Differentiating Social and Personal Power:

Opposite Effects on Stereotyping, but Parallel Effects on Behavioral Approach Tendencies

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differentiating social and personal power

Abstract
How does power affect behavior? We posit that this depends on the type of power. We distinguish between social power (power over other people) and personal power (freedom from other people) and argue that these two types of power have opposite associations with independence and interdependence. We propose that when the distinction between independence and interdependence is relevant, then social and personal power will have opposite effects, however they will have parallel effects when the distinction is irrelevant. In two studies (an experimental study and a large field study), we demonstrate this by showing that social and personal power have opposite effects on stereotyping, but parallel effects on behavioral approach.

Keywords: Social Power, Personal Power, Behavioral Approach, Stereotyping
Differentiating Social and Personal Power; Opposite Effects on Stereotyping, but Parallel Effects on Behavioral Approach Tendencies

How does power affect behavior? This is an important question in psychology, given that we live in a world with extremely salient power differentials. Presidents can decide on the economic fate of millions, CEOs can hire or fire thousands of employees, and the decisions of generals can determine whether thousands of soldiers live or die. If people’s behavior is affected by their power, then it is crucial to know how and why. In the current research, we argue that to answer how power affects behavior, it is necessary to take a closer look at the concept of power itself. We propose that power can refer to different things which in turn have different effects. In the relevant literature, however, power is traditionally treated as a single construct and the difference between various aspects of power is ignored. The multitude of competing and diverging power definitions, already indicates that a monolithic power concept is too restrictive (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007). A close look at these many definitions of power suggests that there are two main types of power

**Social and Personal power**

One group of definitions describes power as the ability of a person to influence others and make them do things they would not do otherwise (e.g. Lukes, 1974; Weber, 1914/1978). In this case, power means exercising control over other people, it is often called social power (Overbeck, 2008; Van Dijke & Poppe, 2006). An example of social power is the power of managers over their employees.

A second group of definitions describes power as the ability to do and get what you want, without being influenced by others (e.g. Cartwright, 1959; Emerson, 1962; French & Raven, 1959). In this case, power is the ability to ignore the influence of others, to control
differentiating social and personal power

one’s own outcomes and to be personally independent, it is often called *personal power* (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008; Overbeck, 2008; Van Dijke & Poppe, 2006). Examples of personal power are money or knowledge. Someone who has a lot of money or knowledge is less dependent on others than someone who lacks it.

In everyday life, certain positions bring more social power and others more personal power. For example, successful artists have mainly *personal* power as they can decide when and what they paint, whereas army officers have a lot of *social* power over their troops, who must closely follow their orders. Many positions of power entail *both* social and personal power. Yet, this should not be taken to mean that social and personal power cannot be distinguished as separate concepts, with separate effects. In this manuscript we aim to show that one can make the distinction between social and personal power. In addition, we aim to show that sometimes one should make such a distinction, as they can have different and even opposite effect.

A number of researchers have already used the social/ personal power distinction. However, all did so, to help focus the attention on one aspect of power that they felt was neglected. For example, Van Dijke and Poppe (2006) showed that, in general, people prefer to increase their personal power (that is, independence from others), but have no special desire for social power (over others). Galinsky and colleagues (2008) argued that their finding that power decreases people’s dependence on norms and the situation is an effect of personal rather than social power. Similarly, Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee (2003) speculated that power has two elements, responsibility and self-interest, that perhaps have different effects. These studies by Van Dijke, Galinsky and colleagues limited themselves
however, to speculating whether their effect was more due to social, or, more due to personal power. They did not directly compare social and personal power as independent constructs.

We claim that it is important to make such direct comparisons because social and personal power are conceptualized in completely different ways. Personal power is power over oneself and freedom from the influence of others. People with high personal power are unconstrained by, and independent from others (Cartwright, 1959; Emerson, 1962). As a result, people high in personal power do not need to bother or care about other people in their social environment. Social power, on the other hand, is associated with interdependence rather than with independence (Arendt, 1969; Parsons, 1967). Social power means managing and directing other people and is therefore strongly linked with the need for responsibility. We propose that the effects of social and personal power can differ, if the distinction between independence and interdependence is relevant for the variable of interest.

