

Research Article

Illegitimacy Moderates the Effects of Power on Approach

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ABSTRACT—A wealth of research has found that power leads to behavioral approach and action. Four experiments demonstrate that this link between power and approach is broken when the power relationship is illegitimate. When power was primed to be legitimate or when power positions were assigned legitimately, the powerful demonstrated more approach than the powerless. However, when power was experienced as illegitimate, the powerless displayed as much approach as, or even more approach than, the powerful. This moderating effect of legitimacy occurred regardless of whether power and legitimacy were manipulated through experiential primes, semantic primes, or role manipulations. It held true for behavioral approach (Experiment 1) and two effects associated with it: the propensity to negotiate (Experiment 2) and risk preferences (Experiments 3 and 4). These findings demonstrate that how power is conceptualized, acquired, and wielded determines its psychological consequences and add insight into not only when but also why power leads to approach.

One image comes to mind when people think back to the failed 1989 revolt at Tiananmen Square in Beijing: the image of a single protester halting a column of tanks heading to the square. Two observations about this man are important. The first is that he was clearly powerless, standing alone on a wide boulevard facing a line of tanks. The second is that he acted.

On the basis of recent theory and research, these two observations seem to be incompatible. Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson (2003) posited that power, which emerges from control over valuable resources and the ability to administer rewards and punishments, activates the behavioral approach system (BAS), whereas powerlessness activates the behavioral inhibition system (BIS; Carver & White, 1994). Recent findings show that when individuals have more control over their own and other

people's resources, they approach more (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Smith & Bargh, in press), act more (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003), negotiate more (Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007), and behave in a more risk-seeking fashion (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Maner, Gailliot, Butz, & Peruche, 2007).

History, however, is filled with vivid examples that show the opposite relationship between power and approach. King Philip II of Habsburg was an overly cautious ruler, driven to indecision because of concerns that his decisions lacked religious legitimacy (Williams, 2001). There are also many dramatic examples of powerless people who did act (e.g., the Spartacus revolt, the U.S. Civil Rights movement). How can one combine the robust empirical finding that power leads to approach and powerlessness to inhibition with the observation that sometimes the powerful are inhibited, indecisive, and risk averse and that the powerless, at times, do act and take risks? We hypothesize that an important determinant of whether power leads to approach is the legitimacy of the power relationship. When power is acquired or wielded legitimately, power will lead to more behavioral approach than powerlessness, but when power is born of illegitimate means, this link between power and approach may be broken.

We believe that illegitimacy moderates the effects of power on approach because the very nature of the power relationship is altered under conditions of illegitimacy. Legitimate hierarchies are associated with cooperation; the powerful act and the powerless follow (Arendt, 1969; Aristotle, trans. 1996; Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008). When power is illegitimate, however, this cooperation is often replaced with force and resistance (Lenski, 1966; Mills, 1956; Plato, trans. 1998). When the powerless perceive power to be illegitimate, they may not wait for directions from the powerful, but rather may attempt to change the situation—in other words, they may approach. When the powerful perceive their power to be illegitimate, they may not act because they are reluctant to wield undeserved power or because they are anxiously protecting their position of power. Furthermore, in terms of the power-approach model (Keltner et al., 2003), although legitimate power puts a focus on gains (approach) and legitimate powerlessness puts a focus on pre-

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venting losses (inhibition), under conditions of illegitimacy this effect of power could be diminished. Because illegitimacy signals the possibility of change, the powerless may focus on potential gains (approach), whereas the powerful may focus on avoiding losses (inhibition). Thus, we predicted that power will lead to more approach than powerlessness, but only when the power relationship is considered to be legitimate.

We explored our predictions in four experiments, all of which manipulated power and legitimacy orthogonally, either by priming participants with these concepts (Experiments 1–3) or by putting participants in legitimate or illegitimate powerful or powerless roles (Experiment 4). In Experiment 1, we explored the effects of power and legitimacy on behavioral approach and inhibition (cf. Anderson & Berdahl, 2002). In Experiments 2 through 4, we replicated the interaction effect of power and legitimacy on two different measures of approach, the propensity to initiate a negotiation (cf. Magee et al., 2007) and preference for risk (cf. Anderson & Galinsky, 2006).

EXPERIMENT 1: RECALL PRIME, BEHAVIORAL APPROACH AND INHIBITION

In Experiment 1, we measured the effect of power and legitimacy on behavioral approach and inhibition (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Carver & White, 1994).

