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Conceptualization of How Power Operates in Human Functioning

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WHAT IS POWER?

Having power has commonly been defined as having sufficient control over forces affecting life to meet individual or group needs, secure necessary resources, and bring about desired goals. Control of one's destiny to some reasonable extent constitutes "the essential psychological component of all aspects of life" (Basch 1975, p. 513), which means that perceiving oneself as having such power is critical to one's health and mental health. Powerlessness—not having such power and control—is painful and will often be defended against by behavior that seeks to create some sense of power (McClelland, 1975; Pinderhughes, 1983, 1989, 1997). Power in the sense of some control of one's environment is critical to survival and constitutes the most fundamental of all human motives (Guinote & Vescio, 2010). Dynamic, systemic, often paradoxical, power, according to Foucault (1982), exists everywhere. Russell asserted that power is "the fundamental concept in social science in the same sense that energy is the fundamental concept in physics" (1938, p. 4). Power operates in all the levels of human functioning and is critical to all relationships: those between individuals, within families and groups, within communities, and within groups in the larger social system.

Visible on an individual level as personal ability or capacity, power exists on other levels of human functioning, as a component in all relationships, being shaped by people's interactions. Thus, power is also seen as a force in social systems, as a thing that is possessed by leaders and the privileged, and also as the quality of the relationship between the privileged and subordinates. Social activists Hunjan and Keophilavong

(2010) defined power as "dynamic, relational and multidimensional, changing according to context, circumstance and interest. Its expression and forms can range from domination and resistance to collaboration and transformation" (2010, p. 11). Institutions and social norms are sources of power, as are people's determination and will.

Jerry Tew (2006), clinician and activist, identified power as a "social relation" existing between people, a social relation that creates individual or social change. Dominating others in a "double edged, contradictory process," it limits and constrains under certain conditions and is productive or protective in others. It "may take form at various scales from the systemic patterning of the social whole, through the more local structuring of interpersonal interactions, to the construction and organization of personal identities (the internalization of power relations)." In creating change, power as a social relation can open up or close off opportunities for individuals or groups, and "may be anything from accessing resources and social or economic participation, through to developing personal identities and capabilities, expressing needs, thoughts and feelings, and renegotiating relationships" (2006, pp. 39–40). Power is, indeed, everywhere.

A Definition from Research

On the basis of findings from extensive research, social psychologists Guinote and Vescio (2010) defined social power as "a dynamic force negotiated in specific contexts on the basis of group needs, the self-serving biases of power holders, legitimating ideologies, and subordinates' tendencies to consent versus resist power" (p. 446). This means that the operation of power involves consideration of (a) whether, as a result of negotiation, the needs and goals being pursued by power holders reasonably encompass those of subordinate individuals and groups, including subgroups within the larger social system; (b) whether the belief systems that exist to justify the legitimacy of power distribution support the interests of both subordinates and power holders; (c) whether the power holders use self-serving biases (stereotyping) or are capable of perceiving and treating the lesser powered in accordance with who they really are and not according to myth or stereotype; and (d) whether subordinates consent or resist the power as exercised. Importantly, Guinote and Vescio stated that "Power is, therefore, relative rather than absolute and is a feature of situations rather than a force that resides solely within people" (p. 447). Power is, therefore, situational. This understanding embodies several of the most basic aspects of power, highlighting the primacy of the relationship between power holders and subordinates, the context or situation that influences that relationship, determining its origin in people's negotiation with their environment as they seek to meet their needs.

Power originates, then, from people's relationships as they negotiate with one another in pursuit of group goals. Influencing, controlling, and shaping interactions between individuals; within groups such as families, work groups, or communities; and between groups within a larger social system (communities and other groups based on class, race, or ethnic origin), power originates when "interpersonal control over valued outcomes creates interpersonal power (such that) asymmetrical possession over

physical, social and economic capital creates power differences at the intergroup level" (Guinote & Vescio, 2010, p. 3).

The force that emerges functions as a necessary organizer and stabilizer, defining the norms, regulations, and guidelines for the different roles and positions people occupy, assigning and legitimating the level of influence (power) that exists in the relationships that develop between individuals and groups. In the process of negotiation, resources (money, material goods, influence, knowledge/wisdom, skills, will and determination, and so on) become the sources of influence in the system, and the persons with the most resources become the ones with the most power: the power holders, the privileged, and the leaders. Guinote and Vescio suggest that power holders get there because they have need for power and are also the most qualified. At the same time that power is critical as an organizer, stabilizer, legitimizer, regulator, and role assigner, whether or not it is reasonably stable is a key question.

How the power is exercised (justly or unjustly) is critical to the degree of stability in the system because power operates recursively, in a seemingly contradictory, paradoxical manner—like an elastic, being enhanced or constrained by a number of factors. Instability is determined by the degree of turmoil and conflict in the relationship between power holders and subordinates. The degree of conflict depends on whether or not subordinates accept or resist leaders' goals and activities. Subordinate resistance depends on (a) whether or not subordinates believe that leaders' pursuit of goals for the group includes their (subordinates') interests as they perceive them and (b) whether subordinates are able to resist. From this perspective, the stability and legitimacy of the power/leadership depend on the nonresistance of subordinates or the ineffectiveness of their resistance; and on their (apparent) acceptance of the status quo. When subordinates view the power as exercised to be illegitimate or unjust and feel power holders' actions are not directed toward goals that are in their (subordinates') interests, they may resist. If subordinates' resistance is strong enough, it undermines the stability of the system, jeopardizing the functions of power as stabilizer, legitimizer, regulator, and role assigner, and calling into question assigned roles and positions and the power holders' pursuit of goals and perspectives (Guinote & Vescio, 2010). This tendency of power to be jeopardized by the resistance of subordinates functions as an important constraint on the unjust exercise and abuse of power.

Subordinates, however, may not resist leader goals even when they consider such goals to be unjust. Their need to avoid anxiety and to have "order, structure, closure, stability, predictability, consistency and control" (Kay, Banfield, & Laurin, 2010, p. 327) prompts such reluctance to resist. This circumstance, indicative of a "symbiotic relationship" (Kay et al., 2010) between low- and high-status people, can reinforce the current unjust or unequal power distribution, enabling the privileged to keep their power.

