



UNC
KENAN-FLAGLER
BUSINESS SCHOOL



ARMY STRATEGIC LEADER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM – INTERMEDIATE COURSE

Instructor: Alison Fragale

Date: Thursday, January 29, 2015
0800-1115

Topic: Consequences of Power

Objectives:

- To learn about the psychological consequences of possessing or lacking power – how power affects how individuals think, feel, and behave
- To discuss the implications of this research for the Army – how do we use the science of power to protect individuals from being their worst selves and enable them to be their best selves?

Readings:

- Gruenfeld, D., Keltner, D., & Anderson, C. (2005). Power, Approach, & Inhibition. Rotman Magazine Series

Suggestions for Preparation:

- Skim the above article. It's a summary of key findings in power research as of 2005. In our session, we will use this knowledge as a starting point to discuss more recent developments in this area and discuss the implications of this science for the Army.



Power, Approach, & Inhibition

By Deborah Gruenfeld, Dacher Keltner, and Cameron Anderson

High and low-power individuals inhabit and, through their own actions, create strikingly different worlds.

What do exhilaration, stereotyping, and poor table manners have in common? Or what do embarrassment, the advantage younger siblings enjoy over older ones in understanding others' mental states, and the complexity of Supreme Court justices' decisions have in common?

Our answer is simple: power. Power is a basic force in social relationships and the dynamics and structure of personality. But as central as power is to social life and to theoretical inquiries in the social sciences, it has received only sporadic attention from psychologists.

Recently, intellectual tides have shifted. Psychologists have begun to illuminate how power influences cognitive processes such as stereotyping, complex social reasoning, moral judgment, and inferences about non-verbal behaviour. Others have examined how power influences social behaviour, including emotional display, behavioural confirmation, familial aggression, hate crime, sexual aggression, and teasing.

Is it possible to develop an integrative account of the effects of power on human behaviour? We believe so, and we present such a theory in this article.

Defining Power and Related Constructs

Definitions of power vary according to the guiding question: Where is it located? How is it distributed? What is the unit of analysis (e.g., societies, groups, or the individual), and what is the outcome of interest (e.g., voting behaviour or emotional experience)? Some definitions focus on the actor's intentions or actions, as in treatments of power as dominance, whereas others highlight the target's response to the actor, as in treatments of power as influence.

We define power as an individual's relative capacity to modify others' states by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments. This capacity is the product of the actual resources and punishments the individual can deliver to

others. Resources and punishments can be material – food, money, economic opportunity, physical harm, or job termination – or social – knowledge, affection, friendship, decision-making opportunities, verbal abuse, or ostracism. The value of resources or punishments reflects other individuals' dependence on those resources.

The perceived freedom with which individuals can deliver resources and punishments to others also influences the individual's level of power. Beliefs about the exercise of power figure prominently in cultural values and morals, as well as attitudes within personal relationships. Beliefs about the freedom to exercise power can come into conflict with the actual resources and punishments the individual can deliver to others – a tension that we elaborate on later.

We focus on the capacity of power to change others' states for several reasons. First of all, people frequently feel powerful

determines the allocation of resources within groups and, by implication, each individual's power. However, it is possible to have power without status (e.g., the corrupt politician) and status without relative power (e.g., a readily-identified religious leader in line at the **Department of Motor Vehicles**.) Authority is power that derives from institutionalized roles or arrangements, but power can exist in the absence of formal roles (e.g., within informal groups). Dominance is behaviour that has the acquisition of power as its end, yet power can be attained without performing acts of dominance (e.g., leaders who attain their positions through their cooperative and fair-minded style). Thus status, authority, and dominance are all potential determinants of power as we define it.

