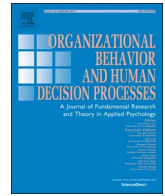




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# Does gender diversity help teams constructively manage status conflict? An evolutionary perspective of status conflict, team psychological safety, and team creativity

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the recent development of the literature on status conflict, the reasons and the contingency of the effects of status conflict on team creativity remain unclear. In this study, we draw on an evolutionary perspective to theorize team psychological safety as an underlying mechanism and gender diversity as a critical boundary condition for understanding why and when status conflict is likely to hinder team creativity. We tested these theoretical hypotheses using a multimethod (field and scenario studies) and cross-cultural (Korean and North American samples) set of studies. The findings offer novel practical and theoretical insights into the joint influence of status conflict and gender diversity on team psychological safety and team creativity.

## 1. Introduction

The emergence of team-based work systems and the demands of increasingly knowledge-driven economies lead firms to emphasize team creativity as a primary means of organizational survival and competitive advantage (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003). In search of the determinants of team creativity, the growing body of extant literature focuses on intragroup conflict, including task and relationship conflict, and their implications on team creativity (De Dreu, 2006, 2008; Farh, Lee, & Farh, 2010). However, how status conflict, which refers to disputes over the relative status positions of people in the social hierarchy of their group, influences team creativity remains unclear (Bendersky & Hays, 2012). Understanding the relation between status conflict and team creativity is important because status conflict can pose a serious challenge in fostering team creativity by making the social environment of a group unsafe for members to share their creative ideas (Gould, 2003; Porath, Overbeck, & Pearson, 2008). For example, our interviews with full-time employees reveal that individuals in teams with status conflict tend to be worried that “people in the group will try to be overly aggressive in asserting their own thoughts,” “members who think they are of higher status will believe that their ideas deserve more attention,” and “team members might disrupt the meeting or try to undermine one another’s participation.” They also tend to believe that status conflict “will likely lead to disagreements and possibly heated disputes and people’s feelings will get hurt” and “could

prompt more personal encounters or more negatively charged interactions among members.” Status conflict among members may pose a practical barrier to the creativity of organizational teams.

The purpose of the present study is to advance our knowledge on when and why status conflict affects team creativity. To achieve this objective, we draw on an evolutionary perspective because status conflict and team creativity share a common evolutionary underpinning. The struggle for status has long been considered “a fitness-relevant feature of human social life” (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010, pp. 334), and it has become acknowledged as a fundamental human motive with a strong evolutionary basis (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001; Cheng et al., 2010). Human displays of creativity have also been valued for their evolutionary function with regard to the increased likelihood of survival and prosperity (Byrne, 1995; Griskevicius, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 2006). In linking status conflict with team creativity, an evolutionary perspective highlights psychological safety as key mechanism underlying such a relationship because humans have evolved to detect potential threats and risks in the environment (e.g., high status conflict) and this social motivational climate plays a role in promoting team creativity.

Notably, an evolutionary perspective helps identify a critical boundary condition for understanding when status conflict is less likely to hinder team creativity via team psychological safety. We focus on gender diversity as a critical contingency because what is admired and respected in the group and the interpersonal tactics used during status

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competition could differ remarkably depending on whether the group is gender diverse. When team members compete for high status, they need to be generous and friendly in gender-diverse groups because the human characteristics of altruism, kindness, and helpfulness are considered highly desirable in these groups (Apestequia, Azmat, & Iriberry, 2012; Barclay, 2010; Farrelly, 2011; Ortmann & Tichy, 1999; Williams & Polman, 2015). By contrast, interpersonal tensions associated with status challenges may persist and even escalate in gender-dominant groups because the use of aggressive tactics becomes a common and acceptable method to win conflicts (for male-dominant groups, see Anderson et al., 2001; Correll, 2004, and Porath et al., 2008; for female-dominant groups, see Archer, 2004; Oesterman et al., 1998, and Griskevicius et al., 2009). The use of unique interpersonal tactics in a group influences team psychological safety, which refers to a shared belief held by team members that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking (Edmondson, 1999; Gelfand, Leslie, Keller, & De Dreu, 2012). Accordingly, we expect that gender diversity (versus gender dominance) mitigates the potential detriments of status conflict on team creativity via team psychological safety.

The present study substantially contributes to the literature by utilizing an evolutionary perspective in investigating the status conflict–team creativity relationship. First, our study complements the emerging literature on status conflict, which lacks empirical works, as well as the theory on how and why status conflict is related to team creativity (Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Groysberg, Polzer, & Elfenbein, 2011; Pettit, Doyle, Lount, & To, 2016; Spataro, Pettit, Sauer, & Lount, 2014). Although the situation in which a social hierarchy is unstable can be functionally beneficial for team creativity given that team members may present creative ideas to prove their superiority and value to the collective (Nijstad & De Dreu, 2012; Sligte, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2011), an evolutionary perspective predominantly suggests that status conflict is likely to undermine team creativity due to the nature of status as a limited but valuable resource in the group. Individuals in a status conflict situation tend to become competitive and aggressive to attain the evolutionary values of status toward survival as well as prosperity, thereby resulting in a psychologically unsafe social climate and constrained idea exchanges (Gould, 2003). We extend the literature by adopting the psychological safety perspective to provide a compelling explanation on why status conflict can undermine team creativity (Chen, Farh, Campbell-Bush, Wu, & Wu, 2013; Eisenbeiss, van Knippenberg, & Boerner, 2008; Gong, Cheung, Wang, & Huang, 2012). The present expansion of the criterion domain to include team creativity (moving beyond team task performance) is meaningful given the increasing appreciation for team creativity for teams to perform non-routine and complex tasks.

More important, we propose gender diversity as a critical group contingency that may suppress the negative effects of status conflict on team psychological safety and subsequent team creativity. Our utilization of an evolutionary perspective suggests that the gender composition of a group may engender noticeably disparate interpersonal behaviors that reshape the way status conflict is managed and resolved in a group (Apestequia et al., 2012; Myaskovsky, Unikel, & Dew, 2005). The literature on intragroup conflict adopts the contingency perspective to understand the conditions under which workgroup conflicts lead to important group outcomes (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; de Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). However, on account of the incentive nature of the literature on status conflict, the contingency of its effects remains unknown (Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Chun & Choi, 2014). Given the importance of the successful management of intragroup conflict, identifying the boundary conditions of the effects of status conflict on team creativity offers valuable insights.

### 1.1. Status conflict and team psychological safety

Striving for status involves evolutionary conditions that stimulate intense competition among members because high status is a scarce but

valuable resource for survival and prosperity (Griskevicius et al., 2006; Huberman, Loch, & Önçüler, 2004; Owens, Sutton, & Turner, 2001). Members who strive for status may benefit group functioning with increased motivation, constructive deviation from the status quo, and competition for novel and useful ideas that facilitate the achievement of a superior group position (e.g., Nijstad & De Dreu, 2012; Sligte et al., 2011). However, evolutionary perspective predominately endorses detrimental consequences of status conflict because disputes over social hierarchy among members tend to become tense and often destructive (Gould, 2003). The limited access to a high status and the considerable impact of status compel individuals in a status conflict situation to become competitive and aggressive, thereby degenerating the social climate of a group including psychological safety (Griskevicius et al., 2009).

Bendersky and Hays (2012) outlined three distinctive properties of status conflict that make this type of conflict particularly damaging for team psychological safety.<sup>1</sup> First, status is a fixed social resource, which means that status conflict “represents zero-sum exchanges in which individuals gain at the expense of others” (Carton & Tewfik, 2016, p. 1138). The disagreements and competition over status may urge team members to claim their status position and become sensitive to potential challenges from others (Groysberg et al., 2011). If such a hostile environment is created by status conflict, team members make sense of this disturbing social environment and develop social evaluative concerns, thereby becoming suspicious about being talked about and mistrusting the intentions of others (Kramer & Messick, 1998). In sum, members perceive the social environment of the group as unsafe.