Under certain circumstances, high-power people manipulate this dynamic to maintain their power (that is, they inspire fear and anxiety in subordinates, as has been seen recently in many political campaigns). Subordinates, on the other hand, may not resist leader goals that they consider unjust if they can see no benefit. As noted previously, whether or not the power holders see their subordinates and their needs as they really exist (as subordinates see them) is a factor in how power operates. Power holders are more vulnerable to using myths, bias, and stereotyping in their perceptions of subordinates

when they have a personal need for power, when the system becomes unstable and their power is threatened, when power/privilege has existed over for a long period of time, or when stereotyping will forward leader goals.

Levels, Types, Sources, and Processes of Power

For our purposes, we identify the levels of power as individual, interpersonal or interactional, intragroup (within family/group/community), and intergroup (between subgroups that exist within groups and communities and within the larger society).

Individual power, known also as personal power or power within, exists as ability or competence. Interpersonal power exists between two parties whereby one party has dominance or privilege stemming from role or resources or there is symmetry/ shared power between the parties. Power in families, groups (also known as intragroup power), and communities exists internally as dominance, leadership/authority, and decision making and externally as privilege and high social status. Intergroup power exists as subgroups influence and achieve potency within the larger group.

The notions of "power over," "power to," "power with," and "power within" facilitate the understanding that power also exists across and between levels and is used by clinicians as well as community developers and activists (Baker-Miller, 1976; Fishbane, 2011; Nelson & Wright, 1995; Oxfam, 2009). *Power over* refers to domination/privilege over subordinates. *Power to* refers to the capability to decide actions and to carry them out. *Power with* refers to the force of influence and potency that emerges from people collaborating, having solidarity, and taking collective action. *Power within* refers to personal self-confidence and is often linked to culture, religion, or other aspects of identity that influence the thoughts and actions that appear legitimate or acceptable.

In couples therapy, clinicians use the formulation of power over, power to, and power with to explain and work to resolve couples' struggles over power and their entrapment in emotional reactivity (Fishbane, 2011; Knudsen-Martin & Huenergardt, 2010).

Illustrating how power operates across levels from the personal/individual to the institutional/structural, Nelson and Wright (1995), participatory development workers in poor communities, favor Hartsock's (1989) formulation: "The point is to develop an account of the world which treats our perspectives not as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as primary and constitutive of a different world" (p. 171). Nelson and Wright then go on to parse the relationship between developing personal "power to" and working with institutions and structures that have "power over":

> First, the personal level involves developing confidence and abilities (including undoing the effects of internalized oppression). Second, is the ability to negotiate and influence close relationships. The third involves working collectively to have greater impact than each could have alone. This is where 'power to' overlaps with the next model of power. (p. 8)

Moving to that next model of power, "power over," Nelson and Wright (1995) identified several key steps for work at this level. Gaining "treatment as equal partners

in a process of development . . . so that they have long-term access to resources and decision-making" (p. 9) and working to "institutionalize processes whereby those with newly acquired 'power to' can negotiate with those with 'power over'" (p. 13) were key among the factors named.

This example of how power operates not only identifies the power relation that operates on and between different levels but also emphasizes the process of acquiring power that involves subjugated people changing internal restraints, developing skills and self-confidence in relating to others, working with others, developing the capacity to negotiate, and functioning as partners and decision makers.

Kinds of Power

There are many types of power. Each kind can be identified from its source.
Examples include:

- Authoritative power: power stemming from legitimate sources such as laws, organizational structure, and so on
- Ascribed power: nonlegitimate power attributed by others (for example, the view that Asians are innately more intelligent than other ethnic groups)
- Good power: "soft power" (Guinote & Vescio, 2010); power that is constructive, not oppressive, and does not exploit subordinates but facilitates use of their own power to have their needs met
- Bad power: dominating, exploitative power

Family therapist Marlene Watson (2014) also defines good and bad power in terms of the liberatory and oppressive aspects of each: Oppressive power may exist at the level of ideas (for example, white is better, or I, as an African American, am worthless), relationships (for example, domestic abuse, loyalty or work), social status (for example, racism, sexism). Liberatory power may emerge from knowledge (intellectual power), personal affect (emotional power), faith (religious/spiritual power), and/or connection (soul power) (personal communication). Specifying the kind of power under consideration is critical to understanding.

Tew's conceptual matrix (2006; see Table 1.1) adds the necessary specificity that also illuminates the shifting, recursive nature of power.

Oppressive power involves exploiting differences to enhance one's own position and resources at the expense of others. For example, the service provider exercises power to meet his own needs, not those of the service user. Sometime he is unaware of his vulnerability here. In the example below, the clinician struggles to recognize how he is exercising his professional power to meet his own needs:

> I was working with a Black prisoner who was very manipulative and controlling. He tested me constantly, asking where I lived, did I have kids, what am I thinking and constantly bringing up the fact that I am white and he is Black. I

TABLE 1.1:   Conceptual Matrix

	Power over	**Power together**
Productive modes of power	***Protective power*** Deploying power in order to safeguard vulnerable people and their possibilities for advancement	***Co-operative power*** Collective action, sharing, mutual support and challenge—through valuing commonality *and* difference
Limiting modes of power	***Oppressive power*** Exploiting differences to enhance own position and resources at the expense of others	***Collusive power*** Banding together to exclude or suppress 'otherness' whether internal or external

Tew, J. (2006). Understanding power and powerlessness: Towards a framework for emancipatory practice in social work. *Journal of Social Work, 6*(1), 41. Reprinted with permission from Sage Publications.

focused on his toughness and his fear of dependency as narcissistic, but I wasn't looking at my part. I was battling with him over control. I was angry and upset at his assertive behavior, challenging my authority, but also not staying in his place—inferior and powerless. How dare he? (Pinderhughes, 1989, p. 138)

Cooperative power is using collective action, sharing, and mutual support. Differences are transcended in order to build alliances. Social movement groups are examples. In collusive power, differences are used to band together and exclude or suppress otherness, for example, white people's use of race to exclude people of color. Examples of protective power occur in child welfare and mental health where vulnerable clients and those around them must be safeguarded. However, intervention with them is always used with the goal that their possibilities for self-determination may eventually be realized, that they will eventually be able to mobilize her resources on their own behalf.