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 152 Dutch university students (46% men, 54% women;¹ mean age = 21.5 years) who completed the experiment in exchange for €6. They were assigned randomly to one of four cells of a 2 (powerless, powerful) × 2 (legitimate, illegitimate) between-participants design.

Procedure

Power and legitimacy were manipulated with an adapted version of the experiential-prime procedure used by Galinsky et al. (2003). Participants were asked to think and write about an experience in their life. The instructions for the *illegitimate high-power* condition were as follows:

Please recall a particular incident in which you had power over another individual or individuals, but in which this power difference was in fact in your opinion unfair and/or illegitimate. By power we mean a situation in which you controlled the ability of another person or persons to get something (s)he or they wanted, or were in a position to evaluate him/her/them. By unfair/illegitimate we do not necessarily mean wrong in the legal sense, just that it felt unfair or illegitimate to you. Please describe this situation of illegitimate power: What happened, How you felt, etc.

The instructions for the *legitimate high-power* condition were as follows:

Please recall a particular incident in which you had power over another individual or individuals, and in which this power difference was in fact in your opinion fair and/or legitimate. By power we mean a situation in which you controlled the ability of another person or persons to get something (s)he or they wanted, or were in a position to evaluate him/her/them. By fair/legitimate, we mean that it felt fair or legitimate to you. Please describe this situation of legitimate power: What happened, How you felt, etc.

In the *legitimate and illegitimate low-power* conditions, participants received corresponding instructions, but were asked to recall an incident in which someone had power over them.

After the recall task, participants completed measures assessing activation of the BIS and BAS (Carver & White, 1994). The original BIS/BAS scales assess dispositional sensitivities to inhibition and approach. We changed the items to measure participants' current state, by adding words such as "currently" or "now." For example, one item was, "If I could currently win something nice, then that would strongly draw my attention"; the response scale ranged from 1 (*fully disagree*) to 9 (*fully agree*). The 14 BAS-activation items and the 12 BIS-activation items (reverse-coded) were combined into a behavioral activation/inhibition scale that showed high reliability ($\alpha = .83$).²

Results and Discussion

A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) testing the effects of power and legitimacy on behavioral activation/inhibition scores showed a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 148) = 10.06$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .97$, $\eta^2 = .06$ (see Table 1). Contrasts conducted within the legitimacy conditions showed that legitimate power led to more behavioral approach than legitimate powerlessness, $t(148) = 2.94$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .97$. Illegitimate powerlessness, however, led to somewhat *more* behavioral approach than illegitimate power, $t(148) = 1.55$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .80$. Contrasts within the power conditions showed that illegitimacy decreased approach among the powerful, $t(148) = 3.20$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .98$, whereas illegitimacy tended to increase approach among the powerless, $t(148) = 1.26$, $p_{\text{rep}} = .72$. These findings demonstrate for the first time that the effects of priming power on approach are moderated by feelings of illegitimacy.

EXPERIMENT 2: RECALL PRIME, PROPENSITY TO NEGOTIATE

The second experiment explored the moderating role of felt legitimacy on the propensity to negotiate (Magee et al., 2007).

¹Information on the sex of 89 participants was lost. The percentages refer to the remaining 63 participants.

²For simplicity, BIS and BAS scores were combined. Separate analyses for each found similar effects.

TABLE 1
Mean Level of Approach and Effect Sizes by Experimental Condition

N	Mean approach				Effect size and significance of contrast comparison			
	Legitimate power		Illegitimate power		Within legitimacy: effect of power	Within illegitimacy: effect of power	Within powerful: effect of legitimacy	Within powerless: effect of legitimacy
	Powerless	Powerful	Powerless	Powerful				
Experiment 1: recall prime, DV = BAS/BIS score								
152	5.49 (0.80)	5.87 (0.76)	5.69 (0.56)	5.44 (0.72)	$r = .32$, $p = .004$, $p_{rep} = .97$	$r = -.17$, $p = .12$, $p_{rep} = .80$	$r = .35$, $p = .002$, $p_{rep} = .98$	$r = -.14$, $p = .21$, $p_{rep} = .72$
Experiment 2: recall prime, DV = likelihood of negotiating a car's price								
101	5.34 (1.85)	6.10 (1.16)	5.82 (1.24)	5.21 (1.81)	$r = .24$, $p = .05$, $p_{rep} = .88$	$r = -.20$, $p = .24$, $p_{rep} = .69$	$r = .27$, $p = .05$, $p_{rep} = .88$	$r = -.15$, $p = .30$, $p_{rep} = .64$
Experiment 3: semantic prime, DV = risk preference								
92	23.5%	55.6%	46.4%	37.9%	$r = .34$, $p = .05$, $p_{rep} = .88$	$r = -.11$, $p = .41$, $p_{rep} = .56$	$r = .17$, $p = .24$, $p_{rep} = .69$	$r = -.23$, $p = .12$, $p_{rep} = .80$
Experiment 4: role manipulation, DV = risk preference								
104	8.0%	25.9%	26.9%	19.2%	$r = .24$, $p = .09$, $p_{rep} = .83$	$r = -.09$, $p = .51$, $p_{rep} = .49$	$r = .08$, $p = .56$, $p_{rep} = .46$	$r = -.25$, $p = .08$, $p_{rep} = .84$

