

Study gives us a new perspective on the powerful.

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Walking a mile in another person's shoes may be the best way to understand the emotions, perceptions, and motivations of an individual; however, in a recent study appearing in the December 2006 issue of *Psychological Science*, it is reported that those in power are often unable to take such a journey.

In the article, *Power and Perspectives Not Taken*, Adam Galinsky of Northwestern University, Joe Magee of the Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at NYU, and colleagues at Stanford University found that possessing power itself serves as an impediment to understanding the perspectives of others. Through several studies, the researchers assessed the effect of power on perspective taking, adjusting to another's perspective, and interpreting the emotions of others.

To study the link between power and perspective taking, Galinsky and colleagues used a unique method in which the participants were told to draw the letter *E* on their forehead. If the subject wrote the *E* in a self-oriented direction, backwards to others, this indicated a lack of perspective taking. On the other hand, when the *E* was written legible to others, this indicated that the person had thought about how others might perceive the letter. The results showed that those who had previously been randomly assigned to a high power group were almost three times more likely to draw a self-oriented *E* than those who were assigned to the low power condition. Galinsky and colleagues also found that power leads individuals to anchor too heavily on their own vantage point, thus leaving them unable to adjust to another person's perspective and decreases one's ability to correctly interpret emotion.

Galinsky says that this research has "wide-ranging implications, from business to politics." For example, "Presidents who preside over a divided government (and thus have reduced power) might be psychologically predisposed to consider alternative viewpoints more readily than those that preside over unified governments." Galinsky also adds that a key is to somehow make perspective-taking part and parcel of power, "The springboard of power combined with perspective-taking may be a particularly constructive force."