RESEARCH REPORT

Does Power Corrupt or Enable? When and Why Power Facilitates Self-Interested Behavior

Katherine A. DeCelles
University of Toronto

D. Scott DeRue
University of Michigan

Joshua D. Margolis
Harvard Business School

Tara L. Ceranic
University of San Diego

Does power corrupt a moral identity, or does it enable a moral identity to emerge? Drawing from the power literature, we propose that the psychological experience of power, although often associated with promoting self-interest, is associated with greater self-interest only in the presence of a weak moral identity. Furthermore, we propose that the psychological experience of power is associated with less self-interest in the presence of a strong moral identity. Across a field survey of working adults and in a lab experiment, individuals with a strong moral identity were less likely to act in self-interest, yet individuals with a weak moral identity were more likely to act in self-interest, when subjectively experiencing power. Finally, we predict and demonstrate an explanatory mechanism behind this effect: The psychological experience of power enhances moral awareness among those with a strong moral identity, yet decreases the moral awareness among those with a weak moral identity. In turn, individuals' moral awareness affects how they behave in relation to their self-interest.

Keywords: power, moral identity, self-interested behavior, moral awareness, commons dilemma

The questions of when and why people will advance their own interests at the expense of the common good are evident across a wide range of organizational behavior research, including but not limited to research on moral behavior, prosocial behavior, and organizational deviance (Aquino, Lewis, & Bradfield, 1999; Aquino & Reed, 2002; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010; Reed & Aquino, 2003; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007). Although it could be that in some situations, the interests of the self and the common good are aligned or even unrelated (De Dreu & Nauta, 2009; Grant & Berg, 2010), our interest is in situations where self-interest and the common good are diametrically opposed (Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009; Kohlberg, 1969; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2006; Schwartz, 1992, 1994; Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). Therefore, we define self-interested behavior as actions that benefit the self and come at a cost to the

common good (Batson, 1998; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001).

Power presents organizations with a paradox related to self-interested behavior. On the one hand, there is a widespread belief and evidence that power corrupts, and people in positions of power can have a substantial negative impact on the common good by acting solely in their own self-interest (Fiske, 1993; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Kipnis, 1972, 1976; Lammers & Stapel, 2011). Indeed, power differences are ubiquitous in organizations (Brass & Burkhardt, 1993; Magee & Galinsky, 2008), and power can lead people to place greater importance on their own interests and subordinate those of others (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Kopelman, 2009; see Keltner et al., 2003, for a review). Yet, power can increase perspective taking (Hall, Coats, & LeBeau, 2005; Hall, Murphy, & Schmid Mast, 2006) and interpersonal sensitivity (Hall, Andrzejewski, & Yopchick, 2009; Schmid Mast, Jonas, & Hall, 2009), suggesting that power might increase the emphasis placed on others' needs as opposed to one's own interests.

In parallel to this research on power, it has been argued that self-interested behavior is a function of individuals' moral identity. Moral identity is the extent to which an individual holds morality as part of his or her self-concept (Aquino & Reed, 2002), and it has been shown to influence the degree to which people emphasize their own versus others' needs (Aquino et al., 2009; Reed & Aquino, 2003; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007). Yet, despite research showing how situational factors shape individuals' self-interested

behavior (Darley & Batson, 1973; Detert, Treviño & Sweitzer, 2008; Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008), research on moral identity has yet to explicate how situational factors, such as power, shape the effect that moral identity has on self-interested behavior (Aquino et al., 2009; Shao, Aquino, & Freeman, 2008).

In this article, we propose that integrating theories related to power and moral identity not only will show for whom power corrupts but also will explain the situations in which moral identity will be associated with more or less self-interested behavior. In particular, we theorize that power and moral identity will interact to explain individuals' self-interested behavior. In this article, we further explain how this effect occurs, theorizing that power will make those with a high moral identity more likely to recognize the moral implications of situations, yet make those with a low moral identity less aware of moral implications. In turn, this difference in moral awareness relates to how people prioritize their own versus others' interests and, ultimately, their engagement in self-interested behavior (see Figure 1).

Theory and Hypotheses

We expect self-interested behavior to be a function of both power and moral identity. Following Keltner et al. (2003), we focus on the psychological experience of power (rather than on the objective possession of power). Power in this case is a psychological state associated with perceiving control, which generates certain action tendencies and affective and cognitive changes (Galinsky et al., 2003, 2006; Keltner et al., 2003). This psychological experience and feeling of power could come from a variety of origins, including but not limited to having actual control over another's resources (Galinsky et al., 2003), being empowered with greater autonomy and discretion (Spreitzer, 1995), or being granted a higher status than others in a given situation (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002).