Tew uses this matrix to show the shifting nature of power: how cooperative, protective power can shift into being constraining and oppressive; and how collusive, oppressive power can be moderated or transformed. For example, cooperative power can shift to be oppressive when a group working together splits into cliques, with one subgroup becoming dominant and controlling.

Protective power can slip into being oppressive when the provider becomes patronizing, "takes over," "does for," or "works harder" than her client instead of working in partnership. Oppressive and collusive power becomes cooperative, productive power through the use of dialogue. In this process, when subordinates and dominant persons come together to find common ground, they may find new ways of interacting such that the privileged become free from the isolation that they are so vulnerable to being trapped in; subordinates develop hope and confidence to express needs and requirements, and new ways of exercising power open up for both the highly powered and subordinates. Invitations to cooperate and work alongside one another may potentially allow shifts from entrenched identities (such as expert or victim) and start to undermine divisive social constructions, thereby opening up opportunities for all participants to enter into

a process of transformation (Fitzsimons & Fuller, 2002; Romney, 2005; Tew, 2006). A good example of this in organizations is diversity and inclusion committees, in which people of different ranks and organizational power work together to make decisions in the interest of the organization.

Tew (2006) wrote that to open up opportunities for "accessing resources and social and economic participation" (p. 40), individuals must develop power and see it not just as a "thing," but as a "social relation." This understanding of power correlates with what successful diversity and inclusion committees do. Individuals in these committees have to develop and build relationships with one another. Because the committee members are diverse in terms of gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality, ability, and organizational rank, they bring different experiences and perspectives to the table. They have different priorities for organizational change. Power in these committees is generated through the very fact of working together, dialoguing, and negotiating with one another to establish priorities and to empower themselves and the organizational members they represent. The dedication to missions that involve equity and fairness, respect, and transparency, which diversity and inclusion committees pursue and advance, is a perfect exemplification of power together that is productive and constructive.

Whenever the provider uses his power to meet his own needs, then the provider's power—which should be productive or protective—becomes oppressive. This is particularly true in work with people whose identity is culturally different from that of the provider wherein cultural bias and stereotyping may blind the provider, in his position of legitimate power, to many issues in the user's life and his own. Stereotyping is an anxiety-reducing mechanism (Pinderhughes, 1989) that can create emotional stability for the user. The following are examples: the teacher who holds low expectations for students who are poor or of color; the clinician who refuses to acknowledge the fear, guilt, and shame he feels in relation to his position of privilege and avoids this discomfort by failing to explore his client's painful realities or getting rid of the client; the physician who uses the excuse that his no-show patient has the right to withdraw without examining his oppressive behavior in his last encounter with the patient.

Gilbert Greene reminds social workers that, particularly in cross-cultural practice in which the practitioner belongs to the dominant majority and the client belongs to a minority group, the dynamic of power must be explicitly addressed. The practitioner must understand the client's unique experience as affected by the social, cultural, economic, and political context in which it has occurred; clients must fully participate in the process of change so that "they define their goals, construct their solutions, and control the pace of change" and "perceive themselves as causal agents in achieving solutions to their presenting problems" (Greene & Lee, 2010, p. 181).

Thus, operating as it does, dynamically, recursively, and paradoxically, having the capacity to enhance, heal, liberate, and transform and also to wound, injure, entrap, and immobilize, appearing as sometimes visible, sometimes not; operating on multiple levels; defining, regulating, coordinating, and legitimizing people's goal-driven actions and roles; determining the differential in the clout possessed by power holders and subordinates, power has serious consequences for each.

EFFECTS OF POWER

Power matters for those who have it and for those who lack it. Power matters because it affects one's ability to secure desired outcomes (including the satisfaction of basic human needs to control and to belong). Power affects the motivation to attend to others and social perception. Power determines self-regulatory focus and attention to rewards versus threats, experiences of positive versus negative affect, and the tendency toward action versus inaction. "Power affects the degree to which one is able to attend flexibly and effectively to important aspects of a situation and set goals" (Guinote & Vescio, 2010, p. 439).

As a result of its influence upon all of the functions listed above, power greatly influences people's health. Medical researchers have described the health effects of low social rank and entrapment in powerless roles: Lack of control and low social participation have a powerful influence on disease risk, and the stress of social subordination can increase mortality because of its effect on neurological, immunological, cardiovascular, and reproductive health. Researchers have:

> analyzed the physiology of power and noted a relationship between status rank
> . . . and two hormones—testosterone (T) and cortisol (CORT). When rank is
> stable, high (compared to low) social rank is associated with (1) higher T levels,
> which set the stage for maintaining positions of dominance, and (2) patterns
> of basal CORT and CORT reactivity that promote effective responses to acute
> stress . . . predictability and controllability are greater, and therefore, stress is
> lower, the higher one's rank. Interestingly when power is unstable, controllabil-
> ity decreases, and the effects of power reverse; powerful people come to exhibit
> maladaptive stress responses when faced with potential loss of power. (Vescio
> & Guinote, 2010, p. 429)

Power affects people's behavior in that powerful people act more, use more variable behavior, and, compared with powerless people, more readily prioritize and engage in effective goal pursuit. In contrast, subordinates have to spend time and energy trapped in distractions that prevent their purposeful pursuit of goals. "Lacking power also inspires feelings of anger in the face of perceived lack of control" (Guinote & Vescio, 2010, p. 431). Feelings of inferiority and low expectations of themselves, confused thinking, inhibited behavior, and withdrawal of effort result.

Table 1.2 focuses on people's feelings and behavioral responses to differences in power.

