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Understanding Gender through Frameworks of Power

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SOAN 490.2: Independent Study

Abstract

Throughout this research paper, two main questions are explored: Do people see gender through lens of power in the contemporary American context, and, if so, which theory—or theories—about power best depict how people describe gender? To explore these questions, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted. These interviews focused on topics such the workplace, family, relationships, policy, state, and broad ideas about sexism, feminism, and gender. The sample was self-selected from Ohio Wesleyan University students to include a variety of involvements in gender activism, a variety of academic perspectives, and a variety of genders including men, women, and individuals whose gender identities exist outside of the binary.

All ten interviewees used frameworks of power to understand their gendered experiences and beliefs. Majority of the sample—five or more of the ten participants—used power to talk about coercion or control, fear, and restriction. Over half of the sample also described the interaction between power and gender as one of empowerment and agency. Nearly all of the interviewees spoke about power as something that is domain specific, meaning it manifests differently depending on situation and context, and something that operates at multiple levels of analysis, from the individual level through the sociocultural level.

Introduction

In the social sciences, an abundance of research has been directed towards gender and power, particularly in terms of inequity and outcomes. However, less consideration has been given to how people subjectively explain and understand their gendered worlds. This paper aims to expand on prior research regarding gender and power by examining if people use frameworks of power to make sense of the gendered observations, experiences, and beliefs involving themselves and others. After establishing this relationship between gender and power in peoples' thoughts, this paper will delve into the specific ways in which people use frames of power to decipher the social world and their personal experiences.

This research suggests that people do use ideas related to power to interpret their gendered experiences and validate their opinions regarding gender, specifically coercion, fear, restriction, empowerment/agency, and the ideas that power and gender interact uniquely depending on domain and level of abstraction. As to which theory of theories about power best encapsulate the subjective understandings interviewees expressed, a murkier answer has emerged. The frames used to analyze power are most closely associated with relational models, which are derived from symbolic interactionism and conflict theories, in conjunction with phenomenological and poststructuralist feminisms, both of which can be traced back to conflict and symbolic interactionist traditions as well.

Review of the Theory

Throughout the following paragraphs, major theories about power are identified and described. Since power is often believed to be a major force that shapes social structures, access,

and outcomes, many groups invest interest in the study of power, including those who study sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, economics, politics, and international relations.

Sociological thought encompasses a few key, frequently cited notions about power. All three of the major sociological traditions—structural functionalism, conflict theory, and symbolic interactionism—consider power to some extent. Conflict theory, in the tradition of Karl Marx, analyzes society as a composition of groups that compete for power and resources. Power can be used to control institutions in society to the advantage of dominant groups. More modern interpretations of conflict theory, such as C. Wright Mills', assert that social structures are created because of conflict between differing interests, and that people are impacted by these broader social structures. From symbolic interactionist perspectives, Max Weber's definition of power is most cited. Weber considers power to be a force that exerts control over other people or resources. Through this understanding of power, power is used to manipulate situations to get desired outcomes in spite of resistance or opposition. Power is understood as adversarial. Structural functionalist perspectives are perhaps least popular within the study of social power. One example is Parsons' conception of power as a tool used to accomplish goals by organizing human activity through social systems.

In the wider study of power, conflict and symbolic interactionist perspectives have in many ways been blended to form a group of classical theories on power—relational models. Relational models of power argue that power can be understood as a series of balancing operations. For Karl Marx, this means that the relationship between classes is a balancing operation between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in which the proletariat grossly suffers due to a lack of ownership over the means of production. Marx's relational model is always rooted in economic relations based on who owns the means of production.

