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Self-Control Signals and Affords Power

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Whom do we perceive as more powerful and prefer to give power to: Those who have self-control or those who lack it? Past theory and research provide divergent predictions. Low self-control can be seen as a form of disinhibition, and disinhibition has been associated with greater power. However, high self-control can be seen as a form of agency, which is associated with greater power. Across seven studies, we found that individuals who exhibited high self-control were seen as more powerful, and given more power, than individuals who exhibited low self-control. This result held when the low or high self-control behavior was chosen either quickly or slowly (Studies 3 and 4), and when exhibiting low versus high self-control entailed the same action but different goals (Studies 5 and 6). Study 6 demonstrated important implications of our findings for goal setting: People were perceived as more powerful and given more power when they had a modest goal but exceeded it than when they had an ambitious goal but failed to meet it, even though in both cases they performed the same action. A meta-analysis of our mediation results showed that people perceived individuals higher in self-control as more assertive and competent, which was associated with greater power perception and then with greater power conferral. Perceived competence also directly mediated the effect of self-control on power conferral. The current research addresses a theoretical debate in the power literature and contributes to a better understanding of how power is perceived and accrued.

Keywords: power, self-control, person perception, goal setting

Supplemental materials: https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000457.supp

Imagine running into a colleague, Sam, while waiting in line at a nearby cafe. You heard from some other colleagues that Sam recently set a goal to lose 10 pounds in 3 months. When you reach the counter, Sam orders a cheesecake and a white chocolate mocha—not a low-calorie order. That is, Sam exhibits low self-control: Their behavior is not aligned with their important goals (Inzlicht et al., 2014). Would this apparent lack of self-control affect your impression of Sam? In particular, how powerful would Sam seem to you? If given the chance, would you recommend Sam for a powerful position? And what if Sam exhibited high self-control instead, such as by ordering a salad and a black coffee?

Power, defined as asymmetric control over valued resources (Galinsky et al., 2015; Keltner et al., 2003), constantly shapes everyday life experiences (Smith & Hofmann, 2016). Since a person's level of power cannot always be directly observed, it often must be inferred from various cues (Smith & Galinsky, 2010). Due to the great value of power, power perception is important for both perceivers and targets. By detecting their interaction partner's level of power, perceivers can behave more appropriately to facilitate the interaction (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003). When perceived as powerful, targets tend to be treated in ways that allow them to acquire power (Ridgeway et al., 1985; Smith & Galinsky, 2010).

Given the importance of power perception, whether we perceive those with low or high self-control as more powerful is highly consequential. For example, if we perceive those who lack self-control, like Sam, as more powerful, we are more likely to give them power. Research suggests this would be unwise. By definition, people with low self-control tend to let their short-term desires distract them from pursuing long-term goals (Fujita, 2011). Such a leader would struggle to coordinate people to achieve a common goal. Furthermore, leaders with low self-control were found to be more likely to abuse their followers (Yam et al., 2016).

Observers pay attention to information related to individuals' level of self-control and form impressions about these individuals based on their perceived self-control (Marr et al., 2019; Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011). The current research examines how this perceived self-control

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The data, analysis code, and research materials from all studies are available at https://osf.io/8frbp/?view_only=049097aac5134f2584a9c57664532681. Preregistration for Study 2b is available at https://aspredicted.org/18X_JC7, and preregistration for Study 5 is available at https://osf.io/esxj8/?view_only=3727e51f550e4137a8ab14cc337d0dd7. Some of the data have been presented at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting, the Society for Personality and Social Psychology Annual Convention, and the Distances in Organizations Workshop.

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affects how powerful a person appears to be and, consequently, how much power others are willing to give this person. We also explore the underlying person perception mechanisms.

How Perceived Self-Control Affects Perceived Power?

How does perceived self-control affect perceived power? Some power theories and research suggest that those with low self-control may ironically be seen as more powerful. Observers tend to perceive people who exhibit behaviors associated with having power as powerful (Keltner et al., 2008; Smith & Galinsky, 2010). That is, powerful individuals are more likely to behave in certain ways, and observers, in turn, perceive those behaviors as cues that indicate individuals' level of power. For example, powerful people tend to process and communicate information more abstractly (Magee et al., 2010; Smith & Trope, 2006), and observers perceive those who use abstract language as more powerful (Wakslak et al., 2014). Nonverbal behaviors such as facial expressiveness, bodily openness, and a loud voice are correlated with power, and observers perceive people who exhibit these behaviors as more powerful (Hall et al., 2005). Similarly, the approach/inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003) proposes that high power is associated with disinhibition—acting without regard to constraints—and low power with inhibition. In turn, observers perceive several socially disinhibited behaviors as signals of power. For instance, they perceive individuals who disregard social norms and display nonnormative behavior, such as by arriving late and putting their feet on a table, as more powerful (Van Kleef et al., 2011). They also perceive naysayers—those who tend to oppose others and express negative views—as more powerful (Chou, 2018). Given that self-control is often associated with response inhibition (Inzlicht et al., 2014), observers may perceive those with low self-control as disinhibited and, consequently, more powerful.

However, low self-control is not synonymous with disinhibition nor high self-control with inhibition. Disinhibition involves approaching rewards, rather than inhibiting one's responses due to concern about threat and punishment (Keltner et al., 2003). Exerting self-control does not always mean inhibiting actions that go against one's goals. Depending on the context, exerting self-control can also involve taking actions that help one approach one's goals, or choosing between two actions where one action is more in line with one's important goal. Furthermore, those with high self-control are not necessarily less reward sensitive than those with low self-control. The difference lies in the type of rewards they value: long-term, important rewards for those with high self-control versus short-term, peripheral rewards for those with low self-control (Fujita, 2011). Additionally, inhibition is often assumed to involve slower action and more deliberate thinking (Corr, 2010; Keltner et al., 2003). Although self-control can be achieved through deliberation, it can also be achieved through more spontaneous means, such as implementation intentions (Fujita, 2011). Therefore, self-control and (dis)inhibition are orthogonal constructs.

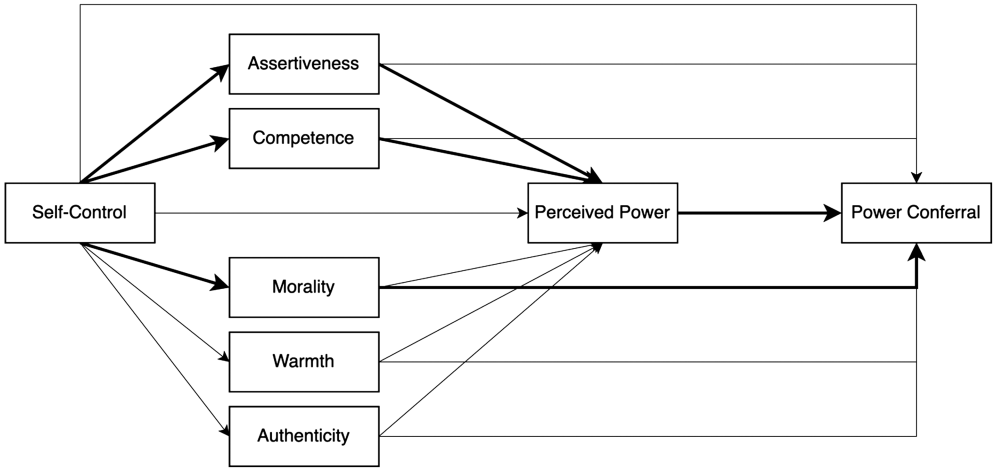
Furthermore, though the approach/inhibition theory (Keltner et al., 2003) proposes a link between power and disinhibition, other theories and research show that having more power causes people to have higher self-control. According to the social distance theory of power (Magee & Smith, 2013), power is associated with greater social distance and more independence from others. This social distance leads high-power individuals to adopt a higher construal level (Smith & Trope, 2006), which is associated with greater self-control (Fujita et al., 2006). Past research supports this prediction. Exerting self-control requires distinguishing between superordinate, long-term goals and subordinate, short-term goals, as well as acting in line with superordinate goals (Fujita, 2011). Greater power is associated with a greater ability to prioritize, persist, and adapt for goal pursuit (e.g., Guinote, 2007; Karremans & Smith, 2010; but see Zhang & Smith, 2018, for an exception). Similarly, leaders devote more effort to tasks they deem important, which involves greater prioritization and more goal-oriented action (DeWall et al., 2011). Given observers' ability to discern power's behavioral consequences and use them as cues to infer targets' power (Hall et al., 2005; Smith & Galinsky, 2010), it is likely that observers detect this positive link between power and self-control and thus infer high self-control is an indicator of high power.

Though we have a clear hypothesis about the relationship between self-control and perceived power, we do not have strong hypotheses about what might mediate this relationship, as relevant research is limited or has yielded mixed results. We review several possible mediators: agency and its facets, communion and its facets, and authenticity. To evaluate these possible mediators, we discuss the evidence for two paths: self-control influencing the mediator and the mediator influencing perceived power. Figure 1 summarizes the mediators and paths we will discuss and test in our studies.

Agency, one of the two fundamental dimensions in person perception (Abele et al., 2021), is an obvious potential mediator of the effect of self-control on perceived power. Agency implies an orientation toward expanding the self and pursuing personal growth and goal attainment (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007) and involves freely behaving according to one's own will. Agentic people are generally seen as more powerful (e.g., Chou, 2018; Ma et al., 2022; Van Kleef et al., 2011), and exhibiting self-control likely signals more agency. As superordinate, long-term goals are more central to the self than subordinate, short-term desires (Pronin & Ross, 2006; Wakslak et al., 2008), those with higher self-control should appear to behave more in line with their core selves and thus appear more agentic. Meanwhile, those with lower self-control behave more in line with their short-term, less important goals (Fujita, 2011), so they should appear less agentic. Greater self-control also means a greater tendency to strive toward and achieve personal goals, an important element of agency (e.g., White, 1979; Wojciszke & Abele, 2008). Indeed, people expect better performance for those who display high (vs. low) self-control (Koval et al., 2015).

Thus, the evidence suggests that agency likely mediates the effect of self-control on perceived power. However, the agency is not a unidimensional construct (Abele et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2022). Recent advances in person perception theories suggest that agency includes two facets: assertiveness and competence (Abele et al., 2021). Assertiveness (e.g., "ambitious," "confident") reflects the motivation-related component of the agency, whereas competence (e.g., "intelligent," "effective") reflects the ability-related component (Abele et al., 2016). High self-control requires both the motivation to achieve goals and the ability to do so. Therefore, observers may perceive those with high (vs. low) self-control as being both assertive and competent (i.e., having both motivation and ability). However, past research has yet to examine whether assertiveness and competence exert different effects on power perception. In the present studies, we examined both assertiveness and competence as separate potential mediators for the effect of self-control on power perception.

Figure 1
Statistical Model for Mediation Analyses



Note. Mediating paths we have stronger evidence for are in bold. All the paths in the model are tested simultaneously.

By comparison, we have less evidence regarding the other fundamental person perception dimension, communion (Abele et al., 2021), as a potential mediator. Communion includes two facets: morality and warmth (Abele et al., 2021). Morality (e.g., "trustworthy," "fair") indicates that one adheres to ethical values in social relations, whereas warmth (e.g., "friendly," "agreeable") indicates that one is motivated to build affectionate relations with others (Abele et al., 2016; Goodwin et al., 2014). Based on previous research, neither morality nor warmth are strong candidates for mediators of the effect of self-control on perceived power.

The evidence for morality as a mediator is mixed: Observers perceive those with high self-control as more moral, but they may not associate morality with being powerful. Self-control is often considered a moral issue (e.g., self-control failures are often morally condemned; Mooijman et al., 2018). Thus, those with higher self-control tend to be perceived as more moral (e.g., trustworthy; Marr et al., 2019; Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011). However, direct evidence of how perceived morality affects perceived power is limited, and related research makes mixed predictions. "Power corrupts" (Acton, 1956) is a popular maxim, yet observers sometimes perceive high-power individuals as more moral (Smith & Overbeck, 2014). Indeed, power is believed to be achieved through both moral and less moral means (Belmi & Laurin, 2016; ten Brinke & Keltner, 2022). Therefore, we are uncertain whether observers will perceive morality as a signal of power and thus do not have a strong prediction about whether morality will mediate the effect of self-control on perceived power.

The relationships between warmth, self-control, and perceived power are even less clear-cut. On the one hand, individuals high in self-control show enhanced interpersonal behavior, such as more perspective-taking, less aggression, and more trust (Tangney et al., 2004), so observers may learn to associate higher self-control with warmth. On the other hand, individuals very high in self-control tend to be perceived as robotic and less warm (Lapka et al., 2023). Furthermore, we are uncertain how perceived warmth affects perceived power. Observers perceive those who exhibit some nonverbal indicators of warmth (e.g., smiling) as less powerful but perceive those who exhibit other nonverbal indicators of warmth (e.g., nodding, laughter) as more powerful (Hall et al., 2005). Therefore, we do not have a strong prediction about whether warmth will mediate the effect of self-control on perceived power.

Though our main focus is on the fundamental person perception dimensions (Abele et al., 2021) that may be more central during impression formation, we also examined authenticity as a potential mediator. Observers tend to infer that individuals who are more authentic are also more powerful (Gan et al., 2018), but there is mixed empirical evidence about how self-control affects perceived authenticity. As argued above, self-control is seen as moral, and observers perceive others' moral behavior as more authentic than their immoral behavior (Newman et al., 2014). In contrast, other research that directly studies self-control suggests that, at least in some cases, observers see others as less authentic when they exert self-control versus act impulsively (Garrison et al., 2023). However, that research focuses on the effortful control of impulses, which is different from our definition of self-control (Fujita, 2011), so it is unclear if this result would extend to our research. Therefore, we do not have a strong prediction about whether authenticity will mediate the effect of self-control on perceived power.