This table was originally compiled from diversity training sessions for graduate social work students, psychiatric trainees, social agency personnel, and conference attendees, in which participants sought to integrate an understanding of themselves and their work through examining their experiences of having and lacking power in relation to difference and cultural and social identity. The goal was to understand what happens when practitioners—through a structured, facilitated process—are able to examine themselves as beneficiaries and/or victims in our social system, to explore

TABLE 1.2: Frequently Described Feelings, Thoughts, and Behaviors Consequent to Differences in Power

FEELINGS	
More Powerful	**Less Powerful**
Having some comfort, more gratification	Having less comfort, less gratification
Feeling lucky, safe, and secure	Feeling insecure, anxious, frustrated, vulnerable
Experiencing more pleasure, less pain	Experiencing less pleasure, more pain
Having less tendency to depression	Having strong tendency toward depression
Feeling superior, masterful, entitled	Feeling inferior, incompetent, deprived
Feeling hopeful	Feeling exhausted, trapped, hopeless, helpless, with few choices
Having high esteem	Having low esteem
Feeling anger at resistance and noncompliance in the less powerful	Feeling anger at inconsiderate control of the powerful
Having fear of the loss of power	Feeling anger at feelings of powerlessness
Having fear of the anger of less powerful	Having fear of abandonment
Having fear of retaliation by the less powerful	Feeling alone
Having guilt over injustices that may result from having or acquiring power	Having fear of the anger of the powerful
Having fear of losing identity as a powerful person	Having fear of own anger at the powerful
Having a sense of burden from the responsibility	
Having fear of abusing power	
Experiencing conflict and confusion resulting from (a) a sense of injustice versus a need to hold onto the power and (b) a wish to share the power versus the fear of rejection by one's own ethnic group	
Having a need for a victim, someone to scapegoat and control	Striking out, becoming verbally or physically aggressive to ward off powerlessness

<div align="right">(Continued)</div>

TABLE 1.2:   (*Continued*)

THOUGHTS	
More Powerful	**Less Powerful**
Justifying aggression, and exertion of power or violence, dehumanizing behavior; pleasure in human suffering	Identifying with the aggressor, leading to self-hatred, dehumanizing behavior, self-devaluation, and pleasure in human suffering
Identifying with the less powerful, leading to a wish to repudiate power	Use of deceptions, secrets, half-truths, lies
Projecting on the less powerful unacceptable attributes, such as being lazy, dirty, evil, sexual, and irresponsible as justification for maintaining power and control	Projecting onto the power group acceptable attributes, such as being smart, competent, attractive
Projecting aggression outside the group onto the less powerful enhances group cohesiveness and unity (This behavior is assisted by a sense of entitlement.)	Projecting aggression outside the group onto the powerful enhances group cohesion (This behavior is assisted by a sense of justice.)

BEHAVIORS	
More Powerful	**Less Powerful**
Adapt easily because have fewer distractions	Many distractions interfere with clear thinking
Having the opportunity to influence the external system for self	Lacking opportunity to influence the external system or self
Having ability to create opportunity	Lacking opportunity to create opportunity
Devaluing one's own pain and suffering	
Blaming the less powerful for assuming the projections	
Having distrust, being guarded and rigid due to vigilance needed to maintain power and control	Having distrust, being guarded and sensitive to microaggressions and macroaggressions, which seems paranoid to the privileged
Denying one's powerful position and its favorable effects on beneficiaries and unfavorable effects on victims	Denying the less powerful position and its effects
Displaying a paranoia resulting in delusions of and the assumption of arrogant behavior and tendency to distort reality with a consequent unreal assessment of the self and the less powerful	Risk of accommodating to stereotypes or assuming them in exaggerated ways, such as a physical or stud image, dumbness, delinquency, and addiction, with a consequent unreal assessment of oneself and the more powerful

(*Continued*)

TABLE 1.2:   (*Continued*)

More Powerful	Less Powerful
Isolating, avoiding, and distancing from the less powerful; taking comfort in sameness; becoming unable to tolerate differences in people; and lacking enriching cross-cultural experiences: RIGIDITY	Isolating, avoiding, and distancing from the more powerful
Displaying entitled, controlling, dominating behavior	Using autonomous, oppositional, manipulative, and passive–aggressive behavior as a defense against powerlessness
Displaying rigidity in behavior; have to keep the power	Displaying rigidity in behavior: to control sense of powerlessness
Having a strong need for control; need for a victim—someone to control	Striking out, becoming verbally or physically aggressive to ward off powerlessness
Blaming the less powerful for assuming the projections	Devaluing one's own pain and suffering
Having distrust, being guarded and rigid due to vigilance needed to maintain power and control	Having distrust, being guarded and sensitive to macroaggressions, which seems paranoid to the privileged
Denying one's powerful position and its favorable effects on beneficiaries and unfavorable effects on victims	Denying the less powerful position and its effects

EMANCIPATORY RESPONSES	
Sharing Power	**Turning Powerlessness into Power**
Developing a tolerance for conflict ambivalence, and contradiction, which, when mastered, leads to flexibility, resourcefulness, creativity, and high self-esteem	Developing a tolerance for conflict ambivalence, and contradiction, which, when mastered, leads to flexibility, resourcefulness, creativity, and high self-esteem
	Engaging in ways to change powerless roles
Working to overcome and heal narcissism and borderline symptoms	Engaging in ways to change powerless roles and perceptions of self as powerless
	Sublimating aggression in adaptive ways
Moderation	
Having opportunity to take responsibility, exert responsibility	Taking responsibility can create the risk of self-blame

their experiences of privilege and lack of privilege in relation to cultural/social identity and connectedness (see Pinderhughes, 1989; amended 1997 and 2013). The table shows the shifting, recursive nature of power through the behaviors used to defend against powerlessness and acquire a sense of power, behaviors that, while conveying some sense of power, are often destructive and costly to self and/or others. The paradoxical nature of power is manifest in its positive and negative effects on those who have privileged status, such as feeling and behaving not only as competent, privileged, and entitled but also as fearful, anxious, and threatened about losing their power and its benefits. Loss of power, even though small in degree, can become an experience in powerlessness with its attendant discomfort.

