

## **POWER AND IMPRESSION FORMATION: THE EFFECTS OF POWER ON THE DESIRE FOR MORALITY AND COMPETENCE INFORMATION**

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Across two studies, power-primed and neutral perceivers faced the task of forming an impression of a target person who was characterized by substantial evaluative inconsistencies and thus thwarted easy judgment. It was hypothesized that the loss to prediction and control engendered by such a target should have an especially strong impact on powerful perceivers' desire for additional target information, as such perceivers enjoy a higher initial level of control and are motivated to maintain it. As predicted, relative to neutral perceivers, power-primed perceivers in both studies indicated greater motivation to process additional target information. Moreover, attesting to their sensitivity to the target's inconsistencies, power-primed perceivers' pronounced motivation to expend processing effort was specific to the most salient domain (morality or competence) in which the target defied easy judgment. These findings add to the growing literature examining boundary conditions of the oft-cited link between power and less systematic processing.

Over a decade ago, Fiske (1993) put forth the notion that power, defined as having disproportionate control over others' outcomes, may be linked to stereotyping. Couched in terms of the continuum model

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of impression formation (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990), stereotyping is seen as a form of category-based processing, which stands in contrast to individuation, a more effortful, attribute-by-attribute processing route. Building on research indicating that outcome dependency increases individuation, presumably as a means of increasing perceivers' sense of prediction and control (e.g., Erber & Fiske, 1984; Neuberg & Fiske, 1987), Fiske (1993) argued that because power means that one's outcomes depend less or not at all on others, the powerful should be less motivated to individuate others. With lower motivation, coupled with the high attentional demands that often accompany positions of power, powerful perceivers should be especially likely to stereotype, a cognitively inexpensive strategy that allows one to exert and maintain control over others.

Others have echoed the proposition that there is a link between power and less systematic processing strategies, such as stereotyping. In particular, Keltner and colleagues have theorized that elevated power should increase the automaticity of social cognition not only because of low motivation and capacity constraints, but also because elevated power elicits positive affect, which is associated with less systematic cognition (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). The result, they argue, is less accurate inferences about others. Research examining the effects of group-based power on judgmental accuracy supports their reasoning (Ebenbach & Keltner, 1998; Keltner & Robinson, 1997). In this work, members of groups whose attitudes were in the majority (high power) and minority (low power) were asked to make estimates of each group's attitudes. In general, high-power group members were less accurate in their estimates than low-power members, and members from both groups estimated the attitudes of the high-power group more accurately than those of the low-power group.

### **POWER AND MORE SYSTEMATIC PROCESSING?**

Fiske's (1993) theorizing on power and stereotyping instigated a flurry of research yielding findings that have prompted elaboration, reformulation, and refinement of her initial propositions. Together, these propositions are now often referred to as the Power-as-Control (PAC) model (e.g., Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000; Goodwin, Operario, & Fiske, 1998). Among the most notable aspects of this model is its articulation of two routes by which the powerful

may stereotype others: (1) by default, an effortless, category-based route characterized by inattention to stereotype-inconsistent information, and (2) by design, a relatively effortful route involving increased attention to information that confirms stereotype-based expectations. Thus, contrary to prior notions that power leads solely to less systematic processing, the PAC model proposes that power may also elicit just the opposite—in the form of effortful stereotyping.

Drawing on social judgeability theory (Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron, 1992), Goodwin et al. (2000) suggested that whether or not the powerful engage in stereotyping by design depends on whether they feel entitled to judge others. Cultural assumptions that the powerful deserve their positions may engender feelings of entitlement or authority to judge among the powerful, increasing confidence in their judgments (see also Operario, Goodwin, & Fiske, 1998). But concerns about maintaining their position of power may lead the powerful to seek justification of their stereotype-based judgments by effortfully attending to stereotype-confirming information (e.g., Fiske, 2001). As Goodwin et al. (2000) put it, “stereotype-consistent information about subordinates preserves, perhaps even bolsters existing power identities” (p. 230). Across several studies employing different paradigms and both situational and personality determinants of power, Goodwin et al. (2000) found evidence for stereotyping by default among powerful perceivers in the form of shorter reading times for stereotype-inconsistent information (Study 3), as well as evidence for stereotyping by design in the form of longer reading times for stereotype-consistent information (Studies 1–3).

While proposing a general link between power and automatic cognition, Keltner et al. (2003) also left room for the possibility that, under certain circumstances, power may elicit more rather than less systematic forms of cognition. In particular, circumstances under which the powerful perceive threat should produce negative affect, which is associated with more systematic processing. Examples of such circumstances include when the power structure is unstable, the legitimacy of one's power is called into question, or one feels accountable (Keltner et al., 2003). In support of such reasoning, Ebenbach and Keltner (1998) found that high-power partisans who experienced threat-related negative emotions were more accurate in

their judgments of their opponents' attitudes compared to high-power partisans who did not experience such emotions.

One final empirical example of a link between power and more, not less, systematic processing is research by Overbeck and Park (2001). Participants in this research were assigned to high- and low-power roles (e.g., professor and student) and interacted with one another over e-mail. Low-power participants had the task of making requests of their high-power counterparts, while the latter were to render a verdict on each request. After their e-mail exchanges, all participants completed a series of attention and judgment measures designed to assess the degree to which they individuated each other. The results showed that high-power participants individuated more than low-power ones, remembering more about low-power participants and distinguishing more accurately among them (Studies 1 and 2). A third study showed that high-power participants' superior individuation was tempered, though not entirely eliminated, when task demands included organization-focused responsibilities in addition to person-centered ones (i.e., responding to each request from a low-power participant).

Now, in much of the research examining the link between power and impression formation, participants have been presented with at least one piece of target information that they could easily latch onto as a basis for forming an impression of the target. This is particularly true in research on the PAC model whose origin in the continuum model (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990) tends to dictate that participants are provided with category-based information (e.g., stereotype cues), along with individuating information (i.e., category-consistent and category-inconsistent attributes), as a means of assessing differences in processing along the continuum. Requiring minimal cognitive expenditure, category-based cues provide an initial expectancy that perceivers may or may not go beyond, depending on the nature of the available information and motivational factors (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Fiske, Neuberg, Beattie, & Milberg, 1987; see also Fiske, Lin, & Neuberg, 1999). Low in control motivation, and thus the inclination to individuate, and faced with the cognitive demands that come with power, powerful perceivers should seize upon category-based information—or whatever other kind of information for that matter—that facilitates judgment. That is, powerful perceivers should latch onto whatever information

best facilitates judgment because doing so gives them the kind of judgments they want for the cognitive resources they can afford.