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses. Percentages in Experiments 3 and 4 refer to the number of people selecting the risky choice. BAS/BIS = behavioral approach system/behavioral inhibition system; DV = dependent variable.

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 101 American university students (38 men and 63 women; mean age = 19.5 years) who completed the experiment in exchange for \$10. They were assigned randomly to one of four cells of a 2 (powerless, powerful) × 2 (legitimate, illegitimate) between-participants design.

Procedure

Power and legitimacy were manipulated the same way as in Experiment 1. After completing the recall task, participants were presented with a simple purchase dilemma, used by Magee et al. (2007): “You are buying a new car. How likely would you be to negotiate the price?” Propensity to negotiate was measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all likely*) to 7 (*very likely*). Next, participants completed checks of the manipulations of power ($\alpha = .92$, 10 items) and legitimacy ($\alpha = .96$, 6 items).

Results and Discussion

The manipulation checks showed that the manipulations of power and legitimacy had the intended effects ($p_{rep}s = .99$). An ANOVA on the effects of power and legitimacy on the propensity to negotiate showed a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 97) =$

4.41, $p_{rep} = .89$, $\eta^2 = .04$ (see Table 1). Contrasts conducted within the legitimacy conditions found that legitimate power led to a higher propensity to negotiate than legitimate powerlessness, $t(97) = 1.94$, $p_{rep} = .88$. Illegitimate power, however, led to a somewhat lower propensity to negotiate than illegitimate powerlessness, $t(97) = 1.17$, $p_{rep} = .69$. Contrasts within the power conditions found that illegitimacy decreased the propensity to negotiate among the powerful, $t(97) = 1.94$, $p_{rep} = .88$, whereas illegitimacy tended to increase the propensity to negotiate among the powerless, $t(97) = 1.04$, $p_{rep} = .64$. These results demonstrate that feelings of illegitimacy not only moderate the effect of power on behavioral approach, but also moderate the downstream effect of power on the propensity to negotiate.

EXPERIMENT 3: SEMANTIC PRIME, PREFERENCE FOR RISK

In the third study, we wanted to demonstrate that semantically priming illegitimacy versus legitimacy moderates another effect of power on approach: increased preferences for risk (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006). We used an unobtrusive priming procedure that exposes participants to words related to these concepts (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001).

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 92 American university students (49 men and 43 women; mean age = 19.8 years) who completed the experiment in exchange for \$10. They were assigned randomly to one of eight cells of a 2 (powerless, powerful) \times 2 (legitimate, illegitimate) \times 2 (gain frame, loss frame) between-participants design.

Procedure

Power and legitimacy were manipulated using two word-search puzzles (Chen et al., 2001). In each puzzle, participants were instructed to find and encircle eight words, laid out vertically or horizontally. Half of these words were fillers. A quarter were words related to either power (*authority, power, control, influence*) or powerlessness (*subordinate, submit, dependent, assistant*), and another quarter were words related to either legitimacy (*fair, legitimate, justified, good*) or illegitimacy (*unfair, illegitimate, unjust, bad*), depending on condition.

Next, participants were presented with the same car-manufacturer scenario used by Anderson and Galinsky (2006): “You are president of a car manufacturer that has been hit with economic difficulties. It appears as if three plants need to be closed and 6,000 employees laid off. You have been exploring alternative ways to avoid this crisis.” Participants were presented with two plans. Because framing this decision in terms of gains or losses affects risk preferences (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981), the plans were framed as losses for half of the participants and as gains for the other half (see Anderson & Galinsky, 2006). In the *gain frame*, participants were told,

Plan A will save one of the three plants and 2,000 jobs. Plan B has a 1/3 probability of saving all three plants and all 6,000 jobs, but has a 2/3 probability of saving no plants and no jobs.

