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The Psychological Consequences of Power on Self-perception: Implications for Leadership

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Structured Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to explore theoretical connections between the cognitive consequences of power on self-perception and the behaviours of leaders.

Design/methodology/approach: A systematic literature review was carried out to investigate the psychological consequences of power in terms of self-perception, perspective taking abilities, emotions, and behaviours. The literature reviewed is further integrated in a theoretical model, and a series of propositions suggesting a relation between power, perspective taking, self-construal, and leadership are introduced.

Findings: We argue that power creates both temporary and enduring cognitive changes that transform the way individuals assimilate and differentiate their self from others. This transforms the way individuals in power behave as leaders, as well as followers. Individuals' self-construal and perspective taking seem to play a mediating role in determining the behaviours of powerful and powerless individuals. This relation is moderated by organisational culture and structure, as well as personality traits.

Research limitations/implications : Further research is needed to test these propositions, including the existence of cross-cultural differences in the power – self-construal relation, and the consequences of holding different types



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of power on an individual's self-construal. For employees and consultants working in organisational development and organisational change, understanding the potential consequences of power in terms of self-perception will improve the understanding of promoting individuals to higher positions. The present research also bears implications for scholars interested in understanding cross-cultural and gender differences in leadership.

Originality/value: This conceptualisation of self-construal as an interface between power and leadership reconcile the individual dynamics of trait theories of leadership and the environmental positions of situational theories of leadership. The paper discusses elements considered critical for design of leadership programs in the workplace, professional development and programs to shape the design of leadership.

Keywords: power, leadership, self-construal, perspective taking, cognitive psychology

Article Classification: conceptual paper

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The psychological consequences of power on self-perception:

Implications for leadership

1. Introduction

During his first electoral campaign for the presidency of the United States, Barack Obama suggested:

Washington is an especially virulent aspect of what happens when people in power are only talking to other monied power interests. They forget that there are an awful lot of people out there who are working just as hard, in many cases more honorably, but are still struggling. (Newsweek, January 04, 2008).

Obama implied that power could change not only individuals' perception of themselves, but also the perception of their social environment. Classical research on leadership (e.g. Bales, 1950; Bass, 1998; Lewin and Lippitt, 1938) has not fully engaged with the psychological consequences of becoming powerful or lacking power, the effects it carries on self-perception or the consequences in terms of interpersonal interrelations. From great man theories of leadership to transactional theories of leadership, two general assumptions have emerged. The first is that the exercise of leadership is a matter of either an individual's characteristics, or of his or her environment. The second is that becoming a leader doesn't change the psychological functioning of an individual (Bass and Stogdill, 1990). Both assumptions are challenged in this paper, which explores theoretical connections between research on the cognitive consequences of power, self-perception and perspective taking.

Power has traditionally been defined in organisational psychology as a property of dyadic relations which affects both leaders and followers, enabling the emergence of a leader – follower relationship. The paper engages with propositions which centre on how can an understanding of the cognitive and behavioural consequences of power on self-perception account for a successful exercise of leadership and followership. We introduce two main

propositions – power increases individuals’ levels of independent self-construal and power decreases individuals’ levels of interdependent self-construal. We note that democratic and transformational leadership styles could be related to a dominant interdependent self-construal and autocratic and transactional leadership styles could be related to a dominant independent self-construal but that self-construal mediates the effect of power on leadership style. Finally, we suggest that both individual characteristics of leaders and organizational structure and culture could moderate these relationships.

Our overall aim is to offer an integrative perspective on the psychology of power and leadership. Traditional approaches have separated the study of the consequences of power from the understanding of the behaviours of leaders, and we argue that it is essential to look at both literatures simultaneously. Such a perspective not only allows a better understanding of the psychology of leaders, but it also allows a simultaneous understanding of the psychology of powerless individuals – quite often followers. A first objective is to bridge the existing gap in the literature between the psychology of power and that of leadership. By showing the systematic existing connections between the two, we show how the psychological consequences of power enable the exercise of leadership to be possible. This also addresses recent calls for a longitudinal perspective on leadership, taking into account gradual changes in individual personality in the emerging process of leadership (Shamir, 2011). Equally important, it also introduces a literature that is often overlooked by leadership scholars. A second objective is to address the issue of the currently unknown mechanisms by which power enables such exercise of leadership to be possible. We argue that self-construal – a self-process that determines how individuals relate to others in a dependent or interdependent way (Markus and Kitayama, 1991) – acts as a mediator of the relation between power and leadership. Finally, we further discuss how the consequences of power

and self-construal can be integrated and related to other known dispositional and situational antecedents of leadership.

2. Theoretical framework: Power and the Self

2.1 Power: A multifaceted construct

Power, often referred to as one of the most fundamental concepts in social sciences, is, according to Russell (1938, p. 10, in Keltner *et al.*, 2003), “*the fundamental concept in social science [...], in the same sense that energy is the fundamental concept in physics*”. Traditional definitions of power define it as a potentiality to exert influence and to stay uninfluenced from others (Lewin and Cartwright, 1951; see also Copeland, 1994; Dahl, 1959; Huston, 1983; Pruitt, 1976; Weber, 1947). In a similar vein, French and Raven (1959) have defined social power as the maximum potentiality of an actor to influence another one in a given social system, and have suggested that influence associated with power is based on five dimensions: coercion, reward, expertise, legitimacy, and referent power. Another perspective on the definition of power is that of Magee *et al.* (2007, p 201), who defined power as “*the capacity to control one’s own and others’ resources and outcomes*” (see also Fiske, 1993; Keltner *et al.*, 2003; Thibaut and Kelley, 1959).

