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*Pers Soc Psychol Rev* 2013 17: 158 originally published online 24 January 2013

DOI: 10.1177/1088868312472732

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# The Social Distance Theory of Power

Joe C. Magee<sup>1</sup> and Pamela K. Smith<sup>2</sup>

Personality and Social Psychology Review  
17(2) 158–186  
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DOI: 10.1177/1088868312472732  
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## Abstract

We propose that asymmetric dependence between individuals (i.e., power) produces asymmetric social distance, with high-power individuals feeling more distant than low-power individuals. From this insight, we articulate predictions about how power affects (a) social comparison, (b) susceptibility to influence, (c) mental state inference and responsiveness, and (d) emotions. We then explain how high-power individuals' greater experienced social distance leads them to engage in more abstract mental representation. This mediating process of construal level generates predictions about how power affects (a) goal selection and pursuit, (b) attention to desirability and feasibility concerns, (c) subjective certainty, (d) value-behavior correspondence, (e) self-control, and (f) person perception. We also reassess the approach/inhibition theory of power, noting limitations both in what it can predict and in the evidence directly supporting its proposed mechanisms. Finally, we discuss moderators and methodological recommendations for the study of power from a social distance perspective.

## Keywords

power, dependence, psychological distance, construal level, interdependence, close relationships

Evidence for how power differences affect individual psychology has mounted at a dramatic rate during the past 10 years, spurred in part by the publication of Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson's (2003) approach/inhibition theory of power. The majority of research on the social psychology of power published during that period has found evidence consistent with, or at least not inconsistent with, the approach/inhibition theory. These studies have revealed that with greater power, individuals tend to be more approach- or action-oriented (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Lammers, Stoker, & Stapel, 2010; Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007; Maner, Kaschak, & Jones, 2010; P. K. Smith & Bargh, 2008), more risk-seeking (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; cf. Maner, Gailliot, Butz, & Peruche, 2007), less averse to potential losses (Inesi, 2010), and more attentive to goal-relevant information (Guinote, 2008; Slabu & Guinote, 2010; P. K. Smith, Jostmann, Galinsky, & van Dijk, 2008).

Meanwhile, P. K. Smith and Trope (2006) advanced the notion that power creates asymmetric social distance. Specifically, they argued that people in high-power positions experience more social distance than people in low-power positions (for a similar argument, see Lee & Tiedens, 2001). Consistent with the proposed role of social distance in construal (Trope & Liberman, 2010), people who are primed with high power or who are in positions of power tend to engage in more abstract information processing than people primed with low power or who are in powerless positions (Huang, Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Guillory, 2011; Magee, Milliken, & Lurie, 2010; P. K. Smith & Trope, 2006; Stel, van Dijk, Smith, van Dijk, & Djalal, 2012). The approach/

inhibition theory (Keltner et al., 2003) cannot account for this association between power and construal level, which suggests that more theoretical development is needed to paint a complete picture of the psychological effects of power. We aim to address this need by explicating the social distance theory of power.

Although some researchers have used the notion that power creates social distance to interpret their results (Inesi, Gruenfeld, & Galinsky, 2012; Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2012; Lammers & Stapel, 2009; Schmid Mast, Jonas, & Hall, 2009), the theory and predictions that follow have not been fully articulated until now. In this article, we describe the necessary theoretical logic connecting power to social distance and social distance to construal level. In doing so, we clarify what is meant by social distance and how it can be measured, we propose how social distance emerges and operates within power relations, and we describe the influence of social distance on mental representation. From these relationships between power, social distance, and construal level, we make a number of predictions, some of which are supported by the existing empirical evidence and some of which are yet untested.

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Broadly speaking, our approach integrates past theorizing on power in the field of social psychology. We build on the relational perspective of Thibaut and Kelley (1959), and, similar to Fiske (1993) and Keltner et al. (2003), we explore the consequences of power differences for intrapsychic and interpersonal psychology. Through our analysis of social distance in power relations, we aim to bring relational dynamics back to the forefront of research on power, and by connecting social distance to construal level, we retain the ability to explain even basic social-cognitive phenomena. We dedicate a significant portion of our discussion to an analysis of the approach/inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003), in light of its revered standing in contemporary research on the psychology of power. We clarify the functions of its purported mechanisms—the behavioral activation system (BAS) and behavioral inhibition system (BIS)—and account for the published evidence connecting power to these mechanisms. From this analysis, we show that a more limited set of phenomena than was originally proposed by Keltner et al. can reasonably be predicted from these mechanisms and that, even for this limited set, there is minimal evidence directly connecting the phenomena to the BIS and BAS. We then conclude with a discussion of conceptual and methodological considerations and potential boundary conditions for the social distance theory of power.

### The Logic of the Social Distance Theory of Power

We adopt the definition of power most widely used in social psychology and compatible with definitions used in neighboring disciplines—*asymmetric control over valued resources* (Dépret & Fiske, 1993; Emerson, 1962; Fiske, 2010; Keltner et al., 2003; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959)—and assume that power is a prevalent feature of social relationships, particularly in situations with limited resources. From this definition, it is evident that within a dyadic power relationship, a low-power individual is more dependent on a high-power individual for desired outcomes than vice versa (Emerson, 1962; Fiske & Berdahl, 2007).<sup>1</sup> The critical role of dependence in the effects of power was recognized by Fiske (1993) in her *power-as-control model*, which focused on the relations between outcome dependence, attention, and stereotyping. Likewise, we begin with the assumption that differences in control over valued resources lead to differences in dependence, and then examine how these differences in dependence transform individuals psychologically (see also Keltner et al., 2003; Kipnis, 1976).

The key insight, and first principle in the social distance theory of power, is that *asymmetric dependence* between two individuals gives rise to *asymmetric experiences of social distance*, with the high-power individual feeling more subjective distance than the low-power individual. The second principle, which follows from *construal level theory* (Trope

& Liberman, 2010), is that high-power individuals' greater sense of social distance leads them to engage in more abstract mental representation (i.e., higher level construal) than low-power individuals. We discuss these principles in turn, explaining their logic and detailing the predictions that follow along the way.

### Principle 1: Asymmetric Dependence Produces Asymmetric Social Distance

We define social distance as a subjective perception or experience of distance from another person or other persons. It has previously been studied in terms of difference between self and other (Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber, & McLeod, 1999; Fiedler, 1953; Liviatan, Trope, & Liberman, 2008; Meirick, 2005; Stephan, Liberman, & Trope, 2011), distinction between one's own and others' group identities (Bogardus, 1928; Buchan, Johnson, & Croson, 2006; Kramer & Brewer, 1984; Poole, 1927; Triandis & Triandis, 1960), and unfamiliarity with others (e.g., Bohnet & Frey, 1999; Brewer, 1968; Charness & Gneezy, 2008; Shamir, 1995; Simmel, 1950; Stephan et al., 2011). To this list, we add the degree of felt closeness to another person (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) as an important aspect of social distance. We borrow this notion from research on close relationships, in which scholars have focused primarily on closeness versus distance in friendships, family relations, and romantic relationships. Recognizing that these relationships might seem (categorically) different from the types of relationships that come to mind with the social-psychological study of power, we want to emphasize that there is a long tradition of studying power dynamics in all kinds of close relationships (e.g., Clark & Reis, 1988; Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Hoffman, 1975; Howard, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1986; Keltner et al., 2003; McDonald, 1980). The most common theoretical bridge between close relationships and power is *social exchange theory* (Clark & Mills, 1979; Edwards, 1969; Foa, 1971), especially the framework of *interdependence* in social relations developed by Kelley and colleagues (Kelley et al., 1983; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978).

Particularly important for our purposes, Kelley et al. (1983) proposed that social closeness depends critically on a high degree of interdependence between two actors. That is, closeness is achieved within the repeated interaction of two individuals who have "mutual fate control" (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and are thus symmetrically dependent on each other (Lawler & Yoon, 1996). This process is set in motion and sustained by the interplay of two factors: individuals' motivation for affiliation with their partner and their expectations of their partner's behavior. Symmetrically dependent individuals are motivated to minimize the distance between them (i.e., they *need* affiliation with the other), and they have expectations of closeness in their interaction (i.e., they *expect* the other to affiliate with them). When one partner's expectations for affiliation are not met by the other's behavior, and

particularly when this is because the other partner is no longer motivated to affiliate, distance grows between the two and the relational structure of symmetric dependence erodes.

Following the erosion of symmetric dependence, whether the relationship takes on a different structure or collapses altogether depends on each partner's level of investment and available alternatives outside of the relationship (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). If neither individual has invested significantly in the relationship, or if both have promising alternatives, the relationship will end. If instead at least one individual has made significant investments in the other, or has poor alternatives, a relationship characterized by asymmetric dependence (i.e., power) is likely to develop. What happens then to the individuals' motivations for affiliation and to their expectations of affiliation from the other? We believe the answers to these questions describe the emergence of asymmetric social distance between the two parties within a power relationship. That is, we propose that the asymmetric social distance experienced by low- versus high-power individuals is a consequence of a combination of the individual's motivation for affiliation and his or her expectations of affiliation from the other party.

Fiske's (1993) power-as-control model provides initial answers to the question of motivation. According to Fiske (1993), power differences in a relationship affect individuals' sense of how much the other party warrants their attention. Low-power individuals are motivated to attend to their high-power counterparts because their counterparts can influence their outcomes. The reverse is not true for high-power individuals, who are less dependent on their low-power counterparts for goal satisfaction.

Thus, a lack of dependence decreases high-power individuals' motivation to affiliate with their low-power counterparts, and low-power individuals' dependence increases their motivation to affiliate with their high-power counterparts (Copeland, 1994; Van Kleef et al., 2008). For expectations of affiliation, we propose the opposite pattern. We argue that low-power individuals expect little affiliation within the relationship, for they are at least implicitly aware that their high-power counterparts are not motivated to affiliate with them. In contrast, high-power individuals, aware of their capacity to satisfy their low-power counterparts' needs, expect low-power individuals to make significant efforts to affiliate with them. Ironically, because high-power individuals realize they possess resources of value, they are apt to make cynical attributions about the intentions of low-power individuals' affiliation attempts (Inesi et al., 2012). Furthermore, power-holders tend to give off distancing signals in their social interactions (Earle, Giuliano, & Archer, 1983; Slobin, Miller, & Porter, 1968), which limits the quantity and intensity of affiliation attempts initiated by low-power individuals.

As a consequence of these interaction processes, we argue that both high- and low-power individuals experience more social distance from each other than do people within

symmetrically dependent relationships. Within the power relationship, however, an important difference also emerges between the high- and the low-power party: Relative to their high-power counterparts, low-power individuals want to affiliate more, but their expectations for affiliation tend to be better calibrated with the low level of affiliation that ensues, and thus they feel less distant. By contrast, high-power individuals have both reduced motivation to develop psychologically close ties with low-power individuals and miscalibrated expectations about the extent to which their low-power counterparts will approach them, and thus they develop a greater sense of social distance within the power relationship.

This process describes how we arrive at the first principle of the social distance theory: Distance grows between both individuals in power relations *and* it is asymmetric, perceived to be greater by the high-power than the low-power party. Consistent with this principle, Lammers and colleagues (2012) demonstrated that individuals in high-power conditions had a stronger preference for independent, solitary activities that created or maintained social distance than individuals in low-power conditions. Also consistent with one line of our reasoning, these researchers showed that power-holders' preference for social distance was partially explained by weaker motivation to interact with their low-power counterparts because they felt less dependent on others to satisfy their goals.

