

Power Helps You Live the Good Life by Bringing You Closer to Your True Self

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How does being in a position of power at work, with friends, or in a romantic relationship influence well-being? While we might like to believe the stereotype that power leads to unhappiness or loneliness, new research indicates that this stereotype is largely untrue: Being in a position of power may actually make people happier.

Drawing on personality and power research, Yona Kifer of Tel Aviv University in Israel and colleagues hypothesized that holding a position of authority might enhance subjective well-being through an increased feeling of authenticity. The researchers predicted that because the powerful are able to “navigate their lives in congruence with their internal desires and inclinations,” they feel as if they are acting more authentically — more “themselves” — and thus are more content.

Their findings are published in [Psychological Science](#), a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#).

In their first experiment, the researchers surveyed over 350 participants to determine if internal feelings of power are associated with subjective well-being in different contexts: at work, with friends, or in romantic relationships.

The results indicated that people who feel powerful in any context tend to be more content.

The most powerful people surveyed felt 16% more satisfied with their lives than the least powerful people. This effect was most pronounced in the workplace: Powerful employees were 26% more satisfied with their jobs than their powerless colleagues. The power-based discrepancy in happiness was smaller for friendships and romantic relationships. The researchers posit that this may be because friendships are associated with a sense of community rather than hierarchy, and therefore having power in this kind of relationship is less important.

In the second and third experiments, Kifer and colleagues examined the causal relationship between power, feelings of authenticity, and general well-being, by manipulating each of the factors independently. The results revealed that being in a position of power causes people to feel more authentic and “true to themselves” — that is, it allows their actions to more closely reflect their beliefs and desires. Feelings of authenticity, in turn, enhance subjective feelings of well-being and happiness.

“By leading people to be true to their desires and inclinations — to be authentic — power leads individuals to experience greater happiness,” the researchers conclude.

Kifer and colleagues propose that future research into power dynamics, happiness, and authenticity should focus on specific kinds of power, both positive (such as charisma) and negative (such as

punishment).

Together, these findings suggest that even the perception of having power can lead people to live more authentic lives, thereby increasing their happiness and well-being.

Co-authors on this research include Daniel Heller of Tel Aviv University, Wei Qi Elaine Perunovic of University of New Brunswick, and Adam Galinsky of Columbia Business School.

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