The coping responses of subordinate populations or individuals, while conveying some sense of power, can under certain circumstances also be disempowering. These coping responses may be as follows: In families, coping behaviors such as isolation, overfunctioning, or underfunctioning, and in individuals, such behaviors as dependency, manipulation, or violence, which may be used to gain some sense of power, create further stress within the family or community. Moreover, such reactions are often seen by others, particularly power holders, as foolish, bizarre, criminal, or crazy.

Other examples include subordinates' assuming in an exaggerated way the stereotypical attributions of those who are dominant, using behaviors such as being aggressively passive, violent, supersexual, superdumb, superdependent, and superdisorganized. Likewise, the responses of high-status people to their own relative privilege (behavior such as arrogance, entitlement, use of bias, and stereotyping) can also create a sense of nonpower. Although many of their responses enhance their power, there are also fears of having to share it, of losing it, feeling a sense of burden, having guilt and shame regarding exploitation, distrust, and—although they may be unaware of it—vulnerability to dehumanizing persons of lower status. The responses of both the subordinates and the privileged demonstrate the recursive nature of how power operates. The risk for subordinates is that behaviors they use to empower themselves can compound their sense of powerlessness, whereas behaviors that power holders use to maintain their power may set in motion processes that actually constrain their power.

POWER AND CULTURE

Persons occupying powerless roles must learn to survive and deal with stress, conflict, and contradiction that those from privileged groups are not required to cope with. They must find ways to cope with effects of their lesser power roles, with the sense of powerlessness that is mobilized, and they must seek some sense of power for themselves. Coping responses to powerless roles and sense of nonpower vary from time to time and from community to community but can become the essence of the culture developed by a group. Culture represents people's response to the political, economic, and social realities they face (Navarro, 1980). For subordinate populations, the realities they face are intricately connected with their entrapment in systems of oppression such as racism, classism, and sexism. The values, beliefs, social roles, norms, family styles, and

community practices that evolve from their efforts to cope and achieve some sense of power and control over their environment can take on a cultural meaning. Understanding how power operate in terms of social status assignment promotes appreciation of the subtleties that characterize cultural differences and of the creativity and complexity involved in people's cultural responses, which embody often unrecognized strengths, but also can involve disempowering consequences as noted earlier.

The following example illustrates the complex, systemic, recursive, paradoxical nature of power along with some of its multilevel, interactive aspects as manifest in the entrapment, confusion, contradiction, and stress of low-social-status populations: As many African Americans live with chronic anxiety, fear, and high levels of tension, and have done so for generations, their oppression and entrapment in lesser power roles undermines physical and mental health. Families and relationships become threatened and are prone to misunderstanding, tension, and conflict. The greatest danger lies not only in the inflexibility and rigidity of functioning that can occur in the attempt to control the consequent stress, anxiety, and affect but also in the paradox they face. The strength and determination they must summon (and the behaviors they use) to manage these stresses can push the flexibility, mutuality, and adaptive compensation so necessary to healthy functioning to exaggerated and destructive levels.

Under the stresses endemic to their societal roles, the coping mechanisms of hard work, determination, and persistence can result in rigidity or driven dedication; being strong and tough can become domination and abuse of power; flexibility can lead to disorganization and inconsistency; and caution can slip into immobilization, passivity, or withdrawal. Thus, African Americans and others of low social status are confronted with this dilemma: To maintain healthy family and couple functioning, they must manage the anger and frustration stemming from their struggles with their societal role so that the vulnerability and mutuality that are so necessary for intimacy are not destroyed by the invincible stance and the readiness to struggle (power stance) that are needed to cope with that role. Maintaining satisfying intimate relationships in the face of ongoing disruptive circumstances that demand very different behaviors means they cannot afford to channel their anger and frustration into their bodies or discharge their feelings onto mates or children. Males from subordinate populations especially have to guard against using domination as compensation in their relationships. All must guard against becoming rigidly committed to defensive, power-over, conflict, and violence-prone behavior. This requires a state of carefully regulated flexibility and vigilance. Such functioning requires energy, effort, and discipline, all of which are likely to be severely compromised and in short supply given the transgenerational vulnerability embedded in their entrapment. The current condition of male–female relationships in these cultural groups indicates the herculean nature of this task. Any solutions to marriage decline for these populations must take into account this stressful dilemma (Pinderhughes, 2002). This example of coping mechanisms that can compound people's stress and sense of powerlessness illustrates the situational nature of power operation for African Americans and its dynamic, recursive nature, whereby role entrapment as a result of social status assignment threatens the stability of family functioning and places relationships at risk. Effective coping with the constraints

to the use of one's power depends on a number of factors: having a certain degree of emotional and behavioral flexibility—not too much (danger of chaos) and not too little (danger of rigidity)—and having the time and energy in the face of multiple distractions and exhausting demands. As noted earlier, biased and stereotyping perceptions about subordinates are used when they can facilitate power holders' goal pursuit (Guinote & Vescio, 2010). When bias and stereotyping become part of a belief system within the community that influences the structure of the social system through assigning value to people according to identifiable characteristics, creating social structures that exclude and marginalize them, a status system is then created.

Status systems serve to create stability and reduce anxiety for power holders, while creating vulnerability to stress for the less powerful. I use Murray Bowen's (1978) concept of the societal projection process to explain the power dynamics involved in the way that bias, myth, and stereotyping are implicated in sustaining this anxiety-reducing function in families and other systems. An elevation of his family projection process concept to the societal level illuminates the purpose that oppression has served in our social system and points the way for focus on its effects upon both victims and beneficiaries. Just as the family scapegoats a member in order to reduce anxiety, conflict, and tension and stabilize itself, so also does the dominant group in a societal system relieve anxiety and reduce tension for itself through attributions upon a less powerful group, thereby improving its own functioning. Bowen identified lesser powered people such as minorities, delinquents, the poor, and the mentally ill as victims of this projection process.