Given research demonstrating seemingly incompatible findings about how power influences individuals' treatment of others (Fiske, 1993; Galinsky et al., 2003, 2006; Hall et al., 2005, 2006, 2009; Schmid Mast et al., 2009), scholars have suggested that power might not directly impact behavior but might rather activate individuals' underlying traits or attributes (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Galinsky et al., 2003; Overbeck & Park, 2001). Consistent with this logic, we theorize that power interacts with an individual's moral identity to determine whether individuals engage in behavior that is more or less self-interested (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Aquino, Reed, Thau, & Freeman, 2007; Reed & Aquino, 2003; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007).
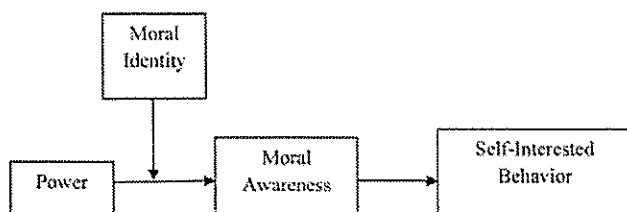
We expect this interaction between power and moral identity to manifest itself because individuals' traits can increase the accessibility of cognitive concepts and then influence how people interpret information (Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, & Tota, 1986; Bargh & Thein, 1985; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; McCrae & Costa, 1995), especially in situations where an individual perceives him- or herself to be autonomous or powerful (Chen et al., 2001; Galinsky et al., 2003). Based on this research, it follows that people with high moral identities will have more readily available moral concepts in their accessible mental structures and that when experiencing feelings of power, they will be more aware of the moral implications of a situation relative to those with a lower moral identity. Reynolds (2006) referred to this recognition by an individual of a situation's moral content as "moral awareness." Importantly, although there is limited empirical research on moral awareness, most theories of moral decision making imply that some level of conscious understanding of the moral implications is fundamental to fostering ethical decision making (e.g., Butterfield, Treviño, & Weaver, 2000; Jones, 1991; Rest, 1986;Reynolds, 2006, 2008; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Treviño, 1986).

Individuals with higher moral identities are likely to have greater moral awareness (Reynolds, 2006), which we argue should lead them to engage in even less self-interested behavior when feeling powerful because they are likely to be especially aware of the moral implications of their actions. Conversely, feeling powerful, yet having a lower moral awareness (associated with a lower moral identity), likely results in individuals not seeing any problem with benefiting themselves at the expense of others. Thus, we theorize that the power–moral identity interaction will affect behavior by increasing or decreasing an individual's moral awareness of a given situation.

> *Hypothesis 1:* Moral identity and power will interact to influence self-interested behavior, such that the relationship between power and self-interested behavior will be negative when moral identity is high and positive when moral identity is low.

> *Hypothesis 2:* The interactive effect described in Hypothesis 1 will be mediated by individuals' moral awareness of the situation.

Study 1

Method

Participants. Participants were 173 working adults who were paid as part of a U.S.-based survey response panel, run by Qualtrics.com, an online survey, software, and market research company. We recruited a random sample of working adults. The sample was 57.9% male, and participants were 41.45 years old on average (*SD* 10.48). The sample was 79.9% White, 11.8% Black, 5.6% Hispanic, 2.0% Asian, and 0.5% Native American; the remainder did not respond to questions regarding ethnicity. Participants had on average 4.28 years of tenure in their current organization (*SD* 1.03), and theyworked in a wide range of industries (e.g., retail, sales, consultants, civil service workers, health care, purchasing).

Procedure. Individuals first participated in a survey consisting of the measures described below. One week later, participants

Figure 1. Mediated moderation model of power and moral identity on self-interested behavior.

received a request to join another study that included a short survey and an experiment. Our response rate for the first phase was 21.5%, and approximately 86% of those participants completed the second phase. Only those who completed both phases of the study were included in the final analyses.

Measures and manipulation.

Power measure (Phase 1). Because our theory focused on the psychological experience of power—a sense of power that should be present across both trait power and state experiences of power (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Côté et al., in press)—we tested our first hypothesis using both trait power (Phase 1) and manipulations of power (Phase 2). We measured participants' trait power using an eight-item measure of assurance–dominance (Wiggins. Trapnell, & Phillips, 1988) on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). This scale has been shown to relate to a sense of power and has demonstrated results consistent with manipulations of power (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002). Reliability was calculated at .90.

Moral identity (Phase 1). We administered the five-item measure of Aquino and Reed's (2002) moral identity internalization, which is the subscale measuring the degree to which a person's moral identity is core to his or her sense of self (Aquino & Reed. 2002; Aquino et al., 2007; Detert et al., 2008). Respondents indicated their agreement with each item on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Reliability was calculated at .77.

Control variables (Phase 1). We controlled for participant gender and social desirability because they have been related to moral behavior in past studies (O'Fallon & Butterfield, 2005). We measured level of social desirability by having participants complete the Marlowe–Crowne social desirability scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960).

Power manipulation (conducted within Phase 2). Following Galinsky et al. (2003). we manipulated power by asking participants to write a narrative essay in which they were asked to recall a particular incident in their lives where they had power. Participants in the control condition were instructed, "Please recall your day yesterday—what happened, how you felt, etc." To ensure our manipulation worked as intended, we followed procedures from Galinsky et al. and had a research assistant who was unfamiliar with the study and blind to the manipulation code these essays with a number value reflecting how much power the person had in the situation described (from 1 *very little power* to 7 *a lot of power*). Results of a one-way analysis of variance testing the difference between conditions indicated that the power manipulation worked as intended, with those in the high power condition having significantly greater power (*M* 4.10. *SD* 2.54) in their essays than did those in the control condition (*M* 1.88, *SD* 1.74), *F*(1, 169) ☐ 44.71, *p* ☐ .001.

Self-interest. We focused on measuring two specific forms of self-interested behavior. To measure actual self-interested behavior, we incorporated a dictator game in which we could observe participants' direct trade-offs between self-interest and the interests of others. In addition, we wanted to examine self-interested behavior that comes at the expense of the organization (and not just other individuals). This idea is consistent with many behaviors that are reported under the construct of organizational deviance (e.g., Aquino et al., 1999; Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Cullen & Sackett, 2003; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). As such, we obtained respondents' self-reports of several organizational deviance behaviors. We describe each of these measures below.