In sum, we hypothesize that observers will perceive those who display high (vs. low) self-control as more powerful. Although we do not have strong hypotheses for the mediation mechanisms, available evidence suggests that assertiveness and competence are more likely to mediate the effect of self-control on perceived power than warmth, morality, or authenticity.

How Perceived Self-Control Affects Power Conferral?

We propose that self-control affects power conferral both through perceived power and separately through other mediators, demonstrating how power perception and power conferral processes both resemble and differ from each other. Because those with high self-control are seen as more powerful, they are likely to be given more power. In general, those who are perceived as more powerful tend to be given more power (Ridgeway et al., 1985). Observers can

interpret cues of power rapidly and nonconsciously and tend to behave in line with the perceived position of others in power hierarchies, making power perceptions likely to transform into actual conferred power (Smith & Galinsky, 2010). Since power hierarchies are perceived as relatively immutable (Hays & Bendersky, 2015), observers are more likely to accept the current distribution of perceived power as is and confer power to those they perceive as powerful. For example, naysayers are both perceived as more powerful and preferred for high-power leader positions. The effect of naysaying on power conferral is serially mediated by perceived agency and perceived power (Chou, 2018). Similarly, the effects of norm violation on power conferral in different cultures are mediated by perceived power (Stamkou et al., 2019).

However, people use more than just someone's perceived power to determine whether to give them power. According to the reciprocal influence model of social power (Keltner et al., 2008), power is conferred to people believed to be more likely to advance the interests of a group. Since power conferral means voluntarily giving another person resources that will help them be influential, power givers need to assess whether this person would use their power selfishly, or instead, to benefit others, especially the group (Keltner et al., 2008). Therefore, perceived morality and warmth are likely to directly lead to power conferral. Indeed, individuals who are more communal tend to achieve more power. For example, people who violate norms are only given more power if they violate norms specifically to help others (Van Kleef et al., 2012). Engaging in more communal behavior, such as developing strong relationships with others and being considerate and kind toward others at work, is associated with achieving more power in the workplace (Anderson et al., 2020). Fraternity and sorority members who are rated higher on communal traits (by both peers and the self) gain power over the subsequent year (Wood & Harms, 2017). Whereas previous research suggests that communion in general leads to power conferral, it does not distinguish between the effects of morality and warmth. We thus examined both warmth and morality as potential mediators for the effect of self-control on power conferral. Due to the stronger evidence that observers associate self-control with morality (vs. warmth) mentioned in the previous section, morality seems a more likely mediator of power conferral than warmth.

Agency, by comparison, seems less likely to directly lead to power conferral. The reciprocal influence theory of power (Keltner et al., 2008) suggests that the acquisition of power relies more on traits related to social engagement with group members (i.e., communion) than traits related to effective goal pursuit and task performance (i.e., agency). For example, in contrast to the results for communal traits above, fraternity and sorority members' rated agency is unrelated to their gains or losses in power over the subsequent year (Wood & Harms, 2017).

How authenticity directly relates to group interests, and thus, power conferral also remains an open question. Authenticity, by definition, is more related to how individuals respond to their inner self than how they respond to others. When individuals are perceived as authentic, they are perceived as expressing their true feelings and thoughts, which may conceivably benefit or harm a group. Indeed, authentic self-expressions can be benevolent and warm, which can enhance interpersonal relationships, or malicious and cold, which can impair them (Seto & Davis, 2021). Similarly, authentic self-expressions can reveal similarities with group members, thus reducing relationship conflict at work, or differences from them, thus increasing conflict (Karelaia et al., 2022). Therefore, we do not have strong evidence that authenticity can directly lead to power conferral.

Overall, we hypothesize that observers are more likely to confer power on people who display high (vs. low) self-control. Past research provides tentative evidence that perceived power may lead to power conferral. Additionally, we have tentative evidence that morality is the most likely direct mediator of the effect of self-control on power conferral. See Figure 1 for the complete mediation model for our exploratory analyses, with the more likely mediating paths in bold.

Overview of Present Studies

We investigated how a person's perceived level of self-control influences how powerful they seem and how much power they are given. In line with our definition of self-control and prior research, we operationalized self-control as either an individual acting according to versus against their important goals (Studies 3–5; e.g., Fujita, 2011) or the extent to which an individual adhered to their goals (Studies 1 and 6; e.g., Koval et al., 2015). In Study 1, we examined the effect of self-control on power perception and conferral in an ostensible lab interaction. In Studies 2a and 2b, we tested whether merely recalling a time when a colleague exhibited low (vs. high) self-control was sufficient to shift a participant's perception of how powerful that colleague was and their willingness to give that colleague power. We included a baseline condition in Study 2b to examine whether our effects were driven by low or high self-control, or both. We manipulated self-control and decision speed orthogonally in Studies 3 and 4. We used decision speed as an indicator of (dis)inhibition (Corr, 2010) to examine whether self-control leads to power regardless of whether it involves inhibition. Finally, in Studies 5 and 6, we addressed the alternative explanation that high self-control individuals are seen as more powerful and given more power because they take actions that are evaluated more positively regardless of their goals, not because they exhibit self-control by taking actions that align with their goals. In Study 5, we manipulated the target's action and goal orthogonally to test whether the same action gave rise to more power when it was aligned with the target's goal (vs. not). In Study 6, we kept the action constant and manipulated the ambitiousness of the goals. Observers judge targets' level of self-control based on the extent to which targets adhere to their goals (Koval et al., 2015). Thus, when a person performs a particular action, they are perceived as having higher self-control when the action goes beyond the goal than when the action falls short of the goal. If self-control leads to greater perceived power and power conferral, then having an ambitious goal but failing to meet it should lead to less perceived power and power conferral than having a modest goal but meeting it.

Across Studies 2a–6, we conducted exploratory mediation analyses using the statistical model displayed in Figure 1. We tested two types of mediation simultaneously. We examined how self-control affected perceived power through assertiveness, competence, warmth, morality, and authenticity, and how perceived power then affected power conferral. We also examined how self-control affected power conferral directly through assertiveness, competence, warmth, morality, and authenticity. We disentangled the effects of self-control and disinhibition in two ways: by manipulating self-control and decision speed orthogonally (Studies 3 and 4) and by varying the relationship between self-control and inhibition across studies

(low self-control was more disinhibited in Study 4; low and high self-control were equally disinhibited in Studies 3 and 5).

Transparency and Openness

For all studies, we report how we determined our sample size, all manipulations, exclusions (if any), and measures. No data were analyzed prior to the completion of data collection. The data, analysis code, and research materials from all studies are available at https://osf.io/8frbp/?view_only=049097aac5134f2584a9c57664532681. All studies received approval from the university's institutional review board of the first author.

Study 1

Study 1 examined whether people perceive new acquaintances with low versus high self-control as more powerful and prefer to give power to them. Participants expected to be working in a group on a task. As a behavioral measure of power conferral, participants distributed votes between two possible group leaders who showed different levels of self-control. We also examined whether the effect of self-control on power conferral was mediated by perceived power.

Method

Participants and Design

We aimed to recruit 200 U.S. participants from Prolific and ended up with data from 201 (M_{age} = 34.87, SD_{age} = 11.63, two did not report their age; 96 men, 105 women) participants for a within-group (low vs. high self-control) design. Four participants correctly guessed that our research purpose was about resolutions or goals. Excluding their data did not influence the pattern of our results (see Supplemental Materials). The analyses below include all participants. A sensitivity power analysis (Faul et al., 2007) suggested that our sample size provided sufficient power (.80) to detect small-sized effects in a paired-sample t test, d_z = .20 (two-tailed).

Procedure and Measures

Participants completed the study online using Qualtrics. They were told (falsely) that they would be connected with several other participants and later do a group task together. First, participants answered some questions about themselves to help the supposed other participants get to know them better. The getting-to-know-you questions included (a) their initials, (b) their favorite holiday and the reason for that, (c) their New Year's resolution and how well they had been following through with it, and (d) their most memorable childhood experience.

Next, we told the participants that they were connected with five other participants, and one of them would be the leader of the group. The leader would be in charge of the other group members during a group task, directing them as they worked on solutions to a problem and setting the standards by which their solutions would be evaluated. Participants would help select the leader by reading the responses of two other participants in their group to the same four questions. (We had participants evaluate only two other participants to make it less likely they would try to manipulate their ratings so that, e.g., they themselves would be the leader.) These two sets of candidate responses were created based on real participants' answers to these four questions gathered in a pretest. We embedded our self-control manipulation in the response to the third question. This response always began with the person's specific resolution. Next, the low self-control answer stated, "I have not held up to this very well," while the high self-control answer stated, "Keeping up pretty well so far." We randomized whether the low self-control answer was part of the first candidate's responses versus the second. We also randomized the order of the two versions of the rest of the profile so that each version was equally likely to be associated with the low versus high self-control text. We found no order effects. Appendix A shows the two sets of responses and where the self-control manipulations were inserted.

Then, for each candidate, the participants completed our power perception and conferral measures in randomized order. Finally, participants answered some demographic questions and wrote down their perceived purpose of the study.

Power Perception. The participants evaluated to what extent they would describe each candidate as "powerful," "independent," "leader-like,"[1] and "influential" (Cronbach's $\alpha > .90$ for both targets) on scales from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). These items are taken from previous power research (e.g., Lammers et al., 2016; See et al., 2011).

Power Conferral. The participants were told that they had 10 votes to divide between the two candidates. The more votes they gave to a candidate, the more likely that the person was to become the leader. The item was structured so that participants had to distribute all 10 votes between the two candidates. The number of votes each candidate received served as our power conferral measure.

Results

Power Perception and Conferral

The target was perceived as more powerful when displaying high (M = 4.94, SD = 1.08) rather than low (M = 4.53, SD = 1.22) self-control, $t(200) = 4.68$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.33$. The target with high self-control was also conferred more power, getting an average of 5.60 votes (SD = 2.00), which is significantly above 5, the expected number in an equal split, $t(200) = 4.23$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.30$.

Mediation Analyses

We used the MEMORE macro (Montoya & Hayes, 2017; Model 1), designed to estimate mediation models in two-condition within-participant designs, to examine whether perceived power mediated the effect of self-control on power conferral. Based on 5,000-sample bootstrapping, perceived power was a significant mediator (95% CI [0.51, 1.30]).

Discussion

In Study 1, participants considered those with high (vs. low) self-control to be more powerful and more suitable for powerful positions. The effect of self-control on power conferral was mediated

[1] An anonymous reviewer raised the concern that the item "leader-like" may confound power and status. For all studies, we reran all the analyses involving perceived power excluding this item from the measure. The pattern of findings remained the same. The results can be requested from the first author.

by perceived power, in line with past research showing that people tend to give power to those who appear to be powerful (e.g., Ridgeway et al., 1985). Importantly, participants believed their power conferral decision was consequential.

However, the within-group design of Study 1 may have highlighted the differences in self-control between targets, leading participants to use that information more than they normally would. In the remaining studies, we used between-group designs to address this problem. Additionally, in Study 1, participants evaluated two strangers with only minimal information provided about them; it is unclear whether self-control information would have such weight in evaluations if, for example, participants rated people they knew well. We conducted Studies 2a and 2b to address this limitation.

Study 2a

We conducted Study 2a to examine whether we could change how participants felt about a real colleague by having them recall an incident in which the colleague displayed low (vs. high) self-control. We expected that due to the availability of the recalled episode (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973), the colleague would be perceived as having lower self-control after the participant recalled a low (vs. high) self-control event and thus would be seen as less powerful and given less power. To better explore the mechanisms driving the effect of self-control on perceived and conferred power, we conducted the mediation analyses depicted in Figure 1. Although we did not have strong predictions, prior research provides more evidence for the bold paths. Specifically, self-control is likely to increase perceived assertiveness and competence, which would increase perceived power, and increased perceived power would increase power conferral. In addition, self-control is likely to increase perceived morality, which would directly increase power conferral.

Method

Participants and Design

We aimed to recruit from Prolific at least 200 U.S. participants who were working either part or full time and had at least one colleague. We used Prolific's employment status screener and recruited 250 participants (to account for attrition). Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (low vs. high self-control) in a between-groups design. We excluded the data from 26 participants because they reported having no colleagues, leaving a final sample size of 224 (M_{age} = 32.18, SD_{age} = 9.21; 122 men, 102 women). A sensitivity power analysis (Faul et al., 2007) suggested that our sample size provided sufficient power (.80) to detect small- to medium-sized effects in an independent-samples t test, d = .38 (two-tailed). Two research assistants independently coded the responses of the 224 participants and agreed that six provided irrelevant responses, 22 could not recall any relevant incident, and four provided answers that did not align with their assigned condition. We included these participants in the analyses below. Excluding their data did not influence our main findings (see Supplemental Materials).

Procedure and Measures

Participants completed the study online using Qualtrics. First, they were told to think of a colleague and type the colleague's name into a text box. After participants submitted the name, they were asked to describe, in as much detail as possible, an incident in which this colleague exhibited either low or high self-control (depending on their assigned condition). We defined self-control to participants as "the ability to think and act in a way that gives priority to long-term, more important goals over short-term, less important ones."

Next, as a manipulation check, participants rated the target colleague's self-control. Then, they completed power perception and power conferral measures, presented in random order, regarding that colleague. After that, participants completed measures of potential mediators, specifically, the colleague's perceived assertiveness, competence, morality, warmth, and authenticity. To rule out the alternative explanation that the effects would be driven by ease of recall (i.e., fluency; Lammers et al., 2017), they also answered how difficult it was to recall the incident. Finally, participants reported their demographic information.