Second, status conflict implicates other group members. To legitimize changes in social hierarchy, actors need to expand their alliances and invite bystanders in a group. Consequently, political divisions into subgroups may emerge during the process of status contest (Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Chun & Choi, 2014). Thus, a challenge to social hierarchy is likely to influence the entire network of social relationships, possibly resulting in an all-out battle over the status involving an expanded set of members (Kalkhoff, 2005; Ridgeway & Walker, 1995). The emergence of subgroups and the spread of friction across members escalate interpersonal tension that compromises the psychological safety climate of a team.

Third, given the disproportionate influence of high-status individuals, disputes over social hierarchy among members tend to become intense because they are concerned about the aftermath (Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Gould, 2003). Although intrateam competition is not necessarily destructive, serious competition could disrupt collaboration and cooperation among members (Christie & Barling, 2010; Groysberg et al., 2011). Engaging in intensive status contests, team members may view one another not as coworkers but as competitors attempting to win at the expense of others (Greer, Caruso, & Jehn, 2011). As a result, members perceive low levels of interpersonal trust and mutual respect, which are foundations of a psychologically safe environment (Edmondson, 1999).

In sum, status conflict can intensify competition and interpersonal tension among team members, urging them to stay alert to potential status threats and act assertively to defend their status (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003). Assertive and aggressive behaviors used to claim status produce various negative emotions, such as frustration, resentment, and anger (Porath et al., 2008; Roseman, 1996). These negative emotions could impair the willingness to act with generosity and interpersonal sensitivity, thereby further damaging interpersonal trust and support (Chun & Choi, 2014; Gould, 2003; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Such damaged interpersonal climate and hostile atmosphere in a group creates an unsafe environment for members (Edmondson, 1999; van Ginkel & van Knippenberg, 2008). Thus, we present the following hypothesis:

<sup>1</sup> For additional information on the recent development and discriminative validity of the construct of status conflict, see Appendix A.

**Hypothesis 1.** Status conflict is negatively related to team psychological safety.

### 1.2. Team psychological safety as a mediator between status conflict and team creativity

The psychological safety construct has been developed to account for the learning-oriented, proactive, and risk-taking behaviors of individuals in social contexts, which lead to team creativity and innovation (Carmeli, Brueller, & Dutton, 2009; Hülsheger, Anderson, & Salgado, 2009). Team creativity requires building on, combining, and critically improving the ideas of each member through unconstrained interactions (Farh et al., 2010; Gong, Kim, Lee, & Zhu, 2013; Lee, Pak, Kim, & Li, *in press*). In a team with low psychological safety, team members cannot freely speak up and exchange new ideas because they are concerned about embarrassment, rejections, and even punishments from others (Bradley, Postlethwaite, Klotz, Hamdani, & Brown, 2012; Edmondson, 1999). Thus, team creativity may benefit from team psychological safety.

Moreover, as psychological safety reduces the energy needed from members to regulate interpersonal relations or to deal with distracting social problems, teams could allocate additional resources for constructive problem solving, and members could present new or risky ideas willingly without worrying about social costs or face-saving concerns (Bradley et al., 2012). Broad perspectives, new suggestions, and divergent ideas are permitted and encouraged in such team contexts (Gong et al., 2012). Group members working in a non-judgmental climate are likely to offer ideas for new and improved ways of working, thereby promoting team creativity (Kang, Matusik, Kim, & Phillips, 2016; West & Anderson, 1996). In this regard, we identify psychological safety as a critical social and motivational climate toward team creativity (Edmondson, 1999; Eisenbeiss et al., 2008).

Considering the proposed negative effect of status conflict on team psychological safety, status conflict may indirectly affect team creativity via its direct effect on psychological safety. In a sense, team psychological safety is a reason whereby status conflict impedes team creativity. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2.** Team psychological safety mediates the relationship between status conflict and team creativity.

### 1.3. Gender diversity as a moderating contingency for status conflict

Although status conflict could detract from team psychological safety, not every group suffers from such detriments. Certain groups deal with such challenges successfully without generating negative emotional and interpersonal ramifications. Thus, the extent to which status conflict unfolds to impede psychological safety and team creativity depends on a third group property or a moderating contingency (de Wit et al., 2012; Goncalo, Chatman, Duguid, & Kennedy, 2015). Drawing on an evolutionary perspective, we focus on gender diversity as such a contingency because in a status competition, what is admired or regarded as legitimate in a group could differ remarkably depending on whether the team is gender-diverse (Griskevicius et al., 2007). Thus, the gender composition of a group introduces a meaningful difference in interpersonal contexts that changes the way status conflict is managed and resolved in a group (Myaskovsky et al., 2005; Williams & Polman, 2015).

According to costly signaling and competitive altruism theories, both males and females tend to behave generously and helpfully when interacting with the opposite gender because such behaviors signal an attractive characteristic, that is, the ability and willingness to take care of others (Barclay, 2010; Farrelly, 2011; Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006; Van Vugt & Iredale, 2013). Empirical studies demonstrate that people tend to exhibit interpersonally sensitive, egalitarian, and generous behaviors

in mixed-gender interactions (e.g., Apestequia et al., 2012; Ortmann & Tichy, 1999; Williams & Polman, 2015). Moreover, when people work in mixed-gender groups, they avoid words or deeds that might appear aggressive and hostile (e.g., Hirschfeld, Jordan, Feild, Giles, & Armenakis, 2005; Myaskovsky et al., 2005). These findings suggest that gender-diverse groups are not highly likely to suffer from interpersonal tension and aggression arising from status conflict among members.

We must note that in addition to the mere presence of the opposite sex, having a balanced number of different genders helps fully reap the benefits of gender diversity during the process of status competition. Studies report that being a small minority or a token member of an opposite gender in a gender-dominant group is associated with considerable discomfort, isolation, self-doubt, and detrimental social interactions (e.g., bullying and harassment) regardless of whether the minority gender is female or male (Berdahl, 2007; Eriksen & Einarsen, 2004; Kanter, 1977a; Kanter, 1977b; Torchia, Calabrò, & Huse, 2011). This result is due to the fact that stereotyping for the minority gender could result in barriers to influencing others in the group (Kanter, 1977a; Kanter, 1977b; Powell, 1993). In particular, status conflict can create a social condition in which members easily develop prejudices against those in the minority position and find weaknesses in different others to obtain advantageous positions in a social hierarchy. Research finds that the benefits of having members of the opposite sex in a group tends to accrue only when a good number of same-sex members are present (Erkut, Kramer, & Konrad, 2008; Konrad, Kramer, & Erkut, 2008; Torchia et al., 2011). Not the mere presence of the opposite sex but gender diversity helps group members refrain from aggressive tactics and show kindness and generosity when they compete for status in gender-diverse groups. The same is true for the norm shift model of diversity effects in which people develop expectations for favorable interpersonal norms in anticipation of working with diverse members (Sommers, 2006).

By contrast, gender-dominant groups (including all-male or all-female groups) face an increased risk of experiencing detrimental social consequences from status conflict. On the one hand, male-dominant groups tend to approach issues over status conflict more aggressively than female-dominant groups do because males have a greater tendency than females to use direct, aggressive tactics (Correll, 2004; Porath et al., 2008). Evolutionary psychologists suggest that males have a stronger desire for status than females, and when competing for status, males tend to exhibit uncivil and other dysfunctional behaviors, which likely escalate group hostility (Anderson et al., 2001). On the other hand, female-dominant groups are likely to react to status conflict aggressively but in a different manner by using indirect aggression, which is behavior intended to hurt someone without face-to-face confrontation, such as socially excluding the perpetrator (Archer, 2004; Oesterman et al., 1998). Griskevicius et al. (2009) showed that activating a desire for status increases female demonstration of indirect aggression. Thus, interpersonal tensions associated with status challenges may persist and even escalate among female members. Such tensions should deter psychological safety among them.

In constructively addressing status conflict without resulting in a psychologically unsafe environment, the smooth resolution of the potentially tense process of status contest is necessary. As noted, using destructive and aggressive tactics to attain status could impose greater costs than benefits in gender-diverse groups characterized by interpersonal norms that do not favor coercive power exercises (Cheng et al., 2010). In gender-dominant or homogenous groups, however, using (direct or indirect) aggressive tactics is common and considered legitimate. In addition, having a small minority of different genders is not enough to affect the entire group because the minority members are vulnerable and exposed to stereotyping by majority members. Thus, we conclude that increasing levels of gender diversity may alleviate the detrimental consequences of status conflict for team psychological safety. We propose the following moderation hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 3.** Gender diversity moderates the relationship between status conflict and team psychological safety such that the negative relationship is weaker for gender-diverse teams than for gender-homogenous teams.

