

Research Article

Power and Perspectives Not Taken

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ABSTRACT—Four experiments and a correlational study explored the relationship between power and perspective taking. In Experiment 1, participants primed with high power were more likely than those primed with low power to draw an E on their forehead in a self-oriented direction, demonstrating less of an inclination to spontaneously adopt another person's visual perspective. In Experiments 2a and 2b, high-power participants were less likely than low-power participants to take into account that other people did not possess their privileged knowledge, a result suggesting that power leads individuals to anchor too heavily on their own vantage point, insufficiently adjusting to others' perspectives. In Experiment 3, high-power participants were less accurate than control participants in determining other people's emotion expressions; these results suggest a power-induced impediment to experiencing empathy. An additional study found a negative relationship between individual difference measures of power and perspective taking. Across these studies, power was associated with a reduced tendency to comprehend how other people see, think, and feel.

The powerful are often accused of being predominantly concerned with their own desires and well-being, of being insensitive to the social implications of their behavior, and of being poor perspective takers (Fiske, 1993; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Kipnis, 1972). Indeed, perspective taking—stepping outside of one's own experience and imagining the emotions, perceptions, and motivations of another individual—seems the antithesis of the self-interested behavior often displayed by the powerful: It has been linked to moral reasoning (Kohlberg, 1976), altruistic behavior (Batson, 1991), and social

competence (Davis, 1983). In this article, we demonstrate empirically that power is associated with increased difficulty in taking other individuals' perspectives. Individuals primed with power anchor too heavily on their own vantage points and demonstrate reduced accuracy when assessing the emotions and thoughts of others.

DEFINITIONS AND THEORIES OF POWER

Power is often defined as the capacity to influence other people; it emerges from control over valuable resources and the ability to administer rewards and punishments (French & Raven, 1959; Keltner et al., 2003). The power-approach theory (Keltner et al., 2003) suggests that power increases goal-directed activity. As a result, the powerful act more (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003) and with greater variability (Guinote, Judd, & Brauer, 2002) than the nonpowerful. Although power is considered a structural variable, a property of social relationships, its psychological properties can be activated by exposure to cues related to power or by recalling past experiences with power; activating power through these manipulations leads to the same effects as those obtained using structural and role-based manipulations of power (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Galinsky et al., 2003).

POWER AND PERSPECTIVE TAKING: OPPOSING EFFECTS

There are a number of reasons why power may diminish perspective taking. First, by definition, people in power have control over valuable resources and are therefore less dependent on others. Thus, to accomplish their goals, the powerful do not need to rely on an accurate, comprehensive understanding of others. Second, power is typically associated with increased demands on attention, so that it is difficult for power holders to take the perspective of everyone under their charge (Fiske, 1993).

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In addition, power and perspective taking affect a number of variables in opposite ways. For example, whereas the perspective taker seems to be the consummate adapter who includes the traits of other individuals in his or her own self-representation (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005), the high-power individual's self-concept remains more rigid; individuals with more power in their marriages resist the identities imposed on them by their less powerful spouses (Cast, 2003), and when relationship partners become more emotionally similar, it is the lower-power partner who has done the majority of the adapting (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003). Perspective taking is associated with increased similarity between the self and others (Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996), whereas having power creates psychological distance from other people (Lee & Tiedens, 2001).

The differential effects of power and perspective taking extend to social perception. The powerful, on the one hand, are less accurate than the powerless in estimating the interests and positions of other people (Keltner & Robinson, 1997) and are more likely to make self-serving attributions (Kipnis, 1972). Perspective takers, on the other hand, accurately perceive the interests of others (Eisenberg, Murphy, & Shepard, 1997) and are more other-serving in their attributions (Regan & Totten, 1975). People with more power form less complex interpersonal impressions than people without power (Woike, 1994), basing their impressions of others on expectancies (Copeland, 1994) and stereotypes (Fiske, 1993; but see Overbeck & Park, 2001). In contrast, perspective takers have been shown to battle successfully the seemingly inevitable forces of stereotyping (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000), and to create more integratively complex contemplations (Tetlock, Skitka, & Boettger, 1989). The opposing forces of perspective taking and power have important social implications: Perspective taking has been associated with altruism and helping behavior (Batson, 1991), whereas power has been linked with such malfeasant social behaviors as sexual harassment (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995).

