



## Powerful perceivers, powerless objects: Flexibility of powerholders' social attention <sup>☆</sup>

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### Abstract

We argue that the effect of power on social attention is a function of flexible, instrumental information processing that allows the high power perceiver to attain situation specific goals using whatever means are available, including attention. Study 1 assigned powerful participants to more “people-centered” or more “product-centered” goals, and found that people-centered powerholders better individuated low-power targets. Study 2 examined responses by both high- and low-power organization members, and found powerful judges more responsive to organizational goals in setting priorities and using information about the organization than powerless judges. Together, these results suggest that powerholders use social attention, like other resources, in order to advance their ability to fulfill organizational goals.

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In the American version of the sitcom *The Office*, the boss arranges a recognition party for his staff, to bolster morale. Through an endless-seeming evening, he doles out awards based on stereotypes (the Indian-American employee gets an otherwise-unexplained “Curry Award”) and limited, outdated information about employees (he debates giving his receptionist a “Longest Engagement” award for the third or fourth consecutive year). The employees groan and suffer, but clearly none are surprised. Despite his efforts to deliver

individual recognition, the boss is unaware of who his employees are as individuals. He has little insight into their skills and contributions, let alone their concerns or their personalities. Like a Dilbert cartoon, the episode derives humor from a sadly common experience: that the boss is oblivious to those around him.

How do the powerful pay attention to others? According to the cynical view depicted in *The Office*, not well. On the other hand, perhaps in real organizations powerholders do pay attention to others well, knowing that such attention can yield benefits that might help to maintain or even increase their power.

The basic research on this topic has leaned strongly toward the former perspective: that power leads people to stereotype others and to pay careless social attention characterized by cognitive laziness and shortcuts (DeDreu & Van Kleef, 2004; Ebenbach & Keltner, 1998; Fiske, 1993; Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Keltner & Robinson, 1997; Rodriguez-Bailon, Moya, & Yzerbyt, 2000).

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This research, whose basic arguments and implications are outlined in Table 1, is most often conducted by social psychologists, and published in psychology journals. Its strongest proponents are Fiske and colleagues (Fiske, 1993; Fiske & Dépret, 1996; Goodwin et al., 2000) and Keltner et al. (2003), who argue that power should be associated with careless processing for a number of reasons.

Fiske (1993) points out that there is usually a one-to-many ratio of powerholders to subordinates, and thus the powerholders' cognitive load is much higher, and precludes careful attention. Powerholders' outcomes are not dependent on the powerless, and so there is little external inducement to attend. Finally, people with dominant personalities are simultaneously more likely to pay careless attention to others, and drawn to positions of structural power. As an example, Fiske cites the Jacksonville Shipyards case, in which a traditionally male workplace was integrated by gender. The entering women were confronted by a hostile work environment in which they were stereotyped and otherwise ignored, Fiske argues, because the men did not feel they needed anything from the women's presence. Managers, who could potentially have remedied the situation, were attentionally overloaded and found it easy to dismiss individual women's complaints as unimportant annoyances. Because of these factors, the hostile environment persisted at least until court decisions mandated otherwise.

Keltner et al. (2003) echo this argument, and extend it by saying that power instills a tendency to approach behavioral rewards. Powerholders will attend to objects that promise the potential for reward, and because powerless people in the environment offer little reward, they get little attention. Further, powerful people tend to have more positive affect—a psychological state associated with more careless cognition—and so may be even more likely to follow the motivational pattern.

A few psychologists have worked to establish boundary conditions for these findings (Overbeck & Park, 2001; Vescio, Snyder, & Butz, 2003), identifying situational variables that seem to moderate whether powerful people's attention is careful. In general, this work has found that power is associated with the active use of attention, and that powerholders can be careful attenders or more stereotype-bound attenders, depending on their expectations and responsibilities. For example, Overbeck and Park (2001) argued that powerholders in organizations feel a greater sense of responsibility for good performance. To the extent that the targets of responsibility are altered, attention will follow.

In the current work, we hope to challenge what seems to be a strongly prevailing notion from the social psychological literature, by integrating work from that literature with organizational behavior theories and observations. Theorists of management and organiza-

tional behavior have crafted models of power use in organizations (generally under the heading of *leadership*) that would seem to require effective use of attention (e.g., Wilemon & Cicero, 1970; Yukl, 1989). Organizational powerholders must solve problems and make decisions regarding people (Hollander, 1978); form coalitions, in part by responding to other people's concerns and developing relationships with them (Kanter, 1983; Kaplan, 1986); display not only task-oriented behavior, but also relationship-oriented behavior, according to situational demands (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Fleishman, 1953; Halpin & Winer, 1957; Hill, 1969; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, & Snoelk, 1964); respond to human as well as task concerns (Blake & Mouton, 1982; Conger & Kanungo, 1987); and interpret performance information about subordinates (Green & Mitchell, 1979). All of these processes, it would seem, should demand the competent use of attention—in particular, flexible attention directed toward objects that help fulfill the organization's goals.

Although the OB arguments are compelling, empirical testing has generally been restricted to evaluation of general leadership models and broad managerial activities. As such, specific implications of these theories for social attention have not been tested to the same extent as the powerholder-as-poor-attender perspective. The current paper seeks to integrate across the two literatures by testing a more inclusive, integrative view of power and social attention.

Keltner et al. (2003) have suggested that power is associated with a set of approach-related affects and behaviors; in short, power reflects an "action orientation" in which the powerful are thought to pursue opportunities and benefits in their immediate environments. On the other hand, low power is associated with general affective and behavioral inhibition; the powerless are thought to be vigilant for threats in the environment, and to strive to avoid these threats. This approach-inhibition model posits that powerholders will tend to favor action over inaction in virtually all cases. For example, Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee (2003) demonstrated convincingly that powerholders will act to serve their own comfort, to advance their own concerns, and to benefit the group at large. In short, powerholders in their study pursued whatever behavioral option was the most *action-oriented*, shunning the passive.

As stated, Keltner et al. (2003) argue that power is associated with heuristic processing of information about other people. In particular, they argue that power is associated with inattention to low-power people and their concerns. Viewed more broadly, however, Keltner et al. can be seen as arguing for a more inclusive story about how power might affect social attention. The theory of action orientation suggests that powerholders, more than others, are predisposed to act and to approach. Likewise, Deschamps (1982) demonstrated that people with power assume and are granted the role

Table 1  
Overview of social psychological views of power and social attention

| Source   | Power & social cognition   | Postulated mechanisms   | Utility of social attention   | Implications for OB   |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| Goodwin et al. (2000) (also Fiske, 1993; Fiske and Dépret, 1996) | Power → Stereotyping (careless social attention)   | 1. Outcome independence<br>2. Cognitive load<br>3. Dominant personality                       | Little:<br>1. Selecting unknown 3rd-party applicants for a job: no goal provided<br>2. Possible desire to decide correctly who should get a prize | Powerful members of newly-integrated workplaces are likely to stereotype new entrants; Power fosters sexism, racism in the workplace; Power is <i>not</i> associated with careful attention to subordinates or their concerns |
| Keltner and Robinson (1997)                                      | Power → Lack of awareness of others' perspectives, exaggerating intergroup differences         | Outcome independence fosters lack of motivation to attend accurately                          | Little: Potential to counter opponents' arguments more effectively  | Powerful partisans in ideological conflicts tend to see more conflict than is actually present, and fail to recognize areas of common ground  |
| Ebenbach and Keltner (1998)                                      | Power → Inability to recognize others' attitudes   | 1. Lack of motivation to attend accurately<br>2. More positive affect fosters poor attention  | Little: Potential to gain advantage in debate over resources  | Powerful partisans in conflict over desired resources do not recognize the views of the other side  |
| Rodriguez-Bailon et al. (2000)                                   | Power → More attention to negative stereotypes   | 1. Motivation to explain one's own higher position<br>2. Motivation to justify one's behavior | Moderate: When hierarchy is illegitimate, HPs are motivated to preserve their position by attending to negative stereotypes about LPs             | Powerful members of organizations will denigrate others (through direction of attention) in order to maintain their own power   |
| Copeland (1994)  | Power → Expectancy confirmation biases   | Power provides the means to attain goals; Here, the goal is to form a predictable impression  | Moderate to high: Careful attention could lead to choosing a partner more likely to help the HP win a prize                                       | Supervisors and managers may be unlikely to go beyond their own expectations in gathering information about subordinates  |
| De Dreu and Van Kleef (2004)                                     | Power → Expectancy confirmation, leading questions   | Outcome independence fosters lack of motivation to attend accurately                          | Moderate to high: Careful attention could enable the HP negotiator to secure a better outcome   | Powerful negotiators are unlikely to go beyond their own expectations and, as a consequence, may deal with incomplete information   |
| Vescio et al. (2003)   | Power → goal- and context-dependent attention to both stereotype and individuating information | Attention is guided by expectations and the goal of forming impressions to maximize outcomes  | Moderate to high: Careful attention could lead to choosing a partner more likely to perform well  | Supervisors and managers may be unlikely to go beyond their expectations in gathering information and are thus vulnerable to stereotyping others; however, they can also pay good attention when the structure encourages it  |
| Overbeck and Park (2001)   | Power → More careful, individuating attention to others  | Power fosters desire to excel in given tasks, sense of responsibility for performing          | Moderate to high: Careful attention was only performance opportunity available to HPs   | Powerful members of organizations are likely to use attention as a resource to accomplish tasks well  |