In accordance with the theoretical advances in the contingency models of team conflict that have called for the search for moderators between team conflicts and team outcomes (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Farh et al., 2010; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003), we propose that gender diversity moderates the indirect effect of status conflict on team creativity via team psychological safety. Congruent with the theoretical expectation that gender diversity attenuates the negative effect of status conflict on team psychological safety, the negative indirect effect of status conflict on team creativity via team psychological safety is expected to be stronger when gender diversity is low than when it is high. In effect, we advance the following moderated mediation hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 4.** Gender diversity positively moderates the negative relationship between status conflict and team creativity mediated by team psychological safety such that the mediated relationship is less negative when gender diversity is high than when it is low.

## 2. Research overview

We tested our hypotheses using three studies based on different methodologies. In Study 1, we conducted a field study in Korea where employees completed the survey on status conflict and team psychological safety at work while team leaders provided team creativity ratings and gender composition information on their teams. In Studies 2 and 3, we collected data from North American employees who participated in scenario studies that manipulated the status conflict and gender composition of a work group. Studies 2 and 3 were designed to constructively replicate the interaction effect of status conflict and gender diversity and to uncover the behavioral outcomes of this effect.

## 3. Study 1: Field study

### 3.1. Sample and data collection procedure

To test the current hypotheses, we collected team-level data by contacting managers participating in the executive training and part-time MBA program of a major Korean university. With the consent of these managers, we initially distributed the questionnaires to 123 teams through postal mail with pre-stamped, preaddressed return envelopes. From the initial sample, completed surveys from 84 teams were returned (84 leaders and 659 members). We screened teams with either less than 2 members (2 teams excluded) or more than 30 members (6 teams were excluded) and further removed questionnaires with over a third of the items having missing responses (6 teams excluded). Thus, the final sample included data from 70 teams comprising 70 leaders and 551 members (response rate at the team level = 56.9%). The functional areas covered by these teams included business planning and administration (40%), sales and marketing (25.7%), research and development (20%), service (4.3%), production and engineering (2.9%), and others (7.1%).

Based on the team size reported by leaders (mean = 10.93,  $SD$  = 5.69, min = 3, max = 28), the present data represented 82% of the entire team membership (average number of participating members per team = 7.87). In the final analysis sample, females represented 4.3% and 29.7% of team leaders and members, respectively. The leaders and members were included in four age groups, namely, below 29 years (0% and 12.1%, respectively), 30–39 years (4.3% and 49.5%, respectively), 40–49 years (67.1% and 30.3%, respectively), and over 50 years (20% and 8.1%, respectively). The education levels of the leaders and members were high school (0% and 1.7%, respectively), two-year college (2.9% and 9.3%, respectively), undergraduate degree

(55.7% and 68.4%, respectively), and graduate degrees (41.4% and 19.1%, respectively). The average tenures in the current team were 4.8 years ( $SD$  = 6.3) and 2.2 years ( $SD$  = 2.1) for team leaders and members, respectively.

### 3.2. Measures

Data were collected from two different sources. The team members reported on status conflict and team psychological safety, whereas team leaders reported on team creativity and gender composition. We translated the survey from English to Korean using back-translation procedures (Brislin, 1986). According to the reports of team leaders, the teams were composed of 31% female members on average, ranging from 0% to 100% (mean = 0.31,  $SD$  = 0.26). The proportion of female members in the sampled teams varied: all males (12.9%), 0–25% females (40%), 25–50% females (28.5%), 50–75% females (10%), 75–100% females (5.7%), and all females (2.9%). Except for gender composition, all variables were rated on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

#### 3.2.1. Status conflict

We measured status conflict using the four-item scale ( $\alpha$  = 0.92) developed by Bendersky and Hays (2012). A sample item includes “My team members experience conflict because of others trying to assert their dominance.” The aggregation statistics showed acceptable empirical properties of status conflict as indicators of shared, collective phenomena ( $r_{wg(j)}$  = 0.83, ICC(1) = 0.24, and ICC(2) = 0.71). Thus, we aggregated the individual ratings of status conflict to group level for our analysis.

#### 3.2.2. Gender diversity

To assess gender diversity within teams, we computed the Blau (1977) index, which is widely used in diversity literature (e.g., Wegge, Roth, Neubach, Schmidt, & Kanfer, 2008). The current measure of gender diversity reflects the entire team membership as reported by team leaders, and it is not limited to members participating in this study. The Blau index was computed as  $1 - \sum p_i^2$ , in which  $p_i$  is the percentage of employees in the  $i$ th category. The index can vary between 0 and 0.5, with values close to 0.5 indicating high diversity.

#### 3.2.3. Team psychological safety

We evaluated team psychological safety using the six-item scale ( $\alpha$  = 0.84) developed by van Ginkel and van Knippenberg (2008). A sample item includes “In this team, I have the impression that the other members want to hear what I have to say.” The aggregation statistics justified the team-level aggregation ( $r_{wg(j)}$  = 0.89, ICC(1) = 0.20, and ICC (2) = 0.66).

#### 3.2.4. Team creativity

Team leaders rated their teams using the four-item scale developed by Shin and Zhou (2007) to assess team creativity (see also Gong et al., 2013). ( $\alpha$  = 0.92). A sample item includes “How well does your team produce new ideas?”

#### 3.2.5. Control variables

We controlled for various team characteristics to exclude alternative explanations and to capture the unique influence of status conflict and gender diversity on team psychological safety and team creativity.<sup>2</sup> First, team size, as reported by team leaders, was used as a control variable considering that the extant literature consistently suggests that team size affects team dynamics, including coordination, member integration, and team satisfaction (e.g., Lee & Farh, 2004). Second, we

<sup>2</sup> We ran additional analyses with no control variables and obtained consistent result patterns.

controlled for task conflict (three items,  $\alpha = 0.81$ ) and relationship conflict (three items,  $\alpha = 0.82$ ; Jehn & Mannix, 2001) as rated by team leaders to determine if status conflict predicts psychological safety and team creativity above and beyond alternative types of team conflict. Third, we controlled for the aggregated need for affiliation measured with the four-item scale adopted from the Manifest Needs Questionnaire ( $\alpha = 0.67$ , e.g., “When I have a choice, I try to work in a group instead of by myself”) (Steers & Braunstein, 1976), which may shape the responses of team members to interpersonal challenges, such as status conflict (Beersma & De Dreu, 2005). Fourth, we controlled for average level of education (1 = “high school,” 2 = “two-year college,” 3 = “bachelor’s degree,” 4 = “graduate degree”) of team members given the significant association between education and creative outcome (Shin & Zhou, 2007). Fifth, we controlled for the level of task interdependence, which urges team members to rely on one another to communicate and exchange resources, thereby potentially affecting status conflict and team creativity (Gilson & Shalley, 2004; Stewart & Barrick, 2000). We measured task interdependence using two items rated by the team leaders ( $\alpha = 0.70$ , Langfred, 2000). Finally, we controlled for functional area (e.g., business planning and administration, research and development, and production and engineering) because the requirement for novel solutions and improved procedures may differ across distinct characteristics of assigned tasks (Lee et al., in press).

4. Results

We conducted a multilevel confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the empirical distinctiveness of the variables in our analysis. The CFA, which included between- and within-group need for affiliation (4 items), team psychological safety (6 items), and status conflict (4 items), as well as between-group task interdependence (2 items), task conflict (3 items), relationship conflict (3 items), and team creativity (4 items), revealed that the multilevel seven-factor measurement model indicated acceptable fit:  $\chi^2(352) = 490.38$ ; CFI = 0.97; and RMSEA = 0.03. Moreover, this model fit significantly better than all the other alternative models in which any two of the three factors at the between- and within-group level ( $308.3 \leq \Delta \chi^2s (\Delta df = 8) \leq 1015.45$ ) or any two of the four factors at the between-group level ( $32.67 \leq \Delta \chi^2s (\Delta df = 6) \leq 120.3$ ) were combined. These results support the discriminant validity of the variables in the current analysis.

