

# Actor and Partner Power Are Distinct and Have Differential Effects on Social Behavior

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Interpersonal power involves how much actors can influence partners (actor power) and how much partners can influence actors (partner power). Yet, most theories and investigations of power conflate the effects of actor and partner power, creating a fundamental ambiguity in the literature regarding how power shapes social behavior. We demonstrate that actor and partner power are distinct and have differential effects on social behavior. Six studies (total  $N = 1,787$ ) tested whether actor and partner power independently predicted behavioral inhibition (expressive suppression) and communal behavior (prioritization of partners' needs) within close relationships, including during couples' daily life (Study 1), lab-based social interactions (Studies 1–5; 1,012 dyadic interactions), and general responses during conflict (Studies 5 and 6). Actor power was negatively associated with behavioral inhibition, indicating that actors' low power prompts self-focused inhibition to prevent negative outcomes that low power actors are unable to control. Partner power was positively associated with actors' communal behavior, indicating that high partner power prompts other-focused behavior that prioritizes partners' needs and goals. These differential effects of actor and partner power replicated in work-based relationships with bosses/managers (Study 6). Unexpectedly, partner power was negatively associated with actors' behavioral inhibition within close relationships, consistent with a desire to prevent negative outcomes for low power partners. We present a framework that integrates the approach-inhibition and agentic-communal theories of power to account for the differential effects of actor and partner power. We describe the implications of this framework for understanding the effects of power in both close and hierarchical relationships.

**Keywords:** power, actor and partner effects, behavioral inhibition, communal behavior

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Dynamics involving power arise whenever people are dependent on one another for satisfying fundamental needs or obtaining valued resources (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Power refers to the capacity to

influence social partners, which arises from control over valued resources and outcomes (Keltner et al., 2003). Low power actors lack the ability to influence social partners because those partners do

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not heavily depend on them for valued outcomes. By contrast, the more social partners are dependent on actors for highly valued resources and outcomes, the more actors are able to exert and resist influence (also Fiske, 1993; Galinsky et al., 2015; Guinote, 2017; Simpson et al., 2015). Power thus determines whether people are able to satisfy their own needs and goals or must prioritize the needs and goals of high power partners (Fiske, 1993; Galinsky et al., 2015; Keltner et al., 2003; Rucker et al., 2018).

These conceptualizations of power emphasize that power involves both (a) *actors'* capacity to influence partners and (b) *social partners'* capacity to influence actors. Although actor and partner power are distinct and may have differential effects on social processes, they are often conflated in empirical investigations of power. For example, low power is often manipulated by giving social partners control over task-based outcomes (e.g., a leadership position), while actors are placed in subordinate positions with no control over relevant outcomes (see Galinsky et al., 2015). Similarly, investigations of power within ongoing relationships tend to classify actors as low power when they are *relatively* more dependent than their partner is (e.g., Lemay & Dobush, 2015; Overall et al., 2016), or when actors perceive they have lower influence *relative* to their partner (e.g., Gordon & Chen, 2013; Pietromonaco et al., 2021). Using these methods, it is impossible to know whether behavioral outcomes are a result of actors' lack of power over partners, partners' power over actors, or some additive or interactive combination of the two. Consequently, there exists a fundamental ambiguity regarding how actor and partner power determine social outcomes.

The aim of the current research is to show that assessing the distinct effects of actor and partner power advances understanding of how power affects social behavior. We contrast the effects of actor and partner power on two social behaviors—behavioral inhibition and communal behavior—associated with low power within the context of close relationships. Power features strongly in close relationships because people's ability to satisfy fundamental needs and goals is heavily dependent on their partner's investment and cooperation (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Such heightened dependence renders people particularly vulnerable if they possess low power (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Actors low in power are relatively unable to control important outcomes, which can constrain their behavior, such as causing actors to inhibit their own feelings and desires (i.e., behavioral inhibition; e.g., Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021; Pietromonaco et al., 2021) and instead prioritize their partners' needs and goals (i.e., communal behavior; e.g., Laurin et al., 2016; Righetti, Luchies, et al., 2015; VanderDrift et al., 2013). The resulting difficulties in fulfilling their own needs, desires, and goals results in people who lack power experiencing poorer relationship and personal well-being (e.g., Kifer et al., 2013; see Agnew & Harmon, 2019).

Do these poor outcomes hinge on actors' own lack of power or do they result from partners having high power? In addressing this question, we drew upon two prominent theories of power (among others). The approach–inhibition theory (Keltner et al., 2003) suggests that low power prompts behavioral inhibition, such as suppressing emotional expressions that could have negative interpersonal consequences. The agentic–communal model (Rucker et al., 2018) proposes that low power prompts communal behavior,

such as prioritizing others' needs. Yet, neither theory, and almost no related studies, has considered actor power and partner power as distinct constructs, rendering it unclear whose power matters most in determining inhibition versus communal behavior.

To provide the first demonstration that distinguishing between actor and partner power provides a more complete picture of the way power shapes social behavior, we present six studies testing whether actor and partner power differentially effect behavioral inhibition and communal behavior. We focused on behaviors theorized to arise from low power given that, as described above, the constraints produced by low power have particularly important and harmful implications for relationship and personal well-being. As we explain in the following sections, this targeted application also allowed a focused analysis of why and how actor and partner power can have distinct effects. We discuss the implications for additional behaviors, such as those theorized to arise from high power, in the General Discussion where we present a framework that integrates the approach–inhibition and agentic–communal theories to account for the differential effects of actor and partner power.

### Are Actor and Partner Power Distinct?

Some theoretical accounts emphasize power *asymmetries*, and thus some readers may initially be resistant to our goal of disentangling effects of actor power from those of partner power. Yet, large power asymmetries are rare across a range of relationship types (romantic partners, family, friends, colleagues, supervisors; see Columbus et al., 2021), because most social relationships involve some degree of interdependence. This is particularly true in close relationships, given both actors and partners are highly dependent on one another, and that interdependence affords each the capacity to influence the other (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Such interdependence often means that actor and partner power are not inversely related. Indeed, the few studies that have reported the association between each dyad members' power indicate that actor and partner power are typically positively correlated, albeit only weakly (Columbus et al., 2021; Cross et al., 2019; Farrell et al., 2015; Langner & Keltner, 2008; Laurin et al., 2016). Such weak associations exemplify the reality of interdependence: Both actors and partners can possess influence (e.g., cooperative dyads that share decision-making) or lack influence (e.g., competitive dyads that resist each other's influence; see Figure 1). Either way, the weak associations highlight that actor and partner power are distinct. As shown in Figure 1, in some relationships both actors and partners will possess high power; in other relationships both actors and partner will possess low power; and in other relationships, actors and partners may possess different levels of power.

In other social relationships marked by steep hierarchies, actor and partner power may be inversely related, as when supervisors have more power than their employees. However, the distinction between actor and partner power also has been documented within hierarchical relationships. When people have been placed in low or high power roles in tasks with strangers, ratings of actor power and perceived or partner-reported partner power are positively, rather than inversely, associated (Langner & Keltner, 2008; also Lammers et al., 2016), likely because most social relationships

**Figure 1**  
*Examples of Different Combinations of High and Low Actor and Partner Powers*

	<b>Low Partner Power</b>	<b>High Partner Power</b>
<b>Low Actor Power</b>	<p>Both actor and partner lack control over valued resources, may offer few resources that are highly valued by the other, but lack valued relationship alternatives</p> <p><i>Both actors and partners have low ability to influence the other creating competitive and conflictual decision making</i></p>	<p>Actor offers less valued resources, has less valued alternatives, and is highly committed and dependent</p> <p>Partner controls valued resources, has valued alternatives, and is less committed and dependent</p> <p><i>Actor has low ability to exert and resist influence; partner has high ability to exert and resist influence</i></p>
<b>High Actor Power</b>	<p>Actor controls valued resources, has valued alternatives, and is less committed and dependent</p> <p>Partner offers less valued resources, has less valued alternatives, and is highly committed and dependent</p> <p><i>Actor has high ability to exert and resist influence; partner has low ability to exert and resist influence</i></p>	<p>Both actor and partner offer and control valued resources, and both are highly committed</p> <p><i>Both actors and partners are able to exert and resist influence to negotiate decision making</i></p>

involve a high baseline level of interdependence. Moreover, studies measuring or manipulating actors' influence over others (actor power) versus freedom from others' influence (perceived partner power) reveal that actor and partner power are distinct and can have different psychological effects (Lammers et al., 2016; Leach et al., 2017; Van Dijke & Poppe, 2006).

Such evidence supports our proposal that actor and partner power represent two distinct factors that may have independent effects on social behavior. The present studies systematically test this distinction by gathering separate assessments of actor and partner power, and examining whether actor and partner power have differential effects on key behaviors theorized to arise from low power: behavioral inhibition and communal behavior.

### **Distinct Effects of Actor and Partner Power on Behavioral Inhibition**

The approach–inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003) proposes that a key consequence of low power is the inhibition of social behavior. Social environments are more threatening for people who lack power because they are relatively unable to influence others in order to control any negative outcomes that arise within social interactions. Accordingly, lacking power causes actors to be vigilant to potential social threat and to inhibit behaviors that may produce negative outcomes that low power actors are unable to control. This implies that low actor power should predict behavioral inhibition. However, Keltner et al. (2003) imply that

inhibition may emerge because low power actors are subject to punishment from powerful interaction partners, which indicates that behavioral inhibition also should be linked with high partner power (also see Langner & Keltner, 2008). Below we consider whether low actor power, high partner power, or both, will predict greater behavioral inhibition.

### **Theoretical Analysis: Actor or Partner Power?**

As emphasized by Keltner et al. (2003), behavioral inhibition is a prevention-focused strategy enacted to avoid negative social outcomes (see Higgins, 1998). Prevention-focused strategies are motivated by the need for safety and security, and are thus particularly relevant for actors who lack power. When actors possess low power, they lack the influence needed to manage or protect against social threats, should they arise. For actors who lack power and are thus unable to shift social situations in their favor, the best course of action is to prevent the risk of negative outcomes. Accordingly, low power actors should more readily recognize potential social threats (e.g., conflicts of interest, loss of acceptance), and inhibit any behavior that risks negative outcomes they cannot control. In contrast, high power actors can approach social situations uninhibited because they have the capacity to reshape the outcomes of social interactions if threatening situations arise. Thus, actor power should be *negatively* associated with behavioral inhibition.

Moreover, low actor power should be associated with more behavioral inhibition *independent* of whether partners possess low or high power. Even low power partners can disagree, become upset, dissatisfied and rejecting, or behave in unresponsive, withdrawing or hostile ways, either because actors' and partners' interests, needs and goals conflict or because partners are unable to be responsive to actors' needs. Regardless of whether these negative outcomes arise when interacting with partners who have low or high power, actors who have low (vs. high) power are less able to influence partners to reduce negative outcomes or shift interactions to produce more desirable outcomes that fulfill their needs.

It is possible, however, that the threat of negative outcomes also may be greater when partners possess high power (Langner & Keltner, 2008). High power partners are better able to push their own interests, withdraw acceptance, retaliate, and punish to attain desired outcomes. For this reason, high (vs. low) partner power may prompt actors to inhibit behavior to avoid social threat, and thus partner power may be *positively* associated with behavioral inhibition. Yet, high partner power does not inevitably imply punishment or threat. Despite the common stereotype that power corrupts and powerful people behave in abusive ways (Kipnis, 1972), high power does not predict aggression on average. Instead, high power predicts aggressive, punishing responses in hierarchical and close relationships only *when* people might lose power and are motivated to sustain dominance (e.g., Bugental, 2010; Case & Maner, 2014; Fast & Chen, 2009; Maner & Mead, 2010; Overall et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2017). Thus, although high power provides partners with the opportunity to prioritize their own goals (Galinsky et al., 2015), this is threatening only when partners' goals are adversarial. By contrast, when high power partners have prosocial goals or care about the other's regard, as people typically do in many social relationships, they tend to behave in prosocial ways (e.g., Chen et al., 2001; Gordon & Chen, 2013; Karremans & Smith, 2010).

Moreover, high partner power may not only be less threatening on average, any potential *positive* effect of partner power on behavioral inhibition may not be independent of the predicted *negative* effect of actor power on inhibition. The perspective that high partner power poses threat stems from a general conceptualization of power as relative in nature—high partner power implies that actors' have low power (Fiske, 1993; Galinsky et al., 2015; Keltner et al., 2003; Magee & Smith, 2013), and thus high power partners can punish or exploit actors who can do little to protect themselves. That is, high partner power is threatening only when actor power is low. In sum, powerful partners do not inevitably represent a source of social threat and may do so only for actors low in power who are unable to control or negotiate negative outcomes. Thus, we expected that the *negative* association between actor power and behavioral inhibition would likely be stronger and more robust than any *positive* association between partner power and behavioral inhibition.

### **Methodological Confusions Regarding Actor or Partner Power**

The methods used in prior studies do not provide clear tests of whether actor power, partner power, or some combination of actor

and partner power contribute to behavioral inhibition. People placed in low versus high power roles (e.g., subordinate vs. leader) report expressing less of their true opinions, disagreement, or anger toward high power others (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Berdahl & Martorana, 2006; Petkanopoulou et al., 2019), and behave in a more inhibited fashion (e.g., gaze aversion, closed posture, Gonzaga et al., 2008; smile irrespective of positive affect, Hecht & LaFrance, 1998). However, in these studies, manipulations of low power involved assigning partners to have control over resources and so inhibition could have been the result of actors' low power, partners' high power, or both.

The conflation of actor and partner power may underlie the null effects of power on inhibition observed in some studies (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Berdahl & Martorana, 2006). In particular, manipulations of low power that involve giving one's partner power may provide only weak tests if inhibition arises primarily from actors' low power (see Hecht & LaFrance, 1998). Null findings have also been attributed to lab-based manipulations that might fail to create strong or real enough social consequences (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Berdahl & Martorana, 2006). Studies examining "real" social interactions that carry ongoing relational consequences provide evidence that power predicts inhibition, but such studies have fallen short of clearly distinguishing between actor and partner power. Studies examining the inhibition of anger (Lemay & Dobush, 2015) or suppression of thoughts and feelings (Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021, Study 2; Pietromonaco et al., 2021) during relationship conflicts have assessed actors' perceptions of their lower power *relative* to their partner's power, and thus are unable to disentangle the two sources of power. Other studies have found that actor power negatively predicts emotional suppression, but have not assessed partner power or examined whether the effect of actor power was independent of partner power (Catterson et al., 2017; also Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021 Studies 1 and 3).

Only one prior study has considered the potentially distinct roles of actor and partner power, but results of that study did not cleanly differentiate which is associated with behavioral inhibition. Langner and Keltner (2008) reported that high partner power predicted greater actor inhibition, but examined perceptions of intimate partners' power without assessing the role of actors' own sense of power (Study 1), illustrated the effects of partner-reported power only for actors who were assigned to low (vs. high) power roles (Study 2), and assessed the experience of negative emotions rather than behavioral inhibition, such as suppressing negative emotions. Thus, prior studies are inconclusive: Some suggest that lower actor power promotes inhibition, some suggest that higher partner power produces inhibition, but most existing studies use methods that cannot disentangle actor effects from partner effects. We address these methodological confusions by gathering distinct measures of actor and partner power and systematically testing whether actor versus partner power have differential effects on behavioral inhibition. We predicted that actor power would be *negatively* associated with behavioral inhibition, and this association would be stronger and more robust than any *positive* association between partner power and behavioral inhibition.



## Distinct Effects of Actor and Partner Power on Communal Behavior

Another key consequence of power involves whether people are other oriented and communal versus self-focused and egocentric (Galinsky et al., 2015). The agentic–communal model of power (Rucker et al., 2012, 2018) proposes that *low* power prompts actors to focus on and consider *others'* needs (communal orientation), whereas *high* power prompts actors to focus on and act toward their *own* interests irrespective of others' needs (agentic orientation). Although the agentic–communal model does not distinguish between actor and partner power, we draw upon this model, and related perspectives on power, to consider whether high partner power or low actor power is most likely to predict greater communal behavior.

### Theoretical Analysis: Actor or Partner Power?

The agentic–communal model of power (Rucker et al., 2012, 2018) suggests that dependence on others for valued outcomes forces actors to be more considerate of and cooperative with those others in order for actors to attain their own goals and needs (also see Rucker & Galinsky, 2016). The defining element of actors' dependence emphasizes that the driving force of communal behavior is likely to be the power of partners to govern actors' outcomes. Other perspectives on power similarly emphasize that people need to attend to the needs and interests of others who are high in power (Fiske, 1993; Keltner et al., 2003), and to prioritize the needs, desires, and actions of high power partners in dyadic exchanges (Keltner et al., 2008). All of these perspectives align with interdependence theory, which specifies that actors' dependence is what affords power to partners, and it is this dependence on partners (and therefore partners' power) that motivates accommodation of partners' needs (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Thus, we expect that partner power will be positively associated with communal behavior: Higher (vs. lower) partner power should be associated with higher (vs. lower) levels of communal behavior focused on addressing partners' needs.

If communal behavior is driven primarily by actors' dependence on partners, then partner power should be more strongly associated with communal behavior than actor power. Actors low in power are less able to leverage rewards and punishments to obtain desired outcomes, and so it is possible that low actor power prompts communal behavior in order to encourage reciprocation from partners. Yet, the degree to which low power actors need partners' cooperation is determined primarily by how much partners have control over valued outcomes (i.e., partners' power). Similarly, although high power actors may be able to operate without considering partners' needs and goals, even high power actors will need to address others' preferences when valued outcomes depend on those others, such as when leaders desire to be liked and respected by subordinates (e.g., Case et al., 2018, 2021) or when high power actors depend on partners for support and intimacy (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Thus, we predict that partners' high (vs. low) power will be more strongly and robustly associated with communal behavior toward partners than actors' low (vs. high) power will.