Dictator game behavior (Phase 2). We adapted a dictator game to measure participants' self-interested behavior (Forsythe, Horowitz, Savin, & Sefton, 1994; Fowler & Kam, 2007). Participants were instructed that they would be playing a simple one-round game in which their responses would be randomly paired with those of another respondent and that their final performance in the game would depend upon their partner's responses. We told participants that we were holding a lottery for a $100 gift certificate for an online retailer and that the number of tickets that they would receive for this lottery would depend upon their performance in this exercise. Participants were then told that they had been assigned to a role in which they were allocated 10 points; their task was to decide how many of these points to keep for themselves, and the remaining points would be transferred to their partner. Participants were then asked how many points (if any) they would like to keep (from 0 to 10), which represented our operationalization of self-interested behavior. Participants kept an average of 5.41 points (*SD* 2.49, range ☐ 0–10).

Organizational deviance (Phase 2). We asked respondents how frequently they had engaged in several behaviors over the past week, from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). We told participants that we were interested in knowing more about what they did at work and reminded them to please try to be as honest as possible, keeping in mind that their responses were completely confidential and secure. We used three organizational deviance items (Aquino et al.. 1999) that focus specifically on the individual's intentional avoidance of work while still getting paid,[1] therefore demonstrating a focus on the individual's own interests despite exacting a cost to the organization. These three items were as follows: "I intentionally left work early," "I took extra breaks to avoid work," and "I lied about the number of hours that I worked." Reliability was calculated at ☐ ☐ .82.

Study 1 Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics and correlations are reported in Table 1. Hypothesis 1 predicted that the relationship between power and self-interested behavior would be moderated by moral identity. Regression analyses (reported in Table 2) revealed a significant interaction between manipulated power and moral identity predicting respondents' actual self-interested behavior in the dictator game, *B* .72, *t*(155) 2.01, *p* .05. Results also revealed a significant interaction between trait power and moral identity predicting self-interested, organizational deviance at work, *B* ☐.12, *t*(165) ☐ ☐3.01, *p* ☐ .01. We graphed these interactions according to Aiken and West (2001) to aid in interpretation (see Figures 2 and 3, respectively), finding support for our hypothesis. For participants with a high moral identity, power was negatively related to self-interested behavior, but for those with a low moral

---

[1] Results of a survey from a separate, additional sample (*N* 174) showed that our selected three-item measure correlated at *r* ☐ .95 (*p* ☐ .0001) with the full eight-item measure. In addition, results of a principal-axis factor analysis with oblimin rotation showed that our selected items loaded onto a single factor with the other original scale items. Finally, all of our selected items loaded on this factor at or above .76 (range .76–.87).

Table 1
Study 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender (1 = male)	0.57	0.50	—					
2. Social desirability	5.38	1.82	$-.11$	—				
3. Power (manipulated)	0.51	0.50	.02	$-.12$	—			
4. Power (trait)	4.52	1.17	.03	.05	.01	—		
5. Moral identity	5.89	1.06	$.22^{**}$	.02	.00	.02	—	
6. Self-interested work behavior	1.72	0.86	$-.06$	$.23^{T}$	.02	.03	$-.51^{T}$	—
7. Points kept in dictator game	5.41	2.49	$-.03$	.09	$-.33^{T}$	.09	.14	$.29^{T}$

Note. $N = 160-173$ due to missing data.
$^{T} p < .01$.

identity there was a positive association between power and self-interested behavior. These results confirm that moral identity moderates the relationship between power and self-interested behavior across both self-reported organizational deviance and actual behavior in a controlled decision-making exercise and across both trait and manipulated power. We now turn to a second study designed to replicate these results and test the actual mechanism behind this effect (Hypothesis 2).

Study 2

Method

Participants and procedure. Participants were 102 undergraduate students (37% male) at a large North American university who completed this study as paid subject pool participants in exchange for $5. Average age of the participants was 20.32 years ($SD = 1.37$). The experiment consisted of two phases. In the first phase, participants received a link to an online survey that included a consent form, the moral identity measure, and demographic questions. Phase 2 occurred approximately one week later, where participants came into a computer lab and participated in the experiment.

The exercise used in this study (Brewer & Kramer, 1986) had individuals participate in a task in which they had to decide how much to take from a common resource. Participants were told that they shared a pool of 500 points with other people and that they

would have to decide how many points (between 0 and 10) that they would take for themselves versus leave for others. All participants learned that the number of points accumulated determined how many lottery points they received and that one participant would receive a $100 gift certificate from a lottery drawing weighted by the number of points each participant possesses. Participants were instructed to be careful not to take too much, because, as with fresh water or electricity, if there are no more points in the common pool at the end of the game, then nobody, including themselves, would receive a reward. Participants were then asked how many points they wished to take (between 0 and 10) from the common pool.

Measures and manipulations.

Power (Phase 2 manipulation). We manipulated power using the same approach as in Study 1. Those in the high power condition again reported having significantly greater power ($M = 5.25$, $SD = 1.37$) than those in the control condition ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.44$), $F(1, 101) = 17.04$, $p < .001$.

