

# Powerful people better at shaking off rebuffs, bonding with others

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Employees often tiptoe around their bosses for fear of offending them. But new research from the University of California, Berkeley, shows people in power have thicker skin than one might think.

A UC Berkeley study has found that people in authority positions – whether at home or in the workplace - are quicker to recover from mild [rejection](#), and will seek out social bonding opportunities even if they've been rebuffed.

"Powerful people appear to be better at dealing with the slings and arrows of social life, they're more buffered from the [negative feelings](#) that rejection typically elicits," said Maya Kuehn, a doctoral student in psychology at UC Berkeley and lead author of the study. She will present her findings this Friday, Jan. 18, at the annual conference of the Society for Personality and [Social Psychology](#) in New Orleans.

Kuehn and her fellow researchers conducted five experiments that examined power dynamics in workplace and in [intimate relationships](#), focusing on how power influences responses to subtle acts of rejection. A total of 445 men and women between ages 18 and 82 participated in the study.

In one experiment, participants were assigned either high- or low-level positions in a workplace, then told they hadn't been invited to an office happy hour gathering. While low-level employees reported feeling stung by this rejection, the high-power ones were relatively unfazed and more

likely to seek out other social bonding activities, such as a hiking club, to improve relations with their coworkers.

In another experiment, participants were told they would be working with someone in either a supervisory or a subordinate role. They corresponded with that person and received feedback that could be perceived as a snub or mild rejection. Those who had been assigned supervisory roles acted with indifference to perceived snubs from their underlings while subordinates took offense to comparable [barbs](#) from their bosses.

"When rejected instead of accepted, subordinates reported lower self-esteem and greater negative emotion, but supervisors did not show an adverse reaction to rejection," Kuehn said.

A similar power dynamic played out in an experiment involving romantic partners. Couples were brought into a lab setting and videotaped discussing problem-solving tasks, such as what to do if an airplane they were on crashed in the wilderness. Before these discussions, couples had rated each other in terms of who held the most power in their real-life relationships, and how responsive their partners had been to their needs that day.

The study found that the partners who perceived themselves as less powerful were less positive during the videotaped discussion when working on a solution with their mate. By comparison, the more dominant partners acted more upbeat and worked harder at connecting and getting their mates on their side.

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

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