## Methodological Confusions and Clues Regarding Actor Versus Partner Power

Results of experimental studies typically have been interpreted to show that low actor power causes actors to behave in communal ways, whereas high actor power causes actors to act in selfish ways. Actors assigned to low power roles or primed with low power are more likely to report communal goals to help and care for others (Copeland, 1994; Rucker et al., 2018), adopt and prioritize partners' goals (Laurin et al., 2016), feel and express more gratitude toward others (Anicich et al., 2021), allocate more resources to others (Rucker et al., 2011), and engage in greater impression management in order to be valued by conversation partners (Copeland, 1994). By contrast, actors assigned to high power roles or primed with high power report a greater focus on their own needs (Rucker et al., 2018), take more resources for themselves (De Cremer & Van Dijk, 2005), are less willing to help others (Lammers et al., 2012), are less grateful when they receive help (Anicich et al., 2021; Inesi et al., 2012), and exhibit lower perspective taking and empathic accuracy (Blader et al., 2016; Galinsky et al., 2006) unless they are high in prosocial or communal motivation (Côté et al., 2011; Gordon & Chen, 2013).

Yet, as outlined above, the results from studies manipulating low versus high power by assigning the partner versus the actor to have control over task-based resources could be due to actor power, partner power, or both. The results from studies priming low versus high power suffer from the same ambiguity. Low power primes typically ask actors to recall a time when *partners* had power over them (e.g., Blader et al., 2016; Galinsky et al., 2003, 2006, 2008; Laurin et al., 2016; Rucker et al., 2011, 2018), which appears to show that high partner power predicts more communal responses although high partner power may in many cases also involve low actor power. Studies concluding that lower power in existing relationships predicts greater perspective taking, sacrifices for partners, and accommodation of partners' emotions (Anderson et al., 2003; Gordon & Chen, 2013; Righetti, Luchies, et al., 2015) also have operationalized low power as actors perceiving partners to have greater relative power and thus these results could reflect high partner power, low actor power, or both.

We identified two prior dyadic studies that gathered separate assessments of actor and partner power and thus could shed light on the potentially distinct effects of actor and partner power. Although the aims of those studies did not involve differentiating the effects of actor and partner power, scrutiny of their results suggests that partner power is likely the strongest determinant of communal behavior. Laurin et al. (2016) focused on actors' reports of their own power, but additional analyses examining partners' reported power revealed that actors were more likely to prioritize partners' goals when *partners* reported high power (Study 1). Similarly, VanderDrift et al. (2013) found that partners' power determined couples' condom usage. Actors accommodated the contraceptive preferences of partners who reported high power, consistent with high partner power generating a greater focus on prioritizing those partners' needs and desires. In the present studies, we systematically test whether partner power is *positively* associated with communal behavior, whether this positive association is stronger and more robust than any *negative* association between actor power and

communal behavior, and we compare this pattern to that observed for behavioral inhibition.

## The Current Research

In six studies, we test whether actor and partner power are distinct and have differential effects on social behavior by focusing on two behaviors that are theorized to arise from low power, have important implications for relationship and personal well-being, and are emphasized by two different theories of power: The approach–inhibition theory (Keltner et al., 2003) and the agent–communal model (Rucker et al., 2012, 2018) of power. As summarized in Table 1, we tested the effects of actor and partner power on behavioral inhibition and communal behavior across a range of power-relevant contexts. Study 1 provided an initial examination of the distinct effects of actor and partner power in couples' daily interactions using an archival data set. Studies 2 and 3 provided replication tests in power-relevant interactions involving couples' discussions of relationship conflict. Study 4 expanded the investigation to a different power-relevant context using archival

data involving couples discussing their personal goals. Studies 5 and 6 applied the methods and measures used across Studies 1–4 to replicate the distinct effects of actor and partner power when experiencing conflict in close relationships. Study 6 also examined whether the pattern replicated within the context of work-based relationships.

Our assessments of behavioral inhibition focused on the most studied form of inhibition within social interactions. Expressive suppression involves inhibiting or concealing emotional expressions (Gross, 2015), and is particularly likely to emerge within situations that risk negative outcomes, such as when people are managing conflicts of interest or are depending on others for support (e.g., Impett et al., 2012; Low et al., 2017, 2019; Thomson et al., 2018). Expressive suppression is thus highly relevant to power dynamics and aligns closely with the behaviors assessed in the studies examining power and inhibition reviewed above. Expressive suppression also is important to study because it has detrimental effects on personal and relationship well-being (Cameron & Overall, 2018; Chervonsky & Hunt, 2017).

**Table 1**  
*Aim, Context, and Measurement of Behavioral Inhibition and Communal Behavior Across Studies*

Study	Aim	Context	Behavioral inhibition	Communal behavior
1	Initial examination of distinct associations in archival data set	Daily relationship interactions	Daily reports of expressive suppression	Daily reports of partner-focused behavior that expresses care and support and prioritizes partners' needs
2	Replication of distinct associations in power-relevant interaction	Couples' discussions of relationship conflict	Postdiscussion reports of expressive suppression Observer ratings of expressive suppression	Observer ratings of partner-focused behavior that expresses care and support and prioritizes partners' needs
3	Replication of distinct associations in new study	Couples' discussions of relationship conflict	Postdiscussion reports of expressive suppression	Postdiscussion reports of prioritizing partner's needs Observer ratings of prioritizing partner's needs
4	Expand tests to different power-relevant context in archival data set	Couples' discussions of personal goals	Postdiscussion reports of expressive suppression	Observer ratings of partner-focused behavior that expresses care and support and prioritizes partners' needs Observer ratings of partner-focused support that prioritizes partners' needs
5	Replication of distinct associations in new study	Questionnaire reports of responses to conflict/disagreement Couples' discussions of relationship conflict	Reports of expressive suppression and conflict avoidance Postdiscussion reports of expressive suppression	Reports of partner-focused behavior involving considering and prioritizing partners' needs Observer ratings of partner-focused behavior that expresses care and support and prioritizes partners' needs
6	Replication of distinct associations in Studies 1–5 Examination in work-based relationships	Questionnaire reports of responses to conflict/disagreement	Reports of expressive suppression and conflict avoidance	Reports of partner-focused behavior involving considering and prioritizing partners' needs

*Note.* Behavioral inhibition self-report measures are comparable across Studies 1–4, but an additional observational measure in Study 2 is included for transparency (see Footnote 7). Communal behavior measures differ across Studies 1–4 by capturing contextually relevant partner-focused behaviors that express support and prioritize partners' needs. We include all measures that capture our operationalization and do not exclude any measure in one study used in any other study. Study 5 (Test 3) and Study 6 include the self-report items of behavioral inhibition and communal behavior across studies to overcome the limitation that Studies 1–4 involved different measures.

Our assessments of communal behavior integrated the central qualities emphasized across theories and research in the power literature reviewed above—caring for, supporting, and prioritizing other's needs—with models of communal strength in close relationships (Mills et al., 2004)—noncontingent responsiveness to partners' needs. Our assessments included partner-focused behaviors that expressed support and prioritized the partner's needs during daily interactions (Study 1) and in contexts that require actors and partners to balance each other's needs, such as when encountering conflict (Studies 2, 3, 5, and 6) or trying to support each other's goals (Study 4). The behaviors surveyed across studies represent commonly studied communal behaviors that have important long-term relationship consequences (Feeney & Collins, 2015; Overall & McNulty, 2017; Rusbult et al., 1991).

To assess actor and partner power, we used the sense of power scale (Anderson et al., 2012), which is a well-established measure used to assess people's global perceptions of power within specific social relationships. Participants reported their own levels of relationship power as well as perceptions of their partner's power (Cross et al., 2019; Langner & Keltner, 2008), which allowed us to test the distinct effects of (a) actors' own reported power and perceptions of their partners' power, and (b) actors' own reported power and their partners' reported power. Prior assessments of power indicate that perceptions of partner power are likely to be critical in determining behavioral responses. For example, relative power is typically measured via actors' perceptions that the partner has more influence or power (e.g., Alonso-Ferres et al., 2021; Anderson et al., 2003; Columbus et al., 2021; Gordon & Chen, 2013; Pietromonaco et al., 2021; Righetti, Luchies, et al., 2015). Priming methods asking actors to recall a time when a partner had power over them also rely on actors' perceptions that the partner held power (e.g., Blader et al., 2016; Galinsky et al., 2003, 2006, 2008; Laurin et al., 2016; Rucker et al., 2011, 2018). Moreover, as noted by other scholars, any effects of partner power on actors' social behavior should occur via perceptions of the power partners' hold (see Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Lemay & Dobush, 2015). Accordingly, we expected any effects of partner power to be stronger when examining perceptions of partner power compared to partner-reported power.

The separate measures of actor and partner power allowed us to first assess whether perceptions of actor and partner power were distinct. We expected to replicate initial evidence of the modest, positive associations between actor power and perceived partner power or partner-reported power, demonstrating that actor and partner power are distinct and not inherently inversely related. Our primary analyses then modeled actor power and perceived partner power or partner-reported power as simultaneous predictors of behavioral inhibition and communal behavior to test whether actor and partner power had independent and differential effects. If these behaviors primarily arise because of relative power differences involving low actor power and high partner power, then actor and partner power should reveal effects in the opposite direction (Edwards, 1994): Actor power will be *negatively* associated, whereas perceived partner power and partner-reported power will be *positively* associated, with behavioral inhibition and communal behavior.

Founded on the analysis detailed above, we hypothesized that actor and partner power would have differential effects on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior. Given that low power actors are unable to navigate social situations to prevent negative outcomes, we expected that low actor power would predict more behavioral inhibition. Although high partner power might also predict behavioral inhibition, powerful partners do not inevitably represent a source of social threat and may only do so for actors low in power. Thus, we expected that the *negative* effect of actor power would be stronger and more robust than any *positive* effect of perceived partner power or partner-reported power. By contrast, given that both low and high power actors need to address partners' preferences when they are dependent on partners for valued outcomes, we predicted that high perceived partner power and partner-reported power would predict more communal behavior, and this *positive* effect of partner power would be stronger and more robust than any *negative* effect of actor power.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, we conducted additional analyses to rule out the possibility that the effects of actor or partner power are accounted for by commitment. Interdependence theory posits that dependence (primarily indexed by commitment) is the principal source of power in close relationships: Actors' greater commitment affords the partner power, and partners' greater commitment affords the actor power (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Oriña et al., 2011; Sprecher et al., 2006). Commitment also is a principal motivating force of communal behavior in close relationships (Rusbult et al., 1991, 1998; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). We expected that it would be actors' and partners' power, rather than commitment as a key source of that power, that would shape behavioral inhibition and communal behavior in couples' interactions.<sup>2</sup>

## Study 1

Study 1 provided an initial examination of the independent effects of actor and partner power on behavior within couples' daily interactions using an archival data set (see Table 1). After completing scales assessing their own and perceptions of their partner's relationship power, every day for 21 days, both members of mixed-gender couples reported how much they engaged in behavioral

<sup>1</sup> These primary analyses directly test the independent effects of actor and partner power on behavioral inhibition and communal behavior, regardless of whether actor and partner power have equally strong opposing effects (supporting relative differences) or differential effects (supporting a stronger role of actor or partner power on different social behaviors). Alternatively, if behavioral inhibition and communal behavior are only produced by specific power asymmetries, such as low actor power/high partner power compared to all other combinations, then both actor and partner power will be unreliable predictors. Instead, the interaction between actor and partner power will be crucial. We thus conducted additional analyses modeling Actor × Partner power interactions to test whether behavioral inhibition or communal behavior arises from specific power asymmetries in each study. As reported in the [Supplemental Materials](#), only six significant interactions out of 32 tests emerged across studies. The significant interactions did not provide strong or consistent evidence that specific asymmetries in power predict behavioral inhibition or communal behavior beyond the independent effects of actor power or partner power. Moreover, meta-analyses revealed no reliable interaction effects of actor by partner power across studies.

<sup>2</sup> Additional analyses presented in the [Supplemental Materials](#) also illustrated that the predicted differential effects of actor and partner power were not due to actor and partner relationship satisfaction or attachment insecurity.

inhibition (expressive suppression) and communal behavior when interacting with their partner that day. We tested whether actor power and partner power were distinct and differentially predicted behavioral inhibition and communal behavior.

## Method

### Participants

Seventy-eight mixed-gender couples replied to recruitment advertisements posted across university-based organizations (e.g., health, recreation, and employment agencies). Couples were in serious relationships (44% cohabitating or married) that averaged 2.58 years in length ( $SD = 1.97$ ). Participants ranged 17–48 years of age ( $M = 23.34$ ,  $SD = 5.48$ ). Couples were reimbursed NZD\$70. Actor–partner interdependence model (APIM) power analyses (Ackerman et al., 2016) indicate this sample provided ample statistical power (.92) to detect small-to-medium ( $r = .25$ ) actor and partner effects when variables were correlated across partners as they are in the present study (Ackerman et al., 2016). See [Supplemental Materials](#) for more information about this archival sample.<sup>3</sup>

### Procedure

During a lab session, participants completed scales assessing relationship power and commitment, and received instructions for completing an online daily record of their behavior when interacting with their partner for the following 21 days. On average, participants completed 19.3 diary entries, producing 3,276 daily reports across the sample.

### Measures

All measures were averaged across scale items (see [Table 2](#)).

**Actor Power.** Participants completed the eight-item sense of power scale (Anderson et al., 2012), including how much actors had power in their relationship (e.g., “In my relationship . . . I think I have a great deal of power”), and were able to make decisions (e.g., “. . . if I want to, I get to make the decisions”), influence their partner (e.g., “. . . even if I voice them, my views have little sway,” reverse-coded), and satisfy their own needs and goals (e.g., “. . . I can get my partner to do what I want”; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Perceived Partner Power.** Participants also completed the sense of power scale reworded to assess perceptions of their partner’s relationship power (e.g., “In my relationship . . . I think my partner has a great deal of power,” “. . . my partner can get me to do what he/she wants”; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Actor and Perceived Partner Commitment.** Participants rated five items from the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998) assessing their commitment (e.g., “I am committed to maintaining our relationship”) and the same five items were reworded to assess perceptions of their partner’s commitment (e.g., “My partner is committed to maintaining our relationship”; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Daily Behavioral Inhibition.** Each day, participants rated a single face-valid item assessing how much they suppressed the expression of negative thoughts and feelings when interacting with their partner that day: “I hid negative thoughts or feelings from my partner” (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). This item is

very similar to items used previously to assess daily expressive suppression (Cameron & Overall, 2018) and loads with the multi-item assessments used in Studies 2–6 (see Study 3).

**Daily Communal Behavior.** Each day, participants rated four items that have been used in prior research to capture accommodative, partner-focused behaviors (Overall, 2020; Overall & Sibley, 2010), including expressing care and support (“I was affectionate and loving toward my partner”; “I was supportive to my partner”) and being willing to prioritize partners’ needs (“I was willing to let my partner have things his/her way,” “I was forgiving toward my partner”). These partner-focused communal behaviors have been shown to play an important role in maintaining relationships with valued partners (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Overall & McNulty, 2017; Rusbult et al., 1991; Sullivan et al., 2010).

## Results

[Table 3](#) displays the correlations across the power measures. Although positively correlated, the associations between (a) actor power and perceived partner power ( $r = .22$ ) and (b) actor power and partner-reported power ( $r = .35$ ) were modest, confirming that actor and (perceived) partner power are relatively distinct. As shown by the scatterplots in the [Supplemental Materials](#), the distinction across actor and partner power reveals that close relationships often involve actors and partners who both possess high power or both possess low power as well as relationships in which actors and partners possess different levels of power.

### Primary Analyses

Our primary analyses focused on whether actor and partner power independently predicted behavioral inhibition and communal behavior. We tested four dyadic regression models in which daily assessments of behavioral inhibition and communal behavior (separate models) were predicted simultaneously from (a) actor power and perceived partner power (Model 1), and (b) actor power and partner-reported power (Model 2). These models followed the guidelines and SPSS syntax provided by Kenny et al. (2006) for conducting analyses with repeated measures dyadic data accounting for the statistical dependence across dyad members and across days (see OSF for data and syntax).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> No prior studies have used this sample to examine the effects of actor or partner power on behavioral inhibition or communal behavior, but this sample has been used to examine the links between actor power (not perceived partner power or partner-reported power) and daily aggression (Cross et al., 2019; Overall et al., 2016). Additional analyses revealed that the effects of power on behavioral inhibition and communal behavior were distinct from aggression (see [Supplemental Materials](#) for further information and results from additional analyses).

<sup>4</sup> Given prior research has shown gender differences in the effects of power on behavior within relationship or mixed-gender interactions (e.g., Gonzaga et al., 2008; Overall et al., 2016; Pietromonaco et al., 2021), we modeled the main and interaction effects of gender (coded –1 women, 1 men; see Kenny et al., 2006) in all studies. Of the 72 effects of actor and partner power in the primary analyses across Studies 1–6, only seven effects significantly differed across men and women. Meta-analyses revealed there were no reliable gender differences in the effects of actor power, perceived partner power, or partner-reported power, on behavioral inhibition or communal behavior. See [Supplemental Materials](#) for details.



