

# Less Power or Powerless? Egocentric Empathy Gaps and the Irony of Having Little Versus No Power in Social Decision Making

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The authors investigate the effect of power differences and associated expectations in social decision making. Using a modified ultimatum game, the authors show that allocators lower their offers to recipients when the power difference shifts in favor of the allocator. Remarkably, however, when recipients are completely powerless, offers increase. This effect is mediated by a change in framing of the situation: When the opponent is without power, feelings of social responsibility are evoked. On the recipient side, the authors show that recipients do not anticipate these higher outcomes resulting from powerlessness. They prefer more power over less, expecting higher outcomes when they are more powerful, especially when less power entails powerlessness. Results are discussed in relation to empathy gaps and social responsibility.

**Keywords:** ultimatum game, power, social utility, fairness, self-interest

“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”  
Lord Acton (1887)

As power is a basic force in social relationships of all kind and nature (Kipnis, 1972; Turner, 2005), the bleak view of the human tendency to abuse power illustrated by this famous quote offers little in the way of optimism for human social relationships. According to Lord Acton (1972), power will inevitably be exploited by those who can wield it, and if true, this would be bad news for mankind indeed. In this article, however, we present a more optimistic and nuanced account of the way people use the power they possess. We demonstrate that the powerful can be generous and that in some situations, being completely powerless can actually be an advantage. We also show that, ironically, people tend to underestimate their powerful counterpart's generosity and prefer situations in which powerful coun-

terparts are actually less rather than more generous. Put differently, the present work reveals that although most people agree with Lord Acton's conclusion that absolute power corrupts absolutely, this conclusion is wrong, and adhering to it is self-defeating.

We begin this article with a brief overview of various literatures on power, noting that the predominant view of power as inducing exploitative and abusive tendencies is countered by growing evidence that power can also produce socially responsible and benevolent behavior. We then move on to discuss work on egocentric empathy gaps and framing, from which we derive the hypothesis that people do not necessarily accurately predict the behavior of powerful counterparts and that their search for power may be ill advised. We report and discuss four experiments in which we tested specific predictions. In Experiments 1, 2, and 4, we examined bargaining behavior of powerful agents vis-à-vis a counterpart with less power or a counterpart with no power whatsoever. In Experiments 3 and 4, we examined people's preference for having a little bit of power or no power and their expectations about their powerful counterpart's behavior. Together, these experiments reveal that powerful agents are more generous to completely powerless counterparts than they are to weaker counterparts but that people generally expect them to be less generous to powerless counterparts as opposed to weak counterparts. Consequently, people prefer having a little bit of power to having no power whatsoever—they agree with Lord Acton's (1972) conclusion that absolute power corrupts absolutely, despite the fact that this conclusion is wrong, and adhering to it is self-defeating.

## The Psychology of Power

Among the more central motives driving human behavior is a search for power along with a tendency to benefit from having it. People tend to prefer being more rather than less powerful, and

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achieving power, including prestige, honor, and impact, consistently emerges across cultures as one of the most important dimensions of human social motivation (Winter, 2007). Such search for power may be quite functional: High-power people are more likely to be characterized as sensitive, socially adept, popular, and likeable (Lee & Tiedens, 2001), and high-power people are expected to obtain higher outcomes (Bruins, 1999; Mulder, 1977; Van Dijke & Poppe, 2003; see also Ng, 1980).

Power has been studied extensively in almost every domain of the social and behavioral sciences, including the political sciences, psychology, and business studies (for overviews, see, e.g., Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; Haslam, 2001; Pfeffer, 1981). Although a detailed and integrative review of these various literatures is beyond the scope of the present article, we briefly review some of the core issues and perspectives that emerged in these respective areas. In doing so, we limit ourselves to interpersonal systems and focus on power differentials between two individuals in relative isolation from their broader social context. With a few exceptions, we thus leave aside the large and otherwise important literatures on group-based power and power differentials between groups (for reviews of these literatures, see, e.g., Haslam, 2001; Hogg & Reid, 2001; Pfeffer, 1981; Turner, 2005).

In keeping with past analyses, *power* is defined as the possibility to influence others (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981; Kelley & Thibault, 1978). We thus differentiate power as structural potential from any specific use of power, such as launching an attack, providing a reward, uttering a threat, or making a promise. Power as structural potential may derive from a variety of "power bases" (French & Raven, 1959), such as someone's position within a group or organization or the possession of valuable resources like expertise (Lee & Tiedens, 2001; Podsakoff & Schriesheim, 1985; Yukl & Falbe, 1991). However, regardless of the specific power base(s) involved, it is the mutual dependence of individuals that allows power to occur. In exchange relations, such as negotiations between two individuals, A and B, B's dependence on A increases with the value of the benefits A can give B, and it decreases with B's access to alternative sources for those benefits (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981; Emerson, 1972). Thus, neighboring states disputing territory may set an ultimatum ("accept our distribution proposal or we go to war"), but the credibility and seriousness of this ultimatum largely depends on the threatening country's military strength. Likewise, job applicants may face the difficult decision of whether to accept their prospective employer's final salary offer or to seek employment elsewhere. How they respond may largely depend on the extent to which their specific expertise makes them valuable to other potential employers.

### Power Differentials: Selfish Exploitation or Social Responsibility?

Having versus not having power has a number of interrelated psychological consequences. In their conceptual review, Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson (2003) argued that elevated power is associated with increased rewards and freedom and thereby activates approach-related tendencies, whereas reduced power is associated with increased threat, punishment, and social constraint and thereby activates inhibition-related tendencies. Indeed, compared with powerless counterparts, those who feel powerful are more likely to take the lead and change annoying situations

(Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003), to rely on their preconceptions about the world when seeking new information (De Dreu & Van Kleef, 2004a; Fiske, 1993; Neuberg & Fiske, 1987; but see Overbeck & Park, 2001, 2006), process less carefully information about the task and their counterpart (Van Kleef, De Dreu, Pietroni, & Manstead, 2006), and take risks (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006). In interpersonal situations where people allocate and negotiate the distribution of resources, power holders set higher aspirations and develop a tough negotiation strategy (De Dreu, 1995; Lawler, 2002), and power often increases the tendency to strategically use information to one's personal advantage and to make more self-serving offers (e.g., Güth & Huck, 1997; Kagel, Kim, & Moser, 1996; Pillutla & Murnighan, 1995; Suleiman, 1996; Van Dijk, De Cremer, & Handgraaf, 2004; Van Dijk & Vermunt, 2000).

It is interesting to note that the finding that being powerful leads people to become sophisticated outcome maximizers is countered by growing evidence that power induces feelings of social responsibility, making people behave in ways benevolent toward those who are in need (Frieze & Boneva, 2001; Gardner & Seeley, 2001; Greenberg, 1978; Lee & Tiedens, 2001). High-power individuals are more likely than low-power individuals to interact constructively with their subordinates, restate tasks in a helpful way, and respond to requests for help (Morris & Rosen, 1973; Tjosvold, 1985). They go out of their way to compliment others (Cialdini, 1993), to cooperate with others, and to be altruistic (Fisher & Nadler, 1974; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991), and they refrain from aggression toward others (Doob & Gross, 1968).

Whether powerful actors behave in a self-interested or more prosocial manner seems to depend on the extent to which strategic versus social responsibility considerations are triggered and dominate. Chen, Lee-Chai, and Bargh (2001) argued and showed that power holders who adopt an exchange orientation and benefit others as a function of expected reciprocation act more strategically and self-servingly. Those who adopt a communal orientation and benefit others as a function of other's needs, in contrast, act on the basis of social responsibility. Gardner and Seeley (2001) likewise argued that power holders are more likely to behave strategically and exploitatively when they make independent self-construals and conceive of themselves and others as separate individuals. However, when they make interdependent self-construals and conceive of themselves and others as part of a social entity, they use their power in a socially responsible, more benevolent way (also see De Dreu & Van Kleef, 2004b; Deutsch, 1982; Hogg & Reid, 2001; Tjosvold, 1985).