Regardless of whether or not powerful perceivers, armed with an initial judgment, go further down the continuum, effortfully attending to category-consistent information that justifies and maintains their powerful status (i.e., stereotyping by design), one question that arises is: What happens when the available array of information about a target fails to provide a cognitively inexpensive, easy-to-discern basis for judgment, such as a stereotype-based cue? The present studies examined this question, guided by the hypothesis that such impression formation situations constitute a new boundary condition on the link between power and less systematic processing.

#### WHEN A TARGET PERSON UNDERMINES CONTROL

Research conducted in the framework of the continuum model has shown that targets who are difficult to categorize, and hence about whom impressions are difficult to form, elicit more effortful, individuating forms of processing (Fiske et al., 1987). In this work, difficult-to-categorize targets were ones about whom a category label and category-inconsistent attributes, or an uninformative label (i.e., "person") and attributes, were presented. In our studies, we presented participants with a target person who defied easy impression formation by virtue of the absence of salient category-based cues and the presence of evaluative inconsistencies. The continuum model would predict that such a target should elicit more effortful processing among all perceivers (e.g., Fiske et al., 1987). Our central hypothesis, however, was that power should enhance perceivers' tendency to engage in more systematic processing.

A core assumption underlying the continuum model is that people seek prediction and control over their outcomes (e.g., Fiske & Morling, 1996). When prediction and control are threatened, accuracy motives are heightened, as being accurate helps to restore a sense of control. One way to achieve accuracy is to go beyond initial, category-based judgments of others and engage in effortful processing of individuating information about them (e.g., Fiske & Morling, 1996; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Weary, Marsh, Gleicher, & Edwards, 1993). Being faced with the task of forming an impression of a target who defies easy judgment should undermine all perceivers' control, powerful or not, thus eliciting effortful processing to regain control.

We hypothesized that the loss of control engendered by such a target should exert a greater influence on powerful perceivers' sense of control. For powerful perceivers who, by definition, enjoy higher control to begin with, and are motivated to maintain this control (e.g., Fiske, 2001; Fiske et al., 1999), losses to control should be especially salient and thus have a bigger impact. Our main prediction, then, was that when powerful perceivers are faced with a target whose evaluative inconsistencies impede easy impression formation, and thus robs them of some of their usual sense of control, these perceivers should be especially likely to show signs of increased processing effort.

We chose behavioral inconsistencies in a target as the means of thwarting easy judgment and, accordingly, undermining perceivers' sense of control because confronting such inconsistency may be a fairly common experience for perceivers in a variety of positions of power. In much of the research on power and impression formation, perceivers are presented with a target person characterized by a single set of attributes or behaviors. They are not privy to information about the target across time or situations, nor do they share any relationship with him or her (for a recent exception, see Overbeck & Park, 2001). Yet in the real world, powerful perceivers usually do share a relationship with their subordinates, one that extends across time and situations, making exposure to inconsistencies in subordinates' behavior more likely than the literature to date might suggest.

### **BIASED INFORMATION-SEEKING AS A STRATEGY FOR RESTORING CONTROL**

What effortful strategies might powerful perceivers employ to restore control in the face of a target who defies easy impression formation? One reasonable answer would be for them to simply seek more information about the target in the hope of ultimately forming an impression of him or her (e.g., Chen & Chaiken, 1999; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). However, not all forms of information are equally useful in impression formation. Drawing a sharp distinction between *morality* and *competence* information, Wojciszke and colleagues have shown that when perceivers have an impression-formation goal, morality-related information (e.g., honesty) prevails over competence-related information (e.g., intelligence) (Wojciszke, 1994; Wojciszke, Bazinska, & Jaworski, 1998; see also Rosenberg, Nelson, &

Vivekananthan, 1968; Ybarra, 2002). For instance, they have shown that morality-related traits are more chronically accessible than competence-related traits, and that perceivers with an impression-formation goal are more interested in obtaining morality- versus competence-related trait information about a target (Wojciszke et al., 1998, Studies 1 & 2; Ybarra, Chan, & Park, 2001).

Taking an approach-avoidance perspective, Wojciszke et al. (1998) argued that morality information dominates in impression formation because, in the absence of any specific goal, perceivers consider the implications of new information for their self-interest and well-being. In this regard, morality information about others is more informative than competence information in that knowing whether or not someone is moral (e.g., socially good or bad, adheres to or defies moral rules) reveals more about whether the person is beneficent or harmful to oneself than knowing how competently the person can achieve beneficent or harmful goals. As Wojciszke et al. (1998) stated: “[Moral] categories are instrumental in locating others on the approach-avoidance dimension to a higher extent than any other concept (competence traits included)—a decision about whether a person is moral amounts to a direct settlement of whether the person is beneficial rather than dangerous” (p. 1252).

In the present research, participants with the goal of forming an impression of an evaluatively inconsistent target indicated their desire for morality- and competence-related information about the target. Across studies, we expected all participants to show a general information-seeking bias in favor of morality information, consistent with Wojciszke et al.’s findings. In addition, however, we hypothesized that powerful participants would be especially motivated to obtain information in the most salient domain in which the target defied easy impression formation, regardless of whether the domain was morality or competence. In Study 1, participants were presented with a target who was characterized by evaluative inconsistencies in both the morality and competence domains. Given the general dominance of morality over competence information, we expected inconsistencies in the morality domain to be especially salient. Thus, we predicted that powerful participants would exhibit a particularly pronounced desire for morality information. Study 2’s target was characterized by evaluative inconsistencies only in the domain of competence. Again, we hypothesized that powerful par-

ticipants would be especially interested in information relevant to the most salient domain in which the target thwarted easy judgment. Thus, in this study we expected powerful participants to seek out competence-related information more than their less powerful counterparts.