Manipulation Check. Participants reported on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) the extent to which they thought "[Colleague's name] has good self-control" and "[Colleague's name] does things that are in line with his/her goals" (r = .74, p < .001).

Power Perception and Power Conferral. Participants rated, in random order, how powerful they perceived the colleague to be using the same four items as in Study 1 (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*; α = .90) and how much power they wanted to confer to the colleague (four items; see Appendix C; 1 = *I totally disagree*, 7 = *I totally agree*; α = .93; similar to Van Kleef et al., 2012).

Mediators. Participants indicated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) how much they would describe the colleague as possessing a variety of characteristics, listed in random order. These characteristics were our measures of potential mediators: assertiveness ("confident," "assertive," "gives up easily" [reverse-coded], "able to resist pressure"; α = .75); competence ("competent," "intelligent," "capable," "efficient," "clever"; α = .90); morality ("trustworthy," "just," "fair," "reliable," "considerate"; α = .93); warmth ("warm," "friendly," "caring," "empathic," "affectionate"; α = .92); and authenticity ("authentic," "genuine," "sincere"; from Gershon & Smith, 2020; α = .92). The items used to measure the first four mediators were adapted from Abele and Hauke (2020), except we did not include the item "has leadership skills" in the assertiveness measure because of its conceptual overlap with power.

Fluency of Recall. Participants rated how difficult it was to recall the incident (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*), and we reverse-coded the rating to measure the fluency of recall.

Results

We conducted independent-sample t tests on all the following variables. When Levene's test indicated unequal variances between the two conditions (p < .10), we conducted Welch's independent-sample t tests instead.

Manipulation Check

Participants who described an incident when their colleagues exhibited high self-control (M = 6.00, SD = 1.07) rather than low self-control (M = 4.78, SD = 1.53) perceived their colleague as having more self-control, t(202.09) = 6.94, p < .001, Cohen's d = 0.92, indicating our manipulation was successful.

Power Perception and Conferral

Participants perceived their colleague as more powerful after they recalled an incident in which this colleague exhibited high self-control ($M = 5.38$, $SD = 1.16$) rather than low self-control ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 1.48$), $t(212.70) = 5.64$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.75$. Likewise, participants were more willing to give power to a colleague when they recalled an incident in which this colleague exhibited high self-control ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 1.38$) rather than low self-control ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.74$), $t(213.88) = 5.70$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.76$.

Mediators

Participants in the high (vs. low) self-control condition rated their colleagues higher on assertiveness, $t(213.87) = 4.61$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.61$; competence, $t(206.06) = 5.56$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.74$; morality, $t(211.01) = 5.01$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.67$; warmth, $t(222) = 3.78$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.51$; and authenticity, $t(221.16) = 3.78$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.50$. See Table 1 for means and standard deviations by experimental condition.

Fluency of Recall

Participants found it easier to recall high self-control incidents ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.72$) than low self-control ones ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 2.00$), $t(219.34) = 2.41$, $p = .017$, Cohen's $d = 0.32$. However, the previous findings still held when we controlled for ease of recall in analyses of covariance and when we regressed the dependent variables on the self-control conditions, with ease of recall as an additional predictor. See Supplemental Tables S8 and S9 for the detailed results.

Mediation Analyses

We conducted the mediation analysis depicted in Figure 1 with 5,000-sample bootstrapping using the *lavaan* package in R (syntax in the Supplemental Materials). We dummy-coded the independent variable self-control (0 = *low self-control*, 1 = *high self-control*). In this and all the following studies, we tested all the paths in Figure 1 simultaneously in one model. See Table 2 for the 95% confidence intervals for all indirect effects of self-control on perceived power, Table 3 for all indirect effects of self-control on power conferral, and Supplemental Figure S2 for a detailed illustration of the results. We discuss only the bold paths and additional significant indirect effects below.

We found some significant indirect effects that were consistent with the bold paths in Figure 1. Self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through assertiveness and then perceived power and a positive indirect effect on power conferral through competence and then perceived power. In addition to these serial mediations, self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through morality.

We also found significant indirect effects other than the bold paths. Self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through competence and a negative indirect effect on power conferral through assertiveness.

Discussion

Our findings suggest that the effect of a target person's self-control on power perception and conferral goes beyond perceivers' first impressions of strangers. The mere recall of a high (vs. low) self-control incident was sufficient to shift people's perception of their colleagues and help their colleagues appear more powerful and be given more power. We also gained some understanding of what basic perceptions drove these effects. Our mediation analyses partially supported what we considered more likely based on previous research (i.e., the bold paths in Figure 1). Targets with more self-control were seen as both more assertive and more competent, which led participants to perceive these targets as more powerful and then to be more willing to give them power. Targets with more self-control were seen as more moral, which directly led participants to be more willing to give them power. Other significant indirect effects were more surprising. Higher perceived competence directly led participants to be more willing to give the target power, and higher perceived assertiveness directly led participants to be *less* willing to give the target power. Since some mediation results were not consistent across studies, we refrain from discussing the mediating mechanisms until later in the article, following a meta-analysis on all the relevant studies.

Study 2a did not include a control condition, so it is unclear if these effects were driven by low self-control decreasing perceived power and power conferral, high self-control increasing perceived power and power conferral, or both. In Study 2b, we replicated Study 2a and added a baseline condition to address this issue.

Study 2b

In Study 2b, we used the same basic procedure as Study 2a but modified the cover story, added a filler question, and moved the manipulation check questions to the end of the study to minimize experimenter demand effects. We also added a baseline condition where participants recalled what their colleagues typically did at work to explore the separate influence of low versus high self-control on power perception and conferral. We preregistered our sample size, study design, and analysis plan on AsPredicted.org (https://aspredicted.org/18X_JC7).

Table 1
Study 2a Means and Standard Deviations of Mediators by Self-Control Condition

Self-control	Assertiveness	Competence	Morality	Warmth	Authenticity
Low	4.86 (1.23)	5.22 (1.21)	5.07 (1.40)	4.96 (1.27)	5.30 (1.33)
High	5.53 (0.97)	6.00 (0.87)	5.90 (1.07)	5.58 (1.21)	5.94 (1.21)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Table 2
The 95% Confidence Intervals for All Indirect Effects of Self-Control on Perceived Power

Mediator	Study 2a	Study 2b	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5	Study S5	Study 6	Meta-analysis
Assertiveness	[0.12, 0.44]	[0.21, 0.37]	[0.06, 0.31]	[0.38, 0.87]	[0.24, 0.46]	[0.004, 0.08]	[0.02, 0.24]	[0.07, 0.15]
Competence	[0.13, 0.63]	[0.14, 0.44]	[0.10, 0.38]	[0.16, 0.48]	[0.12, 0.33]	[0.02, 0.13]	[−0.004, 0.10]	[0.04, 0.09]
Morality	[−0.14, 0.39]	[−0.17, 0.12]	[−0.01, 0.26]	[−0.07, 0.23]	[−0.02, 0.13]	[−0.01, 0.09]	[−0.000, 0.16]	[−0.02, 0.04]
Warmth	[−0.12, 0.15]	[−0.09, 0.07]	[−0.01, 0.13]	[−0.02, 0.02]	[−0.01, 0.03]	[−0.001, 0.10]	[−0.03, 0.08]	[−0.01, 0.03]
Authenticity	[−0.10, 0.17]		[−0.15, 0.10]	[−0.20, 0.09]		[−0.02, 0.02]	[−0.08, 0.02]	[−0.03, 0.02]

Method

Participants and Design

We recruited 450 U.S. participants from Prolific, screening for individuals whose work involved working together with others. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (low self-control vs. baseline vs. high self-control) in a between-groups design. In line with our preregistration, we excluded the data from two participants because two research assistants both coded their responses as not abiding by their assigned condition. Thus, we had a final sample size of 448 (M_{age} = 24.91, SD_{age} = 6.49; 29 men, 412 women, seven identified as nonbinary).[2] A sensitivity power analysis (Faul et al., 2007) suggested that our sample size provided sufficient power (.80) to detect small- to medium-sized effects in a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), $f = .15$ (two-tailed). The two research assistants also coded whether each participant was able to recall relevant information about their colleagues. Thirty participants stated they were not. As preregistered, we included these participants in our analyses below. Excluding their data did not influence our main findings (see Supplemental Materials).

Procedure and Measures

The experiment began similarly to Study 2a, with participants typing in the name of a colleague. After they submitted the name, however, they were told that we were interested in how well people know their colleagues. Participants in all three conditions were first asked to describe their initial interactions with their colleagues. Then, they answered a second question, which differed by experimental condition. Participants in the low and high self-control conditions described an incident in which their colleague exhibited low or high self-control, following the same instructions as in Study 2a. Participants in the baseline condition described a typical day for their colleagues.

Next, participants responded to the same power perception measure ($\alpha = .89$) as in Studies 1 and 2a and the same power conferral measure ($\alpha = .89$) as in Study 2a. Different from Study 2a, we measured perceived assertiveness ($\alpha = .68$), competence ($\alpha = .88$), morality ($\alpha = .89$), and warmth ($\alpha = .91$) as potential mediators but did not measure authenticity. In addition, we asked the manipulation check questions ($r = .64$, $p < .001$) after these other measures.

Results

We conducted one-way ANOVAs on all the following variables. When the main effect reached statistical significance ($p < .05$), we conducted pairwise comparisons using Tukey's honestly significant difference test. In this and all other studies, we describe statistical tests with $.05 < p < .10$ as marginally significant. However, following our preregistered plan, we did not conduct pairwise comparisons when the main effect was marginally significant in this study.

Manipulation Check

The effect of our self-control manipulation was significant, $F(2, 445) = 14.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Participants in the high self-control ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 0.95$) and baseline conditions ($M = 5.82$, $SD = 1.15$) perceived their colleagues as having more self-control than those in the low self-control condition ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.34$; high–low: 95% CI [0.41, 1.04], $p < .001$; baseline–low: 95% CI [0.16, 0.79], $p = .001$). The high self-control condition did not significantly differ from the baseline condition (high–baseline: 95% CI [−0.06, 0.57], $p = .145$). Thus, we had evidence for the effectiveness of our low self-control manipulation, but not our high self-control manipulation.

In a set of analyses that were not preregistered, two independent coders read the descriptions provided by participants and rated them in terms of the self-control level displayed by the target colleagues on a 5-point scale (1 = *very low*, 5 = *very high*; $r = .86$). The effect of our self-control manipulation was again significant, $F(2, 445) = 287.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .56$. Colleagues in the high self-control ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 0.68$) and baseline conditions ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.37$) were rated as having higher self-control than those in the low self-control condition ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 0.85$; high–low: 95% CI [1.66, 2.03], $p < .001$; baseline–low: 95% CI [0.68, 1.04], $p < .001$). Colleagues in the high self-control condition were also rated as having higher self-control than those in the baseline condition (high–baseline: 95% CI [0.81, 1.17], $p < .001$). These results suggest that, compared with the baseline condition, participants in the high self-control condition did recall an incident where their colleagues displayed greater self-control. However, this difference in recalled incidents did not translate into a difference in the perceived self-control of the target colleague.

Power Perception and Conferral

Target self-control had a significant effect on power perception, $F(2, 445) = 6.93$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .03$. Replicating Study 2a, participants perceived their colleague as more powerful when they recalled their colleague exhibiting high ($M = 5.48$, $SD = 1.29$) rather than low self-control ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.49$; high–low: 95%

[2] The data were collected in July 2021, during which the Prolific platform attracted around 30,000 new participants highly skewed toward women in their 20s (https://www.prolific.co/blog/we-recently-went-viral-on-tiktok-heres-what-we-learned). Thus, our sample in Study 2b was younger and had a greater proportion of women than other samples we collected from Prolific. Although our sample was unexpectedly skewed in terms of gender, we did not find any moderation by gender in other studies. Therefore, our Study 2b findings are unlikely to be specific to women.

Table 3
The 95% Confidence Intervals for All Indirect Effects of Self-Control on Power Conferral

Mediator	Study 2a	Study 2b	Study 3	Study 4	Study 5	Study S5	Study 6	Meta-analysis
Assertiveness → perceived power	[0.07, 0.29]	[0.15, 0.31]	[0.02, 0.10]	[0.07, 0.23]	[0.10, 0.22]	[0.001, 0.02]	[0.02, 0.17]	[0.03, 0.07]
Competence → perceived power	[0.08, 0.42]	[0.10, 0.37]	[0.03, 0.13]	[0.03, 0.12]	[0.05, 0.16]	[0.003, 0.03]	[−0.003, 0.07]	[0.01, 0.04]
Morality → perceived power	[−0.09, 0.26]	[−0.13, 0.10]	[−0.002, 0.08]	[−0.01, 0.06]	[−0.01, 0.06]	[−0.003, 0.02]	[−0.000, 0.11]	[−0.01, 0.03]
Warmth → perceived power	[−0.07, 0.10]	[−0.07, 0.06]	[−0.004, 0.04]	[−0.004, 0.004]	[−0.002, 0.02]	[−0.000, 0.02]	[−0.02, 0.06]	[−0.003, 0.01]
Authenticity → perceived power	[−0.06, 0.11]		[−0.04, 0.03]	[−0.05, 0.02]		[−0.01, 0.01]	[−0.05, 0.01]	[−0.01, 0.01]
Perceived power	[−0.01, 0.30]	[−0.002, 0.24]	[−0.02, 0.09]	[−0.10, 0.02]	[−0.09, 0.03]	[−0.02, 0.04]	[−0.08, 0.16]	[−0.02, 0.03]
Assertiveness	[−0.34, −0.08]	[−0.27, −0.03]	[−0.12, 0.06]	[−0.08, 0.33]	[0.04, 0.21]	[0.003, 0.05]	[−0.01, 0.08]	[−0.04, 0.04]
Competence	[0.03, 0.40]	[0.35, 0.82]	[−0.05, 0.11]	[0.03, 0.26]	[−0.07, 0.08]	[0.01, 0.08]	[−0.01, 0.08]	[0.0005, 0.09]
Morality	[0.04, 0.59]	[0.08, 0.48]	[0.12, 0.40]	[−0.03, 0.19]	[0.08, 0.24]	[0.01, 0.10]	[−0.06, 0.05]	[−0.02, 0.11]
Warmth	[−0.04, 0.23]	[−0.17, 0.08]	[−0.06, 0.02]	[−0.02, 0.02]	[−0.03, 0.004]	[−0.04, 0.01]	[−0.02, 0.04]	[−0.02, 0.02]
Authenticity	[−0.11, 0.16]		[0.09, 0.30]	[0.01, 0.24]		[−0.02, 0.02]	[−0.06, 0.02]	[−0.05, 0.07]

Note. The symbol (→) indicates serial mediation.