The core argument further developed in the current analysis is that power differentials in and of themselves may give rise to strategic versus more socially responsible considerations. Strategic considerations are relatively important when one's counterpart has some power to strike back and to hurt the decision maker. When, however, power holders face powerless counterparts who have no means whatsoever to strike back, strategic considerations become less important and may give way to other, more prosocial motives. In terms of March's logic of appropriateness (March, 1995; see also Messick, 1999; Weber, Kopelman, & Messick, 2004), questions like, "What kind of situation is this?" and "What does a person like me do in a situation like this?" have different answers when power holders face powerless partners than when they face weaker partners who still have some power to retaliate. In the latter case, the partner represents a potential threat, however mild, and

this calls for strategic or competitive behavior. When the other is completely powerless, the situation may be interpreted as one that calls for social responsibility: "The recipient is defenseless, and I am not the kind of person that exploits the powerless."

Initial evidence for the idea that facing a weak partner triggers strategic considerations whereas facing a completely powerless partner triggers social responsibility concerns comes from two quite distinct lines of research. Working from a social identity perspective, Sachdev and Bourhis (1985) gave participants no, intermediate, or full control over the course credits to be received by their ingroup and a competing outgroup. Given their results, the authors concluded that absolute-power group members discriminate less than high-power groups. It seems that absolute-power group members felt they could afford a certain degree of benevolent paternalism or "noblesse oblige" vis-à-vis the powerless outgroup.

Other evidence comes from studies comparing behavior in ultimatum bargaining games with behavior in so-called dictator games. In an ultimatum game, an allocator proposes a division and a recipient can accept or reject the proposed division. If the recipient accepts, then the money is divided as proposed. If the recipient rejects, then both receive nothing (Güth, Schmittberger, & Schwarze, 1982; Handgraaf, Van Dijk, & De Cremer, 2003; Handgraaf, Van Dijk, Wilke, & Vermunt, 2003, 2004). The dictator game is similar, except that the recipient cannot reject the offer—the pie will be divided as proposed by the allocator. Unlike recipients in the ultimatum game, those in the dictator game are completely powerless and fully depend on the allocator for their outcome. Consistent with Sachdev and Bourhis's (1985) findings, allocators sometimes act less strategically and offer substantial resources in the dictator game (e.g., Forsythe, Horowitz, Savin, & Sefton, 1994; Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1986; see also Camerer & Thaler, 1995; Van Dijk & Vermunt, 2000). This tendency is perhaps best illustrated in a study by Suleiman (1996), who modified the dependency relation between players in an ultimatum bargaining game by exogenously adding a discount factor,  $\delta$  ( $0 \leq \delta \leq 1$ ). In a standard ultimatum game, rejection of the offer by the recipient leads to a 0–0 outcome. In this so-called delta ultimatum game, however, rejection of the offer did not lead to a 0–0 outcome but instead led to a multiplication of the proposed outcomes for allocator and recipient by  $\delta$ . This means that, for example, when  $\delta = 0.5$ , rejection of a 60–40 offer leads to a multiplication of outcomes for both players by 0.5, resulting in a 30–20 division. An interesting feature of this game is that it covers the entire continuum between a standard ultimatum game and a dictator game. It is identical to the standard ultimatum game when  $\delta = 0$  (rejection leads to an outcome of 0 for either player) and identical to a dictator game when  $\delta = 1$  (whatever the response of the recipient, the allocation remains the same). All games with a delta between 0 and 1 cover the continuum between ultimatum games (in which the recipient has substantive power) and dictator games (in which the recipient has no power at all). Suleiman compared offers and rejection ratios under various levels of delta and concluded that an increase in relative power for the allocator (i.e., lower delta) produced lower offers. However, close inspection of his results revealed an important (albeit nonsignificant) difference between a situation in which recipients had limited power and a situation in which they had no power at all—

allocators made more benevolent offers in the  $\delta = 1.0$  (powerless partner) than in the  $\delta = 0.8$  (weaker partner) condition.

Taken together, the dominant view in the social and behavioral sciences that powerful individuals self-servingly exploit their weaker counterparts is countered by various literatures suggesting that under specific conditions, powerful players act in more prosocial, benign ways, value social responsibility, and seek to help rather than hurt their counterparts. We argue that power differentials in and of themselves give rise to strategic considerations when the partner is weak or social responsibility considerations when the partner is powerless. In Experiments 1 and 2, we examine this possibility by comparing the behavior of allocators who are confronted with less powerful or completely powerless recipients. We expect the increase in offers toward powerless recipients to be systematic and predictable: As long as recipients have any retaliatory power (however small this may be), allocators will proceed on the basis of strategic considerations and focus on own-outcome maximization. They will make strategic offers that are deemed just above the presumed recipient's lowest acceptable offer. However, when the recipient is completely powerless, and there is no need to think and act strategically, social responsibility and moral considerations gain in relative impact, and more generous offers are made. Put differently, we predict that the lower the recipient's power, the lower the allocator's offers will be and that higher offers will be made when the recipient is completely powerless than when the recipient has a small amount of power.

### Egocentric Empathy Gaps and the Irony of Power Search

If our reasoning thus far is correct, then powerless partners would receive higher outcomes than those with a little bit of power. In other words, the basic human tendency to search for and increase power noted at the outset (also see Winter, 1973; 2007) may have the ironic consequence of producing lower rather than higher outcomes. Below, we review work on egocentric empathy gaps and framing that substantiates this potentially ironic tendency.

People generally overestimate the similarity between their own and their counterparts' outlook on the situation, and in social decision-making situations, people tend to have trouble taking the perspective of their partners (Van Boven, Dunning, & Loewenstein, 2000; see also Van Boven & Loewenstein, 2003; Van Boven, Loewenstein, & Dunning, 2003). An example of this so-called egocentric empathy gap is provided by Van Boven et al. (2000), who divided a group of students into owners and buyers of a coffee mug (see also Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1990). They measured buying and selling prices for the mugs and replicated the original endowment effect: The price buyers were willing to pay was much lower than the price sellers demanded for the mug. As a test of the empathy gap, they also asked participants to predict the selling or buying prices of their counterparts. Predictions by both sellers and buyers were strongly biased toward their own valuation of the mug, providing support for the reasoning that because of an empathy gap, agents in both roles were unable to accurately predict the other's valuations.

The implication of these findings is that recipients may fail to see that allocators frame a situation differently when confronted with a powerless other. As the weaker party, recipients perceive a threat to their outcomes regardless of whether they have little or no

power whatsoever, and in both situations, they thus engage in strategic thinking and competitive behavior. Their egocentric empathy gap prevents them from putting themselves in their counterpart's shoes and understanding that the more powerful partner thinks strategically and competitively with weak recipients but in a socially responsible and more prosocial fashion with powerless recipients. Put differently, because of egocentric empathy gaps, recipients fail to understand that being powerless may actually be more advantageous (or less disadvantageous) than having a little bit of power. They hold on to their belief that more power is better than less and fail to understand that no power may, in fact, be better than less power. This line of reasoning was examined in Experiments 3 and 4.

### Overview of the Experiments

Two distinct but interrelated research questions formed the basis for four experiments. First, we test whether allocators indeed make more generous offers to powerless recipients than to weak recipients. Evidence for this hypothesis would be inconsistent with the bleak view of humankind, and power holders in particular, offered by Lord Acton (1972) and with the general notion that accumulating power leads people to be self-serving and greedy. Second, we test whether recipients indeed expect allocators to be more generous when recipient power is small rather than absent, that is, whether recipients adhere to Lord Acton's notion that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

To test our hypotheses, we made use of the delta ultimatum game developed by Suleiman (1996). As mentioned above, the game is identical to the ultimatum game when  $\delta = 0$  (rejection leads to an outcome of 0 for either player) and identical to a dictator game when  $\delta = 1$  (whatever the response of the recipient, the allocation remains the same). All games with a delta between 0 and 1 cover the continuum between ultimatum games (in which the recipient has substantive power) and dictator games (in which the recipient has no power at all). This makes this game an excellent tool for investigating the effects of power (or the lack of it) in distributive decision making. Especially toward the end of the continuum, near  $\delta = 1$  (i.e., the dictator game), we may be able to clearly differentiate between a situation in which a recipient has a small amount of retaliatory power (e.g.,  $\delta = 0.9$ ) and a situation in which a recipient has no power whatsoever. It is here that the distinction between behavior toward a weak and a powerless other should emerge most clearly.