**Table 2**  
*Descriptive Statistics and Reliabilities Across Measures: Studies 1–4*

Measures	Study 1		Study 2		Study 3		Study 4				
	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>R</i>	
Questionnaire assessments											
Actor power	5.37 (0.95)	.84	5.08 (1.03)	.86	5.22 (0.96)	.84	5.23 (0.91)	.80			
Perceived partner power	5.61 (0.78)	.77	5.55 (0.81)	.79	5.60 (0.78)	.76	5.48 (0.83)	.77			
Actor commitment	6.37 (0.76)	.89	6.70 (0.51)	.77	6.51 (0.76)	.89	6.48 (0.65)	.84			
Perceived partner commitment	6.33 (0.84)	.86	6.61 (0.70)	.88	6.48 (0.69)	.85	6.44 (0.65)	.82			
Responses during couples' interactions											
Self-reported behavioral inhibition	2.63 (1.19)	—	2.74 (1.39)	.78	2.87 (1.68)	.91	Actors' goal discussion 2.24 (1.45)	.88	Partners' goal discussion 2.11 (1.32)	.78	
Observed behavioral inhibition	—	—	2.83 (1.26)	.85	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Self-reported communal behavior	5.22 (0.89)	.74	—	—	4.00 (1.52)	.81	—	—	—	—	—
Observed communal behavior	—	—	1.78 (0.54)	.90	3.78 (0.67)	.92	3.22 (0.99)	.78	3.61 (1.09)	.83	

*Note.* *R* = reliability. *R* = Cronbach's alpha for questionnaire assessments and self-report responses during couples' interactions. *R* = intra-class correlation (ICC) for observed assessments; average ICCs are provided when measure composes more than one rating by observers (in Study 3 and communal behavior in partners' personal goal discussion in Study 4). "—" indicates that the measure was not assessed in that study, or reliability could not be calculated (1-item daily assessment in Study 1). Self-reported responses in Study 1 are the mean of within-person averages across the 21-day period.

As shown in Table 4, participants who reported they had lower (vs. higher) relationship power were more (vs. less) likely to suppress their negative thoughts and feelings from their partner, but were not more (vs. less) likely to be communal toward their partner. By contrast, neither perceived partner power nor partner-reported power significantly predicted behavioral inhibition with nonsignificant effects emerging in the opposite direction than would be expected if higher (vs. lower) partner power prompted greater (vs. lower) behavioral inhibition or relative differences in power—low actor power and high partner power—are essential in determining behavioral inhibition.

However, the effect of perceived partner power on communal behavior was more in line with expectations. Participants who perceived that their partner had greater (vs. lower) power were more (vs. less) likely to report communal behavior toward their partner. Although also positive, the link between partner-reported power and communal behavior was not significant, which is consistent with our expectation that perceived partner power would more strongly predict communal behavior than partner-reported power.<sup>5</sup>

### Control Analyses

Consistent with interdependence accounts that posit that actor and partner commitment are central determinants of power in close relationships (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), power and commitment measures were significantly associated (see Table 3). Nonetheless, controlling for actor and perceived partner commitment (Model 1) or partner-reported commitment (Model 2) did not change the results in Table 4 (see Supplemental Materials).

### Study 2

Study 1 provided initial evidence that actor power and perceived partner power had distinct effects on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior. Moreover, actor and (perceived) partner power did not reveal significant effects in the opposite direction in

predicting the same behavior—actor power negatively predicting and partner power positively predicting emotional suppression or communal behavior—which would occur if relative differences in power are critical. Study 2 tested whether the differential effects of actor and (perceived) partner power emerged when assessing behavior during video-recorded interactions in which couples discussed their most serious conflict. Relationship conflicts involve partners trying to influence and resist influence from each other, and so are a key context in which actor and partner power should determine inhibition and communal behavior (Overall et al., 2016). Moreover, the links between power and behavior are likely to

<sup>5</sup> We also tested whether the independent effects of actor versus partner power on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior were significantly different from one another. First, we tested whether the effects of actor and partner power on the same behavior were significantly different by nesting actor power and perceived partner power or partner-reported power within each participant and then modeling interaction effects that tested whether the effects of actor versus partner power on (a) behavioral inhibition or (b) communal behavior differed significantly. Second, we tested whether the effects of actor or partner power had differential effects on each type of behavior by nesting behavioral inhibition and communal behavior within each participant and modeling interaction effects that tested whether the effects of (a) actor power on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior, and (b) perceived partner power or partner-reported power on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior, significantly differed. The results of these different tests are shown by the subscripts in the table of results for each study, with different superscripts across rows and within columns for each model indicating significant differences. Consistent with the distinct effects shown in the meta-analyses across studies (see Table 8), meta-analyses of these difference tests across studies indicated that (a) the negative effects of actor power on behavioral inhibition were significantly different than the effects of perceived partner or partner-reported power on behavioral inhibition, (b) the positive effects of perceived partner or partner-reported power on communal behavior were significantly different than the effects of actor power on communal behavior, (c) the negative effects of actor power on behavioral inhibition were significantly different than the effects of actor power on communal behavior, and (d) the positive effects of perceived partner or partner-reported power on communal behavior were significantly different than the effects of perceived partner or partner-reported power on behavioral inhibition (see Supplemental Materials).

**Table 3**  
Correlations Across Power and Commitment Measures: Studies 1–4

Measures	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Study 1</b>					
1. Actor power	—				
2. Perceived partner power	.22**	—			
3. Partner-reported power	.35**	.23**	—		
4. Actor commitment	.27**	.29**	.23**	—	
5. Perceived partner commitment	.40**	.07	.18*	.56**	—
6. Partner-reported commitment	.23**	.12	.27**	.37**	.46**
<b>Study 2</b>					
1. Actor power	—				
2. Perceived partner power	.33**	—			
3. Partner-reported power	.13	.28**	—		
4. Actor commitment	.26**	.16*	.17*	—	
5. Perceived partner commitment	.41**	.15*	.22*	.58**	—
6. Partner-reported commitment	.17*	.15*	.26**	.36**	.38**
<b>Study 3</b>					
1. Actor power	—				
2. Perceived partner power	.21**	—			
3. Partner-reported power	.14*	.33**	—		
4. Actor commitment	.14*	.26**	.10	—	
5. Perceived partner commitment	.29**	.07	.09	.60**	—
6. Partner-reported commitment	.11	.01	.14*	.32**	.50**
<b>Study 4</b>					
1. Actor power	—				
2. Perceived partner power	.28**	—			
3. Partner-reported power	.15*	.27**	—		
4. Actor commitment	.14*	.24*	.09	—	
5. Perceived partner commitment	.17*	.18*	.03	.50**	—
6. Partner-reported commitment	.09	.15*	.14*	.28**	.41**

Note. Correlations are raw zero-order correlations that describe rather than account for the dependence within and across actors and partners.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

emerge most strongly in threatening, conflict of interest situations (Columbus et al., 2021), and so partner effects might be more evident in this context. Study 2 also extended the daily self-report assessments in Study 1 by gathering observer ratings of behavior (see Table 1).

## Method

### Participants

Couples with at least one child were recruited via community-based advertisements and annual parenting events. The sample available for analyses involved 99 mixed-gender couples after excluding five couples who did not complete the power measures or for whom discussions could not be coded due to equipment malfunction or language issues. APIM power analyses (Ackerman et al., 2016) indicate adequate statistical power (.82) to detect small

( $r = .20$ ) actor and partner effects when variables are correlated across partners as they are in the present study (see Table 3). Couples were married (85%) or cohabiting (15%) parents, with an average relationship length of 11.75 years ( $SD = 4.05$ ). Ages ranged 21–66 years ( $M = 36.69$ ,  $SD = 6.33$ ). Participants identified as New Zealand European/Pākehā (66%), non-NZ European (17%), Māori (8.5%), Asian (7.5%), Pacific Nations (3.5%), Indian (1%), or ethnicity not listed (7%). Couples received NZD\$100 for completing the following procedures. See Supplemental Materials for more sample information.<sup>6</sup>

### Procedure

During a lab-based session, both partners independently completed assessments of relationship power and commitment, and then identified and ranked two ongoing conflicts according to severity. Following a warm-up discussion about nonconflictual events over the past week, couples had a video-recorded 7-min discussion about their most serious conflict. Participants reported on their behavioral inhibition (expressive suppression) during conflict discussion, and observational coders rated each participants' behavioral inhibition (expressive suppression) and communal behavior during the discussion (see Table 1).

### Measures

All measures were averaged across scale items (see Table 2).

**Actor and Perceived Partner Power.** Participants completed the same scales used in Study 1 to assess their own and perceptions of their partner's relationship power.

**Actor and Perceived Partner Commitment.** Participants completed seven items from the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998) used in Study 1 to assess their own and perceptions of their partner's commitment.

**Postdiscussion Reports of Behavioral Inhibition.** Immediately following the discussion, participants rated three items used in prior research to assess expressive suppression during social interactions (Cameron & Overall, 2018; Low et al., 2017, 2019; Peters & Overall, 2020; Thomson et al., 2018): "I tried to hide my thoughts and feelings from my partner," "I kept my negative emotions to myself," and "I tried to control or suppress any negative emotions" (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Observed Behavioral Inhibition.** Four coders blind to all data and the aims of this study were trained to identify a range of nonverbal and verbal behaviors that indicate people are trying to suppress, inhibit or conceal their emotions, such as obvious attempts to conceal involuntary expressions (e.g., covering the mouth, looking away, biting lip, holding body back), slow or controlled body movements, strained or controlled breathing, and a mismatch between the verbal dialogue and type or intensity of the emotion expressed (see Girme et al., 2021; Low et al., 2019; Thomson et al., 2018). At least two of the four coders independently rated the degree to which each person displayed these indicators of expressive

<sup>6</sup> This study has been used previously to examine the links between actor power (but not perceived partner or partner-reported power) and aggressive communication (Cross et al., 2019). Additional analyses illustrated that the novel effects examined here are distinct from aggression (see Supplemental Materials for more details and results).

**Table 4***The Independent Effects of Actor Power and Partner Power Within Daily Relationship Interactions (Study 1)*

Predictors	Behavioral inhibition					Communal behavior				
	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Model 1: Actor and perceived partner power										
Actor power	<b>-.32</b>	<b>-.54, -.11</b>	<b>-2.96</b>	<b>.004</b>	<b>.25<sup>a</sup></b>	.01	-.15, .16	0.09	.929	.01 <sup>b</sup>
Perceived partner power	-.18	-.41, .05	-1.52	.131	.13 <sup>a</sup>	<b>.37</b>	<b>.22, .53</b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.40<sup>c</sup></b>
Model 2: Actor and partner-reported power										
Actor power	<b>-.34</b>	<b>-.56, -.13</b>	<b>-3.13</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>.26<sup>a</sup></b>	.07	-.09, .23	0.87	.384	.08 <sup>b</sup>
Partner-reported power	-.14	-.36, .09	-1.22	.224	.11 <sup>a</sup>	.11	-.05, .26	1.34	.182	.11 <sup>b</sup>

*Note.* Significant effects are presented in bold for ease of comparison across dependent variables. The superscripts index the results from multilevel models contrasting the effects on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior or actor versus (perceived) partner power for each model (Model 1 or Model 2). Different superscripts across rows indicate significant differences in the effects of actor or (perceived) partner power on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior. Different superscripts within each column indicate significant differences in the effects of actor versus (perceived) partner power for that specific behavior (behavioral inhibition or communal behavior) and model (Model 1 or Model 2). Any shared superscripts across rows or within columns indicate the differences are not significant (see Footnote 5).

suppression (1 = low, 7 = high) revealing good interrater reliability (see Table 2).<sup>7</sup>

**Observed Communal Behavior.** The principal method for measuring behavior in couples' lab-based discussions involves observational assessments of categories of behavior that have established consequences for relationship functioning (see Kerig & Baucom, 2004). A separate team of three coders independently rated the degree to which each participant exhibited positive-indirect conflict behavior—a category of partner-focused behaviors that prioritize caring for and supporting partners rather than trying to push partners to change relationship problems (Overall & McNulty, 2017). We used an established coding scheme (Overall, 2018, 2020) that incorporates communication behaviors across the most commonly used coding schemes (see Kerig & Baucom, 2004) along with accommodative behaviors (Rusbult et al., 1991). These partner-focused communal behaviors are (a) positive in valence because they express care and support for the partner, including expressing affection, positive affect, and validation, and (b) indirect because they prioritize the partner's needs over directly addressing the problem, including being loyal, forgiving partners' negativity, softening conflict, minimizing the problem, and focusing on positive aspects of the partner. See Supplemental Materials for details. Coders reviewed the discussion twice to rate how much each person exhibited communal behavior for each 30-s. segment of the 7-min. conflict discussion (1 = low, 7 = high). These 14 segment scores were averaged. Coders' ratings were reliable (see Table 2).

## Results

The pattern of correlations across the different power measures was similar to Study 1 (see Table 3) revealing that actor and (perceived) partner power were distinct. The scatterplots show a fair representation of relationships in which actors and partners both possessed high or both possessed low power, as well as relationships in which actors and partners possessed different levels of power (see Supplemental Materials).

### Primary Analyses

To assess the independent effects of actor and partner power, we tested six dyadic multilevel models in which (a) postdiscussion

reports of behavioral inhibition, (b) observer ratings of behavioral inhibition, and (c) observer ratings of communal behavior (in separate models, see columns in Table 5) were predicted by actor power and perceived partner power (Model 1), and actor power and partner-reported power (Model 2). These analyses applied the guidelines and SPSS syntax by Kenny et al. (2006) to simultaneously calculate the effects of actor and partner power accounting for the statistical dependence across dyad members (see OSF for data and syntax).

As shown in Table 5, the effects of actor power replicated the pattern in Study 1. Actor power negatively predicted postdiscussion reports of behavioral inhibition (see left column) and observed behavioral inhibition (middle column), but did not significantly predict communal behavior (right column). In addition, both perceived partner power and partner-reported power negatively predicted behavioral inhibition, and these negative effects were especially pronounced when predicting postdiscussion reports of behavioral inhibition. Thus, as in Study 1, these results indicate that lower actor and lower partner power have the same effects rather than higher partner power prompting greater behavioral inhibition.

Consistent with Study 1, the effect of partner power on communal behavior was more in line with expectations. Perceived partner power was positively associated with communal behavior. As in Study 1, partner-reported power did not significantly predict communal behavior (see Model 2, Table 5), which again indicates that

<sup>7</sup> We only gathered observational assessments of behavioral inhibition in Study 2 (and no other study) because of increasing evidence that observational assessments of expressive suppression have limitations. For example, in this study, observational assessments of expressive suppression were only weakly associated with postdiscussion reports ( $r = .17, p = .027$ ). These weak correlations arise because only the external cues of expressive concealment, and not the internal components of emotional suppression, are observable (Low et al., 2019). Indeed, given expressive suppression involves deliberately hiding emotional experiences and expressions, expressive suppression may offer little observable evidence for coders or perceivers to generate accurate judgments (see Peters & Overall, 2020). Accordingly, observer ratings and partners' perceptions of actors' expressive suppression within interactions only weakly cohere with actors' reports (Low et al., 2019; Peters & Overall, 2020) and can be unreliable (Thomson et al., 2018). Nonetheless, self-report and observer ratings of expressive suppression can predict the same outcomes (Thomson et al., 2018; Low et al., 2019), and given we gathered observational ratings in this study, we report analyses for this measure for transparency.

**Table 5**  
*The Independent Effects of Actor and Partner Power Within Couples' Conflict Discussions (Study 2)*

Predictors	Postdiscussion reports of behavioral inhibition				Observed behavioral inhibition				Observer ratings of communal behavior					
	B	95% CI	t	r	B	95% CI	t	r	B	95% CI	t	r	p	
<b>Model 1: Actor and perceived partner power</b>														
Actor power	<b>-.24</b>	<b>-.44, -.03</b>	<b>-2.30</b>	<b>.17<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>-.23</b>	<b>-.40, -.05</b>	<b>-2.56</b>	<b>.011</b>	<b>.20<sup>a</sup></b>	.03	-.04, .11	0.89	.373	.07 <sup>b</sup>
Perceived partner power	-.23	-.48, .02	-1.82	.13 <sup>a</sup>	-.12	-.34, .09	-1.15	.254	.09 <sup>a</sup>	.10	.01, .20	2.13	.034	.17 <sup>b</sup>
<b>Model 2: Actor and partner-reported power</b>														
Actor power	<b>-.32</b>	<b>-.50, -.13</b>	<b>-3.38</b>	<b>.24<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>-.25</b>	<b>-.41, -.08</b>	<b>-2.93</b>	<b>.004</b>	<b>.22<sup>a</sup></b>	.07	-.01, .14	1.80	.074	.13 <sup>b</sup>
Partner-reported power	<b>-.23</b>	<b>-.41, -.04</b>	<b>-2.44</b>	<b>.17<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>-.09</b>	<b>-.25, .08</b>	<b>-1.05</b>	.296	.08 <sup>a</sup>	.04	-.04, .11	0.98	.329	.07 <sup>ab</sup>

*Note.* Significant effects are presented in bold for ease of comparison across dependent variables. The superscripts index the results from multilevel models contrasting the effects on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior or actor versus (perceived) partner power for each model. Different superscripts across rows indicate significant differences in the effects of actor or (perceived) partner power on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior. Different superscripts within each column indicate significant differences in the effects of actor versus (perceived) partner power for that specific behavior (behavioral inhibition or communal behavior) and model (Model 1 or Model 2). Any shared superscripts across rows or within columns indicate the differences are not significant (see Footnote 5).

the effects of partner power on communal behavior occur via perceptions of how much power partners hold.

### Control Analyses

Rerunning the analyses controlling for actor and perceived partner commitment (Model 1) or partner-reported commitment (Model 2) did not alter the effects in Table 5 (see Supplemental Materials), with one exception (out of 6 effects): The effect of actor power on postdiscussion reports (but not observer ratings) of behavioral inhibition in Model 1 (but not Model 2) became nonsignificant,  $B = -.16$ , 95% CI  $[-.37, .06]$ ,  $t = -1.42$ ,  $p = .158$ ,  $r = .11$ .