Max Weber, another well-known German social theorist whose work has been used to shape relational models, famously wrote that “power is the chance to impose your will within a social context, even when opposed and regardless of the integrity of that chance” (Weber 1958). Weber, too, advocates for a social and relational understanding of power and frames this relationship in terms of coercion. However, unlike Marx, Weber believes that power exists—and may even be rooted—outside of economic realms. Unlike Marx who is orientated almost completely in macro understandings of the world, Weber has a sense of power’s pervasiveness and personal significance, even suggesting that power could be a motive or a value. Many contemporary models about power build on the ideas outlined by Marx and Weber. For example, sociologist Richard Emerson’s article “Power-Dependence Relations” suggests that power is about dependence for resources in social contexts. Thus, as relationship dynamics change, so does power.

More simplistic approaches to power are base models, which suggest that there are specific bases of power that occur between two actors (individuals or groups). These bases impact the ways in which power is used, perceived, and ultimately functions. In “The Bases of Social Power,” 5 of the “undoubtedly many possible bases of power” (French and Raven 1959) are defined and described: reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power.

Another set of classical perspectives that is considered are contingency models. These models assert that power is contingent on social context. In the article “Validation and Extension of the Contingency Model of Leadership Effectiveness: A Review of Empirical Findings,” Fiedler outlines a couple key ways in which power can be gained in certain social contexts. The first is uncertainty; removing uncertainty or solving a problem can yield power. Second is

criticality, which is a measure of how critical a particular resource is. Having access to or ownership of the most critical resources in a particular context generates power. Third is scarcity. If a resource is scarce in a context, having it creates power to the owner of the scarce resource. Contingency models are connected to relational models in that contingency models assert that social contexts uniquely shape who is critical, scarce, and uncertain.

Finally, feminist theories on power borrow from social and political theories, particularly conflict theories. Key perspectives include liberal feminism, which asserts that power is an unequally distributed resource. A second set of approaches are phenomenological feminist perspectives which—guided by the philosophies of Simone de Beauvoir—focus on the clash between self and society (social, cultural, historical and economic conditions) that shape domination and power. Another major feminist perspective stems from radical feminism, which understands power as a dyadic relation of subordination and domination. Socialist feminism essentially funnels Marxist theories through gendered thought and attribute gender discrimination to large class inequities. A more contemporary addition from feminist studies are intersectional theories, which further broaden understandings of power relations and exploitation to include a variety of power frameworks based on interlocking inequities based on demographics. And, most recently, poststructuralist feminism has supported theories that have mainly been inspired by Foucault's work, which states that power is defined by mobile and continuously shifting social relations (Stanford 2005).

Design and Method

In March and April, I interviewed ten Ohio Wesleyan University juniors and seniors about a variety of both abstract and experience-based topics that I thought might reveal ideologies about power: evolving ideas about gender, gender and the workplace, gender and the

family/relationships, sexism and “reverse sexism”, feminism, government intervention, and so on and so forth. (See the Notes section for the interview guide.) Over ten hours of interview data was collected from the participants with the length of interviews ranging from thirty-five minutes to one hour and forty-three minutes. The interviews took place in a conference room on the residential side of the Ohio Wesleyan University campus. Sessions were recorded on an audio app before being transcribed. In conjunction with the audio recordings, hand-notes were taken to mark notable changes in the interviewees’ demeanor.

The sample was self-selected rather than a probability sample because I wanted to ensure that diversity in terms of gender identity and gendered thought existed in the pool of interviewees. Interviewees were recruited in a few different ways. I attended PRIDE—People Regarding Individual Diversity Everywhere—and SAGE—Sexuality and Gender Equality house (a Single-Living Unit)—meetings and asked attendees to participate. I also sought out participants from a class called Gender in Contemporary Society. During Women’s’ Week in March, OWU students were more vocal about issues regarding gender; by listening to students in Hamilton-Williams Campus Center, I was able to hear students’ opinions about gender and target students who I thought would offer a unique perspective in my overall sample. Finally, some participants heard I was doing this research project and requested that they be interviewed; I obliged.