### *Social Distance Effects of Power*

If power generates asymmetric social distance in interpersonal relations, we can predict a number of differences between low- and high-power individuals that relate directly to feeling close to versus far from another person. These are summarized in the top half of Figure 1. All of these effects involve an interpersonal component based on the asymmetric social distance produced within the power relationship. It is likely that these effects sustain high-power individuals' sense of social distance and reinforce the asymmetric social distance in power relations (see upper dashed "feedback" arrow in Figure 1).

***Assumed Dissimilarity in Social Comparison.*** We propose that power-holders will view their counterparts either as so distant as to be irrelevant in the process of social comparison, or as useful but dissimilar standards of comparison. When comparisons of the self against low-power individuals are undertaken by high-power individuals, we predict a reversal of the tendency to assume similarity with the target (Mussweiler, 2003). Instead, we hypothesize that high-power individuals will assume low-power individuals are dissimilar on the dimension of comparison, which is apt to produce contrast between self and target (Ledgerwood & Chaiken, 2007; Mussweiler, 2003). In contrast to high-power individuals and their counterparts, we predict that low-power

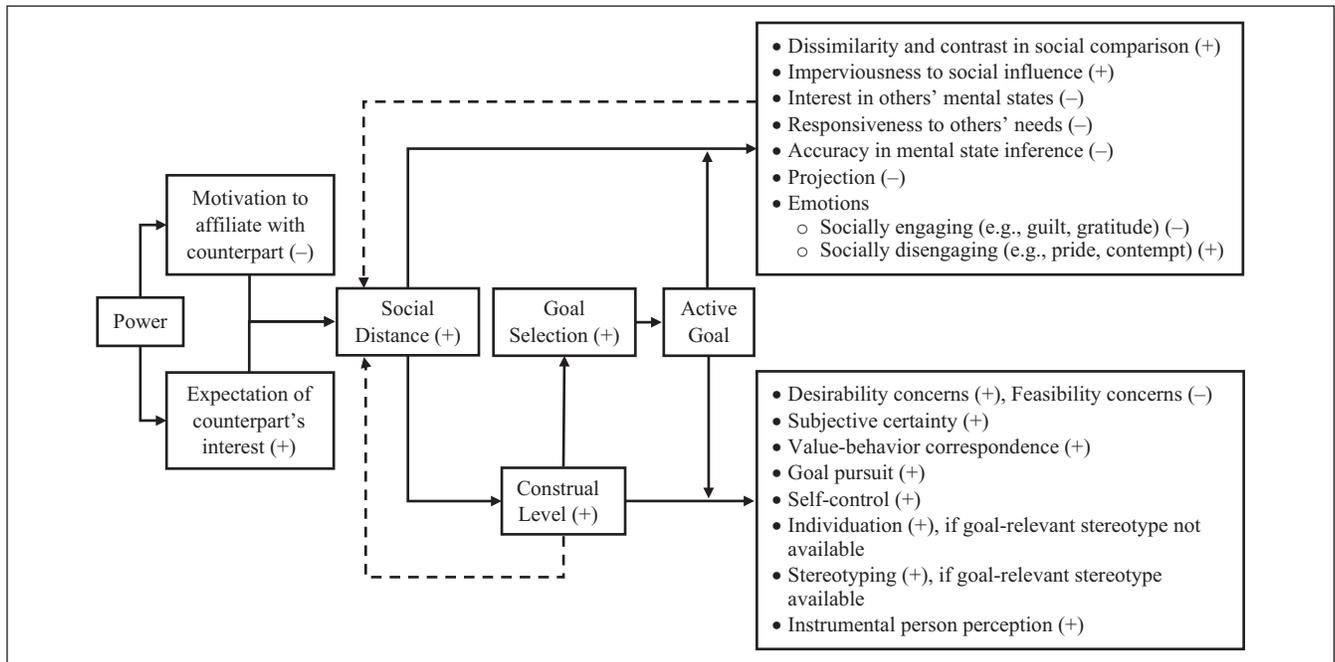


Figure 1. Model summarizing the social distance theory of power.

individuals will assume greater similarity to their high-power counterparts, and thus are more likely to assimilate on whatever characteristic is being compared.

Support for the discounting of social comparison information among power-holders comes from research on the stability of the self-concept. High-power individuals appear to have more stable self-concepts across situations than low-power individuals (Kraus, Chen, & Keltner, 2011), and one contributing factor might be that power reduces the impact of social comparison information on the self-concept (Johnson & Lammers, 2012). Indeed, Johnson and Lammers (2012) found that when high-power individuals were given information about a self-relevant person, they did not shift their self-evaluations, regardless of whether the referent person was an upward or downward standard of comparison. Although the dissimilarity-contrast prediction has yet to be tested, it could account for derogation of subordinates in manager-subordinate relations (Georgeson & Harris, 1998, 2000; Kipnis, 1972). Managers might keep an inflated view of the self and see distant subordinates as a sharp contrast to the self by diminishing their efforts and accomplishments.

**Imperviousness to Social Influence.** According to the social distance theory, high-power individuals are less susceptible than low-power individuals to others' social influence attempts. There are two possible routes to this prediction, both of which are connected to social distance. One possibility is that high-power and low-power individuals give equivalent consideration to their partner's attitudes and advice, but high-power individuals exhibit less change. That is, high-power individuals notice differences between their own and

others' attitudes and advice, but in feeling distant from their partner, they have less need to resolve these self-other discrepancies (Davis & Rusbul, 2001; Ledgerwood & Chaiken, 2007; Sinclair, Huntsinger, Skorinko, & Hardin, 2005). Another, more dramatic possibility, is that power-holders' imperviousness to social influence begins with a lack of motivation to even attend to what their counterparts are thinking and feeling because their counterparts have little influence on their outcomes.

We find support for the general prediction that power reduces susceptibility to social influence in studies of power and attitude change. In task-oriented dyads and simulated group settings, power-holders are indeed more impervious to the influence of their partners' or counterparts' attitudes than low-power individuals (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008, Experiment 3). In studies of advice-taking using straightforward numeric estimation tasks, power decreases the incorporation of outside advice into one's judgments (see Morrison, Rothman, & Soll, 2011; Tost, Gino, & Larrick, 2012). The advice-taking studies lend support to the first mechanism, that high-power individuals notice the content of the influence attempt as much as do low-power individuals, but they discount it to a greater extent. In the next section, we explore situations suggesting that power decreases susceptibility to influence at an earlier stage by limiting their interest in and attention to what others are thinking.

**Disinterest in Others' Mental States.** The social distance theory predicts that high-power individuals are less concerned with, and less responsive to, others' mental states.

People are less inclined to experience empathic concern for dissimilar than similar others (Stotland, 1969) and tend to offer greater help to individuals with whom they have closer relationships (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997; Korchmaros & Kenny, 2001, 2006; Maner & Gailliot, 2007). Thus, relative to low-power individuals, high-power individuals' social distance diminishes their motivation to attend to what others are thinking or feeling.

Consistent with this prediction, power has been associated with reduced empathic concern (Wolfin, Corneille, Yzerbyt, & Förster, 2011, Experiment 3), and Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, and Gruenfeld (2006) argued that this was the reason that individuals primed with high power were less likely than those primed with low power to spontaneously engage in perspective-taking (see also Shirako, Blader, & Chen, 2012). Likewise, De Dreu and Van Kleef (2004) found that negotiators in low-power conditions ask more diagnostic questions to understand their counterpart's goals than do negotiators in high-power and control conditions. Based on these studies, power appears to decrease concern with others' mental states.

If a perceiver makes the effort to understand a target's mental state, he or she then has an opportunity to respond to the target's perceived thoughts and feelings. A wide variety of responses are possible, but it is the extent of responsiveness, rather than the kind of responsiveness, that we argue varies as a function of power. Two types of responses—reciprocal and complementary—have received empirical attention, particularly in contexts in which the target is in distress (e.g., Van Kleef et al., 2008). In a reciprocal response, the perceiver comes to experience or express the same feeling that he or she inferred in the target (e.g., matching inferred distress with distress). In a complementary response, the perceiver has a different, but related, response (e.g., responding to inferred distress with empathic concern). In dyadic power relationships, individuals' level of power is negatively related both to emotional reciprocation and to emotional complementarity (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003; Van Kleef et al., 2008). Furthermore, in negotiations, low-power parties show another kind of complementary response: They cooperate and concede more than high-power parties in the face of a counterpart's angry emotion displays (Overbeck, Neale, & Govan, 2010; Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004). In sum, power tends to make individuals less responsive to others' mental states, as we predict based on social distance.

**Empathic Inaccuracy.** The social distance theory also predicts a negative relationship between power and empathic accuracy. Cultural difference, which produces social distance (Triandis & Triandis, 1960), and social distance in interpersonal relationships have both been shown to limit empathic accuracy. Elfenbein and Ambady (2002, 2003; see also Adams et al., 2010) have demonstrated a cultural in-group advantage in emotion recognition: People are more accurate at recognizing emotions expressed by culturally

similar than by culturally dissimilar targets. Elfenbein and Ambady claim that accurate decoding of emotions depends on understanding the cultural context in which a specific expressive style is displayed, and cultural distance decreases the capacity to understand others' specific expressive styles. Empathic accuracy appears to depend not only on knowledge of the target's culture but also on the closeness of one's relationship with the target. For example, people are more accurate at inferring the thoughts and feelings of romantic partners than of strangers or friends (Colvin, Vogt, & Ickes, 1997; Thomas & Fletcher, 2003).

One possible explanation for these findings is that there is less social learning between individuals with greater social distance. After all, people have more opportunity to learn the emotion expression norms and rules of their own culture(s) than of others' cultures due to greater frequency of social interaction within a culture, and they develop greater understanding of the expressive tendencies of their partners in close relationships than in distant relationships (Sternglanz & DePaulo, 2004). If empathic accuracy were due only to social learning, however, we would expect high- and low-power individuals to be equally poor at understanding each other relative to partners in a symmetrically dependent relationship because they both spend comparatively little time interacting with each other. Research in the domain of close relationships shows that, in addition to learning, motivation to know what the target is thinking and feeling is an important factor in empathic accuracy, and people are more motivated to understand the mental states of others who are close than of others who are distant (Ickes & Simpson, 2003). Similarly, power reduces individuals' motivation to accurately perceive the other party in the power relationship (cf. Georgesen & Harris, 2000; Neuberg & Fiske, 1987; Stevens & Fiske, 2000).

In support of this prediction, participants primed with high power were less accurate than participants in a control condition or participants primed with low power at accurately recognizing static emotion expressions (Galinsky et al., 2006, Study 3; Shirako et al., 2012, Study 3), and in a study of interacting dyads, Gonzaga and colleagues (Gonzaga, Keltner, & Ward, 2008) found that high-power men, but not high-power women, were less accurate judges of their subordinate's emotions.<sup>2</sup>

The finding by Gonzaga and colleagues suggests that it would be fruitful to consider factors that moderate accuracy in inferences of others' mental states. In a series of studies, Schmid Mast and colleagues (2009) found that high-power individuals can be more empathically accurate than low-power individuals; however, their results appear to be contingent on variables orthogonal to power, such as feelings of pride and respect and viewing one's position in other-oriented terms. Also, a field study demonstrating the importance of individual differences interacting with power revealed that employees in powerful positions displayed inferior emotion recognition if they were low in agreeableness, presumably

because colleagues' emotions typically are not relevant to the goals of disagreeable power-holders (Côté et al., 2011, Study 3). Thus, it appears that social goals are one important moderator of the negative relationship between power and empathic accuracy (captured by the moderating variable "Active Goal" in Figure 1).

