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Individual Working Memory Capacity Moderates the Power Effect on Cognitive Task Performance

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Abstract

The experience of power is known to help people pursue their goals more effectively. It has been argued that this is because the powerful are better at managing working memory processes during goal pursuit. However, past research has often disregarded individual differences in working memory capacity. We examined how manipulated power affects peoples cognitive task performance, depending on their working memory capacity. Results showed that high-power participants with a relatively lower capacity performed significantly better than low-power participants, whereas individuals with a higher capacity performed equally well in both high- and low-power conditions. Thus, individuals with a relatively higher capacity were less affected by the experience of low power than individuals with a lower capacity, who in turn profitted more from the experience of high power. Overall, our findings imply that individuals working memory capacity is an important factor to consider in the power effect on cognitive task performance.