

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS: 3-RING CIRCUS

Definitions of power

Power can be defined as "control of choices" in one's own life and in the lives of others. Wealth, education and social position, for example, may contribute to control over choices, but they are not the same as power. Negative concepts of power generally come from experiences of "**power over**" others - the ability of people to control, to varying degrees, the choices in other people's lives. This is probably the most common definition and is the only aspect of power considered by most sociologists. Control of choices, though, is also affected by "**power with**", social power, the influence we wield among equals; and "**power within**", the development of our abilities and potential.¹

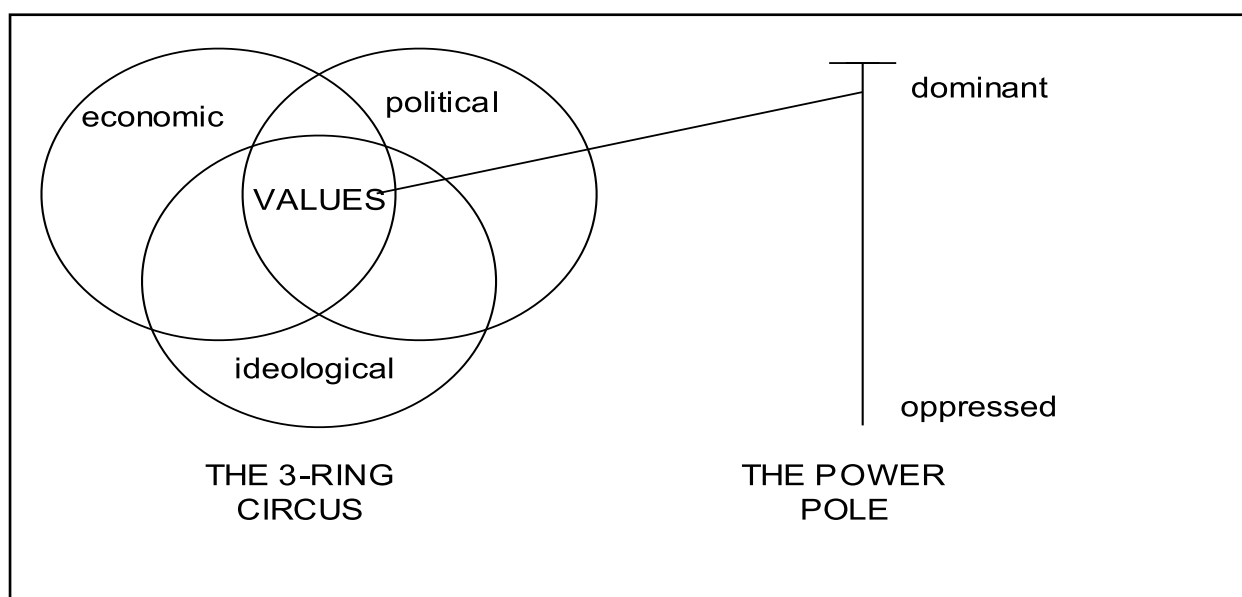
Sources of power

"Power over" tends to be defined by and derived from the institutions of a society. The power associated with institutions may be -

- **Economic**, associated with the production and distribution of goods
- **Ideological**, associated with the transmission of ideas
- **Political**, associated with the making and enforcement of rules.

Any society may organise its economic, ideological, and political functions in many different ways. The beliefs of the dominant group in a society, those with the most power, determine which goods will be produced and distributed and how, which ideas will be taught and how, and which rules will be made and how they are enforced in dominant institutions. Only people who operate according to these beliefs will be successful in dominant institutions and organisations.

Figure: Model of institutional power



¹ See Truth or Dare: Encounters with Power, Authority and Mystery by Starhawk (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977) for development of these concepts

The power-over others of groups or individuals is based primarily on their positions within an institution or organisation, so this type of power is also called positional power. It is derived from the -

- **Perceived legitimacy** of the position - its authority
- **Associated control** of or authority to distribute economic, ideological or political rewards and punishments, including approval, love, safety or material goods and services.