Power is inherently related to leadership (Maccoby, 1981; Zaleznik and Kets de Vries, 1975), and is traditionally seen as one of the components allowing the exercise of leadership to be possible. Being a key component of social interactions, power is pervasive in most social relations (Fiske, 1993), and is used by individuals to understand and organize their relationships (Lee and Tiedens, 2001). Researchers interested in the relation between power and leadership have mainly focused on power as a property of a dyadic relationship, looking at macro effects of power on individuals, but have largely ignored the micro effect of power on the self – which we review here.

2.2 Power, information processing and judgement about others

Power firstly affects an individual's sensitivity to external influence. Galinsky *et al.* (2008) for instance showed that, when asked to create new brand names, participants primed with power – using a word-completion task – created names without being influenced by benchmarks. Similarly, Brinol *et al.* (2007) showed that social roles (*e.g.* a boss role *vs.* an employee role) reinforce confidence in individuals' beliefs. This may be due to the fact that individuals holding high power are confident that they report attitudes that are consistent with what they truly believe (Anderson and Berdahl, 2002).

Power also affects the way individuals' process information (Fiske, 1993, 2001). Power affects the way people pay attention and process cues that are either relevant or irrelevant to accessible information, such as goals or needs (Guinote, 2007c). This is because, following Guinote (2007c, 2008), powerless individuals might be more easily distracted by non-essential information. Weick and Guinote (2008) suggests that power, both in the form of primed power, traits, and actual managerial power, affects the way individuals generate thoughts. Individuals with power tend to be more focused on their own internal states, and are more self-confident (Anderson and Galinsky, 2006). They also tend to pay more attention to their own thoughts, when they have to generate new thoughts (Brinol *et al.*, 2007). The Situated Focus Theory of Power (Guinote, 2007a) explains the effect of power on individual cognition in terms of an increase of available cognitive resources and ability to complete tasks more accurately. According to Overbeck and Park (2006), individuals with power use, at times, more flexible strategies for information processing.

Finally, power changes the way individuals form impression about others. Goodwin *et al.* (1998) observed that individuals high in dominance use more stereotypes and pay more attention to this type of information, often ignoring counter-stereotype information. Keltner and Robinson (1997) noted that individuals who hold power positions in universities (tenured *vs.* non-tenured professors) systematically overestimate the differences they have with others

and tend to underestimate the common points they share with their opponents. Guinote (2007b) suggested that when stereotypes are available, individuals with power use them and individuals without power form more complex social representations. Gruenfeld *et al.* (2008) opined that individuals primed with high power see other individuals more as a means to an end than individuals primed with low power, and they concluded that power increases the objectification of others.

Power also directly affects the type of emotional connections that powerful individuals develop with others (Keltner *et al.*, 2001). Regan and Totten (1975) showed that when asked to empathize with target persons, respondents with low power were more likely to adopt the perspective of others. Keltner and Ebenbach (1995, cited in Keltner and Robinson, 1996) showed that college students living in the same fraternity were more accurate in judging fellow members' emotional and personality traits when they were low in power rather than when they were high in power. Hsee *et al.* (1990) argued that in the context of a learning exercise, powerful individuals actually display more emotional contagion than powerless ones.

In addition, individuals who hold power tend to experience different emotions to those who do not. Anderson and Berdahl (2002) argued that powerful individuals experience more positive emotions and fewer negative ones than powerless individuals, and are more likely to express their true attitudes than individuals without power. Hecht and LaFrance (1998) considered that individuals with power only smile when they actually experience positive emotions, while individuals with low power both when they experience positive emotions and when they do not. Van Kleef *et al.* (2006) argued that powerless individuals consider the emotions of the other side more than powerful individuals do.

2.3 The consequences of power on individual behaviours

The influence of power on individuals' behaviours has been studied since the early 70s, when research on the consequences of power emerged (Andersen and Chen, 2002). The relation between power and behaviours has been investigated following two distinct approaches. The first looked at power as a dispositional characteristic, focusing on a general sense of power or dominance. The second looked at power as a situational characteristic, which can vary across situations, and has mainly been used by experimental psychologists. When considering the effect of power on self-perception, the fit between dispositional and situational forms of power will be crucial to determine the strength of the effect of power on behaviours (Chen *et al.*, 2009).

Power has firstly been related to a higher tendency to adopt proactive behaviours and to make the first move in negotiations (Magee *et al.*, 2007). Power also changes the way individuals act in exchange relations (Chen *et al.*, 2001). Individuals oriented towards exchange tend to react to power in a personal and selfish way, by preserving their own interests. Individuals with power are also less likely to donate to suffering individuals than individuals with low power (Xianchi and Fries, 2008). Galinsky *et al.* (2003) argued power creates an action orientation from the power holders, which in return are more likely to have approach-related tendencies, whereas powerless individuals are more likely to have inhibition-related tendencies.