Even though the sample was small, it included students from all four academic divisions—Fine Arts, Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences. Nine of the ten participants were domestic students. Although questions about salary and socioeconomic status were not directly included in the interviews, information about where interviewees attended high school, the level of education their parents had completed, parent or guardian occupations, and

neighborhoods suggests that the sample was composed of middle-class backgrounds, though a couple interviewees were clearly upper-class and one was working class. As suggested by the composition of the sample, some participants were very involved in gender activism, employment, and coursework whereas other participants had little to no involvement in activism, work, and academia related to gender. Primarily through recruitment at SAGE and PRIDE, I was able to construct a sample that expands beyond the gender binary. Terms that participants used to describe their own genders include: gender fluid, androgynous, transgender, cisgender, man, woman, and gender nondescript.

Once the data was collected, I did some pre-coding (highlighting, underlining, annotating) of passages that were particularly compelling to me. I then segmented the transcripts into meaningful blocks of text before actually coding the interviews, extracting all of the segments that either implicitly or explicitly referenced power. At this stage in the analysis, the possible concepts or words related to power were based off of the array of conceptualizations offered by the literature review. Examples of explicit references to power include using words like “power,” “influence,” “control,” or “authority.” An example of implicit references to power include mentioning concepts such as hierarchy or position that inherently imply a power differential. Once these segments were pulled, I assigned a descriptive code to the excerpts that summed up the key point in each segment. This coding process occurred two to three times in order to make my coding slightly more reliable, given the constraints of having only one coder. All of the descriptive codes were then analyzed to determine the relationship between them (i.e. what were the similarities, differences, frequency, relation between codes, order in what they came up, etc.). This allowed me to create categories—in total, six major categories—that I then used to draw parallels with theories about power.

These tools of analysis and the methodology have some strengths and weaknesses that should be addressed. Choosing to research using semi-structured interviews allowed me to be more flexible than quantitative methods would have allowed. After completing the first and third interviews, I modified the interview guide slightly by removing two questions, rewording another question, and adding a question to the very end of the interview. Being able to clarify questions and obtain immediate feedback was useful because this is exploratory research, so I had to make some adjustments along the way. Another benefit of the interview technique is that my research questions are geared towards looking at the ways in which people think and why they think in these ways. Accessing this type of in-depth information is pretty exclusive to qualitative techniques and is especially compatible with the semi-structured interview because it allows for follow-up questions. Furthermore, because some interviewees only talked about power indirectly, I doubt they would have been willing and able to answer accurately if I had directly asked if they use frameworks of power to understand gender.

Although my methodology and design allowed for research that is valid and rich in detail, it may not be as reliable as other research techniques may have been. Another researcher could look at my interview excerpts and code them—even in terms of power—in a completely different way. Going through the coding process two to three times did allow me to examine the repeatability of my own analysis; however, without inter-rater reliability, it is difficult to say exactly how reliable the analysis is in this way. On the other hand, many of the questions on the interview guide were designed to measure the same (expected) types of power (e.g. I created multiple questions that I thought might be more likely to evoke responses about coercive power), so this should have improved internal consistency reliability. Besides for the above types of

interviewer error or bias, a drawback to this research is the time intensiveness which yielded a relatively small sample size.

Findings

I identified six key themes or concepts that came up from the interviews that were related to power. These key themes were present—to varying extents—in five or more of the ten interviews. When discussing gender, power was associated with (1) coercion/control, (2) fear, (3) restriction, and (4) agency. When identifying power dynamics, interviewees explained that power and gender (5) interact differently in different domains and (6) at multiple levels, including individual, relational, group, and social and cultural.

The first idea related to power that were present the interviews is coercion, meaning that when talking about gender, interviewees described a manipulation or force that controls how people can or should act. The idea of coercion emerged when some interviewees discussed expectations based on gender. For example, one interviewee spoke about decision making and said that,

Historically and generally, men [make decisions]. But I also feel like this is because there is this stereotype about controlling people that supports this in some ways. The ‘hoover parent’ who makes decisions for the child is nine out of ten times the mom—the PTA mom, the daycare mom, the whatever you want to call it type of mom. We also see this is TV and media. For example, the sitcom mom makes a bunch of decisions and is seen as a pushy bitching calling all of the shots while the lazy husband sits back in the chair and watches football or plays poker with the guys. But I think this is a reversal of all of the control men have.