Power, Approach, and Inhibition

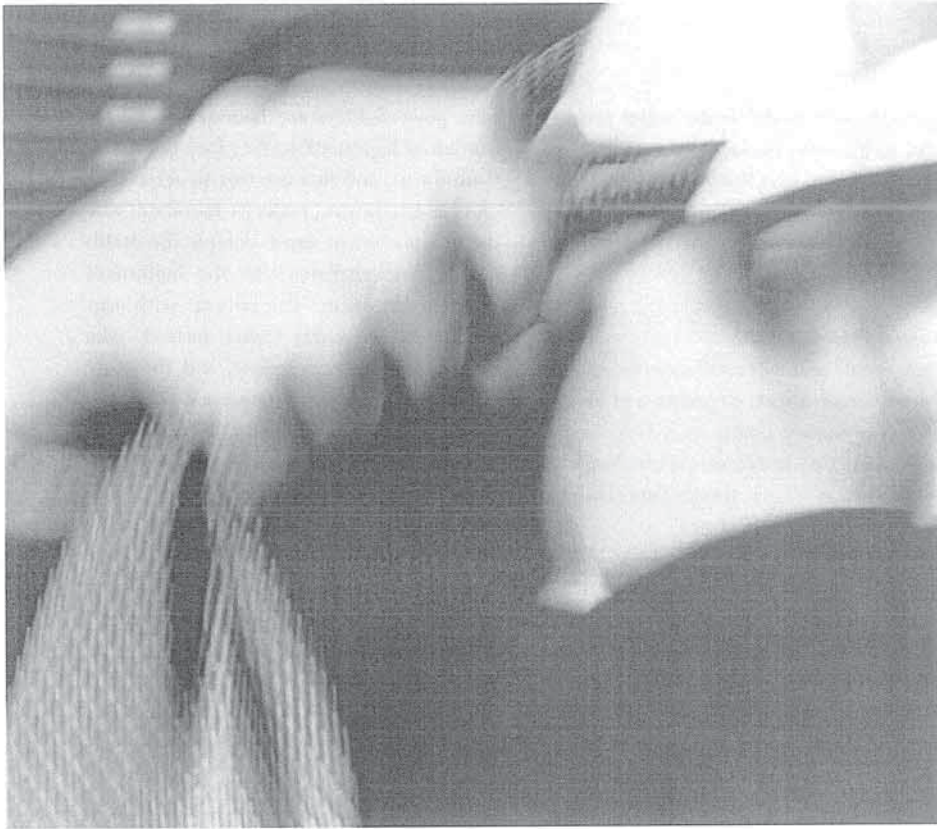
We have defined power as the capacity to alter others' states by providing or with-

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holding resources and administering punishments. Also, the target's response can have many determinants in addition to the power discrepancy itself. Our definition does not restrictively focus on one kind of resource or outcome and suggests that power is present in almost all contexts, from parent-child dynamics to international disputes.

Our definition also distinguishes power from related constructs, like status and authority. Status is the outcome of an evaluation of attributes that produces differences in respect and prominence. Status, in part,

holding resources and administering punishments. In informal interactions, individuals provide resources such as affection, information, attention, or humour and administer punishments through such practices as storytelling, teasing, gossiping, and gift giving. In more formal interactions, individuals provide resources and punishments as a function of their roles and positions within groups; for example, by providing others with financial opportunities, contacts and referrals, access to decision-making processes, or by demoting them or terminating their employment.



Four classes of variables afford certain individuals greater power vis-a-vis others. At the individual level of analysis, elevated power is associated with certain traits, such as extraversion, dominance, increased social skills, charisma, and, in some cases, Machiavellianism. Certain physical characteristics, including height and muscle mass for men, physical attractiveness, and even facial characteristics such as the prominent jaw are also associated with elevated power.

At the dyadic level, the aforementioned attributes determine the individual's power in conjunction with other factors, such as others' interest, investment, and commitment to the relationship. For example, the capacity to provide or withhold affection increases power only if the other person values that affection highly. Further, even if individuals have control over resources, their power depends on whether the other person can obtain those resources by alternative means.

Within groups, power is determined by a number of processes in addition to a number of those already discussed. Specific roles govern the extent to which group members can provide resources to others. This is true in formal hierarchies such as organizations as well as informal authority structures such as sibling hierarchies.

Finally, factors that distinguish groups from one another, including socio-economic status and class, majority or minority group affiliation, and ethnicity provide certain individuals with the greater control over resources and punishments. For example, group membership may afford power to men over women, given the privileged access men have to resources and political decision making.

Less powerful individuals have less access to material, social, and cultural resources. Thus, they are more sensitive to the evaluations and potential constraints of others.

Together, these factors determine the individual's power. As a field, we do not know how these different determinants combine, how they vary across different contexts (e.g., erudition matters more in the halls of the academy than on the dance floor), and what happens when factors contradict one another. For our purposes, this review identifies our independent variables of

interest, which we believe shape behaviour in systematic and similar ways.

The second part of our theory pertains to the effects of power on affect, cognition, and behaviour. We claim that power triggers activation in what have been called the 'behavioural approach' and 'inhibition' systems. The behavioural approach system regulates behaviour related to sex, food, safety, achievement, aggression and social attachment. Rewards and opportunities trigger approach-related processes that help the individual pursue and obtain goals related to these rewards. These include affective states that motivate approach-related behaviour, cognitive assessments of reward contingencies in the environment, and forward locomotion. The behavioural inhibition system is equivalent to an alarm, threat system. It is activated by punishment, threat, the lack of rewards, and uncertainty. The behavioural inhibition system involves affective states such as anxiety, heightened vigilance and inspection of punishment contingencies in the environment, and avoidance and response inhibition.