4.1. Hypothesis tests

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for all the study variables are presented in Table 1. We used path analysis using Mplus

Table 1  
Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of study variables (Study 1).

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Team size	10.93	5.69												
2 Task interdependence	4.96	1.04	-0.08											
3 Task conflict	3.69	0.91	0.11	0.05										
4 Relationship conflict	3.02	1.05	0.20	0.03	0.59**									
5 Aggregated need for affiliation	5.40	0.32	0.02	0.06	-0.09	-0.10								
6 Aggregated educational level	3.07	0.43	-0.01	0.35**	0.02	-0.17	0.08							
7 Business planning and administration	0.40	0.49	0.01	-0.07	0.04	-0.07	-0.13	-0.31**						
8 Research and development	0.20	0.40	-0.11	0.10	-0.12	-0.23	0.03	0.63**	-0.41**					
9 Production and engineering	0.03	0.17	0.18	-0.24*	0.28*	0.30*	0.07	-0.12	-0.14	-0.09				
10 Status conflict	2.76	0.71	0.23	-0.21	0.33**	0.37**	-0.15	-0.15	-0.03	-0.25*	0.18			
11 Gender diversity	0.29	0.17	0.10	0.09	0.08	0.07	-0.02	0.00	0.10	-0.22	-0.19	0.12		
12 Team psychological safety	4.62	0.45	-0.21	0.23	-0.19	-0.30*	0.29	0.31**	-0.02	0.30*	-0.20	-0.55**	0.16	
13 Team creativity	4.74	0.85	-0.16	0.18	-0.20	-0.04	0.10	0.20	-0.11	0.14	0.08	-0.17	0.13	0.28*

Note: n = 70 teams.  
\* p < 0.05.  
\*\* p < 0.01.

7.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) to test the current hypotheses. Team psychological safety and team creativity were regressed on all control variables (i.e., team size, task interdependence, task conflict, relationship conflict, aggregated need for affiliation, aggregated education, and functional area). All the explanatory variables in our models were grand mean centered to decrease multicollinearity and facilitate result interpretation (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). The results are shown in Fig. 1.

Hypothesis 1 posited that status conflict is negatively related to team psychological safety. Fig. 1 shows that status conflict is a significant, negative predictor of team psychological safety ( $b = -0.31$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), thereby confirming Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted the indirect relationship between status conflict and team creativity through team psychological safety. Following the procedure recommended by Bauer, Preacher, and Gil (2006), we estimated the indirect effect by conducting a Monte Carlo simulation with 20,000 replications to obtain a confidence interval around the indirect effect (Preacher & Selig, 2012). The estimate for the indirect effect was  $-0.161$ , and the 95% confidence interval did not include zero ( $-0.336, -0.018$ ). Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that gender diversity positively moderates the relationship between status conflict and team psychological safety. Our analysis revealed that the interaction between status conflict and gender diversity was significant and positive in predicting team psychological safety ( $b = 0.99$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). To further probe this interaction, we performed a simple slope analysis. Fig. 2 shows that status conflict is negatively related to team psychological safety when gender diversity is low ( $b = -0.48$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ); however, such a negative relationship becomes statistically insignificant when gender diversity is high ( $b = -0.14$ , ns.). These patterns are consistent with Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that gender diversity positively moderates the indirect effect of status conflict on team creativity via team psychological safety. To test this moderated mediation hypothesis, we followed a procedure to compare conditional indirect effects (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007). Moderated mediation occurs when the strength of the mediated relationship depends on the level of a moderator (Edwards & Lambert, 2007). The tests on the conditional indirect effects indicated that the indirect effect of status conflict on team creativity via team psychological safety was significant and negative only when gender diversity was low. Meanwhile, under high gender diversity, the same indirect effect became statistically insignificant (see Table 2). This result supported Hypothesis 4.

4.2. Post-hoc analyses

Although our results provided support for the moderating role of

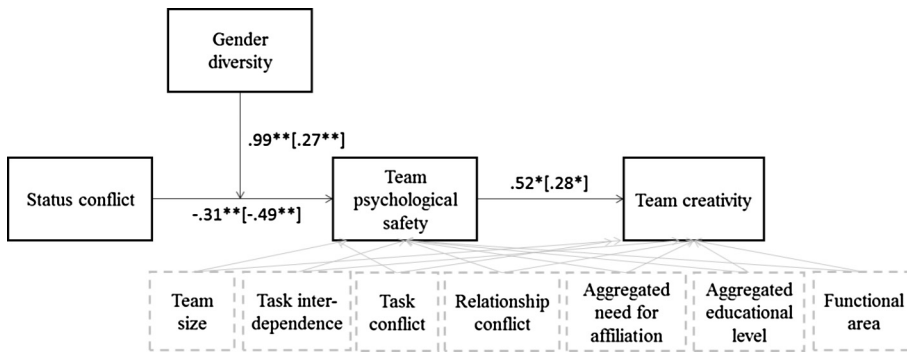


Fig. 1. Results of path analysis (Study 1). Note:  $n = 70$  teams. Values in brackets are the results of an interaction test using standardized scores. Values outside brackets are the results of an interaction test using centered scores. Functional area represents business planning and administration, research and development, and production and engineering. \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

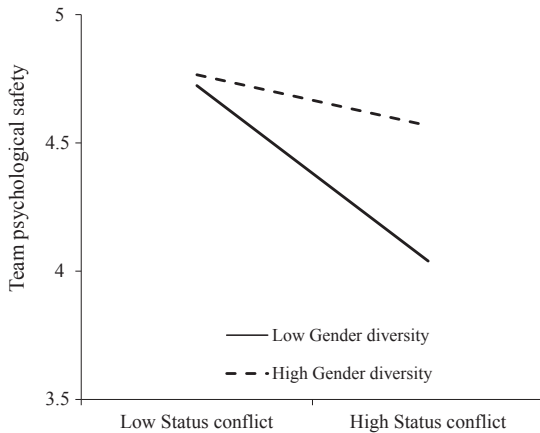


Fig. 2. Interaction between status conflict and gender diversity in predicting team psychological safety (Study 1).

gender diversity on the relationship between status conflict and team psychological safety, the observed moderating effect could simply be due to the high proportion of female members in gender-diverse groups. Females are more reluctant than males to engage in competitive interactions (Brewer, Mitchell, & Weber, 2002; Croson & Gneezy, 2009). Teams with a larger percentage of females than males tend to perform better on interpersonal tasks probably because of the higher average level of interpersonal consideration and social sensitivity offered by female members (Hall & Mast, 2008; Hirschfeld et al., 2005; Myaskovsky et al., 2005; Williams & Polman, 2015). Thus, the positive moderating effect of gender diversity may be driven by the high proportion of females, which may suppress competitive behaviors and soften interpersonal challenges among members. In such a case, the female proportion may exhibit a significant positive interaction with status conflict in predicting team psychological safety. However, given the gender diversity effect, both too low and too high levels of female proportion may lead to a negative effect because extremely few and extremely many female members represent low gender diversity. In this respect, the positive effect of gender diversity may be observed in cases in which a group is characterized by a gender balance with a moderate proportion of females, thereby leading to a curvilinear (inverse U-

shape) effect of female proportion.

To explore the alternative possibility that the linear effect of female proportion instead of gender diversity generates moderating effects, we performed multiple regression analyses in which we introduced the proportion of females and its quadratic term as moderators in the relationship between status conflict and team psychological safety. As shown in Step 3 in Table 3, the interaction between status conflict and the quadratic term of female proportion was significant and negative ( $b = -1.99, p < 0.05$ ). To clarify this interaction involving the quadratic term, we compared the quadratic effects of female proportion on team psychological safety at different status conflict levels. As depicted in Fig. 3, the relationship between female proportion and team psychological safety followed an inverted U-shaped function for teams with a high level of status conflict. Thus, the results corroborated the positive moderating effect of gender diversity and not only the linear increment of the female proportion in a group.