CI [0.22, 0.97], $p < .001$). The baseline condition ($M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.34$) did not significantly differ from the low self-control (low–baseline: 95% CI [−0.65, 0.09], $p = .183$) or high self-control conditions (high–baseline: 95% CI [−0.06, 0.69], $p = .118$).

The effect of self-control on power conferral was also significant, $F(2, 445) = 8.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Replicating Study 2a, participants were more willing to give power to a colleague when they recalled an incident in which this colleague exhibited high self-control ($M = 6.56$, $SD = 2.00$) rather than low self-control ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 2.90$; high–low: 95% CI [0.52, 1.89], $p < .001$). Participants in the low self-control condition gave marginally less power to their colleagues than those in the baseline condition ($M = 5.98$, $SD = 2.56$; low–baseline: 95% CI [−1.32, 0.05], $p = .076$). The baseline condition did not significantly differ from the high self-control condition (high–baseline: 95% CI [−0.11, 1.26], $p = .117$).

Mediators

Replicating Study 2a, the self-control condition had significant effects on assertiveness, $F(2, 445) = 10.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$; competence, $F(2, 445) = 5.39$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .02$; and morality, $F(2, 445) = 4.20$, $p = .016$, $\eta^2 = .02$. However, unlike Study 2a, self-control only had a marginal effect on warmth, $F(2, 445) = 2.79$, $p = .063$, $\eta^2 = .01$. Compared with the low self-control condition, colleagues in the high self-control condition were rated as more assertive (95% CI [0.26, 0.84], $p < .001$), competent (95% CI [0.11, 0.65], $p = .003$), and moral (95% CI [0.06, 0.66], $p = .012$). The baseline condition did not significantly differ from the other two conditions on all these measures, all ps $> .05$ in Tukey's honestly significant difference tests. See Table 4 for means and standard deviations by experimental condition.

Fluency of Recall

The self-control condition also had a significant effect on the fluency of recall, $F(2, 445) = 11.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Participants found it easier to recall their colleagues' high self-control incidents ($M = 5.01$, $SD = 1.74$; high–low: 95% CI [0.27, 1.24], $p < .001$) and typical days ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 1.78$; baseline–low: 95% CI [0.47, 1.44], $p < .001$) than low self-control incidents ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.81$). The high self-control and baseline conditions did not differ significantly (high–baseline: 95% CI [−0.68, 0.29], $p = .602$). However, the previous findings still held when we added ease of recall as a covariate. See Supplemental Tables S8 and S9 for results controlling for ease of recall.

Mediation Analyses

As preregistered, we focused on examining the mechanisms that explained the difference between low self-control and high self-control conditions.[3] We conducted the same mediation analysis as in

[3] Unlike the rest of the studies, for Study 2b, we coded the baseline condition, rather than the low self-control condition, as 0. We did explore what mediated the differences in power perception and conferral between low self-control and baseline conditions and what mediated those between high self-control and baseline conditions. As preregistered, these analyses were purely exploratory, and we did not have a priori hypotheses about the mediating effects. Since the baseline condition did not significantly differ from the low or high self-control condition in terms of power perception, power conferral, and all other potential mediators, we do not report the exploratory results here.

Table 4
Study 2b Means and Standard Deviations of Mediators by Self-Control Condition

Condition	Assertiveness	Competence	Morality	Warmth
Low self-control	5.07 (1.11)	5.71 (1.18)	5.63 (1.24)	5.23 (1.52)
Baseline	5.34 (1.09)	5.94 (0.93)	5.87 (1.09)	5.47 (1.26)
High self-control	5.62 (0.94)	6.09 (0.87)	5.99 (0.94)	5.59 (1.14)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Study 2a except we did not include authenticity, as it was not measured, and we dummy-coded self-control (−1 = *low self-control*, 1 = *high self-control*) differently. The syntax is provided in the Supplemental Materials. See Table 2 for the 95% confidence intervals for all indirect effects of self-control on perceived power, Table 3 for all indirect effects of self-control on power conferral, and Supplemental Figure S3 for a detailed illustration of the results. We discuss only the bold paths and additional significant indirect effects below.

The mediation results replicated those of Study 2a. We found some significant indirect effects that were consistent with the bold paths in Figure 1. Self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through assertiveness and then perceived power and a positive indirect effect on power conferral through competence and then perceived power. In addition to these serial mediations, self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through morality.

We also found significant indirect effects other than the bold paths. Self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through competence and a negative indirect effect on power conferral through assertiveness.

Discussion

We replicated the findings in Study 2a and found that participants perceived a colleague to be more powerful and gave them more power after recalling an incident when the colleague exhibited high (vs. low) self-control. We did not find any significant difference between the baseline condition and either the high or low self-control condition. Nevertheless, for all our measures, the baseline condition lay between high and low self-control conditions, suggesting that both high self-control and low self-control incidents matter.

However, our manipulations of low and high self-control were not equally successful. Our manipulation check results indicate that participants in the high self-control condition perceived their colleagues as having similar self-control as participants in the baseline condition. In contrast, participants in the low self-control condition, as predicted, perceived their colleagues as having less self-control than participants in the baseline condition. We see several possible explanations for this asymmetry. First, participants may have been more likely to think of colleagues they viewed positively, who would most likely be colleagues with a relatively high baseline level of self-control. Second, people may assume that others have high self-control by default. In this case, recalling a time that someone lacked self-control would provide novel information about the person and thus change impressions relative to baseline, whereas thinking about a time the person exhibited high self-control would not. In line with these possibilities, our participants indicated it was hardest to recall an incident in which the colleague exhibited low self-control. Regardless of why we found it, this asymmetry in the success of our manipulation limited our ability to test whether a high level of self-control increases power perception and conferral relative to baseline.

Our mediation results replicated the effects found in Study 2a and partially supported the bold paths in Figure 1. Targets with more self-control were seen as both more assertive and more competent, which led participants to perceive these targets as more powerful and then to be more willing to give them power. Targets with more self-control were seen as more moral, which directly led participants to be more willing to give them power. Other significant indirect effects were more surprising. Higher perceived competence directly led participants to be more willing to give the target power, and higher perceived assertiveness directly led participants to be *less* willing to give the target power.

However, the previous studies did not cleanly manipulate self-control so it could be distinguished from inhibition. In Studies 2a and 2b, participants were free to recall any form of low or high self-control exhibited by their colleagues. Even in Study 1, where we manipulated a target person's self-control directly, it was unclear whether the low self-control target person was more or less disinhibited. Thus, the effects in these studies may have been driven by an association between disinhibition and power, instead of an association between self-control and power. Studies 3 and 4 aimed to address this potential confound.

Study 3

To distinguish the effects of low self-control and disinhibition, in Study 3, we orthogonally manipulated self-control (low vs. high) and decision speed (slow vs. quick). Inhibition is often assumed to involve less rapid action and more deliberate thinking (Corr, 2010; Keltner et al., 2003). When a decision is made quickly, observers are more likely to perceive the target as disinhibited, as the target seems to be acting without considering constraints. Therefore, if disinhibition during self-control conflict can lead to more power, then individuals who make decisions quickly should be perceived as especially powerful and be given more power. However, if low self-control signals a lack of agency even when it involves disinhibition, then high self-control individuals should continue to be perceived as more powerful and be given more power, regardless of whether they decided quickly or slowly.

To further isolate the effect of self-control, we kept the amount of action constant between the low and high self-control conditions. Taking action can be perceived as signaling disinhibition and high power (Magee, 2009). In the present study, the target person actively chose between two options in both conditions; the chosen option was what indicated whether the target had either low or high self-control.

Method

Participants and Design

We aimed to recruit 400 U.S. participants from Prolific and ended up collecting data from 402 participants (M_{age} = 33.92, SD_{age} = 12.78, five did not report their age; 202 men, 198 women, two did not report their gender). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four groups following a 2 (self-control: low vs. high) × 2 (decision speed: slow vs. quick) between-groups design. A sensitivity power

analysis (Faul et al., 2007) suggested that our sample size provided sufficient power (.80) to detect small- to medium-sized effects in a 2 × 2 ANOVA, $f = .14$ (two-tailed).

Procedure and Measures

Participants completed the study online using Qualtrics. First, they read a scenario in which they imagined attending a dance party as part of their company's end-of-year celebration. In the scenario, before the party, they overheard Zack, a colleague, sharing the diet and exercise routine he followed to keep fit. Halfway through the party, the Vice President spoke about the achievements of various top employees, including Zack. As a reward, each top employee could pick a $50 gift card for one of two restaurants. Zack chose the gift card for either the delicious but unhealthy restaurant (low self-control condition) or the healthy but not tasty restaurant (high self-control condition). In addition, we manipulated whether Zack seemed to think for a while before making the decision (slow decision condition) or did not seem to think about it (quick decision condition).

After reading, participants answered, in a randomized order, the power perception items (α = .87) from Studies 1, 2a, and 2b and the power conferral items from Studies 2a and 2b (α = .88). They then answered, in random order, questions about Zack's assertiveness (α = .66), competence (α = .91), morality (α = .94), warmth (α = .92), and authenticity (α = .94), using the same items from Studies 2a and 2b.

Finally, they answered two sets of manipulation checks, presented in a randomized order. To check the self-control manipulation, they indicated to what degree they agreed or disagreed (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) with two sentences ("I think Zack has good self-control," "I think Zack has good self-discipline"; $r = .94$, $p < .001$). To check the decision speed manipulation, they answered two questions ("How much thought did he put into deciding which gift card to choose?" [reverse-coded] 1 = *none at all*, 7 = *a lot*; "How quickly did he decide which gift card to choose?" 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very*; $r = .60$, $p < .001$).

Results

We ran a 2 (self-control) × 2 (decision speed) ANOVA on each dependent variable. We report all significant effects in detail below, and all the ANOVA results are reported in Supplemental Table S10.

Manipulation Check

Participants perceived Zack as having higher self-control when he chose the gift card for the healthy restaurant ($M = 5.97$, $SD = 0.94$) versus the tasty restaurant ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.40$), $F(1, 398) = 148.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .27$, indicating our self-control manipulation was successful. The main effect of decision speed, $F(1, 398) = 2.04$, $p = .154$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$, and the interaction effect, $F(1, 398) = 0.43$, $p = .515$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$, were not significant.

Participants also perceived Zack as deciding more quickly in the quick decision condition ($M = 5.73$, $SD = 1.23$) than in the slow decision condition ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.16$), $F(1, 398) = 170.14$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$, indicating our decision speed manipulation was successful. The main effect of the self-control manipulation, $F(1, 398) = 0.70$, $p = .402$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$, and the interaction effect, $F(1, 398) = 1.45$, $p = .229$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$, were not significant.

Power Perception and Power Conferral

Participants perceived Zack as more powerful when he chose the gift card for the healthy option ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.05$) over the tasty option ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.05$), $F(1, 398) = 22.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Participants were also more willing to give power to Zack when he chose the gift card for the healthy option ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.99$) rather than the tasty option ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.05$), $F(1, 398) = 12.57$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. The main effect of decision speed and the interactions were not significant, Fs < 1.25, ps > .265, η_p^2s < .01. See Table 5 for means and standard deviations for each condition.

Mediators

Compared with the low self-control condition, Zack was rated higher in the high self-control condition on assertiveness, $F(1, 398) = 60.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$; competence, $F(1, 398) = 24.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$; morality, $F(1, 398) = 26.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$; warmth, $F(1, 398) = 8.52$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$; and authenticity, $F(1, 398) = 41.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$. Furthermore, when Zack made the decision slowly (vs. quickly), he was perceived as warmer, $F(1, 398) = 5.04$, $p = .025$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, and marginally more authentic, $F(1, 398) = 3.21$, $p = .074$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. The remaining main effects of decision speed and all the interactions were not significant, Fs < 2.13, ps > .145, η_p^2s < .01. See Table 5 for means and standard deviations for each condition, and Supplemental Table S10 for detailed ANOVA results.

Mediation Analyses

Since our decision speed manipulation did not impact power conferral or power perception, we collapsed across the slow and quick decision conditions and then ran the same model as Study 2a. See Table 2 for the 95% confidence intervals for all indirect effects of self-control on perceived power, Table 3 for all indirect effects of self-control on power conferral, and Supplemental Figure S4 for a detailed illustration of the results. We discuss only the bold paths and additional significant indirect effects below.