In the *loss frame*, participants were told,

Plan A will result in the loss of two of the three plants and 4,000 jobs. Plan B has a 1/3 probability of losing no plants and no jobs, but has a 2/3 probability of resulting in the loss of all three plants and 6,000 jobs.

Participants then indicated which plan they preferred.

Results

A hierarchical log-linear analysis of the effects of power, legitimacy, and frame on the choice between the risky and certain plans showed the predicted two-way interaction between power and legitimacy, $\chi^2(1, N = 92) = 4.82, p_{\text{rep}} = .91$ (see Table 1); this effect was not moderated by frame, $\chi^2(1, N = 92) = 1.09, p_{\text{rep}} = .64$.³ Priming legitimate power led participants to choose

³The loss-frame conditions led to more risk taking than the gain-frame conditions (56.3% vs. 25.0%, $p_{\text{rep}} = .98$).

the risky plan more often than did priming legitimate powerlessness, $\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 3.99, p_{\text{rep}} = .88$. This difference between priming power and priming powerlessness disappeared, however, in the illegitimate conditions; illegitimate powerlessness led to a nonsignificantly greater risk preference than illegitimate power, $\chi^2(1, N = 57) = 0.66, p_{\text{rep}} = .56$. Contrasts within the power conditions showed that priming illegitimacy tended to decrease risk preferences among the powerful, $\chi^2(1, N = 47) = 1.40, p_{\text{rep}} = .69$, but to increase risk preferences among the powerless, $\chi^2(1, N = 45) = 2.36, p_{\text{rep}} = .80$.

EXPERIMENT 4: ROLE MANIPULATION, PREFERENCE FOR RISK

The first three experiments consistently showed that the effects of power on approach are moderated by feelings of illegitimacy. These studies, however, relied on priming the experiences and concepts of power and legitimacy. Although priming has notable advantages as a manipulation (Galinsky et al., 2003) and typically has the same effects as role manipulations (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Chen et al., 2001), a lingering concern was that the results obtained might differ from those that would be obtained if participants were in a real position of legitimate or illegitimate power, with actual control over other people's resources. Therefore, in the final experiment, we manipulated power by telling participants either that they had power over someone else or that someone else had power over them; we manipulated legitimacy by either basing these assignments on merit or explicitly violating merit. We measured approach with the risk-taking scenario from Experiment 3.

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 104 Dutch female⁴ university students (mean age = 20.9 years) who took part in the experiment in exchange for €7.50. They completed the experiment in separate cubicles and were assigned randomly to one of eight cells of a 2 (powerless, powerful) \times 2 (legitimate, illegitimate) \times 2 (gain frame, loss frame) between-participants design.

Procedure

Power and legitimacy were manipulated by telling participants that together with another participant, they would take part in a business simulation, in which they would be either a manager or an employee. Our procedure was consistent with that of previous studies (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Galinsky et al., 2003). The experimenter explained that the manager would have complete control over the work process and would direct and evaluate the employee. Participants were told they would complete a leadership aptitude test that would determine which of the two

⁴This experiment was conducted together with an unrelated study for which only female participants were needed.

TABLE 2
Meta-Analytic Results: Effect Sizes and Significance of Contrast Comparisons

Statistic	Within legitimacy: effect of power	Within illegitimacy: effect of power	Within powerful: effect of legitimacy	Within powerless: effect of legitimacy
<i>M</i>	.27	-.15	.23	-.19
<i>Z</i>	3.95	-2.16	3.42	-2.74
<i>p</i>	< .001	.03	< .001	.006
<i>p</i> _{rep}	.99	.91	.99	.96

Note. These statistics weight each experiment's effect by the sample size.

participants would be the manager. Next, participants received feedback that was ostensibly based on the test, but in reality was randomly assigned. Participants in the *legitimate powerful* condition read that they had done well and would therefore be assigned the position of manager; those in the *legitimate powerless* condition read that they had done poorly and would therefore be assigned the position of employee. In contrast, participants in the *illegitimate powerful* condition read that they had done poorly and would normally be assigned to be the employee but instead would be assigned to be the manager because the researchers at the moment preferred to have a male in the other role; participants in the *illegitimate powerless* condition read that they had done well and would normally be assigned to be the manager but instead would be assigned to be the employee for the same reason.