We propose that elevated power activates approach-related processes for two reasons. First, power is correlated with increased resources. Powerful individuals live in environments with abundant rewards, ranging from financial resources, food, physical comforts and beauty, health, as well as social resources, such as flattery,

esteem, attraction, and praise. Second, the experience of power involves the awareness that one can act at will without interference or serious social consequences. Acting within reward-rich environments and unconstrained by others' evaluations or the consequences of one's actions, people with elevated power should be disposed to elevated levels of approach-related affect, cognition and behaviour.

For complementary reasons, the lack of power should be associated with increased inhibition. Less powerful individuals have less access to material, social, and cultural resources and are more subject to social threats and punishments. Thus, they are more sensitive to the evaluations and potential constraints of others. For example, less powerful individuals are more likely to be victims of aggression. This is evident in childhood bullying, which is directed at low-status children, in racism and discrimination against minority groups, in violence against women, and in violent crime perpetrated against members of lower classes, to cite a few of many relevant findings. Acting in environments with increased punishment, threat, and the lack of resources and being aware of social constraints, people with reduced power should be disposed to elevated levels of inhibition-related affect, cognition, and behaviour.

The preceding arguments suggest that more powerful individuals should show elevated activity of processes that are part of the approach system. In the realm of affect, elevated power should be associated with positive and approach-related moods and emotions that facilitate the pursuit and attainment of goals and rewards. Disposed to feel positive affect and to approach goals and incentives, individuals with power should exhibit increased attentiveness to rewards, and to those features of other individuals that are relevant to goal and reward attainment. Because approach tendencies favour movement toward desired goals and less concern for social consequences, elevated power should also be associated with automatic social cognition rather than controlled or deliberative reasoning. Finally, these processes in combination should increase the tendency for high power individuals to behave in ways that might otherwise be inhibited in social situations.

The absence of power, in contrast, should be associated with heightened activity of inhibition-related processes. Reduced power should heighten the experience of negative affect, increase attention to punishments, to others' interests, and to those features of the self that are relevant to others' goals. Reduced power should increase efforts to process information systematically, to engage in controlled social

cognition, and to deliberate when making social judgments. These processes, in combination, should lead low-power individuals to inhibit a wide array of social behaviours, from sexual response to the expression of political attitudes.

Power's Moderators

What variables might moderate the effects of power upon affect, cognition and behaviour? Our theory points to a few simple predictions. Conditions or events that trigger inhibition (e.g., threat, uncertainty,

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constraint) should shift the affect, cognition, and behaviour of powerful individuals in predictable ways. Conditions or events that trigger approach (e.g., rewards, control, freedom) should alter the affect, cognition and behaviour of less powerful individuals. Evidence from three literatures supports these predictions.

Stability of Power Relations and Perceived Threat

Social systems vary in the extent to which power relations are stable. Group hierarchies tend to be the least stable during initial group formation or following changes to the composition of the group. In certain systems, power can be revoked; in other systems, power is non-negotiable. Events that threaten the legitimacy of those in power or enhance the legitimacy of the less powerful destabilize social hierarchies.

We hypothesize that threat to social hierarchies and social instability will activate the behavioural inhibition system in powerful individuals, leading to more negative feelings, careful attention to others, systematic cognition, and inhibited behaviour.

Perceived threat has been shown to alter the social cognition of Supreme Court justices who overturned or upheld legal precedent. When precedent is overturned,

new powerholders are liberated from the burden of legitimation; they face no immediate threat, and they are free to act as they choose. In contrast, majority members who uphold precedent must defend the status quo against challenges to the legitimacy of their position. Consistent with our prediction, Supreme Court justices who overturned legal precedent, and therefore were momentarily without challenge to their position, were less cognitively complex in their written opinions than were those who upheld precedent.

Threats to the stability of power structures should have equally important effects on low-power individuals. For example, individuals who espouse minority, low-power positions should be more likely to speak out when the dominant view is threatened, for example, by legislative events or changes in public opinion or by political events that afford legitimacy to the minority view. Threats to the power structure give legitimacy and esteem to minority group positions, thus encouraging speaking out as well as other politically relevant approach behaviours.

Accountability

Accountability – the sense that one's actions are personally identifiable and subject to the evaluation of others – often acts as a constraint on unchecked power. Individuals in power who know they will be held accountable are more likely to consider social consequences and take others' interests into account. This explains why U.S. Presidents exhibit greater cognitive complexity after they are elected, when they are accountable to a diverse array of constituents, than prior to election. Accountability is implicit in the psychology of low-power individuals – they carefully consider how their actions will be evaluated by and influence others. To the

extent that high-power individuals are accountable, we predict that their affect, cognition, and behaviour will shift toward a pattern of increased inhibition.