Second, as suggested with previous definitions of power, individuals who hold power are more likely to actively try to influence others (Kipnis, 1972). More specifically, they tend to try to manipulate individuals with low levels of power and prefer to maintain psychological distance from these individuals. Similarly, Lippitt *et al.* (1960) showed, using a field study involving children, that boys with more power are more likely to report trying to influence other children.

Third, individuals with power have been shown to display more socially unacceptable behaviours, thereby transgressing social norms. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggested that individuals with power often show disrespect towards politeness rules (see also DePaulo and Friedman, 1998). Ward and Keltner (1998, cited in Magee *et al.*, 2005) noted that individuals with power display inappropriate behaviours. Power is related to an increase in making associations with sexual thoughts. In two experiments, Bargh *et al.* (1995) showed that men high in likelihood to sexually harass were more likely to find a female target attractive when primed with power.

3. Understanding the relation between power and leadership: Self-construal as the missing link

Cross *et al.* (2011, p 143) defined self-construal as the way individuals see their self in relation to others. The notion of self-construal emerged in 1991, when Markus and Kitayama introduced two different construals of the self, which they suggested were triggered by cultural differences: the independent and interdependent self-construal. They suggested that these differences in terms of self-views were likely to affect cognition, emotions and motivation. The notion of self-construal subsequently became one of the most influential ones in social and cultural psychology due to its capacity to provide an integrative framework for the study of many social psychology phenomena. In this section, we consider possible linkages between power, self-construal, and leadership. For each bi-variate relationship, we review different streams of literature that support the proposed relations. We conclude each sub-section by deriving a series of propositions.

3.1 Power and self-construal

Individuals with power typically encounter conditions which favour the expression of differences between the representation of their self and that of other individuals – that is changes in their self-construal. Anderson *et al.* (2003) for instance showed that, in a romantic

relationship between two people, the one with less power – operationalized in their study as perceived influence over the course of the relationship – is the one who adapts him or herself to the other. Power tends to create distance between individuals, leading individuals to be less likely to identify with others and to incorporate them in their self-concept (Lee and Tiedens, 2001). Powerful individuals, especially those holding high status and control over resources in dyadic relationships, are more likely to engage in more in-depth self-presentations, which are more representative of their unique personality (Guinote *et al.*, 2002). Power may therefore influence self-construal by changing the way individuals are influenced by others. Self-construal being defined as the assimilation and differentiation of one's self from others, it is likely that individuals with power, who are likely to influence others, will be less sensitive to the influence of power exercised on them by others. Conversely, individuals with low power will be influenced by others, and therefore would be more likely to incorporate others in their self-definition.

Fiske and Berdahl (2007) further consider that power, in the context of social power in organizations, creates a tension between independence from others and responsibility towards others. They argued that the powerful are independent from the powerless, and that the powerless are dependent on the powerful. The dependence of the powerless is due to the fact that powerless individuals need to understand how they can receive the best outcomes from powerful individuals. Yet, powerful individuals are also responsible. The responsibility of powerful individual comes from the fact that, although they may act independently from others, their actions have more impact on others than those of the powerless ones. Fiske and Berdahl further noted the responsibility side of power has received little attention, and it is possible that specific situations or personality traits may move the power holder towards a more independent exercise of power, or towards the responsibility side of it, hence changing the type of leadership style they adopt.

Two additional reasons may explain the effect of power on self-construal. Firstly, power requires effort and attention. Therefore, when one wishes to maintain his or her power, one is less likely to have time to consider others, since one's resources are limited. Cast (2003) reported that among newly married couples, the partner with the most power has a more rigid self-concept, which is more hermetic to the inclusion of knowledge of others. Secondly, individuals in power have more control over resources, and therefore do not need to be dependent on others (Galinsky *et al.*, 2006). Miller (1986) also suggested individuals with low status need to know more about the dominants than the dominants need to know about them.

Finally, power is anchored in core social motives that regulate social relations. According to Fiske and Fiske (2007), individuals' core social motives are social belonging (securely *vs.* widely), understanding (relationship *vs.* persons; controlling as a group *vs.* individual), self-enhancement (enhancing relationships *vs.* self-enhancement) and trusting (trusting selectively *vs.* widely). Power plays a role in individuals preferring one form of core social motive to the other. For instance, individuals with low power will favour enhancing relationships, whereas individuals with high power will prefer self-enhancement.

The capacity of power to influence cognitive processes and behaviours echoes that of self-construal. Markus and Kitayama (1991) in fact argued that self-construal could be seen as an umbrella explanation for most of the differences observed when studying individual differences in emotion, cognition and behaviours. Consequently, we derive the following two propositions about the relation between power and self-construal:

Proposition 1: *Power increases individuals' levels of independent self-construal.*

Proposition 2: *Power decreases individuals' levels of interdependent self-construal.*