Authority depends on the perception by all that those with power have the right to exercise it and that others must comply. Even if this perception changes, the dominant group's control of resources that are desired by others is likely to ensure that they retain more power.

Examples follow of the three types of power-over others that people have in specific contexts. Note that most would not be able to achieve the example tasks outside the context specified.

Table 1: Types of power over others in different contexts

Context	Ideological power	Political power	Economic power
Teacher in a school	Emphasise Te Tiriti o Waitangi in history classes*	Order detention for swearing	Allocate a scholarship
Baby in a family	Get picked up by smiling	Get a meal by screaming	Grab a toy
Treasurer in a community group	Convince others in group to pay staff "under the table"*	Require timesheets from paid workers	Prepare budget
Police officer	Campaign against drunk driving	Arrest a person	Give Neighborhood Watch materials

The examples with a "*" do not conform with dominant group values, which may lead to conflict with those with higher authority.

Usually a position which has a great deal of power-over others in one area has a substantial amount in the other two as well. For example, a minister has considerable economic and political power-over others in the church as well as ideological power; her power-over others outside the church depends on the position of the particular church on the power pole.² Some institutions, however, try to limit the extent to which power in one area spills over into another. One example is the limit on the amount corporations can contribute to political parties.

In contrast to power-over others, power-with others is based on characteristics of the person or group in relation to others. It is to do with influence rather than authority. The sources of influence may be -

- **Knowledge** that is considered useful by others, including specialised skills, information and abilities
- **Personal attributes**, such as charisma or earned trust and respect. These are usually culturally defined and can include age, physical beauty or self-confidence.

While a change in power-over others depends on a structural change of positions, a change in power-with others is more easily achieved.

POINT TO PONDER

Compared to Pakeha society, Maori society would appear to rely a great deal more on power-with than on power-over. What are the implications for social change?

Power-within is fundamentally different from power-over and power-with others, as it is latent rather than manifest. The following table lists examples of interactions of power.

Table 2: Examples of power-over and power-with others

	Power-over others	Power-with others
Group:group	Management ignores workers' request	Political party alliance
Individual:individual	Boss fires worker	Friend convinces friend
Group:individual	Harassment committee issues decision	Church converts person
Individual:group	Boss locks out workers	Speaker sways group

Table 3: Combinations of power-over and power-with others

Power-over:	High	Low	High	Low
Power-with:	Low	High	High	Low
Example:	Boss who is not respected	Worker who is highly respected	Boss who is highly respected	Worker who is not respected

POINT TO PONDER

What is the relationship between power-over others and power-within? Increased power-over others may reduce power-within, as the position from which one derives power-over others imposes constraints that may diminish the opportunity to realise one's potential.

The three concepts of power provide another way to classify social change movements.

Table 4: Goals and means of social movements

MEANS	Value-oriented goals (tend to be radical)	Norm-oriented goals (tend to be reformist)
Power-over others	Communist revolution	Anti-birth control
Power-with (persuasion)	Pacifism	Women's suffrage
Power-within (participation)	Women's consciousness raising	Self-help health groups

Adapted from a table in *Sociology: A Text with Adapted Readings* by Leonard Broom, Philip Selznick and Dorothy Broom Darroch. New York: Harper & Row, 1981, pp 470-471. [ISBN 0-06-040991-6]

POINT TO PONDER

Is there an example of women using power-over others to achieve revolutionary ends? You may want to revisit this question after reading about the "power pole" in the section on models for social change.

Use of power-over others as a means of social change tends to be illegal, because the dominant group defines legality. This type of power-over others tends to be based on large numbers of people and the use of some form of violence. Movements based on power-with others tend to focus on ideological strategies. Movements focussed on power-within tend to be separatist because members are inclined to withdraw from society to consider their own perspectives and realities.

POINT TO PONDER

The institutions and organisations in the following list all have power in these three areas. In what specific ways do each of them exercise economic, ideological And political power?

*a church/religion
a family
Sesame Street
rugby
Parliament
a bank*

*a marae
a psychiatric ward
DSW WINZ
a prison
a school
the army*