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Abstract

The current research explores why people desire power and how that desire can be satisfied. We propose that a position of power can be subjectively experienced as conferring influence over others or as offering autonomy from the influence of others. Conversely, a low-power position can be experienced as lacking influence or lacking autonomy. Nine studies show that subjectively experiencing one's power as autonomy predicts the desire for power, whereas the experience of influence over others does not. Furthermore, gaining autonomy quenches the desire for power, but gaining influence does not. The studies demonstrated the primacy of autonomy across both experimental and correlational designs, across measured mediation and manipulated mediator approaches, and across three different continents (Europe, United States, India). Together, these studies offer evidence that people desire power not to be a master over others, but to be master of their own domain, to control their own fate.

Keywords

power, status, autonomy, influence

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Why do people desire power? Nietzsche (1888/1967) believed that people should be primarily interested in self-actualization and realizing their potential. In doing so, people are often frustrated and hindered by others who constrain them; it is exactly this frustration and desire to overcome such constraints that motivates the overman (the *Übermensch*) to seek power. For Nietzsche, the overman desires power because of a need for autonomy. Nietzsche also considered but explicitly ruled out influence as a motive for attaining power. The overman is not interested in controlling other people, because leading others merely distracts from self-actualization. Nietzsche therefore sharply distinguishes between a small-minded love of power for the sake of controlling and influencing others and the desire for power to autonomously control one's own outcomes, overcome one's limitations, and self-actualize (Heidegger, 1937/1979; Kaufmann, 1950). Similarly, Sartre (1946) found that other persons were a constraining and debilitating constraint on the self.

The current studies are inspired by Nietzsche's and Sartre's philosophy. The present research tests whether power satisfies one's desire for influence or one's desire for autonomy. To do so, we explore whether influence and autonomy can be differentiated from each other, and subsequently, how these two conceptualizations of power satisfy

the desire for power. That is, we seek to test whether the desire for power reflects a need for autonomy, a need for influence, or a need for both, and therefore whether gaining autonomy, influence, or both satisfy the desire for power.

Definitions of Power and the Distinction Between Influence and Autonomy

We believe that the distinction between influence and autonomy is masked in many definitions of power. For example, one of the most common definitions of power is "the ability to control resources, own and others" (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003). Note that in this definition, power over *own* and power over *others'* outcomes are lumped together. We believe it is important to distinguish between power

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over others' outcomes, which we consider to be a form of influence (Emerson, 1962; Galinsky et al., 2003; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003) and power over own outcomes, which can be conceptualized as autonomy (Heider, 1958; Ng, 1980; Overbeck & Park, 2001). We stress that both elements of this influence–autonomy distinction also appear in two other often-used definitions of power. Specifically, Dépret and Fiske (1993) defined power as *asymmetrical* control over others' outcomes. The word *asymmetrical* suggests that power consists of a capacity to control others (influence) and a capacity to remain uncontrolled by others (autonomy). Furthermore, Keltner and colleagues (2003) defined power as the *relative* capacity to modify others' states, meaning that power consists of a capacity to modify others (influence) and a capacity to remain unmodified by others (autonomy). Also, Cartwright (1959) already made this same autonomy–influence distinction more than 50 years ago in his field-theoretical conceptualization of power. Specifically, Cartwright conceptualized power as consisting of two components: (a) the ability of one Actor A to change the position of another Actor B in a psychological field and (b) the ability of A to ignore or block any attempt by B at influencing the position of A. The former is influence, the latter autonomy.¹

Our influence/autonomy distinction differs from three related distinctions. Specifically, Torelli and Shavitt (2010) distinguished between personalized versus socialized power; personalized power is power that is used for the advancement of one's own status whereas socialized power is used to advance the value of others. This relates to the distinction by Sassenberg, Jonas, Shah, and Brazy (2007) between power that is construed as an opportunity to advance own goals versus power construed as responsibility for others. Both distinctions are also conceptually close to the exchange versus communal relationship orientation that has been used to explain why power can lead to both selfish and altruistic behavior (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001). Our own distinction between autonomy and influence differs from these three because we do not focus on what power is used for. Both influence and autonomy can be used to further one's own goals or those of others. Instead, the difference between influence and autonomy is determined by how they relate to independence (Cartwright, 1959). Power as influence is expressed in having control over others, which could involve responsibility for others. In contrast, power as autonomy is a form of power that allows one person to ignore and resist the influence of others and thus to shape one's own destiny (Heider, 1958; Ng, 1980; Overbeck & Park, 2001). It is expressed in having control over oneself, in being able to do whatever one wants, to follow one's own wishes, and to be independent.

The Desire for Power

The current research explores whether the desire for power is driven by and also satisfied by the need for autonomy or the need for influence. We distinguish between two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The desire for power is primarily based in a need for autonomy; gaining autonomy satisfies the desire for more power.

Hypothesis 2: The desire for power is primarily based in a need for influence; gaining influence satisfies the desire for more power.

In the current manuscript, we test which of these two hypotheses receives the most empirical support. We next explain each hypothesis in detail.

Autonomy

Our first hypothesis is that the desire for power reflects a need for autonomy. This hypothesis fits well with classic theories in psychology—in particular, with self-determination theory, which holds the sense of autonomy as one of three main innate psychological needs (along with competence and relatedness; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). People prefer to autonomously steer their own outcomes over being dependent on others (DeCharms, 1968). If people feel that their autonomy is decreased and they lack a sense of personal causation, they experience reactance (Brehm, 1993; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). In fact, merely reducing feedback or providing external rewards violates the experience of autonomy (Deci, 1971; Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973). Therefore, when people are made to feel dependent on others because they hold a low-power position, this strongly undermines their sense of autonomy, which may motivate a desire to obtain power (Brehm, 1993; Dépret & Fiske, 1993; Fiske, Morling, & Stevens, 1996).

This first hypothesis that the desire for power reflects a need for autonomy fits also well with a variety of recent empirical findings. First, Inesi, Botti, Dubois, Rucker, and Galinsky (2011) found that lacking power increases preference for larger assortment sizes in consumer choice; for example, people who lacked power preferred a store offering 15 flavors of ice-cream over a store offering only three. This finding fits with power as a desire for autonomy because it suggests that people who lack and therefore desire power are particularly interested in exercising autonomy by choosing from a larger set. Inesi and colleagues also found that the opportunity to pick a product out of a large assortment reduced the degree to which people valued power-related characteristics in a new job. This finding equally fits with power as the desire for autonomy, as it suggests that the experience of autonomously choosing between options satisfies the desire for power. Also, research by Sassenberg, Ellemers, and Scheepers (2012) found that people see being a member of high-power groups (e.g., politicians) as particularly attractive when focusing on power as bringing opportunities compared with when focusing on how power confers responsibilities. This finding suggests that power is seen as particularly attractive if it can be expected to satisfy the desire to autonomously pursue opportunities.