3.2 *Self-construal and leadership styles*

Well-established typologies of leadership can be framed in terms of differences between independent and interdependent self-construal. Lewin and Lippitt's (1938) classical distinction between *autocratic* and *democratic* leadership styles suggests differences in self-construal, with an individual holding a dominant independent self-construal being more likely to adopt an *autocratic* leadership style, and an individual holding a dominant interdependent self-construal more likely to adopt a *democratic* one. Individuals' self-construal has been shown to change the way individuals perceive outcomes of conflicts in negotiations. Individuals with high interdependent self-construal perceived conflict resolution as less of a zero-sum game than individuals low on interdependent self-construal (Gore and Cross, 2011). Howard *et al.* (2007) also showed that individuals' self-construal affected the way they chose to use their power in asymmetrical power relationships. Bales' (1950) distinction between *task-oriented* and *interpersonal-oriented* forms of leadership can also be related to independent and interdependent self-construals, with *task-oriented* leadership style being related to independent self-construal, and *interpersonal-oriented* leadership style being related to interdependent self-construal. A *task-oriented* form of leadership stresses the importance of structure in conducting a task, and provides clear role definitions and hierarchies for the different members of an organization, which makes it compatible with a dominant independent self-construal, given its association with analytical thinking (Smith and Trope, 2006). Conversely, an *interpersonal-oriented* form stresses the importance of taking into account the welfare of the subordinates during the exercise of leadership, which makes it compatible with interdependent self-construal. Bass' (1998) distinction between *transformational* and *transactional* leadership styles can be similarly related to independent and interdependent self-construals. *Transformational* leaders tend to adopt empowerment

strategies, meaning that they are keen to share their power (Jung and Sosik, 2002). This suggests the use of higher levels of interdependent self-construals. *Transactional* leaders tend to be more focused on their own interests, which suggest the use of higher levels of independent self-construals.

Beyond these traditional typologies of leadership style, independent and interdependent self-construal could also be related to other typologies of leadership style. Dion (2012) reviewed eight approaches to leadership, most of which can be framed in the light of the independent vs. interdependent self-construal framework. For instance, Flamholz's (1990) theory of *directive leadership* distinguishes several styles of leadership that could reflect high levels of interdependent self-construal (e.g. consultative, participative or consensual leadership styles). *Shared leadership* (Waldersee and Eagleson, 2002) or *distributed leadership* (Yukl, 2006) could be made possible by leaders holding high levels of interdependent self-construal, in an organization in which followers would also hold high levels of interdependent self-construal that allow them to connect with others. Finally, *servant leadership* could also reflect situations in which leaders hold distinctively high levels of interdependent self-construal, reflecting an overlap between the representation of their self and that of others (Stone *et al.*, 2004). Overall, using self-construal theory as a way to frame and understand different typologies of leadership style offers an integrative way of looking at a sometimes-confusing and contradicting literature.

Another recurring debate in the literature on leadership styles that can be understood in the light of self-construal theory is question of the superiority of one style of leadership style over another one. Eagly (2007) argued that a female leadership style might be in many ways more efficient than a male leadership style, at least in some circumstances. This is due, according to the author, to women's qualities of "*cooperation, mentoring, and collaboration*" (Eagly, 2007, p. 2). Those qualities may reflect the use of an interdependent

self-construal, rather than being purely female attributes. Given the higher levels of interdependent self-construal women traditionally show (Cross and Madson, 1997), self-construal differences may better explain the performance associated with different types of leadership styles.

The type of leadership style adopted by power holders is also likely to influence the self-construal of followers. Several studies have suggested that when leaders adopt a transformative leadership style, their followers' self-efficacy can be improved, which in return, will affect their overall performance (Choi *et al.*, 2003; Dvir *et al.*, 2002; Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1996). As Van Knippenberg *et al.* (2004) further suggested, the self-concept of followers might play both a moderating and mediating role when considering the consequences of leadership styles on followers' performance. Given the importance of the leader-follower relationship in the exercise of leadership (Mumford *et al.*, 2000), and given the crucial role of self-construal in guiding relationship formation (Aron *et al.*, 1991), self-construal may explain the nature of the relation between the type of leadership style adopted by leaders and followers' self-efficacy, providing an explanation for an elusive phenomenon (Van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2004). The correlational nature of the studies discussed suggests that the direction of the relationship between self-construal and leadership style maybe bi-directional. This reflects difficulties related to a recurring absence of experimental research in the field of leadership studies (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1996). Yet, given the role played by power in changing individuals' self-construal, and given the central role played by self-construal in shaping cognitions, emotions and behaviours (Markus and Kitayama, 1991), we believe that self-construal acts as an antecedent of leadership, mediating the cognitive consequences of power on the self, and derive from the above the following propositions about the relation between self-construal and leadership styles:

Proposition 3: *A dominant interdependent self-construal influences the use of democratic and transformational leadership styles*

Proposition 4: *A dominant independent self-construal influences the use of autocratic and transactional leadership styles*

3.3 Power, self-construal and leadership: The role of perspective taking

Perspective taking is an important notion to understand the relation between power, self-construal and leadership. Perspective taking is a key mechanism human beings use in adapting to their social environment (Davis *et al.*, 1996) and can be defined as an attempt to see the world and the surrounding environment from another person's point of view. According to Long and Andrews (1990), perspective taking is linked to empathy, and individuals use it to positively interact with others. Perspective taking may explain individual differences in self-construal in the sense that perspective taking helps individuals to understand others' intentions and beliefs, favouring interdependent self-construal. In many instances, this proves useful to preserve social harmony within and between different social groups. For example, perspective taking has been associated with such social benefits as increased altruism and cooperation (Galinsky *et al.*, 2005), and reduced in-group biases (Galinsky and Moskowitz, 2000). Powerless individuals may therefore use their perspective taking abilities to anticipate the expectations of powerful individuals, and act accordingly to gain social acceptance.