Moral identity (Phase 1). In the initial phase, we administered the same five-item measure of moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002) as reported in Study 1. Reliability was calculated at $\alpha = .88$.

Self-interested behavior (Phase 2). Self-interested behavior was assessed as the number of points participants kept for themselves in the commons dilemma. Participants on average kept 6.41 points out of the possible 10 (range = 1–10 points, $SD = 2.20$).

Table 2
Study 1 Regression Results

Variable	Self-interested dictator game behavior			Self-interested work behavior		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender	$-0.13 (0.40)$	$-0.45 (0.38)$	$-0.51 (0.38)$	$-0.02 (0.12)$	$-0.26 (0.11)$	$-0.22 (0.11)$
Social desirability	$0.13 (0.11)$	$0.08 (0.11)$	$0.11 (0.11)$	$0.11 (0.03)^{**}$	$0.10 (0.03)^{T}$	$0.09 (0.03)^{T}$
Power[a]		$0.49 (0.37)$	$4.81 (2.18)^{*}$		$0.03 (0.04)$	$0.71 (0.23)^{*}$
Moral identity (MI)	$0.83 (0.18)^{*}$		$0.45 (0.26)$		$0.44 (0.05)^{T}$	$0.09 (0.18)$
Power × MI			$0.72 (0.36)^{*}$			$-0.12 (0.04)^{*}$
R^2 (df)	.01 (158)	$.13^{T}$ (156)	$.16^{*}$ (155)	$.06^{*}$ (168)	$.33^{T}$ (166)	$.36^{*}$ (165)
ΔR^2	.01	$.12^{T}$	$.02^{*}$	$.06^{*}$	$.27^{T}$	$.03^{*}$

Note. $N = 160-173$ due to missing data. Unstandardized beta coefficients are reported along with standard errors in parentheses. Degrees of freedom are in parentheses for R^2.
[a] Manipulated power for self-interested dictator game behavior models and trait power for self-interested work behavior models.
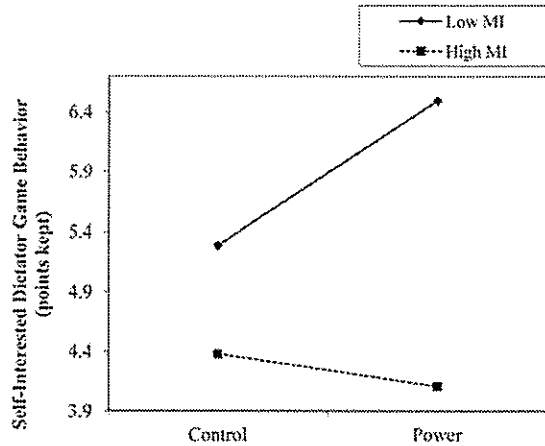$^{*} p < .05$. $^{T} p < .01$.

Figure 2. Power and self-interested dictator game behavior as moderated by moral identity (Study 1). MI moral identity.

Moral awareness (Phase 2). We measured participants' moral awareness using Reynolds' (2006) validated three-item scale. Participants were asked how strongly they agreed with statements referring to the game they had just played, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Reliability was calculated at ⊐ ⊐ .70.

Study 2 Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics and correlations are reported in Table 3. Regression analyses (see Table 4) revealed a significant interaction between power and moral identity predicting points kept in the commons dilemma. *B* 1.17, *t*(98) 2.17, *p* .05, in support of Hypothesis 1. This interaction was graphed according to Aiken and West (2001) to aid in interpretation (see Figure 4), which demonstrated that the interaction was consistent with our hypothesis. That is, high moral identity is associated with less self-interested behavior but low moral identity is associated with greater self-interested behavior under conditions of high power.
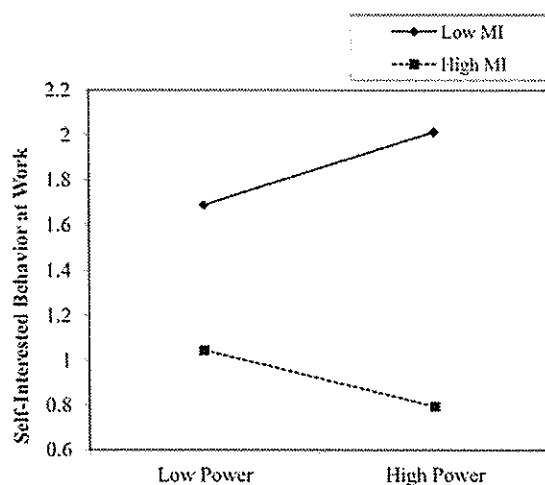

Figure 3. Power and self-interested behavior at work as moderated by moral identity (Study 1). MI ⊐ moral identity.

Table 3
Study 2 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
1. Power (manipulated)	0.43	0.50	—		
2. Moral identity	6.04	0.87	.17	—	
3. Moral awareness	5.10	1.18	.45	.12	—
4. Self-interested commons dilemma behavior	6.41	2.20	.15	.01	.29

Note. N ⊐ 102.
¹ *p* ⊐ .01.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that moral awareness would mediate the moderating effect presented and tested in Hypothesis 1. We tested whether the interaction was mediated through moral awareness by following the Edwards and Lambert (2007) procedure. We found that the relationship between power and moral awareness was moderated by moral identity, *B* .63, *t*(98) 2.21, *p* .05, such that it was positive when moral identity was high but negative when moral identity was low. We graphed this interaction according to Aiken and West (2001) to aid in interpretation (see Figure 5). Examining this graph demonstrates a positive association between power and moral awareness for those high on moral identity but a negative association those low on moral identity, in support of this hypothesis.

