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Breaking the Rules to Rise to Power: How Norm Violators Gain Power in the Eyes of Others

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Abstract

Powerful people often act at will, even if the resulting behavior is inappropriate—hence the famous proverb "power corrupts." Here, we introduce the reverse phenomenon—violating norms signals power. Violating a norm implies that one has the power to act according to one's own volition in spite of situational constraints, which fuels perceptions of power. Four studies support this hypothesis. Individuals who took coffee from another person's can (Study 1), violated rules of bookkeeping (Study 2), dropped cigarette ashes on the floor (Study 3), or put their feet on the table (Study 4) were perceived as more powerful than individuals who did not show such behaviors. The effect was mediated by inferences of volitional capacity, and it replicated across different methods (scenario, film clip, face-to-face interaction), different norm violations, and different indices of power (explicit measures, expected emotions, and approach/inhibition tendencies). Implications for power, morality, and social hierarchy are discussed.

Keywords

power, norm violation, volition

"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely," wrote Lord Acton to Bishop Mandell Creighton in 1887. This classic adage not only reflects popular sentiments about power; it is also supported by scientific research (e.g., Kipnis, 1972). What is unclear, however, is how corruption affects a person's power position. One would hope, perhaps, that powerholders who break the rules fall from grace and lose their power. But is this the case? Or might the very act of breaking the rules actually fuel perceptions of power? We explored this paradoxical possibility, focusing on the effects of norm violations on perceptions of power.

Norms are rules or principles (implicit or explicit) that are understood by members of a group and that guide and/or constrain behavior without the force of laws to generate proper and acceptable conduct (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). Accordingly, we define norm violation as behavior that infringes one or more principles of proper and acceptable behavior. Norm violations are ubiquitous and they come in many shapes. People put their feet on the opposite seat in the train; the boss enters your office without knocking; friends carry on a loud conversation in the movie theater; colleagues answer their cell phones while in a meeting; visitors drop their cigarette ashes on the floor of the cafeteria. How do such behaviors shape observers' perceptions of the actor's power? We draw on the approach/inhibition theory of power (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003) and on empirical work to develop the hypothesis that individuals who violate norms are seen as more powerful than those who do not violate norms.

The Powerful Act at Will

Power is the primary organizing force of social life (Keltner, Van Kleef, Chen, & Kraus, 2008; Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Russell, 1938). It entails the capacity to control others' outcomes by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments (Keltner et al., 2003) and to be uninfluenced by others (Galinsky et al., 2008). According to the approach/inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003), the powerful are relatively free to behave as they wish. High-power individuals encounter fewer social constraints and more resource-rich environments (e.g., money, knowledge, support). This activates their behavioral approach system, which is accompanied by behavioral disinhibition. Low-power individuals, in contrast, experience more social constraints, threats, and punishments. This activates their behavioral inhibition system, which restricts their actions.

Indeed, high-power people appear to act at will without fear of negative consequences. Individuals who feel powerful are more likely to act in goal-congruent ways (e.g., by switching

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off an annoying fan) than those who feel less powerful (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003). Powerful individuals are also more likely to take risks (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006), show approach-related tendencies and goal-directed action (Guinote, 2007; Lammers, Galinsky, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008; Smith & Bargh, 2008), express their emotions (Hecht & Lafrance, 1998), act based on their dispositional inclinations (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001) and momentary desires (Van Kleef & Côté, 2007), and ignore situational pressures (Galinsky et al., 2008).

This behavioral disinhibition makes powerful people more likely to exhibit socially inappropriate behavior. Compared to lower power individuals, powerful individuals are likely to take more cookies from a common plate, eat with their mouths open, and spread crumbs (Keltner et al., 2003); interrupt conversation partners and invade their personal space (DePaulo & Friedman, 1998); fail to take another's perspective (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006); ignore other people's suffering (Van Kleef et al., 2008); stereotype (Fiske, 1993) and patronize others (Vescio, Gervais, Snyder, & Hoover, 2005); cheat (Lammers, Stapel, & Galinsky, 2010); take credit for the contributions of others (Kipnis, 1972); treat other people as a means to their own ends (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008); and sexualize and harass low-power women (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995). Powerful people also exhibit more aggression (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973), and this is relatively acceptable to others (Porath, Overbeck, & Pearson, 2008). In fact, in several European countries the liberty to violate norms without sanction is perceived as a defining feature of the power holder (Mondillon et al., 2005). Although the powerful impose strict moral standards on others, they practice less strict moral behavior themselves (Lammers et al., 2010).