### Study 3

Study 2 replicated the distinct pattern found in Study 1. Actor power negatively predicted behavioral inhibition during couples' conflict interactions, but did not significantly predict communal behavior. By contrast, perceived partner power positively predicted observed communal behavior. Unexpectedly, partner power was negatively associated with self-reported behavioral inhibition. We assess the reliability of the effects of partner power on inhibition in Study 3, which tested the distinct effects of actor and partner power on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior during couples' conflict interactions. Study 3 built on Studies 1 and 2 in two key ways. First, Studies 1 and 2 used different self-report assessments of behavioral inhibition. In Study 3, we combine the single face-valid item used in Study 1 with the established scale used in Study 2 (also see Footnote 7). Second, in Study 2 the observational assessments captured communal behaviors with established consequences for relational functioning as assessed within the large couples' conflict literature (Overall & McNulty, 2017), but did not assess people's motivation to prioritize their partners' needs, which is a key component of conceptualizations of communal behavior. In Study 3, therefore, we asked participants to report the degree to which they prioritized their partner's needs, and also gathered matching observational assessments by asking coders to rate how much participants prioritized their partner's needs.

### Method

#### Participants

Couples replied to recruitment advertisements posted across university-based organizations (e.g., health centers, newsletters, child-care services, university family housing) and social media. Active recruitment continued until our target sample of 140 was reached, which resulted in a sample of 143 ( $n = 5$  same sex) couples. Power sensitivity analyses (Ackerman et al., 2016) indicate this sample provides power ( $>.93$ ) to detect small ( $r = .20$ ) actor and partner effects when variables are correlated across partners as they are in the present study (see Table 3). Couples were involved in serious relationships (51.8% married or cohabiting) that were on average 3.46 years in length ( $SD = 4.27$ ). Participants were on average 24.73 years of age ( $SD = 7.10$ ) and identified as New Zealand European/Pākehā (38.7%), Asian (25.7%), mixed ethnic background (13.4%), non-NZ European (10.0%), Indian (3.8%), Pacific Nations (1.9%), Māori (0.4%), and Other (6.1%). Couples were paid NZ\$100. All participants completed the questionnaire and self-report assessments, but audio issues meant the conflict discussions from three couples could not be coded; analyses for the behavioral outcomes are thus based on 140 couples.



## Procedure

During a lab-based session, both partners independently completed assessments of relationship power and commitment, and then identified the three most serious issues that caused conflict within their relationship. Following a warm-up discussion about nonconflictual events over the past week, couples had a video-recorded 7-min discussion about their most serious ongoing conflictual issue. Immediately following the conflict discussion, participants rated their behavioral inhibition and communal behavior. Observational coders rated the same items to assess communal behavior (see Footnote 7 for why we did not assess comparable observational assessments of behavioral inhibition).

## Measures

All measures were averaged across scale items (see Table 2).

**Actor and Perceived Partner Power and Commitment.** Participants completed the same scales used in Studies 1 and 2 to assess relationship power and commitment.

**Postdiscussion Reports of Behavioral Inhibition.** Immediately following the conflict discussion, participants rated the three items used in Study 2 (e.g., “I kept my negative emotions to myself”) and the item used in Study 1 (“I hid negative thoughts or feelings from my partner”; 1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*) to assess behavioral inhibition.

**Postdiscussion Reports of Communal Behavior.** We targeted the central element of communal behavior involving people focusing on and prioritizing partners’ needs by asking participants to rate two items immediately following the conflict discussion: “I put aside my own feelings and needs for the sake of my partner” and “I was more focused on my partner’s feelings and needs than my own” (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

**Observed Communal Behavior.** Three trained coders who were unaware of the aims of this study independently rated how much each person exhibited the same communal responses. Coders viewed the entire discussion then rated the actors’ behavior using two items analogous to participants’ postdiscussion ratings: During the discussion this person . . . “put aside their own feelings and needs for their partner’s sake” and “was more focused on their own feelings and needs than their partner’s” (reverse-coded; 1 = *low*, 7 = *high*). The second item was rated in the reverse-coded form because pilot testing revealed that coders were more able to assess relative focus in this way. Coders’ ratings of both items were reliable (Intraclass correlation coefficient; ICC = .88 and .95). Although the two observer ratings were only weakly correlated ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ), the results were comparable analyzing each indicator separately (see Supplemental Materials).<sup>8</sup> Thus, to align with the postdiscussion reports, we present analyses with the items averaged.

## Results

As in Studies 1 and 2, the pattern of correlations across the different relationship power measures indicated that actor power and (perceived) partner power were distinct (Table 3); thus, many relationships involved both actors and partners possessing high or low power and many involved actors and partners possessing different levels of power (see Supplemental Materials).

## Primary Analyses

Using the same analytic approach as Study 2, we ran six dyadic multilevel models in which (a) postdiscussion reports of behavioral inhibition, (b) postdiscussion reports of communal behavior, and (c) observer ratings of communal behavior (in separate models) were predicted by actor power and perceived partner power (Model 1), and actor power and partner-reported power (Model 2; see OSF for data and syntax).

As shown in Table 6, the effects of actor power replicated the pattern in Studies 1 and 2. Actor power negatively predicted behavioral inhibition, but did not significantly predict reported or observed communal behavior. Additionally, both perceived partner power and partner-reported power were negatively associated with behavioral inhibition, and as in Study 2, the negative association for partner-reported power on behavioral inhibition was significant. This pattern is the opposite of what would be expected if higher partner power prompted greater behavioral inhibition or if relative differences in power—low actor power and high partner power—are essential in determining behavioral inhibition. Instead, the replication across studies suggests that lower (vs. higher) actor power and lower (vs. higher) partner power predict greater (vs. less) behavioral inhibition.

The effects of partner power on communal behavior were again as predicted, and consistent with Studies 1 and 2. Perceived partner power was positively associated with both self-reported and observed communal behavior. Finally, partner-reported power positively predicted observed communal behavior (see bottom row of Table 6) aligning with the consistent effects of perceived partner power in Studies 1–3.

## Control Analyses

Rerunning the analyses controlling for actor commitment and perceived partner commitment (Model 1) or partner-reported commitment (Model 2) did not eliminate the expected significant effects in Table 6 (see Supplemental Materials), although the unexpected effect of partner-reported power on postdiscussion reports of behavioral inhibition (Model 2) became weaker,  $B = -.18, 95\% \text{ CI} [-.39, .02], t = -1.75, p = .081, r = .11$ .

## Study 4

Study 4 used an archival data set to test the independent effects of actor and partner power within another power-relevant context in which both behavioral inhibition and communal behavior have important implications (see Table 1). In this study, couples had two discussions about the most important personal goal they were each trying to achieve. One discussion involved actors disclosing their goal-related desires, progress, and challenges to partners, and the other discussion involved partners disclosing their goal-related desires, progress, and challenges to actors. Goal pursuit represents a useful context because both actors’ and partners’ goal pursuit offer

<sup>8</sup> This low coherence is likely due to the nature of the measures. Rather than focusing on specific acts categorized by conflict typologies as in Study 2, these items infer people’s motivation and focus which (as with behavioral inhibition) may not have clear observable signals (see Footnote 7). Accordingly, in all other studies we focus on observational assessments of communal behavior that involve observable acts that have been extensively documented and have established consequences for relational functioning.

**Table 6**  
**The Independent Effects of Actor and Partner Power Within Couples' Conflict Discussions (Study 3)**

Predictors	Postdiscussion reports of behavioral inhibition				Postdiscussion reports of communal behavior				Observer ratings of communal behavior				
	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
<b>Model 1: Actor and perceived partner power</b>													
Actor power	<b>-.34</b>	<b>-.55, -.13</b>	<b>-3.22</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.19<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>-.30, .08</b>	<b>-1.17</b>	<b>.244</b>	<b>-.03</b>	<b>-.12, .05</b>	<b>-0.84</b>	<b>.406</b>	<b>.05<sup>b</sup></b>
Perceived partner power	<b>-.20</b>	<b>-.45, .04</b>	<b>-1.63</b>	<b>.104</b>	<b>.10<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>.13, .57</b>	<b>3.10</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>.27</b>	<b>.17, .37</b>	<b>5.35</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.31<sup>c</sup></b>
<b>Model 2: Actor and partner-reported power</b>													
Actor power	<b>-.35</b>	<b>-.56, -.15</b>	<b>-3.42</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.20<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>-.25, .13</b>	<b>-0.63</b>	<b>.532</b>	<b>-.02</b>	<b>-.11, .06</b>	<b>-0.49</b>	<b>.626</b>	<b>.03<sup>b</sup></b>
Partner-reported power	<b>-.21</b>	<b>-.42, -.01</b>	<b>-2.01</b>	<b>.045</b>	<b>.12<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>-.15, .23</b>	<b>0.40</b>	<b>.688</b>	<b>.15</b>	<b>.06, .23</b>	<b>3.44</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.21<sup>c</sup></b>

*Note.* Significant effects are presented in bold for ease of comparison across dependent variables. The superscripts index the results from multilevel models contrasting the effects on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior or actor versus (perceived) partner power for each model (Model 1 or Model 2). Different superscripts across rows indicate significant differences in the effects of actor or (perceived) partner power on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior. Different superscripts within each column indicate significant differences in the effects of actor versus (perceived) partner power for that specific behavior (behavioral inhibition or communal behavior) and model (Model 1 or Model 2). Any shared superscripts across rows or within columns indicate the differences are not significant (see Footnote 5).

tests of whether people will express their own needs and frustrations and/or be communal by focusing on their partner's needs.

With regard to discussions of actors' goals, goal pursuit is best accomplished if actors are able to express goal-related challenges because this helps generate support from partners (Gregory et al., 2020; Monin et al., 2009). Greater behavioral inhibition, however, conceals actors' needs from partners, restricting partners' support and problem-solving that are critical to successful goal achievement (Low et al., 2017). As in Studies 1–3, we expected low (vs. high) actor power to predict more (vs. less) behavioral inhibition. Successful goal pursuit also requires a healthy focus on actors' own needs and goals to ensure actors' personal pursuits are not sacrificed for the relationship (Visserman et al., 2017). Yet, prior research has shown that lower relative power (higher partner power) can increase actors' focus on their partner at the expense of their own goals (Laurin et al., 2016; Righetti, Luchies, et al., 2015). Thus, we expected that high perceived partner power and partner-reported power would predict more communal focus on the partner when actors discussed their own goals, such as recognizing and validating the partner's advice, suggestions, and support efforts.

With regard to discussions of partners' goals, the interdependent nature of couples' goal pursuit (Fitzsimons et al., 2015) means that partners' goal pursuit can also induce negative feelings and frustrations, such as when partners' procrastination or poor planning negatively impact the relationship, partners rely too heavily on actors' reassurance, or when partners' goal pursuit threatens closeness and security (e.g., Jayamaha et al., 2017; Starr & Davila, 2008). Actors low in power should feel more of a need to suppress these negative emotions from their partner. Discussing partners' goal pursuits also creates a natural context in which actors can support and focus on partners' needs (Laurin et al., 2016). Given the results of Studies 1–3, we expected that high perceived partner power and partner-reported power would predict more need-facilitating support that prioritizes partners' needs.

## Method

### Participants

One hundred mixed-gender couples responded to paper and electronic advertisements distributed across a large university and associated organizations (e.g., health and recreation centers). Power sensitivity analyses (Ackerman et al., 2016) indicate this sample provides adequate statistical power (.83) to detect small ( $r = .20$ ) actor and partner effects when variables are correlated across partners as they are in the present study (see Table 3). Participants were involved in serious (13% married, 36% cohabiting, 47% serious dating relationships), long-term ( $M = 3.28$  years,  $SD = 4.16$ ) relationships, and were a mean age of 22.64 ( $SD = 6.51$ ) years. Couples were paid NZ\$80 for the session described below.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> This study has been used previously to examine the links between actor power and aggressive behavior during discussions of actors' goals (Overall et al., 2016). No prior studies have examined whether actor or partner power predicts behavioral inhibition or communal behavior during discussions of actors' or partners' goals, and the novel effects reported here were independent of aggressive behavior (see Supplemental Materials).

## Procedure

After completing assessments of power and commitment, participants identified and ranked in order of importance three current personal goals they were trying to achieve. Each person's top-ranked goal was selected for discussion, unless goals overlapped across partners, in which case the next ranked independent goal was selected. Following a warm-up discussion about routine events over the past week, couples had two video-recorded 7-min discussions involving discussing (a) actors' personal goal and (b) partners' personal goal. The order of discussions was counterbalanced across the sample. Participants rated their attempts to inhibit their emotional expressions within each discussion. Observational coders who were unaware of the aims of this research rated how much each person exhibited contextually relevant communal behaviors within each discussion (see Table 1).

## Measures

All measures were averaged across scale items (see Table 2).

**Actor and Perceived Partner Power and Commitment.** Participants completed the same scales used in Studies 1–3 to assess relationship power and commitment.

**Behavioral Inhibition.** Immediately following each discussion (actors' personal goal discussion and partners' personal goal discussion), participants rated the three items used in Study 2 to assess expressive suppression (e.g., "I tried to hide my thoughts and feelings from my partner;"; "I kept my negative emotions to myself," 1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*).

**Communal Behavior During Discussions of Actors' Personal Goals.** The assessments of communal behavior involved contextually relevant partner-focused behavior that supports and prioritizes partner's needs. The observer ratings of communal behavior during discussions of actors' own personal goals assessed the degree to which actors were focused on the partners' needs despite the interaction being structured to focus on their own goal. The behaviors were derived from established coding schedules assessing support-related behavior exhibited within couples' discussions (Barbee & Cunningham, 1995; Overall et al., 2010; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). Four trained coders independently rated the degree to which each person exhibited partner-focused communal behavior, including (a) expressing care and support, such as expressing affection, positive affect, and validation along with appreciation for the partners' efforts, and (b) prioritizing the partner's needs, such as complimenting the partner's abilities and willingness to help and reassuring the partner by alleviating any negative feelings they had (1 = *low*; 7 = *high*; see Supplemental Materials for further details). Interrater reliability was high (see Table 2).

**Communal Behavior During Discussions of Partners' Personal Goals.** The assessment of partner-focused communal behavior was more extensive because of the more detailed theoretical frameworks and empirical work specifying partner-focused behaviors that support partners' needs when partners are striving for personal goals. We applied an extensive coding protocol that integrates the range of behaviors examined across the support literature that capture supporting and prioritizing partners' fundamental needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The combination of behaviors

expresses care and support (relatedness support) while also prioritizing partners' personal needs by facilitating competence and autonomy (competence and autonomy support). *Relatedness* support included communicating the partner is cared for, understood, and valued (ICC = .83). *Competence* support includes validating and encouraging partners' abilities and efforts through goal-relevant praise (*low*; 7 = *high*; ICC = .83). *Autonomy* support includes validating and encouraging partners' own goal-directed efforts, ideas, and plans (ICC = .82). These three types of support were averaged to provide an overall assessment of need-fulfilling support (see Table 2). See Supplemental Materials for more details.

## Results

As in Studies 1–3, the pattern of correlations across the power measures confirmed that actor and (perceived) partner power were distinct (see Table 3 and Supplemental Materials for scatterplots).

### Primary Analyses

Applying the same dyadic multilevel procedures as in Studies 2 and 3, we tested models in which (a) postdiscussion reports of behavioral inhibition, and (b) observer ratings of communal behavior during couples' discussions (separate models) were predicted by actor power and perceived partner power (Model 1), and actor power and partner-reported power (Model 2; see OSF). We first examined behavioral inhibition and communal behavior during discussions focused on actors' own personal goals, and then discussions focused on partners' personal goals (a total of eight separate models).

The results are shown in Table 7. Replicating the pattern observed in Studies 1–3, actor power negatively predicted behavioral inhibition, but did not significantly predict communal behavior. By contrast, both perceived partner and partner-reported power positively predicted communal behavior. Moreover, unlike the prior studies, neither perceived partner power nor partner-reported power was negatively or significantly associated with behavioral inhibition.

### Control Analyses

Rerunning the analyses controlling for actor commitment and perceived partner commitment (Model 1) or partner-reported commitment (Model 2) did not eliminate the significant effects in Table 7 (see Supplemental Materials).

### Studies 1–4: Summary and Meta-Analyses

We provide a summary of Studies 1–4 and meta-analyses as these results became the basis for replication in Study 5 and Study 6. The results across studies provided consistent evidence for independent and differential associations of actor and partner power. Actor power negatively and significantly predicted greater behavioral inhibition across four studies (12/12 tests) and did not significantly predict communal behavior (12/12 tests). By contrast, perceived partner power positively and significantly predicted communal behavior across studies (6/6 tests), although significant effects of partner-reported power emerged only when predicting observational ratings of communal behavior (Studies 3 and 4; 3/6 tests).