More indirect support for Hypothesis 1 comes from a variety of findings on the transformative effects of power. If the desire for power mainly reflects a need for autonomy, then gaining power should allow people to fulfill that desire and indeed act in an autonomous manner. Consistent with that idea, power shapes basic cognition by making people more autonomous from others' control (Guinote, 2007). Similarly, the powerful follow their own autonomous will (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008) and behave in a more idiosyncratic and variable manner (Guinote, Judd, & Brauer, 2002). Indeed, one of the key mechanisms by which power affects moral behavior is by freeing people from social norms to act autonomously (Lammers, Galinsky, Dubois, & Rucker, 2015).

In summary, we propose that there is a wide variety of theoretical and empirical findings that support Hypothesis 1 that the desire for power reflects a need for autonomy and that satisfying this need for autonomy also satisfies the desire for more power.

Influence

Our second hypothesis, the desire for power reflects a need for influence, fits with McClelland's three needs theory. This theory holds the need for power, often called *n*Pow or *n* Power, as one of the three fundamental human needs, together with the need for achievement and the need for affiliation. According to that theory, *n* Power can be satisfied by gaining influence over others (McClelland, 1988; Winter, 1973). People with a high *n* Power do not desire power to reduce their dependency on others, but rather seek to increase others' dependency on themselves (McClelland, Koestner, & Weinberger, 1989; Winter, 1973). McClelland's three needs theory is consistent with Hypothesis 2 and holds that the desire for power reflects a need for influence.

There is certainly evidence that people who score high in *n* Power are more likely to seek power, in line with the second hypothesis. To tap into individual differences in *n* Power, researchers who follow that theory use a Thematic Apperception Test, consisting in part of pictures portraying people interacting with each other. Differences in *n* Power are established on the basis of whether the respondent perceives such interactions to be about influence (Atkinson, 1958; McClelland, 1981; Winter, 1973). Various studies have found that *n* Power correlates with the likelihood that managers, executives, or naval officers climb the ranks of their organizations (Cummin, 1967; McClelland, 1981; Varga, 1975). People who score higher in *n* Power tend to better in networking, increasing their visibility, and establishing influential and powerful positions (Winter, 1973). Furthermore, in a longitudinal study among managers in six Bell telephone companies, those who scored higher on *n* Power were more likely to have reached a high management level 16 years later (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982). At the same time, this latter pattern held only for nontechnical managers, and *n*

Power did not predict any increase in power among technical managers. Moreover, findings in other studies suggest that the desire for power as a motive to influence others may not be conducive to achieving success in climbing the ranks of an organization (Cornelius & Lane, 1984).

To summarize, theoretical contributions and empirical findings in the tradition of McClelland's three needs theory support Hypothesis 2: The desire for power reflects a need for influence and that satisfying this need for influence satisfies the desire for more power.

Autonomy Versus Influence

One important limitation to existing research on the desire for Power, as discussed in previous paragraphs, is that no research has directly tested the need for autonomy and the need for influence against each other as two alternative explanations for the desire for power. In the current article, we aim to do so. We predict that Hypothesis 1 will have higher validity and that the degree to which people subjectively experience their power as autonomy shapes their desire for power more than influence does.

A first reason why we believe that influence is not critical in shaping the desire for power is because we believe it may be subject to a problem of focalism. It is easy to think of examples of powerful individuals who seemingly desired influence and to control others, either in the past (Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon), in the present (Obama, Putin), or in fiction (Darth Vader in *Star Wars* or Tolkien's *Sauron*). In contrast, the sense of autonomy of these powerful individuals is not as visible: It is reflected in the *absence* of constraint, plans *not* being thwarted, and ambitions *not* being frustrated—an absence which remains unobserved. This perceptual aspect of influence and autonomy—that the one is visible and the other not—can easily lead to a false understanding of what drives the desire for power (McArthur, 1980; McArthur & Baron, 1983; Taylor & Fiske, 1978). This problem is compounded by the fact that influence and autonomy can be expected to correlate (indeed, we will test for their correlation in the current studies); when people gain more power in their search for autonomy, they will often also secure more influence as a by-product (Van Dijke & Poppe, 2006). Even though it is more visible, influence may not drive the desire for power.

This idea that autonomy and not influence drives the desire for power is further strengthened by the observation that influence is often unattractive because of the burden it brings. A power hierarchy helps the collective to perform more effectively, by distributing responsibilities between leaders who provide instructions to reach long-term goals and subordinates who follow these instructions (Halevy, Chou, & Galinsky, 2011; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). A position of influence thus brings the *burden of leadership*, where the powerful are responsible for others and accountable for failure to reach collective goals. Such a responsible

exercise of power requires the powerful to engage in detailed processing and to avoid relying on mental shortcuts in viewing others (Lammers, Stoker, & Stapel, 2009). It forces the powerful to use their power to help others and resist the temptation to use it for selfish goals (Chen et al., 2001; Torelli & Shavitt, 2010). These demands placed on those who exercise influence over others are even more sizable because influence can easily lead to resistance whenever subordinates feel that they are not being treated well (Blau, 1964; Eckhoff, 1974; Hinkin & Schriesheim, 1994). Such considerations explain why people are especially likely to find powerful positions attractive when they think of the liberty and opportunities that power offers; in contrast, when they think of the responsibilities and duties that come with a position of power, their interest in power decreases (Sassenberg et al., 2012).

To summarize, we distinguish between two ways in which a position of power can be construed and two motives for gaining power: power as influence over others (influence) and power as the ability to resist the influence of others (autonomy). Although in theory both may drive the desire for power, we propose that there is stronger empirical evidence that autonomy is the driving force behind power compared with influence. This leads us to predict that Hypothesis 1 will have higher validity: The degree to which people subjectively experience their power as autonomy shapes their desire for power more than influence does.

Overview of the Current Studies

Earlier research has shown that people find both autonomy and influence particularly attractive, but no research has directly tested how the two affect the desire for power or compared which of the two affects the desire for power more. Our approach therefore differs in that we directly measure and manipulate how power is experienced and that we directly measure how this affects the desire for power. Specifically, after an initial test to determine whether people intuitively prefer autonomy over influence (Study 1), we report five studies (Experiments 2, 3a, 3b, 3c, and 5) in which we measure or manipulate power and then measure the desire for power. In addition, we measure influence and autonomy as two separate constructs. We tested our predictions using multiple mediation (Studies 2, 3a, 3b, 3c, and 5) and causal chain analysis (Studies 4a and 4b). Using multiple mediation analyses, we establish which of the two best explains the desire for power. We expect that autonomy mediates any effect of power on the desire for power but influence not (or much less). Furthermore, in two additional studies (Experiments 4a and 4b), we manipulate high versus low feelings of autonomy versus influence and test the effects of both on the desire for power. Again, we expect that feelings of increased autonomy will be associated with less desire for power (compared with feelings of decreased autonomy), but feelings of increased influence will not.

