

The social cognition of power: From abstract thinking to executive functions  
Pamela K. Smith

I propose that individuals with higher power should view the world in a more high-level, abstract fashion than individuals with lower power. After all, power means seeing the “big picture.” Having power requires one to plan ahead and think about the world in terms of superordinate goals. Similarly, greater power increases the psychological distance one feels from others, and this distance (according to construal level theory) should lead to more abstract information processing. Thus, those with power think in terms of the “big picture,” focusing more on primary, goal-relevant aspects of stimuli and moving beyond the details to see patterns and structure, than those without power. In my talk I will review several studies that demonstrate this effect. Then I will discuss more recent research that has explored the intrapersonal and interpersonal implications of these effects for domains such as perceived power, forgiveness, and executive functioning.