**Social Projection.** One question that follows from the prediction that the powerful are less empathically accurate than the powerless is whether there is a predictable pattern to power-holders' deviation from accuracy in mental state inferences. Two distinct possibilities for systematic bias in inferences of targets' mental states are social projection, the extent to which one anchors on one's own mental states (Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004; Nickerson, 2001), and social stereotyping, the extent to which one anchors on beliefs about a target group's characteristics and attributes (Judd & Park, 1993).<sup>3</sup>

The social distance theory predicts less projection among high-power perceivers than low-power perceivers. Two different operationalizations of social distance have been associated with reduced projection: People are more likely to project onto close than distant others (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996), and onto individuals who are more similar to the self (Ames, 2004). Thus, the experience of social distance among high-power individuals would make them less likely to project their mental states onto others. Later in the article, we argue that, under specific conditions, power is likely to be associated with more stereotyping.

**Experience of Socially Disengaging Emotions.** To make our predictions about discrete emotions from the social distance theory, we use the distinction between socially engaging and socially disengaging emotions (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000; Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006). We argue that, with reduced motivation for affiliation with others, high-power individuals are less likely to experience (or will experience with less intensity) socially engaging emotions and more likely to experience (or will experience with greater intensity) socially disengaging emotions than are low-power individuals. We do not make predictions about the likelihood of experiencing the precipitating events that cause discrete emotions, which of course would affect the frequency with which these emotions are experienced. Instead, we are predicting that high- and low-power individuals have different emotional responses to identical precipitating events, based on whether the emotion is more likely to be experienced in close or distant relationships, or whether it fosters social connection or pushes people apart.

Compassion is an intuitive example of an emotion that communicates social engagement to others; it is an emotional expression of complementary responsiveness to others' needs (Goetz, Keltner, & Simon-Thomas, 2010), which we have already discussed is more likely to occur among low- than high-power individuals. Gratitude also serves a socially engaging function. In close relationships, the expression of gratitude increases the perception that partners are

communally oriented toward one another (Lambert, Clark, Durtschi, Fincham, & Graham, 2010) and helps maintain commitment to one's partner (Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012). We also consider guilt and embarrassment to be socially engaging emotions (Barrett, 1995); as negative self-conscious emotions, they require awareness of the self as an object of judgment (Lewis, 2008) and are experienced in anticipation of, or response to, social disapproval (Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). Most important for the present analysis, these emotions serve reparative functions in social relationships (Keltner & Buswell, 1997; Tangney, 1999), and guilt in particular is experienced more frequently in close than distant relationships (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994). We have argued that, within the context of power relations, the high-power individual is less motivated to maintain the relationship and feels more distant than the low-power individual. Thus, we predict that power is negatively related to the experience of compassion, gratitude, guilt, and embarrassment.

For socially disengaging emotions, we predict the opposite. We expect that power is positively related to the experience of emotions that emphasize one's lack of dependence, such as pride, or that result in social separation, such as disgust, contempt, and anger (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989). Power-holders might have a greater propensity to experience these emotions for reasons beyond the social distance theory. For example, one function of both anger and pride is to signal elevated standing in a social hierarchy (Oveis, Horberg, & Keltner, 2010; Shariff, Tracy, & Markusoff, 2012; Tiedens, 2001), and anger is also used instrumentally to influence others' behavior (e.g., Clark, Pataki, & Carver, 1996; Fischer & Roseman, 2007; Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980; Van Dijk, Van Kleef, Steinel, & Van Beest, 2008). We are proposing that, in addition to these reasons, high-power individuals' social distance will increase their propensity and intensity of experiencing socially disengaging emotions. Oveis et al. (2010) found that feelings of pride produce a sense of dissimilarity from weak others; similarly, high-power individuals' pride might maintain distance from their low-power counterparts. Although anger can eventually lead to reconciliation and increased closeness, in the short term, it leads to avoidance and reduced closeness (Averill, 1983; Fischer & Roseman, 2007; Lemay, Overall, & Clark, 2012). Feelings of contempt emerge in part from sensing distance in otherwise close relationships or from a desire to avoid social contact with another person, and contempt has more drastic distancing effects than anger over the long term (Fischer & Roseman, 2007). Disgust is even more disengaging; it is reserved for target individuals with whom one feels little human connection at all (Harris & Fiske, 2006). Although each of these emotions has its own distinct triggers and expressions, they all maintain or increase social distance. Thus, we expect high-power individuals to be more likely than low-power individuals to experience these emotions, and to experience them with greater intensity.

### Summary: The Principle of Social Distance in Power Relations

Power is a distancing force in social relations, with high-power individuals experiencing greater distance than low-power individuals (e.g., Inesi et al., 2012; Lammers et al., 2012). We have proposed that this asymmetric social distance is a consequence of the interplay between both parties' motivation for affiliation and their expectations of affiliation attempts from the other party. Once asymmetric social distance is experienced between high- and low-power individuals, we have hypothesized that a number of interpersonal differences emerge, with power-holders demonstrating (a) less assumed similarity in social comparison, (b) less susceptibility to social influence, (c) less interest in and responsiveness to others' mental states, (d) less accuracy in mental state inference, and (e) reduced likelihood of experiencing socially engaging versus disengaging emotions. In the next section, we describe how social distance is connected to abstraction in mental representation (i.e., high-level construal), which we propose causes another set of differences between high- and low-power individuals.

### The Relationship Between Social Distance and Construal Level

Social distance can be thought of as a form of psychological distance, one of many factors that affect whether something or someone is experienced as being close to or far from the self here and now. Based on the core tenet of construal level theory that psychological distance and construal level are positively related (Trope & Liberman, 2010), we argue that power changes the mental representation of target stimuli (e.g., objects, events, people, goals, actions). Specifically, we argue that social distance causes power-holders to construe targets at a higher level. Whereas a low-level construal is a relatively unstructured representation that emphasizes the target's peripheral and subordinate features, a high-level construal is a schematic representation that emphasizes central and superordinate features.

A particular feature may be defined as high- versus low-level based on how central and superordinate it is in the mental representation of an object. High-level features are more central in that they are more defining of an object than are low-level features. Thus, changing a high-level feature changes the meaning of an object more than does changing a low-level feature, and high-level features are more invariant than low-level features across contexts. High-level features are also superordinate to low-level features in that the meaning of low-level features is more dependent on high-level features than vice versa.

Consider the context of a job negotiation. Multiple issues can be negotiated, and each party brings particular interests to the table. We describe interests as a high-level feature and issues as a low-level feature for two reasons that illustrate the

properties of centrality and superordination (Giacomantonio, De Dreu, & Mannetti, 2010; see also Henderson, Trope, & Carnevale, 2006). First, if a negotiator changes one of his or her interests, his or her position would change more fundamentally than if he or she changed his or her stance on a particular issue (i.e., interests are more central). For example, it would be more jarring for a job candidate to suddenly care about his or her work-life balance than for the same candidate to suddenly quibble about how many vacation days he or she has a year. Second, interests dictate the prioritization of specific issues, but issues do not dictate the prioritization of interests (i.e., interests are superordinate). For example, a candidate's heightened interest in his or her health (due to a rare medical condition) would cause him or her to push more on the issue of health care benefits. However, caring more about the issue of health care benefits would be unlikely to change a candidate's general level of interest in his or her health. Based on this analysis of centrality and superordination, we would expect high-power negotiators to be more attentive than low-power negotiators to satisfying underlying interests and more creative at generating a variety of possible deals to satisfy those interests. At the same time, high-power negotiators might be more reluctant than low-power negotiators to entertain a deal that does not maximize value on their primary interests.

### Principle 2: Power Increases Construal Level (via Social Distance)

Individuals in high-power conditions, compared with individuals in control and low-power conditions, engage in higher level construal of targets within the context of power relations and beyond. In laboratory experiments, individuals primed with high power have demonstrated more abstract thinking immediately following the prime by using broader and superordinate categories, focusing on primary over secondary features, and detecting more Gestalt patterns and structure in stimuli, than individuals primed with low power (Guinote, 2007a; Huang et al., 2011; P. K. Smith & Trope, 2006; Stel et al., 2012). For example, in one experiment, high-power participants preferred to describe actions in terms of the abstract goals the actions might satisfy (i.e., *why* they would do something) rather than the concrete means by which the actions could be pursued (i.e., *how* they would do something), relative to low-power participants (P. K. Smith & Trope, 2006, Experiment 2). In real life, high-ranking personnel described the terrorist attacks on 9/11 in more abstract terms than low-ranking personnel and victims (Magee et al., 2010). In this case, high-ranking personnel held power for days and weeks in the aftermath of the attack, which shifted their mind-set to be more abstract in processing information even outside of their domain of power during that extensive period.

Much as the previously discussed effects of social distance serve to reinforce that distance, high-level construal also

appears to increase perceptions of social distance. Stephan et al. (2011, Study 3) found that participants who construe others' behavior at a higher level perceive them as less familiar than participants who construe others' behavior at a lower level. Moreover, Rubini and Kruglanski (1997) found that interviewers who ask more abstract questions develop less rapport—a kind of closeness—with their interviewees. Thus, high-level construal among power-holders might reinforce their sense of social distance from low-power counterparts (see lower dashed “feedback” arrow in Figure 1).

### *The Similarity of Various Psychological Distances*

One more tenet of construal level theory is important as we develop our arguments. All forms of psychological distance (temporal, spatial, hypothetical, and social) represent a single underlying dimension—lack of overlap with one's own, current, subjective experience—and, thus, have similar meaning for individuals (Bar-Anan, Liberman, Trope, & Algom, 2007; Trope & Liberman, 2010). As a communicative expression of mental representation, some language reflects this unification of meaning across psychological distances (Boroditsky, 2000). The expression “out of sight, out of mind” is invoked to describe when someone so spatially distant as not to be seen also feels socially distant. In fact, the phrases “social distance” and “feeling close,” both central to the present analysis, are adaptations of spatial language to describe the psychology of interpersonal relationships. Some behavioral expressions of social distance also reflect its relationship to spatial distance; for example, individuals sometimes elect to sit further away from people who are unlike them (Snyder, Kleck, Strenta, & Mentzer, 1979).

All forms of psychological distance not only have similar meaning but also tend to operate on construal level in the same way (Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007). This is important in developing our predictions from the social distance theory because any construal-related outcomes that have been found to be caused by temporal or spatial distance, hypotheticality, or other types of social distance (e.g., dissimilarity) could plausibly be caused by power as well. For instance, we propose that power is positively associated with a focus on desirability concerns and negatively associated with a focus on feasibility concerns in the evaluation of alternatives (P. K. Smith, 2012), and we base this proposition on the findings that temporal distance and dissimilarity (i.e., social distance) both lead to a similar emphasis on desirability over feasibility (Liberman & Trope, 1998; Liviatan et al., 2008). As psychological distance and, thus, construal level increase, the priority given to desirability concerns increases relative to feasibility concerns because desirability reflects the superordinate concern of the desired goal, whereas feasibility reflects the subordinate concern of the means to achieve that goal. In subsequent sections, we will borrow

heavily from research on other forms of psychological distance to predict, via construal level, a number of effects of social distance.