We manipulated power in multiple ways, by changing actual control over outcomes (Study 2) and by using recall manipulations (Studies 3a, 3b, 3c, 4a, and 4b). To validate the effect of power among actual power holders, we also measure existing, naturally occurring differences in power, autonomy, and influence among a large sample of powerful and less powerful managers and employees (Study 5).

In all studies, we set sample size in advance, except for Study 5, where we simply maximized participation within a given time frame (without any data-inspection prior to finishing data-collection). We report all data exclusions, all manipulations, and all measures. Study 5 was a collaborative effort, involving multiple independent projects. There we report all measures of the current project.

Difference With Earlier Research

Our research thus differs from existing research first because we directly test the desire for power. Earlier research directly compared influence and autonomy, but did not measure how these variables affected the desire for power. For example, in an earlier research by Van Dijke and Poppe (2006), participants played a stock trading game, in which they sought to maximize their profit by strategically buying and selling stocks. As part of the game, players could also meddle with each other's stock portfolios. When given the opportunity to change the parameters of the game, participants were mainly interested in ending the influence of other players on their portfolio, but relatively uninterested in influencing other players' stocks. Although these results support our idea that people value autonomy more than influence, the authors did not test how people's preferences for the game subsequently affected the desire for power. In fact, there is no evidence that participants perceived their preferences as even bearing on the concept of power, and an alternative explanation is that participants just believed that they were more effective stock traders and simply wanted to maximize their outcomes (Alicke, 1985). Inesi and colleagues (2011) found that the opportunity to pick a product out of a large assortment reduced the degree to which people value power-related characteristics in their dream job. Sassenberg and colleagues (2012) found that people see high-power groups, such as politicians, as more attractive when they focus on the fact that power opens up opportunities. Both findings certainly offer support for our idea that the experience of autonomy is important, but none directly tested the relative value of autonomy versus influence in satisfying the desire for power.

A second way in which our approach differs from earlier work is that we focus on situational changes in the desire for power, measured with explicit measures. Earlier research mainly focused on individual differences in implicit power motives (McClelland et al., 1989; Schultheiss, 2008). That approach studied the need for power as a relatively stable and chronic dispositional drive that propels some people to seek power more than others. We focus instead on how

people subjectively experience and construe a specific position of power. Furthermore, rather than treating it as a stable construct, we focus on how the desire for power fluctuates and is satisfied by different contexts. Also, where the former approach argues that people have difficulty knowing their true motives for power and therefore predominantly uses implicit, projective measures (e.g., Pang & Schultheiss, 2005), our focus on the subjective experience of power essentially places explicit measures at the center of our approach. This focus toward explicit measures is also guided by concerns about the validity of these projective measures. The internal reliability of some of these measures is low, with alpha scores below .40 (Entwistle, 1972) and test-retest scores as low as zero (Kraiger, Hakel, & Cornelius, 1984). For these reasons, projective techniques need to be treated with ample skepticism (Lilienfeld, Wood, & Garb, 2000). Some may argue that implicit measures offer an advantage over explicit measure because of reduced susceptibility to social desirability. However, the mere fact that projective measures are implicit does not guarantee reduced susceptibility to social desirability (Gawronski, 2009). In the "General Discussion" section we return to this issue.

Cultural Differences

We test our predictions across a series of studies in Western cultural settings and performed two exact replications in India (Studies 3b and 4b). Performing exact replications is valuable by itself (Schmidt, 2009), but replications across cultures offer the additional benefit of providing a robustness test against cultural differences. Furthermore, comparing a Western with an Eastern sample is particularly interesting because Indians score higher on power-distance and lower on individualism than Westerners (Hofstede, 1984). One could therefore expect that Indians value influence more and autonomy less, which would work against our predictions. However, our inspiration in self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) would lead us to expect that these effects generalize across cultures, given that this theory considers autonomy to be one of three *universal* needs (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003). Although we did not have strong predictions, we collected these data to test for cross-cultural robustness.

Study 1: Preference for Autonomy Over Influence

Method

Participants and design. A total of 100 (Study 1a; 68 males, 32 females; M age = 34.8 years) and 101 (Study 1b; 45 males, 56 females; M age = 32.2 years) U.S. American MTurk users participated for US\$0.20 in a study on career decisions. Given no prior knowledge on the effect size, we aimed for 50 respondents per cell (Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2013).

Procedure: Study 1a. Participants read that they were working on a position as analyst and were presented with a promotion (with the same salary as your current position). We varied whether the promotion provided more autonomy and less influence or less autonomy and more influence than one's current position. Specifically, in Study 1a, we used a between-subjects design; half of the participants read that they currently held a position that offered high influence but less autonomy; it required taking directions from a manager and then motivating and directing a number of subordinates toward those goals. They then read that their boss presented them a promotion to a more prestigious position in a different group (but with the same salary), which was described as offering high autonomy, but no influence; it required setting one's own goals and independently working toward them, without any subordinates. The other half of the participants read that they currently held the position that offered high autonomy but no influence and were presented with a promotion to a more prestigious position—the one that offered high influence but less autonomy. All participants read that their boss was also happy if they instead preferred to keep their current position. Participants indicated whether they took the promotion or not.

Procedure: Study 1b. The procedure of Study 1b was completely similar, except that we used a within-subjects design; participants first imagined that they held the one job and were offered the other job as promotion and next imagined that they held the other job and were offered the one job as promotion. Order of administration was randomized.

Results

Study 1a: Between-subjects design. Of the participants who held the high-influence position, the majority (62%) *accepted* the promotion to the high-autonomy position; of the participants who held the high-autonomy position, the majority (74%) *rejected* the promotion and kept their current position (i.e., only 26% accepted the promotion), $\chi^2(1) = 13.15, p < .0001$. In other words, participants were 2.4 times more likely to accept the promotion when it increased autonomy at the expense of influence, than when it increased influence at the expense of autonomy.

Study 1b: Within-subjects design. When participants held the high-influence position, the majority (60.4%) *accepted* the promotion to the high-autonomy position; of the participants who held the high-autonomy position, the majority (70.3%) *rejected* the promotion and kept their current position (i.e., only 29.7% accepted), McNemar $\chi^2(1) = 19.61, p < .0001$. In other words, participants were 2 times more likely to accept the promotion when it increased autonomy at the expense of influence, than when it increased influence at the expense of autonomy.

As expected, most participants in Study 1 preferred to have autonomy over influence and were therefore more likely to reject a promotion if it increased influence at the expense of autonomy, than vice versa.

Study 2: Multiple Mediation in a Business Simulation

Study 2 manipulated power and measured only autonomy, influence, and desire for power. We predicted that autonomy but not influence would mediate the effect of condition on the desire for power.

Method

Participants and design. Forty Dutch undergraduate psychology students (7 males, 33 females; M age = 19.6 years) participated for course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (high vs. low power).