Additionally, we tested whether team psychological safety can predict relatively routinized and conventional types of team task performance (e.g., getting things done quickly and efficiently) as rated by team leaders. We adopted the four-item scale of team task performance ( $\alpha = 0.86$ , e.g., “This team accomplishes its task quickly”) from Jiang, Zhang, and Tjosvold (2013). The results revealed that team psychological safety was not significantly related to team task performance ( $b = 0.18, ns.$ ). The indirect relationship of status conflict with team performance via team psychological safety was not significant either. Explorative and learning-oriented endeavors facilitated by psychological safety may be beneficial for team creativity but not necessarily conducive to achieve daily group performance of routine tasks (McGrath, 2001). Finally, we tested alternative types of interaction effects. First, considering the suggestion of a prior study on the moderating role of team psychological safety on the relationship between intragroup conflict and team outcomes (Bradley et al., 2012), we tested the interaction effect of status conflict and team psychological safety on team creativity. This interaction effect was not significant ( $b = -0.20, ns.$ ). Second, we tested the interaction of other types of conflict and gender diversity. The interaction terms involving task and relationship conflict with gender diversity were not significantly related to team psychological safety ( $b = 0.50$  and  $0.23$ , both  $ns.$ ). Third, we further tested the possibility that other types of diversity, such as age and education diversity, interact with status conflict to predict team psychological

Table 2 Moderated mediation results for team creativity across levels of gender diversity (Study 1).

Independent variable	Mediator	Dependent variable	Moderator	Level	Indirect effect	LL 95% CI	UL 95% CI
Status conflict	Team psychological safety	Team creativity	Gender diversity	Low	-0.25	-0.518	-0.028
				Medium	-0.16	-0.336	-0.018
				High	-0.07	-0.196	0.001

Note:  $n = 70$  teams. CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Mediation is supported when the confidence interval excludes zero.

Control variables: Team size, task interdependence, task conflict, relationship conflict, aggregated need for affiliation, aggregated educational level, and functional area.

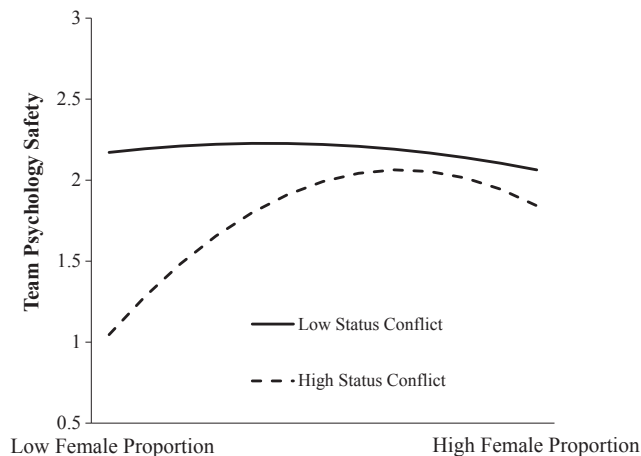
**Table 3**  
Post-hoc analyses: Curvilinear interaction of status conflict and female proportion on team psychological safety (Study 1).

Variables	Team psychological safety					
	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>
Team size	−0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.01
Task interdependence	0.05	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.05
Task conflict	−0.04	0.07	0.00	0.06	−0.02	0.06
Relationship conflict	−0.05	0.06	−0.03	0.05	−0.02	0.05
Aggregated need for affiliation	0.43 <sup>+</sup>	0.16	0.33 <sup>+</sup>	0.14	0.37 <sup>++</sup>	0.13
Aggregated educational level	0.23	0.16	0.16	0.14	0.22	0.14
Business planning and administration	0.15	0.11	0.09	0.10	0.10	0.09
Research and development	0.19	0.17	0.20	0.15	0.17	0.14
Production and engineering	−0.01	0.32	0.10	0.29	0.33	0.28
Status conflict			−0.25 <sup>+</sup>	0.07	−0.16 <sup>+</sup>	0.08
Female proportion			0.34	0.22	0.43 <sup>++</sup>	0.21
Female proportion <sup>2</sup>			−1.74 <sup>+</sup>	0.57	−2.07 <sup>++</sup>	0.58
Status conflict × female proportion					0.80 <sup>++</sup>	0.28
Status conflict × female proportion <sup>2</sup>					−1.99 <sup>+</sup>	0.95
Δ <i>F</i>	3.05 <sup>++</sup>		7.80 <sup>++</sup>		4.61 <sup>+</sup>	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.31		0.51		0.58	
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	0.31		0.20		0.07	

Note: *n* = 70 teams. Coefficients are unstandardized regression coefficients (*b*).

\* *p* < 0.05.

\*\* *p* < 0.01.



**Fig. 3.** Post-hoc Analysis: Curvilinear interaction of female proportion and status conflict on team psychological safety (Study 1).

safety. All these interactions were not significant, and the results remained the same with or without these additional interaction terms. Thus, the interaction between status conflict and gender diversity provides a unique value in accounting for team psychological safety.

**5. Study 1 discussion**

The results of Study 1 offered initial evidence for the indirect association of status conflict with team creativity through team psychological safety with gender diversity as a boundary condition of this relationship. Despite these promising results, they are subject to several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design of this field study limits our ability to infer causality. Second, the present data were collected from organizations in Korea characterized with high levels of power distance and collectivism (Hofstede, 2001). Finally, although we argued that gender diverse teams deal effectively with status conflict because using destructive and aggressive tactics to attain status could impose greater costs than benefits in gender-diverse groups, this presumption is

untested and remains unclear about what behavioral tendencies are aroused by different types of gender composition. To constructively replicate the findings of Study 1 and address these limitations, we conducted two additional studies.

**6. Study 2: Online scenario study**

We conducted Study 2 to constructively replicate our findings in Study 1 using data from Western cultures (e.g., United States and Canada) and to clarify the direction of causality.

**6.1. Sample**

We collected data from employees in the US and Canada using Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), an online crowdsourcing market (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). We recruited participants who currently work in a company. This online simulation included the amount of time participants spent on the survey and attention-check items to screen out participants who failed to follow instructions (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). We initially recruited 505 participants and removed missing responses and data from non-native English speakers. We also excluded those who failed to meet the attention-check guidelines (e.g., participants who provided incorrect answers to attention-check items or spent less than 5 minutes). Accordingly, the final analysis sample comprised 454 individuals. The sample demographics were as follows: 49.1% of participants were female; 80% were Caucasian; and 72.7% were between 20 and 39 years old.

**6.2. Procedures**

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following 6 conditions: 2 (status conflict versus no status conflict) × 3 (gender-diverse, gender-dominant, control). Participants were instructed to read a scenario and imagine a typical day at work in this team, a day involving significant interactions with their team members (see Appendix B for an example scenario of the status conflict × gender diversity condition). We manipulated gender composition with each participant reading one of the following gender composition sentences in the second paragraph

of the scenario.<sup>3</sup> For example, female participants in the gender-diverse condition read, “Your team has both females and males. Your team has two female members named Jennifer and Stephanie as well as three male members, Joe, Nick, and Andrew.” In the gender-diverse condition, a team as a whole consisted of three females and three males (50–50%) including the participant. For female participants in the gender dominant condition, they read, “Your team has five male members named Joe, Nick, Andrew, John, and Russ,” and male participants in the gender dominant condition read, “Your team has five female members named Jennifer, Stephanie, Anna, Sue, and Angela.” Accordingly, each team was comprised of five team members with a different gender than the focal participant. Finally, the control condition participants read a scenario with no statement of gender composition.

In the third paragraph of the scenario, status conflict was manipulated by the following sentences: “Your team members do not substantially differ in the way they get things done and personal values. However, your team members hold differing perceptions of people’s relative status positions in their group’s hierarchy. That is, some members assert that they deserve more status than they currently have. They argue that they contribute to the group relatively more than others and that other group members are overestimating their status and need to be put in their place.” By contrast, in the no-status conflict condition, participants only read, “Your team members do not substantially differ in the way they get things done and personal values.”