The existence of a relation between power and perspective taking has been supported in the literature. Galinsky *et al.* (2006) demonstrated the existence of a relationship between power and perspective taking. In their studies, power – in the form of a power prime involving a recall-task – changed the way respondents drew a letter on their forehead, making

it readable for their partner only when they were not primed with power. Galinsky and Mussweiler (2001) showed that individuals who take the perspective of the other in a negotiation process make more concessions than those who do not, suggesting that forcing someone to take the perspective of the other might result in this person displaying less negotiation power. Lammers *et al.* (2008) demonstrated that power, in the form of acting as a supervisor in a business task, is linked to perspective taking, and that perspective taking mediates the relation between power and the use of stereotyping. Individuals with more power are therefore less likely to adopt the perspective of the other than individuals who have less power.

The consequences of power on perspective taking and on both the psychology of leaders and followers may help to maintain a harmonious and productive relation between the two. The increase in low-power individuals' abilities to take the perspective of the other probably serves as a way to better follow leaders' instructions, and will be reinforced by interdependent self-construal. The interdependent self-construal of followers is also likely to favour identification with their leader. In turn, leaders with a transformational style probably show higher levels of perspective taking, which is corroborated by the fact that transformational leaders focus on the fulfilment of their followers' self-development (Avolio and Gibbons, 1988). Thus, the consequences of power for followers are that power favours increased identification with the organization, especially in organizations with a strong organizational culture, and more identification with the leader, given that self-construal favours shared representations of the self and others (Aron *et al.*, 1991; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). We therefore conclude with the following proposition:

Proposition 5: Perspective taking and self-construal mediate the effect of power on leadership style

4. Power, self-construal and leadership: Potential moderators of the relationship

The first part of this article mainly discussed the mediating role played by perspective taking and self-construal in the power – leadership relation. In this section, we further integrate our propositions with the existing literature on dispositional characteristics of leaders (*e.g.* personality traits) and characteristics of organizations that can affect the expression of leadership (*e.g.* organizational structure and culture), looking at the potential moderating role of these variables in our model.

4.1 Personality traits and the power – self-construal – leadership relation

Personality traits are likely to play a role in the power – self-construal – leadership relation, by attenuating or accentuating the effects of power and perspective taking on independent and interdependent self-construal. By personality traits, we mainly focus here on five-factor models of personality, which are the most stable and cross-culturally valid models of personality (Costa and McCrae, 1988; Digman, 1989; McCrae and Costa, 1997). As an indicator of personality stability, *neuroticism* could for instance moderate the relationship between independent and interdependent self-construal and autocratic / transactional and democratic / transformational leadership styles. Previous studies have found the existence of a link between low levels of *neuroticism* and the display of strong leadership qualities (Bass and Stogdill, 1990). Conversely, since individuals high in *neuroticism* are likely to show variations and inconsistencies in their emotions and thoughts, this might lead to the absence of a dominant type of leadership style, as individuals might be likely to show no dominant mode of self-construal. *Extraversion* has previously been related to social leadership (Costa and McCrae, 1988). Individuals high in *extraversion* could therefore display higher levels of interdependent self-construal and be more likely to adopt a democratic / transformational leadership style. Yet, the high level of energy and assertiveness typically associated with

extravert individuals (Hogan *et al.*, 1994) could also suggest an increase in independent self-construal and autocratic / transactional leadership style among highly *extravert* individuals. *Openness* could similarly play the role of a reinforcer of the relation between independent self-construal and autocratic / transactional leadership style. *Openness* has been related to creativity and independence of thought (McCrae and Costa, 1997) and divergent thinking (McCrae, 1987), which are also markers of independent self-construal. *Agreeableness* can be related to interdependent self-construal, considering that need for affiliation is generally considered to be an indicator of *agreeableness* (Piedmont *et al.*, 1991) and that individuals high in need for affiliation are thought to be more supportive towards others (Yukl, 2006). Thus, individuals high in *agreeableness* might see higher levels of interdependent self-construal, and consequently of democratic / transformational leadership style. Washington *et al.* (2006) also previously related servant leadership with *agreeableness*. Finally, *conscientiousness* is likely to be related to independent self-construal, since it fosters self-reliance and persistence in ones' initiatives and current work (Kirkpatrick and Locke, 1991). Consequently, individuals high in *conscientiousness* are likely to be more autocratic and transactional in their approach to leadership, given their more result-oriented approach to management.

Personality orientations could also moderate the effect of power on behaviours. Goodwin *et al.* (2000) demonstrated that priming responsibility to powerful individuals moderated their use of power, and changed the way they processed social information. Chen *et al.* (2001) suggested that relationship orientation (exchange *vs.* communal) also moderated power's effects on behaviours. Lammers and Galinsky (2009) argued the effect of power on individuals' cognitions depended on the meaning that they attach to power relationships. When individuals have a functionalist approach to power, they are likely to see power as legitimate and as allowing societies to function. When individuals have a conflicting

approach to power, they might see power as a corrupting element that disturbs the functioning of societies and creates inequalities. Therefore, different personality orientation towards power might affect the effect of power on self-construal, and consequently on leadership.