Procedure. Participants took part in a simulation of a company and were randomly assigned to a high-power manager or low-power assistant role. Participants were told they would work toward finishing desirable, interesting and less desirable, boring tasks. Managers picked theirs' and their assistants' tasks, while assistants did not.

Measures. To check the meaningfulness of the assignment, participants indicated whether they were "happy" and "unhappy" with their position ($r = -.92$, $p < .0001$). Next, the experience of *autonomy* was measured with two items: "I have enough control over my own tasks" and "I am satisfied with the amount of control I have over my own tasks" ($r = .89$, $p < .0001$). *Influence* was also measured with two items: "I have enough control over others' tasks" and "I am satisfied with the amount of control I have over others' tasks" ($r = .50$, $p = .001$). The *desire for power* was measured with two items: "I would like to have more power in this company" and "I would like to have a better position in this company" ($r = .92$, $p < .0001$). All answers were between *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7). Autonomy and influence correlated strongly in the manager ($r = .52$, $p = .02$), but less strongly in the assistant condition ($r = .37$, $p = .11$).

Results

Assistants were less happy ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.43$) than managers ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 1.29$), $F(1, 38) = 16.99$, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.30$, 95% CI (confidence interval) = [0.90, 2.65]. Assistants experienced less autonomy ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.12$) than managers ($M = 6.23$, $SD = 0.66$), $F(1, 38) = 125.53$, $p < .0001$, $d = 3.54$, 95% CI = [-3.84, -2.66]. Assistants also experienced less influence ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.23$) than managers ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.18$), $F(1, 38) = 13.11$, $p = .001$, $d = 1.14$, 95%

Figure 1. Study 2: Regression coefficients of power (0 = assistant, 1 = manager) on the desire for power, mediated by autonomy and influence.

* $p \leq .05$. *** $p < .0001$.

CI = [-2.14, -0.61]. Finally, assistants had a higher desire for power ($M = 4.90$, $SD = 1.36$) than managers ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 0.93$), $F(1, 38) = 55.42$, $p < .0001$, $d = 2.36$, 95% CI = [+2.00, +3.50].

Mediation analyses. Consistent with our main predictions, only autonomy mediated the effect of condition on the desire for power, while influence did not (see Figure 1). A hierarchical regression analysis showed that adding autonomy predicted the desire for power, $B = -0.43$, $SE = 0.22$, $p = .055$, but influence did not, $B = -0.01$, $SE = 0.17$, $p = .97$. Importantly, multiple mediation analysis using bootstrapping (5,000 resamples; macro by Hayes, 2013) and traditional Sobel tests showed that autonomy marginally mediated the effect of condition on the desire for power, 95% CI = [-3.39, +0.10],² Sobel's $Z = -1.95$, $p = .051$, but influence did not mediate, 95% CI = [-0.70, +0.47], Sobel's $Z = -0.03$, $p = .97$.

As predicted, Study 2 found that autonomy—but not influence—explains why low-power participants had a stronger desire for power than high-power participants.

Studies 3a, 3b, and 3c: Multiple Mediation Using Experiential Power Primes

Study 2 used a role manipulation of power. Studies 3a to 3c used a different manipulation—an experiential power manipulation (Galinsky et al., 2003)—and included a control condition.

Method

Participants and design. A total of 154 U.S. American (Study 3a), 154 Indian (Study 3b), and 150 U.S. American (Study 3c) MTurk users participated for US\$0.50. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: low power, high power, and control. As in previous studies,

Table 1. Cell-Means and Overall ANOVA Results in Studies 3a (Top), 3b (Middle), and 3c (Bottom).

	Low power	Control	High power	ANOVA
n_{cell}	50	52	48	$F(2, 147)$
Desire for power	5.63 _a	3.61 _b	3.45 _b	55.06, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .43$
Autonomy	2.35 _a	4.65 _b	5.08 _b	53.18, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .42$
Influence	2.63 _a	3.46 _b	5.38 _c	47.82, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .39$
n_{cell}	41	50	30	$F(2, 118)$
Desire for power	4.74 _a	3.99 _b	3.84 _b	10.35, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$
Autonomy	4.31 _a	5.29 _b	5.58 _b	10.38, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .15$
Influence	4.43 _a	4.90 _a	5.78 _b	11.22, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$
n_{cell}	44	57	44	$F(2, 142)$
Desire for power	6.28 _a	3.69 _b	3.02 _c	97.16, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .58$
Autonomy	1.90 _a	4.61 _b	5.15 _b	74.98, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .51$
Influence	2.02 _a	3.59 _a	5.47 _c	62.58, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .47$

Note. Means with different subscript differ at $p < .05$ (Tukey's Honest Significance Difference test).

given no prior knowledge on the effect size, we aimed for 50 respondents per cell (Simmons et al., 2013). In Study 3a, four participants terminated the study before completing all measures or entered garbled text in the experiential power prime, leaving 150 participants (79 males, 70 females, one unknown; $M_{\text{age}} = 29.1$ years). For similar reasons, 33 participants were excluded in Study 3b, leaving 121 participants (72 males, 49 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 30.9$ years),³ and five participants were excluded in Study 3c, leaving 145 participants (72 males, 73 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 37.3$ years). Importantly, results are virtually identical in all studies without deletion.

Procedure. Participants first completed an experiential power manipulation (Galinsky et al., 2003). High-power participants recalled a time “in which you had power over another individual or individuals.” Low-power participants recalled a time “in which someone else had power over you or where you lacked power.” Control participants recalled and wrote what had happened yesterday. Given the above instructions, the possibility exists that the high-power condition caused a particularly strong experience of influence and the low-power condition a particularly low experience of autonomy. To address this confound, participants in Study 3c were only instructed to recall an experience of power or powerlessness—without any further instructions.⁴

Measures. Experience of *autonomy* ($\alpha_{3a} = .93$, $\alpha_{3b} = .91$, $\alpha_{3c} = .96$) was measured with four items: I had the feeling that I . . . “was able to do whatever I wanted to do,” “could follow my own wishes or desires,” “could freely choose to do whatever I wanted,” or “was independent from other people.” Experience of *influence* was measured with four items ($\alpha_{3a} = .91$, $\alpha_{3b} = .82$, $\alpha_{3c} = .94$): I had the feeling that I was . . . “leading,” “influencing,” “in control of,” or “responsible for” . . . other people. *Desire for power* was also measured with four items

($\alpha_{3a} = .83$, $\alpha_{3b} = .52$, $\alpha_{3c} = .92$): “I personally would have liked to have more power,” “I personally would have liked to have a stronger sense of control,” “I felt personally satisfied with the amount of power I had” (recoded), and “I felt personally satisfied with the sense of control I had” (recoded). All were answered on 7-point scales, as in Study 2.