Next, participants responded to the same scenario as in Experiment 3. Finally, they completed checks of the manipulations of power ($\alpha = .69$, six items) and legitimacy ($\alpha = .80$, six items).

Results

As in Experiment 2, the manipulation checks showed that the manipulations of power and legitimacy had the intended effects ($p_{\text{rep}} = .99$). A hierarchical log-linear analysis of the effects of power, legitimacy, and frame on the choice between the risky and certain plans showed the predicted two-way interaction between power and legitimacy, $\chi^2(1, N = 104) = 3.87, p_{\text{rep}} = .88$ (see Table 1); this effect was not moderated by frame, $\chi^2(1, N = 104) = 0.21, p_{\text{rep}} = .39$.⁵ Although legitimate power led more participants to favor the risky option than legitimate powerlessness did, $\chi^2(1, N = 52) = 2.91, p_{\text{rep}} = .83$, this difference between power and powerlessness disappeared in the illegitimacy conditions; illegitimate power led somewhat fewer participants to favor the risky option than illegitimate powerlessness did, although this trend was nonsignificant, $\chi^2(1, N = 52) = 0.43, p_{\text{rep}} = .49$. Contrasts within the power conditions showed that illegitimacy nonsignificantly decreased risk preferences among the powerful, $\chi^2(1, N = 53) = 0.34, p_{\text{rep}} = .46$, but marginally increased risk preferences among the powerless, $\chi^2(1, N = 51) =$

3.14, $p_{\text{rep}} = .84$. These results replicate the pattern found in Experiment 3, but using role-based manipulations of power and legitimacy.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across four studies, using both experiential and semantic primes, as well as a role manipulation, we found that the link between power and approach is not invariant. The effects of power on behavioral approach, the propensity to negotiate, and preference for risk were all moderated by legitimacy. We repeatedly found that legitimate power led to more approach than legitimate powerlessness, a result that is consistent with the power-approach model of Keltner et al. (2003) and associated findings (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Galinsky et al., 2003). But when power was conceived or expressed under the shadow of illegitimacy, the powerful no longer showed more approach than the powerless. Given that the same effects occurred regardless of whether power and legitimacy were primed or directly manipulated, we can conclude that the relationship between power and approach is fundamentally a psychological one.

To establish the overall size of the effects of legitimacy and power on approach, we performed a meta-analysis (see Table 2). The results showed a reliable positive effect of power on approach under conditions of legitimacy and a reliable, albeit noticeably weaker, negative effect of power on approach under conditions of illegitimacy. The meta-analysis also showed that illegitimacy significantly decreased approach among the powerful, but significantly increased approach among the powerless.

The current studies make two important contributions. First, they help in clarifying *when* power leads to behavioral approach. We have shown that the effect of power on approach is context dependent, partially determined by the legitimacy of power. Second, this research adds insight into *why* power leads to behavioral approach. In the power-approach model of Keltner et al. (2003), and in subsequent empirical and theoretical extensions (Galinsky et al., 2003; Magee et al., 2007), power was thought to lead to approach and disinhibition because the powerful have access to rewards and are less dependent on other people than the powerless are, whereas the powerless lack resources and are

⁵The loss-frame conditions led to more risk taking than the gain-frame conditions (25.9% vs. 14%, $p_{\text{rep}} = .79$).

more subject to social threats. The findings of the current studies qualify that reasoning. We manipulated legitimacy without referring to differences in resource control. In addition, illegitimate powerlessness is likely associated with even more social threats than legitimate powerlessness. Nonetheless, illegitimate power did not lead to more approach than illegitimate powerlessness. The consequences of power seem to be determined by how power is conceived and conceptualized, and how it is acquired and wielded, not just by the amount of resources possessed.

Why Legitimacy Moderates the Power-Approach Relationship

We think there are a number of reasons why legitimacy moderates the effects of power on approach. First, the very nature of power relationships is altered under conditions of illegitimacy. Legitimate hierarchies are associated with cooperation, and illegitimate ones are associated with domination (Lenski, 1966; Lammers et al., 2008). As a result, the powerful lead and the powerless follow under conditions of legitimacy. Illegitimate powerlessness, however, is associated less with following and more with resistance; in contrast, the illegitimately powerful may be reluctant to wield their power and lead.