In the above excerpt, the idea of “control” is used to explain decision making, a key signifier of who has—and who does not have—power. Rather than immediately taking a stance on who actually makes decisions, the interviewee works through their ideas about history and media in

order to explain how decision making is a mechanism of control in terms of what both children and adults do. Ultimately, the interviewee asserts that men have more coercive power than women, but that women are portrayed as having coercive power as a comedic tool or in terms of mothers' relationships with their kids. Coercive power was also discussed at the end of some of the interviews when interviewees were directly asked if they think gender and power are related. After emphatically saying yes and explaining how this manifests, one person explained: "That is power: To do what you want and manipulate others to get what you want and do not even see that it is happening most of the time." In this quote, the interviewee provides a couple different ideas about power, but the most salient is manipulation, which is related to coercion and control.

Another way in which power surfaced within the topic of gender was in terms of fear. Two main branches of fear were presented: The fear that someone would cause physical harm to the interviewee, and the fear that others may take away personal rights that the interviewee has. Fear was used to describe personal ideas about gender; fear was also used by some interviewees to articulate opposing viewpoints. The first type of fear—fear about a loss of safety—were more likely to be reported by gender minorities (a woman, a trans interviewee, and an androgynous interviewee). One androgynous interviewee mentioned a couple instances of sexual harassment throughout their interview. Towards the end, they said that "I understand why women and people on the spectrum are afraid to reveal their truest identities. After I left [they moved away from their hometown and family who were very unaccepting], I have been very hidden about this part of me, because the threats were real. The violence was real. The fear was real." This specific understanding of fear and power—though often in less extreme ways—appeared in four of the ten interviews. Fear was used in other cases to articulate a loss of power as a result of other people gaining power. One interviewee explained his qualms with feminism. He said: "Feminists

want to take away my rights. I am not exactly angry about it, but maybe I am, because you should not take my stuff, the things I work for, and be disadvantaging me. I work really hard! No one should punish me for being me [a man].” When asked to explain why other people may have different viewpoints than themselves, a woman in the sample and a gender fluid individual both spoke to this type of fear identified above. One explained:

Men fear losing power, status, and position in society. I do not think it is malevolent, like ‘oh, let me keep control of my power.’ I think it is like they have goggles on. They don’t realize they are privileged and think that [government policies or regulation] takes away from their equality. They feel like they are being taken down a step and are afraid of losing their power, autonomy, and control. But in reality, women are just being brought up a step... Sometimes you do not know why you are afraid, but you are. That’s really scary to think about. Like, maybe we all want to unconsciously keep everyone down.

Although these observations and opinions did not represent the understandings about power and gender that all of the men in the sample held, it did mirror two of the men’s responses. Overall, although this theme was the least pervasive with only five of the interviewees mentioning it, those who did associate gender with fear and power used this frame extensively to understand their experiences, legitimize their opinions, and work through the perspectives of others.

A third way in which power and gender were linked by participants was in terms of restriction or confinement stemming from gender roles. Power was discussed as a mechanism that restricts the range of behaviors and traits that people are supposed to express based on gender. Eight out of the ten interviewees talked about this; seven of the ten interviewees mentioned that sex scripts for men were particularly limiting. One interviewee said that “If women are strong and independent, we are called bitches, but if we are sweet and kind and dainty, we can’t get anywhere.” In describing traits that women are expected to embody, this interviewee critiqued how limiting these expectations can be and discussed the repercussions that

could result from disobeying these prescribed roles. One man talked about his personal tensions with the idea of masculinity. “Men are confined. Like, I like being a man, but it is rigid. Don’t cry. Act tough. Play sports. Make money. It’s a lot to do and deal with on a constant basis.”