The order of administration of the mediators was counterbalanced. In both studies, a factor analysis (Varimax rotation) on the eight mediator items showed two components (both eigenvalues > 1) with high own ($> .65$) and low other loadings ($< .50$). Feelings of influence and autonomy correlated significantly in the low-power conditions of all studies ($r_s > .30$, $p_s < .03$), correlated in the control condition of Study 3a ($r = .28$, $p = .053$), and only correlated in the high-power conditions of Studies 3a and 3b ($r_s > .30$, $p_s < .06$).

Results—Study 3a

Consistent with predictions, low-power participants had particularly low feelings of autonomy and a particularly high desire for power (see Table 1, top). Specifically, low-power participants had weaker feelings of autonomy than control participants, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.57$, 95% CI = $[-2.98, -1.64]$, and high-power participants, $p < .0001$, $d = 2.17$, 95% CI = $[-3.41, -2.05]$, while the latter two did not differ, $p = .30$, $d = 0.29$, 95% CI = $[-1.10, +0.25]$. And, low-power participants had a stronger desire for power than control participants, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.67$, 95% CI = $[+1.48, 2.57]$, and high-power participants, $p < .0001$, $d = 2.04$, 95% CI = $[+1.72, +2.64]$, while the latter two again did not differ, $p = .77$, $d = 0.13$, 95% CI = $[-0.71, +0.39]$. In contrast, feelings of influence increased linearly from low power to control, $p = .01$, $d = 0.54$, 95% CI = $[-1.50, -0.16]$, and from control to high power, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.39$, 95% CI = $[-3.41, -2.05]$.

Figure 2. Study 3a: Regression coefficients of high-power effect code (upright) and low-power effect code (italic) on the desire for power, mediated by autonomy and influence.

* $p \leq .05$. *** $p < .0001$.

Mediation analyses. Multiple mediation analyses confirmed that only autonomy mediated the effect of condition; influence did not (see Figure 2). To code three experimental conditions, we used two effect code variables, where the control condition represented the comparison factor (coded as -1), and low or high power were alternatingly coded as 0 and +1. As expected, only autonomy affected participants' desire for power negatively, $B = -0.41$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .0001$, while influence only had a marginal effect, $B = -0.10$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .09$. Mediation analyses using bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) and traditional Sobel tests showed that mediation occurred solely through feelings of autonomy (high-power effect code: 95% CI = $[-0.67, -0.25]$, Sobel's $Z = -4.71$, $p < .0001$; low-power effect code: 95% CI = $[+0.44, +0.97]$, Sobel's $Z = 5.80$, $p < .0001$) and not through feelings of influence (high-power effect code: 95% CI = $[-0.36, +0.02]$, Sobel's $Z = -1.66$, $p = .10$; low-power effect code: 95% CI = $[-0.01, +0.28]$, Sobel's $Z = 1.64$, $p = .10$).

Results—Study 3b

The results were highly comparable with those of Study 3a (see Table 1, middle). As before, low-power participants had particularly low feelings of autonomy and a particularly high desire for power. Specifically, low-power participants felt less autonomy than control participants, $p = .0002$, $d = 0.93$, 95% CI = $[-1.62, -0.34]$, and less than high-power participants, $p = .001$, $d = 0.68$, 95% CI = $[-2.00, -0.55]$, while the high-power and control participants did not differ, $p = .58$, $d = 0.33$, 95% CI = $[-0.41, +0.99]$. Also as in Study 3a, low-power participants had a higher desire for power than control participants, $p = .006$, $d = 0.74$, 95% CI = $[+0.29, +1.22]$, and high-power participants, $p = .003$, $d = 0.94$, 95% CI = $[+0.37, +1.44]$, while the latter two did again not differ, $p = .77$, $d = 0.19$, 95% CI = $[-0.36, +0.66]$. As in Study 3a, the experience of influence was distributed in a more linear manner. Low-power participants experienced marginally less influence than control participants, $p = .15$, $d = 0.36$, 95% CI = $[-1.06, +0.13]$, who

experienced less influence than high-power participants, $p = .005$, $d = 0.93$, 95% CI = $[-1.53, -0.23]$.

Mediation analyses. We found a highly similar mediation pattern as in Study 3a. Again, only autonomy affected participants' desire for power negatively, $B = -0.36$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < .0001$, while influence did not, $B = -0.08$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .28$. As in Study 3a, mediation occurred solely through the experience of autonomy (high-power effect code: 95% CI = $[-0.26, -0.04]$, Sobel's $Z = -2.52$, $p = .01$; low-power effect code: 95% CI = $[+0.09, +0.46]$, Sobel's $Z = 3.36$, $p = .0008$), while again no mediation occurred through influence (high-power effect code: 95% CI = $[-0.12, +0.06]$, Sobel's $Z = -1.05$, $p = .29$; low-power effect code: 95% CI = $[-0.06, +0.14]$, Sobel's $Z = 1.04$, $p = .30$).

Results—Study 3c

The results were highly comparable with the results of Studies 3a and 3b (see Table 1, bottom). Low-power participants experienced particularly low autonomy and particularly high desire for power. Specifically, low-power participants felt less autonomy than control participants, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.90$, 95% CI = $[-3.35, -2.07]$, and less than high-power participants, $p < .0001$, $d = 2.59$, 95% CI = $[-3.94, -2.57]$, while high-power and control participants did not differ, $p = .11$, $d = 0.39$, 95% CI = $[-1.19, +0.10]$. Also as before, low-power participants had a higher desire for power than control participants, $p < .0001$, $d = 2.24$, 95% CI = $[+2.03, +3.15]$, and high-power participants, $p = .003$, $d = 3.19$, 95% CI = $[+2.67, +3.85]$, while the difference between the latter two was again much smaller, $p = .014$, $d = 0.53$, 95% CI = $[+0.11, +1.22]$. Also as before, the experience of influence was distributed in a more linear manner. Low-power participants experienced less influence than control participants, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.13$, 95% CI = $[-2.25, -0.88]$, who experienced less influence than high-power participants, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.20$, 95% CI = $[-2.56, -1.19]$.

Mediation analyses. We found a highly similar mediation pattern. Again, autonomy strongly decreased participants' desire for power, $B = -0.51$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .0001$, while the effect of influence was much smaller, $B = -.15$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .006$. Mediation occurred mainly through the experience of autonomy (high-power effect code: 95% CI = $[-0.93, -0.41]$, Sobel's $Z = -6.41$, $p < .0001$; low-power effect code: 95% CI = $[+0.72, +1.35]$, Sobel's $Z = 7.46$, $p < .0001$), although different from previous studies, some mediation also occurred through influence (high-power effect code: 95% CI = $[-0.50, -0.08]$, Sobel's $Z = 2.69$, $p = .007$; low-power effect code: 95% CI = $[+0.08, +0.47]$, Sobel's $Z = 2.75$, $p = .006$). Nonetheless, in the high-power condition, the size of the mediation effect through autonomy was 2.4 times larger than the mediation effect through influence, while in the low-power

condition, the mediation effect through autonomy was 4.1 times larger than the mediation effect through influence.