Bowen wrote:

These groups fit the best criteria for long-term, anxiety relieving projection. They are vulnerable to become the pitiful objects of the benevolent, over sympathetic segment of society that improves its functioning at the expense of the pitiful. Just as the least adequate child in a family can become more impaired when he becomes an object of pity and sympathetic help from the family, so can the lowest segment of society be chronically impaired by the very attention designed to help. No matter how good the principle behind such programs (to help subordinates), it is essentially impossible to implement them without the built-in complications of the projection process. Such programs automatically put the recipient in a "one down", inferior position and they either keep them there or get angry at them. (1968, p. 445)

Expanding this concept, I have suggested that persons who are holders of high-status positions become beneficiaries whose positions allow them to use their privileged roles and behaviors to stabilize themselves. These roles and behaviors allow beneficiaries to keep victims excluded and separate so that much of the tension, contradiction, and confusion that belong in the larger social system remains confined to victims and their communities. This is illustrated in (1) the negative stereotypical views held about less powerful groups, stereotyping being understood as a tension-relieving mechanism; (2) the creation of ghettos, reservations, and barrios where large numbers of the lesser powered live amidst noise, expressways, halfway houses, inadequate schools, drug abuse,

and violence, in contrast to suburbs where a majority of beneficiaries live in relative tranquility, stability, and security.

Oppression functions as a stabilizer of the social system and a benefit to the higher powered for whom it promotes comfort, a sense of competence, superiority, and entitlement, thus reinforcing their power status. Power holders in the system benefit from perceiving and treating subordinates as societal problems, as inferior, incompetent, and weak (Pinderhughes, 1989, 1997).

Hunjan and Petit (2011) sum up this issue of bias, stereotyping, and social structure in the way that power operates:

> Power can also be understood not as a resource or ability, but as the prevailing social, political and economic norms and structures that create hierarchies within society, as well as the attitudes and behaviour leading to marginalisation. Discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality and other identities is often caused by such norms and structures of power, making it more challenging to address discrimination. These norms and structures are often 'internalised', becoming part of the unconscious social patterns to which people conform—whether 'powerful' or "powerless." Challenging power then becomes a question of recognizing, naming and shifting these socialized boundaries. (p. 11)

The operation of power thus is implicated in this entrapment on individual, group, and intergroup levels. Opportunities for these populations (non-white, female, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered, handicapped, immigrant) to use their power to meet their needs are blocked by the prejudice, stereotyping, and exclusion that mark their experience. People's specific behavioral responses to such entrapment are often intricately connected with the problems they bring to practitioners in terms of their health, mental health, thinking, behavior, and quality of life. For low-status populations, many of these behaviors represent attempts to cope, to get a sense of power, or to turn their sense of powerlessness into a sense of power. Many of the responses of higher status populations trapped in the societal projection process constitute attempts to acquire, hold on to, exploit, or benefit from their power. Responses are positive but also may be negative (see Table 1.2).

To summarize, we have examined the significance of power relations and group status in the operation of power; how power emerges from the negotiations between people relative to having or not having access to resources. "[A]symmetrical possession of physical, social, and economic capital" (Guinote & Vescio, 2010, p. 3) leads to the establishment of power differentials between the parties involved, the formation of high-status/privileged and low-status/subordinate individuals and groups, and eventually to systems of oppression.

Power holders are vulnerable to using bias and stereotyping in their perceptions of subordinates when it would facilitate the goals they pursue and not when it would interfere with their goal strivings. Power is dynamic and bidirectional (and sometimes paradoxical) so that the beneficial effect of power on power holders is moderated by the

degree to which the power remains stable. The stability of the power hierarchy is a key factor in determining these primarily positive effects for high-ranking groups and negative effects for low-ranking groups. When power is stable, its right to exist is endorsed not only by the powerful but also by the lesser powered through their consent. The legitimacy of this function can become jeopardized when low-status persons view it as illegitimate or unjust and attempt to change the power differential. Then, the effects of power can reverse. Faced with potential loss of power, high-ranking individuals experience a decrease in their controllability and "come to exhibit the sorts of maladaptive stress responses typical of low-rank (low-power) people who live with chronic stress" (Guinote & Vescio, 2010, p. 446).

Social status rank, group identity, and connectedness affect people's feelings, thoughts, beliefs, behaviors, relationships, values, expectations and sense of possibilities, determining people's quality of life, life chances, health, longevity, and mortality. The difference in the degree of power between the parties involved makes the relationship between them as important in how power operates as is a sense of individual control. Thus, control of forces affecting the people's situation and the relationship between the lesser powered and the privileged—whether the power relation is exploitative, oppressive, and constraining or nonexploitative, productive, protective, "soft power"—is key (Guinote & Vescio, 2010; Tew, 2006). Soft power, moral power, is exercised so that it does not exploit subordinates but facilitates subordinates' use of their own power to meet needs and reach goals.

Although we do not yet have the language or the research to adequately track in detail the intricate ways that power works, this discourse takes further steps on the journey undertaken by Bowen (1978), Tew (2006), Clark (1974), Guinote and Vescio (2010), Foucault (1982), and many others. Definitions of power are debated and ever emerging, and we may never understand this complex and robust concept fully. We still must work to translate current knowledge of these complexities to provide effective assistance to people whose problems bring them to service providers.

SOME QUESTIONS TO GUIDE OUR THINKING

Where do we begin? Where should we, given our present state of knowledge, intervene? What does this conceptualization of power tell us about our current models of service delivery, the current theories and concepts that guide our practice, and the relationship between the service providers and the service users? Although much of this conceptualization may seem to apply specifically to social workers, psychologists, and social activists, what is its implication for teachers, physicians, spiritual leaders, lawyers, and other service providers? Can intervention at one level (for example, the individual), whereby some needed sense of power is attained, affect the constraining effect of powerlessness at the social status level?

In a given situation, can an intervention executed in a single nodal place be sufficient to address all the power constraints, or will a set of more comprehensive strategies be necessary? Can we encourage a sense of "power to" in our clients without rescuing

them? Can service providers' use of protective power (as in child placement, institutionalization in mental health) ever reach the goal of client setting their own agenda?