of “subjects” who act upon the world, as opposed to low-power others, who play the role of object in the social world.

Just as the powerful tend to orient their *actions* toward objects that promise fulfillment of desired goals, they should similarly orient their *attention* to social and perceptual stimuli that appear instrumental. Rather than being careless or superficial in their processing of social information, powerholders should attend carefully to any stimulus—even a subordinate—that *facilitates their own goal attainment*. This argument concords with the OB literature’s predictions that powerholders (in the form of organizational leaders) should use attention according to their management goals and chronic styles.

To return to the opening question of this paper—how do the powerful pay attention to others?—we suggest that the answer is, “flexibly.” Sometimes that attention will be careful and systematic, provided that the other people in question are of some use in attaining the powerholder’s goals. If people are irrelevant to these goals, then the powerholder is likely to direct his or her attention elsewhere, to other objects that are more immediately instrumental. The studies that have shown heuristic processing by the powerful have tended to use paradigms in which the targets are of little practical use to the powerful perceivers. Those that have shown more systematic processing have used designs in which careful social attention was important for discerning how well a target might perform on a valued task, or for the powerholder’s ability to complete his or her own task. Keltner et al. acknowledge that power is likely to yield general attention focused on attainment of one’s personal goals. We simply extend this perspective to social attention—attention to others and their concerns—and to goals beyond the personal.

In this work, we follow Thibaut and Kelley (1959) in using the term “power” to refer to the potential or ability to control others’ outcomes or even behaviors; as such, power is a property of relationships between people, rather than a property of an individual. The powerholder can make decisions about the other’s resources, opportunities, and rewards, and can evaluate the other’s performance.

Note that in an organization, any member’s formal power is constrained by the organization itself. The organization provides and legitimates the individual’s power because it wants him or her to act on its behalf and to achieve its goals. The legitimacy provided by the organization may be the only base of power, or may be the foundation for additional bases of power (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965). In any case, the legitimacy conferred by the organization is a *necessary* component of the person’s power. Because of this, individuals holding formal power in organizations should feel heightened responsibility to produce desired results. In the following studies, then, we manipulate not *personal* goals

of powerful participants, but rather the goals espoused by the organizations in which they interact. We argue that powerholders will allocate their attention in an instrumental manner to satisfy the organization’s goals.

For example, consider what happens when an office member is promoted to a management position. Whereas previously she may have ridiculed management initiatives and rolled her eyes at cost-cutting efforts, in solidarity with her co-workers, now as a manager she finds herself charged with creating and enforcing those initiatives and cutting costs. It is likely that she will come to accept and even endorse what she now needs to promote. This could be because her incentives are aligned with these behaviors, because of conformity pressures from fellow managers, or because she fears for her own job if she fails to meet expectations. However, we suggest that the more important cause is that she genuinely comes to internalize the organization’s goals, and therefore uses her available resources—including attention and ability to act—in service of those goals. By doing so, she ensures that she will remain in power, and she enjoys continued legitimacy as an organizational powerholder. In our work, we will isolate the effects of power and goals from effects of incentives, conformity pressures, or expectations.

To integrate the social psych and OB literatures, we set out to accomplish the following. The dominant argument in the psychological literature is that power leads to stereotyping or other forms of careless perception, leading to failure to individuate targets (i.e., to see them as distinct individuals with unique characteristics and not just the conferred characteristics of their social groups). Thus, we set out in Study 1 to use measures and a design that closely echo previous work on power and social attention, and to establish a very simple effect: that at equivalent levels of power, we can find variance in the degree to which perceivers individuate targets as a function of differences in the perceivers goals. We look only at perceivers with *high* power, because it is this group that has been the focus of most of the theorizing regarding allocation of attention as a function of power. Like past literature, Study 1 examined attention to only one attentional object, and we looked for goal differences in attention to that object.

In Study 2, we explore our central assertion: that power should lead to flexible use of attention, whereby powerholders allocate their attentional resources toward objects that will help further the organizational goals that are the *raison d’etre* for the powerholders’ power. We predicted that, when examining the responses of both high- and low-power participants, we would find this kind of goal-sensitive flexibility *only* among the powerful—a finding that would resonate with the attention-relevant aspects of leadership theories. Further, Study 2 provides more than one attentional object. We expected that powerful perceivers would make more

flexible shifts between those objects, according to organizational goals.

In Study 1 we assigned different goals—or, more specifically, an equivalent set of goals with different emphasis—to powerholders in two conditions. These conditions reflect two distinct goal contexts: people-centered and product-centered. Participants in both environments conducted the same tasks, and were assigned the same two goals, but the emphasis on these goals differed such that people-centered powerholders were told that issues of employee engagement were paramount, and product-centered powerholders were told to emphasize task productivity.

Also, in Study 1, we stayed close to the measures and methods used in recent work (particularly Overbeck & Park, 2001) by focusing on individuation processes. We predicted that the people-centered supervisors would individuate their workers well, and better than product-centered supervisors.

## Study 1

### *Method*

#### *Overview*

Participants role-played supervisors in “a simulated publishing company whose workers telecommute.” All participants were assigned to the high-power supervisor role, and were told that they would interact with five workers (actually pre-scripted) who were completing a proofreading task. Instructions emphasized different goals for participants in two conditions: one, a people-centered context, stressed making workers feel engaged and included. The other, a product-centered context, emphasized productivity and efficiency. Note that even though we only collected data from participants in a high-power role, these participants believed that they were interacting in a reciprocal hierarchy with low-power counterparts. Participants spent approximately an hour communicating, then answered questions about the scripted targets.

#### *Participants*

Ninety-five undergraduates at the University of Colorado at Boulder participated in the study, in partial fulfillment of course requirements. Of these, three expressed suspicion about the presence of the workers, five could not complete the study within the allotted time, and one participant’s data were inadvertently deleted. After omitting these, 86 participants’ responses were analyzed. The group included 49 women and 37 men.

#### *Stimulus materials*

The materials for the study were presented using a HyperCard program on Macintosh computers. Each

participant/supervisor received 20 “e-mails”—four from each of five scripted worker targets. Each e-mail took the form of a report from a worker to the supervisor on one of four proofreading tasks. The supervisor received a form on which the worker ostensibly provided numbers of errors found, reactions to the particular proofreading task, and any additional comments.

All written comments included two pieces of information for which memory was later tested. Every participant dealt with the same 20 messages, presented in the same order, and including the same scripted information. For example, in the first message they received (shown in Fig. 1), supervisors learned that Joe (worker #1) found it easy to miss repeated-word errors and had been to the town of Cluny, France.<sup>1</sup> This information was identical across conditions.