Discussion

Studies 3a to 3c used multiple mediation analyses to test our predictions. Participants provided recollections of experiences of low- or high-power, or of neutral experiences, and then indicated whether they felt autonomous and influential and whether they desired to have more or less power in that situation. All three studies showed that feelings of autonomy mediated the effect of condition on the desire for more power, but influence did not (Studies 3a and 3b) or much less (Study 3c). In other words, autonomy quenches the desire for additional power—but influence does not (or much less). Furthermore, we found this effect both in America and India, strongly suggesting that these effects are robust against cultural differences.

Studies 4a and 4b: Causal Chain Analysis

Whereas Studies 3a to 3c measured our mediator, Studies 4a and 4b manipulated the mediator. Statistical mediation has been criticized for being unable to establish the causal role of the mediator and a design where the mediator is manipulated is advocated instead (Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). We manipulated high versus low feelings of influence versus feelings of autonomy. We expect that the experience of high autonomy would lead to a lower desire for power compared with the experience of low autonomy, but that the experience of high influence would not lead to a lower desire for power compared with the experience of low influence. We again conducted this study with both American and Indian samples.

Method

Participants and design. In all, 205 U.S. American (Study 4a) and 203 Indian (Study 4b) MTurk users participated for US\$0.50. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four cells (high vs. low influence and high vs. low autonomy) between-subjects design. Given no prior knowledge on the effect size, we again followed Simmons and colleagues' (2013) recommendation to use 50 respondents per cell. In Study 4a, all participants were included (125 males, 80 females, $M_{\text{age}} = 30.1$ years). In Study 4b, 21 participants were excluded for entering garbled text in the experiential power prime, leaving 182 participants (118 males, 64 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 31.1$ years).² Importantly, results of Study 4b are virtually identical without exclusion.

Manipulation. We independently manipulated the experience of high and low autonomy and the experience of high and low influence using an adapted version of the experiential

power manipulation (Galinsky et al., 2003). Participants in the high (vs. low) autonomy condition recalled an experience in which they were free and independent (vs. lacked freedom and independence), meaning that they could determine what they would get (vs. someone else could control or direct them). To ensure that all instructions were otherwise as similar as possible, we used the word "control" across all conditions when referencing to the presence or absence of influence or autonomy. Participants in the high (vs. low) autonomy condition recalled an experience in which they were (vs. were not) free and independent to control their own fate. Participants in the high (vs. low) influence condition recalled an experience in which they were (vs. were not) trying to influence or control other people.

Measures. We measured participants' *desire for power* using the four items of Studies 3a, 3b, and 3c ($\alpha_{4a} = .93$; $\alpha_{4b} = .55$) and as manipulation checks the four autonomy items ($\alpha_{4a} = .95$; $\alpha_{4b} = .74$) and the four influence items ($\alpha_{4a} = .90$; $\alpha_{4b} = .93$) used as mediators there, in randomized order. In Study 4a, the correlations between feelings of autonomy and influence varied strongly between conditions. They ranged from positive in the low-autonomy condition ($r = .29$, $p = .04$) and uncorrelated in the high-influence condition ($r = .04$, $p = .79$) to negative in the low-influence ($r = -.44$, $p = .001$) and high-autonomy ($r = -.27$, $p = .050$) conditions. In Study 4b, feelings of autonomy and influence correlated positively in all conditions (all r s $> .35$, all p s $< .02$).

Results—Study 4a

Manipulation check. Our manipulation had the expected effect on the manipulation checks. High-autonomy participants ($M = 5.98$, $SD = 1.05$) felt more autonomous than low-autonomy participants ($M = 1.98$, $SD = 1.16$), $t(105) = 18.77$, $p < .0001$, $d = 3.63$, 95% CI = [+3.58, +4.42], and high-influence participants ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 0.94$) felt more influential than low-influence participants ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 1.33$), $t(96) = 9.48$, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.92$, 95% CI = [+1.75, +2.68].

Desire for power. A 2 (autonomy vs. influence) $\times$ 2 (high vs. low) ANOVA on the desire for power showed two main effects and the predicted interaction effect, $F(1, 201) = 142.67$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .42$. As expected, participants who experienced low autonomy ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 1.02$) felt a stronger desire for power compared with participants who experienced high autonomy ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 1.40$), $t(105) = 13.50$, $p < .0001$, $d = 2.62$, 95% CI = [+2.73, +3.67]. In comparison, participants who experienced low influence did not report a strong desire for power; in fact, their desire for power was even significantly weaker ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 1.40$) compared with participants who experienced high influence ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.24$), $t(96) = -3.92$, $p < .0001$, $d = 0.79$, 95% CI = [-1.58, -0.52].

Only the experience of high autonomy was associated with *less* desire for power, compared with the experience of low autonomy, but the experience of high influence was not associated with less desire for power. One explanation for the unexpected increased desire among high-influence participants could be that experiencing influence over others motivates people to gain more power to ensure that their influence is successful. Although unexpected, these results support our predictions.

Results—Study 4b

Manipulation check. Our manipulation also had the expected effect on the manipulation checks. High-autonomy participants ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 0.93$) felt more autonomous than low-autonomy participants ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.78$), $t(97) = 5.62$, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.16$, 95% CI = [+1.07, +2.24], and high-influence participants ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 0.70$) felt marginally more influential than low-influence participants ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.17$), $t(81) = 1.89$, $p = .06$, $d = 0.55$, 95% CI = [−0.02, +0.84].

Desire for power. The results were highly comparable with the results of Study 4a. A 2 (autonomy vs. influence) $\times$ 2 (high vs. low) ANOVA on the desire for power showed two main effects and the predicted interaction effect, $F(1, 178) = 8.62$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. As expected, participants who experienced low autonomy ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.16$) felt a stronger desire for power compared with participants who experienced high autonomy ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.73$), $t(97) = 4.24$, $p < .0001$, $d = 0.87$, 95% CI = [+0.45, +1.24]. In comparison, participants who experienced low influence did not differ in their desire for power ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.86$) from participants who experienced high influence ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.73$), $t(81) = 0.26$, $p = .79$, $d = 0.06$, 95% CI = [−0.31, +0.40].

Only the experience of elevated autonomy was associated with low desire for power, compared with the experience of low autonomy, but the experience of high influence was not, compared with a low-influence experience, supporting our prediction.

Discussion

Studies 4a and 4b independently manipulated influence and autonomy, and both studies supported the main prediction that the experience of elevated autonomy is associated with less desire for power compared with reduced autonomy and more so than is the experience of elevated influence compared with reduced influence.

Study 5: Naturally Occurring Power Differences

The first sets of studies supported our predictions using lab-based experimental designs. Although their experimental designs offer the advantage of causal explanation, a

disadvantage is that the consequences of having versus lacking power were either manipulated within the limitations of the lab (Experiments 1 and 2) or recalled from personal experiences (Experiments 3a–3c and 4a–4b). To generalize our findings to a working population, Study 5 tests the effect of actual positions of power among a large sample of professionals.

