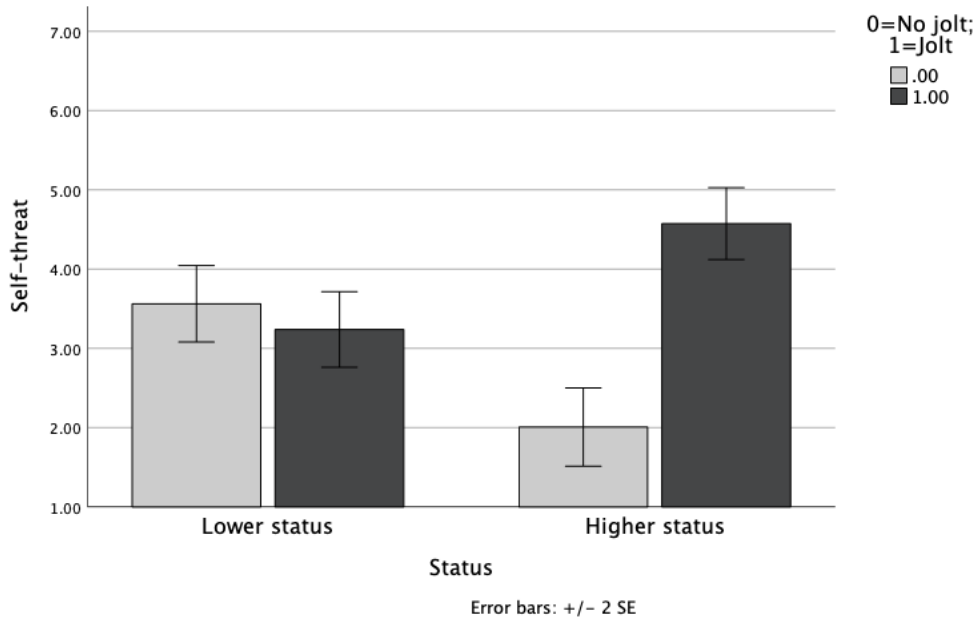


Figure 7:
Moderating Effect of Initial Status on the Relationship between Task-Based Jolt and Opportunity (Study 2)