**Stereotyping: opposite effects of social and personal power**

Several authors have already observed that power can have different effects on stereotyping: Power sometimes increases stereotyping and sometimes decreases it (Chen, Ybarra, & Kiefer, 2004; Overbeck & Park, 2001, 2006). It is, however, unclear why this is the case. Overbeck and Park suggest that some power relations are more people-centered than others, but it is still unclear what exactly distinguishes more people-centered power from less people-centered power. We posit that the distinction between social and personal power is essential here and can improve our understanding of the relation between power and stereotyping.

Because personal power means freedom from others, we argue it increases stereotyping. People who are high in personal power will therefore be less inclined to spend
the extra effort to individuate and make sense of others. Instead, they will simply rely on automatic cognition, in particular on stereotypes (Fiske, 1993; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Neuberg & Fiske, 1987). Yet social power means responsibility over other people. Responsible exercise of power requires care and consideration in dealing with others. For example, even though managers have power over their employees, this usually does not mean that they stereotype them. Instead, they are motivated to pay extra attention to understand what their employees are like and what they think (Bass, 1998). This is why social power should decrease stereotyping (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Neuberg & Fiske, 1987).

This analysis of the link between personal-social power and stereotyping effects fits nicely with how previous studies empirically approached the effect of power on stereotyping. Studies that found a positive effect of power on stereotyping typically manipulated power in independent settings — associated with personal power. In these studies, high power participants are typically given the opportunity to select anonymous alleged job-applicants who they do not meet or know and with whom they have no sense of interdependence. They are also completely free and independent in how they select candidates. Any sense of responsibility is therefore blocked. See for example studies that use the “Springfield Evaluation Paradigm” (Fiske, & Dépret, 1996; Goodwin, et al., 2000) and studies that use the “Work Group Paradigm” (Fiske, & Dépret, 1996; Rodríguez-Bailón, Moya, & Yzerbyt, 2000).

In contrast, studies that found a negative effect of power on stereotyping typically manipulated power in interdependent settings — associated with social power. In these experiments, powerful people operate as agents of an organization, responsible for their subordinates’ performance as members of an interdependent collective. For example, they
adopt the role of a professor versus a student (Overbeck & Park, 2001, Study 1), or of a judge in a legal case (Overbeck & Park, 2001, Study 2), two roles that have strong associations with responsibility. Another study that reports decreased stereotyping among the powerful (Chen, et al., 2004), obtained these effects by priming the experience of power, but predominantly used social power stimuli (authority, executive, influence, control, boss) and only one personal power stimulus (money).

**Approach: parallel effects of social and personal power**

Although social and personal power should have opposite effects on stereotyping, this should not be the case if the distinction between independence and interdependence is irrelevant, such as is the case in the effect of power on behavioral approach (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Galinsky et al., 2003; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Smith & Bargh, 2008). As Keltner and colleagues (2003) explain, power increases behavioral approach tendencies both because high power is associated with the freedom to act without interference (i.e. personal power) and because high power is associated with the control over other people’s rewards (i.e. social power).

**Study 1: An Experiment**

To test these predictions, we performed two studies. A first study primes social and personal power and compares their effects on stereotyping and behavioral approach.

**Method**

**Participants and design**

Participants consisted of 113 university students (74 women, 40 men, mean age 21.4 years) who took part in exchange for 7 euro. Participants were randomly assigned to one of
six conditions in a 3 (manipulation: social power, personal power, control) X 2 (dependent variable: stereotyping, approach) between participants design.

**Procedure**

***Manipulation.*** Participants first completed an adapted version of the experiential power prime (Galinsky, et al., 2003). In the social power condition, participants were asked to recall an experience ‘in which you had power over others, where you controlled and directed other people. This means that you could determine what these others should do or what they would get’. Participants in the personal power recalled an experience ‘in which you personally had power, where you were independent from the influence of others. This means that you could fully determine what you yourself would do or get’. Participants in the control condition recalled the last time shopping. All the participants used a sheet of paper with 20 lines to write about this experience. There was no difference between conditions on the amount recalled (overall $M = 9.5$ lines completed, $F(2, 109) < .5, p > .6$).

**Measures**

***Behavioral approach.*** Next, half of the participants were randomly selected to complete a twelve item behavioral approach scale (e.g. ‘Currently, I would like to do my best to get the things I want, fully disagree [1], fully agree [9], $\alpha = .71$). This scale reliably measures actual approach-related behavior tendencies (Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008).