### *Construal Level Effects of Power*

In addition to the predominantly interpersonal effects that are predicted directly from social distance, the mediating mechanism of construal level can produce a number of important social-cognitive effects. We summarize these effects in the bottom half of Figure 1 and spell out their logic below.

**Subjective Certainty.** The social distance theory predicts greater certainty and less attitude change among power-holders. As previously discussed, one source of immunity to attitude change is social distance, whereby power-holders are less influenced by their counterparts' attempts to change their minds. Moreover, we expect that changes in construal level would also lead to more general attitude certainty and stability in the face of other kinds of pressures outside of strictly interpersonal dynamics. Judgments and attitudes construed at a high level are less dependent on context and less susceptible to influence from any peripheral factors. That is, high-level construal would cause powerful individuals to neglect the sort of information that might make them more uncertain or influence their beliefs—information that is incongruent with their expectations and attitudes, or disconfirming of their hypotheses—because in models of confirmation bias such information is clearly peripheral (Darley & Fazio, 1980; Nickerson, 1998). Ledgerwood, Trope, and Chaiken (2010) found that individuals' evaluations of various policies were less susceptible to social influence when they construed the policies from greater temporal distance. In that context, the source of social influence was others' evaluations, which were peripheral to the participants' task of forming their own evaluations. Thus, we predict that high-level construal will produce greater confidence and conviction in the attitudes of the powerful.

Research on power is consistent with this prediction. In the context of evaluating new products and policy proposals, circumstances that were not interpersonal in nature, Briñol, Petty, Valle, Rucker, and Becerra (2007) found that power increased individuals' confidence in their initial evaluations, and stronger conviction in their attitudes made high-power individuals less susceptible to persuasive messages (see also Eaton, Visser, Krosnick, & Anand, 2009). Similarly, individuals in high-power conditions are more confident in their judgments and general knowledge than individuals in low-power and control conditions (Fast, Sivanathan, Mayer, & Galinsky, 2012; See et al., 2011; Tost et al., 2012, Experiment 3), and Magee and colleagues (2010) showed that powerful individuals not only made statements that were more abstract than the statements made by powerless individuals in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks but also displayed more certainty in these statements, even after accounting for

impression management concerns. Furthermore, Erber and Fiske's (1984) finding that high-power individuals are less attentive than low-power individuals to expectation-inconsistent information is in line with the reasoning behind our prediction (for complementary findings that low power increases attention to expectation-inconsistent information, see Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, & Yzerbyt, 2000; Stevens & Fiske, 2000). Expectations determine what is central in individuals' construals, and information that is inconsistent with expectations is therefore peripheral. Thus, high-power individuals' high-level construal would reduce their attention to expectation-inconsistent information.

**Value–Behavior Correspondence.** The social distance theory predicts greater value–behavior correspondence among high- than low-power individuals. Values are representations of desired end states; as abstract concepts, values motivate behavior across a wide range of situations rather than prescribing the concrete means to achieve desired ends. Thus, if an individual is bogged down in *how* to perform a behavior (a low-level construal), values have little use in helping with those mechanics; however, if an individual is thinking about *why* he or she might do something (a high-level construal), values provide the compass to guide intention and action. Indeed, abstract mind-sets appear to facilitate behavior congruent with one's values more than concrete mind-sets do (Torelli & Kaikati, 2009). Furthermore, temporal distance has been shown to affect both construal level and value-behavior correspondence. People represent the distant future in more abstract terms than the near future, and their intentions in the distant future are more congruent with their values than are their near-future intentions (Eyal, Sagristano, Trope, Liberman, & Chaiken, 2009). In negotiations, individuals who are primed with greater temporal distance exhibit stronger correspondence between their social value orientation and their tactics: With greater temporal distance, prosocial negotiators are more cooperative and pro-self negotiators less cooperative (Giacomantonio, De Dreu, Shalvi, Sligte, & Leder, 2010).

If social distance operates like temporal distance, through construal level, it could explain a number of studies demonstrating that individuals' intentions and behavior are more consistent with their values when they have greater power. Among men who have a strong orientation toward sexual harassment, the mere activation of the concept of power can be sufficient to increase sexual attraction to women (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995), and Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh (2001) reported that power made communal individuals more generous and exchange-oriented individuals more selfish. In a negotiation context, Galinsky et al. (2008, Experiment 4) found that, under high-power conditions, prosocial individuals had greater intentions to form a trusting relationship with the other party than did pro-self individuals, regardless of the other party's reputation (cooperative or competitive). In the baseline comparison condition, participants' intentions were determined primarily by the other

negotiator's reputation. These results support the notion that power-holders' intentions and actions are determined more by their own values, and less by situational forces, than are the intentions and actions of the powerless, and the social distance theory offers construal level as a mechanism underlying value-behavior correspondence.

**Facilitation of Goal Selection.** When individuals enter a situation without a clearly defined goal, they are apt to take cues from the environment about what goals would be afforded by the situation (Cantor, 1994; Gibson, 1977). The social distance theory predicts that power facilitates selection of a goal to pursue from the myriad of possibilities. If a particular situation compels or strongly affords a particular goal, this goal is a central and superordinate feature of the situation. For example, in many work settings, career goals would be a central and superordinate feature, but social goals would not. Power-holders, by dint of their use of higher level construals, would efficiently select the goals most applicable to a situation (e.g., career goals over social goals in a work situation). Because lower level construals would contain both situationally applicable and inapplicable goals, low-power individuals would show more equivocal goal selection.

We also argue that high-power individuals are more focused on what is desirable than on what is feasible to pursue. When people are selecting goals to pursue, issues of feasibility take a backseat to issues of desirability because feasibility is peripheral and subordinate to desirability (Liberman & Trope, 1998). Higher construal level increases this focus on desirability. On a related note, Trope and Liberman (2010) have argued that higher level construal provides a stronger signal of the value of a stimulus. From a distance, detecting the desirability of one goal relative to others is simply easier; without feasibility concerns impinging on the judgment, the relative desirability of the goals can be judged more easily.

Some research on power supports these predictions. Guinote (2008) found that high-power individuals are more effective than low-power individuals at selecting goals applicable to the situation. For example, high-power individuals were more inclined to engage in work-related activities and less inclined to engage in social activities in work situations than low-power individuals, but the opposite was true in social situations. Furthermore, Guinote (2007b) found that high-power individuals report requiring less time than low-power individuals to set a goal. We argue that these findings could be explained by high-power individuals deciding which goals to pursue using high-level construals. High-level construal would allow power-holders to rapidly distinguish situationally applicable from inapplicable goals, and desirable from undesirable goals, and thus to more efficiently select a goal to pursue.

**Facilitation of Goal Pursuit.** The social distance theory also predicts that power facilitates goal pursuit. Once a goal is chosen, it influences an individual's particular high-level

mental representation of potential activities because what features are central and superordinate depend on what goal is being pursued (Trope & Liberman, 2010). Low-level representations generally lend themselves to multiple high-level representations, and it is one's goals that determine which high-level representation is selected. For example, depending on one's goals, "teamwork" may be construed at a higher level as either "accomplishing complex tasks" or "being social." For an individual who values productivity and achievement, teamwork becomes an opportunity to get work done, and for someone who feels isolated in their personal life, it becomes an opportunity for conversation. Though both individuals are thinking of the same activity, their different high-level construals shape how they prioritize different aspects of the activity so that they each are more likely to channel their energy toward satisfying their specific goals. For example, an individual who construes teamwork as an opportunity for task accomplishment would encourage the team to tackle its most pressing work first, whereas an individual who construes it as a social activity would, in the same situation, look for opportunities to gossip.

Furthermore, we argue that high-level construal broadens the range of means one might consider for goal pursuit. Goals themselves are organized hierarchically in the mind and can be construed at higher or lower levels (Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 1960; Vallacher & Wegner, 1987). When goals are represented at a higher level, a greater variety of concrete actions are viewed as contributing to goal fulfillment. Thus, we propose that high-level construal makes power-holders more flexible in making use of whatever means the situation affords for goal pursuit.

Multiple lines of research have shown that high-power individuals think and act more in line with an active goal than do low-power individuals (e.g., Galinsky et al., 2008; Slabu & Guinote, 2010; P. K. Smith et al., 2008). For example, in a series of studies, Guinote (2007b) demonstrated that high-power individuals are more efficient and flexible in their pursuit of goals than are low-power individuals. In one study, high-power participants were faster to perceive and act on good opportunities for goal pursuit than low-power participants. In another study, high-power participants attempted a greater variety of means to solve a problem compared with low-power participants. In addition, Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, and Galinsky (2008) showed that power increases individuals' propensity to perceive others through a lens of goal fulfillment (i.e., to see how they are relevant to one's goals and to use them to satisfy those goals). These studies involved immediate goals, but even over longer temporal periods, power appears to facilitate goal pursuit. Karremans and Smith (2010) found that for individuals who had a long-term goal of maintaining a relationship (i.e., were highly committed to it), high power increased the likelihood of forgiving their relationship partner for a transgression and thus behaving in line with their goal. We are proposing that mentally representing goals and

potential activities at a higher level helps power-holders focus on what they can do in a given situation to satisfy their goals.

**Self-Control.** The social distance theory predicts that high-power individuals exhibit greater self-control than low-power individuals. Self-control is exercised when individuals prioritize more important, longer term motives over less important, shorter term motives when the two motives directly conflict (e.g., a dieter selecting the fruit plate rather than the chocolate cake for dessert). Most models of self-control require that individuals inhibit automatic thoughts or impulsive responses connected to these short-term motives to continue making progress toward a long-term, more important outcome (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989; Trope & Fishbach, 2000).

We argue that, when confronted with conflicting goals, high-power individuals, because they use higher level construals, are guided more by their central and superordinate goals than are low-power individuals. Central and superordinate goals are determined by what is most important to a person; compared with peripheral and subordinate goals, they tend to be more global goals that transcend specific contexts. For example, goals aligned with core aspects of the self-concept, identity concerns, and values would be central and superordinate. High-level construal leads people to perceive their options through the lens of their central and superordinate goals, highlighting the negative aspects of temptations because they conflict with these goals (Fujita & Han, 2009; Fujita, Trope, Liberman, & Levin-Sagi, 2006). Thus, high-level construal leads people to seek more important rather than more immediate rewards (Fujita et al., 2006). Similarly, we would expect individuals with high power to be more likely than individuals with low power to denigrate or disregard an object of temptation and pursue more important goals.

DeWall, Baumeister, Mead, and Vohs (2011) have found evidence consistent with, but not demonstrative of, our prediction. In a series of experiments, they found that high-power individuals were more likely than low-power individuals to regulate their effort in terms of how well tasks aligned with their goal priorities. When a task was goal-relevant, high-power individuals performed better than low-power individuals; however, when a task was viewed as trivial and unimportant, high-power individuals performed worse than low-power individuals. We see this as indirect, preliminary support for our prediction and lay out the type of research design that would need to be implemented to more explicitly test the theory in a later section of the article.

**Individuation, Stereotyping, and Instrumental Person Perception.** The social distance theory offers a compelling, unifying account for three related phenomena that have been linked to power: individuation, stereotyping, and instrumental attention in person perception. We propose that high-level

construal produces more stereotyping, individuation, and instrumental person perception among power-holders.