We conducted subsequent analyses according to Edwards and Lambert (2007) to test the significance of the conditional indirect effect. Following these procedures, we tested the relationship between the mediator of moral awareness and the dependent variable of self-interest while controlling for the independent variable of power. *B* .55, *SE* .18, *t*(100) 3.01, *p* .01. We then used 1,000 bootstrap samples to locate the upper and lower bounds of the sampling distributions of the indirect effect of power and moral identity on self-interested behavior via moral awareness (i.e., first-stage moderation; Edwards & Lambert, 2007). This analysis indicated that the moderated relationship between power and self-interest by moral identity was significantly mediated by moral awareness (*B* ⊐ ⊐ .39), 95% CI [.79, .32], in support of Hypothesis 2.

General Discussion

Across two studies, we found that power predicts self-interested behavior differently depending on moral identity. In our first study of working adults, there was a negative association between trait power and self-interested work behavior when individuals had a high moral identity, yet a positive relationship between trait power and self-interest when individuals had a low moral identity. In addition, the relationship between a randomly assigned power manipulation and actual self-interested behavior in a decision-making exercise was negative when individuals were high on moral identity but positive when individuals were low on moral identity. These findings help explain when power will decrease or increase the likelihood of self-interested behavior, demonstrating that moral identity is a crucial influence on this relationship. In addition, this study demonstrated that these effects were not limited to either trait or manipulations of power but were more general to the psychological experience of power. In our second study, the

DECELLES, DERUE, MARGOLIS, AND CERANIC

Table 4
Study 2 Regression Results

Variable	Self-interested commons dilemma behavior[a]			Moral awareness (mediator)	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2
Power (manipulated)	7.33 (3.34)		5.49 (3.39)	0.05 (0.23)	3.88 (1.75)
Moral identity (MI)	0.04 (0.30)		0.13 (0.31)	0.65 (0.13)	0.46 (0.16)
Moral awareness					0.45 (0.21)
Power × MI	1.17 (0.54)	0.55 (0.18)	0.86 (0.55)		0.63 (0.28)
R^2 (df)	.07 (98)	.09 (100)	.11 (97)	.20 (99)	.23 (98)
ΔR^2			.04	.20	.03

Note. N = 102. Unstandardized beta coefficients are reported along with standard errors in parentheses. Degrees of freedom are in parentheses for R^2.
[a] Dependent variable is points kept for oneself in the commons dilemma.
$p < .05.$ $p < .01.$

relationship between power and self-interested behavior in a commons dilemma was different depending on people's moral identity, and this interactive effect was mediated by participants' moral awareness. This second study goes beyond replication and helps explain why power and its interaction with moral identity affect self-interested behavior. That is, power is associated with different levels of moral awareness depending on one's moral identity.

Our research helps to explain the paradox presented by prior work regarding the corruptive effects of power. By integrating the power literature with that on moral identity and establishing the mechanism of moral awareness, we demonstrate that power can reduce self-interested behavior due to its strengthening of the relationship between moral identity and moral awareness. Although the power literature has demonstrated some evidence that power can reduce self-interested behavior (Chen et al., 2001; Galinsky et al., 2003; Overbeck & Park, 2001), the majority of the power literature still emphasizes the corruptive side of power (for a review, see Keltner et al., 2003). Our work extends this research by presenting an explanation for this paradox. That is, power both corrupts people and enables people to benefit the common good by corrupting those with a low moral identity and enabling those with a high moral identity. Given the strong research evidence in support of moral identity influencing self-interested behavior (Aquino et al., 2007, 2009; Aquino & Reed, 2002; Reed & Aquino,

2003; Reynolds & Ceranic, 2007), we believe it is especially important to demonstrate that those with strong moral self-concepts, when given power, will increasingly behave in ways that benefit the common good versus their own interests.

The research reported here extends what is currently known about moral identity. The impact of moral identity on self-interested behavior is well researched, but little work has explored when and why moral identity has such a strong role in self-interested behavior. We establish that power offers one explanation for how moral identity may work. In particular, we theorize that power can both reduce and increase self-interested behavior, and this effect emerges from how moral identity and power shape individuals' processing of morally relevant situational information. Importantly, although moral identity is an individual difference variable, our findings go beyond implying that bad people do bad things when they feel powerful or that good people do good things when they feel powerful. In fact, individuals with a lower moral identity could be very "good" people in terms of their behavior. We show that individuals with a lower moral identity, when feeling powerful, are likely to be more self-interested relative to those with higher moral identities, and that this self-interested behavior is a result of those with a lower moral identity being less aware of the moral implications of their behavior, not necessarily because they are bad people.
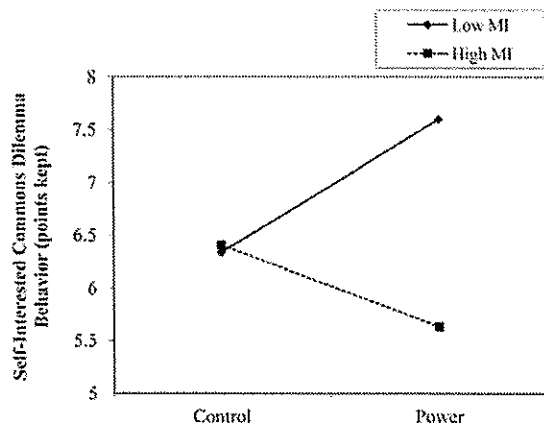