After reading the scenario, the participants were asked to write several sentences regarding their thoughts and feelings, including how they would interact with the team members. They then responded to the measures of status conflict and team psychological safety. No significant difference existed in how participants with a different gender responded to the survey across different conditions. Thus, we combined responses from male and female participants to create a 2 (status conflict versus no status conflict)  $\times$  3 (gender-diverse, gender dominant, and control) group comparison. The cell sizes, means, and standard deviations are presented in Table 4.

### 6.3. Measures

All responses were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

#### 6.3.1. Status conflict

The same scale (4 items;  $\alpha = 0.94$ ) used in Study 1 was applied in Study 2.

#### 6.3.2. Team psychological safety

We used the same scale (6 items;  $\alpha = 0.93$ ) from Study 1.

## 7. Results

### 7.1. Manipulation check

As expected, participants in the status conflict condition reported experiencing more status conflict than participants in the no-status conflict condition,  $F(1, 448) = 618.77, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.58$ . No significant main effect was observed for gender composition,  $F(2, 448) = 2.54, p = 0.08, \eta^2 = 0.01$ .

<sup>3</sup> We decided to compare gender diverse groups (6 members comprising 3 females and 3 males) with gender dominant groups (e.g., of 6 members, 5 members are the same gender, and 1 member is different), not gender homogenous groups (e.g., all 6 members have the same gender) to maintain consistency with Study 1, in which gender diversity is operationalized as the degree to which a team is composed of individuals of varying gender. Thus, we created scenarios where we can investigate the difference between more and less gender-diverse groups.

**Table 4**  
Cell size, mean, and standard deviations (Study 2).

	Status conflict		Psychological safety	
	Status conflict	No status conflict	Status conflict	No status conflict
Gender diverse	4.26 (0.77) N = 61	2.48 (0.75) N = 77	2.85 (0.91) N = 61	3.92 (0.58) N = 77
Gender dominant	4.40 (0.66) N = 82	2.70 (0.99) N = 82	2.43 (0.83) N = 82	3.80 (0.71) N = 82
Control	4.54 (0.50) N = 80	2.53 (0.93) N = 72	2.51 (0.91) N = 80	4.05 (0.55) N = 72

Note: For each condition, means, standard deviations in parentheses, and cell sizes are presented.

### 7.2. Team psychological safety

The 2 (status conflict versus no status conflict)  $\times$  3 (gender-diverse, gender dominant, control) ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for status conflict,  $F(1, 448) = 335.63, p < 0.001$ , and  $\eta^2 = 0.43$  and significant main effect for gender composition,  $F(2, 448) = 5.05, p = 0.01$ , and  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ , on team psychological safety. A significant interaction also occurred between status conflict and gender composition,  $F(2, 448) = 3.47, p = 0.03$ , and  $\eta^2 = 0.02$ .

To analyze the interaction patterns, we examined the data by gender composition (see Fig. 4). As expected, our analysis results revealed that when status conflict occurs, participants in the gender-diverse group perceived their groups to be significantly more psychologically safe ( $M = 2.85, SD = 0.91$ ) than those under control ( $M = 2.51, SD = 0.91; t(147) = -2.46, p = 0.01$ ) and gender-dominant conditions ( $M = 2.43, SD = 0.83; t(152) = -2.19, p = 0.03$ ). However, this effect was weakened in the no-status conflict conditions. The team psychological safety level did not significantly differ between participants in the gender-diverse ( $M = 3.92, SD = 0.58$ ), control ( $M = 4.05, SD = 0.55; t(139) = 1.33, p = 0.19$ ), and gender-dominant conditions ( $M = 3.80, SD = 0.71; t(160) = -1.19, p = 0.23$ ). Thus, these results support Hypotheses 1 and 3.<sup>4</sup>

## 8. Study 2 discussion

Although the results of Study 2 provide greater confidence in supporting our hypothesis that gender diversity mitigates the negative effects of status conflict on team psychological safety, this study is limited in two important ways. First, in the gender-dominant condition, the participant always held a minority position in the team, whereas in the gender-diverse teams, participants had two other team members who had the same gender as the participant. Thus, an alternative possibility is that the participants’ majority/minority status, not the gender composition *per se*, was driving the effect. To exclude this alternative explanation, it is important to create conditions in which the participant was part of a gender-dominant team but was not part of a minority (e.g., male participants facing a team with four other males and one female). Second, drawing on an evolutionary perspective, we argue that gender-diverse groups refrain from aggressive tactics. To provide empirical evidence on this presumption

<sup>4</sup> We also tested our hypotheses by assessing team members’ interpersonal facilitation defined as “interpersonally oriented behaviors that contribute to organizational goal accomplishment” (Van Scotter & Motowidlo, 1996, p. 526). Interpersonal facilitation includes behaviors such as listening to each other, cooperating, and expressing positive values for others. Our analysis revealed that when status conflict occurs, the gender-diverse condition manifests the highest levels of interpersonal facilitation, compared with either the control or the gender-dominant conditions. This is consistent with team psychological safety as an outcome.



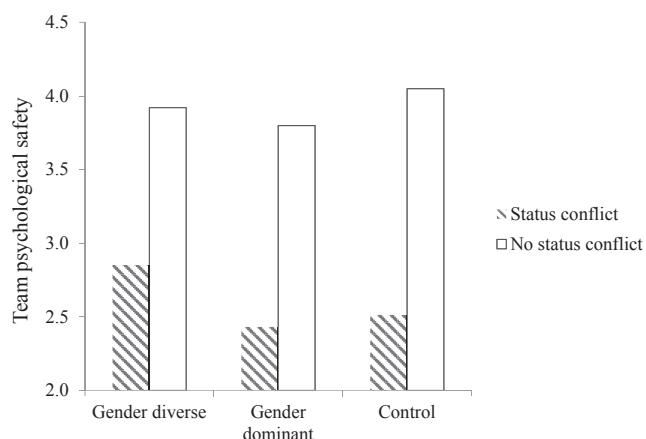


Fig. 4. Team psychological safety by condition (Study 2).

and unravel behavioral tendencies aroused by gender-diverse groups under condition of status conflict, we conducted Study 3.

### 9. Study 3

At the outset, we identified dominating (or forcing) style of conflict-handling behaviors as aggressive forms of interpersonal behaviors in the context of status conflict. Dominant behavior is well-established as one form of conflict-handling behavior, and research suggests that aggressiveness often transforms into attempts to dominate others (De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, & Nauta, 2001; Stroebe, Nijstad, & Hemelrijk, 2017). Drawing on evolutionary perspective, we previously theorized that, in the face of status conflict, team members exhibit less aggressive tactics such as dominating style of conflict management behaviors when they work in a gender-diverse team (versus in gender-dominant teams). We empirically tested this presumption by assessing the team members’ dominant behaviors such as using coercion to get their ideas accepted, forcing their side of the issue, and using their power to win a competitive situation (Gelfand et al., 2012; Rahim, 1983). According to Rahim (1983), individuals using a dominating style of conflict-handling behavior show a high degree of caring for themselves and ignoring others’ feelings, and taking little consideration of how the conflict would affect others. Dominant behavior damages a team’s emergent state of psychological safety because it promotes active confrontation to publicly win conflicts, leading to aggressiveness, hostility, and intimidation (Gelfand, Leslie, & Keller, 2008). Gelfand et al. (2012) demonstrated that teams with more dominant behaviors have lower levels of team psychological safety.

Consistent with Study 2, we used Mturk. Of the initial 519 participants, we screened out missing responses, non-native English speakers, and those who failed to satisfy the attention-check guidelines. The final sample comprised of 454 full-time employees in the US and Canada. The sample demographics were as follows: 49.3% of participants were female, 81.3% were Caucasian, and 67.2% were between 20 and 39 years old.

#### 9.1. Procedures

We followed the same procedure with Study 2. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following 6 conditions: 2 (status conflict versus no status conflict) × 3 (gender-diverse, gender-dominant, control). The only change we made is in the gender-dominant condition. In Study 2, participants in the gender-dominant condition were assigned to the group where all other team members had a different gender from the focal participant, thereby being a minority in the group (e.g., female participants read scenarios about working with five male members). However, we created the gender-dominant condition in Study 3 by assigning the focal participant into the majority group of gender. For example, female

Table 5  
Cell size, mean, and standard deviations (Study 3).