Stereotypes are high-level constructs, generalized descriptions of the ways in which categories of people are believed to think and act *across* situations. Their content typically comprises adjectives widely associated with social groups rather than verbs describing specific behaviors of a group's members (Maass, Salvi, Arcuri, & Semin, 1989; Semin & Fiedler, 1991). The abstract nature of stereotypes makes it possible for people to impute them to individual members of social groups and to interpret a wide array of behaviors as consistent with the stereotypes of an individual's group. McCrea, Wieber, and Myers (2012) reported a series of experiments showing that people in abstract mind-sets use stereotypes more than people in concrete mind-sets. Once a stereotype was made salient, high-level construal led individuals to perceive social targets as more exemplary of the stereotype content. If high-power individuals construe the world at a higher level, they will make greater use of stereotypes in construing other people, as long as stereotypes are available and applicable in the situation.

The relation between power and stereotyping was once thought to be uniformly positive (Fiske, 1993). In support of this idea, Goodwin et al. (2000) found that high-power individuals tend to pay more attention to stereotype-consistent characteristics and less attention to stereotype-inconsistent characteristics of low-power individuals. The overall evidence for a relationship between power and stereotyping, however, is not so clear (e.g., Lammers, Stoker, & Stapel, 2009). At a minimum, and consistent with the social distance theory, power appears to lead to stereotyping only when a stereotype is available (Chen, Ybarra, & Kiefer, 2004).

For situations in which a stereotype is neither available nor applicable, the social distance theory can also explain superior individuation processes among the powerful. Individuation is fundamentally about representing people in terms of the traits that define them as individuals across situations. In situations where stereotypes are not relevant, people typically try to infer targets' traits based on their behavior (Winter & Uleman, 1984; see Uleman, Saribay, & Gonzalez, 2008, for a review). Trait inference involves a process of abstraction, extracting global aspects of someone's personality from the available evidence presented in their behavior. Whereas low-level construal of a target involves paying attention to a target's distinct features and actions (e.g., reads books and speaks softly), high-level construal involves integrating a wide range of behavioral cues to assemble the gist of the target's personality (e.g., is introverted). Indeed, psychologically distant observers, whether far away in time or space, are more likely than psychologically close observers to draw spontaneous trait inferences about actors (Rim, Uleman, & Trope, 2009).

We propose that similar effects would occur as a function of social distance in power relations. Consistent with this proposition, when no obvious stereotype is available to apply to a social target, high-power individuals are superior

to low-power individuals at individuation, assembling a set of behaviors into a coherent, accurate representation of the target individual's personality (Gruenfeld et al., 2008, Experiment 2; Overbeck & Park, 2001).

Much as goals moderate other effects of power in the social distance theory, we propose that perceiver goals play an important role in person perception. According to the theory, the power-holder's goals are a crucial determinant of which aspects of a target's personality he or she attends to (Trope & Liberman, 2010). We argue that, whereas low-power individuals represent their goals at a concrete level and miss opportunities to see how other people fit with their goals, high-power individuals' abstract goal representations help them note the similarities between their goals and the attributes of social targets that could be employed to achieve those goals. For example, in a study by Gruenfeld and colleagues (2008, Experiment 2), all participants were charged with judging a candidate's fit for a librarian job. Compared with participants primed with low power, participants primed with high power were more effective at extracting a target's introverted and extroverted behaviors to determine whether he or she was an introvert in general and thus a good candidate for the librarian position. With a different goal, such as finding a romantic partner, we would expect high-power individuals to exhibit superior performance at generating a global impression of the target's emotional stability (cf. Goodwin, Fiske, Rosen, & Rosenthal, 2002). Thus, according to the social distance theory, whether power-holders attend to stereotype content is determined in part by whether that content is goal-relevant. This prediction is in line with Vescio, Snyder, and Butz's (2003) findings: When available stereotypes are goal-relevant, power leads individuals to stereotype more, but when stereotypes are goal-irrelevant, power leads to less stereotyping.

We interpret these goal-related findings as examples of the much broader phenomenon of instrumental person perception, wherein people focus on those characteristics of others that are instrumental for goal completion, which a number of researchers have found is increased by the possession of power (Copeland, 1994; Gruenfeld et al., 2008; Kunstman & Maner, 2011; Overbeck & Park, 2001, 2006; see also Kipnis, 1972). We propose that high-level construal can account for these findings and the other results showing greater stereotyping, on one hand, and greater individuation, on the other hand, among high-power compared with low-power individuals.

Our proposed effects of power on person perception can be summarized as follows: Relative to low-power individuals, power-holders construe other people at a more abstract level (i.e., they stereotype or individuate social targets, depending on what information is available and applicable) and also construe their own goals at a more abstract level, which leads them to more effectively find and focus on the characteristics of others that would facilitate goal completion (i.e., to attend instrumentally to social targets). Although

we have described stereotyping here as an unmotivated process, our logic also makes room for power-holders' stereotyping of the powerless as a way of maintaining or enhancing their power (Fiske, 1993; Kay, Banfield, & Laurin, 2010). We would expect power-holders with a strong power-maintenance or power-enhancement goal to be more likely to stereotype their counterparts unfavorably; this goal could emerge from a situational need for power enhancement (e.g., a threat), an individual dominance motive (e.g., Goodwin, Operario, & Fiske, 1998), or a hierarchy-enhancing ideology (e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

### **Summary: The Principle of Construal Level in Power Relations**

Based on the association between social distance and construal level, high-power individuals construe objects, events, activities, and other people at a higher level than do low-power individuals (e.g., Magee et al., 2010; P. K. Smith & Trope, 2006). These higher level representations among power-holders are characterized by greater attention to features of situations and social targets that are more central and superordinate. We have argued that these differences in construal level have important consequences for high- and low-power individuals' behavior. As a function of greater abstraction in their mental representations, we have hypothesized that power-holders (a) feel greater subjective certainty, because they neglect information that is incongruent with their attitudes; (b) behave more in line with their values, because they are guided more by why to act than how to act; (c) select goals more efficiently, because they can identify the most central, superordinate, and desirable goals afforded by the situation; (d) pursue goals more efficiently, because they prioritize activities in line with their most important goals and consider a wider range of means to accomplish those goals; (e) exhibit greater self-control, because they prioritize central and superordinate goals and neglect peripheral temptations; (f) perceive people more in terms of stereotypes when available and applicable, and otherwise in terms of traits, because both stereotypes and traits are categorical abstractions of targets' behavior; and (g) perceive people more instrumentally, because their attention is drawn to aspects of others that are goal-relevant.

### **A Comparison With the Approach/Inhibition Theory of Power**

The received wisdom until now is that the approach/inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003) explains many of the phenomena described above. It is more accurate to say that the theory is at best consistent with, rather than explanatory of, some of the empirical results we have described. Notably, the approach/inhibition theory cannot be used, without significant adjustment, to generate many of our predictions. In Table 1, columns (a) and (b), we clarify which of

our predictions are also made by Keltner et al. (2003). There is overlap between the two theories on less than half of the predictions. Furthermore, column (c) shows that although the approach/inhibition theory has often been used by researchers to motivate some of these overlapping predictions and remains a valid possibility for some of the phenomena we discuss, the direct evidence supporting Keltner et al.'s proposed mechanisms is minimal. This is not to say the theory is invalid or is not useful for thinking about some of the psychological processes generated by power dynamics in social relations. Rather, we want to highlight that a substantial body of evidence about power's psychological effects is agnostic as to which theoretical mechanism produced them. To explore this issue, it is useful to revisit the mechanisms that underpin the approach/inhibition theory.

According to Keltner et al. (2003), the experience of power is governed by the relative activation of two neurobiological systems, the BAS and the BIS. They posit that a person's level of power affects the extent to which he or she experiences freedom and reward versus constraint and threat. Due to these differing experiences, reduced power activates the BIS and elevated power activates the BAS. The BIS is responsible for identifying novel stimuli (including threats), recognizing goal conflicts, and interrupting ongoing behavior, whereas the BAS leads individuals to attend to potential rewards and to initiate and maintain behavior that brings them closer to their goals (Fowles, 1980, 1988; Gray, 1975, 1982; Gray & McNaughton, 2000). Keltner et al. also present the BAS and BIS as having straightforward associations with positive emotion and negative emotion, respectively; however, this interpretation has been called into question (Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009). For example, anger, frustration, and guilt have all been associated with the BAS (e.g., Amodio, Devine, & Harmon-Jones, 2007; Carver, 2004; Harmon-Jones, 2003).

In both the social distance theory and the approach/inhibition theory, goals play a central role in regulating behavior. Otherwise, the two theories are distinct. The starting point for the approach/inhibition theory is the individual's tendency to experience reward versus threat as a function of power, and Keltner et al. propose a neurobiological mechanism (the BAS and BIS) for power's effects. In contrast, the social distance theory begins with the interpersonal dynamics of dependence, and we propose an interpersonal mechanism (social distance) and a cognitive mechanism (construal level) for the effects of power.

To assess the validity of the approach/inhibition theory, we would want to see at least three types of evidence. First, we would expect to observe that power causes changes in the BIS, the BAS, or both. At the time of the theory's publication, Moskowitz (2004) criticized the lack of precision about which relationships the theory was actually predicting, and 10 years later, there is still a lack of evidence connecting power directly to either of these systems. P. K. Smith and Bargh (2008, Experiment 1) found that power is positively

**Table 1.** List of Effects Predicted by the Social Distance Theory of Power, With Whether the Effect Was Predicted by Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson (2003) and Evidence Supporting Associations Between the Phenomena and the BIS/BAS (Irrespective of Associations Between Power and the Phenomena).

(a) Effect (organized by proximate mechanism in italics)	(b) Predicted by Keltner et al. (2003)?	(c) Evidence for association with BIS/BAS
1a. Motivation to affiliate with counterpart (-)	N	—
1b. Expectation of counterpart's interest in affiliation (+)	N	—
2. Social Distance (+)	N	—
• Dissimilarity and contrast in social comparison (+)	N	—
• Imperviousness to social influence (+)	Y	—
• Interest in others' mental states (-)	Y	—
• Responsiveness to others' needs (-)	N	—
• Accuracy in mental state inference (-)	Y	—
• Projection (-)	N	—
• Socially engaging emotions (-)		
○ Guilt	Y	Amodio, Devine, and Harmon-Jones (2007): Activated BAS for reparation Sheikh and Janoff-Bulman (2010): Positive association with BIS
○ Embarrassment	Y	—
○ Gratitude	Y	—
○ Compassion	N	—
• Socially disengaging emotions (+)		
○ Pride	Y	—
○ Disgust	N	Reuter et al. (2004): Positive association with BIS
○ Contempt	N	—
○ Anger	Equivocal	Carver and Harmon-Jones (2009): Review finding positive association with BAS
3. Construal level (+)	N	—
• Goal selection	N	—
• Desirability concerns (+), feasibility concerns (-)	N	—
• Subjective certainty (+)	Y	McGregor, Nash, Mann, and Phills (2010): BAS associated with conviction as a response to uncertainty
• Value-behavior correspondence (+)	Y	—
• Goal pursuit (+)	Y	Berkman, Lieberman, and Gable (2009): BIS and BAS interact to maintain goal pursuit
• Self-control (+)	Opposite	Avila (2001): BIS activation negatively associated, and BAS activation positively associated with disinhibition Smillie, Jackson, and Dalgleish (2006): Positive association between BAS and impulsivity
• Individuation (+), if stereotype not available	N	—
• Stereotyping (+), if goal-relevant stereotype available	Y	—
• Instrumental person perception (+)	Y	—

associated with the BAS, but not with the BIS, as measured with Carver and White's (1994) scales, and Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, and Otten (2008, Experiment 1) reported that legitimate power is positively associated with a scale combining Carver and White's BIS and BAS items in a

nonstandard way. Taking a neuropsychological approach, Boksem, Smolders, and De Cremer (2012) found that participants primed with high power, compared with participants primed with low power, showed increased relative left-sided frontal brain activity, a neural signature associated

with the BAS (but not the BIS; Amodio, Master, Yee, & Taylor, 2008)

Second, in studies that have nothing to do with power, we would expect evidence connecting the BIS or BAS to the same phenomena that Keltner et al. (2003) hypothesize can be produced by power. As summarized in Table 1, column (c), such evidence is sparse. This should not be surprising as many of the phenomena involve person perception or mental representation, which nobody that we are aware of has theorized to be connected to the BIS or BAS.