Each target could be individuated through both the information presented and the language and content of the e-mails, which were manipulated to give each target a “personality.” The five targets displayed the following personalities, respectively: “good-natured/friendly,” “unintelligent/irresponsible,” “negative/argumentative,” “competitive/aggressive,” and “smart/efficient.” Joe, for example, consistently used friendly language, greeted the participant affably, and talked about his friends. The personality traits were selected on the basis of their clarity and distinctiveness from one another (see Norman, 1963), and because they offered the opportunity to script clear behavioral manifestations into the e-mail exchanges. They also reflect most of the dimensions used in our prior work (Overbeck & Park, 2001).

In addition, the proofreading performance of the worker targets was manipulated. Although the group of targets improved somewhat, on average, from the beginning of the work session to the end, some targets consistently performed better than others. In particular, the “smart” target performed very well and the “unintelligent” target very poorly; the others performed between these two extremes. Although the participant/supervisors were told to strive for a final average of 95% accuracy, the workers ultimately attained only about 85% accuracy, in order to maintain the participants’ motivation to affect worker behavior through the final task.

Except for condition-specific instructions, all materials presented on the computer were exactly the same for participants in both conditions.

<sup>1</sup> The scripted information, as shown here, included items both relevant and irrelevant to the interaction at hand. In past work (Overbeck & Park, 2001), powerholders’ memory for individuating information was particularly strong with respect to task-relevant information. Here, we did not observe such a difference, and item relevance will not be discussed further. Participants were notified that their counterparts had been told to share personal information, and despite substantial probes for suspicion we did not find that they found this information to lack credibility.

Fill out the form to send feedback to this worker. You must complete ALL sections. Look at the charts you were given to find the "error index" and "time index," and remember that the BEST index is a score of 1. If you decide to change the worker's pay, you MUST tell them so in the feedback you give. Also, use the feedback space to exercise your management and give details on what the worker should do.

From: **JOE** Task # 1  
Time used: 137 seconds

**Reaction and comment:**  
This didn't seem too bad. I'm not sure if I caught all the repeated words, they are really easy to miss for some reason. I did check it over to look for more of them. I was surprised to see the topic of this paragraph. I have been to this town Cluny in France, a few years ago during high school. It was a really small town but they had a public pool and some cafes where I met a lot of other people to hang out with.

To: \_\_\_\_\_  
Task #: \_\_\_\_\_  
Error index: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time index: \_\_\_\_\_  
Did this worker seem enthusiastic & motivated to do what's best for this publishing company?  yes  no  
This worker will earn 75 cents for this task. To change the pay, click here:   
Feedback/Recommendations: \_\_\_\_\_

Hit this button ONLY when your entire response is completed and you are ready to send your feedback to the worker.

**SEND**

Fig. 1. Sample e-mail screen for *people-centered* participants in Study 1. Note the highlighted position diagram in the upper left, the tone and scripted content of the e-mail, and elements of the feedback form that support manipulation.

### Procedure

Participants were seated at computers in separate rooms and told that they were taking part in a study of workgroup effectiveness in telecommuting contexts. Written instructions said that five of the current participants would be assigned to a "worker" role and would be proofreading several text passages, and that one would have the "supervisor" role, to oversee the five proofreading workers. In fact, all were assigned to be supervisors. They were told that they would interact over e-mail; in fact, all the e-mails were pre-scripted. Participants received a set of numeric goals (numbers of errors and time for proofreading each passage) that each worker was supposed to achieve.

After reading instructions, participants were assigned to their role. Assignment to goal condition was random, and was accomplished through the instructions given to participants. In the product-centered condition, participants read,

Your task is to get the workers performing at the goal level by the end of the work session. In order for telecommuting to be a viable option, it is critical that people perform as productively and efficiently as possible. Therefore, we need to discover whether we can assure the necessary levels of production. We do not want workers sabotaging the company's goals by sitting at home watching TV when they should be working. Use whatever means you can derive to accomplish this goal, including the kinds of recommendations and feedback you provide, and decisions about workers' pay.

As a secondary aim, we find that when workers feel positive, engaged and with a sense of belonging to the organi-

zation, they may be more able to focus on doing what is best for the company. You should also consider fostering such feelings in your workers, but remember, your primary goal is to get them to produce what the company needs.

In the people-centered condition, participants read,

Your task is to establish an atmosphere in which workers feel positive, engaged, and with a sense of belonging to the organization. It has been demonstrated that this atmosphere causes workers to be more enthusiastic and motivated to focus on doing what is best for the company. If the right environment is established, the rest of the company's goals can be met with much less effort and difficulty. Workers are more likely to channel their effort to the company's benefit, by doing their work rather than (for example) watching TV while they are at home, which is basically taking pay without working. Use whatever means you can derive to accomplish this goal, including the kinds of recommendations and feedback you provide, and decisions about workers' pay.

Of course, any company cares about productivity and making money, so you should also consider how well your workers are meeting productivity and accuracy goals. But remember, your primary goal is to foster the right kind of "company culture" for your workers.

Note that both conditions received both kinds of goals. It was merely the emphasis placed on each goal—like the hierarchy of goals found in actual organizations—that distinguished the two conditions. To strengthen and check the manipulation, participants were asked to list specific strategies they might use in order to meet their assigned goal.

Participants next learned the names of the five (scripted) targets with whom they would interact, along with a spatial diagram labeled with the name of each person, to maximize the number of cues for participants to keep track of targets' identities. (This diagram, unlabeled but shaded to indicate the current target, is depicted at the top of Fig. 1.) Participants were quizzed to ensure that they learned all names and spatial locations: they saw a blank diagram with text boxes into which they had to type the name of each target. Participants had to complete the quiz perfectly in order to proceed.

The proofreading task was presented next. Participants were given a sample proofreading task to try, along with feedback on the actual numbers of errors in the task. They then received e-mailed work reports from the workers, one at a time. The spatial diagram appeared on each e-mail, and each worker's position on the diagram was highlighted when his or her reports appeared. The supervisor completed a form on the computer, providing feedback to each worker after each task: he or she indicated the number correct out of the number possible (supervisors were told what the correct numbers were for each task) and gave written feedback on the worker's accuracy. Participants were also told that workers would automatically be paid 75 ¢ for each task unless the supervisors changed this amount. A box was provided for supervisors to assign a higher or lower pay. In order to support the goal manipulation, people-centered supervisors were asked to evaluate workers' enthusiasm and motivation, whereas product-centered supervisors evaluated worker's productivity. Finally, participants were asked to keep notes about their group's progress on a "tracking sheet"; people-centered supervisors wrote ideas to improve workplace inclusiveness, and product-centered supervisors tracked worker accuracy and speed. This was designed to reinforce the salience of the goal condition.

After the work session, participants completed dependent measures. As each person left the lab, the experimenter probed for suspicion and then fully debriefed each participant.

#### *Dependent measures*

Four measures assessed the degree to which participants individuated the five targets. The first was a confusions task (Taylor, Fiske, Etcoff, & Ruderman, 1978). The 40 pieces of information from the work reports were randomly ordered and presented, and participants indicated which target provided each item. Correctly identifying the worker paired with each bit of information reflects greater individuation of targets.

Next was a trait-rating task. Each target was rated on 20 trait adjectives, including 10 traits characteristic of the various targets, two per target (good-natured, friendly, unintelligent, irresponsible, negative, argumen-

tative, competitive, aggressive, smart, efficient) and 10 words of opposite meaning (harsh, hostile, conscientious, dependable, easy-going, agreeable, passive, weak, slow, sloppy). Ratings were made on a seven-point scale (1 = "not at all descriptive" to 7 = "highly descriptive").

Participants then completed a paired similarity task, in which they saw each possible dyadic combination of the five targets, and rated the similarity between the two members of each pair (1 = "not at all similar" to 7 = "extremely similar"). In addition, two independent judges rated the degree of actual similarity between each pair of targets, based on both the scripted behaviors and personality information and on the targets' work performance. The judges agreed on 86% of ratings. Both judges' ratings were averaged together, and the mean ratings were then used as the criterion to identify pairs of targets who objectively were of low, medium, and high similarity. These objective categories were then used in evaluating how well participants perceived actual differences in the degree of similarity from pair to pair.