Table 5
Study 3 Means and Standard Deviations by Experimental Condition

Self-control	Decision speed	Perceived power	Power conferral	Assertiveness	Competence	Morality	Warmth	Authenticity
Low	Slow	4.44 (1.01)	4.12 (1.06)	4.46 (0.95)	4.65 (1.04)	4.23 (1.22)	4.62 (1.04)	4.25 (1.48)
	Quick	4.28 (1.08)	4.08 (1.05)	4.40 (0.91)	4.43 (1.11)	4.07 (1.11)	4.29 (1.07)	3.93 (1.41)
High	Slow	5.03 (1.00)	4.73 (1.00)	5.34 (0.92)	5.11 (1.01)	4.87 (1.13)	4.77 (1.15)	5.04 (1.08)
	Quick	4.97 (1.09)	4.59 (0.98)	5.39 (0.84)	5.15 (0.98)	4.89 (1.08)	4.72 (0.99)	5.08 (1.08)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

We found some significant indirect effects that were consistent with the bold paths in Figure 1. Self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through assertiveness and then perceived power and a positive indirect effect on power conferral through competence and then perceived power. In addition to these serial mediations, self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through morality.

We also found a significant indirect effect other than the bold paths. Self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through authenticity.

Discussion

When we manipulated apparent self-control and disinhibition orthogonally, we found that only a person's apparent level of self-control influenced how powerful they were thought to be and how much power they were granted. Indeed, how quickly a person made a decision did not affect to what extent they were perceived as powerful or given power. These findings also further clarify the relationship between disinhibition and power. Although disinhibition may lead to power when it involves exerting agency despite external constraints (Chou, 2018; Van Kleef et al., 2011), we found that disinhibition no longer led to power when the constraints were self-imposed and central to the self.

Our mediation analyses partially supported what we considered more likely based on previous research (i.e., the bold paths in Figure 1). Replicating Studies 2a and 2b, targets with more self-control were seen as both more assertive and more competent, which led participants to perceive these targets as more powerful and then to be more willing to give them power. Targets with more self-control were seen as more moral, which directly led participants to be more willing to give them power. In addition to the bold paths, targets with self-control were seen as more authentic, which led participants to be more willing to give the targets power.

Study 4

Study 4 was designed as a further test of whether the effect of self-control on power is related to (dis)inhibition. In this scenario study, we again manipulated self-control and decision speed orthogonally. However, instead of keeping the amount of action constant as in Study 3, we designed Study 4 so that the low self-control target was the most disinhibited. That is, the target made an action (getting desserts) in the low self-control condition and refrained from action (not getting desserts) in the high self-control condition. Thus, the study provided a stronger comparison between the effect of self-control versus disinhibition on power. If our previous effects were driven by disinhibition, and not self-control, then in Study 4, the low self-control target should be seen as more powerful, contrary to our hypotheses.

Method

Participants and Design

We aimed to recruit 400 U.S. participants from Prolific and ended up collecting data from 401 participants ($M_{age} = 31.80$, $SD_{age} = 11.75$, four did not report their age; 145 men, 245 women, 10 identified as nonbinary, one did not report their gender). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four groups following a 2 (self-control: low vs. high) × 2 (decision speed: slow vs. quick) between-groups design. A sensitivity power analysis (Faul et al., 2007) suggested that our sample size provided sufficient power (.80) to detect small- to medium-sized effects in a 2 × 2 ANOVA, $f = .14$ (two-tailed).

Procedure and Measures

The procedure and measures were the same as in Study 3, except for some slight changes in the scenarios. We changed the type of company the target person worked at (manufacturing) and the type of end-of-the-year event (watching a football game). We changed the target person from Zack to Sarah to test if the effect of self-control on power holds for both men and women targets. Like Zack in Study 3, Sarah talked about the diet and exercise routine she followed to keep fit. For the self-control manipulation, instead of choosing between restaurant gift cards, Sarah either chose to get dessert (low self-control condition) or chose not to (high self-control condition). For the decision speed manipulation, Sarah decided either after seeming to think about it a little bit (slow decision condition) or without seeming to think about it (quick decision condition). Similar to Study 3, we measured perceived self-control ($r = .97$, $p < .001$) and perceived decision speed ($r = .38$, $p < .001$) as manipulation checks. We measured power perception ($\alpha = .91$), power conferral ($\alpha = .86$), assertiveness ($\alpha = .80$), competence ($\alpha = .92$), morality ($\alpha = .92$), warmth ($\alpha = .91$), and authenticity ($\alpha = .93$), using the same items as in Studies 2a–3.

Results

We ran a 2 (self-control) × 2 (decision speed) ANOVA on each dependent variable.

Manipulation Check

Participants perceived Sarah as having more self-control when she did not get the dessert ($M = 6.23$, $SD = 0.83$) than when she did ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.46$), $F(1, 397) = 217.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .35$, indicating our manipulation of self-control was successful. The main effects of decision speed and the interaction were not significant, Fs < 2.42, ps $> .120$, η_p^2s $< .01$.

Participants perceived Sarah as deciding more quickly in the quick decision condition ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 1.28$) than in the slow decision condition ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.94$), $F(1, 397) = 97.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$, indicating our manipulation of decision speed was successful. The main effect of self-control and the interaction were not significant, Fs < 0.84, ps $> .361$, η_p^2s $< .01$.

Power Perception and Power Conferral

Participants perceived Sarah as more powerful when she chose not to get the dessert ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.05$) than when she did ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.30$), $F(1, 397) = 12.67$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Participants were also more willing to give power to Sarah when she did not get the dessert ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 0.87$) than when she did ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 1.08$), $F(1, 397) = 10.12$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. The main effects of decision speed and the interactions were not significant, Fs < 1.88, ps $> .172$, η_p^2s $< .01$. See Table 6 for means and standard deviations

Table 6
Study 4 Means and Standard Deviations by Experimental Condition

Self-control	Decision speed	Perceived power	Power conferral	Assertiveness	Competence	Morality	Warmth	Authenticity
Low	Slow	4.41 (1.27)	4.48 (1.14)	4.20 (1.18)	4.59 (1.23)	4.44 (1.15)	4.69 (1.00)	4.33 (1.36)
	Quick	4.12 (1.30)	4.13 (1.00)	4.00 (1.16)	4.29 (1.13)	4.03 (1.11)	4.43 (0.98)	3.84 (1.38)
High	Slow	5.02 (1.01)	4.93 (0.87)	5.56 (0.84)	5.17 (0.86)	4.99 (0.92)	4.70 (0.93)	5.25 (1.00)
	Quick	5.04 (1.10)	4.78 (0.87)	5.57 (0.71)	5.05 (0.94)	4.72 (0.98)	4.40 (0.98)	5.00 (1.10)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

in each experimental condition, and see Supplemental Table S11 for detailed ANOVA results.

Mediators

Compared with the low self-control condition, Sarah was rated higher in the high self-control condition on assertiveness, $F(1, 397) = 89.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$; competence, $F(1, 397) = 14.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$; morality, $F(1, 397) = 13.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$; and authenticity, $F(1, 397) = 27.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, but not on warmth, $F(1, 397) = 0.004$, $p = .952$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$. Furthermore, when Sarah made the decision slowly (vs. quickly), she was perceived as warmer, $F(1, 397) = 4.81$, $p = .029$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, and marginally more moral, $F(1, 397) = 3.43$, $p = .065$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. The remaining main effects of decision speed and all the interactions were not significant, Fs < 2.30, ps $> .130$, η_p^2s $< .01$. See Table 6 for means and standard deviations in each experimental condition, and see Supplemental Table S11 for detailed ANOVA results.

Mediation Analyses

We ran the same model as in Studies 2a and 3. See Table 2 for the 95% confidence intervals for all indirect effects of self-control on perceived power, Table 3 for all indirect effects of self-control on power conferral, and Supplemental Figure S5 for a detailed illustration of the results. We discuss only the bold paths and additional significant indirect effects below.

We found some significant indirect effects that were consistent with the bold paths in Figure 1. Replicating Studies 2a–3, self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through assertiveness and then perceived power and a positive indirect effect on power conferral through competence and then perceived power. However, inconsistent with the bold paths and previous studies, the indirect effect of self-control on power conferral through morality was not significant.

We also found significant indirect effects other than the bold paths. Self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through competence and a positive indirect effect on power conferral through authenticity.

Discussion

In Study 4, self-control led to power even when exerting self-control involved taking less action or deciding slowly. These results provide stronger evidence that when a person faces constraints that are self-imposed and core to the self (such as important goals), sticking to these constraints rather than going against them in a disinhibited way shows more agency and garners more power. Our mediation analyses partially supported what we considered more likely mediation paths (i.e., the bold paths in Figure 1). Replicating Studies 2a–3, targets with more self-control were seen as both more assertive and more competent, which led participants to perceive these targets as more powerful and then to be more willing to give them power. But we again found patterns inconsistent with the bold paths. Replicating Study 3, perceived authenticity directly led participants to be more willing to give the targets power. Unlike in Studies 2a–3, targets with more self-control were seen as more moral but that did not lead participants to be more willing to give them power.

Across these first five studies, a person who seemed to exhibit high self-control was perceived as more powerful and was given more power. However, it is possible that high self-control led to more power because the behavior of high self-control individuals in these studies was more socially desirable and thus would have been evaluated more positively regardless of their goals. Indeed, in all the studies (1, 3, 4) where we manipulated the target's self-control behavior directly (instead of having participants recall past behaviors), the high self-control behaviors (e.g., foregoing dessert, choosing to eat at a healthy restaurant) would arguably be evaluated as the more positive behaviors, even without knowing the target's goals. Of course, exerting self-control does not have to imply taking action that is less hedonistic or more socially desirable (e.g., Vosgerau et al., 2020). To properly assess the effect of self-control on power perception and conferral, we had to disentangle self-control from the inherent social desirability of a behavior (i.e., how the behavior is evaluated independent of an actor's goals). Studies 5 and 6 used two different research designs to address this issue.

Study 5

A core element of self-control is whether a person's actions are in line with their important goals (Fujita, 2011; Inzlicht et al., 2014). For example, though running 3 days a week may be considered a positive behavior for anyone to engage in, it only reflects high self-control if it is consistent with a person's important goals (e.g., training for a marathon, improving heart health). In Study 5, we examined whether action–goal consistency predicted power perception and conferral beyond the main effects of actions and goals by themselves. That is, is power predicted not just by what a person does but also by whether what they do fits with their goals? Here we manipulated goals and actions orthogonally so that the target person had a goal (lose weight vs. save money) and chose a restaurant (a healthy but expensive restaurant vs. a cheap but unhealthy restaurant). As can be seen, each action aligned with one goal but not the other. We predicted that the interaction between actions and goals would matter for power perception and conferral:

The choice the target person made should lead to greater power perception and conferral if that choice was in line with their stated goals (e.g., choosing a healthy but expensive restaurant when trying to lose weight) versus not (e.g., choosing a healthy but expensive restaurant when trying to save money).

In Study 5, we also used a new measure of power conferral. In Studies 2a–4, our power conferral items focused on promotion into leadership positions, which can lead to increases in both power and status. To focus on power rather than status conferral, we revised a validated measure (Yu et al., 2019) that distinguishes power from status and aligns more strictly with our definition of power as asymmetric control over valued resources (Galinsky et al., 2015).

Method

Participants and Design

As preregistered, we aimed to recruit 800 U.S. participants from Prolific. We ended up with 802 participants ($M_{age} = 40.14$, $SD_{age} = 14.28$; 398 men, 391 women, 12 identified as nonbinary, one did not report their gender). Participants were randomly assigned to one of four groups following a 2 (goal: lose weight vs. save money) × 2 (action: chose the Aloha Social vs. chose George's Pizza) between-groups design. A sensitivity power analysis (Faul et al., 2007) suggested that our sample size provided sufficient power (.80) to detect small-sized effects in a 2 × 2 ANOVA, $f = .10$ (two-tailed).

Procedure and Measures

Participants took part in the study online using Qualtrics. First, they read one of four versions of a scenario about Simon, whom they were supposed to imagine was a new colleague who had just joined their company a few days ago. They were told that during the new employee orientation, they overheard him discussing his recent goal to either *lose weight* or *save money* (goal manipulation) for an upcoming vacation. They then read that they chatted with Simon about his evening plan during a coffee break and that Simon was torn between two dinner options: the Aloha Social, a high-end restaurant known for its healthy dishes, and George's Pizza, a budget-friendly fast-food spot known for its high-calorie offerings. They imagined running into Simon again, and Simon either decided to go to *the Aloha Social* or *George's Pizza* (action manipulation).

To reduce demand effects, we measured the target's perceived self-control ("Simon has good self-control"), perceived goal to lose weight ("Simon has a goal to lose weight"), and perceived goal to save money ("Simon has a goal to save money") in a pretest using a separate sample. We measured power perception (α = .91), assertiveness (α = .80), competence (α = .93), morality (α = .92), and warmth (α = .92) using the same items as in Studies 2a–4. We used a new measure for power conferral (see Appendix C; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*; α = .94), revised from a measure that distinguishes power from status (Yu et al., 2019).

Results

We ran a 2 (goal) × 2 (action) ANOVA on each dependent variable. We used independent-sample *t* tests to examine simple effects. When Levene's test suggested heterogeneity of variance ($p < .10$), we instead conducted Welch's *t* tests.