Breaking the Rule to Rise to Power

People hold rich stereotypes of the behaviors associated with power (Keltner et al., 2008; Tiedens, Ellsworth, & Mesquita, 2000). For instance, people associate power with less smiling, more gazing, more other-touching, more gesturing, more interruptions, and a louder voice (Hall, Coats, & LeBeau, 2005). Because certain behaviors are believed to be associated with power, the cues themselves may signal power (Ridgeway, Berger, & Smith, 1985). Thus, when people perceive others around them, they may use such cues to infer their level of power. For instance, individuals who display greater action orientation are perceived as more powerful because they signal that they have the capacity to act according to their own volition (Magee, 2009)—a freedom that comes with greater power (Galinsky et al., 2003; Keltner et al., 2003).

By the same logic, norm violations may signal power. Given that power is associated with lack of constraint, individuals whose behavior appears unconstrained by normative pressures may be perceived as powerful. People who violate norms apparently experience the leeway to do so, suggesting that they have relatively high levels of power that enable them to behave as they please. Suggestive evidence supports this possibility. People who interrupt others are perceived as more assertive (Robinson & Reis, 1989) than are noninterrupters, and individuals who express anger (an emotion that is often suppressed in light of social norms; e.g., Van Kleef & Côté, 2007) are seen as more powerful than individuals who express (more acceptable) sadness (Tiedens, 2001). Moreover, research on adolescent aggression indicates that bullying behavior is associated with prestige (Savin-Williams, 1976; Sijtsema, Veenstra, Lindenberg, & Salmivalli, 2009). Thus, we hypothesize that norm violators are perceived as more powerful than individuals who do not exhibit norm-violating behavior. We tested this idea in four studies.

Study 1: The Coffee Can

To test our hypothesis, we constructed a scenario in which the focal person exhibits norm-violating behavior (or not), and we measured respondents' perceptions of that person's power.

Method

Forty participants (25 females; mean age = 19.53, $SD = 1.91$) read a scenario in which an actor exhibited norm-violating versus neutral behavior. Participants imagined having to wait in a crowded waiting room in the city hall to renew their passport. In the norm-violation condition, the actor got up and took a cup of coffee from the personnel's can when the service desk was empty. In the neutral condition, the actor got up, went to the bathroom, and returned shortly thereafter. Thus, both conditions involved equal amounts of action.

We measured perceived power with two scales. The first consisted of six adjectives indicative of power: *decisive*, *strong*, *powerful*, *in control*, *compliant* (reverse coded), and *leader-like* ($\alpha = .82$). These adjectives were embedded in a 25-item questionnaire on "social impressions" to conceal the study's purpose. This questionnaire also contained five adjectives measuring norm-violation perceptions (*asocial*, *immoral*, *improper*, *rude*, *well-mannered* [reverse scored]; $\alpha = .92$). Participants rated to what extent each of these adjectives characterized the actor (1 = *definitely not*, 7 = *definitely*). Next, participants indicated to what extent four power statements applied to the actor: "This person is influential"; "... has a leadership position"; "... is in charge of subordinates"; "... enjoys considerable authority" ($\alpha = .81$).

Results and Discussion

Participants rated the person who took coffee (norm-violation condition) higher on the norm-violation scale ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.43$) than the person who went to the bathroom (control condition; $M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.03$), $t(38) = 3.35$, $p = .002$, $d = 1.07$, indicating that the manipulation was effective. Consistent with our hypothesis, participants in the norm-violation condition also rated the actor as more powerful, both on the power adjectives scale ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 0.70$ vs. $M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.82$), $t(38) = 3.56$, $p = .001$, $d = 1.13$, and on the power statements

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scale ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.30$ vs. $M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.76$), $t(38) = 2.19$, $p = .035$, $d = 0.72$. This study provides initial evidence that violating norms can fuel perceptions of power, even though the behavior is regarded negatively (e.g., it is seen as asocial, immoral, improper, and rude).

Study 2: The Bookkeeper

To examine the generalizability of the effect, Study 2 focused on a different type of norm violation that was set in an organizational context. In addition, we used a different measure of power to match the organizational setting. Furthermore, we investigated whether the effect of norm violations on power perceptions is mediated by volition inferences, as suggested by our theorizing.