Another interviewee said that “men are ‘supposed to be’ independent and controlling and possessive” Even outside of concepts of masculinity and femininity, one interviewee said gender itself is “oppressing, limiting, and constraining.”

The fourth—and most optimistic—understanding of gender and power that appeared from the sample is the idea of agency/empowerment. This theme was widespread with eight interviewees mentioning agency or empowerment to some extent throughout their interview. One interviewee said that “people need to be able to choose...who they want to be and have that agency.” Another interviewee spoke more to the idea of empowerment by reflecting on feminism. She said: “[Feminism] is empowering, isn’t it? There is so much out of my control in this world, and I can’t control how others treat me or think about me, but I can control how I think, so I will.” Other interviewees recognized that some people have more agency than others simply because of their gender. A trans man said that even though he does not fully experience the social benefits of being a man yet because he is in transition, he realizes that “men tend to have more power to do things, to say things, so make choices, to live like they want to. And sadly [men even] have power over women.”

The idea that power is about empowerment and agency was also used to express values related to individualism. One man said that “people have the power to make their lives what they want them to be. Blaming your gender on whether or not you get what you want seems like a cop out. You’ve got to take it on yourself.” The implication here is that people have the free choice to make all of decisions that shape their lives without limitation. This interviewee also talks about

personal responsibility (“take it on yourself”) and refusing to “blame gender” on outcomes or experiences as ways to use agency. A woman echoed a similar sentiment: “I feel like I want to make my own way and not have someone help me, but I know it [policies or practices intended to reduce gender inequity] is something that should happen because women are at a disadvantage. I don’t want to take help even if I should.” Unlike the previous interviewee who failed to recognize that gender can actually shape life outcomes and experiences, the second interviewee recognizes disparity exists but suggests that her individualistic tendencies (e.g. “I want to make it on my own” and “not have someone help”) suggest that some interviewees believe that with enough independence and hard work anyone can have agency, even despite systemic impacts of power.

This final two ideas that interviewees discussed when thinking about power and gender are less thematic than the four previously identified concepts. The remaining two ideas—that gender and power interact differently depending on context and that gender and power interact in multiple levels of society—are more like special conditions or ways in which power works than actual concepts or themes. The first that will be explored is the idea that in some ways, power and gender manifest differently in different domains. When answering questions about the family and relationships or providing personal anecdotes, interviewees were less likely to use language directly associated with power. On the other hand, when responding to questions about policy, the state, and the workplace, interviewees were most likely to use language directly related to power. To this point, one interviewee elaborated:

Gender and power look different when we look at different spheres. So, if you look at a family, a woman not having power could be abuse, being silenced, not being able to make independent choices. But these things could be seen as simply having a more dominant partner. A woman not having power at work might be spun as, like, ‘she doesn’t want to move up’ or ‘she enjoys being an assistant.’ And in these different

spheres, different behaviors and actions show these power relationships because these are different environments with different norms. If you are a boss, you cannot tell a female coworker to clean your office, but if you are a husband, it is less weird to a lot of people to tell your wife to clean something.

This interviewee wove together power dynamics and domain in an interesting way by mentioning the idea of being equals (a coworker versus a wife) and the “different environments with different norms.”

Two interviewees did imply that power is related to violence, particularly violence against women in personal relationships. However, generally, interviewees were reluctant to discuss this topic. Only one interviewee directly mentioned power within the family or relationship contexts beyond the idea of abuse. Interestingly, this particular interviewee was least invested in activism, work, and academics related to gender. Power came up when he described his ideal partner. He talked about wanting a “wifey” who would be able to complete his ideal “power couple.” She would be “equal and hold her own as, like, a lawyer or accountant” because she should be “smart and ambitious” enough for him and “come from a similar family and want a similar future.” This interviewee uses power when talking about gender and relationships in terms of finding a woman who is good enough for himself, but willing to take on a more traditionally feminine role as the caregiver of future children. “I want to know we are on the same playing field. But hopefully she will want to stay at home when we have kids, otherwise I am not sure that it would work out.” When speaking about other contexts related to power and gender (e.g. workplace, state, education), this interviewee did not voice this idea that women—or people of other genders—should be equal to him.