Given these conflicting effects of power and perspective taking, we hypothesized that power would decrease perspective taking. We conducted an initial study to test for this proposed inverse relationship. Thirty-two participants (13 male and 19 female undergraduate students) reported their personal sense of power, using a measure that assesses an individual's power in general, across his or her social relationships (eight items; $\alpha = .82$; e.g., "I think I have a great deal of power in my relationships with others"; Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2005). Scores on this sense-of-power scale are correlated with people's standing in power hierarchies (whether or not they occupy powerful roles) and predict the same behaviors as structural manipulations of power (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Anderson & Galinsky, 2006). Participants also reported their tendency to engage in perspective taking, using a scale that measures the "tendency to adopt the psychological point of view of others" in everyday life (Davis, 1983, pp. 113–114; seven items; $\alpha = .64$; e.g., "I

sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective"). We regressed perspective-taking scores on power scores (controlling for participant's sex) and found a significant negative relationship, $B = -0.35$, $SE = 0.17$, $p_{rep} = .88$.

To establish that power leads directly to a lack of perspective taking, we conducted four experiments using a diverse set of perspective-taking variables. We explored whether high-power participants would be less inclined to spontaneously adopt another individual's visual perspective (Experiment 1), less likely to take into account that others did not possess their privileged knowledge (Experiments 2a and 2b), and less accurate in determining the emotion expressions of others (Experiment 3), compared with individuals in low-power or control conditions. Because structural manipulations of power (e.g., providing direction or evaluating other people) often increase cognitive load (Fiske, 1993), which might reduce the ability to engage in perspective taking, we used a priming procedure—having individuals recall an experience with power (Galinsky et al., 2003)—in which power was manipulated while cognitive load was held constant.

EXPERIMENT 1: DRAWING AN E

Experiment 1 was designed to examine the effect of power on the tendency to spontaneously adopt another person's visual perspective, an important dimension in understanding other people's beliefs and intentions (Baron-Cohen, 1995). We used a procedure created by Hass (1984) in which participants are asked to draw an *E* on their foreheads. One way to complete the task is to draw an *E* as though one is reading it oneself, which leads to a backward and illegible *E* from the perspective of another person (see Fig. 1, left panel). The other way to approach the task is to draw the *E* as though another person is reading it, which leads to production of an *E* that is backward to oneself (see Fig. 1, right panel). We predicted that participants in the high-power condition, compared with those in the low-power condition, would be more likely to draw the *E* in the self-oriented



Fig. 1. Responses to the task of drawing an *E* on one's forehead: self-oriented *E* (left), indicating no perspective taking, and other-oriented *E* (right), indicating perspective taking.

direction, indicating a lesser tendency to spontaneously adopt another person's perspective.

Method

Subjects were 57 undergraduates (41 women and 16 men) with an average age of 20.02 years. In return for their participation, they received a payment of \$10 and entry into a \$300 lottery.

The experiment involved two conditions, a *high-power* and a *low-power* condition. Participants came in groups of 2 or 3 to the lab, where they were given a high- or low-power experiential prime, which has been shown to reliably manipulate a sense of power (Galinsky et al., 2003). Participants assigned to the high-power condition were instructed to recall and write about a personal incident in which they had power over another individual or individuals. Participants assigned to the low-power condition were instructed to write about a personal incident in which someone else had power over them. For both groups, power was defined as controlling the ability of another person to get something he or she wanted or being in a position to evaluate someone else. Participants were unaware of the power-prime manipulation that the other participants in their session received.

After completing this power-priming task, each participant was brought to a separate room, and the experimenter explained that the next tasks would be described in a packet on the desk in the room. The packet instructed the participant to begin working on a resource-allocation task, which was designed to reinforce the power prime. Those participants who received the high-power prime were asked to allocate seven lottery tickets to themselves and another participant, whereas those participants who completed the low-power prime were asked to estimate how many of the seven lottery tickets they would receive from the other participant. Participants next read the following instructions:

Please follow the instructions below and perform the tasks requested in the order they are presented. They are coordination tasks.

Task 1. With your dominant hand, as quickly as you can, snap your fingers five times.

Task 2. With your dominant hand, as quickly as you can, draw a capital *E* on your forehead with the marker provided. Don't worry, the marker is nontoxic, and we will make sure it is removed before you leave today.