Pretest: Manipulation Check

A separate sample of 300 U.S. participants from Prolific ($M_{age} = 39.23$, $SD_{age} = 11.25$; 144 women, 150 men, six identified as nonbinary) participated in the pretest. They were randomly assigned to read one of the four versions of the scenario. They then rated whether they believed (a) Simon had good self-control, (b) Simon had a goal to lose weight, and (c) Simon had a goal to save money (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

For perceived self-control, an ANOVA revealed a main effect of action, $F(1, 296) = 97.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .25$, and a main effect of goal, $F(1, 296) = 66.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$. More importantly, there was also a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 296) = 132.65$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .31$. When Simon chose the Aloha Social, he was perceived as having greater self-control when this decision was consistent with his goal (to lose weight: $M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.23$) than when it was inconsistent with his goal (to save money: $M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.22$), $t(149) = 8.06$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.31$. Likewise, when Simon chose George's Pizza, he was perceived as having greater self-control when it was consistent with his goal (to save money: $M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.29$) than when it was inconsistent with his goal (to lose weight: $M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.13$), $t(147) = 8.23$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.35$. This interaction pattern is in line with action–goal consistency being core to self-control (Fujita, 2011; Inzlicht et al., 2014).

For the perceived goal to lose weight, as expected, the main effect of goal was significant, $F(1, 296) = 145.83$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .33$. Participants were more likely to think Simon had the goal to lose weight when they were explicitly told he had this goal ($M = 5.72$, $SD = 1.41$) than when they were told he had a goal to save money ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.55$). Unexpectedly, the main effect of the action was also significant, $F(1, 296) = 5.22$, $p = .023$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, such that participants tended to think Simon had the goal to lose weight if he chose the Aloha Social ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 1.90$) rather than George's Pizza ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 2.06$). The interaction was not significant, $F(1, 296) = 0.85$, $p = .359$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$.

For the perceived goal to save money, as expected, the main effect of goal was significant, $F(1, 296) = 41.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. Participants were more likely to think Simon had the goal to save money when they were explicitly told he had this goal ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.65$) than when they were told he had a goal to lose weight ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.60$). Unexpectedly, the main effect of the action was also significant, $F(1, 296) = 22.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, such that participants tended to think Simon had the goal to save money if he chose George's Pizza ($M = 4.99$, $SD = 1.74$) rather than the Aloha Social ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.86$). The interaction was not significant, $F(1, 296) = 1.35$, $p = .246$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$.

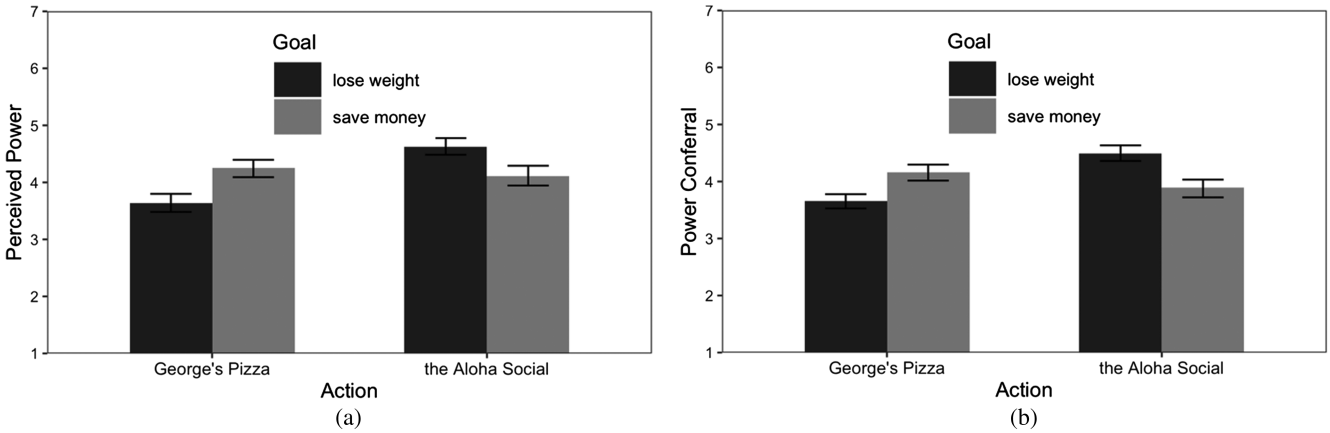
Overall, the results suggested that our manipulation was successful since goal–action consistency significantly affected perceived self-control, but not perceived goals.

Power Perception and Power Conferral

For power perception, as predicted, the interaction was significant, $F(1, 798) = 48.39$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$ (see Figure 2a). Action–goal consistency increased perceived power. When Simon chose George's Pizza, participants perceived him as more powerful when he had a goal to save money ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 1.15$) than when he had a goal to lose weight ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(402) = 5.46$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.54$. When Simon chose the Aloha Social, participants perceived him

Figure 2

Perceived Power (a) and Power Conferral (b) by Goal and Action in Study 5



Note. The error bars indicate bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals.

as more powerful when he had a goal to lose weight ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.09$) than when he had a goal to save money ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.23$), $t(396) = 4.40$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.44$. The main effect of action, $F(1, 798) = 74.96$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, and the main effect of goal, $F(1, 798) = 28.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, were also significant: Simon was seen as more powerful when he chose the Aloha Social and when he had a goal to save money, respectively.

For power conferral, the Action × Goal interaction was also significant, $F(1, 798) = 55.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$ (see Figure 2b). When Simon chose George's Pizza, participants gave more power to him when he had a goal to save money ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.06$) than when he had a goal to lose weight ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 0.96$), $t(402) = 5.02$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.50$. When Simon chose the Aloha Social, participants gave more power to him when he had a goal to lose weight ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 1.02$) than when he had a goal to save money ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.16$), $t(396) = 5.52$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.55$. The main effect of action, $F(1, 798) = 63.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, and the main effect of goal, $F(1, 798) = 23.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, were also significant: Participants gave more power to Simon when he chose the Aloha Social and when he had a goal to lose weight.

Mediators

Interactions were significant for assertiveness, $F(1, 798) = 215.67$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .21$; competence, $F(1, 798) = 75.81$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$; and morality, $F(1, 798) = 40.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, but not warmth, $F(1, 798) = 1.81$, $p = .179$, $\eta_p^2 < .01$ (see Supplemental Table S12 for detailed ANOVA results). Specifically, when Simon chose George's Pizza, he was perceived as more assertive, $t(402) = 12.83$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.28$, competent, $t(402) = 7.45$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.74$, and moral, $t(400.66) = 5.39$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.54$, when it was his goal to save money rather than lose weight. When Simon chose the Aloha Social, by comparison, he was perceived as more assertive, $t(396) = 7.95$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.80$; competent, $t(388.01) = 5.01$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.50$; and moral, $t(396) = 3.77$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.38$, when it was his goal to lose weight rather than save money. See Table 7 for means and standard deviations in each experimental condition.

Mediated Moderation Analyses

We conducted mediated moderation analyses with the *lavaan* syntax provided in Supplemental Materials. The model was similar to that in Study 2b, except we treated action, instead of self-control, as the independent variable (0 = chose the Aloha Social, 1 = chose George's Pizza) and added goal (0 = lose weight, 1 = save money) as a moderator. See Table 8 for the 95% confidence intervals for all indirect effects of the Action × Goal interaction on perceived power, Table 9 for all indirect effects of the Action × Goal interaction on power conferral, and Supplemental Figure S6 for a detailed illustration of the results. We discuss only the bold paths and additional significant indirect effects below.

Table 7

Study 5 Means and Standard Deviations of Mediators by Action and Goal

Action	Goal	Assertiveness	Competence	Morality	Warmth
George's Pizza	Lose weight	3.57 (1.00)	4.30 (0.92)	4.38 (0.84)	4.64 (0.85)
	Save money	4.81 (0.94)	4.99 (0.95)	4.85 (0.89)	4.70 (0.85)
The Aloha Social	Lose weight	5.15 (0.93)	5.05 (0.96)	4.85 (0.97)	4.69 (0.95)
	Save money	4.37 (1.01)	4.52 (1.11)	4.47 (1.07)	4.58 (1.03)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Table 8
The 95% Confidence Intervals for All Indirect Effects of Action × Goal Interaction on Perceived Power in Study 5

Mediator	95% confidence interval
Assertiveness	[0.36, 0.83]
Competence	[0.26, 0.69]
Morality	[−0.02, 0.27]
Warmth	[−0.01, 0.07]

We found some significant indirect effects that were consistent with the bold paths in Figure 1. Replicating Studies 2a–4, the Action × Goal interaction had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through assertiveness and then perceived power and a positive indirect effect on power conferral through competence and then perceived power. Replicating Studies 2a–3, the Action × Goal interaction also had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through morality.

We also found significant indirect effects other than the bold paths. Unlike all previous studies, the Action × Goal interaction had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through assertiveness.

To better compare the results to previous studies and to facilitate our later meta-analysis, we additionally conducted the same mediation analyses as in Study 2b and as depicted in Figure 1 (except without authenticity) by recoding the separate goal and action variables into one self-control variable, which became the independent variable. Self-control was coded as 1 when the goal and the action were aligned (e.g., the goal was to save money and the action was to chose George's Pizza) and as 0 when they were not (e.g., the goal was to save money but the action was to chose the Aloha Social). The pattern of results was consistent with the mediated moderation model. See Table 2 for the 95% confidence intervals for all indirect effects of self-control on perceived power, Table 3 for all indirect effects of self-control on power conferral, and Supplemental Figure S7 for a detailed illustration of the results.

Discussion

Study 5 provided evidence that self-control, operationalized as aligning one's actions with one's goals, gives rise to power, above and beyond the effects of the specific actions and goals. That is, when a target person performed a particular action, the target was perceived as more powerful and given more power when that action was consistent with the target's stated goals. Overall, our findings supported two key bases of the current research. First, greater goal-action consistency led to greater perceived self-control (as shown in our pretest data). Second, power perception and conferral were not just influenced by an action itself but also by action-goal consistency.

Our mediated moderation analyses partially supported the bold paths in Figure 1. Replicating Studies 2a–4, targets whose action and goal were aligned (vs. not aligned) were seen as both more assertive and more competent, which led participants to perceive these targets as more powerful and then to be more willing to give them power. Replicating Studies 2a–3, targets whose action and goal were aligned (vs. not aligned) were seen as more moral, which directly led participants to be more willing to give them power. Inconsistent with the bold paths and all previous studies, perceived assertiveness directly led participants to be more willing to give power to the targets.

We also conducted Study S5 where we manipulated action and goal orthogonally and found similar patterns of results using an undergraduate sample. Since the self-control manipulation was less effective in Supplemental Study S5, we report these findings in the Supplemental Materials but still include them in our later meta-analysis.

Table 9
The 95% Confidence Intervals for All Indirect Effects of Action × Goal Interaction on Power Conferral in Study 5

Mediator	95% confidence interval
Assertiveness → perceived power	[0.15, 0.39]
Competence → perceived power	[0.11, 0.32]
Morality → perceived power	[−0.01, 0.12]
Warmth → perceived power	[−0.004, 0.03]
Perceived power	[−0.15, 0.10]
Assertiveness	[0.10, 0.46]
Competence	[−0.14, 0.17]
Morality	[0.16, 0.47]
Warmth	[−0.05, 0.01]

Note. The symbol (→) indicates serial mediation.

Study 6

Study 6 again focused on separating the effect of self-control from the effect of the social desirability of the observable behavior when the goal is not considered. Here, the target person always performed the same action, but their goals varied. Observers judge targets' level of self-control based on the extent to which targets adhere to their goals (Koval et al., 2015). When a person performs a particular action, they will be perceived as having higher self-control when the action goes beyond the goal than when the action falls short of the goal. Thus, if greater self-control is associated with greater power, then those who set an ambitious goal but fail to meet it will appear less powerful and gain less power than those who set a modest goal but exceed it. In this way, we also examined one potential downstream consequence of the power signaling and affording effect of self-control: whether failing to meet ambitious goals can lead to worse outcomes than exceeding modest goals.

Method

Participants and Design

We collected data from undergraduate students at a large public university who took part in in-person lab sessions for course credit. Participants were connected in pairs via Chatplat, an online platform that allows dyads to have live interactions by texting (e.g., Huang et al., 2017). In each pair, one participant was randomly selected to act as the target and was randomly assigned to follow one of the two predetermined scripts (exhibiting low vs. high self-control). In other words, the target acted as a confederate. The other participant acted as the perceiver. They interacted with and made judgments about the target. Thus, we collected data from perceivers, but not targets. In short, the study followed a between-groups design (self-control: low vs. high).

Due to the subtleness of our self-control manipulation, we aimed for at least 150 perceivers per experimental condition (300 in total). We collected data until the end of the academic quarter, assuming

this would be sufficient time to reach our goal, and ended up with data from 379 perceivers. We excluded data from 60 perceivers because their interaction partner (i.e., the target) did not follow our script as instructed. That left us with data from 319 perceivers ($M_{age} = 20.73$, $SD_{age} = 2.52$; 189 men, 127 women, two identified as nonbinary, one did not report their gender). A sensitivity power analysis (Faul et al., 2007) suggested that our sample size provided sufficient power (.80) to detect small- to medium-sized effects in an independent-samples t test, $d = .31$ (two-tailed).

Procedure and Measures

Participants took part in the study in a lab on a computer via Qualtrics and Chatplat. The study consisted of two parts: interaction and evaluation. The targets only participated in the interaction, whereas the perceivers participated in both the interaction and the evaluation.

In Part 1, perceivers were told that they would interact with other participants and work on tasks together. We informed them that they would first be matched with a partner and the two of them would get to know each other via chatting online. They were further informed that they and their partner would later join other participants in the session to work on a group task together. Meanwhile, targets were told that they would interact with another participant via chatting online but that they should type in predetermined scripts while their partner would type in their real information. We told targets this setup allowed us to precisely study how different kinds of information influence the impressions people form about strangers.