### STUDY 1

Study 1's participants had the goal of forming an impression of a target about whom we presented an array of morality- and competence-related behavioral information that was evaluatively inconsistent (i.e., positive and negative) across both domains. As noted, such inconsistencies were intended to create a target about whom an impression was not easily formed and hence who would undermine control. Our primary dependent measures were participants' self-reported desire for additional morality and competence information about the target as an index of their motivation to expend greater processing effort.

To test the effects of power on participants' desire for additional information, power was manipulated using a priming procedure whereby half of our participants was unobtrusively primed with the concept of power via exposure to power-related words, whereas the other half was exposed to neutral words. A growing body of research has similarly used exposure to semantic associates of the concept of power to manipulate power and test its effects (e.g., Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995; Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Pryor & Soller, 1994; Zurbriggen, 2000). The reasoning for this manipulation is that the concept of power is mentally represented in most if not all people and thus can be activated by semantic or other related cues in the environment. Upon its activation, cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses associated with power should be elicited, as would be true for any activated concept. Thus, we expected that priming the concept of power via exposure to power-related words should elicit power-related responses. Put another way, instead of putting participants in an explicit position of power, which would presumably also activate the concept of power and elicit associated responses, we chose to activate the concept of power directly.

Although recent research has relied on ostensibly richer and more involving manipulations of power, namely, asking participants to recall and describe a time when they held power over others

(Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003), the conceptual basis for this manipulation was the same as ours. That is, by having participants engage in the recall and describe task, Galinsky et al.'s aim was simply to activate the concept of power. Moreover, other researchers using the present semantic-priming procedures to manipulate power have replicated the findings produced by more naturalistic priming procedures (i.e., seating position in a professor's office; Chen et al., 2001). Finally, it is worth highlighting potential upsides to using a power-priming manipulation such as ours: it allows one to tap the effects of power without participants' awareness of our interest in power, thereby minimizing demand and possibly confounds between power and affect (Keltner et al., 2003).

Study 1's main prediction was that power-primed participants would report a stronger desire for additional information in the most salient domain in which the target defied easy judgment. Given the dominance of morality information in impression formation (Wojciszke et al., 1998), we expected morality-related inconsistencies would be especially salient in the overall array of target information. The inability to form an impression of the target along the morality dimension should be particularly undermining of power-primed participants' sense of control and, as a result, should prompt them to be especially motivated to obtain additional morality information as a means of restoring control.

## **METHOD**

### **PARTICIPANTS**

Participants were 100 undergraduates (26 men, 74 women) enrolled in an introductory psychology course at a large, North American university. Participants took part in this study in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. The study was run in small groups ranging from two to four.

### **MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE**

Upon arrival, participants were seated in a small laboratory room and asked to read and sign a consent form. They were then informed that the study involved completing several unrelated tasks, and that

the experimenter would go over the instructions for each task. The first task was a word-search puzzle, which served as our power-priming manipulation. For this task, participants were instructed to find and circle ten words that were embedded in a grid of letters, laid out vertically and horizontally, forward and backward. For half of the participants, six of the words were power-related (i.e., authority, boss, control, executive, influence, rich), and four were unrelated to power (e.g., clock, house). For the other half, all ten words were unrelated to power. The words used to prime the concept of power were identical to ones used in prior research (e.g., Bargh et al., 1995; Chen et al., 2001).

After completing the word-search puzzle, participants were told that the second task involved forming an impression of a target person named Bob and that they would be given a booklet containing behavior statements about him, with each behavior typed on a separate page. Participants were told they would have eight sec to read each behavior, with the experimenter saying “turn” at the end of each eight-sec interval to signal them to turn the booklet page and read the next behavior. They were instructed to read each behavior only once, and to not turn back to previous behaviors. After making sure all participants understood the instructions, the experimenter handed out the booklets and signaled participants to begin reading the first behavior about the target.

The booklet contained 28 behavior statements, each one starting with “..” followed by a behavior (e.g., “..donated a lot to charity”). The stimuli were the same as those used in earlier research (Ybarra, 2001; Chan & Ybarra, 2002). The behaviors varied along two dimensions: valence and domain. The valence of the behaviors was either positive or negative and their domain was either morality-related (e.g., honesty) or competence-related (e.g., intelligence).<sup>1</sup> There were 12 moral-

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1. A reader might wonder whether asymmetries in the diagnosticity of positive versus negative morality information, positive versus negative competence information, and extreme versus moderate information (e.g., Reeder & Brewer, 1979; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989) call into question the manner in which we instantiated an evaluatively inconsistent target. We note here that our aim was not to create a *perfectly* evaluatively inconsistent target (across two domains), but to create a target that, on the whole, would be perceived as quite inconsistent, albeit not perfectly so. By exposing participants to multiple instances of positive and negative target behavior in both the morality and competence domains, we believe we achieved at least this.

ity– and 12 competence–related behaviors, with half positive in valence and half negative within each domain. Four behaviors were neutral (e.g., “.did laundry last night”), with two appearing at the beginning of the booklet, and two at the end. The order of the remaining 24 behaviors in the booklet was randomized. A second version of the booklet was created by simply reversing the order of the first version. See Appendix A for the full list of behaviors.

#### DEPENDENT MEASURES

After reading the behavior booklet, participants were asked to fill out a questionnaire in which the key dependent measures regarding their desire for additional morality and competence information about the target person were embedded, along with various ancillary measures. More specifically, the questionnaire included an item that asked participants to indicate their overall impression of the target on a 7–point scale ( $-3 = \textit{very unfavorable}$ ,  $+3 = \textit{very favorable}$ ). Next, participants rated the target on three morality–related attributes (i.e., honest, friendly, moral) and three competence–related attributes (i.e., intelligent, skillful, competent) using six–point, Likert–type scales ( $0 = \textit{not at all}$ ,  $5 = \textit{very much}$ ). They then responded to several task–related items. Specifically, they rated how engaging they found the task of forming an impression of the target to be, how difficult they found this task to be, and how consistent of a person they viewed the target using the same six–point, Likert–type scales.

