Psychological Consequences of Possessing Power

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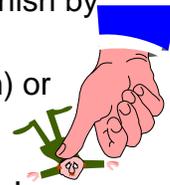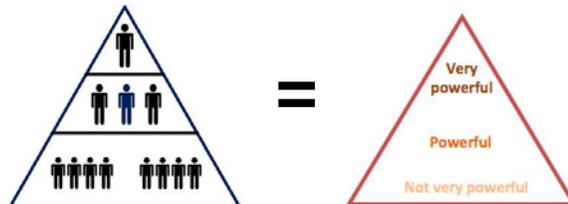

Power and Hierarchy

Power = control over resources that others value

- Ability to reward by granting resources and punish by withholding resources
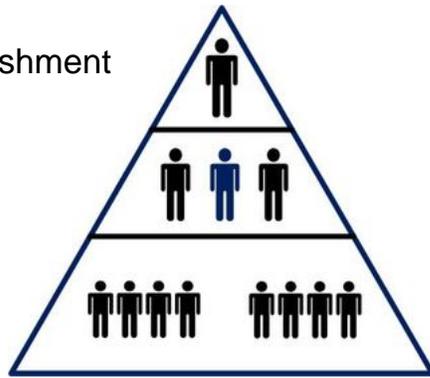- Resources could be tangible ($, physical harm) or intangible (friendship, teasing)

Hierarchy = unequal distribution of power in a group

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Very powerful

Powerful

Not very powerful
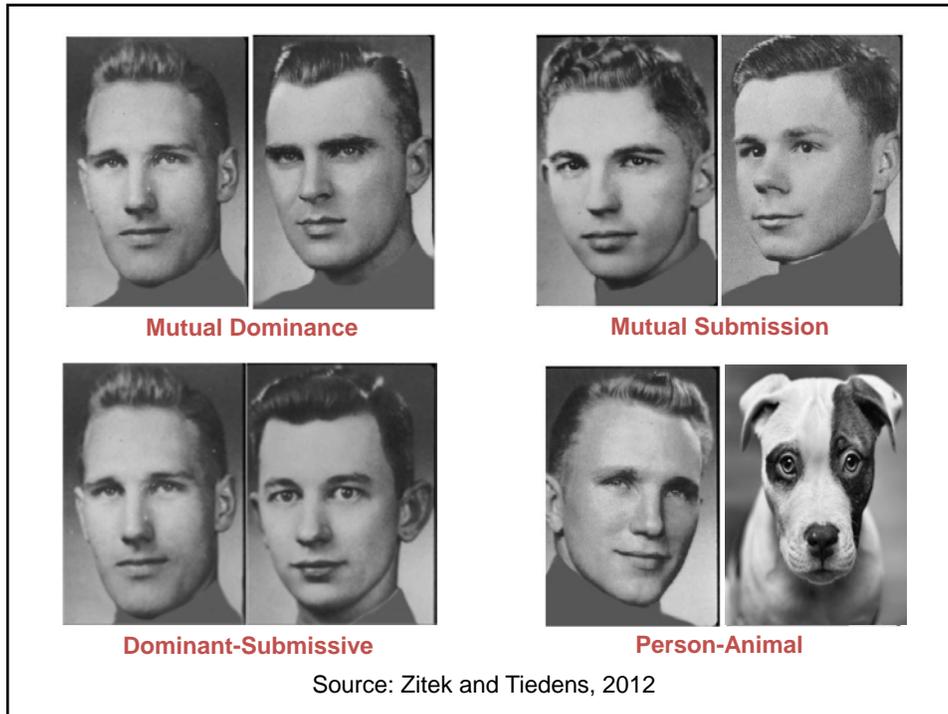
Hierarchy is...