Third, we would want to see the entire chain of evidence connected—power producing a change in BIS/BAS, and BIS/BAS, in turn, producing an effect. Not a single published study in the dozens citing Keltner et al. (2003) has contained evidence of this kind.

We want to be clear that we are not criticizing Keltner et al. (2003); their purpose was to present a set of organizing principles to make sense of past research and to make a number of predictions that would generate novel studies of power. They certainly accomplished these goals. Nor is this a criticism of the many studies and published articles that have followed. In the aggregate, however, researchers have hung their hats on a theory for which there is little direct support. In a field that takes pride in the identification and measurement of mechanisms, this is a surprising point to reach. We are simply arguing that researchers ought to consider the social distance theory, as it incorporates both a different array of phenomena and mechanisms that have already been linked to those phenomena. Considering these mechanisms and phenomena ought to help researchers of power reach a more productive destination.

Setting aside the evidence for a moment, we now analyze which of our predictions could also be made from the approach/inhibition theory based on current thinking about the functions of the BIS and BAS. The approach/inhibition theory could plausibly explain the facilitation of goal selection and goal pursuit. After all, the BAS is thought to play an important role in animating goal-directed behavior, and the BIS is believed to signal a conflict between competing behavioral responses and command interruption of ongoing behavior (Amodio et al., 2008; Avila, 2001; Carver & White, 1994; Gray, 1982; Smillie, Pickering, & Jackson, 2006). Thus, an activated BAS, a deactivated BIS, or both, might increase the speed of goal selection and facilitate pursuit of the chosen goal.

For other phenomena, particularly for those with an interpersonal component, the BAS and BIS have proven useful more as metaphor than as mechanism in research on power. For example, we know of no theory linking these systems to disinterest or inaccuracy in mental state inference, instrumental person perception, or stereotyping, but researchers (including the first author) have described these effects of power as broadly consistent with the approach/inhibition theory (e.g., Galinsky et al., 2006; Gruenfeld et al., 2008) without adequately interrogating the logic of the theory. We

believe this has happened because the particular mechanisms posited by Keltner and colleagues (2003) have been set aside in favor of their general image of the power-holder as an especially goal-driven, lazy, and egocentric being. A wealth of evidence can be made to fit with this image, but it is not a very precise representation of the approach/inhibition theory. For instance, it seems reasonable, according to this image, to hypothesize that power-holders would engage in more stereotyping than others; however, it is not clear how the BIS or BAS are purported to produce stereotyping. Indeed, we know of no published research that links the BAS to more automatic social cognition, or the BIS to more controlled social cognition. For person perception and social comparison as well as other interpersonal, affiliative phenomena discussed here, such as mental state inference and most of the socially (dis)engaging emotions, the social distance theory offers a more plausible account, given the present state of the literature.

### *Two Phenomena for Which the Theories Make Divergent Predictions*

For two phenomena described here—focus on desirability versus feasibility, and self-control—the approach/inhibition theory and the social distance theory generate different predictions. Further explanation of the predictions in these two areas illustrates the importance of construct definition to help clarify what can be inferred (and what cannot) from the data generated within different research paradigms.

**Focus on Desirability Versus Feasibility.** There is an important difference between the two theories' predictions about the extent to which low- and high-power individuals attend to the distinct domains of feasibility and desirability concerns in decision making. First, it is important to understand what these two terms encompass. Desirability comprises all issues related to the outcome of a decision, whether desirable or undesirable. Similarly, feasibility involves both the feasibility and the unfeasibility of the means to achieve those outcomes. That is, "desirability" and "feasibility" are labels that capture qualitatively different kinds of information in decision making; one domain of information is not more positive than the other.

Construal level is associated with the relative influence of desirability versus feasibility on decision making (Trope & Liberman, 2010). As the outcome is more superordinate and central than the means used to obtain it, desirability is a higher level concern than feasibility. Thus, the social distance theory predicts that desirability, relative to feasibility, will have a greater influence on high- than low-power decision makers. In contrast to this domain-based prediction, the approach/inhibition theory makes a valence-based prediction. Increased BAS relative to BIS activation would make high-power individuals more selectively attentive to positive than negative information in both the desirability and the

feasibility domains. In the desirability domain, power would increase attention to which outcome appears most rewarding, disregarding unpleasant aspects of that outcome, and in the feasibility domain, power would increase attention to the reasons one could in fact attain that outcome, disregarding relevant constraints.

Data relevant to either prediction is limited. P. K. Smith (2012) provided initial evidence for the social distance predictions. For example, when deciding whether to play a gamble, high-power participants are more influenced by the amount of money they could win, and less influenced by the probability of winning, than low-power participants. A few studies have provided evidence consistent with high-power individuals exhibiting more selective attention than low-power individuals to negative versus positive information (Inesi, 2010; Whitson et al., in press), a finding that the social distance theory cannot account for. However, these studies specifically found that having power decreases attention and sensitivity only to negative information, in the domain of desirability in one case (Inesi, 2010) and in the domain of feasibility in the other case (Whitson et al., in press). There was no effect on attention and sensitivity to positive information, which is contrary to the predictions of the approach/inhibition theory. Because what participants attend to is in part constrained by study design (e.g., what is available for participants to attend to), in the future, we would like to see a “critical test” of the two theories, crossing the domain of information (feasibility vs. desirability) with the valence of information (negative vs. positive) available to participants.

**Self-Control.** The two theories make opposite predictions with respect to self-control. Recall that the prediction from the social distance theory is that power is positively associated with self-control. The approach/inhibition theory seems to offer the opposite prediction, although the language used to describe it is not the same. Keltner and colleagues (2003) predicted that high-power individuals’ heightened attention to rewards relative to potential punishments will lead them to exhibit a particular type of self-regulation failure—disinhibition—more often than low-power individuals, particularly in contexts governed by strong social norms for appropriate behavior. For example, many people might feel a desire to engage in sexual behavior when the opportunity arises, or aggressive behavior when provoked, but, for most, the fear of the potential negative consequences of such behavior leads them to exert control over those momentary impulses. Powerful individuals, according to the approach/inhibition theory, are guided more by their drive toward experiencing reward immediately, relative to any fear of punishment, and, thus, are more likely than powerless individuals to indulge in impulsive behaviors.

There is little research testing the so-called disinhibition hypothesis, although it remains a seductive possibility (Hirsh, Galinsky, & Zhong, 2011). Our prediction of greater

self-control among individuals with more power suggests an opportunity for another critical test pitting one theory against the other. If such a critical test were to be undertaken, it would be important to distinguish between what is meant by “self-control” and what is meant by “disinhibition.” As previously discussed, self-control involves prioritizing long-term over short-term motives when the two are in conflict. This implies that self-control failures and successes can only be labeled as such once an individual’s goal structures have been identified. For example, a politician’s extramarital affair with a staffer would not be considered a failure of self-control if the politician perceived sex as a means to maintain power in work relationships (e.g., Kunstman & Maner, 2011), or if the affair did not conflict with, or even facilitated, other long-term motives (e.g., finding a life partner). However, the affair would be considered an instance of disinhibition as long as the politician appeared to have overridden the inhibitory force of norms against extramarital affairs, particularly with subordinates in the workplace.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the distinction between self-control and disinhibition makes clear that contexts in which individuals’ goals are unobservable are unsuitable for testing the relationship between power and self-control.

## Conceptual and Methodological Considerations

In keeping with the traditions of Kelley and colleagues (Kelley et al., 1983; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) and Fiske (1993) summarized here, the social distance theory of power is a relational theory, and its point of departure is the symmetrically dependent relationship. This is a notable contrast to the majority of research on power conducted during the previous decade, and it highlights the need for researchers to revise some of the taken-for-granted features of typical power research designs. In this section, we provide our thoughts and recommendations on the following conceptual and methodological issues in the study of power: (a) selecting appropriate comparison conditions to include in research designs, (b) whether the predicted effects of power would be different within versus outside of the context of power relations, (c) similarities between power and money and their effects on social distance, (d) selecting tools to use in measuring social distance, (e) other mechanisms that might link power to construal level, and (f) moderating factors that would delineate important boundary conditions of our predicted effects.

### *A Change to the Standard Comparison (Control) Condition*

To establish the relative strength of the effects of being low versus high in power, researchers have relied on comparing low- and high-power conditions to “control” or “baseline” conditions that are non-relational (e.g., write about your day

yesterday [e.g., Galinsky et al., 2006; P. K. Smith & Trope, 2006], neutral semantic primes of concepts unrelated to social relations [e.g., Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Magee et al., 2007]). We recommend instead that researchers use the symmetrically dependent relationship as a comparison (e.g., Stevens & Fiske, 2000), and it is worth reiterating our prediction in such a design. We hypothesize that individuals in a symmetrically dependent relationship will experience less social distance than low-power individuals, who, in turn, will experience less distance than high-power individuals (e.g., control condition < low power < high power). This is a very different prediction than is typically made in a research design that involves a nonrelational control condition, which is usually hypothesized to fall between the low- and high-power conditions (e.g., low power < control condition < high power).

### *Specifying the Domain of Effects: Social Distance From Whom? High-Level Construal of What?*

We emphasize that when we speak of power leading to asymmetric social distance, this distance originates within power relations. That is, the social distance of interest here occurs as a consequence of power dynamics and is experienced specifically vis-à-vis the high- or low-power counterpart within the relationship. Thus, our predictions made directly from social distance about interpersonal phenomena are most clear-cut, and we anticipate them to be strongest, in the interaction between high- and low-power individuals. We also allow for the possibility that these effects might extend, in attenuated form, to social targets external to the power relationship, provided that a new relation of asymmetric dependence does not exist with the external target. Furthermore, it is possible that social distance is a chronic feature of having power and thus is part of a schema that is automatically activated whenever power is induced. In this case, minimal manipulations of power, such as semantic primes (e.g., completing word stems related to high vs. low power) and episodic primes (e.g., recalling a time when one had vs. did not have power over others), might invoke differences in the subjective sense of social distance (Lammers et al., 2012).

Construal level, on the other hand, has wider application beyond the power relationship. Research on other forms of psychological distance suggests that once one's level of construal is set, it is used to represent all kinds of stimuli and persists until it is reset. That is, psychological distance, and its concomitant higher level of construal, acts as a form of procedural priming, shifting how one processes information outside the context in which psychological distance is experienced (Freitas, Gollwitzer, & Trope, 2004). Whereas some forms of procedural priming have limited applicability across situations (E. R. Smith & Branscombe, 1986), we

argue that construal level is a fundamental feature of mental representation that applies to the vast majority of situations. An illustrative example comes from research by Förster, Friedman, and Liberman (2004), who found such a procedural priming effect of temporal distance on creativity; compared with thinking about the near future, thinking about the distant future in one task increased individuals' creativity (a process that benefits from high-level construal) in a second, unrelated task. Extrapolating to social distance, we predict that our hypothesized effects mediated by construal level are likely to extend to stimuli outside of the power relationship and to persist until a psychological force alters high- or low-power individuals' level of construal.