After those preliminary questions, participants were presented with the critical dependent measures. Specifically, they were told to imagine that they were able to get more information about the target, “as sometimes people feel they need more information than they have to form an impression of another person.” They were then asked to rate the extent to which they desired more information on each of three morality–related attributes (i.e., truthful, inconsiderate, unsociable) and each of three competence–related attributes (i.e., capable, inept, ineffective). These desire–for–information ratings were made on six–point, Likert–type scales ( $0 = \textit{not at all}$ ,  $5 = \textit{very much}$ ).

After completing the questionnaire, participants filled out a short form with demographic items and one item assessing their awareness or suspicion regarding the study’s procedures and hypotheses (i.e., “What do you think the researchers are trying to examine in the

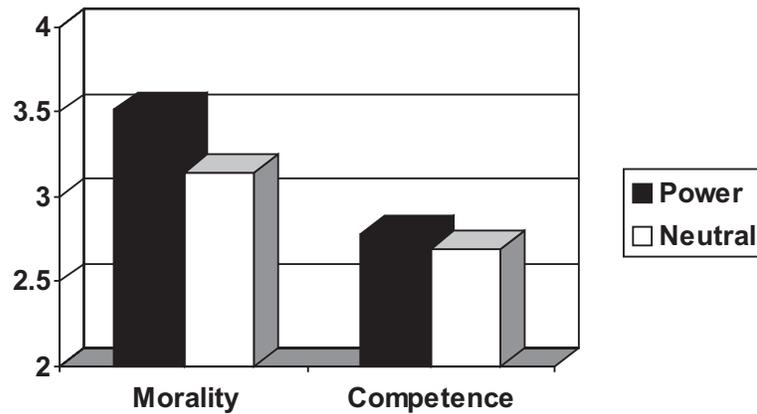


FIGURE 1. Desire for morality- and competence-related information as a function of priming condition in Study 1.

present experiment?”). After completing this form, participants were debriefed, thanked, and excused.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Two participants were excluded because they circled fewer than half of the words in the word-search task. In response to the suspicion-probe item, four participants (4%) expressed some suspicion that there might be a link between the word-search task and later experimental tasks. Because none of these participants mentioned anything related to power or, more generally, the notion that the nature of the words in the word-search task might have influenced their subsequent responses, they were retained in all analyses reported below.<sup>2</sup> These analyses were conducted on a final sample of 98 participants (power prime,  $n = 52$ ; neutral prime,  $n = 46$ ). Preliminary analyses indicated that booklet order did not influence the results; thus, this factor is not discussed further.

2. Analyses conducted with and without these four participants were virtually identical.

## DESIRE FOR ADDITIONAL MORALITY AND COMPETENCE INFORMATION

To examine Study 1's main hypothesis that power would enhance participants' desire for additional morality information, in particular, we first created indices to represent participants' desire for morality and competence information by averaging their desire-for-information ratings for the three morality-related attributes (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .44$ ), and the three competence-related ones (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .71$ ), respectively.<sup>3</sup> We then examined these indices in a  $2 \times 2$  (Power  $\times$  Domain), repeated-measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). This analysis yielded a significant domain effect,  $F(1, 96) = 37.62, p < .001$ , with participants indicating an overall stronger desire for morality ( $M = 3.32$ ) over competence information ( $M = 2.73$ ). This effect conceptually replicates Wojciszke et al.'s (1998) research showing the greater impact of morality over competence information in impression formation.

Although the predicted two-way interaction was not quite significant,  $F(1, 96) = 2.14, p = .15$ , we conducted follow-up analyses to test our a priori hypotheses regarding the effects of power in each behavioral domain separately (see Figure 1). Directly in line with our predictions, the power effect for the morality index was significant,  $F(1, 96) = 4.41, p = .04$ , indicating that power-primed participants' desire for morality information was significantly stronger ( $M = 3.51$ ) relative to neutral participants' desire for such information ( $M = 3.14$ ). In contrast, power-primed and neutral participants did not differ in their desire for competence information (power,  $M = 2.78$ ; neutral,  $M = 2.69$ ),  $F < 1$ . It is worth noting that the main effect of power was not significant, suggesting that power-primed participants did not simply have a greater desire for information overall. Rather, participants primed with power were biased in their desire for information in favor of what was presumably the most salient domain in which the target defied easy judgment.

## ANCILLARY MEASURES

*Overall Impression Ratings.* Not surprisingly, given the inconsistent nature of the behavioral information presented about the target, the

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3. Analyses conducted separately for each of the morality- and competence-related items yielded results that patterned in a similar manner as those seen for each set of items combined.

grand mean of participants' ratings of their overall target impression was near the neutral point of the scale ( $M = .39$ ). However, the effect of power on these ratings was significant,  $F(1, 96) = 9.52, p < .01$ , with power-primed participants rating the target more closely to the neutral point ( $M = .04$ ) compared to neutral participants ( $M = .74$ ), who rated the target mildly positively. This effect suggests that power-primed participants were more sensitive to the evaluative inconsistencies in the array of target information than their neutral counterparts.<sup>4</sup>

*Ratings on Morality and Competence Attributes.* Two separate indices were created to examine participants' ratings of the target on the three morality-related attributes (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .70$ ) and three competence-related attributes (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .53$ ). We then examined these indices in a  $2 \times 2$  (Power  $\times$  Domain) repeated-measures ANOVA, which yielded two significant effects. First, the domain effect was significant,  $F(1, 96) = 16.98, p < .001$ , indicating that participants rated the target more negatively on the morality attributes ( $M = 2.75$ ) compared to the competence ones ( $M = 3.18$ ). This finding suggests that participants were especially sensitive to the negative morality information, which makes sense given the dominance of morality over competence information (e.g., Wojciszke et al, 1998), as well as the pronounced impact of negative information in impression formation (e.g., Fiske, 1980; Reeder & Brewer, 1979; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987). The power effect was also significant,  $F(1, 96) = 7.07, p < .01$ , indicating that power-primed participants tended to rate the target less favorably overall ( $M = 2.80$ ) compared to neutral participants ( $M = 3.12$ ). The interaction was not significant ( $F < 1.5$ ).