	Status conflict		Dominant behavior	
	Status conflict	No status conflict	Status conflict	No status conflict
Gender diverse	4.11 (0.61) N = 70	2.23 (0.84) N = 67	3.95 (0.79) N = 70	3.28 (0.97) N = 67
Gender dominant	4.06 (0.57) N = 90	2.34 (0.76) N = 67	4.17 (0.51) N = 90	3.22 (0.79) N = 67
Control	4.18 (0.68) N = 84	2.34 (0.88) N = 76	4.19 (0.59) N = 84	3.09 (0.90) N = 76

Note: For each condition, means, standard deviations in parentheses, and cell sizes are presented.

participants in the gender-dominant condition read, “Your team has four female members named Jennifer, Stephanie, Anna, and Sue and one male member named Joe.” Male participants in the gender-dominant condition read, “Your team has four male members named Joe, Nick, Andrew, and John and one female member named Jennifer.” Accordingly, while the gender composition in the team is consistent with Study 2, the focal participant in Study 3 had the majority gender. The cell sizes, means, and standard deviations are presented in Table 5.

#### 9.2. Measures

All responses were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree.

##### 9.2.1. Status conflict

The same scale (4 items;  $\alpha = 0.93$ ) used in Study 1 was applied in Study 2.

##### 9.2.2. Dominant behavior

We adapted three items ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ) from Rahim (1983). The three items are “My team members use their influence to get their ideas accepted,” “My team members are firm in pursuing their side of the issue,” and “My team members sometimes use their power to win a competitive situation.”

### 10. Results

#### 10.1. Manipulation check

Participants in the status conflict condition reported experiencing more status conflict than participants in the no-status conflict condition,  $F(1, 448) = 696.20, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.61$ . No significant main effect was observed for gender composition,  $F(2, 448) = 0.61, p = 0.54, \eta^2 = 0.00$ .

#### 10.2. Dominant behavior

A 2 (status conflict versus no status conflict) × 3 (gender-diverse, gender-dominant, control) ANOVA on dominant behavior revealed a significant main effect of status conflict,  $F(1, 448) = 160.76, p < 0.001$ , and  $\eta^2 = 0.26$ ; however, no significant main effect was observed for gender composition,  $F(2, 448) = 0.40, p = 0.67$ , and  $\eta^2 = 0.00$ . The analysis further indicated the significant interaction effect of status conflict and gender composition,  $F(2, 448) = 3.03, p = 0.049$ , and  $\eta^2 = 0.01$ .

We examined this interaction by comparing the gender-diverse condition with other conditions. Under the status conflict condition, participants in gender-diverse groups perceived their teams to enact significantly less dominant behaviors ( $M = 3.95, SD = 0.79$ ) than those

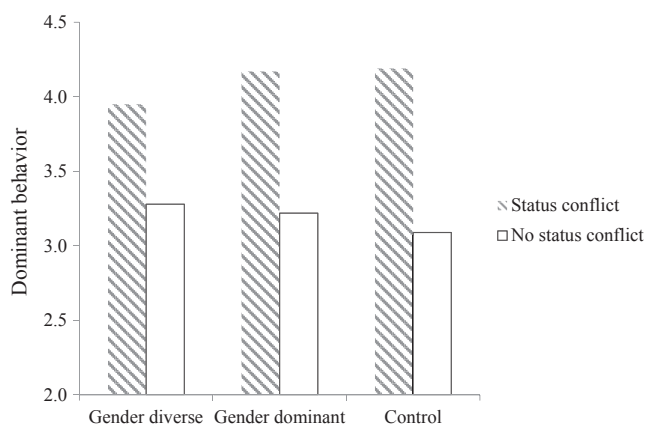


Fig. 5. Dominant behavior by condition (Study 3).

under the control ( $M = 4.19$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ;  $t(152) = -2.17$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ) and gender-dominant conditions ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ;  $t(158) = -2.09$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ). However, this effect was attenuated in the no-status conflict conditions. Specifically, no difference was observed in the dominant behavior between participants in the gender-diverse ( $M = 3.28$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ), control ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ;  $t(141) = 1.22$ ,  $p = 0.22$ ) and gender-dominant conditions ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ;  $t(132) = -0.39$ ,  $p = 0.70$ ). This pattern supports our prediction that when status conflict occurs, members of gender-diverse groups manifest the lowest levels of dominant behavior, compared with those in either the control or the gender-dominant group conditions (see Fig. 5).

## 11. General discussion

Drawing on an evolutionary perspective, the present conceptual framework and empirical analysis demonstrate that status conflict affects team creativity by undermining team psychological safety and that such a negative unfolding process is less likely to be materialized in groups characterized by gender diversity. Despite the general consensus on the importance of status conflict and its negative impact on the task performance of a group, whether status conflict is conducive to team creativity remains unanswered. We draw on an evolutionary perspective to provide a compelling explanation on why status conflict can undermine team creativity and to underscore the relevance of gender diversity in mitigating the negative impacts of status conflict on team psychological safety and team creativity. The multimethod, cross-cultural set of field and experimental studies in Korea and North America provided convergent evidence for the current theoretical framework.

### 11.1. Implications for theory and research

The present study contributes to the literature in several meaningful ways. First, drawing on an evolutionary viewpoint, we investigated whether and how status conflict affects team creativity. The present expansion of the criterion domain to include team creativity (moving beyond team task performance) is meaningful because most teams have both routine and non-routine tasks. Furthermore, the success of different types of tasks may be explained by distinct unfolding processes. For example, as shown in our supplementary analyses, team psychological safety as a socio-motivational climate failed to predict a team's task performance but it did predict team creativity. Therefore, status conflict possibly has distinct implications for varying performance domains in teams, depending on the elicited intermediate processes and operating boundary conditions.

The present study further addresses the question of *why* status conflict relates to team creativity by outlining a plausible mediating mechanism underlying such a relationship. In the study by Bendersky and Hays (2012) on the relationship between status conflict and team

performance, the researchers identified team cognitive functioning as an intervening process. We further extend the literature by adopting the psychological safety perspective based on the socio-motivational view of team creativity (Chen et al., 2013; Eisenbeiss et al., 2008; Gong et al., 2012). Psychological safety is an important mediator from an evolutionary perspective, which suggests that humans have evolved to detect potential threats and risks in the environment and to make sense of these situations for selecting their behavioral strategies. An interpersonally hostile environment (e.g., high status conflict) may deteriorate the psychological safety perceptions of team members (Anderson, Kraus, Galinsky, & Keltner, 2012; Marmot, 2004). For the development of the status conflict literature, drawing on different theoretical lens to identify unique mechanisms translating status conflict into various team outcomes will be genuinely intriguing.

By isolating a potential boundary condition for the status conflict effect, we further offer an elaborate understanding of *when* status conflict actually impedes team psychological safety, and thus, team creativity. Under high status conflict, it is possible that team members can compete more intensively as they attempt to draw attention from the members of the opposite sex in gender-diverse groups; however, the current field and experimental data demonstrate the opposite in that gender diversity actually serves as a contingent suppressor (rather than a facilitator) of the negative effects of status conflict. This phenomenon probably occurs because gender-diverse groups (versus gender-dominant groups) use less aggressive tactics and demonstrate more interpersonal consideration when they compete for social status, as shown in our online simulations. Adding to the currently developing theoretical framework of status conflict, our investigation of gender diversity as a contingency variable opens a new avenue for the contingency perspective of research on status conflict and team outcomes (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; de Wit et al., 2012; Jehn & Bendersky, 2003).