Second, Keltner et al. (2003) suggested that the stability of the power relationship might moderate the effect of power on approach. In fact, stability and legitimacy are intimately connected because, as Tajfel and Turner (1979) pointed out, perceived illegitimacy always implies some degree of instability. When hierarchical relationships are unstable, future behavior may produce a gain for the powerless, whereas the powerful come face to face with the possibility of losing part of their privilege.

Third, one of the core components of the power-approach theory is that greater power is associated with increased approach emotions, including both positive affect and anger (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Keltner et al., 2003; Tiedens, 2001). However, if that power is acquired or exercised illegitimately, the emotional landscape should be altered, such that the powerless may feel angry and contemptuous and the powerful may feel guilty and fearful. In fact, feelings of anger (Lerner & Keltner, 2001), power (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006), and feelings of disgust (Tiedens & Linton, 2001), when compared with feelings of fear and lack of power, have all been shown to have the same effects on risk preferences, heuristic processing, and social perception. In addition, because expressions of anger lead to status conferral (Tiedens, 2001), feelings of illegitimacy and resulting anger among the powerless may increase their perception of their own power (Martorana, 2005; Martorana, Galinsky, & Rao, 2005), leading them to focus on those resources they do control. Future research should explore the extent to which each of these explanations accounts for the moderation of the effects of power by illegitimacy.

Legitimacy: From Whose Perspective and From What Source?

One important question is: Does it matter from whose perspective the power is or is not legitimate? The meta-analysis suggests that illegitimacy influences approach tendencies equally for the powerful and the powerless, making both the powerful more reluctant to approach and the powerless more willing to act. In the current studies, we explored the effect of power and legitimacy on general approach tendencies that were unrelated to the manipulations of power and legitimacy. It may be, however, that illegitimacy has stronger effects on the powerless than the powerful, or vice versa, when action and risk taking are relevant to the power structure, because then there is a chance that the behavior could alter the power hierarchy itself (Martorana, 2005; Martorana et al., 2005).

The current research did not examine which variables predict when the power relationship is seen as legitimate or when a change in perceptions of legitimacy occurs. Future research should adopt a dynamic approach and study what happens when a hierarchy shifts from being perceived as legitimate to being viewed as illegitimate. There may be a time course for how the powerless express illegitimacy-induced approach. Feelings of illegitimacy may initially provoke action against the powerful that is relatively covert (e.g., spitting in food) or that capitalizes on the resources the powerless do control (e.g., sabotage), but eventually could lead to overt action against the power structure (e.g., strike) that may be designed to reverse the power relationship (Martorana, 2005; Martorana et al., 2005).

A related topic worth exploring is what happens when the powerful and powerless have divergent views on the legitimacy of the power difference. In situations in which the powerful feel their power is legitimate, but the powerless disagree, both may display approach tendencies, with the powerless rising up only to be met by a forceful reaction from the powerful. Perceptions of legitimacy by the powerful may be a critical determinant of when rebellions successfully alter the power structure and when they are effectively quelled by the powerful. In fact, under conditions of what Russell (1938) called “naked power,” situations in which the powerful have complete control over the powerless (e.g., when a victorious army has power over the vanquished), perceptions of legitimacy by the powerless could become essentially irrelevant.

Another distinction is whether perceptions of illegitimacy concern how power is acquired or how it is wielded, that is, whether the position of power is undeserved or misused corruptly (Wrong, 1979). In our first two experiments, participants were free to focus on either source of legitimacy, but our final experiment manipulated the legitimacy of how power was acquired. Future research should explore whether the legitimacy of the source and the legitimacy of the actions of the powerful are equally important in affecting the behavior of the powerful and the powerless.

Other Moderators of the Power-Approach Relationship

Our findings are part of an emerging literature that has identified a number of variables that moderate the link between power and approach. One critical moderator is whether the power holder's primary concern is with his or her own well-being or with the target's well-being. A greater sense of responsibility makes the powerful less self-interested and more generous (Chen et al., 2001), less risk seeking (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006), and more thoughtful in their impressions of subordinates (Overbeck & Park, 2001). For example, although parents clearly have great power over their children, they usually show restraint and risk aversion in serving and protecting their children's interests.

Culture also determines whether power leads to approach. Although Western, independent cultural orientations associate power with approach, East Asian, interdependent cultural orientations associate power with restraint (Zhong, Galinsky, Magee, & Maddux, 2008; Zhong, Magee, Maddux, & Galinsky, 2006). The current findings add further support to the accumulating evidence that the power-approach link is not invariant, but rather depends on how power is conceptualized, achieved, and expressed.

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