Figure 4. Power and self-interested behavior in a commons dilemma moderated by moral identity (Study 2). MI = moral identity.
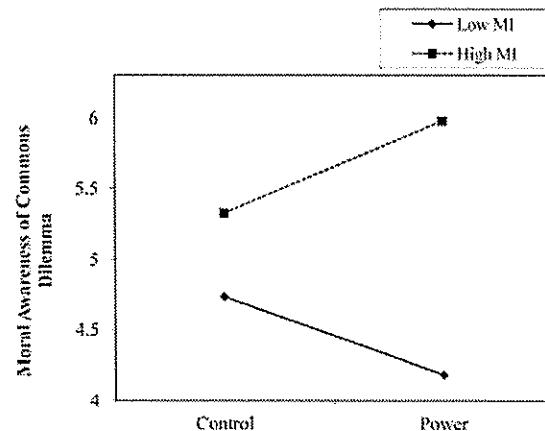

Figure 5. Power and moral awareness of a commons dilemma as moderated by moral identity (Study 2). MI = moral identity.

One area that we believe will be particularly interesting and important at the intersection of moral identity and power would be for researchers to examine the interactive influence of powerlessness and moral identity. Here, our theoretical focus is on the influence of powerfulness and moral identity, and so we manipulated a neutral control condition rather than low power or powerlessness in our experiments. It could prove interesting to develop and test theory related to how a perceived lack of power might interact with moral identity and whether these effects would be similar or dissimilar to the results seen here on self-interested behavior.

Our research has important practical implications. As organizations look to promote people to more powerful positions or empower people with greater discretion, our research suggests, understanding how central morality is to the person's self-concept will be a critical consideration for predicting whether that person will engage in self-serving behavior. For employees who are already in positions of power or who exhibit strong trait power, it is important that organizations work to develop their moral identity.

Our study is not without limitations. Our measure of self-interested work behavior was a three-item self-report measure of individuals' deviant work behavior, which admittedly might differ conceptually from a more general measure of self-interest. For example, deviance may indicate self-interest at the expense of the organization and thus be driven by organizational attitudes and not self-concern. Our experimental study improved upon this operationalization of self-interested behavior by allowing a closer operationalization of the construct to its definition. Yet, it is noteworthy that the pattern of effects for this measure was consistent with measures of actual behavior and with other operationalizations of self-interest, thus reducing the likelihood that these results are explained by either conceptual differences or same-source bias. Future research will benefit from evaluating this model with other measures of self-interested work behavior, as well as interpersonal deviance and organizational deviance measures to help examine these possible differences. In addition, our focus has been on the psychological experience on power, but it would be both fruitful and important to test this model using alternative conceptualizations of power. That is, in organizations, it might be particularly relevant to test this model among those who possess different amounts of power.

Our study has several noteworthy strengths. Our independent and dependent variables were measured at different points in time or experimentally manipulated, and we used both survey data and experimental data, establishing generalizability, causality, and testing of our explanatory mechanism. We also observed the same effects using both trait and manipulated power as opposed to being specific to a state- or trait-based conceptualization. In sum, our research demonstrates how power and moral identity interact to explain individuals' moral awareness and self-interested behavior. Our hope is that this study motivates other scholars to continue examining the intersection of power and morality at work.

References

Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (2001). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Anderson, C., & Berdahl, J. L. (2002). The experience of power: Examining the effects of power on approach and inhibition tendencies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83,* 1362–1377. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.83.6.1362

Anderson, C., & Galinsky, A. D. (2006). Power, optimism, and risk-taking. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 36,* 511–536. doi:10.1002/ejsp.324

Aquino, K., Freeman, D., Reed, A., II, Lim, V. K. G., & Felps, W. (2009). Testing a social-cognitive model of moral behavior: The interaction of situational factors and moral identity centrality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 97,* 123–141. doi:10.1037/a0015406

Aquino, K., Lewis, M. U., & Bradfield, M. (1999). Justice constructs, negative affectivity, and employee deviance: A proposed model and empirical test. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 20,* 1073–1091. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1099-1379(199912)20:7‹1073::AID-JOB943›3.0.CO;2-7

Aquino, K., & Reed, A. (2002). The self-importance of moral identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83,* 1423–1440. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.83.6.1423

Aquino, K., Reed, A., Thau, S., & Freeman, D. (2007). A grotesque and dark beauty: How moral identity and mechanisms of moral disengagement influence cognitive and emotional reactions to war. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 43,* 385–392. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2006.05.013

Bargh, J. A., Bond, R. N., Lombardi, W. J., & Tota, M. E. (1986). The additive nature of chronic and temporary sources of construct accessibility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50,* 869–878. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.50.5.869

Bargh, J. A., & Thein, R. D. (1985). Individual construct accessibility, personal memory, and the recall–judgment link: The case of information overload. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 49,* 1129–1146. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.49.5.1129

Batson, C. D. (1998). Altruism and prosocial behavior. In D. T. Gilbert & S. T. Fiske (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (pp. 282–316). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Bennett, R., & Robinson, S. (2000). Development of a measure of workplace deviance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 85,* 349–360. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.85.3.349