Finally, independent and interdependent self-construal are likely to interact with other self-processes to influence leadership style and leadership effectiveness. Bono and Judge (2003) for example demonstrated that self-consistency partly mediated the influence of transformational leadership on employee's performance. Another self-process that may mediate the relation between leadership style and employees' performance is self-esteem (De Cremer, 2003). Leaders that use consistent procedures see an increase in their followers' self-esteem, resulting eventually in higher performances (Shamir *et al.*, 1993). Overall, and in line with what has been suggested by Fiske and Berdahl (2007), personality traits and orientation are likely to moderate the effect of self-construal changes resulting from power on leadership. We therefore propose:

Proposition 6: Personality traits and orientation moderate the relation between self-construal and leadership style

4.2 Organizational factors and the power – self-construal – leadership relation

The structure and culture of an organisation is also likely to moderate the relation between power, self-construal, and leadership, since culture-specific perceptions, within organizations, can interact with a leader's self-construal. For instance, in organizations which promote close relationships between employees – for instance *via* a people-oriented, matrix structure – and which emphasize harmony and conformity to social hierarchies, the effect of power on independent self-construal – and subsequently on autocratic / transactional

leadership style – is likely to be attenuated. The effect of power and self-construal on leadership styles might, in fact, depend on the congruency between the type of organizational culture and structure, and a leader's dominant type of self-construal. If an organisational culture creates conditions which favour close relationships between employees, then power might reinforce a leader's interdependent self-construal, resulting in the adoption of a democratic / transformational leadership style. Conversely, in a task-oriented, centralized organization, power is likely to predominantly influence an individual's independent self-construal, resulting in the use of an autocratic / transactional leadership style.

Overall, whenever a discrepancy exists between an individual's dominant self-construal and the cultural orientation of an organization, this could lead to the adoption of inefficient leadership styles. Organisations therefore need to pay attention to the fit between a leader's self-construal, and the culture of an organization. Alternatively, if an organizational culture is improperly articulated across the organizational structure, this can result in the emergence of a sub-culture, dominated by a leader's own leadership style and self-construal (Brewer, 1993).

Changes in self-construal resulting from power shifts could also have a transforming influence within hierarchical organisations. Indeed, the longevity of change lies not merely with the temporary power of the leader but the acceptance, agreement and purchase of ideas and concepts. Hierarchical organisations and cultures are not built in general upon intellectual rigour but are frequently built upon complex power relationships and interactions (Ashkanasy, 2007; Holmberg and Akerblom, 2006). These are prone to major revisions when one leader is replaced by another. Hierarchical culture can frequently produce acceptance but not purchase. Paradoxically, leaders – regardless of their own self-construal – can become prisoners of the very culture that they serve and may wish to mediate.

This, altogether, suggest that the expression of the consequences of power on self-construal, and subsequently on leadership style, is likely to be embedded in the nature, structure and culture of an organization. We therefore propose:

Proposition 7: *Organizational structure and culture moderate the effect of self-construal on leadership style*

Figure 1 summarizes our model, including our seven propositions, and suggested relations between power, perspective taking, self-construal and leadership style, and the potential moderating role of personality traits, organizational structure and culture.

<Figure 1 about here>

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical implications

One of the major implications of the present model pertains to the understanding of gender differences in leadership style. Gender is generally considered an “*institutionalized system of social practices that creates a set of expected behaviours for men and women*” (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 637). Eagly and Johnson (1990) questioned the existence of gender differences in leadership style, in a meta-analysis in which they found that the only notable gender difference was a difference between democratic vs. autocratic style – with female leaders being more likely to use a democratic leadership style, and male leaders an autocratic one. It may be argued that rather than being purely ‘male’ or ‘female’, different types of leadership may better be labelled ‘independent type of leadership’ and ‘interdependent type of leadership’. Given the relation between power and self-construal identified in this paper, a

typology of leadership styles based on individual differences in self-construal may be more relevant than a typology based on gender.

Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) further observed that women in power often experience a conflict between conforming to their expected gender roles and their expected leadership roles. This conflict most likely result from the contradiction between the high levels of interdependent self-construal traditionally observed among women (Cross and Madson, 1997) and the consequences of power on independent and interdependent self-construal. Women may use interdependent self-construal as a way to conform to the expectations of gender roles, so as to show concern for others. Tension might also arise between men followers and female leaders as a result of the asymmetric consequences of power on self-construal, and the different types of leadership style primarily adopted by women, resulting in men followers evaluating female leaders less favourably (Ayman *et al.*, 2009).

An additional theoretical implication of the present research relates to understanding cross-cultural differences in leadership. Self-construal being an inherently cross-cultural concept (Markus and Kitayama, 1991), understanding how culture shapes perceptions of power could offer interesting perspectives on how power might effect self-construal and leadership across cultures. Lammers and Galinsky (2009) for instance argued power is associated with independence in individualistic cultures, and with interdependence in collectivist cultures. In collectivist cultures, power-holders are expected to act responsibly, which is likely to be shaped by the higher levels of interdependent self-construal levels traditionally observed in these cultures (Magee *et al.*, 2010). Cross-cultural differences in terms of self-construal could also explain why choices of influence tactics tend to differ across countries (Fu and Yukl, 2000).