Method

One hundred and sixty-nine participants (age and sex not recorded) read a scenario about a bookkeeper who either sticks to the rules or violates the rules of bookkeeping. In the scenario, a trainee points a senior bookkeeper to an anomaly in the financial report. In the norm-violation condition, the bookkeeper replies, "This happens all the time, we don't have to worry about this. External accountants never catch these things, so we'll get away with it. Now and then you can bend the rules a little, if necessary." In the control condition, the bookkeeper replies, "This happens all the time, but we have to take this very seriously. External accountants never catch these things, but we need to sort this out. We must follow the rules."

Reflecting common conceptualizations of power as control over other people's outcomes (e.g., Keltner et al., 2003), we operationalized power in terms of control over others, using four items developed by Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) for use in organizational settings, which we adapted to the current context: "I think that this person can influence other people's pay level"; "... influence whether people get a promotion"; "... make life difficult for other people"; "... make things unpleasant at work" (1 = *definitely not*, 7 = *definitely*; $\alpha = .79$). Next we measured norm-violation perceptions as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .88$). Finally, we measured volition inferences using a validated scale by Magee (2009). This scale consists of six items (e.g., "To what extent does this person feel free to do what s/he wants?"; "... lack freedom in deciding what to do?" [reverse scored]; 1 = *not very much*, 7 = *very much*; $\alpha = .84$).

Results and Discussion

The bookkeeper who bent the rules was rated higher on the norm-violation scale ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 1.13$) than the bookkeeper who followed the rules ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 0.94$), $t(167) = 8.01$, $p = .001$, $d = 1.24$. As predicted, participants perceived the bookkeeper who bent the rules as having more power ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.10$) than the bookkeeper who followed the rules ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 1.15$), $t(167) = 2.86$, $p = .005$, $d = .44$. Participants also inferred more volitional capacity when the bookkeeper bent the rules ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.08$) than when he observed the rules ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.13$), $t(167) = 2.73$, $p = .007$, $d = .42$.

We conducted mediated regression analyses to test whether volition inferences can account for the effect of norm violation on power perceptions. We have already shown that the bookkeeper who bent the rules was perceived as more powerful and was rated higher on volitional capacity. When norm violation and volition inferences were simultaneously entered into a regression analysis, volition inferences were a significant predictor of power perception, $\beta = .20$, $t(166) = 2.55$, $p = .012$, and the formerly significant effect of norm violation was reduced to nonsignificance, $\beta = -.07$, $t(167) = -.96$, $p = .34$. A Sobel test confirmed that the indirect effect was significant, $z = 1.97$, $p = .049$, indicating that the effect of norm violation on power perception was fully mediated by volition inferences.

This study shows that norm violations can fuel perceptions of power because violating a norm signals that one is free to act according to one's own volition—a freedom that is associated with elevated power (see Magee, 2009). A potential limitation of Studies 1 and 2 is that they relied on verbal descriptions of norm violations. Thus, it is unclear whether the effect also occurs when people visually perceive an instance of norm-violating behavior. In Study 3, we therefore aimed to replicate the effect with a more dynamic visual norm-violation manipulation.

Study 3: Feet on the Chair and Ashes on the Floor

Study 3 employed a different norm violation and a different methodology (a video paradigm) to establish the robustness of the effect. In addition, we added indirect measures of power to rule out demand effects that may be an issue with more direct measures. Research on emotion stereotypes has found that powerful individuals are expected to react with more anger and less sadness to negative events than less powerful individuals (Tiedens et al., 2000) and, accordingly, to exhibit more active (e.g., approach, confrontation) and less passive (e.g., inhibition, helplessness) action tendencies (Keltner et al., 2003). We used this notion to develop an unobtrusive proxy of power perceptions, expecting that norm violations would lead to higher ratings of anger and approach tendencies and to lower ratings of sadness and inhibition tendencies.

Method

One hundred and twenty-six participants (81 females; $M = 21.93$ years, $SD = 4.49$) watched one of two 75 s video clips depicting a man in an open-air cafeteria (Figure 1). In the norm-violation (control) condition, the actor puts his feet on another chair (crosses his legs), lights a cigarette, and repeatedly drops the ash on the floor (in the ashtray). He glances at the menu, which he does not put back (carefully puts back) on the stand. After a while, the waiter asks, "Good morning sir, what would you like?" He answers,

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Figure 1. Screenshots from the norm-violation (top) and control condition (bottom) video clips (study 3)

"Bring me a vegetarian sandwich and a sweet coffee" ("May I have a vegetarian sandwich and a sweet coffee, please?"). The waiter says, "Right away," and he does not reply (replies: "Thank you"). He puts out his cigarette on the pavement (in the ashtray).