Taken as a whole, the results for overall impression, morality, and competence ratings are consistent with research showing that compared to consistency in personality, inconsistency is related to more disliking (e.g., Hendrick, 1972). If powerful perceivers are more sensitive to information that undermines their control—in this case, evaluative inconsistencies—then it makes sense that they would rate

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4. Our interpretation of the means for participants' overall impression ratings as indicating evaluatively neutral impressions is supported by the fact that the overall standard deviation was fairly small ( $SD = 1.17$ ). Put differently, 80.6% of participants indicated a -1, 0, or 1 overall impression rating on the 7-point scale ranging from -3 to +3 (84.6% in the power condition and 76.1% in the neutral one).

the target more negatively than neutral perceivers both on an overall basis, as well as in terms of specific morality- and competence-related attributes.

*Task-Related Ratings.* Power-primed and neutral participants did not differ in their ratings of how engaging the impression formation task was ( $F < 1$ ), and both participant groups found the task to be moderately engaging overall ( $M = 2.92$ ). However, power-primed participants tended to rate the task as marginally more difficult ( $M = 3.31$ ) than did neutral participants ( $M = 2.83$ ),  $F(1, 96) = 3.06$ ,  $p = .08$ . Moreover, although all participants tended to rate the target as a fairly inconsistent person (i.e., below the midpoint), as one would expect, power-primed participants rated the target to be significantly more inconsistent ( $M = 1.31$ ) than did neutral participants ( $M = 1.85$ ),  $F(1, 96) = 5.65$ ,  $p = .02$ , again suggesting that the former group of participants was more sensitive to the evaluative inconsistencies in the target.

Wojciszke et al. (1998) argued that morality information dominates in impression formation because such information best enables a “direct settlement” of who someone is. In line with our main prediction, power-primed participants, who we hypothesized would be particularly interested in seeking information pertinent to the most salient inconsistencies in the target, indicated a stronger desire for additional morality-related information about the target relative to neutral participants. Overall, this first study provides initial evidence for a new boundary condition on the oft-cited link between power and less systematic processing: being faced with the task of forming an impression of a target who, by virtue of the absence of any obvious, informative category-based cue and the presence of evaluative inconsistencies, thwarts easy judgment.

## STUDY 2

In Study 1, the target was characterized by positive and negative behaviors in both the morality and competence domains. Given that morality information has greater utility in impression formation (Wojciszke et al., 1988), and thus that morality-related inconsistencies in the target were especially salient, it made sense that power-primed participants indicated a particularly strong desire for additional morality information. Our aim in Study 2 was to conduct a more difficult, fine-tuned test of our hypothesis that the loss

of control engendered by a target characterized by evaluative inconsistencies has a particularly strong impact on powerful perceivers, prompting them to be especially biased in favor of information relevant to the control-undermining inconsistencies.

Study 2's target was also characterized by evaluatively inconsistent behaviors, but this time only in the competence domain. Unlike in Study 1, then, the target defied easy judgment only in the domain of competence. Would power-primed participants continue to show a pronounced desire for information in the (only) domain of inconsistencies—in this case, competence-related information? Or were Study 1's findings limited to cases where behavioral inconsistencies in the morality domain impede one's ability to easily form an impression of a target? These are important questions to ask in light of Operario and Fiske's (2001) finding that powerful perceivers (i.e., high trait-dominant participants assigned to a powerful role) were more sensitive to morality (i.e., sociability) than competence information about their subordinates.

We hypothesized that, relative to neutral participants, Study 2's power-primed participants would indeed show a bias for competence, rather than morality, information. That is, powerful perceivers would indicate an increased motivation to expend processing effort toward the information most relevant to the domain in which the target thwarted impression formation—regardless of the domain. Yet at the same time, it might be expected that all participants would show a bias in favor of morality over competence information given the absence of any explicit morality information about the target, as well as the generally greater utility of morality information in impression formation (e.g., Wojciszke et al., 1998). Overall, then, although all participants might exhibit a morality bias, we predicted that power-primed participants would still express a greater desire than neutral participants for additional competence-related information. Support for this prediction would indicate that the effects of power on increasing information-seeking desires is not limited to the morality domain. In this regard, it would extend Operario and Fiske's (2001) research by demonstrating that power does not always increase sensitivity to morality information; under certain circumstances (i.e., when confronted with a target characterized by highly inconsistent, competence-related behaviors), it may increase sensitivity to competence information.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 78 undergraduates (26 men, 52 women) enrolled in introductory psychology courses at a large, North American university. Participants took part in this study in partial fulfillment of a course requirement. The study was run in small groups ranging from two to four.

### MATERIALS AND PROCEDURE

The materials and procedure were adapted largely from Study 1. Participants first read and signed a consent form, and then were informed that the study involved completing several unrelated tasks. The first was the word-search puzzle used in Study 1, which again served as the power-priming manipulation. As in Study 1, the second task involved forming an impression of a target person (i.e., Bob) based on reading a booklet containing statements about his behaviors. The instructions and procedures for reading the booklet were identical to Study 1's. However, in this study the booklet contained only the previously-used positive and negative competence behaviors (six each), along with 12 neutral behaviors. Two neutral behaviors always appeared at the beginning and end of the booklet. The remaining 20 behaviors were randomly ordered, and a second booklet order was created by reversing the original order. See Appendix B for the full list of behaviors.