### *The Relationship Between Power and Money*

An astute reader might notice a parallel between our predicted effect of power increasing social distance and the reported effect of money increasing social distance (Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006; Zhu, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2009). This should not be surprising; having more money typically translates into having more power, as money is one of the most universally valued resources. We note two further similarities between our theorizing and the theorizing of Vohs et al. (2006). First, the manipulations of money used by Vohs and colleagues could be considered a form of power manipulation specific to control over financial resources. Second, the proposed mechanisms behind these parallel effects are very similar, if not identical. Vohs et al. apply the term *self-sufficiency* to individuals with money, whereas we focus on the "lack of dependence" of individuals with power. When one is self-sufficient, one is not dependent on others. When such similarities exist between independent variables, dependent measures (see Lammers et al., 2012), and the mechanism operating in between, there is often one underlying process that can unify the two programs of research. Indeed, reminders of money also cause people to use high-level construals (Hansen, Kutzner, & Wänke, in press). In this case, a theory about power and social distance would most likely subsume a theory about money and social distance, but, for now, we simply view Vohs and colleagues' research as support for the social distance theory of power.

### *Measures of Social Distance*

Although the direct effect of power on construal level has received significant empirical support (Huang et al., 2011; Magee et al., 2010; P. K. Smith & Trope, 2006; Stel et al., 2012), our most straightforward prediction, that greater power increases the experience of social distance, has not been the subject of nearly as much attention (for an exception, see Lammers et al., 2012). We hope this will change now that the theory has been fully explicated. Toward this end, in Table 2 we catalog a number of scales and measures that researchers can use to quantify social distance within

power relationships and external to those relationships as well. These measures, taken primarily from the close relationships literature, can be divided into the following three categories: affiliation motivation, feeling close, and behaving close.

We have argued that social distance is created in power relations because of the interaction of individuals' motivation to affiliate with their counterpart and their expectations that their counterpart will affiliate with them. In addition to measuring expectancies for quantity and intensity of social interaction with one's counterpart, we recommend adapting measures of affiliative needs (e.g., Cheek & Buss, 1981; Hill, 1987; Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2001) to individuals' specific motivation to affiliate with their high- or low-power counterpart. Alternatively, preferences for social versus solitary activity (e.g., Lammers et al., 2012; Maner, DeWall, Baumeister, & Schaller, 2007; Vohs et al., 2006) and perceptions of, and attention to, social versus non-social cues and targets can be used to infer the extent to which individuals' affiliative needs are being met in the relationship (e.g., DeWall, Maner, & Rouby, 2009; Epley, Akalis, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2008; Pickett, Gardner, & Knowles, 2004; Waytz et al., 2010). Once high- and low-power individuals' affiliation expectancies and affiliation motivation have been measured within the same study, researchers might be able to begin to answer whether it truly is "lonely at the top" (Lee & Tiedens, 2001). After all, self-reports of loneliness (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980) are not associated with solitary activity as much as with whether one's relationships meet one's expectations and needs (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008).

Self-other overlap (Aron et al., 1992) and perceptions of closeness (e.g., Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989; Popovic, Milne, & Barrett, 2003;) both directly measure social distance from our perspective.<sup>5</sup> Although Lammers and colleagues (2012) have shown that power influences preferences for solitary over social activity in contexts unrelated to power, we would like to see direct tests of the connection between power and a subjective feeling of social distance within the power relationship.

Aron and colleagues (1992) drew a distinction between feeling close and behaving close, which we view as one of many potential downstream consequences of power. Whether one behaves close to one's counterpart in a power relationship likely depends on multiple factors that are affected by the dynamics of power outlined here, such as one's affiliative needs, expectations regarding one's partner, and the extent to which those needs and expectations are being fulfilled (i.e., the extent to which one feels close). Behaving close could be measured by self-reports of the frequency, intensity, and diversity of interaction (e.g., Berscheid et al., 1989) or partner reports of affiliative and compassionate behavior (e.g., Cutrona, 1996; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). Another approach would be to directly observe socially engaging versus disengaging behavior, such as emotion expressions (e.g.,

Buckley, Winkel, & Leary, 2004; Kitayama et al., 2006), self-disclosure (e.g., Archer & Berg, 1978; Earle et al., 1983; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Petromonaco, 1998), nonverbal communication and mimicry (e.g., Hall, Coats, & Smith LeBeau, 2005; Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Lakin & Chartrand, 2003), aggression (e.g., Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Fast & Chen, 2009), and avoidance (e.g., Snyder et al., 1979).

### *Alternative Mechanisms Linking Power to Construal Level*

We have relied entirely on social distance within the power relation to make our construal level predictions because we think social distance is sufficient to produce the hypothesized effects across a broad range of relationships. It is possible, however, that other factors could affect construal level in power relations, and we discuss three of them here.<sup>6</sup> It is noteworthy that all three factors, like social distance, push high-power individuals toward higher levels of construal. Thus, none of these alternatives conflict with the direction of our predictions. Indeed, it is possible that more than one mechanism operates simultaneously to buttress the relationship between power and construal level.

In most social structures, there are more high- than low-power individuals, and one possible alternative route to higher construal level among power-holders is a greater sense of distinctiveness. Dissimilarity, which is akin to distinctiveness, has been found to produce high-level construal (Liviatan et al., 2008), and here it would mediate between power and construal level. Although it is challenging to apply this explanation to dyadic power relations, where the numbers of high- and low-power individuals is the same, it is possible that a sense of distinctiveness has become associated with the possession of power and overgeneralized to dyadic settings.

Another possibility is that possessing power allows individuals the cognitive space to think about more distal issues. Whereas powerless individuals must attend to proximal concerns, power-holders need not focus so much on what will happen in the near future, what is in their immediate physical surroundings, and people with whom they have close relationships because these proximal factors are unlikely to impinge on their ability to achieve their goals. Power-holders also have the luxury of thinking mostly about what is desirable versus undesirable because they are more likely than powerless individuals to have the means to make something feasible. This pattern of distal versus proximal cognition and interest in what is desirable versus feasible might foster a general mind-set characterized by higher level construal among high-power individuals than low-power individuals.

Power might also create a psychological sense of being literally higher up, engendering the perception that one is above others, looking down at what is happening in

**Table 2.** Catalog of Measures Relevant to Social Distance.

Measure	References
<b>Affiliation motivation</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpersonal Orientation Scale—Positive Stimulation subscale</li> <li>• Sociability Scale</li> <li>• Need to Belong Scale</li> <li>• Preferences for social connection</li> </ul>	<p>Hill (1987)</p> <p>Cheek and Buss (1981)</p> <p>Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, and Schreindorfer (2001)</p> <p>For example, Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, and Otten (2012); Maner, Gailliot, Butz, and Peruche (2007); Vohs, Mead, and Goode (2006)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attention to cues of social acceptance</li> <li>• Anthropomorphism</li> </ul>	<p>For example, Pickett, Gardner, and Knowles (2004); DeWall, Maner, and Rouby (2009)</p> <p>For example, Epley, Akalis, Waytz, and Cacioppo (2008); Waytz et al. (2010)</p>
<b>Feeling close vs. distant</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale</li> <li>• Relationship Closeness Inventory—Strength subscale</li> <li>• Perceived Interpersonal Closeness Scale</li> <li>• UCLA Loneliness Scale</li> </ul>	<p>Aron, Aron, and Smollan (1992)</p> <p>Berscheid, Snyder, and Omoto (1989)</p> <p>Popovic, Milne, and Barrett (2003)</p> <p>Russell, Peplau, and Cutrona (1980)</p>
<b>Behaving close vs. distant</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship Closeness Inventory—Frequency and Diversity subscales</li> <li>• Perceived Partner Responsiveness</li> <li>• Socially engaging vs. disengaging behavior                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Emotion</li> <li>○ Self-disclosure</li> <li>○ Nonverbal communication and mimicry</li> <li>○ Aggression</li> <li>○ Avoidance</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Berscheid et al. (1989)</p> <p>For example, Cutrona (1996); Reis, Clark, and Holmes (2004)</p> <p>For example, Buckley, Winkel, and Leary (2004); Kitayama, Mesquita, and Karasawa (2006)</p> <p>For example, Archer and Berg (1978); Earle, Giuliano, and Archer (1983); Laurenceau, Barrett, and Petromonaco (1998)</p> <p>For example, Kraus and Keltner (2009); Hall, Coats, and Smith LeBeau (2005); Lakin and Chartrand (2003)</p> <p>For example, Bushman and Baumeister (1998); Fast and Chen (2009)</p> <p>For example, Snyder, Kleck, Strenta, and Mentzer (1979)</p>

the environment. Power is implicitly associated with a higher vertical position (Giessner & Schubert, 2007; Schubert, 2005), which, in turn, has been found to influence perceived distance: Objects appear farther away when looking down at them from above than when either looking up at them from below or gazing out at them on a horizontal plane (Stefanucci & Proffitt, 2009). By this reasoning, high power would implicitly activate a subjectively higher vertical position, which would increase a person’s sense of spatial distance. Alternatively, vertical position might have more direct metaphorical effects on construal level. A “bird’s eye view” or “view from 10,000 feet,” for example, are expressions about elevating above the details and capturing the gist, similar to the abstract representation of high-level construal; indeed, the word “overview” means both a summary of a subject and a view from above.

In summary, distinctiveness, freedom to focus on distal concerns, and subjective vertical distance are intriguing alternative mechanisms that could account for how power influences construal level. Future research could test these against our proposed mechanism of social distance.

### Moderators

We have used the logic of the social distance theory to advance a number of hypotheses regarding the behavior of the powerful and the powerless across many contexts. Without a systematic treatment of moderating factors, the careful reader has undoubtedly come up with anecdotes and situations that counter the ideas we have advanced here. Not all power-holders feel distant from their subordinates, and powerless people are not forever sunken into concrete construal. Some negotiators with incredibly attractive alternatives still find it in themselves to thoughtfully consider their opponent’s perspective, and some leaders act as if their espoused values do not guide their behavior.

What of these cases in which our predictions seem, instinctively, wrong? When discussing some specific predictions, we have already suggested a handful of factors other than social distance and construal level that could play a role. In particular, we have documented some roles that goals play—social goals in empathic accuracy and the goal-relevance of stereotypes, for example—and incorporated them into our model (see Figure 1). Yet, further elaboration is

needed, and we use the core phenomenon of asymmetric social distance in power relations as a starting point for generating boundary conditions to the theory. Any factor that makes the social distance between high- and low-power individuals more symmetric is apt to attenuate the effects summarized in Figure 1, and any factor that reduces both individuals' subjective sense of distance ought to make individuals in a power relationship think and behave more similarly to individuals in a symmetrically dependent relationship. We identify the following factors that could shape power relations by changing social distance and thus could moderate the effects we have laid out here: (a) goals, (b) culture, (c) legitimacy of power differences, and (d) leadership, intergroup relations, and organizations.