After viewing the video clip, participants completed the norm-violation perception scale (same as before; $\alpha = .93$), which was again embedded in a series of unrelated questions. One of those questions asked participants to what extent they perceived the person in the video as *active*. We included this

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item to examine whether any effects of norm violation on power perceptions were due to impressions of activity, which have been shown in past research to be related to perceptions of power (Magee, 2009). Next, we measured power with the validated and widely used Generalized Sense of Power Scale developed by Anderson et al. (e.g., Anderson & Galinsky, 2006). The items were converted from first-person to third-person to suit our purposes. Sample items are "I think this person has a great deal of power" and "If he wants to, this person gets to make the decisions" (reverse scored) ($\alpha = .80$).

Next, participants learned that the actor eventually received a wrong order. Participants indicated on 7-point scales to what extent they thought the actor would become angry (*angry*, *irritated*, *outraged*, *furious*, *annoyed*; $\alpha = .87$) or sad (*sad*, *down*, *distressed*, *depressed*; $\alpha = .82$). We then asked participants to predict the actor's approach/inhibition tendencies using existing general items (adapted from Frijda, Kuipers, & Ter Schure, 1989), complemented with situation-specific items that were constructed to fit the current context. Approach tendencies were measured with six items (e.g., "He wants to go against the situation and conquer"; "He will express his opposition"; "He will ask the waiter to change his order"; $\alpha = .80$). Inhibition tendencies were measured with four items (e.g., "He feels helpless"; "He will try to stop thinking about the situation"; "He will satisfy himself with the current order"; $\alpha = .70$).

Results and Discussion

Participants in the norm-violation condition scored higher on the norm-violation scale ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 0.89$) than those in the control condition ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.87$), $t(124) = 14.44$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.58$. Participants did not perceive the actor in the norm-violation condition as more active than the actor in the control condition. In fact, ratings were *lower* in the norm-violation condition ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.07$) than in the control condition ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.12$), $t(124) = -3.74$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.67$. This means that any effect on power perceptions in this study cannot be due to perceptions of action (cf., Magee, 2009), thus ruling out a possible confounding influence.

As predicted, participants in the norm-violation condition perceived the actor as more powerful ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 0.81$) than those in the control condition ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.04$), $t(124) = 7.54$, $p = .001$, $d = 1.36$. Participants in the norm-violation condition also expected the actor to feel more anger ($M = 5.96$, $SD = 0.79$) than did those in the control condition ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.09$), $t(124) = 4.86$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.88$. Conversely, participants in the norm-violation condition expected the actor to feel less sadness ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.04$) compared to those in the control condition ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 1.22$), $t(124) = -2.52$, $p = .013$, $d = 0.45$. Participants also ascribed more approach tendencies to the actor in the norm-violation condition ($M = 5.59$, $SD = 0.83$) compared to the control condition ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 1.08$), $t(124) = 5.05$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.91$. Conversely, the norm violator was expected to experience less inhibition ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.87$) than the actor in the control condition ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 0.99$), $t(124) = -2.44$, $p = .016$, $d = 0.44$ (see Figure 2).

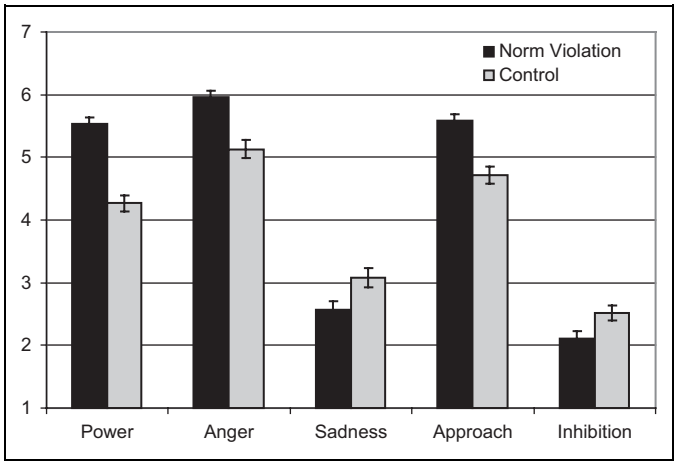

Figure 2. Effects of norm violation on perceptions of power, expected emotional reactions, and approach/inhibition tendencies (Study 3)

Study 4: Feet on the Table

So far participants rated the power of individuals with whom they did not actually interact, based on descriptions (Studies 1 and 2) and film clips (Study 3) of their behavior. To further establish the robustness and generalizability of our findings, we investigated whether the effects also occur in face-to-face interaction.