At the end of the experiment, each participant was thoroughly debriefed and fully probed for suspicion. Not a single participant expressed any suspicion that the power manipulation and the dependent measure were related.

Results

As Hass (1984) pointed out, handedness could affect the direction of the *E*; thus, we controlled for handedness (49 right-

handed and 8 left-handed participants) and participant's sex in all analyses. Using logistic regression, we regressed the direction of the *E* (0 = self-oriented, 1 = other-oriented) on power condition, handedness, and participant's sex. The only significant effect was for power, $B = -1.51$, $SE = 0.76$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .88$. High-power participants were almost three times as likely as low-power participants to draw a self-oriented *E* (33%, 8 of 24, vs. 12%, 4 of 33).

To determine whether the amount of power people expressed possessing predicted perspective taking, we had one coder, who was blind to both condition and hypotheses, rate each essay using a 7-point scale measuring how much power the participant reported having. This coder had achieved high reliability ($\alpha = .94$) with another coder on a large sample of power essays from another set of studies. Participants described themselves as having more power in the high-power essays ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 0.53$) than in the low-power essays ($M = 2.21$, $SD = 0.55$), $t(55) = 24.44$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .99$, $d = 6.57$. Using logistic regression, we regressed the direction of the *E* on these ratings of power in the essays, handedness, and participant's sex. The only significant effect was for the amount of power expressed in the essays, $B = -0.41$, $SE = 0.21$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .88$. The more power participants described possessing, the more likely they were to draw a self-focused *E*.

The results are consistent with our theorizing. Individuals given an opportunity to spontaneously adopt another person's visual point of view were less likely to do so if they had received the high-power prime than if they had received the low-power prime. In the next set of experiments, we sought to determine whether power affects the tendency to take another person's perspective when doing so is required for effective communication.

EXPERIMENTS 2A AND 2B: CONSIDERING COMMUNICATION INTENTIONS

Most messages can be interpreted in multiple ways, and effective communication requires taking the knowledge and perspectives of one's audience into account. The same semantic content (e.g., "nice suit!") can be received as a compliment or as a thinly veiled insult, depending on knowledge of the speaker's tastes and previous interactions. People who have privileged knowledge about a speaker's intentions often have difficulty recognizing and adjusting for the fact that other listeners do not share this privileged perspective (Keysar, 1994). They are cursed by their knowledge, inaccurately predicting that others see the world as they do. Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, and Gilovich (2004) have suggested that individuals initially anchor on their own vantage point and then adjust for another person's perspective. We contend that power leads this adjustment to be particularly insufficient.

Experiment 2a

Following Keysar (1994), we gave participants a message and asked them to interpret how a friend of the speaker might per-

ceive the message. The message on its face seemed sincere, but privileged background knowledge about the speaker's intentions suggested a sarcastic interpretation. We predicted that high-power participants would be more likely than low-power participants to assume that the friend understood the sarcasm, even though a sarcastic interpretation depended on privileged background knowledge that the friend did not possess.

Method

Subjects were 42 undergraduate students who participated in return for a for \$10 payment. They were greeted in the laboratory by an experimenter, who explained that they would complete several questionnaires related to decision making. The experimental manipulations and our dependent variables were embedded in the packet of materials that participants received.

Power Manipulation. The power manipulation was the same experiential prime used in Experiment 1.

Message Interpretation. After completing the power prime and a filler task, participants read a scenario in which they and a colleague went to a fancy restaurant recommended by the colleague's friend but had a particularly poor dining experience. The next day, the colleague sent an e-mail to the friend stating only, "About the restaurant, it was marvelous, just marvelous." Participants were asked to respond to the question, "How do you think the colleague's friend will interpret the comment?" Responses were made on a scale anchored at *very sarcastic* (1) and *very sincere* (6). There was no information in the e-mail itself to suggest anything other than sincerity. However, if participants anchored on their privileged knowledge of the speaker's intention, then they would think that the friend would interpret the message as sarcastic.

Debriefing. As in Experiment 1, no participants expressed any suspicion that the power manipulation and the dependent measure were related.

Results

High-power participants thought the message would be perceived as more sarcastic by the naive recipient ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 1.54$) than did low-power participants ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 1.30$), $t(40) = 2.47$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .93$, $d = 0.77$. These findings support our prediction that power leads individuals to anchor too heavily on their own vantage point, insufficiently adjusting to other individuals' perspectives.