### Experiment 1

To be able to show that the emergence of a social responsibility norm that leads to more socially responsible behavior is indeed caused by the recipient's powerlessness, we use deltas that are close to both ends of the continuum of possible deltas. The use of a delta that is close to 1 should make it clearer that there is indeed a difference between behavior toward a powerless person and behavior toward a recipient with only small retaliatory power. In Experiment 1, we therefore use delta of 0 (ultimatum game), 0.1, 0.9, and 1.0 (dictator game). We expect that as delta increases, offers will go down but that if  $\delta = 1$ , offers will rise again (cf. Suleiman, 1996). The reason for this prediction is that for  $\delta < 1$ , strategic considerations dominate such that allocators offer less,

the less damage the recipient can do to them. An increase in delta—and therefore a decrease in power—should lead to a decrease in offers. When confronted with completely powerless recipients, allocators will not have to fear their reaction. We expect those allocators to let go of strategic considerations and instead rely more on social responsibility norms and moral considerations.

### Method

#### Participants and Design

Participants in this study were 78 students (74% women; average age = 20.4 years) from Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands. They were paid an equivalent of \$5 for participating in several experiments. All participants played the role of allocator in a delta ultimatum game. They were randomly assigned to one of four conditions ( $\delta = 0$ ,  $\delta = 0.1$ ,  $\delta = 0.9$ , and  $\delta = 1.0$ ). The main dependent variable was the offer they made.

#### Procedure

Upon arrival, participants (between 6 and 8 at a time) were seated in front of computers in separate cubicles. We made an effort to convince participants that at least 7 other participants were sitting in the other cubicles in the lab. Participants were informed that they were going to divide an amount of money together with one of the other participants. Participants were also told that they would remain anonymous to each other and that the number assigned to their cubicle would determine whether they would be an allocator or a recipient. In reality, all participants were allocators. We then explained the rules of the modified ultimatum game. The participants learned they were going to divide 100 chips (each worth the equivalent of \$ 0.05 at the time of the experiment). Player A (the allocator; i.e., all participants in this study) got to make an offer for a division of the chips. The other player (the nonexistent recipient) then had the possibility to accept (and then the chips would be divided as proposed) or reject this offer. Rejection of the allocator's offer by the recipient would entail a multiplication of the offer by delta. The delta values varied in the four conditions of this study and were as follows:  $\delta = 0$ ,  $\delta = 0.1$ ,  $\delta = 0.9$ , and  $\delta = 1.0$ . Notice that the game with  $\delta = 0$  is equivalent to an ultimatum game, whereas the game with  $\delta = 1.0$  is actually a dictator game. Allocators were told that the recipients had the same information as they did concerning delta.

To assess whether participants understood the game, we asked them to indicate what the consequences of rejection by the recipient would be. After this, they indicated the number of chips (between 0 and 100) they were willing to allocate to the recipients. To assess whether the manipulation of delta indeed affected the perceived power difference between players, we asked questions about their respective power and about the extent to which players depended on each other. Examples are, "How powerful do you think Player B is?" (from *completely powerless* to *extremely powerful*) and "Who is more dependent, you or Player B?" (from *Player A (you)* to *Player B*). Questions were answered on 7-point scales. After recoding, we combined these questions to one scale, the Perceived Power scale ( $\alpha = .86$ ). A higher score indicates that participants perceived Player B as less powerful and oneself as more powerful. Afterward, participants were debriefed. They were



then thanked, and all received the total amount that was divided (\$5). All participants agreed to this procedure.

## Results

### Manipulation Checks

All 78 participants understood the game as intended. An analysis of variance, with delta value as the independent variable and perceived power (our manipulation check for the effect of delta) as the dependent variable showed an effect of delta. A higher delta value resulted in a higher score on the Perceived Power scale ( $M = 4.47$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ , for  $\delta = 0$ ;  $M = 4.88$ ,  $SD = .95$ , for  $\delta = 0.1$ ;  $M = 5.85$ ,  $SD = .83$ , for  $\delta = 0.9$ ; and  $M = 6.54$ ,  $SD = .55$ , for  $\delta = 1.0$ ),  $F(3, 74) = 20.42$ ,  $p < .001$ . This shows that the manipulation of power was successful. Moreover, it also shows that an increase in delta from 0.9 to 1.0 (mean difference = .70, Tamhane's  $T_2$   $p = .029$ ) results in a much greater drop on Perceived Power scale ratings than the equivalent increase in delta from 0 to 0.1 (mean difference = .41, Tamhane's  $T_2$   $p = .788$  [unequal variances assumed]).

### Offers

We expected that for  $\delta < 1$ , the offer would decrease as the power of the recipient decreased, that is, the offer of the allocator should be lower when delta is higher. We also expected that the offer would be higher when the recipient was completely powerless—when  $\delta = 1.0$ —than when  $\delta = 0.9$ . In other words, we expected a downward slope for  $\delta < 1$  and a subsequent increase for  $\delta = 1.0$ . Indeed, the offer for  $\delta = 0$  ( $M = 47.75$ ,  $SD = 9.10$ ) was higher than the offer for  $\delta = 0.1$  ( $M = 43.29$ ,  $SD = 13.05$ ), which was higher than the offer for  $\delta = 0.9$  ( $M = 36.05$ ,  $SD = 19.19$ ), which, in turn, was lower than the offer for  $\delta = 1.0$  ( $M = 44.44$ ,  $SD = 13.92$ ). If our reasoning is correct, then the data should fit a quadratic function rather than a linear or a cubic one. A polynomial trend analysis showed that these offers followed the expected pattern. The offer data are best described by a quadratic trend,  $F(3, 74) = 3.988$ ,  $p = .050$ . Both linear,  $F(3, 74) = 1.391$ ,  $p = .242$ , and cubic,  $F(3, 74) = 1.667$ ,  $p = .201$ , functions did not describe the data well. This confirms our expectations.

### Discussion and Introduction to Experiment 2

Experiment 1 suggests that allocators act as sophisticated outcome maximizers when  $\delta < 1$ . They take the retaliatory power of the recipient into account when making an offer, which leads to lower offers as the power of the recipient becomes smaller. However, when recipients are completely powerless ( $\delta = 1$ ), allocators instead make offers that are more in line with such prosocial motives as fairness and generosity than with a self-interested desire to maximize personal outcomes. This result is consistent with our argument that there is an important difference between a situation in which a recipient has some retaliatory power and a situation in which a recipient has no power whatsoever.

That powerless recipients received higher offers than weak ones is consistent with our notion that a social responsibility norm emerges when allocators are confronted with powerless others. If correct, then we should find not only differences in allocations between situations with deltas of 0.9 and 1.0 but also differences

in the extent to which the intention to help plays a role, to which allocators evaluate the other more positively, and to which they trust their recipient. This is what we investigated in Experiment 2.

Another goal of Experiment 2 was to replicate the basic finding of Experiment 1 in a different setting. Up until now, relevant results have always been obtained in the rather context-free and artificial setting of the ultimatum bargaining game. In Experiment 2, we used a scenario in which participants were café owners proposing a division of a stretch of sidewalk for use as an outdoor café to their neighboring café owner. We expected a similar pattern of offers as in Experiment 1: Powerless others would receive higher propositions than those with a small amount of power. Moreover, in line with our earlier reasoning regarding the emergence of a social responsibility norm when confronted with a powerless other, we expected that participants would interpret the situation less in terms of social responsibility (associated with a feeling of an obligation to help), would evaluate the other less positively, and would trust the other less when the neighbor was weak rather than completely powerless.