Next, the pair engaged in an initial testing phase where they could each send three messages to the other. Then, they entered the structured interaction where the admin posted three questions, one at a time, and the perceiver and target responded to them. The perceivers typed in whatever responses they wanted. As previously mentioned, and unbeknownst to the perceivers, the targets typed in the three scripted responses we provided to them. The manipulation of the target's self-control was in the response we provided to the second question, which was "What was your New Year Resolution for 2021? How well have you been following through on it?" In the low self-control condition, the scripted response was "Read 200 pages of book per week. So far 100 pages/week on average." In the high self-control condition, the scripted response was "Read 50 pages of book per week. So far 100 pages/week on average." In other words, the target always reported the same action ("so far 100 pages/week on average") along with one of two goals (200 vs. 50 pages per week). In the low self-control condition, the goal was more ambitious (200 pages per week), and the action failed to meet the goal. In the high self-control condition, the goal was more modest (50 pages per week), and the action exceeded the goal. See Appendix B for a sample script from the perceiver's perspective for each experimental condition.

After the chat, the targets provided their demographic information and the study ended for them, but the perceivers proceeded to Part 2. The perceivers were told, again, that all the participants in the session would work together on a group task. In addition, they learned that a leader would be selected from the participants. Same as in Study 1, this leader would direct and set the standards for evaluating the other participants. They were further told that everyone would evaluate their partner from part one, and the admin would select a leader based on the evaluations. We waited to provide information about leader selection until Part 2 so that the perceivers would not think the targets were strategically self-presenting in Part 1. Next, in randomized order, each perceiver rated the perceived power of their partner with the same four items as in Studies 1–5 ($\alpha = .86$), and their desire to give their partner power with a single item ("To what extent would you recommend your previous partner for the leader position?"). Similar to Studies 2a, 3, 4, and 5, they then rated assertiveness ($\alpha = .59$), competence ($\alpha = .85$), morality ($\alpha = .87$), warmth ($\alpha = .90$), and authenticity ($\alpha = .86$) of their partner. Finally, they rated their partner's self-control ("has good self-control," "does things that are in line with his/her goals"; $r = .72$, $p < .001$) as a manipulation check. Everything was rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Finally, the perceivers provided their demographic information and comments and were debriefed by an experimenter.

Results

We conducted an independent-sample t test on each dependent variable. Levene's tests all suggested homogeneity of variance (all ps $> .10$).

Manipulation Check

As expected, given that all targets reported reading 100 pages per week, targets with a modest 50-pages-per-week goal (i.e., high self-control targets; $M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.10$) were perceived as having higher self-control than those with an ambitious 200-pages-per-week goal (i.e., low self-control targets; $M = 5.17$, $SD = 1.04$), $t(317) = 3.96$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.44$. In other words, those who had a modest goal but exceeded it were perceived as having higher self-control than those who had an ambitious goal but failed to meet it, even though their actions were identical, indicating our manipulation was successful.

Power Perception and Power Conferral

As predicted, targets exhibiting high (vs. low) self-control were perceived as more powerful ($M_{high} = 4.39$, $SD_{high} = 1.08$ vs. $M_{low} = 4.12$, $SD_{low} = 1.17$), $t(317) = 2.08$, $p = .038$, Cohen's $d = 0.23$, and were recommended for the leader position to a greater extent ($M_{high} = 4.57$, $SD_{high} = 1.11$ vs. $M_{low} = 4.30$, $SD_{low} = 1.20$), $t(300) = 2.04$, $p = .042$, Cohen's $d = 0.24$.[4]

Mediators

Targets exhibiting high (vs. low) self-control were perceived as more assertive, $t(317) = 2.20$, $p = .029$, Cohen's $d = 0.25$, and moral, $t(317) = 2.12$, $p = .035$, Cohen's $d = 0.24$, and marginally more competent, $t(317) = 1.71$, $p = .089$, Cohen's $d = 0.19$, but similarly warm and authentic, both ts < 1.10, ps $> .275$, Cohen's ds < 0.13. See Table 10 for means and standard deviations by condition.

[4] Due to researcher oversight, participants had the option to choose not to respond to the power conferral measure. Seventeen participants did not provide an answer for the power conferral measure but completed other dependent variables, leading to the difference in the degrees of freedom.

Table 10
Study 6 Means and Standard Deviations of Mediators by Self-Control Condition

Self-control	Assertiveness	Competence	Morality	Warmth	Authenticity
Low	4.60 (0.84)	5.00 (0.96)	4.54 (0.96)	4.52 (1.12)	4.86 (1.19)
High	4.81 (0.91)	5.18 (1.00)	4.78 (1.03)	4.62 (1.13)	5.00 (1.14)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

Mediation Analyses

We ran the same model as in Studies 2a, 3, and 4. We again dummy-coded self-control (1 = high self-control, 0 = low self-control) as the independent variable. Note that 1 means the target had a modest 50-pages-per-week goal which they met, and 0 means the target had an ambitious 200-pages-per-week goal which they did not meet. See Table 2 for the 95% confidence intervals for all indirect effects of self-control on perceived power, Table 3 for all indirect effects of self-control on power conferral, and Supplemental Figure S10 for a detailed illustration of the results. We discuss only the bold paths and additional significant indirect effects below.

We only found one mediation path that was consistent with the bold paths in Figure 1. Replicating Studies 2a–5, self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through assertiveness and then perceived power. The remaining bold paths, and all other indirect effects, were not significant.

Discussion

Replicating Studies 1–5, we again found that self-control signals and affords power. In Study 6, we manipulated self-control by holding the action constant and manipulating how ambitious the goal was. When the action was identical, a stranger who had a modest goal and exceeded it was perceived as having higher self-control than a stranger who had an ambitious goal but failed to meet it. Accordingly, in an ostensibly consequential live interaction with a stranger, perceivers found the stranger more powerful and more suitable for a leadership position when the stranger had a modest goal and exceeded it than when they had an ambitious goal but failed to meet it, even though in both cases, the stranger's actual behavior was the same. Study 6 extended our previous findings by showing an implication for goal setting: having ambitious goals can inadvertently lead to less perceived and afforded power than having modest goals, if the ambitious goals are not met.

Consistent with one bold path in Figure 1 and replicating all previous studies, targets with more self-control were seen as more assertive, which led participants to perceive these targets as more powerful and then to be more willing to give them power. However, we did not find support for the remaining bold paths nor any other indirect effects.

Our findings showed that people are alert to signals of self-control and that setting ambitious goals but not meeting them can lead to less power by signaling low self-control. One alternative explanation is that individuals who set modest goals are perceived as more powerful and given more power than those who set ambitious goals, regardless of how these goals relate to their actions. However, this is unlikely, as ambitiousness indicates more agency and elicits more power conferral (Ma et al., 2022).

Meta-Analysis of Mediation Mechanisms

Whereas we found some recurring mediation mechanisms across studies, we also found some inconsistencies, presumably due to our wide variety of operationalizations of self-control. To determine the overall mediation mechanisms, we performed a meta-analysis on the mediation analyses using two-stage structural equation modeling (Cheung & Chan, 2005). We conducted this analysis using the *metaSEM* package in *R*. The syntax for the analysis is available in the Supplemental Materials.

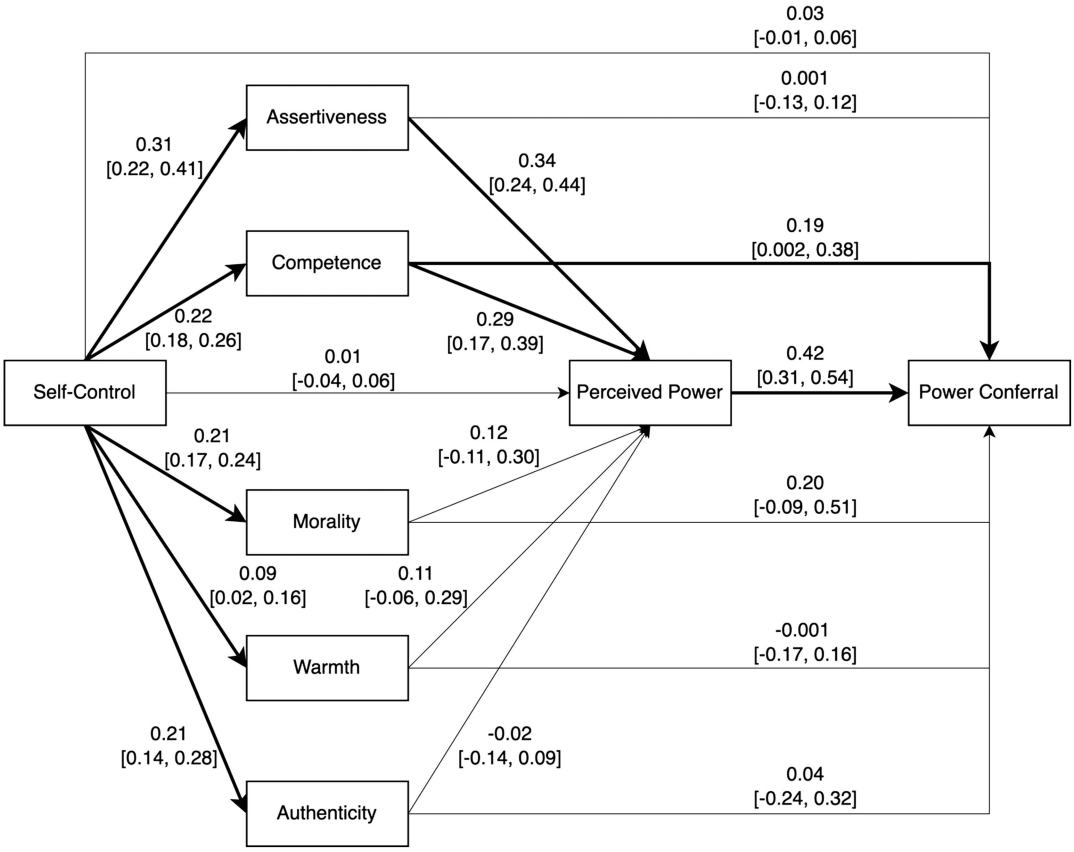
Based on the two-stage structural equation modeling approach, in the first stage, we pooled the correlation matrices of seven studies we ran that measured multiple potential mediators (i.e., including Supplemental Study S5, but excluding Study 1). We used a random-effects model to account for heterogeneity of effects across studies. The maximum likelihood-based approach used by the *metaSEM* package allowed us to include studies with missing data (i.e., studies in which authenticity was not measured). In the second stage, we performed structural equation modeling based on the pooled correlation matrix, testing all paths simultaneously in one fully saturated model depicted in Figure 1 and specified in the Supplemental Materials. Because the structural equation modeling was based on correlation, the path coefficients were all standardized coefficients.

The meta-analysis revealed several significant mediation paths. Self-control had a positive indirect effect on power conferral through assertiveness and then perceived power and a positive indirect effect on power conferral through competence and then perceived power. Self-control also had a positive indirect on power conferral directly through competence. The rest of the indirect effects were not significant, including a bold path we had considered likely: the indirect effect on power conferral directly through morality. See Table 2 for the 95% confidence intervals for all indirect effects of self-control on perceived power, Table 3 for all indirect effects of self-control on power conferral, and Figure 3 for the standardized coefficient and 95% confidence interval of each path.

General Discussion

Across seven studies, we found that people both perceive those with higher self-control to be more powerful, and are more willing to give them power, than those with lower self-control. We found similar results regardless of whether the target person acted quickly or apparently after some thought (Studies 3 and 4), and whether the target person was a hypothetical person (Studies 3–5), a stranger (Studies 1 and 6), or a familiar colleague (Studies 2a and 2b). By manipulating the target person's goal and action orthogonally (Study 5) or keeping the action constant but manipulating the goal (Study 6), we ruled out the alternative explanation that higher self-control signals and affords power only because those with higher self-control usually take actions that are more socially desirable

Figure 3
Mediation Model Results for Meta-Analysis



Note. Standardized coefficients are reported, with 95% confidence intervals in brackets. Significant paths are in bold.

regardless of their goals. We further examined the downstream implications of our findings for goal setting (Study 6). Specifically, we found that those who set a modest goal but met it were perceived as more powerful and given more power than those who set an ambitious but unmet goal, even though both parties performed the same action.

We used two different operationalizations of self-control. In Studies 3–5, we operationalized self-control as acting according to versus against one's important goals. In Studies 1 and 6, we operationalized it as the extent to which an individual adhered to their goals. In Studies 2a and 2b, participants recalled examples of high or low self-control that could fall into either category. Across these different operationalizations, we consistently found that those who displayed more self-control were perceived as more powerful and were conferred more power.

Our exploratory mediation analyses showed how different dimensions of person perception drove the effect of self-control on power perception and power conferral. Although the findings varied somewhat, there were several consistent patterns. A meta-analysis showed that observers perceived targets who displayed higher self-control as more competent and assertive, which led them to perceive those targets as more powerful and then to be more willing to give those targets power. Additionally, perceived competence directly led observers to be more willing to give targets power. We discuss the implications of these mediation patterns below.