The final key finding that surfaced through the coding process is the idea that power and gender operate at multiple levels of analysis or levels of abstraction, including individual,

relational, group-level, organizational, state, and historical/social/cultural. This idea was the most ubiquitous across interviews. All ten interviewees included this idea about gender and power—either directly or indirectly—in their discussions about power. The most indirect way in which this came up is that in providing examples and offering explanations to the questions, responses ranged from personal experiences and reasons to very macro reasons and understandings. For instance, one interviewee talked extensively about a sexist person in their life for about thirty-five minutes (individual level and relational), about a lack of school and government attention and follow-through on gender issues (state and organizational), and then about how history continues to impact gender-power interactions (social/historical/cultural). This pattern of identifying the relationship between gender and power at various degrees of social experiences was very common. A couple interviewees more directly addressed the idea that there is a simultaneity of gender-power relations at different levels of social interaction. One person said:

I've heard women say 'well, I do not need feminism because I am equal.' Let's assume that is true for a minute. That's good for you, stereotypical white, middle class, able-bodied girl...Sarah, Helen, Barbara, whoever. Even if you are good, until all women are good like you're good, we still need feminism. There are different levels of looking at this; it's not just about you as the individual.

This interviewee uses this theme to critique other peoples' understandings of gender and equality. Like the above excerpt implies, some interviewees suggested that people with perspectives about gender that were unlike theirs were unable to see beyond certain levels of analysis.

Discussion

There is little question that when thinking about gender, interviewees—regardless of gender identity and involvement in gender activism, academics, and work—use frameworks of

power to make sense of what they experience and observe. Power is also used to legitimize participants' personal opinions and work through oppositional viewpoints that others might have. Considering the key ideas extracted from the research—that power and gender relate in that gender involves coercion, fear, restriction, and agency and is both context and domain specific—theories about power can be explored.

Returning to previous conversations about theories that attempt to explain social power, there were certain conceptions of power that were simply absent from the interviews, such as strategic contingency models and radical feminist models. Several theories about power appeared in only a couple of the ten interviews, meaning that they were present, but not dominant, lenses through which interviewees analyze power. One of these is the functionalist perspective; only a couple interviewees used it in terms of explaining broader social structures (e.g. that's just the way it works) and expressed being perplexed. Liberal, socialist, and intersectional feminist approaches also surfaced rarely. The biggest surprise here was intersectional feminism; although interviewees did articulate ways in which their experiences may be unique based on context, only three interviewees referenced the multiplicity of social categories (e.g. specific interactions between class and gender). Another power theory that gained little support are base models. Even though interviewees associated gender with coercive power, little to no support was provided for the other four major bases of power.

A couple overlapping power theories did prove to be highly compatible with how participants subjectively perceive power: Relational models—a hybrid of conflict and symbolic interaction theories—and phenomenological and poststructuralist feminisms, both of which align with the emphasis on instability found in conflict theory and contemplate the meanings derived from language and symbols addressed in symbolic interactionism. However, no single theory

listed here fully encompasses the variety of ways in which interviewees think about, use, and analyze power. Though classical relational models depict the relations between individuals, groups, organizations, etc., they inadequately address intrapersonal meditations on power. Also, relational models tend to break down social relations into more simplified dyadic interactions. This does not fit with interviewees' understanding of power as an incredibly multifaceted and complex phenomenon with multiple ongoing power relations—some of which contradict one another—operating simultaneously. Though phenomenological approaches articulate the self and society relationship and provide a more nuanced understanding of the facets of what is “social,” it does not clearly outline how interviewees come to associate things like coercion, restriction, and fear with gender. Finally, poststructuralist thought accounts for the variance and changeability in power relations, but—like many purely conflict-based theories—fail to articulate what is durable in terms of gender and power interactions.

