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### **STATEMENT OF RESEARCH INTERESTS**

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I study the psychological experience of the powerful. Within this broad topic, I am interested in how power affects perception, and how this perceptual vantage point affects behavior. Currently, I am studying this in three ways. In the first line of work, my colleagues and I have looked at how powerful individuals see other people and how this affects subsequent interpersonal behavior. For example, we have studied whether those in power are more likely to see others through a lens of self-interest and use them accordingly. In a second line of work, I am interested in the effects of membership in a high power group on perceptions of the self. In particular, I study how being a member of a dominant group (e.g. White males) affects perceptions of personal competence and beliefs about one's chances for success. The third line of work is my dissertation research: I am interested in how power affects perceptions of decision alternatives and, ultimately, the choices made by these individuals.

The organizational implications of each of these streams are direct and substantial. Power exists in all organizations and, while necessary and beneficial, it can carry substantial negative consequences. By studying how power affects the power holder and those with whom he or she interacts, we may be better able to understand, predict and manage its impact on the organization at large.

#### Power and Decision Making

In my dissertation research, I am interested in how power affects the decision making process. I define power as the capacity to influence others (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, in press; Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2006; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). I propose that power creates a sense of psychological safety, such that the individual feels more comfortable choosing alternatives that may carry negative consequences.

The concept of psychological safety has been discussed in developmental psychology (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969) and organizational behavior (Edmondson, 1999; Schein & Bennis, 1965). Although these disciplines define it in slightly differently ways, psychological safety can be conceptualized as the subjective sense that one is safe from the consequences of negative outcomes. For example, organizational scholars highlight the importance of psychological safety in work teams to encourage information sharing, which in turn encourages creativity (Edmondson, 1999).

I believe that over time, power becomes linked to a sense of psychological safety. Power is associated with increased resources, including financial and social capital (Keltner et al., 2003). As a result, those in power have more to fall back upon in the event of a negative outcome, thereby buffering the experience of loss. With repeated exposure to this buffering effect, power may become psychologically linked with safety and security, such that even subconsciously priming power in the absence of greater resources should activate a sense of psychological safety. Just as repeated episodes with a sensitive

and responsive parent lead a child to feel safe and secure in new environments, so repeated exposure with power leaves an individual with a sense that negative outcomes are not so threatening.

If powerful individuals do indeed feel a greater sense of psychological safety, then I propose that they will perceive the consequences of decision options differently. By definition, a decision implies alternatives. Usually, each of these options carries both positive and negative consequences. When imagining how the positive consequences of decision options would feel, high individuals should expect to feel as good as individuals not in a position of power. However, when imagining the negative consequences of a decision option, powerful individuals will predict them to feel less bad and value avoiding them less (H1). A perception that negative outcomes will not feel so bad should have direct effects on actual choices made by power holders. Specifically, I predict that people under conditions of power will exhibit reduced loss aversion (H2).

In a series of studies, I tested the first hypothesis by priming participants with power and then asking them to imagine what positive and negative outcomes would feel like. These events included finding or not finding a book that is necessary for a class and receiving an A or receiving a C- on a test. Across these studies, those in the high power condition predicted the negative outcomes would feel less bad than participants in other conditions did. High power participants were no different than others when predicting how positive events would feel.

These initial results indicated that high power individuals might exhibit less loss aversion than others. In two studies I tested whether power would indeed moderate loss aversion. Prior research has shown that power alters perceptions of risk (Anderson & Galinsky, in press). To separate my effect from this finding, I use decisions that do not involve risk. A variety of paradigms demonstrate a general tendency toward loss aversion in riskless decisions (Tversky & Kahneman, 1991). I have replicated two of these (the endowment effect and the status quo bias) to test my hypothesis. I found that (a) regarding the endowment effect (Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1990; Thaler, 1980), the difference in value of an endowed vs. an un-endowed object was less for those in power than for other participants and (b) regarding the status quo bias (Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988), those in power were more willing, when upgrading a gift, to trade into a new category of gift as opposed to staying within the same category

I plan to extend this research in two ways. First, I am interested in how individuals experience the outcomes of their choices. Specifically, I am interested in whether power affects the ultimate experience of the decision outcomes: do power holders actually feel less bad in the event of a negative outcome? Second, I would like to better understand the mechanism driving the reduced loss aversion of power holders. I have hypothesized that because power holders feel a greater sense of psychological safety, that they predict negative outcomes will feel less bad. I have yet to test this mechanism directly and plan to do so in upcoming studies.

## Power and Perceptions of Others

### *Perspective Taking*

Power is often associated with insensitivity to others. Those in power are more likely to act counter to group norms (Ward & Keltner, 1998), more likely to base their

impressions of others on stereotypes (Fiske, 1993) and less accurate about the preferences and beliefs of others. These findings suggest that those in power remain rooted in their own perceptual vantage point and are less able to take the perspective of others. We designed a series of experiments to test this in various ways. Across four experiments, we demonstrated that those in high power conditions were more likely to anchor on their own visual perspective, were less able to take into account their own privileged knowledge when communicating with others, and showed reduced empathy when observing others' emotional expressions, a critical skill in perspective taking (Galinsky et al., in press). In sum, when perceiving others, those in power are biased toward their own perspective.