## Experiment 2

### Method

#### Participants and Design

Participants in this study were 58 students from Tilburg University, Tilburg, the Netherlands (43% women; average age = 21 years). The participants were students either in social sciences or economics who participated as part of a classroom exercise during a “psychological economics” course or who were approached on the Tilburg University campus. All participants played the role of allocator in a delta ultimatum game. They were randomly assigned to one of two conditions of a scenario ( $\delta = 0.9$  and  $\delta = 1$ ). The main dependent variable was the offer they made.

#### Procedure

Participants were instructed to carefully read the instructions and were told that their answers would remain anonymous to both their fellow students and the instructor. They proceeded to read a scenario in which they were asked to imagine themselves as being one of two competing owners of adjacent cafés. Both want to use the sidewalk in front of their cafés for an outdoor bar. Participants were told that the city council endowed them with 100 m<sup>2</sup> that they could use together. As they were the ones that first contacted the city council about this extension of their café, the participants are instructed by the city council to come up with a division of the 100 m<sup>2</sup>. Allocators could therefore propose a division of the 100 m<sup>2</sup> to their neighbors. In the condition in which the participants were confronted with a powerless neighbor, they were told that they could make any division and that the neighbor is going to have to accept this proposal—the 100 m<sup>2</sup> will be divided as they propose. It is important to note that this is equivalent to a delta ultimatum game with a delta of 1.0 (or a dictator game). In the other condition, participants were confronted with a neighbor with a small amount of power. They were told that the neighbor has information that could lead to a decrease of the total space that could be used for the outdoor café. The neighbor has a choice between either accepting the proposal that the participants make or

informing the city council that the 100 m<sup>2</sup> are too close to the street and that according to the law, 10 m<sup>2</sup> would have to remain unused. This would mean that although the relative sizes of the parts for each café owner would remain as proposed, the total area to be divided would be reduced by 10%. It is important to note that this situation is equivalent to a delta ultimatum game with a delta of 0.9. The scenario was accompanied by a map that gave an overview of the layout of the two cafés, the area to be divided, and, in the  $\delta = 0.9$  condition, the area that was too close to the street.

After reading this scenario, participants were asked to indicate what percentage of the total 100 m<sup>2</sup> they would allocate to their neighbors. After making this proposal, they indicated on 7-point Likert scales the extent to which they agreed with the following statements (1 = *totally disagree*, 7 = *totally agree*): “I think my neighbor is a nice person” (liking), “I trust my neighbor” (trust), and “I want to help my neighbor” (helping). They then indicated their age, gender, and major.

## Results

### Offers

As expected—and in line with the results of Experiment 1—offers in the  $\delta = 1.0$  situation were higher ( $M = 41.90$ ,  $SD = 12.42$ ) than those in the  $\delta = 0.9$  situation ( $M = 34.35$ ,  $SD = 15.28$ ),  $t(56) = 2.07$ ,  $p = .044$ , Cohen’s  $d = .54$  (see Table 1).

### Obligation to Help, Trust, and Liking

Allocators confronted with a weak other indicated their intention to help to be lower than allocators confronted with a powerless other (i.e.,  $\delta = 1.0$ ;  $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 1.25$  vs.  $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = .98$ , respectively),  $t(56) = -2.34$ ,  $p = .023$ , Cohen’s  $d = .61$ . A similar pattern, albeit less strong, was found for trust: In the situation where  $\delta = 0.9$ , allocators trusted the other less than in the situation where  $\delta = 1.0$  ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = 1.47$  vs.  $M = 4.41$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ),  $t(56) = -1.87$ ,  $p = .07$ , Cohen’s  $d = .49$ . Finally, allocators saw their counterpart as less nice when she was weak rather than powerless ( $M = 4.10$ ,  $SD = 1.18$  vs.  $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ),  $t(56) = -2.20$ ,  $p = .032$ , Cohen’s  $d = .58$  (see Table 1).

### Discussion and Introduction to Experiment 3

The results of Experiments 1 and 2 reveal a marked difference in allocator behavior when facing a weak counterpart and a completely powerless counterpart—allocators are more generous to-

ward powerless others than toward those with a small amount of power. Also, powerful allocators see weak rather than powerless others in a less positive light—they have less trust and feel less obligation to help. This pattern of results is consistent with our notion that facing a powerless other triggers a social responsibility norm. We return to this in Experiment 4.

An interesting implication of these findings is that the general idea that more power is better may be wrong. Our results suggest that people should prefer having no power whatsoever than having a little bit of power—when facing a powerful allocator, people should prefer having no possibility to retaliate rather than some, because in the former case, the allocator will be more inclined to help and will offer more. Introspection and casual observation tend to suggest otherwise, however, and indicate that people prefer having a little power over having no power whatsoever.

In Experiment 3, we set out to test whether people indeed have such counterproductive and potentially self-defeating preferences when it comes to the search for power. Such a possibility is strongly implied in the literature on frame interference and empathy gaps. Blount and Larrick (2000; see also Van Boven et al., 2000) argued that agents experience interference from the salient frame (the situation they are currently experiencing) and that this causes incorrect predictions with regard to other frames. Thus, people have difficulty predicting the behavior of others in situations that they do not experience themselves. Consistent with earlier theorizing (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; De Dreu & Van Knippenberg, 2005), we expect that recipients—being the weaker party in the situation—will feel that their outcomes are threatened. This will lead to adoption of a competitive frame, which will color their perceptions of the allocator’s situation. They will expect the allocator to be strategically motivated and outcome maximizing, no matter what power level they themselves possess. This will lead them to expect lower offers when they are powerless than when they have at least some retaliatory power.

To test our reasoning, in Experiment 3, we decided to focus on recipients rather than on allocators in delta ultimatum games. We gave recipients the opportunity to choose between different power distributions between allocator and recipient. Half of the participants had the choice between sticking to a delta of 0.9 or increasing their power to a delta of 0.8, whereas the other half could choose between  $\delta = 1.0$  (a dictator situation) or  $\delta = 0.9$ . It is important to note that recipients could increase their power by the same increment in both situations but that in the latter condition, the lowest power situation entails complete powerlessness, whereas in the former condition, the low power situation still entails at least some power for the recipient.

In addition to having participants choose between situations entailing more or less power, we also assessed their preferences and expectancies with regard to their outcomes in both situations. We expected that recipients would predict that outcomes would be highest in the situation in which they had more power and that they would therefore make use of the opportunity to increase their retaliatory power. Because, as Lord Acton (1972) claimed, power corrupts but absolute power corrupts even more, we expected this effect to be especially strong when participants had a choice between powerlessness ( $\delta = 1.0$ ) and a little bit of power ( $\delta = 0.9$ ).

Table 1

*Allocators’ Average Offers, Liking of Their Neighbor, Trust in Their Neighbor, and Intention to Help Their Neighbor for Different Levels of Delta in Experiment 2 (N = 58)*

Variable	$\delta = 0.9$			$\delta = 1.0$		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>n</i>
Offers	34.35	15.28	29	41.90	12.42	29
Liking	4.10	1.175	29	4.71	.897	29
Trust	3.79	1.473	29	4.41	1.018	29
Helping	3.72	1.251	29	4.41	.983	29

## Experiment 3

### Method

#### Participants and Design

Participants in this study were 59 students from Tilburg University (52.5% female; average age = 22 years). They participated as part of a classroom exercise during a “psychological economics” course or were approached on the Tilburg University campus. We ensured that these participants were never the same as those who participated in Experiment 2. All participants played the role of recipient in a delta ultimatum game and were randomly assigned to one of two conditions of a scenario ( $\delta = 0.8$ – $0.9$  or  $\delta = 0.9$ – $1.0$ ). The main dependent variable was whether participants chose to increase the power they would have in a delta ultimatum game. We also measured their expectations with regard to proposals by the allocator.