Considering the future of the study of power and gender, there are many directions in which theory, research, and application could potentially go. In terms of theory, as discussed above, many of the ways in which academics think about power are limiting. This is because models tend to simplify social reality in order to offer a general understanding of a process. However, in terms of power and gender, an oversimplification makes it difficult to uncover how and why people think in certain ways. Future theories about gender and power ought to better account for the multiplicity of contexts and domains in which power relations unfold. The current conclusion—that peoples' frames used to analyze power most clearly draw from relation models (i.e. symbolic interactionism and conflict theory) as well as phenomenological and poststructuralist feminisms—implies that a hodgepodge theory about power would need to be created to explain the subtleties of gender-power thought.

Future theoretical work might aim to better explain how more comprehensive theories about society can explain power relations. A preliminary example of this can be observed through the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. He approaches power within the context of a comprehensive theory of society; thus, he sees power as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly re-legitimized through agency and structure. Maybe more complicated models like Bourdieu's could address the vastly different understandings of power that were generated from the interviews and the array of themes identified in the findings.

When rethinking research, a further examination of gender and power would ideally expand the sample, which would allow for more diverse and intersectional representations of the social world. Specifically, more attention should be given to interviewing a sample that has more racial, social class, and sexuality diversity. Under these circumstances, the interview guide should be modified to reflect these unique life experiences.

Class is thought to be important because some research and theory suggests that class differences—especially between the working-class and middle/upper class—correspond with different sex scripts. Erik Olin Wright (2000) suggests that class and gender have an interesting relationship because class and gender are both strongly related to the types of jobs people have and therefore the ways in which people spend all of their working hours. Furthermore, work by Jean Anyon (1984) argues that working-class and affluent women have contradictory sex role ideologies. Because findings from my research indicate that the workforce is viewed through lens of power, varying class could yield differences in the ways in which participants articulate the gender-power relationship or whether or not it is addressed at all.

Race would be an interesting variable to explore further because, as suggested by Amy Blackstone, “women of color historically have had much stronger ties to the workforce because

of the necessity of their incomes to their families' well-being. Thus, their experiences as wives and partners may be different from middle-class counterparts" (2003: 335). Also, the history of slavery—especially in the context of the United States—has uniquely shaped the concept of black femininity. Researchers Blee and Tickamyer have identified racial differences in men's attitudes about women's gender roles (1995), and Cole and Zuker have studied differences in how black and white women perceive femininity (2007). Because of these different experiences and understandings of gender—particularly femininity—based on race, it would be expected that in a larger sample, the power-gender relationship is modified by race-based understandings and experiences.

Finally, sexuality might be a useful demographic to further explore the gender-power relationship. This is because some research has suggested that although gender and sexuality are not collapsible concepts, peoples' understandings of gender and sexuality shape one another. Although this realm of sexuality and gender research has not been thoroughly explored, Lisa Diamond and Molly Butterworth's publications "Questioning Gender and Sexual Identity: Dynamic Links Over Time" uses a qualitative approach to study several non-heterosexual and transgender people. Their participants have a range of experiences and ways of interpreting these experiences. One of their participants directly mentions that though he is a trans man, he does not identify with all of the experiences and privileges that most men have. Perhaps an exploration of this intersection could produce results more explicitly related to power.

Arguably, when considering future applications outside of academia, this research could be of most use. The significance of understanding the ways in which people understand their worlds is huge. Power functions as an ideology, not a simple fact or state of existence; therefore, it shapes what people think is and is not important and gives meaning to what people experience

and observe. Without understanding ideology, we cannot truly understand how people see themselves and their worlds. Recognizing the ways in which people perceive things can then be used to address a particular audience's concerns more acutely or attempt to connect groups of seemingly disparate people who may understand or experience their social realities in similar ways.

