The Power Paradox: The Promise and Peril of 21st century power

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Power is the basic medium of social living

The fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense that Energy is the fundamental concept in physics... The laws of social dynamics are laws which can only be stated in terms of power (Russell, 1938, p. 10).
Five questions

• What is power?
• How do we get power?
• Does power corrupt?
• What makes for strong social systems?
• Power and the problems of today?
Power = Economic/political force, military might?

• Taylor Swift or Joe Biden?

• The Power of the vote-less and penniless

• Please vote at meet.ps/science
What is power? The capacity to alter the state of others

- Information: Thomas Clarkson
- Social Ties: Civil Rights
- Innovation: The Pill
- Culture
Vice as pathway

- Law 3: Conceal Your Intentions
- Law 6: Court Attention at All Costs
- Law 12: Use Selective Honesty and Generosity to Disarm Your Victims
- Law 15: Crush Your Enemy Totally
- Law 18: Keep Others in Suspended Terror: Cultivate an Air of Unpredictability.

Hence a Prince who wants to keep his authority must learn how not to be good, and use that knowledge, or refrain from using it, as necessity requires.

*The Prince* Niccolo Machiavelli, 1469-1527
A virtue approach

• Kindness
• Courage
• Empathy
• Respect
From 48 hunter-gatherer societies

- “generous, brave in combat, wise in making subsistence or military decisions, apt at resolving intragroup conflicts, a good speaker, fair, impartial [i.e., open], reliable, tactful, and morally upright,” and “strong and assertive” but “humble.”
Power is Gained in Advancing Greater Good

*Power is employed and exercised in a netlike organization.* - Foucault

Maria expresses gratitude to Sameer

Maria delights in Giving

Sameer Acts in more prosocial fashion with others

Maria develops positive reputation in conversation

Others Esteem Maria

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Empathy

Thurlow Weed on Abraham Lincoln

• *His mind is at once philosophical and practical. He sees all who go there, hears all they have to say, talks freely with everybody, reads whatever is written to him* (page 289).

• Empathy
Functions of Touch

• Reward others
• Stirs Cooperation
• Encourage
• Calm
Machiavellian approach

• Works in violent contexts, short term

• Fails compared to collaborative protests (Chenowith & Stephan, 2008).

• Fails in US Senate (ten Brinke et al., 2015)

• Fate of Machiavellians
  – Don’t rise in ranks
  – Less pay
  – Less respect
  – Social isolation
Social Systems that Constrain Abusive Power

- Accountability: Transparency and open critique of decisions
- Capacity to form strong ties
- Collective Scrutiny
  - Public Opinion, Criticism, Ridicule
- What we esteem, afford status for
- Institutionalized Force
Does power corrupt?

- Having elevated power leads to:
  - impulsive behavior,
  - gambling, risk taking,
  - rudeness, shoplifting,
  - sexual impropriety,
  - irrational generosity
UNETHICAL DRIVING

(Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012, PNAS)
UNETHICAL DRIVING

\[ \beta = .16, \ p < .05 \]

(Piff, Stancato, Côté, Mendoza-Denton, & Keltner, 2012, *PNAS*)
Power and empathy deficits

Percent Who Took Other's Perspective

Power

Low

High
The Power Paradox

• Groups select for socially intelligent leaders

• We gain power through what is good in human nature

• But power decreases our social intelligence

• Power releases all that is bad in human nature
Social Class, Poverty, and Stress

• US Historic levels of economic inequality (Hacker & Pearson, 2011, *Winner Take All Politics*)

• US Poverty: 4 person household $23,850
  – 14.1% of adults
  – 21.1% of children under age of 18
Health threats of powerlessness

Racism
Sexism
Class stigma
Attacks on sexual identity
Lack of voice
Being disrespected
Galvanizing discoveries

• Costs of inequality (Adler et al., 1994)
  – With each rung down class ladder
    • More likely to die of cancer
    • Suffer chronic pain
    • Auto immune disease

• Costs of childhood poverty (Miller, Chen et al., 2009)
  – Elevated cortisol, cytokines
  – Human frailty syndrome: weak bones
  – 20 to 40% increased chance of death due to disease
  – First 25 years in poverty, six years of life expectancy lost
Inequality produces social ills

- Inequality is Biggest Issue Outside of Climate Change Facing US Today
  - Depression
  - Poor health
  - Happiness in personal life, romantic partnerships
  - Racism, Xenophobia
  - Social Ills: Bullying, Aggression
Psychological Interventions

- Empathy training for teachers reduces suspensions of African American males (Okonofua, 2016)
- Nature as health care (Bare)
- Mindfulness in criminal justice
From coercive to collaborative power
(Flannery & Marcus, 2012)

- 8000 to 12,000 BC
  - Expanding human settlements, food surpluses
  - Rise of Hierarchy, slavery, religion, inequality, heritable power
The Power Revolution: Why such foment today?

- A Power Revolution
  - Women, multiple ethnicities
  - New countries: India, China
  - Rise in collaboration
  - New forms of influence: Facebook, Instagram
  - Rise of democracies
  - Rights movements
  - Reduction of harm
Thank you

• May you make the most of your good power, and enjoy its accompanying delights