Theoretical Contributions

Our research makes several theoretical contributions to the literature. First, it extends the literature on power perception and conferral by identifying self-control as a novel signal of power and by showing that disinhibition, in some cases, can lead to less, not more, power. Past research suggests that power is often signaled by disinhibition and lack of constraint, including behavior such as naysaying (Chou, 2018) and norm violation (Van Kleef et al., 2011). We clarify the effect of disinhibition on power by showing that disinhibition does not lead to power if it does not signal agency. Socially disinhibited behaviors, such as naysaying and norm violation, signal agency because people who conduct these behaviors act according to their own will despite external constraints. By comparison, disinhibited low self-control behavior signals low agency because people who conduct these behaviors act against their own important goals. We thus show that constraints can also lead to power when they are self-imposed. Integrated with previous

research, our findings indicate that power is signaled more by showing the strength of one's own volition than by simply ignoring constraints.

Second, our work builds upon the literature on the relationship between goal-related behavior and power. Past research suggests that power leads to better self-control. Exerting self-control requires behaving in line with one's goals (Inzlicht et al., 2014). When feeling powerful, people are capable of setting goals with less time and information, initiating goal-directed action more promptly, persisting and adapting flexibly to achieve their goals, and grasping the opportunity to act (Guinote, 2007). Power also facilitates abstract thinking (Smith & Trope, 2006). The ability to think abstractly helps people advance long-term goals over short-term ones and thus is critical for exerting self-control (Fujita et al., 2006). Our research indicates that the causal relationship between power and self-control is bidirectional. Displaying self-control also leads to more perceived and afforded power. This, along with other bidirectional relationships between power and its behavioral consequences (e.g., abstract thinking; Smith & Trope, 2006; Wakslak et al., 2014), shows how power can become self-reinforcing.

Third, it highlights the differences between self-control and inhibition. Research on self-control suggests that self-control can be achieved in ways other than behavioral inhibition (Fujita, 2011). Our research suggests that self-control is also seen as distinct from inhibition when people form impressions of others. Participants perceived those who acted in line with their long-term goals as having more self-control, whether the action indicated the inhibition of impulses (e.g., staying away from desserts) or an active approach toward a goal (e.g., reading more books). These perceptions were also not affected by whether the action happened quickly without thinking or after some deliberation. Furthermore, people who exhibited self-control were perceived as more powerful and conferred more power regardless of whether their self-control was achieved through inhibition. Our research suggests that self-control and inhibition are not only conceptually distinct but are also perceived as distinct by lay observers.

Fourth, we further the understanding of how self-control can facilitate goal achievement through interpersonal processes, contributing to the literature on the interpersonal side of self-regulation and goal pursuit (e.g., Koval et al., 2015; Laurin et al., 2016; Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011). A wide range of research examines the link between self-control and goal achievement as an intrapersonal process (e.g., de Ridder et al., 2012; Duckworth et al., 2019). Our findings suggest that those with high self-control may also achieve their goals more easily by attaining power. Since they appear more powerful, others may tend to defer to them and help them achieve their goals. Since they are afforded power, they can have both more autonomy to stay away from external distractions and more influence to garner resources for goal achievement.

Fifth, our exploratory mediation findings contribute to the understanding of power perception and conferral processes. We find that self-control increases power perception and then power conferral via both facets of agency, assertiveness and competence, supporting past research where agency signals and affords power (e.g., Chou, 2018; Magee, 2009; Van Kleef et al., 2011). The close links between agency, power perception, and power conferral show how power can become self-reinforcing through person perception processes (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Smith & Galinsky, 2010). Building upon that research, our research shows the importance of distinguishing between facets within the agency dimension (i.e., assertiveness and competence) and the communion dimension (i.e., morality and warmth; Abele et al., 2021; Goodwin, 2015) when studying power perception and conferral processes. For instance, competence directly mediated the effect of self-control on power conferral, whereas assertiveness did not.

Some of our mediation findings suggest that, despite the distinct consequences of status hierarchies and power hierarchies (Blader & Chen, 2014), their antecedents may be similar, to the extent that power is also voluntarily conferred by peers. Although our research focused on power rather than status (i.e., respect and esteem in the eyes of others; Blader & Chen, 2014), some of our findings parallel previous research and theory on status conferral more than that on power conferral. For example, competence directly mediated the effect of self-control on power conferral. This finding goes against the reciprocal influence theory of power (Keltner et al., 2008), which suggests that the acquisition of power relies more on traits related to social engagement with group members (i.e., communion) than traits related to effective goal pursuit and task performance (i.e., agency). By comparison, this finding aligns with the status conferral literature showing that competence may play a more central role in attaining higher status than assertiveness (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Redhead et al., 2019; see also McClanahan et al., 2022). Compared to research on status, research on power focuses more on its consequences than on its antecedents (Blader & Chen, 2014). Our research indicates that research on power conferral could be informed by theories of status conferral.

Finally, our research highlights another issue with setting ambitious goals. Though difficult, or stretch, goals, can lead to better performance (Locke & Latham, 2002), they also lead to risk-taking, unethical behavior, and lower self-esteem (see Ordóñez et al., 2009, for a review). Study 6 showcases another reason ambitious goals can have negative side effects: When people fail to meet them, observers perceive them as less powerful and less suitable for high-power positions.

Practical Implications

Our research has several practical implications. First, people need to be aware of how the self-control they display outside of work can influence the level of power they achieve at work and be cautious about revealing information related to self-control. We find that progress toward personal goals, even when these goals are not directly related to work (cf. Marr et al., 2019), matters for individuals' social ranking, in addition to previously studied factors such as perceived instrumental value for organizational and team goals (e.g., Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Willer, 2009). Although self-control failures are common (Parker-Pope, 2007), and sharing them may induce a feeling of similarity which would make the speaker more likable (Lapka et al., 2023), our work indicates that sharing such failures is likely to reduce the speaker's power. Even if someone is already powerful, giving the impression that they lack self-control should make them seem less suitable for their high-power role, making their power seem illegitimate. Since our everyday goals like getting in shape or learning a new hobby are common conversational topics, power seekers should reconsider casually sharing their failures in achieving their goals. Even worse, people may have misperceptions about how self-control influences power. For example, since low self-control signals disregard for

constraints, some may display low self-control or purposefully overshare their self-control failure, thinking this is a way to show off their power. Our findings can help individuals avoid impression mismanagement (Sezer, 2022) of this kind.

Second, our findings provide insight into what kind of disinhibited behavior can benefit (or harm) power seekers. Although impulsive, disinhibited behavior is conflated with low self-control in both the popular press (e.g., Gourguechon, 2019) and some theories of self-regulation (e.g., Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Hofmann et al., 2009), our work demonstrates that they are distinct constructs. Indeed, leaders can exhibit disinhibited behavior and show strong self-control at the same time. For example, leaders of groups may lash out at outgroup members to achieve the goals of repelling competitors and garnering resources for their own group. They may take such action quickly without much deliberation but nonetheless approach their goals. As long as these disinhibited behaviors do not distract leaders from their important goals, they can lead to more power (e.g., Chou, 2018; Van Kleef et al., 2011, 2012). However, our work indicates that when these behaviors seem to work against their goals, these leaders will no longer be perceived as powerful or be given more power.

Third, our research suggests that individuals need to be cautious about setting ambitious goals, especially in public. We find that, keeping the action constant, individuals who set an ambitious goal but fail to meet it are perceived as less powerful and given less power than individuals who set a modest goal but exceed it. Whereas individuals may personally hold goals that are a little hard to reach to motivate themselves, to avoid the social penalty, they may want to avoid disclosing goals if these goals are unlikely to be achieved. On the bright side, however, individuals may also strategically make ambitious goals public as a commitment device (Bryan et al., 2010). Since social power means valuable resources, our research can demonstrate why individuals tend to be extra motivated to achieve their goals once these goals are made public.

Fourth, compared to other methods of self-assertion, self-control may be a more benevolent and less controversial route to power. Some antecedents to power, such as naysaying (Chou, 2018) and norm violation (Van Kleef et al., 2011), come at the cost of others' interests. Naysaying benefits the naysayer but upsets the people being told "no" to their face. Norm violation benefits the norm violator but upsets norm abiders. By comparison, self-control is a within-person process and is less likely to infringe on others' interests and invite backlash. Thus, it may be an especially preferable route to power for groups that are frequently penalized for displaying assertiveness, such as women. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Williams and Tiedens (2016) shows that women are penalized for demanding others to change but not for showing nonverbal confidence. Like nonverbal confidence, self-control shows assertiveness but typically does not require change from others. Therefore, displaying self-control may help women achieve power with less risk for backlash.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our studies all examined momentary power perception and conferral. They do not directly speak to whether self-control leads to power over the long term. We propose that this would likely be the case. We studied power conferral both when it was consequential (Studies 1 and 6), suggesting the effect is not confined to self-report, and when the targets were familiar colleagues (Studies 2a and 2b), suggesting the effect extends to long-lasting relationships. Furthermore, when low or high self-control behaviors are observed repeatedly, observers will be more likely to attribute these behaviors to individual characteristics rather than external circumstances, leading to a stronger effect on power. Nevertheless, future research on this topic would benefit from a longitudinal design examining power attainment in naturalistic groups.

Our mediation analyses showed some inconsistent results across studies. Future research could examine what accounts for these differences. For example, self-control had a negative indirect effect on power conferral through assertiveness only in Studies 2a and 2b where observers evaluated colleagues they already knew. Perhaps observers are less willing to give assertive targets power when they already know the targets or when they expect repeated interaction with the targets in the future. As another example, the indirect effect of self-control on perceived power through competence was only absent in Study 6. This absence may be attributed to the intellectual activity the target engaged in. Reading books regularly may send a strong signal of competence on its own, overwhelming any effect of goal success. Future research can directly test boundary conditions like this by, for instance, manipulating the type of action targets engage in.

Even for the consistent findings on mediation mechanisms, the relationship between mediators and dependent variables in our analyses is correlational, not causal. Future research can further test the causal mechanism through a moderation-by-process approach (Spencer et al., 2005). For example, the causal role of perceived agency in the effect of self-control on power perception and conferral could be tested by varying whether a person received outside assistance (e.g., from friends or commitment devices) to exert self-control. Achieving high self-control through the use of such assistance would not necessarily signal agency. Would it still lead to power?

Furthermore, although the perceivers in our studies varied from undergraduate students to online survey takers, and their relationship to the targets they were evaluating also varied, we did not examine the effect of perceiver characteristics or the perceiver–target relationship. Whereas our perceivers had relatively equal social standing with the targets across our studies, power can be conferred from the top down, by those higher up in the hierarchy, or from the bottom up, by those lower in the hierarchy. These different groups of perceivers may have different leader preferences. For example, moral integrity matters less for superordinates than subordinates (Cook & Emler, 1999). Even if the perceivers are peers, they may make different attributions about self-control successes and failures depending on whether the target is an ingroup or an outgroup member. People may attribute ingroup members' low self-control behavior to external circumstances and high self-control behavior to essential personal traits but make the exact opposite attribution about outgroup members' behavior (Hewstone, 1990). Therefore, high self-control may lead to even greater power when most observers are ingroup members, and low self-control may lead to even less power when the majority of observers are outgroup members. Future research on self-control and power attainment would benefit from systematically considering the perceiver–target relationship and taking an intergroup perspective.

Finally, we do not know whether our participants' assessment that people with high self-control make better leaders is accurate. Some evidence suggests that our participants were indeed correct. For example, among leaders, self-control is negatively related to abusive supervision (Yam et al., 2016). Additionally, self-control strengthens

the link between leaders' good moral character and ethical leadership behavior (Sosik et al., 2019). High self-control leaders are also more likely to meet the expectations their followers have about leaders (Rosing et al., 2022). Since our work demonstrates that people prefer to give power to those who exhibit self-control, further understanding of how leader self-control influences followers and team performance is especially important.

Conclusion

Our research suggests one way in which power can be achieved through inhibition and constraint: exerting self-control. Self-control struggles are common in everyday life, and the ability to exert high self-control is doubly beneficial, as it helps people achieve their intrapersonal goals and attain interpersonal power.

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(*Appendices follow*)

Appendix A

Study 1 Profiles

Participant 1	Participant 2
What are your initials?	
JL	AM
What's your favorite holiday? Why?	
Thanksgiving, because it marks the first holiday of the Holiday Season, which I have very fond memories of. I enjoy spending time with my family during this time!	Christmas, I love the peaceful vibe of the season and coming together with family.
What was your New Year's Resolution for 2021? How well have you been following through with it?	
I promised I'd spend more time running and exercising. ${e:// Field/sctext1}	To eat less sugar and processed foods. ${e://Field/sctext2}
What was your most memorable childhood experience? Please briefly describe it.	
My most memorable childhood experience was eating family dinners together during the summer. We would have the backdoor open and my dad would always grill any assortment of chicken pork, bratwurst, and potatoes.	One of my most memorable experiences in childhood is when my grandmother took me out shopping when I was 7 years old. I dragged her all over Walmart and I'm sure she was beyond exhausted by the end of it, but she loves me so she did it and with a smile. That memory will stick with me forever.

Note. The order of profiles associated with JL and AM was randomized. The inserted self-control manipulation was either "Keeping up pretty well so far" or "I have not held up to this very well," also presented in randomized order.

Appendix B

Study 6 Sample Interactions (Perceiver Perspective)

Low Self-Control Condition

Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

(*Appendices continue*)

High Self-Control Condition

Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

Appendix C

Power Conferral Measures

Studies 2a–4:

1. I would support giving (target) a promotion.
2. I would want (target) to be a leader.
3. I think (target) would be an effective leader.
4. I do not think (target) should be given a job with more power.

Study 5:

1. I would give Simon a supervisory position.
2. I would like Simon to formally manage people.
3. I would want Simon to be able to provide rewards to others at his own discretion.
4. I would want Simon to have more power at work.
5. I would give Simon the authority to discipline others when needed.
6. I would designate Simon to a role that allows him to control a lot of resources.

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