Conclusion

Do people use frameworks of power to understand gender; and if so, which theory or theories about power best depict this relationship? Clearly, interviewees do use ideas related to power to interpret their gendered experiences and validate their opinions regarding gender. Specific frames that were used are coercion, fear, restriction, empowerment/agency, and the ideas that power and gender interact uniquely depending on domain and level of abstraction. When considering which theories about power best encapsulate the subjective understandings interviewees expressed, theories that weave together conflict theory and symbolic interactionism—such as relational models, phenomenological feminism, and poststructuralist feminism—tend to be the best fit. In light of these findings, it is suggested that more comprehensive theories about society be used to explain gender-power relations in the future.

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Notes

Final Version of the Interview Guide

SECTION A: Background and Education

1. Can you very briefly describe where you grew up?
2. What kinds of jobs do your parents have?
3. Can you describe the kind of students in the schools you attended?
4. What did your friend group look like in terms of gender?

SECTION B: Employment, Home, and School Information

1. What kind of jobs have you had? What was the gender makeup of the workplaces?
2. What is your major?
3. How do you think gender is represented in your major?
4. Are you involved in any organizations or events centered on gender?

SECTION C: Overall Views on Gender

1. How do you define the idea of gender?
2. Do you think the genders are naturally different in any way? (For instance, that women are NATURALLY more nurturing than men, or that men are NATURALLY better leaders than women). Why do you think that is?
3. How do you feel about people who identify as neither masculine or feminine, or both masculine and feminine?
4. Do you think someone's gender can change over time? Why or why not?

SECTION D: Gender and the Workplace

1. What do you think of those who say men get preferential treatment in the workplace?
2. On average, relative to men, women earn less money, are less likely to own property, and occupy only 4.2 percent of the top 500 CEO positions in the U.S. Why do you think this is the case?
3. Do you think women have to choose between their families and their careers? Do you think men have to choose between their families and their careers? Why or why not?

SECTION E: Gender, Family, and Relationships

1. In a family, who do you think makes most decisions? Why do you think this?
2. Some people say that men should be breadwinners and women should stay at home. How would you explain this belief? Do you think there is any truth to it?
3. Do you think families led by single mothers and families led by single fathers face the same challenges? Why or why not?

SECTION F: Sexism

1. What is sexism in your view? Can you give me an example?

2. Many women say that they experience a lot of discrimination in their daily lives. Other people say that this is not the case. What do you think?
3. Do you think that being a woman is an advantage or a disadvantage in contemporary America?

SECTION G: Feminism

1. How would you define feminism(s)?
2. Do you identify as a feminist? Why or why not?

SECTION H: Government Intervention

1. In the past, women suffered lots of prejudice in this country. Do you think that because of this history, the government should spend money and have specific programs on their behalf?
2. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 protects both women and men from sex discrimination in pay rates. Despite this, discrepancies in pay exist. In your opinion, whose fault is it that these pay differences persist?
3. Should public schools encourage girls to take classes typically dominated by boys?
4. Should public schools encourage boys to take classes typically dominated by girls?
5. Should public schools support transgender children? Why/why not?

SECTION I: “Reverse Sexism” in Legislation and Policy

1. A number of Americans oppose affirmative action; others support affirmative action. Why do you either oppose or support affirmative action?
2. Some people seem to be angry about affirmative action. How do you explain their anger?
3. From what sources do you get information about gender legislation and gendered issues (e.g. news, discussion with friends, personal experience, social media, class)?

SECTION J: Closing Questions

1. What do you think are the biggest issues facing men today?
2. What do you think are the biggest issues facing women today?
3. What do you think are the biggest gendered issues in the U.S. today?
4. If you were the president of the U.S., what would you do to eliminate gender inequality?
5. Do you think gender and power are related? How?