#### Procedure

Participants were asked to carefully read instructions and were told that their answers would remain anonymous to both their fellow students and the instructor. They proceeded to read a scenario that described a similar situation as that used in Experiment 2, except that participants in the current study were asked to imagine being the recipient in the same situation. Again, both neighbors wanted to use the sidewalk in front of their cafés for an outdoor bar. The city council endowed them with 100 m<sup>2</sup> that they could use together. As their neighbor had contacted the city council first about this extension of their cafés, the neighbor was instructed by the city council to come up with a division of the 100 m<sup>2</sup>, which would then be implemented. The neighbor could therefore propose a division of the 100 m<sup>2</sup> to the participants.

Participants in the  $\delta = 0.8$ – $0.9$  condition had information about the lack of a fire escape route that, when communicated to the city council, would lead to a reduction of the total area by 10%. The neighbor also knows this and is aware that these participants have this information. This means that the allocator in this condition thinks he is facing a  $\delta = 0.9$  delta ultimatum game. In the  $\delta = 0.9$ – $1.0$  condition, nothing is mentioned about a fire escape route. This means the allocator thinks he is facing a  $\delta = 1.0$  delta ultimatum game (dictator game) in which the recipient cannot influence the outcome.

In both conditions, participants were told that they have (extra) private information that could lead to a (further) decrease of the total space that can be used for the outdoor café. Participants (all recipients) have private information that the 100 m<sup>2</sup> are too close to the street and that if the city council was informed of this, then (another) 10 m<sup>2</sup> would have to remain unused. This would mean that although the relative sizes of the parts for each café owner would remain as proposed, the total area to be divided would be reduced by (an extra) 10%. They were also told that the neighbor is not aware of this information. They thus have the choice of increasing their power by informing their neighbor about this problem with the proximity to the street. The scenario was accompanied by a map that gave an overview of the layout of the two cafés, the area to be divided, the area that was too close to the street, and, for the 0.8–0.9 condition, the fire escape route.

It is important to note that when participants have only this information about the proximity to the street, this situation is equivalent to a delta ultimatum game in which the allocator thinks that delta is 1.0 but that the recipient can change delta to 0.9 by revealing the information. In effect, the recipients in this condition have a choice between playing with a delta of either 1.0 or 0.9. In the situation where both the recipient and their neighbor knew about the fire escape route, the situation is equivalent to a delta ultimatum game in which the allocator thinks that delta is 0.9 and revealing the information about the proximity to the street would change delta to 0.8. In effect, the recipient has a choice between playing with a delta of either 0.9 or 0.8.

After reading this scenario, participants were asked to indicate whether they would reveal the information about the proximity to the street to their neighbor. This represented a choice between a delta of 1.0 and 0.9 in the  $\delta = 0.9$ – $1.0$  condition and a choice between a delta of 0.9 and 0.8 in the  $\delta = 0.8$ – $0.9$  condition. After making this choice, participants indicated whether they agreed with the statement, “If I reveal the information about the problem with the area I will receive more land” (7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *totally disagree* to 7 = *totally agree*). They then indicated the percentage of the area they expected to receive if they did or did not reveal the information to their neighbor. They also indicated their age, gender, and major.

### Results

#### Choice

Although of all participants, 76.3% chose the option of having more power, there was a significant effect for condition,  $\chi^2(1, N = 59) = 5.65, p = .018$ . Of the participants who could choose between having a little bit of power ( $\delta = 0.9$ ) and having a little more power ( $\delta = 0.8$ ), 63.3% chose to have more power. Of the participants who could choose between no power ( $\delta = 1.0$ ) and a little bit of power ( $\delta = 0.9$ ), the large majority (89.7%) chose to have more power. This corresponds with the idea that people find it particularly aversive to be completely powerless.

#### Outcome Expectancy

We also measured whether the participants thought they would receive more land in the high-power than in the low-power situations. As expected, participants who had a choice between  $\delta = 0.9$  and  $\delta = 1.0$  believed more strongly that having more power would result in higher outcomes ( $M = 4.24, SD = 1.85$ ) than those who had a choice between  $\delta = 0.8$  and  $\delta = 0.9$  ( $M = 3.10, SD = 1.61$ ),  $t(57) = 2.54, p = .014$ , Cohen's  $d = .66$ .

We also asked participants to indicate the percentage of the area they expected to receive in each of the situations they could choose from. An analysis of variance with the two expectations as repeated measures and the high- and low-power conditions as between-subjects factors revealed a main effect of the repeated measure factor: Participants in both conditions expected to receive a larger proportion of the 100 m<sup>2</sup> when they had more power ( $M = 43.93, SD = 11.51$ ) than when they had less power ( $M = 37.32, SD = 12.28$ ),  $F(1, 55) = 35.80, p = .000$ , Cohen's  $d = .56$ .

Taking a closer look, a marginally significant interaction effect indicated an interesting pattern: In the 0.8–0.9 situation, participants

expected to receive more ( $M = 43.15$ ,  $SD = 10.84$ ) when they had more power than when they had less power ( $M = 38.52$ ,  $SD = 12.54$ ). Similarly, in the 0.9–1.0 condition, participants expected to receive more ( $M = 44.66$ ,  $SD = 12.24$ ) when they had more power than when they had less power ( $M = 38.52$ ,  $SD = 12.54$ ). However, as expected, this pattern was more pronounced for the 0.9–1.0 condition,  $F(1, 55) = 3.10$ ,  $p = .084$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .054$ . This is consistent with our hypothesis that it is the  $\delta = 1.0$  situation that recipients especially want to avoid.

### *Discussion and Introduction to Experiment 4*

The results for both recipient choice and expected outcome obtained in Experiment 3 are in stark contrast to the behavior of allocators in Experiments 1 and 2. Whereas allocators offer more to powerless than to weak recipients, recipients prefer to be weak rather than powerless and expect allocators to offer them more when they are weak rather than when they are powerless. Clearly, recipients act on the supposition that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely, whereas allocators withhold abuse of (absolute) power and instead act in accordance with a social responsibility norm that one should help, and not abuse and exploit, powerless counterparts.

Results of Experiment 3 are based on hypothetical scenario situations and need to be replicated in an actual choice situation. Doing this was the first goal of Experiment 4. Second, the paradox between allocator behavior and recipient expectations is based on comparing, across experiments, different people in (slightly) different situations. Demonstrating the paradoxical preference reversal within participants would be desirable, and this was the second goal of Experiment 4. We would consider it strong support for our reasoning if we were able to demonstrate that even when people experience both the role of recipient and allocator, they still prefer little power over no power as recipients but allocate more to powerless recipients than to weak recipients as allocators. Experiencing both roles thus should not eliminate the empathy gap. Finally, and most importantly, we designed Experiment 4 to obtain more insight into the underlying psychological mechanisms that account for (a) allocators' tendency to offer more to powerless recipients than to weak recipients and (b) the paradoxical and potentially self-defeating tendency among recipients to prefer weakness to powerlessness.

In Experiment 4, participants played the recipient role first and then the allocator role second. In their recipient role, they had a choice between having some power ( $\delta = 0.9$ ) or being completely powerless ( $\delta = 1$ ). We expected to replicate our findings from Experiment 3 that participants prefer to be more powerful and expect higher outcomes when they are weak rather than powerless. In the next phase of the study, participants were randomly assigned to the role of allocator in either a  $\delta = 1$  or  $\delta = 0.9$  ultimatum game. On the basis of a generic consistency principle, one would predict that allocators now offer more to weak recipients rather than to powerless recipients. However, on the basis of the results of Experiments 1 and 2, one would instead predict the reverse: Allocators should offer less to weak than to powerless recipients. As argued, a discrepancy between situational choice as recipient and behavioral action as allocator would be consistent with work on frame interference (Blount & Larrick, 2000) and egocentric empathy gaps (Van Boven et al., 2000, 2003). We therefore expect

that when participants are subsequently given the allocator role, the frame of the first situation will be overridden: We predict that the frame produced by the second situation will have such a strong influence that it will annul participants' previous frame. We therefore expect these same participants who preferred  $\delta = 0.9$  over a dictator situation and expected to receive more when  $\delta = 0.9$  to make higher offers to their counterparts in the dictator situation than in the  $\delta = 0.9$  situation. We further expect that allocators' prosocial behavior toward powerless recipients is mainly caused by their framing of the situation in terms of social responsibility, rather than by their positive evaluation of their opponent.