### *Objectification of Others*

The perspective-taking findings portray those in power as simply less aware of the experience of others as distinct from their own. In this next line of research, we take these findings a step further to suggest that when power holders do perceive others, it is through not only a self-centered lens, but also a self-serving one. Indeed, we demonstrate that the powerful are more likely to view, treat, and evaluate social targets as a function of their utility to the power holder, that is, to objectify (Gruenfeld et al., 2006). We know from prior research that power makes personal goals more salient (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995; Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001). Also, while those in power are less attentive to others overall (Copeland, 1994; Fiske, 1993), they appear to be more attentive to those aspects of others that may be useful to the power holder (Overbeck & Park, 2001). Thus, it seemed possible that power would lead to the objectification of social targets. Consistent with this possibility, we demonstrated that those in high power positions were more likely than others to characterize a colleague in an objectifying manner, were more effective at choosing a target that best matched a salient goal, and were more likely to choose a teammate based on a personal goal over an organizational goal (Gruenfeld et al., 2006).

Taken together, the effects of power on perspective taking and objectification provide a much richer picture of how power holders perceive the individuals they encounter. While those in power may be generally inattentive to the unique experience of other individuals, they are sensitive to those characteristics that meet their personal goals. In the next line of research, I switch the focus of perception from other people to the self. Specifically, I look at how those in power perceive themselves and how certain beliefs about the world affect this.

### Power and Self-Perceptions

Dominant group membership confers many concrete benefits: greater access to resources, better healthcare and better education to name a few. However, less attention has been devoted to the psychological consequences of this position. I am interested in how members of dominant groups perceive their abilities and their successes in light of all the benefits they receive. My colleague and I investigate this in the context of beliefs about affirmative action policies. We propose that the more challenging the environment seems to dominant group members, the greater they believe their chances of success in general and the more they believe their own competence is the driver of this success.

With regards to affirmative action, White men represent the dominant group since the policy generally seeks to improve the position of women and minorities. Research has shown that White men are more likely than women and minorities to believe that affirmative action operates in its strongest form: quotas (Haley & Sidanius, 2006). Consistent with this belief, White men often believe that affirmative action discriminates against them (Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Lowery, Unzueta, Knowles, & Goff, in press; Zelnick, 1996). We propose that such a belief provides these dominant group members with two psychological benefits. First, they are able to heighten their perception of their level of ability because any successful outcomes were achieved in spite of the higher hurdle they face in the form of discrimination. Second, by perceiving themselves as victims of discrimination, they can discount the possibility that they receive any unfair advantage by virtue of being a dominant group member: any success is driven solely by their own ability. Therefore, we hypothesized that for White men, the stronger they believed affirmative action to be, the more confident they would be in their ability to succeed at a task based on competence (Lowery & Inesi, under review), and the more they would believe their personal competence to be a driver of that success (Inesi & Lowery, 2006)

In support of this first statement, we found that White men who believed that affirmative action operated as quotas exhibited greater confidence in their ability to succeed in an unrelated domain (e.g., trivia). This was less true when they believed affirmative action did not operate in a way that carried such personally negative consequences (Lowery & Inesi, under review). Another study (Inesi & Lowery, 2006) tested the relationship between personal ability and success: whether personal ability was a significant driver in affecting personal success. We showed that this relationship was strong for those that believed that affirmative action personally affected them in a negative way. It was absent for those who were told that quotas do not exist.

In sum, it would seem that being a member of a high power group in society is beneficial only to the extent that it is perceived by the power holder as not carrying any unfair advantage. When group members believe that their successes can be attributed to their own abilities, they demonstrate both greater confidence in their ability to succeed and a greater sense of being able to control their own success. In contrast, when told that societal policies do not discriminate against them, they lose this confidence in their ability to succeed and lose the sense that they can control their own outcomes.

### Power and Group Value Creation

In one final stream of research, my colleague and I are developing a model of value creation in hierarchically differentiated teams (Inesi & Neale, 2007). While not directly related to my focused interest on power and perception, this project has allowed me to apply my knowledge of the psychology of power to a more applied topic: how work groups can create better solutions for their organization. Two of the key processes in value creation are 1) sharing group members' relevant information and 2) processing that information to create a valuable outcome. Our model proposes that high and low power actors each have a critical role in one of these processes. High power actors have the potential to create an environment in which information sharing is normative and encouraged. The low power negotiators then take that information and process it to come up with the final product. We further propose that the affective experience of each of

these actors will determine the extent to which they fulfill their role. For example, while happy high power group members should foster information sharing, angry power holders may encourage the opposite behavior in others. At the same time, anxious low power actors may be more likely to process in an effortful manner than euphoric low power actors. We have recently begun collecting data to test this model.

### Conclusions

In sum, I seek to understand the psychological experience of the powerful by studying the intervening role of perception. While much of the work on power has focused on its interpersonal effects, I believe that studying perceptions of decision alternatives and perceptions of the self represent promising areas for future research. My dissertation work and my work on power and perceptions of personal ability (Inesi & Lowery, 2006; Lowery & Inesi, under review) represent initial steps in that area.

Finally, as mentioned in the introduction, I believe that the organizational implications of each of these streams are both direct and substantial. By getting inside the minds of the powerful and understanding why they behave the way they do, I believe we can work toward both ameliorating the abuses and capitalizing on the benefits that power carries.

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