Our supplementary analyses reveal that gender diversity only mitigates the impact of status conflict, but not that of either relationship or task conflict, on team psychological safety. Evolutionary theories of gender effects speak to what characteristics of individuals are considered desirable and admired in the group, which has a strong signal for deciding who will obtain high status in the group. Thus, gender composition primarily guides how to compete for status in groups. In addition, gender diversity may have a minimal impact on psychological safety in the context of task conflict given that group members do not have enough motivation to make extra effort to be more attractive and gentle depending on gender composition. The reason is that task conflict is not about differences in status but about differences in thoughts and ideas. Furthermore, it is possible that when relationship conflict occurs, it is too late for gender diversity to have an impact on group dynamics because the group already is experiencing friction and emotional conflict as a result of individual differences in personal values. Future research may further delve into this issue by examining different intermediate mechanisms through which gender diversity may have an impact on group dynamics by mitigating (or even reversing) detrimental consequences of other forms of intragroup conflict.

By theoretically framing gender diversity as a moderating contingency, this study further contributes to the diversity literature replete with mixed findings related to the main effect of diversity variables (e.g., Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007; Wegge et al., 2008). As shown in our analysis, group diversity can operate as a context for unfolding interpersonal interactions and developments in teams, rather than serving as an "input" factor that directly shapes interpersonal dynamics. This theoretical reorientation and flexibility may suggest a potential venue for diversity researchers to further enrich the conceptual and empirical analyses of group diversity.

Finally, the current hypotheses were supported in both Asian and Western samples, which corroborate the generalizability of our findings across different cultural contexts. In Asian countries, people typically underscore conformity to existing social structures and readily accept hierarchical differences, whereas in Western countries, people perceive individual independence as desirable and frequently encourage

challenging the authority (Kitayama, Park, Sevincer, Karasawa, & Uskul, 2009). The empirical consistency across samples from different cultures speaks to the power of status conflicts and the potential benefits of gender diversity in organizations. Nonetheless, considering that majority of the diversity and intragroup conflict studies have been conducted in Western countries (Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007; Shore et al., 2009), we call for additional cross-cultural studies that could unravel similarities and differences in the effects of group diversity and conflict across different cultures.

### 11.2. Implications for practice

From a practical perspective, the present study provides meaningful messages to practicing managers. Considering that status conflict may damage team creativity by creating a psychologically unsafe environment for members to freely speak up and exchange new ideas, leaders must closely monitor the team to prevent status conflict among members. For example, leaders may take extra care to clarify what individual characteristics and behaviors are valued and appreciated in the team and the organization. Accordingly, the social hierarchy among members becomes relatively clear and stabilized, and members may accept and recognize the status differences.

When status conflict has previously occurred and the members have become highly competitive, leaders can attempt to maintain fair and socially favorable interactions, as well as channel the competitive energy towards a constructive direction. In particular, if a group is dominantly composed of either females or males, leaders may consider reshuffling the group composition by adding new members from the minority gender. Considering that the presence of gender diversity tends to alleviate the hostile group atmosphere, such efforts are critical for achieving team creativity, which significantly depends on psychologically safe interpersonal climate in work teams.

More than ever, the increasing representation of women in the workforce that was previously dominated by males (Hirschfeld et al., 2005) has significantly created a more gender-diverse composition within the workforce (e.g., in South Korea, Magoshi & Chang, 2009; in the US, Myaskovsky et al., 2005; in Europe, Wegge et al., 2008). Accordingly, organizations have developed growing interests in eliciting positive effects from gender diversity without inviting the detrimental side effects of gender division or faultlines, thereby capitalizing on the full range of talents within the labor pool (Goncalo et al., 2015). As the current results suggest, gender diversity can be productively employed when a team suffers from serious status disputes. Considering that both conflict and diversity comprise critical elements to maximize the creative potential of team members (e.g., De Dreu, 2006, 2008), leaders should be keenly aware of the interactive dynamics of various types of conflict and diversity, which can nurture or suffocate the desirable interactions among members toward team creativity.

### 11.3. Limitations and future research

Several limitations should be noted in interpreting the present findings. The first limitation pertains to the potential alternative theoretical mechanisms of the hypothesized relationships. For example, although we drew on an evolutionary perspective to explicate the socio-motivational benefits of gender-balanced groups in managing status conflict, the advantages of gender diversity can be attributed to its broad range of skill sets as well. According to social role theory of gender differences (Eagly, 1987), men's and women's skills and abilities are complementary in that women possess significantly higher sensitivity to cues related to feelings and interpersonal relations, whereas men tend to be directly focused on problems, facts, and solutions (Apestequia et al., 2012; Croson & Gneezy, 2009; Myaskovsky et al., 2005). Thus, gender-diverse groups have the benefit of complementarity in their gender-based behavioral repertoire, which can be used in constructively managing both problem-oriented and

interpersonal challenges brought about by status conflicts. We call for future research to investigate the alternative intermediate processes explicating the joint influence of status conflict and gender diversity on team creativity.

Second, we acknowledge a discrepancy between our theorizing regarding gender (stereotypes and roles) and our measurement of gender in terms of biological sex. We tested behavioral and psychological differences caused by the sex composition of a group; however, we used the term "gender" to refer to biological sex differences rather than the individual identification with male versus female roles. We further utilized the term to maintain consistency with prior research on the influence of gender composition and gender difference in the diversity literature (e.g., Apestequia et al., 2012; Lee & Farh, 2004; Myaskovsky et al., 2005; Wegge et al., 2008; Williams & Polman, 2015). Future research could investigate whether the difference in a person's biological sex and subjective gender perceptions can provide additional insights into current theoretical propositions.

Finally, future research should be vigilant and pursue the possibility that status conflict can actually increase team creativity. Status conflict may encourage a group to constructively deviate from the status quo, and members compete for other useful and unique ideas beneficial for attaining a high status. Considering the ambivalent creative potential of status conflict, searching for moderators is important to identify under what conditions status conflict would benefit team creativity. In particular, a recent study by Bendersky and Hays (in press) shows that, for teams with low-status agreement, status conflict can benefit group performance by helping members clarify the hierarchy and leading them to subsequent status agreement. We call for future research that identifies conditions in which the seemingly dysfunctional aspects of status conflict counterintuitively enhance team creativity.

## 12. Conclusion

The struggle of humans for status and creativity is an important topic of research, acknowledging the growing interest in status conflict as a new form of intragroup conflict and the mechanism through which creativity emerges in teams. We found that status conflict damages team creativity by spawning a psychologically unsafe environment. Interestingly, however, the gender composition of a team seemed to help mitigate such detrimental consequences of status conflicts. In particular, status conflicts can be more constructively managed in gender-diverse than gender-dominant groups. The results of our study not only highlight the importance of a contingency approach in investigating the status conflict–team creativity relationship but further offer new insights into the positive role of gender diversity in managing status conflict. Building on our findings, we encourage future research to continue examining the creative potential of status conflict and gender diversity, and to explore various boundary conditions that shed new light on the successful management of intragroup conflict and team creativity.

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## Appendix A. Development and discriminative validity of status conflict construct

To capture distinct social dynamics over status, Bendersky and Hays (2012) recently proposed and validated the construct of status conflict.

They further elaborated that status conflict is conceptually distinguishable from other types of conflict, namely, task, relationship, and process conflicts in two broad aspects. First, status conflict possesses a unique structural property in that the source of status conflict is based on members' positions in the group's social structure (Christie & Barling, 2010; Pearce, 2011). By contrast, task, relationship, and task conflicts tend to be issue-specific and dependent on members' interests in task outcomes, personal values, and task processes, respectively. Second, status conflict induces more competitive behaviors than the other types of conflict because status conflict has longer-term consequences, engages other group members to a greater extent, and encompasses more distributive outcomes (Bendersky & Hays, 2012; Porath et al., 2008). The discriminant validity of status conflict was further supported by Chun and Choi (2014).

#### Appendix B. Example scenario (status conflict × gender diversity condition)

“Imagine that you are a member of a business planning team in a mid-sized company operating in the US. Your team's tasks include conducting environmental and competitor analyses, problem and opportunity identification, and development of short- and long-term business plans. You work in a team of five people in addition to yourself.

Your team has both female and male members. The two female members are named Jennifer and Stephanie and the three male members are Joe, Nick, and Andrew.

Your team members do not substantially differ in work style and personal values. However, your team members hold different perceptions of people's relative status positions in their group's hierarchy. That is, some members assert that they deserve more status than they currently have. They argue that they contribute to the group relatively more than others and that other group members are overestimating their status and need to be put in their place.”

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