Method

Participants and procedure. Readers of *Intermediar*, a Dutch national magazine aimed at professionals, completed a questionnaire on the Internet, for participating in a book-token raffle. We maximized sample size within a fixed time frame. In total, 1,456 respondents participated in the study. Given our interest in power relations, 440 unemployed and self-employed participants were excluded a priori, as well as 30 incomplete responses. This yielded 986 respondents (584 men, 402 women, M age = 39.2 years). Of these, 55% were in non-management, 25% in lower management, 15% were in middle management, and 5% were in top management. In terms of education, 41% completed a bachelor's degree, 52% a master's degree, and 7% a PhD. In terms of economic sector, 21% worked in industry, 45% worked in trade and commercial services, and 34% worked in non-commercial services. In terms of company size, 12% worked in a small company of less than 10 employees, 17% worked in a company with between 10 and 49 employees, 10% worked in a company with between 50 and 99 employees, 26% worked in a company with between 100 and 499 employees, 18% worked in a company with between 500 and 1,999 employees, and 18% worked in a company with 2,000 employees or more.

Measures. Participants indicated their *power*, as the actual, current position in the hierarchy of their organization, on a 2.4-inch vertical line that ranged from 0 (bottom of organization) to 100 (top of organization; Lammers et al., 2009). Results showed that participants from different management positions reliably differed on this continuous measure of power in the expected manner, $F(3, 982) = 75.30$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$, $p < .0001$, so that non-managers reported having the least power, lower managers reported second least, middle managers the second most, and top managers the most power (all pairwise comparisons at $p < .05$), see Table 2.

We measured *desire for power* with six items ($\alpha = .72$): “I would like to have more power,” “I would like to have more control,” “I would like to have more responsibilities,” “I would like to have more authority,” “I would like to have less responsibilities” (recoded), “I would like to have less control” (recoded); all between *completely disagree* (1) and *completely agree* (7). Respondents indicated their *autonomy* by answering one question measuring the degree that they are independent to do what they want in their organization. Respondents indicated their *influence* by answering one

Table 2. Cell-Means and Overall ANOVA Results in Study 5.

	Non management	Lower management	Middle management	Top management	ANOVA
n_{cell}	546	250	145	45	$F(3, 982)$
Power position	49.60 _a	59.57 _b	76.56 _c	87.51 _d	75.30, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$
Desire for power	4.59 _a	4.67 _a	4.42 _a	3.66 _b	13.90, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$
Autonomy	4.08 _a	3.97 _a	4.60 _b	5.27 _c	13.94, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$
Influence	2.05 _a	4.57 _b	5.48 _c	5.84 _c	431.67, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .57$

Note. Means with different subscript differ at $p < .05$ (Tukey's Honest Significance Difference test).

question measuring the degree to which they can lead other people in their organization. Both items were answered between *not at all* (1) and *very much* (7). Consistent with our theorizing, feelings of influence and feelings of autonomy correlated strongly with feelings of power ($r_s > .35$, $p < .0001$), but weakly with each other ($r = .16$, $p < .0001$).

Results

Main analyses. Three regression analyses on the effect of power, measured with the continuous 2.4-inch vertical line, showed that power increased the experience of autonomy, $\beta = .36$, $b = 0.55$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [0.46, 0.64], $t(984) = 12.13$, $p < .0001$, increased the experience of influence, $\beta = .40$, $b = 0.80$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI = [0.68, 0.91], $t(984) = 13.66$, $p < .0001$, and decreased the desire for power, $\beta = -.16$, $b = -0.17$, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI = [-0.23, -0.10], $t(984) = -5.11$, $p < .0001$. A hierarchical regression analysis, in which influence and autonomy were added as mediators to the effect of power on the desire for power (Figure 3), showed that autonomy was a significant predictor, $\beta = -.19$, $b = -0.13$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [-0.17, -0.08], $t(982) = -5.69$, $p < .0001$, but influence was not, $\beta = .01$, $b = 0.004$, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI = [-0.03, +0.04], $t(982) = 0.23$, $p = .82$. Multiple mediation analysis using bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) and Sobel's test showed that autonomy mediated the effect of power on the desire for power, 95% CI = [-0.10, -0.04], Sobel's $Z = -5.15$, $p < .0001$, but influence did not, 95% CI = [-0.03, +0.03], Sobel's $Z = 0.23$, $p = .82$.

Top management. Following our reasoning, top managers should stand out from all other participants, in having particularly strong feelings of autonomy and therefore a particularly low desire for power, while other participants should not differ much. This idea was confirmed (see Table 2). Top managers experienced particularly strong feelings of autonomy compared with middle managers, $p = .047$, $d = 0.48$, 95% CI = [+0.005, +1.33], lower managers, $p < .0001$, $d = 0.89$, 95% CI = [+0.67, +1.93], and non-managers, $p < .0001$, $d = 0.76$, 95% CI = [+0.58, +1.78]. Moreover, those in top management had a particularly low desire for power compared with middle managers, $p < .0001$, $d = 0.72$, 95% CI = [-1.21, -0.31], lower managers, $p < .0001$, $d = 1.06$, 95% CI = [-1.44, -0.59], and non-managers, $p < .0001$, $d = 0.94$,

Figure 3. Study 5: Regression coefficients of power (studentized) on the desire for power, mediated by autonomy and influence.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .0001$.

95% CI = [-1.35, -0.53], while participants in the other three power levels did not significantly differ in their desire for power. In contrast, top managers and middle managers did not differ in their experience of influence, $p = .37$, $d = 0.34$, 95% CI = [-0.21, +0.94], and feelings of influence were distributed more gradually. Consistent with our reasoning, top managers stand out by a particularly strong experience of autonomy and a particularly low desire for power.

Additional analyses. An earlier reviewer remarked that our effect may differ between small companies and bigger companies, in that our effect is due to the fact that there is simply little room for advancement in smaller companies. We thank this reviewer and we ran the same analyses again but now using only respondents working in medium to large companies (100 employees or more). Using this more restrictive sample, we found virtually the same pattern, where top management had a particularly strongly reduced desire for power, $M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.70$, compared with those in middle management, $M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.06$, lower management, $M = 4.68$, $SD = 0.96$, and non-management, $M = 4.68$, $SD = 0.99$. All comparisons between top management and the other three groups were significant, all $p_s < .02$, all $d_s > 0.72$. Also, the mediation pattern was highly similar; autonomy mediated the effect of power on the desire for power, 95% CI = [-0.08, -0.02], Sobel's $Z = -3.11$, $p = .002$, but influence did not, 95% CI = [-0.04, +0.04], Sobel's $Z = -0.13$, $p = .90$.