## Experiment 4

### *Method*

#### *Participants and Design*

Participants in this study were 38 students from the University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands (76% female; average age = 21.2 years). They were paid an equivalent of \$9 or one required credit point for participating in several experiments. This was the initial compensation for showing up for the study. Moreover, some of them had the opportunity to increase their earnings according to the decisions they made in our experiment. All participants first played the role of recipient and then the role of allocator in a delta ultimatum game. In the allocator part, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (power of  $\delta = 0.9$  or  $\delta = 1$ ). The main dependent variables were their choice to be in either a  $\delta = 0.9$  or a  $\delta = 1$  ultimatum game and the offer they made as allocator.

#### *Procedure*

Upon arrival, participants (between 2 and 8 at a time) were seated in front of computers in separate cubicles. An effort was made to convince all participants that at least 6 other participants were also present in the lab. Participants were informed that they were going to divide an amount of money together with one of the other participants. The participants learned they were going to divide 100 chips (each worth the equivalent of \$ 0.04 at the time of the experiment). We also informed them that 1 out of 5 participants would randomly be selected and paid the value of their chips in real money after the experiment, on top of the money or credit point they were already going to receive. Participants were told that they would remain anonymous to each other and that the number assigned to their cubicle would determine their role in the games. In reality, all participants first played as recipients and then as allocators. All participants were informed that the number of the cubicle they were in determined that they were assigned the role of recipient. Player A (the allocator) got to make an offer for a division of the chips. We told the recipients (all participants) that they had the possibility to choose between two situations: one situation in which they had to accept the offer of the other player (Situation 1;  $\delta = 1.0$ ) or another situation in which they could respond by either accepting the offer or rejecting it, which would lead to a diminishing of the offer by 10% (Situation 2;  $\delta = 0.9$ ). Notice that Situation 1 is equivalent to a dictator game, in which the recipient is powerless, whereas the game with  $\delta = 0.9$  entails some, however limited, power for the recipient. After indicating



their preference, participants answered several questions about their preferences and expected outcomes contingent on their choice. We asked them to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale the extent to which they agreed with these statements (1 = *totally disagree*, 7 = *totally agree*): “I would prefer to be in Situation 1” and “I would prefer to be in Situation 2.” We also asked participants what offers they expected in either situation: “If you would have chosen Situation 1, how many chips do you think you will be offered?” (similar for Situation 2). For the participants who chose the situation with  $\delta = 0.9$ , this was followed by a question in which they indicated the minimum number of chips they would still accept. This would later be used to determine whether they had accepted or rejected the offer by their counterpart in this part of the study.

We then proceeded with the second part of the study. The procedure resembled that of Experiment 1. We told recipients that they were now linked to another one of the participants (it was made especially clear that this was a different person than the person they played against in the first part). We informed them that because they had been recipients in the first part, they were now given the role of allocator and that they could propose a division of another 100 chips (each worth the equivalent of \$0.04). Again, we informed them that 1 out of 5 recipients would receive the value of their chips in real money after the experiment.

We randomly assigned participants to one of two conditions: Half would be allocator in a delta ultimatum game with  $\delta = 0.9$ , and the other half would be allocator in a dictator game. We explained to them the rules of the game they were in, and to assess whether participants understood the game, we asked them to indicate what the consequences of rejection by the recipient would be. After this, they indicated the number of chips (between 0 and 100) they were willing to allocate to the recipients. We then asked them several questions on 7-point Likert scales (*not at all to completely*). A factor analysis with varimax rotation revealed two distinct factors with an eigenvalue larger than 1. Together, they explained 75.3% of the variance. From these factors we created two scales, each consisting of four questions. The first, Social Responsibility ( $\alpha = .88$ ), consisting of questions such as, “To what extent do you think that it is inappropriate to harm the other player?” and “To what extent did you want to help the other?” taps the perceptions the recipients have of the situation as requiring a social responsibility norm. A higher score indicates that the situation is perceived more in terms of social responsibility. The other factor, Opponent Construal, focuses on perceptions about the other player and consists of questions such as, “To what extent do you see the other player as an opponent?” and “To what extent do you see the other as competition?” ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

Afterward, participants were debriefed. They were then thanked, and all received their initial compensation. One out of 5 participants was then paid out the full amount they had earned in the two parts of the experiment. Outcomes were determined by linking them to a random other participant in the experiment. When they had chosen to play a dictator game in the first part, they received the offer this random other had made in his or her second part. When they had chosen to play the  $\delta = 0.9$  game, we compared their minimum acceptable offer in the first game with the offer of the random other in his or her second part. If the offer was higher or equal to their minimum, then they received the offer; if not, then 10% was deducted. For the second part, we reversed this reason-

ing. When participants were in the  $\delta = 1.0$  condition, their offer was paid out; if they were in the  $\delta = 0.9$  condition, then their offer was compared with the minimum acceptable offer indicated by their counterpart in her or his first part of the study. All participants agreed to this procedure.

## Results

### Recipient Results

**Choice.** When asked which situation they would prefer to be in as a recipient, the large majority of participants (78.9%) chose the situation in which they had some power. This replicates our finding in Experiment 3. Also, when we asked participants to indicate whether they agreed with the statements, “I would prefer to be in Situation 1” and “I would prefer to be in Situation 2,” a paired-samples *t* test indicated that participants preferred being in Situation 2 (the situation in which they had at least some power;  $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 1.68$ ) over the dictator situation ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ ),  $t(37) = 3.052$ ,  $p = .004$ , Cohen’s  $d = .94$ . This confirms (as in Experiment 3) that participants have a strong preference for the  $\delta = 0.9$  situation (see Table 2).

**Expectancies.** We also asked participants to indicate how high they expected the offer of the allocator to be in the  $\delta = 0.9$  and  $\delta = 1.0$  situations. A paired-samples *t* test showed that people expected to receive more when they had some power ( $M = 40.08$ ,  $SD = 20.98$ ) than when they had none ( $M = 33.00$ ,  $SD = 17.66$ ),  $t(37) = 3.692$ ,  $p = .001$ , Cohen’s  $d = .37$  (see Table 2). The data concerning the preferences and expectancies that people have with regard to being a recipient in either a  $\delta = 0.9$  or a  $\delta = 1.0$  ultimatum game thus provide strong corroboration of the results from Experiment 3.

### Allocator Results

**Manipulation checks.** After explaining the delta ultimatum game they were going to play as allocators, we asked all participants to indicate what would happen if the offer were rejected in the second situation (when they were allocators). Five participants answered this question incorrectly, but because the answer to this question was always followed by an extra explanation of the consequences of rejection, we decided to keep these participants in

Table 2  
*Participants’ Expectations Regarding Offers, Actual Offers Subsequently Made, and Ratings of Social Responsibility and Opponent Construal Under Different Levels of Delta in Experiment 4 (N = 38)*

Variable	$\delta = 0.9$			$\delta = 1.0$		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>n</i>
Expectation as recipient	40.08	20.98	38	33.00	17.66	38
Offer as allocator	29.78	20.46	18	42.15	15.63	20
Social Responsibility	4.38	1.29	18	3.19	1.95	20
Opponent Construal	3.29	1.50	18	4.28	1.98	20

our sample. Moreover, whether we retained these participants did not make any difference with regard to our results.