However, one pattern of effects was unexpected. Although perceived partner power was never significantly associated with

**Table 7***The Independent Effects of Actor and Partner Power Within Couples' Discussions of Actors' or Partners' Personal Goals (Study 4)*

Predictors	Behavioral inhibition					Communal behavior				
	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Discussions of actors' goals										
Model 1: Actor and perceived partner power										
Actor power	<b>-.46</b>	<b>-.69, -.24</b>	<b>-4.04</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.28<sup>a</sup></b>	.03	-.11, .18	0.46	.647	.04 <sup>b</sup>
Perceived partner power	-.04	-.29, .21	-0.34	.733	.03 <sup>b</sup>	<b>.20</b>	<b>.05, .36</b>	<b>2.59</b>	<b>.011</b>	<b>.20<sup>b</sup></b>
Model 2: Actor and partner-reported power										
Actor power	<b>-.46</b>	<b>-.68, -.25</b>	<b>-4.21</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.29<sup>a</sup></b>	.12	-.02, .27	1.66	.100	.12 <sup>b</sup>
Partner-reported power	-.10	-.32, .12	-0.92	.360	.07 <sup>b</sup>	<b>.20</b>	<b>.05, .34</b>	<b>2.66</b>	<b>.009</b>	<b>.19<sup>c</sup></b>
Discussions of partners' goals										
Model 1: Actor and perceived partner power										
Actor power	<b>-.31</b>	<b>-.52, -.10</b>	<b>-2.87</b>	<b>.005</b>	<b>.20<sup>a</sup></b>	-.03	-.20, .14	-0.33	.744	.02 <sup>b</sup>
Perceived partner power	-.01	-.24, .23	-0.03	.975	<.01 <sup>a</sup>	<b>.30</b>	<b>.12, .49</b>	<b>3.25</b>	<b>.001</b>	<b>.24<sup>c</sup></b>
Model 2: Actor and partner-reported power										
Actor power	<b>-.31</b>	<b>-.51, -.10</b>	<b>-2.97</b>	<b>.003</b>	<b>.21<sup>a</sup></b>	.06	-.10, .23	0.75	.452	.05 <sup>b</sup>
Partner-reported power	.10	-.10, .30	0.94	.348	.07 <sup>b</sup>	<b>.24</b>	<b>.08, .41</b>	<b>2.88</b>	<b>.004</b>	<b>.20<sup>b</sup></b>

*Note.* Significant effects are presented in bold for ease of comparison across dependent variables. The superscripts index the results from multilevel models contrasting the effects on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior or actor versus (perceived) partner power for each model (Model 1 or Model 2). Different superscripts across rows indicate significant differences in the effects of actor or (perceived) partner power on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior. Different superscripts within each column indicate significant differences in the effects of actor versus (perceived) partner power for that specific behavior (behavioral inhibition or communal behavior) and model (Model 1 or Model 2). Any shared superscripts across rows or within columns indicate the differences are not significant (see Footnote 5).

behavioral inhibition (6/6 tests), partner-reported power was negatively associated with self-reported behavioral inhibition during couples' conflict interactions in Studies 2 and 3 (2/6 tests) and consistent nonsignificant trends occurred for both partner-reported power and perceived partner power across studies.

To determine the overall reliability of the independent associations between actor and partner power with inhibition versus communal behavior, we conducted a series of meta-analyses to estimate the size and significance of the effects when modeling the independent effects of (a) actor and perceived partner power (Model 1), and (b) actor and partner-reported power (Model 2) on behavioral inhibition and communal behavior. Following Rosenthal and Rosnow (2007), we estimated the effect sizes for the coefficients derived from each dyadic model (see Tables 4–7). These multilevel models generate specific degrees of freedom for each effect, which were used to calculate the effect sizes. We then followed the meta-analytic procedures for estimated weighted *r* values assuming random effects as outlined by Lipsey and Wilson (2001). The meta-analytic effects are shown in the top of Table 8. The significant effects in bold represent effects of actor and partner power in expected directions. The significant effects in italics represent unexpected significant effects.

Actor power was significantly negatively associated with behavioral inhibition, but was not significantly associated with communal behavior. Comparing the confidence interval of effect sizes indicate that these effects are distinct (no overlap in 95% CI). By contrast, both perceived partner power and partner-reported power were significantly positively associated with communal behavior. Nonetheless, the more consistent and stronger effect for perceived partner versus partner-reported power on communal behavior (around twice the size; see Table 8) aligns with our expectation that more (vs. less) communal behavior toward high (vs. low) power partners should primarily occur via actors' perceptions that the partner has high power.

The effects of perceived partner power and partner-reported power on communal behavior were distinct from the effects on behavioral inhibition, as is clear by the opposite direction of the effects and nonoverlapping confidence intervals (Table 8). However, the significant negative effects of perceived partner power and partner-reported power on behavioral inhibition were unexpected. The theoretical and empirical work covered in the Introduction suggest that, if an association emerged, it would be high (vs. low) partner power predicting more (vs. less) behavioral inhibition, rather than the reverse association that emerged. This negative effect of partner power on inhibition may be related to the responsibility that people often feel for low power others (Smith & Hofmann, 2016), which may motivate actors to inhibit negativity to avoid harming partners (e.g., Lemay & Dudley, 2011). Nonetheless, although both actor and partner power were significantly negatively associated with behavioral inhibition, the negative effect of actor power was around 2.5 times greater than the effect of perceived partner or partner-reported partner power and the nonoverlapping confidence intervals confirm that effects of actor power were larger.

## Study 5

The aim of Study 5 was to replicate the differential effects shown in Studies 1–4 within a new, larger sample that provided three distinct tests.<sup>10</sup> Married or cohabiting couples attended a lab-based session

<sup>10</sup> Data collection and observational coding for this study was completed after Study 1–4 was peer reviewed, except for the lockdown subsample (Test 3), in which measures were specifically included to replicate the effects of Study 1–4, but was not complete when finalizing the project for initial submission. The analyses and measures described below were planned to replicate the effects based on the meta-analysis of the first four studies (see top of Table 8). See OSF for analytic plan and rationale. Note the tests are reported in a different order than outlined in the plan to facilitate a more efficient presentation.



**Table 8**  
*Meta-Analyses of Independent Effects of Actor and Partner Power*

Predictors	Behavioral inhibition				Communal behavior			
	<i>r</i>	95% CI	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	95% CI	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Studies 1–4								
Model 1: Actor and perceived partner power								
Actor power	<b>-.21</b>	<b>-.27, -.16</b>	<b>-7.20</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	-.01	-.07, .04	-0.49	.622
Perceived partner power	-.08	-.14, -.02	-2.60	.009	<b>.25</b>	<b>.19, .30</b>	<b>8.48</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Model 2: Actor and partner-reported power								
Actor power	<b>-.23</b>	<b>-.29, -.18</b>	<b>-8.01</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	.04	-.02, .09	1.30	.195
Partner-reported power	-.08	-.14, -.02	-2.71	.007	<b>.13</b>	<b>.07, .19</b>	<b>4.41</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Studies 1–6								
Model 1: Actor and perceived partner power								
Actor power	<b>-.28</b>	<b>-.35, -.21</b>	<b>-7.46</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	.01	-.03, .06	0.50	.615
Perceived partner power	-.06	-.12, -.01	-2.15	.031	<b>.28</b>	<b>.23, .33</b>	<b>10.60</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Model 2: Actor and partner-reported power								
Actor power	<b>-.30</b>	<b>-.36, -.23</b>	<b>-8.88</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	.13	.05, .21	3.03	.002
Partner-reported power	-.08	-.12, -.04	-4.38	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.14</b>	<b>.10, .17</b>	<b>7.59</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>

*Note.* The significant effects in bold represent effects of actor and partner power in expected directions. The significant effects in italics represent unexpected significant effects. The top section presents the meta-analytic effects across all analyses in Studies 1–4. The bottom section presents the meta-analytic effects across all analyses in Studies 1–6, in which Model 1 was tested in Studies 1–6 (Studies 1–4, Study 5: Test 3, Study 6) and Model 2 was only assessed in Studies 1–5, which included dyads and thus could assess partner-reported power.

that involved completing questionnaires assessing their own relationship power and typical behavioral responses during conflict. Couples were then recorded engaging in two discussions about their most serious relationship conflicts and reported their behavioral inhibition immediately after the discussion as in Studies 2–4. Independent coders rated the degree to which they exhibited communal behavior using the established coding scheme applied in Study 2. These lab-based assessments provided two independent tests of the differential associations between actor and partner-reported power (Model 2) with behavioral inhibition and communal behavior by using both (a) questionnaire assessments of typical responses to relationship conflict (Test 1) and (b) responses within specific conflict discussions using the established protocols in Study 2 (Test 2).

Finally, a subsample of couples completed additional questionnaire assessments during a mandatory legally enforced nationwide COVID-19 lockdown in which couples and their children were confined to the home for several weeks. During the lockdown assessment, participants completed questionnaires assessing their own and their partner's relationship power along with measures of their behavioral inhibition and communal behavior during the lockdown, which included items assessed in the prior lab-based session (Test 1) as well as self-report items of behavioral inhibition used across Studies 2–4 and key self-report items of communal behavior in Studies 1 and 3. This overcame a limitation that Studies 1–4 involved different measures. In sum, the lockdown assessment provided a third test of the differential associations between actor and perceived partner power (Model 1) and actor and partner-reported power (Model 2) during a challenging family context with assessments that captured the measures of behavioral inhibition and communal behavior across studies.

## Method

### Participants

Participants included 285 mixed-gender couples ( $N = 570$ ) with at least one child who was recruited from advertisements posted in

a parenting magazine and at early childhood centers, or from a database of parents who had expressed interest in contributing to studies investigating children's development. Couples were married (84%) or cohabiting (16%), with an average relationship length of 11.70 years ( $SD = 4.36$ ). Ages ranged 23–55 years ( $M = 37.11$ ,  $SD = 5.24$ ). Participants identified as Māori (7.8%), Pacific Nations (7.1%), New Zealand European/Pākehā (55%), non-NZ European (12.4%), Asian (9.2%), Indian (4.2%), or an ethnicity not listed (4.2%). Couples attended a 3-hr lab-based session with their 4–5-year-old child, which included couples completing the questionnaire assessments and conflict discussions described below while their child completed tasks unrelated to the present study in a separate room. Families received NZD\$180 for completing the study.<sup>11</sup>

Couples who had participated in the study prior to the emergence of COVID-19 in the community were also invited to complete an additional questionnaire during the initial Level 4 Lockdown in New Zealand (March 26 to April 28, 2020). During the lockdown, all families were legally required to stay within their immediate household with no physical contact outside the home with the exception of one person occasionally gathering essential resources (medicine, groceries). Couples received \$NZ50 for participating. Of the 234 couples invited to participate, 157 couples provided complete data. Demographics of the lockdown sample were very similar to the full sample: mostly married (87%), with an average relationship length of 11.70 years ( $SD = 4.36$ ), and mean age of 37.30 ( $SD = 4.92$ ).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Forty-eight families participated after COVID-19 had been eliminated from the community and data collection of the larger study could resume. Additional analyses revealed none of the effects reported in Tables 11 and 12 differed according to whether data collection occurred prior to or after the pandemic ( $t_s < 1.72$ ,  $p_s > .09$ ; average  $t = .75$ , average  $p = .53$ ).

<sup>12</sup> The full Study 5 sample used in Tests 1 and 2 is new and has not been reported in any prior publication. However, the lockdown subsample used in Test 3 has been previously used to examine family functioning during the lockdown (see Supplemental Materials), but none of the measures in this study have been previously examined.

### Statistical Power

We conducted power analyses prior to running the analyses. Power analyses were based on meta-analyses of Studies 1–4 (see top of Table 8). The primary aim was to replicate the negative association between actor power and behavioral inhibition, and positive association between (perceived) partner power with communal behavior, shown in bold.

**Lab-Based Assessments ( $N = 285$  Couples): Tests 1 and 2.** The lab-based assessments did not include a measure of perceptions of partners' power due to time constraints of the research session and because the targeted sample size provided statistical power for small partner effects. As a consequence, analyses involving the lab-based assessments tested the effect of partner-reported power only (Model 2). Power analyses using the APIM power module (Ackerman et al., 2016) specifying the actor and partner effects shown in Table 8 as partial  $r$ s yielded  $>.99$  power to detect the negative effect of actor power on behavioral inhibition ( $r = -.23$ ), and  $.894$  power to detect the positive effect of partner-reported power on communal behavior ( $r = .13$ ). The study did not have adequate statistical power ( $.502$ ) to detect the unexpected negative effect of partner-reported power on inhibition ( $r = -.08$ ).

**Lockdown Assessment ( $N = 157$  Couples): Test 3.** For the specific purposes of the present study, in the lockdown assessment, we assessed both actor power and perceptions of partners' power. Using the APIM module, we calculated the power of this smaller sample to detect the meta-analytic effect sizes when modeling the effects of (a) actor and perceived partner power (Model 1 in top of Table 8) and (b) actor and partner-reported power (Model 2 in top of Table 8). Statistical power was above  $.95$  for detecting the negative effect of actor power on behavioral inhibition (Model 1,  $.976$ ; Model 2,  $.990$ ). Statistical power was also above  $.95$  for assessing the positive effect of *perceived partner* power on communal behavior (Model 1,  $.997$ ) but weaker for the effect of *partner-reported* power on communal behavior (Model 2,  $.660$ ). The study was inadequately powered to detect the unexpected negative effect of (perceived) partner power on behavioral inhibition ( $<.32$  for Models 1 and 2).

### Procedure and Measures for Lab-Based Assessments: Tests 1 and 2

Both partners independently completed assessments of relationship power and commitment along with a questionnaire assessing their typical behavioral responses when experiencing disagreements or conflict with their partner. This provided the first assessment of behavioral inhibition and communal behavior during conflict (Test 1). After identifying, and ranking according to severity, three areas of ongoing conflict in their relationship, couples had a warm-up discussion about nonconflictual events over the past week and then two video-recorded 7-min discussions about the most serious, nonoverlapping area of conflict identified by each partner (order counterbalanced across gender). Immediately following each conflict discussion, participants reported on their behavioral inhibition, and observational coders rated each participants' communal behavior, which provided the second assessment of behavioral inhibition and communal behavior during conflict (Test 2).

**Actor and Partner Power.** Participants completed the same sense of power scale (Anderson et al., 2012) used in Studies 1–4 to assess their own relationship power.

**Actor and Partner Commitment.** Participants completed the same Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998) used in Studies 1–4 to assess relationship commitment.

**Typical Responses During Conflict (Test 1).** New to this study, our first test examined the associations between power and behavioral inhibition and communal behavior using questionnaire assessments of typical behavioral responses during conflict. Participants completed the Kerig (1996) Conflict and Problem-Solving Scales, which include items that align with the constructs and prior assessments of behavioral inhibition and communal behavior (supporting and prioritizing partners' needs) in Studies 1–4 (see Table 1). Participants were asked "Please rate how often you respond in the following ways when you have conflict or disagreements" using a scale of 1 = *not often* to 7 = *very often*.

To assess *Behavioral Inhibition*, we selected items primarily from the avoidance subscale to assess the degree to which people inhibit their reactions and avoid the threat of conflict. The six items included: "I clam up, hold in feelings," "I change the subject," "I try to ignore the problem, avoid talking about it," "I leave the room," "I express my thoughts and feelings openly" (reverse-scored), and "I talk it out with my partner" (reverse-scored). To assess *communal behavior*, we identified items from the capitulation and cooperation scales that assessed supporting and prioritizing the partners' needs by compromising, smoothing things over, and considering the partners' needs, feelings, and goals. The five items included: "I compromise, meet my partner halfway," "I try to smooth things over," "I accept the blame, apologize," "I listen to my partner's point of view," and "I try to understand what my partner is really feeling." As shown in Table 9, the items provided reliable measures.

**Responses During Couples' Conflict Discussions (Test 2).** Our second test involved examining the associations between power and behavioral inhibition and communal behavior as exhibited during couples' conflict discussions in the lab (as in Studies 2 and 3). To assess *Behavioral Inhibition*, immediately following the discussion, participants rated the three items used across Studies 2–4 to assess expressive suppression during social interactions (e.g., "I tried to hide my thoughts and feelings from my partner"; 1 = *not at all*; 7 = *very much*).

To assess *Communal Behavior*, a team of three coders independently rated the degree to which each participant exhibited communal behavior in each of the conflict discussions using the established coding scheme applied in Study 2, which assesses expressing care and support for the partner and prioritizing the partner's needs (see Study 2 and Supplemental Materials for details). Coders reviewed each discussion twice to rate how much each person exhibited communal behavior for each 30-s segment of the 7-min conflict discussion (1 = *low*, 7 = *high*) and these 14-segment scores were then averaged. This coding procedure inevitably creates lower scores than would be produced from global ratings across the discussion (as in Studies 3 and 4). Coder reliability was excellent (see Table 9).

### Procedure and Measures for Lockdown Assessment: Test 3

During the mandatory COVID-19 lockdown, participants completed an online questionnaire that included assessments of their

own power, perceptions of their partners' power, and relationship commitment. Participants also reported on how they responded when experiencing disagreements or conflict with their partner during lockdown.

**Actor and Perceived Partner Power.** To reduce burden of participation during the lockdown, we used a six-item (instead of 8-item) version of the sense of power scale (Anderson et al., 2012). Items were worded to assess own power (e.g., "I could get my partner to listen to what I said"; "Even if I voiced them, my views have had little sway") and perceptions of partners' power (e.g., "My partner could get me to listen to what he/she said"; "Even if my partner voiced them, his/her views have had little sway") during the lockdown.

**Actor and Partner Commitment.** Participants completed the same scale used in Studies 1–4 to assess their own relationship commitment.

**Responses During Conflict in Lockdown.** We assessed behavioral inhibition and communal behavior during conflict while in lockdown by integrating the items assessed in the lab-based discussion (Test 1) with self-report items used across Studies 1–4. We expected that these items would form a reliable index of behavioral inhibition and communal behavior, providing evidence that the assessments across studies tap similar constructs. Participants rated each item according to how they responded when they had conflict or disagreements with their partner during lockdown (1 = *never*, 7 = *very often*).

To assess *Behavioral Inhibition*, participants completed the six items from the Kerig (1996) Conflict and Problem-Solving Scales completed in the lab-based assessment (e.g., "I clammed up, held in feelings") as well as the three items used to assess behavioral inhibition during social interactions in Studies 2–4 and Study 5: Test 2 (e.g., "I tried to hide negative thoughts and feelings"). The resulting nine-item scale was highly reliable (see Table 9).

To assess *Communal Behavior*, participants completed the six items from the Kerig (1996) Conflict and Problem-Solving Scales completed in the lab-based assessments (e.g., "I tried to smooth things over," "I tried to understand what my partner was really feeling") as well as the Study 1 items assessing prioritization of

partners' needs during daily life ("I was forgiving toward my partner," "I was willing to let my partner have things his/her way") and the Study 3 self-report items used to assess communal behavior during conflict discussions ("I put aside my own feelings and needs for the sake of my partner," "I was more focused on my partner's feelings and needs than my own"). The scale was highly reliable (see Table 9).

