

New study refutes assumptions about power linked to reputation concern

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Contrary to earlier research findings, people of power—politicians, celebrities or bullies in school—turn out to be no less concerned about their reputation, compared to those who have less influence and control within the society.

Previously, it has been assumed that since those who have the upper hand in the society—unlike the "powerless"—are able to get away with commonly unacceptable behavior (e.g., aggression and exploitation), would care less about any potential damages to their reputation.

However, a recent research by scientists at the University of Kent (United Kingdom) and Kochi University of Technology (Japan), published in the open-access journal *Social Psychological Bulletin*, failed to find a correlation between the sense of power and reputational concern.

To make their conclusions, Dr. Hirotaka Imada, Dr. Tim Hopthrow and Ph.D. student Hannah Zibell, conducted a series of three studies with the participation of about 900 British citizens in total.

Having used well-established psychological research approaches, their findings do not only question previous assumptions about the link between one's sense of power and concern about one's reputation, but also challenge current methodologies in [social science](#).

One of the two used methods relied on people recalling an event, where they felt they had power, before answering questions that measured reputational concern (e.g., "I do not consider what others say about me") and evaluating statements that referred to their sense of power (e.g., "If I want to, I get to make the decisions").

The second well-established psychological research method involved three groups of people: one of [high power](#), another with low power, and a third that served as a [control group](#). Each was asked to fill out the blanks into 20 fragmented words relevant to dominance and subordination.

"Reputational concern shapes various social behaviors, since having a [negative reputation](#) often results in receiving negative social consequences such as ostracism and punishment. As such, individuals are motivated to avoid displaying socially disapproved behavior," explain the researchers.

"The powerful, by definition, can influence others, and even if they establish a negative reputation, it is unlikely that they will receive negative reputational consequences such as punishment; they are immune from negative reputational consequences. Thus, it can be hypothesized that power would liberate individuals from reputational concern," they add.

However, they remain cautious about the weight of their new findings. "Overall, it would be too early to draw any conclusions about the relationship between [power](#) and reputational concern. Given the ubiquity and the crucial role of [reputation](#) in social lives, the potential relationship between them deserves further scholarly investigation."

More information: Hirotaka Imada et al, Does the sense of power influence reputational concern? Tests with episodic and semantic power priming, *Social Psychological Bulletin* (2023). [DOI: 10.32872/spb.7779](https://doi.org/10.32872/spb.7779)

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