Method

Fifty-two students (38 women; mean age 20.63 years, $SD = 2.09$) participated in the study. The experiment employed a within-participants manipulation involving two male confederates of equal height and age. Both confederates played both roles (norm violator and control, counterbalanced) to limit potential confederate effects. There were no differences between the confederates, and therefore, this factor is not discussed further.

When participants arrived, one confederate was already waiting outside the lab (the "control" confederate, who behaved appropriately throughout the session). The experimenter led both inside the lab and told them that the experiment would start as soon as the third participant (the norm violator) had arrived. The experimenter asked the two first arrivals not to talk to each other yet and left to collect some questionnaires. Then, the norm-violating confederate arrived, 1.5 minutes late. He threw his bag on the table in front of the couches where the participant and the other confederate were sitting. As he sat down (always next to the other confederate), he put his feet on the table. Shortly thereafter, the experimenter returned with a packet of questionnaires. She explained that the three "participants" would work on a collaborative task in a few minutes. Then, she escorted each person to a different cubicle and asked

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participants to fill out a questionnaire, which assessed both confederates' volitional capacity, power, and manipulation checks (intermixed with several unrelated questions).

We used Magee's (2009) scale to measure volition inferences (see Study 2; $\alpha = .72$ for the norm-violating confederate and $\alpha = .75$ for the control confederate). Next, we measured perceived power with the Generalized Sense of Power Scale (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; see Study 3; $\alpha = .73$ and $\alpha = .81$, respectively). Finally, we administered the norm-violation perception scale (same as before; $\alpha = .81$ and $\alpha = .80$).

Results and Discussion

The norm-violating confederate was rated higher on the norm-violation scale ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.16$) than the control confederate ($M = 2.46$, $SD = 0.75$), $t(51) = 8.18$, $p = .001$, $d = 1.32$. Furthermore, participants rated the norm-violating confederate higher on volitional capacity ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 0.70$) than the control confederate ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 0.75$), $t(51) = 4.92$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.73$. The norm-violating confederate was also rated as more powerful ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 0.98$) than the control confederate ($M = 4.49$, $SD = 0.98$), $t(51) = 2.27$, $p = .028$, $d = 0.41$.

Given the within-participants design, we conducted repeated-measures ANOVAs with power ratings of the two confederates as a repeated-measures factor to test whether the norm-violation effect can be explained in terms of volition inferences. Consistent with the t test, a significant repeated-measures effect emerged, indicating that the norm-violating confederate was rated higher on power than the control confederate, $F(1, 51) = 5.14$, $p = .028$. When volition inferences were added as a covariate, a significant effect of the covariate emerged, $F(1, 50) = 10.65$, $p = .002$, and the norm-violation effect became nonsignificant, $F(1, 50) = .04$, $p = .85$. A Sobel test indicated that the indirect effect was significant, $z = 2.72$, $p = .007$. These results indicate that the norm-violation-to-power effect is mediated by volition inferences.

General Discussion

The idea that power corrupts and propels individuals to violate norms is widespread (e.g., Kipnis, 1972; Lammers et al., 2010), but the reverse possibility had never been explored. Although one would hope, perhaps, that norm violations undermine power, the present investigation revealed that norm violations lead individuals to be perceived as *more* powerful. We established this phenomenon using different paradigms (scenarios, a film clip, confederates enacting norm violations in face-to-face interaction) and different violations (taking coffee from another person's can, bending the rules of bookkeeping, dropping ashes on the floor, putting one's feet on the table). The effect emerged on various explicit measures of power as well as on indirect, unobtrusive measures (i.e., expected emotional reactions and action tendencies). Norm violators were expected to react with more anger and less sadness when faced with a negative event, and they were expected to show more approach tendencies and less inhibition tendencies. Mediation analyses showed that the norm-violation effect can be explained in terms of volition inferences: Norm violators are perceived as having the capacity to act as they please, which fuels perceptions of power.[1]

The question of what makes people rise to power has a longstanding interest in the social sciences (Hall et al., 2005; Keltner et al., 2008). Empirical work has uncovered several predictors of power, ranging from personality traits such as extraversion (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001) and dominance (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009) to demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, ethnicity; Ridgeway et al., 1985) to nonverbal behavior (e.g., engagement, status moves; Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Tiedens & Fragale, 2003). We contribute to this domain by showing that individuals can gain power in the eyes of others by violating norms. To the extent that perceived power translates into actual power positions (Anderson et al., 2001), our findings enhance understanding of when and how individuals attain power.