Finally, participants evaluated their power in the work session and their motivation to achieve time and accuracy goals (1 = "not at all," 7 = "a great deal"). Experimenters recorded the gender of each participant.<sup>2</sup>

## Results

### *Manipulation checks*

Participants' strategy lists were coded for mention of contextual goals and values (1 = strongly product-centered, 5 = strongly people-centered) by a single coder, blind to condition, as a check of the goal manipulation.<sup>3</sup> Analysis revealed that, though the means do not fall at the extreme ends of the rating scale, product-centered supervisors planned to use a more product-centered approach to their task ( $M = 2.56$ ) and people-centered supervisors' planned approach was significantly more people-centered ( $M = 3.15$ ),  $F(1, 85) = 6.42$ ,  $p < .02$ ,  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $.06 \leq b \leq .52$  (see Table 2 for all manipulation checks). The quality of comments also indicated that

<sup>2</sup> No effects of gender were found, and gender did not moderate context for any results. Therefore, it is not discussed further.

<sup>3</sup> For example, a people-centered participant wrote, "I want to create an environment where the workers feel their ideas are heard and implemented. I will do this by listening and compiling all their info to most effectively run the company." A statement like this received a code of 5. A product-centered supervisor wrote, "I will let them know the incentives for working harder and more efficiently, which include an increase in pay for superior work. I will also let them know that the better the company does as a whole, the more successful it will be, therefore increasing their pay." Such statements were coded as 1. A list containing no strong people- or product-centered content was assigned a code of 3.

Table 2  
Means and standard deviations of manipulation check responses (Study 1)

|                                | People-centered   |           | Product-centered  |           |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|
|                                | <i>M</i>          | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>          | <i>SD</i> |
| Strategy to meet assigned goal | 3.15 <sub>a</sub> | 1.07      | 2.56 <sub>b</sub> | 1.14      |
| Power felt                     | 4.47 <sub>a</sub> | 1.71      | 4.24 <sub>a</sub> | 1.66      |
| Motivation                     | 4.14 <sub>a</sub> | 1.39      | 4.22 <sub>a</sub> | 1.13      |

*Note.* Listed strategies were assigned a code on a 1–5 scale with 1 = highly product-centered and 5 = highly person-centered. Power and motivation ratings were made on a 1–7 point scale with higher numbers indicating higher levels of the measured construct. Means in the same row with different subscripts differ at  $p < .05$ .

participants were involved in the study and that psychological realism was high.

It is important to confirm that our values manipulation did not create differences in felt power among participants in the two conditions. Indeed, there was no difference in how powerful members of each condition felt,  $M_{\text{product}} = 4.24$  vs.  $M_{\text{people}} = 4.47$ ,  $F(1, 85) = 0.40$ , *ns*. There was also no difference in motivation to achieve time and accuracy goals,  $F(1, 85) = 0.09$ , *ns*.

#### Confusions task

Performance on this task indicates whether the goal variables affected participants' ability to attribute information to the correct source and to distinguish the targets from each other. The dependent variable is a count of the number of items correctly attributed. As predicted, people-centered supervisors correctly matched a greater number of items to the target who provided the information ( $M = 25.65$ ) than did product-centered supervisors ( $M = 21.52$ ),  $F(1, 85) = 8.65$ ,  $p < .005$ ,  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $.47 \leq b \leq 2.44$ .

#### Trait ratings

Individuation involves successfully identifying each characteristic trait with the target correctly described by that trait (e.g., rating Joe high on "good-natured" and "friendly") and rating that target low on the opposite traits (rating Joe low on "negative" and "hostile"). Correct targets (i.e., those who were in fact described by these traits) should receive high ratings on characteristic traits and low ratings on uncharacteristic traits. Among other targets, there should be less of a difference between characteristic and uncharacteristic traits.

The significant 2-way interaction of trait type  $\times$  target type showed that, overall, there was a much greater difference in ratings of characteristic relative to uncharacteristic traits for the correct targets than for the other targets,  $F(1, 85) = 212.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .70$ ,  $1.64 \leq b_0 \leq 2.15$  (see Table 3). Further, the three-way interaction of trait type  $\times$  target type  $\times$  goal condition confirmed that this pattern differed for product-centered

Table 3  
Results of trait ratings (Study 1)

|                             | People-centered    |           | Product-centered   |           |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|
|                             | <i>M</i>           | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>           | <i>SD</i> |
| <i>Correct targets</i>      |                    |           |                    |           |
| Characteristic traits (C)   | 5.16 <sub>a</sub>  | 0.88      | 4.54 <sub>b</sub>  | 0.95      |
| Uncharacteristic traits (U) | 2.33 <sub>a</sub>  | 0.62      | 2.47 <sub>a</sub>  | 0.78      |
| Difference (C–U traits)     | 2.83 <sub>a</sub>  | 1.28      | 2.07 <sub>b</sub>  | 1.52      |
| <i>"Other" targets</i>      |                    |           |                    |           |
| Characteristic traits (C)   | 3.39 <sub>a</sub>  | 0.37      | 3.31 <sub>a</sub>  | 0.45      |
| Uncharacteristic traits (U) | 3.66 <sub>a</sub>  | 0.37      | 3.51 <sub>a</sub>  | 0.45      |
| Difference (C–U traits)     | –0.27 <sub>a</sub> | 0.37      | –0.20 <sub>a</sub> | 0.47      |

*Note.* Ratings on 1–7 scale with 7 = "extremely characteristic." Means the same row with different subscripts differ at  $p < .05$ .

and people-centered participants,  $F(1, 85) = 5.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .06$ ,  $.04 \leq b \leq .56$ . Importantly, for the correct targets only, people-centered participants were even more likely to correctly rate the characteristic traits high for these targets and the uncharacteristic traits low, relative to the product-centered participants,  $F(1, 85) = 6.55$ ,  $p < .02$ ,  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $.08 \leq b \leq .69$ . It is clear from ratings of the "other" targets that participants did not simply overgeneralize the presence of the traits. The differences for the other targets were very small and negative, and did not depend on condition,  $F(1, 85) = 0.68$ , *ns*.

#### Paired-similarity task

Given that the targets were in fact quite distinct from one another in their behavior and personality characteristics, lower average similarity ratings (across all targets) indicates greater individuation in that the raters have resisted lumping all targets together. A test of the linear contrast (low vs. medium vs. high similarity) can reveal whether participants pick up on the finer distinctions in pair similarity.

This test showed that, although both groups did identify a linear difference among low, medium, and high similarity pairs,  $F(1, 85) = 21.71$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .20$ ,  $.44 \leq b \leq 1.11$ , people-centered supervisors made much stronger distinctions than product centered supervisors,  $F(1, 85) = 8.59$ ,  $p < .005$ ,  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $.16 \leq b \leq .82$ , for the test of the linear by goal condition interaction (see Table 4).<sup>4</sup> Collapsing across the linear contrast, means were consistent with greater overall similarity judgments by product-centered supervisors, though the difference was not significant.

A Proxscal multidimensional scaling analysis (Carroll & Chang, 1970) was carried out on the similarity judgments. Proxscal uses distance data to plot targets in a two-dimensional space, allowing interpretations of *how*

<sup>4</sup> The quadratic contrast was nonsignificant, although the quadratic contrast  $\times$  organizational values manipulation was also marginally significant,  $F(1, 85) = 3.39$ ,  $p < .07$ .



Table 4  
Paired similarity ratings (Study 1)

|                  | Actual (scripted) similarity |           |          |           |          |           |
|------------------|------------------------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
|                  | Low                          |           | Moderate |           | High     |           |
|                  | <i>M</i>                     | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
| People-centered  | 2.07                         | 1.02      | 4.37     | 0.96      | 4.71     | 1.01      |
| Product-centered | 2.82                         | 1.21      | 4.25     | 0.78      | 4.39     | 1.00      |

Note. Similarity ratings on 1–7 scale with 7 = “extremely similar.”