### DEPENDENT MEASURES

After reading the booklet, participants filled out a questionnaire in which the dependent measures regarding their desire for morality and additional competence information about the target were embedded. As in Study 1, ancillary measures were also included. Specifically, participants indicated their overall impression of the target on a seven-point scale ( $-3 = \textit{very unfavorable}$ ,  $+3 = \textit{very favorable}$ ), and then rated the target on the same three morality- and three competence-related attributes used in Study 1. Next, they responded to the same task-related items used in Study 1—how engaging the impression formation task was, how difficult it was, and

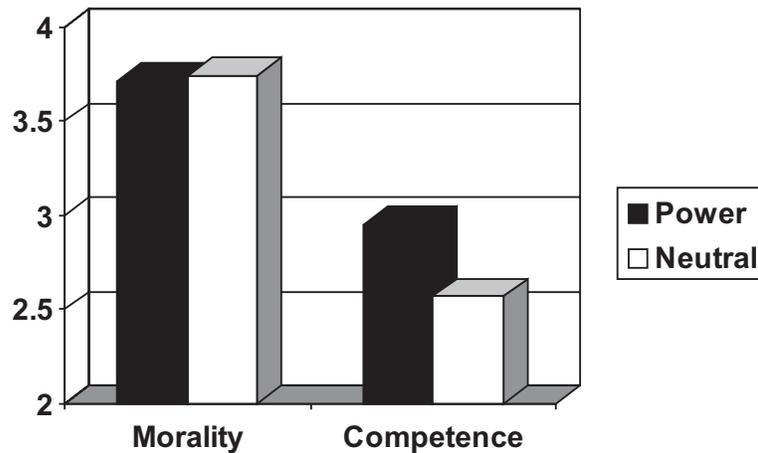


FIGURE 2. Desire for morality- and competence-related information as a function of priming condition in Study 2.

how consistent of a person the target appeared to be—using six-point, Likert-type scales (0 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*).

Participants then imagined that they were able to get more information about the target, and rated their desire for information about the same three morality and three competence attributes used in Study 1. These desire-for-information ratings were made on six-point, Likert-type scales (0 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*). Next, participants completed the short form containing demographic items and the suspicion item. Finally, participants were debriefed, thanked, and excused.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

No participants were excluded due to the failure to complete the word-search task. However, two participants were excluded because they did not complete large sections of the questionnaire properly, and two others were excluded because they reported that English was their second language and that they had learned English at 16 years or older. Five participants (6.7%) who expressed some general suspicion of a link between the word-search task and later

tasks were retained in all analyses, as in Study 1.<sup>5</sup> Two participants (2.6%), however, were excluded because they not only expressed suspicion of a link, but also mentioned the power-related nature of the words in word-search task. The final sample used in all of the analyses reported below included 72 participants (power prime,  $n = 36$ ; neutral prime,  $n = 36$ ). As in Study 1, initial analyses revealed that booklet order did not affect the results; thus, this factor is not discussed further.

#### DESIRE FOR MORALITY AND ADDITIONAL COMPETENCE INFORMATION

To examine participants' desire for competence information—beyond what they were already presented with about target—as well as their desire for morality information, we once again created separate indices based on participants' desire-for-information ratings for each behavioral domain. To create the competence index, we averaged ratings for all three competence-related attributes (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .58$ ). For the morality index, however, we averaged ratings for two of the three attributes (truthful, inconsiderate) (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .65$ ), and excluded ratings for the third one (unsociable) because its inclusion substantially lowered the reliability statistic (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .17$ ) in this sample.<sup>6</sup> We then examined the two indices in a  $2 \times 2$  (Power  $\times$  Domain), repeated-measures ANOVA. Consistent with Study 1, this analysis yielded a significant domain effect,  $F(1, 70) = 41.36, p < .001$ , with participants indicating an overall stronger desire for morality ( $M = 3.88$ ) over competence information ( $M = 2.76$ ). And, once again, the power effect was nonsignificant ( $F < 1$ ).

The predicted Power  $\times$  Domain interaction, however, was marginally significant,  $F(1, 70) = 3.14, p = .08$  (see Figure 2). To examine our a priori hypotheses, we once again conducted follow-up analyses for each behavioral domain separately. Focusing first on the compe-

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5. Analyses conducted with and without these five participants were virtually identical.

6. Analyses conducted with and without the unsociable item produced a similar pattern of results. It is also worth noting that the similarity in findings across studies in terms of the overall morality bias suggests that the three morality-related items were capturing the same thing in both studies, despite the especially low reliability when the unsociable item was included in Study 2.

tence index, we found a marginally significant power effect,  $F(1, 70) = 3.37, p = .07$ , whereby power-primed participants indicated a stronger desire for competence-related information ( $M = 2.95$ ) than did neutral participants ( $M = 2.57$ ). Hence, although all participants showed a preference for morality-related information, power-primed participants tended to show a special interest in receiving additional competence-related information. This supports our prediction that the inconsistent nature of the information presented about the target, all of which pertained to the target's competence, would be especially glaring to power-primed participants, as it barred them from forming an impression of the target along this dimension. The power effect was not significant for the morality index ( $F < 1$ ), indicating that power-primed and neutral participants sought morality information about the target to a comparable degree.

#### ANCILLARY MEASURES

*Overall Impression Ratings.* Study 2's target was deliberately portrayed as evaluatively inconsistent, as was Study 1's, but this inconsistency was limited to the competence domain. Thus, Study 2's target was arguably less inconsistent than Study 1's target, who was portrayed as evaluatively inconsistent across two behavioral domains. Not surprisingly, the grand mean of participants' ratings of their overall impression of Bob was further from the neutral point of the scale ( $M = .99$ ) than was the case in Study 1 ( $M = .39$ ). Also diverging from Study 1, the effect of power on these ratings was not significant ( $F < 1.2$ ). It is likely that this was due to the very fact that evaluative inconsistency in the target was limited to a single behavioral domain in this study. Despite the absence of a power effect, the information-seeking results for the competence domain nonetheless suggest that power-primed participants were more attuned and responsive to the evaluatively inconsistent nature of the target relative to their neutral counterparts.

*Ratings on Morality and Competence Attributes.* Two separate indices were created to examine participants' ratings of the target on the three morality-related attributes (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .47$ ) and the three competence-related attributes (*Cronbach's*  $\alpha = .50$ ). We then examined these indices in a  $2 \times 2$  (Power  $\times$  Domain), repeated-measures

ANOVA, which yielded a significant domain effect,  $F(1, 70) = 14.02, p < .001$ , indicating that participants rated Bob more negatively on the morality attributes ( $M = 2.94$ ) compared to the competence attributes ( $M = 3.32$ ). All other effects were not significant ( $F_s < 1$ ).