**Offers.** As we expected, allocators who were confronted with powerless recipients (the  $\delta = 1.0$  condition) made higher allocations ( $M = 42.15$ ,  $SD = 15.63$ ) than did those confronted with a weak opponent (the  $\delta = 0.9$  condition;  $M = 29.78$ ,  $SD = 20.46$ ),  $t(31.73) = 2.077$ ,  $p = .046$  [equal variances not assumed], Cohen's  $d = .68$ ; see Table 2).

**Other measures.** To gain more insight into the reasons for these higher offers when the opponent is powerless, we also asked some questions that were related to allocators' perceptions with regard to the situation and the recipient with which they were coupled. We derived two scales, one that taps the perception of the situation and asks for socially responsible behavior (Social Responsibility) and another that consists of questions that focus on perceptions about the other player (Opponent Construal; see the *Method* section for questions and factor analysis). The Social Responsibility measure revealed that allocators in the dictator situation interpreted it more in terms of social responsibility ( $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) than those who were in the  $\delta = 0.9$  situation ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.95$ ),  $t(28.98) = 2.18$ ,  $p = .038$  [equal variances not assumed], Cohen's  $d = .72$ ). The Opponent Construal measure showed similar results: Allocators in the dictator game saw the recipient less as a competitive opponent ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ) than those who were in the  $\delta = 0.9$  situation ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ),  $t(36) = 1.75$ ,  $p = .045$  [one-tailed], Cohen's  $d = .56$ ; see Table 2).

**Mediational analyses.** As in Experiment 2, we found that both perceptions of the situation as well as perceptions of the other player differed between the  $\delta = 1.0$  and  $\delta = 0.9$  situations. Allocators in the dictator game interpret the situation as one that calls for social responsibility and see the other as less of a competitive opponent. To investigate which of these two factors is a better explanation for the higher allocations we found in the dictator game, we performed two mediational analyses. A series of regression models were estimated according to the method described by Baron and Kenny (1986). The first analysis treated power as the predictor, Opponent Construal as the hypothesized mediator, and offers as the dependent variable.

We first found that there is an effect of power on offers ( $B = 12.372$ ,  $SE = 5.872$ ,  $p = .042$ ) and then that power had an effect on Opponent Construal ( $B = -0.990$ ,  $SE = .566$ ,  $p = .089$ ). We further needed to establish whether the mediator still had a significant effect on offers when controlling for the effect of power, and linear regression analysis showed that this was the case ( $B = -5.302$ ,  $SE = 1.506$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Furthermore, we established that the effect of power was reduced ( $B = 7.122$ ,  $SE = 5.331$ ,  $p = .190$ ). Although this pattern indicates that there is some level of mediation of Opponent Construal, the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) indicates that it is not justified to speak of full mediation ( $Z = 1.5$ ,  $p = .12$ ).

We performed a similar set of analyses for the hypothesized mediator Social Responsibility. As reported above, power significantly predicted offers. We found that power had an effect on Social Responsibility ( $B = 1.181$ ,  $SE = .530$ ,  $p = .032$ ). We further needed to establish whether the mediator still had a significant effect on offers when controlling for the effect of power, and linear regression analysis showed that this was the case ( $B = 8.442$ ,  $SE = 1.212$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Furthermore, we established that the

effect of power was reduced ( $B = 2.406$ ,  $SE = 4.112$ ,  $p = .562$ ). This pattern indicates that there is some level of mediation of Social Responsibility, and, moreover, the Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) indicates that it is justified to speak of full mediation ( $Z = 2.12$ ,  $p = .034$ ).

Because both Social Responsibility and Opponent Construal (partially) seem to mediate the effect of power on offers, and they are moderately correlated ( $r = -.55$ ), we wanted to assess whether the weaker mediator (Opponent Construal) is an independent partial mediator. To do this, we added both Social Responsibility and Opponent Construal to the regression equation. If both are independent mediators, then the effect of power on offers should be reduced and the effects of both mediators on the dependent variable should remain significant. A linear regression analysis showed that the effect of power on offer was reduced ( $B = 1.777$ ,  $SE = 4.088$ ,  $p = .667$ ). However, when both hypothesized mediators were added to the equation, the effect of Opponent Construal became nonsignificant ( $B = -1.772$ ,  $SE = 1.297$ ,  $p = .181$ ) and the effect of Social Responsibility remained highly significant ( $B = 7.489$ ,  $SE = 1.385$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This indicates that it is the interpretation of the decision situation as one that asks for social responsibility that mediates the effect of power on offers and not so much the extent to which allocators view the recipient as a competitive opponent (see Figure 1).

### Discussion

In this final study, we were able to demonstrate that when participants actually experience both the role of recipient and allocator, the frame that is produced by the second situation is strong enough to override the framing of the first situation. As expected, the frame of the situation they are in has such a strong influence that people fail to take into account their previous reasoning. This discrepancy between situational choice as recipient and behavioral action as allocator is consistent with work on frame interference (Blount & Larrick, 2000) and egocentric empathy gaps (Van Boven et al., 2000, 2003).

Moreover, we were able to show that the more generous behavior of allocators in dictator games is mainly due to the interpretation of the situation: The confrontation with a powerless other was interpreted more in terms of social responsibility, which led allocators to make higher allocations to the powerless. Finally, we also established that the paradoxical offers and

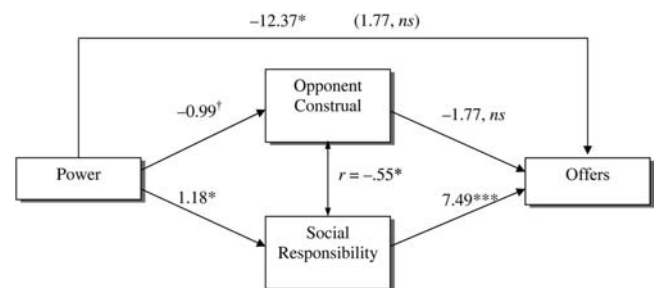


Figure 1. Test of the mediating role of the Opponent Construal and Social Responsibility factors on offers in Experiment 4. Values are regression weights. †  $p < .05$ , one-tailed. \*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed. \*\*  $p < .01$ , two-tailed. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

counterproductive preferences that were demonstrated in Experiments 1–3 even emerged when participants were exposed to both the role of allocator and recipient.

### General Discussion

The results of Experiments 1–4 support our hypotheses that allocators are more prosocially oriented toward powerless recipients and that this is caused by the frame these allocators experience when they make their offers. Allocators experience the situation as one that asks for social responsibility when they are confronted with a powerless other, whereas those confronted with retaliatory power act as sophisticated profit maximizers. We have also demonstrated that recipients do not expect this generosity by dictators and that they prefer more retaliatory power over less, especially when less power equals no power. Even when participants experience both roles, they make these paradoxical offers and reveal counterproductive preferences. We were able to demonstrate these results in different paradigms, both scenarios that ask people to imagine a real-life situation as well as more abstract game-like approaches in which participants divide money and receive outcomes according to their behavior.

If we relate our current conclusions to the grim view of those in positions of power as illustrated by the quote at the beginning of this article, it seems that this view is only valid to a certain extent. In fact, in light of our results, Lord Acton's (1972) maxim, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," is at best only valid for the first part: Powerful allocators will indeed take as much as they can, acting as sophisticated profit maximizers. The exceptions, however, are those with absolute power, as they show an inclination to care for other people's outcomes and distribute resources in a socially responsible manner. This adds to and further specifies the two literatures that were described in the introduction—one that views power as inducing exploitative and abusive tendencies and the other that relies on growing evidence that power can also produce socially responsible and benevolent behavior.