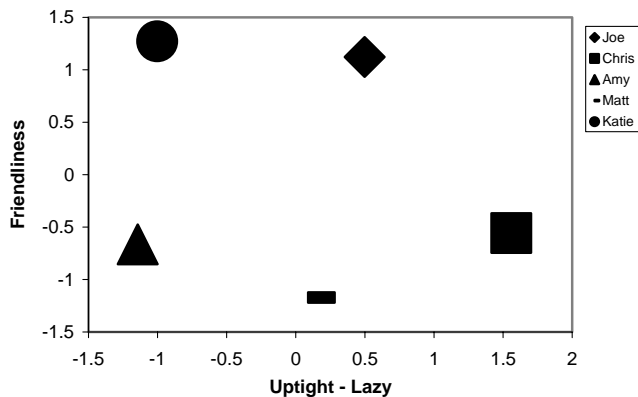


Fig. 2. Paired similarity judgments, Study 1: Two-dimensional space representation of how supervisors formed judgments of similarity among targets.

the targets are seen to differ. It also calculates a score for each participant that reflects the degree to which each dimension was used in judging similarity.

Across all participants, targets were judged using two primary dimensions. Dimension 1 (the X-axis in Fig. 2) appears to involve the personality traits “uptight” versus “lazy”: The four targets grouped at the left end of the axis were more motivated (or tense) about doing well, and the target at the far right was exceptionally lazy. Dimension 2 (the Y-axis) appears to capture the topic focus of targets’ e-mails. That is, the targets toward the bottom of the axis used more personal references and stories. The other targets’ comments were more task-focused.

Interestingly, the two conditions weighted these dimensions differently when judging target similarity,  $F(1,85) = 13.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .13$ ,  $.03 \leq b \leq .09$ . While product-centered supervisors used both dimensions about equally, people-centered supervisors gave more weight to the personality trait dimension and much less to the topic focus dimension. This difference suggests that people-centered supervisors may be more attuned to personality traits than to focus, and product-centered supervisors attend equally to both.

## Discussion

The results from Study 1 support the argument that powerful perceivers can be flexible with their attention,

using perception as an instrumental resource to achieve their ends. Two perceivers who were equally powerful, when operating in environments that elicited different objectives, displayed different patterns of social perception. Powerholders with the primary objective of fostering a sense of inclusion attended more to individuals, kept straight information about them, learned about their personalities, and saw them as distinct from one another. Powerholders with the primary objective of assuring output were less attuned, more confused, and less able to discern the unique characteristics of social targets. In addition, the Proxscal analysis shows that powerholders’ goals apparently created an information expectancy that guided the kinds of impression information used in judging similarity. This study confirms that power does not lead fixedly to heuristic thinking; rather, powerholders can attend flexibly, even engaging in controlled and systematic interpersonal perception if that facilitates the goals they’re charged with meeting.

In one sense, it is not terribly surprising that different social or cognitive goals produce different patterns of person perception—this has been argued convincingly in earlier research (Neuberg, 1989; Sanitioso, Freud, & Lee, 1996; Seta & Hayes, 1994; Trzebinski & Richards, 1986). However, the present findings contribute in important ways to the power literature, going beyond the demonstration of simple goal effects. First, the goal that participants were given was to achieve a particular outcome. The presentation of this goal did not explicitly mention attention. It was up to the participants to decide how to allocate their attention in order to achieve that outcome. Thus, it is unlikely that participants would have paid attention differently when trying to, for example, enact a product-centered environment, unless they took the intermediary step of deciding that this attention was a means to achieve that goal.

Second, much of the psychological power literature has developed under the notion that effects of power are invariant and predictable, as long as level of power is identified. Thus, it is important that one can observe variations in perception within a single power level. As argued above, it is important that the judgment patterns displayed by participants correspond to what was most instrumental for them, given their assigned goals. This reflects powerholder flexibility, as perceivers with equally high power paid attention differently according to these goals.

Though the results of Study 1 support our contention that powerholders can direct their attention in an instrumental manner, it leaves some important questions unanswered. First, if indeed attention is flexible, we should be able to observe powerholders allocating attention differently to *different kinds of information*, depending on what offers immediate utility. In other words, not only do we want to show that powerholders pay more or less attention to one attentional object, but also that they

flexibly transfer their attention from one object to another depending on the instrumental value of those objects. Keltner et al. (2003), and previous researchers (Goodwin et al., 2000; Overbeck & Park, 2001), have also tended to focus on arguments about the *amount* of attention paid by powerful and powerless perceivers. Our current focus, however, is on how that attention is *directed*. We assume that powerholders generally pay substantial attention to the external environment, as they monitor it for opportunities (Keltner et al., 2003). It may sometimes appear that little attention is being paid to people and their concerns because the powerholder's attention, though substantial, is being directed toward something more instrumental. Study 1 did not allow us to assess this, because only one attentional object was provided. Therefore, we designed Study 2 to include two kinds of attentional objects—information about both people-oriented issues and productivity issues—to more directly examine how attention is directed.

In addition, we broadened the kind of information provided. Having already examined attention to individuating information about the targets to provide a link to past research, we now wanted to examine a measure that is perhaps more directly related to the day to day functioning of an organization—namely, the issues and concerns that are judged to be of greatest importance in running the organization. If a powerholder is presented with some issues and concerns that focus on the people in the company and some that focus on productivity and financial performance, our flexibility argument predicts that the type of concerns judged to be more important will vary as a function of the goal given to the powerholder. To this end, we provided information about people-oriented policies, achievements, and challenges faced by the organization, rather than simply the personal characteristics of individual workers.

Study 1 is not informative about whether flexible, instrumental attention is unique to powerholders, given that powerless actors were not included in the design. It might be that *all* organizational actors allocate their attention according to the goals emphasized by the organization. Study 2 addressed this issue by using a full design in which both powerful and powerless actors were presented with the same organizational goals and the same information about the organization. We predict that attention should be allocated in flexible, instrumental way by powerholders, but *not* by the powerless.

Finally, as our earlier examples made clear, using attention flexibly could be a result of other variables that might covary with power in organizations, particularly incentives, pressures toward conformity, and the expectations of peers and superiors. We designed our condition manipulations to dismiss these alternative explanations for attentional differences.

## Study 2

### Method

#### Overview

Participants were told that they would be role-playing a company work team, interacting live with one manager and many subordinates, and were assigned randomly to one of these roles. They were further told that their company held either people-oriented values or production-oriented values, to provide a goal context to guide their attention. Next, participants were presented with information about the company's recent accomplishments and challenges, including both people-oriented and production-oriented items. Measures assessed participants' use of this information and how it reflected their sense of priorities.

#### Participants

Eighty-four undergraduates at the University of Southern California (51 men and 33 women) participated in the study, in partial fulfillment of course requirements for an introductory course in organizational behavior.

#### Materials and procedure

Participants were seated in small conference rooms in groups of 8–10 and told that they would be conducting an organizational simulation. They first received a brief questionnaire containing items that assessed extraversion and surgency (cf. Norman, 1963), and that might appear on their face to be validly related to leadership aptitude. This questionnaire was ostensibly scored on the spot, and the results used to assign participants to a role that they would play in the simulation: either manager (high power) or worker (low power).<sup>5</sup> After the apparent scoring, participants received a packet that contained the power manipulation and instructions for the study. In the high-power (HP) condition, participants read:

You are going to be the MANAGER of this workgroup. Everyone else present will be your subordinates, and you will supervise them.

<sup>5</sup> In the literature, social power is manipulated in various ways, including semantic priming (Bargh & Raymond, 1995), experiential priming (Galinsky et al., 2003), measurement of naturally-occurring power differences (Ebenbach & Keltner, 1998), or providing different resources to high- and low-power participants (Kim & Fragale, in press). Here, we follow past work that has instantiated a more involving and psychologically real experience of power by placing participants into positions of formal power, in interactive situations with real or simulated others (Copeland, 1994; Overbeck & Park, 2001; Vescio et al., 2003). We believe that our manipulation is practical and externally valid, and is most likely to evoke the cognitions and responses that ordinary people feel when interacting in a real-world hierarchy.