Thus, unlike Study 1, there was no power effect with power-primed participants rating the target more negatively overall. Again, it is quite likely that this is attributable partly to the fact that information about Study 2's target was limited to the competence domain, whereas Study 1's target was also characterized by positive and negative behaviors in the morality domain, which research suggests facilitates negativity effects in evaluation (e.g., Reeder & Brewer, 1979; Skowronski & Carlston, 1987; Ybarra, 2002). Also, precisely because competence information is less central to impression formation than morality information (e.g., Wojciszke et al., 1998), it may have been more difficult to capture power differences in participants' sensitivity to positive and negative competence-related information. Indeed, attesting to the centrality of the morality dimension, all participants appeared to have drawn inferences about the target's morality even in the absence of explicit, morality-related information in that their judgments of the target's morality were more negative than their judgments of the target's competence about which explicitly negative information had been presented.

*Task-Related Ratings.* Power-primed and neutral participants did not differ in their ratings of how engaging the impression formation task was, nor in how difficult they found it to be ( $F_s < 2$ ). In terms of target consistency ratings, overall Study 2's participants rated the target as more consistent ( $M = 2.51$ ) than did Study 1's participants ( $M = 1.58$ ), who were presented with a set of target behaviors that were in fact less consistent. Moreover, unlike Study 1, the effect of power on these consistency ratings was not significant ( $F < 2$ ). Again, this is likely due to the relatively less dominant role of competence information (inconsistent or not) in impression formation.

Taken as a whole, Study 2 conceptually replicates and extends Study 1 in several respects. First, when faced with an evaluatively inconsistent target, power-primed participants expressed a greater desire than neutral participants for additional information pertaining to the domain in which the target defied easy judgment. As in Study 1, then, under some circumstances power may elicit greater rather than dampened motivation to expend processing effort. And, impor-

tantly, the results suggest that this effect is not limited to the morality domain, extending research showing that powerful perceivers are especially sensitive to morality information (Operario & Fiske, 2001). Whether or not powerful perceivers show a heightened sensitivity to morality information depends on factors such as the nature of the array of available target information.

In addition, evidence suggesting the greater utility of morality over competence information once again emerged in that all participants expressed a greater desire for the former over the latter. It is worth underscoring, however, that while power-primed participants desired more morality than competence information, they still expressed a pronounced desire for competence information, presumably because obtaining morality information was not enough to restore the sense of control that was undermined by the target's competence-related inconsistencies.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Relative to neutral participants, power-primed participants in both studies reported greater motivation to expend processing effort, as assessed in terms of their desire for additional target information. This link between power and enhanced motivation to expend processing effort was seen in response to an impression formation situation in which evaluative inconsistencies impeded participants' ability to easily form an impression of the target. We hypothesized that being faced with the task of forming an impression of such a target would undermine any perceiver's sense of control, but that this loss of control would exert a greater impact on powerful perceivers, who enjoy higher control to begin with and are motivated to maintain this control. As a result, powerful perceivers should be especially likely to engage in efforts to regain control, such as by seeking information in the domain in which forming an impression of the target was thwarted.

In both studies, power-primed and neutral participants alike exhibited a bias in their desire for information in favor of morality over competence information, bolstering prior research showing the pronounced impact of morality information in impression formation (e.g., Wojciszke et al., 1998). However, relative to neutral participants, power-primed participants in both studies still showed a more pronounced desire for information in the most salient domain

in which the target defied easy impression formation. In Study 1, the most salient domain was morality; although the target was characterized by evaluative inconsistencies in both the morality and competence domains, it is likely that morality-related inconsistencies were more salient given morality's more central role in impression formation. In Study 2, the most salient domain was competence; the target was characterized by only competence-related inconsistencies. By demonstrating that power-primed participants expressed a greater desire for competence information, Study 2 extends Operario and Fiske (2001), who found that highly dominant individuals in a position of power were particularly sensitive to morality information. That is, competence-related inconsistencies in a target led powerful perceivers to show a special interest in competence information. Taken together, the results support our central proposition that being faced with the task of forming an impression of a target about whom rendering an easy judgment is not possible is a new boundary condition on the link between power and less systematic processing.

Our research adds to the small but growing literature documenting a link between power and more, not less, systematic processing. For example, in addition to showing that power decreases processing of stereotype-inconsistent information, Goodwin et al. (2000) found that power can also lead to more systematic processing in terms of increased attention to stereotype-consistent information (i.e., stereotyping by design). However, it is worth noting that their primary evidence for the latter took the form of longer reading times, which may be somewhat ambiguous in terms of their meaning (see also Overbeck & Park, 2001). For example, information consistent with one's expectations is generally thought to be easier to process than inconsistent information, raising questions about equating reading time for the former information with processing effort. On a different note, it seems possible that perceivers may prolong exposure to stereotype-consistent information not so much to effortfully elaborate on it, but rather to avoid the possibility of encountering inconsistent information. Despite these potential ambiguities, Goodwin et al.'s (2000) findings and the broader notion of stereotyping by design are provocative.

Overbeck and Park (2001) have similarly produced some evidence suggesting that power may increase systematic processing (al-

though see Overbeck & Park, 2001 for a lengthy discussion of differences between their research and the PAC model). As noted at the outset, these researchers had participants assigned to a high- or low-power role interact over e-mail with four other participants assigned to the opposite role, who served as targets. Low-power participants made requests and high-power participants rendered a judgment on each. Instructions guaranteed that each target made several requests or judgments that consistently implied a single personality characteristic (i.e., irresponsible, rigid, competence, or unintelligent). Using several different measures of individuation (e.g., free recall of target information, similarity ratings for each pair of targets), Overbeck and Park found that high-power participants individuated more than their low-power counterparts (Studies 1 and 2).

It is important to point out the apparent discrepancy between Overbeck and Park's findings and our conceptualization of impression formation situations in which power should lead to greater systematic processing. We have argued that substantial evaluative inconsistencies in a target should threaten perceivers' sense of control, and that this threat should be more salient and thus have a stronger impact among powerful perceivers, as they begin at higher levels of control and are motivated to maintain this control. As a result, powerful perceivers should expend greater processing effort as a means of regaining control. Yet Overbeck and Park found greater individuation among high-power participants faced with evaluatively *consistent* targets. In our view, significant differences between the task faced by our high-power participants and theirs suggest ways to reconcile the two sets of findings.