- **Ubiquitous** in groups and organizations

- **Desired**, no matter what people say
  - Easy to understand
  - Facilitates task accomplishment
  - Improves relationships

Hierarchy is Easy To Understand

- Hierarchical relationships are easier to see, understand, learn, & remember than egalitarian relationships

- Example: West Point yearbook photos paired or contrasted on facial dominance
  - Facial dominance of cadets predicts their rank at the academy (Mazur et al., 1984), and later in their careers (Mueller & Mazur, 1996).
  - Reaction time task: press H if picture of two people, press A if picture of person and animal

Source: Zitek and Tiedens, 2012

Mutual Dominance

Mutual Submission

Dominant-Submissive

Person-Animal

Source: Zitek and Tiedens, 2012

Hierarchy Facilitates Task Accomplishment

Hierarchical groups perform better on interdependent tasks than egalitarian groups

- Testosterone (both in utero and circulating) predicts dominance behavior, power attainment & financial success (e.g., traders)

- Groups differentiated in prenatal testosterone (2D:4D ratio) performed better on a letter-word-sentence task – Groups make sentences out of words that each member finds in a letter matrix.

- Similar results found with other measures and manipulations of power
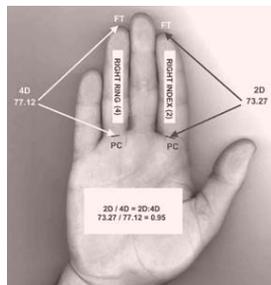
Source: Ronay, Greenaway, Anicich, & Galinsky, 2012

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Nonverbal Power Displays

Hierarchy Improves Relationships

 + **=** **Mimicry**

 + **=** **Complementarity**

- Complementarity leads to greater liking and comfort than mutual dominance or submission (mimicry)
- We prefer being in hierarchical relationships even if we are in the subordinate position (we all know our place)

Source: Tiedens and Fragale, 2003

The Downside

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men."

-- Lord Acton, 1887

Could this be true?

And Many More…

- … "ethical lapses are an escalating problem for the military's leaders."
  - 4 in every 10 commanders at rank of LTC or above who were fired fell as a result of behavioral issues (sex, drugs,…)
  - 18 generals and admirals fired in recent years
  - 255 commanders fired since 2005, 78 due to sex-related offenses (32 in Army)
  - Statistics don't include MG Baker, LTG Huntoon (USMA), LTG Fil, Jr.

Source: AP, Jan 20, 2013

More "Mundane" Examples

*GO has the authority to approve spouse international travel. GO spouse has always wanted to visit the country scheduled for an upcoming trip. GO directs his staff to coordinate a full itinerary for his spouse for the upcoming mil-to-mil foreign travel and approves spouse travel.

*MG is invited to sit in on a fellow MG's daily update. During the update, the MG being briefed looks around at his aide, raises his coffee cup and snaps his fingers. When the aide returns with the coffee, the MG says, loud enough for all to hear, "Did you think I was going to wait all day for you to do your job?"

*MG commanding a division and installation has one BG ADC who has had several tours in the division. MG receives a call from the DA IG that the BG is under investigation, and the MG is not to get involved. The BG and spouse are very popular within the local community, and ask the community leaders for support. BG's spouse wants tangible support from the MG and requests an office call with the MG.

More "Mundane" Examples

*MG, hands free, requires his aide to carry his brief case and walk him to his car each evening so he can assign taskers for the next day.

*GO is responsible for setting priority for service MILCON. After fully coordinating and vetting the MILCON priority list within the service, GO realizes a project of personal interest falls just below the cutline for resourcing. GO changes priority list by moving his personal interest project above the cutline and submits the MILCON list without further coordination or approval.

*Engineer battalion commander, on his own initiative, reaches out to leaders of the local community to work together to clean up a city park that has fallen into disrepair. The end result is a safe and beautiful city park and strengthened bonds between the post and community. MG is briefed on this success and tells his Public Affairs officer to set up a press conference. MG's first words to the assembled members of the press are, "I consider this one of my major accomplishments in command.

Beyond Unethical to "Undesirable"
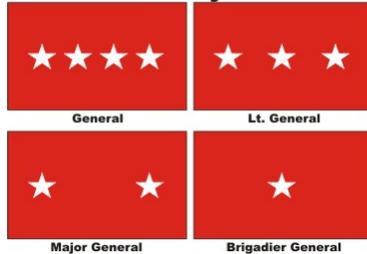
Why Are We Talking About This?