In the low-power (LP) condition, participants read:

You are going to be a WORKER in this workgroup. One of the people present will be the Manager and will supervise you and the rest of the group, who will be your fellow workers.

Though they were led to believe that each group contained only one manager and that all others were workers, this was not true. In fact, roles had been randomly pre-assigned and the questionnaire responses were not used in the assignment.

The same packet of information contained a manipulation of the primary values held by the organization being simulated. In the “people-oriented” condition, participants read:

Your company has a history of particularly good working relationships with employees. The company’s mission statement emphasizes that it cares very much for employees and is concerned with making its people feel valued and included. As you act as manager to promote the interests of the company, please keep in mind that the company wants all its employees to experience high satisfaction and a sense of personal involvement in their work. In order to accomplish this, your decisions should be consistent with the high value that the company places on its people and their concerns.

In the “production-oriented” condition, participants read:

Your company has a history of pursuing optimal productivity and running a lean operation. The company’s mission statement emphasizes that it wants to be the leader in its industry, to maximize profits and shareholder returns, and to ensure the highest possible productivity. As you do your work to promote the interests of the company, please keep in mind that the company wants efficiency and productivity to be reflected throughout all activities. In order to accomplish this, your actions should be consistent with the high value that the company places on financial performance.

Participants were asked to summarize these instructions before continuing, both to heighten the salience of the manipulation and to verify that they understood it.

Following the delivery of these two manipulations, participants viewed a sample of the workgroup task that would ostensibly be the main activity of the simulation. They were told that they would create a company budget; each worker would request funding for a project related to their functional area, and try to win funding for that project. The manager would have final authority over the budget, but could not exceed \$1,000,000. Participants were told that the workers would have to make detailed proposals and defend those proposals by persuading the manager and answering questions, and that the manager had sole discretion in final budget decisions.

Several features of this design deserve special note. First, this task was highly relevant to the students’ classroom work, and they were accustomed to participating in organizational simulations for course credit; thus, we believe that this constituted an engaging task in which participants felt a genuine desire to perform well, and felt that the power differences were salient and consequential. Second, each ostensible workgroup (which participants believed included one manager and multiple workers) was seated in a separate room, and did not expect to interact with any other participants. Thus, no pressures toward conformity among managers were present. Third, there were no additional incentives provided to managers, relative to workers, for meeting organizational goals. The workers had reason to want to succeed at an individual level, insofar as they would be proud to get their own projects funded and might impress the experimenter; similarly, the manager’s only incentive for good performance was potential for pride and the experimenter’s approval. Finally, all participants were told that they were personally expected to meet organizational goals.

After this preview of the workgroup task, participants were told that they must first become familiar with the current state of the company, so that their proposals and decisions would be more informed. To this end, all participants saw the same list of 20 statements (hereafter called “target items”) about “major events at the company right now: problems, accomplishments, and statements of current conditions.” Embedded within this list were 10 items that focused on employees’ personal achievements and concerns (“Employees of the company have expressed concern that vacation policies are too strict”; “One of your researchers has just won a major international scientific prize”) and 10 that focused on productivity and financial health (“The industry is highly competitive and this company has been losing market share”; “A recent retooling of the production line has speeded production by 8%”). The full set of target items is presented as Appendix A.

After reading all the items, participants were directed to write a concise “State of the Company” report, summarizing the few target items of *greatest* importance to the company. If the participant was a manager, this report was to be written to the Board of Directors. If the participant was a worker, the report was written for inclusion in the employee newsletter. Though they were free to choose the items themselves, we recommended that they limit themselves to approximately six items that they found most important. Next, we presented the same list of 20 target items and asked participants to rank the importance of each item for the functioning of the company, from 1 (the most important item on the list) to 20 (the least important item on the list).

At this point, participants handed in their study materials and believed that they would go on to the workgroup

(budgeting) task. However, the experimenter informed them that they would *not* be completing the workgroup task. They were debriefed, thanked, and released.

### *Dependent measures*

Two measures assessed participants' attention and priorities. The first was the State of the Company report written by each participant. These reports were coded by two independent coders, blind to condition and hypotheses, for the presence of the 20 target items. Agreement on these codes was 97%; disagreements were resolved through discussion. The measure of interest was the number of people-oriented versus production-oriented items included in the report.

The second measure was the priority ranking of the 20 target items. To focus precisely on the participants' *top* priorities, we examined those items that each participant ranked in their own top 5. Again, we counted the number of people-oriented versus production-oriented items included in these top 5 priorities. The measure analyzed is the number of *people-oriented* items that participants included in the top 5, given that the number of people plus production-oriented items necessarily summed to 5.

### *Pilot study*

To examine the efficacy of the power manipulation without contaminating responses on the DVs, we administered this procedure (minus the presentation of target items and associated DVs) to a group of 49 undergraduates at the University of Southern California. After reading about their assigned role, organizational goals, and the upcoming workgroup task, participants were asked about their feelings of power and expectations placed upon them. Then they were debriefed and dismissed.

In particular, we were concerned with demonstrating that our manipulation resulted in a greater sense of power among HP relative to LP participants, but that it did not produce differences in perceptions of the extent to which participants felt they were expected to act on behalf of the company's best interests. Results of the pilot study confirm that our manipulation led to significant differences in feelings of power. We averaged across responses to four items (To what extent do you feel that you have the ability to obtain the outcomes that the company prefers in this task; To what extent do you feel that, in this exercise, you are given authority and control by virtue of your position in the simulated organization; To what extent do you feel that you have the ability to affect the outcomes of others in your workgroup in this task; How much power do you feel that you'll have in the workgroup task?) to create a felt power scale. HPs felt significantly more powerful ( $M = 6.11$ ) than LPs ( $M = 4.79$ ),  $F(1, 44) = 28.94$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .40$ ,  $0.41 \leq b \leq 0.89$ .

In contrast, when we asked participants about the degree to which they believed that they were expected to act in accordance with the organizational goals assigned to them (To what extent do you feel that you are expected to behave in ways that maximize profits and shareholder returns for the company; ...in ways that ensure high satisfaction and personal involvement within the company?), there were no differences between high- and low-power participants on either profit expectations,  $M_{HP} = 6.32$  vs.  $M_{LP} = 6.00$ ,  $F(1, 44) = 0.67$ , *ns*, or people expectations,  $M_{HP} = 6.14$  vs.  $M_{LP} = 5.65$ ,  $F(1, 44) = 2.34$ , *ns*, confirming that our power manipulation did not create different senses of expectations for performance. That is, supervisors and workers alike felt that they were expected to be as good an employee as possible in achieving company goals.

## **Results**

This study used a 2 (participant power: high vs. low)  $\times$  2 (company values: people-oriented vs. production-oriented) between-subjects design. Because of non-responses on various measures, the number of observations used in the following analyses also varies.

### *Comprehension of values instructions*

We checked to ensure that participants understood the company values instructions. Indeed, 100% reported them correctly.

### *Reports*

We predicted that powerful participants should reflect the assigned organizational goals in their reports; that is, powerholders in the company that valued people should include more people-oriented items in their reports than should those in the company valuing production. Those in the production-valuing company should include more production-oriented items than those in the people-valuing company. We did not expect low-power participants to show this flexibility according to company values condition.

All participants tended to write more about production items than people items,  $F(1, 74) = 9.67$ ,  $p < .003$ ,  $R^2 = .08$ ,  $-1.04 \leq b \leq -.23$ . This was especially true for those in the production-valuing company,  $F(1, 74) = 7.02$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = .09$ ,  $-.94 \leq b \leq -.13$ , and, separately, for powerful participants,  $F(1, 74) = 5.20$ ,  $p < .03$ ,  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $-.87 \leq b \leq -.06$ . The 3-way interaction of power, values condition, and item type was marginally significant,  $F(1, 74) = 2.79$ ,  $p < .10$ ,  $R^2 = .04$ ,  $-.74 \leq b \leq .07$ . More important, as predicted, the simple 2-way interaction of values condition and item type was significant only for powerful participants,  $F(1, 74) = 7.78$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2 = .10$ ,  $-1.50 \leq b \leq -.25$ .