Brass, D. J., & Burkhardt, M. E. (1993). Potential power and power use: An investigation of structure and behavior. *Academy of Management Journal, 36,* 441–470. doi:10.2307/256588

Brewer, M. B., & Kramer, R. M. (1986). Choice behavior in social dilemmas: Effects of social identity, group size, and decision framing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50,* 543–549. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.50.3.543

Butterfield, K. D., Treviño, L. K., & Weaver, G. R. (2000). Moral awareness in business organizations: Influences of issue-related and social context factors. *Human Relations, 53,* 981–1018. doi:10.1177/0018726700537004

Chen, S., Lee-Chai, A. Y., & Bargh, J. A. (2001). Relationship orientation as a moderator of the effects of social power. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 80,* 173–187. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.80.2.173

Côté, S., Kraus, M. W., Cheng, B. H., Oveis, C., van der Löwe, I., Lian, H., & Keltner, D. (in press). Social power facilitates the effect of prosocial orientation on empathic accuracy. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.*

Crowne, D. P., & Marlowe, D. (1960). A new scale of social desirability independent of psychopathology. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 24,* 349–354. doi:10.1037/h0047358

Cullen, M. J., & Sackett, P. R. (2003). Personality and counterproductive workplace behavior. In M. R. Barrick & A. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Personality and work* (pp. 150–182). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Dalal, R. S. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relationship between organizational citizenship behavior and counterproductive work behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 90,* 1241–1255. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.90.6.1241

Darley, J. M., & Batson, D. C. (1973). From Jerusalem to Jericho: A study of situational and dispositional variables in helping behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 27,* 100–108.

De Dreu, C. K. W., & Nauta, A. (2009). Self-interest and other-orientation in organizational behavior: Implications for job performance, prosocial behavior, and personal initiative. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 94,* 913–926. doi:10.1037/a0014494

Detert, J. R., Trevino, L. K., & Sweitzer, V. L. (2008). Moral disengagement in ethical decision making: A study of antecedents and outcomes. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93,* 374–391. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.93.2.374

Edwards, J. R., & Lambert, L. S. (2007). Methods for integrating moderation and mediation: A general analytical framework using moderated path analysis. *Psychological Methods, 12,* 1–22. doi: 10.1037/1082-989X.12.1.1

Fiske, S. T. (1993). Social cognition and social perception. In M. R. Rosenzweig & L. W. Porter (Eds.), *Annual review of psychology* (Vol. 44, pp. 155–194). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.

Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. E. (1991). *Social cognition.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Forsythe, R., Horowitz, J. L., Savin, N. E., & Sefton, M. (1994). Fairness in simple bargaining experiments. *Games and Economic Behavior, 6,* 347–369. doi:10.1006/game.1994.1021

Fowler, J. H., & Kam, C. D. (2007). Beyond the self: Social identity, altruism, and political participation. *Journal of Politics, 69,* 813–827.

Galinsky, A. D., Gruenfeld, D. H., & Magee, J. C. (2003). From power to action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 85,* 453–466. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.85.3.453

Galinsky, A. D., Magee, J. C., Inesi, M. E., & Gruenfeld, D. H. (2006). Power and perspectives not taken. *Psychological Science, 17,* 1068–1074. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2006.01824.x

Grant, A. M., & Berg, J. M. (2011). Prosocial motivation at work: When, why, and how making a difference makes a difference. In K. Cameron & G. Spreitzer (Eds.), *Handbook of positive organizational scholarship* (pp. 28–44). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Grant, A. M., & Mayer, D. M. (2009). Good soldiers and good actors: Prosocial and impression management motives as interactive predictors of citizenship behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 94,* 900–912. doi:10.1037/a0013770

Grant, A. M., & Wrzesniewski, A. (2010). I won't let you down... or will I? Core self-evaluations, other-orientation, anticipated guilt and gratitude, and job performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 95,* 108–121. doi:10.1037/a0017974

Hall, J. A., Andrzejewski, S. A., & Yopchick, J. E. (2009). Psychological correlates of interpersonal sensitivity: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 33,* 149–180. doi:10.1007/s10919-009-0070-5

Hall, J. A., Coats, E. J., & LeBeau, L. S. (2005). Nonverbal behavior and the vertical dimension of social relations: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 131,* 898–924. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.131.6.898

Hall, J. A., Murphy, N. A., & Schmid Mast, M. (2006). Recall of nonverbal cues: Exploring a new definition of interpersonal sensitivity. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 30,* 141–155. doi:10.1007/s10919-006-0013-3

Jones, T. M. (1991). Ethical decision making by individuals in organizations: An issue-contingent model. *Academy of Management Review, 16,* 366–395.

Keltner, D., Gruenfeld, D. H., & Anderson, C. (2003). Power, approach, and inhibition. *Psychological Review, 110.* 265–284. doi:10.1037/0033-295X.110.2.265

Kipnis, D. (1972). Does power corrupt? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 24,* 33–41. doi:10.1037/h0033390

Kipnis, D. (1976). *The powerholders.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Kohlberg, L. (1969). Stage and sequence: The cognitive developmental approach to socialization. In D. A. Goslin (Ed.), *Handbook of socialization theory and research* (pp. 347–480). Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.