Finally, researchers interested in the consequences of empowerment in communities may also benefit from the outcomes of research on power, self-perception and leadership. Given the present findings, research on empowerment may start to investigate the negative consequences of empowerment. Because empowerment may change the way individuals see themselves in relation to others, it may lead to structural changes in small communities, lowering the impact of development policies. Rather than bringing individuals together, it may have the opposite effect in some small communities. In addition, the present research may explain previous findings on community development, which have suggested that empowerment may be more successful for women than for men (Momsen, 1991). Higher success of policies targeting women may be explained by the increase in their level of interdependent self-construal, which triggers a stronger commitment to the community, and a will to give back to the community once empowered. Understanding the consequences of empowerment in terms of self-perception may therefore be key in order to manage the desired outcomes of such policies by governments.

5.2 Managerial implications

For employers, understanding the effect of power on self-construal and leadership may result in improved recruitment practices. Certain types of work – involving being a follower in a team – might require a high level of interdependent self-construal. Conversely, other types of work – involving decisional leadership roles – may require a high level of independent self-construal. Existing measures of independent and interdependent self-construal (*e.g.* Harb and Smith, 2008; Singelis, 1994) could be used to assess prospective applicants' self-construal, in the same way personality tests are usually used to identify a candidate's strengths and weaknesses.

Besides recruitment purposes, the consequences of power on self-construal and leadership may help in the understanding of the consequences of promoting an individual to a

higher position in the hierarchy of a company. Since promoting an individual is likely to increase an individual's feeling of power, consequences of such promotions in terms of self-construal should be taken into account when deciding whom to promote. Whether a person promoted would need to act independently or interdependently in his or her new occupation may influence the final decision. This could prove useful for individuals in charge of leadership development in organizations, by highlighting the need for taking into consideration the potential consequences of power in terms of self-perception. Coaches and mentors working on these issues could benefit from familiarizing with the theory of self-construal and its consequences in terms of power and perspective taking. For consultants working on organisational change and organisational development, the results of this research will provide insights into the understanding of intra-organisation dynamics and different types of leadership. It also carries important consequences for approaching male and female forms of leadership.

5.3 Limitations and future research

The main limitations of the present article result from the use of a systematic literature review as the main method. Despite the support of numerous empirical articles from the literature of power, self-construal and leadership – corroborating our seven propositions – the present research did not involve data collection, and we therefore cannot offer empirical support for our propositions. Yet, we believe that there is ample evidence to support a theoretical connection between power, self-construal, and leadership. Future research will therefore need to test the propositions in order to establish the precise relationships between power, self-construal, and leadership.

Another question that will require further investigation is that of the direction of the causality between the different constructs discussed here. We have argued that power acts as an antecedent of self-construal, which in return shapes leadership behaviours. We cannot rule

the possibility of a recursive relation between the concepts, meaning that leadership styles could in return influence individuals' dominant self-construal, which then could influence the way individuals acquire or not additional power. Previous research has suggested that self-construal could act as a moderator or mediator of leadership style and leadership effectiveness (Nahum-Shani and Somech, 2011; Pekerti and Sendjaya, 2010). Chen and Welland (2002) showed that a self-construal prime could also serve as a moderator of the use of power. Overbeck and Park (2001) also showed that when primed with interdependence, managers care more about their subordinates. Future research could address this question by testing different types of relations between power, self-construal and leadership using different experimental models, as well as conducting mediation analyses.

As the relation between power, self-construal and leadership becomes empirically established, a necessary following step will be to uncover the exact role played by different forms of power. Studies reported here come from experimental social and cognitive psychology or from the leadership literature, and conceptualized power as influence (*e.g.* Smith and Trope, 2006) or as control over resources (*e.g.* Guinote *et al.*, 2002). Since most experimental work manipulated power in terms of influence or control over resources, the role played by other forms of power on self-construal and leadership style remains elusive. For instance, would the use of 'softer' forms of power (*e.g.* expertise or referent power in French and Raven's typology) have the same effect on the hypothesized causal relationship between power, self-construal, and leadership than the use of 'harder' forms of power (*e.g.* coercion or legitimacy, in French and Raven's typology)? It could be argued that the use of 'soft' types of power, could lead to an increase in interdependent self-construal. Conversely, the use of 'hard' types of power could well reinforce the effect of power on independent self-construal. The main difficulty of conducting such research is to be able to distinguish

between the cognitive consequences of power, and the behavioural consequences of these various forms of power, especially in terms of followers' reactions.

Finally, investigating cross-cultural variations in the relation between power, self-construal and leadership could also reveal insightful findings. The way powerful individuals are expected to behave varies across culture (Torelli and Shavitt, 2010). In Western cultures, power-holders are generally expected to use power in a way that reinforces their personal status, suggesting that autocratic / transactional leadership could be the preferred mode of leadership style. In Eastern cultures, power comes with a perceived duty of responsibility of the power holder towards followers, suggesting that democratic / transformational leadership style could be the preferred mode of leadership. Clarifying the role of power and self-construal in the context of cross-cultural leadership could help understanding why previous findings suggested cross-cultural differences in terms of the efficiency of different types of leadership styles (Jung and Avolio, 1999). Similarly, investigating the relation between power and self-construal for individuals belonging to minority groups could reveal interesting findings on whether personal power could overcome low-power stereotypes, and how this would relate to agentic or communal leadership styles (Livingston *et al.*, 2012).