General Discussion

In the current research, we examined what drives the desire for power. We explored two competing hypotheses. One hypothesis held that the desire for power reflects a need for autonomy and that gaining autonomy satisfies the desire for power. A second hypothesis proposed that the desire for power reflects a need for influence and that gaining influence satisfies the desire for more power.

Nine studies provided strong evidence for the first hypothesis. Our results suggest that people desire power to gain autonomy, not to gain influence over others. Furthermore, the data demonstrate that when people gain such autonomy, their desire for power dissipates. We found evidence for the primacy of autonomy as the driver of the desire for power by testing whether participants were more likely to reject a promotion if it reduced autonomy compared with when it reduced influence (Study 1), by manipulating power as actual control over desired outcomes, for both the self and others' (Study 2), by asking participants to recall personal episodes of power (Studies 3a-3c), by independently manipulating autonomy and influence (Studies 4a and 4b), and by measuring actual positions of power in existing power hierarchies in organizations (Study 5). Furthermore, we found this effect in Dutch (Studies 2 and 5), American (Studies 1, 3a, 3c, and 4a), and Indian (Studies 3b and 4b) settings. The fact that we found these effects across so many different cultures is remarkable. Overall, we found robust evidence for the primacy of autonomy in driving the desire for power using a wide variety of methods and a wide variety of samples.

Across Studies 3a to 3c and Study 5, we found a seemingly inconsistent relationship between power and the desire for power. Specifically, in Studies 3a to 3c, low-power participants showed a particularly high desire for power compared with high-power and control participants, whereas in Study 5, top managers had a particularly low desire for power. This disparate pattern fits exactly our predictions, however, as it shows the importance of autonomy. Participants in both the control and high-power conditions (in Studies 3a-3c) are in a position where they are not controlled by anyone and therefore experience high autonomy and a low desire for power. In contrast, due to the fact that organizational structures typically consist of a small power-top and a broad bottom of subordinates, most people in organizations, including lower and middle managers, are not in that position (Weber, 1914/1978). Almost everyone in a modern organization is controlled by someone and only top managers are free from control. Therefore, people from all levels of an organization experience some lack of autonomy and therefore some desire for power, except those in top management.

As we argued, the concepts of influence and autonomy can be distinguished on theoretical and practical grounds. In practice, however, the two will often be correlated. Throughout these studies, we measured the correlation between influence and autonomy. In Study 5, the two were

positively correlated but only modestly. In the other studies, we measured correlations within cells, because the experimental manipulation artificially creates a positive correlation. We found that the correlation between influence and autonomy varied wildly between conditions and between samples. The correlation was often positive, sometimes negative, and sometimes null. All in all, these results suggest that distinguishing between influence and autonomy makes sense from a practical standpoint.

In contrast to our findings, one finding does offer suggestive evidence for the importance of influence in driving the desire for power: dispositional narcissism among real-world dictators. Given that narcissists desire to dominate others to enhance the self, dictators keep looking for new people to influence, thus creating an insatiable hunger for power (Glad, 2002). Our findings paint a completely different picture and shows that the desire for power is a quenchable thirst for autonomy. An important difference, of course, is that our studies were not conducted on dictators, but ordinary people.

Potential Limitations

Across studies, we exclusively relied on self-report measures of the desire for power. We did so because our focus was on people's subjective experience and construal of power. Some may argue that using self-reports opens the possibility that social desirability played a role in shaping our effects. Perhaps, participants did not want to admit having influence or desiring power. We believe this to be unlikely. First, if participants indeed disliked admitting having influence or desiring power, then we would have found weaker effects of the experimental manipulation. Yet, across all studies, we found very strong effects. Second, although our manipulations had strong effects on both autonomy and influence, only autonomy consistently mediated the effects on the dependent variable. Such a selective mediation pattern cannot be explained by social desirability. Third and finally, the experience of power has been shown to *decrease* the tendency to conform to the opinions of others (Galinsky et al., 2008). Therefore, if social desirability had influenced our participants, then we should have found the powerful to express the strongest desire for power. However, we consistently found the opposite. In summary, social desirability runs against our results. If it affected our responses, then the results reported here likely underestimate the true effect.

A limitation to our approach is that we only measured influence over people in one's direct and present environment. Arguably, people can seek influence for a wide variety of reasons—influencing others to act against their own interests, influencing others to teach them new skills, influencing others to improve society, or even influencing future generations by making improvements to the environment. It is possible that this latter, more self-transcendent form of influence may be related to the desire for power, as it is connected to

needs for generativity and the desire to provide a meaningful personal narrative (McAdams & De St. Aubin, 1992). Generativity and power may be closely related; some of the most striking examples of generativity can be found in the biographies of powerful leaders such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King, who used their influence to create a better world for current and next generations (Erikson, 1969). A particularly interesting question for future research would be to test how people's concerns for generativity influence their desire for influence. It may be that a concern for generativity increases influence as a driver of the desire for power.

Although we found the exact same pattern of results across Eastern and Western cultures, we also acknowledge that effect sizes were larger in our Western samples. The fact that power distance is higher in India than the United States or Netherlands may explain why the differential value of autonomy versus influence was weakened in our Eastern samples. However, what is critical for the current research is that even in a high-power distance country, autonomy was the more important predictor of the desire for power.

Conclusion

In the past decades, a wealth of psychological research has focused on understanding the psychological effects of power. Researchers have uncovered various effects of power—ranging from malicious to benevolent, and from adaptive to maladaptive. Our findings examined why people seek power in the first place. The current results suggest that people are not primarily interested in influencing others but instead seek power to gain autonomy from the influence of others. The desire for power is born not of a desire to be the master of others, but to be master of one's own fate and domain.

Authors' Note

All data will be shared on request. Materials are included.

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Notes

1. The influence–autonomy distinction is connected to an earlier distinction between social and personal power (Lammers et al., 2009; Van Dijke & Poppe, 2006). We avoid those terms, however, as they create confusion; the term “social power” is also commonly used to distinguish the overarching concept of (psychological) power from, for example, electrical or military power (e.g., Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; Sassenberg, Ellemers, & Scheepers, 2012). Even more so, the term “interpersonal power”

is similarly used as a synonym for the overarching concept of social power (e.g., Sturm & Antonakis, 2015). In contrast, our proposed distinction between influence and autonomy is more explicit and can easily be applied to make distinctions in other forms of power. For example, America is a powerful nation because it has influence (it can threaten other countries with an invasion or economic boycott) and has autonomy (similar threats by other countries have less effect on America).

2. A 94% CI (confidence interval) = $[-3.40, -0.001]$.
3. In the Indian sample, markedly more participants entered garbled text. Also, the alpha reliability of the items was lower in the Indian than in the U.S. samples. Note that the same compensation (US\$0.50) has a much higher purchasing power in India.
4. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing us to this possible confound.

Supplemental Material

The online supplemental material is available at <http://pspb.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

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