- As you train the next generation of military leaders, what needs to be done to stop this trend?
- For many soldiers, this may be their first significant position of power
- Two theories:
  - Bad eggs have slipped through the cracks; better selection procedures
  - All good eggs can go bad under the right circumstances. Solution: Not selection; then what?
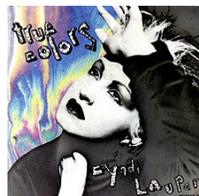
Behavioral Inhibition System

- Brain interrupts behaviors that may lead to aversive consequences - when there is goal conflict (BIS; Gray, 1982)

Power Suppresses the BIS

- Power activates Behavioral Approach System (BAS) – controls pursuit of rewards
- BAS silences BIS – eliminates goal-conflict
- **Power leads to action (goal pursuit).**

- Two consequences:
  Power reveals the self   Power changes the self

Power Reveals the Self

- Disinhibition
  - Cookie-eating behavior (Ward & Keltner, 1998)
  - Moving a fan (Galinsky et al., 2003)
 - Smiling when happy (Hecht & LaFrance, 1998)
- Increased relationship between traits/feelings & behavior
  - Communal individuals become more generous with power (Chen et al., 2001)
  - Men with tendency to sexually harass are more likely to see a female colleague in sexual terms when they have power (Bargh et al., 1995)
  - Powerful are more likely to eat when hungry, or when food is good (Guinote, 2010)

Power Changes the Self

- Much research has manipulated power by assigning people to high power roles (manager-subordinate, episodic recall)
- Among other things, the powerful are more likely to:
  - Use decision heuristics
  - Be egocentric and less empathetic
  - Stereotype
  - Objectify others
  - Derogate subordinates
  - Experience moral hypocrisy
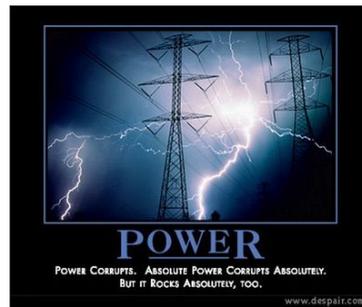
Power & Overconfidence

- Powerful more likely to rely on decision heuristics
  - Action & deliberation may be incompatible (Galinsky et al., 2003)
- Powerful overconfident in the accuracy of their decisions
- People with power at work more likely to bet (and lose) $ on difficult general knowledge questions
  - How many countries were members of the EU in June 2003?

Fast et al., 2012

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Planning Fallacy

- **Planning fallacy**: People systematically underestimate the amount of time it will take them to complete tasks (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979)
  - Overestimate uniqueness of task, don't account for contingencies, focus on global representations not subcomponents
- Powerful are more susceptible to planning fallacy – narrow focus on goals (Weick & Guinote, 2010), reduced awareness of constraints (Whitson et al., 2012)
- Powerful people in charge of a big project = over time and over budget

Egocentrism & Empathy

- The powerful are less likely to take the perspective of others (experience empathy)
- Also less accurate in judging others emotions (men are worse than women – societal power)

Galinsky, A. D., Magee, J. C., Inesi, M. E., & Gruenfeld, D. H. (2006)

Stereotyping

- Powerful are less likely to pay attention to subordinates than vice-versa
  - Lack cognitive capacity, not dependent on subordinates for outcomes, the powerful have dominant personalities (Fiske & Morling, 1996)
- More likely to stereotype, less likely to individuate
- Example: hotel managers evaluating two applicants with identical qualifications for DJs or teachers

Powerful see Naeem Chikompa as better qualified to be a DJ than a teacher

Powerful see Andrew Collins as better qualified to be a teacher than a DJ

Guinote & Phillips (2010)

Objectification

- Powerful more likely to treat others as a means to an end – objectification
- Executives self-report more objectification in their work relationships than MBA students
  - I tend to contact this person only when I need something from him/her
  - If our jobs changed and this person wasn't helpful anymore, our relationship wouldn't continue
- Assume others are instrumental, too
  - Power leads to cynical attributions for others favors
  - Leads to less thankfulness, reciprocity, and trust
  - E.g., instrumental attributions led to less relationship commitment among high-power (wage earning) spouses
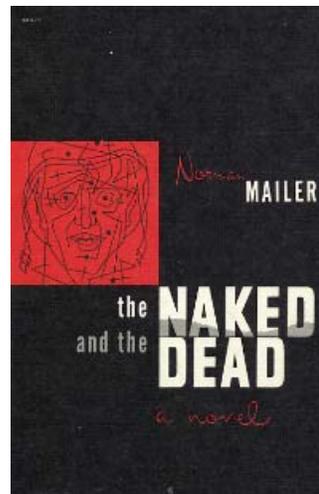 - This cynicism undermines relationship quality

Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Inesi et al., 2012

Subordinate Derogation

"To make an army work you have to have every man in it fitted into a fear ladder. The Army functions best when you're frightened of the man above you and contemptuous of your subordinates."