**Goals.** Goals can be chronic and stable across situations or temporary and emergent from a particular situation (Srull & Wyer, 1986). Chronic goals come from stable individual differences (e.g., values, personality traits, self-concept), and temporary goals can be activated by goal-related cues in the environment (Förster, Liberman, & Friedman, 2007). We propose that goals can moderate the effects of power along two different pathways. First, goals determine what is central and superordinate in high-level construal, as previously discussed in the section on facilitation of goal pursuit.

Second, goals can be social or relational and thus alter the social distance experienced within a relationship. For example, people in positions of power are responsible for others' outcomes. This is true in all power relations, from parent-child to boss-subordinate relationships, although the frequency and magnitude of responsibility varies across types of power relationships. One psychologically interesting issue is what happens when responsibility is salient enough to trigger other-oriented concern in the power-holder (e.g., Maner & Mead, 2010), an issue we touched on in the section on empathic inaccuracy. In these situations, responsibility for another person's well-being would decrease a power-holder's experience of social distance from his or her low-power counterpart.

A more stable and enduring form of other-oriented goal comes from interdependent or relational self-construals (Cross, Hardin, & Gercek-Swing, 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). People with strong relational self-construals see themselves as connected to others through their relationships, are more likely to be concerned about others' mental states, and are more considerate of the impact of their actions on others (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; Cross & Morris, 2003; Maddux & Yuki, 2006). In sum, relational self-construal reduces social distance. Thus, power-holders with strong interdependent or relational self-construals are apt to experience a reduction in social distance from their low-power counterparts. For example, power-holders with a strong interdependent self-construal might be more susceptible to social influence than power-holders with a strong independent self-construal because conformity in public is a key aspect of a high interdependent self-construal (Torelli, 2006).

**Culture.** We conceptualize culture as a set of values, beliefs, and norms shared by a group, an organization, or a society (Hofstede, 1980; Lehman, Chiu, & Schaller, 2004). Aside from the documented influence of culture on self-construal (Cross et al., 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), culture has the potential to influence the association between power and social distance in at least two other ways.

First, the meaning of power, its conceptual associations, and beliefs about appropriate behavior in positions of power could vary across cultures. Indeed, in some East Asian cultures, power is viewed in more other-oriented terms and is associated with helping others more than in the United States (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010, 2011; Zhong, Magee, Maddux, & Galinsky, 2006). Similar to our prediction about the moderating effect of responsibility goals, in these cultures, the experience of asymmetric social distance might not go hand-in-hand with power.

Second, the extent to which cultures take for granted and even justify power imbalances could increase social distance, particularly for low-power individuals, within power relations. Hofstede's (1997) measure of power distance—"the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (p. 28)—demonstrates that the powerless confer legitimate authority on the powerful more in some countries (e.g., China and Venezuela) than in others (e.g., Israel and Sweden). In countries or organizations characterized by high power distance, people in high-ranking positions as well as those in low-ranking positions legitimize the psychological boundary between their roles. Structural stratification is reinforced by a kind of psychological segregation in these cultures, where we would expect low-power individuals to experience as much social distance as high-power individuals. We hypothesize this would attenuate our predictions about differences between people within a power relationship, but both high- and low-power individuals would still differ significantly from people in a symmetrically dependent relationship (i.e., a relationship in which power distance is irrelevant).

**Legitimacy.** The implications of the legitimacy of power differences on social distance hinge on what exactly is meant by legitimacy. Consistent with Lammers and colleagues (2008, 2012), we describe power relations as illegitimate when the low-power individual is truly dependent on the high-power individual for a valued resource (i.e., the low-power individual has no viable alternatives) but the high-power individual assumed the role through illegitimate means. In a situation of this kind, we predict that the low-power individual would seek social distance from the power-holder, thus making social distance between the two parties more symmetric (although we would expect both still to experience more social distance than individuals in a symmetrically dependent relationship).

In making this prediction, we assume illegitimacy is explicitly recognized by the low-power party but not

recognized (let alone confessed) by the high-power party. We believe these assumptions reflect the psychological dynamics of illegitimate power relations that have the greatest potential for interesting, dynamic social consequences (e.g., laying the foundation for significant changes in social structure). Yet, in most studies exploring the interaction of power and legitimacy, the high-power party has explicitly recognized the illegitimacy of his or her position as well (e.g., Lammers et al., 2008, 2012). This artifact of experimental design might account for documented reversals of our theorized relation between power and social distance under conditions of illegitimacy (Lammers et al., 2012).

#### **Leadership, Intergroup Relations, and Organizations.**

We have relied on power in dyadic relationships to develop our theory in part because social psychology is well-equipped to deal with this most atomistic instantiation of power. From this relational foundation, it is important to build up to more complex and complicated social structures and consider how prevalent structural conditions might alter power's effects. We explore the relationship between power and three common aspects of structure: leadership in groups, intergroup relations, and organizations.

**Leadership.** Hierarchy serves important functions in groups, and in most groups a leader emerges and is recognized by consensus, or one is anointed (see Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Van Vugt, 2006, for reviews). Group leaders typically have power over many followers, and the one-to-many relationship of their role might make them distinctive from the rest of the group. With respect to leadership, however, distinctiveness is not the same as difference, which otherwise could create distance as we discussed above. According to the social identity theory of leadership (Hogg, 2001; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003), leaders are distinctly prototypical members of their groups; they possess the core attributes and values of the group to a greater extent than other group members. It is not well understood whether or not leaders are aware that they are prototypical or the extent to which their prototypicality influences their behavior, but we argue that they are at least implicitly aware that their attributes and values are widely shared by others within the group. Thus, we propose that in the context of leadership, some of our predictions might reverse (Overbeck & Droutman, 2012). For example, leaders might assume greater similarity with group members than group members do with each other and engage in more social projection than their followers. It depends, of course, on who is the referent in social comparison and who is the target in social projection; our predictions are about these processes *within* groups, as this is the domain of the leader's power.

**Intergroup relations.** In *intergroup* contexts, the group boundary is usually a more salient divide than any interpersonal boundaries, and out-group members are more socially distant than in-group members (Brewer, 1991;

Kramer & Brewer, 1984; Triandis & Triandis, 1960). Researchers can approach the study of power in different ways when multiple groups are involved. They could still focus on power differences within the group if, for example, they were interested in differences between how leaders and followers *within the same group* behave in the presence of an out-group. Similar to our predictions above, as more prototypical representatives of their groups than other in-group members, leaders might assume greater similarity with in-group members and greater difference from out-group members, differentiating between the groups more than followers. Similarly, leaders might project more onto the in-group and less onto the out-group than might other group members (see Robbins & Krueger, 2005).

Alternatively, researchers could focus on power differences between groups, where a resource collectively controlled by one group gives its members power over another group. In this case, we would begin with the same predictions summarized in Figure 1, except that, for the interpersonal phenomena, the target individuals would be members of the out-group because power resides in the relations between groups. Consistent with social identity theory, we would expect other factors to influence the effects of power on intergroup relations and that, as studies accumulate, researchers might identify further moderators, such as individuals' level of identification with the in-group (see Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

**Organizations.** Leadership and group identity are relevant to organizational life (e.g., van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003), but organizations also have other structural factors that might moderate the basic relationship between power and social distance and thus the relationship between power and many of the downstream effects we have discussed here. Perquisites of power, such as isolating large offices for managers and insular staffs that create "echo chambers" for leaders' opinions, probably increase power-holders' experience of social distance from their subordinates but, by preventing employees' access to superiors, are also apt to create a comparable increase in subordinates' experience of social distance from superiors. More generally, any factor that affects accessibility of a high-power individual to a low-power individual is apt to increase social distance symmetrically, rather than asymmetrically, between the two parties (Napier & Ferris, 1993).

Another factor worth considering is the many-to-one hierarchical structure of employees reporting to managers in organizations. We have already noted this feature of power relations in groups, but we think it has two specific effects in task-based groups and organizations. We propose that managers' span of control over many employees can influence construal level directly and, through social distance, indirectly. First, with greater span of control, managers' attention is split between more subordinates, which limits the time they spend with each

subordinate (Goodstadt & Kipnis, 1970) and, thus, the extent to which the manager can feel close to most of them. Second, we propose that managers typically use high-level construal in dealing with multiple subordinates. In fact, it is their responsibility to extract the central and superordinate features of what their subordinates report so they can prioritize the most pressing issues. Although this many-to-one structure is typically conflated with power in organizations, we advocate conceptualizing it as a separate factor that can exist in informal social structures, such as friendship and advice networks, and could influence social distance and construal level even in the absence of a formal power hierarchy.

## Conclusion

The social distance theory of power highlights how power is fundamental to psychology by tying it to broader theories of interdependence, close relationships, and construal level. These connections retain the relational component central to the definition of power and also allow for power to affect intrapsychic processes. Through asymmetric social distance, power produces a number of interpersonal phenomena. Through construal level, power changes a basic dimension of mental representation, which has profound effects on attitudes, behavior, and perception. In addition to testing the main predictions laid out here, we also advocate for careful testing of their boundary conditions. Toward this end, we have documented a series of important conceptual and methodological considerations for researchers to use in their analyses of the social distance theory of power in the years to come. We know that there is more work to be done and would not be surprised if many more predictions could be developed from the theoretical framework laid down here. Power is a complex and multidimensional construct, and we hope that we will inspire an appropriately nuanced approach to its study, encouraging exploration not only of what effects power has on individuals, relationships, and organizations, but also of how and why these effects occur.

## Author's note

We thank Dave Amodio, Serena Chen, Nate Fast, Adam Galinsky, Jen Overbeck, and three anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments or suggestions on previous drafts of this manuscript, and participants in the Stanford GSB Organizational Behavior Seminar, the 24th Annual Conference for the International Association of Conflict Management, the 2010 Duck Conference on Social Cognition, the 2011 Person Memory Interest Group Meeting, and the Social Cognition Preconference at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting for comments on presentations of this research.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Notes

1. We focus on dyadic relationships because they simplify the theoretical analysis, and most studies that we review operationalize power within a dyadic or, at the least, a nongroup setting.
2. It is important to note that the procedure used by Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, and Gruenfeld (2006) involved decoding fixed expressions of power-neutral targets. Low-power individuals tend to be less expressive than high-power individuals, so differences between low- and high-power partners in the accuracy of their mental state inferences in a dyadic interaction may be due to greater expressivity (and not reduced sensitivity) on the part of the high-power partner (e.g., Hall, Rosip, LeBeau, Horgan, & Carter, 2006; Snodgrass, Hecht, & Ploutz-Snyder, 1998).
3. Stereotyping does not necessarily lead to inaccuracy in person perception; it depends completely on the extent to which the stereotype happens to be related to the truth in a given situation (Judd & Park, 1993). Following West and Kenny (2011), we recommend researchers capture the perceptual route as well as the degree of accuracy in perception so that they can detect whether accuracy was achieved by accident (i.e., via an indirect route, such as stereotyping) or by a more direct process.
4. Without further information, it is impossible to distinguish between the following three causes of the politician's behavior: (a) the politician perceived the norms differently (e.g., as not applying to himself or herself) or did not perceive them at all, (b) the politician perceived the norms but consciously chose to violate them, and (c) the politician perceived the norms and impulsively violated them. Only the third situation would normally be classified as disinhibition.
5. Note, however, that Overbeck (personal communication, August 14, 2012) reports that she has found that manipulations of power do not reliably produce differences in the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992).
6. We thank two anonymous reviewers for these suggestions.

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