***Stereotyping.*** The other half of the participants instead completed a Donald paradigm (Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977) to measure the degree to which they were inclined to stereotype. Participants read a short story (18 lines of text) about a girl named Petra, who behaved in an ambiguously stereotypically female manner (showing dependency on her
boyfriend, indecisiveness, empathy, etc.). Next they rated Petra on ten traits, all stereotypical for women (dependent, social, sensitive, naive, dedicated, caring, modest, kind, covetous, friendly), between not at all (1) and very much (9) (see Banaji, Hardin, & Rothman, 1993; Stapel & Koomen, 2001).

**Manipulation checks.** Participants finally completed four items measuring feelings of personal power (e.g., I felt independent, $\alpha = .84$), four measuring social power (e.g., I felt in charge of others, $\alpha = .83$) and four unspecific measures of general power (e.g., I felt powerful, $\alpha = .96$).

### Results

**Manipulation checks**

Factor analysis on the twelve manipulation check items yielded three clearly identifiable constructs (general, social and personal power), each with strong factor loadings on their respective components and low loadings on other components (Table S1, available on-line). General power (averaged over four items) correlated strongly with social power ($r = .68, p < .001$) and correlated weakly with personal power ($r = .27, p = .06$). As expected, social and personal power were uncorrelated ($r = .12, p = .43$).

Preliminary analyses also showed that our manipulations selectively manipulated social and personal power and jointly manipulated general power. That is, personal power was greatest in the personal power condition and social power was greatest in the social power condition; in addition, general power was greater in the personal and social power conditions than in the control conditions. Details of these analyses are available in Table S2 in the supporting information on-line.

**Stereotyping**
An ANOVA on the effect of the experimental manipulations (social, personal, control) on participants’ stereotyping showed a robust effect, $F(2, 58) = 8.68, p < .001, \eta_p = .23$. Contrast analyses showed that — consistent with predictions — personal power increased stereotyping ($M = 6.07, SD = .47$), compared to the control condition ($M = 5.74, SD = .47$), $t(58) = 2.21, p = .03$, while — also consistent with predictions — social power decreased participants' tendency to stereotype ($M = 5.44, SD = .49$), compared to the control condition, $t(58) = -2.01, p = .049$. The difference between social and personal power was highly significant, $t(58) = 4.17, p < .001$.

**Approach**

An ANOVA on the effect of the experimental manipulation of power on participants’ behavioral approach tendencies, showed a robust effect, $F(2, 49) = 3.71, p = .03, \eta_p = .13$. Consistent with predictions, contrast analyses showed that personal power increased participants' approach tendencies ($M = 5.68, SD = .74$), compared to the control condition ($M = 5.11, SD = .87$), $t(49) = 2.56, p = .01$, while social power likewise increased approach tendencies ($M = 5.79, SD = .74$) compared to the control condition, $t(49) = 2.11, p = .04$. As expected, social and personal power did not differ, $t(49) = .41, p = .68$.

**Discussion**

As predicted, we found that social and personal power had parallel effects on approach but opposite effects on stereotyping. That is, personal power increases stereotyping, social power decreases stereotyping, and both personal and social power increase approach. Furthermore, our manipulation checks showed that both social and personal power are independent constructs that do not strongly correlate with each other, but do correlate positively with general power. These manipulation checks also showed that social and
personal power can be reliably primed as independent constructs; our personal power manipulation selectively increased personal power, our social power manipulation selectively increased social power, and both manipulation increased general power.

**Ruling out Self- and other-orientation**

To rule out that these effects were caused by the fact that our power instruction might have primed a self- versus other-orientation, we conducted an additional study, in which 103 university students (73 females, 30 males, mean age 19.7 years) participated in return for the sum of 7 euros. The design was similar to Study 1, yet instead of the dependent variables we administered (in random order) five other- versus self-orientation scales: the Empathy subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) (Davis, 1983), the Inclusion of the Other in the Self (IOS) scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), the Concern for Others subscale of the student version of the Comparative Emphasis Scale (CES) (Ravlin & Meglino, 1987), the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal (RISC) Scale (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000), and the individualistic and altruistic subscales of the Social Value Orientation (SVO) scale (Van Lange, 1999). ANOVAs revealed no effect of our power manipulation on any of these other- versus self-orientation scales, $F$’s (2, 100) ≤ 1.91, $p$ ≥ .15. These results show that our manipulation did not affect self- and other-orientation.