### *The Powerful*

The results with regard to the allocators support and add to the argument of Van Dijk and Vermunt (2000, p. 1), who suggested that, "sometimes it pays to be powerless." In their study, they showed that allocators who have an informational advantage make less use of this advantage when the recipient is powerless and cannot retaliate on an unfair offer. Van Dijk and Vermunt only compared allocator behavior in standard ultimatum games and dictator games. In terms of delta, this means they only included the endpoints of the continuum in their study (i.e.,  $\delta = 0$  and  $\delta = 1.0$ ). We added deltas that are very close to both ends of the continuum and show that it is indeed only toward completely powerless recipients that allocators behave more fairly. These results also demonstrate that the nonsignificant increase in offers toward powerless recipients found in Suleiman's (1996) study is no fluke, but rather a systematic, interesting occurrence.

Experiments 1, 2, and 4 show that allocators are more concerned for the welfare of a completely powerless recipient than for the welfare of a recipient with very limited power. There is a fundamental difference between allocator behavior when this allocator is

confronted with a powerless recipient and with a recipient with little power. We have successfully argued that this prosocial behavior stems from an interpretation of the situation in terms of a different frame: In terms of March's logic of appropriateness (March, 1995, see also Messick, 1999; Weber et al., 2004), it could be said that the questions "What kind of situation is this?" "What kind of person am I?" and "What does a person such as I do in a situation like this?" have completely different answers when one is confronted with a powerless other than when this other has some power to retaliate. In the latter case, the situation is interpreted as a threatening situation where the other is an opponent, and that calls for sophisticated profit maximizing. In the former case, there is no threat to one's own outcomes and therefore other rules apply. The situation is interpreted as one that calls for social responsibility: The recipient is defenseless and should not be exploited.

Our argument is related to research that shows that elevated power can increase an action orientation in high-power agents (Galinsky et al., 2003) and research that shows that power is associated with positive affect and disinhibited behavior (Keltner et al., 2003). However, where these authors focus on situations of higher versus lower power levels, we instead specifically focus on the effects of different levels of power and especially powerlessness. One of the implications of the current research is that it is useful to distinguish between situations in which relative power may be influenced gradually and situations in which a change in power results in complete powerlessness for one of the relevant parties. If even the smallest decrease in power means one of the parties becomes completely dependent on another, this may have strong effects on the way the situation is interpreted by relevant agents, especially by the stronger party. Increasing or decreasing power is usually interpreted as a continuous phenomenon with continuous effects—in Experiment 1, a gradual decrease in power for the recipient gradually decreased offers. However, when the gradual decrease of power reaches the point of complete powerlessness, a discontinuity seems to occur, which radically changes the way a situation is framed.

### *The Powerless*

With regard to the recipients in our studies, our results support and add to the empathy gap literature (Van Boven & Loewenstein, 2003; Van Boven et al., 2000, 2003). Even though recipients may correctly assume and predict that in most situations they will receive higher outcomes when they are more powerful, they do not anticipate the frame change that occurs when an allocator confronts an opponent who has no retaliatory power. The results also conform to the findings of Blount and Larrick (2000), who found that players in ultimatum-like games fail to correctly select the frame that will bring them the higher payoffs. Frame interference causes them to be unable to predict the frame their opponent will be in: Recipients in Experiments 3 and 4 expected allocators to make use of their power advantage also when this power advantage is absolute. They do not anticipate that the allocators will frame the situation as one that requires socially responsible behavior.

As Van Boven et al. (2000) argued, egocentric empathy gaps stem partly from people's misprediction of what they themselves would experience if they were in the other role. In our final experiment, we demonstrated that participants indeed do not make



the connection between their own preferences with regard to power distributions and their own behavior as allocator in either a  $\delta = 0.9$  or a  $\delta = 1.0$  ultimatum game. The same people that want to get out of the powerless situation and expect to receive more when they have retaliatory power subsequently allocate more to powerless others. Our results add to the theorizing with regard to empathy gaps, because we show that participants who actually experience both frames are so preoccupied with the frame that is produced by their current situation that this overrides the reasoning they expressed when they were experiencing the framing of the alternative situation.

It should be noted that the discrepancy between participants' choices in the recipient role and the offers in the allocator role cannot be explained by referring to self-serving assessments. The general finding that most people feel that they are more generous, less selfish, and altogether "holier" than others (Epley & Dunning, 2000, see also Miller & Ratner, 1998) would predict that participants expect themselves to make higher offers than others in both the  $\delta = 0.9$  and the  $\delta = 1.0$  situations. Self-serving assessments therefore cannot explain why we found that expectations about offers when participants played the role of recipient showed an opposite pattern to the actual offers they made themselves.

Blount and Larrick (2000) identified other motivations that brought their participants to choose the less profitable frame, specially fairness and respect. Our studies do not give insight into the role these motivations may play in the choices our participants made. It could be argued that recipients in Experiments 3 and 4 preferred the higher power because they thought it would be more fair and they would gain more respect if they would have some retaliatory power. However, even if these nonmonetary motivations do play a role, they are still associated with the incorrect expectations about outcomes that we demonstrated: Recipients really do expect to receive higher outcomes when they have more power.

### Future Research

As we have shown repeatedly, the overwhelming majority of participants preferred to be in the more powerful situation when they were recipients. However, some did pick the powerless situation. It might yield interesting insights if we could analyze the expectations these participants had with regard to the offers that the allocators would make under different power distributions. Unfortunately, the overwhelming preference for the higher power situation expressed by participants prevented us from doing any meaningful analysis on the differences in expectations and (in Experiment 4) subsequent offers between those who prefer to have more power and those who choose to be recipients in a dictator game: Maybe these few players actually were able to bridge the empathy gap and were aware of the fact that they would receive more when they were powerless. Future studies might shed more light on whether some people do see the advantage of being powerless. Alternatively, it might be interesting to investigate the preferences of allocators with respect to being confronted with a powerless or a weak other. Research by other authors (Dana, Cain, & Dawes, 2006) shows that dictators sometimes prefer to avoid the allocation situation and are actually willing to pay for not having to deal with a powerless other. It would be interesting to examine

whether similar behavior occurs for dictators who can choose to increase the power of the recipient from powerless to weak.

Future research could also further focus on the motivations (including the nonmonetary ones) of the recipients when they show a preference for more power. One wonders whether recipients would still make the same choices if they had known the results of the current studies. Also, it could be interesting to directly check the proposed mediational processes by directly manipulating Social Responsibility and Opponent Construal and measuring their effects on allocator behavior. This would provide strong support for our current findings.

### Conclusions

It is often thought that those in power will abuse their power. Participants in our studies anticipated such behavior and preferred more power over less. As we were able to demonstrate, this reasoning was not always correct. Those who were confronted with completely powerless others were prosocially motivated, interpreted a distribution situation as a decision that calls for social responsibility, and therefore considered it inappropriate to (ab)use their power.

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### Call for Nominations

The Publications and Communications (P&C) Board of the American Psychological Association has opened nominations for the editorships of **Developmental Psychology**, **Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology**, and **Psychological Review** for the years 2011–2016. Cynthia García Coll, PhD, Annette M. La Greca, PhD, and Keith Rayner, PhD, respectively, are the incumbent editors.

Candidates should be members of APA and should be available to start receiving manuscripts in early 2010 to prepare for issues published in 2011. Please note that the P&C Board encourages participation by members of underrepresented groups in the publication process and would particularly welcome such nominees. Self-nominations are also encouraged.

Search chairs have been appointed as follows:

- **Developmental Psychology**, Peter A. Ornstein, PhD, and Valerie Reyna, PhD
- **Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology**, Norman Abeles, PhD
- **Psychological Review**, David C. Funder, PhD, and Leah L. Light, PhD

Candidates should be nominated by accessing APA's EditorQuest site on the Web. Using your Web browser, go to <http://editorquest.apa.org>. On the Home menu on the left, find "Guests." Next, click on the link "Submit a Nomination," enter your nominee's information, and click "Submit."

Prepared statements of one page or less in support of a nominee can also be submitted by e-mail to Emnet Tesfaye, P&C Board Search Liaison, at [etesfaye@apa.org](mailto:etesfaye@apa.org).

Deadline for accepting nominations is January 10, 2009, when reviews will begin.