INTERVENTIONS

Solomon (1976) advised that the goal of empowerment for social workers working with lesser powered populations such as poor people and people of color should be to focus on removing the blocks to people's power, the constraints to people's use of their power. Our conceptualization suggests that the goals of service providers should be to assist people in locating, reclaiming, and enhancing their sense of power (power to); to help them strengthen their ability to use power with; and, when required, to use productive, soft power over to help them meet goals and needs.

According to Tew (2006), "[t]he versions of empowerment we have are not actually about service users setting their agenda" (p. 35). Helping service users to set their own agenda would require their being able to identify the constraints to their effective exercise of power and the many ways that power operates to produce these constraints and removing them. Constraints may be identified as whatever forces create the sense of not having enough power to pursue goals and obtain needed resources. Examples include poor physical and mental health status, lack of information (knowledge/education), and lack of access to resources (decent housing, education, employment, and so on). Some constraints can be removed by the provision of information or the educational process, whereas others require attention to whatever is blocking people's effective use of that information or education. Examples include barriers to access erected by structures within the social systems, such as laws, customs, values, belief systems, and institutions.

As noted earlier, other barriers can be seen in people's own constraining responses to their entrapment in social roles, responses that compound their entrapment and prevent their use of access should it exist. These responses include self-perceptions of inferiority, giving up, using uncontrolled anger, unregulated aggression, and so on. These responses have been adopted to bring some sense of power and control, but they become maladaptive. In a stable, organized society, the cost is high, resulting in constraints upon such behavior that range from disapproval and marginalization to punishment. An example of this is the large numbers of people of color trapped in our prison system.

These responses, however, may not constitute the primary force constraining the power of subordinate persons. That force is the exercise of immoral oppressive power by the high powered, so that the lesser powered are blocked from reaching their goals. Unfortunately, much of intervention does not focus on this primary cause—which remains largely hidden—but on the secondary cause: people's responses to the oppressive power embodied in their subordinate status, which is more visible and for which subordinates are often blamed.

Using this conceptualization, here are some logical approaches to work with subordinates that address some power constraints: Provide an experience of subordinates being treated with respect, their voices being heard, being seen as knowledgeable about self, and having an experience in (a) becoming hopeful; (b) being educated about the

ways that oppressive power contributes to a sense of powerlessness; (c) recognizing that one has a choice about how to view one's sense of powerlessness and how to view the constraint, having a vision of the possibility of a change in the power constraint and in the oppressive power relations that maintain the constraint, and believing there can be a change in the oppressive power; (d) identifying ways in which the service user has exerted power and is competent (strengths and successes are identified); (e) having a successful experience in working with others to change a constraint to one's power, such as removing blocks to opportunities, and developing the ability to use opened opportunities; (f) success in social participation and leadership to shift oppressive power, to fight back when needed. Clark warned that when the nondominant person seeks real power, power conflicts emerge.

How should power conflicts be managed toward the goal of justice, of people's opportunity to set their own goals and meet their own needs? Here are some logical approaches in work with high-powered/privileged individuals and groups, including oppressive power holders such as abusers: Being held accountable and then accepting responsibility for exercising oppressive, constraining power; having information about the costs to power holders of oppressive power in terms of vulnerability to stress, isolation, fear (fear of subordinates, fear of losing power); vulnerability to use of stereotypes and myths about subordinates; use of dehumanizing behavior; having guilt, etc. (see table). Focus should also be on acquiring information about the benefit of power sharing, of using "soft" power, of shifting the exercise of oppressive power to learning skills in sharing power, using power non-exploitatively, using productive, cooperative power. Can using these approaches enable service providers to help service users to use their own power and set their own agenda?

Activists, community developers, clinicians, and other service providers use varying language to describe needed changes in the power relation that produces oppressive, constraining power. Some experts identify the needed change as power sharing; others speak of power shifts. Still others call it transformation of the power relation. There is no clarity on whether the goal should be to moderate the degree of power difference (that is, the degree of oppression) or to seek equity in the power relation. Those who use the language of equity advocate that both parties participate in the process of the power change: a sharing of power. Clinicians using this approach suggest that both parties develop an expanded vision, a new perspective of "knowing and being known by the other" (Weingarten, 1991, p. 295), using shared understanding, mutuality, mutual attunement, mutual empathy, mutual support, power sharing, shared goals, power-with approach, cooperation, alliance, working together, looking together at, co-construction of reality, equal commitment, and co-responsibility to the goal and the relationship.

In any model of making alliances and working together, the skill of dialogue and engagement becomes key, as do the principles of including subordinates and having their voices heard. It also involves their becoming able to see themselves as equals, becoming skilled in dialogue, verbalizing their needs, and being involved in every step in the process needed to achieve change (Tew, 2006). The privileged must acknowledge their responsibility for the way they have exercised power and become accountable for their privilege (Almeida & Bogard, 1991). Almeida's model of working with abusers involves

placing them in a group with other abusers who have already learned to take responsibility for their abusive power. Involving recovered abusers with current abusers in a dialogue about the cost of abusive power and the benefit of sharing power, the latter find space and support for change.

In couples' therapy, family therapists use what they call "social intervention" as they work with individuals and couples to counteract social inequalities. They do this through attention to power inequities in couple relationships, examining how these are reflective of customs and behavioral expectations embodied in cultural roles (Knudsen-Martin & Huenergardt, 2010). Therapists work with power struggles and imbalances of power to facilitate equality, mutual respect, and "relational empowerment." They explain, demonstrate, and have the couples rehearse power-to and power-with perspectives and behaviors that ameliorate some power-over dynamics between partners.

Since power is not static, and often cuts across different forms, spaces, and levels, activists call for transforming the power relation by using a multilevel lens, looking within and across the systems of human functioning to map the many ways that power is manifest, and intervening with more than one action at a time in more than one location at a time. Mapping the operation of power requires language that can specify the kind of power and the complex processes involved (Hunjan & Keophilavong, 2010; Miller, VeneKlasen, Reilly, & Clark, 2006; Oxfam, 2009).