Accountability may play a role in several paradoxes. The apparent inconsistency exhibited by powerful leaders who are deliberative in their policy making but impulsive in their personal lives may in part be due to context-related variation in accountability. Individuals may behave in strikingly different fashion as they acquire power and are accountable to others than when their power is firmly entrenched.

Cultures that endorse power differences facilitate disinhibition in the powerful as well as inhibition in the powerless.

Research lends credence to these speculations. High need-for-power individuals engaged in profligate gambling, drinking, and sexual licentiousness less often when two kinds of life events enhanced their accountability: having younger siblings and becoming a parent. In fact, the social responsibilities tied to having a younger sibling or being a parent led high-power individuals to engage in more pro-social, approach-related behaviours, such as involvement in voluntary organizations. More generally, we would predict that accountability would lead to less approach-related emotion, more attention to others, and more careful cognition in high-power individuals.

Individual and Cultural Differences

We have not yet attended to whether power will have different effects when different kinds of people are involved or in different cultural contexts. Clearly, this is likely to be the case. People vary in their levels of dominance, in whether they rise in status, and in how they lead. Culture predicates the extent to which power differences are accepted and consensually reinforced (e.g., in high power-distance cultures) or disputed, challenged, and consensually negotiated (e.g., in low power-distance cultures). How might one think about how individual differences and

cultural factors moderate the effects of power on affect, cognition, and behaviour?

In terms of individual differences, we predict that individuals who are predisposed to approach-related behaviour will especially conform to the pattern of power-related affect, cognition, and behaviour on gaining power. Thus, one might make this prediction about highly extraverted or dominant individuals, already predisposed to approach. Consistent with this possibility, researchers found that individuals who were high in trait dominance exhibited the

same tendency to use stereotypes as those who were placed in a high-power experimental condition. Ironically, it is the extraverted, dominant individual who is more likely to gain power and, by implication, act in disinhibited fashion. In contrast, one would expect different effects of power for highly introverted, inhibited individuals: They would likely be less vulnerable to the disinhibiting effects of power. Power may even enhance their introverted tendencies.

A similar logic applies to culture. We would expect cultures defined by high power distance (i.e., those cultures who endorse power differences) to facilitate disinhibition in the powerful as well as inhibition in the powerless. Cultures defined by low power distance, in contrast, should moderate these effects by placing constraints on the behaviour of high-power individuals and introducing incentives for low-power individuals to challenge power-related expectations.

Conclusion

We have presented arguments and evidence that indicate high-and-low-power individuals inhabit and, through their actions, create strikingly different worlds. People feeling powerful experience approach-related moods and emotions, are more attentive to

social rewards and to those features of others that satisfy their own goals and needs, and they cognize their social environment in more automatic fashion. They also act in a more disinhibited and at times counter-normative fashion. People feeling powerless are more likely to feel negative moods and emotions, to attend to punishment and threat, to make more careful, controlled judgments about others' intentions, attitudes and actions, and to inhibit their own behaviours and act contingently upon others.

This scenario points to clear processes by which leaders shape the culture of groups, organizations, subcultures, and governing bodies. This analysis just as readily reveals the conditions for social change: the excesses of powerful leaders – their propensity for disinhibited behaviour and stereotypic, error-prone social perceptions – are certain to feed into the processes that lead to changes in leadership. These speculations make contact with social psychology's long-standing interest in authority and group dynamics and one researcher's observation that low-power individuals constrain the actions of high-power individuals by affording them respect and status and thus controlling their public reputation.

Perhaps what is most promising about power as an object of inquiry is its interface between macro and micro processes. Students of social structure, institutions, class, ethnicity, race, and groups have long viewed power as an organizing force. So have students of cardiovascular response, neuroendocrinology, neurotransmitters, and physical health. Power is the nexus between the macro conditions and process of social existence (culture, class, ideological and group identity) and the internal processes of the individual. Understanding how power shapes situations, groups, and cultures ultimately rests on a formulation of how power – and powerlessness – shape the psychology of the individual. ■

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This is an excerpt from a paper published recently in *Psychology Review*. Deborah Gruenfeld is a professor of organizational behaviour and co-director of the Centre for Leadership Development and Research at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business. Dacher Keltner is a professor of psychology at the University of California at Berkeley. Cameron Anderson is an assistant professor of management and organizations at New York University's Stern School of Business. For a complete copy of this paper, send an e-mail to christen@rotman.utoronto.ca