-- Mailer, 1948

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Subordinate Derogation

- As evaluator power increases, performance ratings of others become increasingly negative, and self-evaluations become increasingly positive (25 study meta-analysis; Georgeson & Harris, 1998)


Power Without Competence

- Feelings of low status or low competence increase subordinate derogation among powerholders – feel threatened and insecure
- More likely to assign demeaning behaviors to subordinates (bark like a dog, say "I am filthy")
- More likely to aggress
  - Give painful sound blasts to another person

Fast & Chen, 2009; Fast et al., 2011

Moral Hypocrisy

- Powerful uphold stricter moral standards for others, lower moral standards for self

Over-reporting travel expenses
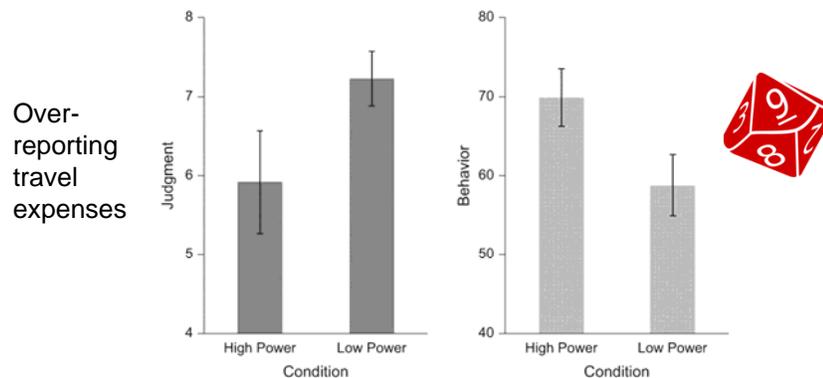
Lammers et al., 2010

Do They Get Away With It?

- Powerful less likely to be punished for low severity crimes (taking a little money), more punished more severely for high severity crimes (taking a lot of money)
  - We assume high power people "know better" so their transgressions are intentional (Fragale et al., 2009)
- "Slippery slope" effect: (Welsh, Ordonez, Snyder, & Christian, 2014)
  - People are more likely to justify small ethical indiscretions than major ones.
  - Over time, as they justify more and more, they can be led to justify even big indiscretions.
  - When faced with abrupt and large dilemmas (rather than those that gradually increase), people are less likely to be unethical.

Where Do We Go From Here?

- How do we maximize the benefits of hierarchy without negative behavior from the powerful?
- Research solutions lag problem demonstration
- Some ideas, such as gratitude expression by the powerless reduces derogation
  - Solutions can't rest on the shoulders of subordinates
- Awareness of the psychology, consistent punishments even for low severity crimes, reduce entitlement and powerful-powerless gap

Accountability Matters

- **Accountability** – the expectation that one may be called on to justify one's actions to others (Lerner & Tetlock, 1999)
- Two types:
  - Procedural: account for the process
  - Outcome: account for the end result
- Procedural accountability reduces self-serving behavior more than outcome accountability, especially for the powerful
- Where is there outcome accountability in the Army? Where is there procedural accountability?

Pitesa & Thau, 2013

Breakout Groups

- Meet with your group to discuss situations you have seen involving undesirable behavior from powerful parties.
- No required format for discussion
- Some questions to consider:
  - How did it get to this point?
  - How could it have been prevented?
  - What do we do about it?
  - How do I keep myself from getting in this position?
- Be prepared to report out to larger group when you get back

If You Want to Know More

DAN ARIELY
THE (HONEST) TRUTH ABOUT DISHONESTY

Richard H. Thaler
Cass R. Sunstein
Nudge
Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness

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