Clinicians also remind us that identifying appropriate strategies requires having a more complete understanding of the power relations at play; that there is no single solution, no one size fits all; and that for lasting change, intervention should address more than one dimension at a time with action on more than one level. Gains from work confined to the individual or family are maintained only when power sources in social, economic, and institutional structures are opened. Work at the societal level is effective only when subordinates develop the ability to take advantage of opportunities that offer inclusion and participation, which then allows them to acquire resources. Such work requires taking actions that link personal, interpersonal, and sociopolitical dimensions of power (O'Melia & Miley, 2002).

Madsen (1999) described the power shift in terms of providers becoming "appreciative allies standing in solidarity with people as they resist the influence of problems in their lives" (pp. 15–16), developing partnerships and mentorships, becoming allies with colleagues, and developing agency-to-agency relationships geared toward opening opportunities (O'Melia & Miley, 2002).

All insist that strategies must involve people considered as subordinates, who must have equal voice in the process and interaction that is working toward that shift. The privileged take responsibility for the consequences of their privilege; the underprivileged develop voice and power. While opposing oppressive power is a recommendation by all, the manner of opposition varies. "Fight-back" strategies and outright conflict are not preferred by clinicians. While constraints are identified, major focus is on sources of strength and how they can be used to transcend constraining power. Rather than a "head-on" approach, Tew advocates creating a shift from oppressive to cooperative modes of power through dialogue and engagement, as in the aforementioned example of working with abusing men. However, new models are emerging that offer promise that

providers can work in ways that do help people to set their own power agendas. Recently, the Carnegie UK Trust developed an action-oriented program based on a process called "power analysis" that has sustained significant success in helping disadvantaged groups and communities facing issues of power inequalities in their work to understand the operation of power and use their understanding to achieve their goals. The primary focus of this process is on identifying the people's own power and figuring out how to use it effectively**.** This means helping people to understand their power as individuals and the power they have when they work together with others in their communities. It is also about helping people to understand how other systems and institutions, such as business and banking, may exercise their own power in less transparent ways to achieve the change they want and the impact of this on the change people are seeking.

Reports of the process called "power analysis" (Hunjan & Petit, 2011) and of the project itself (Hunjan & Pettit, 2011) describe how power analysis allows groups, organizations, and communities to explore different dimensions of power, the way it operates, and the best strategic options to achieve the required change. It brings people together and helps them to analyze the bases of power they possess and decide on the best courses of action and channels to create or pursue, enabling individuals and groups to exercise their own power in the most effective ways. Tried and tested on a variety of organizations facing issues of power inequalities in their work, this report brings power squarely onto the table and provides a potent tool to effect positive change beyond traditional analysis and change management processes.

Power: A Practical Guide for Facilitating Social Change (Hunjan & Petit, 2011) describes how the power analysis process works: Facilitators help people explore issues of power in terms of its operation in their lives (work, home, community, larger system institutions, and so on) over a sustained period of time through workshops, one-on-one mentoring, and self-reflection. The guide describes the frameworks, theories, conceptualizations of power dynamics, and tools that facilitators use to help participants engage in the analysis. Tools such as experiential exercises, creative writing, storytelling, drawing, diagrams, drama, films, or games are made relevant to the situations under analysis and to the people working within communities to achieve change. Combined with the structured process, these tools enable participants to identify the power they have, the sources of that power, and ways they can use it to achieve the goals they seek. The authors and publishers believe this project and its report prove that when people can examine their own power from a variety of perspectives, using structured frameworks in facilitated groups of others who also have need for such understanding, they can come to see how they can exercise their own power in the most effective ways.

My work to develop a diversity training model (Pinderhughes, 1989) grew out of a similar—though much less complex—process whereby participants used self-reflection to examine the operation of power in their lives. Structured to examine experiences with having and lacking power in relation to culture (ethnicity, race, gender, and other social identities affected by the operation of power) and difference, my model limited the examination to experiences within the family, workplace, and community and did not extend, as does the UK model, to other systems such as banking institutions. The field of examination expands widely in the UK model to include other institutions, laws, social

policies, belief systems, and so on as the lens through which power is viewed extends from individual, family, and community levels to national, regional, and even global levels. Participants may consider how they and their experiences are linked to power operation in all of these areas. There is a major focus on the ways they have experienced the operation of power in their lives, how they have used power successfully and unsuccessfully, and the ways they can now plan to use power more effectively. This UK model appears to be a promising tool for enabling people to use their own power to meet their own needs and reach their life goals.

Tiziana Dearing, a professor at Boston College, is calling for the development of "New Economy Neighborhoods" that will bring innovation and micro-economic development to Boston's inner city, where many poor and people of color are trapped and economically powerless. Innovation clusters "right where people live" could turn these disenfranchised communities into "small-scale engines of tomorrow." Dearing offers several examples. For instance, in a public housing development, small groups using "3-D printing could produce component parts for manufacturing elsewhere" (Dearing, 2013); an urban grower's association could be formed using apartment gardening equipment to supply local food to restaurants and markets. Listening to leaders in these neighborhoods, who are already aware of such possibilities and whose voices must be heard, City Hall should "identify opportunities, and then coordinate the human and geographical potential of these areas with the companies and research efforts that could use them" (Dearing, 2013). As Deering (2013) said, "Cities help smooth these connections for big industry all the time. Why not for communities of color?". This is some of the latest thinking on power.

The following chapters illustrate how some service providers have used and can use their understanding of the operation of power in their work considering the present level of understanding of how power operates. Our concluding chapter will summarize the approaches in terms of the conceptualization presented here. As you peruse these chapters, we ask that you ask yourself what you, the reader, can add. Each practitioner may have to evolve his or her own perspective on how to fit the perplexities into a coherent guideline for considering practice intervention in particular situations. Conceivably, perspective is as important as—or more important than—strategies, goals, or interventions. Our perspective is one centered on emancipatory practice achieved by means of the service provider's and service user's shared emancipatory aims. What are yours?

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