Kopelman, S. (2009). The effect of culture and power on cooperation in commons dilemmas: Implications for global resource management. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 108,* 153–163. doi:10.1016/j.obhdp.2008.06.004

Lammers, J., Galinsky, A. D., Gordijn, E. H., & Otten, S. (2008). Illegitimacy moderates the effects of power on approach. *Psychological Science, 19,* 558–564. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02123.x

Lammers, J., & Stapel, D. A. (2011). Racist biases in legal decisions are reduced by a justice focus. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 41,* 375–387. doi:10.1002/ejsp.783

Magee, J. C., & Galinsky, A. D. (2008). Social hierarchy: The self-reinforcing nature of power and status. *Academy of Management Annals, 2,* 351–398. doi:10.1080/19416520802211628

Mazar, N., Amir, O., & Ariely, D. (2008). The dishonesty of honest people: A theory of self-concept maintenance. *Journal of Marketing Research, 45,* 633–644.

McCrae, R. R., & Costa, P. T. (1995). Trait explanations in personality psychology. *European Journal of Personality, 9,* 231–252. doi:10.1002/per.2410090402

Meglino, B. M., & Korsgaard, M. A. (2004). Considering rational self-interest as a disposition: Organizational implications of other orientation. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 89,* 946–959. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.89.6.946

Meglino, B. M., & Korsgaard, M. A. (2006). Considering situational and dispositional approaches to rational self-interest: An extension and response to De Dreu (2006). *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91.* 1253–1259. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.91.6.1253

O'Fallon, M. J., & Butterfield, K. D. (2005). A review of the empirical ethical decision-making literature: 1996–2003. *Journal of Business Ethics, 59,* 375–413. doi:10.1007/s10551-005-2929-7

Overbeck, J. R., & Park, B. (2001). When power does not corrupt: Superior individuation processes among powerful perceivers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81,* 549–565. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.81.4.549

Reed, A., & Aquino, K. F. (2003). Moral identity and the expanding circle of moral regard toward out-groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 84,* 1270–1286. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.84.6.1270

Rest, J. R. (1986). *Moral development: Advances in research and theory.* New York, NY: Praeger.

Reynolds, S. J. (2006). Moral awareness and ethical predispositions: Investigating the role of individual differences in the recognition of moral issues. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91.* 233–243. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.91.1.233

Reynolds, S. J. (2008). Moral attentiveness: Who pays attention to the moral aspects of life? *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93.* 1027–1041. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.93.5.1027

Reynolds, S. J., & Ceranic, T. L. (2007). The effects of moral judgment and moral identity on moral behavior: An empirical examination of the moral individual. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 92,* 1610–1624. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.92.6.1610

Robinson, S., & Bennett, R. (1995). A typology of deviant workplace behaviors: A multi-dimensional scaling study. *Academy of Management Journal, 38,* 555–572.

Schmid Mast, M., Jonas, K., & Hall, J. A. (2009). Give a person power and he or she will show interpersonal sensitivity: The phenomenon and its why and when. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 97,* 835–850. doi:10.1037/a0016234

Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 25, pp. 1–65). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Schwartz, S. H. (1994). Are there universal aspects in the content and structure of values? *Journal of Social Issues, 50,* 19–45.

Schwartz, S. H., & Bardi, A. (2001). Value hierarchies across cultures: Taking a similarities perspective. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 32,* 268–290.

Schwartz, S. H., & Boehnke, K. (2004). Evaluating the structure of human values with confirmatory factor analysis. *Journal of Research in Personality, 38,* 230–255.

Shao, R., Aquino, K., & Freeman, D. (2008). Beyond moral reasoning: A review of moral identity research and its implications for business ethics. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 18,* 513–540.

Spreitzer, G. M. (1995). Individual empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement, and validation. *Academy of Management Journal, 38,* 1442–1465.

Tenbrunsel, A. E., & Smith-Crowe, K. (2008). Ethical decision making: Where we've been and where we're going. *Academy of Management Annals, 2,* 545–607. doi:10.1080/19416520802211677

Treviño, L. K. (1986). Ethical decision making in organizations: A person–situation interactionist model. *Academy of Management Review, 11,* 601–617.

Wiggins, J. S., Trapnell, P., & Phillips, N. (1988). Psychometric and geometric characteristics of the Revised Interpersonal Adjective Scales (IAS-R). *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 23,* 517–530. doi:10.1207/s15327906mbr2304_8

ORDER FORM

Start my 2012 subscription to the *Journal of Applied Psychology* ISSN:0021-9010

____ $108.00 APA MEMBER/AFFILIATE

____ $294.00 INDIVIDUAL NONMEMBER

____ $914.00 INSTITUTION

In DC and MD add 6% sales tax

TOTAL AMOUNT DUE $ _____

Subscription orders must be prepaid. Subscriptions are on a calendar year basis only. Allow 4-6 weeks for delivery of the first issue. Call for international subscription rates.

SEND THIS ORDER FORM TO
American Psychological Association
Subscriptions
750 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4242

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Call **800-374-2721** or 202-336-5600
Fax **202-336-5568** :TDD/TTY **202-336-6123**
For subscription information,
e-mail: **subscriptions@apa.org**

❑ **Check enclosed** (make payable to APA)

Charge my: ❑ Visa ❑ MasterCard ❑ American Express

Cardholder Name _____

Card No. _____ Exp. Date _____

Signature (Required for Charge)

Billing Address

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Daytime Phone _____

E-mail _____

Mail To

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

APA Member # _____

APLA12