Perhaps the most obvious explanation is that Overbeck and Park's high-power participants were faced with four targets, whereas ours faced only one. The increased cognitive demands of keeping track of four targets instead of one alone could be a source of threat to participants' sense of control, a threat that may exert a greater impact on high-power participants by the same logic that predicts that the loss of control that ensues from evaluative inconsistencies in a target affects powerful perceivers more strongly. Beyond simply a difference in numbers, it is important to note that although Overbeck and Park's targets were evaluatively consistent when considered singly, there was evaluative inconsistency across targets (e.g., competent

and unintelligent target), which points to another plausible source of loss of control. In our view, the upshot is that comparing our research to theirs suggests that multiple factors and circumstances—beyond evaluative inconsistencies in a target—may elicit a threat to control that, in turn, may have a bigger impact on powerful perceivers' processing efforts.

In our research, we studied a new boundary condition on the link between power and less systematic processing—situations in which perceivers must form an impression of target who, by virtue of evaluative inconsistencies, defies easy judgment. In our view, this is a particularly important condition to consider for several reasons. Most important, relationships between powerholders and subordinates in the real world often extend over time and situations, rendering it likely that powerholders will be exposed to at least some degree of inconsistency in subordinates' behavior. Research on power and impression formation may underestimate the extent to which this occurs as participants are often given only a snapshot of a target; no information about the target's behavior across time or situations is usually provided. Although we also presented participants with just a snapshot, we would suggest that the substantial evaluative inconsistencies in our target at least more closely approximated the true variety of information about others to which people are often exposed over time. On a different level, research suggests that there is in fact considerable inconsistency in people's behavior across time and situations—that is, personality may be best conceptualized in “if-then” terms (Mischel & Shoda, 1995)—further attesting to the importance of examining impression-formation situations involving inconsistent targets.

At this point, we hasten to acknowledge that various limitations compel caution in over-*interpreting* our findings. Among them, in both studies we assessed the desire or motivation to expend processing effort, rather than actual processing effort. Second, we assumed that powerful perceivers are especially likely to be affected by the loss of control engendered by a highly inconsistent target, but we did not directly assess this. Third, we cannot be sure that power-primed participants' greater motivation to expend processing effort was not ultimately in the service of finding a way to stereotype the target, an interpretation that would fit the PAC model's notion of stereotyping by design. Next, although we replicated the finding that

power-primed participants indicated a greater desire for additional target information in the most salient (or only) domain of behavioral inconsistency, we did not include a consistent target condition in which one should find that power-priming decreases the desire for processing additional information. Also, it would be useful in future research to compare the responses of powerful to powerless perceivers when faced with the task of forming an impression of a target like the one we used in our studies. Finally, we relied on a single, priming-based manipulation of power; additional research using other manipulations, such as ones involving actual outcome control, is needed to assess the generalizability of our findings.

Despite these limitations, the results from the current two studies at least provide evidence consistent with the notion that, under certain circumstances, power may increase the likelihood of systematic routes to impression formation, joining a small but growing literature making a similar argument (e.g., Goodwin et al., 2000). They extend this literature by suggesting a new boundary condition on the oft-cited link between power and less systematic processing—namely, impression formation situations involving the absence of category-based cues and the presence of substantial evaluative inconsistencies. Moreover, the present findings integrate theorizing and research on the differential utility of particular kinds of information on the one hand (e.g., Wojciszke et al., 1998) with the literature on power and impression formation on the other. Increasingly, the weight of the evidence indicates that the question of whether power elicits more or less systematic processing in impression formation has multiple answers depending on a variety of informational, psychological, and situational factors.

**APPENDIX A**

## POSITIVE MORALITY BEHAVIORS

- returned the extra change at the grocery store
- filled in his time sheet accurately at work
- donated a lot to charity
- paid for a nice dinner for three of his friends
- gave his seat up on the commuter bus to an elderly man
- visited his friend at the hospital every other day

## NEGATIVE MORALITY BEHAVIORS

- looked at another student's exam answers
- didn't return a borrowed racquet
- didn't help his dad with yard work
- didn't visit his old friends back home
- didn't take on volunteer work last semester
- kicked his roommate's golden retriever

## POSITIVE COMPETENCE BEHAVIORS

- won the city chess championship
- read many books and papers on philosophy
- managed to construct a model of the Eiffel Tower with wood
- won the tennis match three sets to none
- became president of a debating society
- helped organize a conference that went really well

## NEGATIVE COMPETENCE BEHAVIORS

- flunked an intro sociology class
- couldn't program the VCR
- tried roller-blading for the whole summer but still didn't learn
- broke the lawn mower while using it
- didn't get elected to be the dorm representative
- was the group leader for a class project but no one listened to him

## NEUTRAL BEHAVIORS

- did laundry last night
- bought a new pair of shoes
- phoned to book a flight ticket
- cooked a lot of pasta and sauce for dinner

**APPENDIX B**

## POSITIVE COMPETENCE BEHAVIORS

won the city chess championship  
read many books and papers on philosophy  
managed to construct a model of the Eiffel Tower with wood  
won the tennis match three sets to none  
became president of a debating society  
helped organize a conference that went really well

## NEGATIVE COMPETENCE BEHAVIORS

flunked an intro sociology class  
couldn't program the VCR  
tried rollerblading for the whole summer but still didn't learn  
broke the lawn mower while using it  
didn't get elected to be the dorm representative  
was the group leader for a class project but no one listened to him

## NEUTRAL BEHAVIORS

did laundry last night  
bought a new pair of shoes  
phoned to book a flight ticket  
cooked a lot of pasta and sauce for dinner  
rearranged his living room furniture  
talked on the phone for a few minutes  
went to the drug store  
mailed the letter on his way to work  
rented a movie to watch at home  
went for a walk in the park  
listened to the radio on his way home  
ordered a burger and fries for lunch  
read the sports section of the newspaper  
ordered some merchandise over the Internet  
painted his apartment over the weekend  
wrote a check for his groceries

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