

The Seven Sources of Power: An Alternative to Authority

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Abstract

Power is almost universally and mistakenly seen as the capacity to control other people. In this article power is defined as the capacity to produce change which flows from seven different sources: grounding, passion, control, love, communication, knowledge, and transcendence. Persons whose power or lack of it is exclusively based on the manipulation of others suffer from powerless or authoritarian scripts which compliment each other. Persons who derive their power from a balanced mix of the seven sources described are likely to become Resisters when confronted with authoritarianism.

Tolstoi's definition of power as "the combined will of the masses vested in one person" perfectly illustrates the problem with the concept of power. Most thinking about power addresses only the kind of power that involves control of many by a few.

The subject of power was not part of my education or thinking (although certainly part of my behavior) as a psychologist or psychotherapist until about 1969. After working out the script matrix (Steiner, 1966), I began to see that the diagram was more than a visual aid representing the transactions of the three main players of the family drama - the parents and the child. The script matrix showed the parents above and the child below, thus realistically representing a dimension that goes beyond the transactional into the realm of power or the relative capacity of the players to affect each other (with the offspring at an obvious disadvantage).

I saw clearly for the first time that the young child is in the classic position of the oppressed, not totally powerless, but one-down in relation to the parents who are one-up. Because the view of the child as oppressed and overpowered

is not universally accepted, some people disagreed with the unevenness I postulated in the parent-child relationship and even argued that the child often has the upper hand. At that time, my work as a therapist was less active in the area of parent-child relationships than in the relationships of the adult men and women who sought my counsel. It was while mediating in the "war of the sexes" that I saw in stark relief the one-up and one-down maneuvers people use to stay in control and to maintain or advance their position in life.

Eventually I saw beyond these control maneuvers or power plays to the variable of human power itself, a factor in human life far more central than the domination of others through power plays. Power, which I believe is best defined as *the capacity to produce change*, is a more extensive faculty than manipulation or control of others, itself an extremely limited form of power.

The Powerless and Authoritarian Scripts

One of the most common and damaging scripts, which is shared by most people and is therefore largely unnoticed and taken for granted, is the script of powerlessness and its mirror image, authoritarianism. The seeds of this script are sown through one-up/one-down transactions in childhood. The script teaches the child that power equals control and that control is the way to bring about change and to be powerful in the world. It denigrates other sources of power, reducing the multidimensional realm of human potential into a unidimensional "ladder of success" on which people line up, some above, some below, stepping on each other as they struggle to climb to the top.

The deeply ingrained banal tendency of people to line up in the competitive one-up/one-down continuum constantly has the potential of

getting out of control. This occurs when the peculiar chemistry between authoritarian and powerless people produces a polarization in which those in a one-down position collude with an authoritarian person to develop a symbiosis in which power is relinquished by the many to one who willingly takes it from them. Thus the Master/Slave, Leader/Follower one-up/one-down relationships in families, schools, and workplaces can become a social tide that sweeps whole countries or continents. It is during this process that some Bystanders, unable to stand life in the Master-Slave continuum, become Resisters (Jacobs, 1987).

What makes people Resisters in a situation where authoritarian powers attempt to establish control? In my opinion, people who resist domination are powerful in their own right, independent of their place in a hierarchy. How does one acquire this kind of power? The totality of a person's power or charisma depends on the development of various sources of power such as knowledge, communication, love, passion, transcendence, grounding, and control, each of which adds to a person's capacity to have an effect in the world. The individual with a sense of power in the world responds badly to others' efforts to control. Resistance comes naturally in such situations, just as passivity is the natural consequence of powerlessness.

Seven Sources of Power

The following paragraphs outline seven sources of power which have their origin in the ancient theory of the *chakras* of Kundalini yoga: earth, sex, power, heart, throat, third eye, and cosmos. These seven power sources, of which control is but one, better represent the rainbow of options which is power than the colorless, unidimensional power based solely on control.

Grounding: The capacity to stand one's ground, to occupy the space that we are allotted, to be rooted and to be comfortable while standing, walking, or running upon the Earth is an important source of power.

Each source of power can be underdeveloped to the point of nonexistence or overdeveloped so that it crowds out other sources of power. A person deficient in grounding is physically unstable, easy to push around, easily frightened, unsteady on his or her feet. When overdeveloped along these lines, a person is stub-

born, stony, unmovable, and dull.