**Study 2: A Cross-sectional Field Study**

The previous study shows that a manipulated sense of social power can have parallel and opposite effects, compared to a manipulated sense of personal power. Yet, although this experimental manipulation has many advantages, it has one drawback: An important element in our predictions is that social and personal power (as different aspects of power) can have opposite effects, *even though* they are in reality often positively correlated. To show this, we
decided to measure social and personal power in existing relations and study how they are related to stereotyping and approach.

Method

Participants and design

Readers of the national monthly magazine *Intermediair*, a Dutch journal aimed at middle and higher level employees, were asked to voluntarily complete a questionnaire on the internet. In total, 3082 respondents completed the questionnaire (32.9% women, 67.1% men, mean age 37.1 years). Respondents work at various levels of power (57.8% executive staff, 23.1% lower management, 14.7% middle management, 4.4% top management).

Measures

We measured *social* and *personal power* with two single items. Consistent with a definition of social power as power over others, we measured this by asking respondents to indicate to what degree they influence and affect other people in their organization, on a five point scale between not at all (1) and very much (5). Consistent with a definition of personal power as power over oneself, we measured this by asking respondents to what degree they had power over themselves (as a person), meaning that they could personally do what they wanted, between none (1) and very much (5). Respondents then completed a series of 100 unrelated items (taking approximately 8 to 10 minutes), which for us served as a filler task.

Next, we measured *stereotyping* by asking respondents to indicate to what degree they thought twelve gender stereotypic traits applied to men and women. We measured three negative male (aggressive, dominant, blunt), three positive male (rational, assertive, technical), three negative female (neurotic, dependent, unstable) and three positive female traits (talkative, sensitive, considerate), all on 9 point scales ($\alpha = .83$).
differentiating social and personal power

Next, we measured respondents’ *behavioral approach orientation*, using the scale of Sassenberg, Jonas, Shah, and Brazy, (2007), which is an accepted, short measure of behavioral approach and inhibition, consisting of five 9 point bipolar scales ($\alpha = .71$).

*Demographic variables.* Finally, we asked respondents for their gender, age, education, and length of employment, to be able to control for these. All our dependent and independent variables were normally distributed.

**Results**

*Social and personal power.* Consistent with our expectations, a simple bivariate correlation found that social and personal power correlated positively, $r = .44$, $p < .001$. This simple correlation was about equally strong for men ($r = .45$) as for women ($r = .41$) and there were no indications that this correlation was nonlinear or that it was weaker or stronger at higher or lower levels of power.

*Stereotyping.* We then checked how social and personal power were related to stereotyping. In a first step, in which we only entered demographic variables, we found a negative effect of age ($B = -.01$, $p = .003$), of education ($B = -.07$, $p = .007$), and of gender (females stereotype less than males, $B = -.18$, $p < .001$). We then added in a second step personal and social power. As expected, we found that *personal power increases stereotyping*, $B = .05$, $CI_{95\%} = [.01, .09]$, $p = .01$, while *social power decreases stereotyping*, $B = -.04$, $CI_{95\%} = [-.08, -.01]$, $p = .03$.

*Approach.* Entering demographic variables, we found a positive effect of length of employment ($B = .03$, $p < .001$), of education ($B = .11$, $p = .002$) and of age ($B = .03$, $p < .001$). We then added personal and social power. As expected, *personal power, $B = .22$,*
CI$_{95\%} = [.19, .26], p < .001, $ and social power, $ B = .18, CI_{95\%} = [.13, .24], p < .001, $ both increased behavioral approach tendencies.

These results replicate the effects of Study 1, now measuring rather than manipulating social and personal power. Again, social and personal power had parallel effects on approach but opposite effects on stereotyping, even though they were positively correlated.

General Discussion

Power has a strong influence on human behavior. It does not only give people influence over the world and other people, but it also has a wide range of strong side-effects on cognition and behavior: People with power think and act differently than people who lack it (Kipnis, 1972). If we want to understand society, we need to understand how power affects behavior (Russell, 1938/1960). In the past decades, psychologists have intensively tried to do this, generating a wealth of literature on the effect of power on cognition and behavior.

The current work shows that studying power as a monolithic concept is unlikely to further our understanding of its effects. We distinguished personal and social power and showed that these two types of power can have different effects because they are differentially associated with interdependence and independence. Personal power increases stereotyping because it is associated with independence and freedom, but social power decreases stereotyping because it is associated with interdependence and responsibility. When the independence-interdependence distinction is irrelevant, such as for behavioral approach, personal and social power have parallel effects.