This study points to a new mechanism through which social and organizational hierarchies are reinforced and perpetuated. Because power leads to behavioral disinhibition (Galinsky et al., 2003; Keltner et al., 2003), the powerful are more likely to violate norms (Bargh et al., 1995; Haney et al., 1973; Kipnis, 1972; Lammers et al., 2010). Doing so in turn leads other people to perceive them as powerful, as we have demonstrated. As individuals thus gain power, their behavior becomes even more liberated, possibly leading to more norm violations, and thus evoking a self-reinforcing process. This vicious cycle of norm violations and power affordance may play a role in the emergence and perpetuation of a multitude of undesirable social and organizational behaviors such as fraud, sexual harassment, and violence. Indeed, among groups of hooligans and street gangs, norm violations (e.g., violence, vandalism) are thought of as status enhancing (cf., Sijtsema et al., 2009). As hooligans attain higher status in their group and feel more powerful, behavioral liberation may promote more violence.

We are not claiming that norm violations always lead to perceptions of power. Our goal here was to demonstrate, for the first time, that they *can*. It is unclear whether there are boundary conditions to this effect. For instance, is the effect limited to certain types or degrees of norm violation? Are members of some groups (e.g., higher status groups) more likely to get away with norm violations than members of other (e.g., lower status) groups? Do inferences of power based on norm violations persist, or do they fade away in the longer run? And what happens when a person repeatedly breaks the rules? Do the repeated transgressions reinforce the effect, or will they backfire at some point? We suspect that whether and how long people get away with norm violations depends on whether they have the competencies and affordances that warrant power. People are quick to detect power in others but also to undermine a person's power position (for instance, through gossip) when they feel it is illegitimate (Keltner et al., 2008). A person who breaks norms repeatedly but fails to do what it takes to maintain power may ultimately fall from grace.

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Another question that would be interesting to explore is whether the norm-violation-to-power effect is moderated by the social consequences of the norm violation. According to the reciprocal influence model of power (Keltner et al., 2008), people are afforded power when they act in the interest of the group. Based on this idea, norm violators should be more likely to be afforded power when the norm violation entails benefits for other people. Conversely, power may be taken away from them when their violation hurts the group (cf., Anderson, Srivastava, Beer, Spataro, & Chatman, 2006). Thus, violating norms in the interest of one's group may be an especially powerful way to increase one's standing.

A final issue concerns the role of action. Individuals who display a greater proclivity to act tend to be perceived as more powerful (Magee, 2009). This raises the question of whether norm violations that entail action lead to stronger perceptions of power than norm violations that entail inaction (e.g., refusing to comply with a normative request). Our Study 3 finding that a norm-violating actor was perceived as more powerful than a nonviolator despite being seen as *less* active suggests that norm violations that do not entail action can also fuel power perceptions. We suspect that the role of action depends on the context, such that the type of (in)action that signals the most volitional capacity is most likely to produce power perceptions. Future studies could explore this possibility.

Awaiting future research, we conclude that norm violations can increase one's power in the eyes of others. As individuals gain power, they experience increased freedom to violate prevailing norms. Paradoxically, these norm violations may not undermine the actor's power but instead augment it, thus fueling a self-perpetuating cycle of power and immorality.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interests with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

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Note

1. We also explored whether norm-violation perceptions mediated the norm-violation-to-power effect. In Study 1, norm-violation perceptions were significantly correlated with the power adjectives scale ($r = .45$, $p = .001$), and the effect on perceived power was partially mediated by norm-violation perceptions ($z = 1.65$, $p = .05$, one-tailed test due to small sample size [$N = 40$]). In Study 2, norm-violation perceptions were also correlated with power perceptions ($r = .44$, $p = .001$), and the effect of norm violation on power perception was fully mediated by norm violation perceptions ($z = 4.62$, $p = .001$). In Study 3, norm-violation perceptions again correlated with power perceptions ($r = .62$, $p = .001$) and fully mediated the norm-violation-to-power effect ($z = 3.90$, $p = .001$). In Study 4, norm-violation perceptions were moderately associated with power perceptions ($r = .24$, $p = .087$), and controlling for these perceptions rendered the norm-violation-to-power effect nonsignificant ($z = 1.71$, $p = .044$, one-tailed due to small sample size [$N = 52$]). Thus, across the four studies, there is converging evidence that norm-violation perceptions mediated the norm-violation-to-power effect, lending additional support for our theoretical model.

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