6. Conclusion

This paper has engaged with the psychological consequences of having or lacking power, and offers theoretical perspectives to improve current understanding of leadership behaviours in organisations. By systematically comparing and contrasting evidence from the literature on the cognitive and behavioural consequences of power with evidence from the literature on self-perception and leadership style, we suggest that understanding the psychological consequences of power has major implications for leadership scholars and practitioners. We offer new perspectives to improve the understanding of the mechanisms by which power enables the exercise of leadership. We support Galinsky *et al.* (2008) position

that the psychological consequences of power allow for the exercise of leadership. However, we argue that self-construal is the key variable in explaining the relation traditionally observed between power and leadership style.

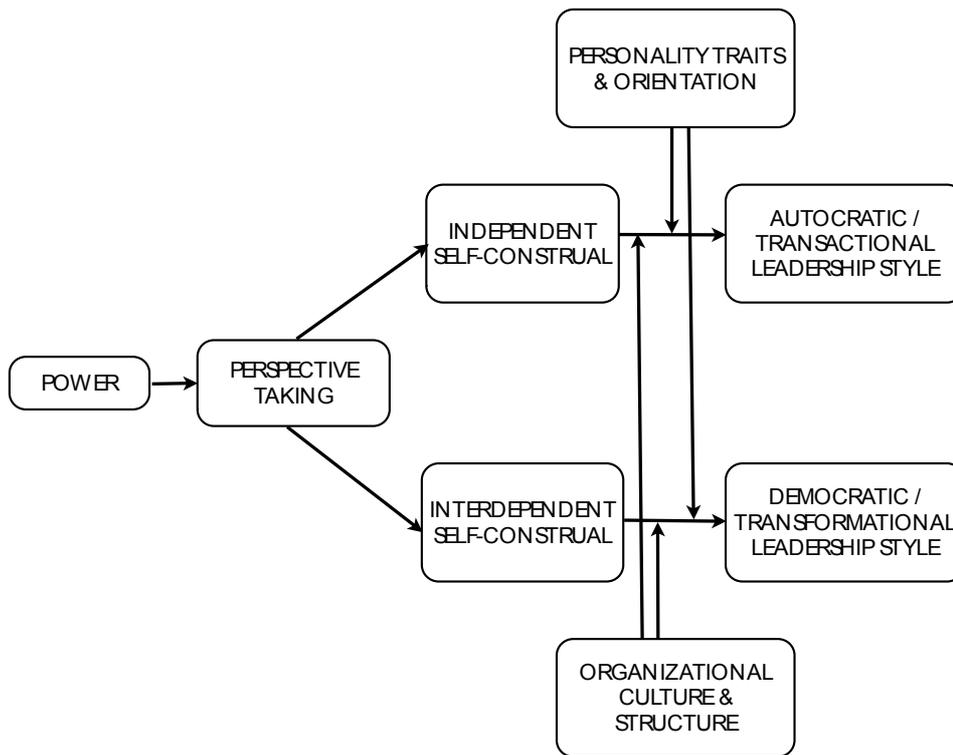
We do not claim that power acts as a sole antecedent of self-construal, which in return changes the way individuals behave as leaders. Self-construal processes are complex, and can be influenced by many factors. While we have insisted on the potential of self-construal to serve as a core antecedent of leadership style, and as a result of the effect of power, we have also considered the necessary complexity of the relation between individual characteristics and the power – leadership connection, by looking at the potential moderating roles of personality traits and organizational factors. A difficulty in understanding the relation between these constructs is that the relation between power, self-construal and leadership is likely to be a recursive one. In addition, the link between power, self-construal and leadership is not necessarily a conscious one. Rather, as Galinsky *et al.* (2006) noted, the effect of power might be a non-conscious one.

The understanding of how self-construal evolves over time helps to understand how leadership styles can change depending on different contexts. The relation between power and self-construal suggested here is a relation between both trait and state aspects of power and self-construal. Traits associated with different types of leadership styles may be explained in terms of trait differences in self-construal. Conversely, contextual variations in leadership styles may be explained in the light of experimental results on the interaction between gender, power and state differences in self-construal. This in part helps to reconcile trait theories of leadership (Zaccaro, 2007) and situational theories of leadership (Hersey, 1985).

Finally, that power changes – in a way that makes them compatible with one another – both the sense of self of leaders and that of followers, suggests that self-construal might be

the key to understand and improve the relations between leaders and followers. Self-construal may be useful to explain both the psychology of followers and that of leaders, since it is a key component of social interaction, and is dependent on individuals' power, a key enabler of the leader-follower relation. Understanding the respective role of independent and interdependent self-construal in task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership behaviours might help to reconcile different streams of research in the management and leadership literature that are traditionally opposed (Yukl *et al.*, 2002; Yukl and Lepsinger, 2005).

Figure 1: Proposed Model of the Relationship Between Power, Self-Construal and Leadership



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