Experiment 2b

We ran a follow-up experiment using a different scenario to rule out the possibility that power simply produces sarcastic attributions. Fifty-one subjects read that they and a colleague had gone to a restaurant where the colleague's friend always had poor dining experiences. They, however, really enjoyed the meal. The

colleague sent the friend the same "marvelous, marvelous" e-mail, and subjects predicted how the friend would interpret the comment, using the same sarcastic-sincere scale from Experiment 2a. In this experiment, however, the privileged information implied sincerity, but the naive listener would have inferred sarcasm. As in Experiment 2a, high-power subjects were significantly more anchored on their privileged knowledge than low-power subjects were. Specifically, high-power subjects ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.46$) thought that the naive recipient of the message would interpret it as more sincere and less sarcastic than did low-power subjects ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.35$), $t(49) = 2.4$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .93$, $d = 0.68$.

EXPERIMENT 3: INTERPRETING EMOTION EXPRESSIONS

The previous experiment suggests that power can reduce accuracy in social judgment. Power might also inhibit the ability to pay attention to and comprehend other people's emotional states. Accurate perception of another person's emotional state is part and parcel of the capacity to experience empathy. Indeed, empathy has been defined as "the ability to perceive accurately how another person is feeling" (Levenson & Ruef, 1992, p. 234). Because the ability to discern others' emotions bears resemblance to theory-of-mind abilities related to perspective taking, this skill has also been called affective perspective taking (Denham, 1986). We predicted that power would be associated with worse ability to accurately detect other individuals' emotion expressions. Consistent with this prediction, previous studies have determined that men, who typically have more power in society than women do, are worse judges of other people's emotion expressions than women are (Hall, Gaul, & Kent, 1999; McClure, 2000).

To test our hypothesis, we used pictures from the Diagnostic Analysis of Nonverbal Accuracy (DANVA2; Nowicki & Carton, 1993). The pictures were of young men and women expressing emotions that differed in both their quality and their intensity. Because the first two experiments did not use an experimental control condition, it was not entirely clear whether activating high power decreased perspective taking or activating low power increased perspective taking. To resolve this ambiguity, in the final experiment we compared a high-power condition with a control condition.

Method

Seventy undergraduate students (16 men and 54 women, average age of 20.17 years) were recruited from an on-line participant pool at a private West Coast university and paid \$12. When they arrived at the lab, they were seated at semiprivate cubicles and were told they would be completing a study on experiential cognition.

There were two experimental conditions: high-power and control. Participants in the high-power condition completed the

same experiential prime that was used in the previous three experiments. Participants randomly assigned to the control condition responded to the following: “Please recall your day yesterday. In the space below, describe your day, including thoughts, feelings, events, etc.”

Next, subjects were told they would complete an ostensibly unrelated task that involved “looking at the experience of others.” Specifically, they were told that they would be observing a series of faces and their task would be to determine the emotion being expressed by each target. The stimuli they saw were the Adult Faces and Adult Paralanguage Scale associated with the DANVA2, which consists of 24 images of faces that express happiness, fear, anger, or sadness. After viewing each stimulus, participants selected which of the four emotions was being expressed.

Results

Accuracy was measured by recording the number of errors participants made in judging the target’s expressed emotion. We submitted the total number of errors to a 2 (high-power vs. control condition) \times 2 (participant’s sex) analysis of variance. The results replicated prior work, showing a main effect for participant’s sex, $F(1, 66) = 4.59, p_{\text{rep}} = .90, \eta^2 = .07$, with men ($M = 4.56, SD = 3.01$) making more errors than women ($M = 3.61, SD = 2.12$). More important to the present research, a main effect of power also emerged, $F(1, 66) = 10.81, p_{\text{rep}} = .98, \eta^2 = .14$. Participants primed with high power made more errors ($M = 4.54, SD = 2.80$) in judging the emotion expressions than control participants did ($M = 3.11, SD = 1.57$). The interaction was not significant, $F(1, 66) = 2.32, p_{\text{rep}} = .79, \eta^2 = .03$. These findings support the prediction that power is associated with decreased accuracy in emotion detection and suggest an additional consequence of diminished perspective taking: greater difficulty in experiencing empathy.