## Results

The associations between actor power and partner-reported power in both the lab-based and lockdown assessment were positively and moderately correlated as in Studies 1–4 (see Table 10). The link between actor power and perceived partner power in the lockdown assessment, however, was higher than in Studies 1–4, perhaps because these assessments measured relationship power experienced specifically in the challenging lockdown period. Nonetheless, the scatterplots revealed a fair representation of relationships involving both actors and partners perceived to possess high or low power, as well as actors and partners perceived to hold different levels of power (see Supplemental Materials). Moreover, as in Studies 1–4, all analyses modeled own and perceived partner power or partner-reported power simultaneously to examine the independent effects of actor and partner power predicting behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior.

We present primary analyses for the three independent tests of the effects of actor and (perceived) partner power in sequence, focusing first on the lab-based assessments with the full sample (Tests 1 and 2) and then examining the lockdown assessments with the lockdown subsample (Test 3). We then consider additional analyses ruling out relationship commitment as an alternative explanation across Tests 1–3.

### Test 1: Typical Responses During Conflict

Our first test used the questionnaire measures of typical behavioral responses during conflict completed during the lab-based assessment. These analyses only examined the effect of partner power using partner-reported power (Model 2) because lab-based

**Table 9**  
*Descriptive Statistics and Reliabilities Across Measures: Studies 5–6*

Measures	Study 5: Lab-based assessments		Study 5: Lockdown assessments		Study 6: Close relationships		Study 6: Work relationships	
	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>R</i>	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>R</i>
Questionnaire assessments								
Actor power	5.12 (0.96)	.84	5.39 (1.09)	.85	5.53 (0.99)	.85	4.88 (1.04)	.84
Perceived partner power	—		5.61 (0.94)	.79	5.63 (0.96)	.83	5.84 (0.89)	.85
Actor commitment	6.66 (0.76)	.92	6.62 (0.73)	.91	6.40 (0.81)	.84	5.23 (1.34)	.90
Behavioral inhibition during conflict	3.01 (1.19)	.83	2.78 (1.15)	.88	3.52 (1.12)	.82	3.89 (1.01)	.76
Communal behavior during conflict	5.19 (0.90)	.71	4.81 (0.91)	.81	5.49 (0.79)	.75	5.29 (0.83)	.77
Responses during couples' conflict discussions								
Self-reported behavioral inhibition Discussion 1	2.24 (1.44)	.90	—	—	—	—	—	—
Self-reported behavioral inhibition Discussion 2	1.89 (1.36)	.94	—	—	—	—	—	—
Observed communal behavior Discussion 1	2.14 (0.72)	.89	—	—	—	—	—	—
Observed communal behavior Discussion 2	2.06 (0.68)	.90	—	—	—	—	—	—

*Note.* *R* = reliability. *R* = Cronbach's alpha for questionnaire assessments and self-report responses. *R* = intra-class correlation (ICC) for observed assessments. "—" indicates that the measure was not assessed in that study or component of study.

assessments did not include a measure of perceived partner power. We ran two dyadic multilevel models simultaneously calculating the effects of actor and partner power on (a) behavioral inhibition or (b) communal behavior accounting for the statistical dependence across dyad members (see OSF for data and syntax).<sup>13</sup>

As shown in the top of Table 11, the effects in Studies 1–4 replicated, but some additional effects also emerged. Focusing first on behavioral inhibition, actor power was negatively associated with behavioral inhibition, revealing (as in Studies 1–4) that actors lower in power were more likely to report behavioral inhibition during conflict with their partner. Moreover, the negative meta-analytic association between partner-reported power and behavioral inhibition was also supported suggesting that, rather than greater partner power prompting behavioral inhibition, close relationship partners may inhibit responses and avoid conflict to protect partners lower (vs. higher) in power.

Turning to communal behavior, replicating the meta-analysis across studies, partner-reported power was positively associated with communal behavior, indicating that actors were more likely to report communal behavior when partners' reported possessing higher (vs. lower) power. However, unlike Studies 1–4, actor power also was positively, and more strongly, associated with communal behavior. This unexpected finding is inconsistent with much of the theoretical and empirical work covered in the Introduction, and would indicate that high rather than low actor power promotes greater communal behavior.

### Test 2: Responses During Couples' Conflict Discussions

Our second test examined the associations between actor and partner-reported power (Model 2) with behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior during couples' conflict discussions. The dyadic models used in the prior studies and Test 1 were extended to account for the repeated assessments of behavior across the two conflict discussions. In particular, we applied a multilevel dyadic model that treated the conflict discussion as repeated measures nested within each dyad, which had the advantages of maximizing power and accounting for dependence in behavior across discussions (see Kenny et al., 2006; see OSF for data and syntax). This multilevel strategy also allowed direct tests of whether the effects differed across the discussions, which revealed that the effects shown in Table 11 did not differ (i.e., the effects replicated) across discussions ( $ts < .53$ ,  $ps > .59$ ).

The bottom of Table 11 displays the results from the two dyadic multilevel models simultaneously calculating the effects of actor and partner power on (a) behavioral inhibition or (b) communal behavior accounting for the statistical dependence across discussions and dyad members. Again, the effects in Studies 1–4 replicated, but (as in Test 1) additional effects emerged. For behavioral inhibition, a strong negative association was observed between actor power and behavioral inhibition within couples' conflict discussions. In addition, a smaller, but still significant, negative association again emerged between partner-reported power and behavioral inhibition.

For communal behavior, partner-reported power was once again positively associated with communal behavior. However, unlike Studies 1–4 (but as in Test 1), actor power was positively associated with communal behavior suggesting that actors' higher (rather than lower) in power were more likely to behave in pro-relationship ways

**Table 10**

*Correlations Across Power and Commitment Measures: Study 5*

Measures	1	2	3	4
Study 5: Lab-based assessments (Tests 1 and 2)				
1. Actor power	—			
2. Perceived partner power	— <sup>a</sup>	—		
3. Partner-reported power	.23**	— <sup>a</sup>	—	
4. Actor commitment	.41**	— <sup>a</sup>	.26**	—
5. Partner-reported commitment	.26**	— <sup>a</sup>	.41**	.45**
Study 5: Lockdown assessments (Test 3)				
1. Actor power	—			
2. Perceived partner power	.51**	—		
3. Partner-reported power	.22**	.22**	—	
4. Actor commitment	.46**	.42**	.38**	—
5. Partner-reported commitment	.38*	.27**	.46**	.35**

*Note.* Correlations are raw zero-order correlations that describe rather than account for the dependence within and across actors and partners.

<sup>a</sup> Correlation could not be calculated because perceived partner power was not measured in lab-based assessments.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

that focused on their partners' needs. We consider this unexpected pattern when summarizing the results across all Study 5 tests and analyses, but note that this pattern nonetheless joins Studies 1–4 showing that actor and partner power can have independent effects, rather than competing or opposing effects that would occur if relative differences in power were crucial.

### Test 3: Responses During Conflict in Lockdown

Our final test involved examining the associations between power and behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior during couples' conflicts within the confines of a COVID-19 lockdown. Unlike in the lab-based assessments (Tests 1 and 2), we gathered measures of both actor power and perceptions of partners' power in the lockdown assessment. The smaller sample size provided adequate power for reliably detecting the stronger associations between *perceived partner* power and communal behavior (Model 1,  $r = .25$ ), but not the weaker association between *partner-reported* power and communal behavior (Model 2,  $r = .13$ ; see details of power analyses described above). Nonetheless, although we focus on the effects of perceived partner power, we report all dyadic analyses for Models 1 and 2 for completeness.

We ran dyadic multilevel models simultaneously calculating the effects of actor and perceived partner power on (a) behavioral inhibition or (b) communal behavior accounting for the statistical dependence across dyad members (see OSF for data and syntax). The results are shown in Table 12. As in all prior tests, actor power was negatively associated with behavioral inhibition, revealing that actors lower in power were more likely to report behavioral inhibition during conflict. The previously unexpected negative association between partner power and behavioral inhibition was not significant in these analyses, consistent with very low power ( $< .30$ ) to detect the small meta-analytic effects. Instead, as expected, perceiving

<sup>13</sup> In Studies 1–4 we modeled the main and interaction effect of gender because prior research has shown gender differences in the effect of power within mixed-gender interactions (see Footnote 4). We applied the same analytic strategy here. None of the effects shown in Tables 11 and 12 differed across gender (see Supplemental Materials).



**Table 11***The Independent Effects of Actor and Partner Power on Responses During Couples' Conflict (Study 5: Lab-Based Assessments)*

Predictors	Behavioral inhibition					Communal behavior				
	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Test 1: Typical responses during conflict										
Model 2: Actor and partner-reported power										
Actor power	<b>-.43</b>	<b>-.53, -.33</b>	<b>-8.52</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.36<sup>a</sup></b>	.22	.14, .30	5.44	<.001	.24 <sup>c</sup>
Partner-reported power	<i>-.13</i>	<i>-.23, -.03</i>	<i>-2.50</i>	<i>.013</i>	<i>.11<sup>b</sup></i>	<b>.12</b>	<b>.04, .20</b>	<b>2.85</b>	<b>.005</b>	<b>.13<sup>c</sup></b>
Test 2: Responses during couples' conflict discussions										
Model 2: Actor and partner-reported power										
Actor power	<b>-.46</b>	<b>-.54, -.37</b>	<b>-10.54</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.50<sup>a</sup></b>	.17	.13, .21	8.23	<.001	.24 <sup>c</sup>
Partner-reported power	<i>-.09</i>	<i>-.17, -.001</i>	<i>-2.02</i>	<i>.044</i>	<i>.06<sup>b</sup></i>	<b>.11</b>	<b>.07, .15</b>	<b>5.52</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.16<sup>d</sup></b>

*Note.* Effects that we predicted would be significant based on meta-analyses of prior studies and a priori power analyses are presented in bold. Other significant effects for partner-reported power that emerged in prior studies but a priori power analyses suggested we did not have power for are in italics. Other significant effects for actor power that were unexpected are shown in italics. The superscripts index the results from multilevel models contrasting the effects on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior or actor versus partner power for each test. Different superscripts across rows indicate significant differences in the effects of actor or partner power on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior. Different superscripts within each column indicate significant differences in the effects of actor versus partner power for that specific behavior (see Footnote 5).

partners to have greater power was positively and significantly associated with communal behavior. Moreover, controlling for the stronger association between actor power and perceived partner power, actor power was not associated with communal behavior as in Tests 1 and 2 (see Table 12, Model 1).

**Control Analyses for Study 5 Tests 1–3.** The associations between power and commitment were stronger in Study 5 than Studies 1–4 (see Table 10). Nonetheless, rerunning the analyses controlling for actor and partner commitment did not substantively alter the effects across Tests 1, 2, and 3 (see Supplemental Materials), with one exception: The negative effect of partner-reported power on behavioral inhibition during couples' lab-based conflict discussions was reduced,  $B = -.05$ , 95% CI  $[-.14, .03]$ ,  $t = -1.24$ ,  $p = .214$ .

## Study 5 Summary and Discussion

The results of Study 5 replicated the primary effects emerging across Studies 1–4. Across all tests, actors lower in power were more likely to report behavioral inhibition during conflict with their partner. Similarly, in Tests 1 and 2 that were powered to detect the effect of partner-reported power, actors were more likely to report and exhibit communal behavior when partners were higher (vs. lower) in power. Test 3, which included perceptions of partners' power, also replicated the effect of perceived partner power across Studies 1–4: Actors enacted more communal behavior when perceiving their partner to be high in power.

The results also provided additional evidence for the negative association between partner-reported power and behavioral inhibition that was unexpected at the outset of the investigation but was significant in the meta-analysis across Studies 1–4. The growing evidence for this pattern indicates that, at least in close relationships, people may inhibit responses and avoid conflict to protect partners who report lacking power. Controlling for commitment reduced the link between partner-reported power and inhibition in Test 2 (but not Test 1) as it did in Study 3, which may further indicate that this protective effect arises within close relationships when people are

committed to caring for their partners. In Study 6, we examine work-based relationships, alongside close relationships, which may shed light on the potential boundary conditions of this initially unexpected, but relatively consistent, effect.

Finally, in Study 5, an unexpected effect of actor power emerged that was not evident in any of the prior tests across Studies 1–4. Actors higher (vs. lower) in power were more (vs. less) likely to report or exhibit communal behavior during couples' conflict. This association is inconsistent with a common perspective that actors higher in power are selfish and behave with less empathy and consideration of others (e.g., Blader et al., 2016; Galinsky et al., 2006; Rucker et al., 2018), including in close relationships (e.g., Gordon & Chen, 2013; Righetti, Luchies, et al., 2015). Yet, actors high in prosocial or communal motivation are not less communal when high in power (Côté et al., 2011; Gordon & Chen, 2013). Instead, because high power actors can approach and prioritize their own goals (e.g., Keltner et al., 2003; Rucker & Galinsky, 2016), high power may motivate communal behavior for those who generally prioritize relationship goals, as is likely the case for the coparents in the present study (also Chen et al., 2001; Gordon & Chen, 2013; Karremans & Smith, 2010). This unexpected effect did not occur when controlling for the strong association between actor and perceived partner power, which could indicate the link between actor power and communal power was an artifact of the perceived interdependence across actors and partners in these married, coparenting couples. Regardless, the results of Study 5 confirm a central point evident across Studies 1–4: Actor and partner power have independent effects on behavioral inhibition and communal behavior, rather than opposing effects that should emerge if relative differences in power are essential in determining social behavior.

## Study 6

Our final preregistered ([osf.io/5bwr3](https://osf.io/5bwr3)) study was designed to replicate the pattern of differential associations between actor and perceived partner power with inhibition versus communal behavior within intimate relationships. In addition, we examined whether the

**Table 12***The Independent Effects of Actor and Partner Power Within Couples' Conflict in Lockdown (Study 5: Lockdown Analyses)*

Predictors	Behavioral inhibition					Communal behavior				
	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Model 1: Actor and perceived partner power										
Actor power	<b>-.52</b>	<b>-.64, -.40</b>	<b>-8.67</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.44<sup>a</sup></b>	.07	-.02, .17	1.46	.147	.08 <sup>c</sup>
Perceived partner power	-.04	-.18, .10	-0.60	.551	.03 <sup>b</sup>	<b>.38</b>	<b>.27, .49</b>	<b>6.76</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.37<sup>d</sup></b>
Model 2: Actor and partner-reported power										
Actor power	<b>-.52</b>	<b>-.62, -.42</b>	<b>-9.92</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.50<sup>a</sup></b>	.23	.14, .32	4.95	<b>&lt;.001</b>	.28 <sup>c</sup>
Partner-reported power	-.09	-.20, .01	-1.79	.075	.10 <sup>b</sup>	.06	-.03, .15	1.28	.202	.08 <sup>c</sup>

*Note.* Effects that we predicted would be significant based on meta-analyses of prior studies and a priori power analyses are presented in bold. Unexpected significant effects are shown in italics. The superscripts index the results from multilevel models contrasting the effects on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior or actor versus (perceived) partner power for each model (Model 1 or Model 2). Different superscripts across rows indicate significant differences in the effects of actor or (perceived) partner power on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior. Different superscripts within each column indicate significant differences in the effects of actor versus (perceived) partner power for that specific behavior (behavioral inhibition or communal behavior) and model (Model 1 or Model 2). Any shared superscripts across rows or within columns indicate the differences are not significant (see Footnote 5).

same differential associations occurred in work-based relationships with managers, supervisors, or employers. Replicating the pattern of associations in work-based relationships would provide initial evidence that the implications of actor and partner power generalize across contexts. Although we thought that actor and partner power should give rise to similar interpersonal processes in work-based relationships, it is possible that differences across contexts could emerge. For example, the unexpected negative effect of partner power on behavioral inhibition may be less likely to occur in actors' relationships with managers or supervisors if actors inhibit responses to care for low power partners they feel responsible to protect.

We recruited participants using Prolific, an online crowd-sourcing platform, in which participants are prescreened according to criteria relevant to the study aims, including participants (a) living with their spouse or romantic partner in an intimate relationship of at least 6 months duration, as well as (b) working full time at an organization they had been employed for at least 6 months. Participants reported their own power and their intimate partner's power as well as how they generally behaved when experiencing conflict or disagreements with their intimate partner using the items in Study 5: Test 3 that merged all self-report measures across Studies 1–5. Extending Studies 1–5, participants also completed the same assessments of power and behavior within the context of a work-based relationship with a current boss or manager.

## Method

### Participants

Participation was open to Prolific panelists in the United States or Canada who had been (a) living with their romantic partner in a committed relationship for at least the past 6 months, and (b) employed in a job that involves working with a manager, supervisor or boss for at least the past 6 months. We specified these criteria to ensure we captured power and behavioral responses in ongoing close and work relationships. Additionally, given pandemic-related disruptions shifted many close and work relationships online, we wanted to maximize the degree to which we were sampling power and behavioral dynamics that occurred in person

(cohabiting couples, ongoing work relationships). In addition to restricting participation to panelists whose prespecified demographic profile met these criteria, consent involved confirming these criteria, and each section of the survey screened relationship and employment status. Respondents failing any of these checks were informed they did not qualify for participation. Participants were compensated £3 GBP judged by panelists as above "fair" (good) payment for the expected 20 min. completion time.