Table 5  
Means on priority and memo tasks (Study 2)

|                                  | High power           |           |                   |           | Low power            |           |                   |           |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|
|                                  | Production condition |           | People condition  |           | Production condition |           | People condition  |           |
|                                  | <i>M</i>             | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>          | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>             | <i>SD</i> | <i>M</i>          | <i>SD</i> |
| Production items in memos        | 4.37 <sub>a</sub>    | 1.12      | 3.15 <sub>b</sub> | 1.57      | 2.91 <sub>a</sub>    | 1.59      | 2.78 <sub>a</sub> | 1.24      |
| People items in memos            | 1.58 <sub>c</sub>    | 0.96      | 2.85 <sub>b</sub> | 1.57      | 2.39 <sub>a</sub>    | 1.53      | 2.83 <sub>a</sub> | 1.34      |
| People items in top 5 priorities | 1.10 <sub>a</sub>    | 1.09      | 2.19 <sub>b</sub> | 1.28      | 1.91 <sub>b</sub>    | 1.41      | 1.79 <sub>b</sub> | 1.38      |

Note. In the top two rows, means with different subscripts differ at  $p < .05$  when they occur within the same power-condition heading. Across all of the third row, means with different subscripts differ at  $p < .05$ .

Simple effects tests of the means presented in Table 5 revealed that, consistent with predictions, powerholders wrote about significantly more production items in the production than in the people condition,  $F(1, 74) = 5.95$ ,  $p < .02$ ,  $R^2 = .08$ ,  $-1.12 \leq b \leq -1.15$ , and wrote about significantly more people items in the people than in the production condition,  $F(1, 74) = 6.71$ ,  $p < .02$ ,  $R^2 = .08$ ,  $.11 \leq b \leq 1.10$ . The 2-way interaction of values condition and item type for low-power participants was not significant,  $F(1, 74) = 0.61$ , *ns*, nor were either of the simple effects of item type as a function of the two values conditions, people  $F(1, 74) = 0.01$ , *ns*, product  $F(1, 74) = 1.02$ , *ns*. This indicates that powerful participants used company goals information to guide their attention to and selection of information for inclusion in the company report, whereas the powerless did not.

#### Priorities

Again, we predicted that powerholders in the people-valuing company would include more people-oriented items in their top 5 rankings than would those in the production-valuing company. We expected no such difference among powerless participants.

Overall, all participants tended to rank a greater number of production items ( $M = 3.39$ ) in their top 5 than people items ( $M = 1.61$ ),  $F(1, 80) = 29.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = .25$ ,  $-2.11 \leq b_0 \leq -.97$ . However, as expected, this effect was moderated by the 2-way interaction of power level and company values,  $F(1, 80) = 4.45$ ,  $p < .04$ ,  $R^2 = .05$ ,  $-.59 \leq b \leq -.02$ . As shown in Table 5, powerholders included more people-oriented items in their top 5 rankings in the people-oriented company than in the production-oriented company,  $F(1, 80) = 6.35$ ,  $p < .02$ ,  $R^2 = .07$ ,  $-.98 \leq b \leq -.12$ . For low-power participants, there was no difference as a function of the company-values manipulation,  $F(1, 80) = 0.53$ , *ns*,  $R^2 = .001$ . This finding indicates that powerholders indeed allocated their attention in an instrumental manner. Low-power participants, though provided with the same information, goals, and activities, did not.

#### Discussion

The results of Study 2 conform nicely to our predictions. People assigned to powerful roles in a workgroup

were more responsive to the stated values and goals of the organization that empowered them: they used value-consistent information more in their reports on the state of the organization, and they ranked such information as more important to the continued functioning of the company. People assigned to powerless roles in the workgroup did not follow this pattern; instead, they appeared insensitive to the stated values and goals of the organization. It would be easy to expect *all* participants to simply follow the goals that they were given. That power affects the likelihood of doing so is, we think, a novel and dramatic finding.

It is noteworthy that Study 2 goes beyond the narrow realm of interpersonal cognitive measures of stereotyping and individuation emphasized in previous work on power and cognition (Fiske, 1993; Keltner et al., 2003; Overbeck & Park, 2001; Vescio et al., 2003). The measures used here assess attention to matters relevant to the human side of the organization, as well as matters involving the organization's task functions. Further, the responses required of participants are transparent in their relevance to the kind of instrumental use of information that takes place in real organizations.

#### General discussion

Study 1 provides a bridge from past work on power and individuation, by using similar methods and measures to reveal an effect that the social psychology literature would generally not predict: powerful perceivers showed variance in individuating social targets, based on the organizational goal that the perceiver was trying to meet. Powerholders who received people-centered goals tended to show better individuation of powerless targets than did those who received product-centered goals, across personality and memory measures, suggesting that the former summoned more of their attentional resources for the task.

Study 2 extended this result by using different measures and domains of attention. In addition, Study 2 confirmed that instrumental, flexible use of attention was unique to powerholders in this context; the powerless did not show the same flexibility. The manipulation used in Study 2 helps us to discount alternative explana-

tions that our differences were based on different understanding of the goals, on different incentives, on different pressures for high- versus low-power participants, or on different expectations about how they should behave. Instead, we argue that power helps people to direct attentional resources more fluently and effectively toward goal attainment.

The whole point of power, one might argue, is to get something done. Whether a political leader striving to control territory and policy, a corporate executive seeking profit or protecting turf, or even a parent trying to quiet a child in a restaurant, people see power as a means to an end. Indeed, the approach-inhibition model of social power (Keltner et al., 2003; see also Galinsky et al., 2003) focuses strongly on power as *action*. As mentioned earlier in the paper, this model implies that powerful people will orient toward opportunities in the environment and will use resources—such as attention—that help them obtain rewards and fulfill goals. It makes little sense, then, to expect that power might invariably lead to heuristic, careless, or deindividuating social attention. Instead, as OB theorists have long argued, different circumstances call for different degrees of attention and interpersonal sensitivity. This paper supports their work by showing that, indeed, leaders may be uniquely suited to meeting these demands.

#### *Power and goals*

The key variable determining how power will affect social attention is, we argue, the *goals* of the powerholder. In the laboratory, it is easy to see why powerholders will adopt the goals they are given: there is a limited, narrow set of activities and attentional objects provided to participants, and in this stimulus-poor environment the goal manipulation looms large and commanding. (What is truly remarkable about our findings, of course, is that it did not loom similarly large for the powerless participants.) In a real organization, however, powerholders do not just passively receive goals, but are actively involved in creating them. Nonetheless, we believe that, as part of their creating goals for themselves and the organization, a process of internalization will occur whereby powerholders adopt the goals of the organization as their own.

There are two reasons that powerholders should tend to internalize their organizations' goals. The first is constraint. Although it is tempting to think of powerholders as unconstrained and free (Brauer, Chekroun, & Judd, 2004; Keltner et al., 2003), in fact powerholders too operate under constraints, particularly in organizational contexts. Hamilton and Biggart (1985) argued that the expectations associated with their roles constrain powerholders, who must produce results, act powerful, and behave so as to ensure both the cooperation of those below them and the approval of those

above. Organizations grant power to individuals to make them *agents* who can act on the organization's behalf, accomplishing desired ends. Though powerholders may have considerable latitude in terms of *how* they accomplish these ends, they also nonetheless bear the obligation to do so (also see Overbeck, Tiedens, & Brion, in press). The powerholder needs not only to get things done, but to do them on behalf of the organization, and thus the goals guiding action should be those of the organization.