DISCUSSION

Across four experiments, we found that power was associated with a reduced tendency to comprehend how other individuals see the world, think about the world, and feel about the world. Priming power led participants to be less likely to spontaneously adopt another person’s visual perspective, less likely to take into account that another person did not possess their privileged knowledge, and less accurate in detecting the emotional states of other people. This inverse relationship between power and perspective taking emerged across multiple forms of perspective taking; regardless of whether participants were explicitly told to be accurate (Experiment 3) or whether the consideration of another person’s perspectives was spontaneous (Experiment 1), power was associated with less perspective taking than was observed for low-power or control participants. In addition, evidence from the third experiment, in which participants who

were primed with power deviated from those in a control condition, demonstrates that it is high power that is an impediment to, not low power that is a facilitator of, perspective taking. Given that participants were unaware of the connection between our experiential manipulation of power and the perspective-taking dependent variables, we can say this relationship is at least partially a nonconscious one. We believe that power leads not to a conscious decision to ignore other individuals’ perspectives, but rather to a psychological state that makes perspective taking less likely. The four experiments, combined with our initial study demonstrating a negative relationship between a measure of power and a measure of perspective taking, suggest that compared with low-power individuals high-power individuals are less focused on the meaningful psychological experiences of those around them.

Although the current studies collectively point in the direction of our hypothesized inverse relationship between power and perspective taking, we acknowledge that each of our designs was limited to a dichotomized independent variable, and our findings always depended on a difference between two conditions. The use of multilevel manipulations of power in the future would provide for greater precision in interpreting power’s effects.

Diminished perspective taking may connect to the finding that power is associated with action and increased goal pursuit (Galinsky et al., 2003). By not attending to the concerns of other people, the powerful can plunge headfirst into action and pursue goals without restraint (Galinsky et al., 2003; Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, in press). Although lack of perspective taking may lead the powerful toward malfeasance, it can be an adaptive response to attentional demands, one that allows for efficient navigation of social and organizational worlds.

Our results are consistent with recent views that power can lead to objectification (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2005; Keltner et al., 2003), the tendency to view other people only in terms of qualities that serve one’s personal goals and interests, while failing to consider those features of others that define their humanity. Giving less attention to the human aspects of other people should make it easier for a power holder to use them as tools in the service of his or her goals and interests (Gruenfeld et al., 2005).

The current results also indirectly support the idea that there is an integrated relationship among power, perspective taking, and stereotyping: Perspective taking decreases stereotyping (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000), power increases stereotyping (Fiske, 1993), and power decreases perspective taking. Fiske (1993) has argued that stereotyping is one way that the powerful maintain their privileged position. Failing to take others’ perspectives, objectifying others in a self-interested way, and stereotyping others may all be part of the cognitive toolbox that power holders use to stay in control. However, lack of perspective taking may also sew the seeds of power’s demise. When disregard for the concerns, emotions, and individuality of others—their humanity—persists, the powerful can inspire enmity,

bitterness, and incipient rebellion. The inverse relationship between power and perspective taking may allow the powerful to accomplish short-term goals but lead to the long-term loss of power.

Although our studies demonstrate that power reduces perspective taking, we suspect this relationship is not invariant. One important moderator might be the extent to which accurate knowledge of another person's perspective would increase the likelihood that a power holder will achieve his or her goals. In addition, the degree of responsibility that high-power individuals feel for their subordinates is likely to influence perspective-taking tendencies. Indeed, when the powerful feel a sense of responsibility, their behavior resembles that of the ideal perspective taker: They show increased generosity (Chen et al., 2001) and more individuated impressions (Overbeck & Park, 2001). Similarly, increasing accountability (the pressure to justify one's decisions or view to other people; Tetlock et al., 1989) may direct the attention of power holders to other people's perspectives, checking and balancing the cognitive effects of power. Finally, culture may be a critical variable in determining when power leads to perspective taking and when it leads to egocentric self-focus (Zhong, Magee, Maddux, & Galinsky, 2006).

The observation that responsibility, accountability, and culture may influence how power is experienced and enacted offers insight into when and how power may be delivered from the forces of corruptibility: Action-oriented power combined with perspective taking may be a particularly constructive force. If the powerful are led to take the perspectives of others, their actions ultimately might benefit the lives of the less powerful, while also possibly helping them to remain in power.

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