Given this study involved individuals, rather than dyads, only the differential effects of actor power and perceived partner power (Model 1) could be conducted. To determine sample size we conducted a meta-analysis of the size of effects across all prior tests in Studies 1–5: actor power → behavioral inhibition  $r = -.26$ ; perceived partner power → communal behavior  $r = .27$ . Using G\*Power (Faul et al., 2009) to calculate 95% power indicated a sample of 220 was required. We oversampled to provide room for preregistered exclusions (osf.io/5bwr3): Failing to correctly answer attention check questions ( $n = 14$ ) and completing the survey in less than the prespecified time (10 min) needed to reliably differentiate measures ( $n = 39$ ). Additional analyses including these excluded participants produced the same pattern of results.

The final sample included 221 participants (153 men; 66 women; 2 gender diverse). Participants were an average age of 35.61 years ( $SD = 8.09$ ) and identified as African (5.9%), Arab/West Asian (1.4%), Black/African American (24.4%), East Asian (6.3%), Indigenous/Aboriginal (.5%), Latin American/Hispanic (1.4%), South Asian (1.4%), South East Asian (3.6%), White/Caucasian (60.2%), and Native American (.5%). Participants reported education levels were high school diploma or equivalent (5%), community college/trade-school diploma/associates degree (5.9%), undergraduate/bachelors degree (20.8%), master's degree (60.2%), doctoral degree (5%), and profession degree (3.2%).

The majority of participants were married (89.6%) and had been cohabiting for an average of 9.16 years ( $SD = 5.70$ ). Over the past 6 months, the majority of participants' relationship interactions had occurred in person rather than online (phone, text messaging, video calls, etc.): in person only (33.9%), mostly in person/sometimes online (61.5%), about equal in person and online (3.6%), online only (.9%). All participants were employed full time, and their current boss/manager had been their boss/manager for the past 4.11 years

( $SD = 2.71$ ). Over the past 6 months, the majority of participants' interactions with their boss/employer had occurred in person: in person only (20.8%), mostly in person/sometimes online (42.1%), about equal in person and online (11.3%), mostly online/sometimes in person (13.6%), and online only (11.8%). These interactions were typically frequent: Occurring most days (40.3%) or more than once a week (33%), with smaller groups reporting once a week (10%), every week or two (7.2%), every 2 or 3 weeks (5.9), and once a month (3.6%). Controlling for mode or frequency of contact did not alter the results.

### Procedure and Materials

Participants were randomly presented with two separate blocks of questions assessing power and behavior with regard to their (a) close relationships with their intimate partner and (b) relationship with their boss or manager at work. All measures were averaged across scale items. Table 9 presents descriptive and reliability statistics.

### Close Relationship Measures

At the beginning of the close relationship measures, participants provided information about the length of their relationship with their partner and the mode of interaction over the past 6 months (described in the Participants section). Participants also reported the initials of their partner, which were piped into the instructions of the following measures.

**Actor and Perceived Partner Power.** Participants completed the same scales used in Studies 1–5 to assess their own and perceptions of their partner's relationship power.

**Actor Commitment.** Participants also completed the same investment model scale (Rusbult et al., 1998) assessing their own commitment as in Studies 1–5.

**Behavioral Inhibition and Communal Behavior.** We applied the same self-report assessment in Study 5: Test 3, which included all self-report items used across Studies 1–5 to assess behavioral inhibition and communal behavior. Participants rated how often (1 = *not often*, 7 = *very often*) they responded to conflict and disagreement in their relationship with (a) behavioral inhibition (e.g., "I try to hide negative thoughts and feelings," "I try to ignore the problem, avoid talking about it") and (b) communal behavior (e.g., "I try to smooth things over," "I am more focused on my partner's feelings and needs than my own").

### Work Relationship Measures

At the beginning of the block of work relationship measures, participants reported on their employment status and completed an assessment of organizational commitment. They were then asked to identify "the person at work who is in charge of assigning and evaluating your work," and in the case of "more than one boss/manager, select the person who you directly report to and who most often assigns and evaluates your work." Participants reported the initials of their boss/manager, which were piped into the instructions of subsequent measures to ensure participants remained focused on the boss/manager they identified.

**Actor and Perceived Partner Power.** Participants completed the same eight-item sense of power scale (Anderson et al., 2012)

used across studies worded to refer to their relationship with their boss/manager, including their own power, e.g., "I can get my boss/manager to listen to what I say," "My wishes don't carry much weight" [reverse-scored], and perceptions of their boss/manager's (partner's) power, e.g., "My boss/manager can get my me to listen to what he/she says," "My boss/manager's wishes don't carry much weight" [reverse-scored]; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*.

**Organizational Commitment.** Pilot testing revealed that rewording the relationship commitment items did not translate well to work relationships with boss/managers. Accordingly, we drew on established measures of organizational commitment to index the dependence that comes along with being invested in one's current work role. Participants completed the six-item version of the affective commitment scale (Allen & Meyer, 1990) with regard to the organization in which they were currently employed (e.g., "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me," "I do not feel like 'part of the family' at this organization" [reverse-scored]; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Behavioral Inhibition and Communal Behavior.** Participants completed the same items to assess behavioral inhibition and communal behavior when having differences of opinions or disagreements with their boss/manager. Participants rated how often (1 = *not often*, 7 = *very often*) they responded to disagreement with their boss/manager with (a) behavioral inhibition (e.g., "I try to hide negative thoughts and feelings," "I try to ignore the problem, avoid talking about it") and (b) communal behavior (e.g., "I try to smooth things over," "I am more focused on my boss/manager's feelings and needs than my own").

## Results

The association between actor power and perceived partner power within close relationships ( $r = .48$ ,  $p < .01$ ) was higher than in Studies 1–4, and similar to the association emerging from the online assessment during lockdown in Study 5: Test 3 (see Table 10). Moreover, a similar positive association between actor power and perceived boss/manager power was observed within work relationships ( $r = .43$ ,  $p < .01$ ) indicating that interdependence and mutual influence, rather than asymmetries, may characterize many work relationships, even those that are more hierarchical in nature than intimate relationships (also see Columbus et al., 2021; Lammers et al., 2016; Langner & Keltner, 2008). Nonetheless, as shown by the scatterplots in the Supplemental Materials, both close and work-based relationships can involve actors and partners both possessing high or low power as well as different levels of power.

### Primary Analyses

We first present multilevel analyses in which reported power and behavior in close relationships and work relationships were treated as repeated measures within individuals (see OSF for data and syntax), which allowed us to control for dependence in participants' reported behavior across domains, as well as directly test whether the effects of actor and perceived partner power are the same or different across domains. Behavioral inhibition and (in a separate model) communal behavior was modeled as a function of: actor power, perceived partner power, the relationship domain (close vs. work), and the interactions between Actor power  $\times$  Domain and

Perceived partner power  $\times$  Domain, which test whether the effects of actor and perceived partner power differed across domains.<sup>14</sup>

As shown in Table 13, the differential patterns supported in Studies 1–5 emerged when examining the effects across domains: Actor power significantly predicted behavioral inhibition, but was unassociated with communal behavior. By contrast, perceived partner power significantly predicted communal behavior, but was unassociated with behavioral inhibition. Moreover, these significant effects did not differ across domains. The only significant difference across domains indicated that the links between perceived partner power and behavioral inhibition differed in the context of close versus work relationships.

To calculate the effects within each domain, we adjusted the multilevel model using dummy codes to simultaneously specify the separate effects for close relationships and work relationships while continuing to account for the dependence in participants' behavior across domains. As shown in Table 14, the differential effects of actor and partner power on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior replicated in both relationship domains.

Actors' low power was associated with more behavioral inhibition when encountering disagreements with their intimate partner or boss/manager. By contrast, perceiving intimate partners or boss/managers to have high power was associated with more communal behavior. Finally, the significant difference in the effects of perceived partner power on inhibition across close relationship and work domains revealed a similar pattern as in prior studies: Perceiving intimate partners to have low power predicted more inhibition, but this was not the case for perceptions of boss/managers' power.

### Control Analyses

Just as actor relationship commitment was positively associated with power and communal behavior in close relationships ( $r_s = .31-.56$ ), greater organizational commitment was associated with power and communal behavior in work relationships ( $r_s = .36-.60$ ). Nonetheless, rerunning the analyses controlling for commitment did not alter the effects in Table 14 (see Supplemental Materials), with one exception: The negative association between perceived partner power and inhibition within close relationships was reduced when controlling for relationship commitment,  $B = .14$ , 95% CI  $[-.31, .04]$ ,  $t = -1.57$ ,  $p = .118$ .

### Study 6 Summary and Discussion

Using the self-report measures used across Studies 1–5, Study 6 replicated the differential pattern between actor and perceived partner power on behavioral inhibition and communal behavior within close relationships. Moreover, the same pattern emerged within work relationships with boss/managers indicating that the independent effects of actor and perceived partner power may generalize across relationship contexts. Only one effect significantly differed across close and work relationships: The initially unexpected negative association between perceived partner power and behavioral inhibition that appeared across Studies 1–5 again emerged, but only within the close relationship domain. This difference across domains fits with the proposition that actors may inhibit threatening responses in order to care for and protect low power intimate partners; a motivation or responsibility that

people are less likely to have for their boss/manager. As in Studies 3 and 5, however, this effect was reduced when controlling for relationship commitment also indicating that inhibition to protect partners perceived to be low in power is most likely to emerge in close relationships.

### Studies 1–6: Meta-Analyses

Studies 5 and 6 provided five tests with sufficient power to detect the meta-analytic effects of actor power on behavioral inhibition and (perceived) partner power on communal behavior from Studies 1–4. Two tests examined the links between actor and partner-reported power on behavior during conflict within close relationships (Model 1: Study 5, Tests 1 and 2), and three tests examined the links between actor and perceived partner power on behavior during conflict within close relationships and work relationships with boss/managers (Model 2: Study 5, Test 3 and Study 6). All five tests replicated the predicted pattern of independent and differential effects: Actor power was negatively associated with behavioral inhibition, and (perceived) partner power was positively associated with communal behavior. Recomputing the meta-analytic effects across all analyses in Studies 1–6 confirmed this distinct pattern revealing reliable, significant, and independent associations (see bottom of Table 8).

Additionally, in Studies 5 and 6, three of five tests within close relationships provided additional evidence for the unexpected negative association between partner-reported power (Study 5) or perceived partner power (Study 6) and behavioral inhibition. Nonetheless, as evident in the meta-analytic effects (see bottom of Table 8), the negative effect of actor power was at least three times greater than the effect of (perceived) partner power on behavioral inhibition.

Finally, in Study 5, an unexpected effect emerged that was not observed in any other study. Actors higher (vs. lower) in power were more (vs. less) likely to report or exhibit communal behavior during couples' conflict. This effect was also significant in the meta-analysis across Studies 1–6 when modeling actor and partner-reported power (Model 2). However, comparing the effect sizes and confidence intervals illustrates that actor power was much more strongly associated with behavioral inhibition than it was with communal behavior (see Table 8). Moreover, the link between actor power and communal behavior was not significant when controlling for the stronger association across actor power and perceived partner power (Model 1; see Table 8). Thus, the overall pattern illustrates that actor and partner power had independent and distinct associations with behavioral inhibition and communal behavior. Indeed, in no tests across Studies 1–6 did actor power and partner power reveal significant effects in the opposite direction

<sup>14</sup> In Studies 1–5 we modeled the main and interaction effect of gender because prior research has shown gender difference in the effect of power within mixed-gender interactions (see Footnotes 4 and 13). We applied the same analytic strategy here to ensure the analyses were consistent across studies. The effects of actor power and perceived partner power toward boss/employees did not significantly differ across men and women (gender difference  $t_s < 1.37$ ,  $p > .171$ ). In close relationships, the effect of actor power on inhibition and the effect of perceived partner power on communal behavior were stronger for women compared to men (gender difference  $t_s > 2.05$ ,  $p > .030$ ). Nonetheless, these primary effects were significant for both women and men (see Supplemental Materials), and meta-analyses revealed no systematic differences in the effects of actor power or perceived partner power across men and women (see Table SM1).



**Table 13***The Independent Effects of Actor Power and Partner Power in Relationships With Intimate Partner and Boss/Manager (Study 6)*

Predictors	Behavioral inhibition					Communal behavior				
	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Model 1: Actor and perceived partner power										
Actor power	<b>-.36</b>	<b>-.46, -.27</b>	<b>-7.36</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.36</b>	.04	-.03, .11	1.16	.246	.06
Perceived partner power	-.09	-.22, .03	-1.48	.140	.07	<b>.32</b>	<b>.23, .42</b>	<b>6.89</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.32</b>
Domain (close vs. work relationship)	.08	-.00, .15	1.93	.055	.12	-.10	-.16, -.05	-3.55	<.001	.22
Actor power × Domain	-.03	-.12, .07	-0.57	.567	.03	.01	-.06, .08	0.22	.827	.01
Perceived partner power × Domain	.12	.02, .22	2.40	.017	.14	.03	-.05, .10	0.71	.479	.04

*Note.* These results are from multilevel analyses of actor power, perceived partner power, and behavior across both types of relationships (close vs. work relationships) nested within individuals to test whether the effects differed across relationship domains. This study involved individuals rather than dyads so only the effects of perceived partner power (Model 1) could be conducted. Effects that we predicted would be significant based on meta-analyses of prior studies and a priori power analyses are presented in bold.

when predicting the same behavior. This meta-analytic pattern provides evidence against the assumption that differences in power are essential in predicting either behavioral inhibition or communal behavior.

### General Discussion

The present studies provide the first systematic tests of whether actor power and partner power have differential effects on social behavior. Rather than hinging on relative differences or asymmetries in influence, actor and partner power were distinct and were differentially associated with behavioral inhibition and communal behavior. Actor power negatively predicted behavioral inhibition (expressive suppression) in all tests across six studies. Aligning with the approach–inhibition theory of power (Keltner et al., 2003), these results indicate that actors' low power prompts a prevention-focused tendency to inhibit behavior that could risk negative outcomes that low power actors are unable to control. Actors high in power, in contrast, have less fear from expressing emotions because they are

better able to take recourse if their behavior produces negative outcomes.

By contrast, perceived partner power and partner-reported power positively predicted communal behavior. These results align with the agentic–communal model of power (Rucker et al., 2012, 2018), which suggests that dependence on social partners—high partner power—increases attention to and accommodation of partners' needs (also Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Fiske, 1993). Conversely, a lack of dependence on others—low partner power—frees people from having to consider others' needs (also Lammers et al., 2012, 2016). The present studies move beyond previous work by clarifying that the dependence dynamics underlying communal behavior primarily involve partners' power, rather than actors' power.

This differential pattern suggests that actor power is more likely to shape prevention-focused inhibition, whereas partner power is more likely to shape other oriented, communal behavior. Unexpectedly, however, perceived partner power and partner-reported power also negatively predicted behavioral inhibition, particularly within conflictual interactions in close relationships. This finding diverges from theories that emphasize power asymmetries, including those

**Table 14***The Independent Effects of Actor and Partner Power in Relationships With Intimate Partners and Boss/Managers (Study 6)*

Predictors	Behavioral inhibition					Communal behavior				
	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>B</i>	95% CI	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>r</i>
Close relationship with intimate partner										
Model 1: Actor and perceived partner power										
Actor power	<b>-.36</b>	<b>-.51, -.20</b>	<b>-4.56</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.30<sup>a</sup></b>	.06	-.05, .16	1.10	.271	.08 <sup>c</sup>
Perceived partner power	-.21	-.38, -.05	-2.64	.009	.17 <sup>a</sup>	<b>.29</b>	<b>.18, .40</b>	<b>5.22</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.33<sup>d</sup></b>
Work relationship with boss/manager										
Model 1: Actor and perceived partner power										
Actor power	<b>-.40</b>	<b>-.52, -.28</b>	<b>-6.54</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.41<sup>a</sup></b>	.06	-.03, .16	1.31	.192	.09 <sup>c</sup>
Perceived partner power	.04	-.12, .21	0.53	.596	.04 <sup>b</sup>	<b>.33</b>	<b>.20, .46</b>	<b>5.05</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>	<b>.32<sup>d</sup></b>

*Note.* Effects that we predicted would be significant based on meta-analyses of prior studies and a priori power analyses are presented in bold. The other significant effect presented in italics is consistent with prior studies examining power in close relationships. The superscripts index the results from multilevel models contrasting the effects on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior or actor versus perceived partner power within each relationship domain. Different superscripts across rows indicate significant differences in the effects of actor or (perceived) partner power on behavioral inhibition versus communal behavior. Different superscripts within each column indicate significant differences in the effects of actor versus perceived partner power for that specific behavior (behavioral inhibition or communal behavior). Any shared superscripts across rows or within columns indicate the differences are not significant (see Footnote 5).

suggesting that inhibition should be amplified when high power partners are able to deliver punishments (Keltner et al., 2003), and that freedom from others' influence (low partner power) should allow people to express themselves with little concern of consequence (see Pike & Galinsky, 2020). Instead, the negative effect of partner power on inhibition may reflect the tendency to care for and protect low power partners.

In the following sections, we propose a framework that integrates the current results with prominent theories of power and advances understanding of how power shapes social behavior. We consider which effects are likely to be specific to close relationships, and those that should generalize to more hierarchical relationships. We also outline how this framework has important implications for the study of power across a range of relationship contexts.

### **An Integrative Framework for Understanding the Effects of Power on Social Behavior**

Different theories of power tend to underpin separate lines of inquiry that focus on different behavioral outcomes, such as behavioral inhibition *or* communal behavior. Examining only one behavior (e.g., behavioral inhibition) relevant to specific theories (e.g., approach–inhibition theory) leaves it unclear which theories of power best explain the effects of power on particular behaviors (see Galinsky et al., 2015). Our investigation demonstrates the benefits of integrating theories to understand how actor and partner power might predict different social behaviors. Figure 2 organizes the expected and unexpected results of the present studies according to the two dimensions emphasized by the approach–inhibition theory (Keltner et al., 2003) and agentic–communal model (Rucker et al., 2012). The framework depicted in Figure 2 suggests that actor and partner power can predict both inhibition and approach behaviors (emphasized by the approach–inhibition theory), but those behaviors differ in self- versus other focus (emphasized by the agentic–communal model). Below, we describe how the current findings support this integrative framework and advance understanding of how actor and partner power are associated with different types of social behavior in interdependent relationships.