Limitations

We showed these effects of personal and social power on stereotyping and approach by (a) priming (Study 1) and by (b) measuring (Study 2) them. Some readers may wonder
about the ecological validity of these effects. We note however that the priming manipulations and measures of power we used have similar effects as structural manipulations of power (see Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001).

Other readers may wonder about the ecological validity of our rather abstract dependent variables. We argue however, that this is a strength rather than a weakness of our approach, as more elaborate measures are likely to be associated with related concepts, such as responsibility, and thus lead to confounded results. The abstract measures we used easily generalize across different types of power. Furthermore, previous research has shown that such abstract measures have had similar effects to more face-valid measures of approach (e.g. Lammers, et al., 2008) and stereotyping (e.g. Devine, 1989).

Suggestions for future research

We found in Study 1 that the manipulation check of general power correlated more strongly with that of social power than with that of personal power. This suggests that the subjective meaning that participants give to the concept of power overlaps more with social power than with personal power. Future research might want to determine to what degree popular primes of general power (e.g. Galinsky, et al., 2003, Experiment 2) manipulate social and to what degree they manipulate personal power. This would allow a more detailed understanding of the nature of their effects.

Related, our finding that general behavioral approach is unaffected by the distinction between social and personal power, does not mean that more specific behavioral effects are similarly unaffected. If the distinction between independence and interdependence is relevant then this more specific behavior will also be affected. Most likely, personal power increases behavior that goes against social norms and constraints, while social power decreases such
counter-normative behavior (cf. Galinsky, et al. 2003, Study 3). Our results also do not imply that all cognitive effects of power are subject to the distinction between social and personal power. For example, Smith and Trope (2006) found that feelings of elevated power increase abstract thinking. This perceptual effect of power is most likely unrelated to either independence or interdependence and therefore invariant to the personal/social power distinction.

**Links to existing literature**

Our results link to other research that shows the malleability of power-effects. Personal (Chen, et al., 2001), cultural (Zhong, Magee, Maddux, & Galinsky, 2006), and situational (Lammers, et al., 2008) associations with power can drastically affect the results. In addition we show that even within the concept of power, lies the root for such disparities. Power is too basic a phenomenon to have simple effects.
References


differentiating social and personal power


Table S1. Factor analysis of the manipulation checks of Study 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>General power</th>
<th>Social power</th>
<th>Personal power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General power 1</td>
<td><strong>.87</strong></td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General power 2</td>
<td><strong>.89</strong></td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>General power 3</td>
<td><strong>.86</strong></td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.08</td>
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<tr>
<td>General power 4</td>
<td><strong>.95</strong></td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social power 1</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td><strong>.77</strong></td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social power 2</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td><strong>.60</strong></td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social power 3</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td><strong>.81</strong></td>
<td>-.15</td>
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<td>Social power 4</td>
<td>.49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal power 4</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td><strong>.85</strong></td>
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Table S2. Results for manipulation checks of Study 1.4

<table>
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<th>Condition</th>
<th>Alpha</th>
<th>Social power</th>
<th>Personal power</th>
<th>Control</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MC: Social power</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>7.28 (1.17)</td>
<td>6.38 (1.54)</td>
<td>5.02 (1.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC: Personal power</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>6.17 (1.39)</td>
<td>7.45 (1.08)</td>
<td>6.79 (1.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC: General power</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>6.57 (1.21)</td>
<td>6.56 (1.51)</td>
<td>3.22 (1.69)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Footnotes

1 Within-condition factor-analyses show similar patterns.

2 We also checked whether these manipulation checks mediated the main effects. This was not the case. This might have been caused by the strong effects on and low variance of these manipulation checks.

3 Reassuringly, these non-significant trends showed that social power nonsignificantly decreased altruism, and nonsignificantly increased individualism, compared to control and personal power conditions.

4 Data refer to means (SDs) of three manipulation checks (MCs) in three conditions. Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) with relevant contrasts showed that participants experienced more personal power in the personal power condition than in the control ($p < .001$) and social power condition ($p < .001$). Participants experienced more social power in the social power condition than in the control ($p < .001$) and personal power condition ($p < .01$). Compared to the control condition, participants experienced more general power both in the personal power ($p < .001$) and social power conditions ($p < .001$), while personal and social power did not differ ($p = .99$).