The second and, we believe, more compelling reason for the powerful to internalize organizational goals is that adopting these goals allows the powerholder to maximize legitimacy. In an organization, most formal powerholders are not innately powerful—rather, the organization provides and legitimates their power. It can be argued that a meta-goal of the powerful is to maintain, if not increase, their power (Conniff, 2002; Pfeffer, 1992). Bachrach and Baratz (1962) stated that one of the principal forms and purposes of power is the manipulation of attention in order to perpetuate the power status quo. Powerholders are more likely to maintain power if they stay in the good graces of the organization, and adopting the organization's goals as their own—then paying attention to the things that fulfill those goals—is obviously a promising strategy.

#### *Cognitive effectiveness*

It seems likely that power improves effectiveness not only through the direct sense of control that powerholders enjoy, but also through their potential for more flexible cognition. In the book *Black Hawk Down*, journalist Mark Bowden discusses the power and team dynamics characterizing two groups of soldiers involved in a catastrophic incident in Mogadishu, Somalia, in the 1990s. The elite, high-status Delta Force soldiers are given the power to make decisions for themselves. Their tactical meetings have the flavor of group consensus sessions, and each individual is able to control critical aspects of a mission. The somewhat lower-status Rangers follow traditional chain-of-command procedures and enjoy far fewer freedoms and less autonomy.

Bowden's account touches on attention—the young Rangers appear to be monitoring how “cool” the Deltas are, rather than on mission-critical objects. Deltas attended to the environment, monitoring cues that could tell them how to plan, act, respond, in order to keep themselves and their buddies alive. The Rangers, they complained, were perpetually unready and unaware, even to the extent of firing on their own team during an operation because they did not pay enough attention to where the other team members were. In combat in Mogadishu, these differences were painfully consequential, with Rangers tending more to hang back and wait for Deltas to make decisions about how to proceed, in some

cases causing problems because squads remained separated and thus harder to rescue.

Though the kind of power held by Delta Force may look somewhat different from that held by an organization manager, nonetheless this illustrates how power can lead people to use attention as one of their available resources, and to move among goals with flexibility and lack of tunnel vision. Using attention effectively, in this way, can be an enormous advantage for the powerholder.

#### *What about the powerless?*

Although this example suggests that lower-power individuals show poorer attention, our data offer little insight into how the powerless use social attention resources. There is some evidence that the powerless see powerholders in an undifferentiated, unindividuated way in at least some settings (cf. Overbeck & Park, 2001; Ric, 1997) and they may, as a consequence, attend to a fixed (and perhaps erroneous) set of objects that they *believe* will be useful, failing to attend flexibly or instrumentally with respect to the goals of the organization.

A more interesting possibility is that the powerless are not using social attention as a resource at all. Some evidence suggests that the powerless are primarily concerned with projecting a positive impression, and with evaluating the impressions they're making on others. Copeland (1994) found that, when powerless participants interacted with powerful prospective partners, they were most concerned with how the powerful person was seeing them—that is, they experienced the interaction as objects rather than as subjects or perceivers. Similarly, Earle, Giuliano, and Archer (1983) found that, in dyads interacting in an explicit hierarchy, the low-power partner tried to reveal information about themselves—to make themselves more knowable and more perceptible—in a way that reinforced their status as an object and not an agent of perception.

The powerless, then, may tend to be self-focused in social interactions with the powerful. Rather than looking outward for opportunity (the perspective of an agent), powerless people may look inward. If so, their self-orientation could supersede the outward direction of attention. In Study 2, though we did not measure this possibility, the powerless participants may well have been inattentive to company goals and information while they thought anxiously about how they would be perceived when the workgroup budgeting task occurred. In a similar vein, Bowden (2000) suggests that the lower-power Rangers used attention largely to compare themselves with the elite Delta Force, in part assessing their own competence and toughness. Certainly, this echoes work on performance decrements caused by self-focus due to social anxiety and stereotype threat (Mansell,

Clark, & Ehlers, 2003; Steele & Aronson, 1995). This is a compelling possibility that we plan to examine in future research.

#### *Limitations of the current work*

We have argued, and found confirmation, that powerholders adopt the goals of their organization; however, our work is silent on the issue of how powerholders might respond to *competing* attentional demands. For example, will the powerful always privilege the values of the organization, or will they put their personal concerns first when given the opportunity to do so? What if there are sanctions or punishments for privileging personal goals? It would be useful for future research to explore powerholders' allocation of social attention given aligned and misaligned personal and organizational goals. Further, we have argued that goal-directed attention is "flexible"; however, our design did not allow us to test whether powerholders *change* attentional direction in response to changing situations. To truly reflect flexibility, that should occur. Thus, additional work is needed to explore whether attentional variability occurs just between powerholders, or within the individual powerholder, as well.

The studies are also limited in their test of instrumentality. Limited goals were offered to participants, and the attentional objects that might help meet those goals were quite circumscribed. It would be fruitful in future research to explore how powerholders act on goals that can be carried out in multiple ways, and whose implications for the interpersonal environment are less clear (cf. Galinsky et al., 2003).

Finally, the studies are of course limited by the fact that such a vast and complex construct as power is measured in a laboratory setting, using power-unfamiliar undergraduates, and in role-playing simulations. Although these are real limitations, we argue that these studies constitute a strong and valid test of our hypotheses. First, power in the real world is so vast and complex as to be downright messy; the laboratory setting is essential for isolating effects of the variable of *power* itself, and not dominance, status, incentives, expectations, or the myriad other constructs that covary with power in more natural settings. Second, although undergraduates do not have extensive experience with being in power, our design creates *relative differences* in power, which are sufficient to test our hypotheses. Third, through years of testing various power manipulations, we have found that role-playing provides the most absorbing and psychologically real experience of power possible in the laboratory. Participants' performance within the studies, as well as their anecdotal comments after the studies, indicate that they take the simulations very seriously and find them convincing and engrossing.

## Conclusion

Rather than being heuristic and automatic, power-holders can be flexible and variable. The more research illuminates the responses of powerful individuals to their social worlds, the more it appears that there is little utility in analyzing power as an individual difference with invariant consequences for those who have it. Power is embedded in a context of relationships, roles, and resources, and whether resulting actions or cognitions appear corrupt or benevolent is determined by the interaction of these contextual elements rather than by power itself. The approach-inhibition model offers a useful framework for considering how power may influence outcomes while being sensitive to variability due to context. It is hoped that this work extends that flexible perspective on power to the domain of social attention, as well.

## Appendix A

Twenty target items presented to participants in Study 2. People-oriented items are designated with a (P) following the item.

1. The building's infrastructure is aging and requires costly updating, which will cut into this year's profits.
2. The industry is highly competitive and this company has been losing market share.
3. Employees of the company have expressed concern that vacation policies are too strict. (P)
4. A group of employees hopes to start a mentorship training program, to make new hires' experiences more positive. (P)
5. An independent auditor has found that the company is wasting money through inefficient purchasing and poor accounting practices.
6. An independent review board has found that increasing demands from the company on the time and energy of employees are making it difficult to achieve a good work-life balance. (P)
7. The company is trying to negotiate several new contracts that will increase its sales substantially.
8. A recent retooling of the production line has speeded production by 8%.
9. New government rules mean that many employees will stop being eligible for overtime pay in the next few months. (P)
10. A group of employees has formed a sailing team, under the company name, that has won several local championships. (P)
11. Workers are being injured on the production line at a higher rate than average. (P)
12. Several managers have been criticized by employees for creating unpleasant work environments in their departments. (P)
13. The company has established new productivity standards, but most production lines are operating at only 85% of the new standards.
14. An expensive new software package, if implemented throughout the company, might provide better cost containment and financial planning.
15. The company conducted a layoff in the past year that saved a substantial amount of money, primarily through savings on salaries and health care.
16. Employees have expressed a great deal of concern about the negative effects of the layoff on team-building and trust. (P)
17. The company is spending a great deal of money on legal fees to file several new patents and protect its intellectual property rights on its existing patents.
18. The COO has proposed a plan that could nearly double production with only 10% additional investment.
19. One of your researchers has just won a major international scientific prize. (P)
20. The company has inspired such loyalty from workers that many have been there 15 years or more. (P)

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