#### ***Actor Power: Self-Focused Inhibition and Approach Behavior***

The bottom left side of Figure 2 proposes that low actor power elicits self-focused inhibition to prevent negative outcomes that people with low power are unable to control. Consistent with this proposal, in all 17 tests across the six present studies, actor power negatively predicted expressive suppression (our index of behavioral inhibition). The factors shown to predict expressive suppression in prior research also fit with this theoretical framework. For example, greater expressive suppression during conflictual interactions is observed among people who are insecure and lack trust in their partners' regard (e.g., Low et al., 2019; Righetti, Balliet, et al., 2015; Thomson et al., 2018). Key relationship theories (e.g., attachment theory, Simpson & Rholes, 2012; risk regulation theory, Murray et al., 2006) specify that insecurity in partners' continued regard or commitment creates self-protective responses to prevent the risk of rejection. Integrating these prior findings and relationship theories with the current findings and approach–inhibition theory, we suggest that power is central to these dynamics (also Overall,

2019). Partners' low regard and commitment signify that partners lack dependence on actors and thus actors lack power to control unfavorable outcomes. Actors' low power, in turn, prompts behavioral inhibition to prevent negative outcomes.

By contrast, high power actors have greater control over redressing undesired consequences, even in contexts in which negative outcomes could occur. The reduced need for self-protection should decrease behavioral inhibition and, instead, allow high power actors to confidently express and prioritize their own needs and goals (see top left side of Figure 2). We did not directly assess self-focused approach behaviors in the present studies, but this hypothesis is consistent with prior research showing that actors placed in positions of high power more readily focus on and follow their own goals (see Galinsky et al., 2003; Guinote, 2017; Pike & Galinsky, 2020; Rucker et al., 2018). In highly interdependent relationships, salient goals may often be communal in nature (Karremans & Smith, 2010), especially when reciprocal cooperation is crucial for meeting one's own needs. Indeed, in Study 5, involving couples heavily reliant on each other to coparent young children, actors higher (vs. lower) in power were more likely to exhibit communal behavior during couples' conflict. However, in the 13 other tests across studies, actor power did not significantly predict communal behavior, and across studies the negative effect of actor power on inhibition was significantly stronger than the effect of actor power on communal behavior.

The general pattern across studies, therefore, indicates that the promotion of actors' own needs and goals does not inherently mean lower support of others' needs and goals (i.e., lower communal behavior). Given that high power actors can prioritize their own goals, any association between actor power and communal behavior is likely to depend heavily on actors' other oriented (communal) versus self-oriented (agentic) motives in the situation (Chen et al., 2001; Côté et al., 2011; Gordon & Chen, 2013; Karremans & Smith, 2010). It is possible that high actor power reduces communal behavior in contexts in which actors are less motivated to sustain relationships and care for partners (e.g., Lammers et al., 2012). Yet, even in nonintimate contexts, high power actors often depend on others to attain valued outcomes (e.g., respect, task completion, team performance), and we propose that it is this level of dependence—and thus partner power—that will most strongly determine communal behavior (see right side of Figure 2).

#### ***Partner Power: Partner-Focused Approach and Inhibition Behavior***

The top right of Figure 2 proposes that high partner power prompts other-focused approach behavior directed toward supporting and promoting partners' needs and goals. This proposition is consistent with prior evidence that low relative power increases communal behavior (e.g., Copeland, 1994; Rucker et al., 2011, 2012, 2018; van Kleef et al., 2008). The current results go beyond previous evidence by showing that communal behavior emerges from partners' power to control actors' outcomes, rather than actors' lack of power to influence partners. Integrating our results with other theoretical perspectives (Fiske, 1993; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rucker et al., 2012, 2018) underscores that dependence on high power others motivates a focus on promoting their needs and goals, likely in a bid to access valued outcomes (e.g., stimulating prosocial motivations in partners, assuring regard, sustaining relationships).

**Figure 2**  
*An Integrative Framework of the Effects of Actor and Partner Power on Behavioral Inhibition and Communal Behavior in Interdependent Relationships*



*Note.* This figure organizes the expected and unexpected results of the present studies according to the two dimensions emphasized by the approach–inhibition theory (Keltner et al., 2003) and agentic–communal model (Rucker et al., 2012) of power. This integrative framework suggests that actor and partner power can predict both inhibition and approach behaviors (emphasized by the approach–inhibition theory), but those behaviors differ in self- versus other focus (emphasized by the agentic–communal model).

Our theorizing is supported by the fact that perceived partner power was a stronger predictor of communal behavior than partner-reported power (see Table 8). If communal behavior helps one gain rewarding outcomes and sustain relationships with high power others, then the effects should occur via perceptions of the power the partner holds. Alternatively, if greater communal behavior emerges because high power partners force compliance, then partner-reported power would be expected to have equal or even greater effects on communal behavior. This was not the case in the present studies. Our theorizing is also supported by the conditions shown in prior research to produce communal responses. The strongest predictor of communal behavior in close relationships is high relational dependence, which is primarily indexed by high commitment (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Yet, the current effects of perceived partner power and partner-reported power were independent of commitment, emphasizing the point that dependence on a partner gives the partner power, and the partner's power is a central driver of communal behavior.

By contrast, when actors are not dependent, and thus free from their partners' power, they do not need to be as concerned about promoting partners' interests, needs, and goals (also Lammers et al., 2012, 2016). Yet, although low partner power likely produces lower communal behavior, we do not think that this will lead to exploitation or maltreatment in most social relationships. First, low communal behavior does not equate to the presence of destructive behavior (Overall & McNulty, 2017), which is why the links between power and communal behavior were independent of aggressive and demeaning behavior across all six studies (see Supplemental Materials). Second, aggressive or punishing behavior often emerges when actor's power is threatened, rather than when partners lack power, and primarily by actors who fear losing power

or are motivated to sustain power (e.g., Maner & Mead, 2010; Overall et al., 2016). By contrast, drawing on the social distance theory of power (Magee & Smith, 2013; Magee, 2020), it is possible that the reduced need to attend to low power partners may result in more distancing or dismissive behavior (withdrawing, ignoring, excluding).

Third, actors may often feel responsible for protecting low power others, which may explain the unexpected finding that lower partner power predicted more behavioral inhibition (bottom right of Figure 2). Smith and Hofmann (2016) found that occupying positions of power, but not actors' sense of power, predicted feelings of responsibility in daily social interactions. This pattern likely arises because partners' low power, rather than actors' high power, elicits feelings of responsibility. Other studies have shown that possessing power is often construed as responsibility for others rather than just an opportunity to pursue one's own interests (Sassenberg et al., 2012). Notably, our analysis and integration in Figure 2 indicate that the *responsibility* of power most likely arises from low *partner* power whereas the *opportunity* of power most likely emerges from high *actor* power. Our perspective also is supported by evidence that power holders feel more responsible when focused on others (i.e., partner power) rather than on the self (i.e., actor power; Scholl et al., 2017).

In sum, partners' low power may reduce the need to actively promote partners' needs and goals (lower communal behavior), but also activate responsibility norms and associated inhibition behaviors to prevent negative outcomes that low power partners cannot control and actors would feel obligated to address (greater behavioral inhibition). Accordingly, consistent with prior research showing that actors often conceal negativity to protect insecure partners (e.g., Lemay & Dudley, 2011), we found that actors tended to inhibit behaviors that could produce negative outcomes for low power partners in close relationships. Interestingly, the association between low partner power and behavioral inhibition was supported in the meta-analyses for perceived partner power and partner-reported power, but was more consistent and slightly stronger across studies for partner-reported power. This pattern suggests two mechanisms may be at play. Actors may feel responsible to protect intimate partners that actors perceive are low in power. Additionally, partners who report low power are also likely to engage in behaviors that cause actors to inhibit potentially hurtful behaviors. For example, low power partners may enact guilt induction or supplication tactics that amplify the obligation actors feel to care for and protect dependent partners (e.g., Howard et al., 1986; Overall et al., 2014; Overall, 2019).

In other contexts involving less motivation and responsibility to care for partners, low partner power may not produce behavioral inhibition. For example, in our examination of work-based relationships in Study 6, low partner power did not predict behavioral inhibition during conflict with actors' boss or manager. However, although subordinates may have little responsibility to care for their superiors, managers may attempt to inhibit negativity that might demotivate or harm low power subordinates for whom they feel responsible (Sassenberg et al., 2012; Scholl et al., 2017; Smith & Hofmann, 2016), and this might be particularly the case if subordinates enact strategies to counteract or regulate their low power by amplifying the salience of responsibility norms in high power managers.

## Implications, Caveats, and Future Directions for Examining Power in Interdependent and Hierarchical Relationships

A central implication of the current results is that the principal focus on power asymmetries in prior investigations impedes understanding of the ways in which power shapes social behavior. Illustrating the reality of interdependence, actor and partner power were positively, not inversely, associated in the present studies (average  $r$  between actor and perceived partner power = .35 or actor and partner-reported power = .20). This also was the case within work-based relationships with bosses/managers (Study 6) showing that even the most common social relationship involving hierarchical roles is characterized by interdependence (also see Columbus et al., 2021; Smith & Hofmann, 2016). As is the case with close relationship partners, subordinates and superiors depend on each other for valued outcomes (performance, rewards, respect, cooperation) giving rise to reciprocal influence.

We found little evidence in the present studies that behavioral inhibition or communal behavior hinged on relative power or power asymmetries. Actor and partner power did not reveal significant effects in the opposite direction when predicting the same behavior, which should occur if relative differences in power are essential. Moreover, there was no reliable evidence for Actor power  $\times$  Partner power interactions (see Footnote 1 and Supplemental Materials). It is possible that the methods in the present studies limited statistical power to detect Actor power  $\times$  Partner power interaction effects. However, if such asymmetries are crucial then actor or partner power on their own should be unreliable predictors. Instead, actor power and partner power both exerted reliable effects, suggesting that even if power asymmetries do account for additional variance, they will likely amplify, rather than fully determine, the effects of actor power or partner power.

Even in hierarchical relationships defined by sharper power asymmetries, actor and partner power are likely to have distinct behavioral implications. This proposition is supported by prior studies in hierarchical settings demonstrating that people differentiate and distinctly regulate their influence over others (actors' power) versus their autonomy or freedom from others' influence (perceived partner power; Lammers et al., 2016; Leach et al., 2017; Van Dijke & Poppe, 2006; also see Cislak et al., 2018). We extended this prior work by testing the effects of actor versus partner power on different social behaviors in both close relationships and work-based relationships (Study 6). Actor power negatively predicted behavioral inhibition and perceived partner power positively predicted communal behavior in relationships with managers just as it did in relationships with intimate partners. Thus, distinguishing actor from (perceived) partner power increases understanding of highly interdependent intimate relationships and relationships in more hierarchical settings.

Regardless of relationship context, the current investigation demonstrates that understanding the effects of power requires methods that differentiate actor power from partner power, rather than methods that only assess relative power or conditions involving power asymmetries. In the present studies, distinct measures of actor and partner power predicted different behaviors in couples' power-relevant interactions. Despite the ecological validity of examining interactions and behaviors within ongoing relationships, the methods rely on correlational data that prevent causal conclusions. Rather

than actors' low power producing behavioral inhibition, it is possible that greater inhibition reduces actors' influence over their partner. Similarly, rather than partners' high power producing communal behavior, it is possible that communal behavior bolsters partners' influence and power. We suspect that these processes are reciprocal: Low versus high actor and partner power produce different behaviors that, in turn, create reinforcing dynamics that sustain low versus high actor and partner power. Future experimental designs could generate stronger causal evidence, but the most common experimental paradigms will need to be adapted in order to manipulate actor and partner power in distinct ways.

Comparing different measures of power may also elucidate the relative effects of actor and partner power. Perceptual or reporting biases that determine the way people construe and report power may affect the way actor and partner power independently or combine to affect social behavior. For example, in addition to the interdependence inherent in close (and other social) relationships, the positive associations between actor and perceived partner power could arise because people are hesitant to admit or report the self or the partner lacks power. Yet, simultaneously modeling the effects of both actor and partner power control for any general bias. Moreover, such biases could not theoretically account for the differential effects of actor and partner power observed in these studies. However, it is possible that people use different information and standards in judging their own versus their partner's power. If so, levels of actor and partner power may not be directly comparable, reducing the relevance and strength of Actor  $\times$  Partner power tests in assessing whether relative power offers additional predictive insight beyond the distinct effects of actor and partner power. By contrast, asking actors to directly consider who has more influence, as is commonly done to measure relative power (e.g., Columbus et al., 2021; Gordon & Chen, 2013; Pietromonaco et al., 2021; Righetti, Luchies, et al., 2015), may directly evoke an evaluative comparison that provides additional, idiosyncratic information of power dynamics that could amplify or reduce the differential effects of actor versus partner power.

Examining the mechanisms underlying the effects of perceived partner power versus partner-reported power will also advance understanding of how power shapes social behavior. Indeed, perceived partner power and partner-reported power were only weakly correlated (average  $r = .27$ ), indicating that actors and partners do not strongly agree with how much power each other holds (also see Cross et al., 2019) and perceived partner power and partner-reported power may have different effects. As we expected, perceived partner power was a stronger predictor of actors' communal behavior than partner-reported power, which suggests that people try to attain favorable outcomes from partners who they *perceive* control those outcomes (an *actor motivation* mechanism), rather than partners who report high power behaving in ways that force cooperation or compliance (a *partner behavior* mechanism). However, partner-reported power appeared to be a more reliable predictor of behavioral inhibition than perceived partner power, indicating that partners' behavior may play a stronger role: Partners who report low power may compel actor inhibition via guilt-induction tactics (a *partner behavior* mechanism), rather than or in addition to actors inhibiting behavior that may harm partners they feel responsible for (an *actor motivation* mechanism). Assessing the different mechanisms involved in the behavioral effects of actor, perceived



partner, and partner-reported power is an important direction for future research.

Examining distinct measures of actor and partner power in conjunction with role-based manipulations of power also may elucidate behavioral effects of power that vary across interdependent relationship versus hierarchical contexts. For example, positions of power (high actor power) that involve very little dependence on others (low partner power) may produce both self-focused promotion of actors' own needs and lower consideration of others' needs (see Figure 2). This combination may enable more successful attainment of actors' goals, but also increase the potential for partner exploitation. Although we found that lower partner power predicted greater inhibition in close relationships, in less interdependent contexts characterized by more exchange rather than communal norms, greater social distance from low power others may increase the risk of objectification, dehumanization, and domination to achieve self-interests (Magee, 2020), especially for those who do not have communal goals or feel responsible for low power others, but instead are primarily motivated to sustain their power. Nonetheless, even in the context of such hierarchical roles, distinguishing actor from partner power is needed to identify whether exploitation (or any other type of social behavior) is produced by high actor power, low partner power, or the combination of these two factors.

Moderating variables that determine the effects of power may operate by increasing the relative weight of actor versus partner power. Many moderators of the link between relative power and communal behavior, for example, involve factors such as prosocial motivations, trait agreeableness, and feelings of social responsibility that amplify other-focused attention and thus the salience of partners' low power (see Foulk et al., 2020, for review). By contrast, characteristics that amplify the salience of actors' own self-interests, such as narcissism, dominance orientation or activation of important self-relevant goals, predict greater self-interested behaviors that ignore and sometimes harm social partners' needs and goals (e.g., Chen et al., 2001; Maner & Mead, 2010; Mead et al., 2018). While some suggest that these moderators hinge on whether power is construed as responsibility versus opportunity to pursue personal interests (Foulk et al., 2020), the current framework (see Figure 2) suggests that both different ways of construing power and the moderators of the effects of power reflect the salience or level of partners' power versus actors' power.

Future work may benefit from applying the theoretical integration in Figure 2 to test ways in which actor versus partner power determine a range of perceptual, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes. We suggest that low actor power should be associated primarily with processes related to lacking control over potential negative consequences (e.g., insecurity, anxiety) and minimizing or redressing such threats (e.g., inhibition, avoidance, aggression, guilt induction). By contrast, given high power actors can control and address any negative consequences that might arise, we expect high actor power to predict processes related to the confident pursuit of goals (e.g., optimism, authenticity, risk-taking, mate pursuit, goal performance, and persistence), including goals that are communal or self-interested in nature. Based on the current results and integrative framework in Figure 2, we expect that partner power will primarily predict other-focused attention and concern (e.g., perspective taking, empathy, compassion, ignoring, devaluing) and related behaviors (e.g., helping, compliance, sacrificing, distancing, exclusion). Identifying whose power is most likely to determine such outcomes

in both interdependent and hierarchical relationship contexts will provide greater clarity regarding the conditions that should be targeted to limit the potentially damaging consequences of power for both actors and partners.

## Conclusion

Most investigations of power assume that actor power and partner power reflect two ends of a continuum—as one increases, the other necessarily decreases. Consequently, most prior investigations have tended to conflate actor and partner power, assuming that psychological processes are produced only by relative differences or asymmetries in power. The present studies illustrate that assessing the distinct effects of actor and partner power across different behavioral outcomes can help integrate previous theories and provide a more complete picture of the effects of power on social behavior. The results of six studies reveal that some behaviors (e.g., behavioral inhibition) are more strongly determined by actor power, whereas other behaviors (e.g., communal behavior) are more strongly determined by partner power. The differential effects of actor and partner power illustrate that distinguishing between actor and partner power is crucial to clearly understand how power shapes social behavior.

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