Passion: The powers of passion and its most common manifestation, sexuality, are capable of mobilizing and invigorating people as nothing else can. The power of passion is the power to create, to recreate, to transform, in short, to inflame with energy and produce sudden change. When underdeveloped in this area a person is unexcitable, boring, and gutless; when fixated in it, a person is driven by sexual passion and the fanaticism and violence that result when such strong drives are repressed.

Control: The capacity to aggressively manipulate the environment and people, either physically or psychologically, is the form of power that has crowded other forms of power from awareness. The extreme form of control is represented by our culture's highly valued "competitive personality," the individual who is highly competent in the use of power plays and sees every interaction as an opportunity to test who is better, who is right, who knows more, or who has more of some commodity. Underdeveloped control power produces individuals who cannot deal with their internal or external environment. They cannot control their feelings, what they say or do, what they ingest, are generally unable to get what they want from others, and are perceived by others as losers.

Love: Knowing how good it feels, everyone wants to love and be loved, yet few people recognize love's power. The power of love is enormous; it is capable of overcoming vast obstacles. Its power binds people, thus enabling them to work together. Love has the power to nurture, to heal, and to instill hope that can propel a person out of the most dire situations. When the power of love is underdeveloped, a person is cold, incapable of experiencing loving feelings or of benefiting from one's own and others' strokes, unable to nurture and be nurtured, unable to love himself or herself. When this form of power is overdeveloped or fixated, people feel driven to excessive sacrifices and to giving themselves away to others while neglecting themselves.

Certain sources of power are stimulated or squelched by different cultures, thus giving rise to cultural scripts. In our culture, the power of love is encouraged for women and discouraged for men; in contrast, control is encouraged for men and discouraged for women. This leads to troublesome interpersonal inequalities which

reinforce the one-up/one-down scripts in the population.

Communication: The power to produce in someone else the feelings and ideas that reflect one's own is the power of communication. It is essential for effective and satisfying relationships, for transmitting knowledge, and for solving problems between people.

As with the other forms of power, communication works in conjunction with other sources of power. Communication can work in combination with control, in which case the effect (browbeating) will be different from the combination, say, of communication and love or communication and sexuality. Ideally communication works in conjunction with knowledge and love so that, rather than browbeating someone in order to convince them, a person communicates to share truthfully and nurturously; thus the recipients can compare what they already know with what is being communicated and form their own, new opinion.

Knowledge: The four sources of knowledge are science, intuition, wisdom, and vision. Scientific knowledge is derived from the methodic observation of variables and their effect on each other. Intuitive knowledge is derived, not from systematic scientific observation, but from holistically grasping the laws of nature. Wisdom or historical perspective comes from knowledge of past events either through personal experience or through the study of history. Vision is the enlightened capacity to see what lies ahead, not through extrapolation, which is a scientific form of knowledge, but through the actual perception of future events. Ordinarily, only science is considered to be a valid source of knowledge. Wisdom, intuition, and vision are increasingly discounted in that order: Wisdom is for old people, intuition for women, and vision for lunatics. Nevertheless, each of these forms of knowledge has validity and adds to a person's total power. Ignorance is the consequence of the underdevelopment of this form of power; excessive reliance on the power of

knowledge is the consequence of its overdevelopment.

Transcendence: Transcendence is derived from a person's unity with the universe. It is the power of the consciousness of one's participation in every aspect of the cosmos, such that existence is detached from any particular material form. With this understanding, one does not fear death or the future because unity with the universe cannot be disrupted by events. One can "rise above" a situation and maintain one's sense of power regardless of material conditions. Underdevelopment of transcendence causes people to see themselves as separate entities and renders them insensitive to other living beings and the environment. When overdeveloped, this power causes detachment from earthly connections, a sort of floating away which can be seen as a mystic state but is more often seen as schizophrenia.

Conclusion

This multilayered view of power implies that the fixation on control as a source of power is a restrictive script that renders large numbers of people powerless in the face of individuals who occupy the high positions on the control hierarchy. The greatest antidote to authoritarian power in which a few dominate the many, is for people to develop individual power in its multidimensional forms and to dedicate themselves to passing on power to as many others as can be found in a lifetime.

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